



This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights and duplication or sale of all or part is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for research, private study, criticism/review or educational purposes. Electronic or print copies are for your own personal, non-commercial use and shall not be passed to any other individual. No quotation may be published without proper acknowledgement. For any other use, or to quote extensively from the work, permission must be obtained from the copyright holder/s.

THE SUPERNATURAL REFERENCE:  
THE PRESENCE AND EFFECT OF  
SUPERNATURAL TERROR IN ENGLISH  
FICTION OF THE MID-NINETEENTH  
CENTURY

PETER DENMAN

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF KEELE, 1980 - 81.

# T A B L E   O F   C O N T E N T S

	Abstract	5
	<u>PART ONE</u>	
	Introduction	7
I	Approaches to the Supernatural; Transcendental and Subjective	17
	Animal Electricity 20	
	Swedenborgianism 24	
	Animal Magnetism 25	
	Phrenology 30	
	Phrenology in Fiction 41	
	Theories of the Supernatural	
	(1) Ferriar 52	
	(2) Alderson, Hibbert 58	
	Currency of Ferriar's and Hibbert's ideas 65	
	Conclusion 67	
II	The Nature of Gothic	67
	The Gothic Concept 70	
	Feminine Gothic 73	
	Gothicism in Decline 78	
	Poetry 80	
	The End of Gothicism 83	
	Appraisals of Gothicism 85	
	The Nature of Gothic 90	
	Conclusion 95	
III	From the Confessional to the Solipsistic	98
	The Vogue of the Confession 99	
	<u>Caleb Williams</u> 102	
	<u>Confessions of an English Opium Eater</u> 111	
	<u>The Confessions of a Justified Sinner</u> 116	
	<u>Frankenstein</u> 133	
	Conclusion 139	

IV	From <u>Blackwood's</u> to Le Fanu:	
	The Physiology of Suffering	142
	Some <u>Blackwood's</u> Stories	143
	Imminent Death	151
	Revenants	157
	Dreams	164
	Ghosts: The Later Stories	168
	Sheridan Le Fanu: Some Stories	173
	Currency of Blackwood's Stories	186
	Conclusion	189
V	House and Brains: Shaping Forces in the Supernatural Terror Story	191
	The Involves Reader	192
	The Passive Protagonist	198
	Terror and Fantasy	202
	Framing	206
	Gradation of Effect	211
	Conclusion	216
 <u>PART TWO</u>		
VI	Edward Bulwer-Lytton	218
	<u>Falkland</u>	218
	<u>Eugene Aram</u>	223
	<u>A Strange Story</u>	235
	Conclusion	240
VII	Charles Dickens	242
	<u>Oliver Twist</u> (Death of Sykes)	243
	<u>Great Expectations</u>	249
	<u>Our Mutual Friend</u>	266
	Conclusion	277
VIII	Charlotte Brontë	279
	<u>Jane Eyre</u>	280
	<u>Villette</u>	300
	Conclusion	314
IX	Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu	316
	<u>Uncle Silas</u>	316
	<u>Wylder's Hand</u>	328
	Conclusion	333

X	Wilkie Collins	335
	<u>The Woman In White</u>	337
	<u>The Moonstone</u>	351
	Conclusion	357
XI	George Eliot	359
	"The Lifted Veil"	360
	<u>Middlemarch</u>	368
	<u>Felix Holt, the Radical</u>	374
	Conclusion	380
XII	Towards Conrad and Modernism	382
	Notes	397
	Appendix A - "Outlines of Phrenology"	423
	Appendix B - Three <u>Blackwood's</u> Stories	438
	Bibliography	466

\* \* \* \* \*

N. B.

The notes are at the end of the main text, between  
page 397 and page 422 .

## A B S T R A C T

I. Introduction. II. Animal electricity, mesmerism, Swedenborgianism and phrenology all had a bearing on ideas of the supernatural. Of particular importance were studies by Ferriar and Hibbert which accounted for apparitions on the basis of sensory distortion. III. The identifying feature of Gothic literature is exoticism. It flourished for a relatively brief period, and its extension into the nineteenth century has been exaggerated. IV. Works by Godwin, Mary Shelley, Hogg and De Quincey show the unusually intense concentration on the narrator affecting the stability of his fictional world. V. The short stories in Blackwood's in the 1820s and 1830s portray consciousness in extremity, often accompanied by sensory distortion. Victorian ghost stories (as represented by Le Fanu) are often a development of this tendency. VI. Specific narrative patterns and situations are seen as appropriate to the depiction of the supernatural.

The characteristics identified above are employed by the mainstream novelists of the mid-nineteenth century.

VII. Bulwer's Falkland, Eugene Aram and A Strange Story show the range of possibilities. IX. In Oliver Twist the supernatural reference is used for specific local effect; in Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend it informs the larger structures. X. In

6

Jane Eyre and Villette it keys the intensified experiences of the heroines. XI. Wilkie Collins in his mystery novels uses the possibility of the supernatural to increase the number of factors to be eliminated in arriving at a solution. XII. The supernatural reference is similarly present in Le Fanu's Wylder's Hand, while in Uncle Silas it is basic to the exploitation of Maud as a vehicle for terror. XIII. "The Lifted Veil" shows George Eliot's awareness of narrative methods which later, in Felix Holt, underpin her treatment of man's moral condition. XIV. The late 1860s saw a change in general attitudes to the supernatural, but, as Heart of Darkness illustrates, the techniques of the solipsistic supernatural story had partly anticipated modernist fiction.

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

This study concerns itself with a type of literary supernatural which remains firmly anthropocentric. It is a supernatural which exists as a possibility, or a suggestion at the extreme of consciousness, referred to rather than assented to. The primary area of concern is a period of supernatural fiction which, because it is flanked by two much scrutinised but different types of the supernatural, has been rather overlooked. The nineteenth-century ghost story is generally thought of as emerging as a sub-genre around 1850 and lasting on into the middle of the next century; the two most recent books on the form, Night Stories by Julia Briggs<sup>1</sup> and Elegant Nightmares by Jack Sullivan<sup>2</sup>, operate within these limits. For the preceding hundred years, Gothic fiction is seen as providing the only available mode of supernatural terror fiction. Although its epicentre is located in the 1790s, commentators have uniformly seen its effects as persisting in literature up to and after the beginning of the Victorian ghost story. As a result, discussions of the intervening period have



tended to fill a critical vacuum by applying Gothic critical concepts and terminology to a fiction which evolved along radically different lines.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a supernatural fiction based on a popularised version of eighteenth-century sensationalist and materialist philosophy. The overriding feature was the claim that apparently supernatural manifestations have their origins in the distorted senses of the perceiver. The implications for the fiction of the time were extensive: an immediate effect was that the supernatural was no longer necessarily accepted as such, nor explained away in the manner of Mrs Radcliffe, but was treated as a newly understood phenomenon of human perception. These stories might well be called "sensational fiction", but even had the term not been appropriated for another and quite distinct type of writing one could still argue that "supernatural" is a more apt designation. Although they move towards a redefinition and naturalisation of the supernatural, they nevertheless present an encounter with new areas of experience.

There have been a number of studies of the literary supernatural which commence at a point earlier than do those by Briggs and Sullivan mentioned above. Dorothy Scarborough's The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (1917) begins with the Gothic novel, from which is traced a line of descent reaching down to Algernon Blackwood. Americans such

as Hawthorne and Poe are included, and it is suggested that the short story emerges as the dominant form in supernatural fiction, but her main focus is with the kinds of supernatural beings which occur in fiction, using a taxonomy of these to classify stories.

H.P. Lovecraft's essay Supernatural Horror in Literature (1939) similarly commences among the Gothicists, and ranges thereafter over "weird" literature (his epithet) in America, Britain and on the continent. It is a survey rather than a work of critical analysis, and manages to combine an enthusiastic eclecticism with some notable omissions (little or nothing on Le Fanu or the late nineteenth-century English writers)<sup>4</sup>.

Arthur Clayborough in The Grotesque in English Literature (1965) writes from a philosophical and psychological background<sup>5</sup> and follows on from Wolfgang Kayser's The Grotesque in Art and Literature (1957)<sup>6</sup>. He takes Dickens as a case study.

Peter Penzoldt's The Supernatural in Fiction (1952), which combines a close attention to the texts with a psycho-analytical approach, remains the pioneering treatment. The second part of the book considers particular writers of supernatural fiction, beginning (inevitably) in mid-century with Le Fanu; the first half, however, deals with the various motifs and supernatural creatures, and, most valuably, the characteristic narrative structure of the ghost story. In this he demonstrates how the subject

treated and effect aimed at demand a certain narrative pattern, in which events are more than usually subordinated to the climax<sup>7</sup>.

None of these treatments set the supernatural/ghost/weird story in conjunction with the novels of the period in order to investigate whether the dominant characteristics of the one are in any way discernible in the other. Edwin M. Eigner in The Metaphysical Novel in England and America does deal with a limited selection of nineteenth-century novelists, while feeling constrained to reclassify the works he examines as "romances"<sup>8</sup>. It is a study which convincingly spans the Atlantic, uniting Hawthorne, Melville, Bulwer and Dickens under the one heading. It is, however, primarily thematic in approach, and deals with the work of the four novelists without considering the background of supernatural short fiction which was first to explore such material.

The present study is basically comparative. Its first part describes a tendency of fiction in the first decades of the nineteenth century, in which pride of place is given to those states of mind consonant with supernatural experience. It is a corpus of work which does not seem to have been identified hitherto, other than in rather disparaging allusions to "Blackwood's stories". The impression is that these stories are to be seen collectively as ur-Poe, crude forerunners of the Tales of Mystery and Imagination. Poe certainly learned from Blackwood's

11

in choosing vehicles for his symbolist method, but in describing those stories I would prefer "raw" to "crude". They evince a vitality which, as will be shown, ensured that they remained current through much of the nineteenth century, even if they did subsequently drop from sight. These stories should not be seen in the context of the epigones which Poe fathered on them but in that of novels such as Caleb Williams and The Confessions of a Justified Sinner. These novels may be marginal, in that they do not fall within the bounds of the tradition as it is usually mapped out, but they are central to that tendency which found popular expression in the Blackwood's short stories. The tendency arose from popularised versions of theories of perception formulated by the eighteenth-century philosophers, which did<sup>not</sup> fully impinge on the general awareness until after the turn of the century. In particular books like those by John Ferriar, Towards a Theory of Apparitions (1813), and Samuel Hibbert's Philosophy of Apparitions (1824) had a clear impact on ideas of the supernatural; these works, largely overlooked now, indicate what was peculiar to the early fiction.

They also indicate one aspect of the movement away from Gothicism, particularly that of the Radcliffean or "terror" type<sup>9</sup>. The effect of terror is inextricably bound in with the supernatural in fiction. It is generally secondary, but in the

Blackwood's stories the normal relationship is reversed. The protagonist is placed in position of extreme danger or suffering, and under the stress of terror is driven to experience hallucinations of an apparently supernatural character. While it is recognized that terror is a necessary concomitant of the supernatural in fiction, the main concern of this study will be the latter quality, Gothic fiction treats terror as a consequence rather than as a stimulus. It may seem that, in a thesis which argues in part that there has been an undue readiness to ascribe the effects of supernatural terror in nineteenth-century to an atavistic Gothicism, a disproportionate amount of attention is devoted to "The Gothic Phenomenon". It should be seen as an exercise in clearing the decks, identifying the dominant traits of Gothicism in order to delimit its extent.

In its second part, this study moves to a general study of nineteenth-century novels, seeing them against the background of the earlier supernatural stories. No sustained attempt is made to argue a direct "influence" by the Blackwood's-type stories on the later novelists; similarities of structure arise from the fact that in each a degree of supernatural terror may be intended, or at least be present by oblique reference. Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of Blackwood's is evident in that there is a demonstrable link between it and six of the seven

authors selected for consideration: Bulwer, George Eliot and Conrad were all published by Blackwood; Le Fanu was owner and editor of the Dublin University Magazine, a periodical established in admiring imitation of the Edinburgh publication - even adopting the name "Dea", along the lines of "Maga"; and both Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens were readers of Blackwood's in the formative stages of their careers<sup>10</sup>.

In many respects the concepts and effects outlined in this study are those discussed by Coleridge in his Biographia Literaria; in his attack on materialist principles of associationism there he alleges, in part, that

The hypothesis of an external world exactly correspondent to those images or modifications of our own being, which alone (according to this system), we actually behold, is as thorough idealism as Berkeley's, in as much as it equally (perhaps, in a more perfect degree,) removes all reality and immediateness of perception, and places us in a dream world of phantoms and spectres, the inexplicable swarm and equivocal generation of motions in our own brains.<sup>11</sup>

Such a hypothesis may be logically unsound but it sums up accurately the situation exploited by the short story writers in Blackwood's. Because of this, the theoretical framework delineated in the

first chapter does not centre on the great empiricist thinkers of the previous century - the age, as Basil Willey remarks, of

physico-theology, when, - - - - religious emotions formerly attached to super-nature are being transferred more and more to "Nature".<sup>12</sup>

The naturalisation of the supernatural commenced in the eighteenth century but did not permeate the general awareness until the beginning of next, at which moment the inversely related aims of Wordsworth and Coleridge as expressed in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads begin to echo insistently. A little later, at the very time when Coleridge was working laboriously towards the publication of his Biographia Literaria, with its reassessment of strict materialism and its redefinition of fancy and imagination, Ferriar's Theory of Apparitions, based on the retention of sense impressions was enjoying a modest success in the bookshops<sup>13</sup>. It is in the thinking represented by Ferriar that this study has its origins; while the fiction examined has undeniable links with "Romanticism", I have stopped short of, or rather started beyond, the point of contact with the high Romantic movement. However, it has not been possible to avoid using a very Coleridgean and much abused opposition: that of subjective and objective. Subjective is used quite simply to describe those impressions which are perceived by the protagonist or narratorial identity of a work of fiction, as

distinct from the objective which is generally the world as described by the authorial voice, and which conventionally corresponds to that perceived by a community of which author and reader are members. The distinction embraced by the terms is so crucial and serviceable that I have decided to avail of them, and endure the disapproval of the unlikely alliance of Gabriel Betteredge and John Ruskin.

In selecting the novelists to be discussed in Part Two, I have aimed to represent the range of mid-century fiction. There are three omissions which might call for comment. Thackeray is not included because the supernatural features treated play little part in his novels. Had there been another chapter, it would have been devoted to Trollope, in particular to He Knew He Was Right; Louis Trevelyan is an acute study of a mind driven into a pathologically subjective state. And while one might reasonably have expected to find Wuthering Heights taking a prominent place, I have by-passed it, feeling that it has been too much analysed already. Further, it is, as F.R. Leavis says, "a freak", and discussion of it illuminates only itself. But I take the opportunity to point out that this, the novel which more than any other springs to mind when the supernatural is mentioned, begins with a subjective consciousness - the first word is a first-person pronoun - and ends with the same consciousness wondering how

any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers



for the sleepers in that quiet earth.  
For all the spiritual activity which has gone before,  
the enduring image is that of clay, the body's  
material. It is a condition of the supernatural in  
nineteenth-century fiction that it be constantly  
referred back to the human centre.

PART ONE

# CHAPTER ONE

## APPROACHES TO THE SUPERNATURAL: TRANSCENDENTAL AND SUBJECTIVE.

Here (at Florence) our little English coterie printed a book, and called it the "Florence Miscellany", . . . and here, one day, for a frolic, we betted a wager who could invent the most frightful story, and produce it by dinner time. The clock struck three, and by five we were to meet again.<sup>1</sup>

This note by Hester Thrale (Mrs Piozzi) describes a literary competition which anticipates by some thirty years that which pitted Byron, Polidori, Mary Godwin and Percy Shelley against one another. Because of the notoriety of the members of the group which assembled in the Villa Diodati and the Maison Chappuis near Geneva in 1816, and the resultant composition of Frankenstein, or. The Modern Prometheus, we remember the later gathering rather than the earlier in Florence. Hester Thrale's own story won that particular competition, and it does not read very fearsomely today: it is little more than a fragment in the early Gothic manner, showing signs of the haste which attended its conception. Sad to relate, the near-octogenarian Mrs Piozzi, writing

from Bath in 1819, reacted to Frankenstein with dismay:

Did I ever show you a horrible story of my own writing, done upon the spur of the moment, for a wager, at Florence? Lord bless me! that hideous tale of the Modern Prometheus was done, it seems, by Miss Godwin, in some spirit of competition between her and some physician - nobody says who - and Lord Byron. His "Vampyre" is a filthy and a fearful thing, but her "Frankenstein" carries away the palm of horror and impiety. What times are these! The growth of crime is beyond all telling . . . I suppose the warm weather, and our

prosperous state of finance, are at fault . . . <sup>2</sup>  
But the interesting feature of Frankenstein is not just its demonstration of the deleterious effects of simultaneous rises in wealth and temperature, but the evidence which it offers of being written from an awareness of fairly recent scientific activity. Both Shelley's preface to the 1818 first edition and Mary's own preface to the 1831 edition lay some stress on the scientific credentials of the story. Mary writes:

Many and long were the conversations between Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among them the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated. They talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin (I speak not of what the Doctor really did, or said that he did, but,

as more to my purpose, of what was then spoken of as having been done by him,) who preserved a piece of vermicelli in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with a voluntary motion. Not thus, after all, would life be given. Perhaps a corpse would be reanimated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth. <sup>3</sup>

The Dr. Darwin mentioned in the prefaces to Frankenstein is Dr. Erasmus Darwin of Lichfield, one of those energetic eccentrics of the later eighteenth century who did so much to further scientific discovery. He elected to publish much of his findings in long poems of iambic pentameter couplets, and his verse enjoyed considerable vogue; Shelley was among its admirers. As he expressed it in his best-known work, The Zoonomia, or the Laws of Organic Life (1794), Darwin saw God as the "Great First Cause" but considered the process thereafter as being one of transformism, by which species emerge and improve conditioned by the environmental factors. He anticipated the theories of his grandson Charles in a number of respects, although much of his thought was wildly erroneous. Darwin's last major work, The Temple of Nature (1803), describes life being nurtured in the sea, with the heat of the sun providing the energy to encourage chemical reaction.

Hence without parent by spontaneous birth  
Rise the first specks of animated earth;

From Nature's womb the plant or insect swims,  
And buds or breathes with microscopic limbs.

I, ll. 247-250.

But Darwin found that the poetic form proved refractory as a medium of learned communication. It failed to encompass everything that he had to say, and as a result The Temple of Nature is accompanied by lengthy notes expanding on the kernel of Darwin's theory. In the first of these notes Darwin writes of some experiments which may have been those that Mary heard Byron and Shelley discussing in their debates on "the nature of the principle of life". There is in particular mention of one experiment leading to the animation of "vermicelli":

Mr Ellis in Philosophical Transactions Vol. LIX gives drawings of six kinds of animalcula infusoria, which increase by dividing across the middle into two distinct animals. Thus in paste compound of flour and water, which has been suffered to become acescent, the animalcules called eels, vibria anquillula, are seen in great abundance; their motions are rapid and strong; they are viviparous and produce at intervals a numerous progeny . . . <sup>4</sup>

Speculation on the possibility of spontaneous generation had engrossed some of the <sup>most</sup> enquiring minds of the eighteenth century, continued until Pasteur's "sealed jar" experiment disposed of it in the 1860s.

### Animal Electricity

The possibility of regeneration was closely allied to that of spontaneous generation, and, as the author of

Frankenstein remarks, the former concept seemed to have been given some basis in science by Galvani's work on what he called "animal electricity", the motive force in living creatures. The factitiously scientific tone of Frankenstein made an almost clean break with the sensibility-centred fiction of the eighteenth century<sup>5</sup>. In theme and plot it touches on both regeneration and spontaneous generation; the monster becomes a vehicle for the recycling of parts of numerous corpses, while the life which animates the whole is a new and created force. The Promethean ofermod of Frankenstein is that he dares to create life. The "solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house" which serves as his "workshop of filthy creation" (Ch.IV) provides a laboratory setting in which the area of investigation is the physiology rather than the sensibility of humankind.

The work of Luigi Galvani (1737-1798) in Bologna had seemed to hold out the possibility of corpses being reanimated. In the 1780s Galvani observed that the amputated legs of a frog, when brought into contact with a metallic arc connecting them to the nerve centre, showed muscular movement. This led him to advance the proposition that movement in animate beings is produced by a subtle electrical "fluid" flowing through both the muscles and the nerves. The hypothetical fluid was termed "animal electricity", and the general phenomenon "Galvanism".

Within a decade of the publication of Galvani's De viribus electricitatis in motu muscularis commentarius

in 1791, Galvani's theory was discredited by the work of Alessandro Volta (1745-1827), but not before Galvani's experiments had been reported in England by Richard Fowler. Fowler learned of the experiments while a medical student in Paris and, with all the zeal of a convert, published his Experiments and Observations Relative to the Influence lately discovered by M. Galvani and Commonly Called Animal Electricity in 1793. Fowler's book draws particular attention to a phenomenon of stimulation, the discovery of which he attributes to Volta. By applying two different metals to the various organs of sense, the brain received sense impressions<sup>6</sup>. For instance, when the metals were brought into contact with his eye Fowler experienced bright flashes; when his tongue was the object of experiment there was a sharp acrid taste. Fowler went on to make a trial of his other senses, inserting electrodes into his nostrils and ears - at some risk to his health:

On withdrawing them from my ears, I experienced a feeling similar to that which one has after emerging from water. I was not sensible of having hurt my ears by the experiment, nor had I any uneasy sensations after; but, on getting out of bed next morning, I perceived both my pillow and my face stained with blood; and, on examining, I found that it had come from my ears. . . . I need not say, that I have never repeated the experiment, and that I certainly never shall. (p. 85)

Two things became apparent from the work of Galvani and his successors. The first was that it was possible



to produce independent, if involuntary, movement in dead animals which, in Mary Shelley's phrase, gave token of the possibility of reanimation. The conventional film scene in Frankenstein's laboratory which has the monster coming to life during a violent storm of thunder and lightning is as appropriate on historical grounds as it is emotionally. Some of Galvani's most important early discoveries were made during preparations to observe the effects of atmospheric electricity, following Franklin's kite-flying experiment which proved that lightning was electrical in nature. In Mary Shelley's original story, however, the monster is given life by a mechanically produced spark, and the crucial thunderstorm comes earlier, while Frankenstein is still a youth. In the company of a man of science he witnesses a giant oak tree being struck and killed by a flash of lightning, whereupon his companion outlines "a theory which he had formed on the subject of electricity and galvanism" (Ch.II). The effect on Frankenstein is the overthrow of the doctrines of those medieval philosophers and alchemists - Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus - which hitherto had dominated his imagination. With a nice irony Mary arranges it so that Frankenstein's first intimation of the powers which will enable him to endow his monster with life comes to him while observing their immense powers of destruction. Figuratively, the concept of galvanism provided a word for sudden and unnatural physical effects. Dickens, for instance, speaks of Gradgrind as

- - - a galvanizing apparatus - - - charged with a

grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away. (Ch.II)

But as well as introducing both the possibility of reanimation and a figurative expression for momentary energy, the experiments of Galvani also opened up the way for a demonstration of the fact that a person might receive sense-impressions even when the external stimuli normally associated with them were absent. This, as we shall see below, was akin to the line to be followed by writers like Ferriar and Hilbert who offered a physiological explanation for supernatural apparitions.

#### Swedenborgianism

Physiological explanations were in sharp contrast to the transcendental mysticism of the teaching of illuminati such as Swedenborg, who wrote of the resuscitation of man from the dead as the entrance to eternal life:

These two motions, the breathing of the lungs and the beating of the heart, are the very bonds on the breaking of which the spirit is left to itself; and the body being then without the life of its spirit, grows cold and begins to decay. The inmost communication of the spirit of man is with the respiration and the heart, because all the vital motions depend upon these not only in general, but also in every part.<sup>7</sup>

Swedenborg went on to recount how he himself had undergone resuscitation:

- - - it has been shown to me by living experience.

The actual experience was granted me in order that I might fully comprehend the process.

I was brought into a state of insensibility as to the bodily senses, and thus nearly into the state of dying persons, whilst yet the interior life with thought remained entire, so that I perceived and retained in memory the things which befell me - - - -<sup>8</sup>.

Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) may serve as a reminder of the strain of spiritual asceticism which existed during the eighteenth century<sup>9</sup>. Swedenborg saw the physical world as a symbolic manifestation of its divine creator, and propounded an elaborate set of correspondences between the sensible materialist universe and the spiritual universe. Inter-planetary and inter-stellar space was the domain of angels and other spirits carefully arranged in hierarchies; the human mind could come to a knowledge of them through a regime of prayer and fasting. His teaching attracted a number of adherents, and in England the Swedenborg Society remained active throughout the nineteenth century.

### Animal Magnetism

Where Swedenborg saw the cosmos inhabited by angels and spirits, Friedrich-Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) claimed that all areas of the universe were permeated by a subtle fluid. Starting from the proposition that there exists a mutual influence between the heavenly bodies, the earth and animate beings, Mesmer claimed that the influence is transmitted by the omnipresent fluid.

That property of the human body which renders it susceptible to the influence of heavenly bodies and to that of humans surrounding it he called "animal magnetism". Mesmer believed that this animal magnetism, when properly acted upon, could be used for the cure of illness, particularly of nervous disorders. He found a ready clientèle in Paris, whither he was obliged to migrate in 1777 after falling foul of the medical establishment in his native Vienna. The iron rods and tubs of "magnetised" water which constituted Mesmer's principal therapeutic apparatus soon began to attract patients, and in the early 1780s "mesmerism" took a considerable hold on the life of the French capital. Such an innovative practice soon provoked lively controversy and in 1784 a Royal Commission, chaired by Benjamin Franklin, was established to investigate animal magnetism. The findings of the commission were that no such phenomenon as animal magnetism existed and that the effects produced by Mesmer's treatment - most frequently trances and hysteria - stemmed from the susceptible and overwrought imaginations of his patients. Not long after this Mesmer found himself involved in a dispute with his associates concerning the allocation of financial resources, and he quit France for the obscurity of Switzerland. Mesmerism without Mesmer survived for a time in Paris but was swept away in the Revolution<sup>10</sup>.

So ended what might be called the first phase of mesmerism. The movement was by no means finished, however, and in the early years of the nineteenth century

it began to become popular in England. Once it had taken root it proved a hardy growth. In this later phase there was less emphasis placed on the allegedly directly curative properties of mesmerism; gone were the vats and rods which had been a feature of the Paris sessions. Instead, attention was concentrated on "magnetic somnambulism" - mesmerically induced trances which seemed to open up a way for the exploration of the mind. The most active and most eminent proponent of mesmerism in England was the Professor of the Principles and Practice of Medicine at University College, London, John Elliotson; as a result he soon found himself running up against opposition from other members of the medical profession. The controversy was at its most intense in the late 1830s, and eventually Elliotson was obliged to relinquish his teaching post. His book Human Physiology (1835) exerted a widespread influence; it included the use of mesmerism as a medical technique, and it is one of the texts cited by Ezra Jennings three decades later when he was setting up the climactic experiment in Wilkie Collins' The Moonstone<sup>11</sup>. Elliotson had considerable personal contact with literary figures; Dickens was a close friend of his (and shared his interest in mesmerism)<sup>12</sup>, while Thackeray dedicated Pendennis to him after Elliotson's attention during the illness of 1849. Even after Elliotson left his university post, popular opinion in support of him continued strong, so that in 1846 he was invited to deliver the prestigious Harveian Oration. The unrepentant Elliotson seized the opportunity to promote still further the cause of

mesmerism, which he also did by means of his magazine The Zoist.

Even though Elliotson had shifted the area of concern towards the investigation of psychosomatic illnesses, the basic tenets of mesmerism, with its universal "fluid", had remained unaltered since 1780 or so. Eventually the theory of mesmerism came under attack from James Braid. In 1843 he published his Neurypnology, or the Rationale of nervous sleep considered in relation with animal magnetism, which he followed up with smaller works, The Power of the Mind over The Body (1846) and Observations on Trance, or Human Hybernation (1850). Like the Royal Commission in Paris sixty years before, Braid came to the conclusion that the observable phenomena of mesmerism did not depend on a subtle fluid, but resulted from the power of suggestion. In order to point the distinction, he proposed a new name: hypnotism.

Nevertheless, mesmerism and the public controversy attendant on it were part of the intellectual background of the first half of the nineteenth century, and were kept particularly in the public eye by the Elliotson affair. Offering a copy of his pamphlet Facts in Mesmerism to Bulwer-Lytton in 1840, the Reverend Chauncey Hare Townshend wrote defensively:

The subject on which I have written is unpopular and terribly connected, in persons' imaginations, with quackery and humbug.<sup>13</sup>

Townshend's pamphlet was dedicated to Elliotson, who was equally acquainted with both Bulwer and Dickens, and Dickens himself was to practice mesmerism on several of

his family and friends<sup>14</sup>. He did not always take it seriously. One of the plays staged in 1850 by the amateur dramatic group with which he, Bulwer and Wilkie Collins were active was a farce by Mrs Inchbald called Animal Magnetism.

Changing attitudes to animal magnetism can be traced in the pages of Blackwood's. In the very first volume, the lead article in the September 1817 number was "Observations on Animal Magnetism"<sup>15</sup>. Exactly twenty years later, at the height of the Elliotson affair, it carried a mocking piece on "Animal Magnetism in London in 1837", purporting to describe a mesmeric session in the rooms of "Baron Dupotet, principal professor of animal magnetism in Paris". It makes a significant comment on the changed attitudes to the phenomenon:

Instead of being brought forward as something altogether supernatural, and setting all reasoning and experience at defiance, it now comes before us as science founded upon natural laws - -. <sup>16</sup>

As we shall see, animal magnetism was just one of a group of movements tending to bring apparently supernatural events within the compass of natural laws. Much later, after Braid's work had become known, Blackwood's for July 1851 carried a long communication to the editor roundly attacking mesmerism<sup>17</sup>, and a decade later, Bulwer, whatever his personal views may have been, was obliged to begin one of his Caxton essays, "On the Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination", with the admission:

Most men are sceptical of the wonders recorded of

mesmeric clairvoyance.<sup>18</sup>

And in Collins' The Moonstone (1868), Mr. Murthwaite observes of the Indians:

"It would be a refreshment and encouragement to those men - quite inconceivable, I grant you, to the English mind - to surround their wearisome and perilous errand in this country with a certain halo of the marvellous and the supernatural. Their boy is unquestionably a sensitive subject to the mesmeric influence-and, under that influence, he has no doubt reflected what was already in the mind of the person mesmerizing him. I have tested the theory of clairvoyance - and I have never found the manifestations get beyond that point."<sup>19</sup>

Mesmerism is now seen as being with it a certain aura of the supernatural, but is rejected as being thoroughly unEnglish and bogus.

