



The House by the Churchyard

J. Sheridan Le Fanu

Download now

Read Online [➔](#)

The House by the Churchyard

J. Sheridan Le Fanu

The House by the Churchyard J. Sheridan Le Fanu

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu is best known today as one of the Victorian period's leading exponents of supernatural fiction, and was described by M.R. James as standing 'absolutely in the first rank as a writer of ghost stories'. The House by the Churchyard is perhaps his best novel in this genre. Set in the village of Chapelizod, near Dublin, in the 1760s the story opens with the accidental disinterment of an old skull in the churchyard, and an eerie late-night funeral. This discovery relates to murders, both recent and historical whose repercussions disrupt the complacent pace of village affairs and change the lives of many of its notable characters forever. Charm and chilling darkness abound in equal measure in one of the greatest novels of a Victorian master of mystery.

The House by the Churchyard Details

Date : Published August 5th 2007 by Wordsworth Editions (first published 1863)

ISBN : 9781840225747

Author : J. Sheridan Le Fanu

Format : Paperback 542 pages

Genre : Horror, Classics, Gothic, Fiction, Mystery, Literature, 19th Century

 [Download The House by the Churchyard ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The House by the Churchyard ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The House by the Churchyard J. Sheridan Le Fanu

From Reader Review The House by the Churchyard for online ebook

Susan Wight says

This is one of those rare books that I have given up on.

150 pages in, I was still stuck with a confusing array of characters - none of whom emerged as the protagonist. I also had no idea of which events were important to the plot and which were light relief. There seemed to be an awful lot of light relief for a Gothic tale. During a burial in the prologue, a skull is unearthed which bears the marks of a violent death. IN the novel proper, the bulk of the action takes place some hundred years earlier beginning with the mysterious night-time burial of a body identified only as RD. After this promising beginning, the action then moves through a rather tiresome array of village social events (including a duel arising from a complete misunderstanding) and doesn't seem to be getting anywhere. The main ongoing mystery revolves around village gossip concerning the background of village newcomer, Mr Mervyn who has moved into the allegedly haunted Tiled House. We are treated to a narrative of the ghostly hand said to haunt Tiled House but the chapter was so separate from the rest of the narrative that it does little to maintain a sense of suspense.

The overriding mystery for me was whether the book would return to the Gothic mystery before I entirely gave up on the tale.

I loved *Uncle Silas* by the same author (which also had a strong comic element to it but maintained a good sense of Gothic suspense) but lost patience with this one.

Isidore says

Le Fanu's third novel is markedly inferior to its predecessors. There is no sign in this stupefyingly prolix book of the wit and excitement of *The Cock and Anchor*, and even *The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O'Brien* furnished a greater number of memorable moments.

With commercial success eluding him, Le Fanu appears to have set out to manufacture a product more pleasing to mid-Victorian audiences, accustomed to huge doses of raw sentimentality, a very leisurely pace, and a broad artistic canvas: even though the events in this book are confined to a single Irish town in the mid-eighteenth century, there are at least a dozen major characters drawn from many walks of life, and a variety of plots and sub-plots.

The trouble is, Le Fanu was not Dickens. It's all shallow and unadventurous: the characters are flat and do not arouse the reader's interest or empathy. Overly-abundant comic incidents and "quaint" characters come off as laboured and dull. Yet another frail and doomed Victorian heroine passes through the narrative without straying from a formulaic path. One senses that Le Fanu himself isn't terribly involved in his own narrative, because the novel only comes to life when his more characteristic interests---ghost stories and thrillers---peep through.

So, there is a sensationally effective haunted house chapter early in the book, easily one of the best Le Fanu ghost stories; it's often anthologized on its own as "The Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand" or "Ghost Stories of the Tiled House". But it has *nothing* to do with the rest of the book. Perhaps Le Fanu's nerves were screaming for relief, and he decided to cut loose for a chapter prior to returning to literary drudgery! The novel does improve about half-way through when a violent crime is committed and unravelling its

underlying mystery becomes a central thread of the plot. This permits the introduction of a few interesting episodes: for instance, there is a brief interlude which dwells eerily on the still and lonely crime scene, the victim lying in a dark forest in the dead of night, as beetles scuttle unheedingly about him. But the mystery itself holds few surprises, and there is little suspense overall.

