In his *Revelations of the dead-alive* (1824), John Banim depicts his time-travelling narrator encountering future interpretations of the fiction of Walter Scott. In twenty-first-century London, Banim’s narrator realises, Scott is little read; when he is, he is understood, as James Kelly points out, ‘not as the progenitor of the historical novel but rather as the last in line of an earlier Gothic style’.

According to the readers encountered in his travels, Scott is actually the ‘last and most successful adaptor or modifier’ of a gothic literary mode introduced by Walpole and practised by Lewis and Radcliffe. Commenting slyly on the question of Scott’s originality while also denying lasting fame to the period’s most financially and popularly successful novelist, Banim’s *Revelations of the dead-alive* perceptively reveals the formal and generic slippages of historical and gothic fiction in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As it does so, it underscores the formal and generic fluidity of Romantic-era literature. While modern-day readers frequently view gothic and historical fictions of this period as distinctly different types of writing, especially in the period following the publication of *Waverley* (1814), contemporary accounts of these fictions are much more equivocal in their categorisations of works that were unquestioningly understood as cross-formal and cross-generic.

Looking back to the novels of James White, considered in Chapter 1, we see the manner in which late eighteenth-century critics struggled with the formal classifications that are often accepted without question today. Reviews of White’s *Earl Strongbow* (1789) oscillated in their classifications of the tale as either historical or romantic in nature. *The Critical Review* briefly dismissed White’s use of the ghost of Strongbow to narrate the tale as ‘trite and hackneyed’ before offering a ‘minute’ dissection of the novel’s many historical anachronisms. Despite highlighting the ‘inconsistency’ of a
language unsuitable to the time of Charles II and various other anachronistic misdemeanours, *The Critical Review* ultimately commended *Earl Strongbow* as an amusing publication able to teach its readers much about the past: ‘we have been entertained with the tale. It is not an eventful story to please general readers; but we think many will be instructed in some points of history by it, and particularly in the manners of their ancestors.’ The *Gentleman’s Magazine*, in contrast, emphasised the novel’s romantic quality, introducing *Earl Strongbow* as an ‘imitation of Gothic romance possess[ing] a degree of merit which ought not to pass unnoticed’. And, where *The Critical Review* had found the ghost of Strongbow tired and stale, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* praised White for his originality: ‘The ghost of an antient baron, who stands high in the chronicles of military renown, rehearsing his adventures, in a narration continued through several progressive nights, each of which forms a chapter, is an idea that has not been started by any other writer.’

White’s next novel, *The adventures of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster* (1790), also met a mixed reception owing to its striking combination of quasi-factual historical detail and imaginative fictional narrative. The tale recounts the various escapades of the eponymous John of Gaunt (1340–99), the younger brother of Edward, the Black Prince, as he accompanies his sovereign brother, first to Wales, and then to Scotland, where they become embroiled in a war between that nation and England over the ransom of the imprisoned King of Scotland, David II. Describing the battle in which the English triumph over the Scottish as well as the hasty war council that precedes it, White inserts a footnote containing a barbed observation on the accuracy of historiography: ‘Strange that none of the annalists or chroniclers have taken the least notice of this battle, or of the parliamentary debate which preceded it, or of any of the circumstances here related. Culpable negligence!’ White’s footnote forces the reader into a peculiar position of ambivalence: until the battle, the tale has been presented as unequivocally fanciful in nature, a kind of chivalric *Gulliver’s travels* (1726). As war is introduced, White asks his reader to accept his fantastical narration as more accurate and truthful than history writing. In so doing, White effects a deliberate blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, suggesting his particular interest in ongoing debates over the value and appeal of prose fiction.

Unimpressed with White’s construction of a close proximity between fiction and historiography, *The Critical Review* scathingly condemned *John of Gaunt* as not only uninteresting but also alarmingly deceptive for readers:
[W]hat purpose do these antique-modern tales answer? They are less entertaining ..., less interesting, and less instructive than even the modern ones; for the evident fiction destroys the interest, and the mixture of ancient and modern customs, which cannot be discriminated by general readers, will mislead.

With the tale’s fictionality ruining any claim to historical value, *John of Gaunt* threatened, according to *The Critical Review*, to merge fact and fiction in the minds of susceptible readers. To be both interesting and instructive, *The Critical Review* suggested, involved a less fantastical approach to prose fiction; the review therefore concluded with the advice that White ‘meet us again like a man of this world’.

What White needed, *The Critical Review* proposed, was the kind of didactic realism that had come to represent by the latter half of the eighteenth century that which distinguished the novel from earlier forms of prose fiction, the romance in particular. For writers such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, didactic realism crucially differentiated the novel from preceding prose fictions, including the mid- to late seventeenth-century French chivalric works by La Calprenède (1609–63) and Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701), among others. Against the improbabilities and excesses of texts such as *Cassandre* (1644–50) and *Artamène; ou le grand Cyrus* (1649–53), the novel offered edifying and entertaining realism. As Fielding wrote in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742), ‘those voluminous Works commonly called Romances, namely Clelia, Cleopatra, Astræa, Cassandra, the Grand Cyrus, and innumerable others … contain, as I apprehend, very little Instruction or Entertainment’. Fielding saw *Joseph Andrews*, in contrast, as akin to history writing and championed his novel as a work in which ‘[d]elight is mixed with Instruction, and the Reader is almost as much improved as entertained’.

Ten years later, the dangers of over-indulgence in romances would be humorously portrayed in Charlotte Lennox’s *The female Quixote* (1752), in which the heroine is depicted as requiring a ‘cure’ from the delusions produced by her romance reading. In this, both Fielding and Lennox foretell the opinion put forth by James Beattie in his *Dissertations moral and critical* (1783):

Romances are a dangerous recreation. A few, no doubt, of the best may be friendly to good taste and good morals; but far the greater part are unskilfully written, and tend to corrupt the heart, and stimulate the passions. A habit of reading them breeds a dislike to history, and all the substantial parts of knowledge; withdraws the attention from nature, and truth; and fills the mind with extravagant thoughts, and too often with criminal propensities.
Within this context of condemnation of the romance as socially and morally destructive, Leland’s advertisement of *Longsword* as ‘an historical romance’ is notable, suggesting what E.J. Clery calls ‘[t]he return of romance to eighteenth-century fiction’. Similarly, Walpole’s stated desire ‘to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern’ marked a turning point in the history of the novel as well as in the development of the literary gothic, as Clery observes (*Castle of Otranto*, p. 9). What makes *Otranto* so important, Clery contends, is its combination of the realism of the novel and the fantasy of the romance: ‘The credible emotions of the characters connect us to incredible phenomena and events and allow terror to circulate via a process of identification and projection’. David Punter similarly argues that it is *Otranto*’s merging of realism and romance in the form of the supernatural that establishes the novel as the originating moment of eighteenth-century gothic fiction.

What *Otranto* managed to do, according to both Clery and Punter, was to merge the improbabilities and interest in the past of earlier romance traditions with the realism of the novel that had apparently replaced them. Correspondingly, Punter contends, *Otranto* is ‘the earliest and most important manifestation of the late eighteenth-century revival of romance’.

Indicative of the critical tendency to distinguish prose fiction as either romance or novel by way of didactic realism, such arguments elide the continued overlap of these generic categorisations and the texts to which they are applied. Moreover, the idea of romance’s ‘re-emergence’ suggests that, with the ‘origin’ and ‘rise’ of the novel, the romance – and its associated fantastical elements – fell out of favour and was largely replaced by or, at the very least, subjugated to the novel. In fact, as Brean Hammond and Shaun Regan compellingly claim, ‘it is entirely possible to argue that the novel never did distinguish itself from romance in such a neat and wholesale manner’. The late eighteenth-century literary gothic’s oscillation between terms – ‘romance’, ‘novel’, ‘historical romance’, ‘tale’, ‘story’, ‘history’, etc. – makes clear the essential indeterminacy of formal and generic borders in this period. As a form of self-identification in an atmosphere of ongoing, often heated discussion about the worth of prose fiction, these terms held an importance often overlooked in current references to texts by shortened titles that exclude meaningful generic categorisations contained in subtitles. It is not insignificant, for instance, that of the five fictional works published by Ann Radcliffe between 1790 and 1797, not one advertises itself as a ‘novel’, and four refer to...
themselves as ‘romances’ in their titles.\textsuperscript{17} That the choice of terminology could determine, positively or negatively, the way in which a text was read and reviewed is clear from The Critical Review’s reference to Leland’s decision to call \textit{Longsword} a romance: ‘The story of this romance (\textit{as he modestly entitles it}) is founded on real facts’.\textsuperscript{18} The implication is that, as a work containing the truth of history, \textit{Longsword} is superior to a mere romance.

The notable lack of the term gothic in the self-identification of prose fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries makes attention to the generic affiliations of the works discussed here of crucial importance. Although we tend to follow the term ‘gothic’ with ‘novel’ when speaking of the literary gothic, as Williams points out, doing so overlooks both the comparative absence of ‘gothic’ as a generic descriptor and the natural hybridity of the categories variously referred to as ‘romance’, ‘novel’, ‘tale’, and ‘history’.\textsuperscript{19} The first part of this chapter explores the ongoing debate over these generic borders and classifications, focusing on Irish gothic literature’s frequent uncovering of the porousness of boundaries between fact and fiction, novel and romance – an indeterminacy as socially threatening as the overlap of past and present made manifest in Walpole’s \textit{Otranto} and Leland’s \textit{Longsword}. The second part looks more particularly at examples of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Irish gothic fiction that function as commentaries on, or, indeed, parodies of romance and the literary gothic. These texts might be read, like Lennox’s \textit{The female Quixote} and Austen’s \textit{Northanger Abbey} (1818), as containing romance, in the doubled sense of including and restraining or controlling it. Yet, closer inspection reveals that these works – Anne Fuller’s \textit{The convent; or, the history of Sophia Nelson} (1786), Mrs F.C. Patrick’s \textit{The Irish heiress} (1797) and \textit{More ghosts!} (1798), Eaton Stannard Barrett’s \textit{The heroine, or, adventures of a fair romance reader} (1813), and Alicia Le Fanu’s \textit{Strathallan} (1816) – self-consciously highlight their textuality in a bid to underline the manufactured nature of all prose fiction as well as the taxonomies used to differentiate one text from another.\textsuperscript{20} Accordingly, they are most accurately described as ‘book[s] about other kinds of writing’.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, while they frequently register, like \textit{The female Quixote} and \textit{Northanger Abbey}, a cautionary note about the delusory potential of romance, they also accompany such lessons with a broader critique of undiscriminating or misguided reading – a practice that more often than not turns all forms of literature, factual or fictional, into latent threats.
The final section of this chapter turns attention to one of the leading formal classifications of Romantic-era fiction that has led to the continued neglect of Irish gothic literature in this period: the recognition of the ‘national tale’ as distinct from ‘the Gothic novel’. Pioneered by Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan in 1806, the national tale has become a major focal point in scholarship of Irish Romantic fiction, designated as a new literary form that emerged in response to the debate over and introduction of Anglo-Irish Union (1801). As with Scott’s historical novel, the national tale’s predominance has frequently effected an erasure of the lines of continuity between ‘national’ texts such as Castle Rackrent (1800), The wild Irish girl (1806), and The Milesian chief (1812) and the gothic fiction of the late eighteenth century. It is worth remembering, though, that the term ‘a national tale’ is as slippery as ‘the Gothic novel’. First introduced in the subtitle of The wild Irish girl, the phrase has become synonymous with a literary novelty and originality founded on a desire to make the ‘real’ Ireland known to an English reading public. However, it was very rarely adopted by authors in Owenson’s wake, suggesting that ‘the national tale’, like ‘the Gothic novel’, is a retrospective construction that inadequately addresses the formal and generic hybridity of the literature it attempts to describe. Considering the continued emergence of gothic themes, tropes, and ideas – specifically a concern with investigating and negotiating the past’s relation to the present as well as a related interest in the revival of romance – in several texts now considered ‘national tales’, this section interrogates the relationship of ‘gothic’ and ‘national’ fiction. To do so, it looks in particular at Owenson’s O’Donnel: a national tale (1814), a key text in the renegotiation of prevailing understandings of the national tale and its relationship to contemporary Irish gothic literary production.