### Phrenology

Braid brought hypnosis firmly into the mainstream of pre-Freudian psychology. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the most pervasive aspect of the nascent psychology had been phrenology. Its originator and his disciple, Drs. Gall and Spurzheim, have been roundly castigated by many as the perpetrators of an irredeemably crank movement. However, although phrenology was comprehensively wrong in the central tenet of its doctrine - which held that there is a direct correspondence between the personality and the shape and size of the brain as revealed by the skull - his original



hypothesis encompassed a valuable insight. He may be regarded as the first to advance the theory of detailed cerebral localization, by which different sections of the brain perform different functions; Gall's word for it was "organization". This principle is now established as being in accordance with the facts, although of course the actual distribution of senses and functions in the brain in no way corresponds to phrenology's "Organs".

Gall's early work was done in Germany. Like Mesmer, he offended the establishment - in this case the religious establishment - and, again like Mesmer, settled in the more receptive environment of Paris. In the English speaking world - first in Britain and then in America - his doctrines were popularized by Dr. Spurzheim, an indefatigable writer and lecturer.

Phrenology divided the brain into some three-dozen organs. The number is approximate because occasionally new organs were considered to have been discovered and established. For instance, in 1824 George Combe gave thirty-three organs. Of these, the organs of Size, Weight and Time he considered as probably existing but not established. He also suggested that an unnumbered organ of Wonder existed next to Ideality. This organ of Wonder is associated with the faculty which "produces delight in stories of ghosts and supernatural agency".<sup>20</sup> These thirty-three faculties were classified into three groups, Propensities, Sentiments and Intellectual properties, as listed on the next page.

<u>Propensities</u>	<u>Sentiments</u>	<u>Intellect</u>
Amativeness	Self-esteem	Individuality
Philoprogenitiveness	Love of approbation	Form
Concentrativeness	Cautiousness	Size
Adhesiveness	Benevolence	Weight
Combativeness	Veneration	Colouring
Destructiveness	Hope	Locality
Constructiveness	Ideality	Order
Acquisitiveness	Wonder	Time
Secretiveness	Conscientiousness	Language
	Firmness	Comparison
		Causality
		Wit
		Imitation

The Propensities were considered to be associated with the organs in the occipital region, to the rear and lower sides of the head; the Sentiments with those in the crown; and the organs of the Intellectual faculties were clustered on the brow and forehead.

Although confident that they had hit upon a new and reliable method of using physical features as an index to character, the phrenologists saw themselves not so much as innovators as refiners of a science already venerable: physiognomy. In his Outlines of the Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim . . . . . (1815) Spurzheim does not use the term "phrenology" at all, and explicitly rejects the more concrete near-synonym "craniology", and continues

Our doctrine in general concerns the knowledge of

man - anthropology - and the physiognomical part in particular examines the organ of the mind - organology - and the activity of the faculties - pathognomy, <sup>21</sup>

From the outset Spurzheim was anxious to associate his own work with that of the Swiss physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801). Although Lavater's theory of physiognomy took in the human body as a whole, it concentrated on the face and hands as the most revealing features. In his Autobiography Goethe tells how, on taking up the collection one Sunday morning, Lavater

proposed to himself . . . to see no one, but only to observe their hands and to interpret to himself their forms. But not only the form of the fingers, but also the manner of the same in putting down the gift did not escape his attention, and he had much to reveal to me about it.<sup>22</sup>

A person of mystical tendencies, Lavater regarded physiognomy not just as a method of reading character but also as revealing the divine spirit which is immanent in man. Phrenology claimed to be empirical in its approach, but nevertheless took to itself the name of physiognomy at first.

The most prominent advocate of phrenology in Britain was George Combe of Edinburgh, founder of the Phrenological Society, editor of the Phrenological Journal and Miscellany which appeared quarterly from 1823 to 1847, and author of several books on phrenology<sup>23</sup>.

From the start phrenology was the object of considerable opposition, beginning in 1815 with Dr.

Gordon's hostile review in the Edinburgh Review, which notes the spread of the doctrine after Spurzheim's books and lectures in London and goes on to launch a violent attack on this "thorough quackery" <sup>24</sup>. In response to this Spurzheim undertook to lecture on his methods in Edinburgh, and it was at these that Combe was won over to the science. As a result, in 1826 the Review had to carry another attack when Combe's own work, A System of Phrenology, came out.

Long before this time - - - we expected to have seen - - - this folly consigned to that great Limbo of vanity to which the dreams of Alchymy, Sympathetic Medicine, and Animal Magnetism, had passed before it. But it seems we had underrated the taste for the marvellous which still prevails in the world: for the science, we find, still flourishes in certain circles - and most of all, it would appear, in this intellectual city - where there is not only a regular Lecture on the subject but a Quarterly Journal devoted exclusively to its discussion - - - <sup>25</sup>

In lumping phrenology along with animal magnetism the reviewer (Francis Jeffreys) was anticipating the frequent linking of the two. Dr. Elliotson was converted to the pseudo-science and promoted it along with mesmerism. By the 1840s phrenology was so poorly regarded in academic circles that Professor Adam Sedgwick, the geologist, in his vigorously hostile review of Chambers' anonymously published Vestiges of Creation (1844), thought he might condemn it all the more effectively

by associating it with "phrenology, (that sink-hole of human folly and prating coxcombery)"<sup>26</sup>.

But the frequency and violence of the attacks on phrenology did not diminish its pervasiveness. Phrenological societies flourished; its methods and case-histories were promulgated in periodicals ranging from Combe's Phrenological Journal to the weekly Phrendogist, founded in London in 1833 and the Phrenological Bijou (c. 1830); and those anxious to pursue studies more practically were able to buy casts of assorted heads from the catalogues of suppliers such as Luke O'Neill and Son, of Edinburgh.

One of the most remarkable examples of the influence of mesmerism and phrenology in the 1840s is that given by James Hopkinson. It is worth quoting at some length, if only for its frank simplicity:

I was 19 years old when a celebrated Mesmyrist came and lectured in Nott<sup>m</sup>. His name was Spencer Hall. He published a work entitled the Phreno Magnet of which I was very fond of reading as it contained a quantity of useful information.

(Hopkinson describes how Hall gave a demonstration of mesmerism. A few days later he himself tried mesmerising a servant girl).

Well I commenced the passes over the head as I had done before and in 5 minutes she was sound asleep. Now this girl knew nothing about Phrenology and I was anxious to know how she would act when I began to touch the different organs. . . .

As I had a good knowledge of Phrenology I had no

difficulty in finding the different Organs. So I commenced first with benevolence. As soon as my finger had rested a short time on this organ her face underwent a wonderful change from a sleepy expression to one of intense pity and she began to empty her pockets and give away first one thing and then another untill she began to give away her clothes when I stoped her by simply taking my finger off her head. I next tried Combativeness, but she was not largely developed in that although she was evidently put out by something and if I had continued it much longer I have no doubt she would have wired in. I next tried Acquisitiveness or the stealing organ, and under its influence she would have emptied our pockets. I then put my finger on concientiousness when the change on her features was more remarkable than ever. The tears began to run down her face and her sobs were audible to all the room. I then touched language and kept my other finger on concientiousness, when she began to confess to having stolen something, which I at once stopt as I did not wish her to expose herself any more by telling us.<sup>27</sup>

At the other end of the social scale, Combe twice visited Buckingham Palace in the early 1850s to examine the heads of the royal children and to outline his theories of education<sup>28</sup>.

One of the earliest literary figures to come under cranial scrutiny was the three-week-old daughter of

William Godwin who, in 1799, was examined by Mr. Nicholson. In the preamble to his report on the future author of Frankenstein, Nicholson observes that "our organization at the birth may greatly influence those motives which govern the series of our future acts of intelligence, and that we may even possess social habits acquired during the foetal state". He goes on:

1. The outlines of the head viewed from above, its profile, the outline of the forehead, seen from behind and in its horizontal positions, are such as I have invariably and exclusively seen in subjects who possessed considerable memory and intelligence.
2. The base of the forehead, the eyes and eyebrows, are familiar to me in subjects of quick sensibility, irritable, scarcely irascible, and surely not given to rage. That part of the outline of the forehead, which is very distinct in patient investigation, is less so in her. I think her powers, of themselves, would lead to speedy combination, rather than continued research.<sup>29</sup>

He goes on to comment on the baby's eyes, nose and mouth. Nicholson's analysis was made before publication of Gall's theory, and owes most to the more general physiognomical approach. However, it is just possible that Nicholson knew something of Gall's first lectures on his system, delivered in Vienna in 1796<sup>30</sup>. His use of the word "organization" seems to anticipate the phrenologist's division of the brain into "organs" (earliest recorded usage in the OED is 1806) and he

locates "patient investigation" in the forehead, where the phrenologist would locate the investigative and reasoning powers.

The overlap between physiognomy and phrenology recurs frequently. Gall and Spurzheim called their science "physiognomy" at first; Charlotte Brontë, much later, in Jane Eyre and Villette, (both novels deeply infused with explicitly phrenological terms), speaks always of physiognomy rather than use the more particular term; and E.S. Dallas, in his 1861 articles urging the claims of physiognomy after the discrediting of phrenology, speaks of the latter as being but a partial aspect of the much more reliable former.

In 1815, Coleridge, writing splenetically to a friend, makes the alleged unoriginality of Gall's claims the basis of his hostility:

I have read Spurzheim's book . . . (it) is below criticism. Of Gall's anatomical discoveries, of course, I can be no Judge; but even of these I can shew full half, stated either as Truths or Absurdities<sup>ti</sup>, in one single chapter of Platner's Anthropology - a work published 20 years before Gall had been exhaled from the Boeoti(an) Swamp of Vienna.<sup>31</sup>

But by 1817, having met Spurzheim, Coleridge had mellowed considerably - in his opinion of the man at least<sup>32</sup>. And in the long note on "Spurzheim and Craniology" in Table Talk, dated 29 July 1830, Coleridge argues himself into a partial acceptance of phrenology.

Hazlitt also expressed a virulent early opposition



to the pseudoscience. His essay "On Dreams" begins with a consideration of the work of Gall and Spurzheim, and later in the Plain Speaker (1826) he has a whole essay "On Dr. Spurzheim's Theory". The cornerstone of his refutation is a denial that the brain can be regarded as anything other than a unified homogeneous entity; as it happens, the one respect in which phrenology has since been proved correct is the principle of cerebral localization.

In general, opposition to phrenology was based either on anatomical or on philosophical grounds. Anatomically, Gall was from the outset accorded recognition for his work on the dissection of the brain. However he and Spurzheim came under attack when it became apparent that their map of the brain was not as empirically based as they purported it to be. Quite apart from the attempted division of the brain into various identifiable organs corresponding to innate faculties, the claim that the shape of the individual brain was directly related to the formation of the surrounding bone-tissue was taken for granted and never tested. The most comprehensive and influential opposition in the 1820s came from the lectures of Sir William Hamilton, who attacked phrenology specifically because of its neglect of empirical evidence and of methodological rigourousness. Similarly, Monroe in 1827 commented on the phrenologists' tendency to interpret the evidence in the light of their theories rather than vice versa:

Drs. Gall and Spurzheim have endeavoured to account

for the integrity of the mental powers of the greater number of hydrocephalic patients with large heads, upon the idea, that the brain, in that disorder, is not wasted but merely expanded. Such an opinion presupposes that we are acquainted with the immediate seats of the mental faculties; but, in the words of the French Institute, "the phenomenon of hydrocephalic patients who have preserved their intellectual faculties for a long time, proved nothing; for as we do not know with what part of the brain, nor with what faculties of its organization, these faculties are connected, we can draw no conclusion from it relevant to the essential structure of the brain."<sup>33</sup>

A more effective charge levelled at phrenology was that it was necessarily materialist. Such an accusation carried far greater weight among the general adherents of the doctrine, and it was controversy surrounding just this which led to a split in the association and the loss of a great number of members in the early 1840s. A reviewer in Fraser's had already used materialism as a stick with which to beat phrenology. Alleging that "phrenology is now-a-days the stronghold of materialism . . . <sup>34</sup>, in the course of an ad hominem refutation of Spurzheim, he points out that

the first proposition we are called upon to concede is, that the brain is the material instrument by means of which the mind carries on intercourse with the external world <sup>35</sup>

This caught phrenology firmly in the contemporary

debate on materialism, in which the philosophical speculation resulting from the enquiries of Locke and Hartley in England, Condillac in France, were given new point by the early nineteenth-century upsurge in the search for verifiable knowledge regarding the nature of the mind. As a result the pseudoscience was attacked on the one hand for being insufficiently empirical in its methods, and on the other for being too empiricist in its outlook.

### Phrenology in Fiction

In his article "On Physiognomy" E.S. Dallas protests that the odium attaching to the far-reaching claims of phrenology has been transferred to the older science of physiognomy - undeservedly so.

The false start made by phrenology has retarded the progress of physiognomy. The part usurped the whole, and gave its own bad name to it.

Physiognomy we are to understand as embracing the entire form - . . . The phrenologists started the theory that the physiognomy of the skull is the most important of all, and that nothing is more easy than to decipher it.<sup>36</sup>

Dallas's article, and its follow-up the next month "The First Principle of Physiognomy"<sup>37</sup>, read very much as a last-ditch defence of a discredited science. His attempt to return to the principles of Lavater is interesting in that he had been a student<sup>of</sup> the prominent opponent of phrenology, Sir William Hamilton. Of more

intrinsic interest are the remarks he makes regarding the use of physiognomical traits in literature, instancing the work of George Eliot and Dickens in particular. Of the latter it is remarked:

Mr Dickens so frequently dwells on the external manifestations of character . . . that he has been severely blamed for doing so. It has been said, that we can see how superficial he is for he does not go deep into character; he does not paint the mind, he merely paints the physiognomy.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of George Eliot, Dallas claims to see a conflict between her avowals and her practice. He refers particularly to the description of Hetty at the dance in honour of Arthur's twenty-first birthday:

But Hetty's face had a language that transcended her feelings. There are faces which nature charges with a meaning and pathos not belonging to the human soul that flutters beneath them, but speaking the joys and sorrows of foregone generations - eyes that tell of deep love which doubtless has been and is somewhere, but not paired with these eyes - perhaps paired with pale eyes that can say nothing; just as a national language may be instinct with poetry unfelt by the lips that use it. (Bk 3, Ch. XXVI)

Dallas comments that

George Eliot's instincts contradict her reasoning. She cannot help the expectation of certain mental qualities when she perceives certain physiognomical signs. That expectation, she tells us, has often

been deceived. But on what has it been founded at all that it should constantly recur? It is founded on facts. . . ." <sup>39</sup>.

But in his attempt to disentangle phrenology from physiognomy Dallas is on weak ground, Eliot in her writings is generally equally dismissive of both. She has already written of the effect of Hetty's good looks on a lover:

The little darling is so fond of him, her little vanities are so bewitching, he wouldn't consent to her being a bit wiser: those kitten-like glances and movements are just what one wants to make one's hearth a paradise. Every man under such circumstances is conscious of being a great physiognomist.

Nature, he knows, has a language of her own, which she uses with strict veracity, and he considers himself an adept in the language. (Bk I, Ch. XV)

The whole concept of physiognomy is here demolished by the irony of tone, and the attitude is of a kind with Eliot's rejection of phrenology after having lived in close contact with its principles.

Her Coventry mentor, Charles Bray, was an enthusiastic convert to phrenology<sup>40</sup>, and through him she came to know George Combe. Her friendship with Combe developed to the point that she was a guest of the Combe's in Edinburgh for a fortnight in 1852. Earlier, in 1843, "while staying at Devizes Mary Ann missed a chance to hear Cornelius Donovan, a phrenologist, who was lecturing at Coventry"<sup>41</sup>. At Devizes Mary Ann was the house-guest of Dr. R.H. Brabant who, by a pleasant,

if inconsequential, quirk of coincidence was the very correspondent to whom Coleridge had written so slightly of phrenology twenty-eight years before. From Mary's comments on her inability to attend Donovan's lecture it is quite evident that she is familiar with the concepts and terminology of the science, and not long after this a cast of her own head was made for the purpose of analysis. In one of her letters to the Brays in which she gives an account of the meeting organised by Chapman in his struggle to break the bookseller's cartel in 1852 there is a remarkable description of Dickens. Although she may have been shaping her words to suit her correspondents' beliefs, it is nevertheless a striking demonstration of the extent to which her own thinking was imbued with the phrenological classifications:

His appearance is certainly disappointing - no benevolence in the face and I think little in the head - the anterior lobe not by any means remarkable <sup>42</sup>:

There are several other references to phrenology scattered through George Eliot's correspondence, among them a glimpse of the reading she and Lewes undertook preparatory to the latter's Physiology of Common Life:

We are reading Gall's Anatomie et Physiologie du Cerveau, and Carpenter's Comparative Physiology, aloud in the evenings, and I am trying to fix some knowledge about plexuses and ganglia in my soft brain . . . <sup>43</sup>

One can see that the concept of the brain as a moral and

intellectual index is being supplanted by a more strictly analytical interest in its composition, and a year later she is jocose about phrenology in a letter to Charles Bray:

I keep the purse and dole out sovereigns with all the pangs of a miser. In fact, if you were to feel my bump of acquisitiveness, I daresay you would find it in a state of inflammation, like the "veneration" of that clergyman to whom Mr Donovan said, "Sir, you have recently been engaged in prayer." 44

Presumably the Mr Donovan alluded to is the Cornelius Donovan whose lecture she had missed thirteen years before.

The phrenological correspondence with Bray reached its climax as a result of Lewes' comments on the science. In his History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte Lewes has written what must still stand as the fairest and most comprehensive account of Gall and his teaching. Concise and balanced, the chapter on Gall draws attention to the defects inherent in phrenology without neglecting its contribution to the study of the mind. Not altogether surprisingly, however, Charles Bray was unhappy with Lewes' less than enthusiastic account of the science, and Mary Ann had to write him a conciliatory letter which shows her torn between the belief of her earlier mentor and the scepticism of her later, but ultimately rejecting phrenology in the same spirit as she had previously rejected evangelical religion:

I suppose phrenology is an open question, on which

everybody has the right to speak his mind . . . With regard to their system, phrenologists seem to me to be animated by the same sort of spirit as that of religious dogmatists, and especially in this - that in proportion as a man approximates to their opinions without identifying himself with them, they think him offensive and contemptible.<sup>45</sup>

She here carefully avoids a direct renunciation of the system, listing instead her objections to its proponents.

The interplay between appearance and character is unusually important in Eliot's work, but it is not, for the most part, physiognomically based, in spite of what Dallas claims. Occasionally, however, her familiarity with the skull is discernible in the slightly obtrusive use of cranial terms, as in the description Dempster at the opening of "Janet's Repentance" "a preponderant occiput and a bulging forehead, between which his closely-clipped coronal surface lay like a flat and new-mown table-land". In Adam Bede we are told that in Seth one can "discern the exact contour of a coronal arch that predominates very decidedly over the brow" (Ch. I). These details seem to be given simply in the interests of physical exactitude, although in the case of Seth the predominant "coronal arch" would, according to the phrenologist, be the area indicative of benevolence, and George Eliot does stress the kindness of Seth in her portrayal of him. Certainly, in her one explicitly supernatural story, "The Lifted Veil", as shall be seen in Chapter XI, she does describe a phrenological exploration of the protagonist's head



with scrupulous accuracy, and it is an event of some moment in the story. In Felix Holt, the Radical (1866) both Felix and Mr Lyon have had their heads examined, the latter commenting:

It is, I fear, but a vain show of fulfilling the heathen precept, "Know thyself," and too often leads to a self-estimate which will subsist in the estimate of that fruit by which alone the quality of the tree is made evident. Nevertheless . . . that phrenological science is not irreconcilable with the revealed dispensations. (Ch. V).

It is left to Dorothea in Middlemarch to find out just how erroneous one can be in judging by appearances. Talking with her sister after the first meeting with Mr Casaubon, she makes it quite clear that she has been captivated by a fancied consonance between his appearance and her ideal of him.

"He is one of the most distinguished-looking men I ever saw. He is remarkably like Locke. He has the same deep eye-sockets . . . Everything I see in him corresponds to his pamphlet on Biblical Cosmology." (Ch. II)

Later, during the honeymoon of disillusionment in Rome, Naumann offers a cynical analogue to this attitude when he takes Casaubon as a model for Aquinas.

An author not mentioned by Dallas is Charlotte Brontë, a notable omission as her novels are imbued with phrenological references, although she refers to the general science as physiognomy. In both Jane Eyre and Villette there are instances of the heroine, isolated

and vulnerable, overhearing an analysis of her character after having been taken in to a strange house. In Jane Eyre it occurs as Jane recovers consciousness in Marsh End after her flight from Thornfield. Diana and Mary remark on the physiognomy of Jane, and later St John Rivers is more definitive:

"Rather an unusual physiognomy; certainly, not indicative of vulgarity or degradation". . . .

"I trace lines of force in her face which make me sceptical of her tractability", (Ch. XXIX)

Nothing in St John's reading is belied by Jane's character in the novel.

The parallel incident in Villette occurs when M. Paul is invited by Madame Beck to assess the character of Lucy Snowe; again, the subject of analysis is apparently unconscious, but in fact perfectly aware of what is happening at her bedside.

"Mon cousin," began Madame, "I want your opinion. We know your skill in physiognomy; use it now. Read that countenance."

. . . .

"I read it," he pronounced.

"Et qu'en dites-vous?"

"Mais - bien des choses," was the oracular answer.

"Bad or good?"

"Of each kind, without doubt," pursued the diviner. (Ch. VII)

As Emmanuel comes progressively to dominate Lucy's feelings, he several times refers back to this seemingly

inconclusive interpretation. Pressing her to take part in the play, he claims to have an insight into her character: "I read your moyens; play you can; play you must." (Ch. XIV); here he obviously suggests a phrenological examination, which we would not infer from the details given.

Elsewhere in Villette, however, there are several easy and natural references to aspects of phrenology.

Rosine is described as "a young lady in whose skull the organs of reverence and reserve were not largely developed" (Ch. XXX)<sup>46</sup>; Dr. John's mother "possessed a good development of benevolence, but he owned a better and larger." (Ch. XIX); "the Labassecouriens must have a large organ of philoprogenitiveness" (Ch. XI). And in Jane Eyre a great deal of Jane's increasing knowledge of herself and her involvement with Rochester is similarly portrayed. She speaks of her first friend and protector, Miss Temple:

I suppose I have a considerable organ of veneration, for I retain yet the sense of admiring awe with which my eyes traced her steps. (Ch.V)

Later, she looks at Rochester's head:

He lifted the sable waves of hair which lay horizontally over his brow, and showed a solid enough mass of intellectual organs, but an abrupt deficiency where the suave sign of benevolence should have risen. (Ch. XIV)

and in response to Jane's enquiry as to whether he is a philanthropist he replies

"No, young lady, I am not a general philanthropist;

but I bear a conscience"; and he pointed to the prominences which are said to indicate that faculty and which, fortunately for him, were sufficiently conspicuous; giving, indeed, a marked breadth to the upper part of his head. (Ch. XIV)

All this is quite accurate in its location of the phrenological organs (see diagram Appendix A ). In the scene in which the disguised Rochester feigns telling Jane's fortune, his scrutiny of her is physiognomical, and Charlotte Brontë consistently refers to physiognomy, never using the word "phrenology". Nevertheless, its doctrines helped provide her with a conceptual map of the mind and personality which are shown developing in Jane Eyre or struggling to retain integrity in Villette.

It is a conceptual map which, one suspects, underlies Dickens' damning description of Bradley Headstone:

He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. . . . From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers - history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left - natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places - this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner that

could be described as one of lying in wait. - - -  
 It was the face of one belonging to a naturally  
 slow or indifferent intellect that had toiled  
 hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold  
 it now that it was gotten. (Our Mutual Friend Bk2,  
 Ch. I)<sup>47</sup>

The warehouse-like arrangement of Headstone's mind is closely analagous to the cerebral localization postulated by Gall, and there is also the suggestion that this mental constitution has had a discernible effect on Headstone's appearance. The insistence on "mechanically" and "mechanical" recalls the incident already quoted from Hard Times in which Gradgrind is described as "a galvanising apparatus charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away" (Ch. II), and behind the words one can discern the whole early nineteenth-century debate on materialism. Similarly, when Pip and David Copperfield are subjected to the automatic rigours of mental arithmetic by Pumblechook and Murdstone respectively, it blunts rather than stimulates their mental responsiveness. As such, these incidents are a menace to the natural development of the imaginative and emotional personality<sup>of</sup> a kind with the restrictions experienced by Jane Eyre; in the case of Pip, as shall be seen in ChapterVII, the moment of repression is followed by an episode of mental excitement which is crucial to his life.

The pervasiveness of phrenology, and of the framework

it offered in the delineation of character, is an important element in nineteenth century fiction<sup>48</sup>. In a literature of mimetic realism, it offered the possibility of "reading" physical details as psychological descriptions. More generally, and in common with galvanism and mesmerism, mediated through subtle fluids, and with Swedenborgianism in its vision of cosmic space inhabited by spiritual hierarchies, it seemed to give material access to the transcendental world. Each in its own way constituted a claim that areas hitherto regarded as lying outside observable reality and beyond explanation - areas spiritual, vital or mental - could be brought within the compass of rational or empirical investigation.

#### Theories of the Supernatural. (i) Ferriar.

While the various doctrines of continental origin which we have mentioned above were spreading across the Channel, there were instances of a new and more analytical approach to the specific problem of apparitions. The first notable work was Dr. John Ferriar's Essay towards a theory of apparitions (1813). Ferriar's book, short and ill-organised though it is, is of some significance in medical history and of rather more in literary history. Breaking with the numerous theorists who had hitherto accounted for ghosts, spirits, and popular belief therein, by claiming that some sort of supernatural influence played a part in the production of such phenomena<sup>49</sup>, Ferriar set out to demonstrate that all apparitions are traceable ultimately to the

operations of sensory perception.

The concept of sensation became important in human thought by way of philosophical empiricism: knowledge comes to the mind through the avenue of the senses. For this reason empiricism has always been allied to sensationism and, among the British empiricists, to their associationism. Physiologists turned to the problems of sensation after Bell's and Magendie's discovery (1811-1822) that sensory and motor nerves are different - the Bell-Magendie law.<sup>50</sup>

Ferriar's theory, however, was not based on physiological experiment but, in so far as it has any rigorous methodological basis, is a conceptual model derived from behavioural observations.

A graduate of Edinburgh medical school, Ferriar worked for much of his life in Manchester where he devoted great efforts to the cause of public health<sup>51</sup>. He had a background of interest in literature, publishing Illustrations of Sterne; with other essays and verses in 1798 and reworking Thomas Southern's play Oroonoko and retitling it The Prince of Angola (1788); these were followed by a verse letter The Bibliomania in 1809. This literary background is much in evidence in the disarmingly jocular preface to the Theory of Apparitions, in which he roundly condemns the contrivances of the explained supernatural of Gothic novelists:

It has given me pain to see the most fearful and ghastly commencements of a tale of horror reduced to mere common events, at the winding up of the

book. I have looked, also, with much compassion, on the pitiful instruments of sliding-panels, trap-doors, back-stairs, wax-work figures, smugglers, robbers, coiners, and other vulgar machinery, which authors of tender consciences have employed to avoid the imputation of belief in supernatural occurrences. (pp. vi-vii)

Addressing himself particularly to authors, Ferriar goes on to claim that the theory which he is about to outline has the great advantage of offering the facility of conjuring up ghosts "without offending against the true philosophy, and without violating probability".

The highest flights of imagination may now be indulged, on this subject, although no loophole should be left for mortifying explanations, and for those modifications of truth, which completely baulk the reader's curiosity, and disgust him with a second reading. (p. vii).

Although at the outset Ferriar proposes to divide his essay into three sections, considering in turn the general law of his system, the proof of the existence of "morbid impressions", and the application of his principles to actual case-histories, he does not adhere to his plan. The nub of the theory is given in a few pages of the first chapter, and the remainder of the Essay is mainly a collection of anecdotes culled from printed sources and from Ferriar's own experiences.

The linch-pin of Ferriar's theory is his claim that the mind responds to sense-impressions long after the external stimuli which provoked them have been removed.



It is a well-known law of the human oeconomy,  
that the impressions produced on some of the  
external senses, especially on the eye, are more  
durable than the action of the impressing cause.  
(pp. 15,16).

As an illustration of this he points out how, after one has looked at the sun for a time, the image of a luminous globe remains even after one's gaze has been averted. He cites Erasmus Darwin's work on optics, but does not refer to another figure whose work provided additional evidence for the general principle: Fowler, whose experiments had shown that sense-impressions could be artificially stimulated in the absence of the normal stimuli by means of Galvanic electricity.

Once it is accepted that sense-impressions may outlast their stimuli, says Ferriar, the way is open for a rational explanation of hallucinations. They are simply the after-effects of experience operating on the brain; similarly, in dreams,

when an object is presented to the mind, during sleep, while the operations of judgment are suspended, the imagination is busily employed in forming a story, to account for the appearance, whether agreeable or distressing. (p. 17)

Here Ferriar's psychology is anticipating that of Freud, for he is postulating a subconscious memory which, in delirious or dreaming states, freely presents random or associative images to the mind. In his essay "On Dreams" Hazlitt was to make much the same point, using Ferriar's very terms, judgment and imagination:

So, in madness, there is, I should apprehend, the same tyranny of imagination over judgment.

But Ferriar is careful to observe the distinction between susceptibility to delusion and insanity, while admitting that the two may frequently go together:

I have frequently conversed with persons, who imagined that they saw demons, and heard them speak. This species of delusion admits of many gradations, and distinctions, exclusive of actual insanity. (p. 31).

He is able to observe such a distinction because, just as crucial to Ferriar's theory as the retention of sense-impressions, is the principle of cerebral localization implicitly underlying what he claims to be the essentially original feature of his Essay:

It has not been generally observed, that a partial affection of the brain may exist, which renders the patient liable to such imaginary impressions, either of sight or sound, without disordering his judgment or memory. (pp. 14-15)

As a result, madness or dream-states are not always necessary conditions for the disordering of the senses. Because the brain is multiple, it is quite possible for a man to retain his logical faculties, to be quite sane to his own satisfaction and that of his neighbours, and yet be subjected to apparitions because of a malfunctioning imaginative faculty. This malfunctioning might arise from any one of a variety of causes: disease, indigestion, drugs, etc. Indeed, there is an innate susceptibility to delusions in all men, and they may be triggered by a

chance arrangement of external objects. Citing the widespread tendency to see imaginary shapes in a regular pattern, as on a wallpaper, Ferriar claims that these are long-forgotten perceptions surfacing involuntarily from memory and imposing themselves on the pattern. The perceiver does not recognise the images because they spring from memory independently of judgment. Because the judgment is inoperative, the images are not fixed or ordered but take on varying shapes and sizes, and can be transmuted by the free play of imagination. In Coleridgean terms, the delusive state as outlined by Ferriar approximates to the workings of Fancy<sup>52</sup>.

