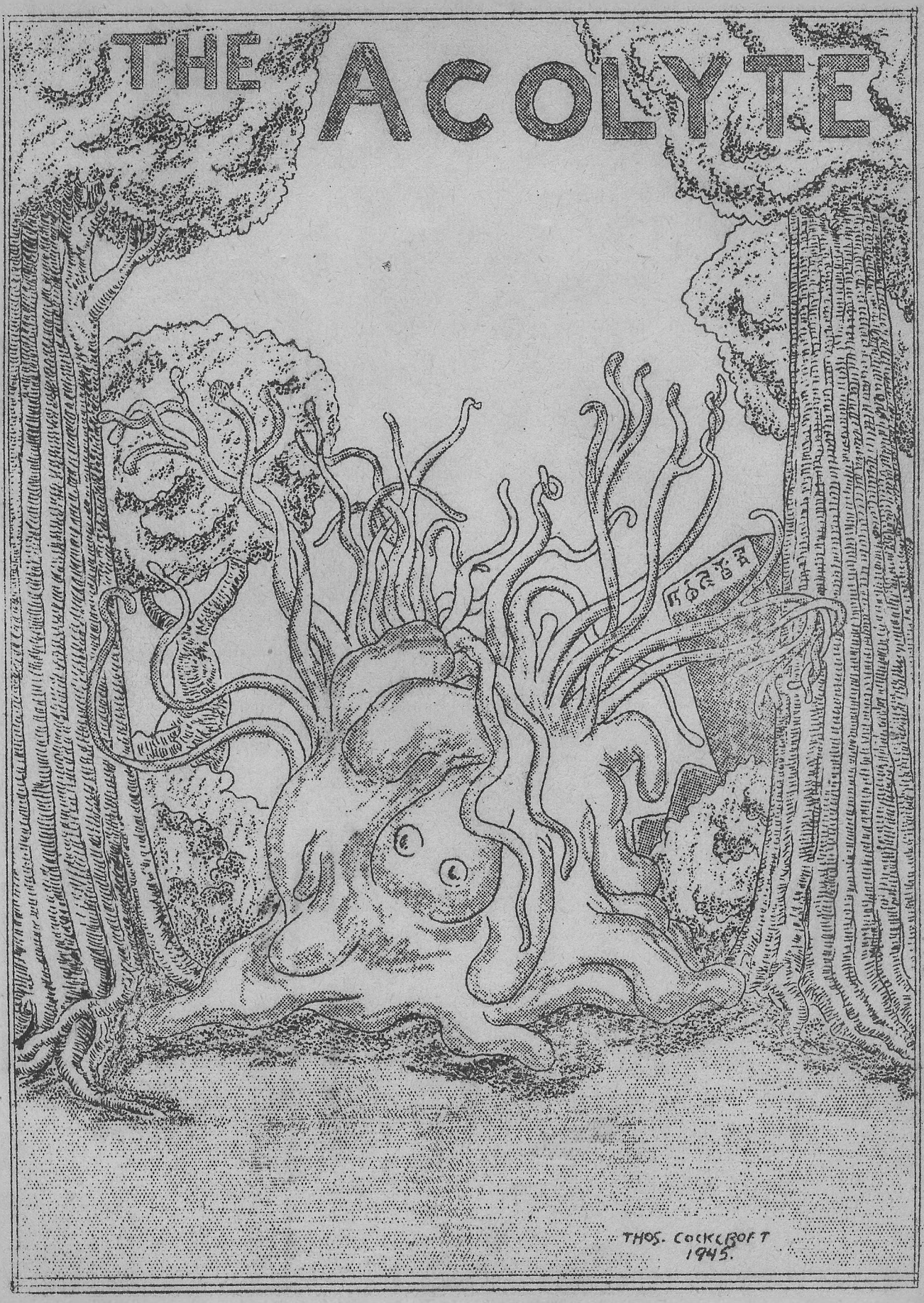
THE ACOLYTE



THE ACOLYTE

AN AMATEUR MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENTIFICTION

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Cover:

VENERIAN NAUTCH GIRL — Thomas G. L. Cockroft

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* For speediest attention, all communications dealing with subscriptions, changes of address, exchanges, and submissions of material should be sent directly to Francis T. Laney, who handles this phase of The Acolyte. *

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EDITORIALLY SPEAKING

AN APOLOGY We are sincerely sorry for the stupid mistake which failed to give Burnham Eaton a by-line for the poem "Dark Era" on page 13 of the last issue. Blame Laney for this one.

---ooOoo---

THE PERDUE HISTORY In our last editorial, you may remember, we asked for reader reaction on this colossal project. We regret to say that, of those mentioning it at all, an overwhelming majority regard it with a jaundiced eye. Only two or three readers approved of further installments, while at least twenty emphasized their desire to see no more of it. So be it. Negotiations are afoot with Forrest J Ackerman, who has indicated a wish to consider serialising the tabulation in his magazine Voice of the Imagi-Nation. In the event that the balance of the history sees publication here, we

shall inform you. In the meantime, we are quite willing to publish articles based on Mr. Perdue's cards. If anyone wishes to attempt such a series, he is urged to write to Elmer Perdue, 2020 South 8th Ave., Los Angeles, and see if he can make arrangements for a collaboration.

-oOo-

MONTAGUE AND SAMUEL. It took these two doughty characters over a year to turn out the essay which comprises nearly all of this issue of The Acolyte, but I believe it was well worth the wait. My editorial instincts, such as they are, screamed loudly for a serialization, which author Russell objected to vehemently. It is perhaps regrettable that so much other material had to be held over, and it is certain that this issue is very poorly balanced. Nevertheless, now it is all on the stencil, I'm really glad to publish it in one chunk. If any article or study coming nearer to deserving the appellation "definitive" has yet appeared in the fan press, I have not seen it. ---ftl.

-oOo-

MATERIAL ON HAND. An enumeration of our backlog at the moment would be far too long for available space. Certain to appear in the next issue is a long article on the late Stanley Weinbaum and his writings together with a detailed bibliography by Sam Moskowitz. We have sufficient concrete evidence on shylock fantasy dealers to drag at least two names through the mill. We can hardly wait. We almost ran "Banquets for Bookworms" this time, since we not only had these exposes but reviews of several important new books, but finally decided that Tucker's article would be of more immediate use to collectors. We have two outstanding stories by simon-pure amateurs: Burton Crane and Charles Burbee. Tom Cockroft, the New Zealand fan whom we expect to see develope into a major contributor, has an article on Lovecraft which astoundingly enough developes several entirely new slants. We have a series contemplated by Boland that promises to develope into our most interesting feature. But why go on? Enough material is on hand at the moment to make about an issue and a half. If you want to see this material, we suggest you examine the space to the right of this sentence. If a rubber-stamped "OCT 15" appears therein, it means that your subscription has something in common with the Great Carrier Pigeon.

-oOo-

MATERIAL WANTED. The preceding paragraph is not to be interpreted as meaning that we don't need and want more material. We don't want to have to start reprinting stuff from former issues!

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WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE ACOLYTE? This seems as good a place as any for me to say that I'm completely dissatisfied with The Acolyte as it now stands, and really need your help in diagnosing it. At the end of three years of publication, this magazine should be getting in the groove. I'm inclined to feel that it's just in a rut. The magazine, it seems to me, is treating of a most fascinating subject--fantasy--in a most unfascinating manner. We have had some extremely fine contributions, but they seem to me lost in a morass of stuffiness. Most adult fantasy fans are extremely interested, interesting people whose interests are by no means confined to fantasy. The Acolyte has fallen far short of what a fantasy magazine should be to interest these people, and I frankly am at a loss to put my finger on the trouble. Is it the format-less format? The lack of humor? The preoccupation with "literary criticism"? The next few issues are going to be experimental. You might as well be prepared for it, because we are going to try all sorts of innovations, many of which are certain to be duds. But if you have any suggestions, please make them. This magazine is either going to get out of the rut, or it is going to stop.

FTL

IRONY and HORROR:

The ART of M.R.JAMES

by Samuel D. Russel

-oOo-

With the publication in 1944 of the Best Ghost Stories of M. R. James (1) by Tower Books, the work of the man who is generally acknowledged to be the finest modern writer in this genre has at last achieved popular circulation. His manner of writing has had a strong and lasting influence on recent supernatural fiction, and many writers during the last twenty years have attempted, with greater or lesser success, to follow his technique; but none have consistently equaled his effectiveness. Perhaps, then, it is time to examine and analyze his fiction thoroughly, with a view to describing his methods and trying to answer the oft-raised admiring cry of his reviewers, "How does James do it?" To this end it will be best to describe first the man himself, then the content of his stories, and finally their form and style.

Montague Rhodes James was born in Enlgand on August 1, 1862, one of the three sons of the Rev. Herbert James, who in 1865 became the curate of the village of Livermere in Suffolk, and until the father's death in 1909 the family lived in the Rectory on the edge of the great park surrounding Livermere Hall. Young Monty was a book-lover as early as six, and with the encouragement of his father he educated himself so well that he was not sent to school until he was eleven. At Temple Grove school he was a gentle, lanky, spectacled lad who was quite popular among his classmates but loved reading and scholarship above all else. Like his father, he attended Eton and later King's College, Cambridge University, where, despite considerable physical strength, his nearsightedness prevented him from participating in games, and where he became fascinated by the byways in Latin, Greek, and the Apocrypha, and won several prizes and scholarships. During his last year in college he was a half-term master at Eton, and the following year (1887) he participated in archaeological excavations in Cyprus, but the antiquarian lure of medieval manuscripts and apocryphal literature proved even stronger than classical archaeology. Upon his return he was elected to a fellowship at King's and became Assistant Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, where he began his long career of cataloging medieval manuscripts. In 1893 he became director of the museum and Dean of King's College, where he stayed for twelve congenial years; having no lecturing and little business work to do, he was free to devote his time to scholarship, so that in his early thirties he already ranked third or fourth among European savants in the knowledge of manuscripts.

Probably what helped him most to attain this intellectual eminence was his vast and retentive memory, universal in scope and unerring in application, which steadily improved with the years and speeded his scholarly work immensely. Though placid and unhurried at all times, he never wasted a spare moment but worked constantly and unobtrusively during odd minutes, writing on any scraps of paper that were handy. His clear and well-directed mind needed no inspiration or "warming up" to begin work, and moved swiftly from one subject to another without strain in the transition. Nothing was beyond or beneath the range of his catholic interests, for he never concerned himself with whether a thing was worth knowing; to him all knowledge was its own reward. His youthful popularity continued unhampered by his bookish seclusion, and

there was a steady and increasing flow of young visitors to his office, where he made them welcome, listened to tales of their doings while he worked, and became the center of a nightly gathering. Among his more surprising traits was a power of faithful mimicry of speech, equally exact for general human types and for individuals, which began at Livermere when he and his brother Herbert created, as a perpetual game between them, the roles of two argumentative, slow witted village tradesmen: Johnson, a butcher, played by Herbert, and Barker, a grocer, played by Monty, who later expanded it into other ignorant, talkative types for the amusement of his friends.

