

# Preface

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This volume investigates the correspondences and differences between two national traditions of ›writing angst‹ as they emerged and developed during the Romantic period: the German Schauerroman and the Anglophone – particularly the Scottish – tradition of the Gothic novel. The initial observation that inspired the joint conference hosted by the German Department of the Technical University Dresden and the English Department at the University of Göttingen in July 2024 was a deceptively simple one. The German Schauerroman proved instrumental in articulating the intellectual, social, and spiritual anxieties of its age in a new and powerful literary form; yet, unlike its British counterpart, it left comparatively few traces in subsequent literary periods. While isolated »Gothic moments« in later German cultural production—such as Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's 1922 silent film *Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens*, or more recent turns to psychological horror in contemporary cinema and fiction – attest to the genre's continuing cultural and critical potential, they cannot claim the continued force of a sustained national tradition. The Schauerroman was, as Barry Murnane has claimed, a largely »late-Enlightenment anthropological and aesthetic phenomenon«<sup>1</sup> which transitioned into the psychological Gothic mode of German Romanticism in the works of Ludwig Tieck and E.T.A Hoffmann, but was later critically marginalized and quickly superseded by the philosophical and realist traditions of German literature. However, the initial impetus the Schauerroman had provided for the transnational dissemination of the Gothic cannot be understated. Numerous scholars have noted – including Carol Margaret Davison, Fred Botting, Monica Germanà, and Catherine Spooner – that the Gothic around 1800 was a fundamentally transnational mode.<sup>2</sup> Its vitality depended on intercultural exchange, and if Edgar Allan Poe would later claim that

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1 Murnane, Barry: »Haunting (Literary) History: An Introduction to German Gothic«, in: Barry Murnane/Andrew Cusack (eds.): *Popular Revenants. The German Schauerroman and its International Reception 1800–2000*, New York 2012, pp. 10–43; here p. 18.

2 Cf. Davison, Carol Margaret: *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764–1824*, Cardiff 2009; Botting, Fred (ed.): *The Gothic. Essays & Studies* 54 (2001); Spooner, Caroline: *Contemporary Gothic*, London 2006; Germanà, Monica/Davison, Carol Margaret (eds.): *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh 2017.

»terror is not of Germany but of the soul« (see Carol Margaret Davison's contribution in this volume), we should not forget that this denial of a genre attribution in national terms points exactly to the transnational expansion the Gothic had gone through, emerging from one national literary tradition and branching out to a larger psychological model employing a set of universal generic tropes. Almost every early Gothic novel featured foreign settings or characters which articulated the tension between the familiar and the alien, constructing a drama of otherness that mirrored contemporary anxieties about nation, identity, and the boundaries of the self. Friedrich Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*, to give an example, is set in Venice, as is – at least partly – Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and the characters in both novels have diverse national provenances. Yet transnationality was not only a thematic concern but also a crucial factor in the literary marketplace: like its characters, the Gothic genre travelled widely. Translation, in particular, played a decisive role in shaping cross-cultural reception and influence. William Robert Rix has traced the immense impact of English translations of Gottfried August Bürger's ballad *Lenore*, which caused a sensation in the Anglophone world and introduced the »German Gothic« as both a source of sublime terror and, later, a target for parody within the British cultural imagination.<sup>3</sup> The German Gothic certainly marked a point of origin which later proliferated through such exchanges, when the Gothic became a shared European language for articulating the uncanny, the repressed, and the socially unassimilable.