Through the workings of subconscious memory, a morbid disposition of the brain is capable of producing spectral impressions, without any external prototypes. . . .

From recalling images by an art of memory, the transition is direct to beholding spectral objects, which have been floating in the imagination.

(pp. 99,100).

Ferriar claimed to account for hallucinations on the basis of abuse of the brain mechanisms and of the sensorium. It obviously de-supernaturalised ghosts and spectres, and in his preface he is careful to state that his treatise is applicable only to individuals in a "profane" context, and that it has no theological reference whatsoever. In effect, Ferriar offers a materialist explanation of ghosts while attempting to steer clear of the charge of materialism. His focus on the individual level of experience locates his

hallucinations as subjective manifestations without any independent supernatural existence.

Theories of the Supernatural. (ii) Alderson, Hibbert.

The publication and subsequent success of Ferriar's monograph brought an aggrieved reaction from John Alderson (1759-1829), who had already written An essay on apparitions, printed in the Edinburgh Medical and Chirurgical Journal in 1810 and published separately in 1811. In this he had stated that delirium, during which condition apparitions were most frequently seen, was attributable to pathological conditions and not to spiritual agencies. It attracted little attention<sup>53</sup>, but after the impact of Ferriar's work a second edition was brought out in 1823. Alderson's resentment is clearly evident in the preface:

As no notice whatever was taken of his publication, the author has been induced, at the recommendation of his friends, to republish it in a more book-like form, not only to prevent all suspicion of plagiarism, but to assert his claim, and show his right to whatever novelty or merit there may be in the theory itself. (p. ix)

Even more so than Ferriar's, Alderson's Essay is made up of a collection of case-histories. There is little evidence of methodological progression, and no investigation of perception or of the mind as such. Alderson relies on the individual cases which he records to prove

That the belief in apparitions, ghosts, and spectres

is not only well-founded, but that these appearances are perfectly natural, arising from secondary physical causes, and depending on circumstances to which all nations, all mankind, are equally liable.

(p. 20,21)

Alderson does not claim to deal with all supposedly supernatural phenomena and, like Ferriar, is particularly interested in those apparitions apparently seen by those who retain their rationality. He distinguishes such hallucinations from those associated with partial insanity, delirium, somnambulism and reverie.

- - - the cause lies not in the perturbed spirits of the departed, but in the disordered functions of the living.

In spite of republication and his protests, Alderson's essay did not have great impact, but it is of interest as evidence of the new thinking on the supernatural. The tendency at the time was to regard ghosts and spectres as part of abnormal human experience rather than as an access of the supernatural.

Alderson and Ferriar conducted their discussions of apparitions on a popular but responsible level. A rather weightless book, Apparitions; or The Mystery of Ghosts, Hobgoblins, and Haunted Houses, Developed . . .

.<sup>54</sup> (1814) by Joseph Taylor contributed little other than an avowed intention

to laugh a ridiculous fear out of the world, by shewing on what absurd and improbable foundations the common notions of ghosts and apparitions are built. (pp. 14,15)

More successfully funny was the London Magazine's spoof article "On the Dry Rot in Brains"; which purported to be a communication from one "John Sykes", pointing out the danger posed to brains by dry rot and offering an infallible remedy - obtainable only from the same Mr. Sykes<sup>55</sup>. In a notice of John Reid's Essays on Hypochondriasis (1821), the reviewer, believed to be Robert Gooch<sup>56</sup>, summed up the attitude to mental disorders which produced hallucinations - while side-stepping the materialism charge which was to stick to phrenology:

. . . there are no moral diseases strictly so called; . . . although attended by moral symptoms, they depend on physical processes, and . . . , as indigestion may produce that delusion called night-mare in sleep, so other conditions of the body may produce those delusions called insanity in the waking state.

Though the most striking symptoms of insanity are moral phenomena, they do not prove that it is a moral disease; for whether the operations of the mind are the functions of the brain, according to the materialist; or the actions of a spirit superadded to the brain, - still, whenever this organ is diseased, the most striking symptoms will be a disorder in the mind.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps the most orderly popular treatment of the mind and its susceptibility to hallucination was Dr. Samuel Hibbert's Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions (1824)<sup>58</sup>. Like Ferriar, Hibbert (1782-1848) was

Edinburgh trained and, for a time, Manchester based, although he never practised medicine. His book owes a considerable amount to Ferriar, to whom he frequently refers. He starts from the proposition that

apparitions are nothing more than ideas, or the recollected images of the mind, which have been rendered more vivid than actual impressions. (p. 61)

He differs from Ferriar, however, in that he considers the mind as "simple and indivisible", conceiving that "every mental feeling is only the mind itself, existing in a certain state" (p. 62); Hibbert takes the "mind" rather than the brain as the topic for analysis. And whereas Ferriar holds that revived impressions, in competing with actual impressions, were likely to dominate only at times of mental repose or distraction, Hibbert stresses rather the permanence of sense impressions, claiming that feelings or ideas, even those experienced in early infancy, are never lost and can be recovered by the application of appropriate stimuli<sup>59</sup>.

There are few of my readers, probably, who are not aware of the distinction which is always made between the states of the mind which are induced when causes impressing our organs of sense are present, and those which occur as revivals of prior mental states; the former being termed sensations, the latter ideas, or, more correctly, renovated feelings. Sensations and renovated feelings differ essentially in nothing but degree. Thus, the latter are less intense, less vivid, or fainter, than the former. (p. 66)

The view of the mind which Hibbert adopts leads him to regard the unconscious as a storehouse of received impressions.

Past feelings, even should they be those of our earliest moment of infancy . . . are constantly liable to be renovated, though they should not be the object of consciousness at the latest period of our life. According to this view, any past impression of the mind never becomes, as it were, extinct.

Once acquired, a sense-impression can be regenerated by a renewal of the emotionally charged feelings which are associated with it. The potency of the renovated feelings may efface actual sensations, thus leading to hallucinations and apparitions.

In all spectral impressions the illusion is either increased or diminished in proportion to the force of the emotion it excites.

On the individual level, therefore, it is emotion - for example, fear - that induces hallucination, a reversal of the generally accepted causal relationship. On a wider social level, a similar process may be observed in the workings of superstition:

In well-authenticated ghost-stories of a supposed supernatural character, ideas which are rendered so unduly intense as to induce spectral illusions may be traced to such fantastical objects of prior belief, as are incorporated in the various systems of superstition, which for ages have possessed the minds of the vulgar. (p. 125)



Again, his argument has it that ghosts, or belief in them, presuppose superstitious tendencies rather than vice versa. The remark that Dr. Johnson put into the mouth of Imlac, that the belief in apparitions could have become universal only by its truth, is here stood upon its head.

Hibbert is more rigorous in the task he sets himself than are other writers on the subject of apparitions, aiming to arrive at a systematic concept of the process which produces such phenomena.

If apparitions are really to be considered as ideas equaling or exceeding in vividness actual impressions, there ought to exist some important and definite laws of the mind which have given rise to this undue degree of vividness. (p. vi)

A large part of his book is taken up with considering the pathological states which are frequently connected with the production of spectral illusions, and the different temperaments which are susceptible when excited. He also refers to Davy's work with nitrous oxide two decades before, drawing attention to the disorganisation of perception experienced by Davy.

When Davy

subjected himself to the vivifying influence of the nitrous oxide (he experienced) an increased sensibility of touch, and occasionally noticed what he names a tangible extension. (p. 246)

Ultimately, Hibbert regards apparitions as resulting from the perceptions being unusually excited by some physiological disorder, whether this be caused by

disease, morbidity of temperament, or some chemical agent such as nitrous oxide. In this, he is fundamentally in accord with Ferriar.

He and Ferriar were to be further linked in 1830 when Fraser's carried an unsigned article by Thomas Richards entitled The Philosophy of Apparitions<sup>60</sup>. In this, although the title is taken from Hibbert, the greater part of the matter is lifted from Ferriar, on whose book Richards performs a ruthless scissors-and-paste operation. Although he does mention his two sources by name, Richards by no means acknowledges the extent to which he is indebted to them. But it all served to keep the topic in general, and Ferriar and Hibbert's thinking in particular, in the currency of ideas.

One other book on the subject, of much later date, may be mentioned: Herbert Mayo's Letters on the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions (1849), a series reprinted from Blackwood's. In his book, Mayo deals with

the Od force<sup>61</sup>, the law of sensorial illusions, the laws of trance. The superstitions thus reduced to natural phenomena fall thus into the domain of physiology . . .

But it was principally Ferriar and Hibbert between them who shifted the base for apparitions into the sensorium of the subject; the metaphysical is not metaphysical at all, but a function or malfunction of the physiological. The primary impulse for apparently supernatural experiences comes from the minds of the individual.

Currency of Ferriar and Hibbert's Ideas

Setting out to write a philosophy of clothes, Carlyle asks rhetorically in the opening chapter of Sartor Resartus:

Have we not a Doctrine of Rent, a Theory of Value; Philosophies of Language, of History, of Pottery, of Apparitions, of Intoxicating Liquors?

Certainly, by the early 1830s, philosophies or theories of apparitions had entered into general currency. In 1818 the Blackwood's reviewer of Phentasmagoriana, the same collection of German stories which had prompted the literary competition in Geneva which produced Frankenstein, began his article with a discussion of Ferriar's book, and notes that in spite of it the ghost story remains potent<sup>62</sup>. The author of Frankenstein herself, writing in The London Magazine in 1824, did not agree. Writing on ghosts and ghost stories, Mary Shelley laments

But these are gone out of fashion. Brutus's dream has become a deception of his over-heated brain. Lord Lyttleton's vision is called a cheat; and one by one these inhabitants of deserted houses, moonlight glades, misty mountain-tops, and midnight churchyards have been ejected from their immemorial seats . . . <sup>63</sup>

And James Hogg, writing in Blackwood's as "The Ettrick Sheppard", begins his story "The Mysterious Bride" on a defensive note: "A great number of people now-a-days are beginning broadly to insinuate that there are no such things as ghosts, or spiritual beings visible to

mortal sight"<sup>64</sup>. Both Mary Shelley's and Hogg's protests indicate the acceptance of the type of thinking propounded by Ferriar and Hibbert; indeed, Hogg's opening sentence reproduces remarkably that which opened a story by Samuel Warren in the same periodical the month before, but this time mentioning Hibbert by name:

The age of ghosts and hobgoblins is gone by, says worthy Dr. Hibbert; and so, after him, says almost everybody now-a-days - - - <sup>65</sup>

Hibbert's book had already figured in Blackwood's, cropping up as a topic of conversation in one of Christopher North's "Noctes Ambrosianae".

The allusions indicate that the writers had a degree of familiarity with the theories of apparitions outlined in the first quarter of the century, and that they could presume an equivalent familiarity on the part of readers. The theories exerted an influence that lasted for several decades. Dickens owned a heavily annotated copy of Hibbert<sup>66</sup>, and in 1859 All The Year Round carried an article, A Physician's Ghosts which refers to the fact that Hibbert has been read extensively and goes on to cover much of the same ground, arguing that ghosts are products of a disturbed consciousness<sup>67</sup>. Even later, Bulwer Lytton in Chapter LXXI of A Strange Story (1861) cites Hibbert approvingly. But perhaps the most striking demonstration of the universal familiarity with the two physicians had occurred earlier in the rather unlikely setting of Cranford. When Mrs Forrester confesses to being frightened of ghosts, Miss Pole attempts to dispel her

fears by coming down upon her "with indigestion, spectral illusions, optical delusions, and a great deal out of Dr. Ferrier (sic) and Dr. Hibbert besides" (Ch. X); Mrs Gaskell was obviously confident that the allusion to two earlier inhabitants of Manchester would be meaningful to readers of Household Words.

### Conclusion

In the half-century or so from 1780 to 1830 there were several developments in popular scientific, philosophical and medical thought which had a bearing on the supernatural. Galvanism, mesmerism and phrenology each in its own way projected a link between the material and the metaphysical, and each offered a rational explanation of certain areas of transcendental experience. Meanwhile, seemingly supernatural events were being attributed to phenomena produced by mental or perceptual mechanisms. Each tendency revalued psychic experiences by interiorising them: on the one hand the operations of the metaphysical were mastered by logical investigation - life was reduced to a muscular motor force responding to electrical stimuli, a person's mind could be put into a trance and controlled by that of another, or an entire personality could be codified by the shape of a skull; but along with this interiorisation came a focus on the breakdown of the mental processes, leading to a state in which sense impressions are not a reliable link with the external world. Man is no longer seen as a fixed unit in a hierarchical order of being, with the supernatural

existing on another order. Instead, man is seen as a physiological organism, whose relation with all that is other becomes potentially problematical. The approach to the supernatural changes emphasis from the transcendental to the subjective, but, although the nature of the supernatural is altered, it still remains as a concept of disordered experience. Later chapters in Part One will look at the type of fiction to which this change in emphasis gave rise; for the moment, an earlier and more widely known fiction of the supernatural requires consideration.

## C H A P T E R   T W O

## T H E   N A T U R E   O F   G O T H I C.

During the period considered in Chapter 1 - the latter half of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth - there was a flourishing literary fiction of the supernatural. It coexisted on premises very different to those being advanced by the theorists of either subjective or transcendental experience. It was the age of Gothic fiction, a fiction of emotional reaction rather than of physiological perception. The supernatural story of the first half of the nineteenth century constitutes a distinct mode of writing, differing from the Gothic romances which antedate it in tone, narrative structure and postulates. The physiologically based story is not simply a mutation that evolved from Gothic fiction, but a radically different product of different literary conditions and it emerged specifically in response to the changed attitudes to the supernatural which have been outlined above. The new type of story is a successor to Gothic literature, certainly, but not a lineal descendant.

Nevertheless, because of the vigour of its efflorescence and the hardness of its aftermath in

critical terminology, some consideration of Gothic literature and the concept of Gothicism is both inevitable and useful here, so that characteristics of the later supernatural stories can be more clearly defined in the light of their opposition to the Gothic mode.

### The Gothic Concept

Horace Walpole was the first to use the term "Gothic" in a literary context, when he styled The Castle of Otranto (1764) "a Gothic story". Subsequently, stories by authors as various as the Misses Lee, Ann Radcliffe, M.G. Lewis, William Godwin, and the ladies of the Minerva Press came to be labelled "Gothic", not without imposing some semantic strain on the word. Monsieur Longueil has chronicled the shifts in meaning which the word underwent during the latter half of the eighteenth century; the original meaning, more or less equivalent to "barbaric" or "outlandish", gave way to connotations of medievalism, and this meaning in turn yielded to the more enduring one of supernaturalism<sup>1</sup>. The Castle of Otranto qualifies on all three counts as it happens (although Walpole, in his preface to the first edition, claims that "the language and conduct have nothing that favours of barbarism"<sup>2</sup>). Writing late in the century, both Charlotte Smith and Ann Radcliffe use the term only for architecturally related features. Monimia's turret room in The Old Manor House is several times described as "gothic". In The Mysteries of Udolpho there is "the gothic gloom of the surrounding buildings"<sup>3</sup>. Later, on her arrival at Chateau-le-Blanc with its "gothic features" Blanche



fancifully imagines stories of a knight "clothed in black armour" who comes "to rescue the fair lady of his love from the oppression of his rival; a sort of legends, to which she had once or twice obtained access in the library of her convent, that - - - - was stored with these reliques of romantic fiction"<sup>4</sup>. In this instance the term comes close to being used in a literary context, but, as Longueil makes clear, the movement towards synonymy with the "grotesque, ghastly and violently superhuman in fiction" took the best part of four decades:

The term Gothic in its modern transferred sense is a fairly late usage, post-dating the chief Gothic romancers, Walpole, Reeve, Lewis and Radcliffe, who never used the adjective except with medieval connotation, and not greatly ante-dating the end of the eighteenth century<sup>5</sup>.

As a result the descriptive precision of the term for critical analysis is somewhat hampered by the fact that latter-day usage does not correspond to or even overlap with usage by the authors of the archetypal works which it now describes. Nowadays the occasionally unthinking application of the term to almost any fiction dealing with supernatural or fantastic phenomena or with artificially stressed emotion has concealed important modal distinctions. The term is applied to authors as diverse in method as Clara Reeve and M. G. Lewis, and as historically remote from one another as William Beckford and William Faulkner. Because Mrs Radcliffe, rightly regarded as the quintessential Gothic writer, produced fictions associated with terror

provoked by supernatural or quasi-supernatural agents, it has subsequently been erroneously assumed that any narrative which exposes its central character to unexplained or uncanny external menace must perforce be categorised - as often as not apologetically - as Gothic. As shall be seen, Gothic literature is to be identified not by the presence of supernaturalism alone, but by a combination of supernaturalism and exoticism; its natural fictional form is the prose romance<sup>6</sup>; and it is an aspect of the larger phenomenon of the literature of sensibility.

The nature of these distinctions will be discussed later; for the moment it is proposed to consider Gothic literature as existing within definite historical limits, 1764 and 1820 (i.e. between publication of The Castle of Otranto and Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer). With a few exceptions that occur towards the end of this period - the most notable being Godwin's Caleb Williams and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein - I am assuming that any piece of prose fiction dating from this period dealing with supernatural or quasi-supernatural events may reasonably be termed Gothic. The term is both historically and modally descriptive.

Because of its dramatic suddenness and profuse variety, Gothic fiction soon attracted to itself the attentions of literary commentators. Even before the turn of the century Mrs Barbauld (Miss Letitia Aikin) had published an essay "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" which appeared in the Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose (1773) alongside the fragment of Gothic narrative, Sir Bertrand, written by her brother John. Among his Literary Hours

(1798) Nathan Drake wrote "On Gothic Superstition" and "On Objects of Terror"; these too were published in tandem with fragments of Gothic romance, "Montmorenci" and "Sir Henry Fitzowen"<sup>7</sup>. In his reasonable and methodical discourses Drake is at pains to demonstrate the venerability of terror in literature; he is careful in observing the distinction between horror and terror, and goes on to argue the superiority of the latter, citing instances from Shakespeare and Dante in support of his case, as well as discussing the productions of Mrs Radcliffe herself, calling her "the Shakespeare of Romance Writers" who "never degenerates into horror"<sup>8</sup>.

### Feminine Gothic

After the turn of the century the history of Gothicism is by and large one of reaction against it. Even before 1800 hostility to the Gothic mode had grown with its success, but the early antagonism was based on non-literary grounds - the apparent femininity of Gothic fiction. Its typical protagonists, its most successful practitioners, and the bulk of its readers seem to have been women<sup>9</sup>. "Masculine Gothicism", as exemplified in Beckford's Vathek, Lewis's The Monk and Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, diverges appreciably from the mainstream of the Gothic movement. Orientalism, explicitness and extravagance respectively characterise these works, each of them considerably removed from the exquisite tenterhooks of the writing in which Mrs Radcliffe specialised. Indeed, Vathek (1786) owes as much to Johnson's Rasselas (1759) and to The Arabian Nights

as it does to any antecedent terror literature. Lewis's work, in which an emphasis on horror rather than on terror is combined with a degree of titillation, is conspicuously isolated. Subsequent writing in English certainly learned more from Mrs Radcliffe than from Lewis, whose only considerable imitators are Francis Lethom, Charlotte Dacre and, perhaps, Maturin<sup>10</sup>. It is Mrs Radcliffe's type of writing, with its emphasis on the "ordeal by sensibility", which must be considered paradigmatic of Gothic literature as evidenced in the work of her predecessors and followers: Clara Reeve, Eliza Parsons, Harriet and Sophia Lee, and Regina Maria Roche. That she chooses to explain away the apparently supernatural incidents in her novels<sup>11</sup> - voices in walls, eerie music, and sundry apparitions, - should not obscure the fact that the appeal it has in the first instance is to the supernatural. Her explanations, which may be taken by the reader as either an authorial betrayal or a rational placebo, is secondary both in the sequence of narrative presentation and in imaginative effect.

M. Levy has calculated that, of 290 novels in which the author's sex is indicated on the title-page, close on three-fifths are by women. The accuracy of his figures cannot be taken for granted, for as early as 1770 the Gentleman's Magazine began a notice of a volume of Sermons written by a lady with the observation that

As among other literary frauds it has long been common for Authors to affect the stile and character of ladies, it is necessary to apprize our readers that these sermons are the genuine productions of a female pen

Among the gothic terror writers of the first and second ranks, where in almost all cases the author's identity can be firmly established, there can be no doubt as to which sex predominates: Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Sophia and Harriet Lee, Mrs Meeke, Sarah Wilkinson, Regina Maria Roche, "Ann of Swansea" and "Ellen of Exeter"<sup>13</sup>. And even if it is the case that a number of feminine pseudonyms and coy indications - Emma Dorville By a Lady (1789), Austenburn Castle By an unpatronized Female (1796) - were hiding male authorship, it only demonstrates all the more forcibly that such fiction was considered the preserve of women writers.

There is ample evidence that the readership also was predominantly female. While the Gentleman's Magazine scorned fiction of any sort, Gothic romance was a staple of its contemporary, The Lady's Magazine<sup>14</sup>. From 1791 to 1806 between a half and three-quarters of the stories serialized each year in The Lady's Magazine come into the Gothic category, with the exception of 1803 when for some reason the proportion falls to one quarter<sup>15</sup>. Even before 1791 there is in the shorter tales "a pronounced undercurrent of romance which shows the direction which taste is ultimately to flow - settings remote in time and space, idealized characters, and romantic and often violent actions in an atmosphere of sensibility"<sup>16</sup>. Meanwhile, one of the few contemporary defences of novel reading, "On the Good Effects of Bad Novels", appeared in a women's periodical, The Lady's Monthly Magazine<sup>17</sup>.

A further illustration, albeit satiric, of the Gothic writers' hold over a female readership is provided

by James Gillray's cartoon, "Tales of Wonder". This shows four women seated around a table, their countenances distorted by tense anticipation as one of their number reads aloud by the light of a candle. Behind her the mantelpiece carries statuettes of a human skeleton and Medusa's head. The novel in question is in fact The Monk, and the print is dedicated to Lewis. The dedication is somewhat ironic, for in illustrating the "effects of the sublime and wonderful" the cartoon shows that the immediate effect is to render features hideous, since the listeners' faces grimace with suspense and shock.

The third aspect of Gothic femininity, the tremulous heroine, can be accounted for by the demands of the narrative mode. Writing on the methods of bringing about a harmonisation of Beauty and Terror as evident in Mrs Radcliffe's work, Walter Scott observes that

the indispensable elements of producing such an effect were scenery, a Gothic building (or two, or three) and the sensitive mind of a girl attuned to all the intimations, sublime or dreadful, that she can receive from her surroundings<sup>18</sup>.

Any terror story requires a passive and sensitive central character who will respond to and mediate the menace of a hostile environment. As will be seen in Chapters 4 and 6, this is a formal requirement which governs the narrative structures of the nineteenth-century story as well. As far as the Gothic heroine is concerned, there is no need to assent to the suggestion of M. Levy, who draws attention to the sexual connotations of the

predicament of a maiden threatened by the masculine perpendicularity of the Gothic castle (which, after all, she generally enters rather than is entered by). Nor are Gothic novels all extended accounts of constant threat. As J.M.S. Tompkins points out, there is a tendency to exaggerate the proportion of terror in Mrs Radcliffe's books<sup>19</sup>. The nature and degree of the stimuli affecting the Gothic heroine are more extensive than is generally allowed, and it is one of the disadvantages of the "Gothic" label as used in a literary context that it has tended to focus attention rather too narrowly on the terror elements. Walter Francis Wright has correctly pointed out that the novel of sensibility, which developed almost contemporaneously with the Gothic novel, is similarly centered on the emotional responses of a character in a given situation. The common motivation of each is the portrayal of emotion and sensibility<sup>20</sup>. J.M.S. Tompkins makes a similar point about the female novelists, introducing a historical dimension:

In their hands the novel was not so much a reflection of life as a counterpoise to it, within the covers of which they looked for compensation - - - - To say that the foundations of woman's novel are laid in malice and in daydream is, of course, to exaggerate; - - - but it is the exaggeration of a truth, and so far useful that it connects the domestic sentimental novel of the seventies with the Gothic romance of the nineties and shows them to be products of the same mental soil<sup>21</sup>.

Perhaps the most readily apparent distinction, is that those writers we think of as Gothic are female, while those classed as sentimentalists - Goldsmith, MacKenzie, Brooke, Day, Holcroft - are nearly all men, the one notable exception being Mrs Inchbald. That this is a useful distinction is demonstrated by Ellen Moers in her discussion of "heroicism"<sup>22</sup>, but it does not gainsay the point that the Gothicism associated with Mrs Radcliffe is part of the larger phenomenon of the novel of sensibility.

### Gothicism in Decline

The Gothic mode began to fall off after 1800. Mrs Meeke, a prolific and well-established writer in William Lane's Minerva Press stable, prefaced Midnight Weddings (1802) with a survey of the market for fiction as it then stood. She noted that readers were going for "either the quiet romance teeming with ghosts and spectres, or the satirical adventures of a political Quixote replete with wit and judgment or else the more simple narrative founded on events within the bounds of probability". She situates the Gothic supernatural story as one of three trends in current fiction, no longer enjoying undisputed dominance. Significantly, the erstwhile author of The Mysterious Wife (1787) and The Sicilian (1798)<sup>23</sup> announced that Midnight Weddings was forsaking the "ghosts and spectres", indicating the way public demand was moving. Mrs Meeke also advises aspiring authors to attach special weight to the approbation of publishers, for "the gentlemen



and ladies who sit in judgment on the fine webs from the prolific brains of female authors are very competent to decide upon the taste of the public". Her own publisher, William Lane, was the principal retailer of Gothic fiction, and figures quoted by Levy show that, whereas in the decade from 1796 to 1805 his press brought out eighty-three Gothic novels, for the following ten years the figure dropped to forty<sup>24</sup>.

It would seem therefore that the decline in popularity of Gothic fiction had set in before the publication of satires or burlesques such as Sarah Green's Romance Readers and Romance Writers (1810), E. S. Barrett's The Heroine, or The Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader (1813) and Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey and Peacock's Nightmare Abbey, both of which appeared in 1818. Bearing in mind Mrs Meeke's comments, the fact that Northanger Abbey failed to obtain publication in 1803 may be an indication that at that date the hold which Gothic fiction exerted on the market was still strong and that the publisher Crosby was reluctant to go against the trend of the market<sup>25</sup>. The burlesques did not begin to appear until the tide had already turned, and they should be seen not as causes but as symptoms of the shift in public taste. Winfield H. Rogers, who has listed some fifty works which, in whole or in part, tilted at the "melodramatic sentimentality" of the English novel during this period, points out that Gothic sentiment is only one constituent of the general cult of feelings and that the Gothic novel is not attacked

per se. The decline of the Gothic novel is part of the larger literary historical movement away from the novel of sensibility, in which the central character is offered as an ideal or paragon for emulation, to the novel of social realism, in which the central character is offered as a representative of the empiric real. "It cannot be an accident", writes Harry Levin, "that realism from Rabelais' burlesque of the Arthurian legend to Jane Austen's glances at Fanny Burney and Ann Radcliffe, has so often originated in parody"<sup>26</sup>. Anti-Gothicism is revolutionary rather than reactionary, in that its primary significance is a preparing of the way for a new style of writing, not a simple coup de grâce directed against the old.

### Poetry

Not until the 1820s does supernatural terror begin to be apparent in the more empirical fiction of the nineteenth century, where its status is founded on the attitudes outlined in Chapter 1. In the meantime its dominant mode of literary expression was poetry. The lyrical Ballads appeared in the year following publication of The Italian. Coleridge stated that the aim of the collection as far as he was concerned was to give "a human interest and a semblance of truth" to the supernatural, while Wordsworth gave "the charm of novelty to things of every day"<sup>27</sup>. Already apparent in these aims is an attempt to mediate between the ordinary and the extreme, in which the supernatural is associated with the empirical world while the mundane

is to be defamiliarised and revitalised through enhanced awareness. Notwithstanding Wordsworth's claim in his Preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads that they were written to counteract the "outrageous stimulation" of, among other things, "frantic novels", the poems shared a common source with the Gothicists in returning to popular ballads as their models. The material of the ballads had been used by the Gothic writers ever since the publication of Percy's Reliques of ancient English poetry in 1765. Along with the ersatz folklore of Macpherson's Ossianic poems and the aesthetic rationalising of Burke's Enquiry into the origin of the sublime and beautiful, and Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance, these constitute a group of books published in the first half of the 1760s which, as much as Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, stand as the fountainhead of Gothicism. Broadly speaking, in the second half of the eighteenth century the supernatural in literature moved from the traditional and anonymous ballad through romantic prose fiction to the poetry of the individual. The romantic poets were the chief custodians of the supernatural during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, a period during which prose fiction had turned away from it after earlier excesses.

The indebtedness of the Romantic poets to their Gothic precursors was swiftly spotted; just four years after the appearance of Lara the Gentleman's Magazine carried an accusing little piece called "Plagiarisms

of Lord Byron" pointing to the borrowings from The Mysteries of Udolpho<sup>28</sup>. Nor was Lara an isolated instance. Blake's early poem "Fair Elenor" is a piece of gothic balladry in which the castle settings of Coleridge's "Christabel" and Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes" are anticipated. It is in the descriptive aspects that the debt to Gothicism is most marked: the landscape and architectural features clearly derive from the earlier prose. The treatment of the supernatural in romantic poetry is by no means confined to the Gothic mode, but explores a wider range of connotation and application. By the time of the second generation romantics the sources of the supernatural had widened considerably. Of the three major poems in Keats's 1820 volume, "The Eve of St Agnes" is the only one that might be termed Gothic in style and setting<sup>29</sup>; it is also the only poem in which the supernatural event is more apparent than real, with Porphyro making use of a superstitious belief to gain access to Madeline. The other two poems, "Lamia" and "Isabella", do contain explicitly supernatural incidents but they derive from classical and renaissance literature respectively.

Furthermore, in taking over supernatural incident from the Gothacists the romantic poets refined its purpose, changing its status from stimulus to symbol. Whereas previously it had been an agent of stress which allowed the emotional and moral (but not the mental or imaginative) responses of an ideal protagonist to be tested, it now became symbolic and even allegorical in

poems like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "Alastor". Leigh Hunt refers to Coleridge's poem as "a voyage to the brink of all unutterable things"; in it, as in the others mentioned, the encounter between mortal and spirit is offered not testingly, as in Gothic fiction, or credulously, as in the original ballads, but as a possible and primary patterning of human experience.

