Ambivalent Spiritualities: Disembodied and Corporeal Monstrosity in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*

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Introduction

In a study of the 'Death and the Maiden' motif in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's fiction, Alison Milbank argues that the writer's theology rejects the 'extreme idealism' of Emanuel Swedenborg, while at the same time avoiding stark materialism.[1] I would argue, however, that in the collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1872), the narrative wavers between what can appear to be materialism, and Swedenborgian idealism, exploring an ecumenical space of in-betweenness, where the spiritual is intertwined with the material. Building on Milbank's argument that Le Fanu's fiction rejects both the extremes of idealism and materialism, I argue that the apparent opposition between materialism and disembodied idealism is tentatively resolved in Le Fanu's fictional space of in-betweenness, where the two grow intertwined in ways that posit the material as a necessary stepping stone for theological and spiritual enlightenment. While the material is part of an imperfect, fallen realm, it is – given these limitations – part and parcel of an occult-like process of uncovering spiritual knowledge, or at least its possibility. This space of in-betweenness presents, at a surface level, the possibility of rejecting the supernatural in his stories 'Green Tea' (originally published in 1869), 'The Familiar' (1872), 'Mr Justice Harbottle' (1872), and 'Carmilla' (first serialised 1871-72); but ultimately, such readings are negated. This is largely due to the stories' presenting of a realisation that there is something out there, but that it is impossible to understand what it is, and what it ultimately adds up to; this is a mechanism particularly manifest in the collection *In a Glass Darkly*, where Le Fanu places his readers at times tantalisingly close to a theological epiphany, only to let them fall back onto the material.

This is reaffirmed by how the monstrous figures that appear throughout the collection slip through various degrees of materiality. 'Green Tea', 'The Familiar', and 'Mr Justice Harbottle' are often read as ghost stories, but their inclusion in the collection alongside the vampire tale 'Carmilla', all woven together by Dr Hesselius' framing narrative, indicates that

[1] Alison Milbank, 'Death and the Maiden: Theology, Gender, and the Grotesque in Le Fanu's Fiction', in *Inspiring a Mysterious Terror: 200 Years of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, ed. by Jarlath Killeen and Valeria Cavalli (Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 177-96 (p. 182).

they can be read more broadly, in Swedenborgian terms, as material manifestations of a metaphysical reality, rather than simply as ghosts. As Jarlath Killeen argues, Le Fanu's stories are caught within a hesitation as to 'the "correct" explanation for the mysterious spectres who populate his stories' and as to 'whether [they] are actually spectres at all, and not just projections of a guilty conscience'.[2] The spectres' materiality, derived from Swedenborgian correspondence, which outlines the existing relationship between matter and an inner truth concealed within, I demonstrate, tips the balance in favour of them being real.

Within this space of hesitation and in-betweenness, this essay argues, *In a Glass Darkly* discovers its own brand of the explained supernatural, one which we can examine and understand through the prism of the natural – logically, scientifically, and medically. This implies that the supernatural is both real and explainable through recourse to reason and science. This is consistent with occult and esoteric theologies and currents gaining popularity during the nineteenth century, which construe the supernatural as often concealed within the natural, rather than existing in opposition to, or outside of it. Through his use of Swedenborgianism, however, Le Fanu makes scientific, medical language central to his explorations of the supernatural, leading to a double effect. He first presents the idea that we cannot conceive of the spiritual without the support of material images; then, after asserting the logic and rationalism of science, he makes manifest its limitations, leaving our perception of the material world impoverished, and striving for a never-achieved completeness. This duality makes the rejection of the supernatural impossible, binding medical discourse to theology.

Indeed, recent criticism in the field of gothic literature has explicated the genre's theological dimensions, questioning perceptions of it as a sceptical mode. Jonathan Greenaway's *Theology, Horror, and Fiction* considers the 'theological antagonism' running through nineteenth-century gothic fiction not as opposed to religion, but instead as 'a spur for theology to re-evaluate and reconsider key doctrinal and theological ideas in creative […] ways'.[3] Sam Hirst's *Theology in the Early British and Irish Gothic* further challenges the idea of the gothic as a 'secular mode', contextualising the early gothic against the backdrop of 'the complexity of contemporary discourse and the rival claims of overlapping and antagonistic theologies'.[4] In the context of this critical turn, recent theological readings of Le Fanu's fiction

[2] Jarlath Killeen, 'Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Ireland', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Steam Age Gothic*, ed. by Clive Bloom (Palgrave, 2021), pp. 263-80 (p. 267).
[3] Jonathan Greenaway, *Theology, Horror, and Fiction* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), p. 2.
[4] Sam Hirst, *Theology in the Early British and Irish Gothic, 1764-1834* (Anthem Press, 2023), p. 2.

have elucidated the ambivalent negation of matter and spirit in his work, questioning medicalised readings of stories such as 'Green Tea' and 'The Familiar'. In *God and the Gothic*, for example, Milbank argues that Le Fanu's stories use the material to think through transcendence.[5] As in his novel *Uncle Silas* (1864), the theological echoes of Swedenborg are clearly heard in *In a Glass Darkly*, which, Milbank explains, explores fears regarding the emergence of an inescapable materialism. Such is the case with Carmilla, for instance, whose vampirism reverses the Swedenborgian idea that '[o]ur full human flourishing is in the afterlife, the celestial real', embodying instead the 'fear that Swedenborgian union of natural and supernatural will fold back upon itself into a mere materialism like that of Poe'.[6] I propose that the fear of stark materialism explored by Milbank is accompanied in Le Fanu's collection by the threat of ignorance. I am referring specifically to a type of metaphysical ignorance instantiated by the revelation that while the supernatural is depicted as inhabiting the natural, and while Le Fanu's characters understand this as the reality of their world, knowledge of the precise nature and truths of the supernatural is textually withheld.

Although Swedenborgian thought is a point of negotiation for Le Fanu's theology, often mediated against radical Calvinism, as Milbank shows, I nonetheless argue that it is fundamental to how Le Fanu builds up the material as a site of supernatural revelation, only to draw his readers back into the stubborn primacy of materialism.[7] My aim is not to construe Le Fanu as unequivocally Swedenborgian in his fiction, but rather to illustrate how this uncanny tension between the material and the spiritual world is anchored in Swedenborg's belief that any spiritual idea needs to find a material form within the world to be perceived and understood while in the world. This in turn means that material objects, as well as bodies, are pervaded by a deeper spiritual truth, which can, in theory, be uncovered. This tenet of Swedenborgian thought underlies Le Fanu's corporeal hauntings in the collection. I begin with a consideration of Swedenborg's thought on the relationship between materiality and spirituality, which I then consider contextually against the backdrop of *In a Glass Darkly*. Although the collection includes previously published material, the narrative framing of the stories as case studies by Dr Hesselius threads them together. I therefore consider the implications of materiality and Swedenborgian thought on the collection as a whole and its narrative progression, exploring how each story stages a move overall from entertaining the possibility of scepticism to its collapse. Importantly, my argument is not merely that this move informs the narrative

[5] Milbank, *God and the Gothic* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 209-10.
[6] Milbank, *God and the Gothic*, p. 219.
[7] On Le Fanu's negotiation of Calvinism and Swedenborg, see Milbank, *God and the Gothic*, p. 208.

progression of individual stories, but also that it can be threaded through the direction of the collection as a whole. To account for the complications afforded by the non-supernatural story in the volume, 'The Room in the Dragon Volant', I analyse the stories out of sequence, so as to demonstrate topicality and patterns of Swedenborgian engagement, rather than being driven by strict chronology, although, as I argue, the placement of 'Carmilla' at the end of the collection is significant.

