Schiller, Coleridge, and the Reception of the «German (Gothic) Tale»¹

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Despite important contributions to the Gothic canon (Die Räuber, 1781; «Der Verbrecher aus verlorenen Ehre,» 1786; Der Geisterseher, 1789) and two centuries of massive critical attention, the role of Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) as one of the accelerants of the German and British Gothic literature movements of the 1790s has until recently received remarkably little attention.² One plausible cause for the delayed recognition lies in the swift and steady English criticism of German Gothic literature as 1) the pulpy mimicry of British forerunners, and 2) an unwelcome presence. Focusing on Gothic elements in Biographia Literaria of 1817, no less an authority than Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) dismissed German Sturm und Drang and Romantic literature as merely derivative of Edward Young’s Night Thoughts (1742, 1745), James Hervey’s Meditations Among The Tombs (1746), Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa (1748) and Sir Charles Grandison (1753), and Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto (1764).³ The widespread agreement on the derivative (and inferior) nature of German Gothic literature has been challenged in findings by Syndy M. Conger (1980, 1987) and more recently by Daniel Hall (2000) and Andrew Phillip Steeger (2004). Conger argues that Schiller’s influence on English and American Gothic literature has been underestimated, in particular with regard to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) and Edgar Allan Poe’s «The Murders in the Rue Morgue» (1841). Hall concludes that English and German Gothic influences are «tides» in an «ever-deepening sea of Gothic literature,»⁴ a thesis explored further in Steeger’s dissertation as «crosscurrents.» Published in 2002, The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, does a good deal to emphasize the influences of Schiller and German Gothic literature on English literature of the 1790s, particularly in the essays by Robert Miles, Terry Hale, and Michael Gamer. Most recently, Jennifer Driscoll Colosimo has documented a compelling explanation for the historical paucity of scholarship on the reciprocal relationships between German and English Gothic literature of the 1790s to the 1820s: she posits an almost entirely Germanisten-free tradition of Gothic literature scholars.⁵ Due perhaps to a lack of awareness of British Gothic literature on the part of experts on German literature and to a corre-
sponding lack of awareness of German Gothic literature on the part of experts on British literature, historical reception demonstrates some disagreement on a number of essential facts and positions central to the understanding of the evolution of Gothic literature. The following study seeks to locate the source of the historical critical divide separating Schiller and the international Gothic turn by tracing the conflicting implications of paradigmatic responses to the Schiller-led German literary invasion of England offered by Coleridge some twenty years apart (1794–1817). Subsequently, an analysis of the chronology and content of Schiller’s early dramas and prose works and their presence in canonical German and British Gothic texts – foremost in the novels of Karl Friedrich Kahlert, Anne Radcliffe, and Matthew Gregory Lewis – addresses the related and contributing reception problem of Whom has been seen to have influenced Whom, and why Schiller has been a relatively minor player in this discussion.

Despite the English roots of Gothic literature touched on above and its increased prominence in England from 1790–1820, by the early nineteenth century Gothic tales were so clearly established as «German Stories» – thus the title of a three-volume British collection of 1826 that Edgar Allan Poe felt the need to reclaim the genre for all humanity in 1839:

THE epithets «Grotesque» and «Arabesque» will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published. [...] I speak of these things here, because I am led to think it is this prevalence of the «Arabesque» in my serious tales, which has induced one or two critics to tax me [...] with what they have been pleased to term «Germanism» and gloom. [...] Let us admit, for the moment, that the «phantasy-pieces» now given are Germanic, or what not. Then Germanism is «the vein» for the time being. To morrow I may be anything but German, as yesterday I was everything else. [...] But the truth is that, with a single exception, there is no one of these stories in which the scholar should recognise the distinctive features of that species of pseudohorror which we are taught to call Germanic, for no better reason than that some of the secondary names of German literature have become identified with its folly. If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul [...].

As is implied by Poe’s compulsion to defend himself against the charge, the association of horror literature with «Germanism» was widespread and the implication was pejorative. In Northanger Abbey (1818), Jane Austen characterizes the 1790s as a decade of «horrid» novels so stereotypically Gothic and German that they constitute self-parodies on both counts. Having cited Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho and Lewis’s The Italian, Austen’s heroine Isabella continues: «I will read you their names directly; [...] Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries» (Austen 33).
The prominence of the concept of «Gothic» as «Germanism» in Poe’s text and (explicitly or implicitly) in the titles chosen by Austen invites a series of questions regarding the evolution of the Gothic novel and the literary traditions of «Germanism.» We must ask, for example, what exactly is the palpably German element of such works? What is the function of their Germanness, which competed with the Italianness of _Otranto_ (Blasone 6)?

