

## German Gothic

BARRY MURNANE

Since the “spirited exchange” (Horner 2002) between different national literatures that produced the Gothic in the 1780s and 1790s, Germany and its *Schauerroman* have occupied a privileged, albeit vilified position. For earliest critics, such as Jane Austen or the *Anti-Jacobin*, Gothic fiction was synonymous with an image of Germany as the depraved site of necromancy, secret societies, and wanton violence. Through writers such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, this continued to be the case well into the nineteenth century, as Poe’s famous dictum in his preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* (“Terror is not of Germany but of the soul”) suggests. Despite a renaissance around 1900, the Expressionist film is the last example of German Gothic that can claim real international relevance.

The *Schauerroman* is generally referred to as the equivalent of the “Gothic novel;” however, in contradistinction to the unifying and homogenizing tendencies of Gothic as a term, German distinguishes between different forms of sensational and affect-driven fiction – the *Ritter-*, *Räuber-*, and *Schauerromane*, or novels of chivalry, brigands, and “shudder” novels (Appel 1859). Indeed it is significant that the first use of the term *Schauerroman* occurred in relation to an English novel and not to a home-grown product at all (Hadley 1978: 147). Dominant English conceptions of German Gothic are even today more the result of English misconceptions than real German tastes (Murnane 2009). This is not to suggest that these various generic terms are themselves unproblematic, however; closer scrutiny has

shown how these seemingly solid borders are in fact blurred by common motifs, plots, and preoccupations (Müller-Dyes 1965: 5–6). Thus the secret tribunals central to the plots of *Ritterromane* since Benedikte Naubert’s *Hermann of Unna* (1788, English translation 1794) follow similar patterns and fulfill similar functions as the secret societies in *Schauerromane* such as Friedrich Schiller’s *The Ghost-Seer* (1887–9, English translation 1795) or Carl Grosse’s *Horrid Mysteries* (1791–4, English translation 1796).

Apart from these caveats, the development of German and English writing in the Gothic mode follows similar patterns, although a direct influence of English writing – as previously assumed – has been ruled out (Hall 2005: 50–2). Both develop as a result of a change in mentality in the course of the Enlightenment. First, the frisson of the supernatural emerges as a result of the rational banishment of all things uncanny and ghostly from a logically ordered world as irrational impossibilities (in differentiation to popular pre-Enlightened ghost stories). The *Ritter-*, *Räuber-*, and *Schauerromane* emerge in the 1780s as further developments of core components of Germany’s sentimentalism-discourse (affective poetics, dangers of rapturous imagination) and the storm and stress movement (medieval settings, the criminal as noble outsider). Secondly, the predominant focus in German works on the psychological uncertainty pertaining to the uncanny points toward their position within the dominant anthropological paradigm of Germany’s late-Enlightenment aesthetics and philosophy. Insofar as these works focus on areas of social life and individual motivation that remained unaccounted for in earlier, more optimistic

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Enlightenment accounts of personality and reality, these works take on an important role in anthropology's "self-Enlightenment" of the Enlightenment.

Schiller's *Ghost-Seer*, as prototype of the *Schauerroman*, draws most obviously on these debates, as the unfinished novel documents the fallibility of a prince to fall prey to the opaque plot of the Armenian, a mysterious figure seemingly supported by a secret society aiming to overthrow Protestant rule in the prince's homeland. The two key themes of German Gothic (insofar as they are to be found in all its variants), the secret society and necromancy, are best understood in these terms. In Schiller, as in more popular authors such as Grosse, Naubert, Lorenz Flammenberg (i.e., K. F. Kahlert), Ignaz F. Arnold, or Josef A. Gleich, these themes seem to take on the status of fictional media for real epistemological problems: namely the sense that the powers of reason are limited in assessing human intentions and social interaction. The most disturbing aspect of Schiller's novel is that the powers of reason are ultimately of little or no use in overcoming these threats: the prince is aware of the fake séances in the novel and still succumbs to the Armenian's machinations (Barkhoff 2011). That these works emerge from a field of popular journals fixated with instances of the occult and secret societies (Voges 1987) merely underlines these widespread social fears.

That German writing in the Gothic mode is to be located in this anthropological tradition is visible in the very term *Schauerroman*. The German version of the Gothic novel displays its affective poetics of shocking/shuddering in this most prominent of its names, drawing deliberately on discussions of the mind-body dualism with the shudder being understood as a bodily manifestation of mental or nervous horror (Zelle 1987: 342–9). Although recent commentators have questioned whether *Schauer* as an affective poetics

based on the delightful horror (*angenehmes Grauen*) of eighteenth-century debates on the aesthetics of the sublime is of heuristic value (Sangmeister 2010), it is certainly present in the form of an implied poetics in most works (Schönert 1977: 30–5). As an experience thematized in all variants of the *Ritter*-, *Räuber*-, and *Schauerroman*, *Schauer* is deployed as an emotional signal linking the reader with the experiences of the protagonists in these novels.

