INTRODUCTION

Romanticism's "pageantry of fear"

> There is an economy of cultural goods, but it has a specific logic . . . To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of "class."
>
> (Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*)[1]

> I submit for your consideration the following hypothesis: a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging.
>
> (Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre")[2]

Since the 1980s, critics like Stuart Curran, Jacques Derrida, and Tzvetan Todorov have stated in various ways and without qualification that genre "is the driving force of . . . all literary history" – that "there is no genreless text."[3] This book does not seek to oppose such assertions so much as to explore their less-acknowledged corollary: that generic classification also depends upon the readers, publishers, and critics who ultimately determine a text's identity and value. The interplay between writers and readers drives not only Bourdieu's sense of canon formation and Derrida's final caution concerning "participation" and "belonging," but also Fredric Jameson's definition of genre as a "social contract" occurring between any "writer and a specific reading public."[4] If these formulations give significant importance to readers, they still present genre as an instance of friendly socialization or businesslike negotiation, where various parties combine to determine textual meaning, and where a significant majority of participants must agree on the nature of a text's "participation" before any act of "belonging," however temporary, can occur.

Taking up Jameson's metaphor, I am concerned in this study less

with generic contracts than with those moments of literary history when the negotiations that precede them break off or end in deadlock. Where writers and readers agree fundamentally on a text's cultural status – implicit in Jameson's idea of "contract" – negotiations may run smoothly and even invisibly. Where writers and readers disagree – or where readers disagree among themselves – we enter into a different situation, one in which writers find themselves placed in generic spaces that they never intended, and where texts do not get to choose their own genres.

In beginning with these assumptions, this book explores the association of writing we now call "gothic" and "romantic" with one another in Britain at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries – years in which neither "gothic" nor "romantic" had yet taken their modern meanings, and in which the texts we now associate with each had not yet been categorized in the ways we would now find familiar. I spend considerable time, therefore, following how the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century writers we now associate with "romanticism" exploited the vogues for gothic fiction and drama in vexed and complex ways. More importantly, the book argues that the reception of gothic writing – its institutional and commercial recognition as a kind of literature – played a fundamental role in shaping many of the ideological assumptions about high culture that we have come to associate with "romanticism." In the last two and a half centuries, "gothic" and "romantic" have held diverse meanings and cultural functions; yet in our own modern criticism both frequently have operated as catch-all terms of convenience whose very belatedness as literary-historical rubrics has helped elide their complex processes of formation. I aim instead to show how the processes through which both terms emerged in large part were determined by their perceived relation to one another. This book, therefore, is very specific about the ways that it employs the terms "gothic" and "romantic."

"Gothic"'s complexity as a historical and ethnic term in the eighteenth century recently has received sustained attention in a number of studies, two of which have proven foundational for this book: Robert Miles's *Gothic Writing 1750–1820: A Genealogy* (1993) and E. J. Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762–1800* (1995). Miles's opening chapters trace gothic's aesthetic and discursive origins, presenting it as a "series of contemporaneously understood forms, devices, codes, figurations, for the expression of the 'fragmented subject'"[5]; and while Clery chooses to make "supernatural" and not "gothic" the focal point of her book, she nonetheless provides an account of the term "gothic" as well as a

foundational study of the origins, practices, and cultural value of gothic fiction. In focusing upon the reception of "gothic" writing as well as its constitutive discourses, I consider myself to be extending and responding to their theoretical and historiographical projects, as well as to the related work that Ian Duncan and Ina Ferris have done on romance and authorship, and that Peter Manning and David Richter have done on reception. Even more recently, James Watt has attempted to map the genre's heterogeneous nature by surveying the often antagonistic relations that existed among the practitioners of gothic fiction.[6] While appearing too late to inform the writing and central tenets of this book, his focus upon the politics of gothic's reception anticipates and supports the detailed arguments about gothic's formation and cultural status I make here. An approach to genre based in reception seems useful to me *not* because it reiterates Foucauldian assumptions about genre as an agentless discourse whose relations to power are defined directly by institutions and indirectly by the decentralized network of accidental voices, but rather because it seeks to isolate those moments where writers and readers self-consciously attempt to determine a text's affiliation and value. If gothic writing possesses ideologically complex and richly discursive origins, gothic's reception tells us much about how readers at the turn of the nineteenth century organized and attempted to make sense of gothic as a "new" kind of writing.