What is the marketing significance of this Germanness? Of the nine works cited by Austen, all written in the 1790s, only two were originally written by Germans. Karl Friedrich Kahlert published _Der Geisterbanner. Eine Wundergeschichte aus mündlichen und schriftlichen Traditionen gesammelt_ in 1792, which was adapted into English by Peter Teuthold as _The Necromancer; or, The Tale of the Black Forest_ in 1794; Carl Grosse’s _Der Genius. Aus den Papieren des Marquis C* von G**_ of 1790–94 was adapted into English by Peter Will as _The Horrid Mysteries: From the German of the Marquis of Grosse_ in 1796. That only two of the nine novels were written by Germans indicates that having actual roots in Germany was barely peripherally relevant to the genre characteristics associated with the _German Tale_. Two of the novels cited by Austen invoke German settings in their titles: Eliza Parsons’s _Castle of Wolfenbach_ (1793) and Eleanor Sleath’s _The Orphan of the Rhine_ (1798), thus indicating that the superficial attraction of these novels lay in the plausible Gothic picturesque setting of a land perceived to be gloomy, feudal, and mysterious. Four of the novels highlight their Germanness in a subtitle: Eliza Parsons’s _The Mysterious Warning, a German Tale_ (1796) and Francis Lathorn’s _The Midnight Bell: A German Story, Founded on Incidents in real life_ (1798); Teuthold’s adaptation of Kahlert’s _Der Geisterbanner_ (The Necromancer) bears the new subtitle _A Tale of the Black Forest_; and Peter Will’s adaptation of Grosse’s _Der Genius_ bears the altered subtitle _A Story From the German Of The Marquis Of Grosse_. In all four of the latter cases, the function of Germanness is a combination of genre description and the marketing thereof. Since the absence of any evidence of progress was no longer a characteristic of Germany by the early 19th century, in order to maintain the Gothic potential of setting, British authors from John Polidori (_The Vampyre_, 1819) to Bram Stoker (_Dracula_, 1897) tended to relocate the source of the Gothic tale to Eastern Europe. The early Italian (_Otranto_) and German locations and subsequent Carpathian relocations indicate that preindustrial feudal gloom and a landscape’s potential for conveying the convincing preconditions for superstition and metaphysical mystery are important genre attractions for the Gothic-consuming public.

Another set of questions regards the timing of influence: who among the English and German Gothic writers could plausibly have influenced whom?
The reception chronology here is documentably a matter of some confusion, paradox, and selective memory, to no small extent on the part of Coleridge, who was among the best informed experts on the German Gothic invasion of the 1790s and the translator of Schiller’s *Die Piccolomini* and *Waltensteins Tod*. If the first wave of English Gothic comprises the native novels of Richardson and Walpole among the others mentioned above (Young, Hervey), the innovations of the second wave demonstrate hardly any heritage of novels at all; instead, the innovations relate to Schiller’s early dramas and prose works to an important extent. Prior to the arrival of Schiller’s works in England in the early 1790s, the English-language tradition of locating the Gothic in a feudal setting distinguishes *The Castle of Otranto* as a Gothic pioneer. With the prominent exception of William Beckford’s *Vathek: An Arabian Tale* (1786), the majority of transitional proto-Gothic works published after Walpole but prior to the 1790s are set in England. These include works of the «Graveyard School» of poetry – Young’s *Night Thoughts* and Hervey’s *Meditations* – as well as novels, including Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1778) and Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* (1783–5). The arrival of Schiller’s works and, to a lesser extent, those of Gottfried August Bürger signal the arrival of the German in British Gothic. Note that all nine of the novels cited by Austen appeared (in English) between 1794 and 1798, several years after Schiller had published the most important dramas and prose works in his Gothic oeuvre, but before the actual post-Schillerian/Romantic establishment of the German states as centers of Gothic production (from the pens of Grosse, Kahlert, and Spiess through Tieck and Hoffmann, to name but a few).

In his ambitious work of 1803, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, the American theologian and historian Samuel Miller delivered a sober assessment of eighteenth-century literature: «The mantle of Shakespeare or of Milton has not fallen upon any succeeding bard» (Miller 1805 3:1). As it turns out, this is not entirely true. By 1796, Coleridge had ranked Schiller above both in some regards, if only temporarily. Coleridge provides not only evolving, but contradictory views on the influence of German literature on English literature. In the 1790s, Coleridge was famously aware of Schiller’s Gothic talent as a «convulser of the heart.» On 3 November 1794, Coleridge was reading *The Robbers* in the 1792 translation of Alexander Tytler Fraser, Lord Woodhouselee, when he dropped the play and wrote to Robert Southey:

> Tis past one o’clock in the morning. I sat down at twelve o’clock to read the «Robbers» of Schiller. I had read, chill and trembling, when I came to the part where Moor fixes a pistol over the robbers who are asleep. I could read no more. My God,
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Southey, who is this Schiller, this convulser of the heart? Did he write his tragedy amid the yelling of fiends? [...] Why have we ever called Milton sublime? that Count de Moor horrible wielder of heart withering virtues? Satan is scarcely qualified to attend his execution as gallows chaplain. (Collected Letters 1:122)

