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Inadequate realities: a social-constructionist perspective on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's fictional communities in times of socio-political and material revolution

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Inadequate Realities: A Social-Constructionist
Perspective on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Fictional
Communities in Times of Socio-Political and Material
Revolution

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Abstract

Inadequate Realities: A Social-Constructionist Perspective on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Fictional Communities in Times of Socio-Political and Material Revolution

Sean Aldrich O'Rourke

I apply a social-constructionist framework to the short fiction and novels of Irish Gothicist Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu that were published from 1860 to 1873. Though social-constructionist theory postdates Le Fanu, his rendering of communal reality-creation follows many of its central tenets by portraying reality as unfixed and consisting of constructed, shared understandings of the world. Through depicting reality as constructed, his texts critique ineffective and oppressive ways of maintaining sociopolitical and material frameworks in times of threatened radical change. They also prompt readers to seek more just, effective frameworks.

I define reality as communally built sets of rules, or paradigms, with which a community articulates what is real and acceptable or unreal and unacceptable. Le Fanu's characters construct their reality through interactions within their communities, steadily reinforcing hegemonic social norms and paradigms for categorising the material world. Further, Le Fanu portrays them struggling with materially unreal and socially unacceptable forces: ghosts, vampires, and other subversive figures who challenge the coherence of realities, threatening to destroy or replace them. As a result, readers and characters can be displaced from communities' ineffective realities.

Le Fanu experienced the actual decline of established sociopolitical and scientific paradigms. This Victorian Irish context informs his late fiction's focus on how realities are built and deteriorated. Further, Le Fanu immerses readers in the world of his texts, making readers an imaginative part of the creation and deterioration of realities. By simulating an experience of one's reality decaying, rather than using his works to allegorise Irish politics, Le Fanu delivers his social critiques on an affective level.

My approach adds to Le Fanu studies and Irish Gothic scholarship more broadly. Through analysing Le Fanu's depiction of reality construction in moments of threatened change, I demonstrate a novel methodology for revealing crucial, affective Irish-literary perspectives on such moments.

Declaration

The work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at this or any other institution. I have clearly acknowledged and identified all sources used in this dissertation. The research for this dissertation has been used to publish one academic article.

Acknowledgement

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Dedicated to Casey and Donald. Both were lost during this project, but their presence could be felt all the way through.

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Introduction

The Gothic texts of Irish novelist, short-story writer, and newspaper proprietor Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) are frequently positioned alongside the real-world anxieties of his powerful but declining Anglo-Irish class. Importantly for this thesis, the situation faced by the Anglo-Irish was often a fearful one, in which particular social frameworks were at risk of collapse. Le Fanu's Gothic texts can be positioned, as Gothic texts often are, to negotiate threatened social boundaries. Importantly for this thesis, his texts also navigate the potentially catastrophic situations in which socio-political and scientific frameworks come into conflict with that which they designate materially unreal or socially unacceptable. Le Fanu's experience, as one professionally and personally invested in the maintenance of Protestant hegemony, feeds into his representations of threatened social frameworks. His fictional communities, like Le Fanu's Anglo-Irish contemporaries, often attempt to preserve their way of life amidst existential threats. Jarlath Killeen ascribes Mary Douglas' conception of "enclave mentality" to the Anglo-Irish. They generated, he contends,

a shared cultural space in which ideas about time and space, ethics, physical nature, metaphysical reality and human relationships are held in common so as to allow the individuals who occupy that space to negotiate their relationship to reality and to others outside the enclave as successfully as possible. (*Emergence of Irish Gothic* 38)

The nineteenth century saw major political gains for the Irish-Catholic majority, such as Catholic emancipation early in Le Fanu's life and the admission of Catholics in universities near his death. Irish Anglicans struggled to uphold their control. Political shifts thus dealt major blows to the efficacy of the enclave that struggled to regulate its shared "relationship to reality and to others". Le Fanu's family, as W.J. McCormack argues, experienced the erosion of the then standard mode of Anglo-Irish life and the growth in aggression of Catholic politics (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 37-46). Le Fanu himself felt that fear that comes from the corrosion of an established way of life, as demonstrated in his urgings to defend the position of Irish Protestants in meetings of the Irish Metropolitan Conservative Society, formed as a reaction to the suppression of the Orange Order (McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 81). For example, Le Fanu strongly argued that the society should officially come out against the repeal of the Act of Union in 1840. For Le Fanu, support for repeal was tantamount to submission to the leadership of O'Connell. Le Fanu "would cast to the winds all considerations of political convenience and aggrandizement rather than suffer it to be believed by [his] silence or by any other implication, that [he] was willing to submit to the contamination of such a leadership as Mr. O'Connell's" ("Irish Metropolitan Conservative Society" 2). His vehemence in the face of socio-political encroachment speaks to the profundity of the threat offered by growing Catholic political power.

As McCormack contends, when challenged by the efforts of popular reformer Daniel O'Connell, Protestant gentlemen came to be seen as protectors of a Williamite constitution, private property, and civilisation (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 12). Both Le Fanu's earlier participation in the Irish Metropolitan Conservative Society

and later editorship of the *Dublin University Magazine* demonstrate his assumption of that role. He was personally involved in the push and pull between opposed visions of an Irish future in the latter case, where he edited a literary publication that served Anglican Irish power. Marjorie Howes contends that Le Fanu's response to the uncertain Anglo-Irish "position was a series of political interests and associations, all of them dedicated to preserving the Anglo-Irish as a distinct and superior caste" (166). Gothic works, Killeen contends, offer useful tools to navigate enclave mentalities via their focus on borders and the importance of mapping limits, policing boundaries, keeping members inside, and blocking outsiders (*Emergence of Irish Gothic* 38-41). It is no surprise then that Le Fanu's texts are frequently figured as expressions of his class's fearful relationship to their socio-political plight. From that perspective, the horrors encountered in Le Fanu's texts become imaginative tools to navigate contemporary threats.

There is some critical disagreement about the applicability of Le Fanu's oeuvre to the socio-political situation of nineteenth-century Ireland. David Punter has said that Le Fanu's later writing shed Walter Scott's influences and better resembled that of Ann Radcliffe. His works became less historical and more reliant on "established Gothic motifs" (201). Punter goes so far as to claim that "[t]here is very little historical or political interest in his 'supernatural' novels" (207). Despite Le Fanu's turn away from the historical novel in his late career, others have identified the consistently political applications of Le Fanu's later, more explicitly Gothic tales. For McCormack, much of Le Fanu's fiction does not depict a world of human society, which would allow for "social didacticism" and a direct commentary on life in England, the setting of much of Le

Fanu's later fiction. Rather, his fiction is situated within a metaphysical and personal reality that better reflects "the diminished reality of the British dimension in Ireland, the declining potency of an ascendancy in recession" (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 252). The anxieties of the Anglo-Irish are often mapped onto Le Fanu's most famous tale, "Carmilla" (from *In a Glass Darkly*, 1872), his pre-*Dracula* vampire story. The text concerns a young girl, Laura, being seduced, bitten, and otherwise victimised by the titular, female, vampiric menace who is ultimately discovered and destroyed. Killeen has remarked on the Anglo-Irishness inscribed on the hyphenated identity of "Carmilla"'s protagonist Laura ("An Irish Carmilla" 101). Meanwhile, Margot Gale Backus has indicated that Carmilla's identity as Laura's relative and a foreigner embodies unease over the national identity of Anglo-Irish children (132-3). The potential historical resonances of these characters are further explicated by Victor Sage who indicates that "Carmilla" allegorises "the corrupt legacy of the Williamite period": Carmilla, for Sage, acts out a circular, matrilineal nightmare (199-200).

Sage indicates a similar historical resonance in Le Fanu's popular novel, *Uncle Silas* (1864). The fearful childhood relationship of that story's lead character, Maud, with the dubious figures surrounding her is tinged with the many concerns afflicting England and Ireland. Those troubles include a mid-nineteenth-century fear of Catholics and a later nineteenth-century fear of Fenianism (105-6). Meanwhile, Howes states that

[t]he novel's preoccupation with Maud's femininity, its covert association of dangerous femininity with a specifically Irish corruption, its emphasis on the process of constructing a more stable female character through education or

civilization, and its representation of sexual misalliance as the exemplary betrayal of tradition, all constitute its distinct Anglo-Irishness and subtly distinguish it from the English sensational thrillers of the period with which it competed. (186)

Critical focus on the anxieties surrounding Le Fanu and his class' way of life is not misguided. Contemporary concerns about the maintenance of the Anglo-Irish enclave are eminently relevant to Le Fanu's texts where reigning power structures seem to be built on unstable foundations and where forces emerge from the peripheries to threaten hegemony. Speaking of Le Fanu's "Schalken the Painter", in which a man's lover is seemingly sold to a demonic figure, James Swafford proposes,

Le Fanu's story ... is an indictment of a specifically Protestant society whose fundamental assumptions no one seems able to challenge. Le Fanu distances this society historically from his own, but seventeenth-century Holland is so deeply involved with Irish Protestantism that Le Fanu's condemnation seems all the stronger. It is a society whose guardians do not guard, whose lovers cannot love, whose church cannot save; it drives its children to suicide. Yet nineteenth-century men like the narrator are determined to excuse it. (57-8)

Swafford's assessment points to aspects of Le Fanu's texts that provide a more reflective critique of hegemony and of the structures that have been put in place to maintain it. I contend that we must think more closely about how the contemporary fears

that seemed to affect Le Fanu's writing, that have long justified marking his writing as political, manifest in Gothic texts that map and critique the upholding of inadequate status quos.

In recent decades, Le Fanu critics have expanded the theoretical approaches applied to Le Fanu, a tradition I hope to continue here. For example, there has been a justified turn in Le Fanu scholarship towards considering his works not just as commentary on an Anglo-Irish backdrop, but also to consider them in wider European contexts. Further, authors like James Walton and Victor Sage have paid close attention in their monographs to key literary, stylistic, and thematic throughlines, often reflective of, but not purely connected to the nineteenth-century, Anglo-Irish political situation. What I wish to add to critical discourse on Le Fanu's fiction through this dissertation is an examination of Le Fanu's depiction of the ways in which dominant societal configurations are created. My approach resembles conventional appraisals of his work by considering Le Fanu in terms of the troubled, Victorian, Anglo-Irish history he was writing into. However, I position that context as a source of his stylistic investigation of the construction and decline of hegemony more widely. By viewing Le Fanu's works as informed by this historical situation of threatened decline, but not a direct allegory of it, I argue that his works offer sociologically complex insights that are fed by Le Fanu's Anglo-Irish, Victorian background. I aim to show that there are key socio-political critiques embedded in Le Fanu's late Gothic works and that they can be applied to his historical moment, but also can exist independently of it. Through a social-constructionist approach, I will demonstrate the ways in which Le Fanu depicts the formation of collective understandings of the world. Further, I contend that Le Fanu

demonstrates how those understandings can be exposed as inadequate, and how they can then decline in situations that challenge commonly held conceptions of social and material reality. Rather than just articulating Anglican unease in coded manners, Le Fanu creates a confrontational experience for the reader. He simulates the sensation of being in the midst of constructed visions of reality. When confronted by that which they deem unreal or unacceptable, those realities often prove to be insufficient, unjust, and at risk of destruction.

I. Defining Reality

Much of the commentary present in Le Fanu's fiction is made possible because his characters are unable to understand their surroundings in objective terms. Indeed, the shadowed worlds of Gothic texts more generally often overmatch the powers of human perception. The objective nature of Gothic settings is often difficult to discern for characters and, consequently, for readers. David Punter argues that early Gothic writers, namely Radcliffe and Lewis, wrote "fables about those points of vision and obsession where individuals blur into their own fantasies". Punter states that the strength of Radcliffe's and Lewis' texts lie in "the detailed and often poeticised depiction of states of mind" (64-65). Punter also points to *The Recess* (1783), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Monk* (1796), all of which disturb "our assumptions of the real" (85). The investigation of complex, troubled human perception was supplemented by a growing intimacy in the Gothic of the nineteenth century. Scholars such as Robert Mighall and Jarlath Killeen have commented on the evolution of the Gothic in the

Victorian period in which Gothic texts often moved from discussing far-off locations to focusing on the imperial centre, the domestic space, and even the body itself (Mighall 130-138, Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 12-19). Jack Halberstam has similarly discussed how “from the late eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, the terrain of Gothic horror shifted from the fear of corrupted aristocracy or clergy, represented by the haunted castle or abbey, to the fear embodied by monstrous bodies” (16). Christina Morin has complicated the notion that the earlier Gothic focused on far-off locations (“Forgotten Fiction” 83), forcing us to rethink the exterior to interior trajectory. However, these accounts nevertheless underline the inward-looking focus of Gothic works in Le Fanu’s time which critics frequently identify as examining interior sources of terror that are embedded in homes, bodies, and minds. Due to the inward-looking tradition in which he wrote, it makes sense that Le Fanu engaged in complex reflections on imperfect perception and its lack of relation to objective reality in the nineteenth century. Maria Beville argues that

a primary concern of Gothic literature is our lack of access to reality, formally evident in the presence of the supernatural and the surreal and in the function of ghosts, spectres and fantastic ‘others’ who offer the reader an alternative reality to that accepted by science and reason. (53)

Gothic writing displays a persistent interest in “a lack of access to reality” as well as what Killeen describes as a continual navigation of borders. The Gothic can thus enable

readers to consider questions about the boundaries of one's conception of reality in situations where reality is inaccessible and what is "accepted by science and reason" is challenged.

A Gothic focus on the difficulties of perceiving the world lines up with contemporary reviews of Le Fanu's work, many of which remark upon ontological uncertainty. In an overview of his work, a writer for *The Nation* states, "Le Fanu's characters live and breathe in a world of mystery, and are the victims of continued secret influences whether spiritual or material" ("Notable Irish Writers" 10). Similarly, in an *Athenaeum* review of *The Chronicles of Golden Friars* (1871), the reviewer expresses an aversion to the supernaturalism of that collection's second story, "The Haunted Baronet". However, the reviewer notes that the supernatural elements make the story read "like a bad dream, and is so far a triumph in its peculiar line" ("Novels of the Week", July 1871, 79). The predominance of "secret influences" and the dreamlike qualities identified in Le Fanu's "world of mystery" by *The Nation* and *The Athenaeum* demonstrate the difficulty of clearly perceiving the world in Le Fanu's texts. That Le Fanu's fiction confronts readers, like the reviewers above, with issues of human perception reinforces a key relation between Le Fanu's texts and the wider field of Gothic writing.

"The Haunted Baronet", for instance, makes the difficulty of objective perception clear in its final act. Maud, one of the main characters, witnesses the protagonist Sir Bale become supernaturally convinced of his coming demise. In an attempt to comfort her sister, Bale's wife, Maud unconsciously emphasises the subjective nature of all experience: "Come, darling [...] we can only talk of impressions, and we are imposed

upon by the solemnity of his manner, and the fact that he evidently believes in his own delusion; every one does believe in his own delusion — there is nothing strange in that” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 173). Misconception is tied inherently to individual discernment here. Ontological uncertainty is also brought to the fore in Le Fanu's *Checkmate* (1871). In that novel, many of the central characters find themselves at a concert in which the narrator comments on the individual nature of consciousness: “And now the grand and unearthly oratorio has commenced. Each person in our little group hears it with different ears. I wonder whether any two persons in that vast assembly heard it precisely alike” (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 287). General Spielsdorf in “Carmilla” tells the protagonist’s father that “you believe in nothing but what consists with your own prejudices and illusions” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 293). In *Checkmate*, the line between “prejudices and illusions” on the one hand, and a consistent, true reality on the other, is blurred because, it seems, no single person in this gathering is able to perceive the same thing. Delusions or prejudices are endemic to these characters, and all are prevented from exerting unbiased discernment.

Le Fanu scholars have also noted the instability of perception endemic to his characters in particular. Carol Margaret Davison states that Le Fanu’s interventions into the Gothic “raised the spectre of ontological uncertainty by way of the supernatural”, helping “to transform the Gothic into the modern tale of psychological terror” (224). Shane McCorristine also comments on Le Fanu’s exploration of “consciousness”, stating that, “[f]rom spectral illusions, to brain fever, to skulduggery, to hereditary suicidal mania, Le Fanu’s protagonists suffer from a lack of objective reality discrimination” (286). McCorristine connects “The Haunted Baronet” to Anglo-Irish

insecurities and anxieties. However, I would like to draw attention to the “lack of objective reality discrimination” observed by McCorristine alongside the focus on “ontological uncertainty” observed by Davison, which mirror similar sentiments about Le Fanu’s world made in *The Nation* and *The Athenaeum* as well as the passages above from “The Haunted Baronet” and *Checkmate*. Further, the inability to discern factual knowledge in Le Fanu’s texts is present for both characters and readers, as noted by a Victorian reviewer of Le Fanu’s *Haunted Lives* (1868). The review complains that the novel does not give readers more information about the plot than the novel’s characters:

Novelists should be chary of mystifying their readers; for in proportion as they are flattered and delighted by the author who admits them into his confidence, readers are prone to resent the action of the story-teller who is continually throwing them on false scents, and is bent chiefly on enjoying himself at their expense, when he ought rather to be bent on amusing them at the expense of some of his characters. (“New Novels”, 1868, 599)

The clearest visions the reader gets of Le Fanu’s fictional locales are still uncertain because readers are often placed on equal footing with characters whose powers of “reality discrimination” are limited and uncertain. Le Fanu’s examination of perception is interesting inasmuch as it occurs in an imaginative setting whose true nature is obscured from his characters and readers. There, experiences with “ghosts, spectres and fantastic ‘others’” prove corrosive to fully trusting that which is “accepted by science

and reason” (Beville 53). Placing Le Fanu’s work within the field of Gothic studies thus encourages my approach, which considers reality in Le Fanu’s late fiction as constructed rather than inherent or universal and prompts questions about how one might form a clear boundary between what is real and not. Therefore, examining Le Fanu’s late texts as Gothic prompts a broader discussion of how the borders of a reality can be reified in a situation where what is objectively real is impossible to perceive for characters and readers.

Maria Beville codifies some of the difficulties of perception described above through her attempt to set the generic boundaries of the postmodern Gothic, a useful concept for discussing Le Fanu’s fiction of blurred discernment. To draw important connections between the Gothic and postmodernist approaches, Beville delves into the Gothic’s interrogation of the coherence of selfhood as well as the goals of postmodernist literature:

The postmodernist approach to literary creation, which effectively invests in the production of what could be called a series of meta-realities, aims at leading the reader to the general conclusion that truth, reality and experience are in essence purely subjective and personal. This is achieved through the use of language, which draws attention to itself as a means of creative expression. (47-8)

What Beville describes here is similar to the rather postmodern vision of discernment depicted in *Checkmate*’s concert scene. Crucially, Le Fanu’s work is not postmodern,

but we can locate postmodernist tendencies in his writing. *Checkmate* prompts readers to ask how objectivity might be configured among different individuals if their perceptions of “the grand and unearthly oratorio” are never “precisely alike”, when their experiences are “in essence purely subjective and personal”. Indeed, Le Fanu’s narratives draw attention to “the use of language ... as a means of creative expression” that might call into being and negotiate a collective sense of reality between and among disparate viewpoints.

What makes Le Fanu’s literary examination of subjectivity fascinating is the way in which it becomes tied to a much larger process that has not been examined in-depth in present scholarship. Despite the interior turn of late Gothic fiction, in the texts Le Fanu wrote between 1860 and 1873, the troubled nature of individual cognition is amplified to the communal level through an examination of how characters’ limited perspectives construct a collective sense of reality. They do so in a fictional world whose true nature cannot be perceived directly by either the characters or the reader. As such, reality in Le Fanu’s late fiction is never singular since objectivity is so hard to determine. Rather it is something that societies create, maintain, and negotiate among their members, who each possess biased, unstable consciousnesses. Here, I define reality as communally built sets of rules, or paradigms, with which a community identifies what is materially real and socially acceptable or unreal and unacceptable. Le Fanu’s characters construct reality through interactions, steadily building and reinforcing hegemonic power structures for categorising and acting on their surroundings. Shared conceptions of the world then are a complicated matrix in these works, built as they are through perspectives in interaction.

The approach adopted by this thesis, of examining a consistent thematic and stylistic focus on realities in Le Fanu's texts, entails a sustained focus on close readings of his stories in order to examine the ways in which characters become a part of linguistically building and maintaining a sense of shared reality. Carving out the space necessary to close-read Le Fanu's works in depth involves limiting the segment of his considerable body of fiction that I discuss. The wave of fiction that began with his last Ireland-set novel, *The House by the Churchyard* (1863), lasted until his death in 1873. The texts discussed in this dissertation, written in the 1860s and 1870s, include *The House by the Churchyard*, *Wylder's Hand* (1864), *Uncle Silas*, *Guy Deverell* (1865), *The Tenants of Malory* (1867), *Haunted Lives*, "The White Cat of Drumgunniol" (1869), "Wicked Captain Walshawe, of Wauling" (1869), "The Child That Went With the Fairies" (1870), *The Chronicles of Golden Friars*, *Checkmate*, *The Rose and Key* (1871), *In a Glass Darkly*, and *Willing to Die* (1873).

Le Fanu's late fiction is, as Punter says, marked by a shift away from historical concerns and towards archaic Gothic subject-matter (201). It provides a sustained, chronologically focused exploration of the creation of reality in the absence of objectivity through its focus on Gothic, ontological uncertainty. Further, Dempsey states that this period of writing replaced "the idylls of the Catholic peasantry and Jacobite nobility" with "stories of socially isolated families in gloomy estates, victims of insidious intruders bent on destabilising the structures of family and power through acts of violence and corruption" (74). This fiction thus provides a focus on how communal structures are destabilised by "intruders", making it ideal for exploring the ways in which reality is both created subjectively and deteriorated. Le Fanu's output in this era also contains many of

Le Fanu's most powerful, accomplished works, and it ultimately presents a compelling narrative space in which to explore how limited subjectivities become formed into a communal perception which might then decay. The insights gained from an extensive, close analysis of Le Fanu's late fiction should then be used in future analyses of Le Fanu's texts that fall outside the chronological remit of this study. Finally, a focus on this period of Le Fanu's work allows for attention to well-known Le Fanu works like *In a Glass Darkly* and *Uncle Silas* as well as less studied texts such as "The Bird of Passage", *The Rose and Key*, and "The Haunted Baronet". I have primarily referenced online editions of the texts in this dissertation, not only due to the constraints of researching during the Covid-19 pandemic as an immunocompromised scholar, but also because a large portion of these texts are out-of-print or are otherwise difficult to access in physical form. Most of Le Fanu's works simply lack public and critical attention. That is not to say there is no desire for or interest in some of these texts amongst both academic and non-academic audiences. Recently, Claire Connolly edited a new edition of *Uncle Silas* for Oxford University Press, while Xavier Aldana Reyes edited a collection called *The Gothic Tales of Sheridan Le Fanu* for the British Library. Both editions embody a nexus between academic and popular appreciation of Le Fanu, a context on which this dissertation hopes to capitalise. I aim to deliver an accessible way to understand the socio-political resonance of Le Fanu's late fiction, including his most popular works and those that deserve wider circulation. I believe that identifying the ways in which collective, subjective realities are constructed and deteriorated in his late texts accomplishes that goal.

II. Socially Constructed Realities

Amid the difficulty of perceiving the world objectively and the necessity of creating subjective schemes of reality, Le Fanu's late texts portray his characters struggling with unreal, socially disruptive forces: ghosts, vampires, and other subversive figures that challenge the coherence of collective conceptions, disrupting social structures as Dempsey says. Le Fanu's seditious creations threaten to replace communities' constructed norms. Relevant here is "Carmilla", Le Fanu's most well-known story, perhaps only rivalled by *Uncle Silas*. Its ubiquity makes it a good starting point for this analysis. On the surface, "Carmilla" is a story about a vampiric disturbance to the protagonist's household. The vampire exhibits same-sex attraction, apparently does not age as humans should, and reproduces through bite rather than heterosexual union. However, the vampire is ultimately defeated, ostensibly re-establishing a particular vision of rationality and civic order: one that does not acknowledge same-sex attraction, matriarchal dominance, or the non-Christian supernatural. Its destruction also upholds male authority. After a brief bout with what they would designate as non-existent, the male characters restore that which is deemed real, and life can go on in the community in which the story is set. However, the experience of reading "Carmilla" through the eyes of its main character, Laura, contradicts a simplistic overview because it suggests that an encounter with the unreal cannot so easily be undone and forgotten.

Robert Mighall's discussion of the reality-deteriorating effect of the titular monster of *Dracula* (1897) is relevant here. Mighall disagrees with prevailing readings of the novel as a story of disguised sexual repression. In doing so, Mighall indicates that the main horror of Stoker's *Dracula* is not repressed sexuality, but instead the revelation

that things deemed fanciful actually and obviously exist (230-43). The emergence of the vampiric Carmilla acts similarly in that Carmilla's presence as a vampire undermines Laura's understanding of the world. Crucially, the reader sees the authority figures around Laura, usually her father, first denying anything supernatural about this vampire, then killing the vampire and attempting to contain it within legalistic language. Thus, the reader bears witness to the battle between those maintaining a reality and the disruptor who contravenes that process. The monster is destroyed by an imperial tribunal that records its death in bureaucratic documents, with official witnesses. Doing so suppresses the subversive power of the monster through institutional might, but not completely, it seems. Many critics such as William Veeder, Michael Davis, and Elizabeth Signorotti, among others, have discussed the effects of dalliances with the otherworldly vampire (Veeder 217, Davis 227, Signorotti 618). The implications of encounters with the unreal, for these critics, survive the vampire's execution, belying the idea that hegemony is successfully restored by the end of the narrative. Indeed, at the end of the tale, Laura says that she still feels the presence of the vampire, as I will later discuss.

Laura is attacked by something supposedly unreal that she cannot completely understand, and which seems to persist at the end of the story. Additionally, Le Fanu depicts a tale of institutionalised power that denies and subsumes alterity, solidifying the boundaries of its vision of reality as will be discussed in more depth in chapter one. Much like the horror in Mighall's account of *Dracula*, there is a distinct anxiety here about the unreal emerging and disrupting present conceptions. In "Carmilla", however, the subversion is woven into a wider dynamic by which supposedly collective

subjectivities are created and maintained in potentially inadequate ways. “Carmilla” is not simply a narrative of the emergence and subsequent defeat of that which is socially deemed to be fictitious, allowing for modernity to carry on in a consistent, progressive manner. It is also an examination of how the categories of real and unreal are built and preserved. Further, the text investigates whether constructed masculinist, dominant understandings of the world can continue to physically and rhetorically expel what is deemed to be materially and socially aberrant. The specifics of the creation of hegemony within “Carmilla” and other Le Fanu stories, and particularly the function of authority within that process, will be explored in greater depth through the coming chapters. What is important for the present discussion is how “Carmilla” functions as an exemplar of Le Fanu’s fiction more broadly. The story pays close attention to the troubled, perspectival way in which a community’s reality is communally invented, perpetuated, and undermined.

The term community is a rather capacious one, intentionally so for the purposes of this dissertation. Le Fanu’s characters exist within various levels of interpersonal connection: they might live in a local civic organisation, a town for instance, but might also belong to a wider group such as their nation. Here, I adopt a broad-church definition of community as a collection of people attempting to live together under a coherent framework of authority and governance. In “Carmilla”, for example, Laura belongs to an isolated household, consisting of herself, her servants, and her father, their leader. But that household is part of Styria. The populations in the stories investigated here can be small or large. They can also be nested within one another. In each case, there is a concerted effort at maintaining an ostensibly consistent reality in

which the whole social circle lives. Laura's household attempts to uphold its shared paradigms but is imbedded in the wider Empire they occupy. By assisting in executing the titular vampire, the household helps to build and sustain material and civic rules under which the empire lives. The configurations of Laura's household and that of the nation around it seem, at times, in conflict; Laura's household is distinctly English in character and sociability as Laura's father perpetuates speaking in the English language and gives Laura a distinctly English impression of her surroundings, as I will later explore. Meanwhile, Styria is Austrian rather than English. However, the constituent societies in the tale elide national difference via the killing and legal obliteration of the vampiric menace, contributing to a framework in which the Empire and its constituent associations can function. At each degree of magnification there is an attempt to preserve a communal subjectivity. The contradictions in the process, the social and material difference that must be elided, speak to the artificial nature of these shared conceptions.

Walton has drawn on Patricia Coughlan's assessment of Le Fanu's ghost stories to argue that "the whole body of Le Fanu's work [...] frames 'important questions about the concept of the self and the constitution of what is called reality' (9). However, the social mechanics used to construct a coherent, collective reality in situations that threaten that construction has been under-examined thus far in Le Fanu criticism. Social constructionism provides a valuable framework for elucidating the manners in which reality is collectively constituted in Le Fanu's texts from 1860 to 1873. Le Fanu's work long precedes the popularisation of social constructionism as a common sociological theory. Nonetheless, this theoretical framework provides valuable insight into the ways

in which characters in Le Fanu's stories actively form concepts of reality and unreality together within their communities. Vivien Burr distils social constructionism, with its many disparate strains and disciplinary applications, to some key tenets. Through a social-constructionist viewpoint, "[k]nowledge is sustained by social processes" and, through interactions among people, our version of knowledge becomes solidified (4). Social constructionism also holds that language is a precondition for thought: "Concepts and categories are acquired by each person as they develop the use of language and are thus reproduced by everyone who shares a culture and a language" (7-8). The adoption of this constructionist viewpoint allows for better recognition of the ways Le Fanu's communities rhetorically shape and maintain the paradigms with which they categorise and act on the world.

Despite its usefulness in examining and understanding Le Fanu's fiction, a social-constructionist perspective carries some built-in hazards. In the wake of what George G. Hruby calls its second wave, this theoretical lens disillusioned some of its greatest proponents as it became married to strains of poststructuralism. Burr explains:

The extreme relativistic views that were often espoused under the banner of social constructionism seemed to lead down a road to social and personal paralysis, for at least two reasons. First, if we must abandon any notion of a reality which bears some relation, no matter how this relation is conceived, to our constructions, then we are left with a multiplicity of perspectives which become a bewildering array of [...] realities in themselves [...] Secondly, the notion of "agency" slips between our fingers in the same way. (qtd. in Hruby 56)

It became difficult to configure grounded political action within this state of “extreme” relativism: “As Burr [...] herself noted, how can one speak of oppressed groups if the concept of ‘groups’ and ‘oppression’ are but social ‘constructions which can have no greater claim to truth than any other?’” (Hruby 56).

The purely relativist perspective encouraged by post-structuralist strains of social constructionism might also damage the social relevance and social critiques of Le Fanu’s texts by rendering all attempts at categorisation and, more broadly, textual analysis meaningless. However, as Hruby demonstrates, later researchers tried to overcome this difficulty by turning to “a revived realism, pragmatism, or naturalism”:

Many (though not all) of these scholars believe that there is a coherent and dependably consistent reality that is the basis for our sensations [...] Our symbolic representations of reality cannot therefore be said to resemble their cause, or even the reality of our experience, but do nonetheless reference the real, greater-than-human world [...] the validity of our representations can only be determined by their pragmatic indexicality and the degree to which they allow us to make dependably accurate predictions about phenomena [...] Such knowledge can demonstrably give us a greater or lesser capacity to negotiate the real constraints and affordances of our world, including our social world, and allow us to pursue a more fruitful and satisfying condition. (57)

This vision of social constructionism is a valuable tool for studying Le Fanu's fiction because the reader is confronted with constructed social and material paradigms that are often unable to afford Le Fanu's characters the means to "negotiate" their "world".

Le Fanu demonstrates how his fictional personae attempt to maintain their conceptions in the midst of disruptions existing around them that they often cannot fully comprehend, defend against, or assimilate into their worldview. As such there is often a sense of a "greater-than-human world" in which Le Fanu's stories are set, a setting to which the readers and characters do not have full access. In that "world", their constructed, communal perception often cannot fully understand and categorise many of the phenomena around them. In an examination of the void into which Walton claims Le Fanu's narratives are projected, Walton contends that "[a] general truth about Le Fanu's representation of the world" is "that perception itself is illusion and [...] a fiction that the mind imposes on reality" (190). Walton points here to the illusory nature of discernment and the way it is imposed on the world around a character. One might then analyse the effectiveness or inadequacy of wider regimes of imposed "perception" through assessing their capacity to allow their occupants "to negotiate the real constraints and affordances of [their] world" (Hruby 57). Perhaps the frequent inadequacy of hegemonic paradigms in these texts explains why reviewers of the time, from opposite sides of the nationalist-unionist spectrum, were often frustrated by the moral quality, or lack thereof, of Le Fanu's work. A reviewer from the *Dublin University Magazine* commented on Le Fanu's early novel *The Cock and Anchor*, saying Le Fanu should "have a more cheerful view of human affairs" and "it may be that in the actual dispensations of life the triumph of villany [sic] is here [...] All we ask is, that, draw his

scenes as he will, the novelist, in his high and holy office of man's instructor [...] teach him that it is best to be upon the side of right and truth" ("The Cock and Anchor" 624-5). Meanwhile, a contemporary reviewer from the nationalist publication *The Nation* claims Le Fanu's fiction prompts obsession with morbidity compounded by associating mortality with vampires and ghouls. Therefore, the reviewer states, his novels are not "good or wholesome reading" ("Notable Irish Writers" 10). I contend that these reviewers point to an important aspect of Le Fanu's writing through their criticism. By urging a clear, morally improving story that celebrates virtue and wholesomeness, these reviewers indicate a sense of morality that relies on conceptions of clear social frameworks. However, this is often impossible in Le Fanu's stories. Part of their power comes from the fact that characters' collectively assembled rules encounter aspects of their surroundings that violate their realities. They show communities' shared subjectivities to be unsuited to the setting in which they have been built. The moral clarity these reviewers desire is violated in these texts by virtue of their examination of flawed regimes of social and material knowledge.

It makes sense, therefore, that a reviewer of Le Fanu's *Guy Deverell* in *The Spectator* emphasises Le Fanu's failure to subvert the exceptional to the level of "historical probability":

the odd, however picturesque, is not, so far as it is odd, a proper subject for art; the circumstantial and mechanical part of a story should never so overpower the human and characteristic part as to make you think less of the characters than of the events. If an artist could draw a landscape truly as it is seen by the light of a

momentary flash of lightning, he would certainly do wrong to prefer such a picture to a sunlight view of the same scene. The glare would be picturesque, but its very curiousness and picturesqueness would distract our attention from the more important and more natural elements of beauty; it would be using the manifold beauty of nature to reveal a flash of lightning, instead of using the lightning to reveal the beauty of nature. In the same way we think Mr. Le Fanu uses his ability in painting modern character to increase the vivid effect of certain unnatural (though possible) conspiracies of circumstance, rather than his skill in weaving circumstances together to bring out his characters. ("Guy Deverell" 15-6)

I contend that the quality of oddness the reviewer identifies as a negative is indicative of Le Fanu's focus on unreality in his late fiction. The writer complains here about Le Fanu's dedication to the exceptional which cannot be contained within notions of the real or natural. The ability or inability to contain the exceptional, the fear that it might dominate the scene and override what is considered real, is a key facet of Le Fanu's writerly power.

It is therefore also worth examining in depth the forces that subvert the realities depicted in Le Fanu's fiction and test their adequacy. Relevant here is Patricia MacCormack who explores the ordeals of characters in some of Le Fanu's most popular tales, in particular "Green Tea" and "The Familiar" (both included in *In a Glass Darkly*). In particular, MacCormack investigates the experience of those who encounter different understandings of the real folding in on one another: "Hallucinations are other worlds intruding or slipping between the cracks and hollows of any one singular plane of

perception” (27). MacCormack’s approach articulates how characters lack singular, universalised, objective conceptions of Le Fanu’s imagined settings. The notion of reality being non-singular in Le Fanu’s world is supported by a reviewer of *Uncle Silas* who mentions a single location represented in two starkly different ways. In the first, the protagonist visits her mother’s grave which has a more benevolent characterisation. In the second, the protagonist visits again with an evil governess, where the scene takes on

a ghastly fantastic horror, which makes the reader draw a breath of relief when they arrive at home again. The difference lies entirely in the different spirit which pervades the description of the two scenes. There is no dramatic incident in either of them; but they serve to shadow forth the struggle between her guardian angel and her evil genius, which is, in fact, the key-note underlying and pervading the whole story. (“New Novels”, 1865, 16)

The difference of “spirit” here, caused by this struggle between two diametrically opposing forces, pervades the story. It is indicative of the wars between the real and unreal throughout Le Fanu’s late fiction. The evil doer here starts to immerse the protagonist in a different understanding of the same location.

Connectedly, Le Fanu’s texts are haunted by the spectre of spiritualist Emmanuel Swedenborg, who discussed multiple layers of perception that might be accessed under the right circumstances. McCormack identifies a “pervading symmetry of Swedenborg’s

system” that is present in Le Fanu’s “literary style” (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 179). McCormack also argues that “[t]here are ... four fundamental tenets of Swedenborgianism relevant to the ideology of *Uncle Silas*: the symmetrical cosmology, the doctrine of correspondence, the world of spirits as the place of judgement, and the possibility of appearance and speech between men and angels” (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 179). Le Fanu’s fiction is thus profoundly affected by a spiritualist system in which various layers of reality can come into contact. A Swedenborgian understanding, productively used to analyse Le Fanu in McCormack’s work, does not provide a totalising understanding of the function of alterity in Le Fanu’s fiction. As McCormack argues, Swedenborg’s metaphysics and Irish folk myth offered symbols, not a creed for Le Fanu (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 242). However, their prevailing relevance to Le Fanu’s thinking and critical conceptions of his texts further underline Le Fanu’s focus on the contact between those occupying the reality of a community and forces that exist partially or totally outside that reality.

Le Fanu’s concern with forces of alterity throughout his large body of fiction is intimately tied to Gothic literature’s well-documented codification of and ambiguous relationship to alterity. Gothic literature is seen by critics like Mighall to designate certain figures and locations, first continental and later domestic, as temporally belonging to a different realm. In Mighall’s view, the Gothic is “principally ‘historical’ in its motivations and emphases, representing attitudes to the past and its influence on the present, and generally employing an element of anachronistic conflict” (xxiii). Further, Killeen offers that the Gothic has a multifaceted connection to the atavistic (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 29). Killeen argues that the nineteenth-century Gothic was concurrent with many

developments in understandings of the past. These included geological discoveries about how old the world is and the evolving understanding of the Catholic Middle Ages as a period of stability and meaning, in which time and the self were in harmony (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 32). The Gothic, for Killeen, can be seen as a transgressive desire for a Catholic past mixed with disgust which would not have been acceptable in more realist fictions (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 33).

In Killeen's account, the Gothic establishes contrasting forces and, in their intersection, finds difficulty entirely discrediting the archaic Catholic world even as the Gothic typically enacts an expulsion of the other. In much of Le Fanu's fiction, at least when examined through a social-constructionist approach, the essentialist, ideological underpinnings of this atavistic-modern divide start to slip away. The titular vampire of "Carmilla" is not just an embodiment of the past, though she does represent a mostly outdated civic order and she herself is literally quite old. She is primarily other in terms of the rules by which she abides. That Carmilla reproduces through biting and apparently despises Christianity establishes incompatibility with Laura's reality. Le Fanu's fiction is thus part of the tradition of Gothic fiction depicting a battle between diametrically opposed forces. However, I contend that Le Fanu's late fiction deepens the confrontation between opposed visions of the social and material order identified by other critics. The conflict is no longer marked by a clear, consistent temporal divide. It now takes place on a less proscribed battleground. The battle is fought because duelling socio-political and/or material paradigms have been constructed differently rather than being inherently modern or anachronistic.

A social-constructionist approach allows for an exploration of the effect of warring conceptions of the world not just on individuals, but also in terms of their wider social implications. In the case of this analysis, a constructionist lens enables an in-depth examination of the power structures involved in creating and maintaining collective conceptions of the world. It allows for an investigation into how power structures can respond to situations that expose their vision of the real as inadequate, and how the meeting of diverse means of inhabiting and acting on one's surroundings often erodes a shared subjectivity. I demonstrate that there are many ways in which the construction and decline of realities is presented in Le Fanu's late fiction. Supernatural figures can deteriorate a society's paradigms, but there are also non-paranormal characters whose actions similarly challenge a reality. There are criminals who subvert established sources of authority. There are characters who have lived in far-off lands or in diverse civic contexts whose personal outlook is at odds with that of their homeland. There are those who work their way into existing social configurations and in so doing undermine rules about acceptable communal structures and behaviours. Others exert control over girls, diverting their reproductive abilities and property rights away from an established, patriarchal, hegemonic social organisation. The attempt to construct and preserve a singular shared understanding of the world is thus constantly under threat in Le Fanu's fiction. The societal strength aimed at supporting collaborative conceptions is often at risk of being stolen away by others, be they ethereal or entirely human.

Therefore, Le Fanu's fictional communities constantly struggle to preserve a coherent configuration of their surroundings. I will explore the concept of a hegemonic reality in more depth in the first and second chapters of this thesis, but it is important to

mention here as a general goal of the societies of Le Fanu's fiction. In upholding shared conceptions of the world as a primary objective, communities sometimes elide ethical responsibility to allow their occupants to, as Hruby says, "pursue a more fruitful and satisfying condition". By doing so, they often perpetuate existing power structures even in the face of a fictional space that routinely exposes the inadequacy of stubbornly sustained ways of being and knowing, at least for a while. Often, the bodies politic in question do harm to their members, especially to the vulnerable, in service of sustaining a consistent set of paradigms. To continue with "Carmilla" as an example, Laura's father's denial of and inability to recognise the vampiric threat attacking his daughter is not just an example of an ignorant character, but also of a socially authorised, domineering man unwilling to consider altering the shared subjectivity he upholds to better protect those around him. Similar are the imperial forces who legally execute Carmilla, designating the vampiric threat over, alterity obliterated. That Carmilla was brought into the story by yet undefeated, perhaps vampiric creatures, that Laura still feels Carmilla's presence at the end of the story, and that the reader is assured people bitten by vampires, as Laura has been, will become vampires all contradict this facile declaration. These prevailing factors enable readers to assess Laura's father's reality as offering inadequate "capacity to negotiate the real constraints and affordances of [his] world" (Hruby 57) when confronted by an alternative reality.

Few of Le Fanu's works published between 1860 and 1873 show every step of the process by which coherent socio-political and physical conceptions of the world are created and deteriorated. However, taken together, they provide a compelling narrative of societies building their visions of what is materially true and socially just, then finding

their inventions harmful to community members. Those elements of a reality that harm characters' ability to negotiate their surroundings open the way for the unreal to deteriorate and perhaps even replace existing paradigms. Le Fanu's fiction imparts a vision of societies attempting to maintain their collective paradigms amidst situations that threaten them. It allows for a critique of the oppressive ways communities produce a shared sense of legitimacy, truth, acceptable behaviour, and the proper assertion of social power in such situations. A social-constructionist perspective therefore demonstrates a broader socio-political resonance in these works. It offers a wider critique of inadequate, repressive ways of contending with times of crisis, both within and outside Le Fanu's historical moment as will be discussed in the final section of this introduction.

III. Le Fanu's Fictional World

My social-constructionist approach also involves reading Le Fanu's late fiction as constructed lenses into a fictional world that is impossible to perceive objectively by reader and character alike. Doing so intensifies Le Fanu's social critiques. The uncertain situation occupied by the reader leads to an absorbing form of reading. In an interview published in *Gothic Studies*, author China Miéville discusses the possibilities of what he calls "radical naivety and forgetting", the act of becoming completely immersed in a story such that the literalism of its metaphors "invigorates both its metaphor and its 'internal' reality" (65-6). The effect of Le Fanu's fiction largely relies on a similar act of "radical naivety", of becoming absorbed in Le Fanu's setting in order to

bolster the simulated authenticity of the world the reader inhabits and its real-world significance. Thus, the reader is “inhabiting [...] a kind of space in which critical intuition can hit you because you are inhabiting the totality of [a] work of art” (Miéville and Shapiro 66).

Le Fanu offers an interesting, intertextual world or worlds for the reader to inhabit. His late fiction, with its shared narrators, characters who cross from one story to another, and events that occur in one work only to be remembered in another, creates the impression of an interconnected universe (or at the very least a series of often interconnected fictional settings) that the reader views through disparate lenses. For example, the main character of Le Fanu’s “The Haunted Baronet” is later mentioned in *Willing to Die* as is the setting of Golden Friars; the latter work references the titular setting of *The Tenants of Malory*, and a haunted carriage of supernatural beings in “Carmilla” returns in “The Child that Went with the Fairies”. A contemporary reviewer from *The Athenaeum* noticed this aspect of Le Fanu’s fiction in their review of *Willing to Die*: “The scene is laid in the old country-houses of Wales and the North, of which we have had former glimpses under the guidance of the writer. We re-visit Malory and Golden Friars, Dorracleugh and Mardykes” (“Novels of the Week”, 1873, 659). It is not always possible to definitively link all of Le Fanu’s stories to each other. However, their often interrelated and inter-referential natures, as noticed by the *Athenaeum* reviewer, allow readers to feel as though they look on a collection of viewpoints into what often seems to be a singular world. Further, Le Fanu frames his late texts as perspectival reports of events that occur in his fictional setting. In “Carmilla”, Laura discusses her direct encounter with vampirism to inform others about that experience, for example,

while in *Wylder's Hand* one man, Charles de Cresseron, attempts to give an account of the disappearance of an acquaintance. *In a Glass Darkly* represents the effort of an editor to publish papers collected and commented on by a doctor, reporting on mysterious events from a variety of perspectives. Reading Le Fanu's texts therefore gives a variety of perspectives on different aspects of Le Fanu's fictional world.

For simplicity's sake, and due to this frequent inter-referentiality, I will be referring to the 'world' of Le Fanu's late fiction. It is often unclear whether the intertextual references discussed above constitute a shared universe or whether discrepancies therein - such as the repeated narrator Charles de Cresseron having seemingly multiple places of origin - mean these universes are somewhat separate. Further, the works Le Fanu released in the decade-long period covered by this dissertation were produced in different situations, often being republished or re-contextualised, potentially challenging the notion of a singular, stable, unchanging universe in which these stories are set. However, the lack of clarity we possess about the nature of these stories' settings and their relationships to one another fits in with the elusiveness of an objective understanding of reality. That our understanding of the seemingly shared world and its nature is so obscured thus supplements rather than contradicts the wider way in which this thesis understands reality: that it is constructed and changeable rather than inherent and universal. Additionally, the impression of an interconnected fictional world that Le Fanu invents indicates that a more freely intertextual and comparative analysis is a profitable one; that these texts are frequently linked points to the benefits of considering our experience of Le Fanu's works as a whole rather than looking at each as a siloed entity to be analysed separately. An intertextual approach allows for more in-

depth theorisation of the position into which Le Fanu consistently places his reader across his late texts. Walton points to “[t]he nested narratives, and the nest of interpretations, presented by ‘Green Tea’” which reflect a “fractured vision of reality” by providing the reader “too many explanations” of the tale’s central haunting (50). The “nest” of perception and interpretation in “Green Tea” is indicative of the state the reader is forced into when experiencing Le Fanu’s fictional setting. The reader’s discernment in this space is made in the joining of their perspective to that of various narrators’, an act of interaction not unlike the process of communication that, through a social-constructionist lens, forms a communal conception of reality. Le Fanu’s consistent focus on this readerly configuration, within the context of a fiction that is so often inter-referential, is thus better analysed through examining Le Fanu’s various texts alongside one another. It allows us to explore the troubling implications of the reader’s viewpoint into Le Fanu’s world in greater depth as Walton does with “[t]he nested narratives” in “Green Tea”, whether that ‘world’ is singular or made up of a web of obscured, variously interconnected fictional settings.

Le Fanu’s reader is encouraged to live in Le Fanu’s fictional environ in the way Miéville describes largely because the narrators populate it. The invitation to occupy the world of the text is something many Gothic works, such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole or *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, accomplish through their presentation as found, actual manuscripts, reporting to readers about a world they too occupy. By virtue of narrators reporting to readers as fellow occupants of a world, Le Fanu’s readers are positioned as a simultaneously internal and external readership, existing within the setting about which they read at the same time that they occupy a space

outside of it. Le Fanu achieves the effect of reading real-world, perspectival accounts by employing a level of uncertainty to his narration. The uncertainty was identified by a reviewer of *The House by the Churchyard* in *The Spectator*:

Mr. Le Fanu [...] looks upon [his characters] as independent beings, who have quite enough real “objective” existence to warrant a smile or a sceptical lunge at their true motives [...] there is a point not very far down, at which his own knowledge of them completely stops, and beyond which he is as much in the dark as his readers about their spiritual secrets [...] It is scarcely possible to disbelieve in characters which the author himself treats as so independent of himself as to excite his own curiosity [...]. The realism of this *artifice* as it may appear to some [...] is of the exactly opposite kind to the realism of De Foe [...] Mr. Le Fanu, following Mr. Thackeray, [...] treat[s] the hidden part of his heroes’ or heroines’ nature as if it were as much a subject of interest, innuendo, and surmise to him, as are the persons of real life. (22)

The narrators Le Fanu creates thus act as real people. There is a limit to their knowledge, creating a kind of “realism” from the limited comprehension of those who report Le Fanu’s world to us. The reader is not exceptional in this setting: they view characters with limited perception through the lens of narrators who are much the same. A reviewer in *The Athenaeum* argues that, in Le Fanu’s *Wylder’s Hand*, “[t]he reader is just sufficiently taken into the confidence of the author to be able to feel a strong

sympathy with the personages concerned, whilst at the same time there is sufficient concealment to stimulate curiosity” (“New Novels”, 1864, 371). The reviewer indicates a push and pull in our sympathy with our narrators and their ability to render the world; readers are in their “confidence” but not completely due to the “concealment” of the narrators’ texts. Readers are left to ponder this uncertain space in which they have been placed and the necessarily imperfect documents they have been given to do so, which are all the more realistic for being imperfect.

