



Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832 (Cambridge Studies in Romanticism)

James Watt

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James Watt's historically grounded account of Gothic fiction, first published in 1999, takes issue with received accounts of the genre as a stable and continuous tradition. Charting its vicissitudes from Walpole to Scott, Watt shows the Gothic to have been a heterogeneous body of fiction, characterized at times by antagonistic relations between various writers or works. Central to his argument about these works' writing and reception is a nuanced understanding of their political import: Walpole's attempt to forge an aristocratic identity, the loyalist affiliations of many neglected works of the 1790s, a reconsideration of the subversive reputation of *The Monk*, and the ways in which Radcliffean romance proved congenial to conservative critics. Watt concludes by looking ahead to the fluctuating critical status of Scott and the Gothic, and examines the process by which the Gothic came to be defined as a monolithic tradition, in a way that continues to exert a powerful hold.

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