Early in the 1890's he made his first brief tour of the Continent on a double tricycle, and after the invention of the bicycle he toured France yearly from 1895 on, usually in April. His initial tour of Denmark in 1896 with his friends Will Stone and James McBryde was followed by other Scandinavian visits in August or September of subsequent years. In France he preferred rurual districts and small towns to the metropolitan "centers of interest" mobbed by conventional tourists, and he enjoyed pausing by the wayside to admire landscapes and nature, in which he took a keen though quiet interest.

After a term as Provost of King's College, he was made Provost of Eton in 1918, the position he held for the rest of his life. Here he was unprecedentedly popular with the boys and enjoyed inviting newcomers to tea and watching all the school games. They sensed that despite his fame as a scholar he really preferred simple, sincere persons of any age to pretentious "stuffed-shirts," though he retained a calm, natural dignity and held the respect of everyone who knew him. Meanwhile the list of his published works of scholarship mounted prodigiously, including exhaustive catalogues of all the major collections of medieval manuscripts in England, translations of and commentaries on the Apocrypha, and books on cathedrals, abbeys, and similar medieval architecture; the list of his publications occupies one and one-half columns of fine print in Who's Who. Toward the end of his life he ventured out less and less often, and finally on June 13, 1936, he died at the age of seventy-three.

It is obvious that in so full a life the writing of ghost stories can have been only a casual hobby indulged in but rarely, and so it was, for he usually wrote just one story a year, at Christmas, to read to his friends. The first we hear of them is when he read "Canon Alberic's Scrap-book" and "Lost Hearts" in his room on October 28, 1893, to ten members of a small discussion group called the Chitchat Society (including E. F. Benson, who later attained distinction as a ghost story writer in his own right). The tales must have made an impression, for the editors of the National Review and the Pall Mall Magazine heard of them and published them shortly thereafter. Dr. James's friend Samuel Lubbock tells us:

> So the Ghost Stories began, and they were continued at the urgent request of a small party that was used to gather at King's just before Christmas. Some pressure was needed; and on the appointed evening the party met and waited till at last, about 11 p.m. as a rule, Monty appeared with the ink still wet on the last page. All lights except one were turned out and the story was read. Afterward, when he was Provost, the same ritual was preserved; but by then the small party had grown, and when the Punch and Judy story was read there was a large gathering in the big drawing room of the Lodge. On that occasion the silence which fell when the grim story ended was broken by the voice of Luxmore: "Were there envelopes in those days?" and Monty of course was easily able to prove that there were. (2)

In 1904 he published his first eight stories in book form under the appropriate title of Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, with the four illustrations by his friend James McBryde which inspired their publication, "the first of which was drawn from a photograph of St. Bertrand de Comminges, and contains an easily recognizable sketch of Monty himself; the bend of the knee alone would identify it." (3) Having promised to bring out a second volume when enough additional Christmases had elapsed, he published More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary in 1911, and year by year it became more evident that his tales were unique in their creepiness and artistry. "Already when he was installed as Provost of Eton their fame was such that Rawlins, then Vice-Provost, alluded pointedly to them in his speech on Chapel steps; and at the words 'Lemures istos' a grim smile for a second curved the lips of the new Provost." (3)

The third volume, A Thin Ghost and Others, appeared in 1919, containing only five stories, none of which was entitled "A Thin Ghost." Probably this title was meant to refer to the initial tale, "The Residence at Whitminster," in which the aphorism, "A withered heart makes an ugly thin ghost," is quoted twice. Also in 1919 appeared a Norse translation by Ragnhild Undset of four stories from Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, under the title of Aander og Trolddom. The fourth collection, A Warning to the Curious, and Other Ghost Stories, came out in 1925, and was extensively reviewed and praised, it being well recognized by now that James was the leading ghost story writer of modern times. His output, however, slackened henceforth in both quantity and quality, perhaps from lack of time, perhaps from a failure of interest or inventiveness. When Edward Arnold, his publisher throughout the years, brought out the definitive Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James in 1931, it included four new stories and an essay ("Stories I Have Tried to Write"), as well as a prediction that there would be no more ghost stories from his pen. Ill-advisedly he yielded subsequently to the importunities of friends and dashed off two brief tales, "The Experiment" and "A Vignette", which deservedly have never been reprinted from their original periodical publication. But his fame rested soundly on his earlier work and stemmed from both his books and his Christmas readings. As Lubbock says,

> His reading of them aloud was---like his reading of the Bible---entirely untheatrical and immensely effective. In his later years, when the supply of new stories had ceased, he could generally be persuaded to read one of the old ones on Christmas night at King's, especially as it was youth, in the shape of some choral scolar, that would thrust a volume of them into his hand. He dined at King's on the Christmas night of 1934 and read us the Punch and Judy story; and that was the last. (4)

In order better to assess the significance of James's work and the innovations it brought to its genre, it might be well to remind ourselves of the kind of weird fiction that predominated in the nineteenth century. First there were the Gothic romances, which flourished prodigiously at the end of the eighteenth century and for several decades at the beginning of the nineteenth, leaving behind a sensational legacy of haunted castles, sheeted ghosts, noisome dungeons, bleeding statues, gloomy defiant villains, pale heroines, faithless nuns, medieval tortures, secret passageways, and all the other familiar trappings of unabashed spectral Romanticism. Eventually these tales of terror exhausted themselves by their own excesses, and public taste turned away from them, but they had considerable influence both

on the great Romantic poets and story writers of their time and on the weird fiction that followed them, some of their themes and devices surviving in diluted form even down to the twentieth century.

In the middle of the nineteenth century there was an access of interest in Rosicrucianism, cabalism, and other occult mysteries, which was expressed notably in the novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton and a few lesser writers. But most Victorian supernatural fiction, as might be expected, consisted of ghost stories of an attentuated, sentimental variety frequently written by women, who were gaining an increasing hold on popular fiction while masculine authors busied themselves with social and historical themes. Charles Dickens, in "A Christmas Tree," spends several pages summarizing some typical plots of the period. "There is no end," he says, "to the old houses, with resounding galleries, and dismal state-bedchambers, and haunted wings shut for many years, through which we may ramble, with an agreeable creeping up our back, and encounter any number of ghosts but (it is worthy of remark perhaps) reducible to a very few general types and classes; for, ghosts have little originality, and 'walk' in a beaten track."(5) Then, as Dr. James says, "He gives us at some length the experience of the nobleman and the ghost of the beautiful young housekeeper who drowned herself in the park two hundred years before; and, more cursorily, the indelible bloodstain, the door that will not shut, the clock that strikes thirteen, the phantom coach, the compact to appear after death, the girl who meets her double, the cousin who is seen at the moment of his death far away in India, the maiden lady who 'really did see the Orphan Boy.'" (6) After three-quarters of a century of these feeble, sentimental maunderings, the straightforward, ironic, grisly tales of M. R. James came as a refreshing shock.

To be sure, James had his antecedents, but their influence in his writings is not very marked. He was particularly fond of Dickens and Thackeray, but the paucity of their ghost stories gave them little opportunity to influence James. From Dickens he may have received some encouragement in the depiction of his amusing "low characters", but the great novelist's two serious ghost stories, "To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt" and "No. 1 Branch Line: The Signal-Man," bear little resemblance to James's work, except that they have modern everyday settings and the former story contains some business about someone's counting a group of men and arriving at an uncertain total because of the half-perceived presence of a ghost in the assembly---a device which James employed in "Count Magnus" and "Casting the Runes". As for Thackeray, who wrote no supernatural fiction (except "The Notch in the Axe," a burlesque on Bulwer-Lytton), it is doubtful whether he contributed more than perhaps some elements of his detached, paternalistic style.

A much more powerful influence, and one which James openly acknowledged, was that of the Irish weirdist, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, whose leisurely, atmospheric, oft-repeated stories and novels were the prototypes of the "old English manor house" type of ghost story. Throughout his life Japes was a fervent champion of Le Fanu's work and was one of those chiefly responsible for rescuing it from obscurity. He lectured on Le Fanu before the Royal Institution of Great Britain and edited a collection of his lesser-known stories, Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Tales of Mystery, in which he asserted unequivocally, "He stands absolutely in the first rank as a writer of ghost stories. That is my deliberate verdict after reading all the supernatural tales I have been able to get hold of. Nobody sets the scene better than he, nobody touches in the effective detail more deftly." (7) And again:

If Dickens's ghost stories are good and of the right complexion, they are not the best that were written in his

day. The palm must I think be assigned to J. S. Le Fanu, whose stories of "The Watcher" (or "The Familiar"), "Justice Harbottle," "Carmilla," are unsurpassed, while "Schalken the Printer," "Squire Toby's Will," the haunted house in "The House by the Churchyard," "Dickon the Devil," "Madam Crowl's Ghost," run them very close. Is it the blend of French and Irish in Le Fanu's descent and surroundings that gives him the knack of infusing ominousness into his atmosphere? He is anyhow an artist in words; who else could have hit on the epithets in this sentence: "The aerial image of the old house for a moment stood before her, with its peculiar malign, sacred and skulking aspect." Other famous stories of Le Fanu there are which are not quite ghost stories---"Green Tea" and "The Room in the Dragon Volant"; and yet another, "The Haunted Baronet," not famous, not even known but to a few, contains some admirable touches, but somehow lacks proportion. Upon mature consideration, I do not think that there are better ghost stories anywhere than the best of Le Fanu's; and among these I should give the first place to "The Familiar" (alias "The Watcher"). (6)

It is quite likely that James became infatuated with Le Fanu's stories during childhood, and how this may have come about is indicated by a scene in "A Vignette," which appears to be largely an autobiographical story, inasmuch as the hero, a boy, lives in a rectory on the edge of a park surrounding a manor-hall, as did James. The boy is struck by the sentence (quoted above) about "the aerial image of the old house," which he finds in a bound volume of a magazine. An enthusiasm dating from early youth would account for the fervor of James's somewhat exaggerated devotion to Le Fanu. As to the extent of the latter's direct influence on James's writing, however, opinions differ. Lubbock says, "He had always enjoyed making our flesh creep with ghost stories, and if he had an audience sensitive to such things would read aloud, with great relish, cheerful tales like Mr. Justice Harbottle. For Sheridan le Fanu was his chief inspiration; the activity of corpses in such stories as A School Story would alone prove that. He 'derives' indeed from le Fanu. . . . " (3) A study of the two men's stories, however, does not actually show so many similarities as one might expect. Le Fanu does not depict "the activity of corpses" but usually writes about conventional ghosts, realistically described but not essentially different in nature from those of the popular fiction of his day. In "Green Tea" and "The Familiar," to be sure, the victims are dogged by demonic pursuers, a situation which occurs several times in James; in The House by the Churchyard (1863) Le Fanu introduces (for the first time, I believe) the idea of a spectral and malignant hand for which no body is visible (later used to great effect by W. F. Harvey in "The Beat with Five Fingers"), which James twice employs briefly in dreams of his characters in "The Residence at Whitminster" and "A View from a Hill"; and, of course, the old manor houses that abound in the tales of the gloomy Irishman are common in James as well, though in Le Fanu they are usually dilapidated and run-down if not deserted, while in James they are well-kept and inhabited by well-to-do people. Le Fanu's style, as a rule, is much more leisurely than James's and has a wealth of descriptive and atmospheric detail which James admired but was chary of imitating. Altogether, James, like Lovecraft, was influenced by his predecessors much less than he influenced his followers. In both content and technique he was tellingly original.

