

Edited by  
*Chiara Conterno*  
*Gilberta Golinelli*

Exchanges,  
Intersections and  
Gender Issues  
between Eighteenth  
and Nineteenth  
Century Europe:  
The Anglo-German Case

Kulturtransfer,  
Verschränkungen  
und Gender-Fragen  
in Europa zwischen  
dem 18. und dem 19.  
Jahrhundert:  
Der deutsch-britische Fall



RIZOMATICA

RIZOMATICA

Collana del Dipartimento di Lingue,  
Letterature e Culture Moderne

diretta da

**Keir Elam e Giovanni Gentile G. Marchetti**

## *Rizomatica*

Il *rizoma*, dal greco *rhízōma*, “complesso di radici” (derivato da *rhiza*, “radice”), indica, in realtà, un fusto perenne, generalmente sotterraneo, che ha uno sviluppo orizzontale.

Nel pensiero di Deleuze e Guattari esso diviene un concetto cardine, in opposizione ad *albero* e a *radice*, che rappresentano la fissità, l’unicità e la verticalità (vocazione gerarchica) del potere.

Il *rizoma*, allora, rappresenta ogni sviluppo libero e imprevedibile, implica *molteplicità* – che si oppone a *unicità* –, *eterogeneità*, *coniunzione*. Può essere interrotto, o spezzato in un punto qualsiasi, ma, in questo caso, subito riprende a seguire qualcuna delle proprie linee, oppure si collega ad altre.

Édouard Glissant si serve della categoria definita da Deleuze e Guattari per sostanziare la sua idea di *creolization*. Risalendo all’etimologia della parola, la definisce come “radice che si estende verso l’incontro con altre radici”, in opposizione alla *radice unica*, “che uccide tutto intorno a sé”. La *creolizzazione*, processo necessario e inevitabile, si fonda, allora, su un *rizoma* di culture composte, base della sua “poetica della relazione”.

*Rizomatica*, dunque, intende annodare e promuovere le diverse linee di ricerca del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne in una libera molteplicità di creative intersezioni, in un incessante processo di scoperta.

### **Comitato Scientifico**

Silvia Albertazzi, Antonella Ceccagno, Andrea Ceccherelli, Luigi Contadini, Carla Corradi, Lilla M. Crisafulli, Giulio Garuti Simone, Maria Chiara Gnocchi, Gabriella Elna Imposti, Rita Monticelli, Marco Presotto, Paola Puccini, Anna Paola Soncini

### **Referee Board**

Fausta Antonucci, Università di Roma Tre  
Michel Delon, Università di Parigi IV, Sorbona  
Amedeo Di Francesco, Università di Napoli L’Orientale  
Gillian Dow, Università di Southampton (UK)  
Annick Farina, Università di Firenze  
Marcello Garzaniti, Università di Firenze  
Stefano Garzonio, Università di Pisa  
Nicholas R. Havelly, Università di York  
Michele Marrapodi, Università di Palermo  
Joan Oleza, Università di Valencia (Spagna)  
Eduardo Ramos Izquierdo, Università di Parigi IV, Sorbona  
Roberto Ruspanti, Università di Udine  
Srikant Sarangi, Università di Cardiff (UK)  
Annamaria Sportelli, Università di Bari  
Kamran Talattof, Università dell’Arizona (USA)  
Geoff Thompson, Università di Liverpool  
Francisco Tovar Blanco, Università di Lérida (Lleida, Spagna)  
Carmen Valcárcel Rivera, Università Autonoma di Madrid (Spagna)

**Exchanges, Intersections and  
Gender Issues between Eighteenth  
and Nineteenth Century Europe:  
The Anglo-German Case**

**Kulturtransfer, Verschränkungen und  
Gender-Fragen in Europa zwischen  
dem 18. und dem 19. Jahrhundert:  
der deutsch-britische Fall**

Edited by / Herausgegeben von  
Chiara Conterno, Gilberta Golinelli

**Bologna**  
University Press

Volume pubblicato con il contributo del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture moderne dell'Università di Bologna.



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA  
DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE, LETTERATURE  
E CULTURE MODERNE

Fondazione Bologna University Press  
Via Saragozza 10, 40123 Bologna  
tel. (+39) 051 232 882  
fax (+39) 051 221 019

ISSN 2283-8902  
ISBN 979-12-5477-217-1  
ISBN online 979-12-5477-218-8  
DOI 10.30682/979-12-5477-218-8

[www.buonline.com](http://www.buonline.com)  
[info@buonline.com](mailto:info@buonline.com)

Trascorso un anno dalla prima edizione, quest'opera è pubblicata sotto licenza CC-BY 4.0

Impaginazione: DoppioClickArt, San Lazzaro di Savena (Bologna)

