



The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel (Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series)

DAVID H. RICHTER

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In this vigorous response to recent trends in theory and criticism, David H. Richter asks how we can again learn to practice literary history. Despite the watchword "always historicize," comparatively few monographs attempt genuine historical explanations of literary phenomena. Richter theorizes that the contemporary evasion of history may stem from our sense that the modern literary ideas underlying our historical explanations—Marxism, formalism, and reception theory—are unable, by themselves, to inscribe an adequate narrative of the origins, development, and decline of genres and style systems. Using the first heyday of the Gothic novel as the prime object of study, Richter develops his pluralistic vision of literary history in practice. Successive chapters outline first a neo-Marxist history of the Gothic; next, a narrative on the Gothic as an institutional form; and finally a study of the reception of the Gothic—the way the romance was sustained by, and in its turn altered, the motives for literary response in the British public around the turn of the nineteenth century. In his concluding chapter, Richter returns to the question of theory, to general issues of adequacy and explanatory power in literary history, to the false panaceas of Foucauldian new historicism and cultural studies, and to the necessity of historical pluralism. A learned, engaging, and important book, *The Progress of Romance* is essential reading for scholars of British literature, narrative, narrative theory, the novel, and the theory of the novel. **David H. Richter** is professor of English at Queens College and at the Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York. He is also director of graduate studies at Queens College, where he has taught eighteenth-century studies and literary theory since 1970. Richter is the author of *Fable's End* and the editor of several books, including *Falling into Theory*, *Narrative/Theory*, and *The Critical Tradition*.

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