Unquestionably the most striking examples of his originality in subject-matter are his ghosts and demons. In the first place, they are invariably malignant and loathsome, inspiring extreme horror in their

victims or spectators. This was a cardinal point in James's rules for the writing of weird fiction: "...the ghost should be malevolent and odious: amiable or helpful apparitions are all very well in fairy tales or local legends, but I have no use for them in a fictitious ghost story." (8) He warns, "...don't let us be mild and drab. Malevolence and terror, the glare of evil faces, 'the stony grin of unearthly malice', pursuing forms in darkness, and 'long-drawn, distant screams', are all in place, and so is a modicum of blood, shed with deliberation and carefully husbanded..." (9) His mention of blood indicates a still more important aspect of his ghosts and demons: their power and practice of attacking and killing those luckless mortals who arouse their wrath. His are no ineffectual phantoms limited to frightening by their mere presence; they can pass at will from the spiritual to the physical and rend their victims with the ferocity of a jungle carnivore. Over half the stories end in a tragedy, and although two-thirds of the victims deserve their fates to some extent, the supernatural beings make no moral distinctions and fall and good and bad alike when roused. In thirteen cases the ghosts or demons appear because they have been (intentionally or unintentionally) disturbed in their resting places or roused by the handling or opening of something with which they are associated; in eleven cases they act in revenge for wrongs done them; and in seven instances they are merely observed while haunting some scene connected with their past activities. It is not quite true, as Lovecraft says, that the demons are usually touched before they are seen, for this situation occurs in only four stories; but that is enough to indicate the preeminently tactual character of these fearsome creatures.

> At first you saw only a mass of coarse, matted black hair; presently it was seen that this covered a body of fearsome thinness, almost a skeleton, but with the muscles standing out like wires. The hands were of a dusky pallor, covered like the body, with long coarse hairs, and hideously taloned... There was black and tattered drapery about it; the coarse hair covered it as in the drawing. The lower jaw was thin--what can I call it?--shallow, like a beast's; teeth showed behind the black lips; there was no nose; the eyes, of a fiery yellow, against which the pupils showed black and intense, and the exulting hate and thirst to destroy life which shone there, were the most horrifying features in the whole vision. There was intelligence of a kind in them--intelligence beyond that of a beast; below that of a man.

Thus is described the demon that appears to Mr. Denniston in James' first story, "Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book". Most of the characteristics of this entity are repeated again and again in subsequent monsters, so one can easily pick out certain favorite traits that intrigued James so much that he used them almost unconsciously. Chief among these are thinness and hairiness. Inasmuch as his ghosts are usually activated corpses that have decayed and dessicated practically down to their skeletons, there is customarily a mention of their frightful leanness, which is often covered by the grayish linen of a shroud or other tattered garments. In "Lost Hearts" the murdered children are thin and hungry-looking in their ragged, shroud-like clothing; in "The Mezzotint" the black-garmented executed pacher's legs are "horribly thin"; the ghost of the sixteenth century wizard in "Number 13" is "a tall thin man" with "a gaunt leg" and his arm "was clad in ragged, yellowish linen, and the bare skin, where it could be seen, had long gray hair upon it"; the long-drowned corpse that fetches away the teacher in "A School Story" is "beastly thin"; the vengeful ghost of "A Warning to

the Curious" leaves a footprint "that showed more bones than flesh"; the scarecrow-like corpse in "Rats" has "bare bony feet" and moves stiffly and shiveringly with arms close to its sides and head lolling and wagging; and the three women and a man who inhabit the forbidden field in "Wailing Well" are simply "flutterin' rags and whity bones". One of them "showed a white skull with stains that might be wisps of hair", like the "white dome-like forehead and a few straggling hairs" beneath the black drapery of the poacher in "The Mezzotint"; and the bald head of the ghost of Dr. Rant in "The Tractate Middoth" looked dry and dusty "and the streaks of hair across it were much less like hair than cobwebs" (his deep-sunk eyes also were covered with thick cobwebs. In "The diary of Mr. Poynter" the theme of hairiness is the main point of the story, for the ghost of Sir Everard Charlett (who had been inordinately proud of his long thick tresses and whose coffin had been found full of hair) is a shapeless mass of hair which the hero, on first touching it, mistakes for his dog; and the red-eyed vampire ghost that bursts from its church-tomb in "An Episode of Cathedral History" is similar--"'Black it was... and a mass of hair, and two legs, and the light caught on its eyes.'" In the middle of the night it roams through the village, giving voice to hideous hungry cries, like those of the two children in "Lost Hearts"; the ghost of Magister Nicolas Franken in "Number 13" likewise is extremely vocal, singing or wailing discordantly in a thin dry voice.

Ann Clark, the feeble-minded toad-faced girl in "Martin's Close" who will not stay under water after her unwilling "lover" drowns her but comes out and follows him around, flapping her arms and squalling a song, is a particularly shuddery example of what may be called the horror of the weak and clinging (another classic specimen of which is Robert Hichens' "How Love Came to Professor Guildea"), and bears a distinct resemblence to Robert Louis Stevenson's "Thrawn Janet", who was inhabited by a devil after her death. The ghost of old Lady Sadlier in "The Uncommon Prayer-Book" is more eccentric in form, appearing like a large roll of shabby white flannel with a vague face at one end having two spidery eyes; it falls forward onto its victim's neck, and he dies instantly as if from a snake bite. In "Mr. Humphreys and His Inheritance" the hero sees in a vision a tiny, blackish-grey figure with a burnt face and waving arms clambering out of a hole, this being presumably the ghost of a mysterious ancestor whose body had been cremated. Other ghosts are invisible, like that of Lady Ivy in "A Neighbor's Landmark", which passes continually to and fro on the hill of Betton Wood, screaming piercingly into the ear of anyone passing by, and which is visible only once as "something all in tatters with the two arms held out in front of it coming on very fast"; the ghosts of the hanged men in "A View from a Hill", who drag off Mr. Baxter for having boiled their bones in his experiments, are invisible except apparently to him, and the ghost in "A Warning to the Curious" can only be seen vaguely at a distance or out of the corner of one's eye. In "The Rose Garden" and "A Vignette" the ghost appears simply as a pink, hot, staring face in the shrubbery, reminding one of the idea in "Stories I have Tried to Write" of a dead face looking out from the window curtains in a room, or of the anecdote in "A School Story" of a woman who, on closing her door, heard a thin voice from the bed curtains say "Now we're shut in for the night."

Demonology is a favorite subject with James (and his characters--many of the ghosts were demonologists while alive), and though there are only eight stories in which demons appear, the latter are frequently more memorable than the ghosts. In "Casting the Runes" and "The Residence at Whitminster" they are simply vague, hairy, doglike shapes, usually invisible, but in the remaining stories they take more anomo-

lous forms. The giant hairy spiders, the size of a man's head, that infest "The Ash Tree", under the direction of the witch whose skeleton is found buried at its base, are perhaps only adaptations of natural horrors, and the three wooden carvings in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" (a cat, a robed and horned devil, and a death-skeleton in a mantle) whose life-size counterparts haunt the guilty archdeacon's house follow traditional forms; but the tentacled familiars of "Count Magnus" and "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" are certainly somewhat off the beaten track--especially the toad-like guardian in the latter story, which the treasure-hunting antiquary mistakes for a damp mouldy leather bag until he pulls it forward onto his chest and it puts its arms around his neck. The revelatory shock of that climax is almost equal to the one in "'Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'" when the blind creature from the extra bed steps into the moonlight and shows its "intensely horrible face of crumpled linen". That invisible and inexplicable entity, summoned by the Templars' whistle, which molds itself in bed-clothing and has no other form, is probably the creepiest and certainly the most original of all of James's demonological creations.

Mention should doubtless be made of some of the lesser supernatural beings and events which he makes use of at times. In "Mr. Humphries and His Inheritance" the characters spmetimes get lost in the garden maze (where the ancestor's ashes are entombed) oftener than is natural, and the hero reads in an old book a parable about a man in a maze who was pursued by stealthy panting shapes, but later is unable to find the book; this is the same situation as one of the plots in "Stories I Have Tried to Write" about a man in a railway carriage who reads a passage that later proves true but never was in the book. One of the "Two Doctors"--the one who has evidently sold his soul to the Devil and mentions meeting spirits in the lane and attending the Witches' Sabbath--does something to a set of bedclothes (evidently rifled from a mausoleum) so that the pillow suffocates his rival one night. In "Number 13" that particular non-existent room in a Danish hotel is created nightly out of portions of the two adjoining rooms by the warlock, whose indecipherable manuscript is buried in the floor. None of the rest of this ghostly company posess that much power over inanimate matter (though they pass through it easily enough), but they frequently have a certain power over people's minds. In "Count Magnus" for example, Mr. Wraxall, fascinated by the legends of the demoniacal count, finds himself walking toward the sarcophagous repeating, "Are you awake, Count Magnus? Are you asleep, Count Magnus?" Every time he (voluntarily?) expresses a romantic desire to see the long-dead sorceror, one of the padlocks on the tomb falls open, this evidently being one of the conditions of the count's release. In "A School Story" the ghost conveys his warnings to his murderer, the teacher, by somehow inducing a boy to write them in Latin during the class exercises in that language; the boy knows nothing of what they mean, but the teacher most assuredly does. The dreams of two charadters in "The Rose Garden", about the trial of a man who was executed for treason in the seventeenth century, are obviously inspired by the cruel judgewho is buried in the garden, though why the dreams should transpire from the point of view of the prisoner (only one among many whom the judge convicted) instead of the judge is never explained. In "The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance" the narrator has a premonitory dream about a Punch and Judy show come to life and acted with gruesome seriousness by a fiendishly murderous Punch who is finally pursued and overtaken by the replica of a victim whom in real life the operators of just such a show have murdered, and whose ghost finally kills them. Other dreams are: the one by the victim in "Two Doctors" who repeatedly dreams of digging up a man-sized chrysalis in the garden that turns out to be his own dead body; the

repetitious dream of Professor Perkins in "'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'" about a creature in fluttering draperies pursuing a man along the seashore; the archaic minatory verse dreamt one night in 1699 by the woodcarver who made the demonic statues for "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral"; and the rather pointless though chilling dreams of disembodied hands by characters in "The Residence at Whitminster" and "A View from a Hill." In "Wailing Well" one of the fearful skeleton-ghosts diverts a would-be rescuer of the doomed boy by evidently switching his vision of the scene around at right angles to its real position so that he strides off in the wrong direction; a boy watching sees the air shimmer down there and feels a bit of the mental confusion being given off by the specter. These instances all illustrage a greater or lesser degree of submective control over or infiltration into the human mind on the part of various ghosts, though it is not always easy to tell whether the influence is exerted deliberately or is merely an accidental and subliminal psychic perturbation.

