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## J. S. Le Fanu, Gothic, and the Irish Periodical

*Elizabeth Tilley*

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu bought the *Dublin University Magazine* (*DUM*) in 1861, and controlled its content until he sold his interest in 1869. He had been associated with the journal since the 1830s, and was a seasoned writer of both short fiction and serial novels. However, Le Fanu's editorship of the *DUM* was always unobtrusive. The sort of fanfare that had heralded the appointment of Charles Lever as editor of the journal 20 years earlier did not accompany Le Fanu's arrival on the Dublin literary scene. No 'Address to the Reader', no statement of editorial aim or agenda was discernable, and the Irish 'colour' of the *DUM*, as has been noted elsewhere, was not particularly strong.<sup>1</sup> To find Le Fanu's voice and to understand the journal's response to popular literature, it is necessary to examine the periodicity of the magazine: to read, as its first audience did, laterally.

If the periodical is considered as a whole, at least in terms of its yearly volumes, we ought to be able to expect a version of the same artistic coherence we see in a collection of short stories or poems. Thematic development, repetition of stylistic features, editorial rigor, should all be in evidence. My purpose here is to examine the offerings of the *DUM* from one particular year in order to investigate the issues noted above. The year chosen is 1864, in the middle of Le Fanu's tenure as editor. The year was also the midpoint of the wild popularity of the sensation novel. The *DUM* published that year Le Fanu's best novel, *Uncle Silas*, in monthly parts from July to December, along with a number of literary comments on sensation fiction, as well as short stories and poems reflecting this type of fiction in various ways. The 1864 volume also contained the final chapters of Le Fanu's novel *Wylder's Hand*, the book that came after his agreement with his English publisher (Bentley) not to set his fiction in Ireland and to relate contemporary rather than historical

events. The work of two other novelists, Anne Robertson and Mortimer Collins, was also featured. It appears that articles in the volume, with very few exceptions, were written by six individuals, and each seemed to have a specialty: J. W. Cole wrote six articles on Irish actors; Percy Fitzgerald tackled the general interest story; T. C. Irwin wrote on poetry; Patrick Kennedy handled book reviews and Irish folklore; J. A. Scott, Le Fanu's editor, wrote on politics, and Le Fanu himself published on fiction in addition to contributing two novels and two short stories during the year.<sup>2</sup> With so few regular contributors, and with the emphasis on literature over polemic, the 1864 volume was characterized not just by an abundance of fiction, but also by a curious internal discussion on the form and function of popular fiction in general. Again, sensation fiction was the most frequent type produced during the year, both in titles published and in critical articles on the genre in the periodical press. There is a fabric of familiarity woven around these articles, a familiarity produced through repetition of authors as well as repetition of subject matter of and about periodicals. I would like to suggest that the *DUM*, for this particular year anyway, forms an organic whole. There is enough information on the subject of Gothic and sensation fiction to claim that it is discussed in its various different guises, and that run-of-the-mill Gothic is bested through example in the journal. It is only through Le Fanu's influence as editor of the *DUM* that the extended treatment of the genre was possible, and the vast majority of the commentary stresses the difference between the sort of work produced by the year's popular sensation novelists and what the reader could expect from the venerable *DUM*. It was certainly in Le Fanu's own interest to defend his work against the charge of 'sensation'. He believed, and his contributors seconded his belief, that sensation as a driving force of fiction was coming to an end, and that only those authors whose works could claim a more than brief public interest could take their place beside great writers like Scott. The 'cheapening' of fiction that seemed to accompany the appearance of sensation on the market would also have had an effect on the reputation on the *DUM* if its own fictional offerings were seen as part of this trend. It is a pity, then, that Le Fanu was ultimately unable to dissociate himself from what had quickly become a 'women's' genre, and he shared the fate of later obscurity with the vast majority of them.<sup>3</sup> What follows is an examination of the stories, poetry, novels, and essays from the 1864 volume that speak about Gothic/sensation fiction or refer to it in an oblique way, with a view towards understanding the response of the *DUM* to what was both a threat and an opportunity.

