

Dazzling Ghostland: Sheridan Le Fanu's Phantasmagoria

David Annwn

As the third chapter of Sheridan LeFanu's *Uncle Silas* (1865), cuts to the fourth, there occurs a most remarkable moment in 19th century literature of horror.

Maud Ruthyn, the youthful protagonist, is thinking over her encounters with members of the Swedenborgian religious sect:

Two or three of them crossed in the course of my early life, like magic lantern figures, the disk of my very circumscribed observation.(1)

She is dwelling on her recent encounter with Mr Bryerly, a Swedenborgian and thinking of her walk with him past her mother's sylvan tomb and his consoling words regarding the afterlife.

Leaning on my hand, I was now looking upon that solemn wood, white and shadowy in the moonlight, where, for a long time after that ramble with the visionary, I fancied the gate of death, hidden only by a strange glamour, and the dazzling land of ghosts, were situate;(2)

For a moment, in Maud's lulled consciousness, it is as though the border between life and death has become permeable, subject to comings and goings. At the turn of the page and chapter, we jump to:

ON A SUDDEN, on the grass before me, stood an odd figure—a very tall woman in grey draperies, nearly white under the moon, courtesying extraordinarily low, and rather fantastically.

I stared in something like a horror upon the large and rather hollow features which I did not know, smiling very unpleasantly on me; and the moment it was plain that I saw her, the grey woman began gobbling and cackling shrilly—I could not distinctly hear what through the window—and gesticulating oddly with her long hands and arms.(3)

Does our consciousness, as readers, move in upon the vision here or does this tall image seem to rise out of the land of the dead towards us? Perhaps both simultaneously, because this moment is a nexus of conflicting spatial urges and affronts to these. Maud, it is clear, is partly drawn to the dazzle of the land where she now believes her mother resides. Her gaze is wide-focussed, being drawn through the mid-ground into the distance, and death seems an inviting and far off prospect, but this attraction receives a powerful rebuttal by the abrupt appearance of Madame de la Rougierre, an immoral adventuress, in the foreground, 'before me'. She will manifest a much more immediate and violent threat of death in the novel. The impact is intensified by the sudden-ness of the figure's appearance and lack of mediating detail of her approach. Her spectral form reminds of Brian Jarvis's words about the looming and lurching of visions in Etienne Gaspard Robertson's Parisian phantasmagoria lantern show:

[...] Robertson positioned the projection technology, his 'Phantascope', behind a screen and placed it on brass rails. Incorporating state-of-the-art optical lenses, the Phantascope could be moved towards and away from the screen to produce a 'looming effect': sharply focused and apparently three-dimensional figures, ...lunged towards a terrified spectator.(4)

At the beginning of this passage, Maud is ‘Leaning on’ her ‘hand,’ fancying that death’s gate is ‘hidden only by a strange glamour’. The scene is strangely unnerving. This is, after all, too early in the novel for the reader, like Maud, to be confident of Mr Bryerly’s motives. His being openly linked to magic lanterns hints at illusion. Maud is in a state of fancy, of reverie, and we remember Coleridge’s designation of Gothic novels as mechanisms inducing reverie. Like a reader of romances, her character is under a spell, as the words ‘strange glamour’ indicate; Walter Scott, in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 1830, writes ‘This species of Witchcraft is well-known in Scotland as the glamour, or *deceptio visus* [...]’.(5) Surely, though, the motif of the wood, death-gate and visionary guide give rise to other uneasy resonances; we remember Dante Alighieri here, the persona in his *Inferno* being led through a ‘selva oscura’ by that seer and spiritual guide, Virgil, to the gate of Hell.

It is clear that Le Fanu has positioned each stage of this prelude to Rougierre’s appearance very precisely: the initial magic-lantern analogy and Maud’s sense of her own limited perceptions linked to the vision of the dead are deployed with great care. If the distinctively dark-clothed Swedenborgians remind Maud of lantern-slides, this association is reciprocal. The young woman’s closeted upbringing has produced a sharply-honed attention capable of a very tight focus on objects before her. It has also, initially, produced a passivity of observation like that of a watcher at a phantasmagoria or a reader of romances. As readers ourselves, we are shocked at the spectacle because our receptive minds have been subtly and powerfully focussed through the reverie of her gaze.

The connection between Rougierre’s abrupt entrance and pre-cinematic technology is one that Le Fanu is also keen to emphasise later in the novel:

But the door opened suddenly, and, like a magic-lantern figure, presented with a snap, appeared close before my eyes the great muffled face, with the forbidding smirk, of Madame de la Rougierre.(6)

Elsewhere, in the famous country churchyard scene, Rougierre mortifies Maud by shouting:

I am *Madame la Morgue*—Mrs. Deadhouse! I will present you my friends, Monsieur Cadavre and Monsieur Squelette. Come, come, leetle mortal, let us play [...].(7)

Ghosts, witches and skeletons amongst the moonlit graves were the stock-in-trade of Robertson’s Directoire lantern show. With her cries of ‘Ça ira, ‘ça ira’ and ‘Lanterne’ (meaning ‘To the lamp-post, to lynch them,’ during the Terror), and her nominal association with red, both blood and over-use of rouge (Mrs Rusk nick-names her Madame de la Rougepot), this character evokes Le Fanu’s worst nightmare: the sanguinary excesses of the Revolutionary mob and, particularly, those ‘unnatural’ bloodthirsty women attending the guillotine. At times she seems literally to become an optical component from Robertson’s show, with all the macabre distortion and animation of one of his slides:

Her great mouth was open, and her eyes absolutely goggled with eagerness. She was devouring all that was passing there.(8)

And just like one of Robertson’s trick slides, she can change, in a twinkling, into even more disturbing forms:

She was transformed into a great gaping reptile.(9)

Rougierre's grinning venom, her head so suddenly revealed as bald, her vigorous danse macabre and cry of 'Mrs Deadhouse' are not easily forgotten and rest uncannily in the imagination. Amongst her literary offspring is the bald and dancing, Mephistophelean Judge Holden in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, a novel where the secular aloes bloom 'like phantasmagoria in a fever land' and riders vanish 'one by one' and reappear 'again and they were black in the sun and they rode out of that vanished sea like burnt phantoms.'(10) Le Fanu's villain casts a long shadow. Harold Bloom declared that McCarthy's Judge Holden is 'the most frightening figure in all of American literature'.(11)

Le Fanu's novels and stories focus upon the phantasmagoria more than those of any other purveyor of literary horror and suspense in the English-speaking world, indeed more than any other writer outside of the accounts of the professional showmen themselves. For over 27 years, Le Fanu used the phantasmagoria and magic lantern for a gamut of different effects in his writings; there are at least 17 direct references to these media, including detailed allusions to the lanternists' techniques, equipment and proto-history. There are also many further implicit references, perhaps up to a hundred, found in his extended imagery of monstification, illusions and shadows.(12) There are at least four times as many of these references in Le Fanu's oeuvre as in the writings of other mature novelists of the period. Charlotte Brönte, Thomas Hardy (who had his own Gothic period of chilling tales) Charles Dickens, George Eliot all used a handful of such motifs. Additionally, in the case of authors who published a substantial number of novels, references to pre-cinematic technologies tend to be clustered exclusively in two or three of their works; this is certainly true of Hardy, Eliot and Dickens but with Le Fanu, the references span each stage of his work from the early stories into the 1870s. Some of the most crucial and intense moments of mystery and terror are expressed in terms of the ghost-lantern.

If Stephen King's novels had featured as obsessive a proclivity for cinematic techniques like 'slo-mo', tracking and dolly shots, this would have received substantial critical attention. Yet Le Fanu's continued and intense interest in early visual technology seems to have been overlooked. Far from being stock images randomly dropped in for effect by an overworked serial writer, these phantasmagoric tropes perform crucial functions in the novels: understanding Le Fanu's allusions to these pre-cinematic media change the ways we read his work and alert us to a complex, inter-related mesh of reference. It also helps illuminate other seemingly puzzling aspects of his work.

For example, in his superb introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of *Uncle Silas*, W.J. Mc Cormack probes the reasons for Le Fanu's link from Maud's visions of her father to Chateaubriand's glimpses of his own sire in *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*: 'Here too the narrator's father walks in a room so as to appear and disappear from and into the darkness.'(13) Mc Cormack then goes on to connect the title of the French author's book (translated as *Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb*), with Emmanuel Swedenborg in that 'it encapsulates the basic tactic of Swedenborgian phantasmagoria, the dreaming-back of life in death.' He then refers to 'the phantasmagoric schemer Silas.'(14) In making such links, Mc Cormack is, perhaps only partly consciously, touching upon further technological associations. Because another reason for that opening episode, the irregularly-shaped, 'long room' (so like the refectory-site of Robertson's convent show), the reappearing and disappearing father emerging 'like a portrait with a background of

shadow' and the link to Chateaubriand, is to set up the network of magic-lantern associations in the novel as a whole. For it is the Chateaubriand of the *Mémoires* who visits Robertson's show and tells us the phantasmagoria is situated somewhere in the cloisters of a convent in Paris 'after the Community of Capuchins had been pillaged.'(15)

These structural tropes linking Rougierre to the lantern of fear, accompany her through the whole novel. Her 'quaint old Bretagne ballad' tells of phantasmal metamorphoses and the song supposedly originates in that same Breton landscape which Chateaubriand called a 'phantasmagoria'.(16) As a prelude to his show, Robertson told of its ancient lineage back to the Eleusinian mysteries. Rougierre gazes like 'the Eleusinian priestess on the vase' at Maud. Elsewhere Maud feels that she has been led into a chamber and 'shown a specter' by the Woman of Endor. One of Robertson's most popular slides was the Witch of Endor. As Le Fanu knew, Walter Scott, in his *Letters of Demonology and Witchcraft*, 1830, described the ghost raised by the Witch of Endor as a 'phantasmagoria'.(17) One reason that Silas seems 'phantasmagoric' is that, at times, he seems a living memorial of the lantern-show, his spectral form 'pointing to the door imperiously with his *skeleton finger*' could not be more like one of Robertson's slides.(18)

Three other examples will reveal a span of such references. In *The Cock and Anchor* (1845), Le Fanu starts to reference the lantern of horror openly. In this scene, Lady Stukely hearing of how she's secretly reviled by her ostensible suitor, Sir Henry Ashwoode, emerges from her hiding-place in a recess:

She opened her mouth, but gave utterance to nothing but a gasp—drew herself up with such portentous and swelling magnificence, that Ashwoode almost expected to see her expand like the spectre of a magic-lantern until her head touched the ceiling. Forward she came, in her progress sweeping a score of china ornaments from the cabinet, and strewing the whole floor with the crashing fragments of monkeys, monsters, and mandarins, breathless, choking [...].(19)

It is, of course, a moment tinged both with pathos and humour: a mockery of Gothic conventions, such as the lady's concealment, the gasp in the recess and the likeness of a spectre. Yet this spectre is here linked to the swelling ghostly projections of the lantern ghost-show. The 'spectre's' association with 'crashing fragments of monkeys, monsters, and mandarins' is no random detail either, for one idea that Le Fanu returned to was the notion of the magic-lantern's chaotic fragmentation of experience.

