

CROSSCURRENTS BETWEEN THE ENGLISH GOTHIC NOVEL &
THE GERMAN SCHAUERROMAN

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Modern Languages & Literatures

Under the Supervision of Professor Robert Shirer

Lincoln, Nebraska

May 2004

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Crosscurrents between the English Gothic Novel & the German Schauerroman

BY

Andrew Philip Seeger

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CROSSCURRENTS BETWEEN THE ENGLISH GOTHIC NOVEL &
THE GERMAN SCHAUERROMAN

Andrew Philip Seeger, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska, 2004

Advisor: Robert Shirer

This study will examine the phenomenon of Gothic literature in England and Germany in the latter half of the eighteenth century. While the English Gothic novel has received a good deal of scholarly attention, its German counterpart, the *Schauerroman*, has for the most part been neglected and its ties to the English Gothic novel ignored. What scholarship there is often either dismisses the *Schauerroman* as a whole, trivializes its contribution to literary history, or focuses more on dividing the German Gothic tales into arbitrarily conceived subgenres.

This study aims to bring the focus back on the Gothic genre as a whole in the two lands. It will examine the explosive emergence of the Gothic genre in both countries, along with its popularity and the vital role it played in the development of the novel, and of book

publishing, authorship, and readership in general. It will also explore the connections and crosscurrents between Gothic tales of both lands, which includes discussing some non-Gothic works that influenced and were influenced by the genre. The focus of the study is on three main questions: first of all, whether there was a German counterpart to the English Gothic novel; secondly, whether all *Schauerromane* belong in the category of *Trivialliteratur*; and finally, whether any crosscurrents between the Gothic literatures of England and Germany exist.

PREVIEW

for Mom & Papa, Tim & Joel

PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express thanks and appreciation to the many people who have helped me, in one way or another, during my graduate studies and in achieving all I have been able to do. First, I want to thank my dissertation director, Robert Shirer, as well as the other members of my doctorate committee: Jordan Stump, Manfred Jacobson, and Robert Stock, the last of whom was a great inspiration and my mentor in all things Gothic. I learned a great deal in his seminars on 18th- and 19th-century English literature and in discussions with him.

I have learned a great deal from other professors as well, and I wish to thank them for their challenging and enjoyable courses and seminars, advice and guidance outside the classroom, and other help along the way. At the University of Nebraska, I wish to acknowledge Harriet Turner, Russ Ganim, Priscilla Hayden-Roy, Errapel Mejias-Vicandi, Wheeler Dixon, Jonis Agee, Radha Balasbramanian, Marshall Olds, Stephen Behrendt, Christina Brantner, Evelyn Jacobson, with special thanks going to Sheryl Monkeliën, Bruce Erlich, Nicholas Spencer and, most of all, Dieter Karch.

At the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, where I completed my M. A. F. L. L. (Master of Arts in Foreign Languages & Literatures) with dual majors in German and Spanish, I wish to acknowledge Marcus Bullock,

Roswitha Mueller, Gerhard Rauscher, Kathleen Wheatley, Gregory Iverson, Charles Ward, Anthony Ciccone, Santiago Daydi-Tolson, with extra special thanks going to Garry Davis and Sharon Hanson.



Just as important as my professors, my fellow graduate students have been vital to my success, both as colleagues and as friends. Other people within the university setting have also been very important. At the risk of leaving some names out, I wish to show my special appreciation for Leo Gruber, Armorel (Drew) Gruber, Daniel Hutt, Joanna Findlay, Claudia Routon, and María Estrella Sotomayor, along with many others, including Cara Critchfield, Krista Dittman, Joy (Jordan) Suder, Corinna Kahnke, Kendal Obermeyer, Nicole Orr, Svetlana Pashkevich, Kate Ternes, Gary Trogdon, and Amy Young.

Other friends have also supported me in countless ways during my years as a seemingly eternal student, and I thank them for everything: Annegret, Bill, Brian H, Christine, David, Emily G, Emily T, Gary, Jen & Vito, Kim, Malcolm, Shane G, Shane L, Taya, Tom, and Trish. For additional inspiration, I also thank Alison, Amanda, Amie, Erin, Hasmik, Kate, Jess, Kimberly, Tabitha, Tonia, and Zuzana among others. Special thanks to the Drew family (Giles, Jane, Will, & Eleanor) in Shenfield, England, for hosting me during several conferences as well.



Finally and most importantly, I wish to thank members of my family. My relatives -- aunts & uncles, cousins, and Oma -- have been very supportive of my returning to graduate school and pursuing a PhD, as I had always planned, when I could've stayed where I was, moving up the professional ranks as a high-school teacher. Special thanks to my cousins and their families who have hosted my many visits to Atlanta (John, Sarah, Philip, Paul, & David) and Miami (Sherry, Alan, Michael, & Robby) for conference presentations and such.