This, Coleridge's first response to The Robbers, is simultaneously a very Gothic-aware and an effusively positive reading, though it fairly pales in comparison to his laudatory Gothic sonnet of 1795 addressed «To the Author of the Robbers»:

SCHILLER! that hour I would have wish’d to die,  
If thro’ the shuddering midnight I had sent  
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent  
That fearful voice, a famish’d Father’s cry –  
Lest in some after moment aught more mean  
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout  
Black HORROR screamed, and all her goblin rout  
Diminish’d shrunk from the more with’ring scene!  
Ah Bard tremendous in sublimity!  
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood  
Wandering at eve with finely frenzied eye  
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!  
Awhile with mute awe gazing I would brood:  
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy! (Coleridge’s Poems 42)

In 1796, Coleridge published the above sonnett with a note of explanation that places Schiller firmly at the center of early British reception of the Gothic. Having recently ranked Schiller above Milton, Coleridge now praises the plausibility of the Schillerian Gothic over the Shakespearean – although Schiller’s Franz Moor paraphrases Richard III in his soliloquy and the Prince in Der Geisterseher cites Hamlet:

One night in winter, on leaving a College-friend’s room, with whom I had supped, I carelessly took away with me «The Robbers,» a drama the very name of which I had never before heard of: – A winter midnight – the wind high – and «The Robbers» for the first time! – The readers of SCHILLER will conceive what I felt. Schiller introduces no supernatural beings; yet his human beings agitate and astonish more than all the goblin rout – even of Shakespeare (CP 42).

Coleridge’s enthusiastic testimony bears witness to distinctly mid-1790s English Gothic sensibilities in his somewhat lopsided focus on the Gothic qualities of Die Räuber, which are listed in detail by Colosimo.10 Despite his praise for Schiller’s original Gothic brilliance in 1794, 1795, and again in 1796; Coleridge has almost had his fill of «terrible» literature by 1797, as can be seen in his letter to William Lisles Bowles of 16 March:
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I am almost weary of the Terrible, having been an hireling in the Critical Review for the last six or eight months – I have been lately reviewing the Monk, the Italian, Hubert de Servrac & &c & &c – in all of which dungeons, and old castles, & solitary Houses by the Sea Side, & Caverns, & Woods, & extraordinary characters, & all the tribe of Horror & Mystery, have crowded on me – even to surfeiting (CL 1:183).

Almost. Later in 1797, Coleridge was still at work on the blank verse drama Osorio, which he later renamed Remorse, «drawn freely from the Sicilian’s tale in Schiller’s Der Geisterseher.»¹¹ The Times of 25 January 1813 credits the applause at the premiere of Remorse to its «foolish blasphemy» and «other exploded plagiarisms from the German school» (Osorio xv).

Coleridge was not alone in his near weariness. English critical patience with «the Terrible» was broadly wearing thin by the late 1790s, and the ensuing critical impatience found its focus in «Germanism.»¹² Also in 1797, the anonymous «German schools» parody with the Robbers sound-alike title The Rovers; or the Double Arrangement «caricatures not only the excesses of the Sturm und Drang melodrama but also the British public’s appetite for them.»¹³ In William Seward’s «Ode to the German Drama» (1799), a Mozart opera (it happens to be The Magic Flute [1791], though Don Giovanni [1787] would have served just as well), dramas by Kotzebue and Schiller, and Kahlert’s novel Der Geisterbanner receive shared blame for German Gothic (literary) and revolutionary (political) violations of British taste:

Daughter of the Night, chaotic Queen!
Thou fruitful source of modern lays,
Whose turbid plot, and tedious scene
The monarch spurn, the robber raise.
Bound in thy necromantic spell
The audience taste the joys of hell,
And Britain’s sons indignant grown
With pangs unfelt before, at crimes before unknown.

When first, to make the nations stare,
Folly her painted mask display’d,
Schiller sublimely mad was there,
And Kotz’bue lent his leaden aid.
Gigantic pair! Their lofty soul
Disdaining reason’s weak control,
On changeful Britain sped the blow,
Who, thoughtless of her own, embraced fictitious woe. (Seward 92)

Before Schiller and Kotzebue are blamed explicitly, the «necromantic spell» of Peter Teuthold’s translation of Kahlert’s Der Geisterbanner (The Necromancer) is sandwiched between two implicit references to Schiller. The first regards the inferred glorification of a band of sylvan murderers in Die Räu-
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ber, and the second regards implicit criticism of the British oppression of the North American states in Kabale und Liebe (1784) and Don Karlos (1787).14

By 1817, Coleridge’s view of the «first fruits» of Schiller’s «youth (I had almost said of his boyhood)» (CBL II:183) has come full circle. He blames Schiller (along with Young, Hervey, and Richardson) and the «whole breed of Kotzebues» (CBL II:184) for all the ostensibly Shakespeare-derivative yet nonetheless infectious sins of German «romantic dramas,» which he dismisses for formulaic emptiness and lacking originality. Surprisingly, he includes Schiller’s Die Räuber, «the earliest specimen» (CBL II:183).