In an essay on the relationship between Trollope, the *Cornhill*, and ideological formation, Andrew Maunder draws on the work of a number of periodical theorists to suggest that Trollope's novels 'as they appeared in the pages of the *Cornhill* can be read as reflections of the assumptions and aspirations of a very particular contemporary "community" of readers for which they were produced and by which they were consumed', and that the various elements of each issue of the periodical work together to reflect and produce this community.<sup>4</sup> W. J. Mc Cormack's study of the *DUM* under Sheridan Le Fanu offers another angle on periodicity, or seriality as Mc Cormack calls it, noting that anonymity and a small pool of contributors created a

complex 'serialism' of magazine reading as such. For the reader did not simply doggedly follow one episode of a fiction with the next: s/he read in an interspersing manner fiction and non-fiction, the work of authors who may have been (in certain cases) one and the same person.<sup>5</sup>

Anonymity or the presence of pseudonymous authors inevitably refers the reader to the internal structure of the periodical itself in order to validate the existence of the repeated voice.<sup>6</sup> I would argue that this process of validation could extend to the assertion of ideologies contained within the various articles of a particular title. The sheer number of references to Gothic/sensation fiction in the 1864 volume of the *DUM* is illustrated below:

January:

- 'Demoniac Ideals in Poetry' (a study of demons in poetry by Milton, Dante, Goethe and others, written by T. C. Irwin)
- *Wylder's Hand*: by the author of *The House by the Churchyard*
- 'Sensation! A Satire' (author unknown)

February:

- Conclusion of *Wylder's Hand*

March:

- 'My Aunt Margaret's Adventure' (anonymous, but by Le Fanu)

April:

- 'Wicked Captain Walshawe, of Wauling' (anonymous, but by Le Fanu)
- 'Earlier Type of the Sensation Novel' (by Patrick Kennedy)

July:

- *Maud Ruthyn*: by J. S. Le Fanu, Author of 'Wylder's Hand', 'The House by the Church-Yard', &c., begins. (The title of the novel is altered several times over the next few months.)

August:

- *Maud Ruthyn and Uncle Silas: a Story of Bartram Haugh*
- 'An Irish Actress – Margaret Woffington' (by J. W. Cole): 'We are not going to draw an ideal heroine, gifted with startling eccentricities, in the vain hope of emulating the effect of a "Woman in White", an "Aurora Floyd", or any other fashionable focus of excitement. We have no wish by ingenious sophistry to make vice appear virtue'.<sup>7</sup>

September:

- *Maud Ruthyn and Uncle Silas: a Story of Bartram-Haugh* (name of house hyphenated)

October:

- *Uncle Silas and Maud Ruthyn: a Story of Bartram-Haugh*
- 'Charles Lever's Essays' (no author attributed by Wellesley, but likely Patrick Kennedy). This is a review of Blackwood's 1864 edition of Lever's *Cornelius O'Dowd*. The article begins: 'The Essayists have obtained a hearing again, and it is a hopeful sign. It appears to show that Sensationalism is a vein worked out. The excitements of the *fast* novel have lost their power by repetition' (p. 459). The article looks back both to Kennedy's own 'Earlier Type of Sensation Novel' in April and also the footnote appended to the final chapter of Anne Robertson's *Yaxley and Its Neighbourhood* (serialized in issues from January to October) that claimed the originality of bigamy as a plot device in the novel.

November:

- *Uncle Silas and Maud Ruthyn: a Story of Bartram-Haugh*

December:

- *Who is the Heir?* (anonymous novel by Mortimer Collins begins and takes over the opening slot)
- *Uncle Silas and Maud Ruthyn: a Story of Bartram-Haugh* (novel concludes)

*Wylder's Hand*, the last few instalments of which were contained within the early issues of the 1864 volume, was the first of Le Fanu's novels that appeared after his agreement with Bentley not to use Ireland as the setting for his work, and to set his plots in modern times. That plot, as Victor Sage has noted, is a fairly complicated murder mystery involving inheritance, Dickensian villains, and isolated women. What it lacks, and again Sage has noted this, is an omniscient narrator.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the reader is frequently in the same emotional space as the characters who fear what they do not comprehend. These narrative gaps, or lacunae, are also discernible in *Uncle Silas*. The ultimate satisfaction of domesticating the threats to self is left unfulfilled at the end of the novel, and its main characters simply glide away from the narrator, as his final paragraph indicates:

Some summers ago, I was, for a few days, in the wondrous city of Venice. Everyone knows something of the enchantment of the Italian moon, the expanse of dark and flashing blue, and the phantasmal city rising like a beautiful spirit from the waters. Gliding near the Lido – where so many rings of Doges lie lost beneath the waves – I heard the pleasant sound of female voices upon the water – and then, with a sudden glory, rose a sad, wild hymn, like the musical wail of the forsaken sea: –

The spouseless Adriatic mourns her lord.