The monstrous figures of *In a Glass Darkly* are all tied, more or less distantly, to materiality. In 'Green Tea', Jennings is haunted by a demonic monkey – an animal – while in 'The Familiar', the disembodied presence of the Watcher who haunts Barton eventually materialises in the shape of an owl. Carmilla is a fleshly monster rather than a ghost. In all these instances, the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, and between matter and spirit, fades. Le Fanu draws on the discourse of scepticism, but allows the supernatural to grow from it, much like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) also does at the end of the century. Analysing the role of Swedenborgianism in the destabilisation of any clear oppositions between spirit and matter, this essay reconfigures the relationship between the two in Le Fanu's fiction as a symbiotic one, even though what it amounts to is monstrosity and terror.

Swedenborg and Matter

Swedenborg describes enlightenment as a condition where some humans are enabled by God to see the truth. It is impossible, he stresses, for the 'human rational' to grasp truths unless 'enlightened by the Lord'.[8] The Swedenborgian relationship between rationality and spiritual enlightenment is complex: without being actively enlightened by God, human reason cannot arrive to truth. In other words, enlightenment itself, stemming from God, acts upon human reason. Thus, Swedenborg explains, 'the Word can be understood by none but a rational man'.[9] Dr Hesselius confesses in 'Green Tea' that his 'Metaphysical Medicine', as he terms it, is fundamentally influenced by Swedenborg, making explicit the clear parallelism between Swedenborgian enlightenment and his own philosophy and practice of medicine: 'I owe Swedenborg a great deal; you will discover traces of him in the little book on Metaphysical Medicine'.[10] According to Swedenborg, those who have been enlightened 'form […] doctrine' – and those who seek the truth, for its own sake, find themselves examining doctrine 'from the

[8] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Concerning the White Horse and Concerning the Word* (Houghton Mifflin, 1926), p. 11.
[9] Swedenborg, *Concerning the White Horse*, p. 12.
[10] Sheridan Le Fanu, 'Green Tea,' in *In a Glass Darkly* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 5-40 (p. 16).

Word' to understand its truth value.[11] Dr Hesselius, in his exposition on a spiritual fluid akin to blood, which he describes as circulating through the nervous system, speaks as one who has been enlightened in the Swedenborgian sense. He hopes that this may, in the future, be 'more generally understood', and expresses his wish for truth to be actively pursued and grasped.[12] But Swedenborgian enlightenment, as much as it is concerned with the spiritual, cannot happen without the support of materiality, for, Swedenborg argues, 'spiritual ideas are concealed' within the natural, so long as a person lives in this world. Unlike angels, who perceive things spiritually, human beings do so naturally, existing in what he terms 'the external sense' of the Word.[13] It is impossible to conceive of the spiritual without the support of earthly images, which foster within themselves arcane truths.[14] The fluid that Hesselius describes is spiritual but 'not immaterial': he likens its nature to that of 'light' and 'electricity'.[15] In this, Le Fanu's narrative signifies that spirituality itself has its own materiality, and indeed, within a Swedenborgian framing, that while existing in this world, it *needs* materiality even to be possible as a concept in the human mind.

'Green Tea', Metaphysical Medicine, and Historical Context

'Green Tea' (first serialised in *All the Year Round* in 1869), the first story in the volume, opens up the possibility of sceptical readings, readings that would be in opposition of course to Hesselius's framing narrative, and question his authority. Haunted by a monkey spirit following his excessive consumption of green tea, Rev. Jennings seeks the help of Dr Hesselius, whose case studies, as already mentioned, also provide the narrative framing of the collection as a whole. The narrative swerves rapidly between the natural and the supernatural, both teasing out the idea that the protagonist Jennings is really haunted, and entertaining the possibility of sceptical interpretations. Jennings is a respectable if unremarkable man: 'middle-aged', and 'a little stately, but not at all stiff'.[16] Yet there is something about him – his dressing 'with a natty, old-fashioned, high-church precision' – which subtly anticipates the theological terrors he is about to experience.[17] His high-churchness suggests his flirtation with doctrines and religious practices outside the traditional, broad Protestantism of the Church of England.

[11] Swedenborg, *Concerning the White Horse*, p. 13.
[12] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 8.
[13] Swedenborg, *Concerning the White Horse*, p. 12 and p. 16.
[14] Swedenborg, p. 12.
[15] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 39.
[16] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 6.
[17] Ibid.

Nineteenth-century ghost stories at times play with medical explanations for the apparition – or perceived apparition of ghosts – and engender hermeneutic ambiguity. A case of possible haunting is framed through medical language and optical illusion in Samuel Warren's 'The Spectral Dog' (1830), where a clergyman is followed around by what appears to be a ghostly dog; Gaïd Girard identifies this story as a 'probable source' for 'Green Tea'. The story was part of *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician* (published in *Blackwood's Magazine* between 1830 and 1837), which Girard characterises as 'positively uncanny rather than merely unusual in parts'.[18] Yet Le Fanu moves beyond even the uncanny, and the possibility of reading his tale as explainable through recourse to strictly natural causes is superficial, as it does not go far enough into the story or grapple with its duality between the natural and the supernatural. The sensorial in the story engenders the supernatural, which grows material in ways mimicking the principles of natural perception. Le Fanu uses the sceptical mode to instantiate the slippage towards a newly recovered but monstrous enchantment, carefully prying open levels of disbelief and rationality until readers find themselves plunged into the realisation of a metaphysical reality, which arrives to them in physical forms. 'Green Tea' establishes this precedent, which is then explored by Le Fanu in the collection. The supernatural reaches the characters and readers of Le Fanu's tales incarnate in monstrous figures, whose reality challenges the idea of mere materialism to the point that characters find themselves increasingly confronting the impossibility of denying the existence of the supernatural. Two of the terrifying figures in the collection, the monkey of 'Green Tea' and the owl in 'The Familiar', assume natural shapes (an animal and a bird); even though the monkey is a spirit, its appearance is that of a natural creature of the world. Justice Harbottle is haunted by a grotesque vision of his own human body, while Carmilla appears to Laura under the guise of a human body. This establishes not simply a mirroring relationship between the explicable and the seemingly inexplicable, but indeed one of inter-dependence.