It is worth reiterating, I think, that, unlike most twentieth-century commentators, gothic's readers in the 1790s considered it neither exclusively a kind of fiction nor even necessarily a narrative mode. As I show in subsequent chapters, part of what caused readers and reviewers to separate gothic from other kinds of writing were its sudden incursions after 1794 into poetic and dramatic realms. Without much difficulty, then, readers by the 1800s grouped together texts as disparate as James Boaden's dramas, Matthew Lewis's ballads, and Charlotte Dacre's fiction under a single categorical umbrella. Several names may have existed for this rubric – "terrorist school of novel writing," "*modern* romance," "the trash of the Minerva Press," "the German school" – yet what is clear from these multiple groupings is the recurrence of specific writers, readers, and publishers under a single heading. While the majority of recent critical commentary has limited itself to gothic fiction, Miles has argued that "such an understanding of Gothic writing [as narrative] is misconceived. We should not understand Gothic as a set of prose conventions, however flexible, but as a discursive site crossing the genres."[7] By nature heterogeneous, gothic texts regularly contain

multiple modes of writing, shifting from novelistic prose into poetry, inset oral narratives, didactic fables, or pantomimic and dramatic spectacles. With Miles, then, I define gothic neither as a mode nor as a kind of fiction (the "gothic novel") but as an aesthetic. I wish, however, to clarify this formulation slightly by characterizing gothic not as a site – which carries with it suggestions of anchored stability – but rather as something more organic and protean. At the very least, if gothic is a site crossing the genres, it is a site that *moves*, and that must be defined in part by its ability to transplant itself *across* forms and media: from narrative into dramatic and poetic modes, and from textual into visual and aural media. I find the conception of gothic as a shifting "aesthetic" helpful because it corresponds to how late-eighteenth-century critical audiences imagined and represented gothic's emergence into British literary culture, except that their own labels for gothic – as foreign invader, as cancer, as enthusiasm, as emasculating disease, or as infantilizing nurse – are more pejorative. The number and intensity of these labels, moreover, demonstrate the range of impressions gothic produced even among its detractors, and give some indication of the extent of the gulf existing between critical and popular audiences. For the purposes of this study's allegiance to the project of historicism, then, my ultimate aim is to problematize gothic as a category by tracking it from its emergence in Britain as a narrative mode to those conflicts that arose when it was appropriated in the later 1790s into other forms, among them ballad, tragedy, and metrical romance. As chapter 2 will demonstrate, in fact, it is gothic's ease of dispersal and ability *not* to stay within the confines of prose romance – its habit of collapsing disciplinary and social categories, however gendered or polarized – that constituted one of the primary threats to the reviewers who condemned it. In defining gothic writing in the terms first accorded to it and through the trajectories of its own contemporary reception, I aim to show how it became a recognized literary category, and why its various generic delimiters so quickly became (or were coined as) terms of abuse. At root an ethnic and historical delimiter that became a generic term only retrospectively, "gothic" operates in this book as a generic term as a matter of terminological necessity; at all times, however, I aim to keep my readers conscious of gothic writing's historically emerging and dynamic identity in these years.

"These years," of course, also refer to decades (1790–1820) traditionally associated with the emergence of "romanticism" in Britain. My aim in positing the development of romanticism as a response to gothic's

reception is to place the term "romantic" under the same critical pressure as I do "gothic." At root a genre term, "romantic" quickly became something else entirely, and for most of the twentieth century has been a locus of debate and contestation, taking on a variety of often conflicting meanings and degrees of importance. My book, therefore, does not use "romantic" to denote a literary period or period-defining movement. With James Chandler and Marlon Ross, I find its use as such misleading because it posits as representative writers who literally did not represent the range of writing of these decades[8]:

