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## Ghost Narratives and the Gothic Novel: Print Culture and Reading Addiction

On a sudden we all felt, at the same instant, a stroke as of a flash of lightning, so powerful that our hands flew apart; a terrible thunder shook the house, the locks jarred; the doors fell shut; the cover of the silver box fell down and extinguished the light, and on the opposite wall, over the chimney piece, appeared a human figure in a bloody shirt, with the paleness of death on its countenance.

—Schiller, *The Ghost Seer*

My terror contained a kind of raging delight, a pleasure that may lie beyond the limits of humanity—I cannot think of anything more frightening than seeing this apparition for a second time; and yet I intentionally repeat for myself the shock, the numbing dread of this moment.

—Tieck, *William Lovell*

On August 10, 1763, three years before the publication of *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, Immanuel Kant wrote to Charlotte von Knobloch, responding to an earlier inquiry of hers about the reality of spiritual visions and ghostly apparitions. The opening of the letter betrays a certain unease that is mixed with sexual gallantry: “Far too long have I denied myself the honor and pleasure of obeying the command of a lady, who is an ornament to her sex, through submitting the requested report. But I had deemed it necessary to engage in a more complete investigation of this matter. The content of the narrative that I am about to relate is altogether different from those that are supposed to have the license of penetrating the chambers of beautiful women in a graceful manner. . . . But even though these

images incite the kind of shudder that is a repetition of early impressions of our education, I am certain that the enlightened lady who reads these words will nonetheless not miss the pleasure that may arise from using this notion correctly. Allow me to justify my proceeding in this matter, gracious lady, since it may look as though a common sort of mania had predisposed me to seek out such narratives and gladly accept them without careful examination."<sup>1</sup>

The following four pages of Kant's letter detail several incidents that speak to Emanuel Swedenborg's purported ability of ghost seeing. According to Kant, the occurrences had been confirmed by several independent witnesses, among them diplomatic ambassadors, as well as a friend and former student. Kant presents as particularly compelling one episode in which Swedenborg, during a visit to Göteborg, gave an accurate description of a fire that was raging at the same time in Stockholm, more than fifty miles away: "The following incident seems to me to have the greatest force of proof and really removes any conceivable doubt." Toward the end of his letter, the German philosopher goes so far as to announce that he awaits "with desire" (*mit Sehnsucht*) the publication of a book by Swedenborg in London, a phrase that extends the sexual frisson of ghostly narratives that "penetrate" the "chambers of beautiful women" to Kant himself.<sup>2</sup>

The previous two chapters explored the crucial role of optical media for the philosophical theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer. Shifting to contemporaneous print culture, I will now analyze the various functions of ghost narratives in the late eighteenth century. In his letter to Charlotte von Knobloch, Kant contrasts his "careful examination" of narrative testimonies that seem to provide empirical evidence for spiritualist claims with the "common mania" (*gemeiner Wahn*) induced by the proliferation of ghost stories in an exploding print market of pamphlets, journals, and books. Closely linked to this scientific approach to ghost narratives is the second, "correct" use of ghost stories, which consists in providing instruction to an "enlightened" reader. As we will see in analyzing Friedrich Schiller's novel *The Ghost Seer*, this didactic function of the ghost



narrative frequently assumed the form of turning against superstition and credulity by telling a cautionary tale about the deceptive power of optical media and an enthusiastic imagination. Kant also describes a third function of ghost stories in suggestive terms that imply a link between fear and pleasure. Even though Kant engages in a "careful examination" of these narratives and reports them to an enlightened reader, they nonetheless create a certain "shudder" (*Schauer*). Within the realm of late eighteenth-century narrative fiction, it is the Gothic novel that centers on this effect of the ghost story. The new literary genre, whose German name is "novel of shudders" (*Schauerroman*), adapted spiritual apparitions as a serial device of shock and terror. But the immersive appeal of these popular tales also caused considerable alarm. Anxieties about its harmful effects had accompanied the rise of the novel since its beginning. But now, conservative critics warned of the dangers of "reading addiction" (*Lesesucht*) and "reading rage" (*Lesewut*), and they invoked a pathological loss of reality as the inevitable consequence of reading too many Gothic novels.

#### ***The Proliferation of Ghost Narratives in Popular Print Culture***

Kant's letter alludes to all of these functions of the ghost story. But in his *Dreams of Spirit Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, published three years later, it is the ostensibly empirical status of ghost narratives as evidence and the proliferation of nonscholarly writings in the medium of print that are at the center of the second, "historical" part. In the "preamble" to the text, which we have cited before, Kant criticizes the popularity of supposedly authentic ghost stories, which were intruding upon philosophical theory: "But why is it that the popular tales which find such widespread acceptance . . . circulate with such futility and impunity, insinuating themselves even into scholarly theories?"<sup>3</sup> Yet even though Kant seems to dismiss spiritual apparitions as a subject worthy of philosophical investigation, he has to concede that empirical claims cannot be refuted by appealing to the certainties of scholastic metaphysics. He states: "What philosopher, torn between the assurances of a rational and firmly convinced

eyewitness, on the one hand, and the inner resistance of an insuperable skepticism, on the other hand, has not, on some occasion or other, created the impression of the utmost imaginable foolishness? Is he completely to deny the truth of all such apparitions? What reasons can he adduce to refute them? Is he to admit the probability of even one of these stories? How important such an admission would be! And what astonishing implications would open up before us, if just one such occurrence could be supposed to be proven!"

Kant opens his treatise by emphasizing the limits of metaphysical deduction in countering assertions that are ostensibly based on experience—in Kant's words: "what reasons can [the philosopher] adduce to refute the truth of all such apparitions?" The first, "dogmatic" part of *Dreams* seeks to answer this question. But as we saw in Chapter 1, instead of resolving the uncertainty as to whether spiritual apparitions are real or not, Kant develops two diametrically opposed theories without clearly marking his own position. The surprising "metaphysical hypothesis" of genuine apparitions is thus followed by the aggressive denunciation of imaginary "brain phantoms."

That theoretical deduction cannot determine with certainty whether spiritual apparitions are real or not is also the conclusion of a text written by Friedrich Schiller's most influential teacher at the Hohe Karlsschule in Stuttgart, Jacob Friedrich Abel. In his *Philosophical Investigations into the Connection of Humans with Higher Spirits* (1791), Abel sought to reject the probability of spirit apparitions.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, he had to admit that the impossibility of an interaction between higher spirits and humans could not be deduced from philosophical reasoning: "Even though we cannot consider this connection and the means suggested for its preservation as probable, we are still too firmly convinced of our utter ignorance vis-à-vis the nature of spirits and their relationship toward us, as that we could, based upon philosophical reasons, dare to deny the possibility of such a connection; instead we readily admit that we are indeed unable to reach a decision about this."<sup>6</sup> The philosophically undecidable question as to whether spiritual communications are real or not leads Abel to an appeal for positive facts and an empirical investigation.