Prima edizione: marzo 2023

## Contents / Inhaltsverzeichnis

Introduzione <i>Chiara Conterno, Gilberta Golinelli</i>	7
Reading Shakespeare in 18 <sup>th</sup> Century English Literary Criticism: The German Case <i>Gilberta Golinelli</i>	11
Drei Briefe im <i>Deutschen Museum</i> . Ein Plädoyer für „Neue Blicke durch die alten Löcher“ <i>Giulia Cantarutti</i>	31
Wechselseitiger Kulturtransfer auf der Bühne. Die implizite Aufwertung von Ekhofs Theaterauffassung in Lichtenbergs <i>Briefen aus England</i> <i>Chiara Conterno</i>	57
Episteme des Fiktiven und des Faktischen. England in Sophie La Roches Schriften <i>Corinna Dziudzia</i>	81
Die frühen Faust-Dichtungen und England <i>Michael Dallapiazza</i>	115

Jane Austen's Reception and Reinvention of German Gothic in <i>Northanger Abbey</i> <i>Serena Baiesi</i>	125
Addressing Germany: Mary Wollstonecraft's <i>Letters from Scandinavia</i> (1796) and Mary Shelley's <i>Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843</i> <i>Lilla Maria Crisafulli</i>	143

# Jane Austen's Reception and Reinvention of German Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*

Serena Baiesi (University of Bologna)

During the final years of the eighteenth century, German Gothic literature enjoyed widespread, though controversial, popularity in England. The reception of the so-called *Schauerroman* occupied an ambivalent position in the English literary panorama for several reasons. On the one hand it received great attention from the public attracted by the novelty of its content, but also incited much criticism, especially from conservative reviewers alerted by the dangers of what was considered a politically subversive and immoral kind of literature. After exploring the critical debate about the German influence on the English press which reached its peak in the 1790s, this article focuses on the Gothic works cited by Austen in *Northanger Abbey* that epitomise the influence of the German Gothic in England during her lifetime. The author in fact conceived *Northanger Abbey* around 1798–1799, the peak years of the debate about the controversy. The novel was later published posthumously in 1818, after a difficult gestation. Considered for years a simple mock-Gothic novel, it is often referred to when discussing German influence on English Gothic stories because it includes an exhaustive debate about the role of such books during the Romantic period. Austen explicitly mentions all the best-known German ‘horrid stories’ published by the famous Minerva Press, that were included in every circulating library. When scrutinised however whilst such stories were all Gothic, they did not all derive from a genuine German source. Far from including naive references to foreign literature into a proper English



novel, I instead suggest that Austen is engaging with the contemporaneous familiarity with the label ‘German Gothic’ in order to draw her readers into a discussion about the use and abuse of Gothic romances during her time, especially from a political and gender-focused perspective. As a matter of fact, Austen emphasises the reinvention and misuse of a ‘wrong’ reading of Gothic romances in order to unveil an even more subtle kind of Gothic lived experience that English women were enduring during the Regency period, which is conveyed through the novel as a form of narration. Detecting the sexual and political liberalism of many late eighteenth-century Continental texts, Austen thus employs references to German Gothic fiction as a powerful and subversive literary metaphor to disclose the injustices and prejudices of her conventional, patriarchal society.

## I. English reception of German Gothic

The influence of the German Gothic on English literature of the Romantic period is well asserted by many studies<sup>1</sup> but still there are some critical issues, which entangle scholars of English as well as German literature alike, regarding the mixed reception of German plots, characters, and values on British culture during the 1790s. Novels and plays were considered ‘contaminated’ by the circulation of translations and adaptations of German Gothic stories. Defined as a ‘cultural invasion’<sup>2</sup> of German Gothic, the phenomenon had a double effect on the English public: on the one hand such stories had a strong appeal to reading audiences because they represented a novelty in the marketplace in

---

<sup>1</sup> See Michael Hadley, *The Undiscovered Genre. A Search of German Gothic Novel* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978); Barry Murnane, “The German ‘School’ of Horrors: A Pharmacology of the Gothic,” in *The Cambridge History of The Gothic*. Vol. 1, eds. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), 364–381; Patrick Bridgwater, *The German Gothic Novel in Anglo-German Perspective* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2013); Terry Hale, “French and German Gothic: the beginnings,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 63–84.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

terms of settings, characters and plots; but, on the other hand, German influence on British literature and drama was much criticised for potential liberal political allegations included within the narration. As Gamer asserts in his study on *Romanticism and the Gothic*, German literary “importations” were labelled as “culturally invasive, morally corrupting, and politically Jacobin”.<sup>3</sup>