The song ceased. The gondola which bore the musicians floated by – a slender hand over the gunwale trailed its finger in the water. 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. (p. 196)

The structure of the average sensation novel is violated here; neither Rachel nor Dorcas is a criminal, and neither deserves such isolation

at the end, but there is no resolution to their sadness, and the narrator – who might have spoken to them and thus concluded the novel more neatly – stays silent. Both women are tainted by their association with criminals and as such have stepped outside the boundary of the commonplace. The linear quality of realist fiction is also violated, and the reader is simply dismissed as a result of a conscious choice on the part of the narrator *not* to ask more questions, to solve such puzzles as still remain. In other words, authorial intention is removed from the narrative space; as such, the story is highly suitable for the periodical. *Wylder's Hand* may have ended, but it is contained within an environment that includes a number of other opportunities for reader satisfaction. Its genre, and the manner in which the story reaches its audience, supplies the place of narrator.

The February issue of the *DUM*, besides concluding *Wylder's Hand*, continued the second part of Anne Robertson's sensation novel, *Yaxley and Its Neighbourhood*, which ran until October. At the conclusion of its final instalment, Robertson (or Scott, or Le Fanu) felt it necessary to append a footnote: 'Lest it might be considered that there was a want of originality in introducing into the story of "Yaxley" the subject of bigamy, lately so much the fashion among novel writers, the author wishes to observe that the tale was finished, just as it stands at present, in February, 1861' (p. 386). The note does not apologize for the use of what had become by 1864 a fairly common plot device, or for the fact that bigamy itself might not be the most morally uplifting of subjects. Its purpose seems simply to claim precedence, and its appearance here further muddies the waters in terms of the attitude displayed in the *DUM* towards sensation in general. Is the reader to glory in the *DUM* having hit upon this sort of plot first? The answer is to be found, again, in reading laterally.

Andrew Maunder, in his recent edited collection of women's sensation fiction, reprinted an eight-stanza poem entitled 'Sensation! A Satire' from the January 1864 issue of the *DUM*. Maunder notes: 'Are we meant to take it as a mocking attack on the public's love of sensationalism? Or is it a parody of the kinds of objections raised by conservative critics?'<sup>9</sup> It seems to me that the position of the *DUM* is more complicated than this, and its various responses to the fiction of the day (beyond this poem) reflect the angles from which the question – what is *good* fiction – is examined.

In a long series of rhyming couplets, the unknown poet of 'Sensation! A Satire' produced a pastiche of an eighteenth-century diatribe against fashion in prose. The naming of seemingly discarded novelists of

the previous generation – Burney, Edgeworth, even Gaskell – provided the reader with examples of morally upright, serious artists. Taking their place were the fashionable writers, and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) was presented as nothing more than a rather disorganized pot of 'fierce ingredients': 'Soon will the book through ten editions fly,/Great Mudie smiles, and eager thousands buy' (p. 86). Though she outsold Thackeray, Bulwer, Dickens, and Scott (all named in the poem), Braddon's claim to be considered an artist was denied; she was indissolubly linked with Mudie, the circulating library bookseller, who was in turn castigated for fanning the flames of sensation for profit. The poet backtracked slightly, as he noted that it is not so much the presence of sensational events that cheapens these novels but rather the crudity with which they are put together. The reader was then reminded that none of this was new, that material had always been culled from penny sheets and crime papers. So the complaint was against bad, immoral writing rather than inappropriate material. Dumas and Ainsworth, for example, were offered as successful romancers, novelists who worked their material 'with skilful hand and nervous force' (p. 87). By the 1860s public entertainment had begun to partake of the craze for sensation, and sensation fiction was seen as part of a larger mania for overblown emotion and spectacle. So the Victorian theatre and its most successful productions – Boucicault's *Colleen Bawn* (1860) and *The Corsican Brothers* (1852) – were linked in the poem with the aerial feats of Blondin the tightrope walker, with trapeze artists, and with viewings of famous prostitutes riding in Rotten Row. All were emblematic of

A sweet republic, where 'tis all the same –  
Virtue and vice, or good, or doubtful fame.  
[...]  
These are thy freaks, SENSATION! where they tend  
No modest eye can see – nor mark the end! (p. 89)

The poem as a whole was a denunciation of the perceived cheapening of the novel as an art form, most particularly through allying it (as the sensation novelists seemed to be doing) with the penny press. Le Fanu's anxiety about the classification of his own work had, therefore, both an economic and theoretical basis. He was emphatic about the identification of his novels as romances in the style of Scott. But he was also a businessman, and the readership of the *DUM*, as well as the ordinary circulating library patron, formed his client base. It would not do to accept that the magazine, through the printing of the editor's own fiction, was



cheapening itself or betraying its roots. If the serial novel was supposed to produce a 'community of readers', Le Fanu's journal was particularly at risk, because this was not the sort of community the *DUM* was after.<sup>10</sup> As he could not really change his own style of writing, what Le Fanu did was try to argue that his work was not really sensation or Gothic fiction at all.

