



# The Uncanny in German Novels Around 1800

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Around 1800, the uncanny became a significant element of German (and British) novels. Spacious, unoccupied, church-like buildings, abandoned castles, howling winds, the clapping of doors and windows, the creaking of rusty hinges, unexpected glimpses of the moon – and not least, mysterious specters – produce feelings of “horror and terror,” as the British gothic author Ann Radcliffe called the readers’ reactions towards the uncanny. My aim in this presentation is neither to give a complete survey of the uncanny in German literature around 1800 – although it is remarkable that this motif is not at all restricted to what one might call “popular culture” – nor to provide typological classifications of the uncanny nor how it is meant to be understood. Instead, I am interested in the historical context of the Gothic horror craze. I will mainly focus on Carl Grosse’s widely received (and translated) gothic novel “Der Genius” and attempt to explain how the contemporary world view or “Weltsicht,” the perception of contingency, created a public interest in the uncanny and its literary figuration.

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