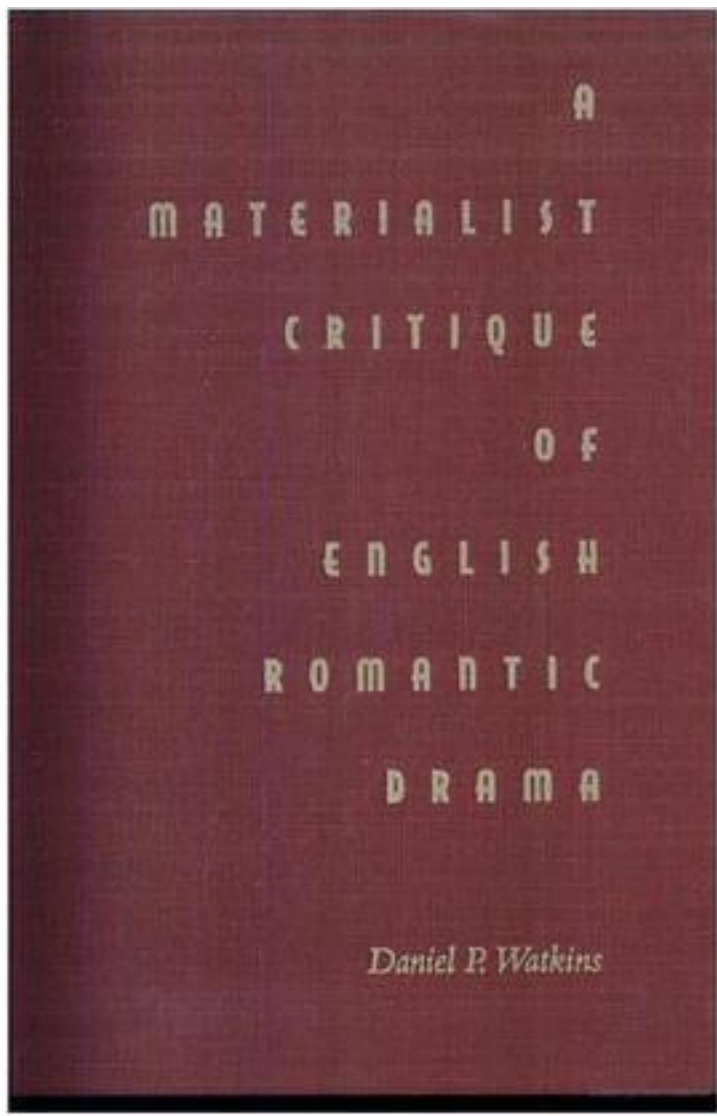


A materialist critique of English romantic drama



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This work interrogates the expressed thematic interests of Romantic drama in order to disclose the political, social and historical conflicts that energise and condition those interests. Watkins considers why drama deteriorated so badly during the Romantic period. Certain chapters are built around close readings of selected Romantic verse dramas, including Coleridge's "Osario", Lamb's "John Woodvil", Joanna Baille's "Demonfort", Walter Scott's "Halidon Hill" and most of Byron's plays. Watkins locates the deterioration of the drama in the general historical transition in England from an aristocratic to a middle-class social order. Emerging in Renaissance England as the supreme expression of an aristocratic worldview, drama was ill-equipped to express the new class consciousness coming to maturation two centuries later. Watkins contends, however, that the debilitating effect of social transformation does not render drama insignificant, but rather gives it a special historical importance because it documents the various ideological struggles between a withering aristocracy and an inchoate bourgeoisie. He also charts the social-ideological spaces into which the bourgeoisie inserts itself as it begins its mastery of social reality. These struggles involve numerous social issues and relations, ranging from gender and the family to religion and economics. They also embrace and explain a variety of seemingly isolated psychological phenomena present in Romantic drama, ranging from nostalgia to anxiety.

Book Description

"An important contribution to our understanding of 'Romantic ideology.'... The book will be of interest to Romanticists in general, not just drama specialists, and those interested in applied Marxist theory will find the book valuable. Byron specialists will find this an essential book."--Michael Scrivener, Wayne State University

While existing criticism of English Romantic drama is principally concerned with conventional Romantic themes and subjects and guided by idealist methodology, Watkins interrogates the expressed thematic interests of Romantic drama in order to disclose the political, social, and historical conflicts that energize and condition those interests. In the most contentious theoretical dimension of his work, Watkins considers why drama deteriorated so badly during the Romantic period. Subsequent chapters are built around close readings of selected Romantic verse dramas, including Coleridge's *Osorio*, Lamb's *John Woodvil*, Joanna Baillie's *DeMonfort*, Walter Scott's *Halidon Hill*, and most of Byron's plays.

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