But to understand the true character of the ROBBERS, and of the countless imitations which were its spawn, I must inform you […], that, about that time, and for some years before it, three of the most popular books in the German language were, the translations Of YOUNG’S NIGHT THOUGHTS, HERVEY’S MEDITA-
TIONS, and RICHARDSON’S CLARISSA HARLOW. Now we have only to combine the bloated style and peculiar rhythm of Hervey […] with the strained thoughts, the figurative metaphysics and solemn epigrams of Young on the one hand; and with the loaded sensibility, the minute detail, the morbid consciousness of every thought and feeling in the whole flux and reflux of the mind, in short, the self-involution and dream-like continuity of Richardson on the other hand; and then to add the ruined castles, the dungeons, the trap-doors, the skeletons, the flesh-and-blood ghosts, and the perpetual moonshine of a modern author (themselves the literary brood of the Castle of Otranto […]), – and as the compound of these ingredients duly mixed, you will recognize the so-called German drama. (CBL II: 183–84)

Although Coleridge ultimately stresses British responsibility for the Ger-
man drama – «we should submit to carry our own brat on our own shoul-
ders» (CBL II:185) – in a case of guilt by association with «Germanism,» he demotes Schiller from the heir to Shakespeare and Milton to the brood of Otranto.

The evaluations voiced by Coleridge (1794, 1795, 1796, and 1797) and Se-
ward (1799), regarding who was a good or bad literary influence on whom in England and the German states, appear quickly forgotten, if not forgiven in the case of Coleridge (1817). The critical assault on Gothic literature beginning in the late 1790s is accompanied by a curious transformation in the awareness of Schiller’s place in its chronology and his role in its popularization. In A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century (1803), Samuel Miller likens Schiller’s Der Geisterseher to «Mrs. Radcliffe’s novels and Lewis’s Monk» for its «mixed class» fusion of «ancient romance» and the «modern novel» form (Miller 1803 2:166–67; see also Parry 12–13). Possibly based on the year of his edition of The Ghost Seer, Miller’s summary implies that the popularity of Radcliffe’s Gothic novels (1791–1797) and those of Lewis (1796–1808) prece-
ded the awareness of Schiller’s works in England, which is demonstrably not the case. Miller chastens the author of Der Geisterseher and others of his ilk in an afterthought, located just after praise of Radcliffe and condemnation of Lewis as «disgraceful»: «In this department of fiction several German writers have made a conspicuous figure, especially the authors of the Ghost Seer, The Victim of Magical Delusion, and many others of a similar cast» (Miller 1803 2:167). Tellingly, Schiller’s name is not mentioned. Thus, having once traveled through space to visit Germany, Lewis in 1792 and Radcliffe in 1794, their works appear to travel through time in order to predate Schiller’s Der Geisterseher in commentary written as early as 1803.

Almost 200 years later, widely available reference works similarly, perhaps consequently, arrive at an almost Schiller-free family tree of Gothic literature. The Encyclopedia of Fantasy (Clute and Grant, 1999) cites Christian Heinrich Spiess’s diabolism novel Das Petermännchen (original German version 1791–92) as an inspiration for Lewis’s The Monk and the novels of Radcliffe (EF 397). Though this is certainly a defensible contention, Schiller’s best-sellers that inspired Das Petermännchen are not mentioned in this context. Further, the «early wave» of German «fantasy» as seen in the works of Spiess, followed by those of Karl Gottlob Cramer (1758–1817), especially Hasper a Spada (1792–93), and those of Joseph Alois Gleich (1772–1841), who was both unpublished and barely seventeen years old when Schiller’s prose career ended in 1789, are described as «a seminal influence on the development of the early Gothic novel» (EF 397). This would depend on the definition of «early.» An examination of the British novels of the 1790s ostensibly influenced by Spiess, Cramer, and Gleich reveals three considerations to the contrary. First, the British Gothic novels in question, written between 1792 and 1798, were all written by authors who either post-date Schiller’s Gothic production entirely or who mention volumes by or including Schiller explicitly. Second, all but one of the novels written by the three German influences cited appeared for the first time in German after 1792, and thus too late to influence the earliest British writers of the 1790s and too late to predate the influence of Schiller’s earlier dramas and prose works. Since Spiess, Cramer, and Gleich were all clearly mimicking Schiller in their novels, as did Grosse, who evidently lifted his subtitle directly from Schiller’s Der Geisterseher, they can only constitute a post-Schillerian wave of German presence in English Gothic literature. Third, in the Gothic explosion of the 1790s, Schiller and Kahler remain the most plausible influences due to the awareness of their works demonstrated by the German writers and two of the most prominent British authors, Lewis and Radcliffe (Hogle 42). Logically, there is no possibility of influence by the Gothic works of Spiess, Cramer, and Gleich, the «seminal
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influences» cited by *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, in England until well into the British-German Gothic explosion of the mid-1790s.