German literature migrated into Britain especially through the Gothic; partly because of the works of the *Sturm und Drang* movement and partly from the translations of the more popular *Schauerromane* (literally ‘shudder novels’) circulating in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. But, as Michael Hedley argues in his pioneering work on the German Gothic novel, there was no German Gothic production before the British, and it was actually Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* which was considered the first English Gothic story in Britain as well as abroad. For both Germany and England, originally the Gothic signified a cultural unspecified otherness, a foreign, immoral literary tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Actually, in England the term German became synonymous with the Gothic from the very start, and after an initial burst of interest and acclaim it was invested with new meaning, including signifying ‘revolutionary’ ideas, and linked to a system of secret societies and necromantic activities. In accordance with Hadley, Barry Murnane, in his introduction to “German Gothic”, remarks that it is significant that the use of the term *Schauerroman* occurred in relation to an English novel and not to an original German story. As a matter of fact, the prevailing conceptions of German Gothic are today, as in the past, more the result of English misconceptions than real tastes<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, if we read retrospectively the crossbreeding of such literature, we can argue that German and English Gothic have more in common than what was supposed in the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>3</sup> Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 145.

<sup>4</sup> Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 78; Hadley, *The Undiscovered Genre*, 222.

<sup>5</sup> Barry Murnane, “German Gothic,” in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, eds. William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 273–274.

It was through translations and theatrical adaptations rather than actual German texts that the English public initially began to associate Germany with the Gothic in the 1790s. Many novels and plays were substantially altered during the process of translation and the linguistic competence of translators was often quite poor.<sup>6</sup> Moreover some of the most famous Gothic stories, which received much attention in England, arrived through other languages and media, including French translations and theatrical adaptations. This is the case, for example, of Benedikte Naubert's *Ritterroman* (novel of chivalry) *Herrmann von Unna* (1788) that appeared in English in 1794, probably from a former French translation by Baron de Bock. In consequence, what was essentially a sentimental romance in the original German source became a successful Gothic story for English audiences.<sup>7</sup>

The process by which German literature in the 1790s was firstly praised and then condemned can actually be found in the xenophobic sentiment that increased in Britain after the wars with France. The fear associated with French revolutionary effects made the English attentive to cherishing and exalting their own principles and constitution in opposition to that which was foreign. According to David Simpson then, since Germany had more proximity to some of the ideals of Englishness, the image of Germany was even more contested and seen as a threat in the late 1790s than was that of France.<sup>8</sup>

In the same vein, Rosemary Ashton in her *The German Idea* dates the British rejection of German literature to around 1800, when a misinformed and negative idea of Germans was prevalent:

---

<sup>6</sup> As asserted by Barry Murnane: "Many novels underwent significant semantic changes in the course of translation, and many translators were either linguistically poorly trained or were German speakers living in Britain but with little literary training. Both groups tended to produce stylistically questionable texts." (Murnane, "The German 'School' of Horrors: A Pharmacology of the Gothic," in *The Cambridge History of The Gothic*. Vol. 1, eds. Wright and Townshend, 364–381, here: 367).

<sup>7</sup> For an extended analysis of the text from German version to the English, see Murnane, "The German 'School' of Horrors: A Pharmacology of the Gothic," in *The Cambridge History of The Gothic*. Vol. 1, eds. Wright and Townshend, 364–381, here: 368–369.

<sup>8</sup> See David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt against Theory* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993).

After an early receptivity to Gothic and sentimental dramas and novels, British editors, reviewers, and readers settled down to ignorant contempt of individual German works like *Wallenstein* and *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister* for their 'immorality' or 'absurdity' or 'obscurity' without deeming it proper to learn something of the cultural context.<sup>9</sup>

One of the first enthusiasts of German philosophy and authors during the Romantic period was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who engaged with German culture and scholarship during and beyond the months he spent in Germany.<sup>10</sup> His enthusiasm for German ideas was conveyed through his translations of German works, which much influenced his own writings and philosophical thought. However, after an early general interest manifested by the reading public that was stimulated by Coleridge's literary dissemination, the poet failed to fully convince his critics about the value of German literary heritage. He was in fact condemned for his translation of Schiller and openly associated with Jacobinism.<sup>11</sup> By 1800, the positive English response to German works, and especially German drama, gave way to a more adverse attitude. This rapid change of opinion is well demonstrated in Ashton's study about German reception in the English press: "periodicals like the *Monthly Review* and *Monthly Magazine* had published regular notices of translations and productions of German plays in the 1790s, but by 1800 the reviewers were complaining of the 'trash' they had been 'obliged to swallow.'"<sup>12</sup>

Many of the severest comments regarding German influence on English literature came from theatrical reviews. The famous Whig editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Frances Jeffrey, made one of the first attacks against German literature in an article on Goethe's *Herman and Dorothea* translated by Thomas Holcroft in 1802. Here he wrote about

---

<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought 1800–1860* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), 1.