Le Fanu’s attempts to create a realistic-feeling space help to compound the sensation of reading documentary accounts of the world. Readers of the time commented on Le Fanu’s attempts at creating verisimilitude. A review of *In a Glass Darkly* from *The Athenaeum* identifies the importance of the collection’s fictional frame in which all the stories therein are collected by a Dr Hesselius: “A certain verisimilitude is given to the most extravagant flights of fancy by this method” (“Novels of the Week”, 1872, 13). Indeed, the anonymous reviewer places tremendous importance on the visceral power of what they call “the illusions of fidelity to truth”, saying that “[o]ur author’s pride is to make his reader’s ‘flesh creep,’ and in this achievement we do not doubt his success” (“Novels of the Week”, 1872, 13). A reviewer of Le Fanu’s earlier *The Cock and Anchor*, even while criticising the novel, indicates Le Fanu’s focus on “the illusions of fidelity to truth” when he states that the tale lacks a singular, overriding impression to which a novel should subordinate all else. He articulates that verisimilitude subverts the primary goal of a novel here because “the very truthfulness of the story causes the disappointment which we feel, and that the tale is the more like life, which [...] leaves on the mind but the sad lesson ‘all is vanity and vexation of spirit’”

("The Cock and Anchor" 608-9). That reviewers at the time identified Le Fanu's texts' elevation of verisimilitude even above other novelistic concerns prompts us to further consider the implications of the immersive space in which Le Fanu places his readers and the means he has given us to understand it.

The experience of reading about non-realist events in a verisimilar space is artfully illustrated by Renée Fox who discusses modes of engaging with realism in *Dracula* by arguing that the novel

guides us to believe in a real that is not already known and knowable, one that we access not by giving ourselves over to 'the felt experience of life within the fictional world' in the way that realist novels demand, but by producing a felt experience through our own agential, intimate, and individual acts of reading. 'Gothic realism' is an invitation to read with passion rather than with reason, to believe in the unbelievable because it feels real. In doing so we can discover the unseen, unknown, and unregistered forms of experience that other, more recognizably realist modes cannot even begin to imagine. ("Gothic Realism" 23-4)

Le Fanu illustrates much of Fox's sentiment through his fiction. Although Le Fanu may not as avidly advocate for affective over reasoned reading, his works ask readers to give themselves over to his documents as real. Once this happens, readers engage with these works with a kind of agency: Le Fanu makes readers a simulated part of

particular regimes of reality and questions them about whether they should continue to support those constructions that exist in his world. Readers are able to assess the imagined realities they are called to occupy, thus critically examining that which is deemed “already known and knowable” from a particular viewpoint. Simultaneously, Le Fanu allows readers to detect the “unseen, unknown, and unregistered forms of experience” which thwart that which is given the constructed designation of “reason”. Engaging with Le Fanu’s work in a state of “radical naivety”, even just from the time one opens the text to the time one closes it, the reader is encouraged to immerse themselves in the realness of Le Fanu’s fictional space. They are able to do so through the texts’ faux-documentary nature, enabling an “agential” encounter with Le Fanu’s world through the central conflict between the “knowable” and the “unseen”.

Le Fanu’s texts are therefore notable for using the Gothic found manuscript trope while closely examining and critiquing the operations by which an understanding of that setting is created. Le Fanu thus positions readers as attempting to understand Le Fanu’s world alongside his characters and narrators. Elaine Freedgood argues that

[r]ealism often depends on a seemingly seamless relationship between a world we know and characters we don’t [...] Genette has written that metalepsis is troubling because it seems to suggest that “the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative. (402)

Freedgood concludes that, in the case of colonial fiction, characters and readers both participate in a narrative of colonisation (403). What is most relevant to Le Fanu's fiction here is the exchange articulated between the reader's world and the space of the text into which the reader is invited. In that space, reader and character are both in a narrative of reality-creation. Freedgood continues, "the connection of fiction to the real is complemented by the connection of that real back to fiction. Such fictions invite the willing, the grateful suspension of belief" (407). Le Fanu's narrators, writing as if they are informing us about our world from their own limited perspective, similarly produce an interchange between extradiegetic space and the setting of the text. They create an imaginative palimpsest of the kind depicted in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), according to Freedgood:

you can think of Jude as you walk the streets of Oxford, but strictly speaking, he was not there—fictionally or literally (in the literal sense of literally—to the letter). Christminster [the setting of *Jude the Obscure*] may be Oxford, but the remove is important: simply having to find a referent makes Christminster fictional and leaves Jude in a fictional world—however interrupted by the palimpsestic reality of Dorset that hovers above, or below, the fictional maps that accompany the Wessex novels. (398)

Freedgood states that elements of our world existing in the fictional leads to a kind of "breakdown of frames". It is a "metalepsis" by which the text challenges dichotomous

relationships between the diegetic and extra diegetic and the reader's position within those configurations (398).

The world of Le Fanu's texts is indeed fictional; when we close the text, we relegate his vampires, ghosts, and criminals to the imagined world Le Fanu creates, similar to the fictional one in which Jude might be confined. However, engaging in radical naivety allows for a palimpsestic space to form around us. There, we inhabit Le Fanu's setting as it is laid over our own. The literary and real-world infiltrate one another as we read fictional documentary evidence that is positioned as a real act of reporting on the world around us, an understanding of Le Fanu's fiction encouraged by the form in which many of his works were originally published. Le Fanu frequently published in periodicals and was an editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*. As Aoife Dempsey contends,

In periodicals, the line between fact and fiction is blurred; journalistic reports appear indiscriminately between poems and ghost stories, while fictional contributions commonly purport to be factual, further blurring the distinction through an implicit verisimilitude engendered by the cultivated respectability of certain Victorian periodicals. (21)

In their original release, usually in the pages of periodicals, Le Fanu's stories resembled journalism, mirroring the non-fiction works alongside which they were often originally

published. Even the medium in which many of these texts were released, that of the periodical, supplements the immersion Le Fanu imparts on his reader. The “blurring” of fact and fiction in Le Fanu’s texts continues in the novels where the line between diegetic and extradiegetic is crossed in readers’ reactions to the text. In an assessment of *The House by the Churchyard*, a Victorian reviewer seems to confuse Le Fanu himself with the narrator of the tale Charles de Cresseron:

Mr. J.S. Le Fanu, when a little boy, professes to have seen a skull turned up accidentally in a village churchyard which bore marks of fearful violence; there is an old tradition connected with the story of the murdered man buried in that grave, and this is the story which the author professes to tell as he heard it from the lips of an old pensioner of the Royal Irish Artillery, aided by the conventional “Diary” and “Family Letters” which always come to the assistance of authors in such cases. (“Literature” 225)

The reviewer somewhat derisively indicates the obviously invented nature of the tale’s verisimilitude. However, they mistakenly assume Le Fanu offers himself, a real person in our actual world, to be the teller of the tale, assisted by “the conventional” documents that are also positioned as real. In doing so, the reviewer speaks to the way in which Le Fanu’s texts prompt us to understand his tales as reports of the world around us. They position us to see narrators as informing us about the world we occupy. Though the reviewer is incorrect about who the narrator is, they successfully occupy that readerly

posture. Le Fanu's world is engineered to stretch out around us as we read, becoming our surroundings as we internalise their, to borrow a phrase from Dempsey, "implicit verisimilitude".

Le Fanu's texts often distinguish themselves from the kind of realism Freedgood discusses in the disruptive horrors and imperfect perception found in his fictional world. Freedgood states that realist texts allow for "ontological flexibility in cultural memory, an open circuit between fact and fiction that contributes to the imagining and undertaking of the work of empire, again and again" (408). Using the example of *Canadian Crusoes* (1852), Freedgood states that the tale of survival in colonial Canada

is a story that narrates at every turn all the features of what could have been [its protagonists'] possible and probable demise. Instead they succeed in clearing land, building a home with a hearth, converting a Mohawk to Christianity, and returning to their natal home—always the object of their desire. This ending also insures, for the credulous reader (the kind of reader this fiction actively produces, that it might educate her), that their adventure is returned to the realm of the fictional: they are home now, that long mishap is over. (407)

Information and ways of seeing the world pass between diegetic and extradiegetic worlds freely in ways that help to support the colonial endeavour, according to Freedgood. Freedgood explains the contrasting difficulty of modernist texts:

Heart of Darkness leaves us wondering about some unnamed horror—to which the novel refers all too vaguely [...] [Realist] novelists write the world as negotiable: as a place where we can get around obstacles one way or another and as a place in which we can transfer information, and even ourselves, from one ontological state to another. (409)

As the coming chapters will show, readers' ability to cleanly categorise the verisimilar "world" Le Fanu unspools around them becomes compromised through the necessity of engaging with the unreal. The steady process of the unreal asserting more and more control in Le Fanu's stories is noted in a contemporary review of *Uncle Silas* from *The Athenaeum*. It states, "[t]he shadow on the first page of the story creeps slowly on, becoming darker as it advances, until the terrible reality comes into sight, which has been preparing from the beginning [...] tracking the steps of a guiltless victim" ("New Novels", 1865, 16). Much as this reviewer notes how, for Le Fanu's characters, "the terrible reality comes into sight", darkening the scene steadily, so too does the reader's vision of Le Fanu's world become shadowed. Disruptors come into frame, unable to be contained by received regimes of knowledge and action. Le Fanu's fiction moves away from the assurances offered by realist texts in Freedgood's estimation. As previously stated, Le Fanu creates a palimpsestic space for readers to occupy. There, fictional events start to overlay the imaginative setting around the reader who engages in radical naivety. However, due to the unreal with which he presents his reader, Le Fanu does not provide the guidance necessary to "get around obstacles" and unproblematically "transfer information" from diegetic to extradiegetic worlds in service of reigning power

structures like that of imperialism. He thus instead immerses readers in the troubled process his characters undergo to create coherent understandings of his setting.

As an example of the space Le Fanu forms for readers, his novel *Wylder's Hand* is told to us as if to inform us of events happening in our world. It takes us to places like Venice, Italy of which the reader is surely aware. Le Fanu places his fictional locales amidst real ones, much like his stories were placed alongside non-fiction in periodicals. He populates both kinds of locations with his fictional characters. His narrator reports on all of them as if they are or were real, creating an imaginative world around the reader and inviting them in. However, the complications of consciousness that arise therein, when the novel releases claims to objectivity, shadows that world. The narrator, for example, states the fate of a main character by saying, "I don't know whether Rachel Lake will ever marry" (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*). Similarly, the narrator of "The Familiar", as will be discussed in the body of this dissertation, admits that he cannot provide a clear explanation of the ghostly events that have transpired. Le Fanu provides us with no clear way to adequately categorise and fully understand our imagined surroundings through received regimes of knowledge and social order. While, as Freedgood argues, information can be transferred to the actual world and back again in support of colonialist endeavours in realist novels, Le Fanu offers us an experience of living within failed realities. The feeling of existing in Le Fanu's world can be transferred to our own all the more readily because his fiction is layered over the world around us while reading, making the reader's encounter with received forms of knowledge more confrontational. We must directly contend with existing ways of knowing that are presented to us while we read. We must therefore also experience the inadequacies of

inherited forms of knowledge when they fail to provide us the means to understand the disruptive presences we are informed are around us and threaten us. He thus provides a fictional space in which to examine the experience of receiving vitally flawed forms of knowledge in an intimate, confrontational way.

A Victorian reviewer of the novel *Checkmate* detected the confronting nature of the text. They discuss how horrific events from the novel, including “a chamber of horrors in Paris, which, we should have thought, could only have suggested itself to a morbid imagination ‘o’er-informing’ a dyspeptic body, contribute to a result which must more than satisfy the most exacting appetite for the appalling” (“Novels of the Week, February 1871, 207). A sense of physiological reaction is so built into these texts, in this reviewer’s estimation, that they assumed such plots could only be formed by a “morbid” mind and “dyspeptic body”. The visceral nature of the texts, I argue, can be taken further than just assigning embodied impact to the most horrific details or bodily disorder to their author. Le Fanu’s texts form a visceral experience of a fictional world in which readers must feel and react to the inadequacies of inherited ways of comprehending it. Le Fanu situates the reader not as a wholly outside observer. Instead, readers are positioned as physically existing in the world of the story, intensifying the experience of forms of reality breaking down and the bodily danger offered by disruptors who threaten characters and readers alike.

Sarah Comyn and Porscha Fermanis draw on Spivak and Krishna in their effort “to consider the ways in which seeing takes place” (11), interrogating the perspectival nature of forming politically consequential visions of the world:

In this formulation, the history of artistic production in sites of colonisation is best understood as what Muthyala calls a 'double movement' – one that gives hegemonic force to white settler identities and ideologies while simultaneously illuminating the existence of alternative worlds that are often only differently accessible – and must be supplemented by the 'dialectical movement' of 'worlding' and 'reworlding', or what Ralph Bauer terms 'the European imperial inscription of a hemispheric terra incognita and a critical (or literary) practice that would unsettle this Eurocentric inscription'. (11)

The setting Le Fanu forms similarly exposes the ways in which spaces are coded by "hegemonic" powers that might be challenged, much as Comyn and Fermanis attempt to do through their reconceptualisation of the "history of artistic production". Le Fanu's writing is confrontational: readers are situated within Le Fanu's imagined world such that they must experience and respond to received forms of knowledge in that space. Le Fanu weaponises that confrontational, readerly position to intensify social critiques embedded therein. His texts position readers to experience existing within inadequate realities and prompts them to challenge and move beyond those received forms of knowledge. Thus, the reader who closes Le Fanu's text has already existed within and deconstructed various regimes of understanding in the imaginative world around them. Le Fanu therefore positions the reader to better recognise and challenge inadequate,

hegemonic frameworks in the real world by imparting a simulated experience of doing so through his fiction.

In summary, by adopting radical naivety, readers encounter the operation through which a coherent communal outlook is formed and the ways it is violated in a more impactful manner. By asking readers to imaginatively engage with Le Fanu's fictional world as their own through the act of reading, Le Fanu encourages them to feel their perception of that setting being controlled by the creation of collective subjectivity. Their access to Le Fanu's invented backdrop is constantly mediated in various ways by the operation of reality creation as it is for the characters in his stories. Le Fanu's positioning of readers as occupants of his fiction also positions them to imagine themselves as potential sites of reception and propagation of social and material norms. Reading Le Fanu's tales is thus not a neutral act. Instead, it is an act of communication by narrators that seems primed to impart particular values on fellow occupants of their world, readers and characters alike. By inhabiting that fictional space, viewing his fiction as disparate, necessarily imperfect lenses into that location, both the "metaphor", or social implications, and "internal reality" of Le Fanu's fiction become invigorated by an embodied experience of the procedure by which common points of view are forged. These viewpoints can then be challenged by disruptive forces who take advantage of their unsuitability and disturb readers' position as receivers of conventional schemes of being and acting.

IV. Social Commentary: Anglo-Ireland and Beyond

I contextualise the fictional process by which supposedly coherent understandings of the world are produced within a real-world, Victorian Irish milieu. Doing so elucidates the ways in which contemporary concerns fed Le Fanu's depiction of the creation of reality. As demonstrated previously, critics have shown the relevance of Le Fanu's fiction to the actual political situation he encountered. Examining the procedure of building communal conceptions helps to illuminate different ways his late fiction maintains an explicitly political resonance for Victorian Anglo-Ireland, despite frequently veering away from Irish historical subjects and political concerns. In particular, it retains the potential for social commentary by critiquing communities who do harm by their inability, as Hruby phrases it, "to negotiate the real constraints and affordances of our world". I contend that the experience of these works extends beyond being a vehicle for allegorically exploring Victorian and Anglo-Irish anxieties, though. They draw on that contemporary context and immerse readers in Le Fanu's fictional "world". In doing so, they enable an experience of the formation of collective subjectivities and their deterioration. Le Fanu's audience might then apply that ordeal, empowered by its embodied nature as Miéville indicates in his discourse on radical naivety, to nineteenth-century Anglo-Ireland and beyond.

Susan J. Navarette argues that H.P. Lovecraft recapitulated "the anxiety felt by his Victorian precursors" when he proposed that the most horrifying thing the mind can imagine is "a malign and particular suspension or defeat of fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space" (qtd. in Navarette 42). In Le Fanu's fiction, "fixed laws" are social and material,

and there is a distinct horror to seeing those crumble. The transitional, uncertain nature of the nineteenth century in Britain and Ireland might remind readers that, as Thomas Kuhn observes, science is not progressive. Instead, it is a series of models in which newly understood facts are placed (qtd. in Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 126). Jarlath Killeen discusses how scientific models are robust but that when anomalies happen, paradigm shifts occur. The alteration here requires new models which are not truer than the old, but which seem to better account for the anomalies. Historically such shifts entailed the reformulation of, for example, Victorian religious frameworks (Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 126). In Le Fanu's texts, there are attempts to negotiate reality and maintain "fixed laws" in light of threatened material and sociopolitical shifts that could profoundly affect how a community understands the world and organises society. It is appropriate then that Le Fanu's fiction, as this thesis will show, depicts both maintaining collective conceptions and potential radical changes in a time when actual, severe alterations to accepted social and material models loomed.

In addition to changing scientific understanding, threats of massive socio-political shifts were ever-present in Ireland. They are ably commented upon through the process of reality building and decline in Le Fanu's late texts. As McCormack contends,

No nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish novel speaks of Irish society as a totality for they either defined that society as explicitly a dual system (the legacy of Scott as seen in *Banim*, *Carleton*, and early Le Fanu) or as an integral if threatened part of a larger British society (the provincialism of early Le Fanu and the exile provenance of later Le Fanu at his erratic best). (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 255)

In both options, articulating “Irish society” as a “dual system” or a “threatened part of a larger British society”, there is an inability on the part of Anglo-Irish novels to render Ireland as one singular, self-contained social entity. The lack of stability in the term “Irish society” indicates a difficulty of communal self-conceptions in a fractious context. In light of continual dangers posed by scientific advances and threats to the supremacy of Anglo-Irish power, the instability of configurations of “Irish society” seems to indicate a wider danger of changes to social paradigms. Radically new visions of what “Irish society” should be came into frame. Le Fanu imparts an experience of such threatened change.

Le Fanu also critiques various means of solidifying paradigms in unstable situations like those experienced in Victorian Ireland. Robert Mighall contends that the Victorians invented new stratified configurations by designating other races, cultures, and criminals as primitive, setting up a temporal criterion of cultural and personal categorisation. Such ways of material and social comprehension were coming into prominence around the 1870s, the decade when Le Fanu’s final stories were published (Mighall 130-51). Mighall further illustrates that these methodologies for understanding the world were transgressed in Gothic novels such as *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* portrays the horror of what happens when the divisions Jekyll establishes between the civilised and the savage are unsustainable (Mighall 151). Le Fanu’s work meanwhile engages in a larger scale investigation of the socio-political frameworks and conceptual delineations societies build for themselves. His fiction depicts how communities form and negotiate what their

realities are, designating the delineations between what is real and not. Much as savagery and civilisation are established by Jekyll, Le Fanu's works demonstrate how groups discriminate between what is deemed real and acceptable or unreal and unacceptable. He also demonstrates how disruptive forces interact with and threaten to deconstruct those constructions. Le Fanu demonstrates the inadequate methodologies ostensibly civilised populations use to contend with that which is deemed outside their conceptions. In Le Fanu's historical milieu and in his fiction, as will be shown throughout this thesis, authority figures and structures often struggled to respond effectively to what they deem unacceptable. It is likely Le Fanu was drawing from his lived experience, unconsciously or consciously, as he illustrated the process of building and disintegrating reality. Le Fanu's texts provide an experience akin to that which was faced by communities in nineteenth-century Ireland under existential threat.

The socio-political insights built into this dynamic cannot be entirely separated from the Anglo-Irish context so often applied to these works. However, as Alison Milbank indicates, critics should avoid viewing Le Fanu as a purely Anglo-Irish writer. Milbank does this by pointing to Le Fanu's hybrid identity, including his Huguenot identity, and how it leads readers towards the grotesquery at the heart of his work (362-3), an analysis that will become especially relevant in chapter four of this dissertation. The following chapters avoid exploring Le Fanu's stories as small-scale Gothic accounts that can be allegorically expanded to become socially relevant to the Victorian Anglo-Irish situation. Jarlath Killeen points to critics like Roger Solomon who have said that the drive to find meaning in accounts of the horror genre elides affect (*Emergence of Irish Gothic* 79). It is possible to avoid this tendency by using my thesis' social-constructionist

approach. When reading Le Fanu's stories from this point of view, one gains meaning not from allegorical categorisation but by first engaging with the ways in which the reader is pulled into Le Fanu's fictional world as I have described. The reader is made to feel the procedure of reality creation rather than codifying and containing its horror within an allegory for Anglo-Ireland. Readers' initial engagement with the stories is thus an empathic, affective one. They experience the conflict between the real and unreal, and often the inability to subscribe to the real put forward by characters and narrators. They feel the inadequacies that come from rigid attempts to maintain realities in times of threatened shift, prompting a complex sociological examination that the reader understands in an embodied way. Rather than the text operating as a series of signifiers for nineteenth-century Irish concerns, the realisations readers gain can be applied both to the historical period that so influenced Le Fanu's fiction and elsewhere.

To illuminate the affective social critiques of these texts, chapter one will first examine the systems by which communities in his fictional world attempt to produce and solidify their collective conceptions. I demonstrate how Le Fanu depicts the real as a narrative formed within a population, preserved by either incorporating or pruning that which is deemed unreal in a procedure led by authority figures, those endowed with social power. Power here is the social might that can be exerted over the process of maintaining a reality. These men sustain their understanding of their social and material surroundings by acting on the vulnerable, especially girls, who are controlled so that they might reproduce official paradigms without complication.

Chapter two then focuses on the deficiencies in the formation of realities in Le Fanu's fictional space, especially focusing on authority figures. In particular, I articulate

both authority figures' inability to uphold societal rules as well as the insufficiency of many of those precepts to allow community members to navigate their world. This chapter also focuses on the oppression of the vulnerable present in the process of maintaining shared subjectivities. Further, it explores how that subjection contributes to inadequacies in shared notions of what the world is and how to act on it. Ultimately, these defects, such as flawed medical, legal, religious, and narratorial authority, often help those considered unreal to exert their ineffable influence.

Chapter three then discusses disruptive figures. In ways both social and material, they subvert the formation of shared perception in Le Fanu's fictional populations. In doing so, they undermine characters' ability to uphold supposedly coherent interpretations of Le Fanu's fictional space. Subversions also thwart readers' attempts to comprehend Le Fanu's world through received frameworks. Thus, other ways of being gain a foothold in their invasions of Le Fanu's fictional communities and destabilise the perpetuation of a shared subjectivity.

Chapter four illuminates the wider effect of those who disrupt realities. Because of them, attempts to maintain a clear communal conception of characters' surroundings begin to fail. Often, one reality's biological strength, wealth, property rights, and other forms of power are commandeered by forces of alterity. By occupying Le Fanu's space, with its constructed and crumbling forms of understanding, readers are invited to notice similar deterioration even in their return to their own world. Readers can use their visceral experiences of existing in flawed frameworks in Le Fanu's fiction to recognise the necessity of gazing past the enclosures of their own reality. They are even prompted to seek the possibilities that exist beyond.

Chapter 1: The Creation of Communal Reality

Before interrogating how Le Fanu's late fiction prompts the reader to look beyond the bounds of what is deemed authentic and admissible by various communities, it is worth first examining how that edifice of shared subjectivity is built. The building process Le Fanu elucidates depicts regimes of communal knowledge and action being steadily assembled through interactions, an operation in which he implicates the reader. To better illustrate this act of construction, I will first turn to the strange narration of Le Fanu's *Wylder's Hand*. At first glance, the novel appears to be told by a mostly omniscient narrator. He depicts a society experiencing typically Gothic incidents. These events lead to an ostensibly positive resolution in which mysteries are solved and, with some caveats, a sense of normalcy is restored to the community. As the narrator says near the close of the narrative, "[t]he whole structure of rapine and duplicity had fallen through with a dismal crash" (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*). Attempts by villainous characters to alter the status quo fail. Upon closer inspection though, the novel becomes more complicated in form. In the same paragraph, the narrator uses various forms of hearsay to illustrate the fall of the antagonist's "structure of rapine". He refers to "minute and merciless essays in the papers" that report on the schemer, Larkin (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*). He also states that "[p]eople say [Larkin] has not enough left to go on with" (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*). The reliance on rumour and an inability to directly perceive what has happened shift focus away from the conventionality of the novel's broader plot. Readers are directed to notice its more nuanced portrayal of the ways in which coherent narratives are formed through interactions between disparate

perspectives. The tale thus draws attention to a kind of communal narration: an operation by which a group narrates its conceptualisation of the real and acceptable.

Social constructionism, as discussed in the introduction, depicts communal sociopolitical and material frameworks as built in and among people rather than being inherent. The narrator's focus on configuring a narrative of what has happened in *Wylder's Hand* based on various reports rather than a direct rendering of these events subtly indicates a constructionist understanding of the real. Examining the procedure of forming a coherent narrative, or reality, among members of a group brings insight into how the societies of *Wylder's Hand*, *Checkmate*, *In a Glass Darkly*, "The Haunted Baronet", *The House by the Churchyard*, *The Tenants of Malory*, *Guy Deverell*, *The Rose and Key*, *Willing to Die*, and *Uncle Silas* sustain their common understandings. In this chapter, therefore, I will demonstrate how Le Fanu depicts shared subjectivity as a kind of collectively generated story of what is socially and materially real, one in which he places the reader as an imaginative participant. Further, I will trace the ways Le Fanu's fictional societies work to exclude alternatives to their shared storytelling, either by reframing potential subversions or by rhetorically disregarding destabilisations altogether. Communal narration in Le Fanu's fictions is typically directed by and supports patriarchal dominance. Patriarchal authority figures lead the maintenance of existing paradigms often by acting on other, more vulnerable denizens, like girls, in order to ensure the purity of their narration. The representation of constructed perception in these texts allows the sociological insights of Le Fanu's fiction to confront the reader while they occupy his imagined world.

I. The Creation and Maintenance of Communal Narratives

Le Fanu's interest in the creation of collective accounts can be felt in texts like *Checkmate*, *Wylder's Hand*, *In a Glass Darkly*, and "The Haunted Baronet". In *Checkmate*, for example, Le Fanu explores some nuances of reality creation through the act of second-hand reporting. After the central friendship between the mysterious Longcluse and the gambling-addicted Richard Arden turns to bitter rivalry, each can gain knowledge of the other in part through impressions made on the community. In one scene, Longcluse hears of the object of his affections, Richard's sister Alice, from an acquaintance, Miss Maubray. She states:

I'm told she really is deeply attached to [Longcluse's romantic rival]. But that does not prevent her accepting Lord Wynderbroke. He has spoken, and been accepted. Old Sir Reginald told my guardian his brother, last night, and *he* told me in the carriage, as we drove home. I wonder how soon it will be. I should rather like to be one of her bridesmaids. Perhaps she will ask me. (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 184)

Here, Le Fanu makes apparent how social rules are confirmed through the transmission of information, especially in terms of how characters are formulated to fit into particular roles in a society. Alice, as a young woman, is situated firmly within the paternalistic norms of courtship and marriage. Miss Maubray figures herself as a participant in these norms in terms of her desire to be a bridesmaid, but also in terms of her own relations

within this patriarchal structure. Her reference to “Old Sir Reginald” and his brother, her “guardian”, grounds the conveyance of information in a network of men. Her reliance on their word centres the events she describes in terms of social constructs such as the marriage market and patriarchal authority. The opening of that quotation, “I’m told”, emphasises the second-hand information that passes in these groups. Once again, there is an act of indirect dissemination, which is now situated within paradigms of masculine dominance. Thus, through reporting information about Alice Arden, these sources configure and uphold certain societal constructs in Le Fanu’s stories, even though the content delivered by Miss Maubray is entirely subjective and is ultimately proven incorrect.

In *Wylder’s Hand*, as previously demonstrated, Le Fanu presents the reader with second-hand community impression rather than a direct relation of events. This text concerns the mysterious disappearance of Mark Wylder, a rich man who is betrothed to the taciturn Dorcas Brandon. Wylder’s vanishing is precipitated by the arrival of Stanley Lake, brother of one protagonist named Rachel. One major source of dramatic friction early in this tangled, Gothic narrative is the question of whether the manipulative Stanley, rather than Mark, will marry Dorcas in order to further climb the social ladder of his society. This marriage would likely be disastrous if accomplished: Lake has been shown to be quite hot-headed, even abusive, when his ambitions are on the line. Further, as the reader will later learn, he is a murderer. The tension increases steadily: Lake reveals himself to be increasingly avaricious and dangerous. Dorcas becomes more determined to marry him despite growing evidence of his moral failings and the protests of Lake’s sister Rachel: “You don't know him: he's profligate; he's ill-tempered;

he's cold; he's selfish; he's secret. He was a spoiled boy, totally without moral education; he might, perhaps, have been very different, but he *is what* he is, and I don't think he'll ever change" (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*). Making things more dire is the fact that Lake is seemingly fatally injured, threatening the consummation of their romance. The pressure increases. And yet, when this plotline is resolved, it is done so with a spectacularly anticlimactic newspaper announcement:

MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

The auspicious event so interesting to our county, which we have this day to announce, though for some time upon the *tapis*, has been attended with as little publicity as possible. The contemplated union between Captain Stanley Lake, late of the Guards, sole surviving son of the late General Williams Stanley [...] Lake, of Plasrhwyn, and the beautiful and accomplished Miss Brandon, of Brandon Hall, in this county, was celebrated in the ancestral chapel of Brandon, situated within the manorial boundaries, in the immediate vicinity of the town of Gylingden, on yesterday. Although the marriage was understood to be strictly private—none but the immediate relations of the bride and bridegroom being present—the bells of Gylingden rang out merry peals throughout the day, and the town was tastefully decorated with flags, and brilliantly illuminated at night. (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*)

After all of the build-up and efforts to ensure the reader understands how dangerous the marriage could be, Le Fanu chooses to convey this important event in terms of journalists' impression of the event rather than in-scene. The indirect rendering of the climactic event delineates two types of narrative within the novel: the account that a group builds for itself and the more salacious one the readers are shown. The latter is hidden for now behind the former: a cheery official account of events. The town represents the marriage as joyous. They depict an occasion symbolising union under "the bells of Gylingden" which celebrate a proper match between people whose lineages are both socially respected. The journalist forms a comfortable, affirming report out of the raw story materials with which they are presented. Both the newspaper and Miss Maubray's second-hand accounts thus reinforce paradigmatic social norms.

The act of collectively configuring a narrative of what is real through the communion of perceptions is built into the narration of many of Le Fanu's texts from the 1860s and 1870s. As stated in the introduction, Le Fanu reveals the perspectival nature of the novel *Wylder's Hand* itself when his narrator uses indirect storytelling, drawing on second-hand reports to conclude the text. There, any pretence of omnipotent narration gives way to an overriding sense of uncertainty and the limits of the narrator's ability to relate the experiences of his characters directly. While configuring a satisfactory conclusion based on various reports and sources, the narrator is at times left to speculate about the characters' fates. Often, narrators and other authoritative figures and institutions discussed in this dissertation, like the newspaper of *Wylder's Hand*, make it clear that they are attempting to form a coherent narrative about events whose objective truth is inaccessible. While imaginatively occupying Le Fanu's world, the

reader, like Le Fanu's characters, thus does not have access to an unbiased depiction of the setting and the events that occur therein.

That is not to say the reader's access is equal to that of personae who populate the novel. The narrator in *Wylder's Hand*, with the benefit of hindsight, allows the reader to see the dangers underlying a mundane wedding announcement. Most characters in the text cannot apprehend that peril. However, as a review of *The House by the Churchyard* in *The Spectator*, previously cited, states, the narration of that text tends to only be able to treat "the hidden part of his heroes' or heroines' nature as if it were as much a subject of interest, innuendo, and surmise to him, as are the persons of real life" (22). It makes sense therefore that, due to Le Fanu's narrators' frequent lack of totalising knowledge, the storyteller of *Wylder's Hand* relies, like the novel's characters, on others' subjective reports to finish the tale. Much as those in the community of Gylingden form their vision of what is true in concert with other viewpoints like those of the newspaper writers, the reader's viewpoint of this setting is forged by engaging with the limited perspective of the narrator, which has in turn been formed by engaging with the perspectives of others. That the reader's understanding of Le Fanu's world is forged in this manner prompts an experience of existing within particular, communally forged regimes of knowledge with the insight that knowledge itself is inherently perspectival.

The instability of the reader's perception as an imaginative occupant of Le Fanu's world becomes all the more intense in Le Fanu's collection *In a Glass Darkly*. In this series of tales, each story is fed to Le Fanu's audience through the consciousnesses of multiple tellers and editors. "The Familiar", for example, is an account written by an Irish clergyman tangentially involved in the ghostly events of the tale. His text is commented

on by Doctor Hesselius, who has collected the clergyman's account. The text itself is finally presented to the reader by an unnamed editor who has put together the wider anthology and offers his viewpoint on those efforts. As a result, the nature of the text as a subjective attempt to narrate an obscure setting becomes clearer through the continual emphasis on the many layers of uncertain testimony. The editor engages with the outlook of Hesselius, which has been formed in part by the clergyman. By the time the story reaches the reader, it has been forged in the meeting of different frames of reference, communally constructing this tale.

"The Haunted Baronet" from Le Fanu's *The Chronicles of Golden Friars*, similarly seems to be a product of disparate subjectivities in communion. The story more broadly concerns a mysterious force that emerges from a lake, threatening the adjoining town of Golden Friars. In this body of water, an ancestor of one protagonist, Sir Bale, may have drowned an ancestor of another protagonist, Phillip Feltram. However, before the apparently supernatural force strikes Feltram, the background to the story is illustrated in a more colloquial locale: a pub. There, the reader is introduced to what the narrator calls "three or four of the old habitués" collectively discussing the aforementioned drowning (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 61). Le Fanu includes the detail that there were "three or four" men at the bar. This strange disclosure indicates some uncertainty in the narrator, heightened by the fact that the narrator is recording an event that happened many years previously. Further, the narrator will soon after identify five men. One is the host of the bar, who might not be classified as a habitué, which perhaps validates the presence of "four habitués". However, this does not explain why the narrator stated "three" as a possibility. There is a distinct instability to the narrator's testimony here,

despite its seeming omnipotence. In the bar scene of “The Haunted Baronet”, Le Fanu emphasises the subjective nature of the narration, something emphasised in *Wylder’s Hand* by the wedding announcement that mirrors the reader’s own experience of the text. Therefore, like social-constructionist theory holds is the case for actual knowledge, the frameworks through which the reader of “The Haunted Baronet” understands Le Fanu’s setting are not impartial. Instead, they are assembled through forms of interaction.

Further, the bar scene indicates the reader's enmeshment in the process of information transmission. The tale being told within the narrative itself is framed in terms of these men’s reactions to the history that contextualises the main plot, showing their storytelling to be an act of communal narration. For example, the men at the bar attempt to form a portrait of one of the main characters, Sir Bale:

“He’s coming here to save a little, and perhaps he’ll marry; and it is the more creditable, if, as they say, he dislikes the place, and would prefer staying where he is.” And having spoken thus gently, Mr. Peers resumed his pipe cheerfully. “No, he don’t like the place; that is, I’m told he didn’t,” said the innkeeper. “He hates it,” said the Doctor with another dark nod. “And no wonder, if all’s true I’ve heard,” cried old Jack Amerald. “Didn’t he drown a woman and her child in the lake? (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 62-3)

The men in the bar are working on imperfect information: the innkeeper, for instance, states that Sir Bale does not like Golden Friars, then immediately qualifies his statement

with “that is, I’m told he didn’t”. The interaction becomes a negotiation of what characterisation these men should give to Sir Bale. They have gained second-hand knowledge of him and negotiate from there, solidifying the communal impression of Bale’s dislike for Golden Friars. They also introduce new hypotheses, such as the assertion that he drowned “a woman and her child in the lake”. Together they integrate or expel these hypotheses as they go: the men will sternly force a retraction of Amerald’s statement that Bale is a murderer, excising that from their narrative. Further, because this conversation happened long before the narrator put pen to paper, the narrator depicts the conversation from a stark remove. He forms an account out of whatever knowledge he has internalised about this meeting of minds from whatever sources he has used and reports this information to the reader. The reader is then invited, imaginatively at least, into an act of collective narration, providing a different kind of “agential, intimate, and individual [act] of reading” to the one Fox identifies in *Dracula* (“Gothic Realism” 24). The reader takes part in that same process of forming a sense of what is materially true through interaction with the perspective of the narrator, just as the narrator has done; the narrator too has their sense of their surroundings formed by a social operation that determines, for example, if Bale is a murderer. Readers - who have, as the introduction to this dissertation indicated, felt Le Fanu’s fictional space spread out around them - have their image of Le Fanu’s world formed through interrogating and internalising the impressions relayed by the narrator. The communally forged concepts like Bale’s character and his lack of criminality become a piece of the reader’s perception of the setting.

If we heed Comyn and Fermanis' call "to consider the ways in which seeing takes place" (11) and do so within the diegetic space Le Fanu presents in the above texts, we can appreciate how readers personally experience the process by which their own sight is formed through interactions with various sources. Readers are enabled to picture themselves, as imaginative occupants of Le Fanu's fictional world, communicating that internalised viewpoint to others in that palimpsestic space that Le Fanu has called them to project around them. Though the reader cannot, in actuality, tell others that it is unlikely Bale drowned "a woman and her child in the lake", doing so becomes at least an imaginative possibility in the context of this "agential" reading, should the reader internalise the collective narrative. This scene, as well as Miss Maubray, the wedding announcement, and the many intermediaries of *In a Glass Darkly* illustrate many of the central tenets of social constructionist thought: observations do not just render objective truth but rather knowledge and patterns of social action are systematised by interactions among people. Further, societies and cultures produce their own versions of reality through social processes (Burr 3-6). In "The Haunted Baronet", Le Fanu has effectively pulled readers into the procedures by which regimes of knowledge and action are configured. Here, Le Fanu allows readers to consider their own viewpoint within the palimpsestic world around them and how that perspective fits into a wider social network. Le Fanu's late texts thus enable an understanding of ourselves as participants in a continual, collective operation of creating communal frameworks in the actual world because that is the position we are asked to take on in the fictional setting we briefly occupy.

That Le Fanu undercuts these sources of authority and the narratives communities weave is something I will discuss later. It is notable that the marriage of *Wylder's Hand* is a dangerous one, not to be celebrated in the way the newspaper does. Additionally, Miss Maubray's news about Alice Arden is false and the men in "The Haunted Baronet" did not actually bear witness to the events of which they speak. However, rather than dwell on the fragility of these accounts, I note here that these examples present a vision of reality that is not set in stone, but that is rather negotiated and reinforced in key ways.

II. Reframing Disruption to Communal Narratives

Having discussed how knowledge and social action are communally upheld in Le Fanu's fictional world, it is worth examining the tactics by which communities deal with disruptions to those collective precepts. In doing so, Le Fanu's readers can better understand what it means to create communal accounts in times that threaten collective conceptions: when forces that might thwart these narratives emerge. Victor Sage argues in *Le Fanu's Gothic: The Rhetoric of Darkness* that Le Fanu's fiction consists of an interplay between the text, which is dead, and the first-person witness, including the reader's, that resurrects it. This resurrection is a kind of rebellion against the dead word, with these forces of death and resurrection, doubt and credulity, teasing each other's limits (202-5). While Sage reflects on the nature of witnessing itself as a recurring concern of Le Fanu's texts, I see the challenge offered by the living witness to the dead text (and vice versa) manifest in the operation by which realities are created. In particular, it appears in the ways characters, including narrators, attempt to reify shared

notions of what the world is and how to act on it amidst surroundings that often challenge that narrative. The dead text morphs into a wider communal process of creating definite rules and conceptions: the newspaper that forms a clear, comfortable account or the narrator who tries to provide a coherent sense of what has happened in a community. The living witness in Sage's dynamic morphs here into those elements of the setting that often exceed community's narratives. These are elements like the Gothic tale of betrayal, female victimisation, and murder that contravene the newspaper's clear, delineated report in *Wylder's Hand*. It can also be seen in the prevailing uncertainty that undermines the narrator's authority to pronounce objective truth as seen at the end of the same novel. The opposed forces of reality maintenance and that which exceeds conceptions of the real challenge one another, with the former attempting to maintain a clear self-conception despite the presence of the latter. Le Fanu positions the reader in the midst of a society negotiating its collective conceptions within a world that pushes back against that effort. Thus, the position of the reader resembles the actual experience of Le Fanu and his community.

The accounts that communities within Le Fanu's fictional world tell themselves in order to form their realities are a crucial part of his fiction's ability to comment on Le Fanu's own Victorian Irish context. The need for the societies of Le Fanu's fiction to negotiate ways of viewing and acting on their surroundings resonates strongly with the Victorians', and especially Irish Victorians', need to similarly negotiate the frameworks within which to live their lives in a time that threatened to expose the woeful inadequacy of previous ways of understanding. As discussed in the introduction, Victorian Ireland was consistently threatened with profound scientific and socio-political paradigm shifts.

Writers in Le Fanu's orbit even articulated their situation in terms that resemble the battle between disruptive forces and the communally maintained realities that must suppress them. There is an anonymous article in the *Dublin University Magazine* entitled "Fenianism" which The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals identifies as Le Fanu's,¹ but was at the very least published under his editorship. In it, the writer hazards some hope that the suppression of the newspaper *Irish People* would be the end of "treason in Ireland" ("Fenianism" 119) and of a supposed desire to prompt the United States into war with Britain after the American Civil War ("Fenianism" 116-7). There is a sense here of the end of a profound crisis, one that would have led to destruction and an overturning of established political forces in Ireland. However, the article cannot allow itself triumph for long, pointing out again that the maintenance of the status quo "may be utterly spoiled in [the government's] mode of dealing with [their victory over Fenianism]" ("Fenianism" 119). In combination with anxieties about scientific realignments around concepts like Darwinian evolution, this feeling of remaining on a knife's edge between preservation and social collapse in Le Fanu's time seems notable. The author of the article claims that the government could spoil this victory despite it having "been secured [...] by the help of the whole body of the loyal community, men of all creeds, classes, and positions in society" ("Fenianism" 119). Socio-political modes of acting on one's surroundings have been maintained by communal action in society but can be easily overturned. One way in which Le Fanu's fictional communities preserve the cohesiveness of their collective reality in similarly turbulent, conflicted times is by

¹ The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals states, "[o]n pp. 356-357 the author speaks of 'pages of this magazine' in which the Middle Party, under the influence of Lord Palmerston, has been discussed, and refers to two arts. — the second [...] in terms implying common authorship", thus providing evidence that Le Fanu may have written this article ("Article Full Record").

weaving periods of instability into a coherent narrative. I will demonstrate how they do so in *The House by the Churchyard*, “The Haunted Baronet”, *Willing to Die*, *The Tenants of Malory*, *Guy Deverell*, and “Carmilla”.

Richard Adelman gestures to a kind of reframing of disruption in Le Fanu’s *In a Glass Darkly*. The collection, according to Adelman, indicates readers are close to “a hellish and ever-present spirituality” that can be “calmly medicalize[d]”, rendering events like the haunting in Le Fanu’s ghost story “Green Tea” “so ordinary as to be simply in need of diligent medical attention” (160). For Adelman, the collection itself normalises the supernatural such that it becomes simultaneously pervasive and somewhat quotidian. In his account, the supernatural retains some of its disruptive power, but this idea of turning the supernatural into normality is intriguing. The attempt to reframe potential disruptive elements as “ordinary”, for the purposes of rendering people and events as acceptable, was undertaken by those writing about Le Fanu himself. In an 1877 summary of Le Fanu’s life in *Temple Bar*, Alfred Perceval Graves states that Le Fanu had a taste for the supernatural but was too sensible to be taken in by it, as evidenced by his satire of spiritualism (517). Similarly, the same writer asserts Le Fanu was no radical. Graves claims that, despite his early ballad “Shamus O’Brien”, a romantic treatment of the 1798 Rebellion, Le Fanu was not a disloyal person because he wrote it before the 1848 uprising when “a ‘98 subject might fairly have been regarded as legitimate literary property amongst the most loyal” (513). Graves thus tries to reduce that which might be alarming and radical to the understandable and socially acceptable.

In the frame narrative of *The House by the Churchyard*, disruptive events are comfortably reframed, much like Graves does to Le Fanu’s writing. Instead of framing

possible disloyalty and spiritualism as acceptable, violent disruption is converted to a cause for community building. Before the story starts in earnest, Le Fanu depicts a gravedigging in Chapelizod that unearths a skull with puncture wounds. Characters join together in trying to determine what happened to the skull. One states, “[t]hat was a bullet,” while “putting his finger into a clean circular aperture as large as a half-penny” (Le Fanu, *The House by the Churchyard*). Another bystander joins in, asking, “[c]ould it be the Mattross that was shot in the year '90, as I often heerd, for sthrikin' his captain?”, while another responds, “[o]h! that poor fellow's buried round by the north side of the church [...] It could not be Counsellor Gallagher, that was kilt in the jewel with Colonel Ruck—he was hot in the head—bud it could not be—ugh! not at all” (Le Fanu, *The House by the Churchyard*). Most of *The House by the Churchyard* goes back in time, illustrating the events leading up to and immediately following the disruptive attack on the skull. That same traumatic event is here rendered as a moment to strengthen collective bonds as people in Chapelizod engage in a bit of history-by-committee. The subversive object at their centre actually draws them together in the act of determining a communal narrative that can explain and accommodate this dark, Gothic event.

In a psychoanalytic reading of “Carmilla”, Michael Davis discusses translation: the process of taking something “enigmatic” and “other” and making it “sensible” (224). What the citizens of Chapelizod do in the opening of *The House by the Churchyard* is a kind of translation. They unearth a mostly forgotten trauma in the form of the skull but find ways to attempt to decipher it. They work to find a kind of meaning and narrative in it, even if that account is lacking and must be rectified over the course of the novel. It is notable that, despite the characters expressing distress at the violence committed on

the skull, there is more excitement than trauma in the scene. In contrast to Laura in “Carmilla”, the characters in *The House by the Churchyard* are not forced into a place where meaning “collapses” after a failure to translate enigmas (Powers qtd. in Davis 234). They instead engage in spirited speculation: the skull is described as “wonderful” and soon after a man appears who can explain the wounds (Le Fanu, *The House by the Churchyard*). It appears that the unearthing of disruptive events becomes less traumatic because the onlookers collectively attempt to translate the event.

There is a similar kind of collaborative historical narration in the bar scene previously discussed from “The Haunted Baronet”, when the “three or four” patrons try to discuss a drowning in the Golden Friars’ lake. Their conversation is a similar attempt at history-by-committee and the codification of local legends that help to define their community. They attempt to collectively form and internalise a coherent narrative out of numerous, limited perspectives. These men cannot fully translate the ostensibly supernatural events as there remains a question of whether these supernatural things pose any threat to their wider social circle. The last comment on the supernatural here is simply the host of the bar remarking that, after a few reported hauntings by a ghostly woman, perhaps the same one drowned in the lake, a local island “got a bad neam, and none cared to go nar it after nightfall” (Le Fanu, *The Best Ghost Stories* 67). The men at the bar leave the supernatural unexplained and a bit threatening. However, the collective narration that takes place at the Golden Friars pub generates community feeling and a codification of social paradigms, as imperfect as it is in its translation. The men remain seemingly rapt in the story being told, offering interjections and amendments as the tale continues. There is a sense of close association among these

men of different stations and professions, from inn proprietors to doctors to ex-navy captains who assert their shared friendship. They end their narration with a final comment on Sir Bale becoming Feltram's benefactor, saying "the thing we know of him for certain should be so creditable to his kindness", with another present affirming the sentiment (Le Fanu, *The Best Ghost Stories* 67). Thus, despite not resolving the apparent supernatural happenings through their narration, they end their good-natured act of storytelling by affirming the goodness of Sir Bale. In doing so, they reaffirm communal bonds and the legitimacy of an authority figure through their engagement with potentially disruptive events that have haunted their town.

Translation even happens between texts. In "The Haunted Baronet", supernatural events occur that are never fully contained within any clear framework. However, years later in the events of the novel *Willing to Die*, the protagonist visits Golden Friars, the setting of "The Haunted Baronet", and is told, "Look at that forest, Ethel [...] It is the haunted forest of Clusted—the last resort of the fairies in England. It was there, they say, that Sir Bale Mardykes, long ago, made a compact with the Evil One" (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*). The ghastly, inexplicable events of "The Haunted Baronet" are here recontextualised within a clear, Christian moral framework involving the devil. The reframing may not truly undo the subversions of "The Haunted Baronet", or indeed prevent such events from recurring in some form, but it does conceptually allow for these events to be placed within a Christian moral configuration.