My immediate family has helped me through my graduate studies more than anyone else. To my brother Joel, about to start graduate school, thanks for your support, helping out with the apartment, and for letting me stay at your place during my many road trips to Minneapolis and Omaha. To my brother Tim & his wife Jen (and daughter Kylie!), thanks for feeding me, putting up with all my laundry visits, and being around to hang out with, as well as giving me a place to stay many times. Most of all, thanks to Mom & Papa for supporting my countless years in graduate school, both in spirit and financially. You have all made these long years of being a poor, struggling graduate student not only possible, but worth the effort.

All of you, along with anyone I forgot to mention, have been a great source of encouragement along the long road to finally earning this doctoral degree. My heartfelt thanks and prayers are with you now and always.

As always, thanks to God for the strength and determination to complete this dissertation and for all the blessings in my life: the ones I recognize, ones I overlook, and ones I may take for granted. Nothing good in my life has come about without the Lord's help.



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CHAPTER 1

HORRID NOVELS & LURID TALES OF TERROR: THE ENGLISH GOTHIC NOVEL & THE GERMAN SCHAUERROMAN

No branch of literature which has once, for any considerable time and in any considerable degree, occupied the attention of the reader, ought to be despised by the student.

~ George Saintsbury¹

Trivial. Forgettable. Worthless. Throughout the centuries, such words have been used to describe various kinds of popular fiction, most often when such works were at the peak of their public appeal. So it was with Gothic literature, both in England and on the Continent, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some critics said that the Gothic tales were too sensationalistic, while others derided such novels for simply being coarse, vile writings which exerted a bad influence on impressionable readers.

The violence and the supernaturalism, the indecency and the obscenity, the halfhearted morals tagged onto the end -- all of these qualities were deemed unworthy of any serious consideration by many critics of the day, and all too frequently, they are often still judged thusly by students and scholars of literature today as well, in

¹ George Saintsbury, preface to *Tales of Mystery*, cited in Devandra P. Varma's *The Gothic Flame* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966) 3.

most cases because they have simply accepted the narrow-minded, subjective viewpoints of earlier times.

Lust, murder, incest, and every atrocity that can disgrace human nature, brought together, without the apology of probability, or even possibility for their introduction. To make amends, the moral is general and *very practical*; it is, 'not to deal in witchcraft and magic because the devil will have you at last!!' We are sorry to observe that good talents have been misapplied in the introduction of this monster.²

Such attitudes have remained prevalent to this day. That might be understandable when one comes across a ludicrous title like *Mystery upon Mystery, a Tale of Earlier Times by the Author of "Black Banner", Baron de Falkenstein*, or the even lengthier *Koenigsmark, the Robber and Terror of Bohemia, in which is introduced Stella, or the Maniac of the Wood, an affecting Tale*. Still, the entire genre shouldn't be judged on the second- and third-rate imitations of writers and publishers whose primary aim was simply trying to cash in on the demand for scary tales.³

Gothic novels served not only as great entertainment, but also helped spread leisure reading across socioeconomic strata.

² Review of *The Monk*. *The British Critic* 7 (June 1796) 677.

³ These titles and many more can be found in Jakob Brauchli, "Literaturangaben, Schauerromanlisten, Erklärung der Abkürzungen und Zeichen. Bibliographical Data, Lists of Novel of Terror, and Explanation of Abbreviations and Symbols", *The English Gothic Novel: A Miscellany in Four Volumes, Volume I: Contexts*, ed. Thomas Meade Harwell (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1986) 279-341.

Furthermore, the question of whether at least some of the novels were of literary quality remains one of personal taste, and some of them remain classics to this day -- or should! On a whole, the genre brought many innovations to writing that greatly affected later literary movements and genres.

While the Gothic novel of England has received a fair amount of scholarly attention, especially since the latter half of the twentieth century, the same cannot be said of its German counterpart, often referred to as the *Schauerroman* ['shudder' or 'quiver novel']. The German *Gotische Roman* ['Gothic novel'] has generally been ignored, with many critics assigning it the lowly distinction of being trivial, utterly unworthy of scholarly attention. In discussing fiction of this sort, terms like *Trivialliteratur*, *Schundliteratur* ['trash literature'], and *Unterhaltungsliteratur* ['entertainment literature'] are frequently employed.⁴

However, as is also the case with the English Gothic novel, such negative attitudes toward the genre and gross stereotypes of the fiction as a whole can often be traced back to the social, political,

⁴ The word *Schauerroman* comes from the verb *schauern*, or *schauern*, both of which can be translated as 'to shudder'. Numerous texts in English therefore translate *Schauerroman* as 'shudder novel'; however, terms like 'Gothic novel', 'shocker', or 'penny-dreadful' are better, as they are also used to describe English novels of the same genre. The different names for this literature will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

and critical biases of the late 1700s and early 1800s, when many of the works were written. In many cases, such biases have carried over until modern times, both in regards to the Gothic genre and to popular fiction in general, without any objective reassessment of the works in question.⁵

Eventually popular fiction and popular culture began receiving more scholarly attention from more than just a few brave pioneers. The literary canon has been reopened and is undergoing reevaluation from all possible angles. Gothic literature, along with many other types of writings, has been receiving much more critical attention. Because much of this popular literature, once viewed as throwaway fiction, had been overlooked by scholars, scholars were confronted with an incomplete picture of literary history.