Echoing the preamble of Kant's *Dreams*, Abel concedes: "If there is merely one single fact that necessarily presupposes our connection with spirits, then suddenly all doubt has been removed, and we will gladly and with pleasure give up all of the arguments that we formulated against this connection."<sup>7</sup>

The difficulties of finding a compelling solution as to how the bodily and spiritual realms might interact with each other and the distinction between dogmatic theoretical deduction and empirical claims founded on experience were also central to Friedrich Schiller's *The Philosophy of Physiology* (1779).<sup>8</sup> Schiller opened his treatise on the mind-body problem by highlighting in Cartesian terms the difference between the impenetrable *res extensa* and the penetrable *res cogitans*. Yet according to Schiller, this gulf between the spiritual and material worlds is bridged by a "mediatory force" (*Mittelkraft*) that, while "altogether different" from spirit and matter, nonetheless allows for the interaction of both.<sup>9</sup> Schiller concedes the impossibility of conceptualizing an excluded middle that would have to be penetrable and impenetrable at the same time: "Is such an entity thinkable? Certainly not."<sup>10</sup> But the "nerve spirit," as Schiller called this interface of spiritual and bodily realms, constitutes an empirical fact that has to be accepted, even if it contradicts the established theoretical propositions of philosophy and science. In Schiller's words, which simultaneously describe the predicament of late eighteenth-century philosophical doctrine vis-à-vis an ostensibly genuine ghostly occurrence: "Experience proves its existence. How can theory reject it?"<sup>11</sup>

Schiller emphatically privileges empirical claims over dogmatic theoretical deduction. But within the discussion about the reality of ghostly visions, the "single fact" that would convert skeptics such as Kant and Abel consists of narrative testimonies. Therefore, the reliability of these ostensibly genuine ghost narratives becomes another, equally undecidable question. As Kant states in the preamble to *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*: "Is [the philosopher] to admit the probability of even one of these stories?" Similarly, Abel remarks, immediately after invoking the one verified occurrence that would resolve the

uncertainty as to whether spirit apparitions are real or not: "Other cases indeed deserve closer examination. A spectre announces his impending death to Brutus; Schwedenborg [sic] converses with spirits, living and dead, as with his friends; may we, should we lend credence to these narratives?"<sup>12</sup>

In the "historical" part of *Dreams*, as well, Kant hints at the impossibility of ascertaining the veracity of these stories. Restating the dilemma described in the preamble, Kant again contrasts the deductive approach of scholastic metaphysics with the empirical investigation of positive facts. But this time, he introduces a further differentiation on the side of empirical evidence, for Kant now distinguishes between "the arguments of reason, on the one hand," and "real experience or narrative, on the other hand."<sup>13</sup> By dividing his treatise into a "dogmatic" and a "historical" part, Kant shifts from theoretical argumentation to an empirical investigation of ostensible facts. Yet by further differentiating between "real experience" and "narrative," Kant raises the question as to whether the circulating stories about allegedly genuine apparitions are fiction or fact. The investigation of "facts" holds out the promise of overcoming the limitations of metaphysical deduction. But the empirical evidence for the reality of a connection with the spiritual realm consists of narratives, which may be authentic or not.

Kant similarly alternates between skepticism and credence at the end of the first, "dogmatic" part of *Dreams*—after the authorial "I" has developed the metaphysical hypothesis of genuine apparitions and after the aggressive denunciation of imaginary brain phantoms. In a strangely contradictory passage, Kant concludes: "It is exactly the same lack of knowledge that leads me to dare a complete denial as to the truth of the many different ghost stories; but I dare so only with the ordinary yet outlandish reservation of casting doubt on each of these individual stories while ascribing some credence to all of them taken together. The reader is free to judge for himself. But for my part, the arguments adduced in the second chapter [that is, in Kant's metaphysical hypothesis of genuine spirit apparitions] are sufficiently compelling that I adopt an attitude of seriousness



and indecision when listening to the various strange narratives of this kind."<sup>14</sup>

While stressing the cognitive limits of speculative deduction, Kant first announces a "complete denial as to the truth" of ghost narratives. But then he gives two different reasons for suspending his disbelief and for adopting an "attitude of seriousness and indecision." The first argument for lending "some credence" to these ghost stories is Kant's "metaphysical hypothesis" of genuine apparitions, which he developed in the second chapter of *Dreams*. Even though this speculative proposition cannot claim any empirical proof, it can be formulated without logical inconsistency. But Kant's contradictory statement also speaks to the cumulative power of the numerous ghost narratives published at the end of the eighteenth century. While casting doubt on "each of these individual stories," he paradoxically ascribes some credence "to all of them taken together."

It seems possible that Kant's suspension of disbelief is based on the assumption that a factual claim deserves to be taken more seriously if it is confirmed by several witnesses. But the sum of testimonies that support one specific claim is quite different from the aggregate of the various ghost narratives published at the same time. In a wider context, Kant's stance of doubting each individual story while lending some credence to all of them taken together may also testify to an idealized view of print as a medium of enlightenment. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a rapid expansion of the book market, with an increase in the number of scholarly treatises and with new journals such as the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, which served as an important site of rationalist critiques of superstition and religious fanaticism after its founding in 1783.<sup>15</sup> Kant's own response to the question "What is enlightenment?" was first published in this journal and predicated on scholarly print culture. After famously defining "enlightenment" as "the emergence from our self-imposed tutelage," Kant presents the "public use of reason" as the primary agent of this process. Clarifying the meaning of "public," he writes: "By the public use of one's own reason I understand that which someone makes of it as a scholar before the entire

audience of the world of readers."<sup>16</sup> For Kant, the public use of reason, which is the primary motor of enlightenment, coincides with academic publishing.

Akin to Kant's positive perspective on scholarly print culture, Josias Ludwig Gosch's treatise *Fragments on the Circulation of Ideas* (1789) praised "the invention of the art of printing books" for allowing easy access to classical authors and scholarly works. Gosch described the "circulation of ideas" as purely beneficial for the moral, economic, and intellectual welfare of society and as promoting "the gradual perfection of the human species."<sup>17</sup> In *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, it may be this model of scholarly communication and an idealized view of print as a medium of enlightenment that underlies Kant's strangely illogical assertion that not all of the published ghost narratives can be wrong. This seems corroborated by his previous assessment of Swedenborg, which explicitly invokes scholarly print culture. In his 1763 letter to Knobloch, Kant presents one report about Swedenborg's purported ability to see ghosts as particularly compelling because one ambassador communicated the incident to another one in a letter meant "for public use."<sup>18</sup> Characterizing Swedenborg as a "scholar," Kant seems to expect an answer to his unresolved questions from Swedenborg's next book, which "will make this whole remarkable affair public before the eyes of the world."<sup>19</sup> In *Dreams*, Kant's assessment of Swedenborg is far more negative. But his high esteem of the printed scholarly word, a medium that he later equates with the public use of reason, persists, and it may have led him to lend some credence to the currency of published ghost narratives.<sup>20</sup>