In 'Green Tea', medical reason is the driving force of the supernatural; and the supernatural, in a symmetrical mirrored image, reinforces medical science. It is not that Jennings's vision of a demonic monkey spirit is not natural: it is, indeed, caused by his excessive consumption of green tea. But that does not mean it is a hallucination. There exists, in Dr Hesselius's system of metaphysical medicine, a 'fluid', spiritual in nature, but which, being part of the body's makeup, works in the manner of organic functions: it circulates,

[18] Gaïd Girard, 'Growing a Voice: Le Fanu and the Laboratory of the *Dublin University Magazine*', in *Inspiring a Mysterious Terror*, pp. 155-76 (p. 168).

'through the nerves', in an 'arterial and venous' manner.[19] The inclusion of the medico-clinical description of the fluid indicates a narrative attuned to contemporary medical science, operating within the ethos of the century that Stoker would later describe in *Dracula* as 'scientific, sceptical, matter-of-fact'.[20] It is the century when James Blundell performed the first successful transfusion of human blood. Unsurprisingly, the discourse and practice surrounding transfusion reframes the concept of blood. As Ann Louise Kibbie has noted, the rise of transfusion has helped 'map out a narrative' by which blood is converted into an essentially '"modern" fluid', stripped of the 'semi-magical' traits attributed to it.[21] The scientific grounding of blood as a modern fluid then provides a framing for the spiritual fluid of Hesselius's spiritual fluid. Because it circulates through the human nervous system as blood does through the circulatory system, it can borrow blood's modernised status. In short, this is not a magical or indeed 'semi-magical' fluid, but a scientific, albeit spiritual, one.

Victorian medical discourse then is not steeped in obscurantism and superstition, and Le Fanu, through Dr Hesselius's meticulously scientific explanations, makes sure that the reader knows this. But this scientific enlightenment, this understanding of the natural world, of the organic, indeed scepticism itself, is exactly what harbours the supernatural in the world of the story. Because Dr Hesselius's discourse is scientific *par excellence*, the supernatural can no longer be brushed off as superstition; its manifestations need to be explained otherwise. To Hesselius, the explanation comes in the form of his Swedenborgian metaphysical medicine:

> I may remark, that when I here speak of medical science, I do so, as I hope some day to see it more generally understood, in a much more comprehensive sense than its generally material treatment would warrant. I believe the entire natural world is but the ultimate expression of that spiritual world from which, and in which alone, it has its life. I believe that the essential man is a spirit, that the spirit is an organised substance, but as different in point of material from what we ordinarily understand by matter, as light or electricity is; that the material body is, in the most literal sense, a vesture, and death consequently no interruption of the living man's existence, but simply his extrication from the natural body – a process which commences at the moment of what we term death, and the completion of which, at furthest a few days later, is the resurrection 'in power'.[22]

[19] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', pp. 38-39.
[20] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 238.
[21] Ann Louise Kibbie, *Transfusion: Blood and Sympathy in the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (University of Virginia Press, 2019), p. 6.
[22] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 8.

At this point, the balance between natural and supernatural interpretation is reversed: it is no longer the case, as it was in Warren's 'The Spectral Dog', that the supernatural can simply be attributed to, or explained through the natural, and ultimately exposed as mere illusion. The relationship between spirit and matter has come under scrutiny during the nineteenth century, especially in the context of growing interest in spiritualism, a movement which, as Jen Cadwallader writes, was preoccupied with the 'material aspects of the afterlife'. This tendency, she explains, is portrayed in Victorian stories as 'reductive', and while Le Fanu's novel *All in the Dark* (1866) reflects this attitude towards spiritualism, he is certainly interested in the material manifestation of the afterlife.[23] As Christine Ferguson points out, the mid-nineteenth century was marked by the flourishing of an interest in occultism, spiritualism, and more broadly 'forms of knowledge considered to lie beyond the fold of scientific rationalism or contemporary Judeo-Christian orthodoxy'. Although this 'revival' reached its 'zenith' with the 'foundation of the Theosophical Society' in 1875 (therefore slightly after Le Fanu's death in 1873), Ferguson traces its roots to the 'late eighteenth century', when it was informed by 'anti-clericalism', and pinpoints its momentum around 1848, with the advent of 'Modern Spiritualism'.[24]

Le Fanu's attitude towards spiritualism is most evident in his *All in the Dark*, where we do indeed find it depicted as reductive. He references the 'creaks and cracks with which Bacon, Shakespeare, and Lord Byron communicated their several inspirations in detestable grammar, to all who pleased to consult them'.[25] Aunt Dinah, a character in the novel, is described as falling for this new religion as she 'loved a short-cut', echoing the idea of spiritualist thinking as reductive.[26] At the same time, Le Fanu's interest in Swedenborg demonstrates the heterodox tendencies of his own theological thought, especially when it comes to envisioning the relationship between matter and spirit, and life and afterlife. While not directly involved with occultism, Swedenborg's focus on vision, symbol, and concealment have led to his association with occult and esoteric theologies, and he has also come to be associated with spiritualism. What W. J. McCormack calls Le Fanu's 'mockery of spiritualism in *All in the Dark*' is, consequently, not a disavowal of an exploration of the relationship between spirits, ghosts, and spectres, and their material imprints upon the world.[27] Importantly, although Le Fanu plays on

[23] Jen Cadwallader, *Spirits and Spirituality in Victorian Fiction* (Palgrave, 2016), p. 12.
[24] Christine Ferguson, 'Introduction', in *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875-1974*, ed. by Ferguson and Andrew Radford (Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-9 (pp. 1-2).
[25] Le Fanu, *All in the Dark* (Downey, 1898), p. 5.
[26] Le Fanu, *All in the Dark*, p. 6.
[27] W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu* (Sutton Publishing, 1997), p. 242.

the intricate duality between nature and preternature, between science and religion, he does not 'attempt to reconcile' them, as Cadwallader argues; rather, '[c]haracters following the lights of either system reach a point beyond which those lights cannot shine, an unknowable darkness where all meaning resides'.[28] This 'unknowable darkness' is articulated theologically through a Swedenborgian framework. This is because Le Fanu uses material images to suggest, in Swedenborgian fashion, that a transcendental reality is hidden within – and yet this transcendence remains clouded in an 'unknowable darkness'.