As Le Fanu hoped, the novel was a moderate success and obtained for him an urgently needed contract with a publisher. But I don't see it has much to offer a modern reader who is not a specialist in Victorian/Irish fiction or Le Fanu himself.

Latasha says

I did not finish this book.

if your really interested in reading this, skip the free version and try to find an up to date version. There are errors galore in the free version. and the Irish accent, sorry Mr. Le Fanu, but it's really hard to read written down. or at least in this book. i gave it 3 tries and it put me to sleep every time.

Issicratea says

I had assumed, from Sheridan Le Fanu's reputation as a forefather of supernatural fiction, and from the gothicky title of this novel, that this would be some tasty piece of 19thC literary ghostiness à la M. R. James. The opening chapter do little to dispel this impression, with their grisly exhumation of a mutilated skull in a suburban Dublin churchyard, and the reburial of a body in mysterious circumstances.

Appearances can be deceptive, however. This is no more a tale of the uncanny than I am a shroud-clad Transylvanian count. It's a ... not at all sure how to describe it, actually: an extended soap opera, tending to comedy, but with a bit of tragedy, sentiment, and proto-crime novel thrown in.

For a while, say a fifth of the way through, I had a sense that *The House in the Churchyard* might qualify for admission to the highly select pantheon of the oddest novels I have read since beginning to record my readings on this site. The prime exhibits here are James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Man*, and Selma Lagerlöf's *The Saga of Gösta Berling*—two very different novels, but with one trait in common: a mad, alphabet-soup-like combination of diverse genre elements, so that you literally have no idea what kind of book is going to show up on the next page.

That was a misleading impression, as it turned out, in Sheridan Le Fanu's case. *The House in the Churchyard* does actually have a unified plot, and its seemingly uncanny elements are eventually (mainly) explained. It's an amiable book, though a rather inconsequential one, and it left me well-disposed towards Sheridan Le Fanu as a yarnmonger. The quality of the writing is pretty high; he has some sharply observed characters; and he even made me laugh on occasion. I would certainly try him again.

Harsh Kumar says

Picked this one up for buddy reads.

I tried and I tried alot. But alas I had to quit eventually. I was able to finish some 10 chapters and then it became dull. Cannot help it.

Found this one boring. My friends gave it up as well.

I have been busy alot lately.

Maybe I will keep this one for some other time when I do not have other things on my mind

Heather says

I originally bought this book to get in the mood for Halloween thinking it was going to be a creepy story. I had read Uncle Silas and loved it. I assumed "The House by the Churchyard" would be just as good and hoped it would be especially because the book is so thick!

I felt overwhelmed by the number of characters when I first began reading. The confusion cleared up some as I read on but not completely because there were so many personalities to keep straight. I remember reading for some time and wondering when something scary would happen. There were points when I thought it was starting to finally go down a dark path but then it wouldn't last.

I found the storyline to be a mixture of a comedy and murder/mystery (but mostly comedy) rather than a ghost story as the title of the book will fool you into thinking. It's interesting to be able to laugh at 19th century humor in the 21st century. Although I didn't end up reading the kind of novel I wanted for the season I still enjoyed my time with this book. As in "Uncle Silas" Sheridan Le Fanu's heavily detailed style of writing makes it effortless to visualize the scene.

Valerie says

Many of le Fanu's stories take place in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, and in the nearby village of Chapelizod: 'Ghost Stories of Chapelizod' and later this novel 'The House by the Churchyard'.

A modern reader might find some of the stories less than spine-chilling and some might dislike the long sentences used by a 19th century author, but I found them readable rather than turgid and always meticulously grammatical. The stories are interesting in the context of the history of Gothic fiction and of social life in an early 19th century Irish village.

Le Fanu was known as the 'British Poe' (he was Anglo-Irish). He influenced a range of writers as diverse as M.R. James, Bram Stoker, Elizabeth Bowen and James Joyce.

Wreade1872 says

'Why, I suppose there isn't so tattling, prying, lying, scandalous a little colony of Christians on earth; eyes, ears, and mouths all open, Sir; heads busy, tongues wagging; lots of old maids, by Jove; ladies' women, and gentlemen's gentlemen, and drawers and footmen; club talk, Sir, and mess-table talk, and talk on band days, talk over cards, talk at home, Sir - talk in the streets - talk - talk; by Jupiter Tonans! 'tis enough to bother one's ears, and make a man envy Robinson Crusoe!'