Yet in adopting this "ordinary yet outlandish" stance, Kant comes precariously close to the "common mania" from which he had sought to distance himself in his letter to Knobloch. For print functioned as a malleable medium, and in addition to an increase in scholarly treatises and journals, the print market of the second half of the eighteenth century also witnessed an explosion in esoteric and occultist pamphlets, flyers, novels, and treatises. The boundary between scholarly and spiritualist writings thus became increasingly permeable, or, to quote one more time from Kant's preamble:



"But why is it that the popular tales which find such widespread acceptance...circulate with such futility and impunity, insinuating themselves even into scholarly theories?"<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of the second, "historical" part of *Dreams*, Kant responds to the proliferation of ghost narratives in popular and nonscholarly print culture by deploring the "haunting circulation" of these stories.<sup>22</sup> Kant now adopts a position that stands in stark contrast to his previously suggested attitude of "seriousness and indecision" and to Gosch's positive view of the "circulation of ideas." He figures the medium of print and an exploding book market—without naming them—in dismissive notions of rumor and (female) credulity. It may appear far-fetched to link Kant's scathing critique of hearsay to popular print culture. But the fluidity of an expanding and largely unregulated book market allowed for the same narrative to be reprinted and excerpted in many different versions and contexts, and the sheer number of new published titles and their wide distribution led Herder to liken the printing press to Fama, the winged Roman goddess of rumor. In 1793, Herder wrote in his *Letters on the Promotion of Humanity*: "Now the letterpress was introduced and lent wings to rags which had been scrawled on. They fly into every corner of the world; with every year, with every hour of the day...the wings of this literary Fama grow and fly to the end of the world.... That which human voices keep silent about is talked and yelled about by molded types and mercantile pamphlets."<sup>23</sup>

Akin to Kant, Herder switches to an oral register of "talking" and "listening" to criticize the negative aspects of commercial, popular print culture. Herder concedes that the "world of scholarly knowledge" (*Welt der Wissenschaften*) would be impossible without print. But Herder also anticipates current concerns about the Internet by warning against an information overload in which "everything" is being published.<sup>24</sup> Highlighting the negative effects of wide and easy access to print, Johann Heinrich Zschokke wrote in the early nineteenth century that "nowadays, simple print tools allow for the worst as well as the best work to be reproduced a thousand times with marvelous speed before being dispersed into the world....

From this stems the immense flood of literary works that openly carry the imprint of wretchedness, destined to communicate the errors and the spiritual and moral aberrations of their authors."<sup>25</sup>

In the second, "historical" part of *Dreams*, Kant anticipates these negative accounts of popular print culture by denouncing the proliferation of ghost narratives as based on hearsay and rumor. The same narratives about Swedenborg's spiritual visions that Kant had described as "beyond any conceivable doubt" in his letter to Knobloch he now introduces as having "no other testimony than that of common hearsay, which provides very dubious proof."<sup>26</sup> Kant expands upon the implied danger for scholarly, rationalist discourse by stating: "It has always been the case . . . that certain absurdities have found acceptance even among rational people for no other reason than that everybody talks about them."<sup>27</sup> He includes among these "absurdities" the assumption that the imagination of pregnant women leaves a bodily mark on their children, and he illustrates the power of rumor by invoking a case of media-induced frenzy in France: "By a great deal of hearsay children and women eventually induced a substantial number of intelligent men to take a common wolf for a hyena, and that in spite of the fact that any sensible person could see that there are not likely to be any African predators prowling around the forests in France."<sup>28</sup>

By contrasting children and women with "intelligent men," Kant seeks to uphold the demarcation between scholarly discourse and popular print culture. But he has to concede that the boundary between the two has become permeable, because even "rational people" and "intelligent men" fall prey to the haunting circulation of ghost stories. Kant himself is not immune to this dynamic, and he concedes that his own summary of Swedenborg's *Arcana coelestia* engages "in such a despicable business as that of spreading fairy tales abroad, which every rational being would hesitate to listen to with patience—and, indeed, not merely disseminating them but actually making them the text of a philosophical investigation."<sup>29</sup>

The publication of *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* inadvertently contributes to the "haunting circulation" of ghost narratives that it seeks to end.



Kant even warns, somewhat ironically, against an impregnation of his readers' minds by his treatise. As he writes, comparing his readers to a woman who may give birth to a disfigured child after seeing a monster during her pregnancy: "I am tired of reproducing the wild figments of the imagination of this worst of all enthusiasts...[and] I also have other reservations as well. The naturalist [who] displays monsters in his show cabinet... must be careful not to allow them to be seen by just anyone.... For among the curious, there may easily be pregnant women on whom they could make a bad impression. Taking ideal conception into account, some of my readers may also be expecting, and I should very much regret it if anything they read impressed them too strongly. However, since I have warned them from the very start, I disclaim all responsibility, hoping that the mooncalves to which their fertile imagination may give birth as a result of this circumstance will not be laid on my doorstep."<sup>30</sup>

This warning against the dangers of reading *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* provides a stark contrast to Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" and its equation of the public use of reason with scholarly publishing. Thirty years after the publication of *Dreams*, Kant returned to a discussion of the sources of "mystical enthusiasm" in a letter in which he recommends "scornful silence," rather than "elaborate refutation," as the appropriate media strategy in responding to the proliferation of stories about the marvelous power of animal magnetism.<sup>31</sup> Yet *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* remains part of the medium it criticizes. The second, "historical" part of the treatise warns against the dangers of popular print culture, which it represents as rumor and hearsay. The numerous ghost narratives, which Kant previously presented as deserving "some credence" when "taken together," are therefore rejected as unreliable and misleading. But they are nonetheless reprinted and turned into the "text of a philosophical investigation."

### ***Friedrich Schiller's Ghost Seer***

The constitutive role of ghost stories for the scientific debate about spiritual communications and the (false) promise of resolving a metaphysical uncertainty by recourse to narratives are also crucial

for Schiller's *The Ghost Seer* (1787–89). In its subtitle the novel presents itself as a history founded on fact, taken “From the Papers of Count O.”<sup>32</sup> Its first edition was printed in six installments over the course of two years, from 1787 to 1789, in Schiller's journal *Thalia*. The text proved an instant and enormous success with late eighteenth-century readers, and Schiller published three different book editions—in 1789, 1792, and 1798—that were equally popular. However, Schiller never wrote the second and third volume that he originally announced. That he did not complete the work may speak to its diverging concerns: the text functions as a narrative essay that seeks to enlighten its readers by warning against credulity and religious fanaticism, but at the same time, Schiller's novel is also a fast-paced, sensational story that is built around a sequence of sudden and terrifying apparitions. In *The Ghost Seer*, spiritual apparitions serve as both a subject of theoretical debate and a serial, narrative device of shock and terror.