Ultimately, because understanding is withheld, Le Fanu's writing manifests the idea, which Milbank pinpoints as central to his work, that real 'flourishing' only happens in death.[29] Prayer is useless to Jennings as he is tormented by the monkey, and the story frames his death, albeit horrific, as the only real possible release. Of course, the implication that Jennings is likely damned suggests that flourishing does not automatically bring with itself salvation, but rather that it is framed epistemologically, as a penetration of the 'unknowable darkness'. It is only by passing through the threshold of death that the unknowable can become known, as Jennings's own death, which emerges as a narrative necessity, demonstrates. This is not only at play in 'Green Tea' but throughout the collection. For example, in a similar vein, Barton's eventual demise in 'The Familiar' is precipitated by his intimation of knowledge, expressed by his conviction that there is a 'dreadful God' – the flourishing of this knowledge of the precise nature of God remains, however, beyond death.[30]

Yet this vision of the beyond also paints materiality, science, and naturalistic understanding in a new, ephemeral light, highlighting their dire limitations. Ultimately, while Hesselius can explain *how* green tea causes Jennings to see the monkey, he cannot explain *why*, nor finally treat the vision; and, as Jenning's death (that is caused by his haunting) tells us, it is the *why* that the text engenders. This 'unknowable darkness', then, moves beyond spiritualist endeavours to frame the supernatural through the language of the material, in attempts to assuage the doubts of some 'Christians who wanted greater proofs of the divine', as Cadwallader explains, though, it must be noted, the stories do also encourage a certain amount of doubt, or at least uncertainty and ambivalence.[31]

[28] Cadwallader, *Spirits and Spirituality*, p. 24.
[29] Milbank, *God and the Gothic*, p. 219.
[30] Le Fanu, 'The Familiar', in *In a Glass Darkly*, pp. 41-82 (p. 60).
[31] Cadwallader, *Spirits and Spirituality*, p. 12.

Dr Hesselius's Swedenborgian Vision in 'Green Tea'

Rather than simply using the material to locate the supernatural, 'Green Tea' recalibrates the relationship between nature and the supernatural: it is now the natural which can only make sense through the supernatural rather than vice versa, as the dynamics shifts. Hesselius's discourse about medicine and the primacy of spirit over matter exposes the natural as a mere illusory reflection. To Girard, Hesselius's discourse 'is typical of [that] of spiritualist mesmerists in their attempt to locate spirit and materialize it'.[32] Yet Hesselius moves beyond mere attempts, uncovering a clear theological vision of spirit and matter, through Swedenborgian correspondence, which entails a relationship between the spiritual and the material realms. And rather than simply locate spirit, it operates on the assumption that spirit governs all matter. To return to Hesselius's vision for medical science expressed in the quotation I introduced in the previous section: he makes it clear that humans are primarily spirits, that 'the material body is […] a vesture', and that 'the entire natural world is but the ultimate expression of [the] spiritual world', thus demonstrating Swedenborgian concealment of spiritual truth within matter at play.[33]

The mystery presented by Le Fanu's collection derives from the arcane theology of the supernatural, which is visible, in various forms and to various people, within the boundaries of the natural world. This knowledge enlightens in the same way that medical science enlightened through its discoveries. If, prior to the ground-breaking discoveries known by nineteenth-century medicine, doctors operated within the bounds of clouded knowledge, Le Fanu's stories suggest that those who practice medicine strictly within the limits of their – albeit significant – material knowledge are similarly restricted, as indicated by Hesselius's affirmation that 'medical science' might one day be understood in a 'more comprehensive sense than its generally material treatment would warrant'.[34] As Cadwallader points out, science leads to the same darkness as religion in Le Fanu's work.[35] Such occlusion is explainable through Swedenborg's concept of enlightenment – or, in this case, lack thereof. Killeen argues that the '[e]pistemological darkness' – which turns out to be 'metaphysical' – of Le Fanu's ghost stories is 'at times' 'punctured'.[36] The term 'punctured' encapsulates the struggle for theological vision perfectly: it provides the occasional 'glimpse', as Killeen puts it, into metaphysical

[32] Girard, 'Growing a Voice', p. 172.
[33] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 8.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Cadwallader, *Spirits and Spirituality*, p. 24.
[36] Killeen, 'Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Ireland', pp. 270-71.

reality, but the veil is never thoroughly lifted.[37] There is a double Swedenborgian system underlying this: on the one hand, the idea that spiritual images need earthly ones to be conceived of; on the other hand, divine enlightenment.

Were truth completely immaterial, we would not be able to conceive of it; we need the prop of the natural to help us uncover its existence and perceive it. This is the picture Hesselius is facing when talking about the spiritual fluid he describes. To explain its nature, he needs to employ the language of the bodily and the organic, using the metaphor of the heart. Hesselius's description is therefore Swedenborgian in its turn to the material to convey the spiritual so that it can be understood by the human mind. 'Of this system', Hesselius explains, 'the brain is the heart', drawing on anatomical understanding, and doubling the emphasis on the material through the mention of both 'brain' and 'heart'.[38] To understand the fluid's circulation to and from the brain, we need medical knowledge of the heart's function, as a bodily organ: how it circulates blood through the body, and how it receives and pumps venous and arterial blood. Indeed, the mysterious fluid is characterised by 'a circulation arterial and venous in its mechanism', Hesselius's syntax suggesting that knowledge of the circulation of blood is essential in understanding this system.[39] Le Fanu here taps into the metaphorical meaning of 'heart' as much as the literal; he knows that it is impossible to ignore the backdrop of the heart's metaphorical signification, which, as Desmond Sheridan points out, has been used, independently and universally, since the earliest forms of writing.[40] Despite his emphasis on the medical function of the heart, however, Le Fanu uses it metaphorically: the brain is for the spiritual fluid what the heart is for blood. The brain is *like* the heart. Le Fanu therefore replicates, at textual level, the Swedenborgian correspondence between the natural image – the heart – and the hidden image concealed within, here both its function, mimicked by the brain, and its metaphorical association with truth, assent, and spirituality.

