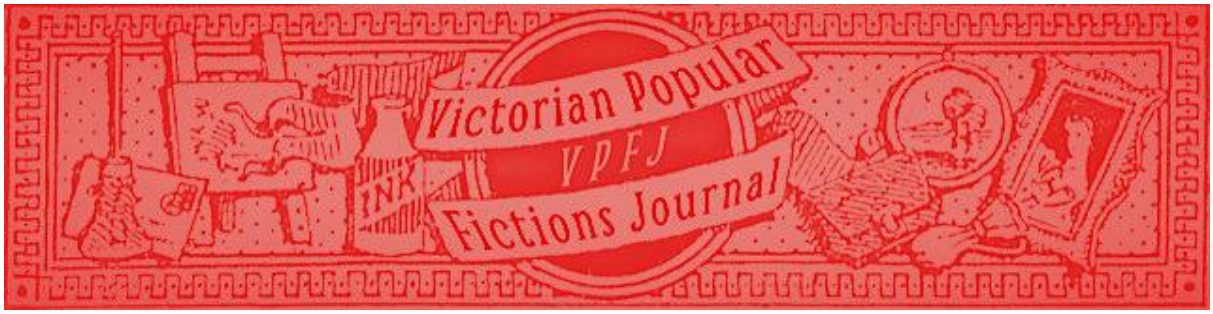

Literary Upcycling Across the Irish and English Press: J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Checkmate* (1870–1), Sensation Fiction, and the Conditions of Periodical Publication

Kaitlyn Fralick

Abstract

J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–73) publicly spoke out against his fiction being labelled as "sensation" despite strategically adopting conventions of the popular genre. As proprietor of the *Dublin University Magazine*, Le Fanu was highly attuned to the demands of periodical serialisation, and he used this knowledge when upcycling his early-career, Dublin-published narratives into new forms for the London press. Though scholars have commented on his tendency to rewrite his previously published fiction, *Checkmate* (1870–1) remains an understudied case through which to examine the author's upcycling practices across the Irish and English presses. This article begins to address that gap by reading *Checkmate* – a sensationalised, contemporary England-set reworking of his historical Ireland-set *The Cock and Anchor* (1845) – to show how Le Fanu adapted and recontextualised his fiction in response to critical feedback and generic trends. *Checkmate*'s plot thematises its own transformation through Walter Longcluse, a surgically altered villain who returns and re-terrorises the Arden family after a two-decade-long disappearance under a new identity. This article ultimately proposes an approach to understanding Le Fanu's sensation fiction by foregrounding the interplay between narrative reinvention, authorial creativity, and the opportunities and constraints of Victorian periodical publishing.

Keywords

J. Sheridan Le Fanu; sensation fiction; literary recycling; periodical press; *Dublin University Magazine*; self-adaptation; Anglo-Irish author

Date of Acceptance: 1 July 2026
Date of Publication: 3 July 2026
Double Blind Peer Reviewed

Recommended Citation:
Fralick, Kaitlyn. 2026. "Literary Upcycling Across the Irish and English Press: J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Checkmate* (1870–1), Sensation Fiction, and the Conditions of Periodical Publication." *Victorian Popular Fictions*, 8.1 (Spring): 92-105. ISSN: 2632-4253 (online) DOI: https://doi.org/10.46911/TUIE6824

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Literary Upcycling Across the Irish and English Press: J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Checkmate* (1870–1), Sensation Fiction, and the Conditions of Periodical Publication*

Kaitlyn Fralick

In his Postscript to the serialisation of *Uncle Silas* (1864) in the *Dublin University Magazine* (hereafter *DUM*), J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–73) made clear his dissatisfaction with his fiction being labelled as "sensation" (1864: 679). He pleaded against the use of "that degrading term" and argued that no one "would describe Sir Walter Scott's romances as 'sensation novels'; yet…there is not a single tale in which death, crime, and, in some form, mystery, have not a place" (679-80). His resistance to popular generic categorisation speaks to a broader tension in Le Fanu's career between what was commercially viable and what was critically respected. The Anglo-Irish author, best remembered today for his vampire novella *Carmilla* (1871–2) alongside *Uncle Silas*, was indeed known during his era for savvily exploiting the genres of ghost, detective, and sensation fiction and was admired by such contemporaries as Charles Dickens, although he never achieved comparable popularity. While Le Fanu publicly resisted the "sensation" label, his publishing practices during the 1860s and 1870s reveal a strategic willingness to adopt conventions of the genre, which dominated the periodical press after the serialisation of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* in Dickens's *All the Year Round* (1859–60). Not only did Le Fanu *recycle* his fiction during this period by reusing plots from his previously published fiction, but he also *upcycled* his fiction by presenting those plots in new genres. This practice is particularly pronounced in Le Fanu's longest-running effort at recycling and upcycling: the historical Ireland-set *The Cock and Anchor* (1845) took on many forms and titles before its final incarnation as *Morley Court* (1873), including a sensationalised contemporary England-set iteration, *Checkmate* (1870–1). *Checkmate* is one of many upcycled novels for which Le Fanu drew upon the highly popular and highly contested sensation genre, and the changes made across iterations suggest both an attempt to meet the demands of London's publishing marketplace and a self-reflexive meditation on literary reinvention and the economics of authorship.

