»Terror is not of Germany, but of the Soul«
National Gothics and the Role of Fanaticism

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I.

At first glance, the title of this essay may seem peculiar and incongruous given that its source derives not from a German or a Scottish Gothic writer, but a famous American Gothic writer – Edgar Allan Poe. In the preface to a collection of his short stories published in 1840, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, Poe contested the characterization of his prose style as marked by »Germanism and gloom«,[1] »Germanism« being then understood to mean »a wild extravagance of fancy […] a morbid irritability of feeling«, morally corrupting, aesthetically immature, and, as Poe readily elaborated, a »species of pseudo-horror which we are taught to call Germanic«.[2] Suggesting that »Germanism« was a shifting cultural and xenophobic construct, Poe playfully noted that if his »phantasy-pieces« were Germanic, then »Germanism is ›the vein‹ for the time being. Tomorrow I may be anything but German, as yesterday I was everything else«.[3]

The claim made against Poe's work in the 1830s seems anachronistic as ›Germanism‹ was at the centre of a moral panic in Britain half a century earlier, in the 1790s. It is crucial to pause and consider this anachronism, especially in relation to Poe's

1 Poe, Edgar Allan: »Preface«, in: Edgar Allan Poe: Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, Garden City/New York, 1979, pp. 7f.; here p. 7. As Benjamin F. Fisher notes, Poe's »Preface« to his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* was responding to »[d]isapproving charges of Germanism targeting some of his early tales – ›Berenice‹, ›Morella‹, ›Usher‹«. Fisher, Benjamin F: »Poe and the Gothic Tradition«, in: Kevin J. Hayes (ed.): The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe, Cambridge 2002, pp. 72–91; here p. 84. Despite its praise of »the force and elegance of his style« and his »superior capacity and […] highly cultivated taste in composition«, for example, »Editorial Comments« in the *Southern Literary Messenger* included the claim that Poe's tale, »Berenice«, exhibited »too much German horror«. Cf. no author: »Editorial Remarks«, in: Southern Literary Messenger 1 (1835), p. 387.

2 E.A. Poe: Preface, p. 8.

3 Ibid., p. 7.

provocative statement – *Terror is not of Germany, but of the Soul*.[4] In its identified parameters of the changing source and site of terror – from a specific and national, secular location (Germany) to a more spiritual, cosmic site (the Soul) – it encapsulates a significant transition generally acknowledged by Gothicists where the source of the Gothic's driving terrors are said to have shifted from external forces in the mid-to late eighteenth century, such as institutional tyrannies and social repressions, to increasingly internal psychological forces in the early nineteenth century, such as terrors of the mind, the alterity of subjectivity, and the terrors of the Soul, as referenced by Poe.[5]

Stepping back into the politically turbulent 1790s, however, when, as Michael Gamer has rightly stated, Britain was experiencing »increasing cultural xenophobia«,[6] the terror was actually perceived to be *of Germany* and what may be described as *the Soul of the British nation*. It may seem counterintuitive to identify Germany as the source of terror and anxiety in the wake of the *French* Revolution, the September Massacres in *Paris*, and the *French* Revolutionary Wars. After all, Germany did not then pose a geopolitical threat to England, as David Simpson has pointed out. Absolutist princes ruled in nearly every principality of Germany, and it was »not even a nation-state, let alone a powerful one«.[7] Nevertheless, as Simpson further claims, using notably arresting rhetoric, Germany »was clearly established as the new evil empire in Europe, even more urgently demonized than France. The French had had their Jacobins, but the Germans, it seems, had invented and organized them«.[8] As Simpson's commentary makes clear, Germany was regarded as the source of revolutionary ideas and secret societies and, as such, it was seen as the hotbed of terror. In his essay, »Thoughts on French Affairs«, Edmund Burke issued a dire forecast in 1791 about Germany and a forthcoming revolution that he warned was »likely to be more decisive upon the general fate of nations than that of France itself«.[9] Employing the popular eighteenth-century motif of the body politic and assuming the role of an attending physician offering up both a medical diagnosis and a prognosis, Burke

4 Ibid., p. 8.

5 Duncan Faherty argues that Poe's Tales did not entirely neglect national political issues. Albeit in oblique and veiled ways, they engaged with issues central to Jacksonian democracy, which Faherty describes as »characterized by rapid and unpredictable economic change, social mobility, racial violence, and underlying fears of mobocracy and rootlessness«. Faherty, Duncan: »›A Certain Unity of Design‹: Edgar Allan Poe's ›Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque‹«, in: The Edgar Allan Poe Review 6 (2005), pp. 4–21; here p. 5.

6 Gamer, Michael: Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation, Cambridge 2000, p. 148.

7 Simpson, David: Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory, Chicago/London 1993, p. 90.

8 Ibid., p. 89.

9 Burke, Edmund: Reflections on the Revolution in France, London 1955, p. 567.

cautioned that »the Germanick body« was at tremendous risk given »the troubles and convulsions of [the] age«.[10]

Germany was thus regarded as the fertile breeding-ground for radical political ideas that posed a national threat with dangerous international implications, and, according to numerous influential, published accounts, the primary source of that threat was the Bavarian Illuminati. Clergymen and journalists alike were responsible for disseminating a dark narrative about that secret society, one that could readily compete with and inspire Gothic fiction. Robert Levine captures the paranoia and magnitude of the claims made by those clerics-cum-conspiracy theorists who argued that »behind the turbulence in France and on the Continent, behind even the increasing political tensions in America, lurked a chief precipitating agent, the alien and seditious Order of the Bavarian Illuminati, a conspiratorial group of Enlightenment-spawned atheists seeking world domination«.[11] This characterization actually ran counter to the goals of that society – originally called the Order of Perfectibility – of reforming Freemasonry and society by »establish[ing] a moral regime that would lead all citizens back to the original state of liberty and equality« (»Illuminati«). Despite the fact that the Order of the Illuminati was suppressed in 1784 after failing to infiltrate the government of Bavaria's Catholic and absolutist prince-elector, its spectre continued to haunt Europe against the increasingly bloody backdrop and terror of the French Revolution. The myth of the Illuminati's dark agenda was strategically manipulated, as renowned historian Margaret C. Jacob has cogently illuminated, by authorities across Europe »to conjure up fear of subversion and to crack down on the supporters of the Enlightenment«.[12] As a result, the Illuminati gained »a paradoxical posthumous influence far greater than it had exercised as a living movement«.[13]

British anti-Jacobins claimed that the Illuminati had broadcast their violent revolutionary ideas by way of German literature, which was popularly described as »jacobinical«.[14] While a »Germanomania« prevailed in the early to mid-1790s when translations of German literary and philosophical works appeared in English for the first time, a tide of Germanophobic commentary followed that pathologized German literature as depraved, infectious, and »toxic«. German philosophy was likewise demonized as dangerous due to its obscurity. Characterized as »cheap