This fluid, Hesselius qualifies, we share with spirits, and 'disembodied spirits may operate' on it in cases when its equilibrium has been 'disturbed' by various 'abuses', such as excessive consumption of green tea.[41] Hesselius thus incorporates the spiritual within the medical: the explanation is both perfectly natural and perfectly supernatural. The monkey's appearance, which starts plaguing Jennings after his excessive consumption of green tea, and

[37] Killeen, p. 271.
[38] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 39.
[39] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', pp. 38-39.
[40] Desmond Sheridan, 'The Heart, A Constant and Universal Metaphor', *European Heart Journal*, 39.37 (1 October 2018), pp. 3407-09 (p. 3407), doi:10.1093/eurheartj/ehy491.
[41] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 39.

which eventually leads to his despair and suicide, can be explained naturally, but only inasmuch as the natural bears inside itself deeper, spiritual realities. As William Hughes argues, it cannot be explained through the '*mere* materialist'.[42] In Warren's *Passages* (1837), Hughes argues, organic processes, such as digestion, can elucidate the appearance of the ghost. As Hughes further notes, the same mechanism of explaining hauntings through digestion informs Scrooge's reaction when, in Charles Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol' (1843), he is confronted by Marley's ghost.[43] There, however, ghosts are real, and the bodily explanation useless. If Dickens and Warren sit at opposite ends of the spectrum, Le Fanu folds the poles upon each other, providing a medical, almost taxonomical, account of the supernatural that is affirmed by science itself. Killeen argues that Tzvetan Todorov's account of fantasy as an either-or choice between natural and supernatural explanations is impossible in Le Fanu: his 'stories […] refuse to decide between the different explanations for the events of the plot'.[44] In a sense, this very refusal to decide brings the two possibilities together, homogenising them, and overcoming the apparent dichotomy. To use Todorov's framing, the 'laws of the world […] remain what they are', but at the same time, 'the event has indeed taken place'.[45] Swedenborgian theology renders the fantastical part of the earthly, binding it to the 'laws of this same familiar world'.[46]

This also means that they are manifestations of a deeper reality and spiritual meaning, which a Swedenborgian reading can once again help elucidate in conjunction with Hesselius's discourse. There is, Hesselius affirms with the physician's precision, a 'world of spirits' where evil spirits coming from hell dwell. This realm 'is in the midst between heaven and hell'; while wicked spirits inhabit it, they exit their hellish state of 'infernal torment' and exist instead 'in every thought and affection of the man'.[47] Swedenborg's theology affirms the persistence of the correlation between literal and inner meanings within the spirit world: spirits take on symbolic forms, which are themselves rooted in natural, earthly images. Swedenborg contends that those spirits attending only to the literal meaning of things are represented as an ugly old woman; those which discern the inner meaning as a beautiful young woman.[48] Some spirits, as shown in 'Green Tea', take the form of a monkey. That the monkey tormenting Jennings is a hellish spirit is evident: it plagues him, prevents him from praying, and ultimately drives him

[42] William Hughes, 'The Origins and Implications of J. S. Le Fanu's "Green Tea"', in *Irish Studies Review*, 13:1 (2005), pp. 45-54 (p. 50), doi:10.1080/0967088052000319508.
[43] Hughes, 'The Origins and Implications', pp. 50-51.
[44] Killeen, 'Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Ireland', p. 269.
[45] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 25.
[46] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 25.
[47] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 14.
[48] Swedenborg, *Concerning the White Horse*, p. 21.

to suicide. But significantly, the spirit needs to take on a material form for it to be perceived by its victim. It might be disembodied, and able to act upon Jennings's spiritual fluid due to his habit of drinking green tea; but its appearance to Jennings is in the form of a monkey's body, for in the Swedenborgian worldview, essentially all mental images are borne through the natural.[49] Because less enlightened spirits are less attractive within a Swedeborgian system, it is arguably significant that the spirit tormenting Jennings appears not as a human, but as a monkey – a proto-human, and especially so in the wake of the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. The apparition, then, can be read as foreshadowing Jennings's damnation as a type of spiritual regression indicative of his unenlightened state. Describing the overwhelming effect of the monkey's tormenting presence, Jennings anticipates the question of the disembodied spirit's power, stating: 'You will ask, how could a silent immaterial phantom effect that? It was thus, whenever I meditated praying; It was always before me, and nearer and nearer.'[50] He explains:

> There is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one's attention to that monotony, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing – and unless I had started up, and shook off the catalepsy I have felt as if my mind were on the point of losing itself.[51]

It is clear, from Jennings's description, that the evil spirit operates at the threshold of the material and the immaterial; its ambivalence consists in its capacity to mimic physicality, springing on the table, as if it were a real monkey.

Yet its grotesquerie arises from the knowledge that it is indeed a spirit, and from its displacement: a spirit normally inhabiting hell should not be there in Jennings's lodgings; nor should an actual monkey. Moreover, there is a mockery of physical form in its movements, which is then channelled onto Jennings's being. Again, the language is that of medicine: he frames the spirit's effect in diagnostic terms through catalepsy, a condition of the nervous system. Jennings's reference to catalepsy indicates the spirit's action upon the spiritual fluid which, as Hesselius reminds us, 'is propagated […] through one class of nerves […] through another', and which he categorises as a 'nervous fluid'.[52] Like the monkey, psychological states are also painted materially. Jennings uses a physical metaphor – 'to shrink' presupposes size,

[49] Swedenborg, p. 12.
[50] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 30.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 39.

recalling primarily physical objects – in conjunction with an evocation of the immateriality of ideas.

Ultimately, however, if this mêlée of embodiment and disembodiment fosters Swedenborgian enlightenment, this is only Hesselius's. Jennings, through the spirit's action, tragically succumbs to theological despair: he can no longer pray. To Richard Haslam, this signifies the activation of Jennings's Calvinistic conscience. His despair, Haslam maintains, does not stem from loss of faith, but from his growing conviction that 'he is a reprobate – predestined (in terms of Calvinistic theology) to damnation rather than salvation'.[53] Jennings's dabbling in the writings of Swedenborg, he adds, is a confirmation of his reprobation: he is attracted to heterodox ideas, or 'paganism', precisely because he is a reprobate.[54] Haslam references the scene in 'Green Tea' where Jennings has highlighted a passage in the writings of Swedenborg about how it is dangerous for 'man to be in a living consort with spirits, unless he be in the good of faith', and reads this as his self-confirmation of his inescapable damnation.[55] Yet the theological substratum of Jennings's condition is pervaded by ambivalence: potentially Calvinistic in its insistence on the centrality of faith, the passage is encountered in a Swedenborgian context, and can thus be read as equally pointing to the openness to truth described by Swedenborg, which leads to an understanding of the Word through enlightenment.[56] In this light, the reference to Jennings's 'high-church precision' can be read as highlighting the fact that this ecumenical openness poses a threat to a strictly Calvinistic framework of faith. This ecumenical openness includes Jennings's interest in the works of Swedenborg. It indicates perhaps a willingness to leave behind the doctrine of justification by faith alone – so central to reformed theology but rejected both by Catholicism, to which high-church Protestantism is drawn, and by Swedenborg, whose works Jennings is attracted to. As this suggests, 'Green Tea' is the story in the collection that most plays on theological enlightenment and apprehension of truth, although no full revelation of it is achieved. Yet it is also the story that most clearly fosters the possibility of reading the supernatural as illusion. What follows in the other stories is an increasing slip of the supernatural into the material.