* Many thanks to Dr. Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Dr. Lisa Surridge (University of Victoria), and Dr. S. Brooke Cameron and Dr. Margaret Aziza Pappano (Queen's University), for their helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

Though critics have considered continuities between Le Fanu's early-career Irish historical fiction and late-career English contemporary fiction, *Checkmate* remains an understudied case through which to examine the author's upcycling practices. Following fellow Anglo-Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen's claim that "*Uncle Silas* has always struck [her] as being an Irish story transposed to an English setting" (1947: 8), most Le Fanu scholarship has remained within Irish studies, with scholars such as Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, Vera Kreilkamp, and Shane McCorristine reading his fiction for its allegorical representations of nineteenth-century Protestant Irish anxieties.[1] The Irish Gothic is of particular focus within this subset of scholarship; Victor Sage, for one, compellingly claims that Le Fanu "reinvent[ed]" the Gothic and "place[d] it dynamically in the context of Irish cultural nationalism" (2004: 5). Building on this work, recent studies by Elizabeth Tilley and Aoife Mary Dempsey resituate Le Fanu's fiction within its Irish periodical context, both advocating for a lateral approach: Tilley reads *Uncle Silas* alongside supporting features in the *Dublin University Magazine* (*DUM*) to find Le Fanu's editorial "voice" (2014: 130), while Dempsey reads across Le Fanu's *DUM*-published fiction, arguing his oeuvre was "working within a broader cultural trend at negotiating the parameters of Irish Protestant identity" (2022: 43). A third subset of scholarship concerns Le Fanu's iterative writing practices. W. J. McCormack and Robert Tracy have traced iterations of the author's novels, while Richard Haslam examines inconsistencies caused by Le Fanu's "tangled textual trail," whereby scholars studied different iterations of a text or overlooked its multiple forms (2011: 339).[2] Analytically, Le Fanu's upcycled short stories have received more attention. Raphaël Ingelbien considers how, when upcycling for *Chronicles of Golden Friar* (1871), Le Fanu adopted the "formal and ideological features of a viable English short story collection" with "ironic distance" by not embracing the collection's locale (2013: 171). Brittany Roberts and Albert Power examine full-length novels that were upcycled from short stories: Roberts turns to "The Murdered Cousin" (1851), another earlier iteration of *Uncle Silas*, as she more broadly questions how sensation short stories and novels use "affect and intuition to different narrative ends" (2020: 42), and Power traces changes made between *Some Account of the Latter Days of the Hon. Richard Marston, of Dunoran* (1848), "The Evil Guest" (1851), and *A Lost Name* (1868) for how they embody "distinct, differentiable depictions of the same basic story of mysterious murder" (2016: 66), noting that the material was ultimately better suited to the shorter format (67). While these three unevenly examined areas of Le Fanu studies – the Anglo-Irish tradition, periodical studies, re/upcycled narratives – at times converge, they are not often brought into sustained conversation.

The present article extends scholarship on Le Fanu's upcycling practices by turning to *Checkmate* for how Le Fanu adapted and recontextualised his own fiction in response to contemporary reviews, generic trends, and the opportunities and constraints of the periodical publishing industry. Le Fanu indeed occupies an intriguing position in Victorian scholarship not only because his fiction intersects a range of genres and publication formats across the Irish and English presses, but also because he had an intimate knowledge of periodical publishing as proprietor and editor of the *DUM* between 1861 and 1869, the period during which he began upcycling his fiction. By tracing the transformation of *The Cock and Anchor* into *Checkmate* for its publication in the London periodical press, I argue that, more than commercial strategy,

[1] The first iteration, "Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess" (1838), was a historical Irish short story that Le Fanu upcycled into a contemporary novel with an English setting and characters, which Le Fanu acknowledges in *Uncle Silas*'s Postscript. Bowen mentions being unable to locate the earlier iteration (1947: 7). On allegorical readings, see, for example, Howes (1992), Kreilkamp (1998), and McCorristine (2009).

[2] See, for example, McCormack (1980 and 1993) and Tracy (2008).

Le Fanu's upcycling reveals a self-conscious process of literary reinvention. In pursuit of this argument, I first situate the author's upcycling practices within the broader contours of the Dublin and London publishing markets before turning to the specific changes Le Fanu made across iterations in response to contemporary reviews of the earlier novel. I then analyse how *Checkmate*'s plot thematises its own transformation through the figure of Walter Longcluse, a surgically altered villain who returns and re-terrorises the Arden family after a two-decade-long disappearance. This article proposes an approach to understanding Le Fanu's sensation fiction by foregrounding the interplay between narrative reinvention, authorial creativity, and the economic and critical forces that shaped Victorian periodical literature.

Literary Upcycling: Genre, Audience, and the *Dublin University Magazine*

Le Fanu's turn towards sensation in his upcycling practice has roots in his first contracts with publisher Richard Bentley (whose firm had famously serialised Dickens's *Oliver Twist* in *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1837–9) during his tenure as proprietor and editor of the *DUM*. After purchasing the *DUM* in 1861, Le Fanu began serialising his novels in the Anglo-Irish magazine before revising them for triple-decker publication in London.[3] Le Fanu's first novel during this period helped him catch the attention of Bentley, who paid Le Fanu £750 to write three novels, *Wylder's Hand* (1864), *Uncle Silas* (1864), and *Guy Deverell* (1865), under the condition they were "of an English subject and in modern times," unlike the historical Ireland-set narratives he had been producing (quoted in McCormack 1980: 140). These contracts were mutually strategic. On the one hand, Bentley only owned each copyright for two years – a rare agreement for Bentley because it offered limited benefit for his promotional work (Colclough 2006: 9-11; Gettmann 1960: 89). Additionally, while Bentley could republish the novels during the two-year period, he could not sell them for less than five shillings, protecting Le Fanu's novels from "over-exposure" and leaving open future republication opportunities (Colclough 2006: 11). On the other hand, the agreement specified that Le Fanu would first serialise each novel in the *DUM*, which Bentley hoped would help promote the sale of the triple-decker forms (10). These contracts marked a turning point in Le Fanu's career, whereby his subsequent novels follow what McCormack terms the "Bentley formula" of contemporary English settings and characters (1980: 140). They also initiated a new pattern in which Le Fanu would revisit decades-old publications and upcycle them within this formulaic framework for new readerships and market conditions.

Le Fanu's upcycling practice further reflects the broader cultural and commercial pressures Irish authors faced during the mid-nineteenth century. This practice began amid uncertainty about his writing career, as none of Le Fanu's pre-1860 historical Ireland-set novels had achieved the financial and critical success to which he aspired. While the Irish and English presses were not entirely separate, Anglo-Irish authors trying to break into the larger London market sought to have their work positively reviewed by London periodicals, which often necessitated publication by a London firm (Murphy 2011: 24). Howes affirms that Irish authors economically relied on the London publishing market, "whose demands often dictated that Anglo-Irish writers present Irish political concerns and questions in indirect and encoded form"

[3] Though few owned periodicals like Dickens and Le Fanu, many mid-Victorian authors did participate in double publication by serialising a novel in a periodical before publishing the triple-decker form, sometimes with the same firm. In Le Fanu's first career example of this strategy, he serialised *The House by the Churchyard* in the *DUM* (1861–3) before self-financing a triple-decker edition in London. Though not initially successful, Le Fanu sold 500 copies to London publisher William Tinsley, and the novel eventually sold "very well" after rebinding (Tinsley quoted in Sadleir 1969: 201).