Firstly the placename Chapelizod is pronounced locally Chapel-lizard. Being from Dublin i had more reasons to like this than most. While viking-era dublin is something you learn about at school, this lets call it... english-dublin, a dublin of tricorn hats, sedan chairs and absentee landlords, i havn't heard much about. So i got something extra from recognising all the place names and knowing the geography of everything. At one point a murder is mentioned in passing, as havng occurred in clondalkin and i got a little chuckle thinking 'wow that place hasn't changed in 200 years' :lol.

It opens in a macabre and funny way and reminded me a lot in its setting and tone, of the Tim Burton 'Sleepy Hollow' movie. I remember thinking this is a nice setup can't wait to see what the actual story is. Then the setup went on and on, and on, until it dawned on me with a shudder, that this wasn't setup this was the main text. Let me return to the 'Sleepy Hollow' movie for demonstration purposes.

Imagine if in that film the headless horseman, Johnny Depp and Christina Ricci's characters are all still in there, but pushed to the very periphery of the script. Their story is still happening but your stuck following the lives of the extras only occasionally getting a glimpse of the main characters in the hazy distance.

In the moment the incidents are readable and go from ok to good but theres no point to any of it. Tolerable while reading but an absolute struggle to convince yourself to pick the book up again once set down. The writing if ok, see quote, is quite organic feeling, like your listening to it even while reading. There are some accents and an occasional lisp but it was neither a plus or minus for me.

Finally at the 60% stage the plot(s) start. I use the plural because 3 of them come along at once and the next 30% rushes along in what feels like a single breath, before we grind to a halt for the last 10% of clean up, which somewhat tested my patience once again.

Many might forgive the first 60% as theres some really good stuff in the latter portion but even these parts arn't without they're flaws.

The author has a remarkable knack of seeming to pick the wrong viewpoint for most situations. It almost always feels like your following the wrong character or focusing on insignificant things while missing the important ones.

Objectively based on my usual scoring this is 2 stars, what i give to failures which have some small worth, the last 40% is quite compelling, mostly. The previous 60% has a lot of charming albeit pointless incidents.

However i've taken the liberty of deducting a star based on personal hatred, it has been quite sometime since i had that dubious honour :) . More work than 'Mysteries of Udolpho' or 'Melmoth the Wanderer'. Feels similar to the work of Thomas Love Peacock... except terrible ;) .

Jon Recluse says

A charming tale of ghosts, mystery and murder set in Ireland during the 1700s. While a touch slow in the early going, Le Fanu's careful recreation of village life at the time reaps rewards for the patient reader.

Sheridan says

To anyone who has the patience and application this is one of the great works of literature bringing as it does the atmosphere of having been written at the time of the Irish Holocaust-the potato famine of 1847+.

Stylistically it is as near to perfect as a narrative is likely to be, the writer's attention to detail in describing a still living suburb(in the 21st Century) of Dublin in the mid 19th Century of life in the 18th Century for one who knows the area intimately, is fantastic.

The humour and pathos in this book carries the conversational style of Swift and clearly is the unwritten fount from which Joyce penned his trip around Dublin and other stories. Regrettably many of those who have used or been inspired by this great writer and human being have not given him the status and credit he still deserves-he was recognised by his contemporaries.

And the story? Read it yourself for the thrill of finishing a masterpiece; it will change you if you are able for it.

Steffi says

Letzter Tag des Jahres: Zeit, Ordnung in den aktuellen Leseprojekten zu schaffen!

Über die Weihnachtstage habe ich diesen Sheridan Le Fanu-Roman leider links liegen lassen und die Lektüre jetzt wieder aufzunehmen fiel etwas schwer. So kommt es, dass ich die letzten 100 Seiten eher überflogen habe, mir aber jetzt dennoch ein Urteil anmaße.

Ich gestehe, ich habe zunächst mehr Schauerliches, Mysteriöses erwartet, kannte ich bislang doch nur Carmilla vom Autor. Und Andeutungen, Geheimnisse gibt es durchaus, doch wird man dann schnell in ein kaum zu überschauendes Geflecht von Personen geworfen, zum großen Teil Bewohner des kleinen Ortes Chapelizod bei Dublin. Ich hatte irgendwann das Gefühl, fast jede halbwegs öffentlich agierende Person in der kleinen Garnisonsstadt zu kennen: drei (!) Ärzte, Pfarrer, Totengräber, bedeutenden Familien, Wahrsagerin und und und. Was anfangs etwas anstrengend war, entpuppt sich dann – in meinen Augen – als eigentliches Thema: Intrigen und Gerüchteküche in einer Kleinstadt! Und in diesem Licht betrachten wir dann auch die Verbrechen und Geheimnisse, die sukzessive entlarvt werden.