Further, the texts themselves – as artifacts that exist in Le Fanu's fictional space – bear the possibility of functioning as a translation of the destabilising, Gothic events their fictional communities experience. They have the opportunity to weave the

disturbances into a coherent narrative, one where meaning does not collapse, and social cohesion increases. Such recontextualisation or translation is done by the narrator on a historic scale in *The Tenants of Malory*. The scars of colonialism take the place of *The House by the Churchyard's* punctured skull when the novel spends much of its opening chapter on illustrating the historic trauma that marks the land around a Welsh town, Cardyllian. The narrator gives a detailed depiction of a landscape that is dotted with haunting remnants of past violence: "At the end of long Castle Street rise the battlements and roofless towers of that grand old feudal fortress which helped to hold the conquest of Wales for the English crown in the days of tabards, lances, and the long-bow" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V1 2-3). The opening also mentions Cromwell, further emphasising the tools of colonial violence that have left their mark on the surrounding area. The text seems to reflect long-simmering anxieties from earlier Gothic fiction. As Luke Gibbons writes, there were concerns at the heart of the Gothic about the legitimacy of the post-Glorious Revolution settlement and of the need to oppress others, especially in the "Celtic Periphery", to maintain English liberty (19). Worries around the validity of the establishment of what is called English liberty are evoked by references to colonialist conquest in *The Tenants of Malory*. Remnants of colonial violence are indicative of what Le Fanu's narrator calls "those days of sorrow when the liberties of England were in the throes of birth" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V1 5). Here, the narration folds a subversive, violent past into an account that reifies the political reality under which Cardyllian lives. Citing "English liberty" as the end result weaves potentially unsettling moments into a positive expression of a colonialist vision of social action and knowledge.

Translation plays out on a more personal level in the framing of Sir Jekyl Marlowe's death at the end of *Guy Deverell*. This is a novel full of false identities, allegedly haunted rooms, doomed romances, and, eventually, attempted murder leading to the fatal wounding of the morally questionable protagonist Jekyl Marlowe. Marlowe's death is the result of these subversive, typically Gothic incidents. However, Marlowe's brother, the Reverend Dives, decides to frame Jekyl's death in a quite tidy manner. Dives elects to avoid an inquest into Marlowe's death to avoid scandal, and "it came to pass that the county paper, with a border of black round the paragraph, announced the death of Sir Jekyl Marlowe, Baronet [...] the immediate cause of his death being the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs, attended by internal hæmorrhage" (Le Fanu, *Guy Deverell* V2). The "border of black" the narrator mentions here literally frames this event, drawing attention to the figurative framing of what has happened to Jekyl. His death is given a more natural, medical cause through an official account delivered by a community institution, the local paper. The newspaper account changes a death caused by traumatic events into something palatable, initiating a kind of stabilisation. Indeed, even the manner of death described here, an internal haemorrhage, fits with the reframing of disruption. Jekyl's death is a bloody one, but one contained inside the body, much as the typically Gothic elements of this event are contained by translation.

Something similar happens in Le Fanu's vampiric tale "Carmilla", where the titular vampire is found, condemned, and executed as recorded in a "report of the Imperial Commission, with the signatures of all who were present at these proceedings attached in verification of the statement" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 316). In "Carmilla", the Gothic events of the novella challenge the reality occupied by the protagonist Laura in

social and scientific terms. The protagonist becomes attracted to a female vampire; the vampire has fed on her and many others, and this creature has defied logic by changing forms and being immortal. The survival of civic paradigms of heteronormativity and the dominance of patriarchal authority, as well as material rules dictating the distinction between life and death, are threatened here. When concluding her narrative, Laura identifies the various forms of “human testimony, taken with every care and solemnity, judicially, before commissions innumerable”, that support and make it “difficult to deny, or even to doubt the existence of such a phenomenon as the Vampire” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 315). The “innumerable” and trustworthy accounts here, paired with Laura’s own experience of the vampire, indicate an existential, persistent threat to the belief systems espoused by her father. It also contravenes the norms held in Styria. People in Styria are readier to believe in vampires than Laura’s father, but they remain a shared subjectivity apart from vampires biologically and morally. The reports of vampires Laura discusses uncover a potential multiplication of Laura’s own subversive experience across much of central Europe, indicating a vast threat to European communities.

In the official telling though, much of the possible vampire’s subversion of schemes of knowledge and social order is recast in a tidy, if bureaucratic, account of vampire slaying. Laura summarises from a “report of the Imperial Commission” saying that Carmilla was examined by the commission as she slept in a blood-filled coffin, before being decapitated: “The body and head were next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes, which were thrown upon the river and borne away, and that territory has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*

316). The official report characterises a crisis that has been violently suppressed and, like Carmilla's body, "reduced to ashes", no longer threatening the surrounding community. What was once un-representable is now represented and set in stone. It is also contained within legal jurisdiction and marked as officially comprehensible by an existing, collective conception of the world that has ostensibly overcome it. The vampiric disturbance, now even more firmly established as credible by Laura's experiences and those of the Imperial Commission, is woven into a narrative about the triumph of masculine, Christian, human dominance. It seems that life can go on without further disturbance.

One potential, future-oriented goal of such reframing appears at the close of the newspaper announcement of Marlowe's death in *Guy Deverell*:

By the death of Sir Jekyl Marlowe [...] a seat in Parliament and a deputy lieutenancy for this county become vacant.' Then came a graceful tribute to Sir Jekyl's value as a country gentleman, followed by the usual summary from the 'Peerage,' and the fact that, leaving no male issue, he would be succeeded in his title and the bulk of his estates by his brother, the Reverend Dives Marlowe (Le Fanu, *Guy Deverell V2*).

The reframing allows for the community to establish an easy sense of futurity for itself. Nothing has been subverted. The natural death of a valued man has occurred, and that occurrence can be easily fit into the passing on of property and social responsibilities.

The newspaper obituary underlines the futurity of the authoritative positions Jekyll occupied by emphasizing the opening of political seats that can now be filled. It also indicates the inheritance of his estate which can smoothly pass on to its rightful new owner based on established rules. Perhaps not coincidentally, the new owner is the very man who avoids an inquest into Jekyll's death. He can reign and the social paradigms from which he benefits are, rhetorically at least, preserved. Otherworldly Gothic presences might be rendered somewhat docile, but they are nevertheless evidence of how a framework of action and knowledge can be damaged and promise that social and material conceptions may never remain fixed. If "[e]very old family has a murder, and a ghost, and a beauty also" (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 4), then it must also be admitted that the present reality has been and may continue to be threatened by ungovernable figures and events. Such threats necessitate a constant negotiation and renegotiation of what is scientifically true and civically just so that such conceptions can continue into the future. Therefore, the necessity for a constant practice of communal narration to maintain collective understandings persists in times that threaten reigning paradigms.

III. Excluding Alternatives to Communal Narratives

Le Fanu's fictional communities reframe some unsettling events, but they also frequently attempt to entirely exclude that which is deemed socially and materially unreal when they cannot or will not incorporate it into their communal conceptions. Such exclusion occurs in many texts, here exemplified by "The Haunted Baronet", *The Tenants of Malory*, and *Checkmate*. The effort to eliminate that which is designated

unreal is exemplified by reactions to “the unseen” in “The Haunted Baronet” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 86). Here, there are strenuous attempts not to recontextualise but to rhetorically abolish that which is deemed unacceptable. There are, according to the narrator, forces that fall outside the realms of the conventionally understood:

There is a faculty in man that will acknowledge the unseen. He may scout and scare religion from him; but if he does, superstition perches near. [Sir Bale’s] boding was made-up of omens, dreams, and such stuff as he most affected to despise, and there fluttered at his heart a presentiment and disgust. (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 86)

The “faculty” that acknowledges “the unseen” is a common trait among the main characters in the story. There is a distinct danger to the “unseen”: it threatens individuals but remains a larger threat which seems to be common to “man” more broadly. Further, it appears difficult to dislodge “the unseen”, as “superstition perches near” despite attempts to unmake irrational thoughts. The narrator’s generalisation makes the unseen all the more threatening as it is both common and hard to disregard. The conflict between these stubborn “unseen” forces and the community that attempts to combat them, to “scout and scare” them away, will carry through much of the rest of the tale. This war finds its first major battleground in Feltram.

Feltram is an unfortunate man, constantly tormented by his benefactor Sir Bale, the soon-to-be-haunted baronet. Feltram’s constant woes are compounded by his

assertion that an otherworldly presence is starting to possess him: he worryingly exclaims to the Baronet's housekeeper, "I think, Mrs. Julaper, it is getting into me. I think it's like possession" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 79). She, in turn, tries to make him forget his anxieties: "you should think of all the blessings you have, and not be makin' mountains o' molehills; and those little bits o' temper Sir Bale shows, why, no one minds 'em — that is, to take 'em to heart like you do, don't ye see?" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 80). She offers him tea first to calm his nerves, but as he describes his affliction further, she pushes alcohol. When Feltram declines, she overpowers his "resistance" by arguing, "[t]ea is no drink for a man when his heart's down. It should be [...] something hot that will warm your courage for ye, and set your blood a-dancing, and make ye talk brave and merry; [...] ye sha'n't say no" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 81). Her response, urging Feltram not to complain and to imbibe alcohol, is rooted in kindness. However, it is still an attempt to dull his senses, to make him forget notions of the "unseen" in favour of "brave and merry" thoughts that come with drink. Further, she works to lessen Feltram's perception of legitimate grievance against an authority figure, Sir Bale. Her actions enforce a clear boundary between that which is tangible and that which is "unseen" as well as between what is socially acceptable and unacceptable: the supernatural should not be countenanced and notions of the otherworldly can be cured with a dose of liquid "courage". The abuse from Sir Bale is acceptable and should not be acted against as "no one minds [his outbursts]", indicating Feltram must pay the cruelty he experiences no mind if he is to be considered somebody. She upholds existing material and social paradigms, such as rationality and aristocratic dominance, and excludes that which exists in opposition to them as beyond the pale. So, in this act

of communication, the boundaries of Feltram and Julaper's communal reality are upheld.

Feltram later appears to be killed by forces within the lake, lending veracity to his acknowledgement of the unseen and to the multiple sightings of the drowned woman in the area. Feltram had fled his abusive benefactor and attempted to cross the lake where he is reported to have been pulled under the water by an arm. He is recovered and brought back to his abuser, Sir Bale, where he is pronounced dead by the often-drunk Doctor Torvey. Feltram's apparent death is both an ontological and, on some level, civic challenge. His death appears to violate commonly accepted rules about what is real and able to affect human lives. It also undermines Sir Bale's legitimacy: it makes plain his cruelty and brings into question the efficacy of his aristocratic right to power as his leadership has led to Feltram's apparent death. The preservation of Bale's authority now seems uncertain. Bale himself acknowledges that he "could not afford to lose anyone's good word just now" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories of J.S. Le Fanu* 102). Destabilisations, brought in the wake of Feltram's death, need a response. Therefore, through interactions with Doctor Torvey and his staff, Sir Bale attempts to promote a sanitised version of Feltram's death, in line primarily with his own claims to dominance.

"[B]ear you this in mind" he says to his servants, "Mrs. Julaper there can tell you more about it. She knows that it was certainly in no compliance with my wish that he left the house to-night", framing Mrs. Julaper as a corroborating witness, willing or no. He then recontextualises the events as resulting from Feltram's "own obstinate perversity, and perhaps — I forgive him for it — a wish in his unreasonable resentment to throw some blame upon this house" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 99). He shifts culpability

away from himself and the dominion he held over Feltram by excluding his role in Feltram's demise. He then mostly ignores the supernatural elements of the story, simply saying to Doctor Torvey, "it is a melancholy ending, poor fellow. You must come to the study with me, Doctor Torvey, and talk a little bit more; and — very sad, doctor — and you must have a glass of sherry, or some port" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 102). Sir Bale alters his persona here, from vindictive benefactor to gracious host, plying Doctor Torvey with wine. He ensures Torvey's acquiescence in depicting Feltram's death as a personal failing rather than a prospect that might challenge the efficacy of current power structures and material conceptions. Bale thus takes part in some reframing and outright excises the "unseen", supporting the reigning, hegemonic reality which allows him to remain in an authoritative position. Tellingly, nothing about the civil organisation of the community significantly changes in the immediate aftermath of Feltram's accident.

Excluding unacceptable events from a communal narrative constitutes an attempt to solidify acceptable material and civic frameworks that uphold a coherent reality. Indeed, Le Fanu depicts the consolidation of what is both socially and tangibly real through a single act of exclusion in *The Tenants of Malory*. In the novel, the young Tom Sedley is, unbeknownst to him, the son of a mysterious woman named Mervyn and the missing Arthur Verney. Arthur is the heir to the powerful Verney title and allegedly died after travelling east and converting to Islam. Mrs. Mervyn tells Tom that she dreamt Arthur returned:

I saw it was Arthur himself coming upright in his shroud, his feet on the water, and with his feet, hands, and face, as white as snow, and his arms stretched to meet mine; [...] I heard the rush of the water about his feet, and a voice—it was *yours*, not his—said, 'Look at me,' and I did look, and saw you, and you looked like a man that had been drowned (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V3* 52)

She expresses doubt about the dream's validity as prophesy, saying, "I don't believe in dreams more I believe than other people, but this troubles me still" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V3* 52). Her dream comes amidst a plot by lawyers and subversive Jewish men to take advantage of authority figures in the community for their own profit. Sedley reassures Mervyn though, stating that he has had no accident like the one in Mervyn's dream and that he thinks "it will puzzle those Jews and lawyers to draw me into their business, whatever it is. I don't like that sort of people; you need never be afraid of me, ma'am, I detest them" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V3* 52-3). Sedley reinforces the boundaries of his own reality in two ways here. He disregards the validity of dreams as predictors of future events. He also draws a clear line between justified society and a particular "sort of people", namely Jews and seditious lawyers.

Sedley brushes aside Mervyn's discussion of dreams, designating dreams as something materially false. He himself has not drowned, thus their predictive ability is moot. As Davison argues, despite eighteenth-century attempts "to explain and thus contain the power of dreams", dreams demonstrated that not every lived experience could be explained by Enlightenment philosophy (35). That earlier challenge posed by

dreams seems to be present here: Mervyn's dream proves at least partially prophetic. Arthur, for one, is not dead and has returned in disguise from across the sea. His appearance as a drowned man indicates this return, perhaps even pointing to the death of his former moral character since he arrives with anti-Christian and largely anti-English views. Further, his connection to Tom, which has not yet been revealed to Mrs Mervyn or the reader, is obliquely foreshadowed by Mervyn's dream as Tom's voice initially comes from Arthur and Arthur's body turns into Tom's. The seeming prophetic nature of the dream presents a challenge to Enlightenment philosophy. However, Sedley effectively sidesteps any potentially troubling aspect of dreams, painting them as immaterial things that Mervyn should disregard because he has "had no accident by land or by water" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 53).

Then, when Sedley says "I don't like that sort of people; you need never be afraid of me, ma'am, I detest them", he articulates what is, in the narrative, a clear danger: being caught up in what Le Fanu depicts as the avaricious, money-centred underworld of Jews and the lawyers that enable them. He marks himself off as being respectable ("you need never be afraid of me, ma'am") precisely because he does not associate with or like "that sort of people". He reinforces his dislike twice in that short sentence for good measure. In creating that boundary between himself, as respectable man, and the influence of Jews, he helps to maintain a boundary between that of acceptable society and Jewish people. As such, in his interaction with Mrs Mervyn, Sedley reinforces a paradigm of respectability that excludes Jewish people as part of a wider operation of setting the bounds of what is socially and materially acceptable or inadmissible.

The separation between the world of acceptable society and Jews is indicative of antisemitism endemic to Le Fanu's novels. Eugenia C. DeLamotte illuminates Gothic texts' obsession with boundaries on an aesthetic level. DeLamotte connects elements like creaking doors to an obsession with setting boundaries, including boundaries of the self, and having those boundaries crossed (20-3). Le Fanu exhibits a similar fascination with partitions; his fictional communities, in the process of producing a border between the real and unreal, place Jews on the far side of that border. *The Tenants of Malory's* handling of Jewish people seems influenced by contemporary debates. Michael Ragussis details how, throughout the nineteenth century,

"the Jewish question" - indeed, a variety of Jewish questions [...] became critical. For it was the profound investment that the English had in their reputation for religious tolerance and political liberty that made the issue of intolerance toward the Jews so vital a concern to conceptions of English national identity. Anti-Semitism became viewed as a challenge to the ground upon which English national identity was built; at the same time, the Judaization of England was a perennial fear in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (298)

In this period of profound questions over the place of Jews in Britain and what the answers to these questions might say about British and Jewish identities, Le Fanu's fiction depicts a character pushing back against Jewish integration. Davison contends that the Gothic is a symptom of and reflection on modernity, which Marshall Berman

asserts is a “struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world” (qtd. in Davison 48). Plunging Jewish people, alongside the idea of prophetic dreams, into the realm of the “unseen” or rejected helps serve this purpose of carving out a home in such a changing context. It establishes criteria determining what constitutes respectable people and beliefs. In other words, characters like Sedley establish both social and scientific paradigms through interactions within these fictional communities. In this case, the contemporary concern around Jews feeds into the fictional process by which the materially “unseen” and socially unacceptable are excluded from communal configurations. Le Fanu’s representations of Jews feed into contemporary, discriminatory rhetoric. Nonetheless, we will also see the ways in which Le Fanu undermines limited, exclusionary visions of reality even as his texts frequently remain committed to antisemitism.

Le Fanu remains focused on the complex social dynamics that determine which actions and people must be excluded as unacceptable in *Checkmate*. When the friendship between Longcluse and Richard Arden breaks down, after Arden learns that Longcluse might not be as respectable as he seems, Le Fanu describes a near fight between them: Longcluse “was about to step to the ground, when he saw Richard Arden striding rapidly up with a very angry countenance. Then and there seemed likely to occur what the newspapers term an ungentlemanlike fracas” (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 177). Le Fanu’s comical wording undermines the seriousness of their quarrel as it is turned from a potentially deadly encounter to an “ungentlemanlike fracas”. However, his invocation of “newspapers” makes the reader aware of the public consciousness surrounding their possible fight. The behaviour of the two men will be interpreted and

articulated unfavourably through modes of inter-community transmission that resemble Dorcas' marriage announcement in *Wylder's Hand*. These discourses will cement what regimes of action are acceptable and which must be excluded from society as unacceptable.

Longcluse's own continental past helps to highlight the ways in which interactions among characters are categorised by the surrounding society. During one of their arguments, Longcluse says to Arden, "[i]n France, such a profanation would be followed by an exchange of shots, and here, under other circumstances, I should exact the same chance of retaliation. I mean to deal differently—quite differently" (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 178). Longcluse, like Arden himself, who offers to fight Longcluse in "Boulogne" if needed, understands the milieu that builds and contextualises their actions, even as their own interactions take part in configuring that context. The means by which Longcluse will "deal differently" with Arden are aimed at establishing his own ability to exert authority over Arden within this particular environment. Instead of shooting Arden, Longcluse entraps him, implicating him in a scheme to defraud Longcluse. The action of the plot therefore remains rooted in what can and cannot be done in sight of the community and is prompted by a character who understands how his own actions will be woven into, and thus accepted or expelled by, a communal narrative in the society he occupies.

The solidification of hegemonic social values in the above examples bears the marks of Le Fanu's middle-class environment. The Victorian middle class had, in the period between 1830 and 1850 when Le Fanu was aged 16-36, stamped "Victorian culture" with the values of "hard work, energy, self-help, individualism, earnestness,

domesticity” (Gilmour 14). The Victorian middle classes were, as Gilmour argues, reformers, many of whom settled into a kind of respectable traditionalism by the 1860s (14). Le Fanu, like many Gothic fiction writers, emerged from and largely addressed the influential middle class to which, as McCormack contends, Le Fanu proclaimed his allegiance (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 7). Class power relations were far from certain in nineteenth-century Ireland. Jarlath Killeen draws on Foster who says that Irish Protestant occult interest mirrors that population’s fears and desire for escapism in light of Catholic middle-class threat. Killeen summarises, “[t]he very broadly defined Protestant population was still in social and political control; this was, though, a control that was under constant threat, and which always seemed on the verge of slipping away” (“Irish Gothic: A Theoretical Introduction” 32-3). Class relations in Ireland were further complicated by what Virginia Crossman calls a difficulty of class consciousness. Crossman illustrates that, in the nineteenth century,

[t]here were clear social divisions between groups such as landlords, tenants and labourers, but the boundaries between each group were so porous as to prevent the development of class consciousness in the sense of a common identity based on common aims and concerns. Religion and nationality proved more powerful than class in shaping political allegiances. Nevertheless, while politics undoubtedly brought disparate social groups to work together in a common cause, this did not lessen awareness of social distinctions or concern with social standing. As we shall see, Irish people had a very clear idea of their place in society relative to other people, and of the importance of maintaining this. (131)

Thus, the Irish middle class, and in particular the Irish Protestant middle class, was a constantly negotiated category in Le Fanu's lifetime. As McCormack indicates, in Dublin, before the Act of Union (1800), the society that gathered at and ruled from Dublin Castle and the Viceregal lodge stood at the top. Underneath were the respectable and largely middle-class professionals. At the bottom was the general population, who were largely Catholic (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 10). During Le Fanu's lifetime, this scheme had already been damaged by the emergence of vocal, Catholic, middle-class representatives like Thomas Moore after the Act of Union and by the forces of Young Ireland as led by Daniel O'Connell (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 10-2). Irish nationalism continued to complicate existing, tiered social organisation across the nineteenth century as did a series of conflicts and reforms like The Land War and subsequent rights gained for tenants later in the century. And yet, class status was codified in fragile yet "clear social divisions". All the while, the middle class were able to codify a set of social norms in a wider British context as they gained dominance throughout the nineteenth century.

The monumental changes to nineteenth-century Irish society prompted various attempts to maintain a kind of traditionalism, providing fertile ground for literary intervention. Burr states that our constructions are connected to power relations because they dictate what is permissible for whom and how people in society should act towards one another (5). Throughout his fiction, Le Fanu demonstrates how social constructions are formed. Communities reproduce regimes of truth and respectability to

allow and exclude various patterns of actions and relations, such as when Jews are configured as separate from a conception of reality. Meanwhile, Longcluse's simultaneous highlighting and undermining of configured rules bears resonances of this indeterminate, contemporary middle-class position, with its contrasting stubborn rigidity and alarming fluidity. As Gilmour has contended, Victorians were living in a time when their seriousness about religion, morals, and science were contrasted with being in uncharted waters in a progression from rural and mercantile to industrial, pluralist (in Christian religions at least), and democratic (2-3). There is an important divide here between the gravity of morals, as well as of institutions of religion or science, and the uncharted nature of Victorian existence. Like Le Fanu's characters, Victorians often attempted to grasp onto clear conceptions of beliefs, morals, and institutions amidst prevailing uncertainty and violations of established rules.

As Killeen has argued, horror in sensation fiction of the nineteenth century was often located in respectable homes and bodies (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 20). Mutable, violable schemes of respectability, or civic paradigms, were of great interest to the Gothic novel's often middle-class readership. Sensation fiction, a genre to which *Checkmate* belongs, indicates the interest of that class in crime and sex scandals in the Victorian press (Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 20). Through his engagement with the middle-class interest in unacceptable behaviour, like the "fracas" threatened between Longcluse and Arden, Le Fanu prompts the reader to look at the mechanisms by which acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, beliefs, and people are configured. He especially examines these mechanisms in situations of threatening fluidity like those experienced by the Anglican, Irish, middle-class Protestants. He also addresses how

these ideas are negotiated when their ideal forms meet the lived experiences that prompt the very scandals the Victorian press delivered to its readers. In the duelling forces represented in *Checkmate* – regimes of respectability and the behaviours that cross them – Le Fanu again depicts the conflict between the often exclusionary process of reality-creation and subversive acts which challenge one another.

Attempts to mark and excise alterity in “The Haunted Baronet”, *The Tenants of Malory*, and *Checkmate* also find resonance in the responses of the colonial administration in Ireland to the political shifts of the nineteenth century. Amy E. Martin discusses this context, arguing that

[t]he Act of Union of 1800, Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the presence of approximately half a million Irish immigrants in Britain by 1841, and the emergence of new forms of Irish anticolonial agitation intensified a well-established imperative not only to distinguish British civility from the colony that was now part of the United Kingdom but also to rationalize new forms of colonial control and biopolitics instituted in Ireland during the period. (52)

Towards the end of Le Fanu’s life, measures to maintain Anglo-Irish paradigms in response to threats continued. Martin contends that the British press racialised Irish violence, “arguing that it was irrational and atavistic. These representations of Irish insurgency as outside the boundaries of human civility justified new state counter-insurgency measures” (53). Here, the disruptive is characterised as “outside the

boundaries of human civility”, separating Irish “violence” from proper human behaviour rhetorically and allowing for quite violent physical excision of its practitioners. The context surrounding Le Fanu seems to inform *Checkmate*, *The Tenants of Malory*, and “The Haunted Baronet”. Characters in these stories often configure and enforce social, religious, and scientific homogeneity as a way of carving out certainty from radical uncertainty. The act of reaffirming a clear, communal narrative through excluding or reframing that which is deemed unacceptable is an attempt to firm up a distinction that is crossed by many Le Fanu characters between the real and unreal. The excision of things that might upset that boundary helps maintain it, for a while at least.

IV. Authority Figures

Although the creation of reality and unreality is a communal operation in Le Fanu’s late works, authority figures have a generally elevated position in setting the distinction between the two. For example, they are often the ones leading the processes of reframing and exclusion in the above examples, holding onto their social power and using it to maintain communities’ norms. It is thus worth examining Le Fanu’s depictions of empowered men as key mediators in the collective procedure of building a dominant conception of knowledge and civic action. They do so despite their often ambivalent or negative characterisation, which helps them to mirror understandings of nineteenth-century leaders in Ireland. In this section, I investigate authority figures in *The Tenants of Malory*, *The Rose and Key*, *Guy Deverell*, *In a Glass Darkly*, “The Haunted Baronet”, and *Checkmate*.

In *The Tenants of Malory*, the efforts of the villainous lawyer Larkin to subvert and draw strength from established authority help to reinforce where power is often located in Le Fanu's fictional communities. Larkin is a recurring antagonist in Le Fanu's fiction who often creates schemes to defraud aristocratic characters. In *The Tenants of Malory*, he works with two Jewish men to do so, a partnership Le Fanu depicts in telling ways:

the three gentlemen, in grave and friendly guise, walked away together, over the flagged court. Mr. Larkin did not half like taking the arms of these gentlemen, but the quarter of the town was not one where he was likely to meet any of either the spiritual or the terrestrial aristocracy with whom he desired specially to stand well. So he moved along conscious, not unpleasantly, of the contrast which a high-bred gentleman must always present in juxtaposition with such persons as Goldshed and Levi. (Le Fanu *The Tenants of Malory* V3 147)

Larkin pays close attention to the tiered nature of his society here. He knows exactly who can associate with whom and in what locations this can happen in order to maintain a sense of respectability. The "quarter of the town" through which they travel is economically depressed enough that he is relatively certain he will not meet with respectable people. He operates away from sites of authority even as he mounts increasing assaults on that leadership structure in order to enrich himself. He navigates the community's configurations of respectability. He therefore becomes a threat that

must be destroyed in order to preserve those same configurations. Crucially though, Larkin's careful efforts to avoid sites of power help to define what authority typically looks like. Dominance lies with the "spiritual" and "terrestrial aristocracy" that are not in this location. Authority is usually possessed by the wealthy rather than by those in this economically depressed part of town. It, ostensibly at least, belongs to people who are not Jewish and "always present" themselves in "contrast" to Jews. It lies with men who achieve an image of "high-bred", gentlemanly respectability. Not all empowered men in Le Fanu's late texts possess all of these qualities, but this passage nonetheless reflects many qualities that legitimise male characters' ability to lead in the creation and maintenance of reality. Further, Larkin possesses some authority by virtue of his professional position as a lawyer, underlining another means by which social power is accumulated in Le Fanu's fictional societies. Professional authority figures also appear throughout the collection *In a Glass Darkly*. They appear in the form of characters like Jennings the clergyman, Harbottle the judge, Captain Barton the ex-military man, and Hesselius the doctor, who will be discussed at length in the next chapter in a discussion of the inadequacies of men in power. Each has a role in supporting key societal tenets - religious, legal, military, and scientific - through their respective professions.

Authoritative men, be they middle class or aristocratic, are generally in respected positions in their society in Le Fanu's fiction. They can occupy a key, illustrious profession. They are often fathers or guardians, such as Laura's father in "Carmilla", who protect their vision of the real by policing their children, wives, and wards, ensuring those under their protection are safe from outside threats. They might own land as is the case for "The Haunted Baronet"'s Sir Bale, an aristocratic landowner with multiple

people directly in his charge. He is known to be ornery and somewhat of an outsider in the town of Golden Friars, and also has money troubles, all qualities that point to him falling short of the authoritative paradigm. But his possession of “terrestrial” aristocratic and masculine force helps him preserve a level of control. When confronted with the potentially supernatural circumstances of his ward’s demise, he uses his authority to justify the death as flowing naturally from the man’s own decisions. He both reinforces the rules of the reality by which his community lives and sustains his position, keeping power in his own hands and those of men like him, conserving their hegemony. In *Guy Deverell*, the Reverend Dives accomplishes something similar in refusing an inquest into Jekyl’s death, as described earlier in this chapter, exhibiting a way in which men reinforce the very social tenets that grant them dominance.

Nevertheless, authority figures are not exempt from the process of communal narration. There are multiple, conflicting depictions of Sir Bale for example. The men in the bar in the beginning of “The Haunted Baronet” discuss Sir Bale, with one alleging (falsely it seems) that Bale was the one to drown a mother and child in the lake while another discusses Sir Bale’s generosity in becoming Feltram’s benefactor. The wife of the town vicar expected him to be like a Gothic hero and is shocked to find that he does not “fulfil her idea of manly beauty and fascination” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 72). Being one of Golden Friars’ preeminent figures, despite his frequent absence from the town, has made Bale and his personal history a subject for collaborative narrative-production. Various, incompatible hypotheses about Sir Bale further reinforce the idea that dominant men do not only influence the collective narratives made by communities. They are, in turn, also configured by those stories. Indeed, Sir Bale’s attempts to control

the reports made about him in the wake of Feltram's death are another facet of the process of maintaining paradigms. He must ensure that the continual communal negotiation of reality does not divest him of power.

Authority figures are especially important in Le Fanu's fiction because, when communities are saved from disruptive forces, this rescue generally involves the intervention of those who possess social power. General Spielsdorf in "Carmilla" is relevant here as a military man who helps end the vampiric threat. He is Laura's neighbour, and Carmilla killed his niece before attacking Laura. He discovers that vampires exist, a fact that tests the efficacy of paradigms of rationality that have been so aggressively instilled in Laura. Spielsdorf reacts angrily to Laura's father's protests to the supernatural. He states, "[y]ou believe in nothing but what consists with your own prejudices and illusions" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 293). Despite his anger at the short-sighted nature of Laura's father and his naivety, the general helps to allow the continuance of a perspective where one can safely believe there are no irreligious and irrational creatures roaming their estates. He does so alongside Laura's father and the Imperial Commission. It is the work of these authoritative men to uphold the "prejudices and illusions" Spielsdorf accuses Laura's father of following, referring presumably to his narrow definition of rationality, that construct the boundaries of their reality. The Imperial report that marks Carmilla's death also performs the function of defeating a destabilising element and providing assurance that the community's way of life will continue. The official language of the report produced by the Imperial Commission, "with the signatures of all who were present at these proceedings, attached in verification of the statement", demonstrates a collection of authority figures articulating Styria's future in

bureaucratic and official terms (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 316). The community will continue to fall under the jurisdiction of the existing legal system and patriarchal, rather than matriarchal, power. Its “prejudices and illusions” are maintained. Those granted supremacy pave over the gaps that have been opened in their midst; they assert that their collective means of knowledge and action remain coherent and that their own position is still justified. However, Spielsdorf’s turn of phrase also reinforces that their paradigms are illusory. Social rules are based in perception and conjecture even as they are reinforced by various characters.

Many other authority figures throughout Le Fanu’s texts act similarly in supporting those “illusions”. Mr Dawe, Charles Marston and Dr Damian, for example, dismantle the alternate, threatening regimes set up by Lady Vernon and her co-conspirators in *The Rose and Key*. In this novel, Lady Vernon, unusually for women in Le Fanu’s fiction, is the chief source of power in her community for most of the text. She uses this might to control the characters around her, conforming them to her desires. Crucially, she even sends her daughter Maud to an asylum, run by Dr Antomarchi, without just cause. Meanwhile, Lady Vernon, her schemes laid bare, becomes increasingly unhinged and eventually dies. Her hubris becomes inflated to the point that, at the end of her life, she attempts to make the concepts of good and evil subservient to her own whims: “Good people understand and honour me. The wicked I trample under my feet” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 302). Although by that point, she has become near delusional, her fantasy is an extension of how she uses her supremacy to control the social reality in which she lives, ensuring it serves her. Her villainy is matched by Dr Antomarchi. As Antomarchi draws Maud into his asylum, Maud notices his mannerisms

change from “ceremonious” to “cold” and “insolent” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 140). He then tells Maud, “[i]t is my duty to treat you with what skill I possess; it is yours to submit; and submit you shall” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 141). Antomarchi encloses his patients in a harsh reality separate from the society that supplies and forgets about them. He forces them to “submit” above all else in order to enrich himself; he will later justify his profits saying, “I rather think we have a right to profits; and considering all our labour and responsibilities, large profits too” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 282). Justice and healthcare are changed in Antomarchi’s asylum to profitable endeavours that empower him through the subjugation of innocents.

However, Vernon and Antomarchi are brought down by Charles Marston, who is devoted to Maud, Mr Dawe, an old honest friend of Maud’s family, and Dr Damian, a medical doctor. Once made aware of Antomarchi’s malpractice, they work to close his perverted medical institution. Like the Imperial Commission in “Carmilla”, though with fewer sly caveats on Le Fanu’s part, these men are able to defeat the subversive presences in their community represented by Antomarchi and Lady Vernon. Further, Charles Marston marries Maud, effectively re-establishing patriarchal dominance in the place of a self-serving matriarchy. The story ends with Charles and Maud married: “Charles and Maud have, indeed, little on earth to desire, for an heir is born to the title of Warhampton, and that heir is not without merry little companions in the nursery” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 310-1). In the face of alternate realities ruled by the unacceptable, such as Lady Vernon and Antomarchi, masculine dominance re-establishes something much more conventional. The promise of an heir and the

aristocratic title he will possess posits that patriarchal supremacy will be passed along smoothly into the future.

Further, in *The Tenants of Malory*, even when authority is ambiguous and its justification uncertain, empowered men can perform crucial acts of reality maintenance. The “poor pompous, foolish Lord Verney” is hardly an ideal leader (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 247). However, his actions effect a return to the established order. Lord Verney has trusted the devious lawyer Larkin throughout the novel. Larkin promised to provide proof of the death of Lord Verney’s older brother Arthur in order to assert Verney’s right to his brother’s title and estate. All the while, Larkin defrauded Verney in an attempt to raise his own wealth and status. Verney’s desire for what he feels he is owed enables Larkin’s devious actions. Indeed, Verney is shown again and again to be avaricious, dense, and, at times, cruel, despite regarding himself a respectable, benevolent authority figure. He is described as being “thin-skinned in his vanities” and as “a narrow man, with obstinate resentments” (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V1 122, 125). His negative qualities impart to the reader a lack of confidence in the strength invested in him and open the possibility that he could be deposed. If he were, his community’s social structure would be altered due to his greed and incompetence: the narrator states that “[t]he effigy of Lord Verney would, indeed, have stood, on state occasions, robed and coronetted, with his order, driven down to the House, and sat there among hereditary senators”, but, in actuality, “the real peer would have sat cold and dark enough, in Jos. Larkin’s dungeon” (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 249). Larkin stands to possess parliamentary power through controlling and puppeting the foolish Lord Verney. And yet, Verney is necessary to the happy

resolution of the novel when he is confronted by Mr Larkin's evil and fulfils his duty as a leader.

It is revealed that Lord Verney's older brother is actually alive, meaning Verney should not hold that aristocratic title, nor its privileges including a place in the House of Lords. Larkin asks Verney to agree to a plan that would have the brother arrested, removing him from the equation. However, Verney's sense of honour as an authority figure wins out over his greed: "you can't mean, or think it possible, sir, that I should lend myself to a deception [...] I'd much rather die in the debtor's prison". He embodies a kind of respect for the values of honesty and uprightness that Larkin cannot comprehend: "Poor, pompous, foolish Lord Verney stood up, so dignified and stern in the light of his honest horror, that Mr. Larkin, who despised him utterly, quailed before a phenomenon he could not understand" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 247). Verney rising to his feet mirrors his ascension above his "[p]oor, pompous, foolish" characterisation, finally appearing as a justified leader.

Verney's loyalty to his society and sense of social order, through which he lives up to the authority that has been bestowed on him, prevents Larkin's takeover:

That gigantic machine of torture which [Larkin] had been building and dovetailing, with patient villainy, at Lord Verney's word fell with a crash [...] Well was it for Lord Verney that the instinct of honour was strong in him, and that he would not suffer his vulgar tempter to beguile him into one indefensible concealment.

Had he fallen, that tempter would have been his tyrant. (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 249)

While Verney is eminently flawed, his social dominance and his allegiance to the terms on which his social group inherits rights, property, and power show the function of his position in maintaining those same paradigms. Verney's actions in particular ensure that a rightful heir will take his estate and titles after his brother's death, which comes soon after. Authority figures in this case ensure that reality-creation remains communal but led by those at the top of conventional hegemonic structures. Leaders can embody and protect consistent frameworks when their coherence comes under threat, even though they worryingly lack consistency and solidity personally.

The obsession with authority figures and their role in preserving established hegemony reflects conceptions of social leaders in Le Fanu's own life, such as Le Fanu's father. McCormack argues Le Fanu's father embodied a particular view of history for his children, that of "the established and rejected church". Indeed, his father was a Church of Ireland minister at a time when Catholics protested the necessity of paying tithes to the Anglican church (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 45). The resulting violence had consequences for the Le Fanu family. McCormack indicates that Le Fanu's father and his wife were viewed with suspicion during their residency in Abington, County Limerick. Le Fanu's brother William was pelted with stones in what he described as a nearly fatal incident (McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 44). This event was given a supernatural edge in reporting by the *Limerick Chronicle*, reprinted in *The Freeman's Journal*. The reporter speaks of a man who was

waiting to ambush Le Fanu's brother but was called away when a relative was struck by lightning. The writer says this event is evidence of God's mercy and justice ("Tithes—Contradiction" 1). The event takes on a kind of Gothic excess in its mixture of violence and supernatural retribution, indicating the severity of the violence in the minds of institutions reporting on it. Further, McCormack proposes that both Le Fanu and his father "saw themselves as symbols or embodiments of a particular view of reality, a once vital but now collapsing historical coherence" (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 46). Others saw Le Fanu in this way too. A writer for *The Nation* in 1885 posited that no man's "alliance was more anxiously sought or more confidently anticipated by Irish Nationalists forty years ago than that of Isaac Butt and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. One was regarded as the political and the other as the literary leader of the Irish Conservatives" ("Notable Irish Writers" 9). Men like Verney and Spielsdorf embody "a particular view of reality" amidst potential, catastrophic changes, Larkin's attempted coup and a vampiric attack respectively. The terrifying deterioration of supremacy was an experience Le Fanu himself had as a representative of an Anglo-Irish reality that found itself dissolving, its solidity becoming fluid amidst the cataclysmic tides of history that threatened to overturn existing power structures.

The necessity of authority figures does not inherently equate to their suitability for their social role. Authority figures become overwhelmed in *Checkmate*, where Longcluse uses codes of respectability in the community to gain strength by stealing it from Richard Arden, who later in the tale becomes Sir Richard Arden. One of Richard's moral failings is his weakness for gambling. He loses his fortune, falls further into debt, and slowly comes under the control of the spurned Longcluse due to these financial

difficulties. He is even made party to imprisoning his own sister and almost forcing her into a dangerous marriage in a social and religious perversion of that institution. When a man like this bears a level of aristocratic authority, the consistency and legitimacy of authority becomes all the more questionable. Its justification is ambiguous, as it seems to be promised to men who themselves cannot be as stalwart as the conceptions of knowledge and action they are meant to form and maintain. But for a hegemonic subjectivity to survive, their position appears necessary. In *Dissolute Characters*, McCormack argues that character, “generally based on assumptions of male bourgeois rectitude and power”, is collapsed by numerous means in Le Fanu’s fiction (*Dissolute Characters* ix). This lack of solidity present in authority figures reinforces the ambiguous, uncertain supremacy of those invested with the social strength to maintain reality.

McCormack identifies a similarly ambiguous attitude present in clergymen like Le Fanu’s father towards an administration which they scorned for being “hostile to their ideals”, but which they also needed for their protection (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 45). As the narrator states in *The Rose and Key*, “[w]e do not know how habitually we rely upon the protection of the upright among our fellow men, until accident isolates us, and we confront a possible villain in a lonely place” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V1 258). Authority figures are those who must rescue the isolated person confronted with a “villain”, returning to them a sense of safety and normalcy. There is an element in Le Fanu’s fiction of the uncertainty of the author’s own time, when some among the Anglo-Irish felt uncertain or hostile to those who were tasked with “protection”. Still, they felt that they might become “isolated” with “a possible villain in a

lonely place” without their protectors. Like authoritative individuals and institutions in nineteenth-century Ireland, Verney, Sir Bale, General Spielsdorf, and the other men discussed here often have an ambiguous relationship with those under their dominance but remain desired in times where the very way of life those leaders help to maintain is under threat. Their use will often prove to be oppressive and damaging to the maintenance of reality, as demonstrated in the next chapter.

V. Girls as Weapons of Ideologically and Physically Reproducing Reality

While authority figures are invested with power to lead a reality-creation process, others are divested of agency in the context of reality building. Girls, usually those in a liminal space between childhood dependence on parents and married life, often occupy that vulnerable group. Le Fanu’s stories frequently have female protagonists, typically young, often just entering the age at which they are considered women by their society which is crucially the moment at which they might marry. The isolated, adolescent girl, alone and preyed upon by dangerous, often otherworldly presences, is a common trope in Gothic and horror fiction. This can be seen from Ellena di Rosalba in Radcliffe’s *The Italian* to the young female survivors of slasher films, often called final girls. Le Fanu simultaneously explores the risks posed to girls in the transitional period between childhood and marriage and the policing of girls by the patriarchal dominance that surrounds them in situations of threatened change. While the empowered exert agency to conserve social structures and methods of categorisation, girls become largely passive tools in those efforts. Girls in stories like *Willing to Die*, “Carmilla”, *Uncle Silas*,

and *The Rose and Key* are largely a part of the negotiation and maintenance of collective paradigms by their relationship to authority figures. The latter's efforts to control girls help to produce what Helen Stoddart calls an "ideologically and biologically suited female who can be placed, body and soul, in the service of imperialism" (31). They also constitute an effort to keep norms intact and ensure their survival as societies move forward into uncharted waters.

The regulation of girls is enacted by many leaders in Le Fanu's late texts. The young protagonist of *Willing to Die* is warned of the dangers facing her by her tutor, a Jesuit priest, who is as personally virtuous as his organisation is shown to be wicked. As she prepares for her first ball, he says, "[d]o not forget your better thoughts. You are entering scenes of illusion, where there is little charity, and almost no sincerity, where cruel feelings are instilled, the love of flattery and dominion awakened" (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*). She is later told by a more ignoble character, "I see, by your countenance, young lady, that you respect authority [...] a dull pupil is a bad bargain, and you are not dull. But a contumacious pupil is utterly intolerable; you are not that, either; you are sweetness and submission itself, eh?" (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*). Her obedience is called into existence by these assumptions and "you are" statements. The characteristics she should aspire to, behaviours she should avoid, indeed how she should relate to those around her, are defined for her by these declaratives of who she is and is not. Such codification comes from male characters who are respectively virtuous and villainous, with warnings about the strict qualities girls must adopt and the dangers that await them should they fail to do so coming from both ends of that spectrum. This is the space in

society that girls occupy in Le Fanu's fiction: one of intense concerns about respectability and an inherent sense of danger if it is breeched.

Laura in "Carmilla" occupies such a threatened social position as her own respectability and biology are threatened. Her father appears especially concerned with ensuring that his daughter remains within his frameworks. Laura is isolated enough that her entire sense of material truth and social action is formed by what or whom her father allows her to encounter. When the supernatural intrudes on this order, her father provides credulity-straining explanations to show how nothing supernatural is happening on his estate. Laura expresses alarm when Carmilla escapes from a locked room. Her father gives a long-winded discourse on how this unlikely event might have happened, ending his contrived explanation by calling the mystery "easily and innocently explained". He says that "we may congratulate ourselves on the certainty that the most natural explanation of the occurrence is one that involved no drugging, no tampering with locks, no burglars, or poisoners, or witches – nothing that need alarm Carmilla, or any one else, for our safety" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 287). Laura's observations as well as the notion that the household might be under threat from anything unreal or criminal, like "burglars [...] or witches", are rhetorically discarded. Thus, the group's "alarms" can be "happily ended, and Carmilla [who is feeding on Laura] restored to her friends" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 287). Unbeknownst to Laura's father, Carmilla's restoration allows her to continue feeding. When presented with an old picture, dated 1698, which looks exactly like Carmilla, he states, "[c]ertainly it is a wonderful likeness", but then looks away and to Laura's "surprise seemed but little struck by it" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 272). In each case, he ignores the evidence before his eyes and the

fears of the women in his house. Their fears and the prospect of the supernatural are considered to be beneath consideration.

In these explanations, Laura's father sets out and reinforces what the world is and how to act on it. In intention, he sets a clear boundary between what is materially real and unreal; that Carmilla is unnaturally old or is supernaturally capable of escaping locked rooms deserves to be brushed aside. In form, he asserts his own position, that of a male authority figure, as being of prime importance over Laura, Carmilla, and their servants in determining what is happening around them. His logic supersedes and must exert control over the fearful women on his estate. He practices the role of leader as performed by many men throughout Le Fanu's fictional communities and, in doing so, he works to instill a coherent regime of material and social paradigms in his daughter, maintaining his reality. In social terms, he seems to have imparted a quite English outlook on her: "My father is English, and I bear an English name, although I never saw England". She describes her surroundings as "this lonely and primitive place, where everything is so marvellously cheap" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 244). She explains how "cheap" her estate's way of life is by English standards and seemingly judges Styria as "lonely and primitive" from that same viewpoint, even though she has never seen England. She is also made to practice both a strict regimen of prayer and the English language. Her father creates a distinctly English way of life, nestled in a wider, tiered Styrian configuration. Laura must be protected, made culturally English, and imbued with paradigms that are mediated by the men who lord over her in order to preserve this embedded reality. She can remain an enlightened member of the western world, continuing the reality of her father in the face of a supernatural, backwards east.

She would presumably be able to pass on her father's ideological viewpoints and legitimacy to the next generation. Laura claims that she is "spoiled" as her "only parent allowed her pretty nearly her own way in everything" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 246). However, in situations like the above examples, when her father ignores Carmilla's picture or invents absurd explanations for Carmilla's absence from locked rooms, he exhibits a much tighter grasp on Laura's perception. He redirects her away from thoughts or events that fall outside of his conceptions. In each of the above examples, men emphasise the control that must be placed on girls in a setting that may well prey upon them. Their protection comes in the form of equipping them with virtues such as piety, the English language, and obedience.

Some of the control exerted over girls in texts like *Uncle Silas* is justified by a fear that they are incapable of following an allegedly rational order. The plots of many Le Fanu stories revolve around whether girls threatened by outside forces are brought comfortably back into the fold of their society or not. The ability to keep girls securely within a consistent framework then might be seen as a vindication of those same values. One such story is *Uncle Silas*. Maud, the novel's protagonist, is told by her uncle, "beware of prejudice; women are unjust and violent in their judgments. Your family has suffered in some of its members by such injustice. It behoves us to be careful not to practise it" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 81). The idea of girls being irrational and capable of bringing down destruction through that irrationality becomes tied up in the biological future of their communities.

I want to draw your attention to two aspects of the quotation from *Uncle Silas* above. First, it is important to consider the responsibility placed on Maud, reinforced

through her interaction with her uncle. She has the fate of her family in her hands: the means to cause it to suffer or not. Implicitly, she also has the capacity to literally bear its future members. This is the position of many of Le Fanu's adolescent girls within the social construction of patriarchal societies: they hold the promise of a future for their kin in which they perpetuate a family name, norms, and legacy. Secondly, the quotation emphasises the prevailing assumption that girls are vulnerable, that their bodies and minds are defective and at risk. Although Maud is warned of the danger she offers to her family's future by a villain, her uncle, she often confirms his argument. Maud herself voices misogynist sentiment in the novel. For example, her adult self interrogates her girlish fear at being asked by her father to undergo an "ordeal" for the sake of her family: "You perceive I had more spirit than courage. I think I had the mental attributes of courage; but then I was but a hysterical girl, and in so far neither more nor less than a coward" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 108). Long after this equation of girlish hysteria with cowardice in matters of familial preservation, she indicates an inherent duplicitousness to girls in matters of love:

What girl was ever quite frank about her likings? I don't think I was more of a cheat than others; but I never could tell of myself. It is quite true that this duplicity and reserve seldom deceives [...] for the most part, when detected we are found out not only to be in love, but to be rogues moreover. (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 292)

As a woman, she will generate and shape the future, but due to her natural injustice and “violent [...] judgments,” the often-untrustworthy aspects of girls Maud also identifies, she is especially likely to destroy that future.