In the anglophone world in particular, the Gothic would continually reinvent itself, sustaining cultural relevance across the nineteenth century and beyond. The Gothic's obsession with history, its insistence on engaging with the return of the past or repressed as a mode to subvert and interrogate the present turned it into a dominant cultural counterforce to realism. In Scotland, the works of Robert Burns, James Hogg, Walter Scott, and Robert Louis Stevenson mark the beginning of what may be described as an unbroken Gothic lineage. David Punter has argued that the Scottish Gothic needs to be seen in the context of a national trauma: after the political union with England in 1707 Scotland's history was under the threat of erasure, and the Gothic became an apposite way of telling suppressed histories.<sup>4</sup> James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) exemplify the transformation of the Gothic from an eighteenth-century literature of terror into a modern mode of

3 Cf. Rix, Robert William: »1796: When the Terror Ballad Came to Britain«, in: Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences, 18 (2020), pp.16–36. <https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.610699>.

4 Cf. Punter, David: »Irish and Scottish Gothic«, in: Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 105–124; here p. 106; Punter, David: *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, New York 1996.

psychological inquiry and social critique. Both authors probe the Gothic as a narrative mode of psychological and moral doubleness, exploring themes of fractured identity, repression, and moral ambiguity that were to become central to modern literature. In their work, the Gothic ceases to be a mere vehicle for supernatural horror and instead becomes a means of »writing angst«, of exploring the divided self and the anxieties of modernity. This trajectory was continually reinforced by later intertextual engagements – through both direct rewritings of canonical Gothic texts and innovative hybridizations of the mode with other popular genres, such as crime fiction, science fiction, or the psychological thriller as this volume shows.

No other literary mode has proven as adept at articulating the cultural, social, and political anxieties of periods of collective crisis and disorientation as the Gothic. This was true in the late eighteenth century, when Gothic fiction voiced the social and existential insecurities of a liminal period caught between Enlightenment rationality and emerging fears of fragmentation of identity, gender, and social stability alike. It remains true today: in an age overshadowed by war, ecological catastrophe, threats to the democratic order and global economic precarity, the Gothic modern afterlives continue to provide an expressive medium for the manifold forms of angst haunting modern existence. And they continue to emphasise the importance to come to terms with the past: Chris Baldick, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, defines the distinguishing features of the Gothic as »a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration.«<sup>5</sup> This definition captures not only the literature that arose from the social and political upheavals of the 1790s, but also those texts that, in later eras, confront the lingering hauntings of past injustices – of race, class, gender, and capital – that continue to unsettle the psychological and ideological foundations of the present. As Judith Halberstam has argued, such moments of haunting »create monsters«: figures that materialize repressed histories and expose the fragility of modern identity.<sup>6</sup> Against linear narratives of historical progress and continuity, anglophone Gothic fiction posits disruption, disjunction, and recurrence, producing a profoundly uncanny sense of instability and loss. Recently, Jacques Derrida's and Mark Fisher's notion of hauntology once more accentuated the persistence and relevance of the Gothic in contemporary culture overshadowed by global apocalyptic scenarios and

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5 Baldick, Chris: »Introduction«, in: Chris Baldick (ed.): *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Oxford 1992, pp. xi–xxiii; here p. xix.

6 Halberstam, Judith: »Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's ›Dracula«, in: *Victorian Studies* 36/3 (1993), pp. 333–352; here p. 334.

anxieties.<sup>7</sup> For Derrida, haunting was a structural condition of being: we exist amid traces of what is no longer or not yet present. Fisher reinterpreted this as a diagnosis of cultural stagnation, arguing that late capitalist culture is haunted by »lost futures«. Contemporary Gothic literature and film provide the artistic vocabulary of hauntology, staging the uncanny return of repressed histories and unrealized possibilities, and translating Derrida's abstract idea of absence, loss and spectral haunting into aesthetic and affect-based form.

This volume does not claim to attempt sketching the complete trajectory of the developments of the Gothic in the German and Scottish literary traditions. Others have delivered comprehensive histories of the Gothic. What we can offer to the reader instead is the outcome of a productive exchange of ideas across disciplinary boundaries which testify to the ongoing attraction and diversification of the Gothic genre over the last 250 years.

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7 Derrida, Jacques: *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, New York/London 1994; Fisher, Mark: *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Winchester 2014.