

TALES OF MYSTERY & THE SUPERNATURAL

# Gothic Short Stories

Edited by DAVID BLAIR



# GOTHIC SHORT STORIES



*Selected with an Introduction  
and Notes by*

DAVID BLAIR



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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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## FOREWORD

The Notes that appear at the end of this volume give brief background information on the individual stories and their authors, plus, where necessary, some explanatory glosses on specific difficulties or allusions in the texts. Discussions of the tales occur in the Introduction below, but since they will certainly 'give too much away' for those who want to experience some of the stories' power to surprise, shock and disconcert, readers are especially advised to follow the generic advice of Keith Carabine in his General Introduction above.

D. B.

## INTRODUCTION

The invention of literary Gothic is generally credited to Horace Walpole and dated to 1764. It was then a means of repossessing imaginative and emotional territories which had been largely surrendered in the rational, enlightened culture of the eighteenth century. In his short novel *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole took the setting back to the 'Gothic' period of the Middle Ages – the 'dark' ages, as those living in the age of 'enlightenment' thought of them – because it seemed more appropriate to him to incorporate supernatural incidents in a fiction set at a period when belief in the supernatural was widespread. Such belief was frequently associated with Roman Catholic 'superstition', and where it existed in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, it was often seen as the aberration of uneducated minds – of servants, peasants or women. Any literary engagement with it could seem almost a self-conscious exercise in cultural anthropology or, as with *Otranto*, in antiquarianism. Only in the second edition of *Otranto* did Walpole admit his authorship of the story; the first edition had kept its 'Gothicism' at safe distance by claiming that it was translated from an Italian medieval manuscript.

Gothic writing thus began as part of an attempt to liberate and validate kinds of narrative – folkloristic, mythic, supernatural – that 'progress' and 'modernity' in their eighteenth-century versions had tended to exclude or marginalise. The results could combine extravagant incident with rather conventional morality in ways that seem clumsy and naïve to modern eyes. On the first page of *The Castle of Otranto*, a helmet of gigantic proportions appears from nowhere in the courtyard of the castle and crushes to death Conrad, the son and heir of Manfred, Duke of Otranto. Later a hand, arm and leg of similar proportions appear; and one of Manfred's ancestors steps down from his portrait and glides spectrally out of the room in apparent protest at his descendant's attempts to coerce into marriage the woman who was about to be his daughter-in-law until Conrad's fatal accident. At the end of the novel the fully-integrated gigantic spectre of Alfonso the Good (whose descendants Manfred's line had usurped), long dead but only bigger and better as a result, manifests itself to terminate Manfred's fraudulently maintained proprietorship of the dukedom, and then ascends into heaven. Naïve as they may seem, however, many of these elements remain recognisable as Gothic writing develops from the limited beginnings that Walpole had provided.

When Anna Letitia Aikin wrote her fragment, 'Sir Bertrand', which opens this selection, literary Gothic was less than ten years old. This early Gothic fiction does not purport to be a self-contained 'story' but presents itself as if extracted from a longer romance. Aikin's orchestration of Gothic effects may suggest something of the broader 'romance' narrative from which it might come, but admits no dialogue and thus no explanations: just as a mouth is opened to speak, the narrative disappears in a puff of dashes. 'Sir Bertrand', however, in its original context, was written to illustrate a thesis. It was appended to two short essays, 'On Romances' and 'On the Pleasure derived from Objects of Terror', which speculated on the issues of literary taste and aesthetics that arose from Gothic's currency in the 1760s and 1770s. Aikin there acknowledges that, once engaged in any narrative, curiosity will carry the reader through pages of (in some cases) tedium or (in the case of Gothic narrative) terror, because 'we rather chuse to suffer the smart pang of a violent emotion than the uneasy craving of an unsatisfied desire'. This is what her hero experiences as 'resistless desire to finish the adventure'. However, readers go into Gothic narratives, she reflects, knowing exactly what they are letting themselves in for and go in regardless. What makes Gothic potent, she concludes, is 'the pleasure constantly attached to the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects':

A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, . . . our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, [and] rejoices in the expansion of its powers.