(1992: 168). Some London publishers were indeed reluctant to publish overtly Irish fiction, and politically polarising events in Ireland like the Great Famine (1845–52) "repelled" audiences because of "the sadness of the subject" (Harriet Martineau quoted in Murphy 2011: 16).[4] Other authors, such as Anthony Trollope, also turned away from overtly Irish fiction. After *Castle Richmond* (1860), set during the famine, failed to succeed in London, Trollope reflected on its poor reception: "I am well aware now that English readers no longer like Irish stories" (1883: 135). As a result, writing and publishing overtly Irish fiction was a commercial risk that some authors and publishers were not willing to take if they wanted financial and critical success in the larger London market.

Le Fanu's dual role as owner of and contributor to the *DUM* granted him editorial advantages while attuning him to the logistical pressures of mid-Victorian periodical publishing; however, this arrangement also curtailed the opportunities his writing might otherwise have afforded him. The *DUM* was saturated with Le Fanu's novels during his tenure as proprietor and editor, and every novel that he wrote meant that the magazine did not have to pay another author. During the 1860s, every issue featured an instalment of at least one serialised novel, and Le Fanu authored at least eight himself.[5] For the magazine, this strategy was successful, and Le Fanu's first serialised novel as proprietor helped him to succeed in "reviving the local fortunes of the *DUM*, not only in terms of content but also those of advertising revenue" (McCormack 1996: 109). However, this strategy offered few benefits to Le Fanu's writing career. While he sold the volume form of each *DUM*-serialised novel to Tinsley or Bentley, he still lost personal income that he would have otherwise earned from selling them to a magazine (110). And though the magazine had a consistent readership, it offered limited exposure, leading "successful authors" to eventually turn to other outlets (102). Le Fanu thus sought publication for his fiction in other periodicals towards the end of the decade. In 1867, he serialised *A Lost Name* in *Temple Bar*, and in 1869, he serialised "Green Tea" in Dickens's *All the Year Round*. Publishing in Dickens's magazine was particularly important because its circulation of 100,000 copies yearly meant that authors earned at least one guinea per page (Cooke 2011: 208).[6] Between 1869 and 1872, Le Fanu published more than 20 short stories, novellas, and novels in periodicals other than the *DUM*, primarily London-based, many of which were upcycled iterations of previously published work.

Despite his plea against the "degrading" label, Le Fanu's turn towards sensation was doubly advantageous as he sought other outlets for his fiction: not only did its conventions appease his London publishers (who demanded contemporary English settings and characters), but the genre dominated the periodical press in the 1860s and 1870s, thereby increasing the likelihood of acceptance for publication. When examining Le Fanu's contributions to *All the Year Round*, Cooke argues he followed Dickens's "implicit requirements" and "manipulated the process of submission, ensuring the best possible result" (209). Cooke proposes that Le Fanu tailored his fiction for a specific magazine (or genre of magazine) when writing, and I argue that this strategy is further evident in his upcycling practice. The defining genre of the period, sensation fiction is marked by the exploration of social anxieties and violation of social norms through controversial domestic plots involving crime, adultery, madness, sexual

[4] James H. Murphy details the hindrances Irish authors faced when publishing in London in *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age* (2011).

[5] These contributions varied in terms of their authorial attribution: some were unsigned or signed by one of a novel's characters, some were acknowledged as "by the author of [another *DUM*-serialised novel]," and some identified Le Fanu by name.

[6] By contrast, according to its "Wellesley Periodical Introduction," the highest the *DUM* paid during Le Fanu's ownership was ten shillings and sixpence per page.

deviance, and murder. Le Fanu's turn towards the genre was a fluid and strategic response to these market conditions. By the mid-1860s, Le Fanu's published novels were primarily Gothic, a genre from which sensation has roots. Winifred Hughes indeed describes sensation as "an everyday gothic, minus the supernatural and aristocratic trappings" and "a kind of civilized melodrama, modernized and domesticated" (1980: 16). Further complementary to Bentley's formulaic instructions, author and critic Henry James identified setting as crucial to the genre because "the nearer the criminal and the detective are brought home to the reader, the more lively his 'sensation'" (1865: 594). Le Fanu did just that: the author brought the criminal and the detective "nearer" in time and space to his desired London readership.

As sensation fiction gained popularity, critics and authors struggled to reconcile its commercial appeal with prevailing standards of literary propriety, and *Checkmate*'s outlet, *Cassell's Magazine*, similarly participated in adopting generic trends for saleability amid critical controversy. Many contemporary critics, such as Margaret Oliphant, dismissed sensation fiction as lacking literary legitimacy. Oliphant explicitly condemned Le Fanu's *Guy Deverell* (1865) "on moral grounds" alongside a long list of "feverish productions" (1867: 275):

> There are a great many foolish people in the world – people, happily, too foolish to be really injured by any rubbish that they may read; and all that is best and highest in fiction, honourably maintains that character for purity which has been won by the English school of novels.
>
> (280)

Oliphant's distinction between "rubbish" sensation novels and "all that is best and highest in fiction," being the "pure[]…English school of novels," echoes Le Fanu's own sentiments about the "degrading" label.