THE LITERARY GOTHIC AND THE REVIVAL OF ROMANCE

In Eaton Stannard Barrett’s The heroine, or, adventures of a fair romance reader (1813), the well-read, rational hero, Robert Stuart, gently admonishes the heroine of the novel’s title for over-indulging her love of romances. Stuart indicates that it is not the reading of works such as The mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Italian (1797) that is dangerous, but the wholesale submission to their fantasies. ‘I do not protest against the perusal of fictitious biography altogether’, Stuart says, ‘for many works of this kind may
be read without injury, and some with profit'. Examples of these, Stuart suggests, include ‘[n]ovels such as the Vicar of Wakefield, The Fashionable Tale, and Coelebs, which draw man as he is, imperfect, instead of man as he cannot be, superhuman’. Such works ‘are both instructive and entertaining’, Stuart reasons. Even ‘[r]omances such as the Mysteries of Udolpho, the Italian, and the Bravo of Venice, which address themselves to the imagination alone; can be ‘often captivating, and seldom detrimental’, Stuart admits. But they are also ‘so seductive … that one is apt to neglect more useful books for them; besides, when indulged in extreme, they tend to incapacitate us from encountering the turmoils of active life’.23

In separating texts such as Goldsmith’s *The vicar of Wakefield* (1766), More’s *Coelebs in search of a wife* (1808), and Edgeworth’s *Tales of fashionable life* (1809–12) from *The mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Italian*, and Lewis’s *The bravo of Venice* (1805), Stuart establishes a generic distinction between ‘novel’ and ‘romance’ akin to that advanced by Richardson and Fielding. Where novels are ‘instructive and entertaining’ because they focus on ‘man, as he is’; ‘romances’ are ‘captivating’ and ‘seductive’ in their presentation of ‘man, as he cannot be’. At the same time, Stuart makes it clear that there is nothing suspicious about romances in and of themselves; they are, as Stuart argues, ‘seldom detrimental’. What is worrying is the way in which romances are read: ‘indulged in extreme’, romances have the potential to blur the line between reality and fantasy, thus unfitting their readers for real life, as is the case with Barrett’s heroine, Cherry Wilkinson.

There is much of interest in Stuart’s advice, including a significant echoing of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* and its self-reflexive commentary on the dangers of prose fiction and ‘horrid’ works such as *The mysteries of Udolpho*.24 Most notable in terms of this chapter’s discussion is Stuart’s classification of all prose fiction – novels and romances – as ‘fictitious biography’. This is an important act of generic conflation; by considering novels and romances together as essentially the same thing, Stuart underlines the slipperiness of generic boundaries we now tend to accept unquestioningly. His description of the novel as based on realism and ‘both instructive and entertaining’ versus the romance as fantastical, ‘captivating’, and potentially ‘detrimental’ references contemporary concerns with the regulation of prose fiction. Yet, his blanket term to describe both novel and romance – ‘fictitious biography’ – points to the continued intersection of these forms, as it does to the merging of factual and fictional prose styles in this period. Tellingly, Cherry’s re-education revolves not around a shift
from ‘romance’ to ‘novel’, but instead from prose fiction to ‘[m]orality, history, languages, and music’ (The heroine, p. 288).

Mrs F.C. Patrick’s earlier novel, The Irish heiress (1797), condemns the overconsumption of prose fiction in comparable terms to those used by Stuart in The heroine. Nevertheless, the text makes no distinction – implicit or explicit – between ‘romance’ and ‘novel’. Instead, it categorises all prose fiction as potentially misleading when consumed in excess. Speaking of her natural social awkwardness as a young woman, the narrator speculates that ‘a few well chosen Novels might have been of service to me, in informing me a little of manners and polite conversation; what warnings I might have drawn from Evelina without any danger as to morals’. The didactic potential of Fanny Burney’s Evelina (1778) notwithstanding, the narrator is barred from reading novels as a child, even though her unaffectionate mother and sister ‘read nothing else’. While a ‘few’ novels might be a good thing, The Irish heiress makes it clear that too many can certainly be a bad thing. Commenting on the excessive novel-reading of her mother and sister, the narrator condemns the habit as responsible for ‘enervat[ing] the mind, and mak[ing] one seek for nothing but amusement, whereas that should be only as a relaxation from more fatiguing, and … more interesting subjects’.

Despite its conservative view of novel-reading, The Irish heiress was criticised in The Critical Review for straying too far from the dictates of instructive realism: ‘While the Irish heiress remained in her own country, the narrative bore many marks of reality. It was a plain tale, in which the writer and heroine appeared to be one and the same; but her departure for France destroyed the illusion, and we afterwards find the grossest fictions blended with real events’. The review referred to The Irish heiress by its own terminology – as a ‘novel’. Still it highlighted the novel’s romantic, unrealistic features as precisely those deserving condemnation, noting with disgust the introduction of ‘[c]haracters connected with the French revolution’, not because of their association with the revolution but because of the author’s inaccurate depiction of them: ‘The duke of Orleans is represented as being enamoured of the heiress, then a married woman; and Robespierre is an agent employed to solicit her favours’. The work in question appears to be a novel, the review suggests, but lacking the genre’s edifying realism, it becomes nothing more than mere romance: ‘There are certainly parts of this novel which claim approbation: but the misfortune of the writer seems to have been, the adjustment of a plan, which he (or perhaps she) had not skill or patience to execute’.
Its condemnation aside, *The Critical Review*’s complicity with *The Irish heiress*’s self-identification as a novel points to the terminological flexibility of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century prose fiction. Indeed, despite the strenuous arguments advanced by proponents of the novel about its value over the romance, journals continued to group novels and romances together. They also used the terms ‘romance’ and ‘novel’ largely interchangeably. An instance of this occurs in the *Monthly Review*’s assessment of *Earl Strongbow*, which it initially classified as a ‘romance’ characterised by a dangerous blend of ‘[h]istory and fable’. Later in the same review, *Earl Strongbow* is identified as a ‘novel’ with some evident merit: ‘if we add that the novel is neatly written, and that the characters are well drawn and supported, we imagine these qualifications are as much as the readers of works of entertainment, generally, require’. Indicatively, the *Edinburgh Review* regularly noted the publication of works such as *The heroine*, Roche’s *Trecotthick bower*, and Alicia Le Fanu’s *Strathallan* under the combined heading, ‘Novels and Romances’.

Contemporary critical accounts of Romantic-era prose fiction emphasise its cross-generic nature and reflect a wider understanding of literary classifications in this period. In his *Essay on light reading, as it may be supposed to influence moral conduct on literary taste* (1808), Edward Mangin argued that ‘[t]he word novel is a generical term; of which romances, histories, memoirs, letters, tales, lives, and adventures, are the species’. Amanda Gilroy and Wil Verhoeven elaborate upon Mangin’s list to account for further ‘subspecies’: ‘the romance of real life’, for example, and ‘philosophical histories’, the ‘philosophical romance’, the various permutations of ‘tale’, including ‘national’, ‘moral’, and ‘fashionable’, as well as those of ‘novel’, like ‘horrid’, ‘terrific’, ‘gothic’, ‘Jacobin’, ‘Anti-Jacobin’, and ‘silver fork’, and John Galt’s ‘theoretical histories’. The importance of this generic hybridity in the assessment of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century prose fiction should not be underestimated, especially when speaking of the literary gothic. While we frequently refer to ‘the Gothic novel’ as a recognisable generic categorisation, what we are actually talking about is a varied body of prose fiction that very rarely identified itself as gothic. Instead, according to contemporary modes of literary nomenclature, works with what we would now identify as gothic content described themselves with reference to a diverse range of terms including, but certainly not limited to, ‘novel’ and ‘romance’. Of the 114 Irish works catalogued in the Appendix here, not one specifically identifies itself as gothic along the lines of the second edition of *The castle of Otranto* or *The old English baron*. 

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The principal terms used to describe the works enumerated here are ‘tale’, ‘novel’, and ‘romance’, in that order. See Figure 1.

Even here, generic and formal boundaries are not as clear-cut as we might wish, as evidenced by the many works documented in the Appendix that display combined variants of the terms listed here, including Elizabeth Griffith’s *The history of Lady Barton, a novel, in letters* (1771) and *The story of Lady Juliana Harley, a novel* (1776). Strikingly, the largest number of combinations and variants occurs with ‘history’ and its referents: Anne Fuller’s *Alan Fitz-Osborne; an historical tale* (1787) and *The son of Ethelwolf; an historical tale* (1789), for example, and Anna Milliken’s *Corfe Castle; or, historic tracts. A novel* (1793), Mrs Sarah Green’s *The royal exile; or, victims of human passions. An historical romance of the sixteenth century* (1810), and the Reverend George Croly’s *Salathiel; a story of the past, the present, and the future* (1828). Many of these terms, whether combinations or not, belong to the category of ‘generic pointers (historical romance, legends, tales, memoir, traditions)’ identified by Robert Miles as the ‘marketing cues’ British authors used in the latter half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century to position their texts as examples of ‘terror fiction’. Other indicators, as Miles outlines, include
geographical features (the recess, ruins, the rock, Alps, black valley, black tower, haunted cavern); architectural features (priory, castle, abbey, convent, nunnery, ancient house, cloister); ... ghost and its cognates (apparition, specter, phantom, the ghost-seer, sorcerer, magician, necromancer, weird sisters); exotic names (Manfredi, Edward de Courcy, Wolfenbach); and generic or historical figures (the monk, the genius, the minstrel, knights, the royal captives, Duke of Clarence, Lady Jane Grey, John of Gaunt).36

Incorporating these categories into the assessment of the Irish works considered here shows that the use of generic or historical figures outweighs that of other identifying features. (See Figure 2.)