There may be several explanations for this concept of throwaway fiction, including the fact that, due to the expense of actually purchasing books in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, many of these novels' readers could only get their hands on copies

⁵ There are countless examples of this, but only a few will be mentioned here. Writers of Gothic and/or horror literature who have fallen victim to this kind of prejudice and literary snobbishness include Edgar Allen Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, and Stephen King. Such prejudices extend to best-selling authors of all genres, but this attitude is most prevalent with such popular genres (sometimes dubbed subgenres) as science fiction, fantasy, mystery or detective fiction, romance, westerns, etc., most of which have only received critical attention in the past few decades.

through the lending libraries. These books literally fell apart after going through so many peoples' hands and actually had to be thrown away eventually.⁶

Another factor contributing to this notion of throwaway fiction may be the fact that many of the works were being read, and written, by women. While women represented a large portion of the readership and authorship of Gothic literature, especially in England, their vital role in literary history has often been marginalized in the past. The role of women in the development of literature over the centuries began receiving its proper due, in part, because of studies devoted to Gothic fiction.⁷

Because of its penchant for sensationalism and the supernatural, Gothic fiction is frequently viewed as being somehow less important, or less meaningful, than so-called "serious" literature. This argument, however, is shortsighted, for one only has

⁶ For more on the role which circulating libraries played in the development of the novel, see J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (1-6, 172-3), John Tinnon Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel* (esp. chapter 2), and Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic* (primarily in chapters 1 and 2), and E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*.

⁷ There are many excellent studies devoted to female authorship and readership, including recent studies by Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the eighteenth century* (1992), B. G. MacCarthy, *The Female Pen: Women Writers and Novelists 1621-1818* (1994), George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later 18th Century* (1998), and Ruth P. Dawson, *The Contested Quill: Literature by Women in Germany, 1770-1800* (2001).

to look as far as the works of writers like Cervantes or Defoe for raucous adventures, and all kinds of supernatural elements appear in the works of canonical authors like Homer, Shakespeare, or Dickens. The argument that tales of terror or horror are somehow more lowbrow than others is a flawed one as well, as author and critic H. P. Lovecraft explains:

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tales as a literary form. Against it are discharged all the shafts of a materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naively inspired idealism which deprecates the æsthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature to “uplift” the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism. But in spite of all this opposition the weird tale has survived, developed, and attained remarkable heights of perfection; founded as it is on a profound and elementary principle whose appeal, if not always universal, must necessarily be poignant and permanent to minds of the requisite sensitiveness.⁸

My own interest in literature of the Fantastic led to this study, an interest which includes not only the Gothic, but also the genres of horror, science fiction, and fantasy, as well as my fascination with popular literature, culture, and media. I realize, of course, that a certain portion of fiction which appeals to the masses is

⁸ H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1945 [1973]) 12.

ephemeral (due to theme, language, or whatever is in vogue at a given time), and is thus unlikely to stand the test of time, but I believe that all too often authors and works who attain a certain degree of popularity are met with critical disdain for the simple reason that they are so popular.

At the heyday of the Gothic novel -- as now -- literary critics simply could not abide the fact that the general public favored certain works over what they, the critics, deemed to be truly worthy of being read. There was still a good deal of elitism as the reading public came to encompass all social classes. The growth in readership among women was a decisive factor as well, as there was concern about their impressionability.

[A]rt and æstheticism can be entirely subjective. The division between high and low literature is, at best, a nebulous one.

... What once was dismissed as "pop fiction" is now being taught in the college classroom in addition to traditional great works of literature. ... [T]he bookshelf containing the literary canon continues to expand... If we are open-minded, popular fiction can complement our reading of elite fiction, and vice versa. Exclusionism at either end of the literary artistic spectrum is merely reductionism.⁹

This of course follows through in all of the arts: literature, music,

⁹ Gary Hoppenstand, *Popular Fiction: An Anthology* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997) 6. His introduction to this anthology raises some excellent points on the public and critical reception of popular fiction.

film, art, etc. In many instances, however, this critical disdain gives way to acceptance and even praise later on, as was the case over the years with writers like Dickens, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Poe, Lovecraft, King, and countless others who have seen their standing in literary circles change over the years.