<sup>10</sup> On this subject see the extensive work by Maximiliaan van Woudenberg, *Coleridge and Cosmopolitan Intellectualism 1794–1804: The Legacy of Göttingen University* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Ashton, *The German Idea*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ashton, *The German Idea*, 8–9.

a temporary loss of taste in Britain, censuring the foreign drama and romance for its immorality, immaturity and exoticism. Echoing similar attacks issued by the Tory *Anti-Jacobin Review*, Jeffrey's rhetoric is a relevant example to testify what Peter Mortensen labelled as the discourse of Romantic "Europhobia"<sup>13</sup> that pervaded the English press during the late 1790s.

Reviews and articles in newspapers from the time well illustrate the power of periodicals, when united in opinion – even from different political factions – to shape British taste:

We have always been persuaded, in spite of many alarming appearances to the contrary, that the poetical taste of this nation was fundamentally different from that of our neighbours in Germany. The caprice of our national character, and the excess into which all fashions are apt to run, may have obtained a temporary popularity for some of the extraordinary production of that country; and the native skill of our actors and translators may have contributed to reconcile us to these exotic novelties. [...] but, unless we prefer sour krout to potatoes, and rhenish to port, we must not flatter ourselves that we have the taste of our entertainers.<sup>14</sup>

As commented by Mortensen, "consistently pathologizing foreign cultural influences, critics branded Continental romance's inchoate phantasms a 'drug', 'disease' or 'infection' which, with its seemingly unlimited ability to diffuse itself, already threatened to inflame Britain's entire body politic".<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, we wonder why after a period of enthusiasm for German literature between 1788 and 1794, the English press so quickly described such influence as a threat to British culture and politics, maiming its stability and identity. This question has been well debated by

---

<sup>13</sup> Peter Mortensen, *British Romanticism and Continental Influences. Writing in an Age of Europhobia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Jeffrey, "Review of Goethe's *Herman and Dorothea*," in *Monthly Review* 39 (December 1802): 383–390, here: 383.

<sup>15</sup> Mortensen, *British Romanticism and Continental Influences*, 32.

Gamer, whose study traces this change from an English perspective by inviting us to first look to English Gothic fiction by Radcliffe and Lewis alongside their reception and adaptation to the English stage in order to better understand the reaction of the British press to German influence. Such scrutiny proves to be effective also in my analysis of Austen's references of the 'Horrid' German novel. In order to understand why Austen is looking to German sources in order to discuss domestic questions, we have to be aware of the literary debate that took place in England surrounding the German Gothic.

## II. 'All Horrid' – but not all German

The famous list of 'Horrid Novels' included in *Northanger Abbey* are part of an explicit engagement by Austen with the literature circulating during the 1790s. But, before considering them in some detail, it is useful to see how these works gained such popularity and why they were all labelled 'Horrid' and 'German' in Austen's novel. As previously stated, the writers that paved the way for Gothic fiction in England were all English, and it was the reception of this fiction in reviews and magazines that introduced the German association to their content. Austen was well aware of this tradition at the time she began composing her novel. Alongside the seven German Gothic stories which I will go on to discuss, the author describes how the protagonist, Catherine Morland, is undertaking an extremely engaging reading of English Gothic romances. She begins with the major writer of the time, Ann Radcliffe, whose *Mysteries of Udolpho* is referred to by Austen as a counter-narrative for *Northanger Abbey*. Moreover, *The Italian*, also by Radcliffe alongside Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* are titles enlisted in Austen's novel, since their reception and circulation were controversial at the time and attached to a supposed German tradition.

After Walpole, it was indeed Ann Radcliffe's romances that attracted the majority of popular attention from the readership to the press. Her works were translated across Europe and immediately adapted for the stage. The reception of Radcliffe's English romances were initially

very positive from the reading public as well as from the critics, yet due to the supposed contamination of theatre adaptations, her works were increasingly associated with a larger body of fiction and drama that reviewers dismissed as German.<sup>16</sup> *The Italian* was acclaimed by Radcliffe's admirers, but also labelled as German by conservative critics, including the *Anti-Jacobin Review*: "the wilderness, the mysterious horror of many situations and events in Mrs. R. are rather German than English: they partake of Leonora's spirit: they freeze; they 'curdle up the blood'."<sup>17</sup>

However, Radcliffe was very linear in her composition of Gothic romances, as she followed a set of conventions that made her works recognisable to the audience and encouraged imitators and manipulations for the stage.

Alternatively, Lewis's ground-breaking Gothic story *The Monk*, has a long and complex story of reception, due to a combination of sources for the organization of plot, character and settings. Such a hybrid form of novel was on the one hand very innovative, but on the other hand was quite derivative and difficult to pin down. As explained by Gamer, it was Lewis in his own words who, mentioning a combined set of sources in the introduction of the novel, contributed to the confusion of a clear definition of his work; "while his own letters claimed the book to be inspired by Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Monk*'s printed Advertisement pointed primarily to German and Spanish sources, and playfully prompted readers with regard to its 'plagiarisms' that 'many more may be found'."<sup>18</sup>

Lewis invited his readers to compose their own genealogies of the Gothic's sources and origins complicating the reception of his work and encouraging any sort of supposition about its origins. Such manipulation of sources combined with the new Gothic horror elements (supernatural events, murders, sexual abuse, etc.), made *The Monk* a very controversial novel. Moreover, its popularity was dampened by its tran-

---

<sup>16</sup> Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 76.