In 'The Spectre Lovers'(1851), a villager encounters a strange procession:

It was owing either to some temporary defect in Peter's vision, or to some illusion attendant upon mist and moonlight, or perhaps to some other cause, that the whole procession had a certain waving and vapoury character which perplexed and tasked his eyes not a little. It was like the pictured pageant of a phantasmagoria reflected upon smoke. It was as if every breath disturbed it; sometimes it was blurred, sometimes obliterated; now here, now there. Sometimes, while the upper part was quite distinct, the legs of the column would nearly fade away or vanish outright, and then again they would come out into clear relief, marching on with measured tread, while the cocked hats and shoulders grew, as it were, transparent, and all but disappeared.(20)

The alliterating ‘p’s of ‘painted pageant...’ supply an auditory correlative of the column of figures. It also provides the idea of a sequence of slides giving the impression of movement. This is one of the most detailed fictional evocations of the back projection from a magic lantern (fantascope), casting images from slides through a screen onto a column of smoke. Robertson created this smoke by setting light to blood, vitriol, aquae fortis and old magazines, a technique which would surely have convinced his audience that they suffered a ‘temporary defect’ of ‘vision’, their eyes streaming, their minds full of fire and brimstone. The blurring and the eerie visual dismemberment of the Le Fanu’s phantom soldiers is strictly faithful to accounts of the show.

This image is anticipated in the tale ‘Spalatro’ (1843), where a girl of ‘preternatural loveliness in limb and feature, but pale and bloodless as the dead’, emerges from a ‘light, semi-transparent vapour, which rolled and eddied in cloudy volumes.’(21) A pale, ‘bloodless’ girl emerging from ‘vapour’ and the ‘vapoury’ column so like a phantasmagoria – the echoes are unmistakable. By the time of *House by the Churchyard* (1861), and by an uncanny law of multiplication, a character’s ‘sensorium’ is described as ‘still all alive with the images of fifty phantasmagoria’

filled up by imagination and conjecture, and a strange, painfully-sharp remembrance of things past--all whirling in a carnival of roustering but dismal riot--masks and dice, laughter, maledictions, and drumming, fair ladies, tipsy youths, mountebanks, and assassins: tinkling serenades, the fatal clang and rattle of the dice-box, and long drawn, distant screams.(22)

This ghost-show is out of control, reproducing itself manically. Le Fanu doesn’t always distinguish between popular magic-lantern shows, the itinerant lantern-shows specialising in slides of ghosts and the highly sophisticated phantasmagoria à la Robertson, but by the time of *Carmilla* (1872), he was ready to display his knowledge of two very different repertoires of visual spectacle.

Terry Castle writes of the metaphorical displacement whereby, in literary works, the human brain itself became a phantasmagoria, the word itself increasingly being identified with ‘states of delirium and psychic alienation’.(23) She goes on to propound a theory of spectralisation of the mind. We see clear examples of these ideas in Le Fanu’s work. When Ashwoode sees the looming figure of Lady Stukely, his mind is distorting her image. Maud’s mind, inured to a lonely childhood has become a kind of magic lantern which projects the disk of her ‘observation’.

In writing of the preternatural stirring of Edgar Allen Poe’s character, Rowena, in ‘Ligeia’, Castle comments: ‘a mental image seems to come to life, fantastically, *in the flesh*. The phantom becomes a reality.’(24) This is not, though, the usual pattern in Le Fanu’s work. Maud in *Uncle Silas*, sees certain characters in, as it were, phantasmagorical terms. In the case of Mr Bryerly, Maud is at first deceived but in the case of Rougierre, she is not. In fact, the reality of Rougierre’s evil nature is much worse than the threat envisaged by Maud’s ‘lanternist’ imagination. Additionally, nowhere in Poe’s writing does a character become a grotesque tell-tale phantasmagoria slide of themselves in the way that Maud’s French nanny and Silas do.

What is the wider literary context for such intense synergy between novels and phantasmagoria in Le Fanu's work? We look in vain for references to pre-cinematic visual media in other works of what has been called 'Irish Gothic': Regina Maria Roche's *Children of the Abbey* (1796), Mrs. Kelly's *Ruins of Avondale Priory* (1796), and Mrs. F. C. Patrick's *The Irish Heiress* (1797). Yet other Irish writers and writers resident in Ireland seemed to find a particular affinity in the tropes of visual technologies. From Edgeworthstown in 1798, Maria Edgeworth writes to her aunt Sophy:

The scenes we have gone through for some days past have succeeded one another like the pictures in a magic-lantern, and have scarcely left the impression of reality upon the mind. It all seems like a dream, a mixture of the ridiculous and the horrid. "Oh ho!" says my aunt, "things cannot be very bad with my brother, if Maria begins her letters with magic-lantern and reflections on dreams.(25)

Edgeworth subsequently used magic lantern analogies to hint at the fashionable transience and grotesquerie of life in the 'Big Houses' of Ireland in *The Absentee*, *Ormond*, *Leonora* and *Helen*. Such was the convergence of optical and literary media that Marguerite Power, Countess of Blessington, titled her book of social glimpses *The Magic Lantern* (1823).