10 Ibid.

11 Levine, Robert S.: Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville, Cambridge 2009, p 18.

12 Jacob, Margaret C.: The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents, Boston/New York 2001, p. 63.

13 Billington, James: Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith, New York 1980, p. 99.

14 M. Gamer: Romanticism and the Gothic, p.146.

and cheerless« with Goethe vilified as morally suspect and an apologist for suicide who prostituted his pen for Vice,[15] German literature was charged with being a »pervasive *disease* destructive to [British] national culture and social fabric«.[16] German theatrical works were targeted by the *Anti-Jacobin* for fomenting class discontent and political insurgency, and for confounding ideas of morality. The works of August von Kotzebue and his imitators, then all the rage on the British stage,[17] were indicted by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* for promoting a »moral and intellectual *Jacobinism* of the most dangerous kind«.[18] Claims about the hazardous circulation of radical ideas soon extended beyond the theatre. According to Hannah More, *all* German writings – »Poetry as well as prose, romance as well as history, writings on philosophical as well as on political subjects« – were not only anti-Christian, »monstrous compositions«, but propaganda penned by »German enlighteners« who aimed at »corrupting the heart [… and] misleading the understanding« by »instil[ling] the principles of *Illuminatism*«.[19]

More's ideas were grounded in the pernicious and popular conspiracy theories of two clerics – John Robison, a respected Edinburgh minister, and the Abbé Augustin Barruel, a Jesuit priest and intellectual. Gothic novelists would have been hard-pressed to compete with their elaborate conspiracy theories about the organizations they claimed had actively promoted the French Revolution. In their respective works – *Proofs of a Conspiracy* (1797) and *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797/1798) – Robison and Barruel notably marshalled Gothic rhetoric and tropes[20] to craft a monstrous myth about a global conspiracy whose objective was to establish, in the words of the *Anti-Jacobin*, »the radical SYSTEM comprehending not Politics only, and Religion, but Morals and Manners, and generally whatever goes to the composition or holding together of Human Society«.[21] While Robison's *Proofs* identified the Illuminati as having infiltrated the Freemasons under the veil of philan-

15 Hays, Mary: »Observations on ›The Sorrows of Werter‹«, in: The Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany 1 (1785), pp. 22–24; here p. 23.

16 M. Gamer: Romanticism and the Gothic, p. 8 (emphasis added).

17 D. Simpson: Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory, p. 85.

18 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor: Biographia Literaria. Vol. II, ed. by. J. Shawcross, Oxford 1973, p. 164 (emphasis added).

19 More, Hannah: Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, with a View of the Principles and Conduct prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune. Vol. I, Salem/Massachusetts 1809, p. 31f.

20 Barry Murnane also calls Robison and Barruel's writings »Gothic« (Murnane, Barry: »Radical Translations: Dubious Anglo-German Cultural Transfer in the 1790s«, in: Maike Oergel (ed.): (Re-)writing the Radical: Enlightenment, Revolution and Cultural Transfer in 1790s Germany, Britain and France, Berlin/Boston 2012, pp. 44–60; here p. 59), as does Fred Botting in *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester 2008, pp. 113f.).

21 No author: »Poetry (June 4, 1798)«, in: The Anti-Jacobin Review, or Weekly Examiner. Vol. 2, London 1799, pp. 415–419; here p. 415.

thropic activity, Barruel's four-volume *Memoirs* fuelled »the MaCarthyism (sic) of the 1790s«[22] in his exposé of the anti-Christian agenda of the philosophes and Freemasons who incited revolution as secretly directed by the Illuminati.

Although *The European Magazine* and the *Analytical Review* ridiculed Barruel's ideas as fanciful and wrongheaded, and respected historians like Jacob have since celebrated the Masonic lodges as laboratories for »a nascent political modernity«,[23] these anti-Enlightenment conspiracy theories were widely disseminated. In some circles, they persist to this day. A notable and compelling dialectic was clearly at play between secret society-based conspiracy theories and Gothic fiction at this time, the boundary decidedly blurred between imaginary and actual terror. As Marie Roberts has noted, »[in] the wake of the French Revolution, the secret societies were the dark spectres haunting the mass movements of Europe. Gothic novelists had seized upon them as metaphors of terror«.[24] Likewise, as Emma J. Clery has rightly observed, it was through their lenses that the French Revolution was being written and consumed by a paranoid British public »like a gripping romance translated from the German«.[25] It is noteworthy, therefore, that, as Clery has further shown, just as the Gothic was becoming more political, »politics moved towards a Gothic aesthetic«[26] used to craft what J. M. Roberts calls »the demonology of the counter-revolution« and the counter-Enlightenment.[27] Thus did the Gothic become vital artillery in the culture and politico-religious wars of the late eighteenth century, infecting, like a virus, a cross-section of discourses – political, philosophical, theological, and cultural.

II.

When first invited to deliver this paper as a keynote for the *Writing Angst* conference, I felt compelled to identify connections between the two national Gothics that are the focus of this volume – the German and the Scottish. Intuitively, I drilled down into the 1790s, an explosive, transitional era of revolution, protest, and reform that is endlessly fascinating. That decade not only witnessed a boom in the German Gothic, it also saw the British Gothic's efflorescence amidst raging debates about national identity, values, and security. A motherlode of key and enduring Gothic themes and

22 Roberts, Marie: Gothic Immortals: The Fiction of the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross, London/New York 1990, p. 89.

23 M.C. Jacob: The Enlightenment, p. 224.

24 M. Roberts: Gothic Immortals, p. 59.

25 Clery, E. J.: The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762–1800, Cambridge 1995, p.172.

26 Ibid.

27 Roberts, John M.: The Mythology of the Secret Societies, London 1972, p. 147.

ideas emerged in this decade, borne of the paranoid imaginary of countersubversion and counter-Enlightenment that proliferated across numerous discourses. A confluence of motifs of conspiracy, fanaticism, and secret societies is readily identifiable that demands reconsideration as they serve as a linchpin connecting several national Gothics of the era. While the Scottish Gothic does not see its inception until the early nineteenth century, its seeds are sown in the mid- to late eighteenth century. The German Gothic subgenre is foundational to it.

I have previously researched and published on the joint subjects of fanaticism and the Transatlantic »Calvinist Gothic« in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland, or the Transformation* (1798) and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Set against the backdrop of late eighteenth-century America and the Illuminati scare, *Wieland* focuses on an immigrant family of French Camisard Calvinists, the sect that organized an armed insurrection to defend their faith in the early 1700s. Hogg's novel, by contrast, trains its lens on a different variant of Calvinism – Antinomian Calvinism, which was experiencing a resurgence in Scotland in the 1820s. Its members believed that God's elect could not lose God's grace even if they violated Mosaic law. Although my earlier examination did not focus on fanaticism *per se*, but rather on Calvinism and what I called the »Calvinist Gothic«, my comments here are meant to complement that earlier scholarship. My driving objective in that earlier research was to explore and expand the history of the unconscious in the Gothic and, to that end, I traced the emergence of the singular figure of the double in relation to Calvinism. Notably, Brown and Hogg chose to get inside the skin of the fanatic, where the terror, while still retaining dramatic national reverberations, was also portrayed to be *of the soul*.

Further research has revealed how the German Gothic, due to some shared and distinctive motivating factors, constitutes a compelling component of the Gothic's engagement with fanaticism. Friedrich Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (1785/1789)[28] is arguably a key source of the Calvinist Gothic that pre-dated those aforementioned Scottish and American texts whose influence extends from Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) through to James Robertson's *The Fanatic* (2001) and beyond. The description of Schiller's Prince's thinly-veiled Calvinist indoctrination in childhood into a »bigoted faith« that taught him »a blind fear« of a God characterized »as an object of terror«[29] evidences the connection.[30]

28 Compare the contribution by Stephan Brössel in this volume.

29 Schiller, Friedrich: »The Ghost-Seer; or Apparitionist«, in: Friedrich Schiller: The Works of Frederick Schiller. Vol. 4, trans.by Henry G. Bohn, London 1853, pp. 377–482; here p. 430.