This point makes the decision to satirize sensation fiction through the medium of poetry an interesting one. The formal, stylized language of the poem suggests a seriousness and erudition that is belied by its content. The interpretive gloss provided at the side of the verses again points out the uneasy juxtaposition of content and style, but offers at least the ghost of a 'reading' of sensation fiction to be supplied through accepting the judgments of the poet regarding the works exposed in this way. Linda K. Hughes makes a strong case for the inclusion of poetry as part of a study of discourse in the periodical, and she notes the ways in which the subject matter of a poem is often picked up by the articles that surround it.<sup>11</sup> Her argument regarding the careful physical placement of poetry – often in the centre column of a three-column page of a daily or weekly paper – can be adapted to fit the circumstances of the *DUM*. 'Sensation! A Satire!', rather than acting as the still point around which a swirl of complementary information is positioned, is set apart from its fellows, and though a poem, is given the physical status of an article. Hence its 'message' carries a weight equivalent to longer prose articles and fiction on the subject.

In March, Le Fanu published a story of his own entitled 'My Aunt Margaret's Adventure'. It was placed just before the continuation of Robertson's *Yaxley and Its Neighbourhood*, which had taken up the main fiction position after the conclusion of *Wylder's Hand* in February. Le Fanu's story is very much in the style of Gaskell's *Cranford*, serialized by Dickens in *Household Words* from 1851 to 1853. Like the ladies of *Cranford*, or even Dickens's Mr Pickwick, Aunt Margaret is subjected to misinformation, misunderstanding, the vagaries of servants, and the perfidy of men. Throughout her adventure she keeps by her side what the narrator calls her 'confidential handmaid' (p. 209), whose main function is to act as a silent audience (mimicking the reader?) and to look surprised when required. There is, of course, in addition an aged, rascally hired man, named Tom Teukesbury, whose enormous lies and excuses for incompetence form the comedic effect of the story. It is indeed an adventure, but with a rather mundane economic motive: Aunt Margaret is a landlord in a small way (she owns one and a half houses – a tobacconist and half a tailor), and she sets off to a

neighbouring town, Tom and Winnie the handmaid in attendance, to collect outstanding rent from the recalcitrant tobacconist. Inevitably, the party gets lost, as Tom, according to the narrator, fell to 'groping in a geographical chaos' (p. 272).

The structure of this story is familiar, and Gothic: a journey undertaken, an incompetent guide, two defenseless women. By rights, the carriage should be set upon, and bandits should rob and threaten the women; the driver should be killed, and the journey, of course, should be undertaken in the Alps, or at least in northern Scotland. What *does* happen is an inversion of the classic Gothic plot. Margaret is the narrator's aunt, a solid, unexcitable, comfortable spinster, and Winnie the maid is half-witted and portly. As an advisor to the heroine, Winnie is severely lacking. Tom the driver is marvelously characterized as a smart-talking, though geographically challenged, underling. The narrator supplies a typical interchange between Aunt Margaret and Tom:

'There's a man coming', said Tom hopefully.  
'Good gracious!' cried my Aunt.  
'No, there aint', said Tom, dejectedly. (p. 272)

Eventually the three come upon an inn in the middle of the heath, mis-called 'The Good Woman'. The chambermaid of the place is, of course, Irish. There being no room for Tom, he is sent back to an alehouse for the night, and the two ladies are admitted alone. The narrator sets the scene through asking the reader to imagine previously encountered situations in literature: 'I don't know whether my Aunt had read *Ferdinand Count Fathom* or ever seen the *Bleeding Nun* performed on any stage, but if she had I venture to say she was reminded of both before morning'.<sup>12</sup> Even references to Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) are here. Before retiring, Aunt Margaret makes an inventory of her room at the inn, looking in drawers and cupboards but finding only 'an old black glove for the left hand' (p. 277). The room looks down on a courtyard, and as Aunt Margaret is peering out of the window, Nell, the Irish chambermaid, looks over her shoulder and gives her a terrible start – but it is irritation at the familiarity of a servant that Aunt Margaret feels, not fear. She *is* terrorized by the maid, but entirely through the verbal audacity of the woman, and by her refusal to observe the conventions of the mistress/servant relationship.