Here again significant overlap occurs, with a number of works deploying terminology from more than one category in their titles. Roche's novels,
for example, frequently combine generic pointers, architectural features, and generic or historical figures, as in *The children of the abbey; a tale* (1796), *The houses of Osma and Almeria; or, the convent of St Ildefonso. A tale* (1810), and *Trecothick bower; or, the lady of the west country. A tale* (1814). The same might be said of Anna Milliken’s *Plantagenet: or, secrets of the house of Anjou. A tale of the twelfth century* (1802). Similarly, Charles Phillips’s *The loves of Celestine and St Aubert; a romantic tale* (1811) calls upon both generic pointers and exotic names, and Catharine Selden’s *Villa Nova; or, the ruined castle. A romance* (1805) on architectural features and generic pointers, to situate themselves in the literary marketplace.

These charts make conspicuous both the centrality and continued imprecision of literary labels in this period. On the one hand, the extensive use of particular formal and generic signifiers indicates a keen authorial awareness of the manner in which books were judged by their covers or, more accurately, their titles, by readers and reviewers. On the other hand, the multiplication of terminological variants and combinations highlights the sheer indeterminacy of such signifiers. While certain authors and critics, especially those concerned with a project of masculinising the novel as a genre, insisted on clear demarcations between various forms of prose fiction, especially ‘romance’ and ‘novel’, the fact is that such categorisations were tentative and fluid at best. As evidenced by the varied use of terminology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, prose fiction was very much the ‘dialogic’ arena envisioned by Mikhail Bakhtin. More modern understandings of the emergence or rise of the novel out of previous forms of prose fiction, including the romance, misleadingly repeat contemporary, ideologically inflected differentiations of the novel like that voiced by Clara Reeve: ‘The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. – The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves.’ The examples of prose fiction discussed in the next section demonstrate the responsiveness of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Irish authors to the imbrication of ‘romance’ and ‘novel’. Presenting themselves as, at least in part, parodies of romance-reading and -writing, these works foreground their awareness of the continued debate over literary forms and their characteristics. They do so not simply to condemn romance but to comment critically upon the myriad intersections between literary forms, fact and fiction, literature and real life. In this sense, these works
are concerned with the practice of reading itself as well as the place of romance, and literature more widely, in modern society.

THE WORK OF ROMANCE

At first glance, texts like *The Irish heiress, More ghosts!* and *The heroine* seem to participate in a longstanding anti-romance literary tradition that might be traced back to *Don Quixote* (trans. 1612) and *The mock-Clelia* (trans. 1678) through to Lennox’s *The female Quixote* and Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. Yet, as has been argued recently in relation to these latter two works, *The Irish heiress, More ghosts!, The heroine*, and other such titles, are much more than straightforward burlesques of existing prose fiction, whether identified as ‘romance’ or not. As Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik point out, *The heroine* uses parody ‘rather cleverly [to have] it both ways: it inscribes the values of the aspiring middle-class … but simultaneously exposes the constraints they impose on the imaginative young woman’.40 Indicatively, Cherry’s ideological recuperation from addled romance reader to rational and decorous young woman ends not with her chastisement but with what she herself identifies as ‘a true romance’ conclusion: ‘You see’, she teases Stuart, ‘after all your pains to prevent me from imitating romances, you have made me terminate my adventure like a true romance – in a wedding’ (*The heroine*, p. 291).

As noted earlier in this chapter, *The heroine* pointedly undermines any sense of irrefragable difference between romance and novel as literary forms, proclaiming as it does so its interest in the acts of reading and writing themselves. As Jim Shanahan convincingly argues, *The heroine* does not simply ‘lampoon what [Barrett] perceived to be bad writing’ but instead, a whole host of writing, both respected and not; in this way, Barrett ‘reinforces the idea that what he is burlesquing is not so much a discredited sub-genre as an entire space of experience.’41 In William Hazlitt’s terms, therefore, it would be a ‘mistake’ to interpret *The heroine*, or parody in general, as only ‘degrad[ing], or imply[ing] a stigma on the subject.’42 Underlined by the *The heroine*’s tongue-in-cheek conclusion is the indeterminacy shared by parody as a technique on the one hand, and literary classifications on the other. Barrett’s text, in other words, is both a romance and not a romance; it is at once derisive of the romance as a form and, apparently contradictorily, mocking of those who would condemn the romance as different in kind and decidedly more dangerous than the novel. Tellingly, Cherry’s playful chiding of her lover for simultaneously

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awakening her from and immersing her in romance is immediately followed by an apparently muddled didactic message. Upon being asked by Cherry ‘with what moral will you now conclude the book’, Stuart replies, ‘I will say … that virtue – no. That calamity – no. That fortitude and resignation – oh, no! I will say, then, that Tommy Horner was a bad boy, and would not get a plumcake; and that King Pepin was a good boy, and rode in a golden coach’ (The heroine, p. 291). Horner and Zlosnick read this concluding sentence as an indication that ‘the moral of The heroine should be absolutely clear to the reader, otherwise Stuart might as well be telling a pack of lies’ (The heroine, p. 338). Barrett’s suggestion, though, is not that prose fiction should contain a didactic message, but that readers should be allowed to discover any such message themselves. Through parody, therefore, The heroine advocates a relaxed attitude towards generic distinctions, arguing, as Stuart himself does, that any threat associated with the act of reading derives from the manner, rather than the matter, of reading.

A similar argument is put forth in Anne Fuller’s The convent; or, the history of Sophia Nelson (1786), which focuses on the virtuous and orphaned young heroine, Sophia Nelson, as she deftly negotiates the perils of life with her ignorant and obnoxious cousins, the Woodvilles. All of Sophia’s relatives present poignant comparisons either to Sophia herself or to her honourable suitor, Mortimer Stanhope. Most egregiously, Miss Cassandra Woodville is described as suffering from the effects of a misguided education in romance. With her name recalling the eponymous heroine of the chivalric romance Cassandre (1644–50), Cassandra is presented as an unreformed female Quixote, ‘squar[ing] her conduct exactly by [the] rules’ of her romances.43 Embarrassed by Cassandra’s long speeches, sighs, and belief that she will one day discover that the Woodvilles are not her family at all, the more rational Sophia laments the ‘wrong education [that] has so overclouded’ Cassandra’s natural virtues (The convent, vol. 1, p. 71). Yet, The convent ultimately rewards Cassandra with an appropriate romance ending: the chivalric courtship of a lover and the (distant) promise of marriage. Moreover, the novel reserves its most pointed criticism for readers of history and modern novels, such as Sophia’s uncle and guardian, Mr Woodville, who is shown to be seriously misled by his incomplete understanding of history and antiquarian scholarship. His home – Woodville Hall – is described by Sophia as ‘in a ruinous condition’, possibly, it is suggested, by Woodville’s own design. Sophia aligns the ‘true Gothic stile’ of Woodville Hall with its owner’s ridiculous pretensions to genealogical greatness; the house is throughout hung ‘with portraits of grim-faced
knights, and smiling damsels’, considered by Woodville as ‘inestimable relics’, the proof of his august lineage (*The convent*, vol. 1, p. 26). When Mortimer Stanhope first visits Woodville Hall and meets both Sophia and her guardian, he is struck by the mistaken and ludicrous understanding of the past displayed by Woodville: ‘In short, he jumbled Normans, Danes, Saxons, and Britons together, till at length he arrived at the Romans, and from them he called out no less a person than Julius Caesar himself, for the head of his family’ (*The convent*, vol. 1, p. 64).

No less ridiculous than Woodville is his second daughter, Eleanor. ‘[I]ndebted for all her knowledge to an ignorant country school mistress, and our modern novelists’, Eleanor is depicted as even more seriously misguided than her sister, Cassandra (*The convent*, vol. 1, p. 16). Although tedious and irrational, Cassandra is nevertheless committed to feminine modesty and virtue. In contrast, Eleanor is not only jealous and mean-spirited, but also determined to get what she wants, even if that means engaging in unfeminine activity. In a telling incident, therefore, Eleanor writes to Stanhope to express her love for him. In so doing, Eleanor confirms her ‘fallen’ nature. Stanhope accordingly begs Cassandra to persuade her sister back into ‘the fold of modesty and maidenly reserve’ (*The convent*, vol. 1, pp. 214–15). Finding herself shunned by Stanhope, Eleanor eventually marries the ‘good looking’ but ‘savage enough’ Irishman, Heremon O’Flaherty, who ultimately turns out to be a fortune-hunter: ‘Uncivilized and all bog-trotter as he is, I am convinced his rib’s beauties, personal or mental never attracted him. No, no, he certainly had a hint about Nelson’s will, and depending on his beau pere’s villainy, wisely puts up with a partial inconvenience, in expectation of a future good’ (*The convent*, vol. 2, p. 61). When this ‘future good’ proves illusory, O’Flaherty unceremoniously deserts his wife, unwilling to be saddled with a ridiculous woman without the benefit of a good settlement.

Why Eleanor should meet this disappointing end and Cassandra be rewarded with the kind of conclusion she has long envisioned for herself has much to do with the value given to ‘modern’ or ‘fashionable’ novels in *The convent*. As part of the ‘wrong education’ provided to fashionable young women, such fiction teaches ladies ‘to consider nothing valuable, but as it contributes to excite admiration’ (*The convent*, vol. 1, p. 261). Eleanor has received just this kind of education, as evidenced by her extreme attention to dress, often with laughable results, as when the sheep she ties to herself as ornaments of her shepherdess costume first rudely overturn her, then escape their tethers, forcing her to chase after them in
Gothic genres

a ridiculous state of dishabille. The remedy to such folly is, the narrative suggests, ‘a proper, useful and refined education’ (*The convent*, vol. 1, pp. 262–3). As with Lady Delacour in Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801), therefore, Eleanor appears to function as a ‘fashionable reader [who] misuses her literary knowledge … to support a rapidly altering sequence of personas whose novelty and daring enable her to maintain her public preeminence’. In contrast to Lady Delacour, however, Eleanor is both inept in her manipulation of fashionable reading and finally unreformed. Where Lady Delacour at length embraces an appropriate course of reading and, correspondingly, the proper domesticity she has hitherto eschewed, Eleanor never does.