30 In a novel with many theological targets, Schiller also employs rich Gothic rhetoric to describe the horrific nature of religious subjects that »always appeared to him [the Prince] like an enchanted castle, into which one does not set one's foot without horror [for fear of] exposing [oneself] to the danger of being bewildered in its labyrinths« (ibid., p. 429).

Based, in part, on my deep-dive into the intellectual history of the 1790s, and in response to Terry Castle's claim that contemporary Gothic criticism has failed in its attempts to explain the Gothic's transnational, transatlantic appeal – its »strange kinetic shifts in mood and manner«[31] – I would argue that much of the Gothic's cultural work in the 1790s exposed and negotiated, in diverse and distinctive ways, the desires and anxieties faced in a post-Enlightenment, secularizing, revolutionary era. As its consistent focus on intergenerational power dynamics evidences, the Gothic tapped into and mediated several cataclysmic socio-political shifts. It expressed the dramatic birth throes of civil societies as they strove to replace established *ancien régimes*, eradicate absolutism and institute new social contracts grounded in republican and democratic precepts, negotiate new relationships between the Church and the state, and identify and eliminate what was perceived to be politico-religious fanaticism.

None of this happened overnight, but we have ample evidence that the Gothic, the literature of terror – in the wake of unprecedented revolutionary terror – served as a cultural laboratory for mediating the expression of these ideas during this period of cataclysmic change and transition. The Gothic became, as I have argued elsewhere, *the* symbolic form of modernity as it »gave expression to both the repressed dreams and nightmares of modernity«.[32] Wittingly and sometimes unwittingly, it trafficked in and registered the collisions and collusions between old and new socio-political systems and pre- and post-Enlightenment values and belief systems. Extrapolating from Angela Carter's famous observation in 1996 that »we live in Gothic times«,[33] it should be recognized that we have always lived in Gothic times, human beings being the Gothic hero-villains that they are – capable of both the greatest good and the greatest evil. The difference is that since the mid-eighteenth century, we have had the cultural form of the Gothic through which to express and mediate these divergent propensities, especially the dark side of people, cultures, ideologies, and nations.

The complex figure of the fanatic, the fanatical secret society, and the concept of fanaticism, broadly conceived, stand out as preeminent and shared transnational phenomena in the Gothic of the 1790s and beyond. The fanatic, »one of the stock characters of modernity«,[34] and the secret society with which he was associated, are

31 Castle, Terry: »The Gothic Novel«, in: John Richetti (ed.): The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780, Cambridge 2005, pp. 673–706; here p. 686.

32 Davison, Carol Margaret: History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764–1824, Cardiff 2009, p. 46.

33 Carter, Angela: »Afterword«, in: Angela Carter: Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories, New York 1996, pp. 459f.; here p. 460.

34 Cavanaugh, William T.: »The Invention of Fanaticism«, in: Modern Theology 27 (2011), pp. 226–237; here p. 229. Cavanaugh refers, more specifically to the *religious* fanatic as »one of the stock characters of modernity« (ibid.). On the question of religion, while some secret so-

anxiogenic – anxiety-inducing – phenomena that are, notably, featured in popular conspiracy theories and a cross-section of national Gothics – the German, the American, and the Scottish. Surprisingly, no study yet exists identifying a range of national fanatics as a compelling cluster in the pages of Gothic literature, manifestations of terrorist politico-religious threats. With an eye to writing such a study that addresses their complex national and transnational significance in the pages of Gothic literature, I wish to sketch out a few key ideas on this topic. As is evidenced in the pages of Gothic fiction, every nation, in different eras, creates the Gothic it needs. In other words, the Gothic possesses an incredible modal neuroplasticity across media and cultural forms that renders it a mode unrivalled in its adaptability in the cultural survival of the fittest.[35]

The word »fanatic« was first used in the mid-sixteenth century, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to refer to »an action or speech [… that] might result from possession by a deity or demon« and »characterized, influenced, or prompted by excessive and mistaken enthusiasm, *esp.* in religious matters«. During the Enlightenment, fanaticism »conjured up everything antithetical to, and rejected by, enlightened rationality« and accordingly »carried a primarily negative valence«.[36] Fanaticism was also increasingly associated during this era with politics and, in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, where the concept became a preoccupation, it came to mean »a deliberate overstepping of the limits of human reason«.[37] In the wake of the French Revolution that awakened Kant from his »political slumber«, according to Hannah Arendt,[38] he drew a clear distinction between enthusiasm and fanaticism. While he applauded the enthusiast as he did not violate the moral law – indeed, Kant claimed, »nothing great has ever been accomplished in the world without« enthusiasm[39] – the fanatic violated the moral law, becoming »untethered in his delusion of

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cieties like the Hellfire Club were anti-religious, others, like the Freemasons, upheld religious ideas and values. Given their deployment of religious-style rituals and their reliance on mystification, secret societies of the immediate post-Enlightenment were arguably pseudo-theological political forces.

35 Davison, Carol Margaret: »Burning Down the Master's (Prison)-house: Revolution and Revelation in Colonial and Postcolonial Female Gothic«, in: Andrew Smith/William Hughes (eds.): Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre, Houndmills/Basingstoke 2003, pp. 136–154; here p. 136.

36 Goldstein, Jan: »Enthusiasm or Imagination? Eighteenth-Century Smear Words in Comparative National Context«, in: Lawrence E. Klein/Anthony J. La Vopa (eds.): Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850, San Marino/California 1998, pp. 29–51; here p. 29.

37 Kant, Immanuel: Critique of Practical Reason, trans. by Lewis White Beck, New York 1956, p. 88.

38 Arendt, Hannah: Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, ed. by Ronald Beiner, Chicago 1982, p. 6.

39 Quoted in Goldsmith, Zachary R.: Fanaticism: A Political Philosophical History, Philadelphia 2022, p. 60.

having direct access to God and the hidden noumenal world«.[40] The fanatic was thus associated in Kant's philosophy with »excessive passion«, »delusion of mind«, and potential »action«, regarded as »all the more dangerous because of [… his potential] active orientation«.[41]

It is fitting that the Gothic and the fanatic should come together, for the Gothic is a literature of extremism that revels in transgression and sublime transcendence, and the fanatic is an embodiment of extremism, a limit case, a quintessentially Gothic figure who probes and transgresses boundaries that often extend beyond the limits of the rational. In essence, the fanatic is akin to the figure of the monster, a role frequently assumed by the seductive and deceptive Gothic hero-villain whom David Punter has rightly described as »incommensurate«, given that s/he exists »on a pure trajectory of desire, with no appreciation of limits«.[42] According to Dominique Colas in his scholarly genealogy of fanaticism, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories*, the concepts of civil society and fanaticism »have mutually defined each other since the beginning of the sixteenth century, the time of both Renaissance humanism and the Protestant Reformation«,[43] the fanatic operating as a monstrous double to civil society, one consistently positioned in opposition to it. Just as the invading, destructive monster, in the nature of both his threat and defeat, helps society set out and understand its boundaries and values, so too does the fanatic.