Applied as a formula for generating Gothic narrative, the tendency of this theory of Gothic is to generate just one strange thing after another, as 'Sir Bertrand' shows. The hero is conducted through a sequence of effects, each of which needs in some way to be more 'strange and unexpected' than the last. This yields a brilliant snapshot of how 'Gothic' was thought of and to an extent practised in its very earliest years, but Aikin's reading of Gothic vocabulary as merely a type of the 'new and wonderful' or the 'strange and unexpected' appears to modern eyes too literal and too limiting.

The most influential of the writers who developed Gothic in the first sixty years after *Otranto* was Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823), author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and other novels. Radcliffe and her many imitators evolved the vocabulary of what can now be thought

of as 'classic' Gothic writing. The setting of the action in the past remained important, although the past was not always as Gothically distant as it had been in Walpole's novel – *Udolpho* was set in the 1580s. The castle remained a valuable albeit not indispensable setting – preferably ruined or partly ruined, helpfully endowed with vaults and labyrinthine passages, ideally with one section mysteriously sealed off. Radcliffe provided another recurrent source of danger by populating her landscapes with sinister *banditti*, always a lurking and sometimes a more active threat to her heroines. Abbeys and monasteries were also richly evocative, not just in their architectural promise, but also in the way that monastic life, with its semi-anonymity, its sexual denial and its ferocious insistence on orthodoxy and discipline, enabled further dramas of secret identity, suppressed histories and persecution. The extract from Charles Maturin's novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), that appears here as 'The Parricide's Tale', colourfully exemplifies this. One step further were the chambers and the machinery of the Inquisition, another potent type of the terror that Gothic man could visit upon man. As Gothic writing developed in these early years, the supernatural was not an essential element: Radcliffe famously practised a form of Gothic in which mysterious occurrences were *supposed* to be attributable to supernatural causes but were proved not to be. This shifted the focus of the narrative of terror from the outward monstrosities and manifestations that might occasion it to the inner imaginative processes of the victim. These processes Radcliffe herself, when at her most disapproving in commenting on her heroine's wayward inner life, could call 'a momentary madness'.

The main medium in which shorter Gothic fiction was practised and consumed in this period was that of the 'blue books' as they are generally known after the colour of their covers. These were compilations of stories produced to feed a huge public demand for sensational Gothic narrative. If novelists were developing the Gothic repertoire, the blue-book writers exercised that expanding repertoire rapidly, vigorously and cheaply. It is tempting, although perhaps too facile, to see the Gothic blue books as being down-market, parasitic offshoots of the 'classic' Gothic novel. Not all blue-book writing was crude and derivative, and not all Gothic novels were products of the kind of serious literary and stylistic endeavour that characterised Radcliffe's work. In the case of the story 'Captive of the Banditti', however, from an 1801 blue book, the charge of parasitism, or downright piracy, is hard to dodge. Here the blue-book publisher, unhampered by modern copyright protocols, has lifted a Gothic

'sketch' called 'Montmorency' from a 1798 miscellany by literary collector and critic Nathan Drake entitled *Literary Hours; or Sketches, Critical, Narrative, and Poetical*. An anonymous hack has then been asked to 'finish' Drake's sketch and the two halves have been clamped together under a new and sensational title as a 'completed' Gothic story for the delectation of blue-book devotees.

What is thus delivered, while not especially satisfying as a narrative, even by blue-book standards, has interesting and enjoyable features – besides representing this particular phase of Gothic writing. Drake's original sketch had been composed as part of the literary defence of Gothic in the same spirit as Anna Letitia Aikin's 'fragment' of twenty-five years earlier. Drake, however, was an avowed admirer of Ann Radcliffe, and what he had laid down as a Gothic exercise shows her influence especially clearly. This is perhaps most apparent in the importance of extended passages of sublime landscape description, something that had featured strongly in Radcliffe's work and which Drake, elsewhere in *Literary Hours*, had commented on admiringly. This use of 'Gothicised' landscape was one of Radcliffe's significant extensions of the vocabulary of literary Gothic. The 'banditti' themselves, of course, have a Radcliffian pedigree, and Drake and his unintended collaborator also, like Radcliffe, equivocate with the supernatural. Drake toys with Walpole's gigantism: the landscape itself is vertiginously scaled-up, and the banditti themselves, when first seen by Montmorency, are 'gigantic figures in ponderous iron armour', like extras from *The Castle of Otranto*, the leader bearing 'a massy shield of immense circumference'. In the end, however, Montmorency has just run into an everyday scenario of Gothic banditry carried out by desperadoes who seem to be, at worst, a bit sturdier than the average. When the anonymous hand takes up the narrative thread the scene is described as 'a place fitted only for the residence of perturbed spirits', and Montmorency sees the approaching female figure in her white dress as 'supernatural'; but again quasi-supernaturalism, like quasi-gigantism, is an intermediate effect of this kind of Gothic and is dissolved by the narrative's explanations and resolutions. If the story thus bears the stamp of Radcliffe's influence, what we notice on the other hand is that the narrative remains male-centred, unlike Radcliffe's highly evolved 'female Gothic'. In this respect it still shows early Gothic's close relationship with medieval chivalric romance, as did 'Sir Bertrand' and, before it, *Otranto*. It is noticeable, even so, that when the anonymous portion of the tale is obliged to tie the narrative together using the fair