Der Autor enttäuscht also durchaus zunächst Lesererwartungen (zum Beispiel wird der junge Mervyn, der sich fabelhaft zur Hauptfigur eignet, über lange Strecken hinweg nicht mehr erwähnt), um dann doch eine überzeugende Geschichte zu liefern.

Man darf als Leser aber keine Wilkie Collins-artige Spannung erwarten, sondern eher Dickens-hafte Beschreibungen.

Randolph says

I had to abandon this tiresome plodding mystery. Not at all what I expected, complicated and full of comic diversions that have little to do with the main mystery plot. Absolutely devoid of atmosphere. I cannot understand why M.R. James considered this Le Fanu's best novel over Uncle Silas.

Tristram says

Simply one of the most gripping novels I have ever read

Admittedly, the first 200 or so pages of this book may be a major put-off to quite a number of readers, but then diamonds have to be cut thoroughly before you can see them shine, and what Sheridan Le Fanu tells us about the inhabitants of Chapelizod is extremely hilarious, no doubt, though maybe not linked too closely with the main plot. However, sticking to the point, like a fly to a pudding, is over-estimated, anyway.

Basically "The House by the Churchyard" is a crime story, or rather a bundle of them. As the story unfolds, the reader is confronted with foul murder, blackmail, and bigamy, with false suspicions and right suspicions, but also with doomed love. It all starts with the unearthing of a skull that shows traces of several hard blows and a trepanning, and in a sort of long retrospect the story behind this ghastly discovery is told – a story in the course of which several other carefully hidden misdeeds are brought to light.

Sheridan Le Fanu's novel abounds in comic characters that, at the same time and as they are in some instances connected with the dreadful mysteries of this seemingly idyllic suburb of Chapelizod, are more than just one-dimensional caricatures. Especially Sturk and Nutter, the two grim opponents, and Sturk's devoted wife are characters you will not forget so easily. Some others are even tinged with a whiff of tragedy.

There is also a creepy ghost story interwoven in this rich tale, which is what Sheridan Le Fanu is really good at (My first encounter with this author was years ago when I came across his terrifying story "Green Tea" in an anthology and was afterwards seriously afraid of seeing some hideous monkey, or other animal, haunting me.).

I am generally not a friend of short tales, because I think that an author should create no less than a universe teeming with life and wit, he, or she, should really convince me that he takes the world he creates seriously, and this novel indeed enriched a summer for me.

For all those who really enjoy reading and losing themselves in a book this novel is a must!

Kim says

"*The House by the Churchyard*" is a novel by Sheridan Le Fanu published in 1863 that combines elements of the mystery novel and the historical novel. According to Wikipedia "aside from its own merits, the novel is important as a key source for James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*." Now I don't know if that is true, if it is then James Joyce wrote a better novel with *Finnegans Wake* than he did with *Ulysses*. *Ulysses* is, of all the books I've made it to the end of - there are two I gave up on - my least favorite, so if I read *Ulysses* first there is no possible way I would have read another James Joyce novel and if I read it before *Ulysses* I have totally forgotten it. Now enough about that horrid novel and on to *The House by the Churchyard*.

I looked up the writer just to know more about him and the thing that jumped out at me was that his name was "Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu" and I guess he dropped the first two names when he wrote books. For some reason I wanted to know why he had so many names and I found that Thomas was his father's name and Joseph was his grandfather's name. Sheridan was his mother's name, according to Wikipedia his mother, Alicia Sheridan LeFanu was an Irish writer. I never heard of her, and she was also the daughter of actor Thomas Sheridan and his wife, writer Frances Chamberlaine Sheridan. I never heard of either of them. She was also the sister of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, an Irish playwright and poet and long-term owner of the London Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and the aunt of writer Alicia LeFanu (with whom she is sometimes confused). And I never heard of any of these people and I tired of looking everybody up, but I did spend some time after that adding parents and grandparents names to my own in different orders to see how it would sound. So now that you all know at least as much and probably more about the author's names as I do I'll move on.