Whether featured in German, Scottish, or American literature, the fanatic and the fanatical secret society are notably always associated with the occult and the supernatural. On one hand, this signals their perceived extraordinary power for as Eugenia C. DeLamotte has cogently argued, »[t]he ›fear of power‹ embodied in Gothic romance is a fear not only of supernatural powers but also of social forces so vast and impersonal that *they seem to have supernatural strength*«.[44] The connection, however, extends beyond a perceived power in »secret society«-based German ghost-seeing Gothic novels, as these figures and associations engage with actual necromancy, delusions, and machine-based technologies that foster optical illusions. In their consistent engagement with such delusion-making machines, these works expose the »smoke and mirrors« mystification often deliberately nurtured in relation to secular political power.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 65.

42 Punter, David: Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law, Basingstoke 1998, p. 13.

43 Colas, Dominique: Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories, Stanford 1997, p. xv.

44 DeLamotte, Eugenia C.: Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic, New York/Oxford 1990, p. 17 (emphasis added).

It should be noted here that scientific *de*mystification was the objective of early magic lantern shows, as Terry Castle has shown.[45] These were undertaken in the public interest to expose frauds and charlatans who would otherwise delude people. German ghost-seeing novels, however, feature fraudulent, delusion-inducing magic lantern shows designed to do the exact opposite – their objective is to mystify rather than demystify. It is here that a further distinction must be drawn as the authors of these works are usually intent on *de*mystification – on exposing the frauds engendered by this mechanical apparatus – unlike the charlatans featured within them. Schiller's *The Ghost-seer* serves as a noteworthy exception to this rule as it exhibits a profound ambivalence about pre-Enlightenment spiritual belief systems. Setting this ambivalence aside, what German ghost-seeing novels share in common is that they register a deep-seated anxiety about the potentially nefarious uses of modern technologies, especially if and when they get into the wrong hands and are used to promote certain fanatical ideologies.

In both Kant's philosophy and much Gothic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there exists a compelling supernatural connection between fanaticism and ghost-seeing that has yet to be recognized or theorized. In his genealogical history of fanaticism, Colas notes that it was Calvin who first mobilized the lexical field connecting the idea of fanaticism to the notion of phantoms and phantasms – a connection forged, in part, as a result of various misspellings of the word »fanatic« using a »ph« instead of an »f« in both English and French documents in the Reformation era.[46] Calvin employed this link between the *fanatic* and *phantoms* to denounce the fanatical Anabaptists, who were said to be »under the influence of a false light or hallucinogenic vision«.[47] The German Lutheran reformer, Philip Melanchthon, and Dutch Calvinist, Gisbertius Boetius, indicted the Anabaptists on the same grounds and by the next century, the term »fanatic« was being more broadly used by theologians like Jacques-Bénin Bossuet to stigmatize such sects as the Quakers who believed »that all their reveries« were divinely inspired.[48] Concurrent with the »German Gothic boom« of the 1780s and 1790s, Kant defined fanaticism in his 1790 *Critique of Judgment* as »the delusion of *wanting to SEE something beyond all bounds of sensibility*«.[49] This definition piggybacked on the Reformation idea that fanatics were delusional ghost-*seers* subject to hallucinations, to suggest that

45 Castle, Terry: The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny, Oxford 1995, p. 143.

46 D. Colas: Civil Society and Fanaticism, p. 12.

47 W.T. Cavanaugh: The Invention of Fanaticism, p. 230. This early use of the term »fanatic« is both fascinating and ironic and is equally applicable to the delusional Calvinist fanatics, of various stripes, who see ghosts and hear voices in the Gothic works aforementioned.

48 D. Colas: Civil Society and Fanaticism, p. 13f.

49 Kant, Immanuel: Critique of Judgement, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis/London 1987, p. 135 (emphasis added).

they were earnest ghost-*seekers*, the source of whose fanatical visions was actually psychological.

At a time when fanaticism, albeit still religiously-inflected, was becoming increasingly associated with politics, German Gothicists resurrected the fanaticism-delusion link for didactic, entertainment, philosophical, and affective purposes. In the *Schauerroman*, the aptly named shudder novel, authors crafted a new monster: a combination French Revolutionary terrorist-cum-secret society fanatic whose methods and their effects registered the convulsions of this post-Enlightenment revolutionary era galvanized by the transnational Bavarian Illuminati panic. In mapping the French revolutionary onto the secret society fanatic, German Gothicists conflated the philosophical sources of that Revolution with what were regarded as its criminal, bloody outcomes. Given the venom with which German literature was vilified in the late 1790s, it is noteworthy that German Gothicists also tended to advance an anti-Jacobin message, in alignment with the works of Robison and Barruel, as opposed to a pro-Jacobin message. The affective impact of their fanatical secret society ghost-seeing works exemplified the Marquis de Sade's characterization of Gothic fiction as »the necessary offspring of the revolutionary upheaval which affected the whole of Europe«.[50]

While scholars of German Gothic have generally classified these works as ghost-seeing novels, positioning them exclusively in that category depoliticizes them and discounts their significance in relation to the shifting eighteenth-century political landscape. It also risks ignoring their engagements with contemporary issues popular in German and Enlightenment philosophy and theology, such as skepticism, freethinking, and the existence of spectral apparitions, just to name a few. Classifying them as »conspiracy fiction«, as Robert Miles does in his essay devoted to »Political Gothic«,[51] also has critical risks as it ignores the vital and unique role played by the supernatural and spectral technologies, a conjunction fundamental to these narratives.

Retaining, for now, the established category of ghost-seeing fiction, it was Friedrich Schiller in *The Armenian; Or, the Ghost-Seer* (1788; translated 1795), who launched this subgenre (*Geisterseherroman*), laying down its narrative recipe, and inspiring such works as Cajetan Tschink's *The Victim of Magical Delusions* (1790/1793; trans. 1795) and Carl Grosse's *Horrid Mysteries* (1791/1795; trans. 1796). Technological necromancy and delusional ghost-seeing serve as conjoined centerpieces in these secret society, conspiracy-driven narratives where Schiller blends what he

50 Sade, Donatien Alphonse François de : »An Essay on Novels«, in: Donatien Alphonse François de Sade: The Crimes of Love, Heroic and Tragic Tales, Preceded by an Essay on Novels, trans. by David Coward, Oxford 2008, pp. 3–20; here p. 13.

51 Miles, Robert: »Political Gothic Fiction«, in: Angela Wright/Dale Townshend (eds.): Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion, Edinburgh 2015, pp. 129–146; here p. 142.

refers to as »fanatical enthusiasm« (»fanatische Begeisterung«) with magic-lantern generated optical illusions that are cunningly designed to seduce and deceive credulous young victims into criminal – and, in the works of Schiller's successors, revolutionary – activity.

As scholars have noted, the Gothic novel has trafficked in delusion since its inception, but the combination of fanatical secret societies and magic-lantern-created apparitions is unique to the German Gothic. The dominant visual medium in the West for the last 350 years, the magic lantern is a seventeenth-century invention that used mirrors and light to project terrorizing ghostly images. Rather fittingly, given its role in German ghost-seeing/secret society fiction where it is often manipulated to suggest divine power or divinely ordained actions and events, it developed out of the *camera obscura*, a scientific technology invented by a Jesuit to mimic the supernatural experience of divine illumination.[52]

In the 1780s and 1790s, the magic lantern was being popularized and transformed into a more multi-sensorial, theatrical entertainment known as the phantasmagoria. It incorporated eerie sound effects, smoke, music, sets, and other props, its images becoming more realistic and terrorizing after Étienne-Gaspard Robertson's development of the fantascope, a large magic lantern that was drawn back and forth on two parallel brass rails as images were projected onto the screen from behind.[53] It is fascinating to note that while demonic and monstrous Gothic figures were a mainstay, such as »looming ten-foot-high, [double-sexed], horned and web-footed devils«,[54] bloody revolutionary fanatics like Danton, Marat, and Robespierre, all principal Jacobin figures associated with the September Massacres, were also featured.[55] That we witness this trans-medial use of the magic lantern in the German ghost-seeing novel, in conjunction with what was perceived as the terrorist and even occult activities sometimes ascribed to secret societies, is fascinating, complex, and compelling to unpack.