The novel opens with Count O's first-person narrative about an unnamed Prince who, during Carnival, stays incognito in Venice. One evening, the Prince and the Count are taking a stroll on Saint Mark's Square when they notice that they are being followed by a stranger: “The mask was an Armenian and walked alone.”<sup>33</sup> As the Prince and the Count sit down on a bench, the mysterious foreigner takes a seat next to them, addresses the Prince with his real name, and announces ominously: “Congratulate yourself, my Prince . . . he died at nine.”<sup>34</sup> After this enigmatic pronouncement, the Armenian disappears without a trace. Six days later, a sealed letter from Germany arrives, informing the Prince that a cousin of his, who preceded him in the ascendance to the throne, died the previous Thursday at nine, minutes before the Armenian's revelation. The seemingly inexplicable coincidence is commented on by the Prince with Hamlet's words: “There are more things in heav'n and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”<sup>35</sup>

During the following week, two further episodes suggest the intervention of an “invisible Being” in the affairs of the Prince.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, the Prince, a “melancholy enthusiast” who has always



dreamed of "communicating with the spirit world," discusses the "occult sciences" during a dinner at an inn.<sup>37</sup> Most of the guests exhibit either superstitious or blasphemous attitudes. The Prince, however, contends that one "ought to refrain from a judgment in these matters," thereby adopting the standpoint of "seriousness and indecision" suggested by Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*.<sup>38</sup> But in the diegetic world of *The Ghost Seer*, the undecidable philosophical discussion about the reality of spiritual apparitions is interrupted by a Sicilian, who offers a practical trial of his ability to raise a spirit. Eager to go beyond the cognitive limits of theoretical speculation, the Prince responds with the exhortation: "Let me see an apparition."<sup>39</sup>

After receiving a generous donation, the Sicilian necromancer agrees to summon the spirit of the Marquis de Lanoy, the Prince's deceased friend, who in dying could not finish his last sentence: "In a convent on the frontiers of Flanders lives a—." The preparation for the conjuring lasts several hours. Finally, the Prince, Count O, and several others are asked to enter a dark room with shuttered windows, dimly lit by a small fire burning in a silver capsula. The Sicilian awaits them among wafting clouds of incense, wearing an amulet and a white apron with Kabbalistic characters. In the middle of the room, on a carpet of red satin, stands an altar covered with black cloth. On top of it lie a human skull and an opened Chaldee Bible, next to a silver crucifix fastened to the altar. The sorcerer arranges the Prince, Count O, and the rest of the party in a half circle, asking them to join hands and to abstain from addressing the apparition directly. He then chants a magical formula in a foreign language before calling on the spirit of the Marquis de Lanoy to appear. After the third summons, he stretches his hand toward the crucifix on the altar in the middle of the room. As Count O recounts: "On a sudden we all felt, at the same instant, a stroke as of a flash of lightning, so powerful that our hands flew apart; a terrible thunder shook the house, the locks jarred; the doors fell shut; the cover of the silver box fell down and extinguished the light, and on the opposite wall, over the chimney piece, appeared a human figure in a bloody shirt, with the paleness of death on its countenance."<sup>40</sup>

The deceased, who speaks with a "hollow, hardly intelligible voice," is finally about to complete his last sentence: "In a convent on the frontiers of Flanders lives a—."<sup>41</sup> Yet suddenly, a second apparition disrupts the conjuring: "The house again trembled; a dreadful thunder rolled; a flash of lightning illuminated the room; the doors flew open, and another bodily form, bloody and pale as the first, but even more terrifying appeared on the threshold. The spirit in the box began to burn again by itself and the hall was lit as before. . . . The figure advanced with noiseless and majestic steps directly up to the altar. . . . The first apparition was seen no more."<sup>42</sup> The stunned necromancer tries in vain to shoot the uninvited second apparition and then faints. The Prince, by contrast, remains calm and now identifies the second apparition as the real ghost of his friend. In the following, Lanoy's spirit reveals that he has an illegitimate daughter who lives in a convent in Flanders. A clap of thunder accompanies the disappearance of the second, seemingly genuine apparition.

Immediately thereafter, a Russian officer who has observed the conjuring as a witness steps forward and accuses the Sicilian sorcerer of being a juggler and a fraud. The previously inconspicuous Russian instills a fear in the necromancer that is surprisingly similar to the terror inspired by the second apparition: "The Sicilian turned round, looked steadfastly in [the Russian's] face, uttered a loud shriek, and threw himself at his feet."<sup>43</sup> Even the Count and the Prince cannot repress a feeling of awe when they look more closely at their companion: "We looked all at once at the pretended Russian. The Prince instantly recognized the features of the Armenian. . . . We were all as petrified with fear and amazement. Silent and motionless, our eyes were fixed on this mysterious being."<sup>44</sup>

Officers of the Venetian police appear and arrest the Sicilian, while in the ensuing confusion, the Armenian again vanishes without a trace. In the subsequent installment, the incarcerated Sicilian gives a detailed explanation of how he staged the first apparition with a "magic lantern" hidden behind the window shutters and operated by an accomplice.<sup>45</sup> The phantasmagoric projection of the alleged spirit became visible as soon as the light in the room was



extinguished, and the electrical shock "as of lightning" that accompanied the appearance of the ostensible ghost was administered by an electrical machine, concealed underneath the room's floor and connected to the silver crucifix that served as a "conductor."<sup>46</sup> The spirit's "hollow voice," in turn, belonged to a second accomplice of the Sicilian who was hiding in the chimney.

In accounting for every detail of the first apparition, the novel appropriates numerous late eighteenth-century treatises on how optical tricks and an enthusiastic imagination may deceive credulous or superstitious observers.<sup>47</sup> The electrical shock to which the Sicilian's audience is subjected may be modeled after the ghost shows of Paul Philidor (a.k.a. Phylidor or Paul de Philipsthal) in which Philidor arranged his viewers with joined hands in a human chain, electroshocking them by means of a hidden Leyden jar in order to silence any disbelief.<sup>48</sup> But above all, Schiller's novel draws on the first volume of Johann Samuel Halle's *Magic, or the Magical Forces of Nature* (1784). This instructional text contained a chapter called "A Magical Ghost Solicitation" that resembles Schiller's novel in numerous details.

In an exposition similar to the course of events narrated in *The Ghost Seer*, Halle first describes the effects of a ghostly projection before giving a detailed technical explanation: "The ostensible magus leads the assembly of curious into a room whose floor is covered with black cloth and in which is an altar painted black and with two lights and a skull or a funerary urn on it. The magus draws a circle in the sand around the table or altar and asks the audience not to step outside this circle. He begins his conjuration reciting from a book of arbitrary characters and burns mastic for good and stinky things for evil spirits. Suddenly, the lights extinguish themselves with a loud bang, a strange rumbling arises, and in this moment, the solicited spirit appears, hovering in the air over the altar."<sup>49</sup> Under the heading "Apparatus," the subsequent four pages of Halle's treatise give a detailed technical and psychological explanation, accompanied by a drawn illustration (Figure 7), of how and why the viewers will mistake the ghostly projection for a genuine apparition: "Apparatus: Optical science teaches us that the light of the magic lantern and the



**Figure 7.** A phantasmagoric projection onto smoke by means of a magic lantern hidden inside an altar. Using a human skull as a theatrical prop appeals to the imagination of the conjuror's audience. From Samuel Halle, *Magie, oder die Zauberkräfte der Natur* (Berlin, 1784).



colors of the painted object can be projected onto a white wall or screen as well as onto smoke, be it from boiling water or dry smoke."

