

**Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan** (1814-1873), novelist; born in Dublin, a son of a Church of Ireland clergyman of Huguenot extraction, and related to R. B. \*Sheridan through his paternal grandmother (the dramatist's sister), he spent his childhood in Dublin and in Abingdon, Co. Limerick, where he was educated at home before entering TCD to study classics. He afterwards studied law and was called to the bar in 1839, a year after he had published his first short story, 'The Ghost and the Bone-setter'. A growing involvement in writing and publishing led to his becoming editor and/or proprietor of a number of Dublin publications including, at various times *The Warder*, *The Protestant Guardian*, *The Statesman*, the *Dublin Evening Packet*, and the *Evening Mail*. He was also closely associated with the *\*Dublin University Magazine*, which he purchased in 1861 and edited. In 1844 he married Susan Bennett and, following her death in 1858, he became a virtual recluse living in his house at Merrion Square.

Neither of Le Fanu's first two full-length narratives, *The \*Cock and Anchor* (1845) and *The \*Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O'Brien* (1847), enjoyed commercial success, and it was not until 1863 that he returned to novel-writing with *The \*House by the Churchyard*. After that eleven other novels quickly followed, most of them appearing first as serials in the *Dublin University Magazine*. These were *\*Wylder's Hand* (1864), *\*Uncle Silas* (1864), *Guy Deverell* (1865), *All in the Dark* (1866), *The Tenants of Malory* (1867), *A Lost Name* (1868), *Haunted Lives* (1868), *The Wyvern Mystery* (1869), *Checkmate* (1870), *The Rose and the Key* (1871), and *Willing to Die* (1873). *Morley Court* (1873) was a reissue of *The Cock and Anchor*, and a relatively extreme instance of the constant process of recycling material which characterizes his bibliography. Besides novels, he also published the story collections *\*Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* (1851), *Chronicles of Golden Friars* (1871), and *\*In a Glass Darkly* (1872). *The Purcell Papers* (1880) posthumously gathered thirteen of the earliest stories from the *Dublin University Magazine*.

Le Fanu excelled in documenting stress-induced states of consciousness looking out on a frightening world where the evidence of the senses and of the powers of reasoning are jeopardized. His shorter narratives tend to concentrate on eerie atmospheres, whereas the novels rely upon characterization while centering attention on the psychological experience of the victims of cruelty and of their oppressors. A different kind of work was 'Shamus O'Brien' (1850), a rhyming \*ballad about a \*United Irishman which was later recited to great acclaim by Samuel \*Lover in his 'Irish Evenings' in England and America. Alfred Perceval \*Graves issued Le Fanu's *Poems* in 1896. A revival of interest in his fiction began with the publication of several stories in a collection by M. R. James (1923). Devendra Varma edited the *Collected Works* (52 vols., 1976). *Seventy Years of Irish Life* (1893) by his brother, William Richard Le Fanu, gives an

account of his background and his writings. See Nelson Browne, *Sheridan Le Fanu* (1951); and W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* (1980).

## Selected Works

*Cock and Anchor, The* (1845), Joseph Sheridan \*Le Fanu's first novel, subtitled *A Chronicle of Old Dublin City* and reissued as *Morley Court* (1873). Set in Dublin at the start of the eighteenth century, it is the story of Mary Ashwoode whose love for Edmond O'Connor is opposed by her unscrupulous family. An attempt is made to manoeuvre her into a marriage with the villainous Nicholas Barden, but she escapes to the sanctuary of an uncle's home in Limerick. The same theme is treated with greater psychological intensity in *\*Uncle Silas*, though without the period costume and detail, and narrated in the first person.

*Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O'Brien, The* (1847), a novel by Joseph Sheridan \*Le Fanu, first serialized anonymously in the *\*Dublin University Magazine*. It is set in the period of the \*Willimate Wars and tells the story of Grace, daughter of the planter Hugh Willoughby, who is in love with Turlogh O'Brien, a Catholic. Torlogh's estates are held by Willoughby but he regains them despite the machinations of Miles Garrett when he eventually marries Grace. Historical characters are \*James II, St. Ruth, and Patrick \*Sarsfield (on whom Le Fanu took advice from Charles Gavan \*Duffy). The climax of the novel is provided by the battle of \*Aughrim, Le Fanu pleading that the battle of the \*Boyne had already been described 'with a masterly hand' by John \*Banim in *The \*Boyne Water* (1826).

*Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* (1851), a collection of four stories by Joseph Sheridan \*Le Fanu containing 'The Watcher', set in eighteenth-century Dublin; 'Schalken the Painter', supposedly based on an incident in the life of the Dutch seventeenth-century artist who specialised in candle-lit scenes; 'The Murdered Cousin', an outline of *Uncle Silas* and set in Ireland, and 'The Evil Guest'. All but the first appeared in earlier versions in the *Dublin University Magazine*, the last two under different titles: 'An Episode in the History of an Irish Countess,' and 'Some Account of the Latter Days of the Hon. Richard Marston of Dunoran'. 'The Watcher' was reprinted as 'The Familiar' in *\*In A Glass Darkly*. The original edition is now rare.

***House by the Churchyard, The*** (1863) a novel by Joseph Sheridan \*Le Fanu, first serialized in *The \*Dublin University Magazine*, it is narrated by Charles Cresseron (a Le Fanu family name) and set in the eighteenth century at Chapelizod outside Dublin. The central incident is the attack on an army doctor, Sturk, whose skull is smashed by a mysterious assailant, having recognized the Englishman Paul Dangerfield as Charles Archer, perpetrator of a killing for which Lord Dunoran had been found guilty. Sturk lives on in a coma until a trepanning operation brings him back to consciousness for just long enough to indict Dangerfield. Several subsidiary plots drawn from the life of the village and the artillery garrison stationed there are interwoven with the main events, as well as an interpolated ghost story. Constructed from recollections and letters, the novel has a leisurely, discursive pace unlike other works by Le Fanu. Its themes of guilt and accusation provided motifs for James \*Joyce's *\*Finnegans Wake*, also set in Chapelizod.

***Uncle Silas*** (1864), a sensational novel by Joseph Sheridan \*Le Fanu, first serialized in the *\*Dublin University Magazine*. The narrator, Maud, is the child of Austin Ruthyn, who lives as a mystic and recluse on his estate. His estranged brother Silas has been socially ostracized since the suspicious death of a gaming companion years before. When her father dies, the will requires that Maud live under Silas's guardianship until coming of age. Should she die in the mean time her inheritance will pass to Silas, an arrangement intended to show her father's faith in Silas, which proves to be misplaced. The second half of the book concerns Silas's attempts to bring about a marriage between Maud and his boorish son Dudley and, when that fails, to arrange her undetected murder. The tightly constructed narrative, which highlights Silas's unpredictable temperament, includes dramatic scenes such as the accidental killing of Maud's governess in place of her. Though set in England, the novel is a gothic parable of mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Irish tensions in relation to the issues of land and property in Ireland.

***Wylder's Hand*** (1864), a novel by Joseph Sheridan \*Le Fanu. Mark Wylder, engaged to Dorcas Brandon, disappears mysteriously. A series of letters arrive from the continent renouncing his claim on her, whereupon she marries Stanley Lake. When Lake is fatally injured in a fall from his horse and the decomposed body of Wylder is discovered, it emerges that Lake has killed his rival and arranged for the letters to be forged. Rachel, Lake's sister, who is aware of her brother's crime, maintains an ambivalent relationship with Dorcas. Although there are some stock characters such as a mad uncle and a scheming lawyer, the novel succeeds in depicting a narrow and remote society, thrown into sharp relief by the outsider De Cresseron, who acts as narrator.

*In a Glass Darkly* (1872), a collection of five stories by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. 'Green Tea' tells of a clergyman driven to suicide by a persistent apparition. Both 'The Familiar', already included in *\*Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* as 'The Watcher', and 'Mr. Justice Harbottle' tell of hauntings. 'The Room in the Dragon Volant' is a novella-length mystery story based on the use of a drug that causes a death-like trance in which the subject remains sentient and conscious, while 'Carmilla' is a vampire story that presents in a more extreme and sinister fashion the female sexuality found in *\*Wylder's Hand*. The stories are loosely linked as case histories narrated by Martin Hesselius, a German physician specializing in psychic disorders, and this is an early usage of a type of figure to become frequent in supernatural stories. 'Carmilla' influenced Bram Stoker's vampire tale *\*Dracula* (1897).