Notwithstanding Eleanor’s failure to reform, *The convent* is clearly interested in the issue of appropriate fictional reading material, especially for impressionable young females. This is made clear by the extended praise accorded to Fanny Burney (1752–1840), who is described with much enthusiasm as ‘a young female, who does honour to her sex and country’:

> At an age when other women give themselves wholly up to dissipation, she devotes her time and her talents to the benefit of human kind. In the pleasing guise of a novellist [sic], she gives the noblest lessons of morality; and has found the art of adorning fiction with the robes of truth. In a word I sincerely wish that all my female acquaintance resembled Miss Burney. (*The convent*, vol. 1, p. 263)

In this encomium of Burney, *The convent* points to a conservative understanding of the proper role of the novel in contemporary society. Like Henry Fielding, Fuller propounds an idea of ‘safe’ and ‘appropriate’ prose fiction as that which educates its young (female) reader by way of didactic realism.

Its apparent conservatism notwithstanding, *The convent’s* treatment of its characters suggests a liberal agenda along the lines of that put forth by *The heroine* – one that implies that, perhaps more important than *what* one reads is *how* one reads. The education Eleanor has received from her fashionable novels helps to win her a husband but provides no comfort when the fortune-seeking O’Flaherty absconds. Similarly, Woodville’s misguided investment in history and antiquities proves the means to his end, and he dies after being attacked by robbers in Dijon, admitting on his deathbed that he had intended ‘to make away with Sophia, some way or other’ (*The convent*, vol. 2, p. 307). In contrast, Cassandra is rewarded,
for all intents and purposes, flouting any notion of the text as wholly dismissive of chivalric romances. Moreover, Sophia herself becomes the subject of a romance plot rivalling that of Radcliffe herself: Woodville rudely rejects Stanhope and insists instead that Sophia marry her dim-witted cousin, Dick. When she refuses, he sends her to a convent in France, where she endures repeated attacks on her Protestantism, before being eventually freed by her concerned friends. Her release precipitates Woodville’s death and frees her from his control. The tale then concludes with Sophia’s own ‘true romance’ conclusion: marriage to Stanhope.

_The convent_ thus hovers knowingly between the borders of fact and fiction, novel and romance. While it condemns certain reading practices, as exhibited by Woodville and Eleanor, and extolls what Marilyn Butler calls ‘intelligent detachment’, it nevertheless suggests that imaginative fiction may not be as delusive as the proponents of didactic realism insist. More emphatically parodic in nature, Mrs F.C. Patrick’s _More ghosts!_ also straddles the line between condemnation of romance and a broader critique of indiscriminate reading. Presented by Patrick as a self-conscious burlesque of literary forms condemned by critics as misleading, including novels, chivalric romances, and ‘terror fiction’, _More ghosts!_ begins with its putative editor noting the universally acknowledged truth that ‘the best way to procure manuscripts, containing authentic histories is by a journey into the country’. Correspondingly, the editor – identified in the preface as both ‘an Officer’s Wife’ and ‘An Officer’s Widow’ (_More ghosts!,_ vol. 1, pp. i, vi, xiii) – describes wandering into the dairy of the country farmhouse at which she has boarded while on holiday. There she espies ‘a bundle of written papers’ negligently stacked on a shelf for the mundane purpose of wrapping butter (_More ghosts!,_ vol. 1, pp. i–ii). She rescues the manuscript from this ignominious end and discovers the story of naive young Thomas Grey, the ward of Reginald Morney, owner of Morney Abbey, a ruinous ‘Gothic structure’ in Yorkshire (_More ghosts!,_ vol. 1, p. 16).

Much like the later, romance-misled heroes of Maturin’s _The wild Irish boy_ (1812) and Scott’s _Waverley_, Grey allows his tendency to credit superstition and the supernatural to guide his conduct, with disastrous results. Manipulated by Betsey Bolton into believing that his kindly guardian is actually his villainous father, responsible for secretly and bigamously wedding Grey’s mother and then discarding her, Grey confronts Morney and soon after finds himself sent away to university to correct the errors of his past mis-education. Revealing the true circumstances of the life and death of Grey’s mother, Morney’s own sister, Morney cautions Grey
against his proclivity to irrational beliefs: ‘credulity is your great fault; guard against that, and think of me as I shall deserve’ (More ghosts!, vol. 2, p. 123). Returned to Morney Abbey after his education, Grey finds his superstitious nature rather confirmed than denied by the apparent supernatural appearance of his mother to various members of the household. Echoing the events that had led to his original disgrace, these visitations imply that Grey’s belief in romance is less misguided than originally suggested. Even Morney himself witnesses the spectral return of his sister, come, it seems, to vindicate her son against Betsey’s false accusations that Grey is the father of her illegitimate child.

As with the ‘explained supernatural’ of Radcliffe’s fiction, the ghost of Morney Abbey is revealed to be flesh and blood. In a scene reminiscent of The old English baron, Morney determines to sit up all night in the haunted room in which the ghost of his sister had appeared to his daughter demanding justice for Grey. Once again the spectre appears, revealing herself to be Morney’s sister, Isabella, in the flesh. It seems she had not died as Morney believed but had instead manufactured her own death in order to escape her past of bigamous marriages and rebellion against ‘the tyranny of man’ (More ghosts!, vol. 1, p. 186). Soon deserted by the lover for whom she had undergone death at least as far as her family and friends in England were concerned, Isabella is converted to Catholicism and enters a convent in Normandy, where she finds both a good abbess and personal peace.49 This situation is later disrupted by the French Revolution, which forces Isabella and her companions to emigrate to England, where Isabella’s natural maternal instincts prompt her to visit her unsuspecting family members in order to safeguard the character and matrimonial liberty of her son.

As in The old English baron, therefore, Isabella’s apparently spectral return serves to rectify the wrongs committed against the hero, restoring him to his uncle’s good graces as well as to his hitherto surrendered maternal inheritance. Grey’s much hoped for end – marriage with Morney’s daughter, Mary – does not follow, however. Although Morney had long intended that the marriage should take place, Mary’s own education while Grey is at university convinces her that their union was founded on ‘some romantic notions, which a knowledge of the world had cured her of’ (More ghosts!, vol 3, p. 262). Mary’s education serves as a poignant counterpart to that of her aunt, Isabella. Sent to London under the care of the ‘female philosopher’, Lady Newet, Mary is introduced to ‘Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, and Gibbon’ (More ghosts!, vol 3, p. 40). Owing to these
‘poisonous’ books and to Lady Newet’s resolute belief in all religion as mere superstition and witchcraft, Mary begins to become a philosopher herself (More ghosts!, vol 3, p. 53). She is at length convinced of her error by the combined efforts of her father and the kindly young clergyman, Seymour, who both recalls The female Quixote’s reforming Doctor and anticipates Belinda’s Dr X–. Mary’s reformation from the moral philosophy she has developed under the influence of dangerous French texts is accompanied by a poignant reflection on her difference from upstanding novelistic heroines: ‘This circumstance of her being, in some degree, led into error would have been omitted, but as serving to shew that the best disposed minds may sometimes suffer from the contagion of bad example, as our heroine was previously esteemed, in mental purity, hardly a whit behind Pamela, Harriet Biron, &c.’ (More ghosts!, vol 3, p. 57).

With this reflection, the narrator confirms the novel’s Richardsonian perspective on the importance of didactic realism and moral rectitude of popular reading material. Offering rational explanations for every moment of apparent supernaturalism in the text and depicting the necessary reformation of its erring female characters, More ghosts! strikes a powerfully conservative and reactionary note, especially with reference to the danger of ideas and sentiments associated with the French Revolution. Ultimately, it seems, like Mary’s ‘romantic notions’, romance and its associated sentiment and sensibility must be controlled in order to ensure the present and future security of the British nation, exemplified in miniature by the domestic units established by the end of the novel – that of Mary and Seymour, on the one hand, and Grey and an unnamed ‘very beautiful lady’, on the other (More ghosts!, vol 3, p. 263). Reviewed glowingly by The Critical Review, More ghosts! was praised for its use of ‘ghosts with a view of dissipating the horrors, lately excited in the tender breast of many a boarding-school miss, by the more artful and terrific dealers in the article’. With spectres more ‘cunning than terrible’, the novel was seen to entertain at the same time that it offered ‘many just reflections on the errors of education and the irregularity of the passions’. Still, like The heroine, More ghosts! ends on a strikingly ambivalent, if humorous note. Following the news of Mary’s marriage to Seymour and Grey’s impending nuptials, the narrator addresses the reader directly, promising three more volumes on ‘the Mr. Morneys and Miss de Burgh’ (More ghosts!, vol 3, p. 264). The implication is that the story is not yet finished, and that more romance, in the doubled sense of another publication as well as future romantic adventures, is to follow.
If *More ghosts!*, *The convent*, and *The heroine* all comment on the habit of condemning romances as immoral and destructive for impressionable readers, they also frequently position romance as a powerful tool for laying open the terrors of real life. In its description of the troubles faced by Sophia at the hands of her mercenary uncle, for instance, *The convent* foreshadows a trend located by Emma Clery in the prose fiction of the last decade of the eighteenth century: ‘In the 1790s the idea seems to emerge, particularly among women authors, that romance, by its very inclusion of the marvellous or the apparently marvellous, can reveal the unpleasant truth about real life in a way impossible in the referential narratives of historians or realist novelists.’ Although *The convent*’s humorous take on readers such as Eleanor and Woodville may suggest the text’s commitment to the tenet put forward by the narrator of *The heroine*, that ‘to make the world laugh … is the gravest occupation an author can choose’ (*The heroine*, p. 6), the novel is nevertheless very serious about the dangers faced by the average middle- and upper-class female in a patriarchal world. Writing to her friend and confidante about her uncle’s insistence that she marry Dick, Sophia naively declares, ‘Thank heaven it is not in his power (nor I hope will not be in his inclination) to force me into so preposterous an union’ (*The convent*, vol. 1, p. 123). The fact is, as Woodville’s dependant, even if made so by a false will, Sophia has very little control over what happens to her, as evidenced by her imprisonment in the convent. Even the freedom Sophia achieves by the end of the novel – release from the convent – results in a confinement of another sort – marriage. The only character to be left free of patriarchal authority by the end of the novel is actually the character who at first seems the most ridiculous – Cassandra. Released from her father’s tyranny by his death and commanding a significant power over her lover, who must comply, on her desire, to ‘the rules of romance’ and therefore defer marriage for ‘ten years at least’, Cassandra finds herself in a position of liberation unequalled by any of her fellow female characters (*The convent*, vol. 2, p. 319). While *The convent* inscribes the judicious choice of reading material and the cultivation of ‘intelligent detachment’ as the basis of a proper education, therefore, it also celebrates romance’s potential both to reveal startling truths about real life and to afford women power in a patriarchal world.