Wandering about in the middle of the night, ensuring that her belongings are not being ransacked, Aunt Margaret loses her way in the dark and ends up in the wrong bedroom; she is discovered the next morning

lying next to a dead body. The mystery is soon cleared up, and the dead man turns out to be the inn's insolvent landlord, who had been hiding from his creditors and had died of catarrh. Even after his death, the people of the house were afraid of the law and had been living with the body in a state of siege until they could dispose of it during the night. The narrator is careful to provide an economic tragedy as the background to the landlord's tale: he had lost his livelihood when a new road, and a newer railway line, bypassed his inn. No forged wills, no murderous villains lurk in his past, and one last reference to the chambermaid emphasizes the extent to which the creation of apparent mystery and horror lie with her:

The Irish maid, whose head was full of the disguises and stratagems of which she had heard so much in her own ingenious and turbulent country, was, for a while, disposed to think that the unseasonable visitors were myrmidons of the law in disguise. (p. 280)

In other words, they were as frightened of Aunt Margaret as she was irritated and annoyed by them. The difference between this story as Gothic or sensation fiction and gentle satire lies both in the attitude of the narrator, whose light tone keeps the narrative comic, and in the description of the main characters, whose age and intelligence (or lack of it) removes them from danger. Everything about the plot line, though, and the atmospheric rendering of darkness and anxiety, is concomitant with Gothic fiction.

In the April issue, *Le Fanu* published another of his own stories, entitled 'Wicked Captain Walshawe, of Wauling'. The story is narrated, as in 'My Aunt Margaret's Adventure', by a relative, and the tone of the narrator is similar. To an unseen audience the narrator says, 'A very odd thing happened to my uncle, Mr. Watson, of Haddlestone; and to enable you to understand it, I must begin at the beginning' (p. 449). The veracity of this story, as of that of Aunt Margaret, is asserted, as Uncle Watson 'was a truthful man, and not prone to fancies' (p. 452). Both stories were published anonymously in the magazine, but their proximity, tone, and gentle satire are alike, and it is not unreasonable to assume that readers of the *DUM* would also have noticed the similarities between them. However, 'Walshawe' is set in the past – 1822 – the year of the protagonist's death at the age of 81, so the events narrated take place well within the eighteenth century, and we are in fact given an exact starting date for them: 1766, when he was 25 years of age. A recent removal from the Army, and a spate of debts to discharge meant that the Captain

turned to a common means of settling his affairs;<sup>13</sup> that is, he eloped with and married an heiress. While the Captain was English, the story begins in Ireland, Clonmel to be exact, where he was quartered, and his future wife (appropriately named Peg O'Neill) was a pensioner at the local nunnery:

In England there are traditions of Irish fortune-hunters, and in Ireland of English. The fact is, it was the vagrant class of each country that chiefly visited the other in old times; and the handsome vagabond, whether at home or abroad, I suppose, made the most of his face, which was also his fortune. (p. 449)

When the pair soon decamps to Lancashire, Peg's Irish maid goes with them, and stays on after Peg's fortune is squandered; Peg is neglected, and is finally harried into her grave by the rake. The Irish aspect to the story seems incidental until the point at which Peg's body is laid out. It is here that the narrative turns from one like 'Aunt Margaret' – slight and gently humorous – to a decidedly sinister, ghostly tale that hinges entirely on a series of clichés surrounding both the Irish and Catholicism. The narrator, clearly unfamiliar with the last rites, notes that the Captain

found some half-dozen crones, chiefly Irish, from the neighbouring town of Hackleton, sitting over tea and snuff, &c., with candles lighted round the corpse, which was arrayed in a strangely cut robe of brown serge. She had secretly belonged to some order – I think the Carmelite, but I am not certain – and wore the habit in her coffin. (p. 450)