52 Crary, Jonathan: Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century, Cambridge/Massachusetts 1992, p. 33.

53 Vara, Maria: »The magic lantern as a Gothic literary instrument«, in: Interdisciplinary Science Reviews 48 (2023), pp. 533–544; here p. 538.

54 Hoeveler, Diane: »Smoke and Mirrors: Internalizing the Magic Lantern Show in *Villette*«, in: Robert Miles (ed.): Gothic Technologies: Visuality in the Romantic Era, https://romantic-circles.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/RC_Praxis_2005_Gothic%20Technologies.pdf. (last accessed 15.02.2025).

55 T. Castle: The Female Thermometer, p. 149.

III.

On that note, I would pause briefly and make the following observation: although, due to their esoteric nature, secret societies possessed a supernatural mystique, my research to date has failed to uncover any actual evidence of them or their agents deploying the optical technology of the magic lantern – alternately known as »the lantern of fear«[56] – in any of their rituals or for recruitment purposes such as is represented in German ghost-seeing novels (the *Geisterseherroman*). Johann George Schröpfer, a coffee-house owner and notorious »ghost-raiser« who organized a breakaway lodge of Freemasons in Leipzig, may serve as the single possible exception. Schröpfer used numerous magic-lantern-generated optical tricks at his private séances, some featuring »female spirits shown in dishabille« where he peppered his prefacing commentary with Masonic and Cabbalistic references.[57]

In the 1790s, secret societies were indicted by their detractors, with no hard evidence, for fostering delusions. In his *Proofs of Conspiracy*, for example, John Robison claimed that Freemasons were recruiting and deluding their members by way of magic and superstitious ideas. It is significant that Robison's comments were not accompanied by details identifying specific lodges or references to optical technologies. He also entirely excluded British Freemasons in his accusation. Instead, and notably, it was Germany that came in for a trouncing as Robison ascribed to German principalities, as a collective, the defect of listening »with greedy ears to the nonsense and jargon of fanatics and cheats« and falling victim to »the gross absurdities of magic, exorcism, witchcraft, [ghost-raising,] fortune-telling, transmutation of metals, and universal medicine«.[58] According to Robison and in keeping with the popular political mythology of the era, Germans were characterized as delusional as a collective, the natural and willing dupes of secret societies.

IV.

The preoccupation with delusion is writ large in German ghost-seeing/secret-society works and contrasted with the idea of illumination. Jointly, these concepts may be ranged under the aegis of the theme of Enlightenment, with the motifs of light and dark being foregrounded, in combination with references to light-based optical

56 M. Vara: The magic lantern as a Gothic literary instrument, p. 534.

57 Jones, David J.: Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern: Desire, Eroticism and Literary Visibilities from Byron to Bram Stoker, Basingstoke 2014, p. 32.

58 Robison, John: Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati and Reading Societies, London/Edinburgh 1798, p. 65.

technologies that are purposefully counterpointed with obscurity. Readers also note how the concept of obscurity is extended to politico-religious obscurantism, which proves to be the order of the day in German ghost-seeing novels: mysterious secret society figures deliberately restrict and manipulate knowledge in order to seduce and ultimately destroy their deluded victims – those willing ghost-seekers. *Horrid Mysteries* provides a perfect example of this, as the words »delusion« and »delusional«, in combination with the sensation of hallucination, punctuate every other page. Indeed, as Don Carlos states at the novel's end, his »whole existence […] resembled a dream«.[59] These works manipulate traditional Gothic locales to magnificent effect – forests, caves, abysses, ruins, poorly lit churches, etc. – sites that obscure the ability to see clearly. Indeed, Gothic atmospherics are layered on thick in the form of disorienting and oneiric landscapes that grow more labyrinthine, obscure, and nightmarish by the chapter as the protagonist, yearning for illumination, finds himself figuratively, and often literally, mystified and in the dark. The reader also notes that these terror-inducing locales not only reflect inner, psychological obscurity and confusion but are physical places frequently featured in magic lantern and phantasmagoria spectacles, locales where those spectacles were often performed. The most famous of such settings was a ruined 1688 Capuchin monastery (Couvent des Capucines) near the Place Vendôme in Paris, where, between 1799 and 1803, Robertson staged his popular phantasmagoria show.[60]

What Ann Radcliffe does in crafting a Female Gothic fiction that merges the novel of sensibility, the seduction novel, and the Gothic to chronicle the treacheries confronting young middle-class women in a safely distant historical and national setting, the German ghost-seeing novel does in a contemporary setting for young men. Its lens is firmly focused on gifted and privileged yet vulnerable youth under siege within the maelstrom of the rapidly modernizing world and its corrupting pseudo-theological political forces. From the outset, these protagonists are barraged by bizarre yet mysteriously connected events that confound their reason and senses. As if literally subject to a magic lantern presentation designed to delude and terrorize him – a technology alternately and fittingly known as the lantern-of-fear[61] – the Prince in one of *The Ghost-seer's* early scenes, for example, confused by the melée, is suddenly presented – to his and the reader's utter astonishment – with the severed head of a man he saw alive just moments earlier, a man, he is told, who had set out to assassinate him.[62] Severed heads and bleeding corpses was notably, in addition to other *memento mori* objects, popular set pieces in magic-lantern spectacles.

59 Grosse, Carl: Horrid Mysteries. A Story from the German of the Marquis of Grosse, trans. by Peter Will, Richmond/Virginia 2016, p. 320.

60 M. Vara: The magic lantern as a Gothic literary instrument, p. 537.

61 Ibid., p. 534.

62 F. Schiller: The Ghost-Seer, p. 382.

In combination with this confusing sensory onslaught, nothing is quite what it seems. As Don Carlos discovers in *Horrid Mysteries*, the so-called ›brotherhood‹ he has joined proves to be monstrously anti-Christian, demanding he undertake homicidal acts against his own family. In addition, he is told he must be willing to sacrifice his self-interest and desires on the altar of the nefarious collective. It is noteworthy that these secret society victims share a similar trajectory and solipsistic nightmare with Calvinist Gothic fanatics who, over time, experience a series of harrowing divisions, both external and internal. In what are represented as fast-moving nightmares, replete with unexplained connections, secret society initiates become alienated from God, nature, community, and self. When Don Carlos encounters his wife Elmira, still living, long after he witnessed her horrifying murder, he wonders if he has been deceived by a delusional phantom of his own imagination. And this is precisely the point, as both Carl Grosse and his English Translator suggest, that there are two parties involved in the delusional nightmares represented in this novel: the ghost-seeker with the overactive imagination on a spiritual quest, and the sinister secret-society lanternist/necromancer intent on his seduction. Both sides are identified as being ›at fault‹ – the deceiver and the deceived, the deluded and the charlatans who strive to delude. This two-way street dynamic is foregrounded in Don Carlos's case when he realizes, his »whole existence still resembl[ing] a dream«,[63] that he was the victim of both »deluded and self-deluding hopes«.[64]

A similar phenomenon transpires in *The Ghost-seer* where a charlatan Sicilian necromancer and a mysterious Armenian loom large in a politico-religious plot to convert a Protestant Prince to Roman Catholicism, murder the royal who precedes him in line to the throne, and position the Prince as ruler of his principality, its inhabitants also targeted for conversion. The Prince is groomed, glamoured, and adored to the point of, the reader is explicitly told, »a continued state of intoxication«.[65] Figuring this seduction process as a form of addiction is fitting, given how the Prince, surrounded by calculating, deceptive, and flattering influences who offer him no time to reflect or resist, becomes the victim of alluring delusions, his senses serving only to further confound him.