In giving a natural explanation to ostensibly supernatural phenomena, Schiller's novel adapts Halle's *Magic* and other contemporaneous treatises on natural magic and optical media.<sup>50</sup> In doing so, Schiller's text contrasts starkly with other Gothic novels, which delighted in shocking their readers with sudden apparitions of unambiguously real ghosts, such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Yet following in the wake of *The Ghost Seer*, Cajetan Tschink's *The Victim of Magical Delusion* (1790–93) and Lawrence Flammenberg's *The Necromancer* (1792) similarly revealed ostensibly genuine spirit apparitions as produced by "a magic lanthorn" and "optical means."<sup>51</sup> In his preface to the 1811 edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Sir Walter Scott commented on this split within Gothic fiction by praising Walpole's "bold assertion of the actual existence of phantoms," and he rejected the "attempt to reconcile the superstitious credulity of feudal ages with the philosophic skepticism of our own, by referring those prodigies to the operation of fulminating powder, combined mirrors, magic lanthorns, trap-doors, speaking trumpets, and such like apparatus of German phantasmagoria."<sup>52</sup>

Schiller's *The Ghost Seer*, which provides a detailed account of the Sicilian's "apparatus," seems prototypical of this "German phantasmagoria." The didacticism of the novel delivers what has been promised in its introduction. There, Count O aligns his report about the fate of the Prince with late eighteenth-century anthropological treatises, presenting the allegedly authentic story as a "contribution to the history of deception and the errors of the human intellect."<sup>53</sup> The narrator's introduction thus all but replicates the title of Johann Christoph Adelung's *History of Human Folly; or, Biographies of Famous Black Magicians, Alchemists, Necromancers, Prophets, Enthusiasts and Other Philosophical Villains*, an instructional textbook published in five volumes from 1785 to 1789.<sup>54</sup>

In the main narrative, the figure of the Sicilian also gives voice to the central arguments of these Enlightenment treatises, revealing

how, in order to inflame the Prince's enthusiastic imagination, he staged several mysterious incidents in the days before the conjuring. The narrator's introduction to the second part of the novel expands on the didactic and anthropological interests of the case history by commenting on the detrimental effects of the Prince's upbringing, which rendered him susceptible to seeing ghosts. Count O indicts the Prince's "bigoted education," which imprinted "frightful images upon his tender brain," thereby transforming religious matters into an "enchanted castle into which one does not set one's foot without horror."<sup>55</sup> While thus alluding to the numerous Gothic novels in the wake of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, these remarks also repeat a skeptical warning against the deceptive power of an inflamed imagination from Schiller's early theoretical writings, which relate a false, feverish vision of "spirits expelled from their graves" to "images absorbed as a child."<sup>56</sup>

Yet instead of exorcizing the rhetoric of ghostliness, Schiller's *Ghost Seer* displaces its figures of supernatural agency onto the description of a vast hidden conspiracy, personified in the mysterious figure of the Armenian. The narrative does give a comprehensive account of how "fanatic enthusiasm" and optical media may lead a credulous spectator to mistake a phantasmagoric image for a real ghost.<sup>57</sup> However, even after the Sicilian's explanation of his fraudulent tricks, the language of the supernatural retains a central role, thereby allowing for further installments of the serial narrative. The Prince does give a short hypothetical account of how the Sicilian and the Armenian might have conspired in staging the sudden, "incomprehensible" appearance of the second specter.<sup>58</sup> But the details of how the Armenian's "invisible hand" might have achieved this remain shrouded in obscurity, thereby leaving room for the possibility of a genuine spiritual occurrence.<sup>59</sup>

### *The Repetition of Shock: Seriality and Reading Addiction*

We have seen how this ambiguity corresponds to the undecided position of Kant's and Schiller's theoretical writings about spiritual visions. But in addition to drawing on the philosophical debate



about the possibility and reality of ghostly apparitions, Schiller's novel also deploys spiritual occurrences as a serial narrative device of shock and terror. The electrical shock, felt by Count O and the Prince when the apparition of the first Lanoy becomes visible—"On a sudden we all felt, at the same instant, a stroke as of a flash of lightning, so powerful that our hands flew apart"—also stands in for the novel's nearly bodily effect on its readers, an effect that the text aims for time and again. In the contemporaneous visual medium of the phantasmagoria, the viewer's disorientation in darkness and the use of black background slides allowed for frightening special effects. To quote Hegel's Jena lectures one more time: "In phantasmagorical presentations it is night on all sides; here a bloody head suddenly surges forward, there another white form abruptly appears, before vanishing again."<sup>60</sup> Comparable effects of disorientation and terror are central to Schiller's sensational novel and its serial narration of unexpected ghostly apparitions. As in the sequence of sudden optical magnifications that assault the phantasmagoria's viewer, Schiller's *The Ghost Seer* administers a series of shocks to its protagonist and to its readers. In the diegetic world of the narrative, one sudden, unexpected appearance is always followed by another: immediately after the apparition of Lanoy's first specter, the text introduces a second ghost, "bloody and pale as the first, but even more terrifying." The Sicilian's fainting then serves as an embodied representation of horror before the unveiling of the Armenian's real identity leaves the Prince and the Count "petrified with fear and amazement."

This narrative structure of seriality and repetition also applies to the second of the six original installments, which features an unreliable narrative told by the incarcerated Sicilian to the Prince and Count O about a previous encounter with the elusive Armenian five years earlier.<sup>61</sup> The Sicilian relates that back then, he was the guest of a bereaved family who remained in uncertainty about the fate of Jeronymo, a son, brother, and fiancé possibly abducted by pirates and missing for years. The false necromancer gives "lectures" on "the intercourse of men with higher beings" and finds a receptive

audience in Jeronymo's "credulous" father and his fiancée, a "young Countess whose mind since the loss of her lover had been more occupied in the world of spirits than in that of nature, and who had, moreover, a strong shade of melancholy in her composition."<sup>62</sup>

Employing his hidden "machinery," the Sicilian finally stages a false apparition of the missing Jeronymo.<sup>63</sup> The somewhat tedious passages on how melancholy "enthusiasm" may lead to credulity and superstition appropriate a treatise on the notorious Cagliostro, published by one of his former victims.<sup>64</sup> But again, the enlightenment of the reader remains incomplete, for the text substitutes violent shock and narrative suspense for its initial didacticism.

The Sicilian's optical simulation of Jeronymo's ghost persuades the Countess that her fiancé has passed away, and she agrees to marry his brother. But the wedding celebration is disrupted by a second, ostensibly genuine apparition. The groom is asked to bring a toast to his departed sibling when Jeronymo's real ghost suddenly reveals his death as fratricide: "'That was my murderer's voice!'—exclaimed a terrible figure, which appeared suddenly in the midst of us, covered with blood and disfigured with horrible wounds."<sup>65</sup> Once again, the unexpected and shocking appearance of a second, seemingly genuine ghost is placed next to a lengthy psychological and technical explanation of a false spiritual vision.