By being assumed into poetry supernatural motifs and themes were eventually made acceptable in literature and accorded a seriousness that had been denied them since the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama<sup>30</sup>. The poets gave wider currency to an area of experience which hitherto had been the preserve of a restricted literary mode - a literary mode, what is more, that in its own time and subsequently was branded as being almost sub-literary; only in the work of Mrs Radcliffe, was it conceded, did it attain the status of art literature. Without entering into a discussion of the hierarchy of literary modes here, one can at least assert that the romantic poets brought the supernatural to the forefront of the dominant literature of their age.

### The End of Gothicism

Meanwhile Gothic prose fiction degenerated into a profusion of "blue books", short tales packed with incident which sold as thirty-six or seventy-two page pamphlets for sixpence or a shilling. Frequently the tales were abridgements of longer works, sometimes with

names altered to hide the affinity, sometimes not, in order to benefit from the success of the original. Mrs Reeve's The Old English Baron became Lovel Castle, or The Rightful Heir Restored, while The Midnight Assassin, or, Confession of the Monk Rinaldi is Mrs Radcliffe's The Italian. These and others are listed by Summers<sup>31</sup>, who also remarks however that in their shortness they deviate from true Gothicism:

The Gothic novel does not admit of any abbreviation; a certain leisure, a certain length allowing of long drawn suspense; a certain hesitation even, seem essentials in the true Gothic romance. We must be held in expectation. Events cannot hurry on their course. The Gothic novel which aims at brevity or concision is never entirely successful or to be approved. As we shall have occasion to note, this is just the point where the chap-books wilt and show so thin<sup>32</sup>.

The brevity of the blue-book tales did not always manifest itself on the title-page; for example, The Castle of St Bernard, or the Captive of the Watch Tower, in which is Illustrated the Fatal Effects of Misplaced Love and the Errors of Credulity (1810) appeals in turn to reader's appetites for intrigue and instruction, while glancing at Mrs Robinson's novel of 1792, Vancenza, or the Dangers of Credulity, published in a blue-book abridgement the same year.

Gothic fiction did manage to end with one last spectacular effusion. Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer

(1820) is a compendium of all that was most notable in Gothicism. Combining the horrors of Lewis with the tremulousness of Mrs Radcliffe and the historicism of Mrs Reeve, its various convoluted tales embrace the complete range of Gothic features. But it is a museum, not a shop-window; it was seen as outmoded, even freakish, as soon as it was published. The Blackwood's reviewer, although giving the novel a favourable reception, praises it by making a comparison with two Gothic novels of twenty years before, The Mysteries of Udolpho and Godwin's St Leon. The vigorously hostile notice in the Edinburgh Review attacked its "Golgotha style of writing" and remarked that "no writer of good judgment would have attempted to revive the defunct horrors of Mrs Radcliffe's school of Romance, or the demoniacal incarnations of Mr Lewis"<sup>33</sup>. Maturin's death soon afterwards, in 1824, ended the half-century or so of Gothicism.

### Appraisals of Gothicism

Gothic literature has not gone short of critical attention during the present century. Edith Birkhead concentrated on the Gothic period as it has been delimited above, but was particularly concerned with demonstrating the antiquity and continuity of terror as an emotion in literature through the ages. Her final chapters extend the survey to take in the nineteenth-century short story and developments in American fiction<sup>34</sup>. Eino Railo studied Gothic literature in terms of its recurrent motifs; the haunted castle

is preeminent among these, but he also isolated "the criminal monk", "the wandering Jew" and "the young hero and heroine" as objects of study. Leaning heavily towards the type of Gothicism represented by Lewis, he played down the importance of the Radcliffean mode<sup>35</sup>. The 1930s saw the publication of two important works. Mario Praz dealt with Gothicism as part of the dark underside of romanticism, a larger phenomenon which he followed through to the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>36</sup>. Montague Summers is distinguished by the omnivorousness of his approach within his chosen period. His lack of selectivity in The Gothic Quest<sup>37</sup> is compounded by the fact that his study is incomplete; important figures such as Ann Radcliffe were to have been dealt with in a second volume which never appeared. Devendra P. Varma's is the most analytical of the studies of Gothicism, while Maurice Levy's is the most factual<sup>38</sup>. Recently Coral Ann Howells has written of the type of feeling depicted in and aroused by Gothic fiction, by examining a representative half-dozen novels<sup>39</sup>.

As well as these full-length studies of Gothic literature, one must also note Dr J.M.S. Tompkins' chapter on "The Gothic Romance"<sup>40</sup>. Stressing the essentially Romantic nature of such fiction, she sees the distinction between Radcliffean and Ludovician Gothicism as a chronological one, with the German-inspired horrors of The Monk as the later phase. This does seem to overlook the fact that the two types attained their respective acmes almost contemporaneously



in the mid-1790s. Less well known than Tompkins is Edward Wagenknecht's fair and concise appraisal of "The Renaissance of Wonder" in his Cavalcade of the English Novel<sup>41</sup>.

In view of the attention it has attracted, one might reasonably expect that the body of Gothic literature would have been satisfactorily delimited by now, but this is not the case. There is general agreement that the publication of The Castle of Otranto in 1<sup>7</sup>64 marks the emergence of the mode, but when it comes to fixing on the terminus ad quem there is less unanimity. Owing to a failure to distinguish between sensationalism, supernaturalism and gothicism, practically any portrayal of bewilderment is termed "gothic". Representative of this tendency is Harrison R. Steeves:

Apart from an unbroken succession of true Gothics, which include readable works by Robert Maturin, Keith Ritchie, G.P.R. James, Harrison Ainsworth, Sheridan LeFanu, Bram Stoker, and Isak Dinesen, Gothic effects are carried forward into the writing of Mrs Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, as well as Emily, Wilkie Collins, Hawthorne, Poe, Stevenson, writers of our own century like Walter de la Mare and Algernon Blackwood, and the authors of unnumbered dozens of our current mystery stories<sup>42</sup>.

Other instances abound. Perhaps the most important recent article on Gothicism, "Gothic versus Romantic; A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel"<sup>43</sup>, sees the Gothic strain as being prolonged through Moby Dick to Faulkner's

Sanctuary. G.R. Thompson in the introductory essay to The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism similarly extends the phenomenon as far as Conrad and Kafka. Even Maurice Levy who, in the title of his work, Le Roman "Gothique" Anglais (1764-1824), precisely delimits the period of concern, cannot refrain from a concluding chapter which traces strong links between the gothic novel and stories dealing with the occult and terror:

But one might go on for ever listing those works in English which demonstrate the durability of "gothic" themes and motifs<sup>44</sup>.

Levy's rather weary capitulation before the seemingly endless continuity is understandable, but the criterion which he uses, as did Steeves, in order to identify the Gothic in literature - the presence of particular motifs and themes - contributes largely to the exaggerated impression of the extent of Gothicism. The themes and motifs typical of Gothic literature are not unique to it, and therefore cannot serve as defining characteristics.

The tendency to see Gothic literature in terms of its ingredients established itself early. In 1797 a writer in The Spirit of the Public Journals proffered the following recipe for a successful novel:

Take

An old castle, half of it ruinous.

A long gallery with a great many doors,  
some secret ones.

Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.

As many skeletons, in closets and presses.

Assassins and desperadoes, quant. suff.

Noises, whispers, and groans, three score at least.

Mix them together in the form of three volumes to be taken at any of the water-places, before going to bed<sup>45</sup>.

And someone styling himself "A Jacobin Novelist" in the Monthly Magazine in the same year, purporting to give instructions on "The Terrorist System of Novel Writing", advises the deployment of similar features<sup>46</sup>. Commenting on the novels as they appeared, the Critical Review's notices repeatedly remarked on "the usual apparatus", "the usual furniture", and "the same instruments", meaning trap-doors, murderers, ghosts and galleries. The poet and dramatist George Colman the younger summed it all up succinctly and dismissively in a stanza of "The Will":

A novel now is nothing more  
Than an old castle and a creaking door,  
A distant hovel,  
Clanking of chains, a gallery, a light,  
Old armour, and a phantom all in while,  
And there's a novel.

Twentieth century critics have perpetuated this attitude of regarding the Gothic novel as a permutation of stock properties and events, with Railo even going so far as to elevate the castle to a central role in the novel.

One of the few critics to protest against the too indiscriminate use of "Gothic" as a descriptive term is Louis James who insists on the distinction between the late eighteenth century tale of terror and that of early Victorian penny-issue fiction:

It is also a mistake to consider the stories of terror which appear in the early Victorian cheap novels, together with earlier Gothic romances, without noticing the differences which mark them off from the literature on which they drew<sup>47</sup>.

### The Nature of Gothic

In the essay mentioned above Hume analyzes some of the qualities of Gothic fiction. He follows Tompkins in seeing the shift from terror-to horror-gothic as being essentially a chronological one, but holds that it accompanied a general change in the idea of good and evil, showing an "increasing psychological concern with moral ambiguity"<sup>48</sup>. Later, Hume isolates what he sees as the overall distinguishing feature of Gothicism:

The key characteristic of the Gothic novel is not its devices, but its atmosphere. The atmosphere is one of evil and brooding terror; the imaginary world in which the action takes place is the objectification of (the) imaginative sense of the atmosphere. In other words, the setting exists to convey the atmosphere<sup>49</sup>.

There are two points to be noted in connection with

this. First of all, although he has earlier written of the "horror-gothic" novels - by which he means The Monk, Frankenstein and Melmoth the Wanderer - as a more advanced type of Gothicism, the atmosphere "of evil and brooding terror" of which he here speaks applies more aptly to the Radcliffean type. Secondly and more importantly he attaches little or no significance to the supernatural character of the incidents and experience in Gothic fiction. Supernaturalism is of the essence. It is of no moment to point at the explanations of the seemingly supernatural associated with Mrs Radcliffe and others. The ultimately bathetic effect of many of these explanations in no way alters the fact that the appeal, in the first instance, is to the supernatural. The constant explaining-away may indicate a hesitancy on the part of the authors to accord the supernatural an unquestioned place in their world-view, notwithstanding the eagerness with which they used it for fictional effect, but for Emily St. Aubert and her like there is no hesitancy. For them the supernatural exists, and events are accepted as supernatural until proved otherwise.

But in according pride of place to "atmosphere" in his summation of Gothicism Hume has identified, in part, the feature which defines it in contradistinction to other types of fiction of supernatural terror. Kenneth Clark, in his study of late eighteenth-century sensibility as revealed in its architecture, states it more precisely:

And Gothic was exotic; if not remote in space,  
like chinoiserie, it was remote in time<sup>50</sup>.

The distancing in space or time or both has been remarked on before, but commentators have not isolated it as a key feature of Gothicism. Yet, as Hume says, the remote setting is the objectification of an imaginative apprehension. The exotic world of the Gothic novel is as ideal and unreal as the world of imagination, and the extent to which this is the case may be gauged from the status of the supernatural. Although indispensable by virtue of the tension and menace it could contribute, it never becomes the culminating or focal point of a novel; the final scene is more frequently a scene of reconciliation (as in Mrs Roche's Clermont) or of retribution (as in The Monk). This factor governs the form of the novel, in that the closure is marked either by a return to a moral norm or by emotional fulfilment. It is as a direct consequence of Gothicism's primary feature, exoticism, that its secondary feature, the appeal to the terror of the supernatural, can be integrated successfully into its world. In the unreal world of the Gothic novel, supernatural events meld with the setting instead of being foregrounded against it as they would be in an every day environment. This was remarked upon by Scott when writing of Mrs Radcliffe:

She has selected for her place of action the south of Europe - - - these circumstances are skilfully selected to give probability to events which could

not, without great violation of truth, be represented as having taken place in England<sup>51</sup>.

One of the most telling comments on Gothicism is made in Shirley by Charlotte Brontë, writing half a century after the phenomenon when the new Victorians considered they had outgrown such fiction. Shirley is the novel which gives effect to the half-resolution expressed in a letter to Lewes:

If I ever do write another book, I think I will have nothing to do with what you call "melodrama"; I think so, but I am not sure.<sup>52</sup>.

After the brouhaha ensuing on the publication of Jane Eyre, problems of tone and approach to reality were to the fore in the writing of Shirley and are reflected in the incident in which Caroline comes upon Rose Yorke reading:

- - - Approaching quietly, she knelt on the carpet at her side, and looked over her little shoulder at her book. It was a romance of Mrs Radcliffe's - "The Italian".

(- - -)

"Do you like it?" inquired Rose, ere long.

"Long since, when I read it as a child, I was wonderfully taken with it."

"Why?"

"It seemed to open with such promise - such foreboding of a most strange tale to be unfolded."

"And in reading it, you feel as if you were far away from England - really in Italy - under another

sort of sky - that blue sky of the south which travellers describe." (CL XXIII)

There one has it: the strangeness and escapism of Gothic fiction justly appreciated for their own sakes.

Continental settings could range from the Mediterranean to the Germanic countries; no particular nation established an overall primacy. Nor were the settings exclusively continental: a Scottish environment (as in Mrs Radcliffe's first novel, The Castles of Athlin and Dunblayne) or an Irish one (as in Mrs Roche's Children of the Abbey) would serve as well, being equally removed from the London-centred experience of the reading public. But if an author should venture to use an English setting then there could be no concession as regards period. Historical accuracy may not have been scrupulously observed (indeed it was set at no great premium) but the antiquity of the action was a clear precondition of the contract between author and reader. Dr Tompkins remarks on the hopelessness of the few attempts to import "Gothic scenery and effects into tales (professedly) of contemporary life"<sup>53</sup>; the antiquity is intrinsic to the Gothic mode.

Within the exotic setting move characters who in their psychology and actions are decidedly of the eighteenth century, constituting recognisable ideals of contemporary mores, both good and evil. As Wright has made clear, terror and horror are but two of a range of emotions evoked in the literature of sensibility, and the various heroes, heroines and villains serve as



models and, perhaps, surrogates for the readers. While the surface attraction of the specifically Gothic novels may have stemmed from the vicarious thrills they provided, it also showed the operations of a sensibility under stress. Ordinary humans (ordinary in the sense that they served as norms towards which a reader might aspire) are subjected to wholly extraordinary experiences. In many respects the novels portray a rite de passage, an ordeal through which the protagonist must pass with his or her probity unscathed. Eliza Parsons' The Castle of Wolfenbach (1793) begins with the hapless orphan Matilda travelling through the stormy night, forced to seek shelter first in a peasant's cottage and later in a haunted castle. By the end Miss Parsons is able to write:

Thus, after a variety of strange and melancholy incidents, Matilda received the reward of her steadiness, fortitude and virtuous self-denial. There is nothing mundane or familiar about the territory which she has traversed. One would be hard put to decide which would be more strange to the genteel young lady of the 1790s: a night in a haunted fortress or in a peasant's cottage. Her acquaintance with either would not be extensive, Scott not yet having widened the scope of the novel to encompass the peasantry.

### Conclusion

I therefore suggest that Gothic fiction is to be distinguished by two criteria: the presence of exoticism

(which may take the form of antiquarianism), and of a secondary supernaturalism (secondary in the sense that it plays a subordinate part in the plot or sequence of events). To these criteria might be added the frequent explicit appeal to a moral and intellectual recognition of what is right or wrong in thought, action and feeling. The frequent occurrence of haunted castles, secret vault-like passages and trembling heroines is an accidental rather than an essential attribute. In all terror stories, in no matter which mode, the protagonist is exposed to terror; a haunted castle was an eminently suitable location for exposing the Gothic heroine to supernatural terror in exotic circumstances, so combining two Gothic hallmarks. Later on, the nineteenth-century terror stories were to substitute the isolated country manor or terraced town-house as haunted environments. Haunted these may have been, but certainly not exotic. It would be a mistake to take them as straight equivalents of the Gothic castle, but it is a mistake which those who attempt to define Gothic literature by its constituents are rather too ready to make. John Ferriar claimed in the Preface to his Theory of Apparitions that

- - - a person rightly prepared may see ghosts, while seated comfortable by his library-fire, in as much perfection, as amidst broken tombs, nodding ruins, and awe-inspiring ivy & . . .

Take courage, then good reader, and knock at the portal of my enchanted castle, which will be opened to you, not by a grinning demon, but by a very civil person, in a black velvet cap,

with whom you may pass an hour not disagreeably<sup>54</sup>. Later writers, who have been regarded as domesticating hitherto Gothic elements (the Brontës, Dickens) were in fact utilising motifs and moods derived from a rather later mode of fiction, one based on physiology as much as on sensibility. Should there be a tendency in these pages to over-emphasize the differences between Gothic fiction and its successor, it must be borne in mind that the similarities have for too long been taken for granted. There are, naturally, obvious and significant points of resemblance between two forms of literature each aiming at the evocation of terror, but these should not blur their respective identities.

## CHAPTER THREE

FROM THE CONFSSIONAL  
TO THE SOLIPSIISTIC

At the end of Chapter One it was suggested that the quasi-supernatural story of the early nineteenth-century is significantly different from Gothic fiction. In this chapter it is proposed to concentrate on four works in particular, and through them to trace the emergence and development of a new mode of fiction. The four works for discussion are Godwin's Caleb Williams, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater, and Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner, and taken together they display different aspects of what might be termed the "confessional mode". The great poem of the age, Wordsworth's Prelude, is, as M.H. Abrams has pointed out, confessional in its concerns, and in form it displays what are to be the characteristic features of the mode.

Wordsworth does not tell his life as a simple narrative in past time but as the remembrance of things past, in which forms and sensations "throw back our life" (I, 660-1) and evoke the former self which coexists with the altered present self

in a multiple awareness that Wordsworth calls  
 "two consciousness". There is a wide vacancy  
 between the I now and the I then,

Which yet have such self-presence in my mind  
 That, sometimes when I think of them I seem  
 Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself  
 And of some other being. (II,27-33)<sup>1</sup>

The primary emphasis on sensation and consciousness, and the apparent fragmentation of the latter, are typical. All four books named above are notable for their emphasis on narratorial perception. In each the narrator-hero, or more accurately the narrator-protagonist, is represented as isolated, and all experience is mediated to the reader through his perception. At the same time the reliability of his perception is called into doubt, a feature which inevitably gives rise to a greater or lesser degree of ambivalence in the text. The general narrative progression is towards a state of solitary consciousness which is used to transmit a distorted vision of the external world.

### The Vogue of the Confession

Writing in Blackwood's in 1823, Thomas Colley Grattan began a light-hearted piece entitled "Confessions of an English Glutton" by remarking

This is confessedly the age of the confession,  
 - the era of individuality - the triumphant reign  
 of the first person singular. Writers no longer  
 talk in generals. All their observations are  
 bounded in the narrow compass of the self,<sup>2</sup>

and he went on to name "the goodly list of scribblers" who "from the author of *Eloise* to the inventor of *Vortigern* - since the Wine-Drinker, the Opium-Eater, the Hypochondriac, and the Hypercritic" who had already related their experiences. Grattan recognizes that Rousseau is the prime mover behind this new phenomenon in literature ("*Eloise*" presumably refers to his La Nouvelle Heloise), but the immediate cause was De Quincey's hugely successful Confessions of an English Opium Eater which had appeared two years previously in 1821<sup>3</sup>. Ten months after the "*Confessions of an English Glutton*" Blackwood's carried another article in much the same vein, "*Confessions of a Footman*". Written by Henry Thomson, this took the form of a letter to the editor from one "Thomas Ticklepitcher", and it too commences by citing precedents, almost reproducing the opening of Grattan's piece:

Seeing that the world, through the medium of the press, is rapidly becoming acquainted with the miseries of all classes; that drunkards, hypochondriacs, water-drinkers and opium-chewers are received with sympathy and commiseration; I take leave to address you upon the grievances of footmen.<sup>4</sup>

With the exception of that by the hypercritic, the various confessions mentioned in the two passages are readily identifiable. The "inventor of *Vortigern*" is W.H. Ireland, the forger of Shakespeare manuscripts, who published a confession of his forgeries in 1805. All the remainder appeared during the early 1820s and

provide a clear indication of the stir created by De Quincey's account of his experiences. The "drunkard" mentioned by the footman is almost certainly the same as the "Wine-drinker" referred to by the Glutton, and must allude to Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard". This work first appeared in 1813, but in the course of 1822 it was resurrected as the result of a literary squabble. A reviewer in the Quarterly Review, Robert Gooch, wrote of Lamb's essay as affording

a fearful picture of the consequences of intemperance,  
and which we have reason to know is a true tale.<sup>5</sup>

In reply to this aspersion on his character, Lamb had the London Magazine republish his essay four months later, prefixed by a note in which he gives an account of the genesis of the essay and returns some fire at the Quarterly. The note concludes with a broadside which includes an announcement of the author's intention to put forth "his long promised but unaccountably hitherto delayed 'Confessions of a Water Drinker'"<sup>6</sup>. This must be the source of the last of Footman's classes of confessors, although the essay never did appear.

Lamb's biographer E.V. Lucas advances two reasons for the return of the nine-year-old essay: the need to make a riposte to the Quarterly, and Lamb's difficulty in coming up with a fresh article as he was on a visit to Paris at the time<sup>7</sup>. But the riposte is contained in Lamb's accompanying note rather than in the article itself, and a further consideration must have been the current vogue for "confessions". After the success of

De Quincey's work, first published in the London Magazine, its editors were only too willing to print more in the same vein. The magazine later carried "The Memoirs of a Hypochondriac", another of the items referred to by Grattan<sup>8</sup>. Hypochondriacs were in the public eye at the time; a book of essays by John Reid had appeared in 1821 with the title On Hypochondriasis and other Nervous Affections - indeed, it was in the course of a review of this book that Gooch made the remarks which brought the "Confessions of a Drunkard" back into circulation.

In October and November 1824 Blackwood's carried Francis Bacon's "Confessions of a Cantab"<sup>9</sup>, but the outburst of confessional articles and stories had already reached its peak in June of that year with the publication of a book by one who, like De Quincey, was a disaffected protégé of the Blackwood's stable: Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner. This was the culmination of a mode of fiction which can be seen as commencing with Godwin's Caleb Williams (1794).

### Caleb Williams

Grattan began his article by announcing "the triumphant reign of the first person singular", and Caleb Williams opens with a succession of first person singular statements. The first sentence, "My life has for several years been a theatre of calamity", locates the action, both temporally ("for several years") and



spatially ("theatre"), within the strict compass of Caleb's experience. Of the eighteen sentences making up the first two paragraphs, fourteen begin with either "I" or "My", and these words or variants of them are prominent in the other four. In his 1832 preface to Fleetwood Godwin describes Caleb Williams' composition in a manner that resembles Poe's "Philosophy of Composition"; he writes that he arrived at the first-person narration as the best adapted

to my vein of delineation, where the thing in which my imagination revelled the most freely was the analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind . . . <sup>10</sup>

In the interplay between Caleb's mind and the external world of "Things As They Are" (Godwin's significant main title for the novel), the problems of rational response to events are presented in terms of a disordering of perception.

There is a number of incidents and statements in Caleb Williams which indicate that Caleb's experiences are all too real. The most obvious of these occurs in the episode during which Caleb falls asleep in the robbers' hide-out and dreams that an agent of Falkland is about to attack him (III, Ch.4). When the dream of Falkland's agent becomes "too terrible" Caleb wakes up, thus disposing of that particular menace. But Caleb recovers consciousness just in time to avoid a descending meat-cleaver wielded by the house-keeper. This woman has nothing to do with Falkland; her

antagonism springs from a wholly personal antipathy to Caleb, as is made clear at the opening of the chapter. Although the sense of menace is carried over from dream to reality, the distinction between the two is observed, and the inference to be drawn is that there exist real and external dangers for Caleb which are far more immediate than the imagined ones of his dreams.

At two crucial points in the novel Caleb does refer to events in terms of dream-experience. After having been discovered opening the trunk by Falkland, Caleb repents of the impulse which drove him to try and ascertain its contents, and says of the attempt: "It now appeared to me like a dream" (II, Ch. 6). Later, while enjoying a measure of respite in the Welsh market-town, Caleb recovers the peace of mind lost to him since his youth, and remarks

I began to look back upon the intervening period as upon a distempered and tormenting dream; or rather perhaps my feelings were like those of a man recovered from an interval of raging delirium, from ideas of horror, confusion, flight, persecution, agony and despair! (III, Ch. 13).

In each instance Caleb's experience takes on a dreamlike quality only in retrospect. While Falkland's persecution of him is at its height there is no suggestion that its operations are anything but real. It is only when the pressure is relaxed that the victim wonders whether he really has been exposed to such intense suffering.

Noticing the new and increasing hostility of his

neighbours in Wales, Caleb debates within himself whether or not Falkland could be behind the change in attitude. Sometimes he is half-inclined to consider it a dream, a disorientation of his own mind.

I felt like a man distracted by the incoherence of my ideas to my present situation excluding from it the machinations of Mr Falkland, on the one hand; and on the other by the horror I conceived at the bare possibility of again encountering his animosity . . . (III, Ch. 13)

The prospect of finding himself once again on the run from Falkland is horrible, but his erstwhile master's involvement seems to provide the only logical explanation. And reason triumphs over the sense of horror. The idea of Falkland persists, and sure enough it emerges that Falkland is behind the spreading hostility.

As in the delusive conditions described by Ferriar and Hibbert, the victim here is caught in a contradiction between reason, which argues that ghosts (or Falkland) do not offer any threat, and sense impressions, which assert that they do. This contradiction generates the terror which plays a major part in Caleb Williams. Yet although a novel of terror, Caleb Williams is a radical departure from the Gothic fiction with which it is contemporary. In the Gothic novel, a protagonist is introduced into an exotic environment; he, or more often she, is a solitary traveller who, in the course of the narrative, moves from secure and familiar ground

into a strange and haunted ideal setting that has some of the transferred qualities of nightmare. These qualities, however, belong with the setting, as does the principal antagonist opposed to the heroine, and she knows that she will be safe if only she can escape from the alien territory in which she finds herself. Caleb, however, is trapped in his native England and Wales, and Falkland belongs very much to the same world as his prey; not the least part of Caleb's agony is the knowledge that for him there can be no awakening from the nightmare. By the conclusion of the novel, the separation of dream and reality which was observed earlier is no longer in force; instead there is a continuum of perception which extends the range of lived empiric experience to the point where the narrator-protagonist is disorientated because reality no longer matches rational expectation. The peculiar stress to which Caleb is subjected is crucial to the novel, and to maintain that the world of Caleb Williams is the waking world is not to deny that its events are accorded significance by their effect on Caleb. The mind's assimilation of external reality and the consequent disordering effects are central to the story and its inherent terror. As Marilyn Butler writes:

. . . . the revised ending locates the action in Caleb's consciousness, which is as it should be.<sup>11</sup>

In the original ending of the novel, the court-room confrontation of Caleb and Falkland brings yet another failure for Caleb and he is crushed to nothingness by

his adversary<sup>12</sup>. The ending as we have it has Falkland admitting to villainy and acknowledging that he has wronged his former secretary. Although on the face of it this is a stagey dénouement arranged for the comfort of the novel's closure, it is also an oblique statement of defeat for Caleb, leaving him still under the posthumous power of Falkland. Shortly before this final encounter he describes the impossibility of escaping from Falkland's agent, Gines, forever dogging his footsteps:

No words can enable me to do justice to the sensations which this circumstance produced in me. It was like what has been described of the eye of Omniscience, pursuing the guilty sinner, and darting a ray that awakens him to new sensibility, at the very moment that, otherwise, exhausted nature would lull him into a temporary oblivion of the reproaches of his conscience . . . .

My sensations at certain periods amounted to insanity. (III, 14)

Hounded as he is, Caleb becomes a function of his pursuer, existing only to be hunted. As his status is concentrated into this, and this alone, his concept of Falkland changes too:

But now he appeared like nothing that had ever been visible in human shape.

. . . . His whole figure was thin, to a degree that suggested the idea rather of a skeleton than a person actually alive. Life seemed hardly to be the capable inhabitant of so woe-begone and

ghost-like a figure. (III, 12)

Falkland, as seen by Caleb, shifts towards the incorporeal, becoming almost an apparition on his last corpse-like appearance, where just before his death he seems to be a revenant. It all brings Caleb to a position exactly the reverse of that implicit in the repeated first-persons of the opening paragraphs. His ego is annihilated, as he exclaims

Why should these reflections perpetually centre upon myself? . . . .

I began these memoirs with the idea of vindicating my character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate; but I will finish them that thy (Falkland's) story may be fully understood; and that if those errors of thy life be known which thou so ardently desired to conceal. The world may at least not hear and repeat a half-told and mangled tale. (Postscript)

Although this is presented in moral terms, there is an equivalent empirical breakdown. In the progression from first-to second-person narrative at the end, the identity of things and persons "as they are" is in flux. Caleb and his experiential world, dreamer and dream, perceiver and perceived, merge in a state of terrifying uncertainty as the autonomy of reason crumbles. This is the significance of Caleb's pyrrhic victory in the court-room.

Godwin's novel is noteworthy for its confessional narrative method. A confessional story is the autobiography of a transgressor. For the

autobiographical aspects, Godwin had two recent models, both of them by continental authors, Goethe and Rousseau.<sup>13</sup> Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther preceded Caleb Williams by two decades, and was a fiction which incorporated elements of autobiography. Rousseau's Confessions are avowedly autobiographical. The autobiography has strong links with spiritual apologetics and moral apologia, and as such extends back to Augustine's Confessions. There is an alternative humanist approach, for which the prototype is Benevenuto Cellini's Autobiography. Cellini lays his cards firmly on the table:

. . . everyone who has to his credit what are or really seem great achievements, if he cares for truth and goodness, ought to write the story of his life in his own hand.<sup>14</sup>

Cellini's work did not become widely known until relatively recently, however, and at the end of the eighteenth century the Augustinian-Rousseauistic tradition dominated.

In English literature there is no clear precedent for Caleb Williams. Moll Flanders may seem at first sight to be the autobiography of a transgressor, but the narrative is scarcely confessional as its whole tendency is to justify Moll's actions, diminishing the transgression. Furthermore, the preface makes clear that the text is a redaction of Moll's own story, several passages having been excised or modified; any "confession", therefore is incomplete. Compare this to the final sentence of Caleb Williams which stresses

the necessity of completing that story<sup>15</sup>.

Rousseau begins his Confessions with a bold assertion of their uniqueness:

I have begun a work which is without precedent, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I propose to set before my fellow-mortals a man in all the truth of nature; and this man shall be myself.