Key to his downfall are three apparitions, all possibly generated by a magic lantern. The first involves a bizarre fake séance for the Prince's deceased friend where the Sicilian necromancer is exposed as a fraud, an event that transpires simultaneously with the unexpected appearance of an actual apparition that seems to substantiate the Armenian's authentic necromantic powers. The second apparitional episode reinforces the sense of those powers as another bloody spectre is conjured, who stunningly reveals, in response to a question asked by the mysterious

63 C. Grosse: Horrid Mysteries, p. 320.

64 Ibid., p. 321.

65 F. Schiller: The Ghost-Seer, p. 435.

Armenian, that he was the victim of fratricide. The third and final seductive delusion involves the »apparition« of a »supernaturally perfect« Greek woman in collusion with the Armenian, who leaves the Prince »wrapped in a dream«,[66] after which he conspires in the murder of his principality's ruler.

The Prince thus loses his mental and moral footing in seductive, doom-laden stages, a downfall the narrator attributes to inadequate educational and religious foundations. His intellectual transitions, figured as a descent, are painstakingly detailed and fundamental to his damnable tale: »he had entered this labyrinth as a credulous enthusiast, had left it as a sceptic, and at length became a perfect freethinker«.[67] In the process, Schiller sets up numerous targets in this novel. In addition to enthusiastic fanatics, he indicts sceptics, freethinkers, Roman Catholics, and Calvinists.

Schiller's Prince, bereft of protective family or intelligent friends, like the protagonists in Grosse's and Tschink's novels, ends up but a ruin of his once promising self. The ruin, a popular and romanticized Gothic architectural site, also serves as an emblem of a young man utterly destroyed by moral corruption. The Prince's ruin in Schiller's novel, the narrator further explains, is enabled by the erosion of family ties in the treacherous new modern world where pernicious secret society members, referred to as »brothers«, are ultimately revealed, in true Gothic fashion, to be duplicitous »Others«, entrenching themselves as family while possessing a hidden, inimical agenda.

In these three German ghost-seeing novels, the reader witnesses a truly terrorizing seduction and deception that is distinctly German as it involves an encounter with the Kantian sublime, that is, as per Kant's definition, »accompanied with a certain dread«.[68] This is *not* the pleasurable terror readily cited as the traditional experience represented in the Gothic novel as theorized by Edmund Burke in his pre-revolutionary 1757 work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Rather, it is a shudder-inducing dread similar to what Burke describes in his 1790 publication, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, as a more »fearful«, »masculine« sublime.

This dreaded terror arguably shares something in common with what 1790s cultural critics called the »gothic gloom« in German literature. It finds its British incarnations in early nineteenth-century Gothic classics such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Its function in these earlier German secret society novels is to reveal a

66 Ibid., p. 480.

67 Ibid., p. 432.

68 Kant, Immanuel: Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime, trans. by John T. Goldthwaite, Berkeley 2004, p. 47.

dreaded yet undeniable truth, a truth those experiencing the French Revolution, especially at the height of the Terror, were in the process of learning, one guillotined victim at a time – namely, that the greatest terror resides with other human beings, as man can be a monster to man. While there are no supernatural creatures in these works – no vampires, no zombies, no wolfmen – there are other predatorial, self-interested human beings, like the Armenian, who assume a terrorizing supernatural mystique. As the reader is informed, rather pointedly, in the Second Book of Schiller's *The Ghost-seer*, it is »parasites« in human form who »poisoned [the Prince's] excellent heart«.[69]

The supernatural and the otherworldly nevertheless play a central role in these works. Like Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto*, Schiller may be said to take a page out of Shakespeare in *The Ghost-seer* with a slightly modified version of Hamlet's tantalizing statement to Horatio, »there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in [Enlightenment] philosophy«[70] Notably, the Prince cites this original line from *Hamlet* immediately after his initial encounter with the Armenian, whose supernatural powers – unlike those of the charlatan Sicilian necromancer – are never fully brought into the light and elucidated.

In his captivating book, *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern*, David J. Jones unpacks the erotic coding of the magic lantern from its creation in the Gothic through to contemporary horror cinema, but he ignores the crucial politico-religious coding that is at play in these German Gothic ghost-seeing works.[71] The pressing question is what might lie behind these secret-society/magic-lantern couplings? A hint is perhaps offered in Tschink's novel, *A Victim of Magical Delusions*, in relation to a fraud designed to lure a man into a revolutionary plot in Portugal. Alumbrado, the Illuminati-connected conspirator who creates the alluring optical illusions that delude his victim, explains the rationale behind a key event, explaining, »The throwing down [of a] picture *by an invisible hand* [… was used to suggest] that a higher power had decreed the dethronement of the King«.[72] This highly suggestive statement recalls Walpole's use of the supernatural in *The Castle of Otranto,* where seemingly bizarre events – like a giant helmet crushing an heir apparent and subjects stepping out of portrait paintings – are not only granted credibility but interpreted as divinely ordained events.

The acts of mimicking and grasping after an invisible hand that guides human events and validates human actions in German ghost-seeing fiction seem, likewise, to be bound up with the loss of pre-Enlightenment belief systems and certainties

69 F. Schiller: The Ghost-Seer, p. 435.

70 Ibid., p. 380.

71 Cf. D.J. Jones: Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern.

72 Tschink, Cajetan: The Victim of Magical Delusions, trans. by Peter Will. Seattle/Washington 2022, p. 246.

relating to a higher power and a higher Truth. As Terry Castle has rightly noted about this phenomenon in the British Gothic, »Even while celebrating the new imperatives of the Enlightenment, the eighteenth century also mourned – as we do – a lost world of supernatural beings. In the pale, magic-lantern-like illusionism of Gothic it learned to make do with cheap simulacra«.[73] German ghost-seeing fiction frequently illustrates how questing for an invisible hand renders one susceptible to delusion. Secret societies exploit that desire by conjuring an old-world mystique of possessing supernatural power and control over the invisible world.

The invisible hand carries other significance. Seductive fanatics – especially those intent on securing political power – must be seen to possess this supernatural power and control over the invisible world. They must also be seen to be divinely inspired and directed, their actions divinely ordained. Their ghost-seeing and necromantic ghost-raising – perpetrated by fraud and fabrication using hidden magic lanterns – are vital components of their allure and recruitment strategy. And it is important to recognize that this is no transparent magic-lantern show about whose fraudulence its viewers are aware, but a concealed magic lantern show projected from behind the scenes that is designed to delude. Counter to the early use of the magic lantern for the educational purpose of demystifying claims around supernaturalism, scientific technologies are employed in these novels for occult ends to masquerade as the supernatural, with mystification being the goal.