The sentiments voiced both by Silas and Maud pair well with contemporary concerns around girls’ intellectual development. Deborah Gorham argues that Victorian advice manuals often told middle-class girls “that they must learn to control their ‘impetuous and unregulated feelings’; control over their emotions was necessary to them as girls, and would later be necessary to them as mothers of children” (112). Women were also asked to rein in their pursuit of knowledge and their practice of activities such as artistic endeavours; such activities should not be performed in an ambitious, masculine manner. Rather they should be performed in a way that makes them a good partner to men (Gorham 104-5). Women, their ambitions, and their unwieldy emotions all must be contained here for fear of, as Silas intimates, the deterioration of familial structures, the domestic configurations to which Victorian middle-class girls were largely consigned and educated to uphold.

The importance of restraining women’s disruptive potential is further highlighted by Marie Mulvey-Roberts. Mulvey-Roberts contends that women were traditionally, from the Classical period, seen as being non-normative, near monstrous (106-7). The language of hysteria, monstrosity, and connections to the monstrous depicts women as being closer to the unreal as a baseline. According to Mulvey-Roberts, the porous quality of women’s bodies meant ultimately that the open mouth, vulva, and the threshold of the domestic home must be closed up through the policing of the female body (106-7). Girls like Maud in *Uncle Silas* and Laura in “Carmilla” are policed to steer

them clear of unacceptable actions, such as anti-familial sentiments or flirtations with the supernatural, which are particularly primed to infect their porous bodies and temperaments.

Backus delves into the regulation of women and its effect on girls in particular in her discussion of the Anglo-Irish family unit. She considers specifically how, in the eighteenth century, greater attention was given to the surveillance of women's purity, representing the care women must give to upholding boundaries between the private and public sphere (56). According to Ruth Perry, the period saw a reified sense of meaning and purpose of women's bodies; the British state colonised female bodies to serve ideological and social production (Backus 61-2). The domestic space was still codified as feminine in the Victorian era as professional work outside the home was given to men, "largely leaving the domestic sphere to women and children" (Lewis 4). Le Fanu's texts thus mirror how girls' social position was codified in the eighteenth century, in which girls occupied a powerful, but consistently threatened, repressed, passive position. Further, the use of girls as symbols of state power figured frequently in Anglo-Irish literature of the nineteenth century. Marjorie Howes argues,

Given the prevailing emphasis on assimilation in imperial discourses on Ireland, the widespread tendency of writers and politicians to figure assimilation (whether beneficial or threatening) as a sexual romance, and the period's association of Celtic and feminine nature, it seems inevitable that representations of gender and sexuality would play a crucial role in Anglo-Irish writing about the problematic political and cultural status of the Ascendancy. (180)

The “sexual romance” often involves girls married to men to symbolise a unified, imperialist future that might have been hard to picture for those living through the Ascendency’s slow decline. The “sexual romance” can be seen in exemplars of the national tale of the early nineteenth century such as *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). While Romantic literature often portrayed these marriages as symbols of more unified future configurations of Ireland in Britain, Susan Cahill elucidates the more anxious side of the ways in which girls are symbolic of futurity. Cahill draws on the work of Sally Mitchell and Catherine Driscoll to propose, “[t]he transitional status of girlhood, its linkages to modernity, and its embodiment of potential that is not easily managed all serve to place girlhood in conversation with our particular anxieties about futurity” (168). While Cahill here mostly talks about girls later in the nineteenth century and in a nationalist context, the figuring of girls as transitional sites of anxiety about the future fits in well with girls’ function in stories like “Carmilla” and *Uncle Silas*. Girls are imprinted with symbolic importance in many Romantic texts, but function in stories like “Carmilla” as uncertain generators of a future under threat. Maud of *Uncle Silas* must ensure she does not misbehave as girls are wont to do and thus destroy her family and its future. Laura, who bears the possibility of generating a future for her father’s reality, must be kept human and told to disbelieve in ghostly entities even as doing so becomes increasingly difficult. Girls in Le Fanu’s texts are imbued with hope for a community’s future, but Le Fanu suggests that this position and that future are uncertain. Girls thus occupy a precarious fictional position of vulnerability and repression as they are figured as simultaneously powerful and powerless.

Ellen Moers' formulation of the female Gothic is relevant here. Moers articulated the uniquely female concerns often found in Gothic works by women (92). Davison builds on Moers' conception of the female Gothic by arguing that, in early Gothic texts like those by Ann Radcliffe:

The Female Gothic protagonist's trajectory may be best characterized as an initiation ritual into patriarchal society during an era of critical class transition [...] According to Claire Kahane, 'the heroine's active exploration of the Gothic house in which she is trapped is also an exploration of her relation to the maternal body that she shares, with all its connotations of power over and vulnerability to forces within and without'. This exploration also involves confrontation with external patriarchal forces about which the protagonist feels decidedly ambivalent. (95-6).

This process of initiation fits into a broader narrative arc that Killeen ascribes to Gothic plots. They, he contends, generally proceed from stability to a period of transition back to stability or, as Northrop Frye states of romance more broadly, "[m]ost romances end happily, with a return to the state of identity, and begin with a departure from it" (Killeen, *Emergence of Irish Gothic* 70, Frye 54). There is a possible conservative reading of the initiation depicted in *The Rose and Key* where its heroine must undergo trauma to participate in a patriarchal order. Thus, the norms of her society and the trajectory of the narrative could be seen to be in harmony: she becomes suited to the reproductive role of women in her society at the happy conclusion of the tale, perpetuating

heteronormative, patriarchal structures. At the end of the novel, the protagonist rejoins patriarchal society after a stint in an asylum. Her evil mother is deposed, and she is married, thus positioning her to bear children and restore her family's aristocratic legitimacy. Additionally, Maud is improved by her stay in the asylum: "Maud Vernon had grown more tolerant. In this strange seclusion, she had learned more of human nature, and had her sense of superiority more humbled, in two or three days, than in all her life before" (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 171). In broad strokes, the narrative trajectory is positive, with Maud growing to suit the position her society wishes her to occupy as a woman. Some of the patriarchal critique embedded in Davison's assessment of the plot trajectory of Romantic-era Female Gothic texts could be removed from the process of integration carried out in *The Rose and Key*.

However, the arc towards integration is uncomfortably mirrored by the asylum in which the protagonist of *The Rose and Key* is jailed. Jennifer Wallis proposes that examining the body in the Victorian asylum "primarily as a site upon which 'barbaric' and 'unenlightened' treatments were brought to bear" presents "an ahistorical 'use/abuse model'" with which to examine "the history of psychiatry" (4). Le Fanu's portrayal of the asylum largely falls into this "use/abuse model". However, as written in Wallis' monograph, medical workers in the asylum worked within and contributed to particular frameworks for categorising and acting on mental illness: asylums "could be places where—in an era increasingly concerned with the links between body and mind—various and complex 'ways of knowing' mental disease were developed, refined, and sometimes discarded" (16). Le Fanu's asylum is similar in that "ways of knowing"

are developed here. However, they are generally malicious and do not reflect the nuance of actual asylum practices as outlined in Wallis' account.

Le Fanu connects Antomarchi's ruthless asylum and the society into which the protagonist is eventually reintegrated through the ways in which both generate "ways of knowing" and being. In the isolated community of Antomarchi's asylum, the heroine, Maud, is told, "[t]is best to be quiet, and orderly, and cheerful, and 'appy, and that's my advice to you, miss; be always pleasant and 'appy, while you stays at Glarewoods" (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key V3* 172). The advice is much like similar exhortations received by other girls in Le Fanu's texts who are instructed to be compliant. I wish to draw attention to two levels of narration here: the broad arc of the novel (that of a girl undergoing trauma to ultimately restore an aristocratic, patriarchal power structure) and the act of narration being done at the asylum. The communal story the asylum community weaves is guided by and serves Antomarchi. Maud must be controlled here to become an ideal passive subject, "always pleasant and 'appy", in order to thrive at the asylum and, it is implied, return to her former life. That implication is a lie. She is not in fact here to be improved or released, but rather to be controlled in service of her mother's and Antomarchi's desires. Her trial in the asylum, in other words, is aimed at serving the desires of those in power rather than her improvement for its own (or Maud's own) sake. In this way, her ordeal resembles Foucault's description of asylums:

For power to be deployed with all this cunning, or rather, for the asylum's regulated universe to be so obsessed with these kind of relays of power, which

falsify and distort this universe, then it is highly likely that at the very heart of this space there is a threatening power to be mastered or defeated. (6)

Le Fanu's engagement with the asylum, a space where "ways of knowing" are sublimated to its proprietor's greed, exhibits an obsession with "relays of power". In this setting, Le Fanu explores in quite explicit ways how the authoritative can exert control such that they "distort" a "regulated universe". As previously discussed, Antomarchi's primary concern with Maud is to make her submit to his will, to master or defeat any "threatening power" she might hold through torture and incarceration. Here, Le Fanu explores the possibilities of institutions helping to uphold harmful, constructed frameworks by acting on girls. In doing so, he provides an uncomfortable mirroring between this extremity and communities that, in perhaps more mundane ways, exhibit "regulated" universes, "obsessed with [...] relays of power".

Maud and other women in Le Fanu's late texts are asked to restrain themselves and assent to control exerted on them in more ostensibly legitimate communities, seemingly with the goal of upholding collective paradigms. In the asylum, Maud must serve Antomarchi's evil dominance, but that pursuit mirrors her role outside of the asylum where she is moulded to help uphold aristocratic, masculine supremacy. Through his representation of girls, Le Fanu prompts a troubling examination of the ways girls are used in service of masculinist tenets by functioning to biologically and ideologically reproduce reality. Characters like Ethel in *Willing to Die* have ideal modes of behaviour mapped on to them by men while Laura's father in "Carmilla" exerts control over his daughter's perception. Meanwhile, women's irrationality justifies the control

exerted on Maud in *Uncle Silas*. Like Maud's situation in the asylum of *The Rose and Key*, more ostensibly legitimate communities work to sublimate girls and their bodies to the maintenance of shared paradigms. Le Fanu illustrates the ways in which girls are made to be passive tools in their ideal trajectory towards the maintenance of particular schemes of patriarchy.

Many critical interpretations of Le Fanu's stories find conservative messaging at their heart. As an example, Michael H. Begnal argues that the whole of Le Fanu's short story collection *In a Glass Darkly* is meant to show society in danger because it has been given over to sexuality and corruption (44). Additionally, Le Fanu's personal status as an exemplar of Anglican conservatism might help to uphold conceptions of his fiction as advocating for the status quo. Further, in *The Rose and Key*, the narrator's argument that Maud's imprisonment was beneficial evokes a conservative reading of the text: "It is well when, even in after-life, we can see that our sufferings have made us better, and that God has purged the tree, and not cursed it" (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 156). The conflation of her victimisation with God's improving gifts implies a benefit to the hardships she faced, benefits not visited on her if she were granted more freedom in her youth: "These awful days, if they lead her to see and to amend her faults, will not have passed in vain" (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 156). The narrator invites an interpretation of the story as Maud being made able to operate in the patriarchal idyll that reigns at the end of the novel. However, through *The Rose and Key*, Le Fanu turns a more critical eye on what particular groups deem to be corruption and, by extension, aberration. Whatever benefits characters like Maud might accrue from their turmoil, Le Fanu points to how communities themselves desire control in order to justify and maintain a

particular way of life, much as Antomarchi did. The question of whether the arc towards integration is validated by Le Fanu's texts thus becomes debatable.

Begnal has written that in *In a Glass Darkly*, three of the strongest pillars of society - religion, the aristocracy, and the law - have been perverted and debased. This shows what a hopeless place society finds itself in (41). We can supplement Begnal's account with a fuller articulation of what occurs before the perversion and debasement. We can add in Le Fanu's nuanced, often critical examination of the construction of key social pillars. We can also include the social implications of the particular roles into which communities force girls to preserve their social structures. The decay of social pillars is just a final act of a much larger arc evidenced throughout Le Fanu's late fiction. Its start has been discussed here and its trajectory will be mapped over the coming chapters. The various attempts by Le Fanu's fictional communities to create clear, universal senses of shared subjectivity appear designed to secure their future. Preserving a singular narrative allows them to keep moving forward with certainty and justification into a coming realm of uncertainty, a process in which Le Fanu implicates the reader. Le Fanu's novels centre on examining the actions that serve hegemonic structures. The vulnerabilities and inadequacies present in Le Fanu's fictional realities become all the more apparent as we continue examining the process by which communal viewpoints are formed. Futurity comes into question, as depicted in Sir Bale's estate after the otherworldly events of "The Haunted Baronet": "Over Mardykes Hall there was a gloom — no sound of children's voices was heard there, and even the hope of that merry advent had died out" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 155). As we will see over the coming chapters, Le Fanu continues to trouble the processes of reality

maintenance depicted in this chapter. He issues a warning to communities within and outside Anglo-Ireland who might try to establish oppressive, short-sighted hegemony. An absence of “children’s voices” and a dying out of “hope” might lie in their wake.

Chapter 2: Constructed Inadequacies

I. The Happy Valley

As discussed in the previous chapter, collective subjectivities in Le Fanu's late fiction are built through a kind of communal narration. The young protagonist of *Willing to Die*, Ethel Ware, personally experiences the toll this narration takes on individuals living in her community. Upon her entrance into adulthood, she feels the weight of what the individual must sacrifice. She states that, in the new adult world she is entering,

[n]o one has a right to be ailing or unfortunate, much less to talk as if he were so, in that happy valley. Such people are 'tainted wethers of the flock,' and are bound to abolish themselves forthwith [...] the necessary restorative cycle must not be interrupted by private agonies, small or great. If that were permitted, who could recruit for his daily task? (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*)

While these reflections on adolescence might simply articulate frustration at the rules by which Ethel must abide, she draws darker conclusions as well. Crucially, the "happy valley" to which Ethel refers is a construction made possible by "the necessary restorative cycle" for which incompatible "private agonies" must be put aside so that this "daily task" might continue. There is a predatory, oppressive pursuit of a cogent vision of reality here in which everything not conducive to the community's narrative must be

sanded off. “[H]appy valley” thus becomes a term emblematic of the often negative characterisation of realities maintained in communities across Le Fanu’s late fiction.

Communal understandings of the world are produced in Le Fanu’s fiction in ways that simultaneously harm the vulnerable and create weak points in the façade of constructed frameworks. Authority figures, as shown in stories like “The Haunted Baronet”, “Green Tea”, *Guy Deverell*, *The Rose and Key*, *The Tenants of Malory*, *The House by the Churchyard*, *Haunted Lives*, *Wylder’s Hand*, “Mr Justice Harbottle”, and *Willing to Die* use the strength bestowed on them to reinforce harmful paradigms that often inhibit their navigation of their surroundings. Further, despite their frequent cruelty, they often fail to adequately protect those same shared sets of rules due to their incompetence. The narrators of “The Haunted Baronet”, *In a Glass Darkly*, *Wylder’s Hand*, and *The Tenants of Malory* exhibit similar failures. As Le Fanu’s audience has direct interaction with narrators, their inability to offer unproblematic visions of action and knowledge assume greater intensity for the reader. Their interrelation further prompts the reader, an imaginative occupant of Le Fanu’s fictional space, to question the efficacy of the shared conceptions the narrators promote. Moreover, readers are led to especially question the submission of girl’s bodies and agency to dominant ways of being, seeing, and acting in tales such as *Uncle Silas*, *Haunted Lives*, *The Rose and Key*, “Carmilla”, *The Tenants of Malory*, and *Checkmate*. In the face of suspect paradigms and methods of upholding them, the subjugation of the vulnerable does not guarantee safety or stability. Ultimately, paradigms that harm the vulnerable and authority figures who cannot uphold a created “happy valley” for the reader or Le Fanu’s characters increase the efficacy of invasions by otherworldly forces.

II. The Failures of Medical, Legal, and Religious Authority Figures

Men who possess professional authority are especially important in upholding shared conceptions of the world in Le Fanu's late texts, exemplified here by men who practice medicine, law, and religious leadership. Many authority figures do successfully uphold a particular reality, as argued in chapter one. However, the ways in which the men discussed in this chapter wield power often reveal that the social tenets they uphold do not afford members of the community sufficient capacity to navigate their world. Their actions also demonstrate a frequent inability of existing power structures to uphold their own paradigms.

For example, professional medical authority figures often attempt to use institutional might to keep supremacy centred in their own hands in Le Fanu's late fiction. Their attempts to do so expose the oppressive nature of the paradigms professional authority figures are specialised to sustain as part of maintaining their "happy valley". A good example is found after the supposed demise of the initial protagonist of "The Haunted Baronet", Feltram. He is apparently drowned in a supernatural incident where, according to a fisherman, a hand reaches out of a lake and drags him under the water. Sir Bale, Feltram's benefactor, successfully avoids blame for the incident and thus, however accidentally, upholds his vision of reality. The town doctor, Torvey, is a key aspect of this gambit's success. Bale knows he needs Torvey on his side because "the Doctor was a bit of a gossip, and in most houses in that region, in one character or another, every three months in the year" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost*

Stories of J.S. Le Fanu 102). The Doctor's medical authority is less a tool of facilitating knowledge and bodily healing and more an agent of preserving Sir Bale's supremacy as hereditary leader of Golden Friars. In this way, Torvey's actions help to support Sir Bale's continued right to rule, thereby preserving paradigmatic aristocratic structures with medical strength. Louise Penner argues that "medical professionalism in the mid-nineteenth century was a work in progress, shaped by forces both within and outside of scientific medicine" (40). One of these forces was Charles Dickens. He encouraged "the view that hospitals could be a kind of ideal 'institutional intermediary between the charitable and the recipients of relief', when medical authority was respected in hospital governance" (Penner 30). The construction of "medical authority" has reached more cynical ends in Golden Friars. That Torvey is more dedicated to upholding particular norms than providing healing casts suspicion on his legitimacy for the reader as the potential benefits he offers are eroded.

Feltram's resurrection soon after his supposed death, however, even more powerfully and directly undermines Doctor Torvey. Torvey is left stunned. He says, "I don't think there is any similar case on record", then defends his own professional intuition by saying, "[t]here never was — and it ain't too much to say there never will be — another case like it" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 108). Torvey's assertion that this event is anomalous, so improbable that it will never happen again, leaves the reader with uncertainty because if one accepts his word, then Feltram's death likely violates commonly accepted rules of medical knowledge by being anomalous. Perhaps Feltram did actually die and was supernaturally revived, which would severely violate accepted understandings of the material world. The lack of a concrete explanation provided by

the doctor to explain what happened to Feltram means we cannot know whether this event is as singular as Torvey asserts in his self-defence though. Indeed, Torvey's assertion that it could never happen again is not backed up by evidence beyond the strangeness of Feltram's revival. There is a potential then for future events that are similarly inexplicable to Torvey's version of medical science. Or perhaps the oft-drunk Torvey simply incorrectly diagnosed Feltram's drowning. All options are unfavourable: either medical paradigms themselves are flawed or Torvey is revealed to be a crucial but profoundly deficient authority figure.

In response to otherworldly events that challenge his understanding of the world and his capability, Doctor Torvey attempts to restore clear boundaries between what is real and unreal. He does so by endeavouring to calm Sir Bale's suspicions about the supernatural nature of his experiences with the revived Feltram. He says Sir Bale's allegedly supernatural ordeals with Feltram are all merely "commonplace" and that anything seemingly supernatural "is just like that fisherman's story, about the hand that drew Feltram into the water on the night that he was nearly drowned" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories of J.S. Le Fanu* 142). Torvey rhetorically links thoughts that fall outside of acceptable conceptions of his world to a member of the lower classes that ascribed supernatural elements to Feltram's death. He promptly leaves the man out of his assessment and argues, "[e]very one can see what that was. Why of course it was simply the reflection of his own hand in the water, in that vivid lightning" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories of J.S. Le Fanu* 142). The fisherman is not included in "every one" in Torvey's estimation. Torvey asserts the primacy of his own perception by assigning valid subjectivity only to his point of view.

Like so many of Le Fanu's authority figures, Torvey reinforces his position as arbiter of reality, much as Sir Bale was shown to do in the previous chapter. Torvey ultimately calls Sir Bale's credence of the supernatural both ephemeral and a symptom of malady: "When you have been out a little and have gained strength you will shake off these dreams" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 142). He phrases Sir Bale's complaints in terms of the remit of his profession, thus reifying his own authority in this disruptive circumstance. However, the dismissal of the fisherman's perception and the containment of supernatural phenomena cannot completely hide the fact that Sir Bale ultimately dies by inexplicable means, which I will explore in more depth in the coming chapters. For now, it is important to note how Torvey engages in questionable, short-sighted means of paving over disruptions to his reality and attempts to reinforce his own station.

The gaps in the coherence of communal conceptions maintained in Golden Friars expose the inadequacies and cruelties of the community. The exposition of fissures in commonly held ideals holds some promise: Killeen draws on Derrida's conception of the ghost, articulating how ghosts defy ontological being, thus exposing our own limits and awakening us to the ethical responsibilities we have to otherness (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 135). However, this statement is only half true in "The Haunted Baronet". Unreal events expose the limits of these characters, but there is no ethical awakening. Bianca Del Villano, similarly to Killeen, draws on Derrida to argue that remembrance of a ghost implies a redefinition of knowledge and culture as I will explore more in the coming chapters. However, "in literature phantoms are always frightening figures, strangers who must be finally expelled, so that society can maintain

its order and set of values” (Del Villano 10). There is little room to countenance others’ experiences in adhering to a rigid, materialist, classist perspective. Expanding the bounds of that which is considered real becomes impossible. Torvey attempts to maintain order and avoid a redefinition of knowledge. Excising the fisherman’s account from official remembrance thwarts any attempts to contend with unknown powers. Further, Torvey reinforces harmful paradigms of social organisation. For instance, he reifies structures that place men like himself and the cruel Sir Bale, who seem incapable of contending with their unknown foe, in positions of authority. The communal conception of scientific truth upheld by Torvey is therefore one inherently undermined by the domineering method by which it is created and upheld. If Victorians were a people adrift in the waters of the new and unexplored, as Gilmour contends (2-3), then Torvey functions as Le Fanu’s warning against short-sighted methods of facing a state of transition.

Another medical leader who performs a similar function is Doctor Hesselius, the spiritualist physician in “Green Tea” from *In a Glass Darkly*. In “Green Tea” the Reverend Jennings is beset by a ghostly monkey who prevents him from performing his religious duties. Hesselius comes to treat Jennings, but his treatments fail. Jennings dies by suicide, his ghostly torment becoming too much to handle. Jennings’ death is a potentially terrifying prospect for his society. From a religious standpoint, a reverend’s ability to preach crumbled before their eyes and he never recovered. From a public safety standpoint, if Jennings can be pushed to suicide by this demonic figure, any member of the community might be at risk. To adequately come to terms with this

situation might require an identification of our limits, as Killeen's discussion of Derrida suggests.

Hesselius does not offer an identification of limits though. He instead counters potential uncertainties by portraying Jennings' death as inconsequential in the bigger picture; it is indicative of a single death, not something that might continue to be dangerous. In support of his authority, Hesselius touts a perfect record of success when treating men like Jennings and states that he had not yet started to treat Jennings. He reinforces this a number of times in his short conclusion to the story, saying variously that he has failed "in no one single instance" to treat illnesses like Jennings' and that any good and diligent physicians "will effect a cure" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 38). His assertions are undermined by the fact that Jennings consulted him and still died, meaning perhaps that others might encounter the same fate despite seeking help. Further, Hesselius states that Jennings' death came about because of a concurrent case of "hereditary suicidal mania" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 40). William Hughes argues that "Green Tea" mixes a kind of Protestant Gothic, in that Jennings is ultimately destined for his fate due to his spiritualist interests, with Swedenborgian spiritualism. The latter comes from Le Fanu's own confused spirituality in the wake of his wife's death. His spiritual uncertainty results in a "hesitantly Swedenborgian edifice" that is built on top of "the more material foundations laid in the medical fictions of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*" (53). Hesselius' conclusion reduces the supernatural to medical terms in Hughes' account, underlining "Green Tea"'s spiritualist edifice and materialist foundation as part of Le Fanu's own uncertain spirituality and his writerly influences. Le Fanu prompts the reader to wonder about the reasons Hesselius moves towards a

scientific foundation, though. His reframing of the haunting as a curable disease mirrors the similarly unhelpful Doctor Torvey's actions. Both place their patients' ordeals within the language of their medical expertise, thus reinforcing their authority and ability to deal with disruptive events. The strategy reveals weakness in their reality as the regimes of medical knowledge to which they subscribe and contribute fail to make the supernatural treatable or assure cures for future victims.

Mighall describes how Victorian specialists like sexologists would reference supernatural figures such as the vampire to configure their conceptions of sexual perversion and dysfunction. In essence, they converted supernatural monsters into mere human dysfunction (226-7). Hesselius is a fitting representative of the process by which authority attempts to integrate discourses on the relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds into authoritative institutions. He also functions as a warning of improper ways of doing so. He rhetorically, but not practically, shields his community from the dangers before them in an attempt to maintain his authoritative position and, consequently, reigning hegemonic structures. The act of reframing, of the kind discussed in chapter one, here reveals much of its cruelty and reckless endangerment when carried out by an authority figure.

Further, the fact that Jennings dies by suicide lends his death more subversive power for a Victorian audience, despite Hesselius' attempt to ensure his death is stripped of anything unnerving. Barbara T. Gates contends that Le Fanu's suicides reflect Victorian unease surrounding the act: for example, in 1823, those who died by suicide were allowed to be buried with more dignity than they had been previously, but only at night and "without Christian rites". Suicides also demanded forfeiture unless

insanity could be proven until 1870 “when forfeiture itself became illegal” (Gates 15). Gates demonstrates that stories like “Green Tea” present the “mystery of suicide” for a Victorian audience and for us by showing readers an admirable character who simply cannot be saved and for whose death there is no satisfactory explanation (23). If Jennings’ suicide is inexplicable, that does not stop Hesselius from explaining it, however unsatisfactorily by virtue of his appearing “irresponsible and foolish” (Gates 22). He also attempts to quell the potential discomfort of suicide in his English community by providing a scheme of personal responsibility to understand and disregard Jennings’ death. Hesselius concludes his case saying, “[i]f the patient does not array himself on the side of the disease, his cure is certain” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 40). This is ridiculous because Jennings seemingly did everything possible to “array himself” against this “disease”. Hesselius assigns the medical cause of death as a personal failing rather than a societally stigmatised fate Hesselius could not treat, one that could await others. Hesselius thus uses his medical authority to contain and excise what is deemed unacceptable, but he renders his act of dismissal and reframing suspect by the absurdity and injustice of the medical criteria he uses.

Perhaps the most explicit example of a harmful medical authority figure in Le Fanu’s texts is Antomarchi from *The Rose and Key*. Antomarchi uses his medical credentials to brutally rule over his private asylum with a supreme dedication to “Mammon, the lord of all, the foundation of his universe, the king of his paradise,” whom “he served with an inflexible adoration” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key V3* 180). As I illustrated in the previous chapter, the asylum uncomfortably mirrors the wider society in which it is nested. Both the asylum and the wider community train the vulnerable to uphold a

particular social order. Based on the efforts of Hesselius, Torvey, and Antomarchi, there is a foundation of similar intent among the three. Antomarchi exerts his dominance with cold, medical efficiency, threatening “the bath”, a horrific torture akin to waterboarding, to make patients compliant (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 178). Anything not under his greedy control must be suppressed through his medical power in ways more violent than, but not overly dissimilar in effect to, those employed by Hesselius and Torvey. When analysing these texts alongside one another therefore, Antomarchi’s asylum makes suspect those less extreme tactics employed by the latter two doctors. Hesselius and Torvey often seem more like ideological mediators and protectors of reality than facilitators of healthcare. Their purpose is demonstrated by their efforts to fit the experiences of the vulnerable and afflicted into accounts that uphold their own legitimacy. Although Antomarchi’s asylum is more overtly wicked than the medical services of the other two doctors, all three force the vulnerable to conform to reigning narratives.

Le Fanu’s questioning of authority figures frequently extends to legal authority too in his late texts. The narrator of *Guy Deverell* indicates potential failings of practitioners of the law by stating, “[a] terrible fact for the world to digest is this, that some of our gentlemen attorneys are about the most slobbering men of business to be found within its four corners ... prone to every sort and description of lay irregularity in matters of order and pink tape” (Le Fanu, *Guy Deverell* V2). While this narrator questions the abilities of attorneys more generally, Le Fanu provides insidious legal figures to cement a suspicion of how the law is wielded. In *The Tenants of Malory*, the reader meets Larkin, the lawyer discussed in chapter one, who the narrator says “has

great malice, but greater prudence [...] Where there is a proper consideration, no man is more forgiving. Where interest and revenge point the same way, he hits very hard indeed" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 260). Larkin's vision of justice here is centred on his own proclivities and desire for personal gain. Others endowed with institutional power have a similar philosophy. Lord Verney, when still operating as the assumed head of his family, illustrates a quite self-serving vision of justice while discussing the ways in which he has been failed by his society's legal framework. He contends that a rival harmed him by running him "into six thousand pounds expense for nothing [...] where's the good of laws if there's no way of reaching a person who commits, from the worst possible motives, an outrage like that, and goes on doing that sort of thing" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V1 181). As shown in the last chapter, Lord Verney is essential to ensuring his society continues to operate in a lawful manner by thwarting Larkin's plans. He scorns the chance to overturn aristocratic dominance by having his older brother, the rightful heir of Lord Verney's title, arrested and taken out of the line of succession. Nevertheless, Verney is equally characterised by an understanding of legality that mirrors Larkin's own, in which personal vengeance can be the measure of the law in his community. The antagonist of *The House by the Churchyard* continues prompting questions about the selfishness, of the kind embodied by Larkin, embedded in institutional legal authority:

I killed him to prevent his killing me. Precisely the same motive, though in your case neither so reasonable nor so justifiable, as that on which, in the name of justice, which means only the collective selfishness of my fellow-creatures, you

design in cool blood to put me publicly to death. 'Tis only that you, gentlemen, think it contributes to your safety. That's the spirit of human laws. I applaud and I adopt it in my own case. (Le Fanu *The House by the Churchyard*)

These lines are spoken by a nefarious character, much like Larkin. However, through characters like Verney and the monologue from *The House by the Churchyard*, readers of Le Fanu's late oeuvre are asked multiple times to think about the "human laws" authority figures often promote and their potential compatibility with Larkin's selfish view of justice.

That Larkin is so prominent in multiple Le Fanu stories, including *Wylder's Hand*, *The Tenants of Malory*, and *Haunted Lives*, further indicates something of the infection of legal dominance with a self-serving vision of justice. Le Fanu effectively illustrates how a man like Larkin can be a valued member of society, fulfilling social functions while also being defined by self-interest and avarice:

He was furnished with an excellent character—his cheques were always honoured—his 'tots' always unexceptionable—his vouchers never anything but exact. He had twice been publicly complimented in this sense, when managing Lord Hedgerow's estate. No man had, I believe, a higher reputation in his walk—few men were more formidable. I think it was Lawyer Larkin's private canon, in his dealings with men, that everything was moral that was not contrary to an Act of Parliament. (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*)

Larkin essentially has no morals outside of that which is profitable or unprofitable to him and his interests. That no action can be immoral unless “contrary to an Act of Parliament” bears witness to his lack of scruples, something that proves true through his actions in *Wylder’s Hand* and *The Tenants of Malory*. The above quotation also speaks to his ability to act within and alongside powerful authority structures, like parliament or Lord Verney in *The Tenants of Malory*, to accomplish his ends. He, in *Wylder’s Hand* and *Haunted Lives*, is consistently valued as upstanding by those around him despite his selfish desires.

Larkin is able to achieve his authoritative position seemingly because he is, in many ways, the image of middle class, outwardly productive manhood that Daniel Lewis illustrates. Lewis argues that masculine norms defined the Victorian middle-class man “as physically and morally strong, and who, if he was to be thought of as a man at all, must be outside the confines of the home during most of the day while he performs his job, thereby largely leaving the domestic sphere to women and children” (4). Larkin’s work is “exact”; he is “publicly complimented”, and in *Wylder’s Hand* and *The Tenants of Malory* he is routinely trusted until it becomes all too obvious that he is malicious. He is not “morally strong”, but he displays that outward professional productivity that Lewis demonstrates was crucial to Victorian masculinity. Larkin problematises the image of professional masculinity promoted as an ideal in a time when the Victorian middle class attempted, as Gilmour contends, to challenge aristocratic leadership “by laying claim to the high ground” (10). Larkin is not stopped until the very end of *The Tenants of Malory*, and Le Fanu gives little assurance that similar situations will be avoided in the future.

The reality that has been created in the novel's fictional society is amenable to granting authority to people such as Larkin which Larkin takes advantage of in three separate novels. Le Fanu views power as mediated by authoritative figures and institutions, ideally with the goal of providing a paradigm of justice in the case of legal authority figures. Through that perspective, Le Fanu highlights the ways in which the legal institution and professional strength more broadly construct paradigms of authority that undermine the ability to claim any "high ground".

The corruption of legal dominance has perhaps its most explicit representative in Mr Justice Harbottle in Le Fanu's story of the same name. His crimes are so great that an otherworldly court apparently executes him as retribution. Harbottle demeans important religious symbols – he fills the bowl in which the Bishop of London baptised his grandfather with punch – and degrades the value of legality by acting like a tyrant in court: "He had carried cases in his own way, it was said, in spite of counsel, authorities, and even of injuries, by a sort of cajolery, violence, and bamboozling, that somehow confused and overpowered resistance" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 88). His conduct erodes the exercise of just legal authority. However, he remains effectually unchallenged by any terrestrial influence. He is confident he can facilitate the execution of Mr Pyneweck, a grocer whom Harbottle sentences to death in order to maintain his control over Pyneweck's wife. He succeeds at this, only to be punished by a kind of spiritual court that only Harbottle sees, resulting in Harbottle either hanging himself due to these apparitions - the explanation his community gives to these events - or being hanged supernaturally. An unjust man again takes on the exercise of justice. Through his power, he, like many an actual 'law and order' political operator, corrodes legal

paradigms through his cruelty and desire to use supremacy for personal gain. In the end, existing paradigms appear to be insufficient. On one hand, a greater ghostly authority that might hold influence over the legal system is terrifying. On the other hand, perhaps some greater, terrifying force is desperately needed when a man like Harbottle is able to accumulate tremendous power in the legal system.

While the legal authority figures above often undermine the legitimacy of social paradigms, Reverend Jennings, the afflicted religious authority figure at the centre of “Green Tea”, demonstrates an inability to provide solidity to his community’s social and material schema. The need to supply a solid, shared perspective through religion was one potential way in which Victorian communities might find a kind of assurance amidst the myriad of political and scientific uncertainties they were hurtling through. The landscape of religion in Ireland underwent significant changes in the nineteenth century, with the disestablishment of the Church of England in 1869 coming near the end of Le Fanu’s life. The theory of evolution also altered many Victorians’ relationships to religion and to a sense of self-identification. In these uncharted waters, religious belief, the connection between religion and state, as well as religion’s role in self-identification were all in question.

Meanwhile, Luke Gibbons charts the shift from what he calls an “epidermal” to “epidemiological” schema of prejudice against the Irish. There was a Victorian conceptual shift away from racial purity being purely skin-colour-based to a configuration that combined “religious bigotry and racial pathology”. The new formation of cultural and racial categorisation posited that the Irish and Celts “threatened the white, Caucasian race from within” (Gibbons 38-40). Coherent racial divisions could be

upheld in order to distinguish the Irish from those of Caucasian origin. Further, in this period, fears of racial corruption were intensified by evolutionary discourse (Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 91). The attempt to rhetorically expel the Irish within this period of intensifying fears of corruption emphasises the desire to preserve distinctions among different groups of people within Britain even as existing distinctions were often threatened.

Religion could play an important role in preserving those separations amidst radical scientific revolutions and social concerns. Within and without Ireland, shifting understandings of racial contact, contamination, and evolution complicated ethnic identification. Religion provided an important boundary that could help maintain a kind of certainty and hierarchy. Even as many among the Anglo-Irish embraced an Irish identity by the nineteenth century, when such self-identification was more common, doing so was complicated by the spectre of ethnic and religious difference (Killeen, "An Irish Carmilla" 102-3). Religious identification perpetuated sectarian divides, preventing common identification but also delineating boundaries crucial to the Anglo-Irish subject's sense of self. Le Fanu himself, in his days as a young conservative writer, wrote that England had "failed in the hour of danger, to redeem her pledge of protection, and [left] the Protestants of Ireland wholly unsustainable and unencouraged, to abide the assaults of their malignant inveterate enemies" (qtd. in McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 83). Religion becomes a way, in Le Fanu's earlier writings, for the Ascendancy to assert a shared identity and set of needs in opposition to threatening, rising factions in Ireland like that of Daniel O'Connell, the Repeal movement, and the push for disestablishment. Despite the relevance of religion in partitioning social groups

in Ireland, contemporary challenges to spiritual hegemony showed that religion might not be a certain foundation for communities and their self-definition. Le Fanu's texts take part in the Gothic tradition of negotiating boundaries through questioning religious strength in his fictional communities. Le Fanu's own context seems to inform "Green Tea" and its commentary on the ability of authority figures to wield religious might to preserve rigid social boundaries.

As Lewis has argued, masculine norms identified that the Victorian middle-class man was meant to display strength and be able to work outside the domestic space (4). Victorian masculine norms were crucially a means of establishing a coherent sense of morality and righteousness by a growing middle class and, as such, masculine identity and purpose was "tied to what physical, intellectual, and religious work they produced" (Lewis 4). Le Fanu emphasises the importance placed on the output of religious authority figures when Reverend Foljambe builds the legitimacy of the Reverend Doody, an Irish clergyman, in *The Rose and Key*. He does so by emphasising that, although the Catholic convert is "a very rough diamond", he is "laborious". Indeed, he is Irish, a group the bishop says is "extremely energetic, and for very hard work unrivalled" (Le Fanu, *The Rose and Key V1* 130). That which might depreciate his value, his Irish speech patterns or his former Roman Catholic affiliations, can be turned to a positive so long as they help one perform "very hard work" of the kind that upholds nineteenth-century, middle-class norms.

However, the reader must question Jennings' ability to uphold gendered, middle-class standards in "Green Tea" as his mental state erodes. As Melissa Dickson illustrates,

Jennings posits a complicated architecture of the human mind as an unnavigable, infinite, and unpredictable phenomenon productive of or containing multiple selves and identities. Catalepsy is a familiar condition of the haunted of gothic literature, and it clearly represents a state of powerlessness and a heightened susceptibility to external forces and mesmeric controls. In the case of Jennings, it is suggestive of the monkey's power both literally and figuratively to cut him off from any sense of meaning or certainty. (89)

Jennings, through his profession, offers his community a clearer sense of reality, both in terms of social norms and material truth, mirroring the historical promise offered by religion in Ireland. Those promises of stability are inadequate in periods of persistent change though because Jennings cannot maintain clear boundaries within himself. Instead, he becomes susceptible to outside influence, his mind becoming "unnavigable". McCormack argues that Le Fanu's fiction, by the mid-1860s, had become increasingly concerned with "uncertainties of self" (McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 211). Jennings' lack of cogency has consequences; he loses some of that ability to lead his community towards upholding a clear, central narrative.

The potential damage caused by personal opaqueness is exacerbated by the public nature of his affliction: he is "incapacitated" in front of his parishioners (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 7). They have seen their spiritual leader deteriorate before their eyes "in the very act of officiating in his old and pretty church at Kenlis" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 7). Indeed, he is described as "leaving his congregation, without explanation, to

themselves” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 7). They are left alone, without their spiritual leader, and with no good “explanation” as to what has happened. Jennings states he is “drawn in and in” by what he terms “the enormous machinery of hell” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 31). As with the socio-political and scientific changes that upset religious structures in nineteenth-century Ireland, Jennings has quite publicly shown that his community’s religious defences are flawed. His incapacitation publicly demonstrates his inability and that of the social tenets he upholds to defend against external attacks that threaten to draw people steadily into the “machinery of hell”.

In *Willing to Die*, there are two distinct religious frameworks that reveal their instabilities through one Catholic religious authority figure, Mr Carmel. He supplements the ability of the lead character Ethel to confront the loss of her sister. This priest offers her a sublime vision of death as well as some prayers that may be of comfort to her before speaking

very touchingly of my darling sister, and my tears at last began to flow [...] Religion during that time had appeared in a gigantic and terrible aspect. My grief for my sister was now tinged with terror. Do not we from our Lutheran pulpits too lightly appeal to that potent emotion—fear? (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*)

Maud says that this moment makes her “ears tingle”, a biblical reference to 1 Samuel 3, God’s revelation to Samuel of his plans to exert his terrible power such that all who hear it would feel their ears tingle. The biblical event cemented Samuel’s status as a prophet,

underlining the ways in which Mr Carmel's words afford a crucial, revelatory influence in the context of Maud's grieving process. The priest's Catholic framework for discussing death unsettles her, but she indicates that its disturbing power offers a means of experiencing death that is productively different from that imparted by her Lutheran upbringing. He here acts as a kind of disruptor, a Le Fanu character type I will discuss more next chapter, by showing the limitations of her religious frameworks.

However, the religious frameworks Carmel represents are those of the Jesuits. Carmel is, in Maud's estimation, a good man, but the scheme of authority under which he lives is also inadequate. His Jesuit leadership is villainous and circumscribes his own good will. Carmel is frequently under the control of the evil priest Monsieur Droquville. He is party to Catholic machinations despite his personal virtue and care for Maud. In this, he embodies both goodness and threat, which Maud alludes to when she says,

We do these proselytising priests great wrong when we fancy them cold-blooded practisers upon our credulity, who seek, for merely selfish ends, to entangle us by sophistries, and inveigle us into those mental and moral catacombs from which there is no escape. We underrate their danger when we deny their sincerity. Mr. Carmel sought to save my soul; nobler or purer motive, I am sure, never animated man. (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*)

Mr Carmel is characterised by his "sincerity". However, because of that sincerity, priests can "inveigle us into those mental and moral catacombs from which there is no escape".

Catholic communities remain a dangerous alternative in Le Fanu's fiction such that even their most benevolent occupants are profound threats. The Catholic social circle provides harmful, avaricious frameworks of religious authority that yet offer something valuable to those able to access the affective benefits of the Catholic vision of death Carmel promotes. Le Fanu prompts the reader to sympathise with the priest. However, he underlines that Catholicism more broadly still deserves an evil reputation. Carmel's personal virtue contrasts with the wider evils of Catholicism, speaking to the interplay between individuals and the communal perspectives they occupy. Even though this priest is a good man, the Catholic church still looms large as a potentially destructive force. His actions are circumscribed by the context in which he finds himself and to which he contributes. Maud's community therefore has flawed religious norms that stunt her ability to react to the world around her while the rules of Carmel's community ensure he is party to cruelty and avarice, even though he himself is neither cruel nor avaricious. While Jennings is indicative of authority that cannot sustain social and material boundaries, through Carmel, Le Fanu reveals flaws in multiple hegemonic religious structures.

III. Narratorial Authority Figures

While the medical, legal, and religious authority figures discussed in this chapter do not represent all empowered men in Le Fanu's texts, cruel and inadequate authority abounds in the above examples. Vitrally flawed men are frequently found in positions of power and the paradigms they uphold are often shown to be inadequate. Readers are

made to question the realities these characters uphold when the façades of those realities appear to crack in key ways. The trend is further reinforced by narratorial authority figures. Le Fanu's narrators often take on an important role in constructing a consistent narrative out of what characters have experienced and communicate it to readers. In doing so, they become a cog within the machinery by which communities build their collective conceptions of material truth and social action. Their legitimacy and effectiveness become questionable, indicating the compromising of the power structures they often uphold. It therefore becomes more difficult for the reader to subscribe to the reality these narrators inhabit. As a result, narrators often function as authority figures and their actions are often similarly oppressive and corrosive to those discussed thus far.

Le Fanu reminds us that narrators tell his tales in the context of a wider web of interactions that form reality. In *The Tenants of Malory*, the narrator debates whether to describe the smoking habit of the Reverend Isaac Dixie: "shall I tell it? Why not? For in truth, if his bishop, who abhors that narcotic, and who, I am sure, never reads novels, and therefore cannot read it here, learns nothing of it, the telling can hurt nobody" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V2 147). The text becomes multiform here, fragmenting into novel and journalistic reporting of the kind that might actively affect living people's reputations. Speaking of the reverend is only permissible because his superior will likely never get hold of this text because it is a novel, despite being, in some way, journalistic. The narrator remains cognisant of not only describing this setting from his perspective, but also that people within that space will receive and engage with the text. By adopting an uncertain mixture of reporting and novelistic presentation, as Le Fanu's late fiction

usually does, *The Tenants of Malory* blurs generic lines and complicates, rather than solidifies, the authority of narrators to set the bounds of reality. Their perspective is subject to the social forces constructed around them, as are all regimes of knowledge and social action. The narrator reminds readers that Le Fanu's space is frequently rendered by narrators who have motivations and agendas, who are also affected by and contribute to social frameworks around them rather than delivering an objective, disinterested depiction of events. They are cognisant of the society around them as they record their setting and deliver it to readers in vignettes.

Additionally, Le Fanu's narrators at times fit hasty happy endings onto their tales, prompting questions about the sufficiency of the conclusions they promote as hybrid storytellers and reporters. "The Haunted Baronet", for example, details terrifying incidents up to and including the death of the titular character who had correctly predicted the time of his own death. His death is immediately followed by under 500 words of conclusion, ending with "[a]bout the year 1795 the baronetage was revived, and William Feltram enjoyed the title for fifteen years, as Sir William Mardykes" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 177). The narrator posits a more unified future with a new baronet in a hurried manner. The conclusion pales, in terms of the space it takes up, to the transgressions that have been detailed over the course of this winding, Gothic tale. It does not take the time to substantively undo the supernatural terror that killed the previous baronet and has been the focus of the tale up to this point. Le Fanu positions the reader here to be uncomfortable with pat conclusions to this Gothic narrative that the narrator promotes.

Le Fanu includes perhaps his most explicit and most obviously problematised example of a narrator engaging in such a conclusion in “Green Tea”. Here, the narrator’s biases and attempts to forcefully control the perspectives of his readers for his own benefit become evident. Doctor Hesselius of “Green Tea” is notable in that he, while a medical leader, is also his story’s narrator. He acts as a source of both medical and narrative authority, mediating the events of Mr Jennings’ illness for the reader. Lewis, as stated previously, has commented on the masculine norms of the mid-nineteenth century, formed by the Victorian middle-class, emphasising the primacy of physical and moral strength, as well as hard work. Jennings, as Lewis argues, is certainly deficient in this regard. However, Lewis claims that “‘Green Tea’ joins other gothic fiction in its depiction of narratives that contest the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, but finally restore those boundaries by punishing those characters that move outside their acceptable social and gender roles” (30). Jennings’ death, for Lewis, is a restoration of gender roles. However, we can supplement Lewis’ insights by examining the ways in which the reassertion of “boundaries” in the text evidences a far more biting critique of authority. The critique is especially emphasised when one considers the motivated mode through which the restoration of norms takes place, namely by deconstructing the framing Hesselius offers for interpreting Jennings’ demise. Relevant here is Fox’s discussion of credulity and narrative framing. Fox identifies the preface of Gerald Griffin’s “The Brown Man”, in which “a gruesome peasant story” is given a “didactic prelude in which the narrator insists that we ‘compare credulity to some sort of mental prism’”. The preface, according to Fox, draws

attention to how our narrative identifications (with cosmopolitan narrator or peasant characters) direct our interpretations of the following tale, it also – like Otranto – suggests that credulity is an interpretive act rather than a simple fact, and that the position from which we read and interpret will fundamentally change the truth of what we read (“Gothic Realism” 17).

Le Fanu tests our credulity in “Green Tea”, underlining the positionality of understanding that Fox draws from nineteenth-century Irish texts like “The Brown Man” (1806) and *The Wild Irish Girl* (1807) (“Gothic Realism” 17). Again, we are prompted to, as Comyn and Fermanis phrase it, “consider the ways in which seeing takes place” (11). Hesselius attempts to exert control over the “position from which [the readers] read and interpret”. By noticing his attempts to do so, readers are able to understand that the restoration of boundaries Lewis identifies emerges from Hesselius’ attempt to reify a vision of reality that benefits Hesselius. By recognising Hesselius’ self-interested framing as subjective, the reader can choose to adopt a different, more critical “position”, altering “the truth of what we read” in Hesselius’ account.

The whole tale is Hesselius’ testimony, fed through a mysterious editor who is devoted to Hesselius and remains nameless. The reader is immediately made to question elements of the report being delivered to them due to the interest these men have in upholding Hesselius’ expertise within the wider social context around them. The editor places a letter from Hesselius to a “Van L---” at the end of the tale, in which Hesselius can, without interruption, justify his own medical ability in light of the events of Jennings’ case (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 38). He asks Van L---, “[w]ho, under God,

cured you? Your humble servant, Martin Hesselius” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 38).

Hesselius is in a position to lay out, as fact, that he is a valid source of protection for all those like Van L---, because he is the narrator. He is able to frame Jennings’ death as a singular event that he is capable of solving should it reappear, as previously stated. From this position, he can assure other occupants of his world that incidents like the one that befell Jennings are not persistent threats. Meanwhile, he can maintain the social trust and power that he currently enjoys. The framing of Jennings’ death therefore does not solely evidence the primacy of the maintenance of a social and material reality over the desire to medically assist others, as demonstrated in the previous section. It also evidences a complication of narratorial authority as seen in self-serving attempts by Hesselius and his editor to control readers’ reactions to these events.