Dorothée's testimony, what ensues is something much closer to the more 'modern' Gothic, centred on female distress and victimisation, of which Radcliffe was the pre-eminent practitioner.

What is apparent looking back on the versions of Gothic evolving at the end of the eighteenth century is that in them the excitement of terror is only in part to do with their machinery of supernatural or quasi-supernatural incidents, of medieval superstition, violence or torture – of 'new and wonderful objects'. Often underpinning this machinery there are other agendas of anxiety. In *The Castle of Otranto* these are anxieties about property, dynastic alliance, inheritance, patrilinearity, the very foundations on which British society and political life were sustained. Radcliffe in her work picks up and develops from Walpole another urgent set of anxieties about male power and property, the tyranny exercised in law by fathers over daughters, husbands over wives, guardians over wards – anxieties which were finding at the same time a non-Gothic expression in the writing of feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft. Furthermore, madness, momentary or otherwise, is a pointed concern in an age in which 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' (in William Wordsworth's famous formulation from the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*) could be promoted rather than locked up or dismissed as aberrant. Such overflow, besides, if transferred to the political sphere, could threaten insurgence, even revolution, as had occurred in France in 1789. In this collection, 'Extracts from Gosschen's Diary: No. 1' and 'The Madman's Manuscript' centre on the negotiation between the violent overflow of 'insanity' and those who think of themselves as standing for 'normality'.

Gothic also dabbles in male – not merely female – sexual anxieties. In a striking episode in Matthew Lewis's infamous novel *The Monk* (1796), Don Raymond de Cisternas tells how, while bedridden due to an injury, he was visited nightly in his tapestried room by the hideous spectre of the Bleeding Nun of Lindenburg, a woman who had pursued unbridled sexual licence in life and now as a living corpse comes to the immobilised Don Raymond's bedchamber to claim him with a basilisk stare and deathly kisses. In what was to be an influential narrative in the development of a certain kind of Gothic, Lewis substitutes a male victim of Gothicised female sexual aggression for the entrapped, tremulous heroines of Radcliffe's female-centred Gothic, subject to unwanted visitation by predatory males. Sir Walter Scott's 1828 story 'The Tapestried Chamber' lifts this idea out of Lewis's novel, and it surfaces again spectacularly in the 1895 story

'No. 252 Rue M. le Prince' by Ralph Adams Cram, which is discussed later in this Introduction.

Other early pieces in this collection illustrate how the Gothic story spins off from the full-scale novel in the decades up to 1840. They illustrate also how perplexed in some ways the relationship between 'incident', 'story', 'romance' and 'novel' remain well into this period. 'Sir Bertrand' presents itself as a 'fragment'. 'Captive of the Banditti' is another fragment which a second hand has tried to convert into a 'tale'. Two further examples – those by Maturin and Dickens – are extracted from much longer novels; and even in 1850 Hawthorne's 'Ethan Brand' appears as 'a chapter from an aborted romance'. Gothic novels often tend to fragment into sub-narratives, such as that of Don Raymond and the Bleeding Nun from *The Monk*, thus allowing Scott to rework the episode as the core of his later story. Conversely, authors writing short fictions often embed them in meta-narrative frames, like Scott's *Chronicles of the Canongate*, for a second series of which 'The Tapestry Chamber' was originally intended, or Le Fanu's *Purcell Papers*, within which 'Strange Incident in the Life of Schalken the Painter' first appeared. Another of the early stories in this collection – this time from the periodical magazines which also carried much short Gothic fiction – promises to be merely the first 'Extract from Gosschen's Diary', although as it happens no others were forthcoming.