Schiller’s influence is even more important in Kahlert’s English presence than in his already derivative German original, *Der Geisterbanner*. As Conger has demonstrated, the English adaptation, Teuthold’s *The Necromancer*, ends with a hyper-Gothic adaptation of Schiller’s «Verbrecher aus verlorenener Ehre» (*Necromancer* 133–58).18 Further, Teuthold introduces his version of «Verbrecher» with a series of elements of the «explained supernatural» that had already appeared in Schiller’s *Der Geisterseher* (1789), but which are still most frequently associated with Radcliffe’s later *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794).19 These elements include the camera obscura and smoke effects (*Necromancer* 132), both of which are introduced in the séance scene in Book I of *Der Geisterseher*. Therefore, whoever read Teuthold/Kahlert in English also read the Gothic highlights of two of Schiller’s most popular works, even if unknowingly. For all of Kahlert’s evident English fame or infamy as the original author of *The Necromancer* and as the source of Seward’s «necromantic spell» (above), it is important to note that three years before Kahlert published his novel, and five years prior to the publication of Teuthold’s translation, necromancy comprised two of the most memorable scenes in Schiller’s *Der Geisterseher*, again the séance scene and then in the ensuing novella of Antonia and Jeronimo narrated by «the Sicilian.»20 Teuthold would not be the last to lift from *Der Geisterseher* in England in the 1790s. Citing as highlights the «sorcery-scene» and «the power of poetry,» a further review of Coleridge’s *Remorse* in *The Examiner* of 31 January 1813 credits Schiller for the play’s success and distances him from the sins of his countrymen and his age: «Mr. Coleridge is indebted to his acquaintance with the German drama, which, in the hands of Schiller at least, redeems all its faults in its excellence» (CO xiv). In an ultimate tribute to the resonance of Schiller’s *Der Geisterseher*,21 Kahlert revised *Der Geisterbanner* in 1799 to include the only *Geisterseher* element it was missing; he created a counterpart to the erotic worship of Schiller’s beautiful Greek woman – «a hint of exoticism and eroticism» in the form of «an escaped nun who appears as a ghost to a Schwärmer [zealot]» (Hall 60).22

Though there are many influences to be explored, the canonical twists in the German Tale of Western Gothic influence in the 1790s addressed here all lead back to (or at least through) the content of Schiller’s early dramas and prose works (1781–1789). Schiller’s fourth drama, *Don Karlos* (1787), features (off stage) Prince Karlos marching through empty palace halls in Madrid at midnight, disguised as his grandfather’s ghost dressed as a monk (SW 6:310, 323–24). This would be just one in a series of scary conspiratorial monks for Schiller, three in three years if one counts the Grand Inquisitor also in *Don
Karlos, four in eight years if one counts Schiller’s essay on «Cagliostro» of 1781 (SW 22:65–6). Schiller’s most important work in the Gothic tradition, the novel fragment/frame novella Der Geisterseher, features the most prominent of the four, the «Armenian» monk with supernatural powers that would define Schiller’s Gothic legacy. Though Daniel Boileau’s English translation, The Ghost-Seer, first appeared in London in 1795, there is good reason to believe that both Lewis and Radcliffe were already aware of the story by 1792 and 1794 respectively. Indeed, nowhere in the Gothic canon is Schiller’s presence more palpable than in Lewis’s The Monk (1796) and Radcliffe’s The Italian (1797), both of which already invoke Schiller’s occultist Venetian monk in their titles.

The essential elements of Der Geisterseher comprise a confused German protagonist-prince, victimized by a very Cagliostro-like borderline-supernatural trickster known as a monk in Italy, and referred to by an ethnic epithet (Armenian); a con-man conjurer (the Sicilian), and a beautiful secret agent and nearly spectral autoerotic madonna known as the «beautiful Greek woman»; all of whom drag the unsuspecting protagonist into the clutches of a Catholic political conspiracy. Lewis’s The Monk is set in Madrid and Germany; his monk, Ambrosio, bears every similarity to Cagliostro embodied as Schiller’s Armenian and follows a very similar path. The Monk combines perverted monks and inquisitors, a bleeding ghost-nun («a tradition still credited in many parts of Germany»), a madonna-image trap, witchcraft, devil worship, and a Catholic conspiracy to create a conflation of The Castle of Otranto, Der Geisterseher, Don Giovanni, and various of the Faust traditions.

Where Schiller’s text – between two scenes involving one phony and one possible case of actual necromancy – implies through the name Armenian and said Armenian’s evident agelessness that he might possibly be the proverbial Wandering Jew, Lewis’s Monk explicitly tells the tale of a necromancer believed in all probability to be the Wandering Jew (end of chapter 1). Lewis was familiar with Schiller’s works, having spent the summer of 1792 in Weimar, and worked on his own translation of Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe as early as 1793. Coleridge was clearly aware of Lewis’s reworkings of Schiller, and claimed in a letter to William Wordsworth dated 23 January 1798 that Lewis’s 1797 drama version of The Castle Specter is «Schiller Lewis-ized» (CL 225).