Similar reframing occurs when Hesselius posits that “Carmilla” is a tale “involving, not improbably, some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence, and its intermediates” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 243). It is a claim by which Hesselius tries to integrate Carmilla into his schema of medical spiritualism, categorising her alongside the other ostensibly supernatural hauntings of *In a Glass Darkly*. However, he never quite explains how Carmilla, identified as a vampire explicitly, neatly fits into that schema alongside the demonic monkey of “Green Tea”, the Watcher of “The Familiar”, or the hellish court of “Mr Justice Harbottle”. Seeing Carmilla’s vampiric nature does not apparently require any opening of inner eyes, for example, an important part of detecting the monsters of those previous texts in Hesselius’ account. Hesselius’s inability to convincingly categorise Carmilla could be attributed to the way in which Le Fanu has attempted to unite disparate, independent stories into a singular collection.

The stories in *In a Glass Darkly* were originally published separately. Hesselius' questionable attempts to unite these different stories in a cohesive conceptual framework may reflect an effort on Le Fanu's part to join different texts with little plot connection into a coherent anthology. We could say he uses Hesselius to tie the tales together in ways that are ultimately narratively unconvincing. However, when engaging with this text as a set of faux, found documents, the delineations between narratorial inadequacy and authorial intention fade away. We are forced instead to contend with a narrative tension arising from our own perspective becoming troubled: Hesselius is an authority figure who imparts particular ways of seeing on the reader. As his frameworks start to reveal their inadequacy, our own regime of knowledge for understanding Le Fanu's world becomes questionable in material and moral terms.

Hesselius also demonstrates the quite cruel way in which power, the social strength one might use to form, shape, or maintain reality, is wrenched away from people like Jennings. During the story, Jennings desperately asks for help through his reflections on his situation, imploring "relief", but feeling like his "prayer is for the impossible, and [his] pleading with the inexorable" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 31). He articulates the experience of a haunting that afflicts him and could afflict others. Alongside discussing how Jennings should have fought his disease more fervently, Hesselius patronisingly designates him "[p]oor Mr Jennings" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 40). The manner of his death and his perceived failures allow him and his reflections on his situation to be effectively cast aside in favour of the narrative Hesselius wants to promote. As a narrator, Hesselius denigrates Jennings' ability to contribute his own experience to collective narratives by phrasing him as pitiable rather than having

valuable knowledge and experience. The reduction of Jennings' voice and memory by Hesselius through his role as the one tasked with categorising this event for the reader is portrayed as plainly self-serving and potentially shortsighted in its undervaluing of the afflicted. It prompts the reader to question the processes by which these communities maintain their reality and who is granted power within that operation.

The beginning of "Mr Justice Harbottle", the third story in *In a Glass Darkly*, destabilises narratorial authority further by bringing to the fore the questionable practices of *In a Glass Darkly's* mysterious editor. The tale was recorded by two people, Mrs Trimmer and Mr Harman. The editor says that Hesselius thought Mrs Trimmer's account "the better of the two" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 84), but that the reader will experience Harman's apparently inferior account as it is "the only one available for this collection" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 84). The editor of *In a Glass Darkly* is unable to find the former account which was said to have been more detailed, "written [...] with more caution and knowledge" and embedded with letters from a doctor directly involved in the case (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 83). Despite these significant caveats, Hesselius feebly argues that this text is exactly the same as Trimmer's account when it comes to the "facts (non-medical) of the case" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 84). Presumably this means the medical facts of the case are not the same, or at least are not rendered with the "caution or knowledge" of the Trimmer account. But that is fine, according to the editor, because "[t]he strictly scientific view of the case would scarcely interest the popular reader". Indeed, he claims that, if he had the choice, he would likely prefer Harman's account for inclusion in this collection (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 84). The reader is left between two renderings of the events in question. One is preferred by

Hesselius, whose capability has been undermined in “Green Tea”. The other is given an unconvincing defence by an unknown editor that the reader is promised is less knowledgeable and exacting. Much of the detail of what happened is therefore inaccessible to the reader; they are made steadily aware that their view of the tale is characterised by missing details, questionable editorial choices, and wavering assurances of authenticity.

The tales of *In a Glass Darkly* thus work together to question the constructed lenses into which the reader views Le Fanu’s world. They do so in part by undermining the many intermediaries between the reader and the action of the tales, each one making the authority of an assemblage of narrators more and more uncertain. “Mr Justice Harbottle” in particular has a rather long list of intermediaries between the reader and historical events: the story is presented to the reader by the editor, who draws from papers collected by Dr. Hesselius. The papers contain Mr Harman’s account, primarily consisting of a letter written to Mr Harman by another man. The man learned about Harbottle through oral stories he heard as a child since the tale occurred decades before his birth. The story becomes an intersection between various perspectives on the event as well as intermediaries like Hesselius and the editor who frame the incident for the reader long after the fact. In this way, Le Fanu troubles Hesselius’ authority in the collection, but also the wider regimes of knowledge from which Hesselius benefits and to which he contributes.

Tomasz Sawczuk comments on the found manuscript trope, which Le Fanu uses in *In a Glass Darkly*, stating that, although the use of found manuscripts can lend veracity to the narration,

the narratives which employ the convention of the found manuscript embrace narrative fragmentation, a mode which relocates the narrative authority from the author to the reader. Doing so, fragmented texts undermine the notions of authorship and ownership [...] Of the works referred to it is perhaps *Frankenstein* which exhibits the most potent manifestation of authorial dispossession, that is, the Creature's coming upon Victor Frankenstein's diary [...] Confronted with the Creature's perspective, Victor's narrative discloses its own bias and loosens some of its control as an embedding structure. (227)

The editor's notes reveal the temporal distance between the account of "Mr Justice Harbottle" and the event itself. There is also uncertainty surrounding the Harman account in the same story as well as the many intermediaries between the historical events and the reader. Further, there are many events that reveal the biased perspective of Hesselius in "Green Tea". Together, these moments of potential unreliability are similar in effect to the "fragmented" and "conflicting narratives" Sawczuk discusses:

Such dynamics of conflicting narratives do not leave the reader unaffected. If every "Gothic Subject, the framer or finder of their respective tale, presses the tale to serve their own agenda" (Southward 53), then the reader is ultimately deprived of any claim to objective reality. As specified by Anolik, fragmentation

“clearly works to disrupt the reader’s hermeneutic possession of the text as meaning falls between the gaps of the fragments” (130). The epistemic impasse triggered by fragmented manuscripts further problematizes gaining access to the past. (228)

The apparent shortcomings of Hesselius and his documents act as revelatory moments for the reader. They destabilise “any claim to objective reality” by the perspective he occupies. The text therefore “loosens some of [Hesselius’] control as an embedding structure”, giving the reader reason to find alternate meaning in the narrator’s perspective which the reader, by reading the text, was asked to internalise. Relevant here is Wayne C. Booth’s influential discussion of unreliability:

All of the great uses of unreliable narration depend for their success on far more subtle effects than merely flattering the reader or making him work. Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. In the irony with which we are concerned, the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in

collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting. (304)

Revelatory moments in *In a Glass Darkly* function similarly to the unreliability Booth mentions here. Readers of *In a Glass Darkly* experience unreliability of a kind laid bare; they are presented with regimes of knowledge whose suitability they are prompted to assess as questionable. Readers can do so because these ways of knowing do not offer an ability "to negotiate the real constraints and affordances of [Le Fanu's] world" in the ways described previously (Hruby 57). However, the primary effects of tenuous narratorial frameworks in the collection are not the certitudes of "pleasure" or inclusion that come with the possession of a clear understanding of what is true. Readers can gain some "pleasure" from recognising the faults of Hesselius as a narrator. However, knowing what is objectively real is elusive in Le Fanu's world such that our own knowledge becomes uncertain, undermining the possibility of readers' sense of superiority and inclusion within some alternate, more objective way of seeing. Indeed, moments of possible unreliability take place within a tapestry of perceptions that form the means by which readers are asked to view Le Fanu's world. That Hesselius and his documents falter means that the communal viewpoint through which the reader examines Le Fanu's difficult-to-perceive world disturbingly unravels.

In contrast to Booth, David Stromberg advises against "prematurely [...] assigning blame either to a would-be unreliable narrator or to an inept author" and calls for a move away from the totalising term "unreliability". Stromberg instead proposes

examining “the doubt generated by a given narrator and the influence of this doubt on a reader’s narrative faith”, or the belief that the text has some relevance to the real world (72). Further, Stromberg argues that, “[b]y preserving the irreconcilabilities of a narrative, we may perceive more of the horizon of a literary work’s norms along with the tensions created by their conflicting interplay— tensions which, if naturalized, integrated or resolved, may limit a work’s interpretive horizons” (73). Stromberg advocates for avoiding designations of unreliability. To do so circumvents resolving seemingly conflicting textual meanings that allow for greater appreciation of “a work’s interpretive horizons”. While I do not focus here on conflicting textual meanings, I argue that Stromberg’s focus on the significance of tensions created by questionable narratorial practices is useful when considering Le Fanu’s late fiction. By understanding how Hesselius and the wider apparatus he upholds construct our own sight in Le Fanu’s world, rather than revelling in the pleasure of colluding with the author behind an unreliable narrator’s back, we can better reflect on the text’s relevance to our own ways of seeing.

By way of contrast, in *The Moonstone* (1868), readers are made to see individual narrators as unreliable based on their prejudices and hints that they deviate from objective fact, thus undermining their credibility. Meanwhile, the undermining of Hesselius and his editor bears consequences for the reading experience that go beyond undermining a narrator’s editorial interference. We can productively compare the narratorial uncertainty of *In a Glass Darkly* to the unreliability of narration in *Castle Rackrent* (1801) by Maria Edgeworth. Thady is a native Irish tenant narrating the fall of the Rackrent family of landlords. Thady’s obviously biased assessments of other

characters present various possibilities for understanding his actions: he could be representing events in a prejudiced manner, actively misrepresenting events, or telling the truth. One tension in *Castle Rackrent* lies in the level of trust one can place in the native Irish in the deteriorating, factional social context of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Ireland. Le Fanu, by contrast, uses inaccessible objectivity to reflect on received forms of knowledge. He prompts an examination of the communal lenses through which one is asked to understand a world in which objectivity remains elusive. Walton discusses how “vacancy” is “the ultimate setting for *all* [Le Fanu’s] tales of the supernatural and the uncanny, the emptiness that serves as *matrix* of the uncanny” (194). The vacant space Walton depicts further underlines Le Fanu’s world’s lack of objective certainty onto which characters and narrators attempt to forge coherent visions of reality that deteriorate before the readers’ eyes.

Stromberg articulates the process of examination we should take part in when encountering narrators like Hesselius:

When we keep in mind that the author, as the origin of aberrant textual signs, situates or retains them in the text deliberately, we as readers and critics can question whether and how this formal aberrance may be connected with a work’s thematic or ethical implications. The estranging devices, then, remain an integral part of the narrative’s normative and interpretive horizons. They are no less necessary to the dynamic of such a literary work than the bonding devices, and no less promoted by the (implied) author. What emerges is an authorial model

with two poles, one bonding and the other estranging, and an oscillation between them which provokes readers to ask questions. (70)

In effect, the reader may determine levels of unreliability on Hesselius' part that have an estranging effect, but I argue that estrangement becomes part of a wider reflection on the creation and propagation of wider regimes of social and material knowledge.

Victorian reviewers, as previously discussed, indicated the obscured nature of Le Fanu's world. With the addition of social constructionism, the modern reader is left to contend with a profound narrative tension. They are made aware of wider structural concerns about regimes of understanding and the extent to which they allow characters in Le Fanu's texts "to pursue a more fruitful and satisfying condition", as Hruby says, in a situation where all knowledge is on some level unreliable. Readers are thus simultaneously left with practical questions about particular ways of knowing as well as concerns over the ways in which all knowledge retains a level of what Booth would call unreliability. Stromberg's focus on the wider effects of our estrangement above and beyond reliability speaks to the social commentary present in the objectivity withheld from the reader's and narrators' experience of their world. Rather than allowing us to identify narratorial unreliability alone, the textual fragmentation in *In a Glass Darkly* forces us to reckon with our own constructed, communal ways of seeing, frequently directed in service of hegemony in a world where objective truth is obscured.

There is a similar destabilisation, though perhaps subtler, of the narrator's "control" in *Wylder's Hand*. There, the narrator presents his imaginings of what the world

of women is like as fact, affecting a similar “epistemic impasse”. In the novel, two young women, Rachel and Dorcas find themselves at various points under the malicious control of Rachel’s profligate brother. At times though, they are able to meet in private, away from patriarchal domination. During one of their rendezvous, Dorcas reveals her love for Rachel’s brother, stating he is the only man she would ever marry. Rachel argues that this marriage would be a disaster and the two are left in disagreement. However, at the end of the conversation, Rachel says, “I love you better, Dorcas, than I thought I ever could. Good-night, dear.’ [...] And the young ladies parted with a kiss, and then another” (Le Fanu, *Wylder’s Hand*). It appears that Rachel’s increase in affection, despite their conversation being primarily characterised by dispute, corresponds to Dorcas’ determination to marry as she sees fit. Their relationship seems partially rooted in a kind of resistance to the patriarchal forces that seek to determine their lives. It is a rebellion Rachel, for practical reasons, cannot always exert in her relationship with her domineering brother.

Dorcas reinforces the basis for their love in a separate, private conversation, where she states,

I said before, Rachel, that I liked you. You are one of us, Rachel [...] Death comes to other women in its accustomed way; but we have a double death [...] Early death of the frail and fair tenement of clay—but a still earlier death of happiness [...] Come, Rachel, shall we escape from the spell and the destiny into solitude? [...] It is not, Radie, altogether jest. I sometimes yearn for it, as they say foreign girls do for convent life (Le Fanu, *Wylder’s Hand*).

Again, their relationship is based in an opposition to the context in which they find themselves. Dorcas articulates, or seems to articulate, what this “happy valley” means to them: that it is constituted by an experience of the death of their happiness first and their bodies second, such that the best image of escape for Dorcas is to retire into solitude. In particular, she fantasises about going to the convents available to “foreign girls”, a fate often imagined as cruel imprisonment in Gothic narratives. Morin has argued that Ireland and England-set Gothic plots in early Irish Gothic texts

upset the current understanding of the Gothic novel's use of European settings as safely “foreign” locations for horror and thereby undermine readers' sense of the British nation as rational, modern, and resolutely secure from the atrocities resulting from Catholic Continental superstition, irrationality, and pre-modernity. (“Forgotten Fiction” 82-3)

In *Wylder's Hand*, Le Fanu upends those same conceptions that plague critical comprehensions of Gothic novels according to Morin. Here, Dorcas envisages Catholic continental practices not as foreign sites of horror, but as an evasion of domestic oppression, further emphasising the need for escape through this forceful reversal. In their private conversations Dorcas and Rachel stand apart from their reality and the “calamity” it represents for them, mirroring the convent and its homosocial bonds (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*). Indeed, their liking for one another flourishes in this mutual

disdain for the feminine experience of “calamity” and provides a critique of supposedly “rational, modern” Britain.

Through these moments of imagining an alternative to their masculinist shackles by confiding in one another, these women arguably undergo some of the “solitude” Dorcas envisages for them. They take part in a tragic, but necessary, fantasy of a better order that exists outside of their community’s paradigms which reify masculine control. In one meeting, Dorcas “caressingly smoothed the golden tresses over Rachel’s frank, white forehead, and kissed them as she did so”, asking while she does whether Rachel is “rested” now. Rachel assents and “kissed the slender hand that smoothed her hair” (Le Fanu, *Wylder’s Hand*). The narrator crafts this image of circular love, in which a hand caresses and is, in turn, kissed. Their bond is, for a period, self-sustaining, creating a space away from the world controlled by men where they instead act as equals and support one another.

Their temporary “solitude” is an illusion though because Rachel and Dorcas’ conversations, while presented as fact by the male narrator of the tale, are entirely in his control. The textual representations of their meetings are based on some source the narrator, Charles de Cresseron, never reveals and thus the narration is at a distance from these characters despite its apparent proximity. This is true of many Le Fanu narrators such as those in *The Tenants of Malory*, *Checkmate*, “A Strange Adventure in the Life of Miss Laura Mildmay”, and *Haunted Lives*, who affect a degree of omniscience despite referring to themselves in the first person and belying their all-knowing nature. Their omniscient posture does not hold up to their obviously limited, perspectival viewpoint. Especially notable in *Wylder’s Hand* are the implications this

faux omniscience holds for the agency of the tale's female characters. The narrator, Charles de Cresseron, is present in the Gylingden community during some of the plot, bearing witness to the general context in which the incidents of the novel happen, but is not actually present for many events in the narrative, especially not for these private encounters between Dorcas and Rachel. As Sage argues, Charles' position as narrator is often impossible in that he renders scenes in detail to which he simply cannot have had access. This facet of the narration draws the reader's attention to the fact that he was not there, pointing to a distinct problem of authority in the story (78).

Charles further brings his narratorial dominance into question in his account of the time he met Dorcas personally. Dorcas is imagined by the narrator as being quite impenetrable; he cannot adequately represent her without the intervention of feminine archetypes:

If Dorcas Brandon had been a plain woman, I think she would have been voted an impertinent bore; but she was so beautiful that she became an enigma. I looked at her as she stood gravely gazing from the window. Is it Lady Macbeth? No; she never would have had energy to plan her husband's career and manage that affair of Duncan. A sultana rather—sublimely egotistical, without reverence—a voluptuous and haughty embodiment of indifference (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*).

He attempts a totalising representation of her from a few different angles. He starts with her appearance alone, segueing to a Shakespearean lens that fails to produce a match

as she lacks “energy”. He finally arrives at a stereotypical, orientalist perspective: he compares her to a “sultana”, a female Islamic ruler, that might, in his eyes, capture her “haughty”, irreverent disposition. Each framework brings him further and further from Dorcas herself, even on a geographical level. He moves from her looks to drama, to what he considers a more apt image: an archetypal depiction of far-off female rulers. There is little assurance de Cresseron has much experience of sultanas, and thus this comparison is, like his portrayal of Dorcas' private conversations, an impression formed at a considerable remove. The passage functions as an acknowledgement of his own foundering representational efforts. The limits of his reporting abilities invite readers to question if his inadequacies are still in play during the private conversation scenes between Rachel and Dorcas. The two women are not just deprived of agency in the public account of events in which they are implicated. They are also potentially recorded as poor conjectures. Hesselius and de Cresseron reinforce traditional sources of authority in their engagement with readers. Hesselius does so in content when he verbally funnels what has happened into a clear account that upholds his own power to define the world around him. De Cresseron does so in form when he exerts totalising control over the voices of Dorcas and Rachel.

Our estrangement from the ways of seeing de Cresseron promotes invites a wider experience of questioning received knowledge. De Cresseron's actions as narrator play into the masculinist norms of the reality occupied by Le Fanu's characters. In rhetorically undermining the autonomy and voice of the vulnerable, as authority figures above do frequently, de Cresseron undermines his community's ability to form a holistic shared perspective, much as when Torvey denied the subjectivity of the

fisherman in “The Haunted Baronet”. By doing this, narrators might contribute further to their limited vision of the material and social that ignores vital perspectives and experiences of their surroundings. In neglecting or subsuming important viewpoints, they expose some of the weakness of the expulsion of alterity introduced in chapter one, further presenting the ways of seeing in which the reader is immersed as harmful. The greatest success of *Wylder’s Hand’s* narrator is ultimately not in becoming a more omniscient narrator, but instead in letting some of his restrictive representational power over Rachel and Dorcas go.

In the previous chapter, I described how *Wylder’s Hand’s* ending is one place where the reader has a clear indication of the distance between the narrative and the actual events that the narrator has formed into a coherent plot. The narrator explicitly acknowledges, for example, how he has gathered the fates of many of these characters from second-hand accounts. One first-hand account in the finale of the text is the narrator’s last glimpse of Dorcas and Rachel in Venice: “Unseen I saw Rachel and Dorcas, beautiful in the sad moonlight, passed so near we could have spoken—passed me like spirits—never more, it may be, to cross my sight in life” (Le Fanu, *Wylder’s Hand*). It is interesting that Charles does not represent what Rachel and Dorcas think or say. In this section of the novel, which most explicitly addresses the narrator’s limits, de Cresseron appears to release his control over these women. On their gondola, they float away from his representational ability and become “like spirits”, beyond the influence of de Cresseron or men like him.

De Cresseron, unlike Hesselius, releases his central characters, even in a limited way, from totalising narrative control, from his actions that reinscribe traditional sites of

power on his community. Gilmour contends that Romanticism had promoted the “concept of the woman as guarantor of the selfhood of the male” which independent women might upset (193). By bringing his own representational abilities into question, de Cresseron decentres his own authority as a generator of the legitimacy of his reality. He, in the conclusion of the tale at least, refuses to use these women as a “guarantor” of male “selfhood”, as objects to be acted on by virtue of and in service to his supremacy. The story highlights and provides an alternative to the often harmful obliteration of alterity committed by other narrators and visions of reality in Le Fanu’s fiction. De Cresseron thus somewhat deconstructs an established framework given to the reader for understanding Le Fanu’s world and gives a more wholistic, if less definite, way to contend with a world in which objectivity is shadowed.

Moments of narratorial revelation, to borrow again from Sawczuk, disclose a narrator’s “own bias”, undermining “notions of authorship and ownership” over the narrative. Le Fanu thus demonstrates a complex, realistic conception of how a collective account can be created in questionable ways in communities through written mass communication. Burr argues that deconstructionism is “an axiomatic example of social constructionism”. Further, “the way that discourses construct our experience can be examined by ‘deconstructing’ these texts, taking them apart and showing how they work to present us with a particular vision of the world, and thus enabling us to challenge it” (Burr 18). Through this theoretical lens, Le Fanu’s similar act of deconstruction becomes apparent. His narrators lay bare the shared language used to produce societal phenomena. They reveal that the vision of their surroundings they assemble is often harmful, self-serving, inadequate, and totalising in its representational principles. As Eve

Sedgwick contends, the Gothic often deals with complicated narration, revelling in the difficulty a story has of getting told (qtd. in Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 17). Le Fanu's manifestation of this Gothic trope undermines not just the veracity of the story itself, but also the certitude of the shared subjectivity that the story could otherwise help to maintain. He does so through narrators imparting collective conceptions to the reader, simulating existing within subjective, oppressive, apparently inadequate realities against a backdrop in which objectivity is largely impossible.

IV. The Price of Submission to Authority

Having cast doubt both upon the ability of various authority figures to uphold their realities and the adequacy of those realities, Le Fanu prompts the reader to also consider sociopolitical and scientific frameworks from the perspective of the vulnerable. The processes by which dominance is granted to or withheld from individuals are especially brought into question through Le Fanu's focus on women and girls. Readers are asked to question what women and girls, as well as the vulnerable more broadly, gain from submission to masculine supremacy. That this question often lacks a satisfying answer, due to the dangers brought on by reigning paradigms, further undermines these communities' shared conceptions of the world. Le Fanu thus emphasises the damaging oppression the vulnerable must endure in the sometimes false promise of forging a coherent, shared subjectivity. Further, Le Fanu shows that the flawed paradigms that harm the vulnerable create openings for invasions by alternate realities.

Early in *Uncle Silas*, before she is sent to live with her murderous uncle, Maud lives on her father's estate. The household is brought into a mild state of chaos by a scream. The women of the house are frightened, believing someone is murdering Maud's father. Bumbling men come to the rescue, "shouting as they did so— Never mind; hold on a bit; here we are; all right;' and the like". In a strange moment, the women draw back when the men come in. They are in their night clothes and, as Maud states, "[w]e were in no condition to be seen" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 110). Even in this situation that they presume to be life or death, they must accede to gendered norms of behaviour. They comply with a framework that places the men of the estate as protectors. However, the latter group does not project an image of certainty, of heroism that might protect these women. Instead, in a scene marked by danger, that is otherwise depicted in a heightened emotional register, Le Fanu represents the men as disorganised and comical. They create a cacophony of meaningless sound, further underscored in its meaninglessness by Maud's own addition: "and the like". In a novel about murderous, evil men, even some of those protecting women rather than victimising them appear incapable of performing their social function. McCormack argues that "[a] society which was patriarchal, hierarchical, and, ultimately, justified by God the Father, depended at every level on the supremacy and potency of the male" and that Le Fanu resists this supremacy (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 244). Here, Le Fanu accomplishes resistance by subtly undermining the expectations of men and masculinity in the Victorian era, illustrated earlier by Lewis. While many authority figures previously discussed similarly undermine masculine dominance, here Le Fanu especially undermines the authority endowed to

men specifically so that they can defend women. To contribute to this “happy valley”, women must submit their agency on the grounds that their masculine leaders will protect them. At the scene of Maud’s father’s death, the women must hide themselves away, even in this potentially dangerous event, to cater to prevailing regimes of feminine decency. In return, they receive the services of, in Maud’s recollection, bumbling, confused men rather than confident saviours. This moment interrogates the basis of such a bargain. It also questions the realities that enable the inadequate masculine power on which authority is founded in these works.

Further, the same masculinist structure of strength that removes Maud’s agency makes it difficult to distinguish who is evil, who is useful, and who is simply incapable of providing help. Because women and especially young girls like Maud must step aside and let men take the lead, they have an often-limited view of the events transpiring. In *Uncle Silas*, the mysteries of the novel are often caused by a limited feminine viewpoint. The reader is placed in Maud’s perspective. From her frame of reference, it is difficult to know who means her harm, often until they attempt that harm. Doctor Bryerly is a good example. He is a Swedenborgian who visits Maud and gives her a long lecture on Swedenborgian metaphysics that she, at her young age, is not at all suited to understand. So, while Bryerly ultimately means no harm to Maud, his moral character is a mystery to her and to the reader. The novel seeds her uncertainty about Bryerly from the start of their relationship. Upon meeting Maud, Bryerly acts dismissively towards her as she is a child. She immediately starts to suspect ill intent because she has not been given the information to interpret him differently:

I remember so well the kind of shock and disgust I felt in the certainty that I had surprised them at some, perhaps, debasing incantation [...] and a sort of fear came upon me, and I fancied he was asserting some kind of mastery over my father, which very much alarmed me. (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 4-5)

Like Maud, readers are left to wonder at his motives because they have little information about Bryerly. He might mean harm, substantiating Maud's first impression that he is "asserting" a sorcerer-like "mastery over [her] father". Still, he might be yet another incompetent. Maud is ultimately forced to be vulnerable here because she, as a girl, is dismissed by Bryerly. She is not allowed to gain a fuller picture of the situation before her. Readers are made to experience that helplessness alongside her as they read her first-person narration and encounter that same uncertainty about this authority figure. Hung-Jung Lee has argued that Le Fanu's story "Carmilla" expresses a fear that divisions between concepts like men and women, civilised and primitive, moral and corrupt, would "break down" (qtd. in Costello-Sullivan xix). The crossing of such barriers is a cause for dread in these texts, as I will contend in the next chapter. There, I will depict the horror communities experience as their sense of what is real and unreal deteriorates. However, Le Fanu also demonstrates here how divisions between men and women can manifest as or at least highlight points of weakness in their shared subjectivities. Backus states that solidifying an innocent vision of childhood in the eighteenth century made girls more vulnerable to emotional and sexual exploitation within and outside the family (57). Similarly, Maud, living as she does in a patriarchal

context, demonstrates that young girls are left vulnerable by not being allowed a clear perception of their situations. Like eighteenth-century girls, they are therefore made more vulnerable to the men around them. Forced ignorance also occurs in other Le Fanu stories like *Haunted Lives*, a novel in which a girl lives apart from society. She is consistently told by the men around her, including a paramour named Dacre, who she can and cannot trust and what she must do. As a result, she is unable to determine that Dacre is actually a man supposedly locked in jail, who seeks revenge on her. Her perspective on the world around her is so limited that men, including her adversary, can harmfully control her vision of that world. Her lack of power and agency leaves her at terrible risk to men like Dacre.

It is important to note that many of Le Fanu's stories, especially his later ones, have female narrators. Stories such as *Willing to Die*, *Uncle Silas*, and "Carmilla" offer readers a distinctly different viewpoint from male narrators, though "Carmilla" is a story mediated by a presumably male editor. Reports from girls are often first-person accounts where their inability to fully perceive the world around them is a key feature of the narration. Relevant here is the way Maud in *Uncle Silas* has such a limited perspective of what is going on around her. At times, she is even unaware of where she is, as the boundaries of space and time become distorted for her in her isolation, much as her impression of those around her is clouded. She highlights the fact that girls are generally not authority figures in the same way male narrators like de Cresseron are, who affect a kind of omnipotence. And yet, her limited understanding of the space she occupies reveals the inherent limitations of Le Fanu's narrators more broadly. Each narrator forms the lens through which the reader and their fictional contemporaries

examine the events that have occurred. However, any attempts to do so in an omniscient manner are undermined by their inherently undependable perception, as emphasised by these female narrators who underline the perspectival nature of all narration in Le Fanu's setting. Female narrators further cast doubt on the validity of the domineering omniscience Le Fanu's male narrators often claim, further undermining the male authority figures who largely control women and girls.

In "Carmilla", the division between men and women also breeds a lack of cohesion between those who are ostensibly meant to uphold the same shared perspective. Instead, as discussed in the previous chapter, Laura's father denies Carmilla's supernaturalism. In doing so, he becomes as inexplicable as the strange manifestations of Carmilla's vampiric nature. Not only does her father's denial of the vampire put her in physical danger, but her father's control and how he wields it also pushes Laura away from identification with him. While her kinship with Carmilla grows, her father becomes stranger as Laura starts to react with "surprise" to her father's denial of the strange happenings around them (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 272). The shared subjectivity Laura and her father are meant to be living in therefore fragments somewhat. Meanwhile, she recognises the "beauty" in the "peculiar", "graceful languor" of Carmilla (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 287). Laura is here pushed away from her father and towards Carmilla because she has far less control of her reality than her father: her own experience starts to diverge from the reality her father maintains because she has little power to shape that reality to better reflect the events around her. Thus, her father's control is forced on her as a girl but starts to lose its cogency. And yet, this

assumed, damaging masculine dominance is continually reified, even in “Carmilla”’s ostensibly happy ending where the vampire is executed.

Within perpetuated systems of masculine agency and feminine victimisation, of the kind seen in “Carmilla”, women like *The Tenants of Malory*’s Margaret are left bereft of hope: she is romantically pursued by one of the chief point-of-view characters, Cleve, who then mostly abandons her once they are married. In the novel, Margaret is controlled by her domineering father. His control continues until she marries Cleve, at which point he exerts control over her. She elopes with Cleve in defiance of an oppressive familial legacy, but then dies under her husband’s dominating position. This position allows him to exert control over her and hide her away as his marriage to her becomes inconvenient for him. For example, Cleve swears a doctor to secrecy when Margaret gives birth to a son, keeping their marriage secret and Margaret out of sight (Le Fanu, *Tenants of Malory* V3 32-3). When Margaret dies, hers is not the noble sacrifice of Quincy in *Dracula* which helps the heroes defeat the subversive vampiric menace and restore paradigms of modernity and safety, though her death does help to moderate her avaricious husband. Rather, her fate is, in key ways, a function of the very kind of reality that is reinscribed on the novel’s community by the end of the narrative, even if her situation is affected by socially unacceptable actions. The shared subjectivity to which she must bow ensures her identity and fate can be written for her by men who are granted the strength to act on her whether they mean to bolster or thwart the community’s norms.

Maud from *Uncle Silas* provides a similar case because of how different kinds of authority are arrayed against her, allowing competing leaders to use her as a weapon to

ensure their own primacy by controlling the hereditary value inscribed on her body. Two men in her life exercise such dominance: her father, who uses it in ways disastrous to his daughter, and her uncle, who maliciously exerts his control over her because he can easily hide his intentions. Le Fanu's focus on heredity and women's bodies is part of a long tradition of female disempowerment in Gothic texts. Mulvey-Roberts argues that, "[w]ithin the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, female powerlessness is epitomised by ways in which the property and inheritance rights of the Gothic heroine could be seized by control of her body, whether through marriage, domestic violence or imprisonment" (108). In *Uncle Silas* and other Le Fanu fictions, women's bodies are similarly mobile signifiers of "property and inheritance rights". Silas' socially granted supremacy almost enables him to gain the hereditary property that is inscribed on her body. In particular, Maud's victimisation is enabled because she is meant to preserve hereditary legitimacy. She is formulated by her father as a sacrifice to help rehabilitate her uncle's reputation. Her father coerces her into the scheme by speaking vaguely to her about duty to the family:

I think little Maud would like to contribute to the restitution of her family name. It may cost you something—are you willing to buy it at a sacrifice? Is there—I don't speak of fortune, that is not involved—but is there any other honourable sacrifice you would shrink from to dispel the disgrace under which our most ancient and honourable name must otherwise continue to languish? (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 103)

Her father asks a leading question about whether she would make any “sacrifice” to save her family from their present “disgrace”. She is coerced into saying yes, with very little concrete information to contextualise that choice. As discussed in chapter one, she is effectively given to her uncle Silas in an attempt to preserve familial authority as it is girls’ place to be acted on in service of their reality. Submitting to that overriding goal, having been given little information about the situation she is being thrust into, enables her abuse by Silas. Maud is then imprisoned by her uncle. All the while, he attempts behind the scenes to marry her to his profligate son and then to kill her to gain the capital that, through inheritance rights, she embodies.

Maud’s legal situation allows this designation of her body as a vehicle for social and hereditary legitimacy, inviting and enabling her control and exploitation by men, both those who are subversive and those who are not. Maud’s tale is illustrative of the dark side of becoming a tool by which leaders reproduce a masculinist vision of social order. Punter describes how the Gothic is often a chance to illustrate the feelings of those caught in systems that seem more and more abstract, namely the capitalist economy (112). Davison similarly contends that the female Gothic provides a sense of living under oppressive systems, but through “gender-aware commentary on modern institutions” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (86). However, the term female Gothic has received criticism. Killeen, for example, demonstrates the extensive undermining of the gender essentialism of the term female Gothic by critics such as EJ Clery (Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 173). Indeed, proto-feminist elements of the female Gothic need not be just attributed to female authors. We can, for example, identify the ways in which Le Fanu himself often achieves a similar proto-

feminist critique about the oppression of systems Davison identifies in earlier fiction. The horror of being caught within abstract, patriarchal systems and being divested of power applies to the situation in which Maud finds herself in *Uncle Silas*. The novel articulates the way constructed legal and aristocratic authority structures harm the vulnerable who are asked to submit to those structures in pursuit of maintaining hegemony. Doing so might alienate those vulnerable people as occurs in “Carmilla”.

Although girls are often figured as guarantors of reproducing masculine reality, as discussed previously, their position as such can be turned against reigning power structures. Subversive presences can use girls to undermine the aristocratic schema of their society as Silas attempted to do. The potential for hereditary paradigms to inflict harm, through girls, on a community reflects fears about inheritance articulated in Gothic fiction. Mighall identifies the trope of ancestral curses haunting the present through a familial line in a kind of hereditary pathology as reflective of contemporary thinking on “hereditary taint”, a trope lessened with the advent of sensation fiction but not abandoned (79-103, 128-9). Le Fanu weaponises such hereditary anxieties in service of critiquing the harms of patriarchal systems.

Le Fanu’s *Checkmate* illustrates that hereditary frameworks of power become a weak point for their reality in times of potential, radical change to accepted paradigms. A focus on heredity and primogeniture can benefit subversive figures who decide to prey on vulnerable girls. In the novel, the ignoble Longcluse is able to manipulate and entrap Richard Arden. The former thus becomes the latter’s puppet master. Longcluse presses his advantage by telling Richard’s sister Alice that she must marry him: “Longcluse had spoken with the resolution that a few sharp and short words should accomplish the

crisis, and show her plainly that her brother was, in the most literal and terrible sense, in his control, and thus, indirectly, she also” (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 356). The villain effectively inserts himself into this family by the assertion of “his power” over Richard. Were Longcluse to have succeeded, this marriage could have had lasting repercussions, presumably producing children. Longcluse would become a permanent fixture of the Arden family line, in a sense corrupting the inheritance of legitimacy through reproduction. Before, Alice may have been able to marry a husband deemed acceptable by her brother and the community and produce children for him. She might raise them by occupying her designated place as facilitator of the domestic sphere and passing legitimacy along conventional pathways. Because those same structures make her vulnerable to men, she was almost destined to transmit her legitimacy and biological reproduction to this disruptive figure, thus playing into Gothic hereditary anxieties.

Similarly, Laura in “Carmilla” is ostensibly a force for the continuance of her own reality, bearing the potential to have children who might be reared in the same worldview in which she has been brought up. However, Laura could also give into her attraction, become a vampire, and use her generative possibilities to contribute to the vampiric alternative that violates the paradigms in which she has been brought up. Girls are made vulnerable yet have a crucial place within the hereditary reproduction of reality. As a result, they become a site of vulnerability for their society when that reproductive power is threatened. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the British state colonised female bodies to serve ideological and social production (Backus 61-2). Texts such as *Checkmate* and “Carmilla” bear resonances of actual exploitation, but also demonstrate the dangers therein both to girls and to the communities that enforce

feminine oppression. Backus reads “Carmilla” as an examination of the “strong agony” associated with the production of Anglo-Irish heteronormativity (Backus 133). While the previous chapter demonstrated the ways in which girls are acted on to maintain hegemony, Le Fanu here demonstrates the flipside of that exploitation. He showcases the destructive might vulnerable girls can have forced on them in the case of Alice or possibly wield in the case of Laura from the restrictive, yet powerful social position constructed for them.

Le Fanu may be reflecting contemporary masculine dread. Killeen writes that nineteenth-century writing took place within a period of fear over a gynocentric future. Such fear emerged, especially in the latter half of the century, in the face of various socio-political developments such as “the increasing bureaucratisation of men’s work, the disappearance of the need for muscular power, the rise of the woman’s movement and a growing sense of sexual ambivalence invading the land (which reached its climax in the trial of Oscar Wilde)” (Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 146). Le Fanu, in places, enacts literary defensive manoeuvres in the face of such gynaecological fear. The titular “Carmilla” threatens to reproduce vampirically by biting Laura, cutting men out of the act of reproduction, and she must therefore be killed. Additionally, Lady Vernon from *The Rose and Key* is a powerful, evil, matriarchal authority figure who must be deposed. After her death, we are left with a scene of general bliss among many characters: “Vivian and Ethel are as happy as any two people, except perhaps Charles Marston, now Lord Warhampton, and his affectionate and beautiful young wife [Maud], can be” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 310). The scene emphasises the profound happiness of these four characters and therefore contrasts sharply with Lady Vernon’s

reign, which had resulted in her daughter's incarceration in a mental asylum. In her place are left more beneficent, moderate, masculine rulers like Charles Marston and a heterosexual marriage between Maud and Charles that can replace sexual ambivalence and female power. However, as discussed in the last chapter, we must remember that Le Fanu mirrors the control exerted in the asylum with integration into patriarchal communities of the kind maintained at the end of *The Rose and Key*. Women are subjected to and made to uphold the paradigms that oppress them. Le Fanu invites readers to empathise with women, like Alice and Laura, who live under restrictive paradigms that seem designed to prevent any kind of gynocentric future and subvert them to existing schemes of inheritance and primogeniture. Readers are thus invited to sympathise with female characters' harmful lack of social strength as well as the experience of constraints that hurt them and make them vulnerable to preserve masculinist hegemony. Readers simultaneously experience how patriarchal shackles often facilitate the invasions of destabilising figures like Carmilla or Longcluse who threaten communities.

Further, by illustrating the plight of the vulnerable, Le Fanu evokes the limitations of hegemonic, Victorian values as universal and attainable. In *The Tenants of Malory* for example, one of the enablers of Mr Dingwell, secretly the rightful heir to the Verney estate, is Sarah Rumble, a poor woman whose job it is to care for the properties of the lawyers who house Mr Dingwell. When faced with morally dubious requests, she simply "courtesied [sic] affirmatively" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V2 77). She has little option in the matter: her destitute situation means she cannot risk losing her job and must politely defer to the ignoble characters who keep her fed. The schemes of social

action for the poor in *The Tenants of Malory* seem to be formed less by rigid norms than a need to survive. Due to being made vulnerable by her poverty, Rumble is unable to fully uphold the paradigms of the wider community. The morality of a man like Lord Verney, who can cast aside villains like Larkin even at great personal expense, is not always available to Rumble:

Sarah Rumble vowed secretly to reconsider the religious propriety of harbouring this old man; and amid these qualms, it was with something of fear and anger that, in a silence between the peals of the now subsiding storm, she heard the creak of his shoe upon the stair. (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 114)

Rumble loses the ability to serve dominant paradigmatic configurations because, like many of the nineteenth century Irish poor, her poverty divests her of much agency. During Le Fanu's life, the poor in Ireland were often quite literally restricted within the workhouse. Chris Gilleard discusses the plight of Irish paupers, those requiring government assistance. Gilleard draws from Frederick Purdy's figures stating, "in 1863, only 12 per cent of registered paupers received indoor relief in England, 8 per cent in Wales and 7 per cent in Scotland. In Ireland, the figure was 97 per cent. For every outdoor Irish pauper, there were some 40 in the workhouse" (1173). The Irish poor in particular found their agency circumscribed by an unusually frequent reliance on indoor aid, often that of the workhouse. Rumble's own poverty forces her to give up her agency: she can only vow "secretly to reconsider the religious propriety of harbouring"

Dingwell, but cannot enact this reconsideration in anything but secretive, non-practical terms. Her vulnerability results in a powerful external control over her and her actions, much as was the case more widely for the poor in Ireland. Le Fanu therefore undermines the universality of Victorian middle-class ideals to which the vulnerable are asked to submit, such as the importance of self-mastery, self-determination, and independence, or at least dependence on a virtuous man. They are simply not available to Rumble, and she must serve Dingwell, a destabilising force.

In *The Tenants of Malory*, the vulnerable thus become a point at which otherworldly ideas and subversive persons can begin to enter into and exert control over a community. Mighall asserts that Gothic fiction began to see atavism closer and closer to the imperial centre in the nineteenth century such that even parts of London might appear to be of a different time (xviii). In Rumble's case, Le Fanu does not seem to be articulating the poor as particularly atavistic. Rumble has not devolved so much as she has become a point at which the boundaries of one common perspective become blurred. The concern over the wider effects of impoverished people and locations was characteristic of a wider Victorian fear surrounding the deleterious effects of impoverished areas, as discussed by Jamieson Ridenhour:

Although London also contained areas of prosperity and wealth, cultural, spiritual, and scientific vanguards that assisted in solidifying the metropolis's status as first among cities, the public's concern with (and fear of) the depressed conditions of impoverished districts and their negative by-products spawned the

urban Gothic novel as well as the Gothic-styled journalism practiced by W. T. Stead and writers like him. (27)

In *The Tenants of Malory*, the lack of agency given to Rumble as one of her society's neglected populations makes her party to subversive acts. The ways in which neglected, impoverished areas of the metropolis might create "negative by-products" are shown to be a consequence of an inadequate social contract in *The Tenants of Malory*. Calvin W. Keogh indicates a similar danger to hegemonic social structures in *Dracula*:

The legitimacy of British hegemony is revealed to have a discursive, as opposed to essential, basis as the Count presents his collection of English maps and manuals, which, even as the solicitor's journal falters in the face of his discoveries, are soon to be redeployed as the instruments of a retributive reverse colonization. (203)

The emblems and inventions of a modern Victorian society become tools of its possible destruction by a vampiric menace. A self-inflicted doom becomes all the more intense when connected to the forces that attempt to establish collaborative conceptions of the world in Le Fanu's late fiction. Through failing to care for the vulnerable in *The Tenants of Malory* and "Carmilla" or give them significant agency in the forging of realities, societies leave the tools of their own destruction at a future enemy's feet.

The vision of a corrupt, self-destructive reality harmonises with contemporary concerns about the Anglo-Irish. Marjorie Howes argues that, “[b]ecause of their hybrid cultural status and tenuous political position, the Protestant Ascendancy imagined an Anglo-Irish tradition that was legitimating and empowering, but simultaneously broken, betrayed, and corrupt” (165). Empowerment and legitimacy had been subverted and, as the previous chapter stated, the validity of authority was ambiguous. The arc of history bent away from Ascendancy hegemony. In Le Fanu’s tales, the reader feels the forces of change at the periphery. These are forces like the ghostly menace at the heart of Golden Friars in “The Haunted Baronet”, or the demonic monkey that challenges established knowledge and individual liberty in “Green Tea”. There is also Antomarchi who threatens to sustain his own regimes of vice and avarice in *The Rose and Key*. They commandeer individuals away from more conventional frameworks. The maintenance of communal conceptions of the world are often aimed at and fail to establish a “happy valley” with a clear boundary between the real and the unreal. The authority structures present in Le Fanu’s late fiction therefore often operate in a precarious situation. In contending with precarity, they oppress the vulnerable and fail to maintain realities that offer their compatriots and the readers frameworks for effectively understanding and living in Le Fanu’s settings. The inadequacies of the fictional realities in Le Fanu’s texts, discussed in this chapter, thus threaten to empower the invasions of the disruptive ghosts and criminals who populate his invented world.

Chapter 3: Reality Under Attack

In the previous chapters, I discussed how the edifices of shared subjectivities are steadily constructed. I also contended that they are problematically reified within many of the fictional communities in Le Fanu's late fiction. Readers are simultaneously alerted to shadowy forces at the fringes who are partially or totally outside conventional social and material paradigms. The act of an Individual slipping away from a reality is usually prompted by those increasingly powerful disruptors. Disruptors are unreal figures who exist apart from a community's sociopolitical and scientific paradigms and disrupt their maintenance. As I will discuss over the next two chapters, those who oppose social and material rules of a reality, like vampires, lawbreakers, and ghosts, start to make their presence more and more apparent. These figures, by opposing a reality, are on some level unreal. The unreal is made all the more dangerous because it exposes many of the faults identified in the last chapter and often takes advantage of them.

According to Milbank, the grotesque monsters of Le Fanu's fiction act as mirror images of their self-alienated prey, creating a grotesque, hybrid image. The supernatural becomes stronger than the everyday in these stories, steadily collapsing the integrity of characters' identities. Milbank contends that, as "the world of daily life is drained of meaning by the stronger reality of the supernatural", hybrid grotesquery "gives way to accommodation" of the monster on the part of the afflicted. When the boundary between the natural and unnatural is thus lost, so is the will to live (367). Milbank articulates a dynamic by which the unreal gradually triumphs over the individual. As a contemporary review of *Uncle Silas* in *The Saturday Review* indicates,

even readers of Le Fanu's time recognised a kind of ungovernable, increasingly powerful unreality evoked in Le Fanu's imagined landscapes:

He is always darkening the stage, and turning on the lime light. Seen through this ghostly medium, all the characters, from the principals to the merest supernumerary, appear more or less weird or unearthly. Mr. Le Fanu depicts a state of society utterly at variance with the prosaic experience of every-day life. The English country-house becomes a veritable Castle of Otranto. (qtd. in Showers 10)

This reviewer demonstrates that, within Le Fanu's fiction, that which appears "ghostly" and "unearthly" starts to dominate, indicating a less individualised version of Milbank's dynamic of boundary violation. As Killeen summarises, the Irish Gothic depicts atavistic elements that rupture the present and end the future, disrupting the triumph of the modern (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 113). As shown in the previous two chapters, communities often struggle to accommodate the unreal into their conceptions of the space they occupy or defeat the unreal. As this chapter contends, the disruptors that Le Fanu's characters encounter threaten to destabilise collective subjectivities before the reader's eyes.

I will discuss the activities of disruptors with reference to "The Haunted Baronet", *In a Glass Darkly*, "The Child that Went with the Fairies", *Wylder's Hand*, *Checkmate*, *The Tenants of Malory*, *Guy Deverell*, "The Bird of Passage", *Uncle Silas*, and *The*

Rose and Key. The confrontation with these terrifying presences in Le Fanu's fiction offers the possibility that a person, even the reader, can be unsettled from conventional frameworks that become disrupted. That disruption is performed by subversive characters who can be supernatural or non-supernatural and who often represent alternate realities. It is here that the reader encounters the ultimate horror, and perhaps even liberatory power, of Le Fanu's fiction. Amid flawed attempts to maintain power structures and offer certainty, the unreal attacks and thwarts the inadequate status quo in Le Fanu's texts for both characters and readers. Individuals can then be drawn from their reality into incoherence and often towards another reality.

I. Disruptors

Renée Fox discusses how "Carmilla" is a story of collapsing and reconfiguring binary oppositions in Irish class politics. Fox does this "[b]y critically entwining" female homosexuality, Anglo-Irish anxiety, and "intricate narrative uncertainty", through which readers are invited to feel "uncertainty" about the conservative Anglo-Irish Gothic tradition. Easy distinctions between Carmilla and Laura, and therefore any "binary allegory of feudal Catholicism rising to crush the beleaguered Protestants", collapse because of the characters' mutual attractions, dreams, and appreciation of beauty ("Politics of Indistinguishability" 115). In Fox's account, Carmilla's attack involves a deterioration of clear boundaries via Carmilla's vampiric seduction. She is enabled by the self-assured, condescending vision of gender relations held by Laura's father which Signorotti calls a "manly protectiveness". His "manly protectiveness" allows Carmilla's companions to trick him into letting Carmilla stay (616). She is also assisted by the fact

that she is attacking a girl. Girls occupy a social position that is distinctly vulnerable, as described in previous chapters. Through these pathways, Carmilla is allowed to stay on the estate, attract Laura, and feed on her, thus encountering and destabilising the more conventional rules of the schloss where Laura lives. Sage indicates that Carmilla disturbs boundaries by presenting her memories and mannerisms as a kind of mirror to Laura's own experience. Laura actually met Carmilla when she was very young. Carmilla states that she too met Laura years ago in a dream. According to Sage, Carmilla does so to engage in a kind of "epistemic mesmerism". She thus takes possession of Laura's reality by laying claim to her memories, making Laura collude "in the process of converting her own past, her own memory, into 'dream', [...] a representation of itself" (182-6). Sage insightfully points out that Carmilla subverts narratives. She controls the ability of community members to narrate their own story.