"*The House by the Churchyard*" puzzled me in many ways. That is a good thing, in this case anyway, because I like figuring things out. I'll start with the back cover of the book. My copy says:

"Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu is best known today as one of the Victorian period's leading exponents of supernatural fiction. Set in the village of Chapelizod, near Dublin, in the 1760s, the story opens with the accidental disinterment of an old skull in the churchyard, and an eerie late-night funeral. This discovery relates to murders, both recent and historical whose repercussions disrupt the complacent pace of village affairs and change the lives of many of its notable characters forever. "

The front of the book says "Tales of mystery and the supernatural" which I'll give them a few points for because there is a mystery or two or three, there doesn't seem to be much supernatural about it unless you count a chapter or two where there is a ghost hand running or crawling or whatever a hand would do, around. However I just can't consider a book of 500+ pages supernatural when a ghost hand is only in one or two chapters having nothing to do with the story. Nothing I remember anyway. The ghost hand story was rather interesting now that I'm thinking of it but would have been better if perhaps after a few days a foot would have joined it, then an arm, then a leg, etc.

I puzzle quite a while over the "murders, both recent and historical". The prologue of the story is rather creepy and at least we learn that there was a murder somewhere, sometime. What I found creepy was at the beginning some person (I forget who) has died and is being buried in the churchyard.

"When this particular grave was pretty nearly finished—it lay from east to west—a lot of earth fell out at the northern side, where an old coffin had lain, and good store of brown dust and grimy bones, and the yellow skull itself came tumbling about the sexton's feet. These fossils, after his wont, he lifted decently with the point of his shovel, and pitched into a little nook beside the great mound of mould at top."

I find it creepy that they must bury people right on top of each other and just throw the old bones away to put in the new ones. That got me wondering how many people are buried on top of each other but I didn't let my brain try to figure that out. I just thought it was odd they uncovered a body while digging the grave and no one seemed to think this was odd. Anyway, they pick up the skull and pass it around - another thing I will never do - and decide that this person must have been murdered because of the holes in the head. It could have been caused by the shovel hitting it in my mind, but what do I know. As they are standing there talking about the dead guy getting shot in the head an old man shows up and tells them this:

'You don't think it a bullet wound, Sir?' said my uncle, mildly, and touching his hat—for coming of a military stock himself, he always treated an old soldier with uncommon respect.

'Why, please your raverence,' replied the man, reciprocating his courtesy; 'I know it's not.'

'And what is it, then, my good man?' interrogated the sexton, as one in authority, and standing on his own dunghill.

'The trepan,' said the fogey, in the tone in which he'd have cried 'attention' to a raw recruit, without turning his head, and with a scornful momentary skew-glance from his gray eye.

'And do you know whose skull that was, Sir?' asked the curate.

'Ay do I, Sir, well,' with the same queer smile, he answered. 'Come, now, you're a grave-digger, my fine fellow,' he continued, accosting the sexton cynically; 'how long do you suppose that skull's been under ground?'

'Long enough; but not so long, my fine fellow, as yours has been above ground.'

'Well, you're right there, for I seen him buried,' and he took the skull from the sexton's hands; 'and I'll tell you more, there was some dry eyes, too, at his funeral—ha, ha, ha!'

Now we go on to Chapter One and have gone back to the year 1767 and are going to be told the story of how the dead man died, and lots of other stories, but don't be looking to find out how the skull gets a hole in its head for a long, long time. Don't be looking for any murders either for a long, long time. That's what puzzled me, the back of the book made so much of the murders they put it on the cover and yet for hundreds of pages I can't find anyone murdered. We are only a few chapters in the book when there is a duel over perhaps the dumbest reason to have a duel ever, but it's a silly duel and no murder. I'm not sure if the guy who survives a duel is considered a murderer or not. I would think he is if he is the one who challenged the other guy to the duel, but I don't know and I'm not taking the time to find out. Besides it isn't one of our two murders anyway. I have to keep reading to find them. There is a guy who goes out for a walk - supposedly for a walk - and never returns and even though a body is eventually found in the river no one thinks he is murdered, everyone thinks he committed suicide. There is a man who is found murdered along some path, but then when they all get to the body it turns out he isn't dead only almost dead, so he probably hasn't murdered anyone and he isn't murdered since he's alive.