[53] Richard Haslam, 'Le Fanu's "Green Tea" and Irish Victorian Calvinism', in *Inspiring a Mysterious Terror*, pp. 93-116 (pp. 99-100).
[54] Haslam, 'Le Fanu's "Green Tea"', p. 100.
[55] Haslam, p. 101; and see Le Fanu, 'Green Tea', p. 15.
[56] See Swedenborg, *Concerning the White Horse*, p. 13.

'The Familiar', 'Mr. Justice Harbottle', and the Materialisation of Hauntings

'The Familiar' (first published in 1851, a revision of 1847's 'The Watcher') – the second story in the collection – begins with a disembodied haunting. But unlike Jennings, Captain Barton knows the source of his haunting. He understands that he is being pursued by the Watcher of his old ship, in whose death he was implicated. As he starts receiving mysterious letters signed by 'The Watcher', he understands that he is dealing with a manifestation from beyond the grave:

> Whatever he might think as to the phantom steps which followed him, there could be no possible illusion about the letters he had received; and, to say the least, their immediate sequence upon the mysterious sounds which had haunted him, was an odd coincidence.[57]

Gradually, the source of his terror materialises: the 'phantom steps' acquire a sense of physicality through the letters he receives, which are real, tangible objects of the world. The naturalness with which Barton is 'handed' these letters – these objects – reinforces the idea that the supernatural has penetrated, physically, the natural. Unlike a disembodied spirit, the letters are inescapably, terrifyingly tangible. Barton holds them in his hands; the first letter is placed 'by the postman […] upon the table'.[58] Any possibility of it being a product of Barton's conscience is swiftly dismissed through the mundane physicality of this exchange. Le Fanu dwells in detail on the nature of the letter's handwriting, with its 'tall narrow characters', which are 'sloped backward', conjuring up a clear visual image of the missive.[59] The reference to the 'hand' that wrote the letter almost restores the spirit to its former body in the reader's imagination.

And while we are made privy to Barton's terror, our vantage point as readers complicates the theological tableau of the story. Favouring an Augustinian reading of the Victorian ghost story, in which she includes Le Fanu's fiction, Zoë Lehmann Imfeld argues that the human condition might be inextricably fallen, but it is 'not static'; instead, it 'stands somewhere on a journey of "becoming"'.[60] Imfeld reads 'The Familiar' as embodying a theological vision of being *in medias res*, whereby the immanence of terror raises the possibility of salvation.[61] In being confronted with the ghost of the Watcher – a 'physical' haunting –

[57] Le Fanu, 'The Familiar', pp. 49-50.
[58] Le Fanu, 'The Familiar', p. 47.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Zoë Lehmann Imfeld, *The Victorian Ghost Story and Theology* (Palgrave, 2016), p. 27.
[61] Imfeld, *The Victorian Ghost Story*, p. 130.

Barton is confronted with the reality of immanence, of post-death existence, and therefore with the need for redemption.[62] As Imfeld explains, his 'crisis is essentially an Augustinian one, firstly in his recognition of his own inadequacy in the face of God, and secondly in his recognition of the need for a mediator for grace'.[63] While Barton's crisis is Augustinian, the reader's is Swedenborgian, for the lack of revelation regarding Barton's ultimate eschatological fate draws us into Swedenborgian occlusion. Through Barton's haunting, the reader experiences the ghost's immanence, made materially manifest. But at the end of the story, what happens to Barton? If he has become aware of his own immanence, we are not – we do not know what happens to him after his death; what we witness in the end is just Barton's cold corpse. Barton's final materiality is affirmed through a deconstruction of personhood: he is reduced to a 'rigid gripe'; an 'awful figure'; a nameless 'dead man'.[64] The occlusive effect is cumulative in the collection *In a Glass Darkly*; as Imfeld argues, the characters are in the midst of a religious experience, but the Swedenborgian framework blocks any transcendental revelation, circling back apparently to what Michael Begnal has described as Le Fanu's 'fatalistic nihilism'.[65]

From a theological point of view, it is clear that, as in 'Green Tea', Calvinistic suppositions are again challenged in 'The Familiar'. A tendency to reject the possibility of supernatural forces inhabiting the material has characterised post-Reformation theologies. Yet this is exactly what happens in the story: indeed, as the narrative progresses, the slip towards materiality grows increasingly striking, as the Watcher eventually carries out his revenge through a familiar spirit – an owl. Unlike the monkey, only visible to Jennings, the owl's materiality is visible to everyone. It arrives as the pet of his fiancée, an 'ill-omened bird' that fills Barton with dread.[66] Incarnate in the owl's form, the haunting, which started off as 'phantom steps', has now reached material fullness.[67] After Barton's corpse is discovered, the owl flies out of the room, and Montague (the father of Barton's fiancée) notices that 'there was something else on the bed with him', pointing to 'a deep indenture, as if caused by a heavy pressure, near the foot of the bed'.[68] The stamp of the inextricably physical is clear, made manifest through the language of weight and heaviness.

[62] Imfeld, pp. 129-30.
[63] Imfeld, p. 130.
[64] Le Fanu, 'The Familiar', p. 81.
[65] Michael Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu* (University of Bucknell Press, 1971), p. 71.
[66] Le Fanu, 'The Familiar', p.79.
[67] Le Fanu, 'The Familiar', p.49.
[68] Le Fanu, 'The Familiar', p. 80.

Whether this is the owl's work or whether the Watcher himself materialised remains unclear; but what is clear is that something supernatural has left its physical imprint on the natural world. Jennings's death was by his own hand; Barton's was the product of an external force. Even if we dismissed the owl being a familiar and read it as a simple bird, Barton is still stalked by 'The Watcher' – and hence the story would still contain supernatural elements. Similarly, in 'Mr Justice Harbottle', spirits are seen, walking 'as living men do', causing the floor to vibrate: the physical is once again central to spiritual manifestations.[69] The ghostly in 'Mr Justice Harbottle' treads the threshold between nightmare and reality. In the end, a ghostly doppelgänger condemns the protagonist to death; while suicide and hallucinatory madness are entertained as possibilities, ghosts are seen not simply by the protagonist himself, thus suggesting that they are an objective reality. A scullery maid sees 'a monstrous figure, over a furnace, beating with a mighty hammer the rings and rivets of a chain', and then pointing out to her the corpse of the judge on the floor, anticipating his death.[70] The ghostly is once again corroborated by a witness external to the haunting. In 'The Familiar', the Watcher's ghostly revenge is not witnessed directly; but in 'Mr Justice Harbottle', the scullery maid sees, first-hand, the monstrous spirit materialising, taking us further down the path of material manifestation of spirits. This shows a clear direction of the collection overall, in its staging of a shift away from ambiguity and towards an increasingly clearer physical manifestation of the supernatural, which ultimately culminates with the vampiric body of Carmilla.