A narrative interest in shock and repetition can also be observed in contemporaneous British Gothic fiction. The length of Ann Radcliffe's novels and their focus on sensibility and sentiment differ considerably from Schiller's fast-paced and comparatively short text. But *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) also indulges in a textual representation and production of "terror."<sup>66</sup> The novel's villain, Montoni, holds the heroine, Emily, captive in Castle Udolpho, where a veiled picture may hold a clue to the identity of its legitimate owner. But when Emily finally seizes a long-desired chance to examine the portrait, she gains fear, rather than knowledge: "Emily . . . hastily entered the chamber, and went towards the picture, which appeared to be enclosed in a frame of uncommon size, that hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then, with a timid hand,



lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber she dropped senseless on the floor.”<sup>67</sup>

The fainting spell of the protagonist serves as an embodied representation of shock, while the reader’s suspense is heightened even further by the novel’s silence about the source of Emily’s terror. We get to know only that what the veil had concealed “was no picture.” The gap in the narrative thus follows Edmund Burke’s appraisal of obscurity as a necessary condition of dread: “To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary.”<sup>68</sup> Four hundred pages later, after a happy end is secured and when the information is no longer relevant, the reader does find out what was behind the curtain. This delay in explaining the supernatural markedly contrasts with the narrative structure of Schiller’s Gothic novel, where the Sicilian’s detailed account of how he staged the apparition of the first Lanoy comes shortly after the appearance itself. But similar to *The Ghost Seer*, Radcliffe’s novel also aims for a repetition of the jolting moment of fright. Immediately after describing Emily’s fainting, the text continues: “When she recovered her recollection, the remembrance of what she had seen nearly deprived her of it a second time.” The text thereby strives for a repetition of the puncturing moment of shock and terror, which has disrupted the normal flow of time by creating a void of pure horror, one in which the past and future have become irrelevant: “Horror occupied her mind, and excluded, for a time, all sense of past, and dread of future misfortune.”<sup>69</sup>

Radcliffe’s borrowings from the sentimental novel set her novels apart from more violent tales such as Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* and Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth, the Wanderer*. But the repetition of shock seems to be a shared structural quality of these texts,<sup>70</sup> one that can be traced back to Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, which opens with Conrad, Manfred’s son, “being dashed to pieces” by a giant helmet unaccountably falling from the sky.<sup>71</sup> In *The Castle of Otranto*, the subsequent course of events comes close to abandoning narrative coherence. The storyline can be read as undoing the usurpation of

the castle by Manfred's ancestors. But Walpole himself described the novel's "principal engine" as "terror,"<sup>72</sup> and indeed, the initial shock is followed by a succession of Gothic effects—the appearance of yet more outsized body parts—until Alfonso, the founder of Otranto, becomes visible as a whole.

A serial succession of ghostly appearances is also central to the second part of Schiller's *Ghost Seer*, which is no longer a first-person narrative, but composed of letters written by Baron F to Count O. The language of the supernatural is here applied to visions of a Greek woman whose "apparition" (*Erscheinung*) is described in two consecutive stories.<sup>73</sup> The Prince encounters the female figure in an empty chapel, where she is perfectly lit by the setting sun entering through a single window, and he responds to this sighting with "terror," a reaction more appropriate to the sublime than to the beautiful.<sup>74</sup> As a result, Baron F questions the Prince about his vision in terms that suggest a ghostly manifestation: "But this figure, your highness? Are you certain that it was something living, something real, and not perhaps a mere picture, or an illusion of your fancy?"<sup>75</sup> As the story progresses, the Greek woman turns out to be German, and the intensity of the Prince's reaction to her appearance is given a natural explanation—a painting of the Madonna has left a lasting imprint on the Prince's imagination.<sup>76</sup> But the equivalence between her appearance and that of a ghost is also corroborated by the fact that Schiller suggested two images for the frontispiece of the first book edition of *The Ghost Seer*: either the apparition of Lanoy's second specter or the Prince's vision of the Greek woman in the church (Figure 8).<sup>77</sup>

The parallel between seeing the Greek woman and seeing a ghost becomes even more pronounced in a story told by a new friend of the Prince, Civitella, who has previously observed the same woman with a telescope and who describes her as "a supernatural being."<sup>78</sup> Again the novel draws on contemporaneous warnings against the deceptive power of an enthusiastic imagination and optical effects: "Was it the play of my imagination, or the magic effect of lighting?"<sup>79</sup> The "angelic brightness of [the Greek woman's] look" pales, however,





**Figure 8.** Frontispiece of the 1792 book edition of Schiller's *The Ghost Seer*: the Prince sees a Greek woman whose appearance fills him with "terror."

once Civitella shifts his focus to the mysterious foreigner standing next to her, who turns out to be the Armenian.<sup>80</sup>

In recounting two sightings of the Greek woman, first as seen by the Prince and then as seen by Civitella, Schiller's novel repeats the serial narrative structure of the first part. At the same time, Civitella's vision suggests a contiguity between a ghostly "supernatural being" and the Armenian, whereas the Prince's vision is actually arranged by the latter. While staying out of sight, the Armenian thereby ignites the passions of the Prince and prevents him from leaving Venice. Baron F naïvely hopes that this new "apparition" will awaken the Prince from his "metaphysical dreams," but the opposite comes true.<sup>81</sup> It is the death of the Greek woman, real or simulated, that in the end drives the Prince into "the arms" of the Armenian, causing his final conversion to Catholicism and murder.<sup>82</sup>

This conclusion of *The Ghost Seer*, however, was hastily patched together in the final paragraph of the 1789 book edition, which was originally meant to be only the first of several volumes. In his letters, Schiller always distanced himself from his most popular and successful work, an unease that highlights the difference between a fast-paced sensational novel and Schiller's later poetics of Weimar Classicism, which was predicated on slow and repeated readings of canonical tragedies and poems. At the same time, Schiller's difficulties in completing *The Ghost Seer* also speak to the diverging concerns of the text. In addition to providing didactic instruction, the narrative also is engaged in the serial representation and production of shock. Concomitantly, the novel's representation of the mysteriously omnipresent Armenian partook in the rise of the "secret society novel" (*Geheimbundroman*), a specifically German genre that centered on the machinations of unseen conspiracies.<sup>83</sup>

