Gothic novels have long fascinated me: because of their emotional powers, their provocative and pleasurable plots and their feminine form. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* sparked my readings of gothic classics and my sensibility of contemporary gothica. Thus, I have come to propose this culture-critical study on the powers of gothic in the late twentieth century.

The gothic has shaped and sharpened my literary studies and numerous stimulating exchanges: in Munich, with Sibylle Kastl and Elisabeth Bronfen, who shared with me their sense of the absurdities in literature and life; in Mainz, with Professor Wolfgang Riedel, who has always both challenged and supported my academic endeavours; and in Toronto, with Professor Barbara Godard and Carmen Cáliz, who unfolded my first, rough ideas into the realm of theory – often through dark and stormy winter nights! The Government of Canada Award brought me to Toronto's York University from the fall of 1988 to the spring of 1990: there, the ‘Canadian connections’ of this study emerged.

At the English Department of Columbia University, New York, where I taught as Adjunct Assistant Professor in 1991/92, I wrote the first outline, and, as a Visiting Scholar in the fall of 1997, I conceptualised Part III. I thank my inspiring students there, as well as those at Mainz University, where I have been teaching since 1990. I thank the Johannes Gutenberg University for awarding the University Prize of 1996 to my dissertation. Carmen Birkle in the American Studies Department has been supportive throughout. Cyrus Patel has
genially formatted the manuscript. My editor at Manchester University Press, Matthew Frost, has proven both clairvoyant and practical. I am thankful to him and everybody involved in transforming the disk into this book.

In Toronto I studied with Professor Linda Hutcheon: to her spiritedness, her professional guidance and intellectual sensibility I owe so much more than I can here express. Her work on postmodernism, as well as her open and suggestive discussions of my evolving ideas, reverberate throughout this book. Professor Alfred Hornung courageously accepted my hopeful fragments as a dissertation when I returned to Mainz. I am grateful for his clear views of my project, for his amazing sense of structure and for important and inspiring discussions. His work on postmodernism and autobiography influenced my readings, and he has patiently overseen the final drafts of the manuscript. I thank Linda Hutcheon and Alfred Hornung for their continuing interest and confidence in my ideas and project.

Special thanks go to Margaret Atwood. In the last years, she has been very generous and supportive and has met me for several intense talks about gothic appearances – her own as well as those of today’s culture. Our meetings at her kitchen counter in Toronto as well as at public events like the book fair in Frankfurt are unforgettable.

Finally, I thank my parents for their persistent support, my brothers for their encouraging sense of humour, and my sister for many gothic ideas and images. And Bernhard, for everything.