Some of the most notable Gothic and horror literary productions of 1790-1820 reference the burgeoning optical media. In Mrs Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), 'vessels, glided upon the scene and passed away, as in a camera obscura'.(26) The literary circles around William Godwin the author of *Lives of the Necromancers* himself were identified with phantasmagoria. Godwin's friend, Hazlitt was fascinated by magic lantern shows or 'phantasmagorias' and he drew on them and on the new science of electricity to give animation and movement to his essay profiles. In *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* published posthumously in 1798, Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin's wife wrote that 'A magic lamp now seemed to be suspended in Maria's prison [...]'.(27)

Wollstonecraft's daughter, Mary Godwin wrote in her journal for 28 December 1814: 'Go to Garnerin's Lecture of electricity, the gasses, and the phantasmagoria'.(28) Balloonist Jacques Garnerin's cabinet de physique and lantern of fear obviously made a considerable impression on the future author of *Frankenstein*. In that novel, she writes of marvellous philosophers who,

penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and *even mock the invisible world with its own shadows*.(29) (my italics)

This is not to mention the Robertson-inspired titling of *Fantasmagoriana*, the anthology of ghost stories which proved so influential in the famous writing contest which first provoked the creation of *Frankenstein*. In *The Last Man*, 1826, Mary Shelley as she was now named, drew upon her knowledge of the spectacle, writing that 'futurity, like a dark image in a phantasmagoria, came nearer and more near, till it clasped the whole earth in its shadow'.(30)

The settings of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, centring on a Capuchin church, monastery, graveyard and convent, surely anticipate Robertson's future placement of his Fantasmagorie in the Capuchin convent adjoining the Place des Piques. One of Robertson's most feared slides was a version of Lewis' Bleeding Nun. Robert Miles cites Matilda's magic mirror bordered with 'strange and unknown characters' used to

conjure up a ‘real-time’ image of Antonia, bathing, and comments ‘As such, one might say that the magic mirror signifies the veil of textuality that mediates’.(31) I’d go much further: Lewis’ mirror, its smoke and occult characters is an obvious trope of the magic lantern and, in particular, the phantasmagoria.

After all phantasmagoria-mania was to last more than 20 years in Paris and London. Books such as *Phantasmagoria: Authentic Relations of Apparitions and Visions* (1805), *Phantasmagoria, or the Development of Magical Deception* (1803) and articles such as Nicholson’s ‘Narrative and Explanation of the Appearance of Phantoms and other Figures in the Exhibition of the Phantasmagoria’ (1802) were commonplace.

In terms of direct contextual influence though, Le Fanu had no further to look than one of his admired literary models, Walter Scott. In *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), and *The Maid of Perth* (1823), Scott utilises magic lantern and phantasmagoric imagery. The Scottish novelist also called Godwin’s novels ‘philosophical phantasmagoria’.

Irish, English and Scottish sources aside, Gary William Crawford wonders

if Schiller's work could have influenced Le Fanu, directly or indirectly, in his writing of the five tales that comprise his "In a Glass Darkly." Schiller's work is essentially a dramatization of the questions, "Are ghosts real? or deceptions? Is there, or is there not a God?" These questions run the rough much of the Gothic novel and the Victorian ghost story, and most prevalently, in Le Fanu. These questions are addressed by Henry Ferris, in his article "German Ghosts and Ghost-Seers," and I have no doubt that Le Fanu at least read this article because it chronicles certain people's experiences of ghosts after drinking quantities of green tea. Hence Le Fanu's tale "Green Tea."(32)

Of course, the most obvious sign of Schiller’s influence is precisely the prominence of lanternists throughout Le Fanu’s work; additionally, we can go considerably further. In Schiller’s *Der Geisterseher/ The Ghost-seer*, the Prince of **d**, earlier the victim of a hoax, a *Laterna Magica* show masquerading as a conjuration of spirits, says:

When everything ahead of me and behind me sinks to nothing – the past lies behind me in dreary monotony like a kingdom turned to stone – when the future has nothing to offer me [...] What comes before me and what will follow me I see as two black impenetrable veils [...].(33)

I have shown elsewhere that this is one of E. A. Robertson’s main sources for the prefatory speeches to his show in Paris.(34) Such is the density of synergetic exchange between visual and literary media 1830-40 that Le Fanu, as well as reading these words, might easily have heard a version of them accompanying phantasmagoria. It is worth comparing the above passage to the words of Le Fanu’s Richard Marston in *The Evil Guest* (1851), as he looks into a fire, seeing the ‘phantoms of murdered time and opportunity’:

“The human mind, I take it, must have either comfort in the past or hope in the future,” he continued, “otherwise it is in danger. To me, sir, the past is intolerably repulsive; one boundless, barren, and hideous

Golgotha of dead hopes and murdered opportunities; the future, still blacker and more furious, peopled with dreadful features of horror and menace and losing itself in utter darkness [...]”.(35)

Soon after, Marston’s obsessive vision is consciously linked to Schiller and the phantasmagoria:

“Sir, this is a monstrous and hideous extravagance, a delusion, but, after all, no more than a trick of the imagination; the reason, the judgment, is untouched. I cannot choose but see all the damned phantasmagoria, but I do not believe it real [...]”.(36)

The tale is rife with the iconography of lantern shows, the flashing of images on minds, the viewer’s passivity, the images’ disembodiment and the closing of the spectacle with a falling curtain:

Mrs. Marston heard him and saw him, but she had not the power, nor even the will, herself to speak or move. He appeared before her passive sense like the phantasm of a dream. He stood up at the bedside, and looked on her steadfastly, with the same melancholy expression. For a moment he stooped over her, as if about to kiss her face, but checked himself, stood erect again at the bedside, then suddenly turned; the curtain fell back into its place, and she saw him no more.