Fox's analysis is useful here because she contends that "Carmilla" is a story of collapsing boundaries through the encounter with alterity in the form of Carmilla. Meanwhile, Sage is helpful because he depicts how the contact between the unreal and the real, begotten in these spaces at which a subjective perspective is invaded, can result in one character laying hold of another's narration. If these insights are placed within a wider process of paradigm maintenance, Carmilla appears to disrupt that operation. The control she exerts over Laura's perception, as described by Sage, speaks to Carmilla's destabilisation of Laura's supposedly coherent scheme of knowledge and action, collapsing boundaries constructed by the process of reality creation. Indeed, when Carmilla falls into one of her strange, amorous humours, Laura says she "was gazing on me with eyes from which all fire, all meaning had flown, and a

face colourless and apathetic” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 274). Carmilla had become so strange as to become, to borrow Michael Davis’ phrase, “not translatable” (227). Carmilla disturbs Laura’s reality’s efforts to translate events that might harm their collective rules; Laura cannot categorise meaning in Carmilla’s face anymore. Laura’s original outlook is contradicted too by the ways in which Carmilla’s very presence as a vampire flouts it: she is an unreal monster. The confirmation of her existence is a threat to the modern, English ways of seeing that Laura’s father tries to maintain for Laura when he routinely downplays supernatural possibilities.

Similar presences in Le Fanu’s fiction, such as the ghosts in “The Haunted Baronet” who will be discussed presently, are unable to be contained within existing socio-political and material frameworks. They therefore might damage the constructed, restrictive rules of Le Fanu’s fictional communities. Walton gestures towards some of these figures by arguing that,

[b]eginning with *The House by the Churchyard* (1863) Le Fanu produced a series of novels in which the attributes of master and protégé, mastermind and outlaw, are embodied in separate characters or united in one without recourse (except metaphoric) to the supernatural. This character is an impostor (or forger), a plotter *within* Le Fanu’s plot, a demonic agent whose schemes, for good or ill, disrupt the inertia of the little world in which he is placed and demonstrate the fragility of the structures of belief and practice upon which that world is founded. In response to the fiction of historical continuity and moral community, he offers an *opposing* fiction. To Georg Lukacs, such a ‘demonic’ presence was essential

to the 'psychology' of the novel, or 'epic of a world that has been abandoned by God' (*Theory of the Novel* 88). The opposing, or demonic, version of reality rather supplements than repudiates the communal one. (96)

Rather than engaging with fictional character types within the wider ideology of novels as Walton does, I look to the societal implications of "opposing, or demonic" characters. They oppose a "communal" "version of reality" and thus repudiate, rather than supplement, "communal" conceptions in Le Fanu's late fiction. These subversives, such as Carmilla, often find themselves in situations amenable to asserting a kind of reverse power, unravelling rather than maintaining the processes by which reality is upheld. In threatening "structures of belief and practice" in such situations, these subversives can corrode key paradigms.

Supernatural presences thwart the social and material frameworks of the citizens of Golden Friars and the narrator in "The Haunted Baronet". Phillip Feltram has been pulled underwater by a mysterious hand and drowns but revives to the surprise of his fiscally challenged tormentor Sir Bale. Feltram is changed into a mysterious, possibly possessed, supernatural presence. He transports Bale to a ghostly, supposedly "gypsy"² fortune teller and her handler who give him predictions about which horses will win in the local races (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 118). Bale's financial success or failure should be, within his economic system, subject to chance, his own efforts, the

² Le Fanu's language here is imprecise and relies on terminology that is understandably offensive to many. Le Fanu does not specify the specific cultural community to which he refers using this term, making its replacement with a more culturally precise term difficult. I have opted to use Le Fanu's terminology in quotations to distinguish the verbiage he uses from my own words and intentions.

economic market, or some combination of these factors accepted as admissible by his community. Instead, his financial wellbeing, a crucial part of maintaining his authority as baronet, is controlled by ghostly, unobservable phenomena. When they decide he should lose, he loses £20,000 and, as a result, his “Mardykes estate was in imminent danger” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 129). When he wins by their betting recommendations, his estate is saved and this “left his affairs in a much more manageable state” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 143). That which those in Golden Friars would officially deem unreal holds profound influence on the finances and property holdings of a powerful community member, undermining their power structures and material understanding.

We can see these ghostly figures’ unreality laid bare when Sir Bale crosses a mystical lake to meet the female “gypsy” fortune teller, draped in black clothing. There, Bale meets the otherworldly man who manages the fortune teller’s finances. Bale’s whole journey is inflected by a kind of mysticism: he must, for example, gaze upon a stone from which a ghostly hand and a mystical “mark” emerge. Feltram tells Sir Bale,

look only on that black blurred mark, and from the point where you stand [...] look to the forest. Take some tree or other landmark for an object, enter the forest there, and pursue the same line [...] until you find little flowers [...] such as you have not seen before [...] and follow wherever they seem to grow thickest, and there you will find him. (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 135)

Bale navigates to the fortune teller by supernatural intervention and natural features “such as [Bale has] not seen before”, leading further into the forest, the place where the surroundings Bale is used to are profoundly obscured by the unfamiliar. Later, when he returns to this area, maps do not seem to avail him: his map gets lost and, during a companion’s attempt to find it, Bale apparently experiences a ghostly visitation. Bale’s companion returns to find him changed, having become “gloomy as a man about to glide under traitor’s-gate”, after which Bale accurately proclaims that he will soon die (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 169). Maps, the tool Bale’s reality provides for navigation, fail to contribute direction or protection in this place. There is a distinct sense of crossing from one realm to another, where geography cannot be measured by conventional means, where one can interact with unknown forces, and where supernatural modes of knowledge reign, which is reinforced when Bale finds this financier

dressed in a bottle-green cut-velvet coat, of the style of Queen Anne’s reign, with a dusky crimson waistcoat [...] This ill-favoured old fellow, with a powdered wig that came down to his shoulders, had a dice-box in each hand, and was apparently playing his left against his right, and calling the throws with a hoarse cawing voice. (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 137)

The figure is, from Bale’s perspective, and that of the narrator, completely perplexing. The financier seems temporally out-of-place due to his style of clothing. Further, his attire does not match his dense, forest surroundings. His voice is inhuman and bird-like.

He strangely plays dice against himself, and he is generally unaccountable from the constructed viewpoint through which readers examine him. And this is all before readers see any supernatural fortune-telling performed. The financier also displays little regard for Sir Bale's authority. Bale is a baronet; yet their conversation is one of condescension and threatened hostility from this ghostly man to him rather than the reverse. He threatens to, for example, "set [his] black dogs after" Bale (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 139). Sir Bale cannot fully comprehend him, and the financier does not function within the configurations of Bale's society.

There are some troublesome considerations to take into account when assigning an identity to the fortune teller and financier. Perhaps Feltram was lying about who they are, or the narrator was misinformed about the "gypsy" identity he ascribes to this fortune teller. The financier's outdated clothing actually matches those depicted in a portrait of an ancestor of Feltram's which Sir Bale had once seen: the man in the picture "wore short black-velvet breeches with stockings rolled over them, a bottle-green coat of cut velvet and a crimson waistcoat with long flaps" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 157), matching the financier's "bottle-green cut-velvet coat" and "dusky crimson waistcoat". Perhaps this figure could be a ghost seeking vengeance for the Feltram family. The disparate supernatural presences in the tale could all be Feltram spirits who try to gain power over Sir Bale and avenge 'the sins of the father' since Sir Bale's ancestor supposedly murdered Feltram's. After all, the ghostly woman in black reappears later in the story and calls herself a kinswoman to another member of the Feltram line. But such an explanation does not make it clear why they would attempt this circuitous method of taking strength from Sir Bale. It is also unclear why they would punish Feltram, killing

him and possessing him, if the ghosts are related to him and seek to avenge the wrongs done to his family. Creating more uncertainty, the narrator insinuates but never proves that the financier was never there, or else was a “gypsy” onto whom Bale unconsciously projected the Feltram-family portrait. Bale has a bad fever at this point in the story. Le Fanu vaguely suggests that nothing supernatural occurs and readers just receive second-, third-, or fourth-hand accounts that originated in a fevered hallucinating mind. But there are so many coincidences in the story: the “habitues” at the bar, described in chapter one, introduce the history of this town by talking about the same kind of ghostly phenomenon that is independently confirmed by fishermen to have killed Feltram. Unless the narrator is fabricating the entire tale, these events seem too coincidental.

Even if the explanation of this haunting as just a ghostly Feltram-family revenge is the most satisfying of all these explanations, such a conclusion must be drawn by the reader. It is not made clear by the narrator, the characters, or the authority figures experiencing these hauntings, which thwarts any certainty the reader might have about an all-encompassing explanation. The disruptors of this text, such as the financier or the hand that pulled Feltram into the Golden Friars’ lake, thwart attempts by Le Fanu’s characters to comprehend them or combat them through existing, collective rules. Sir Bale’s response to the supernatural is fascinating in its own right: “Sir Bale affected no airs of scepticism now; his imagination was stirred, and a sense of some unknown reality at the bottom of that which he had affected to treat before as illusion, inspired a strange interest in the experiment” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 134). His recognition of this “illusion” as an “unknown reality” is intriguing. It is “unknown”, unquantifiable, flying in the face of that which is calculable or acceptable, but now must be called a “reality”

rather than illusion, thus giving it a kind of legitimacy that violates his own reality. His encounter with the unreal is compounded by the inability of those frameworks discussed in the previous chapter to categorise it or prevent it from holding sway over him.

Carmilla similarly exerts control over a reality when she confounds a patriarch's enforced social and material rules. She presents Laura's father alternatives to his enforced conceptions. Laura's father states that the affliction gripping the wider community, which is actually Carmilla's vampiric attack on the peasantry of Styria, is reducible to natural causes. He says that "these poor people infect one another with their superstitions, and so repeat in imagination the images of terror that have infested their neighbours" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 269). Carmilla's response is to conflate the unreal with "reality": "I am so afraid of fancying I see [the images of terror]; I think it would be as bad as reality". Then, in response to Laura's father stating, "[w]e are in God's hands; nothing can happen without His permission, and all will end well for those who love Him", Carmilla says, "Creator! *Nature!* [...] And this disease that invades the country is natural. Nature. All things proceed from Nature – don't they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as nature ordains? I think so" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 270). Phenomena that come from within and from outside the hegemonic perspective of the schloss are blurred as Carmilla's vampiric activity is equated with the nature that Laura's father implies excludes supernatural elements. Superstitious images are allowed into the pantheon of the real by having the potential to "be as bad as reality" and by virtue of acting and living "as nature ordains". Carmilla's supernatural plague threatens the facile comfort of being entirely safe "in God's hands". This turn of phrase echoes Dr Hesselius telling the doomed Jennings that he should be

“confident for the future” because “[y]ou are in [God’s] hands and in the power of no other being” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 33). The unnatural vampiric disease is figured by Carmilla as proceeding from nature, just as “all things” do, an expansion of what can be considered materially real and threatening to a God-fearing populace. Her discourse on the “images of terror” and the plague is therefore a reification of the supernatural which Carmilla performs through interactions with others who occupy a more conventional perspective. Laura’s father is rendered silent by Carmilla’s retort before he changes the subject altogether.

Much like the otherworldly presences of “The Haunted Baronet”, Carmilla performs the role of the ghost, as articulated by Killeen, in Le Fanu’s literature. Killeen contends that ghosts represent cracks in the Victorian narrative of progress (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 129). Crucially, Carmilla accomplishes similar disruption by attacking a particular site of authority. Her accommodation of “the images of terror” into the realm of nature silences his attempts to wrongly assure complete safety through adherence to rigid notions of what is deemed to exist and who is destined to be saved from danger. Laura’s father, a leader within the creation of hegemony, is therefore undermined by Carmilla. Meanwhile, his daughter is at risk of being turned into a vampire. Carmilla thus exposes inadequate social and material rules and threatens to dominate them verbally and physically.

The supernatural presences throughout *In a Glass Darkly* similarly realise their disruptive potential by their complete otherness to the categories formed in the inadequate, oppressive realities discussed in the previous chapter. In “Green Tea”, Hesselius attempts to join the spiritual and scientific as a spiritualist physician.

Connectedly, Jennings, the afflicted clergyman, is surrounded by treatises and experts attempting to theorise and understand the supernatural. Spiritualist Emmanuel Swedenborg is frequently referenced, for example. Jennings claims that everyone has heard something about spectral illusions, a hyperbolic claim that nevertheless evidences the interest in spiritualism and spiritualist research in which those of his social strata engage (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 25). Jennings turns to books and supposedly widely held expertise to quarantine his affliction. He thus attempts to sap it of its ability to affect him, performing the kind of reframing I have discussed previously. Hesselius further solidifies this potential spiritualist understanding of the tale in contrast to a purely material, medical one, at least until he attempts to assign a more material cause to Jennings' death in the finale, as previously discussed. Convincingly rendering the monkey as widely comprehensible, something everyone knows about through a particular framework, would help to dampen its disruptive power.

There are even more possible frameworks for understanding what happens to Jennings. Lauren Rocha argues that, “[i]n addition to the description of Jennings’ drinking tea, his interest in paganism and his writing on the subject hint at a lack of self-discipline as they deviate from the structured Christian mindset, a model society would hold him to as a clergyman” (142). However, readers are not allowed to definitively see whether amending these behaviours might alleviate his suffering. We have already seen how Hesselius fails to produce an adequate spiritual, medical, or moral explanation for Jennings’ affliction. Jennings’ attempts to contain his haunting are, of course, in vain; he later says he believed “not one word of” his self-reassurances, “no more than any other miserable being ever did who is once seized and riveted in this satanic captivity. Against

my convictions, I might say my knowledge, I was simply bullying myself into a false courage” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 26). The ghostly monkey is able to reach out to him and cloud his ability to trust in inherited forms of “knowledge” and “convictions” by its otherness, its inability to be fully contained and made safe within existing frameworks such as medical authority, spiritualist certainties, and Victorian moral rectitude. Dickson discusses how elements of the tale, like the green tea Jennings drinks and the monkey that haunts him, elicit a “gradual accretion of meanings and possible effects”. In doing so, they disrupt “the psychological coherence of the individual and [blur] the boundaries between the material and the spiritual, and the subjective and the objective, while exposing the limitations inherent in all human constructions of knowledge” (Dickson 91-2). Similarly, as previously discussed, Walton states that “[t]he nested narratives, and the nest of interpretations, presented by ‘Green Tea’” provide the reader “too many explanations” of the tale’s central haunting, indicating a “fractured vision of reality” (50). Through a social-constructionist lens, the deconstructionist function of the monkey prompts readers to acknowledge the flawed frameworks communities construct. The monkey does so by deconstructing their ability to categorise the world and protect individuals.

Even Carmilla’s eventual, seemingly obvious designation as vampire by the surrounding community is shown to be a flawed material understanding by Carmilla and her compatriots. The carriage that transports Carmilla into Laura’s narrative appears to be the same carriage that abducts an Irish child in “The Child that Went with the Fairies”. Characters in both stories describe a black woman in the carriage with a coloured turban on her head, seemingly marking her and the carriage she is in as the

same. In “Carmilla”, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine describes the woman as “a hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 257). In “The Child that Went with the Fairies”, the narrator tells the reader she “was a black woman [...] and on her head was a sort of turban of silk striped with all the colours of the rainbow” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 82). There, the carriage is not associated with vampires but instead with the fairies. The reader cannot fully know if the carriage belongs to either group. Alternatively, it might be a supernatural being of a different sort that joins the realities of vampires and fairies to that of the human characters. Further, the carriage could simply be vampiric or from fairyland depending on which social context defines it. Clear material definitions of Carmilla and the supernatural carriage break down here. As discussed with reference to a Victorian review of *Willing to Die* in the introduction, the shared locales of Le Fanu’s stories were noticed at time of publication. Readers now can further explore the implications of those shared narrative elements in the reappearance of this carriage. Through it, Carmilla and her attendants disturb the frameworks readers, Hesselius, and vampiric experts try to apply to them.

“The Familiar” similarly destabilises attempts to comfortably interpret the tale and thus contain the disruptions therein. The reader is encouraged to understand the narrative as a conservative, cosmic punishment of the protagonist, Barton, for his beliefs that are quite rationalist, harmonising with the “French Principles” that had gotten into “fashionable society” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 45). Dempsey states that, “[i]n Le Fanu’s ghost stories, supernatural justice is meted out to Protestants with radical tendencies and unspiritual beliefs (religious or otherwise)” (78). The interpretation of the tale as punishment for “French Principles”, or religious scepticism, is one the narrator,

an Irish clergyman, is likely eager to suggest; he makes a point of noting and expressing disdain at the “French” quality of the protagonist’s beliefs (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 47). Yet, if Barton is supernaturally punished for those impious beliefs, resulting in the story being a parable about “French Principles”, then he is also punished for his past: he began an affair with a crewmember’s daughter when he was a captain for the British navy. The daughter died due to her father’s brutality and her heartbreak, after which the father accosted Barton. Barton punished the man so severely that he died. Frequently, The Watcher, who haunts Barton, seems to specifically target Barton for this bad behaviour. The interpretation of the tale as one of ghostly vengeance undermines the idea that he is punished for his rationalism. Instead, he would have been disciplined for sexual and murderous transgression. There are two possible explanations, each of which expresses a view of the supernatural that upholds paradigms of religious belief and social harmony. However, by the end of the story, the narrator is unable to confirm the true nature of Barton’s haunting:

Whether these circumstances in reality bear, or not, upon the occurrences of Barton’s after-life, it is, of course, impossible to say. It seems, however, more than probable that they were at least, in his own mind, closely associated with them. But however the truth may be, as to the origin and motives of this mysterious persecution, there can be no doubt that, with respect to the agencies by which it was accomplished, absolute and impenetrable mystery is like to prevail until the day of doom. (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 82)

Le Fanu presents a third interpretation here. Barton was thinking about his past sins “in his own mind” without them necessarily being the material explanation for the haunting. Here, the ghastly events of the story are characterised as unknowable despite attempts to project meaning onto them. The presence of multiple, often incompatible explanations is quite similar to the way neither the reader, with their limited viewpoint into this fictional world, nor the narrator, who helps construct that viewpoint, can fully understand Barton’s tormentor. Doctor R-- claims it is all in Barton’s mind while Hesselius claims it is a disease. Both points of view are perhaps undone by the fact that the haunting figure is a physical presence that tangibly interacts with characters other than Barton yet is incapable of being caught as a human tormentor might (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 66).

What the emergence of supernatural beings like the Watcher models is the concept of paradigm shift discussed in the introduction. In paradigm shifts, present rules about how to operate in and understand the world begin to seem insufficient and new ones replace them. Le Fanu’s works show how his fictional societies formulate and perpetuate discourses that create an interrelated set of norms within which a community operates and acts on the world. Throughout the above examples, supernatural presences further expose and even exploit the inadequacy of these rules that make up reality. Like in the process of actual socio-political and scientific shifts, they challenge a socio-political and scientific perspective that increasingly appears outdated.

Crucially, disruptive characters like Carmilla or *Checkmate*’s Longcluse can be supernatural or non-supernatural. The latter, though more conventional in terms of their biological nature, still contest hegemony. Backus argues that literary emphasis on

promoting the idea of the Anglo-Irish nuclear family grew into the paranoid Gothic literature of the nineteenth century. The enemy depicted in texts like *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), “Carmilla”, and *Dracula* is divorced from Anglo-Irishness and humanity. Further, social breakdowns that are portrayed in expressionistic terms as an outside force in earlier literature start emerging from within (Backus 6-8). In my estimation, Le Fanu’s fiction designates non-supernatural subversives who threaten to dissolve key structures as emerging from both within and without. On some level, these figures, like Stanley Lake of *Wylder’s Hand*, Longcluse from *Checkmate*, and Dingwell from *The Tenants of Malory*, emerge from within. Stanley Lake, for example, is born into and exists in a community that ostensibly holds a communal reality of which he is a part: Lake has familial connections in the town of Gylingden, plans to marry into its existing power structures, and is not significantly different, in a biological sense, from the other human beings he victimises. And yet, he subscribes to different social paradigms that fall outside of negotiated sets of rules in Gylingden: Lake is a murderer who seeks to raise his class status by disregarding legal and moral restrictions in the community. He is not just a representation of internal repression as is commonly the case in psychoanalytic Gothic criticism. Neither is he entirely the exterior force that destroys the nuclear family. Rather he emerges from within and without, often embodying threats to the community through this hybridity.

As Ardel Haefele-Thomas writes, “other Victorians”, those not bourgeois, white, or heterosexual and thus silenced by what Michel Foucault identified as “the Violence of the ‘Victorian regime’”, were often beyond the boundaries of gender, race, or nation. Some Gothic works create quite ambiguous and even sympathetic renderings of these

others as well as their “uncanny ability simultaneously to embody multiple subject positions” and challenge “a hegemonic Victorian construction of the patriarchal British family as upholder of gender, sexual, national and racial purity” (2-5). Haefele-Thomas primarily focuses on how such sympathetic texts help to reconfigure monstrosity. However, the otherness they identify, which exists outside the “hegemonic Victorian construction of the patriarchal British family”, is a useful way to think of non-supernatural subversives like Lake and their unacceptability. Lake is vaguely bourgeois and heterosexual. However, because he and villains like him ambiguously embody paradigms both inside and outside hegemonic structures, they exemplify a kind of unreal monstrosity despite being entirely human. They can thus challenge hegemonic constructions as an unreal threat. It is telling then that these figures are often explicitly associated with the supernatural in Le Fanu’s texts.

Longcluse is a threatening non-supernatural antagonist who emerges and gains strength in *Checkmate*. Early in the story, Alice Arden is quite taken with Longcluse, who, as I have discussed, becomes more and more threatening as the story progresses. He eventually attempts to violently take possession of Alice and thus insert himself into the community’s hereditary power structure. The couple’s earlier flirting is done in part through a song that Alice asks Longcluse to sing, a composition which gives their connection an element of unreality:

You've stolen my heart by magic,

I've kissed your lips in dreams:

Our wooing wild and tragic

Has been in ghostly scenes.

The wondrous love I bear you

Has made one life of twain,

And it will bless or scare you,

In deathless peace or pain.

'Our dreamland shall be glowing,

If you my bride will be;

To darkness both are going,

Unless you come with me.

Come now, and mount behind me,

And rest your little head,

And in your white arms wind me,

Before that I be dead. (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 57)

The erotic imagery here, of “wild” courtship, lips kissing “in dreams”, and “white arms” winding, is matched with a “dreamland” threatened by darkness if the relationship is thwarted. There is love here that might “bless or scare”, and images of death that hang over the relationship. Their attraction to one another eventually amounts to a near

infection of Alice by Longcluse, where he holds sway over her brother and almost forces marriage on her. As discussed in the last chapter, this would enable him to insert himself into her family line, asserting control of the legitimacy and reproductive power inscribed on her body which he might then use for his own ends. It is appropriate then that their earlier contact through this song becomes associated with Gothic ballad imagery and is thus characterised as unreal. The relationship itself is likened to a “dreamland”, commencing in “ghostly scenes”. Longcluse, a paradigm-defying criminal, will only become more ghoulish as the story develops.

Longcluse further associates himself with the unreal by connecting his own criminality and the ethereal: “Suppose I tell you I'm a criminal—the kind of man you have read of in trials, and can't understand, and can scarcely even believe in—the kind of man that seems to you as unaccountable and monstrous as a ghost” (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 353). The unsettling figure becomes incomprehensible and thus “monstrous” and ghostly. In his challenge to social rules, he is unaccountable. He is therefore similar to the ghosts of “The Haunted Baronet” in his inability to be contained under reigning, constructed frameworks. Indeed, breaking social configurations comes soon after the above quotation as Longcluse makes advances on Alice, breaking rules of gendered relations and boundaries: “If she thought that Mr. Longcluse would respect the barrier of the threshold, she was mistaken. He entered but one step behind her, shut the heavy hall door with a crash” (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 354). His metaphorical material unreality is intimately tied up with flouting societal paradigms: the “barrier” that Alice expects will protect her because of the rules her community has created is no defence against Longcluse who does not live by those rules. And, when Longcluse manipulates

Richard Arden, Alice's brother, into serving him, Alice similarly relates him to the otherworldly: "Her brother—was it a phantom?—stood before her" (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 355). Richard takes on phantasmal associations as he is manipulated to serve Longcluse. Like a vampire, Longcluse infects others with his unreality.

A similar metaphorical unreality is taken up by a number of characters in Le Fanu's fictional communities, further alluding to the subversive power of even non-supernatural entities. Stanley Lake is explicitly characterised as materially unreal by his sister Rachel: "I don't understand you, Stanley. I am always uncomfortable when you are near me. You stand there like an evil spirit, with some purpose which I cannot divine; but you shall not ensnare me" (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*). Stanley is characterised as "an evil spirit" precisely because Rachel does not "understand him" and because he makes her "uncomfortable" through his purposes which she "cannot divine". The inability to comprehend him makes him ethereal, similar to the monkey in "Green Tea" who cannot be fully reduced to pure materiality. Levi, a Jewish character in *The Tenants of Malory*, *Checkmate*, and *Haunted Lives* is also described in otherworldly, threatening terms in a scene where he cruelly toys with and then kills a beetle; he is portrayed as having "white fangs" and a "lust for torture" that is "monstrous" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V2* 17, 19). By contrast, the narrator addresses the doomed beetle stating, "there is no sympathy with your instinct, with the purpose of your life, with your labours and hopes. An inverted sympathy is there; a sympathy with the difficulty—with 'the Adversary'—with death" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V2* 18). The reader is placed in the beetle's perspective, met with dangerous alterity in the form of Levi. Indeed, the beetle's characterisation is far more human than Levi's: "were there

a little beetle brood, and a wife awaiting him there? A strong instinct of some sort urged him, and a most heroic perseverance" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V2 18). Levi becomes yet another figure in *The Tenants of Malory* who, despite being non-supernatural, is very much characterised as belonging to some foreign reality as he is "monstrous". The beetle is integrated more comfortably, if perhaps jokingly, into heterosexual familial structures and conventional behaviour than a Jewish man.

The unreality of those who fall outside a society's faith structures is also displayed by Dingwell, the man Levi and his compatriots use to gain power and blackmail the Verney family. Dingwell states that he does not belong to the Church of England, nor is he "a Catholic, nor a Quaker", nor does he subscribe to rationalism or to any "ism whatsoever invented by any other man; Dingwellism for Dingwell; Smithism for Smith. Every man has a right to his opinion, in my poor judgment." In response, a clergyman asks him, "pray, sir, if neither Romanist nor Protestant, what *are* you?" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 158-9). Dingwell is the actual heir of the Verney estate, Arthur Verney, presumed dead in his overseas travels. His nonconformity to collective frameworks, specifically Protestant confessionality, would be dangerous and unacceptable enough were he to adopt his position as heir. There, he could take the authority that should be granted to him by the hereditary rules of this community. However, his nonconformity goes so far that this clergyman cannot comprehend him. He takes on the mantle of a threatening force of absolute alterity which cannot be contained by existing paradigms and threatens to invade through the town's hereditary configurations.

Further, both Dingwell and Strangeways of *Guy Deverell* are associated with the supernatural by hiding their true identities. Dingwell is actually Arthur, and Strangeways is revealed to be the titular character, Guy Deverell. Through their disguises, both are rhetorically linked to vampirism. Dingwell states, “don't I look like a vampire”. His comparison to these revenants alludes to the fact that he has been, in a sense, brought back from the dead as the presumed-dead inheritor of the Verney estate (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V2 78). Meanwhile, Strangeways reads a book about a doctor and a vampire who infiltrated an estate “to practise, by stealth, their infernal arts” (Le Fanu, *Guy Deverell* V2). In both cases, Le Fanu associates the disguised characters with the supernatural, and their otherworldliness is explicitly connected to their infiltration of the central community of each story.

Additionally, Dingwell resembles Longcluse of *Checkmate* by demonstrating the ways in which geographic distancing can render someone as other and thus subversive. Dingwell, for example, became de-anglicised from his time abroad in Constantinople. When he returns, he mocks the English norms that govern the Welsh community he unsettles. While in disguise, saying he can verify the death of Arthur Verney in Constantinople, he says,

The presumption of English law, ha! ha! ha! is in favour of the duration of human life, whenever you can't prove a death. So, English law, which we can't dispute—for it is the perfection of human wisdom—places the putrid body of my late friend Arthur in the robes, coronet, and staff of the Verneys, and would give him the spending of the rents, too (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V2 133).

He calls “English law” indisputable, even as he violates it by disguising that he is actually Arthur Verney, and calls it “perfection”. His assessment appears sarcastic as the “English laws” favouring “the duration of human life, whenever you can’t prove a death” are the very impediments that allow this metaphorically undead man to leverage information about Arthur Verney’s death for control over the Verney family. In his time abroad, he seems to have figured himself as outside the English norms that he mocks here.

Dingwell’s immersion in other contexts with their own diverse religious convictions perhaps also prompted his quite nonconformist vision of religious belief. Dingwell, in disguise, secretly addresses a former love interest while under his assumed identity. He tells her that Arthur merely “complied with the custom of the country” when in Constantinople:

So, ma'am, he shaved his head, put on a turban—they wore turbans then—and, with his Koran under his arm, walked into a mosque, and said his say about Allah and the rest, and has been safe ever since [...] It's a very easy and gentlemanlike faith, Mahometanism—except in the matter of wine; and even that you can have, under the rose, like other things here, ma'am, that aren't quite orthodox; eh? (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 217-8).

English and Turkish societies are rendered as parallel here: the behaviours Arthur takes part in are not described as aberrations, but rather as “customs of the country”. Even the Islamic stance on wine can be violated, just as “other things here [...] that aren’t quite orthodox” can be done if performed secretly. In Dingwell’s characterisation, these are parallel social contexts with their own paradigms rather than one being normal and the other abnormal. Walton says that, in *Willing to Die*, Mr Carmel “provides [the protagonist] with a choice ‘between frivolous realities and a gigantic trance’” when she is about to enter society: “the distinction made here is not between illusion and reality but between different orders or degrees of illusion, of dream” (53). Walton ties this discussion into a wider argument about Le Fanu creating a sense of the uncanny in his faux autobiographical narratives. However, Walton’s assessment of Ethel’s choices, that they are “degrees of illusion”, bears similarity to Dingwells’ characterisation of the separate constructions he has variously occupied. Dingwell considers neither one more illusory nor legitimate than the other. Dingwell is a rogue, and the characterisation of him here bears with it Islamophobia, but that does not make his equivalence between English and Turkish ways of life incorrect. If reality is configured in the way Le Fanu depicts throughout his late fiction, then the one occupied by Dingwell in Constantinople is just another perspective, constructed with rules described by Dingwell above. Dingwell has therefore been changed to something different and irredeemable from the viewpoint of his former compatriots due to his revelation gained living in contact with another reality. His former lover, upon learning that he had converted from Christianity, says, “Oh, sir, oh! I couldn't have believed it. Oh, sir, this shock—this frightful shock!” (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 218). Through joining a Turkish set of rules, he is

separated from his reality in a way horrifying and unimaginable to his former compatriots whose social frameworks he now assaults.

Longcluse from *Checkmate* is rather similar in his monstrous, unreal nature. Indeed, as discussed previously, Longcluse is set apart by his time on the continent. Further, Longcluse has actually had his face physically altered to hide his true identity, complicating any sense of singular selfhood, much as is the case with Dingwell. He thus becomes a grotesque, monstrous, foreign menace. Again, despite being ostensibly materially real within the rules upheld by the protagonists, these presences exist outside those formulations. These disguised characters become more and more indicative of something ethereal by the various ways they have been formulated as socially other.

Interestingly, in the supernatural tale “The Haunted Baronet”, Sir Bale is figured as ethereal too, despite being a hereditary authority figure: “As the candles burn blue and the air smells of brimstone at the approach of the Evil One, so, in the quiet and healthy air of Golden Friars, a depressing and agitating influence announced the coming of the long-absent Baronet” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 71). He is associated with Satan, something so evil and subversive as to affect the “air” around him. One townswoman even “expected the hero of a brilliant and wicked romance” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 72). The joke of these early parts of the text is that he is no such presence. She is surprised to see he is merely a middle-aged man, quite comprehensible within her vision of reality as a normal, if antisocial and ornery, hereditary leader. Sir Bale’s otherworldly characterisation in his community is undone by his failure to possess the ghastly qualities of a man like Dingwell who actually threatens the norms of his community.

Further, the unsettling presences above can also frequently be considered representatives of other realities entirely by virtue of occupying alternate constructs of knowledge and action. One of the alternate, yet terrestrial realities that Le Fanu portrays is found in a group that lives alongside the town of Golden Friars in Le Fanu's *Chronicles of Golden Friars*. One member of this "gipsey" (Le Fanu, *Delphi* 6499) community, Euphan, seems liable to draw her potential lover, Squire William, from his society to her way of life in "The Bird of Passage". As depicted by Le Fanu, the "gipsey" people constitute a different reality from that of the Golden Friars town and other settled societies in the area through geographic, cultural, and material differences. The difficulties that arise from their contrasting constructed paradigms are made plain at the end of the story. Euphan leaves the protagonist, Squire William. He then tries to find her again. In his pursuit, he remarks, "[t]hese people [...] are a freemasonry - impenetrable and peculiar" (Le Fanu, *Delphi* 6515). As a group, they are other such that they become impossible to comprehend for Squire William, much as Dingwell becomes incomprehensible for a clergyman. When he sees her years later, they acknowledge that there is a boundary between them that can never be crossed again. He is married now and she, while pretending to read his fortune, acknowledges that "she thinks still of that one that was best to her of all the world, and so will to the end of her years, though she'll never see you more, nor you her" (Le Fanu, *Delphi* 6525). They cannot be together since they have each chosen to exist within their respective ways of life, meaning they will forever remain separate. As Euphan says, in a statement inflected with Le Fanu's own prejudices, a woman like her cannot occupy both realities: "There's but the one way — the wild life or the tame" (Le Fanu, *Delphi* 6506). Euphan temporarily

interrupted Squire William's ability to subscribe to the collective rules to which he belongs because she is indicative of another separate, collective subjectivity entirely that might have drawn him in.

The tension of realities existing alongside each other is apparent in the lake of Golden Friars in "The Haunted Baronet" from the same collection. Here, there is a collective threat posed by an alternative which bears historical resonances. As mentioned already, the story opens on a group discussing a drowning in the lake, an event that haunts the town. The drowned woman has been seen by multiple people, giving a greater sense of danger to the haunting of the initial protagonist Feltram who feels he is being possessed. Feltram becomes an extension of the powers that emerge from the lake, submerged, unreal things that attack Golden Friars in ways that become increasingly widespread. Presences like the hand that emerges from the lake as well as the financier and fortune teller, who are found by crossing the lake, function as heralds of a different scheme of knowledge and social action. Their ghostly nature indicates different material rules they abide by much as their lack of regard for Sir Bale, discussed previously, indicates different social configurations they value. Thus, in the meeting of Bale's community with this supernatural one, the reader experiences two visions of reality at odds. They each have their own social structures as well as relationships to the supernatural and to the surrounding geography. Additionally, Feltram's perception of the supernatural possessing him as well as the fisherman who claims to have directly witnessed these events were silenced by various figures in Golden Friars. Occupants of Golden Friars created a situation amenable to one conception of the world exerting influence on another by oppressively maintaining existing paradigms. The unreal

thwarts prevailing conceptions more and more, eventually pulling individuals into their reality.

The endangered way of life in Golden Friars is arguably informed by the threats Le Fanu's family experienced in rural Ireland. Le Fanu spent much of his young adulthood in Abington, Co. Limerick. As McCormack contends, most of the people in Abington were beneath his concern in the late 1820s. Sectarian division and the poverty of the surrounding community set the Le Fanu family apart from the general population (McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 23). And yet, the native Irish population, despite being ostensibly outside the Le Fanus' social sphere, could not remain unseen. As Howes illustrates, the Le Fanus' position was marked by unrest as the family was "not merely isolated from but openly resented, howled at, and even stoned by the native Irish at Abington" (166). An attack on Le Fanu's brother was given a supernatural, Gothic edge in a contemporary account, as discussed in chapter one, indicating the heightened emotional register with which Le Fanu's class reacted to growing native Irish agitation such that it could be imagined in supernatural terms. The situation in Ireland meant that the Anglo Irish ultimately could not ignore the changing grounds on which they stood. Much as the lake at the centre of "The Haunted Baronet" is a threatening, increasingly insistent reminder of the potential for destabilisation of reigning schemes of reality, the native Irish held a similar function for the Anglo-Irish in Le Fanu's time in Abington. Howes argues that events such as those experienced by Le Fanu at Abington "gave Le Fanu an acute sense of the tenuous political and cultural position of the Anglo-Irish" (166). The lake threatens to disturb any universal sense of knowable rules and configurations existing in Golden Friars. As with the Victorians more

generally and the Anglo-Irish specifically, there is a distinct threat of encroaching figures and frameworks that may upset a coherent material and social perspective.

That historically informed sense of danger to the unreal, of alternate structures outmanoeuvring a communal subjectivity, becomes all the clearer in “Carmilla” where the reader is informed about the mechanics of Carmilla’s reality. Laura’s estate in Austria defines its social and material rules as patriarchal, Christian, heteronormative, and inherently human-based, where the lines between life and death are clear. Laura brushes up against Carmilla, who threatens to theoretically and physically undermine those rules by converting Laura to vampirism. Carmilla’s perspective is configured as matriarchal, Christophobic, homoerotic, biologically non-human, and where crossing the line between life and death is not just possible but is vampires’ means of reproduction.

Punter identifies vampires as well as the figure of the wanderer as two central symbols of terror in nineteenth-century literature, each of which he characterises as not content with the restrictions of orderly society (100-6). Carmilla’s opposition to so-called orderly society, which foolishly denies the vampire’s existence in service of a rigid shared understanding of the world, is what makes her an exemplar of disruptors in Le Fanu’s fiction. She begins to unsettle the reality-creation apparatus that the past two chapters have described. However, since she represents distinct social and material structures of another race of human-like creatures, her destabilisation is that of one understanding of the world undermining the coherence of another, as growing native Irish might in Ireland threatened to do. The Jewish people of Le Fanu’s fiction embody a similar threat as vampires. As discussed in chapter one, Jewish people are largely excluded from communal frameworks like the ones found in *The Tenants of Malory*. Le

Fanu's Jewish characters are primed to invade the protagonists' society when the circumstances allow and challenge its central paradigms as a different, collective subjectivity, with its own rules.

It is important to acknowledge here the racism in Le Fanu's depiction of Jews and what he calls "gypsies" as another reality. He demarcates heterogenous groups as unaccountably other. Le Fanu also reduces actual groups to some of their most harmful, externally imposed stereotypes. *The Tenants of Malory* and *Checkmate*, for example, are profoundly antisemitic in their stereotypical figuring of Jewish people as malicious, greedy, and other, supplementing their designation as an alternate, threatening reality. Larkin, the lawyer, provides a way for the novel's Jewish characters to exert power over the protagonists' community as he himself has a "slim, bald, pink-eyed impersonation of Christianity overtopping the dark and glossy representative of the Mosaic dispensation" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V2 88). He acts as a kind of disguised invader who allows openly Jewish men like Levi to begin, in the language of Richard Arden, to "worm out the secrets of a family—all through one's own servants, and doctors, and apothecaries" (Le Fanu, *Checkmate* 237). Richard Arden is not a character readers can rely on to impartially or reliably describe the world around him. Nonetheless, his description of Jewish people here accurately indicates the possibilities that their alternate perspective has for exerting jurisdiction over important members of the community like himself in *Checkmate*. Through this route, a Jewish regime of action and knowledge can worm its way into and exert control over his reality. It does so through deception and through the money lending that allows Jews sway over Richard and people like him. Disruptive figures like Larkin and the ethereal presences above are

therefore often indicative of a wider vision of reality that invades and pulls individuals away from their communal frameworks. Their presence reinforces the possibility that individuals can come to occupy other realities therefore when their own sense of reality is interrupted.

II. Experiencing Alterity

Due to the ethereal menaces in texts such as *In a Glass Darkly*, *The Rose and Key*, *Wylder's Hand*, *Uncle Silas*, and "The Haunted Baronet", Le Fanu's characters and readers become separated from a shared subjectivity. It is therefore worth examining the experience of becoming untethered to reality. Both groups find themselves less able to gaze at the world through their former, collective perspective when they meet disruptors in large part because they become distanced physically or psychologically from their reality. Characters and readers are thus drawn away from the processes that uphold their communal paradigms into incoherence and often towards another reality entirely.

Isolation becomes one of the key ways in which characters become separated from a communal reality, a direct consequence of their encounter with disruptors. In "Green Tea", when Dr Hesselius sees Jennings for the first time, Jennings is apart from the main group of party guests; Hesselius even describes him as "[t]his courteous man, gentle, shy, plainly a man of thought and reading, who moving and talking among us, was not altogether of us" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 9). In his encounters with an inexplicable simian figure, Jennings is increasingly isolated such that even when he

exists “among” others, he is not “of” them. He is much like Captain Barton of “The Familiar”, who seems improved when in the company of others, but becomes more and more isolated from society as he is further afflicted by his ghostly pursuer. As Barton’s affliction reaches its apex, he adopts a “resolution on which he now systematically acted, of shutting himself up in his own apartment. The window-blinds of this room were kept jealously down; and his own man was seldom out of his presence” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 76). Aside from his attendant, he is mostly shut off from other people “as total solitude [...] had become to him now almost as intolerable as the idea of going abroad into the public ways” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 76). Barton profoundly fears the complete isolation his situation might force on him, but also finds joining others in his social group, in any significant way, “intolerable”. That the isolation of protagonists from society is a common feature of Gothic literature is well documented. Punter indicates that Gothic fiction often features “[c]haracters [...] cut off [...] from anything that might help them to correct their mistakes”, thus becoming dislocated from “everyday norms” (68). In Le Fanu’s fiction, as characters become isolated, they lose their attachment to the interactions that form their societies’ norms, as was the case for Jennings and Barton. Both find themselves to be not “of” their social circle any longer. Each one is in the control of unreal forces. Each therefore loses some of the coherence of perception their social circle had originally offered them as their vision becomes more dominated by otherworldly figures. Similarly, Maud of *The Rose and Key*, Rachel of *Wylder’s Hand*, and a great many other Le Fanu protagonists all find themselves isolated from the process by which common rules are upheld through their encounter with disruptive presences.

Maud from *The Rose and Key* is isolated in an asylum, preventing a marriage between her and Charles Marston. In the absence of those she would normally have around her, she becomes so desperate for their support that she threatens to stop eating so that those who run the asylum would be forced “to bring my friends about me, and once that were effected, I should inevitably get out”. An attendant replies, “[t]hey'd make ye as fat as a pig, in spite of all ye can do” (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 160). The power wielded in this asylum is largely a result of separating individuals like Maud from the web of relations in her society. Eating, otherwise frequently done as part of a social activity, has become a symbol of the singular control Antomarchi holds over her in her isolation and of her desperation to rejoin her social circle, even at the expense of her health. In a discussion of the isolating experience of being party to murder, Victor Sage goes so far as to link Rachel in *Wylder's Hand* with the spiritual as she becomes both a legal and religious witness. She is both accessory to the novel's central crime, her brother killing the titular Wylder, and witness to reality beyond the material realm of the senses. The dead are the ultimate witnesses and Rachel, upon helping to cover up Wylder's murder, becomes dead to the world (Sage 88-92). Sage demonstrates Rachel's figurative demise by quoting the equation Rachel makes between her state and death: “Death will close the eyes and ears against the sights and sounds of earth; but even the tomb secures no secrecy [...] try to find some part which says where safety may be found at any price; for sometimes I think I am almost bereft of – reason” (qtd. in Sage 90). Sage delves further into the act of witnessing as a trope of Le Fanu's work that carries ramifications for Le Fanu's overriding concern with resurrection as a central theme of his oeuvre, which I will not explore here. Still, this idea of Rachel being

separated from other humans by her implication in the murder of Wylder helps to reinforce the unreal becoming correlated with that which exists outside the social norms of a society; her secret causes her to lose “reason” and become rather isolated, making her not just lonely but revenant-like. Further, it underlines that disruptive presences might start to pull others away from the communal perspective and associations in which they have been made a part. She cuts ties with those around her, including the man who expressed romantic interest in her, due to her criminal brother. Stanley’s infection, despite his ultimate defeat, means both Rachel and Dorcas end the story seemingly existing apart from the social group in which they started. Maud in *Uncle Silas* too is taken away, made isolated, and her own vision of the world loses clarity as a result when imprisoned in her uncle’s estate. She even wonders, after her uncle suggests she is mad for being concerned for her safety while in his care, “[a]m I—am I mad? [...] Is this all a dream, or is it real?” (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 422). In her isolation, Maud loses the ability to determine her own mental state and what is “real”.

In “Mr Justice Harbottle”, Harbottle’s ordeal separates him from the shared subjectivity of his social group through the experience of finding his reality incapable of articulating his situation. For example, Le Fanu describes him as “sinking into the state of nervous dejection in which men lose their faith in orthodox advice, and in despair consult quacks, astrologers, and nursery storytellers” (*In a Glass Darkly* 111-2). He shortly thereafter revives his spirits a bit, but impermanently, as these forces will eventually afflict him more and more forcefully until they kill him. Indeed, the turning away from “orthodox advice” here resonates well with what characters like the two

Mauds, Rachel, Barton, and Jennings experience in their encounters with alterity. They are disconnected from social and material norms. They also lose their place within the process of cementing schemes of collective knowledge and action that bind together the community. They are instead drawn towards the boundaries of their conceptions of the world. The above quotation from “Mr Justice Harbottle” even states that as a more-or-less common ordeal: Harbottle fits a pattern that other “men” have embodied according to the narrator.

The actual experience of supposed encounters with alterity in seances mirror some of the ordeal of characters like Maud in *Uncle Silas*. Marlene Tromp articulates the troubling questions that arise from such an encounter:

Which experiences are those of the flesh and which are those of the spirit? In which body does the medium's identity lie? Who is responsible for the reaching arms, the shared kiss, the embrace? The boundary between the spiritual and the flesh of the medium becomes indistinct, and, by virtue of this slippage, the medium cannot demarcate her own identity, locate her own accountability or intention, or distinguish the Victorian woman from the unfettered spirit. The sure boundaries of the “self” crumble in the face of full-form materialization and with them the rules that bind each identity position. (25)

Throughout these examples in Le Fanu's texts, there is a disaffection or disconnection, emotional or physical, from the reality of which these characters are a part, even if it is,

on occasion, only a temporary separation. Like the medium or those who watch their materialisation of spirits, there is a “slippage” here of rules that define the self and one’s relation to their surroundings through a connection with an other. Killeen argues that Maria Edgeworth’s and Sydney Owenson’s marriage plots navigated the fault line between England and Ireland, where symbolic English men and Celtic women unite. By contrast, he contends that the Gothic novel is an examination of the breakdown of identity in the encounter with the other (Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 93-4). In Le Fanu’s fiction, the breakdown that occurs is not just an erosion of national affiliation or identity, but of subscriptions to communal perspectives becoming tenuous.

The erosion of a conventional perspective happens quite explicitly in “Carmilla” where the titular vampire is able to force her way through Laura’s rhetorical defences, much like she did through Laura’s father’s. Carmilla insists on their close friendship: “I have made your acquaintance twelve years ago, and have already a right to your intimacy” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 260). Carmilla’s statement dissipates some of the horror of Laura realising she saw Carmilla years ago, when a young Laura thought she encountered her in a dream. As Laura states, “she was certainly the most beautiful creature I had ever seen, and the unpleasant remembrance of the face presented in my early dream, had lost the effect of the first unexpected recognition [...] We now laughed together over our momentary horrors” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 261). Carmilla draws in Laura further as her professions of her strange attraction get more insistent. Previously, I discussed how Laura loses the ability to define Carmilla’s face when Carmilla falls into one of her “mysterious moods”. In another instance of Carmilla’s strange behaviour, Laura says, “I don’t know you – I don’t know myself when you look

so and talk so” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 264-5). Like that which Tromp says occurred in seances, boundaries break down, so much so that Laura loses the ability to define herself and Carmilla as her relationship with the vampire intensifies. As discussed in the last chapter, Laura’s father becomes strange to her throughout the story while Carmilla’s grip becomes stronger. Her general lack of comprehension lines up well with her journey from one reality to another. In this space of “slippage”, undergone also by other protagonists who are drawn into another reality, from Maud of *The Rose and Key* to Feltram of “The Haunted Baronet”, her viewpoint becomes incoherent as she is pulled from her original understanding of this setting and into Carmilla’s intimate embrace.