Published a year after The Monk, Radcliffe’s last novel, The Italian features an evil conspiratorial monk named Schedoni, whose Catholic conspiracy lands the protagonists in the court of the Inquisition. Once again, Radcliffe creates an elaborate illusion of supernatural activity only to expose it as a ruse in what most will recognize as «the explained supernatural» or what has become known popularly as a Scooby-Doo ending – with the exception of
four dead villains. Conger has demonstrated entire paragraphs of Radcliffe’s obvious borrowing from Schiller’s works (Conger, «Mary Shelley’s Monster» 121–22). Note that not one of Radcliffe’s trademark «explained supernatural» novels appear before Schiller’s Geisterseher, the centerpiece of which is the endless forensic debunking of the supernatural. As was the case with Lewis and The Monk, The Italian was written not long after a trip to Germany, which Radcliffe chronicled in A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794 (1795). Der Geisterseher had appeared in two book editions and one second printing in the German states between 1789 and 1792.

The question of seminal German influences on both the English and German Gothic waves of the 1790s thus leads back to Schiller, not only through conflicting positions in later reception history, but directly from the era’s most canonical Gothic works. If there is indeed anything concretely German about the German tale, it can be found in the mimicry of the content of Schiller’s literary prose works and early dramas: foremost, but not exclusively, Der Geisterseher, Die Räuber, and «Der Verbrecher aus verlorenen Ehre.» Of the many characteristics that comprised the Gothic mood of the 1790s, or Poe’s «Germanism» and «gloom» – political, legal, and social failure; corruption, the Inquisition, persecution, rebellion, and superstition; executions, frame-ups, murders, seances, special effects, pacts with the devil, and ventriloquism; confidence men, conspiracy, and disguises; evil monks, ghosts, prisoners, robbers, and spies; dungeons, forests, lairs, and castle ruins – Schiller delivered all in three works in eight years (1781–1789) immediately preceding the German-English Gothic explosion of the 1790s. Noting similarities in content, however, is where most of the comparisons between Schiller and the Gothic authors of the 1790s end, since very few Gothic novels are considered to be on a comparative stylistic or philosophical niveau with Schiller’s works.

The many secondary sources that overlook the impact of Schiller’s Gothic presence may nonetheless quietly hold the key to why Schiller’s influence on Gothic literature has remained such a relative nontopic. From the testimony of Coleridge of 1794–1796, it is evident Who this Schiller, «this convuser of the heart,» is supposed to be, that is, a dramatist and epic poet of classic stature in his own lifetime – the heir to Shakespeare and Milton, not the inspiration for Der Geisterbanner and The Monk. Critics since Coleridge have proven reluctant to mention Schiller and the Gothic explosion of the 1790s in the same breath. Schiller, who was forever torn between concerns for his legacy and his popularity, and who never acted on his plans for no less than three high-sea and pirate dramas (Das Seestück, Das Schiff, and Die Flibiustiers), likely would have approved of the critical silence. It is also probably true that
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if Schiller’s works and reputation had been the exclusive measure in 1839, Poe would have felt better about being accused of literary «Germanism.»

Samuel Miller’s descriptions of Schiller’s works in 1803, fifty pages apart in sections entitled «Romances and Novels» and «Drama,» offer an early indication that the classic artist Schiller is to be regarded as transcendent of his Gothic tendencies. Thus the unnamed (!) «author of the Ghost Seer» – mentioned only in passing just after Lewis’s The Monk has been deemed «disgraceful to the character of the author» (Miller 1803 2:167) – is in no way associated with Schiller the dramatist: «perhaps no tragic writer of Germany has gained a reputation more extensive and commanding than Schiller, whose Robbers and Don Carlos evince powerful talents, and have gained unusual popularity» (Miller 1805 3:55). Similarly concerned with his legacy, and in the year of both his own death and the 150th anniversary of Schiller’s death, Thomas Mann describes this transcendent quality of Schiller’s works and reception in his essay «Versuch über Schiller» (1955) as «the rarest quality, classical popularity.»31 In the critical gulf that generally separates such «powerful talents» as those evident in Die Räuber from the mere popularity of the «the countless imitations which were its spawn […] themselves the literary brood of the Castle of Otranto» (CBL II:183–184), Coleridge lost the Gothic enthusiasm he first displayed in 1794. One can only wonder if the «powerful poetry» of Remorse warrants its exception from a thus doubly derivative brood. In that gulf, too, Schiller became disconnected from a legacy as one of the godfather’s of the Gothic novel, a distinction that most likely would have made him scream «BLACK horror» himself. Indeed, in 1788, Schiller had already preemptively expressed his permission to leave him out of the Gothic prose discussion in a series of unhappy outbursts over the «bad scribbling» and «sinful waste of time»32 that in his view characterized Der Geisterseher: «I still can’t bring myself to develop any interest in the cursed Geisterseher; what demon ever made me think of it?»33

Notes

1 My sincere thanks to Curtis Maughan, Roma Hermández, Lisa Beesley (California State University Long Beach), Whitney Powell (University of New Mexico), and Melissa Etzler (University of California, Berkeley) for their assistance, and to Clorinda Donato (California State University Long Beach), Jennifer Driscoll Colosimo (University of Puget Sound), and Jennifer M. Hoyer (University of Arkansas) for their insightful suggestions.