Though Oliphant dismissed the genre's literary merits, she also acknowledged its popularity, and this tension between merit and saleability is further reflected in *Cassell's* publishing practices. At the time of *Checkmate*'s serialisation, *Cassell's* was rebranding its content to increase circulation. Established in 1853 as *Cassell's Family Paper*, the penny weekly featured educational and family-friendly content for its lower-middle-class readers. But by the mid-1860s, *Cassell's*, struggling to compete with similarly priced periodicals, increasingly turned towards "purely escapist amusement" (Patricia Anderson quoted in Delafield 2015: 89). Both Le Fanu and Collins began publishing in the periodical in 1869, becoming "part of the penny weekly's experiment to redefine its fictional content whilst maintaining the overall appeal to lower-middle class respectability" (43).[7] The periodical's circulation increased after serialising its first sensation novel, Collins's *Man and Wife* (1869), under this rebranding (148). However, Charles Reade's *A Terrible Temptation* (1871), which features extramarital relations and a courtesan, was unpopular amongst *Cassell's* readers. Reade anticipated this fallout, writing in a journal entry that he feared would "offend the mothers of families" and questioned whether it would be published (quoted in Fantina 2010: 32). The magazine would serialise another Collins novel, *Poor Miss Finch* (1871–2), before resuming more family-focused supporting features (Delafield 2015: 90). A revealing parallel thus reverberates between *Cassell's* and Le Fanu: just as the periodical was undergoing extensive rebranding and featuring sensation fiction to fare better on the literary market, Le Fanu was turning to sensation fiction as a means of upcycling his plots, hoping that *Checkmate* would prove more successful than its previous iterations.

[7] Le Fanu serialised "A Strange Adventure in the Life of Miss Laura Mildmay" (1869) in *Cassell's* prior to *Checkmate*.

Strategic Revision: *The Cock and Anchor*, Early Criticism, and *Checkmate*

Checkmate's publishing history is among the most complex in Le Fanu's oeuvre. *The Cock and Anchor*, from which *Checkmate* borrows its primary plot, was published unsigned in 1845 in Ireland in three volumes by William Curry, Junior & Co. In 1851, the novel was republished as *Sir Henry Ashwoode, the Forger: A Chronicle of Old Dublin City* by Parry of London, for which sheets from a second one-volume edition of *The Cock and Anchor* were used (McCormack 1993: 163). *Checkmate*'s weekly serialisation in *Cassell's* (illustrated by Townley Greene) followed, before its triple-decker publication by Hurst and Blackett (sans illustrations). Another iteration, published posthumously in 1873 and titled *Morley Court: Being a Chronicle of Old Dublin City*, was published as Le Fanu's final contribution to Chapman and Hall's Select Library of Fiction reprint series.[8] Alongside six of his other novels, Le Fanu proposed *The Cock and Anchor* for this series of cheap one-volume novels that cost two shillings and, in a letter dated 30 May 1868, told the publishers that he would first "read" the novel (Colclough 2006: 6). Although *Morley Court* was published in 1873, a few years after *Checkmate*'s serialisation commenced in the 6 August 1870 issue of *Cassell's*, Le Fanu's 1868 letter reveals that he had been preparing *Morley Court* years prior. This overlapping timeline suggests that Le Fanu began working on the upcycled *Checkmate* while revising *The Cock and Anchor* for the Select Library of Fiction.

Before I further investigate the specifics of *Checkmate* and how Le Fanu adapted *The Cock and Anchor*'s plot, I will provide a quick summary of the novel to compare the changes across iterations. Set in London, siblings Alice and Richard Arden live with their uncle David at Mortlake Hall, where their uncle Henry was murdered two decades prior. The murderer, Yelland Mace, escaped conviction and disappeared. Walter Longcluse, the family's close but mysterious friend, courts Alice, and though he is initially supportive of the match, Richard mysteriously warns her against him. Following the death of their father (Sir Reginald), Richard's gambling debts leave him vulnerable to Longcluse's blackmail as Longcluse attempts to coerce Alice into marriage. Though generally well-received by the family, Longcluse's unsettling appearance and presence provoke unease in older characters, including the Ardens' housekeeper, Martha. David's own suspicions prompt him to travel to Paris, where surgeon Emmanuel Vanboeren reveals that Longcluse is, in fact, Mace. The villain – an estranged son of David, Sir Reginald, and Henry's illegitimate brother (Edwin Raikes) – had undergone extensive reconstructive surgery to assume a new identity. Back in London, with Richard's reluctant assistance, Longcluse imprisons Alice. She eventually escapes with the help of her maid and reunites with David, who returns in time to intercept Longcluse with the police. The novel ends with Longcluse's suicide, Richard's death, and Alice's marriage to Vivian Darnley.

Beyond the aforementioned change in setting from early eighteenth-century Dublin to contemporary London that also removes the novel's underlying religious (Catholic and Protestant) and political (Jacobite and ruling aristocracy) tensions, two considerable narrative revisions differentiate *Checkmate* from its earlier iteration. It is important to note here that while *Checkmate* largely maintains *The Cock and Anchor*'s primary action – Richard's gambling debts are used as blackmail, prompting him to force his sister to marry Longcluse –

[8] Another posthumous iteration was illustrated and published by Le Fanu's son, Brinsley, in 1895. In his prefatory note, Brinsley acknowledges the novel's evolving forms, writing that he kept his father's "many alterations" in choosing to republish the prose of *Morley Court* despite reverting to the original title (1895: iii).

the characters have been renamed. In *The Cock and Anchor*, the siblings are Mary and Henry Ashwoode, and the villain is Nicholas Blarden.[9] The first major revision to the plot concerns its ending: while Mary successfully escapes from Blarden, she ultimately succumbs to her grief and dies. The second revision concerns *Checkmate*'s sensational twist: Mace's surgical transformation into Longcluse was a new addition to the plot. To the Ashwoodes, Blarden is a stranger.

Contemporary reviews of *The Cock and Anchor* were limited because the Dublin publishing industry and reading public were smaller than those of London, and Le Fanu's earlier novels did not garner significant attention outside of Ireland. This point is important because the most in-depth criticism on *The Cock and Anchor* was a 27-page review published in the *DUM*, and Le Fanu was already a regular contributor to the magazine by this time. Nonetheless, *The Cock and Anchor* was unsigned, and the critic, John Francis Waller, stated that they have "neither the right nor desire to penetrate the incognito of the author" but "presume that he is an Irishman" (1845: 624). Whether or not Waller knew who authored the novel at the time of this review (Le Fanu's established relationship with the magazine makes complete uncertainty improbable), the *DUM*'s positive assessment reflects opinions shared in shorter newspaper reviews. For example, in a London review printed in the *Metropolitan Magazine*, the reviewer assesses the novel as "a highly credible production" and "written with considerable ability" (1845: 261). In Ireland, the *Belfast News-Letter* described the "truly Irish" novel as "one of the best…we have read for a lengthened period" ("Literary Notice" 1845: 4), and the *Freeman's Journal* agrees that the novel's publishers "issued forth a novel in three volumes in a style not exceeded by the best of the London press" ("Literature" 1845: 3).

