

## Introduction

The Gothic and the uncanny have long existed in literature all over the world, offering glimpses of humanity most would be willing to forget or ignore. While separate, the two are rooted in a lot of the same psychological ground and both tend to provide an unsavoury look into the darker sides of humanity, often by looking at our inner selves. While the Gothic relies more on outward appearances, the uncanny has a subtler manifestation in art. Whilst old, crumbling castles evoke a sense of dread in a clear and obvious manner, a human being who behaves in unusual ways can be harder to spot, and yet both of these manifestations of the Gothic and uncanny have a similar end result in literature, that of unnerving and confronting the reader. The Gothic and the uncanny are particularly viable forms of artistic expression within cultures that exist in unstable conditions or in borderline states, as the external conflict brought on by such a situation often causes a great deal of internal conflict to go along with it. Internal conflicts of this kind, in turn, provide ample material for explorations of identity and the fragile sense of self in literature. The Gothic provides overt opportunities to explore the darkness and horror of such a conflict, whereas the uncanny allows for a deeper descent into the less obvious elements thereof. As we shall see, the literature of Scotland has been a strong example of this due to the infamous split Scottish psyche, stemming from a disconnect between the isolated Scotland and the more outward looking United Kingdom, the cultural divide between the Highlands and the Lowlands, the peculiarities of Calvinist doctrine, and more. For a long time, this duality has been explored in Scottish literature, consciously or not, in a multitude of ways, carrying the traditions of the Gothic and the uncanny and moulding them in specific ways that fit the particular environment of Scottish identity. This often results in an emphasis on the uncanny over the Gothic, although the latter is frequently updated in ways that are closer to what we are familiar with, in itself forming an uncanny twist between the confines of generic elements of the Gothic and the regular world as we know it. This essay will explore this unique brand of the Scottish Gothic and uncanny in literature through an analysis of Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* (1959) and Ali Smith's *The Accidental* (2005), as well as two influential 19<sup>th</sup> century historical novels, James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889). Scottish literature has consistently emphasised the unknowability of life through the usage of the Gothic and the uncanny, which can be seen in the similarity with which these four novels display and utilise elements of the uncanny.

## The Split Psyche and the Uncanny in Scottish Literature

A common thread throughout Scottish literary history is the prevalence of the split psyche, through which Scottish identity becomes riddled with ambiguities that prevent Scotland's inhabitants from obtaining a stable, singular national identity. Monica Germanà (2008) talks about the notion of identity, saying that it "is not fixed, but rather placed in a continuous state of flux" (84), and points out that within Scottish identity there is a strong duality between the Scottish and English elements of the nation, that "historically, Scottishness has been typically—albeit not solely—defined in terms of its binary opposition to Englishness" (83). That is, the identity exists between "the movement towards universal recognition on one hand, and the celebration of differentiation on the other" (89) for the English and Scottish elements, respectively. One way in which Scottish culture differs from that of the English is the predominance of Calvinism, in which each person's designation to Heaven or Hell after death is predetermined. Crawford Gibbon discusses this in the article "James Hogg, Scottish Calvinism and Literary Theory," in which he talks about the elect, those predetermined to go to Heaven, as being "freed from the condemnation of the moral law." Although he quotes *Westminster Confession of Faith*, saying that "the moral law doth for ever bind all, as well [the elect] as others, to the obedience thereof," he also brings up a more extreme interpretation of Calvinist doctrine, in which "[t]he elect [...] continue to sin, but cannot fall from grace" (12), namely that no act committed in life has any effect on the afterlife in either way. This can result in a psychic divide in which people's consciences can remain clean regardless of what they do, as any sin is easily dismissible due to its complete inefficacy in determining the fate of their souls. This divide between spiritual convictions and physical actions thus feeds further into the split psyche as it invokes a degree of self-deception to justify a clear paradox.

Along with this split comes a question of authenticity, since such an ambiguous national identity can result in a strong desire to find a singular unity that ultimately does not really exist. Carla Sassi (2005) looks in particular detail at the way the Highland culture has become emblematic of Scotland as a whole, saying that "[t]he kilt, the woven patterns of the tartan indicating affiliation to a clan, the bagpipes—in short all the traditional markers of Scottish cultural distinctiveness have indeed been borrowed [...] from the Gaelic Highlands" (64-65). The implication is that there has been a reduction or even "erasure of cultural difference" between the Lowlands and the Highlands in favour of establishing "markedly 'non-English'" cultural markers, ones rooted in the past, "or [in] the 'past' represented by a

distinct region,” (65) and thus more easily defended as a national identity with a long tradition. In doing so, the major Scottish cultural markers become not only signs of difference from the outside world but emblematic of Scotland’s inner division. This reduction in the public eye of individuality within Scotland’s own borders is thus similar to the way in which Calvinism allows for a clean conscience regardless of action, though on a less obvious level. While Calvinist doctrine can, in its most extreme form, make people justify their own sinful behaviour since they are predestined to go to Heaven or Hell regardless, thereby suppressing their own conscience and obfuscating the inner conflict that comes with it, the simplification of Highland culture as generally Scottish suppresses and obfuscates the unique properties of individual parts of Scotland in favour of a simpler definition of Scottish culture. This comes with appropriately definitive surface elements that can be presented as proof of a singular identity that does not exist and so these elements act as a disguise similar to Calvinist doctrine, allowing for a subconscious removal of boundaries in favour of “[a] romanticised view of Scotland, as a land of fiery people, unfairly subjugated to England’s hegemony” (Germanà 86), with which to project a strong outward unity. This is, of course, a highly fragile identity and its authenticity is easily questioned and criticised, revealing what Germanà refers to as “Scotland’s lack of cultural self-confidence” (88).

