Eighteenth-century Scotland did not witness the boom in Gothic fiction seen in England at that time. But by the early nineteenth century, Scottish authors like Robert Burns, Joanna Baillie, James Macpherson, and Walter Scott had popularised the Gothic mode in poetry, drama, and pseudo-antiquarian prose, setting the stage for a distinctive style of ‘Scottish Gothic’ that would emerge, after 1815, in fiction by Scott, James Hogg, and fellow members of the *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* circle. Such Scottish Gothic characteristically features an ‘association of national and uncanny themes’, as Ian Duncan has influentially argued. This chapter introduces this corpus of Scottish Gothic literature, specifies some ways in which the ‘uncanny’ entailments of Scottish Gothic relate to religious discourse (very much including the self-conscious secularism incipient in the era), and situates Scottish Gothic literature within the international currents that conditioned its expressions of nationalism.
In the wake of the Glorious Revolution, mainstream Presbyterianism had won for itself the status of national Church. Yet having a Church of Scotland hardly unified that characteristically riven state, and robust debates continued for centuries regarding the status of Reformed, nonconformist or seceding Presbyterians; Scottish Episcopalians (Scott’s own sect); the Scottish Catholic remnant and tradition; and emerging strains of evangelicalism. As often as not, such debates turned on questions of foreign influence, or on observations of religious history and events elsewhere: whether in England or France, in the Holy Land, in America, or in the corners of the globe where missionaries might venture. This legacy of debating religious nationalism at home and abroad was formative for the Scottish Gothic, even if Scottish Gothic authors by and large disengaged from doctrinal struggle.

Through the eighteenth century, ‘literature’, in the broad sense of cultivated writing, still named a largely religious practice, and a body of work much of which was devoted, explicitly or implicitly, to doctrinal debate. Yet this began to change in late eighteenth-century Scotland, setting the stage for the emergence of Gothic literature that could evoke religious sensibility without engaging in religious polemics, and that could even explain the supernatural, with recourse to a skeptical empiricism. While enlightened moderate Presbyterians like the Reverend William Robertson – now best remembered as a historian – were gaining control over the national church, philosophers like Hugh Blair (himself a minister), Adam Smith, and David Hume instituted belles-lettres norms for a new literary establishment. Across the nineteenth century, wherever the influence of Scottish culture was felt, literature in this new tradition would work to transcend sectarian and national divides, while taking nothing less than the whole world of histories and societies as its subject. Taking part in this secularisation and expansion of literature, the versions of Gothic crafted by Scott and his peers in Scotland would soon be manufactured around the globe, by writers attracted not least by the power it afforded their station. Scott, his friend and rival Hogg, and their associates at Blackwood’s worked, each in his own way, to create a Romantic cult of the author that assumes something of the religious
authority so important for literary cultures past. And what starts as Scottish Gothic in their work would become, by the end of the nineteenth century, a Modernist Gothic, a literary approach that owns superstition with shamanistic brio, as it cares for, collects, and curates supernatural practices in the name of literary culture as itself a higher tradition.\footnote{Already, by the early nineteenth century, even quite provincial and minor Scots writers could readily take recourse to a Gothic style. Witness, for example, a description of the funeral of George III, purportedly written by a Scottish visitor from Garnock, ‘pleasantly situated between Irvine and Kilwinning’, who happened to be in London to witness the event, and whose letter describing it was published in \textit{Blackwood's} shortly thereafter.} ‘I was within the walls of an ancient castle’, begins this author, Andrew Pringle,\footnote{\textit{I was within the walls of an ancient castle}, begins this author, Andrew Pringle, starting out in poetry, and then waxing lyrical in prose:}

\begin{verbatim}
So old as if they had for ever stood,
So strong as if they would forever stand,
and it was almost midnight. The towers, like the vast spectres of departed ages, raised their embattled heads to the skies, monumental witnesses of the strength and antiquity of a great monarchy. A prodigious multitude filled the courts of that venerable edifice, surrounding on all sides a dark embossed structure, the sarcophagus, as it seemed to me at the moment, of the heroism of chivalry. ‘A change came o’er the spirit of my dream’ [...] Then an awful cadence of solemn music, that affected the heart like silence, was heard at intervals, and a numerous retinue of grave and venerable men,

The fathers of their time,
Those mighty master spirits, that withstood
The fall of monarchies, and high upheld
Their country’s standard, glorious in the storm,
\end{verbatim}
passed slowly before me, bearing the emblems and trophies of a king. They were as a series of great historical events, and I beheld behind them, following and followed, an awful and indistinct image, like the vision of Job.  