Le Fanu's changes to *The Cock and Anchor*'s plot for *Checkmate* suggest he was responsive to reviews of the 1845 novel. Although critics praised the novel's "truly Irish" nature, Le Fanu transferred the early eighteenth-century Dublin setting to contemporary London. This change aligns with Bentley's formulaic guidance, which Le Fanu had already been following for more than half a decade. Le Fanu's changes to the novel's ending, however, warrant further investigation. In otherwise positive reviews of the 1845 novel, contemporary critics expressed dissatisfaction with Mary's death despite her successful escape from Blarden, exemplified in this review from *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*: "Nor is any relief found in a conclusion happy for the virtuous characters. The wicked are fearfully punished on earth; but the good are sent to find their reward in heaven" ("New Novels" 1845: 453). Waller shared similar sentiments in the *DUM*:

> We have gloomy pictures of human life enough around us. It is some consolation…to dream that the selfish are not always the successful, and the generous are not always dupes. Sure we are that the novel which, if you will, cheats men into such belief, will be more sure of acceptance from the majority of men, than the truest picture of gloom that can be drawn.
>
> (1845: 624-5)

Here, Waller argued that an ending in which the "generous" triumph would be "sure of acceptance from the majority of men." He continued to directly call for this optimistic ending, as he "asked from the author a more cheerful view of human affairs" (625). More than two decades later, *Checkmate* indeed delivers on this request. The upcycled novel rewrites Mary's fate, ending instead with Longcluse's and Richard's deaths and offering a clearer moral resolution that fulfils the emotional expectations voiced by early reviewers.

[9] McCormack notes that "in changing [Mary Ashwoode's] family name to Arden she has reintroduced (or all but devoured) all but the first two letters of Blarden's" (McCormack 1993: 164).

Though Le Fanu rewrote Mary's fate, he retained her escape from Blarden, further evidence of his attentiveness to reviews of the earlier novel. In *Checkmate*, Alice's escape from Longcluse is strikingly like that of her earlier counterpart. In both novels, Blarden/Longcluse hires a maid (Flora in *The Cock and Anchor* and Phœbe in *Checkmate*) to watch his victim, but Flora/Phœbe betrays Blarden/Longcluse to help Mary/Alice escape. In *The Cock and Anchor*, the young women narrowly avoid detection:

> Mary Ashwoode awaited [Flora's] approach, concealed in a small recess or niche in the wall, shrined like an image in the narrow enclosure of carved oak, not daring to stir, and with a heart throbbing as though it would burst...she stepped falteringly from her place of concealment, and took the hand of her conductress in a grasp cold as that of death itself…They had descended about half-way when a loud and violent ringing from the bell of the chamber where Chancey was seated, made their very hearts bound with terror…In this dreadful extremity her presence of mind did not forsake Flora Guy: disengaging her hand from that of her terrified mistress, she tripped lightly down the stairs to meet the person who was approaching.
>
> (1845: 177-8)

A near-identical scene appears in *Checkmate*:

> Here in that flood of white light stood Alice Arden, like a statue of horror. [Phœbe], without saying a word, takes her by the cold hand, and leads her quickly down to the arch that opens on the hall. Just as they reached this point, the door of the room…occupied by Mr. Boult, who did duty as porter, opened, and stepping out with a candle in his hand, he called in a savage tone – "What's the row?" Phœbe pushed Alice's hand in the direction of the passage that leads to the housekeeper's room, which hint she noiselessly took, and entered that corridor; Phœbe advanced to answer his challenge.
>
> (Le Fanu 25 February,1871: 467)

These passages illustrate an identical sequence, with the heroine concealing herself, fleeing with her maid, narrowly escaping detection, and, once again, being saved by her maid. In addition to this parallel, and despite the change in genre, the language is consistent across iterations. Both heroines have "cold" grasps and are described through simile: Mary is "shrined like an image in the narrow enclosure of carved oak," while Alice is "like a statue of horror." Le Fanu would further reintroduce language from *The Cock and Anchor* when revising *Checkmate*'s serialised form for its triple-decker publication: "For a moment the young lady stands irresolute. Her presence of mind returns. She noiselessly takes the hint, and enters the corridor" ([1871] 1898: 303). The *DUM*'s review of the 1845 novel praised this scene as "one of the most thrilling…ever read" (1845: 610). Whether or not Waller's review directly influenced the revision, Le Fanu – presumably aware of this review due to his affiliation with the *DUM* – chose to amend the gloomy ending, maintaining the thrilling escape scene but rewriting Mary's death as Alice's survival, illustrating Le Fanu's strategic balance between preserving critically praised scenes while rewriting the novel's conclusion for a more commercially viable narrative.

"Reading" Below the Surface: Surgical Revision and the Persistence of Past Forms

Mace's resurfacing as Longcluse, prompting the long-overdue resolution of his past crime, is not thematically unique to *Checkmate*. As others have noted, Le Fanu's oeuvre frequently features characters who assume new identities and later resurface. In *Carmilla*, for instance, the titular vampire frequents the same locations under new aliases to prey on new generations,

and in *The House by the Churchyard*, a murderer fakes his death and returns years later, as does the son of a falsely accused man, who seeks to clear his father's name.[10] Unsolved crimes of past decades are often repeated in the present, which, in turn, solves the original crime: in *Uncle Silas*, Maud's witnessing of her titular uncle murdering her governess reveals his culpability in a similar crime for which he was previously acquitted. These thematic consistencies are perhaps most pronounced in *Checkmate*, itself a story that has resurfaced decades after its initial publication and thematises its own publication history. The novel repeatedly draws thematic and structural attention to physical appearances, disguise, and the eventual breakdown of constructed identities. These motifs are most evident in the character of Walter Longcluse, whose surgically altered face allows him to escape legal conviction for a past crime by re-entering society under a new identity. But these motifs also function at a metatextual level: just as Longcluse's surgically altered identity retains traces of his past, *Checkmate* alludes to its origins in *The Cock and Anchor*. In doing so, the novel allegorically reflects on its own status as an upcycled text, drawing attention to the processes of adaptation and revision that can influence literary production within the conditions of the Victorian publishing industry.