The literature of Scotland has long incorporated the Gothic and uncanny in ways that draw heavily on the Scottish psyche and history. Kirsty MacDonald (2009) argues that, unlike “the ‘original’ Gothic of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century” that focused on the “foreign other,” Scottish tradition was more concerned with “the other within,” naming the Highlander in particular. MacDonald goes on to claim that these Gothic texts “problematise the past as myth” and “are capable of highlighting the distortions that past produces in the present—they reveal national myths as Gothic forgeries” (1), thus connecting this notion of Gothic works to Sassi’s observations of the appropriation of Highland culture for the Lowlands in order to distance Scottish identity from the English. Germanà (2010) further comments on the Gothic stating that “fantasy exposes the weaknesses and contradictions of the known world” and that, relating to fantasy, “[t]he Gothic [...] exposes the loss of self-unity and identity most overtly.” She brings into this Tzvetan Todorov’s notion of the uncanny as being “rationally explained as an illusion, dream, or drug-induced hallucination,” in contrast to the marvellous, which is “accepted as part of the world of the story” (13). Thus Gothic, in its most uncanny state, hinges on “liminal borders and conditions” (13-14) between binary states, so that “the closer a fantastic narrative sits to realistic situations, the more subversive is its violation of the real” (13). Within the context of

Scottish identity, this relates directly to the split psyche and the cultural division that exists within the different facets of the Scots themselves, as opposed to the aforementioned “foreign other,” and the uncanny therefore operates at a high degree within a society where these binary oppositions are so prominent and the borders between them so unclear.

The question of authenticity that is so crucial to Scottish identity is also influential in terms of the form in which Scottish literature is presented. Timothy C. Baker discusses this in his book *Contemporary Scottish Gothic*, pointing out in particular the “found manuscript,” or epistolary novel, which “has been aligned with Gothic since its beginning,” but “is peculiarly prominent in Scottish writing” (54). He goes on to claim that “[m]etafictional elements, including found manuscripts and clear forgeries, arguably highlight the extent to which any text, or work of language, fails to represent the past objectively or completely” (55), which is a statement that fits well with Sassi’s look at the appropriation of Highland culture and MacDonald’s view of Gothic texts as distortions of history and “national myths as [...] forgeries” (1). Baker describes several forms of metafictional writing, including “[a]uthentic histories” (58), naming Alisdair Gray’s *Poor Things*, which contains documents supposedly written by the fictional characters Archie McCandless and Victoria McCandless. Despite the fictional nature of the documents, Gray includes an introduction that “insists that it is necessary to understand the historical context of McCandless’s text;” yet Baker points out that the “framework is repeatedly revealed to be partial” and shaped “to [Gray’s] own interpretation” (59). This acknowledgement and dismissal of historical accuracy also extends to using a real museum curator, Michael Donnelly, as the man who discovered the documents so as to further lend credence to the fictional history at play. This mixture of “fact and fiction” (59) places the work squarely in the liminal state of the uncanny, as per Todorov, and further refutes the singular state expected of such a work, which in turn evokes the split Scottish psyche in particular. David Punter (2012) also names the 1819 novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* by Walter Scott as another work that blurs the line between historical fact and fiction, as the text “invite[s] [the reader to] compare uncertainties” between the “interwoven histories” it is based on (134). Yet the narrator of the book states it is “an ower true tale” (cited in Punter 133), once again evoking the liminal state of uncertainty as its stated purpose is undone by Scott’s own storytelling, as interpreted by Punter. This brings the uncanny, with its emphasis on uncertainty, to the forefront of early Scottish literature.

## James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson

Two particularly praised novels, *The Master of Ballantrae* by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* by James Hogg, deal extensively with the Scottish psyche and the duality found within, represented by a pair of brothers in both. Stevenson's novel tackles this divide directly as the elder brother in question, James Durie, fights for Bonnie Prince Charlie in the Jacobite uprising. However, rather than just fighting, he demands to be sent, whereas tradition would dictate the younger brother be sent instead. As James so eagerly has gone to fight for the Scottish Stuart king, he becomes a kind of symbol for at least a part of the Scottish nation, emblematic of its pride and convictions. The younger brother who stays behind, Henry, is less boastful and instead leads a more peaceful life as the Lord of Durrisddeer in his brother's place. Philip Callow (2001) states that the division between the brothers makes the novel "yet another study in duality" from Stevenson (217), following previous works such as *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Hogg also explores this duality with a strong division between two brothers. In Hogg's novel, however, it is the younger brother of the two, Robert, who embodies the Scottish traits, in this case an adherence to Calvinism. Robert learns that he is one of the elect and is thus guaranteed a place in Heaven, no matter what he does whilst living, which is in accordance to Crawford Gribbon's discussion on extreme Calvinism. He is further encouraged by the mysterious Gil-Martin to murder people who lead sinful lives. Robert's elder brother, George, leads a more conventional life, similar to Henry Durie of *The Master of Ballantrae*. In both instances they are confronted continuously by their more passionate brothers, as James challenges Henry in bombastic and often violent ways as he attempts to become Lord of Durrisddeer himself, and Robert stalks George throughout his everyday activities. In both instances there is a strong supernatural current running through these encounters, as James appears to return from the dead after seemingly being killed twice and Robert anticipates George's every move and prevents him from finding solitude. At the same time, both James and Robert display an unnatural degree of persistence against all odds, which in both cases proves ultimately fatal for their more peaceful brothers. In this way, the radical brothers drift heavily towards their Scottish roots, highlighting the "differentiation" that comes with this, as pointed out by Germanà above. Their unfortunate younger brothers, however, lead more conventional lives, through which they lean more towards the "universal recognition" (Germanà 89) aspect of the Scottish psyche, correlating with the more English side of the psyche when placed in the perspective of the "binary opposition" between Scottishness and

Englishness as pointed out above by Germanà (83). Both novels thus provide a strong conflict between the two halves, with the disastrous results emphasising the profoundly unhealthy nature of the split.