The unique quality of Rousseau's work lies in the baldness of the intention. Whereas Augustine had traced the teleological progress of a man through sin and error to the eventual state of grace, Rousseau offers himself as psychological case-study. But the two are alike in their frankness and lack of reserve.

A conventional view of Caleb Williams sees it as a tail-piece to the Political Justice, showing in practice the precepts there expounded. According to this, Godwin is following a sequence similar to that of Rousseau, publishing first the abstract scheme of his philosophy and subsequently giving a more personal and poetic adlineation of it. But although Godwin may have followed Rousseau in his use of a confessional mode, the purpose to which he puts it is rather different. Rousseau wrote the Confessions as a case-study of man, and perhaps in self-justification. Godwin uses the confessional mode as a basis for fictional narrative, with an admixture of didactic elements.

And in Caleb Williams, it is not the perpetrator of crime who suffers, but a victim of the perpetrator.



|||

Even so, Caleb's sufferings do spring from a transgression on his part. He and Falkland know this transgression to be his attempt to open the chest<sup>16</sup>, while society supposes it to be a portrayal of the master-secretary relationship. As a result, the confessional basis of Caleb Williams is quite complex. Whereas Rousseau's Confessions is the record of a succession of peccadilloes and graver faults, Godwin's novel is a consciously shaped fiction built on three closely related but different transgressions. First, there is the hidden transgression of Falkland's act of murder, and then the actual and supposed transgressions by Caleb. His disobedience of the seemingly arbitrary interdiction on access to the chest, which breaks no apparent moral code, is a wilful act which isolates him from society, as is apparent in its erroneous belief regarding his conduct. It may be observed in passing that the arbitrariness of Falkland's ban reproduces the conditions leading to the original and archetypal transgression in Genesis. The meld of three sins is a further blurring of the boundaries of experience. That area directly dependent on Falkland is cleared at the end of the novel by Falkland's court-room confession; for Caleb there is no expiation. His mental confusion is a result of the confusion of his two transgressions.

#### Confessions of an English Opium Eater

De Quincey is so aware of the precedent set by Rousseau that he attempts to renounce his influence on the very first page, observing that

Nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings, than the spectacle of a human being obtruding to our notice his moral ulcers or scars . . . For any such acts of gratuitous self-humiliation from those who can be supposed in sympathy with the decent and self-respecting part of society, we must look to French literature . . . (p. 29)<sup>17</sup>

Admittedly, De Quincey is more reticent than Rousseau with regard to certain areas of experience. Whereas Rousseau set out to delineate a complete man, De Quincey was concerned only with that aspect of himself highlighted by the title. As a result there are coy references to such matters as his love for Margaret Sympson and his relations with the Wordsworths, references which hint at what they conceal.

The progress of the narrative, with its steady onward march, is somewhat disguised by the two-part publication, the balancing of the period prior to the introduction to opium against the period succeeding it, and of the pleasures of opium against its pains. The story adheres closely to chronological sequence; the pleasures of opium are not separated from the pains in order to point a qualitative difference, it is simply that the pleasures belong to an earlier stage of addiction than the pains. Underlying the approach to the climactic final passages of dream experiences is a carefully orchestrated build-up which relies on a counterpoint of corresponding episodes. Part I is the record of a movement from early happiness

to misery. The relative calm of De Quincey's upbringing, the sense of freedom experienced during his walking tour in North Wales, give way to the hunger and deprivation endured in the company of Ann in London. Part II repeats the same overall pattern, this time with the narrator in the thrall of opium. Its earlier pages describe the pleasanter effects of the drug. Next he moves on to the torments it brings, by which time he is again accompanied by a "lovely young woman". The opium dreams and their imaginary terrors have been anticipated during the episode in the house in London in Part I, both in the child-companion's "self-created" illusion of ghosts and in De Quincey's own tumultuous dreams

which were only not so awful as those which I shall have to describe hereafter as produced by opium. (p. 47)

Everything converges on the dream descriptions at the conclusion, during which the figure of Ann is again present.

In the course of giving an account of one dream - that in which De Quincey felt himself caught up in some stupendous and undefinable event - he remarks parenthetically that in dreams "we make ourselves central to every movement" (p. 113). This is a close analogue of the confessional mode of writing itself. It is an exercise in which the writer is at his most self-devouring. In the concluding dream-reports of the opium, form and content overlap, as the reader is moved into the area of the unverifiable.

This unverifiable area is that of the disordered perception of the narrator, as the normal balance of stimulus and response is interfered with by the operations of the drug.

The opium-eater loses none of his moral sensibilities, or aspirations . . . . but his intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power, not of execution only, but even of power to attempt. (p. 102)

He goes on to note a change in his "physical economy" by which sights seem to pass before his eyes as they gaze on darkness. De Quincey then lists four effects consequent on his use of opium: 1. "as the creative state of the eye increased, a sympathy seemed to arise between the waking and the dreaming states of the brain," in that the nighttime waking visions tend to recur in dreams. 2. A state of melancholy. 3. A distortion of the sense of space and of time. 4. "The minutest scenes of childhood, or forgotten scenes of later years, were often revived". (P. 103,104). Many of the apparitions that visit De Quincey in his dreams are remembered impressions, sprung from the subconscious.

Of this, at least, I feel assured, that there is no such thing as forgetting possible to the mind.

(p. 104)

The retentiveness of the mind, its ability to generate visions, the merging of dream and wakefulness and the distortion of perception, all accord with the philosophy of apparitions as outlined by Ferriar and Hibbert. De

Quincey himself ventures into a brief exposition of just such a philosophy:

. . . I feared (though possibly it will appear ludicrous to a medical man) that some dropsical state or tendency of the brain might thus be making itself (to use a metaphysical word) objective; and the sentient organ project itself as its own object. (p. 107)

The dreams are offered purely as perceived experiences. Although De Quincey adopts a term directly opposite to that of "subjective" which was proposed above in Chapter One, it is evident that the two refer to the same phenomenon; the reversal arises because De Quincey takes the brain as his point of reference, whereas in discussing Ferriar and Hibbert the apparitions were taken as a reference point, and seen as detached from the material real and projected in to the brain of the perceiving subject. There is no appeal to an objective equivalent. As in the act of confession, corroborative evidence is not required; the essential is the subject's admission.

One effect of the Opium Eater was apparently to demonstrate that experience of the extraordinary was available to anyone; visionary states could be induced chemically. No longer was the exquisite stress of sensibility the preserve of an ideally cultured élite; imaginative ecstasy and torment were brought within the reach of everyman. As much as Ferriar had claimed, De Quincey made apparitions demotic, although it had been De Quincey's stated intention to warn readers of

the damaging effects of opium. In the Quarterly review already mentioned, Gooch regrets that the pains of opium were not emphasised more strongly. And when the Opium Eater is introduced as a member of the symposium in the "Noctes Ambrosianae"<sup>18</sup> there is a joking reference to the number of addictions and suicides for which De Quincey's work was believed responsible. So many people were tempted to the opium-habit, whether as a result of his book or not, that in the expanded version of 1856 De Quincey no longer described himself as "the only member" of the church of opium; instead he wrote of the church "of which I acknowledge myself to be the Pope"<sup>19</sup>. Opium had become the religion of the masses.

The significance of The Confessions of an English Opium Eater was twofold: it was an important move towards a literature of the involved first-person narrator, and it greatly extended the area of experience available for exploration. Thomson's "Confessions of a Footman" recognizes and satirizes both these effects, based as it is on an assumption of the inherent ludicrousness of the notion that a footman could have anything of interest to say about himself.

#### The Confessions of a Justified Sinner

It is indeed, an awful truth, well known to physicians who see many lunatics, that religious melancholy is one of the most frequent causes of the Daemonomania.<sup>20</sup>

Thus Ferriar. James Hogg's Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner portrays a perception and imagination distorted by bigoted religious convictions. The end result is very similar to that in the Opium Eater, where the perceptions are disordered chemically, although the opium eater avoids the early and violent death that befalls both the Sinner and George Dalcastle. The perceptual distortion in the Justified Sinner is made formally explicit in the interplay of the two narratives, each of them, in part at any rate, dealing differently with the same events. Also like the Opium Eater is the progress of the narrative from initial lucidity to the final snatched glimpses of a consciousness in extremis. The sinner's memoir ends with a gathering of disjointed notes from a diary as fragmentary as De Quincey's notes of his dreams. As a postscript to this is the text of the letter to Blackwood's and the editor's account of the exhumation of Colwan's body and the discovery of the Memoirs. By reproducing the title-page which Colwan had prepared for his narrative, and by the comments on encounters with booksellers prior to the book's publication, the reader is brought to the start of the story he has just read, and a circularity is conferred on the text.

Hogg's presentation of the story, in which the apparently historical narrative of the editor is followed by the transparently obvious special pleading of Robert Colwan is a departure from, or rather a reversal of, the typically Gothic sequence, in which the definitive

version is placed last. In the Gothic tales the effect of the objectively verifiable version is to de-fantasize the hitherto mysterious experience of the protagonist; the apparitions and terrors are accounted for by reference to reality as perceived by persons other than the one directly affected. In the Justified Sinner the existence of an ostensibly objective version in no way counteracts the essential incongruity of the events described; the editor's version is only ostensibly objective because although there is an appeal to tradition, parish registers and written records as "auctors" the fact remains that, for all its dispassion of tone, the narrative is that of a number of frequently bewildered individuals caught up in events beyond their comprehension. These various and at times dissonant experiences are assembled by an editor who is considerably remote from the time of the events in question, and who feels free of any obligation to account for or to reconcile the contradictions and improbabilities contained within the narrative.

The second part of the work, the sinner's actual confession, is coherent - on its own terms. However, clearly evident from its tone is what has already been stated in the editor's narrative: the writer is a religious fanatic and a gullible egomaniac. The experience he relates, for all its internal consistency, is quite unacceptable to an impartial observer. There is an absence of absolute truth. The confession is of value only as a record of Colwan's perception of things, not as a version of reality.



As in Caleb Williams, there are numerous references to the machinery of the law. Godwin used the various appeals to magistrates to demonstrate how the workings of a legal system ill-adapted to the needs of the greater part of society could contribute to the destruction of an individual. A court-room confrontation provides the final climactic episode in Caleb Williams; it is the one time that Caleb emerges victorious in a court-room, and yet the decision only condemns him to more excruciating mental torment. True justice, for Godwin, was not to be served by a set of prescribed rules; ideally it belonged in the individual as an intrinsic quality of behaviour. To Caleb, the law is just one more circumstance of menace in his ordeal; it is the principle of society institutionalized and threatening the outcast. In the Justified Sinner the law is equally prominent but fulfils quite a different function. There, it serves as a norm of uninvolved vision, a standard dissociated from the main events of the story. In a work in which all individual perception is called in doubt, the law can provide at least one reliable observer. Without actually resolving the dilemmas, it allows us intermittently to measure the bewildering action against the truth-seeking apparatus of the courts.

The birth of Robert is commented upon as follows;

A brother he certainly was, in the eye of the law, and it is more than probable that he was his brother in reality. But the laird thought outhewise . . . (p. 18)<sup>21</sup>

and right at the outset of Robert's life there is a conflict between events as interpreted by the law and as seen by the characters. The very first words of Robert to be reproduced as direct speech come as he interrupts George's game of tennis: requested to keep out of the way, he replies insolently "Is there any law or enactment can compel me to do so?" (p. 22). Court cases figure prominently thereafter, usually in efforts to arrive at the truth of disputed events. However, it is a feature of the law-cases that they are not allowed to operate independently of the characters. At all times the processes of law are shown to be susceptible to the bias of influence. Thus, the lord-commissioner investigating the street riot is eventually content to dismiss the fracas as "an unlucky frolic" (p. 31) which got out of hand, but the Reverend Wringhim carries the matter further by his attempts to influence "both judges and populace against the young Cavaliers, especially against the young Laird of Dalcastle" (p. 31). When George is arrested after the encounter on Arthur's Seat, it is a signal for his father to set "his whole interest to work among the noblemen and lawyers of his party" (p. 48). The subsequent hearings before the sheriff and the Lord Justice are conditioned by prejudice rather than by fact: the sheriff, a Whig, is hostile to George's case, while the higher court is turned the other way by the suspiciousness of Robert's appearance. At the trial of Arabella Calvert, the overwhelming case against her is overthrown by the refusal of her victim, Mrs Logan,

to give evidence against her; this prompts the judge to remark "This is the most singular perversion I have ever witnessed" (p.68). Finally, in the last paragraphs of the editor's narrative, the two women, convinced that Thomas Drummond is innocent of George's murder, take their story to the Lord Justice Clerk. He is able to clear Drummond's name, and does so partly by virtue of his office, but mainly because he is related to Drummond.

There is, as a result, an ambivalence about the first section of the Justified Sinner. Its rather spurious authenticity is derived from the textual pernicketyness assumed by the editor, who at one stage interjects the comment

We cannot now enter into the detail of the events that now occurred without forestalling the narrative of one who knew all the circumstances" (p. 48)

referring to Robert's own "confessions" which follow later. The air of authenticity is also derived from the use of an omnipresent legal system, generating depositions which underpin the critical events of the story. But, as we have seen, these depositions are no more than the perceived experience of the witnesses, and ultimately the editor's narrative emerges as an assemblage of personal statements collated as a preface to the principal personal statement: Robert's memoir.

Both the first and last sentences of the editor's narrative lay stress on the authoritative sources of its material: "It appears from tradition, as well as

some parish registers still extant, that . . . " and ". . . this is all with which history, justiciary records, and tradition, furnish me relating to these matters". The sinner's private memoirs then commence on a note of anguished egocentricity which he regards as martyrdom:

My life has been a life of trouble and turmoil;  
of change and vicissitude; of anger and exultation;  
of sorrow and of vengeance. My sorrows have all  
been for a slighted gospel, and my vengeance has  
been wreaked on its adversaries. Therefore, in  
the sight of heaven I will sit down and write.

(p. 97)

Although written works are cited as cause and effect of the type of life that has been led, it is immediately apparent that the consciousness of the writer overrides all in a manner closely reminiscent of the opening of Caleb Williams - indeed, the first eight or ten words reproduce the structure and sentiment of those of the earlier work remarkably: "My life has for several years been a theatre of calamity". The initial possessive pronoun gives way to "I", which starts the next two paragraphs, establishing the leitmotiv of the text. The action of Robert's story is played against that of the editor's narrative so that an unresolved opposition is set up between the two. Apart from the dominance of the sinner's subjective experiences, another character is accorded greater prominence in this part of the work: Gil-Martin, the shape-changer. Gil-Martin is never positively identified in either of the two

sections of the work. Robert admits to doubts and conjectures about his identity but never shares them with the reader; the ludicrous delusion that he is Peter the Great in disguise is allowed to stand almost unchallenged. Others in the story do have their suspicions regarding Robert's companion, as their comments indicate. George says to his brother, "Then friend, confess that the devil was that friend who told you I was here, and who came here with you" (p. 44), and he calls Robert "a limb of Satan" (p. 45); in Robert's own memoirs, when he returns from his first meeting with Gil-Martin, his father remarks "Satan, I fear, has been busy with you" (p. 121). Direct authorial statement is replaced by allusion from the characters.

As revealed in the opening sentences of the memoirs quoted above, Robert is sandwiched between two texts - between the instigating impulse of the gospel and the anguished outcry of his written confessions. The gospel figures as a very active agent; the young Robert first displays his evangelistic prowess by expounding on the Ineffectual Calling of the gospel with regard to the Laird of Dalcastle and other non-enthusiasts. Gil-Martin is encountered for the second time in the act of reading a book; Robert assumes it to be the Bible, which Gil-Martin qualifies significantly as "my Bible" (p. 124). Louis Simpson has demonstrated the antinomian basis of Robert's obsessions<sup>22</sup>; the essence of antinomianism is that those who are among the elect are not bound by the moral law, particularly as it is set down in the Bible. The elect transgress with

impunity. Thus, just as the criminal and civil law are called into question, so too is the moral law. Furthermore, the factor which liberates the antinomian from the precepts of the gospel is his belief. In the editor's narrative we encountered a conflict between belief (based on observation) and the code of law; in the second part of the book this is paralleled by a conflict between belief (based on faith) and the moral code.

The difference between reality and perception is fundamental to The Confessions of a Justified Sinner, and it is presented in terms of contemporary thinking on apparitions. The extent to which this underlies Hogg's book can be appreciated by looking at one of its most striking episodes: the apparition on Arthur's Seat. It is clear that this is derived from the reports of the Spectre of Brocken widely current at that time. Both Ferriar and Hibbert refer at length to traveller's accounts of this larger-than-life figure to be seen in the Harz mountains under certain atmospheric conditions, and both give the conventional explanation of the apparition in support of their contention that apparently supernatural phenomena have assignable explanations - in this instance, an optical delusion. In the words of M. Have, who contributed a lively account of his observations to the Philosophical Magazine and is the source for both Ferriar and Hibbert:

When the rising sun, and according to analogy the case will be the same at the setting sun, throws his rays over the Broken upon the body of a man

standing opposite to fine light clouds floating around or hovering past him, he need only fix his eye steadfastly upon them, and in all probability, he will see the singular spectacle of his own shadow extending to the length of five or six hundred feet, at the distance of about two miles before him.<sup>23</sup>

Joseph Taylor also refers to the spectre in his Apparitions . . . , while in "The Fortunes of Martin Waldeck", a story interpolated in Scott's The Antiquary there is mention of the tutelar demon of the Harz:

. . . many persons profess to have seen such a form traversing, with huge strides, in a line parallel to their own course, the opposite ridge of a mountain, when divided from it by a narrow glen; and indeed the fact of the apparition is so generally admitted that modern scepticism has only found refuge by ascribing it to optical deception.<sup>24</sup>

Coleridge, in spite of a fruitless excursion in the hope of seeing the Spectre of Brocken while in Germany in 1799, used the image in the concluding lines of his poem "Constancy To An Ideal Object" (appending a footnote saying that he himself had experienced the phenomenon, although this may be wishful retrospection, for his diary tells us otherwise ):

The woodman winding westward up the glen  
At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze  
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,  
Sees full before him, gliding without tread,  
An image with a glory round its head;

The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues

Nor knows he makes the shadow he pursues!<sup>25</sup>

From these examples it can be seen that the story of the Brocken phenomenon was widely known throughout the period. In M. Jordan's account of his observation, also quoted by Ferriar, he remarks that similar effects must "no doubt, be observed on other high mountains, which have a situation favourable for producing it."<sup>26</sup> Thus it is suggested the spectre is not necessarily associated with any particular place, but may occur in other settings as well. In describing Arthur's Seat at the time George ascends it, he closely reproduces the conditions given in the accounts by Jordan and Have. All the incidents take place early in the morning, just after sunrise; in every case the scene is a mountain or hill-top; and in every case the upper air is clear while mist or clouds gather around the peaks of high ground. Hogg prepares the way by first having George Colwan witness an unusual atmospheric effect - "the little wee ghost of a rainbow" - while climbing Arthur's Seat. This serves to draw attention to the optical effects produced by the sunlight and provides an effect of visionary beauty to contrast with the related effect of visionary evil that follows on almost immediately. Hogg goes <sup>to</sup> some lengths in depicting all these details, and the narrator remarks

it is necessary that the reader should comprehend something of their nature to understand what follows. (p. 49)

The description of the apparition, as it appears to



Colwan, incorporates the characteristics of the Brocken apparition:

He saw, delineated in the cloud, the shoulders, arms, and features of a human being of the most dreadful aspect. The face was the face of his brother, but dilated twenty times the natural size. The eyes gleamed on him through the mist, while every furrow of its hideous brow frowned deep as the ravines on the brow of the hill . . . He saw every feature and every line of the face distinctly . . . as it neared, the dimensions of its form lessened, still continuing, however, far above the natural size. - - - (Colwan was) confirmed in the belief that it was a malignant spirit on perceiving that it approached him across the front of a precipice. (p. 49-50)

As Colwan flees from this apparition he immediately collides with the very real body of his brother approaching him from the other side, and is "confounded between the shadow and the substance." Events between the two proceed rapidly after this, and Hogg does not venture to account further for the monstrous apparition. No doubt he felt confident that he had supplied sufficient circumstantial evidence for a reader to draw his own conclusions. The final reference to "the shadow and the substance" gives a clear indication that Colwan, sitting on the rock, has seen the projected shadow, not of himself, but of his brother who has climbed Arthur's Seat in pursuit of him. It would seem that Hogg has secured a supernatural effect without

contravening the dictates of reality. But on looking again at the description, one finds that the accepted rational explanation of the phenomenon is not wholly satisfactory in this instance. If indeed it is a shadow, one can accept that Colwan would see the outline of his pursuer. But the gleaming eyes, and the furrowed brow? This is not a description of a silhouette.

Hogg leaves it at that, and we must take it as yet a further example of the ambivalence which pervades The Justified Sinner. He presents us with a spirit, follows it up with a hint that it can be rationally accounted for, but finally seems to rule out the explanation. It would be difficult to find a clearer example of the requirement laid down by M.R. James:

It is not amiss sometimes to leave a loophole for a natural explanation; but, I would say, let the loophole be so narrow as not to be quite practicable.<sup>27</sup>

The unreliability of perception is a major theme of Hogg's novel, and this theme receives its fullest treatment as the distortion of Colwan's perception is traced. In the memoirs, the figure of Gil-Martin soon becomes inseparable from Colwan. It is indicated, although nowhere explicitly stated, that Gil-Martin is a manifestation of Satan - either a devil or the Devil<sup>28</sup>. There can be little doubt that Gil-Martin is "real"; he is seen by several people, and is liable to shoot at or fence with his adversaries. Nevertheless, he is linked with Colwan, whom he accompanies into evil and error, so closely that the autonomy of each is somewhat

compromised.

This is apparent in a number of ways. Gil-Martin's shape-changing, which enables him to take on the forms of different people, appearing now like Drummond, now like the dead George, is paralleled by Colwan's name-changing. Baptised Robert Wringhim, he is later known as Robert Colwan; on the run after the death of his mother, he becomes Cowan and then Ellis. It is while he is on the run that Gil-Martin, appearing to him, says: "I am wedded to you so closely, that I feel I am the same person. Our essences are one, our bodies and spirits being united, so that I am drawn towards you as by magnetism, and, wherever you are, there must my presence be with you." (p. 229). This affirmation of identity, while still talking in terms of duality, suggests that Gil-Martin is more than simply an external agent summoned by or preying upon Colwan. There is a further hint of their affinity when, at their first meeting, Gil-Martin announces that he has only one parent, and that one he does not care to acknowledge. This corresponds with Colwan's experience as a baby, when he is effectively rejected by his father. Then there is the peculiar episode of Colwan's sickness. During the month of his fever Colwan has the distinct impression that he is two people, and that neither of them is himself; they seem to be his brother George and Gil-Martin. Meanwhile, notwithstanding Colwan's protestation that he lay bedridden for the entire month, there are numerous reports of his being seen to plague his brother George with close attention. So, in some

respects, his own seemingly feverish illusion of not being corporeally present in the sick-room tallies with the evidence of independent witnesses who have observed him elsewhere. Later, as Colwan's nemesis approaches, there is a similar episode. This time there is no prolonged illness, of which Colwan is aware, but one morning he awakes from a profound and feverish sleep, having spent the previous evening with Gil-Martin, the Rev. Wringhim and his mother. Yet when he awakes a strange servant informs him that all these characters have either left the neighbourhood or died months before. Meanwhile, it seems, Colwan has been living the life of reprobate, and is suspected of complicity in the disappearance of his mother and of a young girl. Bewildered by all this, Colwan, on meeting Gil-Martin soon afterwards turns to a dualistic explanation of the puzzle. It is true, he asks:

That I have two souls, which take possession of my bodily frame by turns, the one being all unconscious of what the other performs. (p. 191,192)

The second being which takes possession of Wringhim is his interlocutor, Gil-Martin himself. Both before and during this encounter Wringhim refers to the tyranny which his companion exercises over him, but without realising its nature or extent.

This meeting with Gil-Martin also marks the end of Wringhim's belief in himself as a clear seer. Hitherto, in the midst of conflicting and unresolved evidence, he has preserved a confidence in his own lucidity. This confidence crumbles away as the ordeal

gathers in intensity. Furthermore, it is at this point that the partly corroborative evidence of the preceding editor's narrative halts; in the concluding pages, as in De Quincey's Opium Eater, the reader is taken into the area of the unverifiable, and the disintegration of organised perception is mirrored in the fragmentary notes of Wringhim's diary at the end.

Wringhim's last days, from the moment he is grotesquely trapped in the weaver's warp and woof to the final stringing up on the haystack, show him altered from the arrogantly self-righteous prig to a hunted, haunted outcast. It is during this part of the narrative that explicitly supernatural beings are introduced; while Wringhim's persecutor offers a vision of transcendental existence he urges suicide

let us fall by our own hands . . . and, throwing off this frame of dross and corruption, mingle with the pure ethereal essence of existence, from which we derived our being.

Wringhim is eventually driven to his death, but whether or not he attains such "ethereal essence" is not known. In the text he is preserved in quite the opposite way, as his body remains undecomposed in its bog grave, to be exhumed a century later. His survival of death is purely physical.

The year before publication of the Justified Sinner Hogg had prepared the way for it by getting Blackwood's to carry a letter purporting to tell of the discovery of the grave. This letter is reproduced in the book, as having been the instigating factor in

the editor's finding of the memoirs. On inspecting the body, the editor indulges in some phrenological comment on the skull:

I am no phrenologist, not knowing one organ from another, but I thought the skull of that wretched man no study. If it was particular for anything, it was for a smooth, almost perfect rotundity, with only a little protuberance above the vent of the ear.

The disavowal of knowledge may be a blind; at any rate, the area of the protuberance is that associated with a propensity to Destructiveness: "The organ is conspicuous in the heads of cool and deliberate murderers - - - . This faculty (gives) the tendency to rage". Thus Combe, in the same year as the Justified Sinner was published (see Appendix).

The sinner therefore exists for us in the interval between the corporeal and the spiritual, between the physiological and the supernatural. Ultimately he is reduced to a body that, for a time, avoids decay; his visionary brain to a systematised organisation; his agonised witness to an edited text. In the reprinted letter, there is a further blurring of fact and fiction, this time extending to the text itself. Through it all, we are given an insight into a mind made vulnerable by the excesses of religious zeal, just as the rational framework underlying the opium eater's perception was broken down by the drug. In each case, the resultant isolation of the protagonist leads to a quasi-solipsistic state of terror.

## Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus (1818) demonstrates a further use of the confessional mode. Like the Justified Sinner, Frankenstein presents a number of confessions, but instead of being given in sequence they are inserted one inside the other, chinese-box fashion. The outermost and least important of these is embodied in Walton's letters to his sister which begin and end the novel. Only tangentially confessional, their main purpose is expositional and descriptive; nevertheless, they do record a period of emotional turmoil in the writer. Bracketed by the letters is Frankenstein's own story, a miniature bildungsroman tracing the growth of the narrator and his quest for knowledge, his love and ultimate despair and death. Embedded at the core of the book are six chapters giving the monster's own story from his first moments of dawning consciousness.

Confessional fiction proper rests on a transgression, the effect of which is to alienate the protagonist from the social state, thrusting him into isolation. Frankenstein's transgression is, in part, like that of Faustus, an overreaching desire for knowledge. More seriously, it is also the usurpation of the function of the First Author: the Promethean attempt to create life. Working on the assembly of the monster, Frankenstein acts in full knowledge of the enormity of what he is doing, and of how it cuts him off from his fellow-men. Indeed, he rejects society rather than is rejected: "I shunned my fellow-creatures as if I had been guilty of

a crime" (Ch. IV)<sup>29</sup>, he remarks as his creature nears completion. He has already drawn attention to the scission between his kinship with humanity and his monomaniacal desire for success.

. . . often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion. (Ch. IV).

Frankenstein, with the vantage of hindsight, considers his work to have been unlawful precisely because it caused him to neglect family and friends, and abuse his mind:

If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. (Ch. IV)

Frankenstein's divorce from society coincides with his fabrication of the monster; he keeps its existence a secret from others, so that it becomes an emblem of his alienation.

There is a relationship between the stories, with even Walton's confession reflecting that of Frankenstein in a minor key. The two meet at the outset of the novel in an Arctic waste that is a graphic reinforcement of the isolation of each. Like Frankenstein, Walton is driven by a lust for intellectual adventure; where Frankenstein wishes to create, Walton wishes to discover. In both men, curiosity was first nurtured by reading



in early youth. On the occasion of their first sustained conversation, Mary Shelley is careful to point the analogy between the two. When Walton outlines his hopes for the dominion he should "acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race", the response of his interlocutor is dramatic:

"Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating liquor?"

and later returns to the subject to warn

"You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been."

The quest for knowledge has already separated Walton from his family, causing him to pen self-justifying letters to his sister. Later on, after Frankenstein has finished his story, Walton is further isolated by the refusal of the crew to sail further in such dangerous waters. But he relents, and accedes to the will of the majority, an act which restores him to society. Even though Walton's progress is not carried through to the sticking-place, his ordeal is a statement of the main theme of the book.

The monster's predicament arises directly from his rejection by mankind. It is this rejection which causes him to suffer and to kill. So isolated is he from society that only Frankenstein is fully aware of his existence. It is not the murders which he commits that constitute the element of transgression in his case; these are a consequence, not a cause, of his

predicament. His transgression lies in his being ugly, so ugly that he is totally repulsive in a physiognomical age which could pronounce, rather gnomically, "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty". Seen thus, the monster is not simply ugly, his very existence is a blot on truth, a constant crime against human values. In one respect, the monster's story is direct reversal of the confessional story with a human protagonist; that typically ends with a fragmentation of sense perceptions, while the monster's story, and his experience independent of Frankenstein, begins with their steady accretion.

It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. By degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves . . . . (Ch. XI)

The process of sense assimilation is continued over several pages, and the monster, through all the vicissitudes of his moral and social degradation, remains in full control of his faculties. In contrast to Frankenstein, he does not dwindle and die at the end of the novel, but simply moves away. Even Walton has had to struggle to relate what he has seen:

Great God! what a scene has just taken place! I am yet dizzy with the remembrance of it. I hardly know whether I shall have the power to

detail it; yet the tale which I have recorded would be incomplete without this final and wonderful catastrophe. (Ch. XXIV)

Only the need to tell his tale, like the justified sinner in the later novel, enables him to recollect his experience. The monster's sentence is, indeed, its raison d'être, and the progress of his story is an ironic reversal of that of the usual confessional protagonist. For Frankenstein, the real dreadfulness consists not of what he has done, but of what he has brought into being. That this product is at one and the same time a source of recrimination to his creator, an object of abhorrence to others, and a sensitive vehicle in his own right only adds extra irony to the situation.