<sup>17</sup> *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 5 (1800), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 76.

sition to the stage. As a result, the association of this work with German literature was meant by the critics as a more general critique of the decline of English literature and drama at large due to foreign and dangerous contaminants. As asserted by S. T. Coleridge in his review of Lewis' novel:

The horrible and the preternatural have usually seized on the popular taste, at the rise and decline of literature. Most powerful stimulants, they can never be required except by the torpor of an unawakened, or the languor of an exhausted, appetite. The same phaenomenon, therefore, which we hail as a favourable omen in the belles lettres of Germany, impresses a degree of gloom in the compositions of our countrymen. We trust, however, that satiety will banish what good sense should have prevented; and that, wearied with fiends, incomprehensible characters, with shrieks, murders, and subterraneous dungeons, the public will learn, by the multitude of the manufacturers, with how little expense of thought or imagination this species of composition is manufactured.<sup>19</sup>

After Coleridge's review, other attacks on Lewis and *The Monk* followed, and as reported by Gamer, in November 1797 *British Critic* exploited the publication of Lewis's translation of Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* as a convenient opportunity to not only to attack *The Monk* for a third time, but also to reverse disingenuously their previously guarded, though positive, assessments of German literature.<sup>20</sup>

Thereby, even though Gothic works by English authors were all 'horrid' but not all German, they were nevertheless associated with the idea of German literature and the dangers of foreign contamination that I discussed previously. Such distortion made English Gothic fiction a literary genre considered as imported and derived instead of original, invented by Walpole and developed by Reeve, Radcliffe, Lewis and many other English writers.

---

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Review of *The Monk: a Romance*," in *The Critical Review* 19/2 (1797): 194–200.

<sup>20</sup> Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 77.



The German ‘invasion’ of Gothic fiction was further strengthened, as I noted earlier, by the several translations and adaptations of German romances and plays for the English stage that were printed and widely circulated in England at the end of the 1790s. As Fred Botting relates in his study of Gothic literature, in this period “German writing was associated with the excessive emotionalism of Goethe’s *Werther* or the shocks and horrors of robber tales by Schiller rather than virtuous sentimentality.”<sup>21</sup> Works that described themselves as translations or imitations of German fiction were seen to be increasingly suspect as the century progressed, since, as James Watt concurs, “anything ‘German’ was guilty by association with the deluded revolutionary idealism attributed to the Illuminati, or to writers such as Schiller and Kotzebue.”<sup>22</sup> However, such literature, called ‘escapist literature’ and mainly published by commercial presses such as William Lane’s Minerva Press, was included in the circulating libraries, and was massively received by the expanding English reading public.

Jane Austen’s reference to ‘horrid stories’ in *Northanger Abbey* occur when Isabella Thorpe suggests to her close friend and Gothic fanatic Catherine Morland a list of seven fashionable Gothic tales to read after concluding Radcliffe’s *Udolpho* and *The Italian*. The must-read stories are presented in the following conversation:

Dear creature! How much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished *Udolpho*, we will read the *Italian* together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you.” “Have you, indeed! How glad I am! What are they all?” “I will read you their names directly; here they are, in my pocketbook. *Castle of Wolfenbach*, *Clermont*, *Mysterious Warnings*, *Necromancer of the Black Forest*, *Midnight Bell*, *Orphan of the Rhine*, and *Horrid Mysteries*. Those will last us some time.” “Yes, pretty well; but are they all horrid, are you sure they are all horrid?”<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 49.

<sup>22</sup> James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, eds. James Kinsley and John Davie (Oxford: Oxford Classics, [1818] 2008), 25.

These stories recall a German source or location in their titles and content, and they are specifically referred to as “all horrid” with an attractive connotation, meaning that they all arouse suspense as well as curiosity. Using this particular list of German works, Austen is simultaneously acknowledging the great influence of German literature into English popular culture, and the already customary association between the Gothic and German, whilst also identifying several political and social references and meanings of this type of literature on the English literary marketplace. Through the process of translation, adaptation and transformation, both English and German traditions were thought to have been contaminated by virtue of which they become Gothicized in their own way.