Additionally, the mysteries behind the radicalised brothers are played in a mostly ambiguous manner, so as to suggest irrational and even diabolical explanations. *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* serves this function with the character of Gil-Martin, who has the power to change the appearance of his face and foretell of George's location at each given time according to Robert, and this is supported by the factual evidence provided by the fictional editor presenting the titular confession. This flies in the face of the editor's strong belief in the validity of reason and logic above all things mystical or spiritual, which can be read as a deliberate intellectual confrontation towards the reader, as neither Robert, the religious fanatic, nor the strictly factual editor are to be taken at face value. In particular, it relies heavily on both the discrepancies and similarities between the historical record as established by the editor and Robert's own narrative. A particularly striking example of this comes in Robert's murder of his brother, George, presumably accomplished with the help of Gil-Martin. In the historical record, the editor recounts the narrative as provided by Bell Calvert, a prostitute who witnessed the act. At the time the primary suspect of the murder was Thomas Drummond, who subsequently left the country, but Calvert asserts that Drummond left the scene of the crime just before the murder took place. Rather, according to her, the ones who committed the murder were Robert and a man who looked exceedingly similar to Drummond but she emphasises that it was not the same man, stating that "[w]hen I looked down at the two strangers, *one of them was extremely like Drummond,*" yet she "was certain it was not he, because [she] had seen the one going and the other approaching at the same time" (Hogg 53). This matches Robert's narrative, as he assaults George together with Gil-Martin. The nature of the attack, however, differs between the two accounts; Calvert says that Gil-Martin "rushed from his cover with his drawn rapier, and gave [George] two deadly wounds in the back" (56), claiming the occurrence was one of ambush, whereas Robert claims that, upon Gil-Martin losing his weapon, he "rushed between them with my sword drawn" and engaged in a duel, leaving George "covered in wounds" and, consequently, dead (118). This discrepancy, together with the consistency of the major events, enhances the ambiguity of the text, as there is clearly some truth in both accounts. Ian Duncan discusses this in his article on Scott and the historical novel and notes that the contrast between accounts is "[f]ar from resolving into a 'moderate' synthesis," the

ideologies and facts of the novel “swarm disastrously across the text,” which results in a “metaphysical abyss” (114) that defies simple logic.

*The Master of Ballantrae*, on the other hand, uses its more obviously implausible events, i.e. those of James supposedly rising from the dead twice, to directly create an impression of the diabolical. James’s method of survival is ultimately revealed to be entirely rational, as his accomplice, Secundra, says late in the novel that “I tell you I bury [James] alive [...] I teach him swallow his tongue” (Stevenson 217), after which his unsuccessful attempt at reviving him results in “his eyelids flutter[ing]” and even “[rising] entirely, and the week-old corpse look[ing] [Henry’s steward Ephraim Mackellar] for a moment in the face” (218). This would suggest that such methods of survival were at play in both instances of James’s supposed death. However, for much of the novel this goes unexplained, functioning not just as a conventional mystery but also as a tonal device that establishes much of the diabolic atmosphere of the novel. As James’s situation comes about entirely in the aftermath of the Jacobite uprising, and his contention is squarely focused on his own brother, the nature of his character is firmly rooted in both the historical and the personal, both of which provide a strong contrast to his seemingly supernatural nature and thus evoke the uncanny once combined into a single figure. Furthermore, his constant return to Durrisdeer provides him with a spectral presence, as a phantom of the past haunting the house in which Henry lives. This relates to Sigmund Freud’s view of the uncanny as being, according to Germanà, “inextricably bound up with thoughts of home and dispossession, the homely and unhomely, property and alienation,” which Germanà connects to the Gothic, saying that “it is the enclosed, seemingly ‘domestic’ spaces that best accommodate spectrality” and naming the “Gothic castle” as “the haunted house par excellence” (137). This extends to James’s behaviour, as his reluctance to leave his house in Ballantrae becomes not just a personal feud but a spectral provocation, adding even further to the uncanny diabolism surrounding him and his actions.

## Muriel Spark and Ali Smith

In contrast to the extraordinary circumstances found in Hogg's and Stevenson's novels, in both Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* and Ali Smith's *The Accidental* the Gothic and uncanny are often present in ways that integrate them into the mundanity of modern life. One of the main plot elements of *Memento Mori* is a mysterious phone call made to numerous elderly people stating that they should "remember [they] must die" (10). This exchange features the aforementioned integration prominently, as the reminder of death, a dark omen heavily featured in Gothic and supernatural works, is interposed with the modern telephone, thereby modernising the omen and linking it to more recent notions of stalkers. In doing this Spark simultaneously invokes old, Gothic ideas of the supernatural and reduces their mystic presence. Furthermore, the casual manner in which the voice speaks the sentence has an uncanny effect on the reader. The gravity of the sentence itself is entirely undermined by the nonchalance with which it is spoken, as well as the police officers' reactions to it, as they very much dismiss the case out of hand. The novel further evokes the Gothic in the character of Guy Leet, albeit in an unusual manner. After the death of Lisa Brooke, a woman all the main characters are in some way familiar with, her will becomes an item of debate. The will states that "her entire fortune" go to "my husband if he survives me and thereafter to my housekeeper, Mabel Pettigrew" (34), but, as her husband died a long time ago after having divorced her, her sanity at the time of writing her will comes into question. This is resolved, however, when Guy Leet turns out to have married her in secret decades ago. As somewhat of an outsider, Guy is introduced to the reader as a man of no "more than seventy-five" by Godfrey, who last saw Guy "thirty-odd years" ago (25). His status as an outsider thus plays into his presence in the novel as being unwelcome, as well as a bearer of secrets the characters had wanted to forget. His secret marriage to Lisa is also relevant with regards to the Scottish split psyche, as it seems to exist only as a legal procedure rather than a marriage of love. To this effect, Pettigrew states that "Guy Leet had been incapable of consummating his marriage with Lisa Brooke," even going so far as to say that "Lisa never recognised him as [her husband]" (53). This is even further complicated as it turns out Guy Leet had had an affair with novelist Charmian, which Lisa used as a means to blackmail Guy into marriage. This compromises the authenticity and self-determination of everyone involved as their relationships turn out to have been built on lies and deceit and thus establishes the double lives they all lead.