True to the British Gothic's popular anti-clerical agenda, Schiller exposes and indicts the obscurantist machinations of the Roman Catholic Church, an institution he portrays as a demonic anti-Christian secret society brotherhood. Although engaged in necromancy and the dark arts, they are shown to have adapted modern technologies to achieve their sinister objectives. We are also informed that the licentious Bucentauro secret society with its »execrable philosophy« and manners that »were not only a disgrace to their own rank, but even to human nature itself«, »enumerated many of the clergy among its members, and could even boast of some cardinals at its head«.[74] It is they who undertake the Prince's moral corruption and fleece him financially. While not sharing Schiller's clerical target, Grosse and Tschink use similar methods to attack the exploitative Illuminati-style secret societies.

It is significant that a didactic message is also of paramount importance in the English cultural transfer and translation of these German ghost-see(k)ing, secret society novels. Although the conspirators are ultimately revealed to be working for the Holy Inquisition in Schiller's novel, the sermonizing English translator ignores Schiller's anti-Catholic critique, and connects the conspirators to the Bavarian Illuminati despite the fact that that secret society is never once mentioned in *The Ghost-*

73 T. Castle: The Gothic Novel, p. 694f.

74 F. Schiller: The Ghost-Seer, p. 432.

Seer, not even in association with the Bucentauro. The novel's prefacing advertisement for the first English edition reiterates the translator's framing interpretation, however, foregrounding what was then perceived to be the more imminent threat in Britain.

It would seem that, even in translation, every nation creates the Gothic it needs.

V.

I have said that German Gothicists forged a link between fanatical secret societies and delusional phantoms, as generated through the optical technology of the magic lantern, for didactic, entertainment, philosophical, and affective purposes. I want to close with a few words about the affective impact of those works and what was perceived by cultural critics of the time to be their dangers.

German Gothicists innovatively worked to transfer the terrorizing somatic and hypnotic effects of the phantasmagorical magic lantern show to the Gothic novel form. They did this, on one hand, to more spectacularly convey the affective impact of terror on its victims in their narratives. Their technique also served, I would argue, as a significant step towards transferring terror inside, towards enhancing a character's interiority. This aesthetic technique evidences, in advance of the works of Hoffmann, Hogg, and Maturin, a step in the transition from the terror being *of Germany* to its being *of the soul*. It is astonishing what role frantic, anxiety-inducing novels – as Wordsworth referred to the German novels of his day[75] – played in the development of the novel. This technique also greatly enhanced the immersive reading experience.

A recent blog about Schiller's *The Ghost-seer* describes the experience of reading that novel as feeling »like stepping out of a dream or hallucination, whose details and meaning lie tantalisingly out of reach« (»Word Traveller«). This aligned with my own experience reading these German ghost-seeing novels, although, in addition to this disorienting, oneiric sensation, I also felt an ominous sense of dread in many of the scenes in Grosse's and Tschink's novels. With the exception of Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions* and Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, I have never had a somatic response to Gothic fiction. The consistent atmosphere of ominous darkness, unsettling and uncanny mystery, and dread in these German ghost-seeing novels was noteworthy to me in terms of their affective impact. The sensation of being in attendance at a disorienting, hypnotic magic-lantern show while reading sections of these works was palpable. I was especially unsettled by the sequences featuring secret society meetings and tribunals held in obscure, treacherous locales. Notably,

75 Wordsworth, William: »Preface to *Lyrical Ballards*«, in: Duncan Wu (ed.): Romanticism: An Anthology, Oxford 1996, pp. 250–269; here p. 254.

my responses came more than two centuries after these works were published. This is significant because, as has been noted, terror often gets lost in translation. Terror rarely transcends its historic moment, especially across centuries.

I, and the anonymous blogger, as it turned out, are in excellent company. This transmedial experience, where the terror of lantern-of-fear phantasmagoria was transferred onto the page, was actually a phenomenon noted by commentators and intellectuals of the era, including the Marquis de Sade, Hester Piozzi (»Mrs. Thrale«), and Charles Nodier. De Sade claimed that Lewis's *The Monk* exemplified this new, popular phenomenon in the post-French Revolution novel »whose only merit, more or less, consists of their reliance on witchcraft and phantasmagoria«.[76] As we know, Lewis was heavily influenced by the German Gothic, and I would suggest that the effect noted by de Sade was perhaps, in part, the result of that influence, specifically of those German Gothic novels that brought the optical effects of the magic lantern onto the page. Significantly, Hester Piozzi's characterization of cultural life in the 1790s forges this German-phantasmagoria connection when she references how new German plays and novels, filled »with what Parisians call phantasmagoria«, were all the rage.[77]

The powerful effects of these German lantern-of-fear-based narratives are perhaps best evidenced by the experiences of two of their most renowned contemporaries – Ludwig Tieck and Thomas de Quincey. After reading the first two volumes of Grosse's *Horrid Mysteries* aloud with two friends, Tieck experienced vivid hallucinations and dreadful nightmares, which he compellingly described as follows: »Terror enveloped me, *shudders*, the most dreadful ones, were breathing at me, everything around me came to life, horrifying shadows hunted each other around me; my room and I seemed to fly into a black infinity«.[78] This description arguably serves as the best endorsement for a Gothic novel ever written. What is perhaps most fascinating is how Tieck puts the *shudder* into the *Schauerroman* with this graphic description, where it sounds as if he has ingested a drug and is having an intoxicating, psychedelic, yet terrorizing experience.

Thomas De Quincey had a similar experience in 1802 at the age of seventeen, two years before he began regularly using opium to which he fast became addicted. De Quincey had another previous addiction, however, as he was consuming a steady diet of Gothic fiction. His journal reveals that, over the course of eight weeks, he was reading two and three books at a time – sixty pages in the morning, a chapter in the afternoon, a volume and a half in the evening – (a regimen resembling the dosing of medicine) – all of which filtered into his dreams. Unlike in Tieck's case,

76 D.A.F. de Sade: An Essay on Novels, p. 13.

77 Quoted in D.J. Jones: Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern, p. 43.

78 Andriopoulos, Stefan: Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, The Gothic Novel, and Optical Media, Princeton/New Jersey 2013, p. 99.

where the impact was felt in his waking life, this regular consumption filtered into de Quincey's sleeping life. While his reading menu was certainly varied, running from Ann Radcliffe and Sophia Lee to Friedrich Schiller and Carl Grosse, it was consistently and extremely Gothic in nature, and included a heavy helping of German Gothic literature. On Thursday, May 5th, 1803, de Quincey jotted down visions from his Schiller-inflected dream of the previous evening where he relates how he found himself in attendance »at a banquet where a mysterious stranger enter[ed] in, on whose approach [hung] fate, and the dark roll of many woes«.[79]

Some German cultural critics – like Johann Gottfried Hoche in his 1794 polemic, *Intimate Letters: The Current Reading Addiction and Its Influence on the Reduction of Domestic and Public Happiness*, Johann Georg Heinzmann in his 1795 publication, *A Plea to My Nation: On the Plague of German Literature*, Johann Rudolph Gottlieb Beyer in his publication *About Reading Books, Insofar as it is Part of the Luxury of our Times* (1796), and Johann Adam Bergk in his 416-page tome, *The Art of Reading Books* (1799) – had pathologized this habit of unregulated, excessive reading in the 1790s as a type of infection. They coined their own terms to describe it, including »reading rage«, »reading madness« (»Lesewut«), and »reading addiction« (»Lesesucht«).[80] They defined this contemporary reading phenomenon as »the practice of reading too much and too fast«, a process whose effects were said to savage rather than ennoble the brain.[81] According to Hoche, this practice was »a truly great evil, which is as infectious as yellow fever in Philadelphia«.[82] In his insightful 2013 study, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, The Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, Stefan Andriopoulos calls this phenomenon – bringing things back to the topic of fanaticism – *fanatic reading*.[83] Just as the secret societies represented in these German Gothic novels were seeking delusional victims with overactive imaginations, so too were their authors. As far as the book publishers were concerned, credulous readers with over-active imaginations, like Tieck and de Quincey, were precisely what was wanted.