Similarly, in Mrs F.C. Patrick’s *The Irish heiress*, a consideration of the potential risks associated with reading is linked to the heroine’s anxious
negotiation of and, indeed, immersion in the horrors of revolutionary France. Like Patrick’s later novel, *More ghosts!*, *The Irish heiress* repeatedly emphasises its material and marketable nature, as when the narrator refrains from giving details of the eponymous heiress’s travels through England and France, promising instead a future publication: ‘a sentimental journey ... entitle[d] ... “The progress of a female heart thro’ France, in the Year 1788”’ (*The Irish heiress*, vol. 2, p. 24). Moreover, just as is the case with Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, the reader is frequently urged not to view the novel’s main character, Augusta, as a heroine. Accordingly, the narrator – an older version of Augusta herself – reflects on past events, saying, ‘But, alas! for me, what am I writing for, and so totally unqualified for an heroine, that I have not the smallest ear for music, no taste for anything beyond St. Patrick’s Day, &c. which I had imbibed an early predilection for, by hearing my nurse sing to me in childhood’ (*The Irish heiress*, vol. 2, pp. 44–5). Later, learning of the elopement of her beloved, George Mostyn, with her evil sister, Sophia, upon the urging of her unnaturally distant mother, Augusta wishes she could take recourse in the alternatives available to heroines:

I might have gone into a Convent – I might have lived a picture of mild placid woe – I might have taken a fever, and raved alternately of Mostyn and my lap dog. – Undoubtedly there are many models extant of ladies deserted, or I believe deceived rather into such a belief, for who ever deserted a heroine? But, alas! I could not copy models I had never viewed, and nature alone guided me. (*The Irish heiress*, vol. 2, pp. 117–18)

In the wake of George’s desertion, Augusta decides to divert herself with ‘books of a lighter nature’ but is ‘soon disgusted with French novels[:] they were so full of sentiments, many of them not more foolish than wicked, but so gilded over with the finery of language, that they might be often dangerous’ (*The Irish heiress*, vol. 2, p. 124). She reserves particular disdain for Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1787):

I believe I ought to blush when I acknowledge that I read Rousseau’s confessions, but I have some obligations to that book, since to my shame (I suppose) be it spoken, though my state of mind was not the merriest in nature, yet it gave me frequent opportunities of laughing over his most serious affairs, they appeared to my foolish imagination to be managed so ridiculously. (*The Irish heiress*, vol. 2, p. 125)

In its ridicule of Rousseau and contempt for the ‘foolish’ and ‘wicked’ sentiment of French literature, *The Irish heiress* reads as a reactionary text.
anxious to restrain, partially through contemptuous laughter, ‘the true threat to orthodoxy’: ‘the moral relativism implicit in the sentimental movement’.  

At the same time, while laughing at Rousseau and the threatening, radicalised sensibility he had come to represent in the British consciousness during the revolutionary period, *The Irish heiress* subtly removes emphasis from reading material to actuality in describing the terrors of its heroine’s life. In other words, rather than depict Rousseau’s text and other such literature of sentiment and sensibility as subversive – a prominent tendency in a period in which prose fiction was increasingly feminised and radicalised – *The Irish heiress* subtly valorises romance by describing Augusta as caught up in a tale of horror all too real in the revolutionary period. Deserted by Mostyn, Augusta reluctantly follows her father’s advice and marries the Irishman, Mr Connor, while in Paris, where she has been exiled by her unfeeling mother. A staunch defender of the Crown, Connor reverences ‘the sacred character of [the French] king’ and apparently falls in defence of the king at the Siege of Tuileries on 10 August 1792 (*The Irish heiress*, vol. 2, p. 52). With a careful specificity about dates, the third volume of *The Irish heiress* relates the bloody terrors of the French Revolution from Augusta’s perspective, describing how she must tread over a multitude of dead bodies in the street with the chilling belief that she will soon be trodden upon herself. Later, having been reunited with Connor, who had not been killed after all, she witnesses him being brutally and unceremoniously beheaded after his existence is betrayed to authorities by apparent friends. Driven mad by the sight of her husband’s dismembered body, Augusta wanders senselessly through Paris, her newborn child in her arms, before eventually being taken to prison, where she witnesses the people who attempt to assist her falling victim, one after another, to revolutionary zeal.

At length, she returns to Ireland, disfigured from a near-fatal bout of smallpox, only to be denied by her mother, who is anxious that Sophia retain the inheritance meant for Augusta. When she finally proves her identity and assumes her rightful inheritance, Augusta finds further obstacles presented by her Catholicism. Although she has been careful, on her father’s advice, never publicly to reveal her conversion from Protestantism, Augusta finds her ownership of her ancestral estate challenged by her mother. When Augusta eventually takes possession of her familial lands she is again troubled by her Catholicism, this time because her Protestant mother-in-law applies to authorities to have Protestant guardians appointed
for her grandson. By the end of the novel, it seems likely that Augusta will be separated from her child, and the tale concludes with a sense of ominous incompleteness: "[Mrs Connor] still … means to take from me that child, for whose sake I live, and for whom all my cares are engaged; she will take him from me, if I do not prevent her by some stratagem" (*The Irish heiress*, vol. 3, p. 184).

With this conclusion and its promise of future woes – and perhaps future publications – to come, *The Irish heiress* highlights the finally unresolved tension between fact and fiction, romance and novel presented in its pages. A similar ambivalence, albeit more optimistic in nature, concludes Alicia Le Fanu’s *Strathallan*. Finally married to the eponymous hero after a lengthy series of heart-breaking separations occasioned by a keen sense of duty and virtue, Matilda Melbourne receives a letter from her friend, Arbella Sowerby, congratulating her on her long delayed happiness:

> When I consider the mournful and strange events, which so fast followed upon each other before your final re-union could take place, I think I see you, like Balsora and her lover, in the beautiful Eastern tale, two pure and lovely spirits, passing hand in hand, through the glooms of death, to the opening gate of Paradise. Go, happy pair, and … may never the rude blast of misfortune disturb the Eden, of which your hearts are the centre. Go, blest Matilda, and taste, without fear, the happiness you so well deserve, with your long-lamented, your twice-restored Strathallan.54

The ‘mournful and strange events’ to which Arbella refers are not supernatural, despite the suggestion of death and resurrection attending the description of Strathallan as ‘long-lamented’ and ‘twice-restored’. Instead, as in *The convent* and *The Irish heiress*, *Strathallan* depicts reality as inherently stranger and more dangerous than fiction, as it follows Matilda in her quest to navigate the treacherous vagaries of contemporary British society and still maintain her virtue – moral and sexual. Introduced into society by Lady Torrendale, the well-educated and rational Matilda meets a series of women prey, unlike herself, to ‘literary mania’.55 Matilda’s discernment, both in terms of the literature she reads and the individuals she meets, contrasts boldly with the parodic female readers with whom she is surrounded. Lady Torrendale, for her part, is a fashionable reader, concerned only with the appearance and display of reading, and is, as Matilda admits ‘all outside’ (*Strathallan*, p. 280). Though she professes to be ‘dying for the Missionary [by Sydney Owenson]’, her desire for the book stems from the text’s popularity; while at Hookham’s circulating
library, Lady Torrendale melodramatically laments, ‘One, two, three, four, five, – twenty on the list, I declare already for the Missionary … how provoking to be so late!’ (*Strathallan*, p. 242). Miss Mountain, in contrast, is a romance reader, who has come to expect from ‘her chivalrous reading … [a] general gallantry and deference, which, as she did not always receive, she applied herself to obtain by a variety of means, that … gained her often the imputation of coquetry, while it was in fact only an ill understood pride’ (*Strathallan*, p. 53). Miss Langrish, meanwhile, is addicted to ‘modern “Horrors”’, and is almost overcome by her extreme sensibility at the reading of works such as ‘Lenora, Donica, the Grim White Woman, the Little Grey Man, the second book of the Last Minstrel, the Eve of St. John, the Haunted Beach … Otranto, Udolpho, Montorio’ (*Strathallan*, p. 66).

The various readers included in *Strathallan* illustrate Le Fanu’s desire, as outlined in the novel’s preface, ‘[to hold] a medium both in principle and language, between that severity which forbids the existence of passion … and that enthusiasm, which, dazzled by its wild and fitful splendors, mistakes, or wilfully [sic] confounds, in every page, its destructive fires, with the awful and lovely lights of virtue’ (*Strathallan*, p. 2). In other words, Le Fanu wants not wholly to condemn romance and its associated sensibility but to promote instead readerly ‘discrimination’. A key example in this advocacy of detached and discriminating reading is the flighty and flirtatious Arbella Ferrars. Although intrinsically good-natured and kind of heart, Arbella too easily adopts the principles of the texts she reads, without due consideration of their merits and demerits. For this reason, she at one point espouses a philosophical abhorrence of religion derived from certain books ‘in Lord Torrendale’s extensive library (where poison and its antidote lay side by side)’, in which she had found ‘food for doubts and conjectures, which were sooner to be roused than laid asleep again’ (*Strathallan*, p. 334). Matilda patiently and repeatedly counsels her friend, but it is only Mr Sowerby, the well-educated man who acts as Matilda’s chief instructor, who can teach Arbella the dangers of her reading habits. Married to Sowerby by the close of the novel, Arbella seems, if not completely reformed, at least domesticated and given to the guidance of a capable and willing preceptor, much like her namesake in *The female Quixote*.

Despite this conservative sponsorship of the domestic ideology flouted by Lady Torrendale and the corresponding practice of detached or discriminating reading, *Strathallan* almost simultaneously conjures situations
‘just like what one reads about’ (**Northanger Abbey**, p. 114). The group assembled at the home of Lord and Lady Torrendale early in the novel, for instance, receives the news that the family’s eldest son, Strathallan, has fallen in the battle of Corunna (16 January 1809). Days later, the mourners are astounded by the return of Strathallan himself. Miss Langrish hysterically declares it is Strathallan’s ghost, but, it seems, the report of his death had been mistaken, and Strathallan has returned, in the flesh, to his family and home. Although it soon becomes clear that Strathallan and Matilda are kindred spirits, Lord Torrendale intends to wed Strathallan to the unfeeling and unsympathetic Miss Mountain, on account of a promise he made to his late wife, Strathallan’s mother. No amount of persuasion will convince him to relinquish this promise, and Matilda, bound by her sense of duty and virtue, refuses to consider any other action than that of a paternally sanctioned marriage. Later, when Miss Mountain prematurely dies in a hunting accident, Matilda feels compelled once again to deny Strathallan, having been violently forced by her father’s eccentric entailed heir, Sir Harold Mountain, to promise never to marry another man while he is alive. Later again, upon Sir Harold’s death, Matilda sees her chance to marry Strathallan thwarted once more by his service in the Peninsular War (1807–14) and the associated intrigues of Lady Torrendale, who convinces Strathallan not only that Sir Harold is still alive but that he has married Matilda. Eventually, Strathallan returns to England, is informed of his error, and finally weds Matilda with the full consent and encouragement of Lord Torrendale, who repents having made his son earlier ‘[sacrifice] the dearest affections of his heart to my interest, peace, and honor’ (**Strathallan**, p. 472).