Identifying German Gothic in these terms raises the question as to the fate of the *Schauerroman* after the 1790s. Some commentators have claimed that German Gothic ceases to exist altogether (Trotha 1999: 293–359), which ignores the fact that for many readers German Gothic is synonymous with E. T. A. Hoffmann's "black Romanticism." Indeed a continuity in themes and preoccupations links Romantic authors directly with earlier Gothic writing, even if the formal presentation of these themes is more complex. Ludwig Tieck occupies a key position in this transition, with his novels (e.g., *William Lovell*) drawing heavily on earlier psychological themes of epistemological unreliability (Sage 2011). His shorter texts such as *Der Runenberg* (Rune Mountain) or *Der blonde Eckbert* (Blond Eckbert) introduced a signature motif of German Romanticism in the conflict of the bourgeois quotidian with an alternative, marvelous world that is Gothic insofar as it is initially experienced as a shocking dissociation of the protagonist's psyche.

Such a derangement of the supposedly solid enlightened subject remains at the heart of German Romantic writing in the Gothic mode – as illustrated in Hoffmann's novels and novellas such as *The Devil's Elixirs* or *The Sandman*. The horror in *The Devil's Elixirs*, an influential text for the development of the literary double, revolves around questioning under which conditions the subject can say

“I” at all. The monk Medardus experiences a corporeal, passion-driven side to his personality that unravels any semblance of decency he has (Kremer 1993: 233–44). This horrific dichotomy in Medardus’ personality is heightened through Hoffmann’s complex narrative structure, making it impossible to determine whether or not Medardus’ double is a marvelous figure or merely his half-brother Viktorin. This heightened reflexivity of the Romantic Gothic – Hoffmann’s figures are at times even aware of their fictional status and intertextual predecessors – coupled with the introduction of complex narrative structures as the medium of moving the reader to a state of *Schauer*, is the central Romantic innovation in German Gothic.

This formal complexity is also one of the paths of transmission through the nineteenth century, as may be seen in the Realist works of Theodor Storm or Theodor Fontane (Bickenbach 2012). Here memories of reading and listening to ghost stories become an instance of “citing” ghosts within the realist mimetic model, an instance of Derrida’s spectrality effect of fiction for which Storm’s *Der Schimmelreiter* (The Horse-rider) is the most prominent example. Other less high-brow traditions of the Gothic can also be found continuously throughout the course of the nineteenth century, however, in such popular forms as the *Nachtstück* (Night Stories) (Nickel 2010: 189–97). At the close of the century, Fontane’s *Effi Briest* features the eponymous, belated Gothic heroine in a supposedly haunted house, frightened by the ghosts of a Chinese man and Prussia’s patron ghost, the “lady in white.”

The period around 1900 saw a renaissance in German Gothic, particularly in Austro-Hungary, with writers such as Gustav Meyrink, Alfred Kubin, and Franz Kafka (Cersowsky 1983). For many, Kafka’s horrific scenarios of bureaucratized modernity

(*The Trial*, *In the Penal Colony*), morphing landscapes (*The Castle*), monstrous corporeality (*The Metamorphosis*), and ghostly visions are the epitome of Gothic modernity (Murnane 2008: 63–133). Other works of the period are notable for their occultist content and are more obviously located toward the fantastic pole of Gothic writing, with authors such as Meyrink (*The Golem*), Hans Heinz Ewers (*Alraune*, *Vampir*), and Karl Hans Strobl (*Heliogabel Kuperus*) drawing heavily on contemporary esoteric, spiritist theory (Wünsch 1991). Strobl’s and Ewers’ reputations are tainted by their populist forms of nationalism and vulgarized Nietzschean Superman theories, later leading to their involvement with National Socialism.

Ewers’ involvement in the development of the Expressionist film, including cowriting Stellan Rye’s *The Student of Prague* (1913), however, mark him as an important innovator in German modernist aesthetics. Indeed, Gothic production in this period is marked by fruitful collaboration between fiction and film, resulting in cinematic milestones such as Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse* (1922). In Expressionism, film became an important medium for articulating modernism’s discontent with modernity itself, focusing on fragile identities in the form of countless doppelgänger fantasies and hypnotic mind-control (Andriopoulos 2008). Gothic tropes may have become so central to Expressionism because the new medium was itself central in unsettling traditional concepts of identity, seemingly doubling one’s image (Webber 1996: 317–56). The culmination of this Expressionist tradition is undoubtedly Fritz Lang’s chilling depiction of modern industrial production and mass society in *Metropolis*. Despite a continuing fascination with Gothic tropes (e.g., GDR playwright Heiner Müller or filmmakers Christoph Schlingensiefel and Michael Haneke), postwar

German Gothic has failed to have a similar international impact.

SEE ALSO: Doubles; European Gothic; Hoffmann, E. T. A. (Ernst Theodor Amadeus).

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