Two stories contain curious instances of what is apparently the demoniacal possession of insects: in "An Evening's Entertainment" the lane where blood has spilled from the mangled corpse of a Druid-worshipping warlock is haunted by poisonous flies that fed on the blood and moved off in cluds; and in "The Residence at Whitminster" a deserted room containing the effects of a demonolatrous youth of the previous century is infested with great numbers of harmless sawflies, and the father is attacked there at night by an enormous ghostly sawfly the size of a man. Evidently anyone who has carried on demonological activities of any sort or has ever been just an evil and wicked person is likely to live on after death, haunting the site of his or her misdeeds or easily roused by associations with them, or at least to leave behind some sort of residue of psychic unrest causing disturbances for innocent bystanders. In both "The Mezzotint" and "The Haunted Doll's House" the haunting takes the form of a periodic enactment in a picture or model of the fated house of the revenge years ago of an activated corpse-ghost on his murderer by making away with his offspring; James apologized for the repetition of the plot, which he was evidently unaware of when he wrote "The Haunted Doll's House". The most original bit of sorcery in these stories is the curiously heavy pair of field glasses made by the unscrupulous antiquary, Mr. Baxter, in "A View from a Hill," which were "filled and sealed" with a noisome liquid made by boiling the bones of men who had been hanged on Gallows Hill centuries ago, and which therefore, when looked through, showed things as they were when those men were alive. These invaluable binoculars unfortunately are ruined when the unsuspecting hero takes them into a church---one of the only two instances in James when religion serves as a foil to the powers of evil, the other being the effective use of a crucifix against the demon in "Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book." James, the son of a rector, was devoutly religious, but apparently disliked to place any curb on the powers of his ghosts and demons. As an antiquary, he was naturally tolerant toward the Church of Rome (he satirized an anti-Papist in "'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'"), though in one of the better plots in "Stories I Have Tried to Write" a Roman priest was evidently to have been one of the villains---a situation which would not have found much favor with the Rev. Montague Summers, who claimed James as a friend.

James's religious beliefs did not, however, lead him to believe in ghosts, despite his fondness for writing about them; his attitude toward the psychic in real life remained one of complete skepticism. Even toward the end of his life the most he would say on the subject is, "I am prepared to consider evidence and accept it if it satisfies me." Evidently it never did. In his disbelief he resembled H. P. Love-

craft and many other noted authors of weird fiction, and there is much to be said for the assertion that skepticism is an advantage for a weirdist in that it enables him to write convincingly and impressively of the supernatural as a monstrous overthrow of the normal laws of the universe. Certain it is that most "occult" and mystical writers who believe in their spiritual creations treat of them in a boringly casual manner, and that even Algernon Blackwood, a believer in the supernatural, sometimes writes of it so vaguely that one is not quite sure whether or not it is intended to be present. In James there is never any doubt; a determined materialist might be able to find "rational" loopholes out of the ghostly dilemmas in some of the stories, but only by the exercise of great powers of self-persuasion.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the extraordinary and supramundane character of his horrors, James was a realist in all other aspects of his writing, and in that fact lies much of his modern appeal, for we live in an age of realism. Both his settings and his characters reflect the scenes of everyday life with which he was most familiar. As a scholar and antiquary he naturally wrote about the places where he had carried on his researches--the university (in "The Mezzotint" and "'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'"), the library (in "The Tractate Middoth", based on the Cambridge University library, where James of course spent much time), the British Museum (in "Casting the Runes"), and the old cathedral (in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" and "An Episode of Cathedral History"--whose edifices were compounds of the cathedrals of Canterbury, Salisbury, and Hereford--and in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook", "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", and the chapel in "The Uncommon Prayer-Book"). James was the first to exploit these academic settings for purposes of weird fiction, and he did an extremely effective job of it, partly from his intimate knowledge of the recondite activities and appurtenances of such places (as the library) and partly from the awesome atmosphere of hoary antiquity inevitably clinging to them (as in the cathedrals). The romantic gloom of age is always a valuable adjunct to any ghost story, and as an antiquarian and student of architecture, James (again like Lovecraft) was in an especially good position to make full use of the theme.

His tours of the continent found expression in his stories of France, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany ("Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book", "Number 13", Count Magnus", and "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", respectively), and the idea for "Number 13" was in fact suggested by his friend Will Stone who accompanied him on his first trip to Denmark, though he did not write the story until three years later. Eight stories take place in and around the seventeenth and eighteenth century English manor houses that he loved so well, both from memories of Livermere Hall in his childhood and the prevalence of them in Le Fanu's stories. They run to a common Georgian type, like the one in "Lost Hearts"--"a tall, square, red-brick house, built in the reign of Anne; a stone-pillored porch had been added in the purer classical style of 1790; the windows of the house were many, tall and narrow, with small panes and thick white woodwork". And so on, with more architectural detail, equaled only by that in the cathedral stories--with the result that James gave these gracious, confortable homes a romantic, nostalgic atmosphere that has played a large part in their predominance in English weird fiction of this century. They may be said to have taken the place of the Gothic castles as the most effective settings for ghost stories of a reflective and historically atmospheric nature.

Most of the remaining stories occur in villages or rural or seacoast areas in England, several being based on places James had visited, such as Felixstowe, Sampford Courtenay, Herefordshire, and Aldeburgh. He admitted that places were more suggestive to him than any other

sources of fictional ideas, and it is likely that the germs of many of his tales sprang from the historical or atmospherical associations of places that struck his fancy as suitable settings for spectral happenings. His childhood memories called up Temple Grove school for "A School Story" and his father's rectory for "A Vignette".

The characters that people these varied settings are of course the kind that are found there in real life and with whom James was familiar --professors, antiquaries, collectors, ecclesiastics, country squires, and boys. He spends very little time in trying to depict them directly --there is, for instance, almost never any hint of physical description --but by virtue of his powers of mimicry he succeeds admirably in characterizing them as fully as needs be for his purposes through their speech. Mr. Abney, the sly and secretive paganist of "Lost Hearts"; the romantic travel-writer, Mr. Wraxall, in "Count Magnus"; the prim and narrow-minded Professor Parkins of "'Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad'"; the hen-pecked Mr. Anstruther and his determined, matronly wife in "The Rose Garden"; the energetic young librarian who tracks down the "Tractate Middoth"; the strong-minded, ambitious archdeacon who holds out to the end against the terrors of "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral"; the overbearing Judge Jeffreys in "Martin's Close"; the amiable Mr. Humphreys, the intractable Squire Richards in "A View from a Hill"; the terrified young Mr. Paxton in "A Warning to the Curious"; the incorrigible Stanley Judkins who visits Wailing Well simply because he is warned not to---all these and many more are distinct and living creations who ring true to life and whose speech is so right and natural that one never thinks of it. It must be admitted, of course, that they have little psychological subtlety or depth, as James is anything but an introspective writer; he is interested primarily in the supernatural events of his stories, not in his characters' reactions to them. The fact is that weird fiction is probably the field of literature in which characterization is the least important, since the power and horror of the supernatural overshadows the interest that mere human foibles can summon. Nevertheless, convincing characterization adds effectiveness to any story, however marvelous, and James does not neglect this principle.

Special mention must be made of his lower-class dialect characters whose queer and amusing distoritions of the English language he reproduces with uncanny fidelity to life. Here his power of mimicry played a particularly strong role, for practically all these garrulous landlords, self-important vergers, anecdotal guides, and chattering housekeepers are expressions of the life-long extemporaneous character of "Barker", the argumentative village tradesman whom James loved to impersonate when joking with his brother Herbert. James had a Dickensian love for their "humours" and oddities of thought and speech, but they play a still more significant part in his art than comic relief. They serve, in their dense and largely uncomprehending descriptions of supernatural beings and events they have witnessed, to convey an added horror through the suggestive obliquity and incompleteness of their reports. Take, for instance, Mr. Filcher in "The Mezzotint": "...It ain't the pictur I should 'ang where my little girl could see it, sir.. Why, the pore child, I recollect once she see a Door Bible, with pictures not 'alf what that is, and we 'ad to set up with her three or four nights afterwards, if you'll believe me; and if she was to ketch a sight of this skelinton here, or whatever it is, carrying off the pore baby, she would be in a taking." And the commissionaire in "The Uncommon Prayer-Book": "And the eyes, well they was dry-like, and much as if there was two big spiders' bodies in the holes. Hair? no, I don't know as there was much hair to be seen; the flannel stuff was over the top of the 'ead. I'm very sure it wasn't what it should have

been." The uneducated characters are always more obtuse and insensitive to spectral disturbances or horrors than the scholars and gentry, but their very slow-wittedness is employed by James for dramatic effect. He avoids too the mistake many authors make of having certain characters hold up the action and irritate the reader by their logic-tight refusal to accept the evidence of their own eyes or their insistence on finding a "rational" explanation of ghostly phenomena. Their stupidity never extends that low

The milieu of James' fiction, as we have seen, is that of contemporary life, and he considered this to be the best rule to follow in writing ghost stories: "I think that, as a rule, the setting should be fairly familiar and the majority of the characters and their talk such as you may meet or hear every day. A ghost story of which the scene is laid in the twelfth or thirteenth century may succeed in being romantic or poetical: it will never put the reader into the position of saying to himself, 'If I'm not very careful, something of this kind may happen to me!'" (8)

> Now this mode is not absolutely essential to success, but it is characteristic of the majority of successful stories: the belted knight who meets the spectre in the vaulted chamber and has to say 'By my halidom,' or words to that effect, has little actuality about him. Anything, we feel, might have happened in the fifteenth century. No; the seer of ghosts must talk something like me and be dressed, if not in my fashion, yet not too much like a man in a pageant, if he is to enlist my sympathy. Wardour Street has no business here. (6)

To be sure, James himself wrote ten historical stories, of which half are laid in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries and the rest in the early nineteenth. Their evocation of the spirit of bygone times is masterly, but James achieves it by realistic, not romantic, methods. The dialogue of his historical characters contains no more archaisms than are necessary for accuracy, and the scenes are described in a direct, naturalistic manner that makes the past seem as real and believable as our own lives. The seventeenth century trial scene in "Martin's Close", for example, gives a splendid picture of the times and of the Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys (whose language James studied in the records of the State Trials). Jeffreys obviously intrigued James, for he mentions him again in "A Neighbor's Landmark" and obviously bases the character of the wicked judge in "The Rose Garden" on him too, though Jeffreys died in the Tower, not at the probably mythical village of Westfield. The atmospheric value of old historic scenes and associations, as well as his own interest in such things, led James to base his supernatural phenomena on events of a century or more ago in almost all of his stories, even those which take place in modern times. In describing antique objects or transcribing ancient documents, however, he gave full play to his knowledge of the queer antiquarian quirks that such things show to modern minds, for here he could afford to be romantic and grotesque in his style, the better to emphasize the strangeness and age of forgotten times. Looking back at the past from the present requires a different technique from putting oneself into the past. James's mimicry of speech worked just as well for the literary styles of different epochs too--witness the crabbed seventeenth century parable in "Mr. Humphries and His Inheritance":

> However at long and at last they made shift to collect somewhat of this kind: that at first, while the Sun was

> bright, he went merrily on, and without any Difficulty reached the Heart of the Labyrinth and got the jewel and so set out on his way back rejoicing; but as the Night fell, wherein all the Beasts of the Forest do move, he begun to be sensible of some Creature keeping Pace with him and, as he thought, peering and looking upon him from the next Alley to that he was in; and that when he should stop, this Companion should stop also, which put him in some Disorder of his Spirits."

versus the flowery insipidities of early nineteenth century female Romanticism in "The Residence at Whitminster":

> The town, small as it is, afford us some reflection, pale indeed, but veritable, of the sweets of polite intercourse: the adjacent country numbers amid the occupants of its scattered mansions some whose polish is annually refreshed by contact with metropolitan splendour, and others whose robust and homely geniality is, at times, and by way of contrast, not less cheering and acceptable."