Informed readers, perhaps feeling the sublimity of this passage tip over into faint ridiculousness – or recognizing the name ‘Pringle’ – will not be surprised to be told that this letter is from John Galt’s tour de force of gentle satire *The Ayrshire Legatees*, a fictional, epistolary family travelogue that *Blackwood’s* serialised in 1820. Eager as Galt’s ambitious young barrister is to convey ‘a series of great historical events’, what he renders is a series of Gothic clichés. By having the Scotsman Andrew Pringle only fully indulge his Gothic imagination once he reaches England, Galt tweaks Scottish provincialism, as well as the xenophobia of the English Gothic tradition that induced authors like Horace Walpole, Edmund Burke, Ann Radcliffe, and Lord Byron (in this perhaps more an Englishman than a Scot) to set their fantasias abroad (chiefly in Italy, France, or Spain). In the heart of London, Pringle arrives at the odd mixture of conventionalism and sensationalism that characterises the Gothic genre generally.  

Elsewhere in *The Ayrshire Legatees*, back in Garnock, the young clergyman minding the parish duties for Andrew’s father while he journeys is shown to be an embarrassed but enthusiastic reader of Walter Scott, and in particular of *Ivanhoe*, which had been published in December 1819, less than a month before George III’s demise. *Ivanhoe* was the first novel the Author of *Waverley* set in England, and his first set in the Middle Ages; in it, Scott depicts a milieu where Protestantism is nowhere to be found, and achieves a new intensity of Gothicism as he does so. In retrospect, Scott can be seen to have been building up the Gothic aspect of his fiction before deciding, with *Ivanhoe*, to go Medieval. As early as *Waverley*, Scott evokes Gothic themes as he juxtaposes his protagonist’s romance imagination with war’s bloody realities, although he forebears, throughout his debut novel, to ‘pursue such a description’ to a truly
Gothic degree of explicitness. Specifically, Scott remains reticent about the spectacular conversion to Catholicism that marriage to his inamorata, the French-schooled Jacobite temptress Flora MacIvor, would have entailed for Waverley, and about the gory spectacle that does ensnare Waverley’s boon companion Fergus, Flora’s brother, beheaded for his service to Bonnie Prince Charlie’s rebellion. The ultimately religious stakes of love and war in the novel remain a closed book, much like the treasonous treatises of Waverley’s Episcopalian Jacobite tutor, Pembroke, which go unread even as they precipitate Waverley’s arrest and necessitate his rescue by the Presbyterian Reverend Morton (whose precise place in the Scottish doctrinal landscape Scott ostentatiously leaves ambiguous); more romantically, they remain a confined mystery, like that of Flora’s fate within or beyond ‘the convent of the Scottish Benedictine nuns in Paris’ to which she retreats at the novel’s end.

Scott’s follow up, *Guy Mannering*, like *Waverley* reports, rather than depicts, what would have been its most Gothic scenes, significantly locating them on the other side of the world from Scotland – in India – during a seventeen-year gap in the narrative. Yet in his third novel, *The Antiquary*, which completes Scott’s initial trilogy of ‘fictitious narratives, intended to illustrate the manners of Scotland at three different periods’, the Author of *Waverley* confronts the Gothic, even as he moves to the modern setting of a French Revolutionary War invasion panic during which he himself would not have been much younger than the novel’s hero. The plot of *The Antiquary* is notoriously lacking in dynamism – it serves as E. M. Forster’s main exhibit when he arraigns Scott because ‘to make one thing happen after another is his only serious aim’. As Jonathan Oldbuck entertains a young English visitor at the converted Catholic monastery where he lives and obsesses over putative Roman ruins, his antiquarianism gathers the requisite Gothic material, but stifles Gothic passion. Yet from the moment when the unexpected Gothic spectacle of a Roman Catholic funeral procession (surely an inspiration for Pringle’s pastiche) introduces the Glenallan family, the novel moves forcefully toward a conclusion. The patriarch of this local aristocratic Roman Catholic clan, who embodies, per William Hazlitt in *The Spirit of
the Age, the echt Gothic traits of ‘feudal tyranny and fiendish pride’, reconciles himself to society when he discovers Oldbuck’s visitor to be his own lost son, now a fully assimilated British army officer deployed to help fend off French invasion. The Antiquary thus ultimately restates the equation, first laid out with Waverley, wherein modern war redeems for the nation a family that has succumbed to ancient Catholic attractions. In the process, Scott relegitimates the profound ambivalence toward religious heritage that both characterises and is characterised by the Gothic.