But the basic irony is that Frankenstein brings about the very opposite of that which he had wished. He started from an abstract ideal, the wish to create life; by the end of the novel he knows himself to have been responsible for the deaths of friends and family: William, Justine, Clerval, Elizabeth, his father, and, as he himself foresees, his own. This last piece of foresight is the only instance of his living up to the Greek etymology of the name given him in the subtitle, which is otherwise singularly inappropriate: Prometheus, Forethought.

Frankenstein is a complex example of the confessional mode. The accusation, incrimination and accusation of the innocent Justine is a motif which seems to be typical of such fiction. A similar situation forms the

mainspring of Caleb Williams, in which the blame for Falkland's crime is transferred to Tyrrel and his son. Wrongful accusation will occur again in Hogg's Justified Sinner, a book in which misplaced accusations are woven throughout the plot; in particular there is the incident of Wringhim engineering the punishment of his schoolfellow M'Gill. All these in turn echo the incident in Rousseau's Confessions in which a young maid is accused of (and dismissed for) the theft of a ribbon which Rousseau himself had taken. Such a motif of erroneous accusation accords naturally with a fiction of disordered perception. Rousseau himself, in the latter years of his life, was gripped by a powerful persecution complex which rendered the most trivial incidents sinister and full of menace in his eyes. This is an early and non-fictional example of the perceptual distortion which so frequently accompanies confession; the process is described in his last work, Reveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire - the emphasis on the solitude of the writer is significant.

The plot of Mary's novel has a further similarity with that of her father's: it too is the story of a pursuit, or rather of several pursuits. The initial glimpse of the chase across the polar ice-cap serves as an introductory motif, while the six chapters of the kernel tale are the story of the monster's being rejected and hunted by society; his is an experience which closely parallels that of Caleb in this respect. In the narrative which envelops this the monster is shown in the reverse role as, in the desire to be

revenged on his creator, he chases Frankenstein through Europe to destroy him.

In his biography Shelley, the Pursuit, Richard Holmes writes briefly but perceptively of Frankenstein, beginning with the claim that the monster can be seen as a projection of Frankenstein's sub-conscious. The reversal of roles

. . . . creates a doppelganger in which Frankenstein and his creation are made to form antagonistic parts of a single spiritual entity . . . Frankenstein is a study of spiritual isolation, and the monster sometimes seems to be an almost programmatic attempt to present the kaka-daimon of (Alastor), the evil spirit of solitude itself.<sup>30</sup>

The doppelganger theme also occurs in the Justified Sinner, with Gil-Martin particularly adaptable; physically he assumes the identity of a variety of characters, while psychologically he corresponds to aspects of Wringhim's personality. During the episode of Wringhim's illness the theme is present even more strikingly when his consciousness appears to be located outside his body.

### Conclusion

The confessional mode involves a heightening, and often a more violent distortion, of the perceptions of the protagonist. Considerable stress is placed upon these phenomena, often making them the climax of the work; this probably arises as a formal requirement of a mode which, almost by definition, concentrates on the narrator-protagonist's consciousness of events. As

the state of mind becomes pre-eminent, the fictional representation of the external and material reality grows brittle and untrustworthy. The progress of the text moves steadily towards a condition corresponding to the physiological morbidity that, according to Ferriar and Hibbert, produces delusions and apparitions. A concomitant effect of this is an acute sense of isolation; at the least, it stems from the protagonist's conviction that his knowledge and experiences are peculiar to himself, with the result that he no longer shares in the common assumptions of society; at the more extreme, it can take the form of mental derangement fittingly termed "alienation". Suffering and fear are the frequent result of this state. There may be a direct physical threat to the protagonist, as in Caleb Williams or Frankenstein, but primarily the cause is psychological, arising from the sense of vulnerability that comes with isolation. Finally, the process is initiated by some readily identifiable act on the part of the protagonist. Caleb wants to discover Falkland's secret, and his opening of the chest is a voluntary act: in Godwin's philosophy the will of the individual is determined by circumstance, but whatever the factors bearing on Caleb's decision the fact remains that he decides on his course of action. De Quincey chooses to run away from school, and chooses to have recourse to opium while still a free unaddicted agent. Wringhim's ordeal arises not from any consciousness of his "multitude of transgressions" but from the assurance that he is numbered among the justified and can transgress with

impunity. His first reaction on being told that he is one of the elect emphasises both his isolation and his deliberate judgment of himself ("I deemed myself"):

An exaltation of spirit lifted me, as it were,  
far above the earth and the sinful creatures  
crawling on its surface; and I deemed myself as  
an eagle among the children of men . . . .

Finally, Frankenstein deliberately creates the monster which later preys on him.

There is an initiated progress towards a state of terrified solipsism in each of these books, a solipsism that is accompanied by a fragmentation of the self and its awareness. This chapter on the confessional narrative mode began with a reference to The Prelude; it ends with the suggestion that another, even more memorable poem, is paradigmatic of the type of first-person fiction of the age. In The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, the isolated transgressor eventually finds that the sole medium of contact with his fellow men is the telling of his story.

FROM BLACKWOOD'S TO LE FANU:  
THE PHYSIOLOGY OF SUFFERING\*

The supernatural story of the nineteenth century is essentially a short story, and its emergence is inextricably bound up with the spread of periodical fiction, in particular that fiction to be found in the pages of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. Almost from its inception in 1817 Blackwood's championed the tale, conferring on it a generic status to which the dilettantish snippets contributed to the Gentleman's Magazine had never attained. Blackwood's imposed rigorous editorial requirements on the type of material admitted to its pages; the casual open-to-all-comers approach of "Sylvanus Urban" was firmly eschewed. By 1821 the younger periodical felt it had come out from the shadow of its predecessor sufficiently to carry a provocative little article, "Sylvanus Urban and Christopher North", contrasting the "life, buoyancy and fire" of Blackwood's with the "homeliness and heaviness" of the Gentleman's Magazine, while at the same time admitting that there existed a lineal relationship

---

\* The texts of three of the Blackwood's stories discussed in this chapter - "The Iron Shroud", "The Man in the Bell" and "The Murderer's Last Night" - are given in Appendix B.



between the two<sup>1</sup>. As Wendell V. Harris has pointed out, Blackwood's placed an embargo on fluttering romances in particular; action and sensation predominated over the affections<sup>2</sup>. This revealed itself by a marked interest in the more extreme areas of human experience. When Lockhart and Wilson were given editorial control of the magazine after the false start made by Pringle and Cleghorn (dismissed by the publisher after half-a-dozen numbers), Blackwood's started to contain articles such as "Some Remarks on the use of the Preternatural in Works of Fiction"<sup>3</sup>, "Ghost Story (from William of Malmesbury)"<sup>4</sup>, and "De Foe on Apparitions"<sup>5</sup>. These prepared the way for a type of fiction for which Blackwood's was to become famous, even notorious: the terror story based on supernatural or, more often, quasi-supernatural experience.

#### Some Blackwood's Stories

The November 1820, number carried a translation by R.P. Gillies of De La Motte Fouqué's story "The Field of Terror", an exercise in the eighteenth-century gothic manner, but the first home-grown story exploiting the predicament of the protagonist was "The Fatal Repast"<sup>6</sup>. In this the passengers and crew of a sailing-ship are accidentally poisoned, and there ensues a long succession of deaths. The ill-luck, it is suggested, is a result of one of the passengers shooting two "Mother Carey's chickens" (stormy petrels), and although the story as a whole rather peters out without a climax, there is one especially effective

moment worthy of "The Ancient Mariner". It describes the corpses which have been dropped overboard from the anchored ship and can be seen through the clear shallow sea-water:

A large block happened to fall overboard, and the agitation which it occasioned in the sea produced an apparent augmentation of their number, and a horrible distortion of their limbs and countenances. A hundred corpses seemed to start up and struggle wildly together, and then gradually to vanish among the eddying waters, as they subsided into a state of calmness.

Here, as with the spectre of Brocken, a supernatural effect is achieved through the exploitation of a natural optical delusion, offered as such from the outset. The impact is derived from the impression made on the observer.

Not the least part of the power of "The Fatal Repast" springs from the savouring of the narrator's own predicament as he wonders whether he too will be struck down by food-poisoning, meanwhile coping with such varied incidental perils as storms, calms and encounters with other vessels. It is all heightened by his isolation; at sea, the shipboard community constitutes a unit remote from the usual land-based society, and as a result of sickness and death even this unit breaks down. It is the archetypal situation of several decades of Blackwood's fiction, a kind of writing that took on such a definite character that it was alternately imitated and parodied by Poe.

"If you wish to write forcibly, Miss Zenobia, pay minute attention to the sensations."

Such is the advice which Poe pictures William Blackwood giving the would-be contributor, Psyche Zenobia, in the mocking "How To Write a Blackwood's Article" (1838).

A number of pieces drawn from past numbers of the magazine are cited as being illustrative of the style required.

There was "The Dead Alive", a capital thing! - the record of a gentleman's sensations when entombed before the breath was out of his body - full of taste, terror, sentiment, metaphysics, and erudition. You would have sworn that the writer had been born and brought up in a coffin. Then we had "Confessions of an Opium Eater" - fine, very fine! - glorious imagination - deep philosophy - acute speculation - plenty of fire and fury, and a good spacing of the decidedly unintelligible - - - Then there was "The Involuntary Experimentalist", all about a gentleman who got baked in an oven, and came out alive and well, although certainly done to a turn. And then there was The Diary of a Late Physician, where the merit lay in good rant and indifferent Greek - both of them taking things with the public. And then there was The Man in the Bell, - - - the history of a young person who goes to sleep under the clapper of a church bell, and is awakened by its tolling for a funeral. The sound drives him mad, and, accordingly, pulling out his tablets, he gives a record of his

sensations.<sup>7</sup>

Poe has hit upon the salient features of Blackwood's fiction, although The Opium Eater, originally intended for "Maga" it is true, did not appear in its pages. Neither did any story called "The Dead Alive", but it seems clear that Poe is thinking of "The Buried Alive", a short piece which accords with his description of the story and which was published in October 1821<sup>8</sup>.

Of the Blackwood's stories named by Poe, the most remarkable is undoubtedly "The Man in the Bell"<sup>9</sup>, an early contribution from the Cork writer William Maginn - later to edit Fraser's. However extreme in its manner, it is a tale of considerable power, with a nicely-observed gradation of effect. It tells of a bell-ringer who is inadvertently trapped in a belfry while his colleagues, unaware, proceed with their bell-ringing. The protagonist's first fear is that he will fall from his precarious position in the bell-loft, and then that he will be crushed by the huge and swinging bell. Eventually the stress of his situation combined with the assault of the noise takes effect on his consciousness:

The roaring of the bell confused my intellect, and my fancy soon began to teem with all sorts of strange and terrifying ideas. The bell peeling above, and opening its jaws with a hideous clamour, seemed to me at one time a ravening monster; . . . But the most awful of all the ideas that seized on me were drawn from the supernatural . . . .

The process is as follows: the narrator is placed in a

frightening position; the noise to which he is subjected is in itself terrifyingly loud but, more importantly, it is a physical stimulus that acts upon his senses so as to distort his perceptions. It is as a result of these distortions that he imagines he sees supernatural apparitions. The physiological basis of his ordeal is emphasised by his changed appearance at the end of the story.

Another of the stories mentioned by Poe, Samuel Ferguson's "The Involuntary Experimentalist"<sup>10</sup>, portrays a man in a somewhat similar predicament. A doctor attempts to rescue some people from a burning distillery and finds himself trapped in a copper vat. In this he is kept apart from the actual flames but not from the increasing heat. Physician as he is, the doctor takes the opportunity to monitor the effects of the heat on his own body.

Poe provided an acute parody of such stories in "A Predicament: the Scythe of Time". Miss Zenobia is touring Edinburgh and climbs to the top of a clock-tower. While leaning out through an aperture to admire the view of the city she feels a steady and inexorable pressure on the back of her neck. The minute-hand of the clock has descended and trapped her. Faithful to her editor's injunction, the writer records her sensations to the extent of recounting the severing of her own head, which bowls down the hill.

Although he may have poked fun at the Blackwood's tale, Poe also imitated it, most notably in "The Pit and the Pendulum". And the Blackwood's contributors

were not above poking fun at themselves: the month after "The Man in the Bell" came "Account of a Singular Recovery from Death"<sup>11</sup>. This communication from "D.D." (perhaps D.M. Moir, whose usual pseudonym was "Delta") portrays the rigours of the next world with an almost medieval horrific excess; it turns out in the end to have been merely a nightmare brought on by alcohol. Maginn himself wrote to Blackwood 'I suppose the "Singular Escape from Death" is a quiz on my sounding stuff about "The Man in the Bell"', but the joke could just as easily have been aimed at "The Buried Alive", published two months before. Whichever the target, the parody indicates that the editors of Blackwood's were quite as aware as Poe of the type of fiction they were encouraging.

The most sustained exploitation of extreme situations was Samuel Warren's Diary of a Late Physician, "passages" from which appeared between August 1830 and August 1837. In his preface to the "fifth" edition of the collected passages in book form, Warren tells how he had offered the first chapter of the Diary to three London magazines without success before having it accepted by "The Great Northern Magazine". The Diary was one of the most talked of features in Blackwood's during the 1830s. Its various stories purport to be drawn from the experience of a doctor and cover a wide range of melodramatic incident. Warren claims that it was his intention to show human nature at its most revealing and that he scorned

to disturb or complicate the development of character and of feeling with intricacy of plot, or novelty of incident.<sup>12</sup>

However, the characters he portrays are more often than not at some crisis in their lives, and Warren likes nothing better than to finish an episode with a resounding death in the last sentence. The first section of the Diary recounts the difficulties and tribulations encountered by the physician himself and his wife as he tries to get established in his profession, - or rather, in society. Subsequent "Passages" concentrate more on interesting case-histories, and the narrator is more an observer of the sufferings of others. In the Introduction, prefixed to the first chapter published in Blackwood's, Warren writes

It is somewhat strange that a class of men who can command such interesting, extensive, and instructive materials, as the experience of most members of the medical profession teems with, should have hitherto made so few contributions to the stock of polite and popular literature. The bar, the church, the army, the navy, and the stage have all of them spread the volumes of their secret history to the prying gaze of the public; while that of the medical profession has remained hitherto - with scarcely an exception - a sealed book.<sup>13</sup>

Warren's runaway success showed how the doctor's training and position in society made him an ideal vehicle for recounting unusual areas of experience. While Charles Lever, whose Harry Lorrequer and Charles O'Malley were

150

among the best-selling novels of the 1830s and who himself was a qualified physician, persisted in preferring a military background for his heroes, doctors soon began to make an appearance in fiction, and to redress the imbalance remarked on by Warren. In "The Involuntary Experimentalist", published as the series by Warren came to an end, the protagonist uses his medical training and instruments to observe the effects of his ordeal by heat. Later, a number of Wilkie Collins' stories (The Moonstone, "The Dream Woman") assign an important role to a doctor, as does his brother Charles' story, "The Compensation House". The central figure of Bulwer's extended treatment of the occult, A Strange Story is Dr. Fenwick, while Le Fanu used the character of Dr. Hesselius to link together a collection of short stories<sup>14</sup>. Lydgate in Middlemarch is one of the most achieved portraits of a medical man in nineteenth-century fiction, but of more interest in the context of <sup>the</sup> Blackwood's type story is Lucy Snowe's childhood friend, John Bretton, in Villette. When she encounters him again in adult life, the fact that he is a doctor and she his patient means that their relationship can be conducted on terms of some intimacy without their becoming inextricably involved with one another emotionally. The role of physician as confidant admits him to the experience of those in extreme situations. As such, he is at but one remove from the position of the protagonist in fiction of the confessional mode.

Warren's stories cover the gamut of emotionally



151

charged situations, but are unrepresentative of Blackwood's fiction in the one respect pointed out above; for the greater portion of them the narrator occupies the role of observer, watching and reporting the experiences of others. By and large Blackwood's preferred an "it happened to me" angle, a slant which linked its fiction to the stories examined in the last chapter. It is however more difficult than Poe's parody might indicate to group all Blackwood's terror fiction under one heading; three classifications seem to suggest themselves. First there are the stories of imminent death, in which either an unusual degree of physical suffering (as in "The Man in the Bell" and "The Involuntary Experimentalist", already mentioned) or the very prospect of death ("The Murderer's Last Night", "The Iron Shroud") inspire the terror. Then there are the stories of resuscitation, in which the protagonist dies, either really or apparently, only to be brought back to life again. And finally, approaching what is generally thought of as the supernatural or ghost story proper, there are the stories of those who encounter manifestations of the supernatural. Common to all three kinds is the fact that, like the confessional stories at their climax, they have to do with a human consciousness at the extreme of natural experience, about to encounter either extinction or the supernatural.

### Imminent Death

Of the stories of imminent death, one of the most remarkable is William Mudford's "The Iron Shroud"<sup>15</sup>.

This starts in a quasi-Gothic Sicilian setting with the protagonist Vivenzio imprisoned alone in an iron-walled dungeon. He notices that each time he sleeps the walls of his prison close in a little more on him. Although the ingenuity of the device, and the focus on the changing mental state of Vivenzio, point the similarity to the Blackwood's tales discussed above, "The Iron Shroud" lacks the quasi-clinical detachment and precision of vocabulary which distinguishes those. Once the nature of Vivenzio's predicament is made clear there are no further developments in the plot. The cell gets smaller and smaller until eventually the prisoner is crushed out of life. Immediately apparent is the basic technical problem of the position of the narrator. In "The Man in the Bell" and "The Involuntary Experimentalist" the first-person narration, while admitting the reader to a close identification with the protagonist, also gives token of the protagonist's survival. The thoughts and emotions of Vivenzio are painstakingly described, but whatever the conventions one is more than usually aware that there is no way by which the last moments of this inner life could have been communicated to the author. As a result the tale reads more as a text-book exercise in terror than as a first-hand account of sensational experience that is more typical of Blackwood's. Narratorial omniscience brings with it an implied narratorial control which overrides the personal suffering of any one of the characters in the fiction; the confessional or first-person mode, on the other hand,

takes its cue from the perceived experience of the protagonist which is the raison d'être of the story.

An alternative expedient, of course, is to be the confidential witness of a person in extremis. This is the expedient employed through most of The Diary of a Late Physician, and in Thomas Doubleday's story "The Murderer's Last Night"<sup>16</sup>. In this the narrator takes an opportunity of spending the night before the execution alone in the death-cell with the condemned man. His purpose is to comfort the criminal, but the experience greatly affects the narrator both emotionally and physically. The suffering of the condemned is in some measure transferred to his companion so that the narrator becomes protagonist to some degree.

Doubleday begins his story by commenting

Let him, to whom experience has been allotted,  
think it a duty to impart it,

stressing at the outset its reportorial quality. In another Blackwood's hanging story, "The Revenant", the author Henry Thomson pleads exactly the same justification for his narrator, although rather more verbosely:

. . . . the cause which excites me to write is this - My greatest pleasure, through life, has been the perusal of any extraordinary narratives of fact. An account of a shipwreck in which hundreds have perished; of a plague which has depopulated towns or cities; anecdotes or inquiries connected with the regulation of prisons, hospitals or lunatic receptacles; nay, the very police reports of a common newspaper - as relative to

matters of reality; have always excited a degree of interest in my mind which cannot be produced by the best invented tale of fiction.

In both these stories of hanging, the emphasis is on the period leading up to the moment of execution rather than on the hanging itself. The experience narrated lies in the anticipation rather than the action, moving the centre of attention onto the mental state of those involved. It is noticeable that in each case the operation of the actual drop on the gallows is glossed over rather than dwelt upon. The death-watch companion in "The Murderer's Last Night" is so shaken by his night that, after a brief glance at the criminal being led towards the scaffold, he looks away and no further description of the execution is given. Similarly "The Revenant" gives little or no description of the moment:

Of the Chaplain; of the fastening of the fatal noose; of the putting on of the cap which I had so much disliked; of my actual execution and death, I have not the slightest atom of recollection. But that I know such occurrences must have taken place, I should not have the smallest consciousness that they did so.

This playing down of the physical aspects of the ordeal is quite intentional as the homilectic ending of the story makes clear:

For the words are soon spoken, and the act is soon done, which dooms a wretched creature to an untimely death; but bitter are the pangs - and

the sufferings of the body among the least of them  
- that he must go through before he arrives at  
it.

Although the Blackwood's tales often have the reputation of a lurid dwelling on the unacceptable, the emphasis here is firmly on the mental stress of the situation and not on the gruesome particulars of execution. Furthermore, the events are seen in their effect on the individual rather than as social phenomena. This is sharply apparent by comparing "The Revenant" with Lamb's 1811 letter in The Reflector, "On The Inconveniences Resulting from Being Hanged". This tongue-in-cheek piece is also about a survivor of the gallows but deals exclusively with the social disadvantages consequent on such an experience, with little or no mention of the writer's feelings prior to mounting the scaffold. The difference is not just that between humour and sensationalism but the concomitant one of the social versus the individual.

A further illustration of this is to be found in Dickens' two early treatments of "imminent execution": the reportorial "Visit to Newgate" in Sketches by Boz and the chapter describing "Fagin's Last Night Alive" in Oliver Twist (Ch. LII). Philip Collins rightly protests against the view that Dickens was

morbidly given to indulging his suppressed  
aggressive instincts, or his latent criminality,  
by projecting himself into such characters and  
circumstances,<sup>18</sup>

and points to <sup>the</sup> frequency of the topic of execution day.

In fact, Dickens' projection of himself remains just that: the identification with the protagonist is never carried to the point at which the authorial observer is suppressed or completely merged with the condemned man described. Furthermore, Dickens is more interested in pointing to the dramatic and emblematic possibilities of the situation. In the case of Fagin especially the predicament of the condemned man is enlarged by a symbolic suggestiveness which tends to remove the concern away from the particular person at a particular time and place.

Tales involving execution are so numerous in Blackwood's that they might constitute a class in themselves. An interesting variation on the theme is John Hardman's "The Headsman: A Tale of Doom"<sup>19</sup>, in which the mental ordeal that of the executioner rather than the executed. The protagonist is forced to turn executioner and finds that his victim is to be his childhood friend. Two years later a two-part tale "The Executioner" by Syphax (William Godwin, Jr., son of the author of Caleb Williams) continues this idea with a man tricked into taking the job of public hangman<sup>20</sup>. More in keeping with general pattern of Blackwood's stories is one of Warren's Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician entitled "The Forger"<sup>21</sup>. The doctor is summoned to the cell of the condemned man (a genteel youth who is to suffer for a momentary but grievous lapse) and there follows an affecting interview. Although the criminal voices apprehension about the details of his death, it is the affliction of

the doctor-narrator which is most graphically described. Again, the actual moment of death is avoided.

I was shocked at the air of sullen, brutal indifference, with which the hangman loosed and removed his neckerchief . . . . and could stand it no longer.

I staggered from my place at the window to a distant part of the room, dropped into a chair, shut my eyes, closed my tingling ears with my fingers, - and, with a hurried aspiration for God's mercy towards the wretched young criminal who, within a very few yards of me, was, perhaps, that instant surrendering his life into the hands which gave it, continued motionless for some minutes, till the noise made by the persons at the window, in leaving, convinced me all was over.

In another of Warren's episodes, "Mother and Son"<sup>22</sup>, a young man who gets drawn into a duel as a result of his gaming activities is put on trial for his life. Although he is ultimately acquitted of the charge against him, the experience (which includes a night spent listening to the sounds of a gallows being constructed outside his cell) is sufficient to ruin his constitution and he does not long survive.

### Revenants

It is difficult to avoid the reflection that had the unfortunate youth actually gone to the scaffold he might well have lived longer, so frequent are incidents of people surviving the hangman's attentions in the pages of Blackwood's. One of them, "The

Revenant", has already been discussed and the resuscitation stories are often closely related to the "imminent death" stories. In "The Revenant", however, the substance of the tale lies in the account of the period prior to the hanging, and it seems that the narrator's survival was largely a device to facilitate a first-person narration by the victim of an execution.

The currency of such stories is apparent in Lockhart's article "Hints for Jurymen", which is ostensibly a review of a book on medical jurisprudence but seizes the opportunity to retail accounts of various crimes and executions. At one point he writes:

It would appear that it has been a common thing in France, for criminals to recover after being hanged; and (M. Foderé) has been enabled, from their reports, to prove distinctly, that of all deaths there cannot be a more easy one than that of the gibbet . . . .

"Casalpin", says M. Foderé, "affirms that he had been informed by several men who recovered their life after execution, that the moment the knot was fastened they fell into such a stupor that they were sensible to nothing of what followed . . . . 23

Whether or not one accepts the veracity of these reports, there can be no doubt but that reports of the survival of hanging were part of the folk-lore of the age. Lamb's light-hearted essay on the inconveniences of such survival has already been mentioned. Another essayist, De Quincey, tells an anecdote of a body of a



hanged man hurried to a surgeon's dissecting-table for the purposes of an anatomical demonstration; the body is still exhibiting signs of life as the dissection is about to begin, so one of the students present administers the coup de grâce<sup>24</sup>. Then there is a footnote to one of Warren's stories, "The Thunder-Struck", which tells of a galvanic experiment on the body of an executed man who, as the electrodes are applied, suddenly sits up (to the terror of the onlookers) but does not actually regain life. All this provides the background against which one of Dickens' early stories, "The Black Veil" in Sketches by Boz, was written. The protagonist of this story is a young doctor beset by difficulties at the start of his career - a figure distinctly reminiscent of the physician in the first of the passages from Warren's Diary. When requested by a mysterious black-veiled woman to attend at a specific rendezvous, he discovers that his task is to attempt the resuscitation of her dead son, fresh from the noose.

Dickens' surgeon does not attempt to revive the man, but had he wished to do it appears that the necessary operation is a tracheotomy. Lockhart quotes as follows:

Dr. Male states, that it (making an opening in the trachea) was tried on one Gordon, a butcher, who was executed at the Old Bailey in the early part of the last century; the body having hung the usual time, was removed to a neighbouring house, where a surgeon waited to receive it, and enforce every means calculated to restore animation; he opened his eyes and sighed, but soon expired; the

want of success was attributed to his great weight; but we apprehend that, if the statement be correct as to his opening his eyes and sighing, the failure must have depended upon want of skill in the operators.<sup>25</sup>

The narrator of "The Revenant" contents himself with the rather teasing statement that

the accident to which I owe my existence, will have been divined

and leaves it to the reader to work out exactly how he escaped death. In fact the text contains few clues, unless an earlier remark regarding his very faint pulse before being led out of his cell is intended to be significant.

Not all stories of resuscitation involved hanging. "The Buried Alive" is another first-person story, this time of a man mistakenly believed dead and prepared for burial<sup>26</sup>. Although incapable of giving any sign of life, he remains fully conscious as the churchyard earth rattles down in spadefuls on his coffin. There is even more in store for him, for after a short while he is exhumed by professional "resurrectionists" and is taken - still apparently dead - to a dissecting-room. There, like the criminal mentioned in Warren's "The Thunder Struck", he is subjected to galvanic shocks for experimental purposes, but it is only as the anatomist's knife is about to make the first incision that the narrator recovers movement and speech. Moir's burlesque, "A Singular Recovery from Death", is a treatment of the same theme. As shall be seen below,

161  
one of Sheridan La Fanu's stories, "The Room In The Dragon Volant", is a particularly vivid treatment of premature burial. And Charles Lever incorporated into Arthur O'Leary (1844) the story of a man rescued from the coffin just before the lid is screwed on, while in Samuel Lover's Rory O'More (1837) there is a comic treatment of the situation when, after an excess of drinking, a character is persuaded that he is dead and his companions revive him by means of "galvanism" - in reality the application of a heated poker.

Mudford's "The Iron Shroud" might also be regarded as a variation of interment alive, as the title of the story suggests, and all such stories have some theoretical background. John Wilson, in a review of John Snart's Thesaurus of Horror; or the Charnel-House Explored! (1817) had already poked fun at Snart's repeated harping on premature burial when a couple of years later one Walter Whiter, a clergyman, lent the authority of his calling to a more sober investigation, A Dissertation on the Disorder of Death, or that State of the Frame under the Signs of Death, called Suspended Animation (1819). And in the review by Lockhart already cited he quotes:

There is nothing of which we have a greater instinctive horror, than of any force by which our voluntary motions are totally repressed; hence it is, as Cuvier has remarked, that the poetic fictions best calculated to insure our sympathy, are those which represent sentient beings enclosed within immovable bodies.

The description of the trapped subjects as "sentient beings"

isolates the fundamental<sup>characteristic</sup> of these Blackwood's stories. They are, in a particular sense of the term, sensation stories, although not in the accepted sense derived from Margaret Oliphant's review in Blackwood's several decades later devoted to "sensational novels" of the 1860s, and perpetuated by Walter C. Phillips and others<sup>27</sup>. There the term is used to identify a narrative which

occupies itself with incidents all but impossible, and in themselves strange, dangerous and exciting, and aiming to produce "startling effects"<sup>28</sup>; it refers to the events and situations seen dramatically from the outside. The Blackwood's stories are "sensational" in that their primary matter is the sense-experience of their protagonists, as transmitted to and affecting consciousness. Events and situations are explored psychologically rather than dramatically, although on the basis of a psychology that has a strong physiological basis.

In the "imminent execution" stories, the attention is on the predicament of the condemned man for as long as his perceptions convey to him the circumstances of his condition. A condemned man in his cell is, just as much as the victim of premature burial, "a sentient being enclosed within an immovable body", and equally the phrase sums up the situation of the protagonists of "The Involuntary Experimentalist" and "The Man in the Bell". In the last named it is experience of the bell as transmitted by the senses which is recorded:

My eyes, inflamed, bloodshot, and staring, invested

the supposed monster with a full proportion of unholy light.

At a later stage this distortion of vision is accompanied by a corresponding distortion of hearing:

As (the bell) passed over my mouth, it occasionally echoed my cries, which mixed not with its own sound, but preserved their distinct character.

Perhaps this was but fancy. To me, I know, they then sounded as if they were the shouting, howling, or laughing of the fiends with which my imagination had peopled the gloomy cave which swung above me.

The most acute suffering is inflicted during the first spell of bell-ringing; there is a second spell, but the effect of this is diminished because by then the intensity of the ordeal has put the protagonist into a kind of stupor in which his senses are dulled. He is "wrapt in the defensive armour of stupidity". Even at the height of his suffering, the worst fate he envisages for himself is the loss of his mental faculties:

I found I was becoming delirious, and trembled lest reason should utterly desert me. This is at all times an agonising thought but it smote me then with tenfold agony.

The supreme dread is that he might lose his reason, but ultimately it is the dulling of those very perceptions which are the agents of reason which offers the only palliative available.