Smith's *The Accidental*, on the other hand, taps into a different vein of the uncanny. Rather than evoking omens of death, it focuses on the mysterious Amber, a young woman who enters the lives of the central Smart family during their vacation. Despite having no prior connection to the family, she effectively inserts herself into their everyday affairs almost instantly. In doing so she evokes the notion of the changeling, a figure of mythology that replaces the child of a regular family as they simply go on with their lives. The obvious change here is that Amber does not replace anyone — she is simply an inexplicable addition. Patrick O'Donnell refers to Amber as “[t]he stranger who occupies ‘the space that wrecks our abode’” and an “intrusive presence,” who “can be viewed as the uncanny other who each family member either desires or objects” (96). As such, Amber exists mostly in relation to the individual family members, rather than as an individual in her own right. This is reflected in the chapters written from her own perspective, in which she details some of her backstory, though in an often ambiguous fashion. A part of this ambiguity lies in the fact that she never explicitly names herself as the narrator of said passages, coming closest to it by saying that her namesake was Alhambra. Alhambra in this case is the name of a theatre, the “place of [her] conception” (Smith 211), although the theatre's namesake is an old palace in Spain, bridging the Gothic, an old palace, with the modern in crafting Amber's both mysterious and mundane background. Additionally, her first chapter focuses entirely on the circumstances of her conception and birth. The fact that she was named after her place of conception with a name that draws from foreign history further emphasises her lack of individuality, as every element surrounding her early life places her only in relation to the outside world.

In both Spark's and Smith's novels, the uncanny elements present propel the plot as they disrupt the peaceful exterior of the characters' lives, often directing the attention away from themselves. In *Memento Mori*, the death of Lisa Brooke and sudden appearance of Guy Leet are instrumental in changing the dynamics between the rest of the characters, as Pettigrew, who loses the money she had expected from Lisa, becomes Charmian's housekeeper, through which she is further involved with Lisa's friends. Charmian's husband, Godfrey, becomes sexually involved with Pettigrew, though in a minimal fashion, as he pays her small sums of money to simply see “the top of her stocking and the tip of her suspender” (64), implying infidelity between him and Charmian, which echoes Charmian's own affair with Guy Leet. This establishes that both Godfrey and Charmian lead double lives within their marriage, which feeds into the duality of the Scottish psyche. Godfrey is later shown to have a similar deal with Olive Mannering, the granddaughter of poet Percy Manning, who lives in Chelsea. This becomes an important plot point later in the novel, as Pettigrew

discovers the purpose of his trips to Chelsea and Olive moves away. Although he is disappointed in finding Olive absent, he is also left in a state of shame and fear, as he believes Pettigrew intends to blackmail him into altering his will in her favour (164). This brings their story back to the inciting incident of Lisa's death, while simultaneously rooting the conflict in Godfrey's own dual existence.

The mysterious phone calls, mentioned earlier, also play an integral part in the plot's progression, though not in as obvious a manner. The first character to receive the call is Dame Lettie, Godfrey's sister, who immediately contacts Godfrey following one such call. This leads to her staying with Godfrey, who often answers the phone for her to lighten her load and confirm that it is not simply a hallucination. As the story progresses, other characters start receiving similar calls, beginning with Godfrey, when the mysterious caller tells him that "The message is for you, Mr Colston" (120). Eventually the people receiving the calls decide to hire a detective, Henry Mortimer, though their interaction with him proves ultimately useless as no suspect is ever found. However, their personal reactions to the calls often indicate how they die or spend the rest of their lives as presented in the novel. Dame Lettie, who reacts to the phone calls with fear and paranoia, is ultimately murdered in her home, bringing some to believe that the man who killed her was also the voice on the phone, but members of the police, including Mortimer, believe there is likely to be no connection, and that "the anonymous voice would never be traced in flesh and blood" (208). Charmian, on the other hand, reacts to the call in a calm manner, stating that "[she] do[es] not forget [her] death, whenever that will be," at which the voice is "delighted" (127). Not long after, she decides to enter a nursing home of her own free will and uneventfully dies "one morning in the following spring" (218), in accordance with her relaxed manner of dealing with the call. Earlier in the novel, upon meeting the people receiving the calls, Mortimer says "that the offender is, in each case, whoever [they] think he is [themselves]" (152), thus linking each individual's perception of the calls to the subsequent events of their lives. This evokes Kirsty MacDonald's notions of the Scottish Gothic as "the other within" (1), as noted above, and demonstrates Spark's usage of the anonymous calls as a method with which to explore the characters' psyches and how they affect the course of their lives.