The events described as delaying the long-awaited marriage with which **Strathallan** ends, though sometimes apparently supernatural in nature, are systematically revealed to be caused by the mundane, if no less horrific, realities of life – war and the vagaries of human passions, interests, and ambitions.\textsuperscript{58} In this, **Strathallan** comments poignantly on the deep imbrication of romance and reality in everyday life, suggesting that the terrors experienced by its characters are all the more frightening than those proceeding from the supernatural precisely because they are real. Correspondingly, while Le Fanu, like Fuller, Patrick, and Barrett, sounds an apparently conservative call for the regulation of romance and reading in general, especially for young women, she also critiques a critical apparatus that continued to condemn romance as a dangerously misleading literary form. Not only are literary forms other than the romance proven to be
deceptive when read without discrimination, but romance and reality are shown all too often to coincide with truly appalling results. Fittingly, Arbella’s final letter to the new Lady Strathallan both congratulates her friend on her eventual marriage and frames her life to come as a romance, likening her to ‘Balsora and her lover, in the beautiful Eastern tale, two pure and lovely spirits, passing hand in hand, through the glooms of death, to the opening gate of Paradise’. Apparently referencing ‘an Oriental Tale’ written by Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and published in The Guardian in 1713, Arbella’s letter casts Matilda’s marriage as a fairy tale, thus confirming the vital inherence of romance and reality presented by the novel, despite its at times cautious stance towards injudicious reading habits. The clarity with which Strathallan, like The convent, The Irish heiress, More ghosts!, and The heroine, envisions the real terror of everyday life suggests that romance is, in fact, much closer to reality than its critics might like to believe. These works, therefore, comment critically on the essential intersection of fact and fiction. But they also suggest that to condemn romance because of its fictionality and apparent lack of didacticism is crucially to ignore the fact that, in some instances at least, reality is as horrific, if not more so, than that which one reads about.

**THE NATIONAL TALE AND THE LITERARY GOTHIC**

The novels discussed in earlier parts of this chapter evocatively demonstrate Siobhán Kilfeather’s compelling argument that ‘Irish people in the romantic period felt they were living gothic lives’. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Irish authors, Kilfeather persuasively suggested, enacted in their works a general sense of socialised ‘survivor guilt’, producing narratives that played out the Irish people’s post-1798 experience of a reality ‘fractured by repeated intrusive memories of the time of danger, memories in which visual images of horror predominate’. This sense of the terrific nature of reality is particularly clear in the intersection of romance and realism in texts such as More ghosts!, The heroine, and Strathallan. It is also one that arguably animates Irish fiction and, indeed, nonfiction more widely in the early nineteenth century. Yet, Irish literary reliance on romance and related production of gothic fiction tend to go unnoticed in scholarly attention to the national tale and the historical novel, now considered the dominant literary forms of early nineteenth-century Ireland. Indeed, critical focus on the national tale’s totalising narratives of allegorical union and closure has effected an erasure of continued Irish gothic literary production
at the turn of the century. As a result, the common assumption is that the gothic simply died away in the years following the Anglo-Irish Union as regional fiction, the national tale, and the historical novel took its place and attempted to effect a symbolic reconciliation of England and Ireland. This is why Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the wanderer* (1820) is considered such an oddity: too late for the real vogue of gothic literature and too early for the so-called ‘Irish Gothic’ conventionally located at the close of the nineteenth century. But Maturin’s novels ‘were more or less contemporaneous’ with ‘the Faustian gothic of Godwin, Byron, Shelley, and Hogg’, as Kilfeather pointed out. Moreover, as attested to by the publication and circulating library lists for William Lane’s prolific Minerva Press – discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 – English and Irish writers alike continued to produce gothic fiction well into the nineteenth century. Maturin’s *Fatal revenge* (1807) and *Melmoth the wanderer* are the obvious examples of post-Union Irish gothic literary production, but lesser-known works include *Lussington Abbey* (1804), *Villa Nova; or, the ruined castle* (1805), *The discarded son; or, haunt of the banditti* (1807), *The festival of St Jago; a Spanish romance* (1810), and *Villasantelle; or, the curious impertinent* (1817), among many others.

With titles that immediately evoke the literary gothic, thus pointedly underlining continued Irish gothic literary production of the early nineteenth century, the works just noted might seem remote from contemporary texts now commonly understood as national tales. But even these, including *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *The wild Irish girl* (1806), and *Ennui* (1809), to name but a few, reveal a significant, if now often undervalued, reliance on the literary gothic’s themes, images, and tropes. Take Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* as an example: it purposely manipulates readerly expectations in its title, which, in conjuring the expected architectural settings of gothic literature, marketed the narrative as a similarly gothic tale. Scott does this as well, particularly in the names chosen for *The black dwarf* (1816), *The monastery* (1820), and *Castle Dangerous* (1831), and while Edgeworth later constructs the gothic fiction called to mind by *Castle Rackrent’s* title as socially and personally perilous in the hands of *Ennui*’s Lord Glenthorn, her attempt to overthrow its power within the narrative, like Scott’s effort to distance himself from it in his own works, proves incomplete. Owenson’s *The wild Irish girl*, in its turn, self-consciously differentiates itself from the gothic fiction that preceded it, proclaiming its newness in its subtitle, ‘a national tale’. Nevertheless, its interest in national reconciliation and its ‘Glorvina solution’ are paralleled by a keen concern with competing
notions of Ireland’s historical and cultural evolution as well as several themes and tropes now more readily associated with gothic literature.\textsuperscript{67} Moreover, its innovativeness is undercut by its similarities to Owenson’s earlier tales, \textit{St Clair; or, the heiress of Desmond} (1803) and \textit{The novice of Saint Dominick} (1806).\textsuperscript{68} Both of these novels indicatively conjure the gothic in their titles’ references to the stock figures and exotic names identified by Miles as marketing cues for terror fiction.\textsuperscript{69}

As is the case with Scott, Owenson’s emphasis on originality in \textit{The wild Irish girl} has been taken more or less at face value, and the text’s similarities to contemporary gothic fiction minimised in comparison to its formulation of the ‘national marriage plot’ understood to form the heart of the national tale.\textsuperscript{70} Owenson’s later fictions – national tales and otherwise – have tended to lend themselves more readily to analysis as gothic hybrids. Gary Kelly, for instance, classifies \textit{The missionary} (1811) as gothic, including it in the six-volume \textit{Varieties of female gothic} (2002), while Jim Kelly reads \textit{Florence MacCarthy} (1818) as ‘demonstrat[ing] … [that] the Irish landscape and the visible scars of conflict provided a Gothic text in its own right’.\textsuperscript{71} W.J. McCormack, for his part, includes excerpts of \textit{The O’Briens and the O’Flahertys} (1827) in his influential section on ‘Irish gothic and after’ in \textit{The Field Day review}, though he argues that the novel has no ‘direct link to the gothic tradition’.\textsuperscript{72} Julia M. Wright nevertheless identifies the novel’s use of gothic conventions as significant, contributing as it does to a literary hyper-hybridity as well as an ambivalence towards the cultural nationalism promoted by \textit{The wild Irish girl}.\textsuperscript{73} Raphaël Ingelbien, moreover, links \textit{The princess; or, the Béguine} (1835) to fin-de-siècle Irish gothic fiction in its ‘[turn] to continental material to write indirectly about Ireland’.\textsuperscript{74} Owenson’s increased reliance on the literary gothic as her career progressed is in keeping with her growing scepticism about the potential for political stability in Ireland. It also fits in well with conventional readings of the evolution of the national tale as a form. Both Ina Ferris and Katie Trumpener suggest that, from its inception in 1806, the national tale was influenced by but distinct from the literary gothic, preserving that difference for several years before the gothic dramatically (re)introduced itself. Ferris thus claims that Maturin’s \textit{The Milesian chief} ‘pushes the travel plot of Morgan’s political romance into a limit zone’, and, in so doing, ‘invents Irish Gothic’.\textsuperscript{75} Trumpener, meanwhile, contends that the convergence of national tale and historical novel in the wake of Scott’s \textit{Waverley} results in the fracture of cultural wholeness and the breakdown of allegorical marriage, producing tragedy on both personal and national scales. The
introduction of ‘the dislocations of the historical novel’ to the national tale, Trumpener writes, creates ‘a new literary schizophrenia’ more at home with twentieth- and twenty-first-century conceptualisations of the literary gothic than the national tale.76

Recent scholarship by Anne Fogarty, Bridget Matthews-Kane, Julie Donovan, and Clíona Ó Gallchoir has begun to dismantle this stadial approach to the national tale and its relationship to the literary gothic, interrogating the use of gothic topoi and the evocation of the Gothic past in *The wild Irish girl*.77 Such assessments are key to an understanding of the inherence of gothic and national literary modes from the origins of ‘the national tale’ through its various evolutions and transformations in the early nineteenth century. With its supernatural figures, crumbling castles, abortive marriage ceremonies, deathbed scenes, and overriding sense of a violent past that continues to erupt in the present, *The wild Irish girl* is not so different from earlier, more obviously gothic novels such as Roche’s *The children of the abbey* (1796) and Stephen Cullen’s *The castle of Inchvally; a tale – alas! too true* (1796). These tales, in twinning their spectres, odious Catholic priests, ruinous castles, and sexually predatory villains with Irish settings and a clear interest in contemporary Irish affairs, strikingly anticipate later ‘national’ fictions such as *The wild Irish girl*. It is unsurprising, therefore, that *The children of the abbey*, though now recognised as a best-selling gothic romance of its day, has also been called ‘the earliest Irish national tale’.78 *The castle of Inchvally*, assessed upon publication as yet another popular gothic romance, has similarly been understood as ‘the first Irish novel clearly aimed at [an] English readership’.79

Unlike later ‘national’ fictions such as *Castle Rackrent* and *The wild Irish girl*, though, *The children of the abbey* and *The castle of Inchvally* are generally seen to hover rather uncomfortably between gothic and national literary forms. Thus, as both Derek Hand and Claire Connolly argue, while Cullen’s explanatory footnotes in *The castle of Inchvally* look forward to those in *Castle Rackrent*, they nevertheless fall short of Edgeworth’s national intent and literary achievement.80 Erratic and ‘miscellaneous’ in nature, Cullen’s footnotes have ‘the potential to open up spaces of cultural mediation’, but this latent conciliatory effect is cancelled out by the novel’s gothicism, expressed in ‘a plot that depicts the world of contemporary Catholicism, replete with deceitful illusions and supernatural trappings, as dangerously vital’.81 *The children of the abbey*’s gothicism is likewise
seen to war with its presciently allegorical marriage between Irish heroine, Amanda Fitzalan, and her Mortimer, not Horatio as in *The wild Irish girl*, but Henry. Miranda Burgess contends that *The children of the abbey*’s notable ‘generic instability’ functions as the sign of a trauma attributable to cultural and political history.82 Finally unable to eradicate ‘the traces of political history’ through a narrative of domestic settlement as later national tales were better able to do, *The children of the abbey* signals its discomfort with the national marriage plot later familiarised by Owenson by retaining a sense of gothic violence at its close. Later national tales, Burgess asserts, more successfully separate culture and political history, correspondingly moving away from the literary gothic in a more decisive manner than Roche was able to manage.83