'Short Gothic', unencumbered by the need to provide plot and character on a novelistic scale, can seem sometimes, like Aikin's and Drake's early examples and much blue-book writing, to concentrate almost solely on effects. This is again visible in 'The Spectre Bride', a hugely extravagant farrago of Gothic nonsense from the magazines that covers all the territory between the sublime and the ridiculous but somehow survives because of its enormous *brio*. It is detectable too, however, in Scott's much more muted 'The Tapestry Chamber', in the way in which there is no real story: Browne arrives by chance at Lord Woodville's medieval castle, passes his 'painful night' in the eponymous chamber, where he is assailed by the spectre, identifies her in the morning from her portrait and then leaves. It is an incident, not a story. A story, properly and Gothically plotted, would have disclosed some sense in which the unearthly visitation was addressed specifically to Browne, obliging him to discover something suppressed about his own or his family's past that linked it to the darker parts of the Woodvilles' history. As it is, Browne has just been a rather desultory device for reworking the Gothic *topos* of spectral female iniquity, and he is not much more, in

truth, than a modern Sir Bertrand in a less manic, more polished fragment.

To compare 'The Spectre Bride' with Le Fanu's story of 'Schalken the Painter' from the late 1830s is to see how, in reworking strands from earlier Gothic, writers at the beginning of the Victorian period were prepared to handle effect more subtly. In Le Fanu's story the scenario is recognisable – an innocent young woman trapped into marriage with a demon-husband – but whereas 'The Spectre Bride' was indecently eager to take us all the way to hell with the unhappy couple, Le Fanu cloaks the fate of Rose Velderkaust in a silence that is broken only by her one, terrible reappearance at her uncle's house when she seems to be making a last, doomed attempt to escape. Beyond that only Schalken's final dream in the church of Rotterdam hints at the nature of the life-in-death marriage to the 'livid and demoniac' Vanderhausen. It is not, however, just in the greater tact with which Gothic effects are handled that Le Fanu's tale transcends the 'Spectre Bride' model. Whereas Clotilda is romantically seduced by a demon-lover with a modicum of sub-Byronic charisma, Rose is brutally sold into marriage by her mercenary uncle: she is merely a commodity. The macabrely comic scene in which the palpably dead Vanderhausen comes to supper to meet the unsuspecting bride-to-be further roots the Gothic in recognisable social ritual and the grimmer facets of patriarchy. 'Gothic' here is not just a language of literal horrors but a metaphorical language wherein are explored waking anxieties. The 'advantageous' matches that were often forced on women by their fathers, uncles or guardians may have seemed little better, at root, than that forced on Rose with the ghoul Vanderhausen, as Le Fanu hints; and Schalken's dream, in which Rose draws aside the black curtains of the marriage-bed, gestures further towards the sexual horrors elided from the official narratives of such alliances.

When American writers turned to Gothic they faced difficulties that did not trouble writers in the European tradition. It was the Catholic European past and the detritus of European history – castles, catacombs and monasteries – that had provided early Gothic writers with their vocabulary of settings and effects. These spaces had retained custody of the darker narratives of the past and could be made to yield them up again. An American writer in the 1830s, however, had only just over two hundred years of an American past to look back on, and although that past had had its phases of superstition and darkness – most notably in the seventeenth-century witch-hunts and the persecution of the native peoples – these had

not left an infrastructure of sublime architectural ruins and subterranean vaults, although they had left a resonant enough legacy of ruined lives and troubled consciences. American writers who chose to pursue an American Gothic followed from the start different paths. Writing in the 1790s, Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810) in his novels such as *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntley* had firmly located the macabre and the bizarre in the American landscape. There was an inevitable trade-off involved in this: the Gothic subject had to change with the Gothic setting, and a properly Americanised Gothic was not going to be driven by spectral dukes, mad monks and bleeding nuns enacting the horrors of the past. Darkness enough, however, could be found in the American scene – madness, persecution, violence and spiritual desolation had not been left behind in the Old World. *Wieland* (1798), despite one spectacular incidence of spontaneous combustion and the disruptions occasioned by the presence of a voice-thrower, finds terror principally in the mind's potential for catastrophic dysfunction. In *Edgar Huntley* (1799), Brown demonstrates how the American landscape with its natural wonders could function as a home-grown 'Gothic' resource, providing its own repertoire of terrors: journeying through the bizarre landscape of frontier up-state Pennsylvania, the hero wanders in complex cavern-systems that recall the subterranean vaults of the Gothic castle or abbey, or the haunts of Nathan Drake's banditti, threatened by wild beasts and hostile natives in ways that both mirror and supplement the horrors of the disrupted mind itself.