These and all the other accurate and convincing (though at first sight seemingly useless) historical bits, specimens, and references scattered throughout James' stories serve another function as well--that of convincing us (while reading the story) that the less plausible and more fantastic phenomena of ghosts and demons also are true to life. We are, without our conscious knowledge, given the impression that so learned and precise a scholar as the author of these historically well-founded stories could not be leading us astray in other matters we know little of. As one anonymous reviewer puts it, "With Dr. James the facts do the persuading. The facts are most artistically--not to say artfully--presented to produce this effect. He paves the way for passing off the false Rembrandt by first selling you a series of minor masters punctiliously authenticated." (10)

The form and structure of James's tales, while necessarily varying in detail from one story to another, show certain common features just as well adapted, psychologically and artistically, to raising one's hackles as are the different aspects of his subject-matter. He does not first present his spectral disturbances and then take up the rest of the story with attempts on the part of his characters to unravel the mystery; quite the reverse. "Two ingredients," he says, "most valuable in the concocting of a ghost story are, to me, the atmosphere and the nicely managed crescendo. Let us, then, be introduced to the actors in a placid way; let us see them going about their ordinary business, undisturbed by forebodings, pleased with their surroundings; and into this calm environment let the ominous thing put out its head, unobtrusively at first, and then more insistently, until it holds the stage." (11) As this dictum indicates, his stories usually proceed at a somewhat leisurely pace, unhurried and prosaic in their earlier passages, and moving with inevitable continuity to their frightening conclusions. In speaking of his mentor, Le Fanu, he says, "I do not think it is merely the fact of my being past middle age that leads me to regard the leisureliness of his style as a merit, for I am by no means inappreciative of the more modern efforts in this branch of fiction. No, it has to be recognized, I am sure, that the ghost-story is in itself a slightly old-fashioned form; it needs some deliberateness in the telling we listen to it the more readily if the narrator poses as elderly, or throws back his experiences to 'some thirty years ago'." (7) This latter circumstance, incidentally, occurs very frequently in the Jamesian

ghost story.) "Such alarming features as it has, if they are to produce their one effect, must be introduced gradually. An explosion, as of a maroon, is often legitimate enough, but the reader must be put into the mood of expecting it." (12) "I am well aware that mine is a nineteenth (and not a twentieth) century conception of this class of tale; but were not the prototypes of all the best ghost stories written in the sixties and seventies?" (8)

Frequently James proceeds in a more or less indirect manner in telling the story, in order that the supernatural revelations may come in an ascending order of creepiness, with the most horrible reserved for the climax; this is obviously necessary when the latter occurred some time previous to more recent manifestations. Seven of the stories are pieced together from "historical" accounts in the manner of a researcher gathering evidence from several different sources, and this scholarly approach increases measurably the plausibility and fascination of these tales, gives them something of the intellectual allurement of a good detective story. Others are related to the author or narrator by a friend or acquaintance, who usually remebers the events from several decades ago. Occasionally just straight third-person narration is used, but always James uses the "author-omniscient" angle of narration--the point of view of someone who knows all that anyone now knows about what happened and who does not hesitate to inject personal comments now and then, though not enough to hold up the story, as many nineteenth century authors did. He believes in telling the story directly and straightforwardly, without extraneous matter except such as aids the story by creating atmosphere or plausibility or emotional effectiveness. This sometimes results in a somewhat telescoped and swift presentation of the more trivial portions of the narrative, as in the three letters which abruptly open "Casting the Runes" and the later transition, "It is not necessary to tell in further detail the steps by which Henry Harrington and Dunning were brought together." This technique would seem to contradict James' belief in leisureliness; but actually his speed of narration was governed by the exingencies of each particular story: he put in everything that would help to tell the story effectively and left out everything that would not. He does not believe, either, in telling too much or in trying to explain the ghostly event according to psychic laws of some sort. Of his stories he says, "I have not sought to embody in them any well-considered scheme of 'psychical' theory," (8) although "I have tried to make my ghosts act in ways consistent with the rules of folklore." (13) "The reading of many ghost stories has shown me that the greatest successes have been scored by the authors who can make us envisage a definite time and place, and give us plenty of clear-cut and matter-of-fact detail, but who, when the climax is reached, allow us to be just a little in the dark as to the working of their machinery. We do not want to see the bones of their theory about the supernatural." (14) Like Lovecraft, he disliked the "Cagliostro element" in stories like those of Bulwer-Lytton and Blackwood's "John Silence" series, and said, "I feel that the technical terms of 'occultism', if they are not very carefully handled, tend to put the mere ghost story (which is all that I am attempting) upon a quasi-scientific plane, and to call into play faculties quite other than the imaginative." (8) The only "theories about the supernatural" which are implied by his stories are those already mentioned in connection with his ghosts and demons--that they resent being disturbed, leave psychic unrest behind them, are quick to destroy anyone who incurs their wrath, and are not daunted by a pure heart and clean conscience, though they sometimes flee from interruption or from the forces of Christianity. Anything more he is apt to pass off with a laconic "These things are rather beyond us at present," or "I suppose--

Well, it is rather hard to say exactly what I do suppose."

The construction of James's stories is usually admirably tight and well-knit with few if any loose ends left except those which he prefers to leave unexplained because of the mysterious nature of psychic phenomena. Probably the best constructed of his stories--those least vulnerable to the barbs of intensive literary criticism and analysis--are "Count Magnus", "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", "Casting the Runes", "Martin's Close", "A View from a Hill", "A Warning to the Curious" and "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral", with the latter perhaps carrying off top honors because of the skill with which various facts of the case are revealed from documentary evidence until at the very end the whole basis of the hauntings (whose multifarious forms remind one of Bulwer-Lytton's classic "The Haunters and the Haunted") is revealed obliquely in the archaic poem dreamt by the woodcarver as he shaped the wood from the demonic Hanging Oak. James frequently uses archaic inscriptions (often in Latin) to great effect at or near the end of his tales, like "Depositum Custodi" in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", "Quieta non movere" in "The Rose Garden", "Penetrans ad intersoia mortis" in "Mr. Humphries and His Inheritance", and the inscription of Canon Alberic two days before his death in 1701. Biblical quotations are similarly employed, such as Isaiah 34:14 in "An Episode of Cathedral History", which verse is also referred to by Dennistoun in "Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book" when he speaks of "night-monsters".

The less tightly constructed stories are, of course, not necessarily poorer or less effective stories--they are merely those in which James has not chosen to tell as much as he might about the origin or nature of his ghosts and demons. Sometimes, though, his reticence on this score seems to be a definite fault and indicates that he has not thought out the basis for the plot as much as he could have. In "Number 13", for example, he gives no translation of the mysterious document that inspires the haunting, and we never learn anything about Mag. Francken's demonological activities; in "The Rose Garden" the identity of the prisoner in the dreams is unexplained and apparently irrelevant to the hauntings; in "The Tractate Middoth", why does the ghost of Mr. Rant kill Eldred for finding the well?; "Mr. Humphries and His Inheritance" is all at loose ends (it was written "to fill up the volume" of More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, perhaps hastily and uninspiredly) with a disappointingly feeble climax (the ghost is seen merely in a vision)--it would have been much better to have put the events of the parable into real life as the climax; in "The Residence at Whitminster" the original appearance of the demons is never accounted for, and the kysterious effects of Lord Saul are not examined at the end, so we never learn the reason for the haunting of the room by the sawflies; "The Diary of Mr. Poynter" is a bit vague as to Sir Everard Charlett's connections with the Powers of Evil, as is "An Episode of Cathedral History" about the background of the vampire-ghost, and "The Uncommon Prayer-Book" about Lady Sadleir's unholy activities (these things do not necessarily have to be explained, however, in order for the stories to be enjoyed); it is a bit odd that the narrator in "The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance" should dream about the murder and its avenging when he had nothing to do with it; the lethal action of the bedclothes in "Two Doctors" is unexplained; the two deaths and the mysterious flies in "An Evening's Entertainment" are left a mystery; and of course "A Vignette" was obviously written at the last minute with no story-idea behind it and with the ghost from "The Rose Garden" thrown in at the last minute without the slightest pretence of an explanation for its existence. It does not seem quite proper to object to the truncated endings of "There Was a Man Dwelt by a Churchyard" and "After Dark in the Playing Fields", for these were written in James' later years when

he was losing interest in ghost story writing. Peter Fleming shrewdly remarks, "I detect in his later stories a certain leniency, a tendency to let the reader off lightly. There are signs that he finds it increasingly hard to take the creatures of his fancy seriously; like Prospero, he retures more and more into the benevolent showman." (15) This tendency is particularly evident in "After Dark in the Playing Fields", which has a quaint, fairy-tale air like that of his fascinating story for children, The Five Jars. His "benevolence" also leads him to detract from the grimness of the ending of "Wailing Well" by adding two superfluous paragraphs. Such indiscretions, however, are fortunately rare.

Most aspects of James's literary style will have become evident from the discussion of his subject-matter and story structure, for in him style and subject are inextricably fused. Because of the fantastic nature of his themes he cultivated a counteracting reticence and tact in his depiction of these abnormalities. "Reticence," he says, "may be an elderly doctrine to preach, yet from the artistic point of view I am sure it is a sound one. Reticence conduces to effect, blatancy ruins it..." (9) And Fleming comments:

> His first secret is tact. I say tact rather than restraint because he can and does pile on the agony when his sense of the dramatic tells him to... It is tact, a guileless and deadly tact, that gauges so nicely the force of half-definitions, adjusting the balance between reticence and the explicit so that our imaginations are ever ready to meet his purpose halfway... Overstatement has been the besetting sin of the ghost story since the statue at Otranto began to bleed at the nose, and Dr. James will have nothing to do with it, even in its emasculated modern form, which spells thing with a capital T and has a great camp following of dots. (15)

Suggestion is now well known to be the most effective technique for the raising of goose-pimples, but after the crudities of nineteenth century weird fiction it came as a pleasant surprise in the stories of James. When his ghosts and demons make their first appearance on the scene in the typical James tale, they are adumbrated with a tantalizing inconclusiveness, or the half-felt manifestations of their existence are misunderstood and misinterpreted by everyone save the alert reader. Thus these early supernatural incidents are, by suggestion, given much greater force and artistic effect than if they were described baldly and uninhibitedly. Note, for example, the noises in the cathedral in "Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book"; the changing positions of the pictured ghost in "The Mezzotint" seen first by persons who do not understand their significance; the prophetic Sortes taken at random from the Bible in "The Ash-Tree"; the white figure which Professor Parkins sees behind him on the sea-shore and assumes to be another boarder; the innocuous sounding messages in Latin conveyed to the teacher in "A School Story"; the supposed cries of owls in "The Rose Garden" and the enigmatically creepy voice, "Pull, pull. I'll push, you pull."; the repressed and determinedly calm diary entries of the harrassed archdeacon in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral"; the simple, straightforward, gossipy testimony of the woman and the boy in "Martin's Close" as to the appearance of Ann Clark when "it was impossible she could have been a living person"; the limited, far-away viewpoint of the man watching the re-enactment of murder and worse than murder in "The Haunted Doll's House"; the old butler's objective, naturalistic description in "A View from a Hill" of Baxter's unwilling and jerky departure from his house one night

accompanied by bodiless voices; the half-seen glimpses of a dark form following the desecrator of the sacred crown in "A Warning to the Curious"; and the sly conversation of the two Druid-worshippers in "An Evening's Entertainment" about their nocturnal visits to the hillside. All of these incidents gain their principal emotional weight from what is not said outright but only implied or intimated, or what may be assumed by the reader if he so wishes. Under the circumstances he knows full well that more than the literal meaning is intended in these passages, and the uncertainty of the exact nature of what is meant increases his uneasiness, in accordance with the familiar psychological principle that unknown dangers are more fearsome than known ones. As Lovecraft says, "Dr. James has, it is clear, an intelligent and scientific knowledge of human nerves and feelings; and knows just how to apportion statement, imagery, and subtle suggestion in order to secure the best results with his readers. He is an artist in incident and arrangement rather than in atmosphere, and reaches the emotions more often through the intellect than directly." (16)

Notable among the instruments of suggestion with which James plays upon the sensitive nerves of his readers are the archaically styled quotations and mottoes with which, at or near the ends of his stories, he frequently intimates something of the reasons for what has occured or succinctly rounds off the denouement. Such (among many) are Canon Alberic's last words on the back of his demon-picture, the intriguing not by Count Magnus about Chorazin, Abbot Thomas' "Depositum Custodi" ("Keep that which is committed to thee"), and the poem from 1699 at the end of "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral". The latter is worth quoting as an example:

"When I grew in the Wood
I was water'd wth Blood
Now in the Church I stand
Who that touches me with his Hand
If a Bloody hand he bear
I councell him to be ware
Lest he be fecht away
Whether by night or day,
But chiefly when the wind blows high
In a night of February."