However much Scott’s initial three novels concern ‘the manners of Scotland’, their Gothic tensions involve Europe, and their resolution is fundamentally British. It is with his subsequent Tales of My Landlord that Scott develops a more properly Scottish Gothic, exploring the uncanny elements of Scottish nationalism by anatomising the varieties of Scottish religion, often to horrific effect. This process begins with the conceit Scott devises for laying this new corpus on the table. The title page for the anonymously published, initial four-volume set of Tales announces them to have been ‘collected and reported’ by one Jedediah Cleishbotham, ‘schoolmaster and parish-clerk of Gandercleugh’: a fictional town, whose supposed location on the road between Edinburgh and Glasgow makes its inn a convenient spot at which to record the stories of the nation. Cleishbotham’s preface, which purports to explain all this, takes a dark turn when it reveals he is ‘NOT the writer, redactor, or compiler of the Tales of My Landlord’, but that he has merely conveyed to a publisher papers produced by his late junior colleague, the Presbyterian minister turned schoolteacher, Peter Pattieson, who, like Cleishbotham, frequented the inn where these tales were told. The tales, Cleishbotham explains, are the literary remains of this chronically ill poet, whose melancholic pastime it has been to collect them; they appear now as he arranged them for the press because, Cleishbotham avers, ‘the will of the dead must be scrupulously obeyed’. At the outset of the second and major work of the first series, The Tale of Old Mortality, Pattieson – whom we thus know, as we read, to be dead – provides a second, internal frame narrative, in which he describes his habit of walking down to an overgrown
cemetery near the school, where he would occasionally see the self-appointed custodian of Covenanter graves whose stories are said to give rise to the novel. The Gothic atmospherics of *The Tale of Old Mortality* thus come mediated not only by its titular aging Covenanter zealot, but also by schoolteachers trained in, but not practicing, the more moderate Presbyterianism of modern times.

Analysing those atmospherics, Fiona Robertson claims *The Tale of Old Mortality* is ‘free of standard Gothic motifs and situations’. If this is true, it is only true because the religious themes that so saturate the novel can everywhere explain depictions of extreme psychological crises that would strike one as Gothic were they not so evidently spiritual. From the hallucinatory quasi-apparition of the red cloaked woman at the crossroads, who early on warns the fugitive Covenanting assassin John Balfour, aka Burley, of ‘a lion in the path’, turning him toward the moderate hero Henry Morton’s hospitality, to the evocation of Balfour’s own well-nigh Satanic power in his ultimate struggle with Morton, the most vivid scenes from *The Tale of Old Mortality*, so framed, demonstrate the authority of an emergently national and at least somewhat skeptical and secularised literary culture to process the terrors of faith. If Scott’s Tales process these terrors without fully resorting to the Gothic, in so doing, they appropriate to themselves and their author figures something of the uncanny power of the spiritual warriors they depict. Subsequent Tales find Scott only raising the stakes for such cycles of unleashing and confining Gothic terrors: most famously, the *Bride of Lammermoor*, from its opening funeral confrontation (no doubt another inspiration for Galt’s aforementioned Gothic parody) to its tragic ‘mad scene’ nuptial bloodbath, and *The Heart of Midlothian*, which so labours to close a tale of purported child murder with a tragic parricide. Yet even here, readers have found Scott’s Gothic palpable, but unrealised. Many modern critics writing before Robertson and Duncan (and some since), especially those who consider Scott’s work – if not modern literary culture more generally – an exercise in the reproduction of ideological fantasy, dismiss the power of his Gothic stylings; so
too, at least to some extent, did contemporaries like Hazlitt, Galt, and Hogg, each of whom in his own way evinced frustration with Scott for his moderation, closure, or compromise.

