GERLIT 127 – Uncanny Literature in Nineteenth Century Germany

From ghost children and animated statues, the walking dead to machine women and doppelgängers, nineteenth century German literature teems with things that go bump in the night. This course attempts to sketch the history of this tradition of fantastic literature in Germany, trace its origins, present its main authors and its defining features. Authors include E.T.A. Hoffmann, Wilhelm Hauff, Friedrich Schiller, Joseph von Eichendorff and Jeremias Gotthelf. Class discussions, with readings and writing practice in German.

1. Texts

All texts for this class will be available online (at coursework.stanford.edu); copies will also be handed out in class. If you cannot make it to class, I will put a copy of the readings in the box outside my office for you to pick up.

2. Writing Exercises

Since this is a WIM-class, we will practice writing and organizing papers in German. All writing requirements listed on the syllabus should be in German and should be proof-read with some care. Since many will be discussed with your colleagues in peer review conferences, you should make sure that all your writing is presentable and free of careless errors.

3. Audiobooks

I will periodically hand out CDs with some of the class text read by German actors and actresses – both to allow you to work on your listening comprehension and in recognition of the fact that a horror tale, when read well, is twice as scary. Audio files containing some of this semester’s shorter texts will be up on coursework as well.

4. DVDs

There are three DVDs I would ask you to watch in the course of the semester (for due dates, see syllabus) – two operas dealing with the supernatural (Der Freischütz, Der Fliegende Holländer) and one movie (the German Expressionist horror classic Nosferatu). The two operas will be available at the front desk of the music library in the Braun Music Building; Nosferatu will be available for your viewing at the media reserve desk in the basement of Green Library. Please be aware that Braun has different opening hours than Green – they are much smaller and close earlier, so make sure you get to view the DVDs in time. If you cannot see the version on reserve, you can also try and track down any other DVD of the opera (at least of Der Fliegende Holländer they are several).
Week 1 – Erste Schritte im Geistersehen

January 6
Introduction to the Course
Read: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Der Totentanz”

January 8
Read: Johann Peter Hebel, “Das Wohlbezahlte Gespenst”
Johann Peter Hebel, “Merkwürdige Gespenstergeschichte”
Brothers Grimm, “Das Mordschloß”

Week 2 – Hausgeister

January 13
Read: Heinrich von Kleist, “Geistererscheinung”
Heinrich von Kleist, “Das Bettelweib von Locarno”

January 15
Read:
Dorothea Schlegel, excerpt from Florentin
Write: 1-page analysis of the ghost story from Florentin

Week 3 – Doppelgänger

January 20
Read: E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann”
Write: 1-paragraph biographical sketch of E.T.A. Hoffmann to be workshopped in class

Workshop: Introduction to peer review

January 22
Read: E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann”
Write: 1-page paper comparing the form and style of “Der Sandmann” to those of “Geistererscheinung” (peer review)

Week 4 – Willkommen auf dem Blocksberg

January 27
View: Carl Maria von Weber, Der Freischütz
Write: 1-paragraph capsule of the opera to be workshopped in class

Workshop: Summary
January 29
Read: Ernst Moritz Arndt, “Rattenkönig Birlibi”
Joseph von Eichendorff, “Auch ich war in Arkadien”

Week 5 – Geisterschiffe, Geisterstädte
February 3
Read: Wilhelm Hauff, “Die Geschichte von dem Gespensterschiff”

Workshop: Find a book review in a German-language newspaper/periodical and bring it to class

February 5
View: Richard Wagner, Der Fliegende Holländer
Read: Jeremias Gotthelf, Die Schwarze Spinne
Write: 1-page review of “Die Geschichte von dem Gespensterschiff”

Week 6 – Theorie und Praxis des Geistersehens
February 10
Read: Jeremias Gotthelf, Die Schwarze Spinne

February 12
Friedrich Schiller, Der Geisterseher
Write: 2-page paper on Die Schwarze Spinne due for in-class peer review

Week 7 – Geistersehen für Fortgeschrittene
February 17
Friedrich Schiller, Der Geisterseher

February 19
Friedrich Schiller, Der Geisterseher
Write: final draft of Die Schwarze Spinne-paper due in class

Week 8 – Totentanz
February 24
Gustav Meyrinck, “Das Wachsfigurenkabinett”
Write: 2-page paper on Der Geisterseher due for in-class peer review

Workshop: Formal styles in German
February 26
Gustav Meyrink, “Bal macabre”
Rainer Maria Rilke, “Toten-Tanz”
Write: Research the origin of the Totentanz-figure and prepare a brief report

Week 9 – Gestatten, Geist

March 3
Read: Arthur Schnitzler, “Das Tagebuch der Redegonda”
Write: Final draft of Geisterseher-paper due in class

March 5
View: F. W. Murnau, Nosferatu
Write: 2-page paper on “Das Tagebuch der Redegonda” for in-class peer review

Week 10 – Aus der Spuk

March 10
Brothers Grimm, “Blaubart”
Ludwig Tieck, “Ritter Blaubart: Ein Ammenmärchen”
Write: Final draft of “Redegonda”-paper due in class

March 12
Peter Rühmkorf, “Blaubarts letzte Reise: Märchen”
Hermann Grab, “Unordnung im Gespensterreich”
Final Day of Class