Eventually though the murders do happen, well, one did a long time ago it just takes a while to get to it. There's a few love stories in there as well and lots of meddling into each other's lives and trying to get couples together or keep couples apart. There are men who don't like other men, and women who don't like other women, and people who don't like anybody.

And now on to my next puzzling thing about the book: which house is by the churchyard? It took me a long time to figure it out. You would think it was the pastor of the church's house (at least I would) but it isn't. In the first chapter he must go to the church for a funeral in the middle of the night and as he walks there he passes most of the town. He walks past the Phoenix "a jolly old inn", he passes through the town where "no other sound of life or human neighbourhood was stirring" on past the Salmon House an inn at the other side of town, and then arrives at the church. So the rector doesn't live next to the churchyard. It isn't the Phoenix, that's on the other side of town. There's the Tiled house - that's where the ghost hand used to live -

"It stood by a lonely bend of the narrow road. Lilius had often looked upon the short, straight, grass-grown avenue with an awful curiosity at the old house which she had learned in childhood to fear as the abode of shadowy tenants and unearthly dangers."

Not, however by the churchyard. Then there is Belmont with:

"an avenue of gentlemanlike old poplars, and over the little bridge, and under the high-arched bowers of elms, walled up at either side with evergreens, and so into the court-yard of Belmont. Three sides of a parallelogram, the white old house being the largest, and offices white and in keeping, but overgrown with ivy, and opening to yards of their own on the other sides, facing one another at the flanks, and in front a straight Dutch-like moat, with a stone balustrade running all along from the garden to the bridge, with great stone flower pots set at intervals, the shrubs and flowers of which associated themselves in his thoughts with beautiful Gertrude Chatterworth, and so were wonderfully bright and fragrant. And there were two swans upon the water, and several peacocks marching dandily in the court-yard; and a grand old Irish dog, with a great collar, and a Celtic inscription, dreaming on the steps in the evening sun."

No churchyard anywhere near it. There are lots of people in this book, there is Doctor Toole, and Miss Becky Chatterworth, there is Puddock and Captain Cluffe, there is a barber and a few innkeepers. Generals and Captains, and Lords and Ladies. There's an alderman - whatever that is - and a couple of people using different names than their own. A really good guy and a really bad guy, and none of them live by the churchyard. I finally figured out who did, although why his house got to be any more important than anyone else's I don't know. If you want to know which house belongs to which person, read the book.

Oh, I looked up the word "trepanning" because it is mentioned a few times during the book and I didn't know what it meant. Supposedly according to the old man the skull at the beginning of the story had been

trepanned. Now that I've looked it up I hope no one ever trepanns me, at least not until I'm dead.

"Trepanning is a surgical intervention in which a hole is drilled or scraped into the human skull, exposing the dura mater to treat health problems related to intracranial diseases. It may also refer to any "burr" hole created through other body surfaces, including nail beds. It is often used to relieve pressure beneath a surface. A trephine is an instrument used for cutting out a round piece of skull bone."

"In ancient times, holes were drilled into a person who was behaving in what was considered an abnormal way to let out what they believed were evil spirits. Evidence of trepanation has been found in prehistoric human remains from Neolithic times onward. Cave paintings indicate that people believed the practice would cure epileptic seizures, migraines, and mental disorders."

I have both migraines and epilepsy but no one has drilled a hole in my head yet. I don't think so anyway. One more thing then I'm done, this is my favorite quote:

'It is St. John who says, "And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five-and-twenty, or thirty furlongs, they see the Lord walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I, be not afraid." So is it with the frail bark of mortality and the trembling spirit it carries. When "it is now dark," and the sea arises, and the "great wind" blows, the vessel is tost, and the poor heart fails within it; and when they see the dim form which they take to be the angel of death walking the roaming waters, they cry out in terror, but the voice of the sweet Redeemer, the Lord of Life is heard, "It is I; be not afraid," and so the faithful ones "willingly receive him into the ship," and immediately it is at the land whither they go: yes, at the land whither they go. But, oh! the lonely ones, left behind on the other shore.'

I thought about that for a long time. Read the book if only to find out which house is by the churchyard.