Like Cleishbotham, who comically calls Pattieson ‘flimsy’ and criticises him for ‘following not the example of those strong poets whom I proposed to him as an example’, Scott’s contemporaries like Hogg and Galt discount the force of his work and try to improve upon it. Still, refusing his achievement of closure, they carry forward his openness to experience, however sensational, supernatural, spiritual, or otherwise Gothic. The example of a strong poet Cleishbotham holds up for Pattieson is the English divine John Donne, whose Elegy by Thomas Carew he quotes for its well-known lines about how ‘frivolous’ poets (such as Pattieson, in the analogy) discard Donne’s ‘strict laws’ for ‘ballad rhyme’. By rehearsing this amusingly pedantic opprobrium, Scott connects his Tales back to his early work translating supernatural ballads from the German and collecting his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. It may be that those who read Scott’s fiction in the light of the ascendance of law and the state see its reinforcement of social architectonics as predominant, while those who read it with a more immediate sense of chaotic violence can find, in the *Waverley* novels, the verve, raw imagery, and national sensibility associated with ballads. Ultimately, success, for Scott in this mode, may involve crafting his novels as multi-stable representations legible both ways – as ordered, and as disordered – even if such craft, for his critics, represents just more overreach, and hence more failure. From yet another angle, this perennial problem in the interpretation of Scott can be seen to restate theological problems of agency, omniscience, and soteriological humility that have been central for Calvinist sects such as Presbyterianism. Might the suspicion of Scott’s magisterial authority derive from regarding him as a cultural Episcopalian, exhibiting tendencies toward a Catholicism that may be English, or even Roman, and that in any case fails to show a proper cultural deference to the spirit abroad in his proper nation?

Indubitably, Scott’s representation of the Covenanters in *The Tale of Old Mortality* spurred his main peers, Galt and Hogg, to further engage that subject matter themselves, albeit to quite
different effect. As Duncan notes, ‘of Scott’s most interesting rivals’, Galt ‘refused the
conventions of Scottish Gothic in his most characteristic work, although this did not prevent
him from lapses into it’, whereas ‘Hogg, a Scott protégé, reinvented Scottish Gothic as a
powerful and original alternative to the model of fiction devised by Scott’. 18 Significantly, for this
context, Duncan elsewhere argues that Galt’s 1823 historical novel *Ringan Gilhaize, or The
Covenanters* poses a ‘programmatic challenge’ to Scott when it ‘reinvents historical fiction’ by
‘ventriloquizing belief as the foundation of narrative agency and interpretation, restoring its
strong theological term, faith’. 19 Confounding skepticism, such religion disables the supernatural,
and with it the Gothic. How to reconcile this Galt with the Galt whose contemporaneous
serialised fictions such as *The Ayrshire Legatees* Duncan locates ‘at the forefront of the literary
innovations borne by Blackwood’s’, for their thematisation of travel and transport, and their
innovations of the sketch and dispatch forms so compatible with emergent periodical formats? 20
The common denominator here is surely the imperial cultural nationalism synthesised by
Blackwood’s, which transposes the faith of Scottish forefathers in their Church, Kirk, or Covenant
into a modern faith in a global dispensation whereby ordinary Britons can encounter and survive
whatever terrors, or tales of terror, the world might circulate home to them.

A pastoral mission can likewise be identified at the heart of the Ettrick Shepherd’s
bruited anti-imperialism, if we recognise, with Crawford Gribben, that in the hands of the
mature Hogg, the historical novel is both ‘a work of art and a theological argument’. 21 Writing
specifically of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and emphasising the radical
experience afforded by the open form and contradictory structure of that novel, which so
attracted modernists like André Gide, Gribben argues that ‘far more than a satire of Calvinism’,
Hogg’s masterpiece ‘exploits a bastard form of Calvin’s soteriology to [...] destabilise the process
of reading, and insist that we read by faith, not by sight’. At the heart of Hogg’s novel lies not a
religion-damaged psychology sunk in antinomianism – which is actually well distanced by Hogg
from any orthodox form of Scottish Calvinism – but, to the contrary, a scrupulous method of
Calvinist interpretation that forbears strong claims for elect status or for historical knowledge. From the point of view of a literary method possessed of such scruples, it is, Gribben argues, ‘ultimately Galt and Scott’ who are ‘in the same position as the demon-haunted and demon-deceived Robert Wringhim’. As Scottish literary innovations like the historical novel and the Scottish Gothic have travelled the world, Galt’s style of faith has had its evangelists, but so too has Hogg’s – and teachers in each tradition have been able to prove out their arguments from the texts of the others. We might end, then, with the question of which of these lineages best contextualises a work specially chosen for the commemorative one thousandth issue of Blackwood’s, in 1899: a tale of imperial travel, which is also a modernistic paean to constructive ambiguity and epistemological humility, titled ‘The Heart of Darkness’.22


5 ‘The Ayrshire Legatees, Or the Correspondence of the Pringle Family’, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, 7.39 (June 1820), 262–271 (p. 262).
Perhaps uncoincidentally, the surname is also that of Blackwood's founding editor Thomas Pringle.


Duncan, ‘Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Scottish Gothic’, p. 76.