The revenant presence of the recently deceased, a staple figure in Robertson’s show where Robespierre and Marat were ‘resurrected’ nightly, is at the centre of Le Fanu’s tale: the dead Wynston Berkley becomes ‘the hero of the hellish illusion.’ Like the figures projected on the screen at the Capucine convent in 1799, ‘though dead,’ Berkeley ‘is invested with a sort of spurious life’.

Can we extrapolate from Le Fanu’s obvious fascination with the phantasmagoria to hazard that he had personally witnessed such shows? The first appearances of such spectacles in Ireland pre-date his birth by many years. In February, 1802 the premiere of the Irish phantasmagoria took place at Astley’s Royal Amphitheatre, Dublin. Its success led successively to a ‘new phantasmagoria and ‘New Ghosts’’. In 1804 one of the ghost show’s pioneers, Philipsthal opened his spectacle at the Little Theatre, Capel Street, Dublin.

By the time Le Fanu was eight, Jacques Charles, incorporating the discovery of dissolving views (gradual super-imposition of images), and moving slides opened his Dublin ‘Lectures on Apparitions and Ghosts’. A major feature of this latter show was figures projected in ‘a film of smoke’ produced by burning charcoal and incense, giving ‘an aerial appearance to the spectres’.(37) Le Fanu could easily have witnessed later spin-offs of these phantasmagorias in the Dublin of his university years. He also viewed Meyerbeer’s opera ‘Robert le Diable’ at the Theatre Royal. This is important contextually because, as Gavin Selerie has pointed out, Le Fanu, in *Haunted Lives*, focuses on Meyerbeer’s church-yard scene:

In which Bertram summons forth the ghosts of nuns damned for their licentious conduct. Laura’s, the novel’s heroine, is absorbed in this ‘moving picture’.(38)

E.A. Robertson’s real name was Robert, and this ‘moving picture’ takes place in the ruins of a convent, the nuns’ ghosts rising from their coffins led by the Abbess. It is as though the Irish author is transfixed by the phantasmagorical associations of this scene in the opera.

Le Fanu also visited London in 1838 and was given tickets to the Haymarket by Sheridan Knowles.(39) The Haymarket had, by this time, been associated with phantasmal visual displays for over 30 years.(40) Douglas Jerrold's 'A Gallantee Showman nor, Mr Peppercorn at Home', a play about a magic lanternist had opened at the Strand the year before. A gallantee, gallanty or Savoyard showman was the type of projectionist who roamed the country, magic lantern on his back, often with a music instrument to accompany his shows and an assistant with a monkey or other creature trained to do tricks.

The gallantee spectacle was a highly mobile cultural force. These itinerant shows were cheap and linked with the life of beggars, Romanies, tramps and quack healers. The travelling magic lantern was fairly light to carry from village to village, and because slides often got lost or broken in transit, and the programme altered according to the showman's state or whim, the sequence of images was often chaotic, surprising and sometimes muddled. There were no quality controls and many mountebanks and amateurs took up the 'art of light.'

That highly-polished form of magic-lantern show called the phantasmagoria was mainly an urban phenomenon: its milieu was large venues in Paris, London, Berlin, Madrid, Dublin, Edinburgh and other major cities. The shows were expensive and attracted the more well-heeled customer. (Josephine Bonaparte and Chateaubriand saw Robertson's show.) Because of the array of different equipment needed: several heavy fantascopes lanterns, large screens, smoke and liquids, a glass harmonica, a gong and a metal sheet to roar, when struck, like thunder, the phantasmagoria were fixed performances, with a strong processive, ritualistic sense and a replicable schedule of images (however chaotic-seeming their airy demons and their power to send the audience into a disordered frenzy). The phantasmagorists issued programmes for their performances and Robertson's Programme Instructif is still extant.(41) Perhaps up to ten stage-hands were needed to run the show: ushers, a ventriloquist, a master of ceremonies to give a spoken introduction and live actors to walk through the audience in masks to augment the impact of projected ghosts. The lantern-display was often preceded by a cabinet de physique, or science exhibition which needed more organisation and staff to arrange the equipment. Robertson himself was no roving fairground huckster - he styled himself as a sceptical and philosophical scientist.

In the first chapter of his famous vampire novelette, *Carmilla*, Le Fanu describes Laura's feverish view-point of a local priest and maids, inside the aristocratic milieu of the castle nursery, a 'large room', where 'the scanty light' shines through

its shadowy atmosphere through the small lattice. He kneeled, and the three women with him, and he prayed aloud with an earnest quavering voice for, what appeared to me, a long time. I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also, but the scenes I have just described stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness.(42)

Helen Stoddart has written of this moment that Laura's 'memory is constituted at this point by a series of lucid tableaux mordants', employing a theatrical metaphor.(43) Yet, Le Fanu could not be more insistent on the distinct impression of a lantern-show here; the ray of light, the lattice, the praying figures and Carmilla's preceding appearance seem elements of a phantasmagoria. Robertson's show contained slides of static, praying figures as well as scenes of reverence for young girls, as in the resurrection of the poet Young's daughter. In using such imagery, Le Fanu is clearly looking back to the age of the large, urban-based phantasmagoria: the pictures are clearly 'isolated' in darkness and successive (not chaotic and random); yet this 'isolation' of images also anticipates the work of the photographic chronophotographers, Marey and Muybridge, just a few years later. This description is clearly linked to

the orderly procession of the 'pictured pageant of a phantasmagoria reflected upon smoke' in 'The Spectre Lovers', yet it lacks the smooth and eerie continuity of the spectral cavalcade.