Yet, *The children of the abbey* dramatically highlights the manner in which, as Burgess writes, ‘allegory in the national tale is visibly decaying from the start’.84 Indeed, the ‘emotions of the most painful nature’ and ‘violent’ tears experienced by Amanda Fitzalan upon her apparently celebratory return to Ireland in *The children of the abbey* are echoed repeatedly in later national tales.85 They appear in the ‘convulsive shriek’, maniacal laughter, and feverish sobbing with which Glorvina grieves her father and, at almost the same moment, offers Horatio an equivocal consent – ‘such hope as the heart of a mourning child could give to the object of her heart’s first passion’ – to marriage.86 Six years later they re-emerge in Grace Nugent’s angry outburst – ‘My mother! – my mother! – my mother!’ – at the revelations that both enable her marriage to Lord Colambre and elucidate the history of injustice committed against her and her mother.87 And we see them again, in slightly different form, in Owenson’s second self-proclaimed national tale, *O’Donnel* (1814). In marrying the Dowager Duchess of Belmont, formerly the Irish governess, Miss O’Halloran, Roderick O’Donnel, dispossessed and impoverished heir of Red Hugh O’Donnel (1572–1602), King of Tyrconnell, regains his ancestral lands and property, allowing him to forsake service in foreign militaries and once again live permanently in Ireland. Like the female national heroines that have preceded him, O’Donnel greets this revolution in his personal circumstances with mixed feelings. Although he experiences ‘joyous emotions’ at marryng the woman he loves, he, too, is prey to ‘some feeling of melancholy’ derived from his recognition that his corresponding reinstatement at Tirconnell House owes to private rather than public means:
He was willing to owe his best felicity to the hand of love; but he would have wished to have obtained the re-possession of his rights by means more consonant to the spirit of the gentleman, the dignity of the man, and the general interests of his country.88

One of O'Donnel’s first actions upon being restored to ‘the domains of his inheritance’ is tellingly to reclaim the sword of O’Donnel the Red, sold earlier in the novel to fund O’Donnel’s first trip to London (O’Donnel, vol. 3, p. 305). Recalling the display of ‘coats of arms, spears, lances and old armor’ in The children of the abbey as well as the collection of ‘national antiquities, and national curiosities’ in The wild Irish girl, O’Donnel’s proudly exhibited sword mixes the forces of cultural nationalism with a potentially disruptive memory of the past.89 Early in the novel, O’Donnel glibly but pointedly observes to Mr Glentworth on the question of educating the Irish: ‘in good policy, the first lesson you should teach the Irish, should be the art of forgetfulness’ (O’Donnel, vol. 1, p. 217). O’Donnel himself repeatedly maintains his loyalty to British rule, refusing, for instance, to serve in any army currently fighting against England and asserting his belief that, rather than political independence, the Irish people desire sympathy and understanding from the English. Against such fidelity to the Crown, his reverence for his ancestor’s sword evocatively calls into question his ability to master forgetfulness.

Highlighting the weapon’s unruly symbolism, its retrieval and proud display at the close of the novel reminds readers of its first introduction, when Lady Singleton and her party take refuge in O’Donnel’s cottage, not knowing to whom it belongs. There, they are regaled by O’Donnel’s faithful servant, M’Rory, with stories about ‘the great O’Donnel’, whose apparently recent and violent feats have left bloody reminders on the sword exhibited above the mantelpiece and are recorded in a manuscript presented by M’Rory to Lady Singleton (O’Donnel, vol. 2, p. 4). Ferris observes that M’Rory’s arguably deliberate misunderstanding of Lady Singleton’s query about the recent nature of the great O’Donnel’s escapades conflates past (late sixteenth century) and present (late eighteenth century). As it does so, it pointedly links long-ago violence with current Whiteboy activity, fears over which had initially driven the English tourists to O’Donnel’s cabin.90 This interpolated text, understood by the visitors as either a brief diversion or proof of the present O’Donnel’s romantic nature, nevertheless ‘testifies to the simultaneous circulation within the nation of unassimilable kinds of memory and desire’:
In the hands of M’Rory (who literally gives the text to Lady Singleton) the fragment serves to unsettle the colonial story, while in the fugitive bands of White Boys this text of the past finds a material echo and re-enactment. The gothic swerve of interpolation thus takes on a decided political edge, foregrounding a sense of national time not only as dense and layered but as an ongoing contestation between asymmetries of remembering and forgetting.91

In this continued memory of the past, signalled in particular by ‘the gothic technique of embedded texts’, O’Donnell’s ‘Glorvina solution’ is fatally undermined by the slippery boundary between past and present.92 It thus points to the national tale’s powerlessness to effectively resolve the issue of Irish nationalism without accompanying political action. Accordingly, while Lady Llanberis commends the Duchess of Belmont for her enviably romantic domestic settlement, the novel itself ends with a desire to extrapolate private happiness into political change. Extolling his master’s virtues, M’Rory declares, ‘And so, ... if it was God’s will, there is no rayson in life why he should’n’t be a great parliament man’ (O’Donnel, vol. 3, p. 332).

M’Rory’s resort to divine power apparently de-politicises his wish for O’Donnel’s enfranchisement, casting the future of Catholic Emancipation into the realm of supernatural romance rather than violent political action. Here again, however, the ostensibly harmless desire voiced by M’Rory takes on an aggressive edge when we consider the ways in which Owenson, like Maturin before her in The Milesian chief, establishes Ireland as the home of ‘the most wild and incredible situations of romantic story’.93 Just as Maturin set out in The Milesian chief to describe ‘the scenes of actual life’, as outrageous as they might seem, Owenson concerns herself in O’Donnel with ‘the “flat realities of life”’, but she reminds her readers throughout, that, in Ireland, ‘le vrai n’est pas toujours le vraisemblable’ (O’Donnel, vol. 1, p. ix; vol. 3, p. 317).94 Accordingly, while her English tourists conceive of O’Donnel as the fitting inhabitant for the ‘fantastically beautiful’ natural landscape they encounter on the coast of Antrim, Owenson repeatedly calls attention to their dangerously misleading dismissal of Ireland and its inhabitants as mere objects of romance (O’Donnel, vol. 1, p. 130). Presented as of gigantic proportion, capable of heroic feats, impervious to fear, and inclined to the use of hidden passages and revolving portraits that seem borrowed directly from Radcliffe, O’Donnel is, to his English visitors, an exotic object of curiosity derived directly from myth or folklore. Having read the manuscript of ‘O’Donnel The Red, or The Chiefs of Tirconnel. A Fragment’, Lady Florence tellingly reports that afterwards ‘she had dreamed of Irish chiefs and heroes the whole night’,

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thus transforming O'Donnel's family history into a kind of myth or fairy tale (O'Donnel, vol. 2, pp. 7, 70). Later, upon arriving in London, O'Donnel finds himself recommended to the Countess of Llanberis as the subject of 'a tale of wonder' that prompts her to refer to him as 'our hero' and invite him to her home as a personage likely both to amuse her and to catch the attention of fashionable society (O'Donnel, vol. 2, pp. 154, 153).

O'Donnel is immediately wary of the 'exaggerated descriptions' that could have led to the Countess's invitation to him as a 'hero', feeling the term fundamentally at odds with the reality of his situation: poverty, exile, and political disenfranchisement (O'Donnel, vol. 2, p. 153). He nevertheless accepts her hospitality and soon finds his mistrust well placed. Insulted by Lord Charles Savill, Lady Llanberis's accepted lover, O'Donnel challenges him to a duel in which Lord Charles is injured. Outraged, Lady Llanberis turns on Lady Singleton and accuses her of imposing upon her hospitality a man whose sordid reality failed to live up to the romance: 'the man was no more the thing you described, as least that I expected. He was, I think, pretty much like other persons, but not the very least amusing' (O'Donnel, vol. 3, p. 221). The cause of her current troubles, Lady Llanberis suggests, was believing Lady Singleton's 'tales of wonder about kidnapped chiefs, and the Castle of Dublin, and his fighting a whole German legion, and all that nonsense', when all along she should have listened to Lord Charles's insistence that O'Donnel was nothing more than an Irish adventurer (O'Donnel, vol. 3, p. 220). When Lord Charles proves likely to recover from his injury and O'Donnel is married to the Duchess of Belmont in a union that re-possesses him of much of his lost ancestral inheritance, however, O'Donnel returns once again to the realm of romance, at least in the minds of his English acquaintances. Lady Llanberis thus congratulates the Duchess on her fiction-worthy life: 'I have no idea of any thing finer than being the wife of a chief … your following him to Ireland – the Duke of Belmont having left you the property that once had been his – in short, it is all a romance, and I wish Mrs. St. Leger would take it up' (O'Donnel, vol. 3, p. 324).

Dismissing O'Donnel's marriage and the private rectification of past public wrongs it represents as mere romance, Lady Llanberis naively overlooks the fact that, when it comes to Ireland, romance can do little to contain 'the Gothic horror of history'. Having once changed her hero from Red Hugh O'Donnel himself to his 'more polished descendant in a more refined age', Owenson recorded her recognition that to write of the former was to 'raise a veil which ought never to be drawn, and renew the
memory of events, which the interests of humanity require to be for ever buried in oblivion’ (O’Donnel, vol. 1, pp. xii, xi). In the resulting narrative, Owenson attempts to reduce the past to a harmless fairy tale with little bearing on the present. Yet, as is clear in the continued surfacing of a violent memory of the past at odds with O’Donnel’s otherwise rational acceptance of British rule and private, rather than public, enfranchisement, Owenson’s Ireland remains troubled by the persistent convergence of past and present forms of violence.