> This kind of period-defined history views the horizon of time as a domino-effect whereby every writer within a span of time is naturally affiliated with every other *because* they occupy a similar temporal horizon. The accidental and anarchic nature of time is suppressed for another form of representative history.[9]

Philip Cox sees this conflict between the two dominant uses of "romantic" – as period descriptor and as prevailing aesthetic – as a fundamental tension within romantic studies since the early 1960s. Citing the work of Jerome McGann and Marilyn Butler, he puts the matter succinctly: "perhaps even more relevant to our immediate concerns is McGann's earlier observation that a large amount of the work produced during the Romantic Period is not 'romantic.' This, as much as anything, calls into question the relevance of the historical category."[10]

Much of historicist work on "romanticism" during the 1980s and 1990s has sought to show the ways in which specific "romantic" writers and texts, once defined as such, have become in twentieth-century critical accounts powerful, emblematic constructs. These constructs, in turn, have served as the foundations of inherited notions of "romanticism" as literary period, revolution, or movement. It is in response to such prevailing assumptions, for example, that the ironically entitled *Romantic Revolutions* (1990) opens with a section entitled "The Spell of Wordsworth" followed immediately by another entitled "Romanticism without Wordsworth" – their aim being not only to question Wordsworth's representativeness in these years but also, more generally, "to offer hard thought . . . about our search for the great and the representative" as itself a self-perpetuating legacy of romanticism.[11] Marlon Ross operates with similar aims in mind, painstakingly demonstrating canonical romanticism to be based upon masculine tropes of competitiveness, dominance, quest, and conquest, which "romanticist critics" in turn have taken up in more modern accounts:

> Like the romantics, who make women (and the world) an extension of themselves, romanticist critics have made women writers of the period an extension of male romanticism. Such reasoning also makes it easier to ignore the pervasive, fertile, and powerful influence of women poets during the "romantic" period, allowing us to keep intact the idea that romanticism can serve to describe the whole period by equating the male romantic poets with all the literature of the time.[12]

This practice of representative reading "prevents us from considering the ideological limits of romanticism in history" or from engaging in alternative representative practices that produce, in turn, markedly different accounts of literary history.[13]

Put another way, while we commonly see "romantic" invoked in modern criticism to describe a literary period, we rarely, if ever, see "gothic" used in this way – this in spite of the fact that gothic as a popular aesthetic dominated the years 1790–1820 as did no other kind of writing. Why is this? One might simply answer that, in terms of high culture, romanticism won out over gothic in these years rather quickly – by the first years of the nineteenth century if we are to give credence to the modern accounts of Rosemary Ashton or Karen Swann, or the contemporary accounts of the Reviews and private individuals like Baillie, Hazlitt, Jeffrey, Scott, and Wordsworth.[14] As a result, we still often use "romantic" to describe these years, even though the most cursory examination of publishers' booklists yields many times more "gothic" texts than "romantic" ones. As this book demonstrates, however, the contextual picture is more complex than a question of numbers or simple competition – particularly if we wish to understand the circumstances under which romantic assumptions about genre and literary value were produced.

I reserve "romantic," then, to refer to the matrix of assumptions that historicist criticism of the 1980s and 1990s has dubbed "romantic ideology."[15] Coined by Jerome McGann in his foundational study of the same name, "romantic ideology" usually has been represented as a set of writerly decisions about literary value, usually politically derived and articulated either formally or generically. The work of McGann and Marjorie Levinson has focused primarily upon the political evasions of romanticism, pointing to its tendency to elide its own historicity for what are often very historically specific reasons, and to respond to the specific exigencies of time and place by asserting its ability to "transcend the conflicts and transiences of this time and that place."[16] Marilyn Butler, James Chandler, and Clifford Siskin, meanwhile, have concentrated on

romantic ideology's power as a self-perpetuating model, established in the powerful self-assertions of romantic writers that have shaped our notions of periodicity, cultural politics, authorship, and intellectual commonality. Siskin, especially, is interested in the ways in which romanticism – which he calls an ideological matrix – has determined the very terms through which critics have debated romanticism's position within modern culture:

> So pervasive has that power been for over 150 years that mine is among the initial inquiries into Romanticism that treats as artifacts not only its disciplinary boundaries (literary versus nonliterary), hierarchical differences (creative versus critical), aesthetic values (spontaneity and intensity), and natural truths (development and the unconscious), but also the distinction between the organic and the ironic deconstructive that informs contemporary critical debate. It is not that earlier scholars have deliberately perpetuated the past; that they did so simply dramatizes how completely and invisibly the psychologized "reality" of Romanticism has determined our understanding of ourselves and of our writing.[17]

While Siskin's interest lies in the effects of romanticism's longstanding preferences for certain modes of "high" discourse, one might wish to extend this kind of critical inquiry into its assumptions about genre as well. Privileging one kind of writing, however "invisibly," means demoting others linked closely enough to it to be perceived as viable substitutes. In this study, therefore, I focus upon those traditionally "romantic" forms (lyrical ballad, verse tragedy, metrical romance, and historical novel) most closely related to the poetic, dramatic, and narrative modes that meet in gothic writing. Most broadly, I am interested in how negotiations between readers, writers, and reviews over the nature and status of the gothic produced a context to which the ideology of romanticism was a response.[18] While gothic's contentious reception constituted it as a conspicuously "low" form against which romantic writers could oppose themselves, its immense popularity, economic promise, and sensational subject matter made this opposition a complex and ultimately conflicted and duplicitous endeavor. It is no accident that a considerable amount of early-nineteenth-century writing explicitly denies (or otherwise deflects) its association with the gothic at its moments of closest kinship. If my primary interest is with these moments of adjacency and overlapping, it is because within them the gothic perpetually haunts, as an aesthetic to be rejected, romanticism's construction of high literary culture.

1 GOTHIC DEFINITIONS AND THE LEGACIES OF RECEPTION

> There is frequently a striking resemblance between works of high and low estimation, which prejudice only, hinders us from discerning, and which when seen, we do not care to acknowledge; for the defects of a favourite Author, are like those of a favourite friend; or perhaps still more like our own.
>
> (Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*)[19]

This book sets forth two general arguments about genre and reception: that one cannot conceive of particular genres as dynamic and heterogeneous without historicizing them, and that one cannot comprehend the developments and transformations of genres without also tracing the history of their reception. Such an approach is particularly important to understanding genre in late-eighteenth-century Britain, a culture in which most writers were not only readers but also reviewers for a periodical industry expanding at rates that rival gothic even at the height of its popularity.[20] Characterized by unprecedented popular approval and critical aspersion, gothic's reception in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth centuries has shaped its subsequent status and valuation for nearly two centuries. In spite of its centrality to British culture from 1790 to 1820 and its two centuries of success in popular print, film, and now computer media, it was widely considered until 1970 as at best a novel sideshow of romanticism, and at worst an embarrassing and pervasive disease destructive to national culture and social fabric.[21]

Even a quarter of a century after it began to be the object of serious and widespread critical inquiry,[22] the legacy of gothic's reception is still present in three recent and astute critical studies by Jacqueline Howard, Anne Williams, and Maggie Kilgour, all of which begin with ruminations on the difficulties and pitfalls of defining gothic. Arguing for the efficacy of "approaching interpretation of the Gothic with Bakhtin," Howard characterizes "the gothic as an indeterminate genre," and argues that tracing its various "impurities" allows for a "greater precision" in situating gothic in opposition to "the more or less fixed nature of many received views . . . [about the] dominant literary canon."[23] Sharing Howard's concern with processes of canon-formation, Williams's hesitancy comes from her own knowledge of gothic's critical history – that, historically, critics have labelled texts as "gothic" in order to ascribe to them traits of sentimentality, femininity, and pulp popularity, thereby rendering them trivial and ephemeral.[24] Kilgour,

meanwhile, finds gothic's interest and importance precisely where previous critics have attributed its "failure" as a genre, in what she calls its "piecemeal . . . corporate identity":

