

Public Abstract

First Name:Rebecca

Middle Name:E

Last Name:Roma

Adviser's First Name:Devoney

Adviser's Last Name:Looser

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Critics have often noted a significant formal divide in Gothic novels of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The distinct differences in style have regularly been separated into two subgenres: the male Gothic and the female Gothic. Because the founding Gothic text was male Gothic, earlier novels have been excluded from the genre for not following the distinctive conventions of that subgenre. This thesis troubles the notion that any genre can be divided on the basis of the gender of the author and proposes alternate categories with which to describe the divide which accommodate earlier works, regardless of gender. By offering the terms Uncanny Gothic and Sublime Gothic to illustrate the impact that fear has in the novel, on the reader, and in contemporary reception, one is able to describe the inconsistencies for which the previously gendered descriptions were unable to account. The theory of the Uncanny Gothic and the Sublime Gothic is tested by close readings of three Gothic novels: *The History of Ophelia* by Sarah Fielding, *Ethelinde; or the Recluse of the Lake* by Charlotte Smith, and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe. Also, it engages with current Gothic scholars, biographers of the authors, literary critics, and psychoanalytic and formal readings of the works. This study of the Gothic genre finds that, contrary to fitting into any sort of division as previously thought, the novels shift from one form to the other. The acknowledgement of the fluidity of the genre and a study of the significance of the formal shifts proves new terrain for critics and offers a place to revisit the many different, curious manifestations of the genre.