### III. Imitation and reinvention of the Gothic

When consulting this list of stories selected by Austen out of an ample number of Gothic tales circulating at the time, we must consider pivotal elements that drove her attention to such works: pondering the presence or source of German Gothic, the identity of the authors and their aesthetics, and finally the place of publication. This is because, even though Austen's list explicitly refers to a Gothic tradition in titles and style as well as in plots, yet when considering settings and characters, not all these texts have German connections. Only two, out of the seven, were actual translations from German. Moreover, four titles from the list were stories written by English women writers representing a kind of prevalence but also a new literary community of female authors in this field of literature that Austen openly acknowledges. Finally, with the exception of *The Midnight Bell*, all these novels were printed and widely circulated by the profit-making publishing enterprise, Minerva Press.

Eliza Parsons is the author of *The Castle of Wolfenbach* which was published in London in 1793. She also wrote *The Mysterious Warning* (1796). Parsons's works were highly popular at the time and seem to follow the trend of imitating the German Gothic by featuring German locations and characters. Presented as a supposed translation of a work

originally written in German, *The Castle of Wolfenbach: A German Story* for example is completely British, revealing “the vogue for all things Germanic” in the 1790s.<sup>24</sup> Together with Ann Radcliffe’s influence, the traceable contaminations of the text are likely to be French instead of German.<sup>25</sup> As asserted by Diane Hoeveler, Parson’s novel engages “with some of the major ideological issues of its time” namely the French Revolution, as the situation in France was “very much in the forefront of British consciousness”.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, we would agree with Hoeveler, that Parson’s work could be inserted into what Adriana Craciun defined as “cosmopolitan”.<sup>27</sup> In consequence, far from being a second-rate derivative Gothic story, following the tradition of the *Schauerroman*, *The Castle of Wolfenbach* is notably set mostly in Bath, where Austen places her characters in *Northanger Abbey*. Entering into dialogue with questions related to national identity and values in contrast with the French consequences of the Revolution, Parson contributed, as Austen did in her novel, to a political and cultural discourse that discloses much about the English ideologies of the time from the perspective of a middle-class woman writer.

Regina Maria Roche is the Irish author of *Clermont* published in 1798. As with Parson’s works, this novel recalls more closely a French connection than German, borrowing extensively from Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Roche wrote several sensational and sentimental Gothic stories during her life, challenging Radcliffe’s popularity. They include the well-known *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), issued by Minerva Press and republished eleven times by 1832, consolidating its position as a must-read in the circuit of the circulating libraries. In her later productions the author also employed the elements of the travel

---

<sup>24</sup> Diane Hoeveler, “Introduction,” in *The Castle of Wolfenbach: A German Story*, ed. Eliza Parson (Chicago: Valancourt Books, 2006), VII–XV, here: X.

<sup>25</sup> See Devendra P. Varma’s edition of Eliza Parson, *The Mysterious Warning: A German Tale* (London: Folio Press, [1868] 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Diane Hoeveler, “Introduction,” in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, ed. Eliza Parson, VII–XV, here: XII.

<sup>27</sup> See Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).

writing and historical novel genres demonstrating a knowledge of and competence in following the marketing trends of her time. *Clermont* is a British story though, and together with *Udolpho*, they are both employed by Austen in her parody of Gothic modes as well as the critique of misinterpretation of the social Gothic. Roche's German 'affiliation' has been detected only in the way *Clermont* is using the element of horror, instead of terror,<sup>28</sup> and, as asserted by Natalie Schroeder, "in this respect Rochean Gothic becomes more akin to that of the German *Schauerromance* than in the more filmy efforts of Radcliffean romance. Horror, and not terror, is the essential quality of the final scene of *Clermont*."<sup>29</sup> Together with Radcliffe's, Regina Maria Roche's influence on Austen implies an insightful degree of admiration and knowledge of the strategies of the female Gothic.<sup>30</sup>

Eleanor Sleath is the third woman writer mentioned by Austen, in relation to her Gothic romance, *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798). Together with Roche, Sleath is considered one of the more skilful imitators of Ann Radcliffe, and in her expanded production of Gothic romances, copied her great mentor quite openly.<sup>31</sup> However, such literary appropriation should not be interpreted as a passive act of plagiarism, but as a progressive transformation of the canon mostly shaped by women writers. Responding to the Gothic as an evolving generic framework and

---

<sup>28</sup> Ann Radcliffe explained the concept of terror Gothic in her critical essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" published in 1826 where she distinguishes terror from horror, stating that the first enlarges readers' minds by requiring them to participate imaginatively in the narrative's evocation of fear and trepidation, while the second's explicitly violent episodes leave no room for the imagination to operate and thus restrict readers' faculties. See "On the Supernatural in Poetry," in *New Monthly Magazine* 16/1 (1826): 145–152.