In these Blackwood's stories then, the focus of experience is not any external and autonomous supernatural manifestation but the evident inability of the protagonist's

164

organisation to cope with certain extreme situations. Herein lies the basis of what might be termed the physiological ghost story (the term sensation story already having been appropriated elsewhere), in which apparitions are explicable along the lines suggested by Ferriar and Hibbert. In the stories considered so far, no ghost has actually been witnessed; hallucinations are recognised as such. Ever since the distortions caused by the rippling of the sea-water in "The Fatal Repast" the protagonists have been exposed to a variety of delusions and fears, all ultimately attributable to some rationally comprehensible cause - either an optical delusion or a malfunction of the brain under stress.

### Dreams

Warren's opening to "The Spectral Dog", one of the passages from the Diary, has already been quoted in Chapter One for its allusion to Hibbert:

The age of ghosts and hobgoblins is gone by, says worthy Dr. Hibbert; . . . These mysterious visitants are henceforth to be resolved into mere optical delusions, acting on an excitable fancy - an irritable nervous temperament; and the report of a real bona fide ghost or apparition is utterly scouted.<sup>29</sup>

This is the prolegomenon to a story in which a down-to-earth Church of England clergyman suddenly finds himself attended by an apparition of a blue dog. Although the dog proves to be insubstantial - the

clergyman passes his stick through it - the apparition first manifests itself by the sound of footsteps and on occasions the clergyman feels it brush against him. The odd-coloured dog is visible only to the protagonist who fortunately is stolid enough to philosophize about the phenomenon, and sufficiently abreast of contemporary thinking to ascribe it to some physiological disorder. This lessens but by no means ends his disquiet. The final suggestion in Warren's piece is that the phantom is ultimately attributable to a stomach disorder, but this is not unequivocally asserted by the physician.

Warren's "Spectral Dog" moves towards a suggestion of the truly supernatural, but at the same time it has its antecedents in the earlier stories. De Quincey's Opium Eater had already suggested that hallucinatory experiences could be induced by the ingestion of a particular diet. The "Singular Recovery from Death" which appeared in Blackwood's in December 1821 and was taken by Maginn to be a quiz on "The Man in the Bell", contains dreams of the otherworld which are finally revealed to be the after-effect of alcohol. Once again, over-indulgence or abuse of the appetite leads to hallucination. Alethea Hayter has written of the dream theory of the period, remarking that

Dreams were part of one's professional equipment  
as a writer.<sup>30</sup>

Humphry Davy and Robert Southey experimented with dreams

induced by nitrous oxide, while Fuseli, whose painting "The Nightmare" provided an image for the age, and Mrs. Radcliffe before him regulated their diet in the interest of vivid dreaming.

De Quincey had remarked that in dreams "of necessity, we make ourselves central to every movement"; another feature of dream experience in fiction is that the dividing line between the hallucinatory dream world and the waking world tends to be blurred, even obliterated. This most frequently occurs in the course of the dream itself, when the dreamer takes the events of his dream to be real and, for the duration of the dream, believes himself to be participating in them physically. Indeed, this imagined participation is almost required by definition as a sine qua non of dream experience. But it can also happen that this effect extends through the moment at which the dream begins, or ends. The transition from waking to dream, or from dream to waking, may be imperceptible. There is an early instance in the Blackwood's story, "The Last Man", which starts

. . . . I awoke as from a long and deep sleep. Whether I had been in a trance, or asleep, or dead, I know not; neither did I seek to inquire. With that inconsistency which may often be remarked in dreams, I took the whole as a matter of course, and awoke with the full persuasion that the long sleep or trance in which I had been laid, had nothing in it either new or appalling.<sup>31</sup>

The protagonist finds himself apparently alone in the world and feels a deep despair at the solitude of his



condition. This lasts through several pages. Eventually it emerges that the protagonist has been asleep all the time, and that the awakening of the first paragraph was part of the dream. His predicament and the story both conclude as he wakes in the presence of his valet, so that the action described takes place in the interval between an imagined and an actual waking.

Alcohol could serve as well as opium (or raw meat) as a digestive trigger for imaginative experiences of a supernatural type. Three of the stories interpolated in The Pickwick Papers tell of encounters with ghosts or goblins: "The Bagman's Story" (Ch. XIV), "The Goblins who Stole a Sexton" (Ch. XXVIII), and "The Story of the Bagman's Uncle" (Ch. XLIX). In each of them the encounter is preceded by heavy drinking on the part of the protagonist, leading to uneasy dreams. And Le Fanu's first published story, "The Ghost and the Bonesetter", is a humorous account of a night spent in a reputedly haunted room; the drink taken to bolster courage contributes to the ghostly experience.

In Victorian Conventions John Reed devotes some consideration to dreams, but treats them solely as prophetic devices. The prophetic possibilities of dreams is a convention which, although widespread in the nineteenth century, is by no means unique to it. Reed half-notices the wider narrative possibilities of dreams but does not pursue them.

At times it is difficult to say if the prophetic dream is merely a convention, is believed literally, or is a symbol not of the supernatural but of the

accessible human imagination.<sup>32</sup>

But dreams are not necessarily symbolic in function; at times they inform the structure of a fiction. Dreams go hand in hand with drugs in literature; indeed the latter often provoke the former. Each leads to a particular physiological condition in which bodily activity is reduced to a minimum through sleep or lassitude while at the same time the mind is unusually active. With each, a greater range of perceived experience or sensation is presented to the mind while the ability to control or to react to the input is diminished. Where drugs are concerned there is also another possibility, in which the subject performs actions that are not governed by the normal accompanying mental processes: the "theft" of The Moonstone is obvious case in point. The interference in the customary interaction between the mind and the body, as with the relationship between the individual and the outside world in the confessional type story, often threatens the natural human processes sufficiently to result in terror of the supernatural kind.

#### Ghosts: The Later Stories

Although leading to terror of a supernatural kind, none of the stories considered so far contains a ghost in the generally accepted sense of an immaterial revenant in human form. As Edmund Wilson pointed out in connection with The Turn of the Screw, a ghost is by no means essential to a ghost story. The true revenant is a figure that belongs more to folklore than

to literature. Hogg's Scottish stories do feature revenants, as, for instance, "The Cameronian Preacher's Tale", but in these he writes as the folk-figure The Ettrick Shepperd. However, in the middle decades of the century stories containing ghosts in the proper sense of the word came into some prominence, particularly under Dickens' editorship of the Christmas supplements to Household Words and All The Year Round. These stories aim less at establishing an atmosphere of terror than at staging a confrontation of the human and the supernatural. Less highly wrought than the Blackwood's stories, they prefer the eerie to the terrifying. By the end of the story the eeriness is generally dispersed, when it is made clear that the incident described is an isolated one and unlikely to recur. In spite of the differences to the earlier stories, they are written against the same theoretical background, even if, as in the conclusion to Amelia B. Edwards' story of a revenant, "The Engineer", it is mentioned only to rule out the implications.

I expect, as a matter of course, to be told that this was an optical illusion, or that I was suffering from pressure on the brain, or even that I laboured under an attack of temporary insanity.<sup>33</sup>

There is a similar conclusion to her story in "Mrs Lirriper's Legacy", where, after the protagonist's experiences in a "Phantom Coach", the surgeon in attendance "treated the whole adventure as a mere dream born of the fever in my brain"<sup>34</sup>. The ride in the coach is preceded by an encounter with a solitary

philosopher, living in a remote house on the moors, who grumbles at the scepticism of his age.

They reject as false all that cannot be brought to the test of the laboratory or the dissecting-room. Against what superstition have they waged so long and obstinate a war, as against the belief in apparitions?

The philosopher's head is "singularly fine"; "broad in the temples, prominent over the eyes. . . it had all the ideality and much of the ruggedness" of Beethoven. His range of investigation is supported by apparatus including casts, geological and chemical specimens, and a galvanic battery, and has taken in areas

From practical science to mental philosophy; from electricity in the wire to electricity in the nerve; from Watts to Mesmer, from Mesmer to Reichenbach, from Reichenbach to Swedenborg, Spinoza, Condillac, Descartes . . .

Such was the background of thought against which apparitions were to be seen even in the 1860s. Even in "Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions" the story "To Be Taken With A Grain Of Salt" refers in the preliminary remarks to David Brewster, author of Letters on Natural Magic, and to "the Bookseller of Berlin" - the story of Nikolai which had figured prominently in Ferriar's essay.

Of the stories appearing under the aegis of Dickens' editorship, two of the most effective are his own "The Signalman"<sup>35</sup> and Mrs Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story"<sup>36</sup>. In the course of a long letter to Mrs. Gaskell dated

25th November 1851 Dickens had mentioned their shared interest in ghost stories, and he urged significant editorial emendations to Mrs Gaskell's story before its publication - suggestions which Mrs Gaskell turned down<sup>37</sup>. Mrs Gaskell's is one of the most effective uses of the revenant figure. Old Miss Furnivall and her household are haunted not only by apparitions of the dead but also, at the climax, by the spirit of Miss Furnivall herself as a young person. The most radical innovation in "The Old Nurse's Story" is that the principal ghost-seer is a child, on whom the effect is so strong as to amount almost to possession. Here Mrs Gaskell anticipates both The Turn of the Screw and D.H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner", in which the vulnerability of the child-figure makes it particularly sensitive to the supernatural.

The returned spirit is the staple of ghost stories in any culture, and it is the basic device of the later Dickens-associated stories, although in "The Signalman" the spirit seems anticipatory rather than revenant. There are similarities to the Blackwood's type stories, particularly to those dealing with the survival of death - one of which, as has been noticed, was entitled "The Revenant". Both kinds of tale juggle with the irrefragible boundary between life and death. However, the Blackwood's tale narrates events from the viewpoint of the person who dies or nearly dies, while the concentration is on the moments preceding death. The later Dickens-type tale is related by an observer who witnesses the return of the one who dies, and

greater prominence is given to events after death. Indeed, it is frequent for the moment of death to have occurred before the point at which the narrative begins. Although the narrator in the later stories retains firmer links with the normative known world, and is less likely to be immured in cell, coffin, belfry, vat, or similarly isolating environment, he remains the sensitive centre of the story, distinguished by his capacity to witness the supernatural and to respond to it with awe or terror. In this way he continues to occupy the position of central importance in the story.

Furthermore, it is a feature of these mid-century Dickens-associated stories that the apparition is recognized by the protagonist, either at the time of its manifestation or subsequently. In many cases the ghost is that of a person known while alive, as in "The Engineer". Alternatively, as in Sheridan Le Fanu's "An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in A House in Aungier Street"<sup>38</sup>, it may be that of a person recognized from a portrait. The purpose of the return may be reproach, as in Mary Braddon's "The Cold Embrace"<sup>39</sup> or revenge, as in the same writer's "Eveline's Visitant"; it may be to warn, aid or advise the living, even if the advice consists only of directions to locate an unburied corpse; or it may be to menace the protagonist. The use of a portrait, of which the significance is that it holds a likeness from the past, emphasises the essentially anachronistic quality of a ghost. A revenant is an image out of its time. This may be made apparent in an obviously historical appearance, as in

the folk-lorish conception of a knight clanking along the corridors of a stately home; more usually, in the literary ghost story the anachronism rests in the apparition of a person known by the seer to be dead.

This overriding of the infrangibility of the boundary between life and death - which is the most absolute marker of time's passing in man's experience - is structurally similar to a feature of the stories already commented upon: the blurring of the dream/waking distinction. This overlap of two states constitutes a threat to the domain of rationality, as the areas in which it might be thought to operate (waking, life,) are no longer precisely delimited; as in the confessional stories, reason is whittled away.

#### Sheridan Le Fanu: Some Stories

When the nineteenth-century story of supernatural terror is discussed nowadays, it is generally those stories associated with Dickens that are referred to. These are the stories that have found their way into the more widely-known anthologies. For instance, perhaps the most influential is Montague Summers' Supernatural Omnibus, which was first published in 1931 and has been through many impressions in the half-century since then; it contains nothing from Blackwood's, and its earliest pieces are an extract from Marryat's The Phantom Ship and a couple of Barham's Ingoldsby Legends, from around 1840, while drawing heavily on contributors to Dickens' magazines and on stories by Le Fanu. Dorothy Sayers' Great Short

Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror<sup>40</sup> includes only two pre-1850 stories in the "Mystery and Horror" section - one of the stories interpolated in Pickwick Papers and a traditional and horrific history of Sawney Bean. Other standard collections, such as the Oxford Ghosts and Marls and More Ghosts and Marvels<sup>41</sup>, and the Everyman Book of Ghost Stories<sup>42</sup> cover much the same ground. Critical studies adopt similar limits. Peter Penzoldt's The Supernatural in Fiction<sup>43</sup> starts with the work of Sheridan Le Fanu, as does Julia Briggs in the more recent Night Stories: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story (1977). Penzoldt comments that Dickens' own ghost stories are curiously unsatisfactory examples of the form, mainly because of the attempt to marry them with moral purpose.

Although the supernatural element in the earlier stories is less explicit, there are elements which recur in the later. Rather than embark on a general survey of material already covered in the books mentioned, it is intended here to look at two or three examples from the output of Le Fanu, whose work is both representative and accomplished.

"The Room in the Dragon Volant"<sup>44</sup> has already been mentioned in connection with the stories of premature burial. The early part of this gives a glittering picture of life in France in the years following Waterloo, but the climax concerns an elaborate plot in which the protagonist Beckett makes plans for a nocturnal elopement with a countess, having first been prevailed upon to make the necessary advance arrangements for the



175

funeral of one of her kinsmen. On keeping the tryst he discovers that the funeral he has arranged is his own; he is given a drug which totally immobilises any muscular activity but - and this is crucial only for the effect of terror, not for the plot - leaves his mind and senses fully alert. He remains fully conscious as he is dressed for burial and as the coffin lid is screwed down over him, only to be rescued at the last moment.

This story is one of the most highly wrought of those involving "sentient beings in immovable bodies" and the effect is brought about in part by a drug administered to Beckett. Physiological abuse figures even more largely in a companion story, "Green Tea"<sup>45</sup>. This is an account of a learned clergyman who, perhaps as a result of drinking too much green tea to keep him awake over his books, is plagued by the persistent apparition of a small black monkey. He eventually consults Martin Hesselius, a doctor, who undertakes to cure him. But before the curative treatment can commence the strain on the Reverend Jennings becomes too great, and he is found dead by his own hand, a pool of blood and a razor by his side. The similarities to the "The Spectral Dog" are numerous, and in some respects so marked that one is led to the conclusion that Le Fanu had read and retained a memory of Warren's story. However, "Green Tea" represents such an advance in quality that it would be churlish to deprecate the borrowing. In each story the two principal characters are a clergyman and a physician, who figure as protagonist

and narrator respectively. Added to this is the fact that in each instance the apparition takes the form of an animal - a fairly unusual occurrence in supernatural fiction. Like Warren's, Le Fanu's story contains a reference to the early nineteenth-century theories of apparitions:

I had read, of course, as everyone has, something about "spectral illusions", as you physicians term the phenomena of such cases.

It is suggested that the cause of each apparition is dietary: Mr. D--- suffers from a stomach disorder, while the "Green Tea" of the title of Le Fanu's story is tentatively put forward as that of Rev. Mr. Jennings' familiar. Finally, there are incidents common to both stories. Mr. Jennings first sees his apparition while travelling in an omnibus; the protagonist of the earlier story, on first noticing the blue dog, boards a passenger coach in the hope of escaping it, but is no sooner seated inside than he finds the dog at his feet. Mr. Jennings first becomes aware of the immateriality of the monkey when he stretches out his umbrella to poke at it.

It remained immovable - up to it - through it.

For through it, and back and forward it passed, without the slightest resistance.

This reproduces an incident in which Warren's protagonist poked about his walking-stick, and moved it repeatedly through and through the form of the phantom; but there it continued - indivisible impalpable - in short, as much a dog as ever, and

yet the stick traversing the form in every direction,  
from the tail to the tip of the nose!

Notwithstanding these seemingly derivative similarities, the later story is superior in every respect. It is apparent even in the two tests of the creatures' tangibility just quoted. In Warren the incident has little impact, for it merely reinforces what has already been gathered by the reader. Such an unlikely-coloured dog could hardly be real in any case. But in "Green Tea"<sup>the</sup> lead-up to the incident preserves the uncertain status of the creature. A black monkey with glowing eyes might be a strange find on a London omnibus but, as Mr. Jennings himself at first conjectures, it could be a pet inadvertently left behind by a disembarking passenger. There is no reason for Mr. Jennings to suspect that the monkey is a delusion of his own imagining; he is alone on the bus at the time, so there is no other passenger to corroborate or contradict the evidence of his eyes. Consequently, the moment when he reaches out to prod distastefully at the creature with his rolled-up umbrella has the full force of vivid surprise.

As regards the specifically supernatural aspect of the story, Le Fanu adds an extra dimension to it. When Mr. Jennings admits to taking infusions of green tea, it emerges that he does<sup>this</sup> to sustain him in his work on a Casaubon-like survey of pagan religion. This immediately raises the possibility of some occult spiritual force come to plague him, a possibility that is enhanced by the strong presence of Swedenborgian

teaching in the story. When Hesselius first visits Jennings he finds volumes of Swedenborg's Arcana Caelesta lying open in the clergyman's library, with certain passages underlined and annotated. Several passages are quoted at some length, thus bringing Swedenborg's teachings into the text. For instance:

When man's interior sight is opened, which is that of the spirit, then there appear things of another life, which cannot possibly be made visible to the bodily sight. . . .

The effect of these quotations is to accord Swedenborg's teaching an important status in the text. Similar doctrines, set within a medical framework, are referred to in the winding-up comments of Dr. Hesselius after the discovery of Mr. Jennings' body.

You know my tract on the Cardinal Functions of the Brain. I there, by the evidence of innumerable facts, prove, as I think, the high probability of a circulation, arterial and venous in its mechanism, through the nerves. Of this system, thus considered, the brain is the heart. The fluid, which is propagated hence through one class of nerves, returns in an altered state through another, and the nature of that fluid is spiritual though not immaterial, any more than, as I before remarked, light or electricity are so.

By various abuses, among which the habitual use of green tea is one, this fluid may be affected as to its quality, but it is more frequently

disturbed as to equilibrium. This fluid being that which we have in common with spirits, a congestion found upon the masses of brain or nerve connected with the interior sense, forms a surface unduly exposed, on which disembodied spirits may operate: communication is thus more or less effectively established. Between this brain circulation and heart circulation there is an intimate sympathy. The seat, or rather the instrument of exterior vision, is the eye, the seat of interior vision is the nervous tissue and brain, immediately about and above the eyebrow . . .

I have quoted this passage at some length because the passage shows more clearly than any other piece of writing the eventual culmination and synthesis of the two attitudes to the supernatural traced in Chapter I. With his talk of an inner eye capable of "seeing" into the spirit world through the medium of a circulating fluid, Hesselius inclines towards the transcendental approach to supernatural phenomena, an approach prepared for by the earlier allusions to Swedenborg and pagan religions. But in stressing also his work on the mechanisms of the brain, and discussing the physiological effects of a dietary stimulant such as green tea, he admits the possibility of a materialist explanation of the apparition. Thus, the ambiguity of Mr. Jennings' experience - was he, or was he not, plagued by a small black monkey-figure? - is enhanced by the ambivalence of the seemingly matter-of-fact summing up.

Another of Le Fanu's later stories is worth looking

at in detail for its use of dreams: "The Haunted Baronet", first published in Belgravia in 1870<sup>46</sup>. This story, set in the north of England, encompasses a broader sweep than the average short story of the supernatural. Le Fanu spends a considerable amount of time establishing the atmosphere, and in doing so he relies not only on the isolation and lowering scenery of the setting, but adds incident to description; much is made of dreams. As the sense of foreboding gathers around the doomed Sir Bale Mardykes, doomed both for his own misdeeds and those of his ancestors, Le Fanu runs through the gamut of dream effects. Sir Bale employs as his secretary an impoverished young kinsman, Philip Feltram, whose family has suffered grievous wrong at the hands of the Mardykes. Feltram is treated with contumely by his master, but endures all until he is wrongfully accused of stealing a bank-note from his employer, and decides to flee: the shade of Caleb Williams looms in the background. The tales surrounding Sir Bale's grandfather have already poisoned the atmosphere prior to his arrival at Golden Friars - the grandfather is still suspected of having seduced a forebear of Philip Feltram and of having drowned her in the lake near Snakes Island. On his return to the site of his family's ruin Feltram is particularly troubled. He confesses to the sympathetic housekeeper, Mrs. Julaper, that his sleep has been troubled of late, and she takes the opportunity to deliver a little homily on dreams:

"There are dreams and dreams, my dear: there's

some signifies no more than the bubble of the lake down there on the pebbles, and there's others that has a meaning; there's dreams that is but vanity, and dreams that is good, and dreams that is bad - - - - Tell me your dream, and I may show you it's a good one after all. For many a dream is ugly to see and ugly to tell, and a good dream with a happy meaning for all that... "

Mrs Julaper is here expressing the straight-forward conventional view of dreams as keys to future events or hidden truths. But Feltram has no hesitation in rejecting this explanation. In his dreams he has been visited by his great-grandmother, no longer beautiful as in the portrait of her which he has seen, but hard and deathly. She comes to him not with a prediction, but with an instruction - an instruction so forceful that it seems to Feltram he is possessed.

She wants to make use of me; and, you see, it is getting a share in my mind, and a voice in my thoughts, and a command over me gradually.

- - - - I dreamed I went down a flight of steps under the lake and got a message - - - -.

This is more than the familiar device of a spirit appearing to demand vengeance. As yet Feltram has no idea of what exactly is demanded, and is conscious only of the influence exerted over him by the figure in his dreams. Soon after this comes the rupture with Sir Bale. Feltram's cry as he is threatened by the baronet is that of Caleb Williams before him; "Am I awake?" and is a further incidental reference to dream experience:

as the world of dreams begins to affect his waking world, so does the latter begin to assume the properties of nightmare. That night Feltram decides to leave the house. As he is rowed across the lake, past Snake-s Island, one of the boatmen with him sees

something white come out o' t' water by the  
gunwale, like a hand. By Jen! and he leans  
oo'er and tuk it; and he sagged like, and so it  
drew him under the mere, before I cud du nowt,

So, in the event, Feltram's dreams do have something approaching fulfilment, but their prophetic character only becomes apparent in retrospect, if such a paradox can be admitted. As Cassandra discovered, for prophecy to be effective it must be recognized as such at the time of utterance. Feltram's body is brought back to the Hall where two women start to prepare him for burial. Meanwhile Sir Bale, tired out after the perturbations of the night, falls asleep in his chair and, in turn, dreams a dream:

It was one of those dreams in which the waking state that immediately preceded it seems unbroken; for he thought that he was sitting in the chair which he occupied, and in the room where he actually was. It seemed to him that he got up, took a candle in his hand, and went through the passages to the old stillroom where Philip Feltram lay - - - A horror slowly overcame him as he thought he saw the figure under the coverlet stealthily beginning to move. Backing towards the door, for he could not take his eyes off it,



he saw something like a huge black ape creep out at the foot of the bed; and springing at him it gripped him by the throat, so that he could not breathe; and a thousand voices were instantly round him, halloaing, cursing, laughing in his ears; and in this direful plight he waked.

Was it the ring of those voices still in his ears, or a real shriek, and another, and a long peal, shriek after shriek, swelling madly through the distant passages, that held him still, freezing in the horror of his dream?

What has happened is that Philip Feltram, having been certified as dead and made ready for burial, has suddenly returned to life, and it is his sudden reanimation which has caused the screams of the ministering women. This dream, then, is the most polyvalent of all. There is no moment which clearly marks the beginning, while the awakening merely perpetuates the dream. The events of the dream itself reproduce obliquely both events that actually take place at the same moment and those that occur subsequently: the attack by the ape suggests clearly the return to life of Feltram and his subsequent preying on Sir Bale. The animal-like appearance suggests the changed character of Feltram, who henceforth is surly, sinister and malevolent.

This ends the opening section of "The Haunted Baronet", a story which goes on to trace the influence of the new and revengeful Feltram on Sir Bale. It is an interesting supernatural story, partly for its exceptional wealth of incident but also because, unusually,

a great deal of the supernatural action takes place outdoors. This had happened before, notably in Hogg's Justified Sinner, but in Le Fanu's story the landscape is given a pronounced malevolent and unearthly quality.

There are some further references to dreams, but nothing as concentrated as those in the first eleven chapters - in which, indeed, there is also one straightforwardly premonitory dream. All these dreams are more than merely fictional window-dressing; they serve a definite purpose in enlarging the scope of imaginative experience. They do this in two ways. First, by association, as in the earlier dream of Feltram. He is given a foretaste of the adventure that awaits him - one gathers, although nowhere is it explicitly stated, that his quasi-drowning was arranged by the spirit of his murdered great-grand-mother and her family in order to urge him to wreak vengeance on Sir Bale. When first told of Feltram's disturbing dreams Mrs. Julapher had dismissed them as perhaps having no more significance than "the babble of the lake". Later in the story, as the new Feltram begins to exert his power over Sir Bale, he is found by the baronet at the shoreline and remarks:

"I like to listen to the ripple of the water among the grass and pebbles; the tongues and lips of the lake are lapping and whispering all along."

The lake, repository of his ancestor's body and symbol of his dream, does indeed have much of significance to impart to him.

For Mardykes, the dream of the ape has more than

simply associative ramifications; it leads to a direct merger of dream and life. This blurring of the boundaries opens the way for the near-fantasy of the later parts of the story. Sir Bale, normally a worldly and self-confident man, is removed from the customary environment and his harrowing commences. Entering the woods for the mysterious encounter arranged by Feltram, he finds the landscape transformed and inhabited by strange wild-life. Although this is a waking experience, both the narrator and Sir Bale tentatively ascribe it to delirium.

I am now going to relate wonderful things; but they rest on the report, strangely consistent, of Sir Bale Mardykes. That all his senses, however, were sick and feverish, and his brain not quite to be relied on at that moment, is a fact of which sceptics have a right to make all they please and can.

Events are cast in doubt even before they are narrated. Sir Bale himself, looking back on his experience subsequently, says similarly "so far as my brain was concerned, it was all phantasmagoria".

Here then is a counterpart to the earlier dream experience in the story. Whereas there everyday life was incorporated into dreams, here a strong element of fantasy is introduced into the course of everyday life. The use of dreams has led to the creation of a fictional world which, while remaining close to the "real" world, is nonetheless able to contain elements of the supernatural.

### Currency of Blackwood's Stories

Le Fanu's writing career extended from the 1830s to the 1870s and embraced short story, novella and three-volume novel: some examples of the last category will be considered in Part Two. His shorter work has been the subject of examination here because it represents the later supernatural story of the nineteenth century at its most accomplished, and because it shows its links with the earlier, physiologically-based Blackwood's stories, the motifs and situations of which are elaborated in Le Fanu's work.

Although the latter part of this chapter has been devoted to pieces written around 1870, a major concern has been to argue that the nineteenth-century supernatural terror story flourished in a period several decades earlier than is generally realised nowadays. The Blackwood's stories enjoyed a breadth of appeal which has not carried over to the present age. However, they certainly outlived their original periodical appearance. The magazines themselves were durable objects, particularly when bound. Later, several of the stories were republished in their author's collected works; Mudford's "The Iron Shroud" and Maginn's "The Man in the Bell" are cases in point, while the Diary of a Late Physician by Warren was so commercially successful that it went through numerous impressions and editions in book form. In the middle of the 1860s, it was still being advertised by Blackwood in three separate editions: as one of the five volumes of Warren's Works at five-and-six, in a two-volume foolscap

187.  
edition at twelve shillings, and in a crown octavo limited edition at seven-and-sixpence. Just before the start of the same decade, between 1858 and 1860, the same publisher issued twelve volumes of Tales from Blackwood's at quarterly intervals. These each contained between six and eight pieces of the magazine's fiction selected from the previous four decades of publication, and included "The Iron Shroud", "The Man in the Bell", "The Fatal Repast", "The Murderer's Last Night", and "The Involuntary Experimentalist" among others.

There can be no doubt that these tales had an enduring circulation, and there is evidence of this in the allusions to them in the fiction of the time. One of the most direct occurs in Le Fanu's 1864 novel Wylder's Hand:

. . . . his troubles had closed in recently with a noiseless but tremendous contraction, like that iron shroud in Mr Mudford's fine tale. (Ch.XLV).  
Charlotte Brontë had already used the image from the tale similarly in Jane Eyre when describing emotional besieging of Jane by St John Rivers:

My iron shroud contracted round me; persuasion advanced with slow, sure step. (Ch.34)

Almost contemporaneously, Mrs Gaskell used the same image in the crucial Chapter XV of Mary Barton; she describes the state of feeling of John Barton as his monomaniac hostility against the mill-owners takes hold on his personality in a metaphor that seems to derive from Mudford's tale.

I have somewhere read a forcibly prescribed punishment

among the Italians, worthy of a Borgia. The supposed or real criminal was shut up in a room, supplied with every convenience and luxury; and at first mourned little over his imprisonment. But day by day he became aware that the space between the walls of his apartment was narrowing, and then he understood the end. Those painted walls would come into hideous nearness, and at last crush the life out of him.

Apart from the luxury of surroundings, this is an accurate memory of a reading of "The Iron Shroud".

The Diary of a Late Physician, itself a variant of the confessional mode, provided a possible model for sections of narratives such as Marian Helcombe's diary in The Woman in White, Miss Wade's "Diary of a Self-Tormentor" in Little Dorrit, and Helen Graham's diary which forms the core of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. This is continued in her letters which describe Arthur Huntingdon's deathbed, a scene which has a prototype in Warren's "Man About Town". Although deathbeds were a staple of Victorian fiction, Anne Brontë's insistence on bodily decay, the dread of death, the refusal of spiritual comfort, and the graphic portrayal of disease brought on by debauchery, had all been anticipated by Warren in his far more lurid story.

Although Dickens makes use of bells and belfries, he does so in a manner rather different to Maginn in "The Man in the Bell". In "The Chimes", the bell-tower is a place of moral regeneration. The bell heard by Rudge during the burning of The Warren in Chapter LV

of Barnaby Rudge certainly deranges his senses, but it does so because of its associations; it is terrible because of the implications and reminders it brings to overwhelm the moral universe of Rudge, while the bell in Maginn's story remains a purely physical phenomenon. However, in Aurora Leigh, Elizabeth Barrett Browning describes Aurora hearing in her imagination the bells peal for Romney's marriage:

I could not choose but fancy, half the way,  
I stood alone i' the belfry, fifty bells  
Of naked iron, mad with merriment  
(As one who laughs and cannot stop himself),  
All clanking at me, in me, over me,  
Until I shrieked a shriek I could not hear,  
And swooned with noise, - but still, along my swoon,  
Was 'ware the baffled changes backward rang,  
Prepared, at each emerging sense, to beat  
And crash it out with clangour.<sup>47</sup>

The stress on Aurora's feelings is conveyed by a close parallel to the predicament described in "The Man in the Bell", down to the detail of the loss of senses and eventual swooning.