The order of nuns is unimportant to the narrator; what *is* important is the fact that the Captain knocks a burning candle out of the folded hands of the corpse, drawing down on him the curses of the Irish maid and an assertion that Peg would be lost between this world and the next as a result of his action. Not liking quite to destroy the candle, the Captain throws it in a cupboard and apparently forgets about it. When he too dies – 40 years later – it is revealed that Uncle Watson is his heir. The lack of a will and the belief on the part of Uncle Watson that certain leases have been removed ushers in a vital piece of information about him: he is a member of a 'sect who by no means reject the supernatural, and whose founder, on the contrary, has sanctioned ghosts in the most emphatic way' (p. 452). That Uncle Watson is a

Swedenborgian is not made explicit, but it is likely. If I am right, this factor connects Le Fanu's story to the ideology at the centre of *Uncle Silas* (as well as 'Green Tea'), where Maud's father's belief in the tenets of Swedenborg provides an exotic element to the sort of plot previously enriched through being set in a foreign country. In any event, Uncle Watson spends the night in Wauling, and it is, of course, a stormy night, necessitating a candle, which he procures from the same cupboard in which the Captain had thrown Peg's wake candle so many years previously. It is placed on a table, the legs of which bear a resemblance to satyrs, beside the bed. Somehow, the candle calls into being the figure of the Captain, who expands from the size of a thumbnail to his living height, and then ages before Uncle Watson's eyes, to the extent that the last glimpse we have of him is as a corpse, his shroud alive with grave worms. Eventually the spirit is drawn towards the fire and

It seemed to my Uncle that the fire suddenly darkened and the air grew icy cold, and there came an awful roar and riot of tempest, which shook the old house from top to base, and sounded like the yelling of a blood-thirsty mob on receiving a new and long-expected victim. (p. 455)

Le Fanu gives the story a final twist, as it appears that the missing leases are revealed by the ghost (who had been about to burn them in life) in a secret drawer at the back of a chest in the room.

Again, the ghost story elements are familiar: a curse, a removal in time, a family mystery, an evil villain, Catholicism as a plot device, an Irish element providing religious superstition, and an honest narrator whose own religious proclivities are left rather uncertain. This is not sensation fiction, at least in the manner familiar to readers by 1864; rather it forms part of the complementary discourses surrounding longer works that interrogate the Gothic and attempt a re-education of the *DUM*'s readers away from lesser genres back towards something Scott would have recognized.

It is tempting to see the exploitation by Captain Walshawe of an innocent Irish heroine as indicative of a larger comment on relations between Ireland and Britain. However, we know nothing about the Irish heiress, other than the ease with which she was lured away from the protection of the convent and separated from her fortune. The main characters of this story are not allowed a voice; the narrator interprets at a double remove from the action, and the force of the plot

is strangely split – as in ‘My Aunt Margaret’s Adventure’ – between traditional Gothic and Victorian realist fiction.

Besides ‘Wicked Captain Walshawe, of Wauling’, the April issue of the *DUM* included an eight-page essay by Patrick Kennedy entitled ‘Earlier Type of the Sensation Novel’. The first sentence announced that, as the sensation novel was clearly fading away, readers might like to understand the profound difference between the productions of lesser authors in that vein and the sort of fiction they were presented with in the *DUM*:

The mere sensational novel, which we would gladly see devoted to the waters of the infernal Lethe, lays no claim to truthful delineation of character, to moral teaching, to sympathy with the outward and inward manifestations of nature, nor pleasing social pictures, nor genial gushes of humour, nor healthy exercises of thought. Its sole merit consists in keeping the mind in painful suspense, exciting sensations of horror, or terror at least, and surrounding vice with a lurid splendour. The novel that excites a lively interest in the fortunes of its good characters, even though united with the excitement of suspense and mystery, is not the thing against which we protest, if it possesses the desirable qualities we have named. (p. 460)

What Kennedy then supplied was a potted history of Gothic, noting that the height of immorality came with M. G. Lewis, that the air was cleansed with the productions of Edgeworth, Austen, and Scott, and that poor Maturin, trying his best, ‘came too late, however, to do much harm’ (p. 461). In other words, the present mania was to be considered nothing new, and also nothing much to worry about as the current crop of novels ‘will, in turn, be thrown over and flung out of doors, but not till they have accomplished their share of mischief’ (p. 461). And yet the essay is a long one, and it consists chiefly of translated quotations and paraphrases from a French sensation novel written by Marie Aycard.<sup>14</sup> The title of the novel summarized is not given, as Kennedy’s assumption is that it is irrelevant; all such works are equally poorly plotted, and all rehearse the same domestic dramas. Kennedy cannot stop himself offering asides:

She saw her talking to Mons. Ernest de Meyran and Charlotte his sister under a large tree; and, as frequently occurs in French fiction, she placed herself behind the thick trunk, to ascertain whether the young lady favoured the pretensions of the young gentleman in company. (p. 462)

Though the novel is facile, it is of 'an unobjectionable character, and a date anterior [c. 1848] to the Lady Audley school' (p. 469). Kennedy's detailing of the plot is exhaustive, and he emphasizes the morality of the majority of the characters, together with an ending that sees the reconciliation of an estranged married couple. The tone of the article is odd, though, as Kennedy seems half condemnatory of the novel and half laudatory of its middle-class moral patina.