It should be noted that insight into the formation and maintenance of protagonists’ realities is more readily available than insight into the maintenance of alternate realities in Le Fanu’s late texts. The means of upholding Antomarchi’s reality in his asylum are comprehensible, admittedly. However, readers are not often able to fully occupy the shared perspectives of the fictional figures who embody alternate realities like Carmilla and the revived Feltram who seem to be a part of alternate, communal schema. In “The Haunted Baronet”, for example, comprehending a ghostly way of life is largely beyond the lead characters and the narrators. Therefore, since narrators deliver the story to the reader, it is beyond the reader as well. It is also difficult to fully know whether some disruptors, like the monkey in “Green Tea”, are singular or indicate an entire alternate reality. Further, a different means of social action and material knowledge rarely, arguably never, completely supplants that of the protagonists: the infernal court does not permanently replace conventional legal authority in “Mr Justice

Harbottle". The reader is not shown whether vampires rise up and dominate any villages, towns, or countries after Carmilla's death. When Le Fanu returns to Golden Friars in *Willing to Die*, a narrative set years after "The Haunted Baronet", it does not appear as though otherworldly beings from its lake have grown to completely control the town. Perhaps Le Fanu's own environment impacted the focus of his story's anxieties. Rather than experiencing the final chapters of the Ascendency, witnessing the replacement of his social structure by another, he instead lived through various stages of the Ascendency's decline. Le Fanu's experience of a waning sociopolitical framework is resonant of Le Fanu's fictional communities. By examining or existing in the latter, readers and characters can find it difficult to occupy a particular way of seeing, but do not fully experience the ascension and maintenance of alternatives. As such, it can at times be difficult to analyse the construction and maintenance of Le Fanu's alternate realities in detail. Nonetheless, disruptors and the alternate schemes they often represent challenge the rules of the societies they begin attacking, unsettling characters and readers from those shared precepts.

Despite their connection to Le Fanu's own societal context, however, I do not believe that Carmilla or the lake in Golden Friars are direct metaphors for the native Irish. Nor am I saying that "Carmilla" or "The Haunted Baronet" necessarily function as allegories for the Anglo-Irish situation. Such an allegory would be imperfect at best. The lake in "The Haunted Baronet", for example, evokes the ways in which the coherence of Victorian, Anglo-Irish frameworks was disturbed by rapid scientific, political, and cultural changes. However, it does not clearly map onto any single change in understandings of the actual world or its ensuing effects on communities. For example, if it were to be an

allegory for rising Catholic power, one could interpret the Feltrams as deposed rulers taking revenge on the new occupier, Sir Bale Mardykes. However, Le Fanu's efforts to include possibly supernatural "gypsy" characters as a third party, to introduce the complication of Sir Bale's illness, and to leave the cause of the ordeal unclear complicate rather than reinforce the allegory. The tale of "The Haunted Baronet", while resonant of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish situation, is not an allegorical representation of the native Irish. Instead, it evokes a wider fear that inevitably comes with the realisation that one's sense of reality is constructed and that various sources of power therein might be stolen away by a threatening alternative, as will be discussed more in the next chapter. The possibility of invasion and the departure from one's reality due to outside pressures is always possible.

The refusal of clear allegorical meaning of the monkey of "Green Tea" further forces readers to consider their similarity to characters in Le Fanu's texts who encounter disruptors. The terror that the haunting monkey represents could be a Darwinian one, an atavism of humanity's biological origins that unsettles accounts about who humans are as a civilised, rational species. Killeen goes so far as to say it may represent the threat of the atavistic Irish:

Jennings is clearly suffering from a form of hysteria, a condition previously thought applicable only to women; this condition renders him unable to complete a romantic union with a feminised version of the Irish nation, and instead propels him into an eventually destructive and homoerotic union with the ultra-masculine

simian-Irishman, in which the English figure is rendered completely impotent, and eventually defeated. Jennings's suicide may be a warning about the embattled condition of mid-century Englishmen, undermined from within by the forces of religious crisis and social and moral uncertainty, and from without by the resurgent masculinity of the regional male. (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 114)

It could, however, be a symbol of the sin of seeking forbidden knowledge: Jennings has been exploring paganism and the monkey is perhaps a symbol of how such foreign ideologies can infect a Christian mind. One of the horrors of this haunting presence is that it has no clear, singular allegorical meaning. There is no definitive evidence in the text to fully support the monkey being a symbol of Darwinian theory, the Irish threat to Englishmen, or the dangers of non-domestic knowledge. Each one is possible. The simian form calls to mind evolution as well as animalistic characterisations of colonised peoples. Jennings' consumption of green tea evokes fears of the exotic. The demonic presence presents a disparate array of narrative possibilities without a clear answer, much as characters like Hesselius present possibilities for materially understanding it which cannot be fully confirmed as valid.

The difficulty of finding clear one-to-one metaphors thus mirrors the difficulty of applying clear understandings to other disruptive figures discussed thus far. In a psychoanalytic discussion of how Carmilla implants enigmas that Laura cannot translate in "Carmilla", Davis concludes that

if we, as readers of the Gothic, are in fact caught in the same 'vortex of summons and repulsion' (Powers, 1) as Laura, then our constant attempts to decipher the Gothic text [...] leave us all trapped in our own repetition compulsion, inexorably (but perhaps pleasurable) drawn to 'the place where meaning collapses' (Powers, 2). (Davis 234)

I contend that the monkey's indeterminacy, like that of the lake in *Golden Friars*, is the point in that it brings us closer to that place where meaning collapses in our attempt "to decipher the Gothic text": the reader witnesses something they cannot comprehend in scientific or narrative terms. While non-realistic literature often demonstrates characters that fall outside the reader's sense of the everyday, Le Fanu pays special attention in the examples listed above to establishing frameworks through which to understand his setting and then suggesting their inadequacy, throwing the reader's perception into disarray. In this way, "Green Tea" and "The Haunted Baronet" resemble Freedgood's assessment, quoted previously, of the effect of *Heart of Darkness* versus that of realist novels:

Heart of Darkness leaves us wondering about some unnamed horror—to which the novel refers all too vaguely [...] [Realist] novelists write the world as negotiable: as a place where we can get around obstacles one way or another and as a place in which we can transfer information, and even ourselves, from one ontological state to another (409).

Le Fanu's allegorical obscurity forces readers to understand the fictional world around them as non-negotiable. Le Fanu leaves the reader outside the grip of a clear material or allegorical meaning that might be ascribed to the monkey in "Green Tea" or the ghosts of "The Haunted Baronet" in part through the reader's inability to fully analyse subversive figures and alternate realities. As previously cited, Dickson states, the haunted monkey elicits a "gradual accretion of meanings and possible effects". We are not allowed to exist far outside the experience of the characters, assigning concrete meaning to figures who are symbolic representatives of real-world people or ideas. Instead, we are forced to engage with this world like Le Fanu's characters: in a state of puzzlement, parsing unclear meanings through inadequate frameworks. He intensifies feelings of confusion, like those experienced by Laura, as readers become estranged from a community's reality and pulled towards a mysterious space of conceptual alterity.

The slippage from the dialogic process by which shared subjectivities are created and by which individuals become receivers of and propagators of realities can thus start to immerse characters and readers in other ways of being. To quote again from Jennings' description of his own suffering,

as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought under the teeth, as the tip of the little finger caught in a mill crank will draw in the hand, and the arm, and the whole body, so the miserable mortal who has been once caught firmly by the

end of the finest fibre of his nerve, is drawn in and in, by the enormous machinery of hell, until he is as I am. (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 31)

Prayer has been made impotent. His own position as religious leader has been nearly destroyed. It will soon be obliterated completely due to his own death and Hesselius' epithet to Jennings' demise which completely undermines Jennings' authority. He is drawn away from the procedures by which consistent frameworks are invented.

Characters like Jennings, Maud, Rachel, Laura, and Harbottle are thrust into incoherence and are often drawn into another reality. The alternative is, on some level, unintelligible to them as they have occupied their community's shared conceptions for so long. The reader's experience of these texts is somewhat parallel in their frequent inability to contain or understand destabilising figures. The invasions of alternatives begin, it seems, in encounters between the unreal and the real. Unreal intrusions become all the more severe and their effects more wide-reaching in the next chapter. The footholds gained by other ways of being, within these fictional communities and on the reader's perception, will expand and entire schemes of reality will threaten to crumble as a result.

Chapter 4: Realities Crumble

Le Fanu's fictional communities often support regimes of knowledge and being that are oppressive and do not allow their occupants adequate "capacity to negotiate the real constraints and affordances of [their] world" (Hruby 57). The previous chapter discussed such communal subjectivities under siege. Often enabled by the inadequacies of the societies in question, the unreal assaults collective paradigms. The afflicted are drawn away from the process of solidifying consistent perspectives into incoherence or towards an alternative configuration. However, disruptions promise more than just a difficulty for individuals to subscribe to their original frameworks. They also remove strength from a community and empower the unreal. In doing so, they threaten a wider change, in which inadequate frameworks fall and are potentially replaced. The prospect becomes all the more terrifying since readers are made imaginative occupants of this world, intensifying the simulated danger that comes from existing in inadequate, failing social frameworks. However, as doubt grows in the presence of these invading forces, so does the possibility of envisaging replacements to oppressive ways of life. I demonstrate this procedure of decay and potential hope through *In a Glass Darkly*, *Uncle Silas*, *The Rose and Key*, *Willing to Die*, *Wylder's Hand*, *The Tenants of Malory*, and "The Haunted Baronet". Pondering alternatives is relevant in both Le Fanu's historical context and beyond, where the actual crumbling of accepted norms arguably necessitates the consideration of replacements.

I. Disruption Persists

The weakening of bonds between individuals and their reality brings with it the question of whether these ties might be repaired. In texts including *In a Glass Darkly*, *Uncle Silas*, *The Rose and Key*, *Willing to Die*, and *Wylder's Hand*, Le Fanu provides many examples of those who are victimised both from within and without their collective subjectivities. Such afflicted people in Le Fanu's late texts often are prevented from fully reintegrating into their social role, girls in particular. The difficulty girls often find in fully readopting their role to reproduce for their society indicates a potential for societal erosion.

Girls' social role entails allegiance to their realities to ensure they are ideal vehicles to pass social and, frequently, material capital along acceptable lines. They can then create new adherents to a particular scheme of knowledge and social action. Stoddart makes the case that Le Fanu's "Carmilla" entails a breaking of the aristocratic grasp of a tyrannical feudal heritage "on the political-sexual of the present", which "is a small cost for investment in the new ground of an expansionist future" (31). I agree with Stoddart that Carmilla's death is meant to enable Laura to serve hegemony in a future-oriented way. Laura is inscribed with the futurity of her society, much as characters like Maud of *Uncle Silas* and *Willing to Die*'s Ethel. However, many of the young girls of these narratives are not fully brought back into the fold. Some are, but others must leave their social groups. Further, some die, and some, like "Carmilla"'s Laura, are primed to be transformed into agents of the other reality they have encountered. Thus, girls' troubling experiences do not just cause their separation from their prior means of understanding the world as discussed previously. Prompted by the invasion of

alternatives, troubled relationships between girls and the communities that oppress them can gain a degree of permanence, indicating wider social collapse.

Like her sisters in persecution, Dorcas and Rachel of *Wylder's Hand*, Maud of *Uncle Silas* takes part in the tradition of female characters physically leaving their trauma behind in the wake of their encounter with alterity. She thus also resembles Laura in "Carmilla", who travels with her father in an attempt to heal from her vampiric encounter, and Maud of *The Rose and Key*, who "live[s] very much abroad" (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V3 308). After her release from unjust imprisonment, Maud leaves the country: "In compliance with medical advice, cousin Monica hurried me away to the Continent, where she would never permit me to allude to the terrific scenes which remain branded so awfully on my brain. It needed no constraint. It is a sort of agony to me even now to think of them" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 432). After being taken from her home on the advice of medical authority figures to separate her from the traumatic subversion she has experienced, Maud is more at peace. However, her trauma, imparted by otherworldly forces yet enabled by patriarchal paradigms, forced her to remove herself from her social group and still causes her pain. Alternatives have effectively prompted questions about the future of reigning paradigms. If girls like Maud cannot unproblematically carry out their duty of ideological and biological reproduction in their communities, then the unreal will have disturbed the wider maintenance of collective frameworks. Maud's traumatic experiences, for example, make her a somewhat problematic occupant of her community even after she ostensibly reintegrates.

Milbank contributes a compelling argument about the role of perception in *Uncle Silas*: she argues that the novel provides a kind of liberation for Maud when she is able to face the grotesqueness of death and thus view it as a barrier beyond which she might look. As Milbank contends, Maud sees beyond the mortal. She understands that the world is a habitation of symbols, making her a kind of “John the Divine” and allowing her to escape a death that comes when women are trapped within forces like corrupted, seemingly damned families (Milbank 371-5). If women are reproducers of reality and envisioned as problematic connections between the real and unreal, Maud seeing past the mortal is problematic for the communal conceptions of her world she is meant to internalise. In Milbank’s account then, Maud encounters the grotesque and resolves it, but in a spiritualist manner that involves seeing her setting as symbolic, with something much wider, grander, and more difficult to comprehend behind it. Maud starts to end her narrative like this:

I have penned it. I sit for a moment breathless. My hands are cold and damp. I rise with a great sigh, and look out on the sweet green landscape and pastoral hills, and see the flowers and birds and the waving boughs of glorious trees—all images of liberty and safety; and as the tremendous nightmare of my youth melts into air, I lift my eyes in boundless gratitude to the God of all comfort, whose mighty hand and outstretched arm delivered me. When I lower my eyes and unclasp my hands, my cheeks are wet with tears. A tiny voice is calling me 'Mamma!' and a beloved smiling face, with his dear father's silken brown tresses, peeps in. (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 435)

She seems able to cleanly separate herself from her previous subjugation to Silas and, despite lingering trauma, find comfort in her position within a wider Christian and filial context. Her separation from a shared subjectivity is presented here as temporary, and she is apparently able to perform her reproductive function. However, she then troubles that reintegration:

This world is a parable—the habitation of symbols—the phantoms of spiritual things immortal shown in material shape. May the blessed second-sight be mine—to recognise under these beautiful forms of earth the ANGELS who wear them; for I am sure we may walk with them if we will, and hear them speak! (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 435-6)

Thus, despite the confidence Maud has found in these roles, her reverie, delivered to readers like the vision of a prophet, creates a difficulty in categorising her setting in the way Le Fanu's communities seem to desire.

The encounter with what Milbank calls the grotesque, compounded by the traumatic losses she had endured as a mother, convinces Maud that the world is a parable, that it is “phantoms of spirituals immortal shown in material shape”. While Maud's spirituality is comforting for her, it comes from an acknowledgement of the insufficiency of the physical as she had understood it. She also emphasises a desire for

a kind of perception that might be contrary to a society's ability to maintain consistent, definite perspectives. Maud experiences one of the happier endings in Le Fanu's texts. Further, she embraces spiritualism of a kind promoted by her father and his Swedenborgian friends which might indicate a reassertion of patriarchal values. However, there is a separation between this woman and the definite paradigms that Le Fanu's communities seem to desire, as demonstrated in chapters one and two. Even while adopting the role of dutiful wife and mother, she claims a prophetic, sublime vision of her setting, desiring "the blessed second-sight" in light of her traumatic encounters (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 436). Her dangerous experiences were caused by her father giving her to her uncle to preserve their family's legitimacy, resulting in Maud permanently seeing beyond rigid conceptions of what is real, desiring a connection to the incomprehensible supernatural.

Willing to Die's Ethel ends her narrative in a similar, but more permanently isolated manner. She has separated herself from what she earlier called "the world" or social life in her community. She details the deaths of her former companions and concludes that she prefers solitude. In particular, she discusses her love for the mysterious Richard Marston:

With the flight of my years, and the slow approach of the hour when dust will return to dust, the love of solitude steals on me, and no regrets for the days I have lost, as my friends insist, and no yearnings for a return to an insincere and tawdry world, have ever troubled me. In girlhood I contracted my love of this simple rural solitude, and my premature experience of all that is disappointing

and deplorable in life confirms it [...] I wonder how many people are living, like me, altogether in the past, and in hourly communion with visionary companions? [...] In the wonderful working that subdues all things to itself—in all the changes of spirit, or the spaces of eternity, is there, shall there never be, from the first failure, evolved the nobler thing that might have been? [...] Am I giving this infinite true love in vain? I comfort myself with one vague hope. I cannot think that nature is so cynical. Does the loved phantom represent nothing? And is the fidelity that nature claims, but an infatuation and a waste? (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*)

Ethel too takes comfort in the ephemeral, yet not with Maud's confidence. She is left living among phantoms or "visionary companions", indicating her separation from the supposed rationality of Le Fanu's fictional communities. She wonders if her "infinite true love" is "in vain" and imagines that it cannot be. Her feelings are expressed in cosmic, transcendental terms and they must be felt in solitude rather than in close connection with society to which she expresses "no yearnings" to "return" because it has disappointed her.

However, her final sentences articulating her resolve are phrased in questions. There is a lack of certainty here, indicative of a mind looking over the past in terms of almost incomprehensible personal and cosmic significance. Maud was, at the very least, joining a masculine tradition of Swedenborgian thinking in her vision and is contented as mother and wife. There is an element of patriarchy in her reflections even as her understanding of material knowledge extends beyond definite bounds. Further,

her visions of the infinite could perhaps be integrated into contemporary Christian belief structures, however precariously due to the feminine spiritualist power she looks to take on. Ethel has not just retreated into isolation but seems also to have retreated into the ephemeral in her complete departure from social structures. She never marries, staying instead apart from society, her proscribed position as a woman remaining largely unfulfilled. She chooses to exist outside the filial structure that would have been her intended place in “the happy valley” she was initiated into at the beginning of her narrative. In that isolation, she becomes rather ethereal and unreal in her cosmic reflections. She even wonders how many others have been similarly removed from “the happy valley”. Notably, in Le Fanu’s world, it appears that there are many. Margaret of *The Tenants of Malory*, Rachel, Dorcas, Laura, and Maud are all taken from or leave their community, temporarily or permanently. Le Fanu variably teases and realises the possibility of girls’ generative power being taken. The sympathetic Margaret even dies in exile, losing the ability to continue reproducing for her reality as a conventional wife. Her husband and son largely live separated from their social group afterwards.

“Carmilla” takes the consequences of girls’ displacement and intensifies them. The reader is promised that the act of reproduction social groups ask girls to perform will be reversed. It will be used to attack the community’s subjectivity when girls are not brought back to their original reality. Laura, in her final line, states that she often hears the ostensibly dead Carmilla “at the drawing-room door” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 319). Despite Carmilla’s death, the path Laura has travelled has made her unable to disassociate herself from the vampiric way of life Carmilla represents and, in her mind at least, the vampiric force is still present. Laura was drawn towards the vampire and away

from her father's consciousness, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. It is notable that her Gothic crucible fails to bring her back fully to her father's reality, in which the vampire is not a looming presence. She herself states that, since Carmilla's death at the hands of imperial authorities, no vampire attacks have occurred in the area. She is able to occupy, at times, that scheme of knowledge that her father and broader society propose, in which ethereal creatures have been vanquished. However, this final line means she cannot fully inhabit that position, so far has she been pulled from her father's enforced frameworks and into Carmilla's, ideologically and, potentially, biologically. I mention biology because the attentive reader knows that those who are bitten by vampires will themselves become vampires upon death. Laura, it seems, has already died as stated by the editor in the opening of the story. Laura could be, while the reader holds the text in their hands, a vampire, as Signorotti contends: "By the time this tale reaches its readers, both Laura and Bertha [a girl Carmilla killed] have died, yet presumably they continue to live as resurrected vampires, perpetuating the chain of female alliances begun by Carmilla" (Signorotti 618). Laura has not only been pushed away by the patriarchal authority that exerts control over her for its own sustenance. She may also come to permanently, physically exemplify the imagined connection between women and the unreal due to her social circle's inability to reintegrate her, and perhaps her vampiric sisters, into their shared subjectivity.

Andeweg and Zlosnik argue that the family and its kinship ties are a source of threat in the Gothic (1). Andeweg and Zlosnik thus contend that Gothic texts tend to focus on transgression and call into question the "boundaries that appear to underpin social relationships". They produce conservative endings but also open space for

alternative relationships that may be configured (Andeweg and Zlosnik 2). I argue that Le Fanu similarly opens up space to consider more capacious, less restrictive visions of reality. He does so by demonstrating the profound deterioration of broader ties of community and kinship through the removal of girls from their social context and by demonstrating alternate conceptions such as the ones occupied by Maud and Ethel at the end of their narratives. Their finales, in their release from constrictive understandings of material knowledge, reach out beyond the bounds of their prior frameworks which they, to varying degrees, can no longer occupy. Similarly, Stanley Lake's actions drive Rachel and Dorcas into self-imposed exile, giving up the roles of wives and mothers they might otherwise have occupied to help further their collective subjectivities. They become "like spirits" instead of occupying their proscribed social duties in their community (Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*).

Many of the male victims discussed thus far in this dissertation come to exist in a world outside a conventional socio-political context as well; they often encounter the unreal and can therefore no longer completely exist within their community's conception of the material and social. Barton of "The Familiar" must live isolated from society due to a ghostly figure. Richard Arden of *The Rose and Key* finds himself under the control of a law-breaking, former friend. Both are thus isolated from the process of reality creation in their community. Justice Harbottle and Jennings, from "Mr Justice Harbottle" and "Green Tea" respectively, find themselves in a state of dejection after authority fails around them. They are similar to Ethel in *Willing to Die* who says, "no yearnings for a return to an insincere and tawdry world, have ever troubled me" (Le Fanu, *Willing to Die*). While considering his plight, Harbottle's "huge grim purple face confronted the fire,

and seemed to pant and swell, as the blaze alternately spread upward and collapsed. He had fallen again among his blue devils, and was thinking of retiring from the Bench, and of fifty other gloomy things" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 112). Meanwhile, Jennings, when his servant visits him shortly before his suicide, says, "[t]ell me truth, Jones [...] you did not hear any one cursing?", to which his servant replies "[n]o, sire" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 36). Presumably, the demonic monkey that haunts Jennings has been speaking curses at him as he isolates himself in his room, in the dark. Harbottle has been unable to cure himself of his apprehensions of the ethereal, causing him to descend into gloom and contemplate leaving his authoritative position. Jennings similarly finds himself in the "gloomy" realisation that no one can comprehend the creature cursing him; he will kill himself in despair, leaving behind his social position, having lost faith in his ability to thwart his curse by any means, religious or otherwise. Both become divorced from their designated roles as wielders of legal and religious power. These victims' encounters with other perspectives and the inadequacies of their own disrupt their ability to contribute to their community's process of solidifying collective paradigms. The exertion of unreal influence on individuals is therefore all the more alarming because of the role disparate community members have to play in the procedure of reifying reality. Their benefits to that process are lost partially or completely through their encounter with that which exists outside their sociopolitical and material conceptions.

II. The Unreal Commandeers Power from the Real

Moments of disruption are therefore not just individually significant happenings that isolate individuals from clear regimes of understanding. They are also communal events that become potentially permanent breaches in collaborative schemes of perception. While Le Fanu rarely depicts the edifice of reality completely falling as a result, he does depict moments when communities in his late fiction find themselves unable to resist the unreal, causing power to be transferred to the unreal. Power, which might have been used to conserve reality, instead moves to and increases the strength of those who might dominate the former, which I demonstrate here through *Uncle Silas*, *The Tenants of Malory*, *In a Glass Darkly*, and “The Haunted Baronet”.

The extraction of power away from a reality by an ethereal presence is exhibited by the terrifying Madame de la Rougierre in *Uncle Silas*. Maud’s father and Silas each hire her at different points in the story, enabling her to torment Maud. Maud articulates the oppressive presence of the Madame when she states, “[a]s we descended the slope which shut out the surrounding world, and the scene grew more sad and lonely, Madame’s spirits seemed to rise” (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 34). The Madame’s strength seems to grow as Maud’s lessens; her own spirits are in inverse proportion to Maud. She functions here rather like Silas’ residence in the novel. The house in which Maud grows up is more indicative of a conventional subjectivity than that of her uncle. The former has legitimised patriarchal authority, a clear hierarchy, and a sense of propriety among genders evidenced in chapter two. In contrast, Silas’ estate, with its murderous dealings, lack of propriety, and lack of respectability, functions like an otherworld that hopes to steal Maud away for itself. He effectively takes Maud’s

reproductive might as well as hereditary rights carried on her body away from their proper channels. He does so by laying hold of her and thus her respectability, property, and generative ability, first by possessing her at his estate, then by attempting to marry her to his son, then by trying to kill her. McCormack proposes that Silas is a kind of metaphorical “post-mortem existence” of Maud’s father (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 182), pointing towards the depiction of his household as a dark alternative to the stifling, but less dangerous house of Maud’s father. The mirroring of the two, with one acting as the illegitimate, murderous twin of the other, underlines the otherness of Silas’ house, its function as an alternate, darker perspective that is maintained among Silas, his daughter, his son, and eventually the Madame. It might commandeer individuals like Maud. The process of appropriating power from Maud’s original community is enabled by conventional, oppressive legalistic frameworks that help Silas to steal away her contributions to her original reality. Through Maud’s society’s attempts to exert influence over girls, Silas and the Madame are allowed, for a while, to terrorise her and drain away strength from her. Silas’ mirror reality will be invigorated by preying on Maud, this feminine representative of her father’s way of life, much like the Madame, whose might seems to rise as Maud’s spirits fall.

Further, Le Fanu elucidates how a flawed authority figure can allow the unreal to take power in *The Tenants of Malory*. There, the Reverend Dixie converses with the devious Cleve, a protagonist whose actions throughout the novel break laws of marriage and family hierarchy. He even threatens to commit bigamy. Dixie refuses a cigar from Cleve due to a lecture his bishop gave on smoking. Cleve however makes Dixie cave easily, stating, “[y]ou used not to be such a fool, old Dixie. I’m your bishop

now; I've said it, mind—and no one sees you". The narrator reminds the reader soon after that Cleve "stood very near the title and estates of Verney, with all their comfortable advowsons appendant" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V1 85-6). In Dixie's weakness, Cleve asserts himself as Dixie's superior, inserting himself into the religious power structure for a moment with the narrator alerting readers to the immense aristocratic might he may soon take on. He asserts influence in the place of weak authority and seems capable of taking even more strength soon. Those operating outside constructed reality can therefore exert influence over and effectively colonise religious structures as part of a wider process of siphoning power. They can do so through weak leaders and the insufficient religious frameworks that uphold them.

Elsewhere in *The Tenants of Malory*, a similar widespread corruption is threatened. As discussed previously, Dingwell/Arthur Verney spent time abroad which placed him somewhat outside the norms of his reality. Having returned, Dingwell/Arthur uses his hereditary might as true heir to the Verney estate to exert sway over the people around him. He drains money away from his family and maintains control over the Jewish men who are using him to enrich themselves. He and his Jewish co-conspirators claim that Arthur has died and that they are the only ones who are able to confirm the death. They extort money from the Verney family in the process of proving Arthur's death as Arthur's brother, Lord Verney, is desperate to push assorted familial rights along legitimate lines of succession. Dingwell directly implies that he has damning secrets on the family which he jokingly proposes producing under the title "Snuffed-out lights of the Peerage" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 231). While carrying out this threat, he undermines the authority of Lord Verney, stating that Lord Verney and Arthur

"were both alike in this—each was a genius—you were an opaque and obscure genius, he a brilliant one; [...] there must have been a sympathy, notwithstanding his being a publican and you a—not exactly a Pharisee, but a paragon of prudence" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 229). He steadily uses his feigned position as possessor of the truth of Arthur's demise to undermine Lord Verney through mockery and implications of the unrespectable behaviour of the wider Verney relations, which could snuff out "the Peerage".

When Dingwell finally reveals to Lord Verney that he is Verney's brother, Arthur, he further threatens to take resources, the implication being that he can act on his previous threats in order to obtain them:

That's right—never mind. I'll not hurt you. Don't fancy I mean to disturb you. I *can't*, you know, if I wished it *ever* so much. I daren't *show*—I *know* it. Don't suppose I want to *bully* you; the idea's *impracticable*. I looked in merely to tell you, in a friendly way, who I am. You must do something handsome for me, you know. Devil's in it if a fellow can't get a share of his own money, and, as I said before, we'll have no go-betweens, no Jews or attorneys. D—n them all—but settle it between ourselves, like brothers. Sip a little more water. (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 235-6)

He is described as "speaking in quite another voice now, and in the most awful tones Lord Verney had ever heard in his life, and to his alarmed and sickly eyes it seemed as

if the dusky figure of his visitor were dilating in the dark like an evoked Genii” (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V3* 233-4). He is ethereal and terrifying to those in his community, supplementing his unreal designation discussed in the previous chapter, becoming increasingly so as he threatens to steal more power. Further, in stating he will not “hurt” or “bully”, he reinforces his capability of doing both as he threatens to continue appropriating his brother’s resources and undermining him. The events that pulled Arthur from his way of life end up constituting a communal threat as his hereditary authority is placed in service of Dingwell and the Jews who work with him, threatening to further corrode his former reality.

A Jewish reality, much like subversive, ethereal characters such as Dingwell, is able to invade and establish control over key figures of authority, inserting itself into a collective power structure and spreading its influence. Indeed, Goldshed and Levi, as shown in chapter two, control Sarah Rumble as “*their* underfed, overworked, and indefatigable slave” and use her to maintain their “four houses in Rosemary Court” (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V2* 56). The poverty described in the second chapter allows these presences of another regime of knowledge and social action to buy up physical space in the community and exert total control over its members. Their might threatens to rise, allowing them to continue commandeering strength through exerting their will over property and individuals, further threatening to exert more and more dominance over the community.

The steady domination of one reality by another continues when the solicitor Wynne Williams, described as important and “omniscient” within his society, becomes displaced by Larkin: “The fact was that he had been, little by little, so uncomfortably

superseded in his functions by our good friend Jos. Larkin [...] that honest Wynne Williams felt that he might as well do a proud thing, and resign, as wait a little longer for the inevitable humiliation of dismissal" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V3* 188). Sage contends that Larkin is the opposite of the aristocratic structure into which he is trying to climb (96-7). The characterisation of Larkin as the antithesis to an aristocratic social circle, plus the ways in which his actions will threaten the sociopolitical perspective of the protagonists, means he becomes more than just the opposite of the aristocratic world of the community. By latching onto key institutions, Larkin co-opts more power for himself and his Jewish co-conspirators, promising a challenge to collective rules. Larkin plans to "glide ultimately into the absolute command of the House of Verney", a thought at which the narrator gawps: "To think of that indescribably vulgar rogue's actually shaping the fortunes and meting out the tortures of Cleve Verney" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory V2* 192). Larkin can further infect and even more effectively drain strength by taking control of the authority configuration to which the Verneys belong. He can supplant other leaders within the configuration of legitimacy in the town of Cardyllian, thus invading that reality, deteriorating it, and empowering himself.

Laura of "Carmilla" is quite explicitly a victim of an alternate understanding of the real commandeering power from a community in a way that threatens social collapse. That fate is ultimately thwarted in *The Tenants of Malory*, but not so much here. Laura finds herself on a journey from her former conception of knowledge and action to a vampiric one that seeks to continue literally sucking the lifeforce from the former. Carmilla proposes that Laura will undergo that transformation in a procedure Carmilla likens to the maturation of a butterfly: "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” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 270-1). In this steady process of disrupting Laura's subscription to her own reality, described in the previous chapter, Carmilla pulls Laura from her present “propensities, necessities and structure” into another state. This is a piece of a wider arc that extends beyond the traumatic experiences Laura details in the text, even beyond her incomplete reintegration previously discussed. Laura's story is not just a singular character evolution from larva to butterfly, but rather an intensifying transfer of power from one reality to another. We can see this as Carmilla's seduction of Laura becomes more and more insistent:

She used to place her pretty arms about my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine, murmur with her lips near my ear [...] I live in your warm life, and you shall die – die, sweetly die – into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love; so, for a while, seek to know no more of me and mine, but trust me with all your loving spirit. (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 263)

Carmilla here illustrates the operation of stealing Laura from her reality and Laura, as a vampire, doing the same to others. The growth of vampiric might here is made possible by Carmilla's possession of Laura's life-force, the taking of her blood through vampiric bites, and through possessing Laura's “loving spirit”. Laura's influence, when she is

revived as a vampire, becoming a subversive character like Dingwell/Arthur is, will then be used to exponentially drain strength away from her former reality.

Indeed, in the *In a Glass Darkly* collection more broadly, infections of reality, in which individuals, institutions, and particular rules are attacked, promise to spread. Vampirism supposedly spreads disease-like, killing those bitten who then turn into vampires, thus empowering a vampiric reality at the expense of the human ways of life that reign in Styria. There is a similar threat of ethereal pandemic in the opening notes that lead into “Mr Justice Harbottle”. If one reads *In a Glass Darkly* in order, they will have already experienced the fall of a clergyman and a military veteran due to ghostly attacks. Medical, spiritual, and military authority figures have thus failed to offer effective protection when confronted by isolated supernatural phenomena. At this point, Hesselius produces an unintentionally terrifying statement. He argues that the opening of the inner eye, which causes one to be able to see spiritual phenomena, is contagious. He states that the tale of “Mr Justice Harbottle” “was one of the best declared cases of an opening of the interior sense [...] it exhibited, what I may term, the contagious character of this sort of intrusion of the spirit-world upon the proper domain of matter” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 83). Hesselius proposes that the contagious nature of the vampire is not limited to vampires. It applies to all supernatural hauntings of the kind discussed in *In a Glass Darkly*, in which “the spirit-world” intrudes “upon the proper domain of matter”. Hesselius might not be correct in his diagnosis here, but that again brings to the fore mostly disagreeable possibilities for his social circle: either his material frameworks are inadequate, or he indicates a far more widespread form of invasion, a contagion that might occur in cases like Jennings’, Barton’s, or Harbottle’s.

As everyone around the doomed Jennings, Barton, and Harbottle failed to treat these men, an assault of the unreal “upon the proper domain of matter” appears all the more terrifying; the contagious alternative seems more likely to dominate human societies and continue drawing away their strength.

The movement of power from a more conventional reality to the unreal, indeed to an alternate reality, gesturing towards a wider social collapse, is perhaps best shown in “The Haunted Baronet”. There, various policing institutions attempt to reinforce a clear sense of shared subjectivity, as previously discussed. An ostensibly coherent scheme of knowledge and action bumps up against something that might be deemed unreal from the perspective of this social circle and its leaders. However, it nonetheless constitutes its own set of collective rules which violates those possessed by Golden Friars. The alternate reality in “The Haunted Baronet” commandeers two point-of-view characters: Feltram and Sir Bale. Point-of-view characters in this text are those whose thoughts and perspectives the narrator can comfortably render rather than solely depicting them from an exterior viewpoint. Feltram was taken first when he was submerged in the lake and afterwards became an agent of an other way of life. When he is resurrected, Feltram is seemingly changed into a mysterious, possibly possessed, supernatural figure, who cannot be fully understood by the conjoined consciousnesses of the reader and the narrator. He started out meek, saying at one point, “God knows I would not hurt Bale, nor give him one uneasy hour” (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 82). Yet, once he is revived, he is described as utterly transformed:

A change, more comprehensive than at first appeared, had taken place, and a singular alteration was gradually established. He grew thin, his eyes hollow, his face gradually forbidding. His ways and temper were changed: he was a new man with Sir Bale: and the Baronet after a time, people said, began to grow afraid of him. And certainly Feltram had acquired an extraordinary influence over the Baronet, who a little while ago had regarded and treated him with so much contempt. (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 114-5)

After Feltram's encounter with that which is officially deemed unreal, he belongs more to an unseen, incomprehensible way of life than to that of Golden Friars. The narrator, and by extension the reader, can no longer occupy Feltram's viewpoint and he is now only viewed from an exterior perspective. Further, upon his resurrection, Feltram becomes the one with influence, exerting it over Bale rather than the other way around. Sir Bale is in the process of being pulled from the Golden Friars reality by having his own authority enthralled by this mysterious otherworld. The pandemic nature of one conception of the world drawing power from another, present with vampirism in "Carmilla", continues here.

By the end of the tale Sir Bale becomes further detached from his way of life and from the audience. Readers often occupied the perspective of Bale in this story. They heard his thoughts, followed his actions, and centred on him as a protagonist. However, near the end of the story, Bale becomes afflicted with supernatural knowledge. He somehow learns that he is going to die before the next sunrise, presumably from ghostly figures of the kind he has encountered through the narrative. He then believes in his supernatural knowledge fully and ultimately finds himself completely in the power of

these occupants of another scheme of knowledge and social action. He states, "I know that before the clock, that has just struck three, shall have struck five, I ... shall be dead" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 172). Whereas previously his tormentors possessed control over his finances and respectability, they now appear to control when he will die. We then lose Bale's perspective as a point-of-view character. The alternate reality, in the form of the mysterious fortune teller, the woman in the lake, the revived Feltram, and the other supernatural figures, slowly abducts the point-of-view characters. This other way of life leaves the society's social and material paradigms increasingly damaged in its wake. The story enables readers to feel this erosion more strongly by virtue of the steady loss of protagonists' viewpoints.

Once Feltram and Bale have been removed from their reality and from their position as point-of-view characters, readers are left with the viewpoints of four women who remain tenuously in Golden Friars' shared subjectivity: Maud, Janet, Gertrude, and Mary. I will focus primarily on Janet, the woman who marries Sir Bale, and Maud, her sister. Maud eventually travels to Sir Bale's estate to be with Janet who is in distress due to Sir Bale's premonition. They come to a final rhetorical battleground between two visions of knowledge and action. All the while, the wider community seems to be changing as can be seen in a description of the "magnificent view commanded from" Sir Bale's dwelling:

in the foreground the solemn trees of Snakes Island, one great branch stretching upward, bare and moveless, from the side, like an arm raised to heaven in wonder or in menace towards the house; the lake, in part swept by the icy

splendour of the moon, trembling with a dazzling glimmer, and farther off lost in blackness; the Fells rising from a base of gloom, into ribs and peaks white with snow, and looking against the pale sky, thin and transparent as a haze. Right across to the storied woods of Cloostedd, and the old domains of the Feltrams, this view extended. (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 168)

The moonlit terrain reveals the cold and sublime images extending from the most ethereal locations of the story. Le Fanu presents them as readers learn about Sir Bale's newest mental anguish, his inexplicable presentiment of his own death. His prediction will come true and damage the vision of reality of the characters who are present at Bale's house. Paired with the branch that appears to be pointing like a warning towards the house, this moonlit scene indicates the otherworldly is closing in on the estate. The whole landscape feels now alien in the snow and moonlight. These aesthetic changes pair well with the story's structure. The tale has steadily depicted how the supernatural utterly changes, physically or mentally, its successive, chief point-of-view characters. Now that the landscape is at its most alien and threatening, mirroring the increasing power of the unreal, the final alteration can occur.

Notably, the story's ending is characterised by silence; indeed, the last chapter is called "Hush". As social-constructionist theory holds, reality is made through interactions among people. Silence is arguably the opposite of that operation. Maud attempts to use language to fill in the silence, to assure Janet that Sir Bale will not die. In the process

she reinforces their paradigms through which it is impossible for someone to supernaturally know with certainty the hour of their death. The narrator states:

[Maud]'s address was kind and cheery, and her air confident. For a moment a ray of hope returned, and her sister Janet acknowledged at least the possibility of her theory. But if confidence is contagious, so also is panic; and [Maud] experienced a sinking of the heart which she dared not confess to her sister, and vainly strove to combat. (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 171)

“[P]anic” enters the verbal procedure by which a communal perspective is reified, disturbing that process. Therefore, there are duelling forces in the interaction between Maud and her sister: the “hope” that Maud projects which insists their shared conception of the real is valid and the “panic” which erodes their certainty in light of Bale’s affliction. While Maud’s language reinforces the community’s perspective, “panic” about the supernatural creeps in and pushes back in their interaction, becoming contagious. In that growing panic, silence also grows:

The sisters gradually grew more and more silent, an unearthly suspense overhung them all, and [Janet] rose every now and then and listened at the open door for step or voice in vain. They all were overpowered by the intenser horror that seemed gathering around them. (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 175)

According to social-constructionist thought, a version of knowledge is sustained by social processes and interactions among people. Here, disruptive forces seep into the interactions that help to maintain Maud's vision of material comprehension, exposing its limitations to these women. Another reality thus infects and stalls their interactions that might otherwise, to reference Burr, preserve existing "concepts and categories" that they can reproduce through their shared "culture and [...] language" (8).

The ghostly alternative in "The Haunted Baronet", the encounter of which has caused extreme horror for Maud, Janet, Gertrude, and Mary, seems to be overpowering their ability to rhetorically fight it. Indeed, some of Maud's attempts to verbally reinforce her reality emphasise its fragility and fail ultimately to provide any defence against this gathering horror. I return now to a part of the story I quoted in the introduction. Here, it is relevant to the deterioration of the collective Golden Friars subjectivity. Maud says that Bale's presentiment of his own death is a "delusion" and that "every one does believe in his own delusion — there is nothing strange in that" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 173). She thus unconsciously reveals her own vision of material knowledge to be potentially based in "delusion" as "delusion" is, in her account, inherent to everyone's perception. And, in the end, Sir Bale does die. His supernatural imaginings are less dubious than the regimes of knowledge that Maud promotes. With Sir Bale's death, her own communal consciousness is revealed to be a deluded prejudice, which she can no longer defend. In her understanding of the world, one cannot supernaturally predict the exact hour of their death and that belief has just been fully undermined. When she is no

longer able to defend the shared perspective she originally occupied, readers lose her point of view as well.

Even just before Sir Bale's death, silence seems to win out. It descends on these women like the snow that falls and accumulates over Golden Friars as they await his fate, the final determination of whether their reality is justified. The narrator states, "[p]ale and silent those three beautiful sisters sat. The horrible quietude of a suspense that had grown all but insupportable oppressed the guests of [Janet], and something like the numbness of despair had reduced her to silence, the dreadful counterfeit of peace" (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 175). The language that might have collectively maintained their conception of the world can no longer be produced. These women, much like Feltram and Sir Bale, become unable to fully inhabit and lend verbal support to the subjectivity in which they started. As a result, the processes by which paradigms are collaboratively, linguistically preserved have been stopped, changed to silence. Le Fanu depicts no further speech between them after Bale's death.

The ability of these characters to occupy their reality has been damaged. The confidence in leaders to keep characters in their original subjectivities is cracked. The integrity of social structures and consistent schemes of knowledge, like medical knowledge, has been brought into question if not outright destroyed. Some sites of authority have even at times been controlled by otherworldly presences as was the case with Bale and the fortune teller. The terror that started from the lake moved outwards and steadily commandeered a reality's power bit by bit, gaining more might, until these women are shown the insufficiency of their perception. Its façade, for them at least,

crumbles, having given way to a different possibility that has continually pulled away its strength.

In “The Haunted Baronet”, as in texts like *Uncle Silas*, *In a Glass Darkly*, and *The Tenants of Malory*, there is a threatened endgame of the unravelling reality-creation process. Disruptions are shown to potentially lead towards destruction and the empowerment of an ascendant unreal. Le Fanu perhaps draws on his own context where different modes of political action, scientific knowledge, and influence distribution threatened to consume reigning ones. Schemes of action and knowledge, built and maintained throughout chapters one and two, find themselves at great risk of being weakened and consumed. Le Fanu’s commentary intensifies: readers are often made to question existing, collective subjectivities all the more in the knowledge that the maintenance of repressive, inadequate frameworks brings the possibility of their destruction. It is a fear that increases further through the way Le Fanu plays with reader’s immersion in these texts, inviting them to confront unsettling figures and their effects on inherited ways of seeing.

III. Disruptors and the Reader

In the introduction, I discussed how those reading Le Fanu’s works are called to occupy a fictional space. There, they read faux documentary reports in the form of Le Fanu’s texts. These documents are, by their subjective nature, constructed lenses that articulate an environment around readers that they inhabit through the act of radical naivety. Le Fanu’s texts thus also implicate readers in a reality-creation process from

which they often become estranged. In a narrative that did not experience disruptions, or even if readers were able to find a coherent explanation for the supernatural through the narrator's eyes, they would be able to unproblematically internalise the frameworks of these fictional communities as a valid means to understand the fictional world.

"Carmilla", for example, could have ended with Laura's assertion that, after Carmilla's execution, "that territory has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 316). Le Fanu would also have avoided undercutting the safety of this statement by disposing of the surviving, supernatural characters who rode with Carmilla in their mysterious carriage. If he had allowed Hesselius to close the tale, the doctor may have been able to provide a satisfying explanation that there is no further risk of vampire attacks. The reader occupying Le Fanu's locales could more easily adopt the viewpoint of Laura's father, who assured the household that they are in danger of "no drugging, no tampering with locks, no burglars, or poisoners, or witches" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 287). Similarly, had Hesselius' account of Jennings' sickness not disclosed "its own bias and loosen[ed] some of its control as an embedding structure" (Sawczuk 227), readers could accept Hesselius' comforting conclusions in "Green Tea". They could agree that, "[i]f the patient do not array himself on the side of the disease, his cure is certain" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 40). Readers and other occupants of Le Fanu's invented space could unproblematically trust authority figures and their own safety. If the reader exists in Le Fanu's invented space, imaginatively that is, they can envisage themselves engaging with others, communicating with them and further reifying elements of this internalised perspective. Without disruptions, the reality-creation process would go on smoothly. A consistent vision of knowledge and action

would be preserved for the reader who imaginatively occupies a role in maintaining it. Le Fanu's fiction destabilises this operation though.

As discussed in the previous chapter, readers' ability to define clear material explanations and comprehend singular allegorical meanings for many of Le Fanu's stories is often compromised in Le Fanu's setting. Thus, Le Fanu's fictional subversives strike out at the reader too, as can be seen with increasing intensity through examining these disruptors and their relationship to readers more closely in "The Haunted Baronet", *In a Glass Darkly*, and *Uncle Silas*. Previously, I discussed how, in contrast to Freedgood's depiction of realist novels, Le Fanu's fiction troubles any recognition of "the world as negotiable" (409). That non-negotiability is supplemented by the fact that disruptive elements are directly, if in simulated form, a threat to readers. For example, Hesselius' flimsy assertions of safety for those who demonstrate "a little patience, and a rational confidence in the physician" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 28) provide little confidence of the reader's safety in a space in which ghostly monkeys are a possibility. As a result of a setting that is not "negotiable", these stories place readers in realities that are not just hard to fully subscribe to, but which appear to be crumbling, offering little protection for either characters or readers. Le Fanu has revealed the inadequacies of the shared perspectives through which we engage with his world. He combines those revelations with a shortening of the imaginative distance between readers and the unreal of his late texts. In doing so, he gives readers an intense experience of the dangers of existing within declining realities and the need to look beyond them.

Victor Sage contends that Le Fanu's *The Purcell Papers*, which has a Catholic narrator, reflects an attempt at reconciliation. He restores relations between the

narrator, who is made unthreatening and legitimised as the teller of the story, and a Protestant editor as well as a presumed Protestant reader. There is a tension between the tale presented by the Catholic narrator and a readership that is often primed to disbelieve its most supernatural elements. Sage argues that the editor sometimes strikes out at readers' objections to admitting the uncanny. The editor assures them that their tastes and scepticism are not under threat and uses that assurance to record "Irish tradition, family tradition, oral tradition" as "a matter of 'fact'", written into the text. Thus, through the interaction between narrator and editor, the supernatural happenings of these tales are given a strange, confrontational power in the interplay between naturalistic explanations for phenomena and the superstitious possibilities that are not entirely foreclosed (Sage 12-8). Sage explains here how *Le Fanu* lessens the distance between reader and narrative in these earlier texts, fragmenting a Protestant reader's perspective by gaining proximity through a trustworthy editor and then striking out directly at the bounds of the reader's perception. When connected to a social-constructionist framework, the closing of distance between story and reader arguably uses the manner in which readers are implicated in a reality-building process to also implicate readers in the destruction of communal subjectivities. This is memorably accomplished in "The Haunted Baronet".

Early in "The Haunted Baronet", the narrator includes the reader in their discussion of the supernatural when Bale has a premonition upon seeing men approach his house:

We have all experienced what a presentiment is, and we all know with what an intuition the faculty of observation is sometimes heightened. It was such an apprehension as sometimes gives its peculiar horror to a dream — a sort of knowledge that what those people were about was in a dreadful way connected with his own Fate (Le Fanu, *Best Ghost Stories* 97).

Bale's premonition proves correct: the men bring with them the lifeless Feltram, precipitating Bale's disastrous encounters with the unreal. The above passage, initially an acknowledgement of trivial, common phenomena, actually ascribes to the reader those qualities of the supernaturally touched, like Bale. The implication here, in light of the prophetic nature of Bale's 'presentiment', is that the reader and everyone else in this fictional world experience similar events while residing in it. The rest of the tale backs up that implication by depicting a large amount of people being affected by supernatural events. And, as seen with Bale, these events are potentially quite dangerous. Le Fanu suggests to readers that a supernatural ordeal does not just belong to the characters, but to them too. We have seen disruptors interfere with characters' and readers' conceptual understanding of Le Fanu's setting. With passages like the above quotation from "The Haunted Baronet", readers feel disruptors around them, breathing down their necks, threatening to affect them too, as was the case for the women at the end of the tale. Previously, I drew on Stromberg to say that Le Fanu causes readers to not just assign unreliability to various narrators, but instead calls us to question entire ways of seeing in a world of inaccessible objectivity. Here, the reader who once might have unproblematically internalised naturalistic explanations of authority figures like Doctor

Torvey instead confronts, quite viscerally through their immersion in Le Fanu's setting, the limitations of inherited schemes of knowledge in which they are implicated. The embodied quality of the terrors of Le Fanu's fiction, identified by a contemporary reviewer in the introduction, is intensified; Le Fanu positions the unreal to directly confront forms of knowledge the reader has received and the ability of those non-universal frameworks to bodily protect the threatened reader.