It is the very roughness and erratic mistakes in the meter and rhyme of this crabbed bit of doggeral that give it its creepy effectiveness, both by accentuating the antiquity and strangeness of the message and by giving the impression of blind, automatic forces seeking to express themselves through the unaccustomed and imperfect medium of human speech. The mention of the February wind, in which the lonely archdeacon met his end on the dark staircase, is the final touch that sends a chill up one's spine.

Another impressive Jamesian technique in which suggestion plays a large part is that of leading up to the climactic introduction of the demon in a disarmingly casual and mundane way, so that there is no atmospheric foreshadowing to prepare one for the shock, and the horror appears almost before one realises it. Here we find the stories in which the creature is touched before it is seen, such as "The Diary of Mr. Poynter":

> Then he dozed and then he woke, and bethought himself that his brown spaniel, which ordinarily slept in his room, had not come upstairs with him. Then he thought he was mistaken: for happening to move his hand which hung down over

> the arm of the chair within a few inches of the floor, he felt on the back of it just the slightest touch of a surface of hair, and stretching it out in that direction he stroked and patted a rounded something. But the feel of it, and still more the fact that instead of a responsive movement, absolute stillness greeted his touch, made him look over the arm. What he had been touching rose to meet him....

The non-committal, matter-of-fact way in which that unpleasant situation is introduced is used also in the episode in the well in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", the archdeacon's sensations while feeling the carvings in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral", and at considerable length in "Casting the Runes" where it leads up to Dunning's reaching for his watch in the pitch-black room: "So he put his hand into the well-known nook under the pillow: only, it did not get so far. What he touched was, according to his account, a mouth, with teeth, and with hair about it, and, he declares, not the mouth of a human being." In circumstances such as these, James's characters do not linger around for closer inspection; they bolt for safety with unaccustomed speed and often faint after reaching it. James does not in the least mind emphasizing the terror of his uncanny visitants, as long as he can do so inferentially, by suggestion.

But the most outstanding characteristic of his tyle--the personal seal he sets on all his fiction--is <u>irony</u>. It is present from the beginning to the end of the James canon--a dry, sardonic irony that is perfectly adapted to the describing of ghosts and horrors. He seems to stand apart from all his creations, to regard them with the amoral, Olympian eye of a scholar who has learned too much to take any human activity very seriously. "His narrative," says Fleming, "has always a kind of dry naturalism which lends perspective to the action. He shows at times some of the same imaginative adaptability, the same power of suddenly bringing home the implications of an abnormal situation by reference to the trivial, which Swift showed when he made Gulliver notice the Brobdignagian pores." (15)

Irony is implicit in all the techniques of suggestion and obliqueness described above, such as the practice of having an uneducated character describe the ghost in an insensitive, uncomprehending way. Often, too, when James as narrator is depicting a scene from the point of view of the hero, he will describe supernatural horrors with an air of ingenuous guilelessness that carries an obvious double meaning. Such is the passage in "Lost Hearts" in which the boy listens to the murder of his elderly cousin by the ghosts in the study: "His repeated knocks produced no answer. Mr. Abney was engaged: he was speaking. What! why did he try to cry out? and why was the cry choked in his throat? Had he, too, seen the mysterious children? But now everything was quiet....." Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys' sarcastic comments in "Martin's Close" are of course loaded with irony, and Mr. Anderson's observations of the occupant of "Number 13" are a set of rather grimly amusing misinterpretations: "He seemed to be a tall thin man--or was it by any chance a woman?--at least, it was someone who covered his head with some kind of drapery before going to bed, and, he thought, must be possessed of a red lampshade--and the lamp must be flickering very much. There was a distinct playing up and down of a dull red light on the opposite wall." The pedantically pious obituary in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" carries much implicit irony in its innocence of the true character of the archdeacon and his death, as does the mention that Canon Alberic, who had been promised he would die in bed, did indeed so die but "of a sudden seizure" whose nature can easily be inferred. Sometimes the irony is gentle, like that in "After Dark in the Playing Fields": "You

see--no, you do not, but I see--such curious faces: and the people to which they belong flit about so oddly, often at your elbow when you least expect it, and looking close into your face, as if they were searching for someone--who may be thankful, I think, if they do not find him. 'Where do they come from?' Why, some, I think, out of the water, and some out of the ground. They look like that." At other times, as in the killing of the Squire by the enormous spiders in "The Ash Tree", the irony is grim and terrible:

> There is very little light about the bedstead, but there is a strange movement there; it seems as if Sir Richard were moving his head rapidly to and fro with only the slightest possible sound. And now you would guess, so deceptive is the half-darkness, that he had several heads, round and brownish, which move back and forward, even as low as his chest. It is a horrible illusion. Is it nothing more? There! something drops off the bed with a soft plump, like a kitten, and is out of the window in a flash; another--four--and after that there is quiet again.
>
> "Thou shalt seek me in the morning, and I shall not be."

In this sardonic passage we can observe how a corrosive irony--James' personal refinement of the art of suggestion--operates to emphasize the horror of the objective events. It avoids the antithetic 19th century pitfalls of crude, melodramatic sensationalism and mincing, attenuated sentimentality, and satisfies the sophisticated modern taste for strong meat spiced with piquant seasoning. We want our literary nightmares forceful and appalling but presented with some diverting, stimulating artistry so as to delight the intellect and gratify the sensibility to fine writing. No more perfect stylistic means to this end could be found than the subtle, chilling suggestiveness of irony.

There are times, though, when James prefers to deal with physical horrors in a more direct and serious way, as in the landlord's account of the poachers who aroused Count Magnus' wrath: "And I tell you this about Anders Bjornsen, that he was once a beautiful man, but now his face was not there, because the flesh of it was sucked away off the bones. You understand that? My grandfather did not forget that." The exaggerated simplicity of this speech stems not from irony but from the landlord's efforts to repress the horror he feels, and the effect is conveyed with undeniable power. There, of course, James is concerned simply with physical gruesomeness.

> But in a reader here and there of "A Disappearance and Appearance" possibly something will stir which lay buried in the remoter, the seldom-trodden verges of his consciousness--the sense of the presence of Evil. There is a Punch and Judy show in this story, and its Punch is--well, not the devil, but a fairly intimate associate of his. "There came suddenly an enormous--I can use no other word--an enormous single toll of a bell, I don't know how far off--somewhere behind." Dostoevsky heard that bell. It resounds in dreams that have quite a distinct air of reality--a reality "somewhere behind"; and though Dr. James' tales may make no pretence but to amuse, this one carries off that pretence with a singularly malevolent and indelible grimace. (17)

On certain infrequent occasions, however, James reveals a literary ability quite opposite in tone to the depiction of enormities, but fully as effective. This is his knack for the depiction of English

landscapes, particularly windy autumnal scenes neither bright nor gloomy but possessed of a nostalgic, disquieting, twilight sense of the impermanence of all things. The seacoasts in "A Warning to the Curious" and "Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", the "View from a Hill" seen by Fanshawe and Squire Richards, and the countryside in "The Uncommon Prayer-Book" are all examples, each sketched indelibly with only a few words. Still better is the manor in "Lost Hearts":

> An evening light shone on the building, making the window panes glow like so many fires. Away from the Hall in front stretched a flat park studded with oaks and fringed with firs, which stood out against the sky. The clock in the church-tower, buried in trees on the edge of the park, only its golden weathercock catching the light, was striking six, and the sound came gently beating down the wind. It was altogether a pleasant impression, though tinged with the sort of melancholy appropriate to an evening in early autumn, that was conveyed....

Also memorable is the "wet August afternoon, rather windy, rather warm" in "A Neighbor's Landmark":

> Outside the window great trees were stirring and weeping. Between them were stretches of green and yellow country (for the Court stands high on a hillside), and blue hills far off, veiled with rain. Up above was a very restless and hopeless movement of low clouds travelling north-west. ((And on the haunted hill:)) The sun was down behind the hill, and the light was off the fields, and when the clock bell in the Church tower struck seven, I thought no longer of kind mellow evening hours of rest, and scents of flowers and woods on evening air; and of how someone on a farm a mile or two off would be saying "How clear Belton bell sounds tonight after the rain!" but instead images came to me of dusty beams and creeping spiders and savage owls up in the tower, and forgotten graves and their ugly contents below, and of flying Time and all it had taken out of my life.