It is both curious and fascinating to discover that the panic over reading German literature in the 1790s that had plagued Britain and America – where the terror

79 Quoted in E.J. Clery: The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762–1800, p. 152f.

80 The Multigraph Collective: Interacting with Print: Elements of Reading in the Age of Print Saturation, Chicago/London 2018, p. 251f.

81 Wordsworth echoes Hoche's and Heinzmann's claims about the dangerous effects of reading in his »Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*« (1802) in his excoriating attack on those »frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse« that »blunt the discriminating powers of the mind« (W. Wordsworth: Preface to *Lyrical Ballards*, p. 254). Notably, Wordsworth identifies Germany as the source of this type of literary production.

82 Quoted in Littau, Karin: Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania, Malden/Massachusetts 2006, p. 43.

83 S. Andriopoulos: Ghostly Apparitions, p. 103.

was said to be *of Germany* – also carried over to Germany. What is especially notable in this instance, however, is how German cultural critics like Hoche, Heinzmann, Beyer, and Bergk deflected the critique of fanatical reading as a national issue instigated by, and exclusive to, Germany. Instead, they ascribed this threat to an exploding print culture whose source – national or otherwise – remained unspecified. Heinzmann, a book publisher and seller, authoritatively noted that »[n]o nation has printed so much as the Germans«.[84] In tandem with this, he expressed particular concern over the dangers of thoughtless, fanatical reading, especially of works that promoted radical, fanatical ideas, noting that it posed a serious threat to youth who were more likely to possess overactive imaginations and had little life experience. Heinzmann insisted, however, that the source of fanatical terrorism was not *of Germany*. Germans were, he defensively claimed, »the unwitting pawns of fanatical ideas that were not their own«.[85]

Especially alarmed by »the spectre of revolutionary France«, conservative pastor J. R. G. Beyer advocated for »the systematic regulation of reading«[86] on the grounds that such light and thoughtless reading undermined Christian beliefs and risked generating dangerous political outcomes. This reading not only risked producing »a creature who is always dissatisfied with the creator and his creation«,[87] but readers who, having »glimpsed an other, better world […] will rise up and forcibly attempt to impose their vision on the real world«.[88] Equally concerned about the growing readership in Germany and the light, diversionary nature of their reading,[89] Bergk echoed the growing »anxiety about literature's capacity to disturb the status quo, even to foment revolution«.[90] Bergk went a step further by deeming political novels inappropriate »for treatment in works of fine art« as they »excite our passions«.[91] Martha Woodmansee has commented, ironically, on Heinzmann's »*fanatical expression* of the same ideas«.[92] On the basis that reading books about fanaticism could fuel fanaticism and socio-political revolution, Beyer, Bergk, and Heinzmann would have banned German ghost-seeing secret society novels.

84 Quoted in Wellmon, Chad: »Touching Books: Diderot, Novalis, and the Encyclopedia of the Future«, in: Representations 114 (2011), pp. 65–102; here p. 65.

85 Ibid.

86 Quoted in Woodmansee, Martha: »Toward a Genealogy of the Aesthetic: The German Reading Debate of the 1790s«, in: Cultural Critique 11 (1988–1989), pp. 203–221; here p. 208.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p. 209.

89 Ibid., p. 206f.

90 Bergk, Johann Adam: Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen, Jena 1799, p. 214 (trans. by Carol Margaret Davison).

91 Ibid., p. 213 (trans. by Carol Margaret Davison).

92 M. Woodmansee: Toward a Genealogy of the Aesthetic, p. 209 (emphasis added).

This concern with fanatical, diversionary, uncritical reading, particularly when it involved reading books about fanatical secret societies, carried over to the English translations of German secret society novels. The Reverend Peter Will, a devout scholar of German literature and a Lutheran minister of the German Chapel in the Savoy, served as the English Translator for both *Horrid Mysteries* and *The Victim of Magical Delusion*. This emigré to England claims to have translated these works as a patriotic duty to his new country. Deeply concerned that the pleasurable terror involved in reading them might overshadow their moral lessons, Will undertook significant damage control by including lengthy prefaces and closing remarks directed at a group he addressed in *Horrid Mysteries* as his »*judicious* readers«.[93] Other readers, by implication, were *injudicious* and impressionable Gothic addicts. This language and Will's paratextual inclusions betray a deep-seated anxiety about reading fanatics who might, in their delusion, misread the denunciation of fanaticism and radical ideologies contained therein, and disregard the exposure of charlatans looking to recruit secret society members.

On the heels of the passing in Britain of the two ›Gagging‹ Acts of 1795 outlawing seditious meetings and treasonable practices, and in advance of the passing in 1799 of the Unlawful Societies Act that restricted the activities of such radical secret societies as the United Irishmen and the United Scotsmen, Will attempted to render these German works relevant to a British audience. Indeed, this was his main objective in translating them, as his specific reference to »corresponding and other Societies« made clear. These fanatical secret society novels offered, Will says, »a serious warning to all those that listen to the seducing voice of secret, corresponding, and other Societies of a similar nature, that pretend to reform the defects of government, while selfish views are concealed under the imposing outside of philanthropy and patriotism«.[94] The fact that the demonic, criminal secret societies represented in these German novels bore no resemblance to the corresponding societies and other clandestine organizations across Britain, which were advocating for civil and legislative reform, illustrates the various political agendas the secret society theme could be used to serve in the paranoid, xenophobic climate of the 1790s. Notably, this was how conservatives like Will conceptualized *all* clandestine societies – namely, as terrorist organizations.

Secret societies featured in fanatic-fixated, paranoiac 1790s Gothic tapped into different national anxieties and fears in the post-revolutionary era. In those fictions, these clandestine theologico-political organizations possessed both an omnipresence and an omnipotence grounded especially in their supernatural mystique and

93 Will, Peter: »Translator's Preface«, in: Carl Grosse: Horrid Mysteries. A Story from the German of the Marquis of Grosse, trans. by Peter Will, Richmond/Virginia 2016, pp. 1–5; here p. 5 (emphasis added).

94 Ibid.

terrorizing invisibility. The fanatic-focused Gothic that followed in the early nineteenth century would, with the rare exception,[95] undertake a different strategy and focus – getting in under the fanatic's skin to explore both the national impact of fanaticism and the terror of a chilling inside story – the »terror of the soul« as referenced by Poe.

But that is a whole other, equally fascinating yet complicated, story.

95 Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816), which represents the Covenanters as a fanatical secret society, serves as one exception.