Meanwhile, Amber's role in *The Accidental* involves pushing all four members of the Smart family to confront the inner conflict each of them is struggling with. The structure of the novel plays an important role here, as it is divided into three parts, "The Beginning," "The Middle," and "The End," each of which contains five chapters dedicated to the five characters present in the novel, the children, Astrid and Magnus, their stepfather and mother, Michael

and Eve, and presumably Amber herself. Notably, “The Middle” is the only one of the three parts in which Amber is present from start to finish, with “The Beginning” and “The End” displaying the family in the run-up towards her introduction and the aftermath of her stay, respectively. For Astrid, Amber becomes someone who brings a semblance of joy to her family trip. Near the beginning, “Astrid is taping dawns. There is nothing else to do here” (7), establishing her boredom and lack of engaging activities early on. This is in stark contrast to her second chapter, in which Amber charges Astrid with the simple task of buying food for the two of them, a task that is immediately given a sense of importance and is referred to as “Astrid’s mission” (112). Astrid’s relationship with food here provides an additional contrast to her earlier state, before Amber arrived. While filming the dawn at the start of the book, Astrid seems to suddenly realise that “[s]he is hungry. She is starving, actually” (9), but she finds herself unable to eat since “[i]t is literally hours till anything like breakfast,” besides which she does not seem to “[want] to eat anything in this unhygienic dump” (10). This helps cement the effect Amber has on her, as before Amber arrives Astrid’s basic ability and desire to eat is entirely subsumed by her boredom, thus displaying Amber’s ability to bring about a sense of vitality and meaning to Astrid’s mental state.

Magnus, the boy of the family, has also become isolated by the time the novel begins, but his isolation is self-imposed and is attributed to his involvement in a prank that resulted in the suicide of a girl in his school. His state at the beginning of the novel is highly lethargic, as he wonders whether or not it is light outside, and that “[l]ight makes all his muscles like they’ve been drugged.” This is followed up by the thought that “[i]f it’s light, it’ll darken” (37), showing his unwillingness to operate during the day. Upon finally leaving his room, later in the chapter, he makes an attempt at getting dressed. This proves to be a difficult task, as “he can’t get the button to go through the buttonhole [of his shirt]. He can’t get his hand to do it,” and similarly, when he puts on his jeans, “[h]e tucks himself in. He takes the zip, finger there, thumb there. He makes an effort. The zip goes up” (46). The terse sentences portray a lethargic and depressive state of mind and his inability to even button his shirt show the extent which his helplessness has reached. Although his family try to bring him out of his isolation, it is Amber who actually succeeds, thus allowing his character arc and the process of healing to start in a meaningful way, as his second chapter begins with him in “the middle of dinner with everybody there” (136). The way in which Amber brings Magnus out of his isolation, however, involves the two of them engaging in an affair, one that does not directly result in Amber’s later effects on Michael and Eve, though thematically the three are all tied stringently together. Her affair with Magnus is hinted at during the aforementioned dinner,

when she says “*if you’re going to give anybody a hard time, give it to me*” and “winks at him, right at him, right in front of [Eve and Michael],” resulting in “the reddening rise of his prick thickening against his jeans” (136). It is through this affair that Magnus finally confesses his crime, albeit in a truncated manner, when he tells her that “I broke somebody,” and although her response is simply “So? [...] And?” (149) and he does not elaborate, it nevertheless acts as a turning point for his personal journey. This is made evident in the very next scene as Magnus “is overcome with love for his mother, for his sister [...], for Michael. He even loves Michael” (151). This demonstrates Magnus’s improved emotional and mental health as being an extension of his relationship with Amber. O’Donnell points out the possibility that “their affair [is] the first step on Magnus’ road to adulthood,” which leads him to accepting “responsibility for his role in the suicide of [the girl in his school]” (97). In other words, his affair with Amber brings about a sexual maturity in him that, in turn, leads to an emotional maturity that completes his journey into adulthood.

Both Astrid and Magnus overcome the psychological trauma or obstruction that keeps them closed off from those around them, and in both instances Amber acts as a direct influence. This occurs in spite of Amber being a complete stranger to them when she first appears, and her eagerness to interact with the two so intimately, as a sister to Astrid and lover to Magnus, comes across as highly unusual. In this way their interactions occur in the liminal state between familiarity and unfamiliarity, providing a comfort and even complacency not expected from someone they have met so recently, and thus evoking an uncanny portrait of these unlikely pairings. Amber’s actions, furthermore, are performed with a certain degree of apathy that Astrid and Magnus do not seem to be entirely aware of. When contrasted with the intensity of many of those actions, this evokes a familiarity that is not to be expected of such relative strangers and, in more extreme circumstances, an unnatural detachment that once again plays into the uncanny aspects of their relationships through the contrast between intimate human interaction and emotional distance. This can be seen in Astrid’s second chapter, in which Amber drops Astrid’s camera off a bridge and barely acknowledges it. Astrid reacts by ignoring Amber, as “[a]ll the way home [Astrid] won’t look or speak,” which “Amber doesn’t even notice,” and afterwards is shaken to the point of looking into a mirror and finding that “her face is so white that she has to look twice” (119). This emphasises the intensity with which she experiences this event as well as the distance between Astrid and Amber. Amber later admits to having thrown the camera off the bridge to the rest of Astrid’s family, again with a nonchalance that does not befit the situation and so Eve is unable to express the anger she otherwise would have pointed towards Astrid for

losing her camera. This event is also important to Astrid's own journey towards selfhood, as O'Donnell points out that it provides her with "experiential agency that is both apocalyptic and hopeful in her capacity to confront various 'ends'" (99). This agency marks a profound change in her compared to earlier parts of the novel in which she completely lacked the drive to accomplish much of anything. With Magnus, however, Amber's nonchalance about their sexual relationship is what stands out. For example, when leaving the house with Magnus one day she says outright to Eve that she is "taking [...] Magnus for a walk" and that they will "be away about an hour, long enough for me to ravish him sexually then bring him back safely" (143), which Eve simply laughs at as if it was a joke, explicitly pointing out the absurdity of the situation and displaying Amber's detached manner of speech as being analogous to deadpan humour to Eve. This detachment also emphasises Amber's status as outsider, as she does not fit in with the rest of the family. Additionally, the blunt nature of her character, which makes her so uncanny within the context of civilised society, becomes a tool with which she reaches Astrid and Magnus, and, by extent, drives their story in the novel as a whole.