These paragraphs, reflecting his feeling for nature, also display James' style at its most unobtrusive and transparent--a perfect medium for the transmission of ideas, pictures and impressions--a medium so clear, so well adapted to its subject-matter, that one never thinks of it at all but merely absorbs with instand comprehension the matter conveyed. That is the true test of any style, since the function of writing is to transmit meanings clearly and accurately without interposing any noticeable obstacles between the minds of the author and the reader. James' style has a classic terseness, with simple Anglo-Saxon words and smooth, rolling sentences, reflecting perhaps his early reading of the bible and his dislike of pretentious pedantry. Such a style is easy to translate, and one can well understand the success his stories had when translated into French ("The Mezzotint" won a symposium in Paris as to which was the best tale of them all), for French is a language of transparent clarity much better suited to simple realism than extravagant romanticism. Unlike Lovecraft, James never strives to build up a weird atmosphere in his stories with prolix, turgid passages of description or intuition in the conventional manner. In a more subtle way, however, his brief, solemn representations of nature reinforce the uneasy aura of the uncanny that permeates his tales, and help to put one in the mood for spectral manifestations. In any event, they indi-

cate that the effectiveness of his writing is not due simply to its usual fascinating antiquarian and supernatural themes but is the natural and unaffected expression of great talent and artistry. "The ripe old manner, the detachment, the urbanity of these stories are qualities that delight the literary sense," (17) says one reviewer. Mary Butts, the author of the only long essay on James up to now, goes even further in her estimation of him:

> It is the writer's belief that if Doctor James had chosen to write stories about any other subject under the sun, he would be considered the greatest classic short story writer of our time.... If his stories were about anything else (which Heaven forbid) Doctor James would be praised for something of the same qualities for which we praise Horace and Catullus and Villon, for something terse and poignant and durable, and looked at with both eyes wide open....It reminds one of what Lytton Strachey has to say about the art of Racine, purposely avoiding the ambitious comparisons, the striking phrases of the Romantics; content with the far harder business of understatement and classic permanence of effect. (18)

In view of his remarkable (though largely unrecognized) literary gifts, it may be wondered, in conclusion, why James wrote only ghost stories--why he "never cared to try any other kind." Here we enter the field of pure speculation, but a few suggestions may be hazarded. Although none of his stories were based to any degree on personal experience (except "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", which was suggested by a dream), the groundwork for them was probably laid in his mind during his childhood with his reading of the gloomy supernatural stories of Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, who made such an impression as to remain his favorite author all his life. Then came his early and life-long researches as an antiquary--a scholar in medieval manuscripts and buildings--which, as we have seen, is a field closely connected with and admirable as a background for the writing of weird fiction, because of the manifold common associations between the supernatural and the past. Somehow he happened to write his first two ghost stories and, when they proved an instant success, was urged to write more, particularly by the boys he loved to read to at Christmas. He liked writing ghost stories; those he wrote were greatly admired by everyone; and so he continued writing them, one a year, as a habit. But his real career was as a scholar, and he never had time or felt inclined to take up fiction writing seriously and try anything more conventional or profound. He always took a rather casual attitude toward his stories, regarding them as merely a hobby indulged in for the pleasure of his audience. "I am told", he says, "that they have given pleasure of a certain sort to my readers: if so, my whole object in writing them has been attained," and "in evolving them I have not been possessed by that austere sense of the responsibility of authorship which is demanded of the writer of fiction in this generation..." (8) Thus not being a conscious artist by profession, he had no literary ambitions to impel him toward other forms of writing.

None of these influences, however, explain the characteristic sardonic grimness of his stories. Perhaps some of it might be interpreted as a rebellion against modern rationalism, for James was a devout Christian and student of the humanities and apparently had no great love for science (he satirized scientific education in "An Evening's Entertainment"). More than that, behind his gentle, easy-going exterior, there there may have dwelt a private, personal bitterness of some kind, not strong enough to distort his personality, which was well-adjusted to

the life he led, but tending unconsciously to incline his fantasies toward the malevolent. He was too wise and learned a man not to see that the scholarly, gentlemanly, Christian values he believed in most were growing out of fashion in the modern world; and perhaps this engendered in him something of the somber pessimism that seems to be chronic among weird fiction writers in particular if not among thoughtful persons in general. It is visible in the somewhat grim smile of a man who knows that behind the amiable face of appearances grins the hideous skull of reality.

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NOTES

1. The stories omitted from this volume are: "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral", "Mr. Humphries and his Inheritance", "An Episode of Cathedral History", "The Uncommon Prayer-book", "An Evening's Entertainment", "There Was a Man Dwelt by a Churchyard", "After Dark in the Playing Fields", "The Experiment", and "A Vignette". All of these except the last two are included in The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James. It is unfortunate that at least "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" and "An Episode of Cathedral History" were not included in the Best Ghost Stories in lieu of such stories as "The Rose Garden" and "Two Doctors", but otherwise the selection is good. In the introduction the publishers refer to Dr. James fourth collection, A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories, under the erroneous title of Twelve Ghost Stories, apparently confusing it with his article "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories".

2. Lubbock, A Memoir of M. R. James, pp. 38-39.
3. Ibid, p. 39.
4. Ibid, p. 40.
5. Christmas Stories (The Works of Charles Dickens, National Library Edition, Vol. XIII) p. 18.
6. "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories", The Bookman, LXXIX (1929)170
7. Madam Crowl's Ghost, p. vii.
8. More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, p. v.
9. The Bookman, LXXIX (1929) 171.
10. The London Times Literary Supplement, XXIV (1925), 798.
11. Introduction to Ghosts and Marvels, quoted in The Spectator (London), CXXXV (1925), 1107.
12. The Spectator, CXLV (1930), 1009.
13. The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James, p. viii.
14. The Bookman, LXXIX (1929), 172.
15. The Spectator, CXLVI (1931), 633.
16. Supernatural Horror in Literature, p. 102.
17. The London Times Literary Supplement, XIX (1920), 19.
18. The London Mercury, XXIX (1934) 307. 311.

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FANTASY FORUM (cont).
lived longer, they might well have had that understanding; with his emergence from seclusion, HPL was broadening, and REH, despite maternal apron strings, was getting around to see things, so that surely in another dozen years he would have emerged from his realms of fantastic wonder and met the equally wonderful realm of actuality on all sides of him, and known its meaning. Or at least, accepted the riddles, instead of seeking escape.

BUILDING A LIBRARY THE ECONOMICAL WAY

by Bob Tucker

-oOo-

The following may read like an advertisement, may appear to put me in the light of an undercover salesman for the several book firms mentioned, but believe me, I'm just being altruistic. I haven't a thing to sell and will gain nothing by the information given here. Rather, this is offered to those collectors who, like myself, are somewhat limited in the purchasing of books because a household budget has to be met first. And because this article provides one answer to the shark-like tactics currently employed by some fan-dealers with whom The Acolyte is warring.

In a nutshell, I have found five book firms who offer books by mail order at greatly reduced prices. I've been buying from some of these firms for years and have learned that they deliver exactly what they advertise, or refund your money. This applies to brand new books, older books, reprint editions, and out-of-print items.

The American Lending Library, Inc., Used Book Dept., College Point, New York handles used books almost exclusively. They are the parent company of a vast chain of lending libraries scattered in drug stores and newsstands across the nation. As the lending libraries return the books for whatever reason (badly used, dated, unpopular) the parent company sells them at 35¢, and issues an annual catalog around February of each year.

Their current catalog includes the following at 35¢ each. I have loosely classified the titles for identification purposes.

Humorous and light fantasy: The Ill-Made Knight, The Sword in the Stone, and The Witch in the Wood (T. H. White); The Devil and the Doctor (David H. Kellar); Laughter of Fools (Idabel Williams); Sam Small Flies Again (Eric Knight); Swoop (Don Prince); The Passionate Witch (Thorne Smith); and Impregnable Women (Eric Linklater).

Time-travel: The Man Who Went Back (Warwick Deeping); Portrait of Jenny (Robert Nathan).

Miscellaneous: Old Ugly Face (Talbot Mundy); The 25th Hour (Herbert Best); The Survivor (Dennis Parry); Dr. Cyclops (Will Garth); The Edge of Running Water (William Sloane.

And at higher prices (49¢): Eddie and the Archangel Mike (Barney Beneфield); The Uninvited (Dorothy Macardle); The Thorne Smith Three-Decker. (69¢) After Many a Summer Dies the Swan (Aldous Huxley); The Killer and the Slain (Hugh Walpole). ($1.29): I Am Thinking of My Darling (Vincent McHugh); Time Must Have a Stop (Aldous Huxley).

Then there are two cut-rate new-book dealers in Chicago, each publishing annual catalogs: The Book Supply Co., 564 West Monroe Street; and The Clarkson Publishing Co., 1253 South Wabash, Chicago 5. Generally speaking, books which cost two dollars in regular shops may be had at from $1.69 to $1.75; $2.50 books at $1.98 to $2.15; $2.75 books at $2.19 to $2.29; and $3.00 books at $2.59 to $2.69. In addition are the various reprint series, running from 45¢ for the regular 49¢ editions to 85¢ for the $1.00 editions. When buying books from these two firms, it is advisable to weigh one against the other, for prices not only vary several cents but one firm pays the postage to you while the other does not.

Probably one of the best bargains to be found here is the many-times-reprinted old favorite, The Moon Pool. Judging from published comment on the book, this is the Liveright third edition in which the name of the villain varies from Russian to German to Russian again. The

Chicago firm offers mint copies, bound in black cloth with gold stamping, truly beautiful volumes.

But here is a small sample of other items offered by these two firms. Titles priced from 45¢ to 89¢ each include: The Other Worlds (Stong), Great Ghost Stories of the World (Laing), Creeps by Night (Hammett), The Uninvited (MacArdle), Killer and the Slain (Walpole), Sam Small Flies Again (Knight), She (Haggard), Best Ghost Stories (James), One Man Show (Thayer), Tales of Terror (Karloff) A Guy Named Joe (White), Invasion (van Loon), eleven Tarzan titles (Burroughs) and eleven Thorne Smith titles.

Up to $1.98: Houseboat on the Styx (Bangs), Warrior of the Dawn (Browne), Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra (Lewis), Canape-Vert (Marcelin), The Golden Rooms (Fisher), World's Beginning (Ardrey), King Solomon's Mines (Haggard), Moon Pool (Merritt), Witchcraft--Its Power in the World Today (Seabrook), and The Golden Bough (Frazer). The last two are non-fiction.

Up to $2.69 (fiction and non-fiction): Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural (Wise and Fraser), Phantom Victory (Lessnder), Time Must Have a Stop (Huxley), Six Novels of the Supernatural (Viking Portable Library), Pause to Wonder (Fisher and Humphries), Men Before Adam (White), Lost Continent of Mu, Children of Mu, and Sacred Symbols of Mu (Churchward).

At $3.19 and $4.98 respectively: Rockets (Ley) and Dweller on Two Planets (Phylos).

Then there is the **Carter Book Club, 843** Market Street, Newark 3, New Jersey; a book club that functions by mail only. One becomes a member by merely applying in writing. The club does little or no advertising for it needs none, since a member may order from the club any book in print at a 15% discount from the publisher's price. (It will be noted that this 15% discount parallels quite closely many of the prices quoted by the two Chicago firms.)

The fifth source is something else altogether, an out-and-out wholesale house. I have bought nothing from this firm because I simply cannot use twenty-five or thirty copies of a single title. In the hands of a reliable and generous fan-dealer, this source might prove beneficial to dealer and collector alike. An example is the current H. P. Lovecraft volume, Supernatural Stories, which is retailing everywhere at 49¢. In quantities of 50, this volume may be had at 30¢ each. Also at 30¢ are The Croquet Player (Wells) and Of Lunar Kingdoms (Wilson). All in mint condition of course. I shudder to think what outre profits this source might make available to the wrong fan dealer. (The address of this firm may be had from the editor of The Acolyte).

From this brief resume of a small segment of the book selling racket, it should be evident to the dullest reader that a very imposing and worthwhile collection may be built up without paying through the nose for it. Just because you live in a small town and are dependent on Uncle Sam to bring you your books does not mean that you need be victimised. Wide-awake collectors will shell out sizeable sums only for books that are genuinely valuable and hard to get.

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FANTASY FORUM

FRITZ LEIBER, JR. DISCUSSES PERDUE'S HISTORY:

I hesitate to vote on the future of the Perdue history. The present section was entertaining,but I wonder about the effect of a steady diet, especially ten years of it. Here are some points which occur to me:

(1) "Dated" science-fiction comprises how much of the total? One half? One-third? Less? ((Not over 20%. ftl)) A survey as extensive as this one would be more interesting if it took in the whole field. This is more of a literary curiosity. Some of the most prophetic stf would be excluded because undated.