The at times incongruous copresence of philosophical reflection and suspenseful narration in *The Ghost Seer* resurfaces in the second part, which relates not only the Prince's and Civitella's sightings of the Greek woman, but also a lengthy "Philosophical Dialogue" between Baron F and the Prince. The Prince, whose Pietist education had turned religious matters into an "enchanted castle," now



undergoes a period of skeptical agnosticism—under the influence of “the most modern books,” which lie beyond his understanding and which shatter his beliefs with a “dazzling style” and “captious sophisms.”<sup>84</sup> Turning against the projection of a human “purpose onto an imagined deity,” he goes so far as to assert: “What has already happened to me, and may still follow, I look upon as two black impenetrable curtains hanging over the two extremities of human life and not drawn aside by any mortal.”<sup>85</sup> This emphatic invocation of the limits of human knowledge can be read as a very loose adaptation of Kant’s insistence on the limits of philosophical knowledge.<sup>86</sup> But the Prince’s statement also draws on the language of the Gothic novel, all but anticipating Radcliffe’s heroine lifting a veil from what turns out not be a picture.<sup>87</sup> Right after this extended philosophical discussion, which was shortened in later editions, Count O writes in an editorial note: “I also ask my readers for forgiveness that I have copied the good Baron F so faithfully. . . . [He] could not foresee to what extent the Prince’s philosophy would shape his future fate, but I know about it. . . . The reader who hoped to see ghosts here may rest assured that they are still to come.”<sup>88</sup>

Schiller himself did not fulfill this promise of more ghosts still to come, for he never completed *The Ghost Seer*. It thus fell to sequels and spin-offs by other authors to capitalize on the serial structure of the narrative. Cajetan Tschink’s *History of a Ghost Seer* (1790–93), translated into English as *The Victim of Magical Delusion*, made the Armenian part of a patriotic conspiracy that uses deception for noble purposes. Lorenz Flammenberg’s *The Necromancer* copied the plot of *The Ghost Seer* while changing the names of its protagonists, and its second part even plagiarized Schiller’s narrative “The Criminal from Lost Honor.”<sup>89</sup> Other authors presented their books as a “counterpart” to *The Ghost Seer*, a marketing strategy adopted in *Ghost Stories Revealed, as an Instruction and Entertainment for Everybody: A Counterpart to Schiller’s Ghost Seer*, anonymously published in 1797, and in Johann Jakob Brückner’s *Angelika, Daughter of the Great Bandit Odoardo, Prince of Peschia from the House of Zanetti: A Counterpart to Schiller’s Ghost Seer*.<sup>90</sup> Further popular titles in the wake of Schiller’s

*The Ghost Seer* include *The Painting with the Blood Stains: A Ghost Story Based on a True Anecdote* (1800), by Ignatz F. Arnold; *Ghost Apparitions in the Tomb of the Scipios: From Papers Found on Hill Esquiline* (1816), by H. Krappe; *The Female Ghost Seer* (1794–98), by Karl August Gottlieb Seidel; *The Old One—Everywhere and Nowhere: A Ghost Story* (1803), by Christian Heinrich Spiess; *The Conjuraton of the Devil* (1791), translated into English as *The Sorcerer: A Tale*, by Leonhard Wächter; and *Ghosts and Ghost Seers, or, Life and Premature Death of a Necromancer: A Warning Anecdote of our Times* (1789), by Johann Heinrich Zschokke.<sup>91</sup> The unimportance of a classical author function for these serial representations of spiritual and supernatural occurrences also comes to the fore in the most popular edition of *The Ghost Seer*, which combined Schiller's text with a continuation by Ernst Friedrich Folle-nius.<sup>92</sup> The compilation went through numerous reprints throughout the nineteenth century, and its English translation came forth in 1800 as *The Armenian; or the Ghost Seer: A History Founded on Fact*.

Carl August Grosse's *Der Genius: Aus den Papieren des Marquis C\* von G\*\** (1791–95), which also cites Schiller's novel in its subtitle, came to be one of the most widely read literary texts in eighteenth-century Germany.<sup>93</sup> In 1796, the novel was published in two English versions—*The Genius: or, The Mysterious Adventures of Don Carlos de Grandez* and *Horrid Mysteries: A Story*.<sup>94</sup> It comes as no surprise that it was the second, more sensationalist title that made the list of “horrid” novels in Jane Austen's parody of Gothic fiction, *Northanger Abbey* (1798). There, the protagonist, Catherine, indulges in “the luxury of a raised, restless, and frightened imagination over the pages of *Udolpho*,” and her friend Isabella exhorts her to continue thereafter with “*The Italian, Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries*.”<sup>95</sup> The list reads like a parody, but all of these titles were actually published in the late eighteenth century, when Gothic novels appealed to a mass audience that conservative critics described as susceptible to “reading addiction.”

As if lending credence to contemporaneous warnings against the dangerous allure of these popular tales, it is not only Austen's



protagonist, Catherine, who starts seeing ghosts after reading too many Gothic novels; in 1792, the later Romantic author Ludwig Tieck also suffered a nervous breakdown after reading aloud with two friends the first two parts of Grosse's *Der Genius*. Beginning at four in the afternoon, Tieck and his friends, Schmohl and Schwinger, took turns reciting from the text. But even though his friends fell asleep around midnight, Tieck seemed unwilling or unable to stop. As he wrote in a letter: "I continued reading, always with the same enthusiasm, with the same persistent zeal; after two o'clock I was done with the book. A short break in which I could not speak or think; all scenes repeated themselves before my eyes. . . . I was alone . . . standing thoughtfully with my arm resting on a chair . . . rose-colored images swirled around me with blue butterfly wings—when suddenly—I still shudder when thinking about it—all of these sensations sank down in me like in an earthquake, all the beautiful blossoming hills, all the flowery valleys went suddenly under, and black night, the silence of death, dreadful rocks rose in a severe and dreadful manner. . . . Terror enveloped me, shudders, the most dreadful ones, were breathing at me, everything around me came to life, horrifying shadows hunted each other around me; my room and I seemed to fly into a black infinity."<sup>96</sup>

The letter continues to describe Tieck's hallucinations until they come to a frightful climax that is shaped by his readings of Gothic fiction and Shakespeare: "The horses tore the carriage forward relentlessly, I felt how my hair stood on end, I rush into the chamber and scream. They [Tieck's friends, Schmohl and Schwinger], believing I intend to terrify them, also scream, when suddenly the chamber expands as if to a wide hall; in it two giant beings, large and monstrous, unknown to me; their face is like a full moon (only now do I understand this admirable description in *King Lear*); I felt as if I was going to fall down, fear and rage shook all of my limbs; I would have stabbed both of them, had I had a rapier. For several seconds I was truly insane."<sup>97</sup> According to his letter, Tieck continued to scream and almost fainted before he gradually apprehended his friends and his environment. But even then, he was still so

frightened by the white color of Schmohl's sleeping gown that his friend had to don an overcoat. After he had been put to bed, Tieck remained for another hour in a state of terror, picturing himself as lying in a coffin, before he finally fell asleep.

