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May Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* as Metaphysical Quest

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English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920

ELT Press

Volume 26, Number 3, 1983

pp. 187-191

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

MAY SINCLAIR'S UNCANNY STORIES AS METAPHYSICAL QUEST By Rebecca Kinnamon Neff (Hocking Technical College, Nelsonville, Ohio) May Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* (1923) is a collection of modern ghost tales. This volume of seven stories of, in Sinclair's words, "supernatural happenings in this world, the other world beyond death and the borderland between," provides an impressive link between the nineteenth-century fascination with Spiritualism, Theosophy and Psychological Research and the modern revival of interest in parapsychology, faith healing and mind control. As experiments in combining psychological realism with fantasy, the stories compare favorably with other fictional ventures into the supernatural among both Sinclair's contemporaries and ours. From childhood May Sinclair experienced "flashes of Reality" which she early associated with the workings of the unconscious. These recurring incidents prompted her continuing interest in those powers variously called intuitive, psychic, mystic and initiated a personal quest for ultimate reality. Her fiction of the supernatural, especially *Uncanny Stories*, records and elucidates the stages of

that quest. Repelled by what she considered the suppressive qualities of Christianity, Sinclair turned to philosophical idealism and Eastern mysticism; she also followed the reports of the Society for Psychical Research, read William James, Pierre Janet and others and found confirmation of her own speculations in New Psychology, notably in the writings of Jung, whose theories of the unconscious she preferred to those of Freud. Having concluded that the conflict between the desire for individuation and the desire for unity is the controlling feature of human life, Sinclair was attracted to systems of thought and practice that adhere to the concept of the many in the One, which she variously termed Absolute Spirit or Universal Consciousness. Her philosophical treatises, *A Defence of Idealism* (1917) and *The New Idealism* (1922), are in part attempts to understand her own states of expanded consciousness. Her fiction of the supernatural demonstrates what her philosophy propounds. The tales in *Uncanny Stories* illustrate the stages of progress to the Unitive Life by way of adherence to the principles of Spiritual Monism. These principles include, first, the concept of the many in the One: all individual selves are united by virtue of their identity with the Universal Self. Thus the experiences of "spirit communion" described in these stories represent much more than what the Spiritualists valued as communication with the dead. They are moments of union with the Absolute. In this manner of spiritual contact, the mortals in these tales pass through the veil of illusion into the "borderland" between earthly existence and that condition to which, according to the Spiritual Monist, every soul aspires—*Â*a return to what it once was, pure spirit. Concomitant with the first principle is a second, namely, that so long as the individual self remains in any relation to its mortal existence it is deprived of the full ecstasy of that supreme surrender that marks the reunion with the Absolute. Sinclair included in *Uncanny Stories* a novella, "The Flaw in the Crystal," first published in 1912, along with six other tales not published before 1922. Three of these six appeared for the first time in this volume. Not only her prospectus, which survives in draft, but also her notes on the galley proofs indicate 187 that she designed the thematic progression that emerges from a sequential reading of the stories. In the first story, "Where Their Fire is not Quenched," hell is represented as what she called "a repetition of a sin." This narrative of the life and death of Harriott Leigh concludes with a projection of what the afterlife holds for a woman who dies harboring guilt over a secret love affair. Damned not by her sensuality, but by her own self-deception, Harriott's spirit faces eternal ennui with the spirit of a man she has never really loved. A sensualist and hedonist, who in later years experiences ecstatic pleasure from her services as a deaconess, Harriott is never comfortable in her sensuality. Brought up in the romantic tradition of love, she insists on denying that she derives any physical pleasure from her affair with Oscar Wade. Then on her deathbed, Harriott selectively confesses her sins, purposely omitting the secret affair, though it is very much...

MAY SINCLAIR'S UNCLEY STORIES AS METAPHYSICAL QUEST

By Elizabeth Kintner McE
(Hocking Technical College, Wadonville, Ohio)

May Sinclair's Uncley Stories (1922) is a collection of modern ghost tales. This volume of seven stories of, in Sinclair's words, "supernatural happenings in this world, the other world beyond death and the borderland between,"¹ provides an impressive link between the nineteenth-century fascination with Spiritualism, Theosophy and Psychical Research and the modern revival of interest in parapsychology, faith healing and mind control. As experiments in combining psychological reality with fantasy, the stories compare favorably with other fictional ventures into the supernatural among both Sinclair's contemporaries and ours.

From childhood May Sinclair experienced "flashes of Reality" which she early associated with the workings of the unconscious. These recurring incidents prompted her continuing interest in those powers variously called intuitive, psychic, mystic and initiated a personal quest for ultimate truth. Her fiction of the supernatural, especially Uncley Stories, records and elucidates the stages of that quest. Repelled by what she considered the suppressive qualities of Christianity, Sinclair turned to philosophical idealism and Eastern mysticism; she also followed the reports of the Society for Psychical Research, read William James, Pierre Janet and others and found confirmation of her own speculations in new Psychology, notably in the writings of Jung, whose theories of the unconscious she preferred to those of Freud. Being convinced that the conflict between the desire for individuation and the desire for unity is the controlling feature of human life, Sinclair was attracted to systems of thought and practice that adhere to the concept of the unity in the One, which she variously termed Absolute Spirit or Universal Consciousness. Her philosophical treatises, A Defence of Idealism (1917) and The One Idealism (1922), are in part attempts to understand her own states of expanded consciousness. Her fiction of the supernatural demonstrates what her philosophy propounds.

The tales in Uncley Stories illustrate the stages of progress to the Unified life by way of adherence to the principles of Spiritual Monism. These principles include, first, the concept of the unity in the One: all individual selves are united by virtue of their identity with the Universal Self. Thus the experiences of "spirit communion" described in these stories represent much more than what the Spiritualists valued as communication with the dead. They are moments of union with the Absolute. In this sense of spiritual contact, the mortals in these tales pass through the veil of illusion into the "borderland" between earthly existence and that condition to which, according to the Spiritual Monist, every soul aspires -- a return to what it once was, pure spirit. Consistent with the first principle is a second, namely, that so long as the individual self remains in any relation to the mortal existence it is deprived of the full ecstasy of that supreme surrender that marks the union with the Absolute.

Sinclair included in Uncley Stories a novel, "The Flow in the Crystal," first published in 1912, along with six other tales not published before 1922. Three of these had appeared for the first time in this volume. Not only her preface, which survives in draft, but also her notes on the galley proofs indicate





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