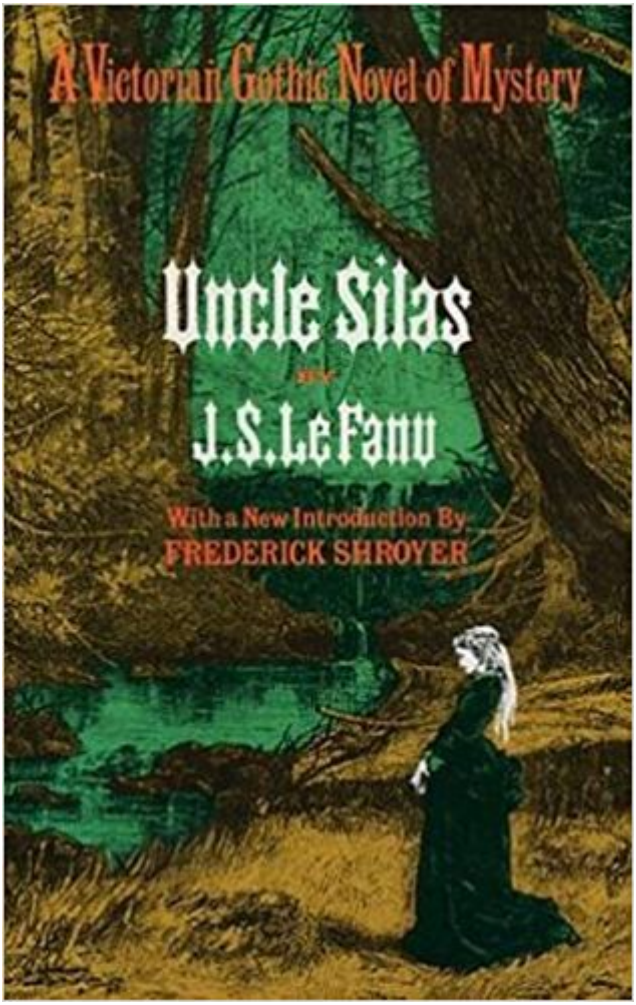
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Uncle Silas



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Synopsis

Perhaps no other writer in the history of English fiction so completely mastered the technique of creating an atmosphere of unrelieved suspense and terror as Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-73). This is surely evident in all of his supernatural fiction: such superb examples of the English ghost story as "Carmilla," "The Haunted Baronet," "Squire Toby's Will," and others (many available in Dover's Best Ghost Stories of J. S. Le Fanu). But nowhere is Le Fanu's success as great as in Uncle Silas.Death prowls the 400-odd pages of this book Ã¢â ¬â • in Maud Ruthyn, her father Austin, the grotesque Madame de la Rougierre, in the shadowy suspicion that surrounds Uncle Silas, in the chilly atmosphere at Knowl and the even more haunting terror pervading Bartram-Haugh, in the gloomy night thoughts and somber reflections about death that occur and reoccur. With consummate skill, Le Fanu has truly captured the secret fears and dreads that grip us all.One of a half dozen or so nineteenth-century novels still read for pleasure rather than as a school exercise, Uncle Silas is the Victorian mystery story par excellence, displaying both Le Fanu's considerable narrative ability and his emotional power. It has remained in print since its first appearance in 1864, has been translated into several languages, and has been filmed in England as The Inheritor. Its longevity and perennial appeal are both well established and well deserved, for as Frederick Shroyer says in his Introduction, "It is one of the most effective, gripping novels of terror Ã¢â ¬Â¦ ever written. Today, as in the past, Uncle Silas continues to serve diabolically well to chill the reader's psychic bones."Despite its continuous popularity, Uncle Silas has of late been virtually unobtainable in America. Now republished by Dover, this chilling Victorian novel will be a welcome treat for all Le Fanu admirers, mystery fans, English majors, and every reader who enjoys a well-told tale.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was born in Dublin in 1814. He was the great-nephew of the playwright Richard Sheridan. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and called to the bar in 1839, but chose instead to pursue a career in journalism. He began his writing career by publishing a number of stories anonymously in the Dublin University Magazine, which had been founded in 1833 by a group of Trinity College students. Le Fanu went on to purchase the magazine in 1861 and became its editor. From 1840 onwards he bought and edited the Warden and the Protestant Guardian, among other magazines and newspapers.His first two novels, The Cock and Anchor (1845) and Torlogh O'Brien (1847), followed the style of Sir Walter Scott. After purchasing the Dublin University Magazine, in which much of his writing was serialized, he wrote the tales that made him a bestseller. These novels use mystery and the supernatural to explore the psychological effects of fear, and often deal with a young, innocent person being drawn into a dangerous situation in which older people conspire to swindle and harm them, as in Uncle Silas (1864). His other works include The House by the Churchyard (1863), Wylder's Hand (1864), The Wyvern Mystery (1869) and The Rose and the Key (1871). In 1872 he collected and published the remarkable stories of In a Glass Darkly, including the famous story of a female vampire, 'Carmilla', which predates Bram Stoker's Dracula by 25 years and formed the basis of the 1932 film Vampyr. After his death in 1873, Le Fanu's works faded in popularity, but interest was revived in 1923 when a collection of stories was published, entitled Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Tales of Mystery. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