This interplay between disguises and their breakdown is first apparent in *Checkmate*'s second chapter, which introduces the uncanny, unsettling persistence of the past at the very moment Longcluse enters Mortlake Hall and is met by Martha, the Arden family's housekeeper.[11] Although she does not recognise him, Martha is viscerally unsettled by Longcluse's voice:

> At sound of that voice, with a vague and terrible recognition, the housekeeper turned with a start towards the door, expecting, you'd have fancied from her face, the entrance of a ghost. There was a tremble in the voice with which she cried, "Lord! What's that?" a tremble in the hand extended towards the door, and a shake also in the pale frowning face, from which shone her glassy eyes.
>
> (Le Fanu 6 August, 1870: 4)

Recognising Mace's voice (having witnessed him murder Henry decades earlier) but seeing Longcluse's face, she concludes that the two are different men. In addition to Martha's bodily reaction to Longcluse's voice – from her "start towards the door" to her "tremble" and "shake" – her response is presented in supernatural terms.[12] To Martha, Longcluse appears more like a spectral embodiment, or "ghost," from the family's past, than a living person. Martha's uncanny "terrible recognition" is a kind of sensory dissonance, where one part of a character (their voice) returns, even as another (their face) is unrecognisable. The disconnect between what Martha sees and what she feels sets the tone for how Longcluse's presence will disturb other characters as the novel progresses.

This scene further introduces the novel's preoccupation with the interpretive act of "reading" appearances and the instability of constructed identity. In what McCormack refers to as a "synchronized double inspection of manufactured faces" (1993: 164), Martha inspects Longcluse while Longcluse inspects a portrait of Sir Thomas Arden. The narration alternates between the characters: Martha looks "hard" at Longcluse as she recovers from her visceral reaction (Le Fanu 6 August, 1870: 5), while Longcluse remarks that the portrait would be deserving of "rank among his finest portraits," but "the canvas is perfectly rotten, and the

[10] Sage, for one, claims that Le Fanu "has a habit of layering and back-dating his texts which sometimes gives them a double or triple sense of time" (2004: 3).

[11] David later offers a mispronunciation of the word "uncanny" to describe Longcluse: "So I say it must be something that's no' canny, as you used to say" (Le Fanu 1 October, 1870: 130-1).

[12] Martha's bodily reaction recalls the "preaching to the nerves" that contemporary critics like Henry Longueville Mansel defined as stereotypical of the sensation genre (1863: 482).

paint…is ready to flake off" (4). These alternating focalisations demonstrate how appearances are "read" in the novel. For Martha, the external appearance (Longcluse's face) cannot replace the internal, remembered truth (Mace's voice); for Longcluse, the deteriorating canvas signals the fragility of his surgically altered appearance, which cannot (as Martha's reaction confirms) wholly conceal his "rotten" inner self. This "reading" foreshadows that Longcluse's disguise will similarly break down over the course of the novel: the "paint" that hides his similarly "rotten" interior will soon "flake off" and reveal what is hidden beneath. The characters' mental processes are thus represented through this rhythmic juxtaposition: Martha is overwhelmed by an uncanny recognition, and Longcluse is invested in concealing his identity.

This thematic interest in how characters (mis)perceive or conceal appearances is further developed by the narrator's aside that immediately precedes the rhythmic juxtaposition. As Longcluse stands "for a moment in profound reverie," the third-person omniscient narrator remarks that "the secrecy of thought is a pleasant privilege to the thinker…If each man's forehead could become transparent, and the light of his spirit shine through…how that magic lantern might appal good easy people!" (3). A "magic lantern" functions through an *internal* mechanism, where a light source shines on a plate, projecting an *external* image on a screen. This metaphor reinforces the novel's obsession with illusions: through this apparatus, the human mind is reimagined as capable of projecting its thoughts onto a visible screen. The concept that someone's "spirit" might "shine through" their forehead is physically grotesque, but more importantly, it calls attention to the boundary between what characters outwardly express and what they internally conceal. Longcluse exemplifies this problem. He deliberately (and surgically) conceals his identity, and the novel's sensational twist depends on the revelation of his "true self" despite his disguise. The narration furthers this concealment by alluding to but withholding the content of Longcluse's "appalling" thoughts, leaving them to the reader's own imagination. In this aside, the "magic lantern" not only foreshadows the revelation of Longcluse's identity but also reflects *Checkmate*'s own strategy of projecting an upcycled image over the older content of *The Cock and Anchor*. Longcluse's surgery is indeed a new plot development in this iteration of the story, reinforcing that even though both character and text have been transformed, their past forms persist.

The scene in which Longcluse's identity is revealed formally and thematically mirrors the scene in which he was introduced. In the chapter aptly titled "Resurrections," and leading to the revelation that Longcluse is, in fact, Mace, the surgeon Vanboeren directs David's attention to various paintings, commenting on the "ease and grace of the lady in the sac" and the "animation and elegance of that dancing boy" (Le Fanu 11 February, 1871: 435). However, David is interested in inspecting Vanboeren's appearance. He notes his "obscurity" and "mean and cunning wrinkles," remarking that the "peculiar lines between [his] contracted brows gave a character of ferocity to [his] forbidding and sensual face" (435). Here, Vanboeren distracts from his own dubious intentions as he directs attention to the paintings, just as Longcluse distracted from his "true self" by directing attention to Sir Thomas Arden's portrait at the beginning of the novel. David considers how Vanboeren's appearance was different from what he had expected, as he "had pictured him in imagination a tall old man with classic features, and manners courteous and somewhat stately" (434). The narration reflects on the disparity between imagined and actual appearance:

> We do not fabricate such images; they rise 'like exhalations' from a few scattered data, and present themselves spontaneously. It is this self-creation that invests them with so much reality in our imaginations, and subjects us to so odd a surprise when the original turns out quite unlike the portrait with which we have been amusing ourselves.
>
> (434)

By using the word "portrait," the narrative not only echoes Longcluse's introduction but also emphasises the recurrence of, and obsession with, visual perception and how constructed appearances eventually break down. For other characters, as well as readers, leading to this revelation, Longcluse's disguise deteriorates over the course of the novel as he steadily commits more heinous acts and is ultimately revealed to still be his "original" self, Mace. Like the portrait of Sir Thomas Arden, Longcluse's appearance breaks down, revealing the "rotten" interior that had been hidden. The revelation of Longcluse's surgical alteration is indeed "so odd a surprise," and the "original" text indeed "turns out quite unlike the portrait with which we have been amusing ourselves."