"The Haunted Baronet" ends with a kind of social restoration, in which Phillip Feltram's brother, a minor character in the story, becomes the new Baronet, ostensibly inserting a virtuous leader into the upper echelons of authority in Golden Friars' existing power structure. However, the text has prompted serious questions about whether any reader should trust or engage in upholding this civic order anymore. According to George G. Hruby, many social constructionists argued that "the validity of our representations can only be determined by their pragmatic indexicality and the degree to which they allow us to make dependably accurate predictions about phenomena" (57). The alternative that appears to have allowed Bale to predict his own death seems to be the far more capable one as it allows for more "dependably accurate predictions". Having internalised this experience, the reader likely cannot fully support a restoration to a state that sacrificed the vulnerable for its own maintenance and offers occupants of this setting, including the reader, little protection. The reader, like Feltram, Bale, or Maud in "The Haunted Baronet", becomes here a site of failure for the communal understanding maintained in Golden Friars. They are invited into close imaginative proximity to the forces that demonstrate that the community's shared conceptions are incapable of rendering Le Fanu's invented space "negotiable". A Victorian reviewer,

previously cited, states that “Le Fanu’s characters live and breathe in a world of mystery, and are the victims of continued secret influences whether spiritual or material” (“Notable Irish Writers” 10). Le Fanu prompts a realisation that, if one wishes to remain safe, one cannot trust a vision of reality that is thwarted by “secret influences”. Readers are therefore positioned as possible “victims” of those “influences”, with little ability to protect themselves with the paradigms they are offered.

Del Villano contends that the figure of the ghost can become “a sublime instrument” that opens “the door to what is *beyond* reason, in order to breach the wall of reality represented by culture” (14). Those who attack more conventional realities in Le Fanu’s fiction work similarly in their ability to confront the limits of a particular regime of understanding and action through their presence in the story. The distance between reader and narrative has been shortened by Le Fanu’s texts by virtue of their function as documentary evidence of a setting the reader occupies. This proximity allows the unreal to viscerally strike out at regimes of knowledge and being the reader is offered as Del Villano says can be true of ghosts. Exposing the untenable nature of the shared subjectivities in which readers are implicated, the unreal has the power to force Le Fanu’s audience towards “the door to what is *beyond* reason”. It prompts them to consider alternatives in order to better exist in these surroundings. Works like “The Haunted Baronet” invite the reader to feel the danger of internalising received forms of knowledge. Within Le Fanu’s invented space then, “The Haunted Baronet” does not just work to trouble notions of authority, but positions readers into an agential experience in which they take on or refuse the very scheme of reality they have been pulled into and which appears to be crumbling, incapable of offering safety for the reader. Confronted

with a terrifying helplessness in Le Fanu's invented space, from the viewpoint offered by characters like Doctor Torvey, the reader is prompted to consider understandings "beyond" narrow formulations.

A similar, visceral encounter with the reader happens in "Green Tea". While Hesselius expects his portrayal of "Green Tea"'s events to justify his own authority to the reader, the presence of the monkey, who is able to flout clear regimes of categorisation, confronts the reader. It acts as an indicator of the shortcomings of the communal schema to which readers are meant to subscribe. By joining their perception to Hesselius', the reader cannot understand or defend themselves from similar hauntings, as shown by continual failures to understand or combat this creature as demonstrated previously. The reader's ability to imagine themselves unproblematically receiving and transmitting the community's vision of social action is thwarted because its control "as an embedding structure" is viscerally disrupted (Sawczuk 227). Here, the reader themselves becomes potentially disruptive rather than submissive to received forms of knowledge as they experience a reality failing.

In "Carmilla" too, despite the apparent destruction of the vampire, Laura's narrative does not allow readers to unproblematically occupy the reality authority figures seek to maintain. Through being written down by Laura, collected and commented on by Doctor Hesselius, and finally presented to the reader by *In a Glass Darkly's* mysterious editor, the attempts to subsume the supernatural that Laura encounters are made plain to those who read Hesselius' documents. The editor tries to uphold Hesselius' authority by asserting that Hesselius treats this tale "with his usual learning and acumen, and with remarkable directness and condensation" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass*

Darkly 243). He includes a note where Hesselius says the tale involves “not improbably, some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence, and its intermediates” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 243). The editor props up Hesselius, who in turn uses the case to reify his spiritualist, medical supremacy and to assert coherent interpretations of supernatural events throughout the collection. Similarly, the masculine leaders in Laura’s life like Laura’s father, General Spielsdorf, and the members of the Imperial Commission attempt to establish and maintain a hegemonic, official account in which their authority over the feminine and supernatural is upheld. Yet, even as that reality seems all the more united and dominant, readers still understand that the events happening in this fictional world that they inhabit have not been fully contained by these frameworks in the ways discussed previously. They can do so because Laura’s story has survived in Hesselius’ documents and made its way to a wider public through the unnamed editor of *In a Glass Darkly*.

Indeed, the final words of *In a Glass Darkly* are not Hesselius’ nor the editor’s, nor have they anything to do with the triumph of masculine authority. Instead, they are Laura’s declaration that she often starts from reveries thinking she “heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 319). Readers are pulled close here to Carmilla, who reaches across the span of years and distance via Laura’s account. In this way, Carmilla indicates that she cannot be restrained within the frameworks of the dominant men encountered in these stories as she has, metaphorically, the final word. Her ongoing power to unsettle is emphasised to the reader, who encounters her in what Fox calls “a felt experience” through the act of reading (“Gothic Realism” 24). A contemporary review of *The House by the Churchyard*

contends that Le Fanu “seems to have no rival among living English writers in his perception of what may be looked for on the other side of that screen which separates the material from the immaterial portion of creation” (qtd. in Crawford et al. 245). Le Fanu creates confrontational encounters with that which would normally be considered “of the immaterial portion of creation” in the form of Carmilla. Through her, Le Fanu prompts the reader to experience the feeling of particular communal conceptions failing, much as he made that reviewer feel they were crossing a “screen”. If beings like Carmilla exist and the immersed reader encounters them, the reader has few defences should their vision of knowledge resemble those of “Carmilla”’s authority figures. Carmilla prompts them to internalise the inadequacies of the subjectivity in which they are implicated and thus feel an embodied danger. As Richard Adelman says, *In a Glass Darkly* does indeed show the reader how close they are “to a hellish and ever-present spirituality” (160). Carmilla’s other companions, her supposed mother and a “hideous black woman” are still on the loose. Laura’s “days and nights” are made dreadful after Carmilla’s supposed death. Numerous vampiric victims may revive, increasing and multiplying “according to an ascertained and ghostly law” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 318). The world the reader occupies is not safe. Readers remain close to “a hellish and ever-present” alternate reality. Received forms of knowledge cannot hide or thwart the mounting danger Carmilla uncovers, much as they cannot contain her lingering presence at the end of Laura’s document.

Jack Fennell further illustrates the lingering traumatic elements of Laura’s narrative,

Even if her personal experiences alone did not qualify as 'trauma', then surely it can be inferred that there is something inherently traumatic about the revelation that vampires exist. In the world of the story, others have uncovered this horrid truth and incorporated it into their understanding of the world, and have carried on with their lives by becoming vampire hunters or experts on vampire lore (though the centrality of vampires to these characters' lives illustrates the traumatic import of this revelation); Laura seems to have done the same by the end of her narrative, though the past continues to haunt her. The passage of time has been disrupted for her by this episode with Carmilla (178)

Written from the viewpoint of the vulnerable rather than the powerful, "Carmilla" places readers in the consciousness of one who is ignored by her father and whose point of view undermines the certitude of a wider regime propped up by masculine leaders. That "[t]ime" has been unsettled for her by the existence of Carmilla further indicates how she has been dislodged from her reality by these traumatic events. Readers also experience a similar disruption in light of the danger of "successful predator[s]" in the world they occupy. Readers themselves thus become a destabilising element within the paradigm-solidifying process of which they were a part in their assimilation of the presence of Carmilla into their vision of Le Fanu's world.

Adelman discusses how there was a tendency in the nineteenth-century Gothic to shift from political critique to exploring psychology and consciousness in scientific and metaphysical ways (162). Arguably, the operation of reality creation and erosion

evidenced in “Carmilla” joins the disparate goals of earlier Gothic and of late nineteenth-century Gothic in Adelman’s account. Le Fanu’s texts use their psychological depth, engaging with the reader’s own psychology as well as the creation of collective consciousness, to produce a confrontational understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics they uncover. Comyn and Fermanis contend that,

For Spivak, imperialism is a worlding process that attempts to disguise its own workings, codings, or value-making so as to naturalise western dominance. For Krishnan, too, the point of world-ing is not so much to study the world-picture itself (i.e. what is seen) but rather to consider the ways in which seeing takes place and ‘how that world is coded in value terms and the forms through which the world is brought into view’, and therefore to expose its conditional, non-universal status. (11)

Carmilla breaks through attempts to code the world by masculine leaders, becoming one of Del Villano’s ghosts, who “breach the wall of reality represented by culture”. Like the process of “worlding” in the context of imperialism, she forces us to “consider the ways in which” our sight is formed by authority figures like Hesselius who frame the story and attempt to provide coherent interpretations that are ultimately inadequate. Codified perspectives like his and Laura’s father’s, as well as Doctor Torvey’s, are exposed as “conditional” and “non-universal”, while also being dangerous for the reader to possess. Thus, “Carmilla” and “The Haunted Baronet” facilitate readers’ imaginative

encounters with disruptions to the hegemonic “world-picture[s]” men present. Both upset readers’ position as receivers and propagators of crumbling realities in Le Fanu’s communities. The experience of imparting a “world-picture” on the reader and then forcing them to feel its failings viscerally operates as embodied critiques on insufficient, actual social and material conceptions that do not allow their occupants to adequately navigate their surroundings.

Indeed, even non-supernatural entities viscerally confront readers and force them to decide whether to subscribe to insufficient realities. Unsettling transgressions by characters such as Silas, Larkin, and Dingwell are preserved too in text form. So too are the ways in which their attacks are enabled by schemes of authority and social structures that fail to protect the vulnerable. Their textual maintenance allows these figures to again reach readers as tourists in Le Fanu’s locales. All the subversive presences discussed so far are discovered by reading the texts that are presented as actual documents. They meet and prompt readers more and more insistently to question their ability to take part in the ostensibly coherent frameworks that leaders uphold, which appear to be failing in light of disruptors’ attacks. At the end of *Uncle Silas*, Maud states, “I have penned it. I sit for a moment breathless [...] the tremendous nightmare of my youth melts into air” (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh* 435). However, the experiences Maud describes cannot quite “melt into air”, even if they seem to for her. Having “penned it”, her narrative, the horrors committed on her by forces real and unreal, the failures of her society and the possibility of it being eroded, cannot be erased. Even if we interpret this ending as entirely positive from the perspective of a conservative social group looking to resolve disturbances to its

collective subjectivity, her penning of this report preserves the horrors wrought upon girls in the patriarchal context of the novel. It prompts questions about whether the readers, as those populating Le Fanu's locales, can unproblematically accept a masculine "world-picture" like this that seems increasingly incapable of protecting its occupants or acting with justice. The readers' proximity to the identified dangers in his stories lends imaginative immediacy to Le Fanu's late texts, delivering an experience of accepted "world-picture[s]" breaking down. The significance of immersion in Le Fanu's texts to the reader's experience indicates the importance of, to borrow from China Miéville again, existing in the totality of a work rather than reducing it to pure allegory. By occupying the fictional place Le Fanu's stories present, existing in a space of inaccessible objectivity, a reader feels "critical intuition" hit them more viscerally regarding the dangers of oppressive, limited visions of the real. Perhaps, they might even feel the need to seek out alternatives.

IV. A Promising Alternative?

Readers' position within the process of building and maintaining communal paradigms is disrupted and they have witnessed characters' understandings of the self, authority, and knowledge more generally become blurred or destroyed. We are left to imagine what they should take away from such an intense experience of deterioration in Le Fanu's late texts. On one hand, the texts warn of the meaninglessness that might come when a collective perspective breaks. As previously discussed, readers are asked to contend with their inadequate ways of seeing in a space that lacks reliable objectivity.

Readers must choose whether to subscribe to often predatory realities that they know are inadequate to the challenges around them or instead risk falling into a space where all collaborative perception has been fractured. In the latter case, the reader resembles Laura in “Carmilla”, being unable to “know” herself when experiencing Carmilla’s fits of passion. On the other hand, perhaps the presence of other possibilities offers hope. According to Del Villano, the ghostly provides the possibility of deconstruction and the emergence of other stories, redefining knowledge and culture (4-9). This vision of deconstruction helps articulate the importance of the immersive encounter with other frameworks in Le Fanu’s fiction: Le Fanu’s communities, as discussed in chapter one, narrate a tale of what their communal rules are. The presence of alternatives not only illuminates the insufficiency of the shared subjectivities at the heart of these late texts by challenging their borders and highlighting absences. It also softly indicates the possibility of other tales that can be told. Le Fanu’s fiction, despite some ostensible conservatism, forces readers to confront the subversive question of whether new shared conceptions should be sought out. Smith and Hughes indicate that the Gothic often supports the status quo but shows a compromising of Enlightenment certainty (3). Through *In a Glass Darkly*, *The Tenants of Malory*, *Uncle Silas*, *Willing to Die*, and *Wylder’s Hand*, I contend that Le Fanu goes further in his depiction of the status quo and alternatives. If, as Sage argues, Le Fanu’s stories exhibit continual violation of narrative frames as a recurring device (202), then they also demonstrate that the reader should consider a similar contravention of the bounds of existing, communal regimes of perception.

As Haefele-Thomas has argued, Gothic texts can open up spaces for positive consideration of alterity. That assessment harmonises with Killeen's discussions of ambiguity between radicalism and conservatism as a central attribute of the Gothic (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 170). I draw again on Haefele-Thomas' discussion of queer others in Victorian Gothic texts who

transgress monstrosity in the sense that they help interrogate the very idea of what is monstrous, opening up spaces where we can read sympathy for others who are queer, who are multiracial, who live outside of the heteronormative economy, or who choose their own family constructs that offer alternatives to the heteronormative paradigm. These queers and others exist outside (and in their existence challenge) a hegemonic Victorian construction of the patriarchal British family as upholder of gender, sexual, national and racial purity. (5)

Haefele-Thomas goes on to talk about Le Fanu's "Carmilla" as an ambivalent approach to alterity exhibited in the story's depiction of the vampire. However, Le Fanu's fiction more broadly evokes Haefele-Thomas' discussion of "sympathy" for alternatives in its often-negative outlook on restrictive regimes of reality that attempt to oppressively root out alterity. The presence of "alternatives" connects back to a social-constructionist effort at deconstruction. As proposed by Burr, "[d]econstructionism is ... an axiomatic example of social constructionism" (18). That reality is non-universal and that multiple realities exist allow for a more complete ability to disassemble particular communal

conceptions. By calling into question a “world-picture”, Le Fanu prompts readers to imagine and consider creating new options to “exist outside” hegemonic structures.

McCormack speculates that Le Fanu himself may have contributed to *The Nation* in the 1840s, a nationalist publication, in a period in which conservatism had displayed it had little to offer Ireland. McCormack further posits that he may have countenanced the disestablishment of the Anglican church in Ireland (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 102-3, 218). Although Le Fanu was often a staunch conservative and, as editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*, the proprietor of an institution committed to upholding Anglo-Irish supremacy, disruptions to narratives of modernity, progress, and the sufficiency of British administration caused him to see other paths that may need to be taken. This is notable, even if he could only manage moderate, often temporary shifts in perspective for himself. Perhaps for him too, encounters with the sublime terror of the nineteenth-century Irish situation insisted on the possibility of and even a need for new modes of arranging social reality.

“Carmilla” brings the promising nature of other realities to the fore. Coughlan indicates that “Carmilla” is unique from Le Fanu’s other demon-lover stories in that he attempts to portray the relationship as attractive (151). Le Fanu’s invading “alternatives” are usually quite harmful. However, as Coughlan shows, they can also draw characters and readers in by offering a compelling alternative, albeit rarely in Coughlan’s account. They can especially do so in light of Le Fanu’s fictional regimes that oppress as well as fail to offer readers and characters the “capacity to negotiate the real constraints and affordances of our world” (Hruby 57). Further, Signorotti discusses how “Carmilla” allows its women to exist outside suffocating formulations of women’s roles and

existence in a way that a novel like *Dracula* does not (628). Even if liberation from the “happy valley” had no place in Le Fanu’s intentions for the tale, the appearance of Carmilla as an unsettling force in Laura’s life has been interpreted and reinterpreted as a way of imagining an alternative to current socio-political frameworks. As Haefele-Thomas notes,

The mere fact that Carmilla has been included in several lists and anthologies meant to entertain and empower points to a queer readership comfortable with reading between the lines and reading within the ambiguities to find something positive to take away. In many ways, it no longer matters what Le Fanu’s intentions might have been. Clearly, lesbians and other queers are still enchanted with his vampire tale. (107)

Even *The Blood Spattered Bride* (1972), a film adaptation of “Carmilla” that often has a leering lens trained on its female characters, detects the story’s social critique. The film depicts patriarchy as a cage and lesbian vampirism as a possible, if problematic, substitute. Michael H. Begnal has argued that women are tragic to Le Fanu because they can perceive, but cannot change, inequities (72). While there is truth to that statement in Le Fanu’s fiction, it is not necessarily true of “Carmilla”. Here, there is a possibility that girls might co-opt the power that their community has invested in them. They may take control of their ability to reproduce their shared norms in biological and ideological terms. Laura does not ultimately choose vampirism; she is not offered the

choice. However, vampirism in this story exemplifies some of the strength that girls in Le Fanu's fiction could adopt. Laura could choose to embrace vampirism and become an agent of commandeering influence from her reality. After all, Carmilla has committed to her vampiric lifestyle since her change, promising to continue increasing and multiplying because she draws "near to" Laura, and Laura, in her "turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 263). Laura can, in a state of rapture, reclaim agency and produce vampires rather than human children. Le Fanu leaves readers an open possibility that girls, by virtue of the power placed upon them, could be a deciding factor in the battle between understandings of the world. Through their reality-generating might, their defection to alternatives could be catastrophic to a shared, oppressive subjectivity, opening up the possibility of radical alternatives. In many of Le Fanu's stories, the problem is that these other conceptions are also quite predatory towards girls. However, through the liberated Dorcas, Rachel, Maud, or Ethel, readers might glimpse a better place beyond the bounds of existing material and social schema.

Further, the conclusion of the romance plot of *The Tenants of Malory* between Margaret and Cleve ends by commenting on the idea that a more conventional reality might be worth escaping, at least partially. Margaret dies in exile from her community and the narrator states,

The dream that made Malory beautiful in my eyes is over. The image of that young fair face—the beautiful lady of the chestnut hair and great hazel eyes

haunts its dark woods less palpably, and the glowing shadow fades, year by year, away. (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 265)

The context around these characters in the town of Cardyllian lost its beauty in the passing of Margaret. It is made unbeautiful because Margaret's unreal aura is gone: the narrator evokes her otherworldly quality, now in a melancholic manner, by discussing her haunting the "dark woods" of Malory. Her spectral presence fading is figured here as a negative. There is something deeply inadequate about the milieu that circumscribes the novel's romance plot and something preferable about Margaret as a revenant-like figure. However, she lingers through her effect on Cleve after her last words are spoken:

And these last words return, though the lips that spoke them come no more; and he *is* very kind to that handsome boy—frank, generous, and fiery like her, with the great hazel eyes and beautiful tints, and the fine and true affections. At times comes something in the smile, in the tone as he talks, in the laugh that thrills his heart with a strange yearning and agony. Vain remorse! vain the yearnings; for the last words are spoken and heard; not one word *more* while the heavens remain, and mortals people the earth! (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 266)

Here then, the positive nature of the ethereal and its beneficial effect points again to the possibility that other narratives of reality need to be told. In this case, the text prompts readers to question the shared subjectivity presented in “The Tenants of Malory”. Cleve needs to be haunted. The world is more beautiful if those “hazel eyes” continue to exert their unreal influence. That the “last words” of this unreal character have been already “spoken and heard” is a tragedy.

As discussed previously, characters like *Uncle Silas*' Maud, *Willing to Die*'s Ethel, or *Wylder's Hand*'s Rachel and Dorcas all find themselves, to varying extents, outside their communities' realities. In progressing beyond them, they place an attractiveness on existing outside of conventional conceptions of the world. Through each of these characters, the encounter with disruption acts as a primer for a reader to consider how they might tell other narratives in the wake of the accounts that have so viscerally failed characters and readers. A reader might turn their gaze beyond the bounds of the collections of rules in which, as readers of these texts, they are problematically implicated. When closing the text, the insights discussed in this chapter position us to pay close attention to the communal perspectives we are implicated in reifying in our own surroundings because we have done so in a palimpsest, simulated world that extended around us. Perhaps, having been prompted to look beyond the walls of disrupted realities in this fictional world, so indebted to Le Fanu's own threatened context, a reader is empowered to consider alternatives that need to be imagined and acted out.

Conclusion

In Le Fanu's *The Rose and Key*, the friendly spinster Max states,

it is enough to be content with one's station in life, and not to grow too fond of any. To be content is, simply, not to wish for change. My poor father used to say that those who wished for change were like those who wished for death. They longed for a state of which they had no experience, and for which they might not be so fit as they fancied, for every situation has its liabilities as well as its privileges. (Le Fanu, *Rose and Key* V1 4-5)

Despite Max's well-meaning words, the preceding chapters of this thesis have demonstrated a suspicion of such sentiments. Le Fanu's fiction betrays an ambivalence or even distaste for restrictive realities and their shunning of states "of which they had no experience". They maintain sets of rules that, to twist Max's words, "might not be so fit as they fancied" for the fictional space in which Le Fanu's characters find themselves. Le Fanu's fiction, informed by his own Irish and Victorian context, prompts questions therefore about the reader's ability to subscribe to prevailing subjectivities in his texts, especially when the unreal becomes able to subvert and leech power from a reality. Le Fanu's fiction does not demonstrate the deterioration of realities to its logical endpoint, depicting the full downfall of schemes of knowledge and action. Instead, he sows doubts about whether particular socially constructed understandings of the world can be

preserved or are worth preserving in light of the disruptions seen in his late tales. He enables readers to experience those doubts viscerally, prompting the reader to similarly examine social frameworks in which they are implicated and seek out alternate realities.

As the broad range of texts explored by this dissertation have intimated, many of Le Fanu's works make unique contributions to our understanding of the process by which shared subjectivities are formed and eroded in his fictional world. In the short stories Le Fanu wrote between 1860 and 1873 that returned to the Irish locales and concerns of his early fiction, the question of what realities characters and readers should trust can be posed again but with new implications. The ability to encounter Le Fanu's world from a wide array of perspectives, offering new ways of thinking about the process of reality building and deterioration, gives Le Fanu's world a kaleidoscopic quality. This quality emphasises a need to continue examining the act of reality creation through various outlooks offered by his fiction. Thus, Le Fanu's texts call for continual re-exploration of his world and its constructed realities from new perspectives. In doing so, for example, through texts explicitly engaged with Irish topics, we can discover new insights about the nature of experiencing, forming, altering, and rejecting communal visions of a terrifying world.

I. Realities in Ireland

To demonstrate the necessary act of re-exploration, this conclusion briefly considers how Le Fanu's late fiction deals with the process by which hegemonic visions of the world are maintained in explicitly Irish contexts, here represented by "The Child

that Went with the Fairies”, “The White Cat of Drumgunniol”, and “Wicked Captain Walshawe of Wauling”. Marketability arguably influenced Le Fanu’s return to his earlier interest in Irish material, as did the advice of Le Fanu’s friend Patrick Kennedy (Cooke 208; McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 239). That is not to say that the works examined thus far have no distinctly Irish inflection. Indeed, the narrator of *The Tenants of Malory* betrays an Irish affiliation: “when one of these sighing, magnanimous, wrinkled Philanders goes by, let us not hiss, but rather say kindly, ‘*Vive la bagatelle!*’ or, as we say in Ireland, ‘More power!’” (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* V3 193). “The Familiar” also deals more explicitly with Irish settings than most of Le Fanu’s texts in this period, such as *Uncle Silas*. However, even that novel, as Elizabeth Bowen famously claimed, seems to transport Irish concerns to an English setting (169-170). This makes sense as *Uncle Silas* was adapted from an earlier Le Fanu tale called “Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess” (1838). However, the engagement of the texts discussed thus far with Ireland tends to be, as Bowen indicates, coded or indirect. When examining the procedure by which reality is formed in direct relation to Irish subjects and concerns, Le Fanu reemphasises the need to look beyond rigid, received frameworks. In particular, a colonialist element is emphasised as the stories present Anglicised “world-picture[s]” (Comyn and Fermanis 11) and the imperial violence that follows them. Native Irish “world-picture[s]” are included too. Through them, Le Fanu offers both effective and ineffective paradigms for navigating his fictional world. Their variable efficacy prompts consideration of native Irish norms and a condemnation of attempts to dominate them in service of colonialist structures. His

explicitly Irish texts thus add to his late fiction's wider argument that readers need to look to different, even more capacious, realities.

There is a concern in these Ireland-set texts, similar to the fiction already discussed, with the oppression begotten by certain schemes of reality. As discussed previously, the narrator of *The Tenants of Malory* weaves colonial violence into a description of the Welsh landscape. "The Child that Went with the Fairies" also opens with a depiction of a landscape marked by violent history:

Eastward of the old city of Limerick, about ten Irish miles under the range of mountains known as the Slieveelim hills, famous as having afforded Sarsfield a shelter among their rocks and hollows, when he crossed them in his gallant descent upon the cannon and ammunition of King William, on its way to the beleaguering army, there runs a very old and narrow road. It connects the Limerick road to Tipperary with the old road from Limerick to Dublin, and runs by bog and pasture, hill and hollow, straw-thatched village, and roofless castle, not far from twenty miles. (Le Fanu, "The Child That Went with the Fairies" 74)

In *The Tenants of Malory*, the narrator discusses the violence embedded in the Welsh landscape as landmarks on a historical timeline that led towards "the liberties of England" (Le Fanu, *The Tenants of Malory* VI 5). In "The Child that Went with the Fairies", there is little attempt to assert the value of such violence. As the reader travels further through this setting, there is no consolation of future "liberties":

A scanty pasturage, on which browsed a few scattered sheep or kine, skirts this solitary road for some miles, and under shelter of a hillock, and of two or three great ash-trees, stood, not many years ago, the little thatched cabin of a widow named Mary Ryan.

Poor was this widow in a land of poverty. The thatch had acquired the grey tint and sunken outlines, that show how the alternations of rain and sun have told upon that perishable shelter. (Le Fanu, "The Child That Went with the Fairies" 75)

King William, despite the depiction of Sarsfield quoted earlier, did achieve victory and, in his wake stands this poor community. Le Fanu depicts yet another rural society, but one that exists in "a land of poverty", a land of "perishable shelters" and "sunken outlines". There is a similar sense of decay in "The White Cat of Drumgunniol" where an Irishman discusses the Coleman family: "there are no Colemans there now at all, and that family has passed away. The famine years made great changes" (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost* 94). Here, the famine scars the landscape. Like in "The Child that Went with the Fairies", the text highlights the harm visited on the vulnerable in a colonialist context. The questioning of the ability of a dominant set of rules to offer safekeeping to those in its bounds is similar to much of Le Fanu's late fiction. Here, the colonial regime is upheld by past violence and has not prevented recent mass tragedy.

Crucially, in "The Child That Went with the Fairies" and "Wicked Captain Walshawe of Wauling", there are often otherworldly presences that commandeer power from the communities they encounter. In "The Child that Went with the Fairies", the supernatural draws strength from a native Irish town because the former offers an attractive alternative to destitute life in the latter. Le Fanu describes one of these fairies in entrancing detail:

her voice sounded sweet as a silver bell in the children's ears, and her smile beguiled them like the light of an enchanted lamp, as she leaned from the window with a look of ineffable fondness on the golden-haired boy, with the large blue eyes; insomuch that little Billy, looking up, smiled in return with a wondering fondness [...] And he seemed to ascend in her small fingers as lightly as a feather, and she held him in her lap and covered him with kisses. (Le Fanu, "The Child That Went with the Fairies" 82).

Much as with vampires in the previous chapter, this creature, potentially a fairy, appears attractive; the soon-to-be abducted boy looks upon her with "fondness", defying gravity slightly to exist in her embrace. Through her attractiveness, she makes good on her threatening nature and successfully steals the child. Further, the gravity-defying nature of the boy's kidnapping indicates something idyllic in the ethereal aspect of the supposed fairies in contrast to the poverty of his social circle. He takes an attractive

alternative to the impoverished life he has been born into under British administration, much as Laura might have left her oppressive context for a vampiric one in “Carmilla”.

In the wake of his abduction, his family witnesses some lingering but receding traces of the child:

This happened often, with slight variations in the circumstances of the visit. Sometimes he would peep for a longer time, sometimes for a shorter time, sometimes his little hand would come in, and, with bended finger, beckon them to follow; but always he was smiling with the same arch look and wary silence—and always he was gone when they reached the door. Gradually these visits grew less and less frequent, and in about eight months they ceased altogether, and little Billy, irretrievably lost, took rank in their memories with the dead (Le Fanu, “The Child That Went with the Fairies” 84).

The boy is pulled more and more away from his community, like Jennings of “Green Tea” who is taken “in and in by the enormous machinery of hell” (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 31), until his strength is completely given to these otherworldly presences. The process of commandeering power remains, even when transplanted to Irish locations with Irish concerns. In the rural Irish setting of this story, a legacy of imperialism and impoverishment might make the ethereal seem attractive. The dynamic by which realities encounter one another takes on a special resonance when joined to the history

of injustice and colonialism that some of these stories highlight, which has helped to render so many native Irish communities enervated and destitute.

Societies in these late stories must then contend with unreal threats. Often their protections fail, much as they did in other Le Fanu tales like “Green Tea”. In other cases, though, there are effective efforts at a practical defence against the otherworldly similar to some of the folk vampire defences in “Carmilla”. In “Wicked Captain Walshawe of Wauling”, the titular English captain’s attempts to maintain his reality, by violently excising the unacceptable, fall into the former category and ultimately backfire. He marries an Irish nun and brings her to England, where he cruelly neglects her. When she dies, he encounters a group of women tending to his dead wife:

“What the d—— are you doing with my wife?” cried the Captain, rather thickly. “How dare you dress her up in this —— trumpery, you—you cheating old witch; and what’s that candle doing in her hand?” I think he was a little startled, for the spectacle was grisly enough. The dead lady was arrayed in this strange brown robe, and in her rigid fingers, as in a socket, with the large wooden beads and cross wound round it, burned a wax candle, shedding its white light over the sharp features of the corpse. Moll Doyle was not to be put down by the Captain, whom she hated, and accordingly, in her phrase, “he got as good as he gave.” And the Captain’s wrath waxed fiercer, and he chucked the wax taper from the dead hand, and was on the point of flinging it at the old serving-woman’s head. (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl’s Ghost* 167)

The captain characterises the apparently Catholic rituals and the women who perform them as other and crucially, through the insult “witch”, unreal. Importantly, the women were taking his dead wife out of her husband’s control and placing her back into her religious role: the narrator posits that she may have been a Carmelite previously which is likely the source of the, from the captain’s perspective, strange rituals. The women burn a candle which Wauling snuffed out, to which one of the women he called witches responds, “[a]n’ now her poor sowl’s in prison, you wretch, be the mains o’ ye; an’ may yer own be shut into the wick o’ that same candle, till it’s burned out, ye savage” (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl’s Ghost* 168). This prophesy or curse seems to come true. Wauling dies and then appears to have been trapped in the candle. His attempts to represent these women and their rituals of female sociability as unreal result in that other way of being taking command of him. His house is later pulled down after the events of the story in a manner deemed “certainly suspicious” by the narrator. The demolition is perhaps another attempt to pave over the disruptive elements of this tale, but an attempt that has apparently drawn attention to itself (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl’s Ghost* 180). An Irish Catholic framework has left a mark on the landscape precisely because of an English character’s attempt to foreclose challenges to his conception of the real and his masculine authority.

“The Child That Went with the Fairies”, by contrast, indicates a framework that might accommodate the ethereal, even if it remains threatening by the end of the tale. It seems to be common knowledge in the native Irish community of this story that the supernatural might break through the barriers of the everyday. The possibility is woven

into a native Irish vision of reality: “How many stories had she [the titular child’s sister] listened to by the winter hearth, of children stolen by the fairies, at nightfall, in lonely places! With this fear she knew her mother was haunted” (Le Fanu, “The Child That Went with the Fairies” 77). These native stories are valuable in creating a framework that accommodates supernatural beings and instructs on how to deal with their presence in this world or at least protect against threatening natural scenarios like those presented by “lonely places” at night. There are also defences that are set up by the vulnerable against a number of supernatural beings:

Round the cabin stood half a dozen mountain ashes, as the rowans, inimical to witches, are there called [...]

Here certainly were defences and bulwarks against the intrusion of that unearthly and evil power, of whose vicinity this solitary family were constantly reminded by the outline of Lisnavoura, that lonely hill-haunt of the ‘Good people,’ as the fairies are called euphemistically, whose strangely dome-like summit rose not half a mile away, looking like an outwork of the long line of mountain that sweeps by it.

(Le Fanu, “The Child That Went with the Fairies” 75)

Fairy legends, according to Angela Bourke, constitute “a shared intellectual resource” for an oral culture that is “responsive to aesthetic, intellectual, and practical requirements” (35). Such beliefs as fairy legend thus provide a reactive means of

engaging with the world. The belief in fairies and other supernatural beings in “The Child That Went with the Fairies” arguably serves a similar purpose.

In this tale, there are attempts to acknowledge the supernatural and act on that knowledge to protect the vulnerable, even when practical measures cannot afford complete protection. However, the reader might be led to wonder what purpose their belief might serve when folk remedies are inadequate. The child, taken by the fairies, for example, cannot be saved by religious or folk cures: “Fairy doctors’, as the dealers in the preternatural, who in such cases were called in, are termed, did all that in them lay—but in vain. Father Tom came down, and tried what holier rites could do, but equally without result” (Le Fanu, “The Child That Went with the Fairies” 85). Despite these failures, the story ends on a solemn acknowledgement of the death that has taken place:

So little Billy was dead to mother, brother, and sisters; but no grave received him. Others whom affection cherished, lay in holy ground, in the old church-yard of Abington, with headstone to mark the spot over which the survivor might kneel and say a kind prayer for the peace of the departed soul. But there was no landmark to show where little Billy was hidden from their loving eyes, unless it was in the old hill of Lisnavoura, that cast its long shadow at sunset before the cabin-door; or that, white and filmy in the moonlight, in later years, would occupy his brother's gaze as he returned from fair or market, and draw from him a sigh and a prayer for the little brother he had lost so long ago, and was never to see again. (Le Fanu, “The Child That Went with the Fairies” 85-6)

McCormack claims “The Child that Went with the Fairies” depicts its narrator at peace with death (*Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* 240) which is, it seems, what the brother is allowed to do here. He can mark his brother’s death despite his disappearance not allowing for conventional burial. Peter Bell argues that “[w]hat lends the ending heightened poignancy is that the beloved lost boy evidently rests not in peace: his family are impotent before a fate they cannot comprehend” (426). Bell’s point about the family not fully comprehending what has happened might make readers again wonder whether the conclusions this Irish town draws about fairies are completely true or useful. They too may be subsuming whatever actually happened under a pre-existing set of frameworks for understanding the world in order to deal with an existential despair. Although a reader might have these doubts, there is less foreclosing of interpretational possibilities in this ending than in other Le Fanu texts discussed in this dissertation like “Green Tea”, where authority figures state that present frameworks assure safety for the virtuous. In “The Child that Went with the Fairies”, the story ends on a gaze towards the fairy hill, acknowledging this inexplicable loss from the perspective of a social circle that has put some measures in place, both effective and ineffective, to live in its shadow. Their communal regime of knowledge is reactive to their setting and, even in minor ways, gives its occupants a way to emotionally and practically exist in the world in which a child can disappear. It does so despite the continual dangers surrounding native Irish communities that cannot be entirely defanged.

Gothic texts are often seen as thwarting rather than embracing an accommodating social outlook. I borrow here from Killeen, using a quotation that was introduced, in part, earlier in this dissertation:

Just as Count Dracula must be staked at the end of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, so too the version of Ireland as atavistic must be banished (and, the suggestion goes, its Catholic representatives as well), and Protestant modernity ushered in. This is a fascinating reading of the entire Irish Gothic tradition as one aspect of the wider project of Protestantising and modernising Ireland. Rather than an indulgence in a form of political escapism from the realities of power loss, as Roy Foster argued, Morash believes that the Gothic is an attempt to re-assert the kind of cultural realism deemed necessary for a nation to enter the modern world and be accorded the full privileges of nation status. ("Irish Gothic: A Theoretical Introduction" 36)

When viewed through the reality-creation lens adopted by this thesis, the project described by Killeen of banishing an atavistic, Catholic Ireland is at odds with what is present in Le Fanu's later tales that concern Ireland. There is a distrust of banishing native Irish beliefs to the realms of the unreal. There is also a possible boon to communities whose sense of knowledge and action might, even in small ways, allow them to productively contend with their surroundings.

Le Fanu's Ireland-set Gothic stories do take part in a longstanding tradition in Gothic writing, though he troubles that tradition somewhat. Luke Gibbons, Carol Margaret Davison, and Jarlath Killeen indicate the Gothic characterisation of Celtic peripheries in Gothic texts and rhetoric. Gibbons contends that "Ireland and the Scottish Highlands" were depicted as the final frontier of "savagery and superstition" which "lent themselves to some of the earliest forays into the Gothic" (19). Davison argues that the beginning of the nineteenth century brought the Gothic inside nationally and psychologically, during which the "Gothicization of a savage and superstitious Celtic periphery persisted to some degree" (189). Killeen agrees with these sentiments, stating that Gothic literature is obsessed with the horror of colonial peripheries, especially Celtic peripheries (*Gothic Literature 1825-1914* 91). Le Fanu's late Irish tales indicate a complication to prevailing forms of rendering Ireland as Gothic. The Celtic periphery in these stories is Gothicised. However, London is too in Le Fanu's other fiction, and the Celtic periphery offers new ways of dealing with the elements of his setting that so often assault realities in his Gothic narratives. Le Fanu prompts examination of these peripheries and suggests value there, not just by pointing to a noble, Romantic past. He instead points to the ways in which native Irish communities find the means to operate in their surroundings in contrast to more restrictive "world-picture[s]". Native Irish groups cannot completely protect against the dangers of Le Fanu's invented space. However, they often provide instruction on the value in schemes of action and knowledge that can more capaciously accommodate the world. He therefore indicates an alternative to readily sacrificing the vulnerable to maintain rigid, collective subjectivities in the context of colonialist domination.

II. A Kaleidoscopic World

Despite their benefits, it is difficult to say if conceptions of Le Fanu's world upheld in his fictional Irish communities are significantly helpful to those living within their bounds. However, in the late Irish tales discussed above, by experiencing visions of reality different to those encountered through the majority of his late fiction, the reader is made to further consider that there are alternate constructions worth countenancing. Further, the failures of native Irish norms indicate the reader needs to keep looking beyond the walls of the possibilities presented to them. Le Fanu, again and again, pulls readers into his setting to exist in a space where they might, as Del Villano says, pass through "the door to what is *beyond* reason, in order to breach the wall of reality represented by culture" (14). By coming to his landscapes from new perspectives and by investigating more Le Fanu texts through a social-constructionist lens, the reader can recognise common themes relating to the building and destruction of "world-picture[s]" winding through his works. They will also find new insights his stories and wider literary efforts impart when observed through that constructionist viewpoint.

Readers themselves, offering differing perspectives with which to understand Le Fanu's texts, must join their disparate outlooks to Le Fanu's narrators to perceive his fictional world. So many details of his setting are not made clear, and his narrators are continually made suspect. Readers are left to latch onto the details they find most important, credible, or actionable for analysis of his fiction. Thus, radically different interpretations are possible based on texts whose component parts can be imagined to

be untrue, falsified, and unimportant, or reliable and crucially important. The reader's assessment depends on the outlook they bring to the text and the trust they place in the veracity of these details once their perception encounters the narrators' and the shadowed locales they both occupy. Scholars will thus be able to continue producing valuable insights while considering how understandings of Le Fanu's fictional space are built and destroyed in his fiction. This is in no small measure because readers' immersive engagement with Le Fanu's oeuvre is predicated on uncertainty and mutability. I wonder to what extent other scholars will trust the realities of these fictional communities and how that trust will affect the critiques they identify in the reality-building of Le Fanu's fiction. I also wonder where readers might find cause for greater suspicion in their involvement with these stories than I have shown here. An increased suspicion while reading may further cloud conceptions of the shared subjectivities I have analysed in Le Fanu's late fiction, perhaps providing further insight into the purpose of the obscurity faced by Le Fanu's reader. In this interplay between suspicion and trust, other scholars will find space for examination and re-examination of Le Fanu's fictional realities as they imaginatively inhabit, react to, and interact with these subjectivities in diverse ways. I hope that this dissertation, with its focus on the experience of inhabiting Le Fanu's fictional world, will prompt readers of his fiction to continue exploring the results of such encounters with Le Fanu's fictional, collective perspectives. In the nuances of various encounters with Le Fanu's works, different corners of this shadowed fiction might be illuminated, even just partially. They must always be explored with the caveat that they may be re-perceived and re-examined by the next occupant, whose own

encounter will, by necessity, interpret these sets of rules, and the unreal that assaults them, anew through their own agential reading experience.

I would like to indicate a few directions in which future scholars might further explore the dynamic of reality creation and deterioration. In particular, a widening of chronological and thematic scope will be of use in future readings of Le Fanu's work. The focus of this dissertation on close reading Le Fanu's late fiction means that Le Fanu's crucial editorial work at the *Dublin University Magazine*, as well as his personal correspondence, have made only passing appearance in this dissertation. Elizabeth Tilley, for example, has done important work in terms of illuminating Le Fanu's efforts as an editor.³ Considering this significant element of Le Fanu's literary pursuits in light of the reality-creation dynamic discussed in this dissertation will provide new ground to consider how Le Fanu's editorial efforts converge with, contrast with, or otherwise affect that dynamic.

In "Theory, Empiricism, and 'Providential Hermeneutics': Reading and Misreading Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' and 'Schalken the Painter'", Richard Haslam points to what he sees as excessive theorisation of aspects of Le Fanu's texts. He comments on theoretically interesting aspects of these texts that, on closer inspection of their material history, seem more likely to result from "contingencies of textual transmission and editorial interpolation" (340): "[other critics'] interpretations of the cruxes in *Carmilla* and 'Schalken' alert us to the hermeneutic errors that may ensue

³ See Elizabeth Tilley. "J. S. Le Fanu, Gothic, and the Irish Periodical." *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760-1890*, edited by Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 130–46. See also Elizabeth Tilley. *The Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. EBSCOhost, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2405062&site=ehost-live>.

when readers allow the providentializing pleasure of theory to overcome empirical scruples” (“Theory, Empiricism, and ‘Providential Hermeneutics’” 360). Haslam’s criticism here is valid as it, like Aoife Dempsey’s *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu* does, points to the various alterations Le Fanu’s works underwent, both by him and those who published his works. Caution when reading Le Fanu’s works is warranted, but Haslam does not entirely undermine the insights that can be gained by allowing such “providentializing pleasure” to take precedent over “empirical scruples” under the right circumstances. If a detail in a work is indeed a mistake, it is still a part of the reader’s experience of the text, though we should remain cognisant of interventions like post-mortem editorial interference that can distort a text. Regarding Le Fanu’s work in particular though, Haslam’s focus on textual history brings to the fore the actual history of revision and rewriting that is endemic to Le Fanu’s published works. For example, Le Fanu often revised stories or republished them. *Uncle Silas* is a revised, Anglicised version of his earlier “Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess”. “Carmilla” was published as a standalone piece before being placed with an added fictional frame in *In a Glass Darkly*. Further, many of these works were serialised in the composite form of papers like the *Dublin University Magazine*, full of disparate authors and articles (Dempsey 21). The approach of this dissertation has favoured the experience of reading the text over its material history, though it is worth acknowledging that readers’ perception of Le Fanu’s invented space is inevitably formed in part by the version of the story they read. Such consistent revisions might be interpreted as the lens the story supplies into Le Fanu’s setting being steadily assembled and reassembled. Thus, when analysing these works, readers might be reminded that fictional viewpoints into this

fictional world are constructed, in part, by their textual histories.⁴ The interaction between the fictional lenses through which we view Le Fanu's world and their actual textual history could provide a valuable avenue through which to further analyse reality creation in Le Fanu's texts.

Much as material history could offer unique perspectives on the formation of reality in Le Fanu's texts, Le Fanu's earlier fiction in general deserves to be examined in light of the building and deterioration of realities demonstrated in this thesis. As discussed in the introduction, Le Fanu's oeuvre is vast enough that this reality-building operation is best examined in a smaller chronological chunk for the purposes of this dissertation. Yet, there are insights to be gained from the earlier fiction's contributions to the operation of building and decaying collective paradigms. So too might there be value in considering the earlier versions of Le Fanu's later stories such as "Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess". Each of the tales mentioned in this dissertation contribute to an understanding of reality-building in Le Fanu's oeuvre, so a more robust examination of the unique contributions the earlier stories make would be worthwhile. Further, as demonstrated in this conclusion, Le Fanu's return to explicitly Irish topics provides new perspectives on reality formation. Analysing the earlier tales that were more frequently set in Ireland, prior to Le Fanu being instructed by his publisher Richard Bentley to avoid Ireland-set stories (Tilley, "Le Fanu and the Irish Periodical" 130-1) could be useful. These tales concerning Ireland could contribute further illuminating insights on the act of creating communal understandings of the world.

⁴ For a recent consideration of Le Fanu's work with intensive focus on its publishing contexts, see Aoife Mary Dempsey's *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*. University of Wales Press, 2022.

The focus on realities in this dissertation also offers a way to explore other works of Irish Gothic fiction. *Dracula* is a good example because the novel has long been a reference point for Irish Gothic studies. Examining that novel as a text depicting the maintenance of communal subjectivities in conflict might help readers to better examine the critiques embedded in the text. Importantly, *Dracula* does not supply the sustained focus on the production and decay of “world-picture[s]” seen in Le Fanu’s late fiction. Le Fanu provides a quite holistic depiction of how coherent, collective schema can be invented and undermined in a setting that lacks discernible objectivity through a wide variety of short stories and novels. The texts examined in this dissertation together demonstrate a broad, nuanced arc to the process by which “world-picture[s]” are made and unmade. However, pieces of Le Fanu’s arc find resonances in texts like *Dracula*, born as they were in times of competing conceptions of the world. *Dracula*’s critical characterisation as a text depicting the battle between a superstitious past and a modern present, for example, will be reimagined and deepened somewhat by exploring the story as a tale of competing constructed regimes of action and knowledge. Readers should consider the diverse ways this text and other works considered part of the Irish Gothic corpus call readers to question that procedure by which collective perception is built and maintained. Doing so allows insight into how a text like *Dracula* comments not only on the Anglo-Irish or Victorians specifically, but also community formation more broadly in times of potential radical change. Critics should also think more closely about how Stoker immerses them in his setting and how that affects their reception of the realities being fought for in the text. The unique ways in which other Gothic texts also viscerally invite readers into the crumbling or preservation of social structures deserves

greater examination too. As in this dissertation, such an approach allows for a greater appreciation of the critiques embedded in the affective strengths of Gothic writing.

Applying elements of this thesis' approach to the expanding array of texts considered in Irish Gothic studies may also prove fruitful. Christina Morin and Richard Haslam, for example, both point to Catholic writers who adopt the Gothic mode, traditionally seen as Protestant (Morin, "The Gothic in Nineteenth-Century Ireland" 370; Haslam, "Maturin's Catholic Heirs" 125-6). These marginalised texts are moving into a more central location in Gothic studies through reassessments of what constitutes Gothic writing. Simultaneously applying a constructionist lens, thus questioning existing conceptions of knowledge and action within the texts, will offer new ways of understanding these works as our own conceptions of the canon expand.

Crucially, the findings of this thesis afford new ways of viewing the relationship between Irish Gothic literature and the situation in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just as importantly though, they turn attention back to us, the readers. The central operation of reality formation supplies a wider theorisation about and critique of repressive, insufficient social structures. Further, it enables readers to encounter those critiques on an immersed, embodied level. Emerging from Le Fanu's tales, having occupied his world, readers are invited to apply their experience to the oppressive, inadequate frameworks around them. They may feel disruptions to those frameworks, with their terrifying and liberatory potential, all the more powerfully. Le Fanu's fiction therefore provides a setting in which what China Miéville calls "critical intuition" can "hit" us in profound ways (Miéville and Shapiro 66). By continuing to inhabit and thus critically reinterpret Le Fanu's shadowed world, we will continue to

enrich our understanding of his oeuvre and the ways it speaks to the experience of our own critically flawed realities.

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