(2) The list is swollen by the inclusion of all dates, apparently, in each story. This hardly seems necessary, especially since some of the dated events are of no great importance--"No war" repeated several times, for example. Stories with many dates are thereby overemphasized.

(3) The total effect of the first section is rather chaotic to me. All I can see is that, very obviously, science-fiction writers have naturally had to tack on dates in a somewhat haphazard way, and there seem to be no interesting agreements--as one might expect. On the whole, I think some principle of selection or organization is called for--maybe discussing the dated stories of one writer and then another, or dated stories pertaining to the same events, such as first rocket trip to the moon--different predictions about it; start of World War II, etc.

(4) On the other hand, the list might have a very stimulating effect, especially on science-fiction writers--if only in encouraging more thoughtful dating in the future.

On the whole I'd be inclined to vote against more of the list in its present form, but would rather see the second section before making it definite. Perhaps you could continue the list in issues when the other contributions are scanty.

----oooOooo----

JACK SPEER, A NEWCOMER TO OUR COLUMNS, THOUGH AN OLD-TIME FAN, GAVE US A LENGTHY CRITIQUE OF THE LAST ISSUE WHICH LACK OF SPACE FORCES US TO CUT DRASTICALLY:

My vote is enthusiastically in favor of continuing the History of the Future. And the fact that one man did this colossal job of rereading and compiling makes it seem not too much to hope that one or several could compile an alphabetical list of stories, classifying all and telling something about the more important ones. I'm told the project has been projected several times, but never got far.

...in your article: I wonder if the propaganda in a sociological story is lapped up subconsciously, or if it isn't rather the entertainment in any story that goes directly into what we call the subconscious, while the consciousness is actually concentrated on the ideas set forth, the non-entertainment residue. ((Speer also takes exception to my statement that no modern master of weird or pure fantasy has put non-entertainment residue into his stories, citing de Camp as an example; and points out that Tony Boucher also used a history of the future (involving a German victory) to tie together a series of otherwise unrelated stories. ---FTL))

----oooOooo----

ROBERT BLOCH DOES A SPOT OF SELF-ANALYSIS:

"Criteria for Criticism" is a stimulating job, and extremely sound--as far as it goes.

But it doesn't go quite far enough.

When you discuss writer motivations, for example, you confine

yourself to creation of a mood, the prediction of the future, the limning of individual reaction to fantastic disaster, daydreaming of the future, composition of a satire, and funny stuff.

These are types of stories, not types of writer-motivation. Maybe we're tangling with semantics, but I think not. I think you actually feel a writer sits down and consciously determines that he wants to do a "mood" story or a "satire" or build a private "Utopia".

That's why I say you don't go far enough.

To me (and to my little-known collaborator, a man name of Sigmund Freud) there are only two primary writer motivations: namely, ego-gratification and catharsis.

(You can combine ego-gratification and catharsis in one object by picturing an enema apparatus with your name printed on it.)

Seriously, though, I think all writer-motivation analysis must be approached from these two angles.

The ego-gratification phase is, I think, self-evident. There is ample evidence in the pages of any pro magazine...fantasy or mundane... of the guy who writes a yarn to demonstrate his amazing knowledge, his facile cleverness. In fantasy, there is the guy who wants to gain a sort of perverted recognition by shocking his readers (as a kid you met the same guys at a boys' camp; they were the ones who talked at the dinner table about eating loathsome concoctions). There is the guy who Utopiayarns in order to make the reader identify him as a profound thinker and a leader...the guy who writes in an absurdly brusque fashion in order to underplay normal emotional reactions and appear ultra-sophisticated.

And of course, since every author writes for readers, he is nothing more or less than an actor who performs for an audience...applause is the object, ego-gratification the obvious key to his work.

So much for that. It is, as I said two paragraphs ago, self-evident...and why didn't I shut up then?

But...this method of catharsis...

Now I am highly tempted to illustrate what I mean by "analyzing" the cathartic element in the work of a number of contemporary writers. I believe I can detect the obvious confessional element in the content of several fantasy producers.

But that would be vastly unfair.

I must therefore limit myself to a discussion of the cathartic material discernable in my own yarns...dreary as the process may be.

Between the ages of 17 and 28 (1935-45) I published about 135 fantasy yarns. Let's ignore the obvious ego-gratification and concentrate on catharsis. (I'm new at this too; never even thought of it until I read your article...let's stumble through it now that I have the list before me.)

During the years 1935-38 I wrote stories about Egypt, about Druids, and a number of pseudo-Lovecraftian tales. A casual survey would imply that I wanted to demonstrate my knowledge of Egyptology and Druidism (which is very shabby and limited) and that I wished to imitate the work of the master.

But that's a mistake--it's the mistake you made in your article; considering motivation in terms of story-content or apparent story-content. Here's where catharsis comes in. Ignore "what is the story about?" Ignore the style. Concentrate on what lurks beneath the surface. Character and setting.

What kind of heroes does the author use? Do they triumph or do they fail? What qualities cause them to triumph or fail? What settings are employed? What villains or personifications of evil are utilized?

These are the questions for the cathartic analysis. Use them on my yarns for the period 1935-38 and see what happens.

My "heroes" or protagonists (for the "hero" is often the villain) are either beaten-down scholars who blunder into trouble and are destroyed, or mercenary rats who blunder into trouble and are destroyed. They seek...and find only death.

Youthful cynicism...adolescent preoccupation with the problems of the depression where the poor scholar (that's me, folks) fails...and the smug realist also fails (that's a wish-fulfillment fantasy, folks). In other words, the philosophy of defeat implicit...."Why seek, you only get into trouble anyway."

Obvious stuff, eh? Any kid can do it? Laney's kids do it all the time, huh?

Wait a bit. Now...let's get cathartic. Consider the environment ...the setting...hang onto your chairs, folks...

In virtually every story I wrote between 1935 and 1938 the villain or evil or doom lurked underground.

There was a subterrene chanting in the "Feast in the Abbey"...a "Secret in the Tomb"...the Druids pulled old Charlie Havacoe down under the stone in "The Druidic Doom", and Nyarlathotep rose out of the sands in "The Faceless God"...a "Grinning Ghoul" lurked beneath the cenetary and "The Opener of the Way" skulked in an Egyptian tomb...the "Brood of Bubastis" was encountered under the Cornish hills (where there ain't no hills, incidentally) and "The Creeper in the Crypt" kept to his cellar in Arkham, just as Captain Carteret had to descend to view the treasures of the "Fane of the Black Pharaoh".

Underground...that's where evil lurks. At the same time, that's where the treasure lies. That's where the hero goes. Seeking treasure. Finding doom.

Get out your Freud, folks.

Can't you see the adolescent, subconsciously obsessed with the female sexual regions? Underground...treasure...possible danger and doom...mystery...

Now we're getting somewhere. That's what I was writing about, whether I knew it or not. Sexual symbolism. Shades of Jurgen!

At this time I pause to realise that if I were to proceed from 1938 onward, I would get increasingly tangled up in a dozen additional symbolic references which enter from that point. It would stretch this pleasant little exercise out for 15 pages or so, and to what end?

But I think this at least provides an inkling of an approach to writer-motivation neglected in the stimulating Laney article. Let other, more qualified intellects take up the torch from here...take up the torch and set fire to the whole damned thing, for all of me!

At least I don't write about caverns so much any more!

-----oooOooo-----

E. HOFFMAN PRICE DISAGREES WITH A TOO ENTHUSIASTIC DESCRIPTION:

Stuart Boland in re. Lovecraft has something worth reading. Boland is quite some traveller. I once spent a number of enjoyable hours looking over his photos and listening to his reminiscences of far off places. One of these days I hope to repeat the meeting. But since, despite gas going off ration, I am compelled to sit tight for some months, I would like to offer a few sidelights on Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft, described as "immortals, each with his stupendous understanding of life, creation, and the universe...."

Those who met either REH or HPL in person could not help but be charmed by their personalities; and their reader-reaction is well known. Still, I don't believe either had a "stupendous understanding of life". With all affection and respect, I don't believe that either of the two had got beyond the juvenile viewpoint.

R. E. Howard did travel around a lot. So did HPL. Reading some

pages, single spaced typing, of the letters Howard wrote Lovecraft makes it clear that he met raw life in oil boom towns, in cow towns, and in travel about Texas. He was a big, solid hunk of man, able and willing to play a spectacular part in any brawl which might be forced upon him. While the things he met couldn't put a dent in his athletic body, they were too much for his sensitive spirit; he saw much more than he could understand or interpret, and these things drove him to create worlds of imagination in which there were greater brawls than any Texas oil boom could offer. Like so many weird story writers, he was an exaggerated escapist, and his exit in 1936 surely indicates that he had, alas, entirely missed the point and meaning of life. Because of Robert's stupendous misunderstanding of life, his father spent the final eight years of his life alone, with ill health and grief as his only company. And to be anticlimactic, I invite a careful reading of Howard's weird (or any other)fiction. Note the naif touches in the passages wherein the author interprets and expounds; and see that the writer, however broad and thorough his studies had been, and however rugged his contacts with life, was nevertheless a very small boy who had not yet won any understanding of life. I grant that his power of observation was keen, unusual, shrewd--as witness his humorous western stories--and that his mind was brilliant. But I repeat, he'd not interpreted what he'd seen and learned; in place of a philosophy, he had only emotional expressions.

HPL, though Howard's very opposite in so many respects, was another who, despite his impressive intellect and amazing erudition, didn't know the first thing about life. He looked back to antiquity, wished he were in the noble 18th Century, and made a virtue of his ignorance of life about him. Granted, his descriptive and expository pages prove him a keen observer of things and people--but again, he wouldn't or couldn't interpret, hence he created fantastic realms for himself to inhabit. He restricted himself largely to the company of the "scholarly", the "literary", the "learned". While a warm and human and lovable personality, he nevertheless was at home with only that one type of person --persons who approximated his own intellectual and literary aspirations.

His short-lived and entirely inadequate marriage indicates that he couldn't have known anything about life. For him, women simply didn't exist except as occasional names in a story or as creatures of whom a scientist took scientific cognizance as natural phenomena. In this respect, Robert E. Howard was far more a standard model, yet only in comparison with Lovecraft. REH did, I infer, have feminine friends. One phoned during my visit in Cross Plains. Robert's mother told the lady that Robert was not in; actually he was in his office, within easy call. Add this to the exaggerated filial piety which led to his suicide on learning that his mother's illness would be fatal, and you get the picture: maternal apron strings keeping a basically solid and salty fellow from meeting and understanding life.

Academically, HPL was broad, deep and versatile; but with respect to life and living, his first thirty sheltered years kept him from any of the laboratory exercises required for an understanding of life. He was an un-realist whom circumstances permitted to remain unrealisitic. His philosophy was selectively deduced from books, not from living. His life was so specialized in its outlook and contacts that he could not in the ordinary sense of the term have known anything about life.

With all respect and friendliness, I submit the above in objection to Boland,s enthusiastic appraisal of two men I greatly admired, and whose company I enjoyed, and whose absence I mourn even to this day: life is richer for having known them, yet it is impossible for my high regard to becloud the issue so badly as to let me admit that they had any "stupendous understanding of life". I do however concede, had they

(continued, with apologies for format, on p. 38)