This study will examine the phenomenon of Gothic literature in England and Germany: its explosive emergence, its popularity, and the vital role it played in the development of the novel and of book publishing, authorship, and readership. It will also explore the connections between the Gothic tales of both lands, which includes discussing some non-Gothic works that influenced and were influenced by the genre. It examines three main questions: first of all, whether there was a German counterpart to the English Gothic novel; secondly, whether all *Schauerromane* belong in the category of *Trivialliteratur*; and finally, whether any crosscurrents between the Gothic literatures of England and Germany exist.

In the second chapter, "The Gothic: the Trivialized, the Forgotten, the Maligned", I give an introduction to the English Gothic novel & the German *Schauerroman*, including some discussion of the pivotal role they played in the development of literature at the

end of the eighteenth and the start of the nineteenth centuries, as well as a look at the connections they had to romances, sentimental novels, and other kinds of works that came before them. There will also be a brief discussion of the publishing phenomenon and the mass appeal these tales had.

The third chapter, "The Pit & the Pendulum", examines the development of the Gothic novel in England up until the turn of the century. The first section will trace the English Gothic novel from its beginnings with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* to Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, focusing on how there was a kind of pendulum effect, swinging back and forth between tales of unbridled supernaturalism and explained events. The second section will look at works which might be said to represent the epitome of Gothic literature in England up until the turn of the century.¹⁰

The fourth chapter, "Early German Influences", focuses on the reception by readers, critics, and other writers of German literature up to about 1790, of both the Gothic and non-Gothic varieties, in both England and Germany. It includes some of the better-known works whose influence on the English Gothic novel has been

¹⁰ Although the Gothic genre continued to flourish well into the next century (and beyond), most of the traditional conventions and types of Gothic tales were established by the early 1800s, including those Germanic elements which seeped into English tales.

acknowledged before, including Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, Schiller's *Die Räuber* and *Der Geisterseher*, and others. Following that there will be a discussion of some of the other early influences from Germany, including folk tales and legends.

The fifth chapter, "The Horrid Novels", takes a look at the infamous titles mentioned in Jane Austen's parody of the Gothic, *Northanger Abbey*, as the vast majority of these novels have a connection to German literature in one way or another. Because of the gap in time between Austen's writing of the novel and its subsequent publication, the titles were long believed to have been her own fictitious creations, but through the careful research of a few scholars, notably Montague Summers and Michael Sadleir, the novels were rediscovered and subsequently reprinted. Nevertheless, they are still not that well known to most readers and scholars nowadays, so their inclusion here is vital to this study, as they establish and solidify some of the connections between the English Gothic and the German *Schauerroman*. I also consider the flood of the fragments, (mis)translations, imitations, and plagiarized works that appeared with the increasing demand for similar tales, as well as the parodies that came about as the initial boom of the genre was

coming to an end. This discussion will be continued in the next chapter as well, especially in regards to translations.

The sixth chapter, "Lurid Tales from Across the Sea", considers German works published after 1790, both by some of the "greats" and by lesser-known authors, works infrequently discussed by literary scholars because of their having been relegated to the trashbin of *Trivial-* or *Schundliteratur*. Some of these latter authors' works hardly have extant copies anymore but are discussed in some of the few studies devoted to this literature, others have been rediscovered in recent decades, and others have simply been forgotten. I will discuss a few examples of these lesser-known works and examine their role in this interplay between the English Gothic and the *Schauerroman*.

This all leads to the final chapter, "Gothic Crosscurrents", which culminates the discussion of how these various elements fit together: whether there actually was a German Gothic novel, how the English Gothic novel and the *Schauerroman* are connected, the lasting effects of this literature on later writers, and the phenomenon of popular fiction as a whole and where it belongs in the scholarship and study of literary history.

CHAPTER 2

THE GOTHIC: THE TRIVIALIZED, THE FORGOTTEN, THE MALIGNED

A collection of Novels has a better chance of giving pleasure than of commanding respect.

~ Anna Letitia Barbauld¹

What was it about the Gothic novel and the *Schauerroman* that made them so vastly popular, yet so utterly despised by critics? From the very beginning, the critical reception of Gothic literature was quite different from that of its public reception. Although there was occasionally some praise given to certain authors and works, or at least to some of the elements within the writings, critics for the most part decried the genre and its dark tales. Sadly, this negative viewpoint has prevailed right up to the present with many scholars, academics, and students; in most cases, because they have simply accepted the one-sided opinions that date back centuries.

Why this is so is something of a mystery, especially given the Gothic's similarities to, its influences on, and its relationship with Romanticism, as well as its relationship to fairy tales, legends, epics, and romances.

¹ Anna Letitia Barbauld, "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing", prefixed to *The British Novelists*, cited in John Tinnon Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel: The Popular Reaction from 1760-1830* (Morningside Heights, NY: King's Crown Press, 1943) 14.