In the article, Kennedy mentions only one periodical offering such fare: this is the *Keepsake*, a respectable annual containing highly competent steel engravings and verse by the best poets of the day, including Moore and Wordsworth; crucially, it had ceased publication in 1857.<sup>15</sup> The choice is not a random one. Kennedy fastens on a particularly horrible story from the *Keepsake* (supplying no date of publication), within which a young woman is revealed to have, instead of a left hand and arm, a 'hissing serpent', which she is condemned to feed. The climax comes as she is revealed pleading with the serpent to spare the life of her betrothed. Kathryn Ledbetter and Terence Hoagwood note that

*Keepsake* publishers were fiscally conservative and serious about their position as moral guardians, yet they challenged the boundaries of propriety by promoting a highly successful commercial product targeted to middle-class female readers, one that competed with poetry volumes and other ostensibly serious literature for an equal share of the literary market.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the aims of business and the protection of moral rectitude in publishing are presented as not necessarily incompatible. Context is everything, and the placement of this article in an issue that offers so many variations on the Gothic/sensation plot has the effect of complicating reader response to the fiction, and contradicting the 'official' response offered both by the *DUM* as a whole and by Kennedy here. Though Kennedy does not say so, the essay suggests that the discerning reader will be able to tell the difference between literature that enriches, and literature that aims only to shock. The implication is that the sort of prose contained within the *DUM* belongs to the former category. The final paragraph of the essay places Aycard's story and asserts its difference:

Our object being to present a sensation French story of an unobjectionable character, and a date anterior to the Lady Audley school, we have spared our readers everything in the shape of criticism. Being

destitute of the evil qualities so dear to the admirers of the wicked works of Feydeau, Sue and Co., it has missed such popularity as is enjoyed by their writings, and will, therefore, as we hope, possess the virtues of novelty for many of our readers. (p. 469)

My final example from the 1864 volume comes from the conclusion in December of Le Fanu's novel *Uncle Silas*. Neatly contained within one volume of the magazine, the novel was, physically at least, always a separate entity. Its first appearance coincided, as we have seen, with the high point of the sensation novel, and Le Fanu's awareness of the apparent timeliness of his work was not completely happy. Bentley published the first edition of the novel in December of 1864, just as the serial version of the story was completed in the *DUM*. Le Fanu provided a 'Preliminary Word' to this edition, meant to be read before the novel and to act as a corrective to those who might mistake the genre to which *Uncle Silas* belonged. However, in the serial version of the novel, this 'Preliminary Word' was appended to the last instalment as 'A Postscript'. We can assume that it was just that, a response by Le Fanu to contemporary reactions to his work as a whole, as well as a slightly exasperated final defense of this novel. Le Fanu noted firstly, and in order to avoid the charge of plagiarism, that *Uncle Silas* was a vastly expanded version of an earlier short story of his (published anonymously in the *DUM* in 1838) entitled 'A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess', and that the story had again appeared with the title altered, in a separate volume of stories.<sup>17</sup> The remainder of the Postscript was a vigorous denunciation of the

promiscuous application of the term 'sensation' to that large school of fiction which transgresses no one of those canons of construction and morality which, in producing the unapproachable 'Waverley Novels,' their great author imposed upon himself. (p. 679–80)

Le Fanu then offered the reader a fair number of examples of the frequency of death, crime, and general mystery in Scott's novels, calling his work 'tragic English romance' and asserting that *Uncle Silas*, though clearly inferior in execution, used incident in the same way that Scott did, and with the same 'moral aim'.

The Postscript is important, I think, as its content is not only applicable to Le Fanu's novel, but also, as we have seen, to a number of other stories and articles in the 1864 volume. The point is not so much that Le



Fanu's works are *not* Gothic, but that Scott's *are*, and that the imprimatur of Scott surely legitimizes Le Fanu's fiction.