While the natural explanation of 'Green Tea' seemed more plausible if improbable, such readings of 'The Familiar' and 'Mr Justice Harbottle' slide further into the domain of implausibility. But even this possibility is denied with Carmilla, a monster both quintessentially natural – in her inescapably bodily form – and supernatural, through her vampiric nature. It is as if, in Swedenborgian terms, readers move away from enlightenment and delve deeper into the material at this point in the collection. We lose track of the inner meaning, and the supernatural grows physical roots. But we know, when reading the story, that there is a supernatural realm in its fictional universe, and indeed one which breaks through the appearance of materiality – we know then that these physical manifestations cannot be explained simply through contemporary science, and it is up to us to decode their meaning. Considered in its entirety then, the collection is pervaded by a shift away from the disembodied

[69] In 1853, Le Fanu published 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street', revising it as 'The Haunted House in Westminster' in 1872, and finally re-titling and revising it to its final form in 1872, in the collection: Le Fanu, 'Mr Justice Harbottle', in *In a Glass Darkly*, pp. 83-118 (p. 86).
[70] Le Fanu, 'Mr Justice Harbottle', p. 116.

and towards the physical. Readers of 'Green Tea' might entertain the possibility of a sceptical reading; but by the time we get to 'Carmilla', the possibility of explaining mystery through medical science fades. When the father of Laura, the protagonist, attempts to explain away, rationally, the mysterious illness afflicting locals, the sneering words of the vampire Carmilla – 'natural. Nature' – resound equally at a metatextual level, as if denying not only the scepticism of Laura's father, but readerly beliefs in the collection's natural explanations.[71]

Carmilla's Corporeality

In 'Carmilla', this step-by-step metafictional discovery is paralleled at a fictional level by Laura's discovery and acceptance of Carmilla's real, corporeal monstrosity. Carmilla collapses the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural: the vampire makes material all which is usually classed as mysterious and dismissed as supernatural. Carmilla's actions, words, and most strikingly, her being, reconfigure the natural. This becomes particularly clear in the scene where Carmilla holds the General by his wrist, causing him to drop the axe with which he was attacking her. We are told that 'she dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him in her tiny grasp by the wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm, but his hand opened, the axe fell to the ground, and the girl was gone.'[72] The unnatural – supernatural – strength of the vampire inhabits her 'tiny' human form, reconfiguring the materiality of her body. Once tinged with the physical imprint of the supernatural, the natural world is transformed. It is no longer a space where everything can be understood through science. Laura's own reality (and perception of it) is irretrievably changed, as evidenced by the novella's ending, where Laura is described as often sinking into reveries about Carmilla. Her world can never be free of Carmilla, even after the physical destruction of the vampire, precisely because her mind now understands the existence of the supernatural in a way that had not been open to her before. The world ceases, in this sense, to be the safe world in which a sceptical reading of 'Green Tea' would fit. Now, having thus been monstrously re-enchanted, the natural becomes monstrous. It is a shift we encounter clearly in 'Carmilla'. The contemptuous assertion that '[t]hese monsters used to make my father laugh' prompted by Laura's encounter with a mountebank who carries all sorts of curios, grows into the acknowledgement that '[m]y father recognized […] his perfidious and beautiful guest, in the face now disclosed to view', upon opening Carmilla's grave.[73] As Noël Carroll writes, Laura's father is the embodiment of scepticism,

[71] Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', in *In a Glass Darkly*, pp. 243-319 (p. 270).
[72] Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', p. 312.
[73] Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', p. 268 and p. 315.

'rejecting the superstitions of the peasants'. Indeed, he goes as far as to devise, Carroll adds, 'the improbable naturalistic explanation of Carmilla's somnambulism in order to account for Carmilla's disappearance'.[74]

To explain the seemingly unexplainable through the lens of somnambulism is to explain mystery through the natural. In 1871, the same year that Le Fanu began publishing *Carmilla* in serialised form in *The Dark Blue*, Robert H. Collyer saw the publication of the second edition of his *Mysteries of the Vital Element: In Connexion with Dreams, Somnambulism, Trance, Vital Photography, Faith and Will, Anaesthesia, Nervous Congestion, and Creative Function; Modern Spiritualism Explained*, where he explains somnambulism as a natural phenomenon.[75] Likewise, clinging on to the perceived safety of the natural, Laura's father attempts to explain away, rationally, a mysterious attack on a young girl, construing superstitious belief as a disease, stating that '"[a]ll this […] is strictly referable to natural causes. These poor people infect one another with their superstitions, and so repeat in imagination the images of terror that have infested their neighbours."'[76] 'Infest' clamps together real and imagined causes of disease: the OED defines it as associated with 'persons (e. g. robbers, pirates), animals (e. g. wolves, vermin, insects), diseases or other evils', but also with 'perverse opinions, errors'.[77] There is a perverse irony in his unwittingly literal use of the word, an irony echoed by Carmilla's response to his insistence on 'natural causes':

> 'Creator! *Nature!*' […] 'And this disease that invades the country is natural. Nature. All things proceed from Nature – don't they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so.'[78]

Carmilla's outburst is both mockery and accord: we know, in light of her vampiric condition, that she must be indirectly and ironically chiding, if not taunting, Laura's father for his naïve adherence to the natural, as well as his religion. But the affirmative syntax of her speech, culminating in 'I think so', also signals her agreement. It does all proceed from nature – the disease is indeed natural, even if she herself is its source; for what is more natural than the body, and blood? If Laura's father moves from 'nature' to 'God', in an act of trust, Carmilla collapses the two into each other. This is not 'nature', but 'Nature', its capitalisation and the

[74] Noël Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 112.
[75] Robert Collyer, *Mysteries of the Vital Element: In Connexion with Dreams, Somnambulism, Trance, Vital Photography, Faith and Will, Anaesthesia, Nervous Congestion, and Creative Function*; *Modern Spiritualism Explained* (Henry Renshaw, 1871), p. 60.
[76] Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', p. 269.
[77] See the entry 'infest' in *Oxford English Dictionary*, n. d., <https://www.oed.com> [accessed 23 July 2024].
[78] Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', p. 270.

parallelism drawn between itself and 'Creator', suggesting the metaphysical dimension of Nature itself. Carmilla's words paint a sublimely sinister picture of the natural, emphasising the real, organic nature of evil. It counters the tendency of Laura's father to separate that which can be understood and attributed to natural causes from the intangible realm of the beyond, putting his trust in the protection of Providence. Once again, this demonstrates how Le Fanu uses the natural, and the material, to contain, within their tangible forms, a supernatural reality. But rather than the 'Providence' that Laura's father invoked, the supernatural presences we encounter in the volume are sinister and threatening, ultimately making horror itself instrumental in the realisation that there is a world beyond the material – and hence a mechanism of revelation, however limited this revelation might be.

