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0521640997 - Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832

James Watt

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James Watt's historically grounded account of Gothic fiction takes issue with received accounts of the genre as a stable and continuous tradition. Charting its vicissitudes from Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* to Scott's Waverley novels, Watt shows the Gothic to have been a heterogeneous body of fiction, characterized at times by antagonistic relations between various writers or works. Drawing on diverse archival materials, he describes the various kinds of classification of Gothic fiction made by writers and readers of the time. Central to Watt's argument about the writing and reception of these works is a nuanced understanding of their political import: he discusses Walpole's attempt to forge an aristocratic identity, the loyalist affiliations of many neglected works of the 1790s, 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.

James Watt is a Junior Research Fellow at St Catharine's College, Cambridge.

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For my parents

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