Le Fanu was increasingly at pains to distinguish the phantasmagorists from the lantern journeymen of a different age. Further into *Carmilla*, he provides the most colourful and detailed vision of a gallantee man in fiction:

It was the figure of a hunchback, with the sharp lean features that generally accompany deformity. He wore a pointed black beard, and he was smiling from ear to ear, showing his white fangs. He was dressed in buff, black, and scarlet, and crossed with more straps and belts than I could count, from which hung all manner of things. Behind, he carried a magic-lantern, and two boxes, which I well knew, in one of which was a salamander, and in the other a mandrake. These monsters used to make my father laugh. They were compounded of parts of monkeys, parrots squirrels, fish, and hedgehogs, dried and stitched together with great neatness and startling effect. He had a fiddle, a box of conjuring apparatus, a pair of foils and masks attached to his belt, several other mysterious cases dangling about him, and a black staff with copper ferrules in his hand. His companion was a rough spare dog, that followed at his heels, but stopped short, suspiciously at the drawbridge, and in a little while began to howl dismally.

In the meantime, the mountebank, standing in the midst of the court-yard, raised his grotesque hat, and made us a very ceremonious bow, paying his compliments very volubly in execrable French, and German not much better. Then, disengaging his fiddle, he began to scrape a lively air to which he sang with a merry discord, dancing with ludicrous airs and activity, that made me laugh, in spite of the dog's howling.(44)

This is the most extraordinarily elaborate and grotesque description, hinting that, as well as viewing contemporary phantasmagoria, Le Fanu had also consulted the myriad humorous prints available of lanternists with animal heads or of groups of beasts mounting their own lantern-show. Given Le Fanu's framing of the tales we know that the action of *Carmilla* is situated in the 1750s or 60s and this is one of the roving lantern-men common in Europe:

These early exhibitors of the magic lantern are recorded, unnamed, in contemporary pictures and engravings or casually noted in the literature of the time. Tobias Smollett – in his third novel, *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, first published in 1753 – writes of the 'traveling Savoyards who stroll about Europe, amusing the ignorant people with the effects of the magic lantern'. Such a person travelling around the country with a monkey appears in the fable by the French novelist Jean Pierre de Florian [...].(45)

In a number of tales and prints, the monkey turns the table on their gallantee man, and takes on the role of projectionist. The man's hunch-back, multifarious accoutrements, foils, masks and 'fangs' associate him with Punchinello, his 'buff, black and scarlet' outfit and criss-cross belts to Harlequin, both of them Commedia dell'arte figures. The carnivalesque and 'grotesque body' as Bakhtin has defined them are relevant here.(46) Punch and the magic-lantern entertainments could appear side-by-side in some attractions such as in Picardy puppet shows which

always began and begin with the dance from Punchinello heritage from the 18th century. To the 19th century and the beginning of, the marionnettists added to the spectacle of the elements of magic lanterns, of the puppets 'métamorphoses'.(47)

(*The House by the Churchyard*, features a woman dressed like a puppet and references both phantasmagoria and magic-lantern shows.) The mountebank's 'execrable' mixed languages hint at archaic, chaotic energies, a picaresque wanderer, jack of all trades and none.

By the late 1860s the magic lantern had largely moved out of the streets and into domestic settings so the gallant man was a presence of the past. We know of Le Fanu's readings in Goethe's *Faust*, not least because of references to Mephistopheles in *Carmilla* and Marguerite in *Wylder's Hand* (1864); in part II of that poem, the deluded scholar feels himself 'king of a thousand salamanders' and watches the vision of a chariot illuminated by:

the myriad starry gleam
as caught in the a magic lantern's beam(48)

Such links of the dark arts to the magic lantern cannot have passed by the Irish author without notice. For Le Fanu, as well as including the hybrid monsters, the alchemical pairing of salamanders and mandrakes, stresses the lanternist's links to folk magic; as well as carnivalesque associations, his white fangs and hunchback both link him to the world of animals and deformed seers: it is he who causes *Carmilla*'s displeasure by noting her pointed teeth. Le Fanu is obviously fascinated by this mercurial Autolykus (a Greek name meaning 'lone wolf', ergo his 'fangs'), with his bag of natural remedies. He is glimpsed crossing from the outside world into the castle's courtyard with a dog at his heels like the Tarot Fool. We note also the lanternist's 'box of conjuring apparatus', and this reminds us that the magic lantern was originally conceived as a valuable tool for magicians. In a text which Le Fanu can have hardly missed: *Letters on Natural Magic: Addressed to Sir W Scott* (1832), David Brewster writes:

The magic lantern, containing in a small compass its lamp, its lenses, and its sliding figures, was peculiarly fitted for the itinerant conjuror, who had neither the means of providing a less portable and more expensive apparatus, nor the power of transporting and erecting it.(49)

The key connection between magicians and the magic lantern, though, is linked to that image that started this study: the conjurer's or phantasmagorist's supposed power to raise the dead and display revenants or mortals with the appearance of resurrection.