Benjamin Stahl says

For anyone else who likes Gothic ghost stories - especially those specifically written by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu - the first thing I would want to tell you about this book is that it is *not* a ghost story. Granted, there is one very, very effective chapter about a haunted house, and that chapter itself stands alone as a near-perfect short story. But otherwise, this 500+ page book gives its yearning horror aficionados nothing more than the very occasional (and I cannot emphasise the word "occasional" enough) hint of a ghost. Mostly, as the editor adequately explains in his introduction - (funnily enough, he actually criticises the book for being overlong, having too many digressions - as well as characters - and for its almost total lack of supernatural material) - *The House By The Churchyard* is more of a confusing medley of Victorian romance, Gothic mystery, and slapstick comedy. It kind of reminded me, in part, of J.K. Rowling's more modern (and, I dare say, much better) social drama/tragedy, *The Casual Vacancy*. Instead of being set in an English country village, it's set in the outer-Dublin provence of Chapelizod, in Belmont. Like *Casual Vacancy*, it purposely avoids the conventions of having a set protagonist, and instead takes on the more ambitious (and often hazardous) concept of portraying to the reader, an entire village of many different individuals, each with their own personalities and stories.

Now while I wouldn't say that Le Fanu fails at holding this together (to the contrary, he does it pretty fucking well) I would say that, at least for the first hundred pages, it proves incredibly distracting, and very nearly puts you off, because you find yourself lumbered with all these silly names (like, how the hell do you pronounce Devereux? Is it, like, "Dave-a-roo? I hope it is, cause that's what I went with. Fucking, be nice to me; at least it's not as bad as calling Harper Lee's Mr. Ewell, "Mr. Eee-Well". *Ohh-ohh-ohh, my brain ...*

But after a little while, the characters do begin to grow on you, and you are able to differentiate between them. I'm not sure if anyone else does this - since my head is pretty far up my arse - but sometimes I like to give a character the face of an actor, based on how they behave, because part of me just wants to picture them as that.

How's this for randomness? I pictured Devereux as Daniel Craig ... Cluffe as one of my friends from High School, whom I daren't mention here ... Sturk as the guy who plays Marty's Great-Great Grandfather or something from *Back To The Future: Part III* ... and Dangerfield as that skinny, long-haired assassin guy from the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* movies (... only with those oft-mentioned silver spectacles obstructing his face). But let's return to the book, before people start telling me to kill myself.

It was not what I expected - or wanted - and was, in fact, so goddamned far from that, that my attention span was, at times, greatly challenged. It also didn't help that it was pretty damned long, as well. Throughout the book, there were some really good scenes (even if they weren't trying to be scary), but sometimes I just couldn't understand what Le Fanu was smoking. I just did my best to interpret the pages, and went along hoping that I wasn't too far off. I suppose, now that I've finished it, I can look back and appreciate the fact that I picked it up not knowing how misleading the picture and title, and, gosh darn it, the author's reputation, was in luring people to buy this novel. Had I known what this book was really like, then I never would have read it. And so, having done so, I am glad for having read something very different and out of my usual field of interest. And, more importantly, it has in no way whatsoever, put me off from visiting Le Fanu again.

Because, without a doubt, this man is a very good writer. That was basically what saved this book from collapsing into itself. Le Fanu has - despite his old-fashioned prose and sometimes longwinded sentences - a very great talent for writing. And while you couldn't quite compare him to Dickens and the like, he's still a darn side better than most modern authors are. At least that's how I feel. I just find the writing style of the 1800's so charming and beautiful to read; it's literature's equivalent to fine wine.

And so, while at times I just wanted to be done with this book, I still can't say that I didn't enjoy it. It was just a bit of a chore to work through. At the end of the day, it's still a worthwhile story, and especially the second half (when things do, admittedly, take a slightly darker turn), a lot of loose ends do finally come together, and the ending is pretty satisfying as a mystery/thriller/Gothic/drama.

I was kind of stuck as to whether I should rate this two or three stars. In the end, I think it rightfully belongs in both, depending on the angle from which you look at it. But as I started writing this review, I just couldn't bring myself to be mean to it. So its gets a somewhat reluctant three stars. On many levels, a difficult book to fully enjoy ... but still one that I can't help but feel glad for having read, anyway.

I *would* recommend it ... but then I would probably regret it.

Over a year later ...

Okay now look here, old friend. It's been a while since I read this but for some reason the story has never really left my mind. As a result of that, I have decided to give it four stars. Like many great works that just need time to grow on you through past reflection - (*Huckleberry Finn* comes to mind for me) - this book was much better than I was initially able to give it credit for.