In the work of Poe and Hawthorne, the two major figures writing what one can call Gothic short stories in America in the 1830s and 1840s, one can see some of the characteristic difficulties and some of the distinctive triumphs of early American Gothic. Poe, who acknowledged openly the compelling precedent that Brown had set, is nevertheless much more likely to be drawn back to the traditional European theatre of the macabre in his most Gothic stories. The most frequently anthologised of these, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', exploits the very 'Gothic' idea of the degenerate legacy of a decaying European aristocracy and with it the crumbling infrastructure of its architectural possessions. Like *The Castle of Otranto*, it ends with the utter collapse of a dynasty and with it of the house that it has possessed or mispossessed, a trope that Poe uses more than once in his stories. 'Berenice', selected for this collection, also centres on an aristocratic family and, like the better-known 'Usher', uses madness, obsession and hints of incest and vampirism as lurid indices of its degeneration.

Close as they are in date, 'Berenice' and the 'Madman's Manuscript', read by Mr Pickwick in Dickens's early novel, remind us of the continued currency of madness as a subject in British and American Gothic, and of the powerful legacy of the 'Gosschen' type of insane-testimony from magazine Gothic of earlier in the century. Dickens, like the 'Gosschen' author, carefully frames the maniacal deposition both by the Pickwickian narrative that contains it and by the diagnostic, hand-wringing comments that are appended to the manuscript itself. It is, in contrast, characteristic of Poe's development of this kind of material that the first-person maniacal narrative monopolises the text and the reader's attention, creating its own self-defined, self-disrupted world.

Hawthorne could be drawn to European settings too (as in his 1844 story, 'Rappaccini's Daughter'), but by far the greater number of his stories use local settings and invent an American Gothic, where they do, by probing the American past for its own horrors. In stories such as 'Young Goodman Brown' and 'Alice Doane's Appeal' (both 1835) these horrors are specifically associated with the Salem witch trials of the early 1690s, in which Hawthorne's own great-great grandfather had been involved as a prosecutor. The story selected here, 'Ethan Brand', however, recreates Gothic differently, relying less on history and instead deploying a clever allusiveness that enables the story to participate in the European Gothic legacy while remaining rooted in Massachusetts. Here is the cursed, wandering, Faustian figure who has made a terrible compact with the forces of darkness, the figure who has in various guises stalked through European literature – as Faust himself, as the Wandering Jew (who had made a guest appearance in Lewis's *The Monk* and is the 'stranger' of 'The Spectre Bride'), as Byron's Manfred and as Melmoth, the demonic wanderer of Maturin's novel, who at the close of the book comes to the end of the time allotted to his ill-purchased life-span. If the figure of Ethan himself thus cues in memories of European Gothic, so does Hawthorne's handling of the setting among the lime-burners' kilns. Ethan's kiln, at which Bartram and his son now toil, is described as a Gothic castle in miniature, a 'tower-like structure', and, like the Gothic castle, a gateway between normality and nightmare, 'a private entrance to the infernal regions'. Abandoned kilns nearby 'look already like relics of antiquity'. Thus Gothicised, this patch of an industrial New England landscape transcends its utilitarian purpose as the arena of Bartram's daily labours and becomes the lurid setting for the last chapter of Ethan's dark night of the soul. As always in Hawthorne's and almost always in

Poe's work, the Gothic setting is the place of self-haunting and self-destructiveness.