The hybrid catalogue of 'parts of monkeys, parrots, squirrels' of the showman's caparison in *Carmilla* remind one of 'riot--masks and dice, laughter, maledictions, and drumming, fair ladies, tipsy youths' of *The House by the Graveyard*, and both passages feature references to 'mountebanks, masks and laughter'. It's no accident either that both extracts also recall the 'crashing fragments of monkeys, monsters, and mandarins' of *The Cock and the Anchor*.

That the phantasmagoria can prove a metaphor for the mind's playing back mental events of the past is a truism of Nineteenth Century studies but, by *Carmilla*, Le Fanu grasped that the phantasmagorist is, essentially, a montageur, a maker who wrenches fragments from their natural context and re-combines them in new orders. Le Fanu's gallant man is a figure with archaic origins in conjuring and chaos. E.A. Robertson, the famous type of a phantasmagorist was an Enlightenment montageur par excellence, stealing the arguments of his prefatory speeches from Schiller, Voltaire, Sterne and Rousseau and filching images for his slides from Matthew Lewis, Füssli and Young. Yet his 'magic' was 'instructif' and his diablerie came complete with programme.

Sixty years separate Sydney, Lady Morgan née Owenson's extensive review of the earliest double-effect dioramas and Bram Stoker's description of Dracula's first arrival on English soil, illuminated by a 'fleeting diorama of light and shade'.(50) Both Irish writers were obviously fascinated by the incipient visual media, in Stoker's case, even using pre-cinematic tropes into the age of cinema proper. In the intervening years, Le Fanu's literary production manifested itself as the single most important body of phantasmagoric fiction in English. Fads for naming books after lantern shows and phantasmagoria came and went but never had an author evoked the paraphernalia and history of the ghost show so insistently. W.B. Yeats was seven when Le Fanu died. It has been mooted that Yeats' poem 'The Stolen Child' owes much to the older writer's *Laura Silver Bell* (1872). It could also be the case that Le Fanu was also responsible for the transmission of other important images into modern Irish literature. Daniel T O'Hara writes that 'Yeats believes that poetry and phantasmagoria are one. 'The poet is never the man who sits down to breakfast,' he reminds us in 'A General Introduction for My Work,' 'there is always some phantasmagoria.'"(51)

To give his references credibility and power, Le Fanu delved into the origins of the magic lantern showman. He understood the impact of projection on smoke, spectral slides and dissolving views, sequentiality and the attributes which defined the phantasmagoria. He knew how to produce macabre literary 'close-ups' of villains' faces and quick metamorphoses like trick lantern slides. Over the 1860s, Le Fanu became known for his increasingly solitary life-style. If the experience of isolation could modify perceptions like those of Maud Ruthyn into states resembling that of the phantasmagoria watcher's reverie, why not those of the fabled reclusive existence of Le Fanu, the 'Invisible Prince' of Dublin?

As early as 1800, the Marquis De Sade, in the *Reflections on the Novel*, argued for Mathew Lewis' dominance of the Gothic field, stating 'Perhaps at this point we ought to analyse these new novels in which sorcery and phantasmagoria constitute practically the entire merit [...].'(52) For Coleridge, in terms of the Gothic, the literary romances and lantern shows were both analogous. 'Phantasmagoria' referred to books and optical shows the same. As Andrew McCann writes 'in Coleridge's own critical writing,' ideas of the primary imagination, and its superiority to the more disordered and random products of 'fancy'

are deployed as a way of denigrating forms of popular literature. Just as Wordsworth uses the term 'phantasma' to describe the anarchy of Bartholomew Fair--'a phantasma,/ Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound!' --Coleridge uses a language of spectacular illusionism, evocative of the 'phantasmagoria', to describe Gothic novels like Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*. He associates them with the narcotic effects of the market for mass cultural forms, rather than with the morally and socially regenerative effects of the imagination.the immaturity of the 'bodily eye'--'the most despotic of our senses'--from the 'intellectual eye' [...].(53)

Le Fanu would never accept such a dichotomy of 'primary imagination' and 'fancy' but he might well find such an association of literature with lantern show seductive. The author as phantasmagorist then, and Le Fanu as the projectionist, the mastermind behind the greatest lantern-inspired ghost-show ever known? Did Le Fanu suspect that, ultimately, an author like himself shared deep affinities with urbane lanternists like Robertson? The analogy cannot have passed him by. Is this why the imagery of these spectacles, instead of being deployed as a scatter of fleeting signifiers as in most literary works of the 19th century, intruded upon and multiplied so potently inside his writings?

There is no doubt that Irish history is inscribed deeply throughout Le Fanu's fiction yet, in the end, writing in that dark room in Merrion Square, did life itself, all the long travails of invasion, Lord Melbourne's 'betrayal' of Irish Protestantism, mutual hatred and savagery, that nightmare of history from which Stephen Dedalus would say, fifty years later, he was trying to awake, seem, like a magic lantern show, a metaphor for more expansive but hidden realities? Is it any accident that, as Nina Auerbach writes, Le Fanu's *Carmilla* has proved so rewarding a filmic source for Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), Roger Vadim's *Blood and Roses*, Roy Ward Baker's *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), Harry Kümel's *Daughters of Darkness* (1971) and Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983)?(54) Or is this application of the phantasmagoric analogy into the world of cinema just too convenient, one metaphor too far?