The discussion surrounding genre is one that, I would argue, appears coherent only after the fact. The echoes, repetitions, and competing discourses that occur in the 1864 volume are ones that impress as a result of their sheer weight, but that are only obvious through lateral reading. A small number of contributors, a particular type of fiction valorized, a declaration of the worth of the definitions offered, all add up to a branding for the Le Fanu years that is not often seen during the tenure of other editors of the *DUM*. Behind the declarations regarding the proper use and form of fiction is the added value accrued through the 30-odd years of the existence of the *DUM*. That is, opposed to new magazines like *Temple Bar* the *DUM* offered itself as a serious literary and political voice, as weighty perhaps as the frequently invoked reputation of Scott. It is impossible to speculate about the readership of the magazine during the 1860s, and Le Fanu's apparent determination to keep his presence as editor very low-key means that clues to an editorial voice and world-view must come from study of the placement and content of articles. However, I do not believe that a clear set of guidelines regarding what constitutes good literature is provided by the material examined above. Contradictions within and between individual statements – whether in prose or fiction – reveal a curious hesitation and confusion about the subject as a whole. Ultimately the absence noted so often in Le Fanu is here as well, and the reader, like many of Le Fanu's characters, is referred back to the periodical itself as a source of meaning, to form as a substitute for completion.

## Notes

1. The critical literature available on the *DUM* begins with Michael Sadleir's 1937 essay delivered to the Bibliographical Society of Ireland (published in 1938); see Michael Sadleir (1938) *Dublin University Magazine: Its History, Contents and Bibliography; a paper read before the Bibliographical Society of Ireland, 26 April 1937* (Dublin: Juverna Press). Wayne Hall's *Dialogues in the Margin: a Study of the Dublin University Magazine* (1999) is the latest long study of the magazine.
2. See *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900*. Available online from < <http://wellesley.chadwyck.co.uk/home.do> >.
3. Suzanne Clark (1991) *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Indiana: Indiana University Press): 'The modernist exclusion of everything but the forms of high art acted like a machine for cultural loss of memory' (p. 6).

4. Andrew Maunder (2000) "Monitoring the Middle-Classes": Intertextuality and Ideology in Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* and the *Cornhill Magazine*, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33.1, 44–64 (p. 45).
5. W.J. Mc Cormack (1996) "Never put your name to an anonymous letter": Serial Reading in the *Dublin University Magazine*, 1861 to 1869', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 26, pp. 100–15. See also Mc Cormack's *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* (1980; Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991).
6. Mc Cormack, "Never put your name to an anonymous letter", p. 105.
7. 'An Irish Actress – Margaret Woffington', *Dublin University Magazine* (August, 1864), p. 180. Further references to the *DUM* will be contained within the text.
8. See Victor Sage (2004) *Le Fanu's Gothic: the Rhetoric of Darkness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave), p.77.
9. Andrew Maunder (ed.) (2004) *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction*, v. 1: 1855–1890 (London: Pickering and Chatto), p.88.
10. See Deborah Wynne (2001) *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave), p. 5 and *passim*.
11. See Linda K. Hughes (2007) 'What the Wellesley Index Left Out: Why Poetry Matters to Periodical Studies', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 40.2, pp. 91–125.
12. This is Tobias Smollett's 1753 novel, *The Adventures of Ferdinand, Count Fathom*. Scott had said that Smollett had painted a 'complete picture of human depravity'. The *Bleeding Nun* was an adaptation of an incident in M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796).
13. We are told that the title of 'Captain' is one of courtesy, 'for he had never reached that rank in the army list' (p. 449).
14. Marie Aycard (1794–1859) was the author of some 22 novels and six plays, most of a sensational character.
15. *The Keepsake* ran from 1829 to 1857. 'Keepsake proprietor Charles Heath was careful to market his book in advertising and prefaces as an exclusive, hand-crafted book of fine literature, but the essential focus on women readers and the means of its production places *The Keepsake* squarely in the mainstream of nineteenth-century middle-class consumerism, oppositional to exclusivity'; Terence Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, 'L. E. L.'s "Verses" and *The Keepsake* for 1829' at < <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/lel/keepsake.htm>>. Accessed July 31, 2013.
16. Hoagwood and Ledbetter, 'L. E. L.'s "Verses" and *The Keepsake* for 1829'.
17. Mc Cormack notes that the novel is also a reworking of another of Le Fanu's stories entitled 'The Murdered Cousin', published in 1851; see W. J. Mc Cormack (1993) *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History Through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), p. 69.