2 The most notable exceptions are Ulrich Thiergard, «Schiller und Walpole: Ein Beitrag zu Schillers Verhältnis zur Schauerliteratur» (1959); Karl S. Guthke, Englische Vorromantik und deutscher Sturm und Drang. M.G. Lewis’ Stellung in der Geschichte der deutsch-
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englischen Literaturbeziehungen (1959), and Devendra P. Varma’s «Introduction» to The Necromancer (1968). The presence of the works of Gottfried August Bürger is addressed briefly by Varma (Necromancer viii), and deserves further attention.

Biographia Litteraria (CBL) II:183–84. Schiller indeed mentions «Richardson’s novels about Grandison and Pamela» in the introduction to his «true» novella, «Eine großmütige Handlung aus der neuesten Geschichte» (1782). See High, Schiller’s Literary Prose Works 9. Schiller does not mention Walpole until 9 March 1798 (Schillers Werke 29: 217, 555), after the end of his own Gothic publishing career, and the only work he mentions is the 1791 edition of The Mysterious Mother, which Schiller appears to believe is a recent work. Though there is no evidence that Schiller had read Otranto prior to the late 1790s, his strategic insistence that his prose works are based on true stories represents a variation of Walpole’s insistence that The Castle of Otranto was a medieval Italian romance published by a fictitious translator. Jennifer Driscoll Colosimo draws attention to the similarities between Walpole’s The Mysterious Mother and Schiller’s sketches to two dramas he never finished, Die Braut in Trauer and Die Kinder des Hauses («Schiller and the Gothic» 294–95). The demonstrable connection between Walpole and Schiller is first evident over a decade after Schiller wrote the works that influenced the English Gothic literature of the 1790s. See also Thiergard, «Schiller und Walpole.»

«The Gothic Tide» 60. See also Guthke’s study of English-German reciprocal influences Englischer Vorromantik.

Colosimo provides a thorough catalogue of the secondary literature indicating that much of it either ignores Schiller altogether or treats him almost exclusively as a peripheral figure in the history of Gothic literature. See Colosimo, «Going Gothic?» esp. 15–17. Indeed, German Studies is still left without an umbrella term for Gothic literary phenomena, making do with the genre-specific term Schauerroman, the broader Schauerromantik, and the English term Gothic among the common descriptors. See Colosimo, «Schiller and the Gothic» 291.

«the shortcomings of the sort of German Gothic scholarship ohne Germanistik that has found a place in the many recent monographs, compendia, and companions devoted to the Gothic genre, are readily apparent, particularly to the Germanist reader» (Colosimo, «Going Gothic» 15).


All of the original spelling, distinctions between upper and lower case, and punctuation have been maintained in all quotations. Edgar Allan Poe in the «Preface» to Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque 5–6.

Norton 106; Miles 42. Colosimo points out a fascinating parallel trend: «Looking through Michael Hadley’s Romanverzeichnis, Bibliographie der zwischen 1750–1800 erschienenen Erstausgaben [Novel Index: Bibliography of First Editions Published between 1750–1800] one finds any number of German texts in the Gothic mode subtitled «aus dem englischen» [from the English] without the benefit of an author’s name» («Schiller and the Gothic» 287).

«Gothic elements appear in a much greater concentration in Die Räuber: in addition to the focus on criminal protagonists, and the presence of a band of bloodthirsty robbers, there is a conflict over an inheritance that results in an attempted murder, a secret imprisonment of a family member presumed dead, and suggestions of supernatural phenomena. […] Daniel Hall notes how Schiller intensifies the emotional and psychological impact of the character’s reappearance through images such as darkness, owls crying out,
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and cries of horror, which are designed to inspire terror, or at least unease.» («Schiller and the Gothic» 293).

11 That same year, Wordsworth completed his adaptation of Die Räuber, The Borderers (Osorio vii; Burwick 303). In 1807, Byron wrote the ballad «Oscar of Alva,» also based on the Sicilian’s tale in Der Geisterseher (Lowes 243).

12 Gottfried August Bürger’s Gothic poem «Lenore» (1773 or 1774) was translated into English as early as 1782 and was receiving a similarly contradictory reception in England, with popular translations published by Stanley, Scott, Pye, and Spencer, but the object of derisive parody by T.J. Matthias: «With Spartan Pye lull England to repose,/Or frighten children with Lenora’s woes.» Cited as in Thürnau (16).