Amber is also important in bringing about change in the adults, Michael and Eve. Just like Magnus, Michael is also infatuated with Amber, a state that is intensified due to his history of being unfaithful to Eve. He reflects on this history as he sleeps with a girl called Philippa Knott, thinking that "[t]en years ago it had been romantic, inspiring, energizing [...]. Five years ago it had still been good," but that "now [he], with twenty-year-old Philippa Knott jerking about, eyes open, on top of him [...] was worried about his spine" (70). This shows not just Michael's long history of sleeping with other women, but also his fatigue and disinterest in it at this point, as he no longer feels the same passion as when he started being unfaithful to his wife. Conversely, Amber brings back that lost passion in him as, on the train on his way home, he "tried to imagine [Amber] sucking him off in the train toilet" (75) but finds himself unable to do so, and after supper is shocked that "[s]he had ignored him the whole time" (77), thus feeding into his obsession with her. This obsession is then built upon by having Michael's second chapter written entirely in verse, saying that "a girl called Amber walked across the room / and everything became a new-made poem" (161). In this way his passion for her is both made explicit and transforms the very form of his chapter. O'Donnell suggests that he may be "saved from the parody of bourgeois existence" (97) due to Amber's transformative force on him. Further, Stephen M. Levin suggests that the poetic form of Michael's second chapter is a "meta-literary" device that reflects his "imaginary ideal of himself" that has been "shattered," and that as a result of this "he is left in a paradoxical state

that is both plentitude and absence” (41). This would suggest that the different form represents his fragmented state of mind as he tries to cope with the removal of “the parody of [his] bourgeois existence” and struggles with both an excess of mental activity and dearth of realistic options with which to proceed with his fascination with Amber.

Eve, then, is shown to be immediately unhappy with Amber and eventually drives her out of the house and confronts Michael about his affairs. In her first chapter she says that she cannot sleep because “[t]hat girl of Michael’s was a little distracting” (79). She also states that “[s]he was clearly his latest ‘student’” (80), and makes “sure to kiss Michael hard when his ‘student’ was out of the room [...] [t]o let him know [...] [t]hat it was all right with her” (88). Accordingly, she makes it clear that she is well aware of Michael’s infidelity, but for the sake of her family and their careers does not act on it, going so far as to say that “Michael was fine. Really, he was fine” (86), most likely as a way of justifying her actions. It is, however, Amber herself who appears to realise the self-deception Eve engages in as, upon reading Eve’s life during “one of those psychological personality games” (180), Amber tells her that she is “an excellent fake [...] [t]op of the class. A-plus” (183). Eventually, Eve discovers that Amber’s reason for being homeless, attributed earlier to her involvement in a car accident in which a child died, was entirely falsified, since when Eve asks her about “[t]he child” and “[t]he accident,” Amber replies “What child? [...] What accident?” (201); at this, Eve sends Amber out of the house and promptly ends the family’s vacation. Having confronted such a lie directly, her attention is then directed towards her relationship with her husband and, in her third chapter, she decides to leave the family and go on a journey on her own. Levin points out that the conclusion of this journey sees her “take on Amber’s role as saboteur by entering a random house during her travels” (42), which suggests she understands Amber’s situation by the end of the novel and possibly even envies her position as an outsider with no responsibilities.

For the adults of Smith’s novel, Amber acts as an unknown entity from outside and disrupts their lives in such a way that they abandon pretence and their secretive nature in favour of openness and honesty. Whereas Michael was used to knowing the women he had affairs with through his work and having power over them in the relationship, Amber’s unknown qualities make her seem fresh and new and thus irresistible for him, which in turn invokes the passion he thought he had lost, for better or worse, exacerbating the disconnect between him and Eve. Amber is also able to engage with Eve on a level that ignores Eve’s public image as a novelist and focuses entirely on her as a regular person. Eve’s profession and her perception thereof is expressed in her first chapter, which takes the form of an

interview between Eve and an imaginary interviewer. Aside from detailing her work as a writer of historical fiction, the form of the chapter also gives insight into Eve's own perception of herself from the outside, as the non-existent interviewer engages in both her work as a whole and her personal fixations on things such as her dislike of Amber and her current inability to work on her upcoming novel. At one point she is asked "[w]as Eve a fraud?" (84), followed by similar questions pertaining to her lack of self-esteem, which she refuses to answer. The use of these questions in an interview conducted by someone most probably invented by Eve herself suggests that Eve's own personal sense of worth is heavily derived from outside feedback and acclaim. Amber, however, does not respect Eve in such a way, and makes it clear when, after Eve tells her about important events of her life, she replies "God, you're boring" (196). This, combined with Amber's earlier accusation of Eve as "an excellent fake" (183), shocks Eve out of her own complacency so she can confront Michael about his infidelity. Once again, with both Michael and Eve, it is the uninvited outsider who shakes them out of their routines by defying social norms and the expectations of the characters. In this respect, Amber echoes the purpose of Guy Leet in *Memento Mori* as the mysterious outsider of Gothic tradition exposing love affairs that everyone involved is aware of but are never acknowledged openly.

Both *Memento Mori* and *The Accidental* refuse to offer easy or obvious answers as to what is behind the uncanny elements presented, only offering suggestions of varying degrees of certainty. Though a considerable part of Spark's novel focuses on solving the mystery of the phone calls, there is never any concrete conclusion to the plot, and whatever elaborations are provided often serve to obfuscate rather than clarify the issue. This is brought to the forefront in chapter eleven, in which a group of people gather together with Henry Mortimer to discuss the issue. Throughout the gathering, the characters provide conflicting descriptions of the caller, as their statements vary immensely, different characters saying that the voice "sounded like a common man," "young," "cultured, middle-aged man," "a very civil young man," and "a man well advanced in years," speaking with a "menacing," "strictly factual," "sinister in the extreme," and "suppliant" tone (147-8). These blatant contradictions might bring to mind the fragile senses of the elderly characters in question, as many of them are heavily preoccupied with being "in charge of all [their] faculties" (11) and are shown to mishear phrases, leading to unfortunate circumstances, and one of them even suggests "mass hysteria," a notion Mortimer feels important to consider, saying that they "can't eliminate any possibility" (152). However, the voices' various identities are confirmed as Mortimer, who has, unbeknown to the others, also received the same calls, thinks to himself "How strange