### Conclusion

It was the particular achievement of the Blackwood's stories to be among the first fiction to articulate, however crudely or imperfectly, human consciousness in extreme situations. Although lurid, they represented an incipient concern with psychological realism, and the artificially constricted arenas of action - death cells, coffins, belfries, etc. - were laboratories for the

observation of a human response to contrived circumstances. Although on occasions there is a certain unpalatable cultivation of horror, there is less than is implied by the distaste with which "Blackwood's stories" are sometimes referred to, and much less than in the work of their more widely-read imitator, Poe. Perhaps this is to be seen most forcibly in the treatment of executions. Their frequent occurrence in Blackwood's is just one aspect of the treatment of what was to be a topos of fiction in the age, but the distinguishing feature of the Blackwood's stories is that, by turning away from the crowd scenes of the court and the scaffold and focussing on the individual in his isolation, they enter the specifically private area of public executions. Psychological rather than social in approach, the world of each story is centripetal; extremes of experience press in and, as with confessional fiction, the boundary between the physical and the metaphysical breaks down as the protagonist is transformed into a sentient medium for exploring the physiology of suffering.



## CHAPTER FIVE

HOUSES AND BRAINS: SHAPING  
FORCES IN THE SUPERNATURAL  
TERROR STORY.

In the conclusion of the last chapter "horror" and "terror" were mentioned, two terms between which it is necessary to distinguish. The OED glosses "terror" as "intense fear, fright, or dread"; horror it defines as "a painful emotion compounded of loathing and fear", "a strong aversion mingled with dread". The words "loathing" and "aversion" are important pointers to the difference between the two, a difference which is too frequently overlooked. Horror entails revulsion, combined perhaps with shocked fascination. It is usually evoked by a spectacle of violence, and the more explicit the loathsomeness of the object or event presented to the sensibility, the greater the horror. It is a crude and direct response to a crude and explicit stimulus. Many writers, among them Poe and the Jacobean dramatists, have pressed such a response into the service of art; the great instance which comes to mind is the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear. Although there are numerous successful stories which utilise horror in a subsidiary role, it is difficult

192

to recall an artistically successful story based on horror alone.

### The Involved Reader

Horror, like pornography, involves an offence against morality. There is a shocked and passionate reaction to an object or event which, it is felt, should not be so. A terror story does not call morality into play for, as Barthes remarks, terror

relates man not to other men, but to the most inhuman images in Nature; heaven, hell, holiness, childhood, madness, pure matter etc.<sup>1</sup>

This, rather out of context, is quoted for its striking similarity to Conrad's evocation of the world of terror in "The Shadow Line", where man is confronted by

stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space, great waters; the formidable Work of the Seven Days, into which man seems to have blundered unbidden.

Or else decoyed.

Ghost stories are frightening because, no matter how anthropocentric the narrative, nor how anthropomorphic any apparition, they diverge from human experience. As with the breakdown of the divisions between dream and waking, between life and death, which is a basic device, the linear progression of the Blackwood's stories is towards a physiological breakdown of human rationality. Terror is rarely a response to a specific factor; it is more often induced by a deviation from the normal or expected course of events. The disorientation of a bewildered mind brought up

against irreconcilable or unassimilable facts is the basis of terror. Furthermore, the terrified person tends to be involved in the situation which gives rise to the emotion, whereas horror is generally a reaction to something external. A reader or audience identifies with Lear in a way that does not occur with Gloucester. Intrinsic to horror is an attempt to deny, to shut the mind to what is being inflicted. This turning away, or aversion, does not take place in the case of terror, for there one is already caught up irrevocably in the situation. The distinctions between horror and terror may be tabulated as follows:

	Stimulus	Condition	Response
Horror	Explicit	Moral	Aversion
Terror	Suggested	Ontological	Involvement

In the simplest terms, the horror-terror distinction coincides with the subjective-objective dichotomy.

In the context of fiction, the question that is immediately begged is that of Lessing's Laocoon: whether by "terrified subject" is meant a character within the text or a reader. In fact, it is part of the technique of the terror story to bring about an imaginative identification of the reader with the protagonist. As Penzoldt says:

There is always a certain amount of identification between the reader and the hero or narrator (if he speaks in the first person) of a ghost story.<sup>2</sup>

Todorov, who advances the concept of an "ideal reader", generated by the text of any fiction and distinct from

any actual individual reader, writes:

Le fantastique implique donc une intégration du lecteur au monde des personnages.<sup>3</sup>

The term "protagonist" is used in this discussion to mean that character in a terror story who is placed in a frightening situation or who confronts an apparition. The protagonist is the only character essential to a supernatural terror story, but it is necessary to regard him, or her, as existing in opposition to the supernatural, whether this latter take the form of an explicitly spiritual manifestation or of a delusion resulting from physiological or environmental causes; therefore the protagonist is always a representative of the natural or normal, in that he derives from the experiential norm. The supernatural terror story exists in the interval between the two poles implicit in the cliché "the fear of the unknown": the known world of everyday experience is opposed to the unknown, because highly individual, world of ordeal explored by the protagonist. The condemned man in the death-cell, the hapless innocent caught up in extreme peril, the occupier of a haunted house, all enter the arena of the unknown. The arena may be defined physically, as in the haunted house, temporally, as during the hours spent in the knowledge of an impending violent death or suffering, or psychologically, as the sensitivity of a mind exposed to influences such as mesmerism or drugs.

The protagonist's place in the dual structure of the story and the individual nature of his experience

175  
combine to give the terror story its particular pattern. Because the experience is out of the ordinary - tending to the supernatural - it is necessary for the reader to be given full and detailed information so that he will participate in the responses of the protagonist.

Therefore the Blackwood's-type story and its derivatives are primarily mimetic. As Defoe had demonstrated long before in "A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs Veal", a great deal depends on a painstaking attention to verisimilitude. In the Blackwood's stories this reveals itself in the accumulation of observation, as in Ferguson's "The Involuntary Experimentalist", where the narrator scrupulously takes note of his body's reactions as it is exposed to the increasing heat. In more elaborate fictions the insistence on a quasi-reportorial accuracy is used not only for verisimilitude but also to create tension through contradiction within the events of the narrative itself, as in the court scenes and editorial commentary in Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner. The mimetic or realistic method of supernatural terror fiction rests in the text's insistence that the events described be taken at face value; metaphorical or allegorical readings are resisted, and the reader must accept the resulting incompatibilities by assenting to the totality of possibilities posited by the text.

These conflicting possibilities seem at times to give the stories the air of fantasy. C.N. Manlove's definition of fantasy is so comprehensive as to be equally a description:

A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms.<sup>4</sup>

The definition goes on to distinguish pure fantasy from "The ghost or horror (sic) story," in which latter the supernatural is left entirely alien, for the point is the shock . . . . that is experienced both by the character and the reader.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the incompatibilities are not allowed to recede into the background of the fictive world to become part of what is given, nor are they susceptible to a figurative interpretation which removes and replaces the literal meaning. Certainly, any particular supernatural manifestation - one thinks of the monkey in "Green Tea", or the rumpled apparition in M.R. James' "'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'" - may suggest a symbolic value, but it is a secondary value in that the symbolism is psychological rather than literary.

As well as being an element in the dual structure of the fiction, the protagonist also enters into a median relationship to the reader and the events narrated. The success of the story is proportionate to the degree of the reader's imaginative identification with the protagonist. Although the events may belong to the unverifiable experience of solipsism or near-fantasy, "the natural form of mimetic narrative is eye-witness and first-person"<sup>6</sup>. Mimesis implies the

197  
existence of a primary reality by which the events portrayed are verifiable by the community of narrator and reader.

Circumstantiality, verisimilitude, and many more of the qualities which we recognize as identifying characteristics of realism in narrative are all natural functions of the eye-witness point-of-view . . . . The realistic elements we sense and respond to in such "unrealistic" narratives as the Commedia and Gullivers' Travels . . . . are all partly due to the kind of colouring which an eye-witness or autobiographical narrator so readily imparts to the events he narrates.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore the narrative mode of the terror story, being realistic or mimetic, runs counter to the extreme or supernatural status of its events, and the resulting interpenetration of the banal and the uncanny serves to create the terror which results from vulnerability to the unfamiliar. It is largely as a result of this that terror stories are nearly always narrated from the point-of-view of the protagonist, who frequently figures as a first-person narrator. The strong preference shown by Blackwood's for stories purporting to be accounts of lived experience of a sensational nature was generically inevitable. Its effectiveness was not lost on editors of later magazines; as Sutherland notes,

All The Year Round came to specialise in fiction that wasted no time in making an impact on the reader. Hence its preference for autobiographical

198  
narrative (four out of the first eight full-length novels had "I" narrators) and stories based on crime. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, in the later terror story which is based on the explicitly supernatural, the first-person narration can serve as a reminder of the traditional folklore origins of the ghost-story, in which the narrative transmission is oral and personal.

These two characteristics - the enumeration of detail and the involvement of the reader - together serve to distinguish the Blackwood's terror stories from the Gothic novel. Gothic literature thrives on the vague and the remote. It is not a fiction of the first-person, and there is an indefinite quality attendant on both atmosphere and language. Coral Ann Howells sees here a possible explanation of the Gothicists' choice of romance as their fictional form.

By adopting a mode which is recognised as being separate from everyday life, they were free to create a fictional world which embodies their fears and fantasies and offered a retreat from insoluble problems, while at the same time it rendered their fears ultimately harmless by containing and distancing them in a fantasy.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, there is a tendency to keep the Gothic heroine remote from the reader; she is a specimen for observation rather than a vehicle for imagination.

#### The Passive Protagonist

The use of the word "protagonist" to describe the



1977  
principal character in a terror story does some violence to its etymology, for the original theatrical usage placed the emphasis on the active role of the character so denominated. In terror fiction the protagonist is passive and encounters danger and mystery with an elaboration of sense perception rather than with resolute action. It is this feature which constitutes the most marked point of resemblance between Gothic fiction and the nineteenth-century terror story. The emotionally highly-wrought heroines of the eighteenth century acted as barometers of the louring atmosphere in which they moved. They were expected to respond to a relatively wide range of emotional experience, whereas the terror story protagonist is concerned almost exclusively with fear. This restriction of range is the less noticeable because the terror story is generally short, while Gothic fiction is typically of novel length and naturally encompasses a broader range of experience.

The passivity of the terror story protagonist gives him an anti-heroic cast which often accords uneasily with expectations conventionally surrounding a masculine character. In the Blackwood's stories passivity was often forced upon a male protagonist through incarceration, in which condition one can do little but accept and endure. An alternative to the invention of extreme situations was to make a protagonist unusually susceptible to suggestion. There was an understandable reluctance to call any further on the sensitive maiden who had already suffered so much in the Gothic cause, and it is not until the

later ghost story that she makes her reappearance. With her came a variation on the sensitive protagonist, the child-figure, who also had the advantage of being free from the obligation to act masterfully. As was noted in Chapter 4, Mrs Gaskell was one of the first to use such a figure in "The Old Nurse's Story". In Le Fanu's "Narrative of a Ghost of a Hand", interpolated in The House by the Churchyard (1864), the person most seriously menaced by the ghostly hand is a two-year-old child, whose paroxysms of terror are ascribed by doctors to "incipient water on the brain".

But it was not always necessary to have an imprisoned, female or infantile protagonist. Passivity could be imposed on a male character by drugs or mesmerism, or through delirium or some allied disorder. This exposes him to a great range of experience while interfering with his ability to respond actively. Robert Beckett in Le Fanu's "The Room in the Dragon Volant" is given drugged coffee which quite immobilises him while leaving him fully conscious. He describes his condition as that of "a spirit in prison". The Marquis who drugs him remarks later on Beckett's "highly sensitive brain" which renders him susceptible to the effects of the drug. When Beckett is immobilised a second time and finds himself being prepared for burial alive in his cataleptic state, there is the reflection:

No one who has not tried it knows the terror of the approach of death, when the mind is clear, the instincts of life unimpaired, and no excitement to disturb the appreciation of that entirely new

201

horror.

In Bulwer-Lytton's "The Hunter and the Haunted" there is an example of the use of the power of one mind to influence and dominate another. So-called supernatural phenomena, says the narrator, "are but ideas conveyed somehow or other . . . from one mortal brain to another". The basis of the manifestation described in the story is the superiority of a brain which makes itself apparent as "will", an energetic quality capable of dominating those with whom it comes in contact. Here again, the witness of "supernatural" phenomena is placed in a condition of passivity, of being exploited by another. This is twice demonstrated in the story: first in the incidents and apparitions in the haunted house, and later in the meeting with G-- at the club, in which the narrator is involuntarily used as a medium to foretell G--'s eventual fate (compare the Indians' use of the boy in The Moonstone).

This exploitative aspect of mesmerism is the feature which links stories employing the device to more orthodox terror and ghost stories, even though the subject mesmerised is not always the narrator or protagonist. The Notting Hill Mystery, an anonymous tale published in Once A Week in 1862, is made up of a collection of documents which purport to be evidence assembled by a private investigator. The story is a frank imitation of The Woman in White, and will be discussed again later in the chapter on Wilkie Collins. Its highly ingenious plot hinges on the nervous sympathy existing between a young woman, Mrs Anderton,

262

and her twin sister who had been kidnapped in childhood. By mesmerising and poisoning the abducted twin, the villainous Baron R-- is able to kill Mrs Anderton at one remove. Exploitation is also apparent in the treatment of Mr Anderton, another of the Baron's victims, who succumbs because of his

constitutional nervousness, mental as well as physical. The latter showed itself in the facility with which, though by no means deficient in courage, he could be startled by any occurrence, however simple; the former in his extreme sensitiveness to the opinions of those about him . . .

The type of the sensitive had become almost a stereotype.

### Terror and Fantasy

The essential feature of the terror story was to have the protagonist exposed to a far wider range of experience than would otherwise have been normal, or else to incapacitate him physically while leaving his brain operative. The balance between stimulus and response is altered, either by intensifying the former or by diminishing the latter. It was in opening the way for this that the theory of apparitions proposed by Ferriar and Hibbert proved most significant. Hitherto there had really been only two possibilities open to a writer who used apparitions in his fiction. He either accorded his ghosts a real and independent status, in which case he came up against the incredulity of readers in an increasingly sceptical and materialist

age; or he eventually conceded that the supernatural phenomena were the result of mundane events erroneously perceived, in which case he laid himself open to charges of artistic betrayal. The theory of optical delusions brought on by stress or disorder of the neuro-endocrine system offered an ideal solution. One could now present more or less normal characters in more or less normal situations undergoing that type of experience commonly called "supernatural". As the supernatural was reconciled with a rational explanation the exoticism of the Gothic novel could be dispensed with. An additional advantage was that the isolation of the protagonist could be preserved, as he alone had his mind interfered with while those around him remained unaffected; in the cases where group experience occurred, this could be presented as several minds responding to the same stimuli.

The disturbance of the customary relationship between stimulus and response, between the protagonist's perception of events on the one hand and his ability to react to or influence them on the other, is a condition associated with, but rather different from, the romantic attitude which, as expressed most notably by Keats, cultivated rather than feared such states. "Negative capability" involved a passive acceptance of "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts", but the uncertainty of the fictional protagonist differs qualitatively in that it has its basis not in simple perplexity before the variety of experience but in a positive doubt induced by some observed phenomenon (e.g. the dead return

2017

to life) or emotional expectancy (e.g. an atmosphere of threat). Therefore, while in the overall ontological perspective of the text the supernatural and the real are reconciled, there is, for one character in the story at any rate, a move towards the breakdown of the commonly accepted laws of reality.

It is this movement or tendency which links the supernatural terror story to fantastic literature generally, an area of fiction which has been the subject of a number of generic studies<sup>10</sup>. Rabkin defines the truly fantastic as occurring in fiction when

the ground rules of a narrative world are suddenly made to turn round 180°. We recognize this reversal by the reactions of the characters, the statements of narrators, and the implications of structure, all playing on against our whole experience as readers. <sup>11</sup>

The drawback of this definition is that it tends to fall half-way between the enclosed fictive world, with its "ground-rules", and the extra-textual world of the readers. Both are appealed to as points of reference. Another definition, formulated by Witold Ostrowski, opts squarely for the extra-textual criterion:

Fantastic fiction is produced by the transformation of the constituents of the empirical world and/or their pattern, which makes them so different from common experience that we may look for them in this world in vain or that their existence is, at least, objectively unverifiable. They exist in their literary form as products of the imagination

or fantasy and for this reason are called fantastic.

The fantastic writings in which Rabkin is primarily interested are literary fictions such as Tristram Shandy, Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds and Borges' Ficciones; but these represent only one type of narrative fantasy. Science-fiction, fairy tales and myths also contain large elements of the fantastic, and in these the self-consciously literary manipulation of the fictive world plays no part.

Ostrowski's definition is more comprehensive, and by opting firmly for the extra-textual criterion he brings into relief the relationship between supernatural terror fiction and fantasy as a whole by stressing the departure from the objectively verifiable. By taking as a base the extra-textual objectively verifiable, the mimetic tendency of the terror story is stressed; as has been seen, its movement is to preserve the mimetic tone while entering the area of what is only subjectively verifiable. Simultaneously, the reader, through a process of imaginative identification, is drawn from an extra-textual status to a position close to or within the fiction he reads.

For Todorov, the defining characteristic of fantastic literature is the attitude of the (implied) reader, whose hesitation on being confronted by the events of the text marks both the presence and the duration of the fantastic. Eventually the reader classifies the events depicted either as uncanny or as marvellous: the fantastic is, by its nature, an

evanescent and transitory mode. Although Todorov's definition operates with reference to factors outside the text, it functions through the reader's demand that events either be rationally explicable or else be assigned to the realm of the marvellous: it is only the moment of hesitancy prior to making this either/or decision which identifies the fantastic.

Fantastic literature is identifiable only by some measure of correspondence to reality, and the interplay of reality and fantasy is especially characteristic of supernatural terror fiction. E.M. Forster began his essay "On Fantasy" with the assertion that

Fantasy implies the supernatural, but need not express it, <sup>12</sup>

thus recognizing the often tentative nature of approaches to the supernatural in which the departure from verifiable norms is half-reconciled to the laws of reality. A protagonist's inability to distinguish between the actual and the hallucinatory is a recurring feature of the stories that have been considered, and this feature is a major contributory cause to the fear experienced. In this way the Blackwood's stories, although devoid of any explicitly supernatural event, are generically related to the ghost story proper and to fantasy.

### Framing

In the short story of terror the interplay between reality and the supernatural typically manifests itself in the plot by a movement away from reality towards the



supernatural. Penzoldt states that the literary ghost story (as opposed to the folk-tale) has a structure peculiar to itself which "may be visualised as an ascending line leading up to a climax"<sup>13</sup>, with the climax being the supernatural event on which the story is based. He also notes that the exposition "is that part of the story that literature adds to the orally-told tale"<sup>14</sup>. He might have added that the exposition is superfluous to the folk-tale because the enveloping tradition usually accepts the supernatural as being integrated into the range of human experience, rather than as an imaginative fantasy set outside the bounds of the possible. In the written tale it is the function of the exposition, grounded as it is in mimetic reality, to break down the dividing line between the objectively possible and the objectively unverifiable. As such its role is more than simply that of establishing a suitable atmosphere for any eventual supernatural manifestation, as envisaged by Penzoldt; it must draw the reader, the protagonist and the supernatural into each others' worlds. Indeed, as the text itself is the only area which all three have in common, it must become a possible world for the duration of the story.

The use of a passive first-person protagonist fosters a sense of identity between him and the reader, and this dual character is brought to an encounter with the supernatural. One way of arranging such an encounter is, of course, through dreams, by which the transition from the everyday verifiable world to subjective imaginative may be blurred. Another expedient entails

not the blurring but rather the marking of the distinction, in which<sup>a</sup> certain area is designated as a sort of privileged environment. This is most frequently seen in the conventional locus of the haunted house. Once a house, or room, or any readily defined location, is established as the possible site of supernatural events, it is relatively easy to arrange and contain supernatural events within it. The reader more readily accepts such experience if it is understood to be limited to a certain space. The boundary of that space becomes the dividing-line between two aspects of experience, and when the protagonist enters the haunted area he is no longer in a domain where events are necessarily objectively verifiable. In introducing the protagonist to a setting divorced from verifiable reality, the terror story writer follows a technique parallel to that of the Gothic novelist; but whereas the Gothicism tended towards all-out exoticism, the "haunted house" device means that the story remains in contact with the customary. The house, whatever strange events may be threatened in its interior, remains situated in a familiar world, part of an English country estate or a city street. Objective reality is constantly present as it is not in Gothic fiction.

Perhaps the archetypal haunted house story is Bulwer-Lytton's "The Haunted and the Haunters". On its first publication, in 1859 in Blackwood's<sup>15</sup>, it was given an alternative title - "The House and the Brain". It is a title which I have borrowed for this

20

chapter, as its two terms sum up succinctly the domain of the terror story: the supernatural locale and the sentient character. In Bulwer's story the narrator's lengthy discourses on the phenomena he witnesses deal with the question of whether the disturbances in the house are psychic or truly supernatural, and raise the question of whether the house is indeed haunted, or the ghosts merely emanate from the protagonist's brain under an influence akin to mesmerism. It seems likely that this was the story referred to by Henry James in an early unsigned review, where he makes some pertinent comments regarding the relationship of a supernatural story to the real:

A good ghost-story, to be half as terrible as a good murder-story, must be connected at a hundred points with the common objects of life. The best ghost-story probably ever written - a tale published some years ago in Blackwood's Magazine - was constructed with an admirable understanding of this principle. Half of its force was derived from its commonplace, daylight accessories.<sup>16</sup>

James recognized the need for a basis in reality where the supernatural is concerned.

Since an apparition is generally the climax of a supernatural story and therefore comes towards the conclusion, the end of the linear plot progression belongs to the supernatural and the earlier part to the natural world. It is a movement that can be graphically symbolised by the protagonist's entrance into a haunted house. He enters a closed world in which the laws of

causality are no longer to be underwritten by experience, and as such the haunted house is equivalent to the subjective solitude of a prison cell. Just as the terrors of confinement and burial alive are generated by extreme physical restriction, so do the stealthily altered conditions of a haunted interior emphasize the degree to which a protagonist is cut off from the outside world. It is a variant of a motif which can be traced back at least as far as the bewildering three-dimensional mazes of Piranesi's drawings, "I Carceri" - "The Prisons".

As well as marking off an arena in which the events take place, the presence of a haunted house often indicates a disruption of the temporal dimension. As has been pointed out already, revenant ghosts are, by definition, anachronistic. They come out of the past, and often the only feature that identifies them is the knowledge that they should not - could not, according to objective laws - be in that particular place at that particular time. It is not unusual for a ghostly manifestation to be linked with some event in the past, generally of a criminal or violent nature. Such stories also tend to be characterised by a strong sense of place. At its most pronounced, this can lead to a near-merger of the supernatural manifestation and its particular locale in a manner that underlines the dual meaning of the word "haunt".

Similarly, the importance of another motif which we have noticed, the portrait, resides in its static and visual qualities. It offers a representation of a

218

person as he or she appeared in the past, and thus provides an obvious image for elapsed time. The picture holds its subject in suspension until, coming alive, it steps out of an earlier age into the present: "representation" indeed. Variations of the motif abound in literature generally: the final scene of The Winter's Tale, the archetypal Gothic instance in The Castle of Otranto, the decadent aestheticism of Wilde's Picture of Dorian Gray, the statue in Merimée's Venus d'Ille, etc. Whereas the haunted house sets up the boundary of a supernatural event, the animate work of art reverses the process. In this, an object confidently taken to be inert and confined within a frame (literally so, in the case of a portrait) is seen to step outside the bounds assigned to it. As a result this frequent motif is related both to the revenant stories and to the Blackwood's resuscitation tales. The widespread convention of the portrait in nineteenth-century fiction generally takes on an added resonance in the supernatural terror story, where the portrait is, in its depiction of a person, quasi-totemic and mimetic, and also anachronistic in its unageing quality. Chekov reminded authors that if they describe a gun hanging on the wall on page one of a story, sooner or later that gun must go off. One might adapt his dictum: if there is a portrait on page one of a terror story sooner or later that portrait must come to life.

### Gradation of Effect

The linear movement towards the supernatural

manifestation entails one further feature of the terror story which has not been referred to so far, and that is the gradation of the sequence of events. In the earlier Blackwood's tales this is generally quite simple; they are constructed around one climactic moment - usually death - and the story leads naturally to the moment of death or to the moment at which the protagonist escapes it. In the later stories, however, where the supernatural makes a more ambivalent appearance, the structure of the stories is often more complex, and the resultant progression d'effet can perhaps be most clearly seen by taking one further example from Le Fanu: his story "An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in a House in Aungier Street"<sup>17</sup>.

The story employs a narrator/protagonist who relates the events in the same chronological order as he experiences them. The first area of perception to be brought into play is the visual sense: the exact nature of this first visible manifestation is left imprecise - either nightmare or illusion. The narrator sees, or imagines he sees, a portrait of a long-dead judge (a previous inhabitant of the house) move mysteriously up the wall of his room and there remain fixed. If this is no more than a nightmare, then it is a nightmare set in the very room of the sleeper, thus superimposing the illusory world on waking life.

The next occurrence is witnessed not by the narrator but by his companion. The section describing this is preceded by an exposition of a Swedenborgian-like philosophy, married to the more materialist

213

thought of <sup>the</sup> medical student persona of the narrator:

What means the whole moral code of revealed religion regarding the due keeping of our own bodies, sobriety, temperance, etc.? here is an obvious connexion between the material and the invisible; the healthy tone of the system, and its unimpaired energy, may, for ought we can tell, guard against influences which would otherwise render life itself terrific. The mesmerist and the electro-biologist will fail upon the average with nine patients out of ten - so may the evil spirit. Special conditions of the corporeal system are indispensable to the production of certain spiritual phenomena.

The purpose of the interpolation is to make the reader examine the nature of the picture-aparition.

Was it, in short, subjective (to borrow the technical slang of the day) and not the palpable aggression and intrusion of an external agent?

Immediately an explanation is offered - the same explanation as that put forward by Pertelote for Chauntecleere's portentous dream in The Nonne's Preeste's Tale: indigestion. But no sooner is a straightforward physiological explanation suggested than it is countered by a further fact: Tom also has been affected by some sort of terrifying experience. As a result Tom moves out of the house and the narrator remains alone.

The next disturbance is an aural one: It was two o'clock, and the streets were as silent as a churchyard - the sounds were therefore perfectly

distinct. There was a slow heavy tread, characterised by the emphasis and deliberation of age, descending by the narrow staircase from the room above; and what made the sound more singular, it was plain that the feet which produced it were perfectly bare, measuring the descent with something between a pound and a flop, very ugly to hear.

Two nights afterwards the cause of the sound is discovered, although the knowledge brings no relief. The "footsteps" are made by a huge grey rat flopping down the stairs one step at a time. This is not allowed to stand as a rational explanation however, for the narrator immediately recognizes in the rat "the infernal gaze and accursed countenance of my friend in the portrait".

This is the end of the narrator's own experiences. He next hears from Tom what had happened to make the latter leave so suddenly. Tom's experiences begin with sound - that of someone

drawing a cord slowly along the floor, lifting it up, and dropping it softly down again in coils.

Next he sees an old man (the same as in the portrait) moving across the room and disappearing into an annexe. A few nights pass without interruption and Tom is about to write off the event as a dream. But one afternoon he falls asleep in the room by accident and awakes in the dark of night to be again confronted by the old man, this time with a rope about his neck. Tom rushes from the room only to find the figure out on the landing before him, and about to slip a noose



over his neck. At this point Tom faints, and on recovering moves out of the house. Such are the events behind the fright experienced by Tom earlier.

After this it only remains for the maid to chime in with her contribution. Having overheard Tom's story, she tells the details of the suicide of Horrocks, the judge pictured in the portrait, and of the mishaps that have since befallen successive tenants of the house.

On examination, it is readily apparent that this seemingly simple story is actually a group of stories, each of them amplifying and clarifying the preceding: first there is the narrator's own experience, then Tom's, then the maid's received account. It is a chinese-box-like arrangement, akin to that of the multiplicity of narratives in Frankenstein and The Justified Sinner, here compressed into a story of seven-and-a-half thousand words. In the events that befall the narrator there is nothing that can be seen as unambiguously supernatural; it is only the corroboration by Tom that confirms the suspicions of the narrator. As a result the encounter with the rat, unsettling at the time, becomes more terrifying in retrospect.

The maid's tale is of ghosts heard of at second-hand, but the other two characters have direct experience. Their encounters differ in one fundamental way. The narrator's apparition frightens him merely because it exists and he witnesses it; Tom's ghost is more actively menacing and offers violence to his person<sup>18</sup>.

Thus the variation of event, whether in the

PART TWO

organisation of the different senses through which the manifestation is presented or in the nature and behaviour of what is actually encountered, is carefully graded to sustain a cumulative effect that continues through the multiple narrative structure. The sequence of the story does not respond primarily to the demands of plot but to those of effect on the reader; there is a palpable manipulation of the reader's response which is the common feature of all supernatural terror stories from Blackwood's on.

### Conclusion

In many ways this entire chapter has served as a sort of conclusion to the first part of this study, although some new material has also been introduced. It should be apparent by now that the fifty years between 1820 and 1870 saw the emergence of a distinct and identifiable type of supernatural terror story, separate from the Gothic novel which largely preceded it, and having its origins several decades earlier than what is popularly considered as the Victorian ghost story.

A number of characteristics were associated with, even necessary to, this type of story: a protagonist who reacts rather than acts; an involved narrator whose perceptions are detailed but unstable; a threat that irrupts into the mundane rather than one that is encountered in the remote unfamiliar; and a physiological basis. The stories, particularly in the earlier Blackwood's form, were specialised, displaying the

strengths and limitations that are naturally attendant on specialisation. The case against them is summed up in Arnold's words, when he writes of his own poetry:

There are situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived. They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continual state of mental stress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also.<sup>19</sup>

Yeats put it more succinctly: "Passive suffering is not a subject for poetry". The Blackwood's type stories do not aim at being poetical. They are painful. Perhaps their major significance is that they helped to provide the nineteenth century with a vocabulary for pain in its various forms. By reference to the particular structures and motifs of supernatural fiction, the novelists of the mid-century had at their disposal an additional model for the depiction of human experience.