The episode constitutes an extreme example of what was called "reading rage"—*Lesewuth*—around 1800 in texts that criticized "reading addiction," the practice of reading too much and too fast.<sup>98</sup> Johann Gottfried Hoche published a treatise on the subject, defining "reading addiction" as a "misguided and pernicious abuse of an otherwise beneficial practice, a truly large evil as contagious as the yellow fever in Philadelphia." As Hoche continued: "one reads everything without purpose, without any order, one does not appreciate anything and devours everything; nothing is understood properly, and everything is given only a cursory reading and then forgotten right away, which is, however, quite good for most of what was read."<sup>99</sup>

Without taking these conservative lamentations at face value, one can read them as responding to a profound change of print culture in the second half of the eighteenth century, when reading was no longer restricted to religious and scholarly purposes, but also a practice of leisure and entertainment.<sup>100</sup> The rise in popular literacy, the emergence of the lending library and reading societies, as well as the availability of affordable reprints, pamphlets, and journals increased the number of readers.<sup>101</sup> Concomitantly, the book market saw an astonishing proliferation of Gothic, knight, and robber novels. While the number of German-language novels published between 1750 and 1760 was 73, the equivalent number for the 1790s grew to an astonishing 1,623 published novels.<sup>102</sup> The rise of immersive reading practices, which were so alarming to Hoche and others, was part of this newly emerging popular print culture.

Women and adolescents were deemed especially vulnerable to "reading addiction," an argumentative strategy reminiscent of Kant's distinction between "intelligent men" and women and children in his discussion of rumor and hearsay in *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*.<sup>103</sup> Hoche's simile of a contagious disease—"a truly large evil as contagious as the yellow fever in Philadelphia"—is also invoked



by Kant in a 1790 letter that addresses the sources of "the current prevalence of mystical enthusiasm." There, Kant characterizes "reading addiction" as "the carrier which spreads this illness [and] the miasmatic poison which produces it."<sup>104</sup> In terms that come close to Schiller's representation of the Prince being led astray by "the most modern books," Kant condemns readers from the "wealthy and higher classes" who, instead of pursuing the "thorny path of thorough learning," attempt to "skim off the cream of scholarly knowledge" by consulting "indexes and summarizing excerpts." Kant describes such cursory readings as resulting in a "loquacious ignorance" (*redselige Unwissenheit*) in which "things are presented as facts even though only a lofty possibility of them can be conceptualized." In his 1790 letter, Kant thereby reintroduces the oral register that underlies his indictment of hearsay in *Dreams*.<sup>105</sup>

As the only cure for this malady, Kant recommends a radical change of school curricula: the substitution of "learning cursorily too many diverse subjects with learning thoroughly the little that counts, thereby channeling the desire to read into a purposeful habit rather than exterminating it completely."<sup>106</sup> In the same way, Johann Georg Heinzmann advocated slow and repeated readings of valuable texts as a remedy against the pernicious effects of the rapid "devouring" of fashionable novels.<sup>107</sup> Seen in this context, the inaccessible, "thorny" terminology of Kant's critical writings and the high poetic register of Goethe and Schiller's Weimar classicism become discernible as distinct, yet parallel attempts at demarcating a small set of canonical texts to be read repeatedly with care and scrutiny, in contrast to the "flood" of popular material intended for fast consumption.<sup>108</sup>

Kant's letter criticized abridged textbooks, summaries, and indexes, all of which excerpted and popularized scholarly knowledge—the CliffsNotes of the eighteenth century, as it were. But in his *Anthropology*, he also warned against "the reading of novels" for making "distraction habitual."<sup>109</sup> Johann Adam Bergk's *The Art of Reading Books* (1799) condemned sensationalist narrative fiction in even stronger terms: "A person who reads many ghost novels runs the danger to lose the correct, if not all, use of reason.... Ghost

novels always keep our expectation under suspense; one impossibility after another one becomes real, one strange apparition follows the next one, and what human beings cannot accomplish is carried out by ghosts; we therefore consider nothing impossible anymore."<sup>110</sup>

According to Bergk, Gothic novels destroy the reader's sense of reality. Instead of educating, they appeal to our "natural inclination to the marvelous and the supernatural." Bergk expands on this by invoking contemporaneous visual media, warning that the reader's "imagination basks in an enchanted world, while his reason goes to sleep... when new, extraordinary, and strange apparitions constantly pass by, as in an optical box."<sup>111</sup> Exempting *The Ghost Seer* from his critique, Bergk described Schiller's novel as "a product of genius and taste" that stood in stark contrast to its many "imitations" by providing "entertainment and instruction."<sup>112</sup> In doing so, Bergk paid tribute to Schiller's status as a canonical author. But Bergk's critical account of how the ghost novel's reader is kept "under suspense" by "one strange apparition follow[ing] the next one" serves as an apt description of both *The Ghost Seer* and the numerous sequels and spin-offs written by other authors. Denouncing the monstrous "disfigurations" following in the wake of Schiller's narrative, Hoche commented on the repetitive structure of these narratives in nearly identical terms: "One spirit follows another spirit, and one devil another devil."<sup>113</sup>

It is this serial iteration of shock and terror that lent these texts the addictive quality that was so alarming to conservative critics such as Bergk and Hoche. Another contemporaneous text about the pernicious effects of reading sensationalist fiction put its focus on young women to conclude that novels "incite the inclination toward the marvelous and extraordinary while instilling disgust toward the normal course of things. Common chores, in which maidens are supposed to educate themselves to grow into women, become intolerable and produce boredom, to be overcome only by new shocks which shatter the imagination."<sup>114</sup> While figuring the addicted reader of the Gothic novel as adolescent and female, this exaggerated warning against the harmful power of narrative fiction



rightly emphasizes the repetition of terror and shock in the Gothic novel. Its readers can always expect more ghosts still to come.

In addition to undergoing an episode of "reading rage" that followed his immersion into the fictional world of Grosse's *Horrid Mysteries*, Tieck also represented the dangers of fanatic reading in his novel *William Lovell* (1795). There, the melancholy enthusiast Balder sees a ghost walking through his room after he reads, in the middle of the night, the first scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "A marvelous imaginary play began in my head at the line.... *Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again*.... I saw the wild night.... Horatio listening with utmost suspense to the strange narrative of his friend—and now suddenly the ghost enters, slowly and silently, hovering, a black shadow.... I felt a shiver that drove its cold hand over my neck to the spine, the silence around me became more and more deathlike, I retreated further into my inner self and with terrified delight I observed the apparition in my innermost fantasy, lost to the external world. Suddenly I heard a long, quietly drawn step through the room, and looked up again—a man walked behind my back toward the door of my bedroom.... I clearly apprehended the white hair on his head; the shadow on the wall followed after him, distorted in a terrifying manner."<sup>115</sup>

The novel describes an external hallucination that rises from Balder's inner visualization of the first scene of *Hamlet*. Tieck thus represents Shakespeare's tragedy as producing the same "terrified delight" that was crucial for the enormous success of the contemporaneous Gothic novel.<sup>116</sup> Texts such as Schiller's *Ghost Seer* and Grosse's *Horrid Mysteries* engendered dread and delight by representing and administering a sequence of shocks. As if describing a reader immersed into sensationalist fiction, one who is subject to "reading addiction" and who longs for the next shock that will shatter his or her imagination, Tieck's narrator recounts: "My terror contained a kind of raging delight, a pleasure that may lie beyond the limits of humanity—I cannot think of anything more frightening than seeing this apparition for a second time; and yet I intentionally repeat for myself the shock, the numbing dread of this moment."<sup>117</sup>