[...] that mine is always a woman” (153), removing any doubt of there being multiple voices. Additionally, the very act of having multiple characters receiving the phone calls establishes that they cannot simply be the products of hallucinations or ailing minds. Though Mortimer compiles their statements and continues his investigation, nothing concrete ever emerges, and his own personal theory, that “the offender is Death himself” (142) emphasises the mysterious and possibly supernatural nature of the calls without ever providing any conclusion. Robert Ellis Hosmer, Jr. (2012) focuses on the character of Jean Taylor “who, at a moment of grace, identifies the caller, though she has never received a call herself” (Hosmer 204). Hosmer names her, along with Charmian and Mortimer, as being one of the characters that “identify the caller as Death,” noting that all three “accept the reality of the supernatural within the natural world” and that Taylor, in particular, “cast[s] off pride and accept[s] the gruesome realities of pain and death” (204). By emphasising the need for such acceptance, Spark establishes the unknowable nature of the world the characters inhabit, as both Taylor and Charmian find peace in accepting both the supernatural nature of the calls and their imminent deaths.

*The Accidental* offers an ambiguity similar to *Memento Mori*, though not draped as clearly in notions of the supernatural. Throughout the main chapters of the book, focusing on each of the four family members, nothing is ever revealed about Amber’s past, nor do the characters attempt to uncover it on any meaningful level. As Amber first enters the family’s life, Michael believes Eve is expecting her and so never questions her being there. Instead he welcomes her, an act that plays on his infatuation with her, as “inside he [feels] blustery, overdone” when she arrives (64). Conversely, Eve initially feels disdain towards Amber, referring to her as “[t]hat girl of Michael’s” (79), as stated above. That Eve believes Amber to be Michael’s student, despite his denial, ensures that neither of them question her relationship to the family too intensely. In addition to this, each of Amber’s own presumed chapters serve to obfuscate her history further, despite explicitly working through her backstory, as in the case of her aforementioned conception in the Alhambra theatre. In the first of her chapters, she details her life in a seemingly unfiltered stream of words, through which extreme events of her life stack on top of each other, such as when her boyfriend “hammered on the church glass” as she “was at the altar about to marry someone” but instead eloped with him and he, having also slept with her mother, “got [her] pregnant and a satanic sect made [her] go through with it” (104). Each event described is more implausible than the one before it, and so it has the effect of reducing the believability of any part of her narrative, instead making it seem like a completely farcical description. Amber refers to worldly events unfolding during



her lifetime in a similar manner, as she was, for instance, “born in the year of the supersonic, the era of the multistorey multivitamin multisonic” (103) and “formed [...] in the Saigon days, [...] the days of rivers of blood [...] Apollo 7 splashdowned” (103-4). She also calls her parents by different names, in reference to major figures of the time, and concludes the chapter saying she “was born free” and that “for all we know [she is] going to live forever” (105). This lends her life a generalised sense of existence, indicating that she is simply a person, or the spirit, of the time rather than a more individually defined human being. Levin calls her “an ‘avatar’ of spectral time” and “the other that intervenes in the narration of imagined selves” (42), emphasising her nature as an entity that exists solely in relation to others. This notion is further underlined as a non-existent interviewer, existing as part of Eve’s first chapter’s narrative style, asks her “*Couldn’t it sometimes take an outsider to reveal to a family that it was a family?*” (97), referring to the way in which members of the family become more active after Amber appears. Furthermore, Amber’s final chapter ends with the words “Careful. I’m everything you ever dreamed” (306), which captures the nature of her existence as an entity without a clear personality or individuality, existing rather to fulfil the needs of the other characters in the novel.

## Comparing Hogg and Stevenson to Spark and Smith

The central uncanny ambiguities of Spark's *Memento Mori* and Smith's *The Accidental* echo those of Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae*, suggesting a lineage in Scottish literature from Hogg and Stevenson to Spark and Smith. As the phone calls of *Memento Mori* are established as being experienced by multiple people, the reader is forced to accept them as truth within the framework of the narrative, thus preventing them from being dismissed out of hand. This is similar to the relation between Robert and Gil-Martin in Hogg's novel, as the editor disregards the supernatural elements of Robert's narrative as "either dreaming or madness" (176), despite the textual evidence provided by the editor himself. In both instances, there is a clear inference that what takes place is illogical and thus cannot be explained rationally, resulting in an element of the uncanny being employed thoroughly in both novels. Similarly, *The Accidental* and *The Master of Ballantrae* both feature central plot elements that are proven to be potentially logical at the end of the story, as both Amber and James Durie are ultimately shown to be simply people. Amber's existence is explained once the Smart family return home in the third section to find their house burgled and devoid of all their previous possessions, so some members of the family therefore suspect Amber of being the burglars' accomplice, with the role of keeping the family occupied and extending their stay on holiday while the burglars clear out the apartment in peace. Yet, neither James Durie nor Amber fit the mould of conventional or rational characters, their elemental nature overwhelming whatever logic they do obey, and in the end their earthly actions end up secondary to the larger societal forces they represent. Additionally, by having the rationality of their actions unexposed for the majority of each of these stories, both characters retain a degree of uncanny existence for the most part and drive the narratives with their unexplainable actions.