This collection avoids as far as possible 'classic' ghost stories. Because, however, the ghost story was in the nineteenth century a major extension of Gothic writing, and the Victorian era's most distinctive contribution to the genre, it would be perverse to ignore it altogether. In Elizabeth Gaskell's 'Old Nurse's Story' it is possible to see especially clearly how Gothic can be simultaneously brought home (to nineteenth-century England) and kept at the margins (in this case rural north-west England), tinged now with characteristic Victorian strands of anxiety and sentiment – anxiety about social class and foreigners (that womanising music tutor) and sentiment about children. The Manor House in the story works very much as the Gothic castle or abbey had done in earlier, classic Gothic. Gloomy and labyrinthine, it has an east wing closed off and associated with dark events in the past, like the south wing of Castle Mazzini in Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790). A servant called Dorothy shows the narrator parts of the building hung with portraits of previous inhabitants, conveying a sense of secrets lodged there and stories not to be told, just as a servant called Dorothee did for Emily St Aubert at Château Le Blanc in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The terrible secrets of Château Le Blanc were rooted, Radcliffe's reader and heroine later learned, in female sexual jealousy and murder, as they turn out to be also in Gaskell's story. Add the raging snow-storm and the ghost-child crying for admittance from the opening of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* – in part another 'old nurse's [Nellie Dean's] story' – in which another house in the middle of northern moors substitutes for the exotic semi-ruin of old Gothic – and the Gothic vocabulary of Gaskell's story is complete. The brutality with which the crime of the past is spectrally re-enacted at the tale's climax is very striking, but again recognisably looks back all the way to *Otranto* itself as the different 'parts' of the tale's Gothicity, the persons and clothes in the portraits, the ghostly organ-playing father, the lone girl-child and her wound, come together in a grand and hideous affirmation that the sins of the past will not be forgotten and must be answered for. The east wing will not contain them: it never can.

Scores of Victorian ghost stories witness this adaptation of Gothic to the sensibilities and the anxieties of Victorian Britain. Prominent among these anxieties is that the carefully cultivated and regulated surface of Victorian respectability may conceal much darker energies or a hideous past that has been edited out of the official histories of

the pillars of society. The latter is a central interest in many Victorian novels – think of Lady Dedlock in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), of Bulstrode in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872) or of Henchard in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) – and one that does not require the vocabulary of Gothic writing in order to be retold. Gothic, however, from *Otranto* onwards, had been adept at probing this particular terror, and often Victorian Gothic, in the ghost story and elsewhere, is used to develop it. In his novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Robert Louis Stevenson produced what is arguably the century's most enduring parable of the dark underside of Victorian respectability; and at the start of 'The Body-Snatcher', another respectable Victorian medical practitioner suddenly confronts at the foot of an inn stairway a figure – the drunken Scotsman, Fettes – who was a participant in, and is the custodian of, his dark, pre-Victorian past – a Hyde to his Jekyll. By tracing the fictional Macfarlane's history back to the notorious 'body-snatching' scandal of 1820s' Edinburgh, Stevenson reminds us of the dark underside of medical practice itself – that uneasy and unacknowledged connection between the great, rich London practitioners and the corpses for dissection going in at the back doors of the medical schools. However, into this grim framework of nocturnal traffic with the dead Stevenson inserts another action, the arrival of the odious stranger, Gray, who has a dark, mysterious hold over the young Macfarlane and is thus, in a sense, an earlier version of Fettes himself at the story's opening, a point that Fettes has reinforced in his pointed remark to Macfarlane that 'we are not so easily shut of our acquaintance'. The story subtly integrates these two actions, each in its way Gothic without being supernatural, towards an even more macabre climax in which the past insists – again after the tradition of Walpole's Alfonso the Good – on reintegrating its scattered body parts and reanimating itself despite all attempts to eradicate it.

Although written by, in the estimation of many, the greatest of all ghost-story writers, 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook' by M. R. James is not a ghost story at all, if we take a 'ghost' to be the manifestation of a dead person. In James's work, even when there are ghosts in this sense, they manifest themselves with striking physicality. Far from being wraith-like, his revenants often arrive in their decayed physical bodies, the water or earth or cobwebs of their burial places still dropping from them. The story of the Cambridge academic Dennistoun, and his scholarly quest to the Pyrenean cathedral town of St Bernard de Comminges (which really exists), is intensely Gothic without being 'ghostly'. Here, as Walpole had done at the birth of the Gothic and

others after him, James exploits the culture of southern-European Catholic superstition. His English, rational, central figure, who approaches the Gothic past with a notebook and camera merely as a repository of antiquarian relics, is like the enlightenment man of the eighteenth century, only now he is a creature of the Victorian 'enlightenment', austere, scholarly and methodical. At Comminges he is disdainfully aloof from the jittery fearfulness of the old sacristan and his daughter, eyes fixed on the crucifix, 'telling her beads feverishly'; but what later manifests itself to Dennistoun cannot be fixed by reason and the tools of nineteenth-century historical enquiry. In James's story the very invention of Gothic is in a sense being re-enacted as the seemingly quaint lumber of a superstitious, medieval past discloses terrifyingly the things of darkness with which that past was in real contact. James himself, lightly disguised as Dennistoun, adores this lumber, and his enumeration of it gives the story authentic Gothic texture and atmosphere.