This same chapter further demonstrates that visual appearances alone do not provide reliable proof of identity. To prove Longcluse is Mace, Vanboeren produces plaster masks of his two faces, made before and after his surgery. David's ability to interpret these masks is limited, however, as he is told the masks are insufficient as proof to implicate Longcluse/ Mace without "the witness to explain them" (Le Fanu 18 February, 1871: 451). In other words, visual evidence in the novel is not immediately understandable on its own, and the surgery is so sensational that even plaster cast reproductions of a person's face require context and explanation. Vanboeren's intentions are revealed when he attempts to extort £10,000 from David in exchange for the evidence and his testimony. When Vanboeren destroys the plaster masks only to later reveal that they were just copies and the originals still exist (and are available to David if he pays), the novel reinforces its obsession with reproduction and deceit.

The novel's metatextual connection between disguise and authorship is fully realised when the specifics of how Mace transformed into Longcluse are explained. Vanboeren recounts the details of the procedure to David:

> It was a severe operation…I opened the skin with a single straight cut from under the lachrymal gland to the nostril, and one underneath meeting it…Then I drew back the skin over the bridge, and then I operated on the bone and cartilage, cutting them and the muscle at the extremity down to a level with the line of the face, and drew the flap of skin back, cutting it to meet the line of the skin of the cheek.
>
> (450)

He continues to describe how he altered Mace's eyebrows, lips, chin, jaw, and teeth. The specific and anatomical language serves two purposes. First, it lends credibility to the implausible notion that someone could be rendered physically unrecognisable through surgery.[13] Second, and more importantly, it reveals the labour inherent in the construction of identity. Vanboeren, assuming the role of creator, proclaims that "these are the features of Yelland Mace as I sent him into the world with the name of Herr Longcluse!" (450). Mace's body becomes a text that is cut and remade, and the surgical descriptions echo that of creation. As Vanboeren cuts and transforms Mace's face, so too does Le Fanu cut and transform *The Cock and Anchor*'s plot, conforming to Bentley's prescriptive formulaic structure and the mid-Victorian market demands for sensation fiction. Mace's new name is further revealing in this regard. "Cluse" evokes the Latin "clūsa," meaning to confine or to close (*Dictionary of Old English* 2018). While Mace's return as Longcluse closes Henry's murder case, "recluse" also reverberates parallels between Mace, who disappeared for more than two decades before his

[13] For an overview of cosmetic practices in the nineteenth century, see Mazzola and Foss (2023).

return to the Arden family as Longcluse, and Le Fanu, who returned to this plot after the same period of time.[14]

The revelation that Mace's surgical transformation into Longcluse occurred on 15 October 1844 holds metatextual significance: 1844 is the same year Le Fanu likely worked on *The Cock and Anchor* for its April 1845 publication. Although *Checkmate* was not composed until decades later, 1844 retroactively links Mace's physical transformation with Le Fanu's earlier narrative, aligning bodily reconstruction with textual composition and gesturing towards the novel's own origins. Mace/Longcluse's reappearance, like the reappearance of *The Cock and Anchor* in sensationalised form, dramatises how identities (personal or textual) can be repurposed. But the resurrection of the original date suggests that such transformations are never complete, and the "original" persists beneath the revision. This intersection of narrative and publication history suggests that, beyond a sensation novel of constructed identity, *Checkmate* reflects on what it means to revise a text in response to changing publishing trends. In this sense, the struggle "between impulses of concealment and self-revelation" dramatised in the plot may also mirror Le Fanu's own creative process, as James Walton argues, with David and Longcluse serving as artistic doubles representing the "divided" author's competing roles as concealer and exposer (2007: 145). *Checkmate* not only dramatises the instability of personal identity but also foregrounds the instability of literary authorship and originality, exposing how narratives – whether criminal or textual – are subject to reinterpretation and recontextualisation.

Le Fanu's upcycling of *The Cock and Anchor* for *Checkmate* was more than just a commercial strategy. It constituted a reflective and adaptive approach to authorship that was shaped by critical reception, contractual obligations, and evolving literary trends. From Bentley's formulaic instructions to the formal demands of sensation fiction and serial publication, Le Fanu negotiated a complex set of pressures that informed how, why, and to what extent his earlier historical Ireland-set novel was transformed into an English sensation novel. But rather than transposing setting and character names, the author restructured the novel's ending to satisfy the expectations voiced by his early critics while retaining scenes that had been praised. During this process, he developed a thematic interest in disguise and the instability of identity, culminating in the surgical transformation of Mace into Longcluse, which reflects the textual transformation of the novel. The 1870s iteration was a familiar structure upcycled with the generic conventions of sensation fiction, but traces of the original 1845 work persist, and the underlying narrative periodically reveals its origins, just as Mace's voice breaks through the mask of his new identity. By making this process thematically central to the narrative, *Checkmate* turns the tropes of sensation fiction inward, using them to reflect on the conditions and consequences of literary reinvention.

