

**Ingrid Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. 288. £67.99. ISBN 9781107182233.**

I write this review in the seventh week of the UK coronavirus lockdown. Seldom can the meanings and value we attach to freedom of movement in Western culture have been so painfully apparent to us; nor could there be a better time to reflect on what we owe to Romanticism in this regard. There is a strong vein of Romantic writing in which recreational or excursive walking, and travel and tourism more broadly, are synonymous with personal liberty, provide a means of self-discovery, and at times channel rebellious political energies. No one suffering the boredom, frustration, and possibly mental ill health associated with the current restrictions can doubt how far we still inhabit that Romantic mentality. But there is a dark side to Romantic mobility: a lengthy roll-call of involuntary travellers including emigrants and exiles, beggars, discharged soldiers, female vagrants and the like. It is this alternative history – mirrored in our own times in the refugee and migrant crisis of 2015 – on which Ingrid Horrocks focuses in this well-researched, stimulating monograph.

The book highlights the figure of the reluctant female wanderer in (mainly) women's writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It examines representations of women 'who wander not because they choose to but because they have no choice' (2) in the poetry of Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian travel book, and Frances Burney's voluminous final novel, *The Wanderer*. Avoiding the well-trodden ground of distressed women as sentimental objects in eighteenth-century texts, Horrocks argues that her chosen writers prefer a protagonist who 'combines a Yorick and a Maria ... in a single figure' (9) and typically problematises the 'sociable system of sympathy' (14) theorised by Adam Smith and others. She adopts a gendered perspective to show how the female wanderer both illustrates the unique vulnerability of displaced or mobile women in the period and brings home more generally the 'troubling' aspects of modern mobility. Perhaps the most striking facet of her argument is its emphasis on language and form – on the ways in which 'wandering' is a stylistic trait of the texts that female wanderers appear in.

Clearly, there is space in a short review to give only a flavour of what are sophisticated treatments of individual texts. A ground-clearing first chapter guides us through Thomson, Goldsmith, and Cowper to trace the emergence of the figure of the wanderer in eighteenth-century poetry as a more authentic vehicle for social commentary than the masculine prospect view familiar to scholars. This itinerary of embedded wayfaring concludes with Smith's *The Emigrants*, in which the situation of the houseless female narrator seems barely preferable to that of the French exiles whose stories she shares. Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* then receive the tribute of a separate chapter, their 'painful repetitiveness' (82) not only reflecting the tribulations of Smith's life but conveying a sense of 'deepening homelessness' (98) in the desolate political landscape of the 1790s.

The focus of the Radcliffe chapter is almost wholly on 'wandering form', particularly the author's fondness for literary quotation and interpolated original verses. Horrocks is interested in what it means to attend fully to passages often seen as annoying interruptions to the narrative; for her, they serve the recuperative function of including the protagonist in a sympathetic community of wanderers and exiles. It is hard to see Wollstonecraft as a reluctant wanderer, so enthusiastically does she embrace the liberating potential of foreign travel; nevertheless, she undoubtedly becomes more of 'an embodied, pained, and homeless figure' (143) in the latter stages of her journey, and Horrocks makes some fine observations on the Copenhagen section of the *Letters* in particular. The best chapter is that on Burney, which provocatively redeems her 'long, ungainly sentences' (178) as the stylistic expression

of the ‘female difficulties to which the novel is dedicated’ (180) and explores in fascinating depth how the heroine’s movements become a dark parody of the domestic tour.

The way in which Horrocks works the dichotomy between voluntary and involuntary travel is perhaps overly gendered. There were women writers in the period who described the pleasures of walking/wandering (no room here for Jane Austen or Dorothy Wordsworth), just as there were male authors who conveyed its hardships and mental tortures (no mention of John Clare’s harrowing *Journey out of Essex*; only passing reference to the persecuted migrations of Godwin’s Caleb Williams). Of course, some such filtering is inevitable in staking out an independent line of argument. Churlishly, one might suggest that the Radcliffe chapter – an ‘outlier’ (112) by Horrocks’s own admission – shows the book itself ‘wandering’ in the manner of its subject. Overall, though, this study brings welcome attention to some less familiar texts and performs a skilful rebalancing of the critical literature on ‘distressed women’ in Romantic writing – amply demonstrating their significance to emerging perceptions of ‘an increasingly mobile world’ (211).

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