The development of the Gothic story in later nineteenth-century America is in many respects more interesting than its development in Britain at this period. Although American writers practise the ghost story, often in ways strikingly similar to writers in Britain albeit transplanted to local scenes, there is also a more vigorous re-exploration of other strands in the Gothic tradition. Accordingly, this collection includes a number of stories which show the diversity of setting and subject that is detectable in turn-of-the-century American Gothic writing: 'The Death of Halpyn Frayser' by Ambrose Bierce, 'The Lame Priest' by S. Carleton, 'Luella Miller' by Mary Wilkins Freeman and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Unlike Poe in many of his Gothic stories and Henry James, too, in *The Turn of the Screw* (1896), but like Hawthorne, all of these writers stay at home to find Gothic in the American landscape, townscape or housescape.

None of the tales is a ghost story, although Bierce and Freeman both wrote good conventional ghost stories. Bierce's 'The Death of Halpyn Frayser' engages daringly with a converging set of Gothic possibilities, this convergence underpinned by the story's intense locus at a single point in the Californian landscape, a point which is a place of burial, of sleep, of nightmare, of murder, even of automatic writing, Frayser leaving as his final text blood-red quatrains in the manner of his ancestor Myron Bayne. As Hawthorne did in 'Ethan Brand', Bierce reminds us that the American landscape carries its own kinds of Gothic signifiers, here not just the graveyard but the



ruined schoolhouse – ‘a typical Californian substitute for what are known to guide-bookers abroad as “monuments of the past”’, as Bierce pointedly remarks. Structurally too the story is daring, Bierce’s narrative voice taking on a kind of studied, almost heartless urbanity as it punctuates the chronicle of dream and death with his comments on Frayser and his past history. Thus the macabre dream of the blood-drenched forest and the shrouded ghoul-mother is interrupted by the retrospective story of the incestuous, possessive closeness of mother and son nurtured amid the macho Southern politicking of *post-bellum* Tennessee. Returning to mid-dream we now see how the ghoul-mother is acting out the vampiric subtext of that desire for incestuous possession that first led Frayser to flee west. Furthermore, this dream, as we learn only at the end, is being experienced while Frayser sleeps unknowingly on his murdered mother’s grave. She herself had travelled west to find him, and he has momentarily woken from sleep in the story’s opening paragraph with her unfamiliar remarried name on his lips, a sleep in which he is subsequently himself seemingly murdered by her murderer. The sounds of demoniac laughter come through the fog at the end of the tale – but is it that of Branscom/Larue? Was his the ‘heartless’ laughter that penetrated Frayser’s nightmare? There is, as the detective, Jaralson, remarks, ‘some rascally mystery here’. For the reader the conundrum is insoluble and unsettling because the giddy convergence of Gothic tropes – madness, nightmare, spirit visitation, murder, incest, the power of the past over the present – will not yield a single perspective or cohere into a single Gothic narrative. The story is an almost mischievous *tour-de-force* from a writer often bent on mischief.

‘The Lame Priest’ too is planted in the American landscape, transformed by winter snows as in some of the most memorable of Robert Frost’s poems. For all the absolute difference of setting, style and effect of the two stories, however, it is at root doing the same kind of thing with Gothic as ‘Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook’. For Dennistoun’s English scholarly detachment read the narrator’s American backwoods pragmatism. For the superstitious French Catholic custodians of the secrets of Comminges read now Andrew’s role as Native American custodian of the secrets of the evil spirits that are abroad in the land. It is Dennistoun’s uncomfortable destiny in James’s story to confront the forces that are at the root of the superstitions that he thinks of as being alien, as being ‘Gothic’. So in Carleton’s story the narrator who despises Andrew’s ‘silly mysteries’ finds himself drawn into a new realisation of the forces at large in the