Recognising upcycling as a deliberate creative strategy foregrounds Le Fanu's position as a writer who is deeply attuned to questions of audience and genre across the Irish and English periodical presses. Beyond *Checkmate*, this approach offers a critical vocabulary for reading the broader Le Fanu corpus, in which narratives are repeatedly edited or rewritten, reflecting evolving markets and cultural concerns. Moreover, it holds potential for wider application across Victorian literature: other authors, such as Dickens, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Ellen Wood, also revised and republished their fiction. Just as Longcluse's transformation cannot fully obscure his past as Mace, Le Fanu's upcycled novels carry the traces of their origins beneath transformed surfaces. By tracing these resurfaced narratives, we gain a more

[14] Alternatively, Claudio Di Vaio draws a parallel between "Longcluse" and "long confinement," referring to pregnancy "confinement." Di Vaio suggests that Mace needed to be "reborn" as Longcluse, with the help of "a very unusual midwife" (Vanboeren) to return to the Arden family (2015: 60).

comprehensive understanding of how texts and authors were reshaped in response to the competitive demands of Victorian periodical publishing.

Works Cited

Bowen, Elizabeth. 1947. "Introduction" to *Uncle Silas*, by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 7-23. London: The Cresset Press.

Dictionary of Old English: A to I, edited by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, and Antonette diPaolo Healey, *et al*. 2018. Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project.

Colclough, Stephen. 2006. "J. Sheridan Le Fanu and the 'Select Library of Fiction': Evidence from Four Previously Unpublished Letters." *Publishing History,* 60: 5-20.

Cooke, Simon. 2011. "'A Regular Contributor': Le Fanu's Short Stories, *All the Year Round*, and the Influence of Dickens." In *Reflections in a Glass Darkly: Essays on J. Sheridan Le Fanu,* edited by Gary William Crawford, Jim Rockhill, and Brian J. Showers, 206-22. New York: Hippocampus Press.

Delafield, Catherine. 2015. *Serialization and the Novel in Mid-Victorian Magazines*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Dempsey, Aoife Mary. 2022. *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Di Vaio, Claudio. 2015. *Unburying the Past: The Hermeneutics of Truth in Le Fanu's Novels*. New York: Gothic Press.

Fantina, Richard. 2010. *Victorian Sensational Fiction: The Daring Work of Charles Reade*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gettmann, Royal A. 1960. *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haslam, Richard. 2011. "Theory, Empiricism, and 'Providential Hermeneutics': Reading and Misreading Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and 'Schalken the Painter.'" *Papers on Language and Literature,* 47.4: 339-62.

Howes, Majorie Elizabeth. 1992. "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature,* 47.2: 164-86. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2933635

Hughes, Winifred. 1980. *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ingelbien, Raphaël. 2013. "Re-Cycling Irish Short Fiction as English Narratives of Community: J. S. Le Fanu's *Chronicles of Golden Friars* (1871)." *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice,* 3.2: 161-73. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/fict.3.2.161_1

James, Henry. 1865. "Miss Braddon." *The Nation,* 1.9: 593-4.

Kreilkamp, Vera. 1998. *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Le Fanu, Brinsley Sheridan. 1895. "Note" to *The Cock and Anchor*, by J. Sheridan Le Fanu. London: Downey & Co.

Le Fanu, J. Sheridan. 1845. Vol. 3 of *The Cock and Anchor.* Dublin: William Curry, Junior & Co.

Le Fanu, J. Sheridan. 1864. "A Postscript" to *Uncle Silas and Maud Ruthyn: A Story of Bartram-Haugh*. *Dublin University Magazine,* 64.384: 679-80.

Le Fanu, J. Sheridan. 1870–1. *Checkmate*. *Cassell's Magazine*, 2 (6 August 1870 – 25 February 1871)

Le Fanu, J. Sheridan. [1871] 1898. *Checkmate*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited. [First published by London: Hurst and Blackett.]

"Literary Notice." 1845. *Belfast News-Letter* (25 April): 4.

"Literature." 1845. *Freeman's Journal* (8 May): 3.

Mansel, Henry Longueville. 1863. "Sensation Novels." *Quarterly Review*, 113 (April): 481-514.

Mazzola, Riccardo F., and Catherine B. Foss. 2023. *Plastic Surgery: An Illustrated History*. Cham: Springer Cham.

McCormack, W. J. 1980. *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCormack, W. J. 1993. *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History Through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats, and Bowen.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

McCormack, W. J. 1996. "'Never put your name to an anonymous letter': Serial Reading in the 'Dublin University Magazine,' 1861 to 1869." *The Yearbook of English Studies,* 26: 100-15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/3508649

McCorristine, Shane. 2009. "Ghost Hands, Hands of Glory, and Manumission in the Fiction of Sheridan Le Fanu." *Irish Studies Review*, 17.3: 275-95. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09670880903115504

Murphy, James H. 2011. *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

"New Novels." 1845. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,* 12.139 (July): 449-53.

"Notices of New Works: *The Cock and Anchor*." 1845. *The Metropolitan Magazine,* 43.170: 261.

Oliphant, Margaret. 1867. "Novels." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 102.623 (1867): 255–80.

Power, Albert. 2016. "Richard Marston of Dunoran: A Tragedy across Three Decades." In *"Inspiring a Mysterious Terror": 200 Years of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, edited by Jarlath Killeen and Valeria Cavalli, 47-68. Oxford, Bern and Berlin: Peter Lang.

Roberts, Brittany. 2020. "Plotting Sensation Stories: Affect and Intuition in Short Sensation Fiction." *Victorian Popular Fictions,* 2.2: 41-58. DOI: https://doi.org/10.46911/HERO5669

Sadleir, Michael. 1969. *XIX Century Fiction, a Bibliographical Record Based on His Own Collection*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers.

Sage, Victor. 2004. *Le Fanu's Gothic: The Rhetoric of Darkness*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tilley, Elizabeth. 2014. "J. S. Le Fanu, Gothic, and the Irish Periodical." In *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760-1890*, edited by Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie, 130-46. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tracy, Robert. 2008. Introduction to *In a Glass Darkly*, by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, vii-xxviii. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (First published in 1872 by London: Richard Bentley & Son.)

Trollope, Anthony. 1883. *Autobiography of Anthony Trollope.* Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons.

[Waller, John Francis]. 1845. "*The Cock and Anchor*." *The Dublin University Magazine,* 26.155: 607-25.

Walton, James. 2007. *Vision and Vacancy: The Fictions of Le Fanu*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

"Wellesley Periodical Introduction: *The Dublin University Magazine*, 1833–1877 and the *University Magazine*, 1878–1880." 1966. *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*. C19: The Nineteenth Century Index.