> At times the gothic seems hardly a unified narrative at all, but a series of framed conventions, static moments of extreme emotions . . . which do not form a coherent and continuous whole . . . Like the carnivalesque, the gothic appears to be a transgressive rebellion against norms which yet ends up reinstating them, an eruption of unlicensed desire that is fully controlled by governing systems of limitation.[25]

For Kilgour, gothic's status as an internally conflicted montage of conventions – almost a heteroglossia of British culture in itself – means that previous critical assessments of it as a separate and coherent category of writing have been not only reductive but misguided. Gothic, she argues, cannot be dismissed as a premature manifestation of romanticism or as a missing link between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel because "it cannot be seen in abstraction from the other literary forms from whose grave it arises."[26] In this she echoes Miles, whose expansive definition of gothic seems, at least in part, an effort to render critical derogation and pigeon-holing impossible:

> "What is 'Gothic'?" My short answer is that the Gothic is a discursive site, a "carnivalesque" mode for representations of the fragmented subject. Both the generic multiplicity of the Gothic, and what one might call its discursive primacy, effectively detach the Gothic from the tidy simplicity of thinking of it as so many predictable, fictional conventions. This may end up making "Gothic" a more ambiguous, shifting term, but then the textual phenomena to which it points are shifting and ambiguous.[27]

Miles's determination to bypass traditional lists of gothic conventions stems in part from his awareness that such lists hearken back to late-1790s dismissals of gothic writing, which represented it as entirely formulaic, a kind of mass-produced fiction-by-numbers.[28] His association of "gothic" with "representations of the fragmented subject" recalls the open characterization of gothic of Jeffrey Cox and Marshall Brown; for both, gothic is concerned primarily with "limits" and "excess" and therefore defined by assumptions that vary across a culture and that change with history.[29]

This prevailing – and warranted – nervousness over defining gothic in anything but the most open-ended terms, I believe, points to even more pressing reasons for historicizing gothic's development and reception: that, as gothic no longer is what it once was, we must stop trying to

define it as having a static identity, and instead try to understand the historical changes and generic transformations that led it to embody its various forms. We must begin not by defining gothic's essence but by tracking its cultural status. This seems particularly important given that gothic's status after 1795 shaped both the conditions under which it could be transmitted into other cultural forms, and its subsequent treatment by critical establishments up to our own time. Over two hundred years after *The Monk* (1796) raised so great a public outcry as to force Matthew Lewis to censor himself and disavow any political relevance to his work for the rest of his career, gothic's stigma is still among the first issues to which recent critical studies of gothic must attend. As the rest of this study will argue, writers at the turn of the nineteenth century were forced to respond to the earliest and most virulent strains of this same cultural stigma.

Rather, then, than echoing Anne Williams's argument that "'Gothic' and 'Romantic' are not two but one"[30] because of their shared poetics, I wish to focus upon the economic and ideological processes that have insured their lasting separation. Following such critics as Eve Sedgwick and Bradford Mudge, Williams observes generally that "[t]wentieth-century criticism records an increasingly effective repression of the Romantic poets' kinship to the Gothic," and particularly that "[b]y mid-century, Romanticists were busy defending their favored poets against the Modernist assaults . . . o[n] this literature as a culturally 'feminine' phenomenon."[31] Such an account, while useful for calling our attention to gender's central role in shaping ideologies of literary value, does not explain fully the relationship between "gothic" and "romantic" because it does not explain why twentieth-century romanticists have assumed that associating romantic poetry with gothic writing would lower its cultural status by feminizing it. Such assumptions, I argue, predate "Modernist assaults" by well over a century, and are a legacy of romanticism's response to the reception of gothic writing in the decades following the French Revolution.

Literary critics and historians since the mid-twentieth century may have sought collectively to recuperate romantic writing by undervaluing its fondness for gothic iconography, machinery, and themes, but they have done so largely at the bidding of the very writers whom they have extolled. If Williams is correct in calling attention to late-eighteenth-century poetry's attraction to gothic settings and tropes, then the critical texts of these same writers – including Samuel Coleridge's reviews of gothic fiction (1794–8), Joanna Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" to *A*