13 See Colosimo’s discussion of The Rovers and Schiller’s place in Gothic reception («Schiller and the Gothic» 288–89).

14 Seward conflates the Gothic with the revolutionary political: «Thy democratic rant be here,/To fire the brain, corrupt the taste» (Seward 92). For a discussion of the revolutionary political offenses implied, see High, «Why is this Schiller [still] in the United States?» 9–10.

15 If Spiess comes after Schiller in the chronology of the Räuber-, Ritter- und Geisterroman, his tragedy Maria Stuart (1783) predates Schiller’s by some sixteen years, although Schiller’s plans for a Maria Stuart drama date back to 1783. Spiess’s collection Biographien der Selbstmörder (1785–1788) marks an important point in the history of tales of madness.


17 As for Walpole’s influence on the early Gothic tides, interestingly, there is no evidence of great awareness of The Castle of Otranto in Germany until 1794, when F. Meyer published a new translation, which indicates, if anything, that the German Gothic boom of the 1780s and 1790s may have influenced international Walpole reception as much as Walpole influenced the Germans. This being the case, the possible influence of Aikins, Sophia Lee, and Clara Reeve on German authors, including Schiller, deserves further investigation.

18 «A third even earlier translation which made Schiller’s tale [«Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre»] available in English in 1794 has been at our fingertips for some time, but, like Poe’s purloined letter, has escaped notice, no doubt because it was buried in another text and not identified by author or title. It forms the final episodes of The Necromancer of the Black Forest (Minerva Press, 1794), Peter Teuthold’s English translation of a contemporary German «Schauerroman» by Karl F. Kahler called Der Geisterbanner. [...] Schiller’s tale was woven by Teuthold into the end of the second volume of The Necromancer, perhaps as filler; and even though its beginning and ending were altered to accommodate it to the main story, it remains a recognizably discrete entity.» See Conger, «Mary Shelley’s Monster» 216–17.

19 Regarding the «explained supernatural,» Varma writes, «Mrs Radcliffe’s Udolpho had become a popular model and the novels that followed it attempted to explain away the supernatural. Very often the strange noises and mysterious occurrences which frightened the characters were accounted for by ventriloquism, and the supernatural expliqué became a common device» (Necromancer ix). Note that among the elements of the explained supernatural in Schiller’s Geisterseher is a case of ventriloquism (Schillers Werke 16: 71–72).
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21 Kahlert was hardly the last to borrow from Der Geisterseher. As Conger has demonstrated, Poe’s Murders in the Rue Morgue and his detective Dupin share a long list of parallels to Der Geisterseher and the Armenian («Another Secret»12).

22 In another early parody of Gothic prose, Thomas Love Peacock’s Nightmare Abbey (1818) appears to parody a popular view of Schiller himself (as much as Shelley) as Scythrop, the melancholic Kantian revolutionary bent on reforming the world from a desk.

23 Boileau’s translation was immediately reprinted in the United States in 1796 in the New York Weekly Magazine, like the original in serial form, here in fifteen installments. A second reprint, that of the translation by William Render, was published in Philadelphia in 1801 (Parry 10).


25 Lewis in the advertisement for The Monk (6).

26 Irwin 21. Lewis’s finished translation, which was published as The Minister in 1797, does not include act II, scene 2, one of the scenes Seward alluded to above that criticize British politics. See High, «Why is this Schiller» 4.

27 Coleridge points out another case of Lewis’s borrowing from Schiller in The Castle Spectre: «The author in a postscript lays claim to novelty in one of his characters – that of Hassan. Now Hassan is a negro, who had a warm & benevolent heart; but having been kidnapped from his country & barbarously used by the Christians, becomes a misanthrope» (Letters 225). Hassan is likewise the name of the misanthropic African in Schiller’s Fiesko (1783), who explains that having found no other outlet for his brilliance in white Christian society, he had chosen the relative freedom of a life of crime.

28 Scooby Doo, Where are You? is a US cartoon series that has continued under different titles since 1969. The hallmark of the original two-year run was the unmasking of the supernatural antagonist as a confidence artist.

29 For an early version of the Enlightenment’s assault on the supernatural, see Clara Reeve’s novel The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story (1778).

30 Die Räuber features Franz Moor, arguably literature’s first empirically explainable and self-aware psychic vampire. Franz Moor is a product of Enlightenment science with an articulate plan to murder his father by systematically draining his will to live. That his plot in act I is an act of conscious vampirism becomes clear in Act II, Scene 2, when Old Moor first feels the effects of Franz’ efforts: «Ungeheuer, Ungeheuer! […] Scheusal! Scheusal! Schaff mir meinen Sohn wieder!» (Schillers Werke 3: 49–50). Francis Lamport’s translation emphasizes Old Moor’s recognition of Franz’s vampiristic intent: «Vampire! vampire! Give me my son again!» (Robbers 68).

31 «das Seltenste: klassische Populärität» (Mann 208).


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