This is a real rip-snorter of a gothic novel. Eighteen-year-old Maude, whose mother is dead, has been raised by her wealthy father, an adherent to a peculiar Scandinavian science religion. There are dark rumors afoot about the character of Maude's father's brother, the mysterious Uncle Silas, into whose guardianship Maude is entrusted at her father's death. Maude is the only thing standing between the money she will inherit from her father (when she comes of age) and Silas' considerable debt. Laudanum addiction, poison, big old houses with uninhabited wings, a creepy cousin (Silas' son), and an evil French governess: if you like gothic novels, this one's got it all.

Here we have poor (actually quite rich), young,meek and naive Maude who just can't seem to stand

up to anyone; her father; Madame; her evil cousin nor her uncle. All in all, this tale was quite hard to put down. In the end good prevailed over evil and she lived to tell the story. But getting there is well worth the trip through the pages of Uncle Silas!

Good read

This book is great for anyone who is a fan of Gothic, Victorian, or mystery novels. All of these genres come into play for an interesting story. The tone is dark, and the descriptions of the landscape help give the book a "spooky" feel. There is also an interesting tie in with the Swedenbourgs, which was informative, as well. I loved this book, and it’s a shame that Sheridan Le Fanu isn’t more widely read.

A classic by Le Fanu. Very much a gothic type mystery. Good turnaround.

Having read the other reviews of this book I expected a thrilling gothic tale of mystery and suspense. What I got was somewhat disappointing. It certainly is an intriguing story with many interesting elements to it, not the least of which is LeFanu’s masterful command of the English language. However, a few serious flaws stand out and detract seriously from the novel as a whole. One is the incredible amount of detail added. Over one hundred fifty pages elapse before Maud even enters Silas’s dwelling. The conclusion is quite frightening, but to get to it one must slog through four hundred pages of building to the climax. Also it seems to me that there are far to many loose ends. For example, close to the conclusion of the novel Maud is traveling in a carriage when she hears a spectral voice whisper, "Beware the hand of Belisarius!" No explanation is given, nor does Belisarius appear during any portion of the book. Despite these and other distractions, "Uncle Silas" has a truly shocking ending, worthy of Steven King. It should only be attempted by patient readers, but those who do read it through to the end will rarely forget it.

Long and tedious but interesting story line.

This is the tale of Maude Ruthyn, a young heiress who, on the death of her father, becomes ward to her mysterious Uncle Silas, who lives in a decaying mansion, under a cloud of suspicion for an unsolved decades-old murder. Is Silas the villain he is popularly suspected to be? Or a decent but misunderstood man as her father had always contended?This is a lengthy, low-key novel, and hard

to categorize. Is it a gothic? A romance? A thriller? A supernatural chiller? A murder mystery? If I were to call it any of these things, you might read the book eagerly looking for elements that would be a long time coming, or perhaps never come at all.So I will say only that, in order to fully enjoy this novel, you need to be willing to enter the mindset of Maude Ruthyn. And, with the possible exception of romance, Maude is not really looking for any of the above genre-elements. She's not looking for adventure; she's not hunting for spooks; she is not really trying to solve a murder. She is not a modern butt-kicking, can-do heroine. She's just a nice, somewhat-timid, kind-hearted young woman trying to cope with the loss of her father, and otherwise trying to deal with whatever hopefully small problems life throws her way. Her problems, which seem major enough to her, include various suitors (both couth and uncouth), squabbling relatives, and an unpleasant French governess.I'm sorry if that does not sound too exciting, but this novel is one best read completely "unspoiled". If you are hesitant about investing in such a long novel, then I would suggest first trying some of Le Fanu's shorter fiction, such as the stories collected under the title IN A GLASS DARKLY. The weakest story from that collection is "The Room in the Dragon Volant". I rate this novel considerably higher than "Dragon Volant", especially in terms of its final impact. But I dare say that if you have no patience for "Dragon Volant", you will have no patience for this novel either.

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