<sup>29</sup> Natalie Schroeder, "The Mysteries Of *Udolpho* and *Clermont*: The Radcliffean Encroachment on the Art of Regina Maria Roche," in *Studies in the Novel*, 12/2 (1980): 131–143, here: 138.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion about the female Gothic and the use of terror and horror Gothic in women's writings see Serena Baiesi, "Intersections and Metamorphoses of the 'Female Gothic,'" in *Gothic Metamorphoses across the Centuries: Contexts, Legacies, Media*, eds. Maurizio Ascari, Serena Baiesi and David Levente Palatinus (Bern: Peter Lang, 2020), 35–51.

<sup>31</sup> Rictor Norton (Ed.), *Gothic Readings; the first wave, 1764–1840* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 77.

popular commercial form, *The Orphan of the Rhine*, in terms of style, explicitly includes references to a German context, but in content it is Radcliffe's and Roche's kind of female-authored, terror romance. As asserted by Kathleen Hudson, "we should thus define Sleath's contribution to the Gothic not by ignoring the ways in which she adapted modular tropes as per the Minerva formula but rather by revisiting Sleath's first work and her initial negotiations of genre – and gender-focused authorship and reading practices therein".<sup>32</sup> From a gender and genre-critical perspective *The Orphan* is a romance which explores, and ultimately blurs, the boundaries between originality and imitation, reimagining Gothic conceptions of female communities and affirming the value of a system of narrative exchange and creative appropriations between female writers. Imitation is employed as a sort of literary empowerment, a productive creative strategy, a means for women to develop fictional genealogies and relationships.<sup>33</sup>

A sole male author of Gothic fiction, Francis Lathom, was included in Austen's list of German horror tales with his *The Midnight Bell* (1798). The romance, published anonymously, was part of the reading material consumed by Mr Austen, Jane Austen's father, as observed in one of her letters.<sup>34</sup> The fact that male readers, such as Mr Austen, chose a particular Gothic romance meant that the novel in question became 'elevated' and considered appropriate for serious readerships (both men and women), not just for exclusive female audiences. Together with reading, debates around Gothic works were also part of family practice for the Austens, that we additionally find in *Northanger Abbey*.

---

<sup>32</sup> Kathleen Hudson, "Adopting the 'Orphan': Literary Exchange and Appropriation in Eleanor Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine*," in *Women's Authorship and the Early Gothic: Legacies and Innovations*, ed. Kathleen Hudson (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020), 113–132, here: 115.

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen Hudson, "Adopting the 'Orphan': Literary Exchange and Appropriation in Eleanor Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine*," in *Women's Authorship and the Early Gothic*, ed. Hudson, 113–132, here: 116.

<sup>34</sup> "My father is now reading the 'Midnight Bell' from the Letter to Cassandra Austen (24 October 1798)," in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 15.

Lathom's narrative has been examined not only as a Gothic romance which fits the model of the time, but David Punter and Alan Bissett have recently interrogated the oddities of the work in relation to a queer aesthetic.<sup>35</sup> Even though this romance, as with previous examples, seems to follow the traditional path of German 'terror' narratives, it also introduces novelty and suggests new paths of investigation from a gender studies perspective, fitting into what Angela Wright suggests is a 'feminine' Gothic tradition.<sup>36</sup> The sexual ambivalence presented in Lathom's novel is quite significant and such fluidity in terms of gender could be the reason Austen included this author in her list of female Gothic narratives. In choosing Lathom as suitable reading material, Austen proves to be attentive to social themes from a gendered perspective.

It is interesting to further consider how and why Austen actually includes in Isabella's list two translations from German texts. *The Necromancer; or, The Tale of the Black Forest* was written by Lawrence Flammenberg (pseudonym of Carl Friedrich Kahlert) and translated by Peter Teuthold (Will) in 1794. This was one of the German sources acknowledged by Lewis for *The Monk*. The romance consists of a series of shocking tales of hauntings, violence and the supernatural, all set in Germany's Black Forest and featuring the resurrected wizard Vokert the Necromancer. The English translator, however, changed much of the content of the German source, *Der Geisterbanner*, meaning the story arrived in England as a substantially modified version of the original. This is what Syndy McMillen Conger questions in her article on the circulation of German authors in translation during the 1790s and their influence on English writers and the marketplace:

Did Teuthold (possibly a German émigré) have Jacobin sympathies? Or did he make changes, as Kahlert seemed to think, to create a story more compatible with English taste, or with the English preconcep-

---

<sup>35</sup> David Punter and Alan Bissett, "Francis Lathom in the Eighteenth Century," in *Gothic Studies*, 5/1 (2003): 55–70.