CONCLUSION

Published in the same year as Waverley, Owenson’s O’Donnel simultaneously looks backward to the more pessimistically ambiguous conclusion of Maturin’s The Milesian chief and anticipates the similarly equivocal ending of Scott’s The bride of Lammermoor. As such, following arguments presented by Trumpener and Ferris and discussed in this chapter, the novel might be taken as evidence of the re-introduction of the gothic to the national tale as it developed in the 1810s. However, closer examination of the text alongside earlier examples of gothic-national fiction proves that it is, in fact, revelatory of a much longer established generic fluidity and interdependence that prevents any easy distinction between gothic novel and national tale from the last decade of the eighteenth century into the first two decades of the nineteenth. In its pointed use and interrogation of romance as a tool for describing an often fantastic and horrific reality, moreover, O’Donnel links itself to contemporary tales such as The convent, The heroine, The Irish heiress, and Strathallan. As it does so, it underscores the enduring production of the literary gothic by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Irish writers.

That all of the texts discussed in this chapter share a concern with local, Irish, and British settings is of note. Not only do these novels dismantle conventional scholarly conceptions of genre and form in this period, but, as Chapter 3 discusses, they also speak to the inaccuracy of current emphasis on the Catholic Continent as the primary setting for gothic fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The focus on domestic settings in much Irish gothic fiction of this period signals the wider attention to local rather than foreign geographies in British gothic as a whole, while the particular use of Irish locales in the works of Elizabeth Griffith (1727–93) helped to combat and reconfigure prevailing English perceptions of Ireland itself as a peculiarly strange and estranging landscape.
3 The Critical Review, 67 (May 1789), 330, 331.
4 Ibid., 331, 332–3.
5 Gentleman’s Magazine, 60 (June 1790), 550.
6 Ibid.
7 James White, The adventures of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, 3 vols (London, 1790), vol 3, p. 243. Further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.
8 The Critical Review, 69 (June 1790), 713.
9 Ibid., 714.
13 Ibid., p. 25.
14 Punter, The literature of terror, vol. 1, p. 47.
15 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 44.
16 Brean Hammond and Shaun Regan, Making the novel: fiction and society in Britain, 1660–1789 (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 7. Clery similarly notes that ‘the novel needed romance as the measure of its own achievements; there was a dialectical relation between the two, an interdependency’; she further adds, ‘in spite of the rhetoric[,] the dividing line between novel and romance was not absolutely clear-cut’; Clery, ‘The genesis of “Gothic” fiction’, p. 23.
17 The full titles of these works are as follows: The castles of Athlin and Dunbayne; a highland story (1790); A Sicilian romance (1790); The romance of the forest, interspersed with some pieces of poetry (1791); The mysteries of Udolphe, a romance, interspersed with some pieces of poetry (1794), and The Italian, or the confessional of the Black Penitents; a romance (1797).
18 The Critical Review, 13 (March 1762), 252. Added emphasis.
19 Williams, Art of darkness, pp. 2–3.
20 For the suggestion that Mrs F.C. Patrick may not be the author of The Irish heiress, see Ian Campbell Ross, Review of A guide to Irish fiction, Eighteenth-century Ireland, 22 (2007), 225.
Rolf and Magda Loeber point out that only six Irish novels published from 1806 to 1846 used the term ‘national’ in their titles, and three of these works were by Owenson herself; *A guide to Irish fiction*, p. lxii.


Mrs E.C. Patrick, *The Irish heiress, a novel, in three volumes* (London, 1797), vol. 1, p. 51. Further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.


See, for instance, *Edinburgh Review*, 22 (October 1813), 245; *Edinburgh Review*, 22 (January 1814), 490; and *Edinburgh Review*, 27 (1816), 537.


Edward Mangin, *An essay on light reading, as it may be supposed to influence moral conduct on literary taste* (London, 1808), p. 5; quoted in Gilroy and Verhoeven, ‘The Romantic-era novel’, p. 150.


See the Appendix for a full list of the texts considered here alongside their generic identifiers.


See Pearson, ‘Masculinizing the novel’.


Reeve, *The progress of romance*, 211.


43 Anne Fuller, *The convent: or, the history of Sophia Nelson*, 2 vols (London [1786]), vol. 1, p. 15. Further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text. Cassandra’s resemblance to Arabella appears to have been deliberate and was commented upon in contemporary reviews: ‘Cassandra Woodville is the Female Quixote’; *The Critical Review*, 62 (December 1786), 469.


46 This is an argument voiced by Marilyn Butler in relation to *Northanger Abbey*, a novel frequently understood as a simple burlesque of the ‘horrid’ fiction Catherine Morland loves. Contesting this simplistic view, Butler persuasively contends that Austen employs parody in much the same way as Barrett in *The heroine*, asking readers ‘not … to criticize certain novels, nor the habit of novel-reading, but rather to consider the habits of mind which the different speakers reveal’; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the war of ideas* (1975; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 173, 175.


48 Mrs F.C. Patrick, *More ghosts! In three volumes* (London, 1798), vol. 1, p. i. Further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

49 In its sympathetic portrayal of Catholicism, *More ghosts!* confirms the arguments presented by Maria Purves when she counters the critical belief that gothic fiction is generally anti-Catholic in nature. Purves contends instead that novels such as *More ghosts!* ‘complicate the orthodox critical reading of Gothic as a vehicle for anti-Catholic, anticlerical sentiment. They make Catholic monastic characters heroic and use them to define and demonstrate the value and superiority of Christian piety in a world of unruly emotion and unchecked sensibility’; Maria Purves, *The gothic and Catholicism: religion, cultural exchange and the popular novel, 1785–1829* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 1.

50 *The Critical Review*, 2nd ser., 24 (October 1798), 236.

51 Clery, *The rise of supernatural fiction*, p. 129.


In her editorial notes to the 2008 Pickering & Chatto edition of *Strathallan*, Anna M. Fitzer names the works referenced here as Gottfried August Bürger’s ‘Leonora’ (1774), Robert Southey’s ‘Donica’ (1797), Matthew Lewis’s ‘The grim white woman’ (1800), Walter Scott’s ‘The eve of St John’ (1800) and ‘The lay of the last minstrel’ (1805), Mary Robinson’s ‘The haunted beach’ (1806), Walpole’s *The castle of Otranto*, Radcliffe’s *The mysteries of Udolpho*, and Charles Robert Maturin’s *The fatal revenge; or, the family of Montorio* (1807) (*Strathallan*, p. 498, n. 61).


The suggestion of supernatural agency is made most clearly in the vocabulary used to describe Strathallan’s supposed death and subsequent ‘resurrection’ as well as in the figure of Sir Harold Mountain, who appears to harbour a spectre in the ruined part of his home. Ultimately, this ghost is revealed to be his own mother, Lady Julia Melbourne. Long believed to be dead, Lady Julia had actually been forcibly confined by her jealous husband, possibly, it is suggested, on false information provided by Lady Torrendale, and had been driven mad by her unjust imprisonment, despite her son’s careful, if secret, attention. Her death shortly after her apparent resurrection precipitates that of Sir Harold.

*The Guardian*, 167 (22 September 1713). The untitled tale tells of Helim, physician to the tyrannical King of Persia, Alnareschin, who, having already executed 35 previous wives, demands Helim’s beautiful daughter, Balsora, as his next. Aware that Balsora is in love with the King’s son, Abdallah, Helim gives the lovers a sleeping potion that allows them to feign death. They then escape to a secluded mountain retreat, disguised as spirits from the after world. There, they live out the remainder of their lives, even after Alnareschin has died. Le Fanu may have been familiar with the tale in its original form, as *The Guardian* and collections of the works of Addison and Richard Steele (bap.1672–d.1729) were published throughout the eighteenth century. She may also have encountered it in one of its permutations as a moralistic children’s tale popular into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For instance, ‘The story of Abdallah and Balsora’ appeared in several collections of didactic tales for children in the latter half of the eighteenth century, including *The new polite instructor; or universal moralist* (London, 1771) and *The moral miscellany; or, a collection of select pieces, in prose and verse, for the instruction and entertainment of youth* (Dublin, 1774).

Jim Kelly observes that ‘[r]egisters, themes and images that we associate with Gothic fiction were so prevalent in Irish printed and oral culture [in the nineteenth century] that modern observers might conclude that there were aspects of the Gothic in everything’; Kelly, ‘Gothic and the Celtic Fringe’, p. 39.

See Morin, ““Gothic” and “national”?’


Robertson, _Legitimate histories_, p. 4. On the use of gothic fiction in _The absentee_ as an emblem of Lord Glenthorn’s susceptibility to romantic enthrallment, the narrative’s attempt to present Glenthorn’s recovery from his reading-induced sensibility, and the conclusion’s uncertainty about Glenthorn’s security against future ontological and literary seduction, see Sharon Murphy, _Maria Edgeworth and romance_ (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 155–66.


Miles, ‘The 1790s: the effulgence of gothic’, pp. 41–2. The clear influence of Goethe’s _The sorrows of young Werther_ (trans. 1779) on _St Clair_ also links Owenson’s novel to German literature and, what was inextricably bound with it in the contemporary British consciousness, gothic romance.

Trumpener, _Bardic nationalism_, p. 137.


Julia M. Wright, ‘“The nation begins to form”: competing nationalisms in Morgan’s _The O’Briens and the O’Flahertys_, _ELH_, 66 (1999), 339–65. Wright further develops the connection between the literary gothic and the national tale in more recent work, arguing that, from its inception, the national tale’s ‘Glorvina solution’ ‘is specifically a solution to a gothic problem – namely, the
need to authorize what remains marked as the illicit seizure of property … and to assuage the gothic anxieties that such instabilities produce'; Wright, *Representing the national landscape*, p. 190.


75 Ferris, *The Romantic national tale*, p. 16.

76 Trumpener, *Bardic nationalism*, p. 142. Although Trumpener is careful to emphasise the generic ‘interdependen[ce]’ of the national tale and historical novel, she is less concerned with the interplay of these works and the gothic novels that preceded, co-existed with, and vitally informed them. She traces the similarities between Radcliffe’s *The castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) and works by Charlotte Smith and Maria Edgeworth but does not enter into a discussion of the important influence of the literary gothic on early national tales and historical novels; *Bardic nationalism*, pp. 131, 138–9.


81 Connolly, ‘The national tale’, p. 221.


83 Ibid., p. 55.

84 Ibid., p. 63.


wild Irish girl and The absentee, see, for instance, Julia Anne Miller, ‘Acts of union: family violence and national courtship in Maria Edgeworth’s The absentee and Sydney Owenson’s The wild Irish girl’, in Kathryn Kirkpatrick (ed.), Border crossings: Irish women writers and national identities (Tuscaloosa, AL and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 13–37; Morin, Charles Robert Maturin, pp. 9–10, 46–7, 65–8; and Morin, ‘“Gothic” and “national”?’

88 Sydney Owenson, O’Donnel: a national tale, 3 vols (London: Colburn, 1814), vol. 3, pp. 306–7. Further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

89 Roche, The children of the abbey, p. 138; Owenson, The wild Irish girl, p. 102.


91 Ibid., pp. 88–9.

92 Ibid., p. 88.


94 Ibid.