All four works also deal with the distortion or preservation of the past on some level, highlighting the importance of history and its unstable nature. *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* deals with this in the most obvious manner, as the conflict between the historical record and Robert's own account would invalidate Robert's version of the story, yet the similarities and the mysterious circumstances of the historical record prevents his story from being entirely discarded and thus the entire history becomes questionable and unreliable. In *The Master of Ballantrae*, meanwhile, there is little historical record to draw from within the confines of the novel's universe, and the editor's preface is simply a few pages as opposed to a considerable portion of the book as seen in Hogg's novel.

Penny Fielding argues that in this novel “Stevenson represents a history that swirls almost chaotically around its characters,” referring to Nicola Chiaromonte, who “argues that the idea of history as a collective experience [...] is a myth.” She clarifies that “although we can *understand* history as shaped by causes, decisions and historical processes, we cannot *experience* it as such” and that anyone participating in a historical event “would not be able to see the event in itself, but just random, even unconnected details” (qtd. in Fielding 164). This disconnect between understanding and experiencing history can be understood through the uncanny, as the close contrast between “realistic situations” and a “fantastic narrative” (Germanà 13) that defines the uncanny is transferrable onto the contrast between historical events and fictionalised expressions thereof. Therefore there is not as much explicit doubt cast on the truth of the narrative; but the fact that it is being related by Ephraim Mackellar, a man whose loyalties to Henry Durie are questionable at times, does raise the question of his impartiality and capability in telling the story accurately. There are also additional chapters in which the story is related by other characters, adding to the uncertainty of a completely truthful account. The ‘editor’ makes no attempt at engaging the text as a work of questionable merit, instead insisting that it “be published as it stands” (8), emphasising his complete trust in the work. Both of these books are epistolary novels, tying back to Baker’s notions of authenticity in the representation of history. As both are historical novels that deal with major events and traditions in Scottish history they function as texts to “problematise the past as myth” (1), in MacDonald’s words, and cast that uncanny doubt not only onto events in both narratives but also the history of Scotland in general.

*Memento Mori* and *The Accidental* deal with the topic of the unreliable past on a more immediate level, reflecting their ahistorical nature. *Memento Mori* is not much concerned with a distant past, although its lead characters could be seen as relics of the past, with their ailing faculties and memories being repeatedly highlighted as reasons to ignore or discredit them. In this way it deals with the past as memory rather than as documented fact, but ultimately the thematic point of the unreliable nature of the past remains. A notable character in this context is Alec Warner, an old sociologist who combats his own unreliable memory by extensively documenting the world around him and keeping the results on card indexes, which he has accumulated in his study of gerontology, containing “[n]early ten years of inquisitive work” (58). His attempts at preservation are ultimately futile, however, as towards the end of the novel his apartment burns down, destroying his entire collection of information. This is similar to the presence of Amber once the family in *The Accidental* returns from their vacation, as Eve insists that Astrid should not mention Amber whatsoever

happens, effectively removing her from the family's collective memory altogether. Even after Eve temporarily leaves, Astrid cannot bring herself to talk about Amber to Magnus, so that "the couple of times [Astrid] has been about to she has for some reason decided not to" and that doing so would be "like poking [a] dead thing with a stick" (223). This displays Eve's effectiveness in removing Amber from the family's conversation entirely. Furthermore, Amber is nowhere to be seen in any of the footage Astrid manages to keep from their journey, as any pictures taken of Amber had been lost after she threw the camera off the bridge. Astrid even "remembers Amber [doing] something very funny, [...] but she can't remember exactly what it was offhand" (226), further showing the fragility of Astrid's memory in retaining the image of Amber in perpetuity. An even more explicit form of erasure occurs around the suicide Magnus believed himself to be partially responsible for, as the school lays the case to rest without revealing any details to the public or chasing down those deemed responsible. This means that Magnus and the other boys "[have] got away with it" (236), following which he tells himself that he "can start to forget it now" and "can let it go" (238). Though it is stated that this is for the betterment of the school and the bereaved family (245), none of the boys involved are punished beyond the suspension they received during the investigation of the matter. Moreover, the complete disregard of any follow-up actions strikes a strong revisionist tone and plays up once more the lack of reliability in the historical record, even in a shorter timeframe than that of the historical fiction by Hogg and Stevenson. Accordingly, all four works question the reliability of history, whether recent or distant, and the expressions of those who experience it first-hand.

## Conclusion

For the last two centuries, Scottish literature has consistently used the Gothic and the uncanny in ways that demonstrate the uncertainty of absolute knowledge and undermine whatever preconceptions the reader may have of the world. With an emphasis on the specifics of identity and perceptions of authenticity and reality, works such as Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* and Ali Smith's *The Accidental* are part of a genealogy reaching back to 19<sup>th</sup> century classics like *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* by James Hogg and *The Master of Ballantrae* by Robert Louis Stevenson. In the worlds presented in these novels, many characters become archetypes of a deep psychological rift and trace the line between fully fleshed out individuals and symbolic apparitions, so that the reality within which the more conventional characters live is constantly being questioned. These characters live in a constant state of limbo, always doubting their place in the situations they find themselves in and are faced with having to make great decisions, and even then it is often impossible for them to truly escape their predicaments and attain self-actualisation. The issue of trust and authenticity is conveyed both thematically and formally, as characters fumble around in search of whatever truth they can find in situations that either defy rational explanation or simply challenge their sense of self on a profound level. Methods of delivery vary greatly between the four texts, some of which use their form to further obfuscate any sense of reality or central truth, as the stories are told while constantly rooted to flawed and frequently unreliable characters, and both Hogg and Spark explicitly remark upon the fragility of both memory and fact through the characters of Robert Colwan and Alec Warner. Ultimately, all of these four Scottish novels display a consistent scepticism of constant, hard facts, and this is used to express the fluidity of identity and world perception, mirroring that of the uniquely fluctuating identity of the Scottish people. Whether the text is written off as the ravings of a fanatic or as the aimless ponderings of an abstract narrator, the only absolute truth asserted in any of these texts is simply that there is no absolute truth.

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