<sup>36</sup> Angela Wright, "Disturbing the Female Gothic: An Excavation of the *Northanger* Novels," in *The Female Gothic. New Directions*, eds. Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 60–75, here: 72.

tion of German literature in the mid-90s? This latter explanation seems more probable. To a great extent, critics ignored the flood of popular German literature arriving on English soil in the 90s; but those who did comment often saw German authors as subversive scribblers with a disregard for literary rules which was symptomatic of their larger revolutionary contempt for social institutions? It may well have been such a notion Teuthold had in mind as he sat down to rework *Der Verbrecher*. Perhaps, though this is admittedly speculation, “Teuthold” was even a conservative Englishman with anti-Jacobin sympathies who deliberately designed his translation to discredit German literature.<sup>37</sup>

The issue of German translation recalls the debates I previously discussed and also involves the last title of Austen’s German ‘horrid’ stories.

The book *Horrid Mysteries; A Story from the German of the Marquis of Grosse* was the second volume listed by Austen that came from Germany and was written by Carl Grosse. Known in Germany by the title *Der Genius*, the novel was translated into English by Peter Will in 1796, two years after the original’s publication. As with *The Necromancer*, *Horrid Mysteries* was freely adapted from German sources by the translator, to meet the expectations of the English audience of the time. As explained by Rainer Godel, “Will’s translations or transformations thus provide a significant example of the complex process of cultural transfer of Gothic literature from Germany to England, a process that does not lack misappropriations and misreadings.”<sup>38</sup> However, this book, considered by Michael Sadleir the most interesting among the *Northanger* novels, “has a strong actuality interest, for its details and length” resembling, as he notes, Schiller’s drama *The Ghost Seer* and the novel *Hermann of Unna* by Professor Kramer.<sup>39</sup> The intrigue is international in terms of setting, and involves the Illuminati sect, thus implying political and social revo-

---

<sup>37</sup> Syndy McMillen Conger, “A German Ancestor for Mary Shelley’s Monster: Kahlert, Schiller, and the Buried Treasure of *Northanger Abbey*,” in *Philological Quarterly*, 59/2 (1980): 216–232, here: 218.

<sup>38</sup> Rainer Godel, “Carl Grosse’s *Der Genius*; or: Contingency and Uncanny in Cultural Transfer,” in *Colloquia Germanica*, 1, 42 (2009): 27–47, here: 27.

<sup>39</sup> Sadleir, Michael, “The *Northanger* Novels, A Footnote to Jane Austen,” in *The English Association Pamphlet*, No. 68 (Nov. 1927), p. 18.



lution. Thomas Love Peacock in his 1818 novella *Nightmare Abbey*, also mentions *Horrid Mysteries*, referring to his character Scythrop, who is a fictionalization of his friend Percy B. Shelley, as a supporter of reforms and social revolution with “the passion for reforming the world”.<sup>40</sup> Not by chance, this character is portrayed sleeping with *Horrid Mysteries* under his pillow and dreaming of “ghastly confederates holding midnight conventions in subterranean caves”.<sup>41</sup>

To conclude, the list of seven titles that Isabella reads out from her pocketbook to Catherine conveys, as Anthony Mandal asserts, “the paradigmatic ingredients of contemporary Gothic fiction, replete as it is with castles and forests, horridly mysterious warnings, Teutonic locations, orphaned protagonists and the raising of the dead”.<sup>42</sup> By using such a specific set of German Gothic elements, Austen acknowledges a literary tradition that is simultaneously broad in terms of writers and consumers. Far from being a random list, Austen’s references represent the mass circulation of literary works and the flexibility of a genre which conveys not only entertainment, sentimentality and the supernatural but all the dangers and anxieties of her time.

Parson, Roche and Sleath, together with Ann Radcliffe, are to be considered significant references in Austen’s mock-Gothic narrative. They well represent the evolution of a genre, developed following a creative as well as commercial impulse, and experimented with primarily by women writers for women readers. The repetition of parallel and highly recognizable narrative paths in all these works, evince the interconnection of a web of female authors who are at the same time building up a genealogy of writers in terms of collective identity, thus transforming the Gothic genre and affirming their dominance in this field of literature. Such gender perspective is openly challenging the literary hegemony of Romantic print culture in general and of the novel marketplace in

---

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey*, ed. Lisa Vargo (Peterborough: Broadview, [1818] 2007), 56.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Mandal, “Gothic and the Publishing World, 1780-1820,” in *The Gothic World*, eds. Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (London: Routledge, 2014), 159–171, here: 159.



particular.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the two translations included in Austen's list are far from occasional references, as they both imply questions of cultural transfer, international politics, and social reformation.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen problematizes female reading practices establishing a close narrative interplay with the German Gothic and affirms the reception and cultural impact that such stories had during her lifetime. Moreover, through using the Gothic in her work, Austen attempts to reinvent the genre through exploring gender limits and boundaries and demonstrating the proclivity of female authors to use the Gothic in their works. Austen also embraces an inter-textual dialogue with other authors, and joins the ranks of those using German Gothic influence to engage with political and social conversations of the day.

---

<sup>43</sup> Edward Jacobs, "Ann Radcliffe and Romantic Print Culture," in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, eds. Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 49–60.