Le Fanu's spiritual beliefs became as complicated and hedged about with doubts and anxieties as his social ideology. An enemy of Catholic politicisation, he nevertheless came, in time, to admire Jesuit asceticism. Beset, as he regarded he was, by Fenianism and Liberalism, he was also never able to renew his belief in orthodox Christian sureties. Ardent scepticism aside, in the light of the evidence presented here, one cannot help but wonder whether, like his Swedenborg-inspired Maud, her maker Le Fanu sensed that his fictions of horror were but glimpses of deeper secrets and that, he, in precisely that sense had always been a phantasmagorist:

This world is a parable – the habitation of symbols – the phantoms of spiritual things immortal shown in material shape.(55)

1. Sheridan Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas* (Oxford World Classics, 1981), 14.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid., 16.
4. Brian Jarvis, 'Anamorphic Allegory in *The Ring*, or, seven ways of looking at a horror video', <http://irishgothic horrorjournal.homestead.com/ring.html>, accessed 15 March 2009.
5. See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol IV, fourth impression (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 198.
6. *Uncle Silas*, 64.
7. Ibid., 32.
8. Ibid., 25.
9. Ibid.
10. Cormac Mc Carthy, *Blood Meridian or the evening redness in the west* (London: Picador, 1990), 52.
11. <http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780679641049&view=excerpt>, accessed 18 March 2009.
12. I have traced another ten such references just in *Uncle Silas*.
13. *Uncle Silas*, viii.
14. Ibid.
15. <http://www.archive.org/stream/collectedworks11hareuoft-djvu.text>, accessed 10 March 2009.
16. Ibid.
17. Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 156.
18. *Uncle Silas*, 314.
19. <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E850000-007/text035.html>, accessed 18 March 2009.
20. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ghost_Stories_of_Chapelizod/The_Spectre_Love, accessed 18 March 2009.
21. W.J. Mc Cormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 65.
22. <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E850000-007/text045.html>, accessed 18 March 2009.
23. Castle, 158.
24. Ibid., 161.
25. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Life_And_Letters_Of_Maria_Edgeworth/Vol1/Letter25, accessed 18 March 2009.
26. <http://ebooks.du.ac.in/etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/r/radcliffe/ann/italian/chapter23.html>, accessed 18 March 2009.
27. <http://ebooks.du.ac.in/etext.adelaide/w/wollstonecraft/mary/w864m/>, accessed 18 March 2009.
28. Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. Feldman & Scott-Kilvert (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 56.
29. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/frankenstein/frank_modern_2.html, accessed 19 March 2009.
30. Mary Shelley, *The Last Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 257.
31. Gothic Technologies: 'Visuality in the Romantic Era, Introduction: Gothic Romance as Visual Technology', <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gothic/intromiles.html>, accessed 5 March 2009.
32. 'Schiller's *The Ghost Seer* in Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*', <http://groups.google.com/group/J-Sheridan-Le-Fanu/browse-thread/thread/017243c527bc2818>, accessed 12 March 2009.
33. Friedrich von Schiller, *The Ghost-seer*, trans. Andrew Brown, Hesperus, London, 2003, pp. 80-1.
34. David Annwn, 'Returning to Fear: New Discoveries in Robertson's Fantasmagoria', *The New Magic Lantern Journal*, Vol 10, Number 4, Autumn 2008, 59-64.
35. http://www.litgothic.com/Texts/evil_guest.html, accessed 12 March 2009.
36. Ibid.
37. Mervyn Heard, *Phantasmagoria, The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern* (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2006,) 154, 173 & 203.

38. Quoted in the superb *Le Fanu's Ghost* (Hereford: Five Seasons Press), 37. See also 34-8.
39. Mc Cormack, 54.
40. Heard, 149.
41. Laurent Mannoni, *Light and Movement, Incunabula of the Motion Picture* (Fruili: Giornate Del Cinema Muto, 1995), 118-119.
42. Sheridan Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 211.
43. Helen Stoddart, 'The precautions of nervous people are infectious: Sheridan Le Fanu's symptomatic Gothic' in *Gothic Concepts in literary and cultural studies*, ed. Botting & Townshend (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 108.
44. *Carmilla*, 228-9.
45. John Barnes, 'The History of the Magic Lantern', *Servants of Light, The Book of the Lantern* (Ripon: The Magic Lantern Society, 1997), 27.
46. See Jack Morgan, *The Biology of Horror; Gothic Literature and Film* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 132-3.
47. 'Laflor and the Amiénois de Cabotins', [Http://speedylook.com_and_the_Theaters_AmiA9noisdeCabotins.html](http://speedylook.com_and_the_Theaters_AmiA9noisdeCabotins.html), accessed 19 March 2009.
48. Author's translation.
49. Sir David Brewster, *Letters of Natural Magic, Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (London : John Murray, 1846), 76.
50. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 120.
51. Daniel T. O'Hara, <http://www.vgronline.org/articles/1991/summer/ohara-poetry-phantasmagoria/> accessed 19 March 2009.
52. Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 62.
53. Andrew McCann, 'Textual phantasmagoria: Marcus Clarke, light, literature and the colonial uncanny', http://finarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6396/i5_2_21/ai_n2905142, accessed 18 March 2009.
54. 'Two Critical Approaches to Vampirism', <http://americanajournal.hu/vol2no2/antoni>, accessed 12 March 2009.
55. *Uncle Silas*, 424.