'The Room in the Dragon Volant' and the Supernatural Tendencies of *In a Glass Darkly*

'The Room in the Dragon Volant' (1872), the fourth piece in the collection, disrupts the continuity of the volume: there is no supernatural element. Unlike the other stories, it is a gothic mystery; significantly, the narrator does not toy with possible hauntings or supernatural monsters as he does elsewhere in the volume. We witness a display of gothic atmospherics, without the implied presence of the supernatural. This might seem to threaten the balance of the collection, but it reinforces the supernatural in the other stories by revealing a situation where humans are solely responsible for the plot's horror. The transition, then, is from a disembodied spirit visible to a single person ('Green Tea'), to a disembodied spirit leaving tangible marks on the world ('The Familiar'), and to a danger posed by human plotting ('The Room in the Dragon Volant'). 'Carmilla' follows 'The Room in the Dragon Volant', highlighting the difference between a human threat, and one posed by something that appears human. Carmilla looks, moves, and speaks like a human. Laura is enthralled by her human features, described in terms of luxuriant beauty. She recalls Carmilla's 'slender pretty figure enveloped in the soft silk dressing gown, embroidered with flowers, and lined with thick quilted silk, which her mother had thrown over her feet as she lay upon the ground'.[79] In 'The Room in the Dragon Volant', Richard Beckett is irrevocably, almost fatally, attracted to the Countess. She is dangerous, but only because she is implicated in a plot to murder him by drugging him to catalepsy and subsequently burying him. Laura is also irrevocably, almost fatally, attracted to Carmilla. But Carmilla is dangerous for a different reason: her supernatural, vampiric nature, which is hidden under the guise of a beautiful woman. There is, on the one hand, the

[79] Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', pp. 258-59.

Swedenborgian thread of concealing a deeper, supernatural truth within a tangible image – that of Carmilla. Yet beyond this, there is, inherent in this conjoining, a warning as to the illusory and disingenuous nature of these material images, with horror lurking beneath beauty.

The appearance of a human form brings Le Fanu's Swedenborgian exploration to completion: the inner reality is contained entirely within the earthly image. Yet the inner meaning revealed here is monstrous, pointing not to salvation or truth as envisioned by Swedenborg, but to the reality of demons, their hellish presence within the safety of the world, which has been pruned of its enchantment by scepticism and Calvinism. 'The Room in the Dragon Volant' appears to complicate this matter. Yet the narrative sequence of the tales in the volume creates a contrast between the false appearance of the Countess de St Alyre, and Countess Karnstein, making the latter's perverse falsehood even more striking. The Countess de St Alyre is a human being devising a trick on the protagonist, while Countess Karnstein is a supernatural figure tricking Laura into trusting that they are both alike, and innocent. The placing of 'The Room in the Dragon Volant' right before 'Carmilla' might induce us readers into the false belief – and hope – that Countess Karnstein might, like the Countess de St Alyre, be unmasked for her trickery and hypocrisy, an expectation which Le Fanu dashes as he rips away any naturalistic, non-supernatural readings from the universe of 'Carmilla'. Where the countess in 'The Room in the Dragon Volant' is revealed to be a natural trickster, the expectation that Carmilla might be one too does not deliver, when she is revealed to be a real supernatural vampire.

In a Glass Darkly: Matter and Transcendence in the Collection

Throughout this essay, I have used individual stories to illustrate the broader narrative and theological tendencies of the collection. It is therefore important to consider briefly the title of the collection itself, a title which has indeed been the subject of sustained critical scrutiny. In its misquotation of 1 Corinthians 13:12, Victor Sage maintains, the phrase 'twists St Paul's metaphor […] that we shall see "through a glass darkly", converting "glass" to "mirror" and trapping us on this side of it'.[80] This conversion from 'glass' to 'mirror' by changing 'through' to 'in' implies that rather than seeing through to the afterlife, we instead see a reflection, as all transcendence is trapped within the material. Sage's reading encapsulates Le Fanu's plunging of the supernatural inside the mould of the natural, allowing us to perceive it, in a Swedenborgian manner, through recourse to the earthly. To Milbank, being 'in a glass darkly'

[80] Victor Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic: The Rhetoric of Darkness* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 203.

entails a reflective relationship between humans and spirits, whereby '[t]he human forms a mirror or glass in which the spirit may see himself, through which his or her affection is revealed'.[81] Beyond the biblical reference, the title likely alludes to another source that captures the ambivalent relationship between spiritual reality and material form, and the struggle towards inner truth: Wilkie Collins's novel *No Name* (1862). Pondering over the good and evil residing within each human, Miss Garth is described as '[s]earching, as in a glass darkly', as she looks 'into the two natures' and feels 'her way, doubt by doubt, from one possible truth to another'.[82] Through the voice of Miss Garth, Collins hints at the 'hidden' natures, good and evil, residing within humans, and which manifest themselves through actions. The hiddenness and surfacing of either good or evil has Swedenborgian reverberations, especially in Collins's emphasis on how Magdalen Vanstone might have 'roused the forces of Evil in herself'.[83] From her vantage point, Miss Garth observes, 'as in a glass darkly', the good and evil at play in the Vanstone sisters. And this is the key to the theological coherence of Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*; like Miss Garth, the reader of the collection observes as if 'in a glass darkly' the forces of Evil 'roused', or invited in, by those who encounter their supernatural sources.

These supernatural encounters in Le Fanu's collection follow a pattern of transgression against the natural order, which opens up a door for monstrous presences to be invited in. The vampire Carmilla is quite literally invited into the *schloss*; Judge Harbottle's own corrupted nature brings about his monstrous doppelgänger; 'The Familiar' is a revenge plot, and hence a cause-effect narrative explored supernaturally; and Jennings, of course, opens his mind up towards malevolent influences through his excessive consumption of green tea. Although Le Fanu's theology is complex and ecumenical, the underlying Swedenborgian theology allows him to explore, in *In a Glass Darkly*, the various stages and forms of enlightenment, placing his characters at different points in the journey described by Imfeld. Yet by showing the limitations of human knowledge – in rejecting or resisting enlightenment – he draws his readers back into the world's materiality, withholding any revelation regarding the nature of the afterlife. Fundamentally, the Swedenborgian framework moves readers from a materiality that fosters scepticism to one that now emerges as limiting, indeed frustrating, due to the knowledge that while it is inhabited by mysterious forces, comprehension is denied.

[81] Milbank, *God and the Gothic*, p. 214.
[82] Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (The Floating Press, 2009), p. 243.
[83] Collins, *No Name*, p. 243.