

# NINETEENTH CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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Horrocks, Ingrid. *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 288 pages.

Reviewed by Kate Ozment

<1>In *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*, Ingrid Horrocks follows the “haunting opposites” of male wanderers that appear with regularity in women writers’ texts (2). Blending a study of form and thematic representation, Horrocks’ argument links the homelessness and pain of the figure of the female wanderer with a formalist analysis of digressions and itinerant texts. She pulls from sentimental novels, travel narratives, and poetry to argue that the literature of the female wanderer is a genre its own. The argument is cohesive and compelling, relating women’s wandering to its masculine precedents and contemporaries while articulating its notable characteristics and providing a fresh reading of popular women writers: Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Frances Burney. It is particularly strong when it connects wandering figures to the revision of editions, authors’ penury and exile, illustrations of women travelers, and intertextual connections that create a rich picture of textual, formalist, and biographical mobility. This book will be useful for readers who are not intimately familiar with the trope of the wanderer but are interested in women writers, travel narratives, poetic form, or the gendering of the poet figure in the Romantic period.

<2>Woven through much of the argument is a discussion of the despair and misery that accompanied women’s mobility in this period, and Horrocks is careful to note that to *wander* is distinctly different than to *travel*. The former connotes alienation and melancholy. Using a distant reading approach, Horrocks looks at a corpus of 200 novels and determines that “‘wander’ and its lexical roots features four times more frequently in the corpus of novels published between 1786 and 1820 than it does in the corpus of those published between 1720 and 1785” (28). Most of those published in the last two decades of the eighteenth century were written by women. Women writers wrote about wanderers who were steeped in misery and despair, and while many of these texts are frequently studied, Horrocks asserts that they have been overlooked as a distinct genre. Gender matters for travelers and wanderers, she argues, because it “creates a particular set of complications (baggage) for the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century woman on the move” (27). She concludes in the coda that when early nineteenth-century male poets like William Wordsworth take up the mantle of the wanderer, they inhabit a feminized subject position in “close proximity to his darker, feminized double” for whom wandering is involuntary (207). This conclusion adds another important piece to the argument for understanding male Romantic poets as part of a gendered literary tradition.

<3>The book moves chronologically, with three chapters devoted to the 1790s, and builds on itself through intertextual references. Horrocks’ reading of Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) pulls from Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and Radcliffe in turn is read in conversation with Smith’s *Elegiac*

*Sonnets* (1784-1800). While each chapter can be read independently, the argument is richer when read in order as a journey its own. The first chapter gives an overview of the traveler as it shifts from the stable prospect position to moving through the landscape in the work of Thomas Gray, Oliver Goldsmith, and William Cowper. This chapter would work for a classroom application as it details the development of the prospect poem and theories of mobility in an accessible and citation-rich discussion. Mirroring her analysis of the wanderer figure, Horrocks then moves from an overview of the literary landscape and the tropes of the eighteenth-century wanderer to a methodical study of itinerant travelers in women writers' work.

<4>Chapter two focuses on Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* and shows that Smith's revisions to her sonnet sequence increase her female wanderer's despair. Textual revisions heighten the wanderer's alienation and create "literal and psychological homelessness" (81). Horrocks reads *Elegiac Sonnets* as an ever-changing long-form poem rather than discrete pieces, and Smith's speaker becomes increasingly desolate. Illustrations added to the 1789 edition show the female figure in motion, never quite at ease in her meditations. Volume two, published in 1797 and revised in 1800, reflects a further fracturing and alienation of the poetic voice due to the upheaval of the political landscape in Europe. Horrocks' reading of the sequence as a whole often creates connections between poems that might otherwise be obscured, which is a challenge she acknowledges as the speaker in many sonnets is usually read as fluid. While these discrete analyses might be contested, the broader arguments about Smith's revisions are timely and grounded in a valid critique of readings that do not consider the moment and context of composition in this frequently changing sequence.

<5>Chapter three analyses Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* and parses the differences between physical traveling and psychological wandering. Horrocks links the forced journeys and fears of imprisonment central to Radcliffe's heroines to the texts' frequent digressions; the heroines wander thematically, but, "they also have a tendency to lapse into offset quotations, to imaginatively wander into other worlds, and to compose poems that break up the text of these novels" (111). Horrocks interestingly connects Emily St. Aubert's confinement and terror to the absences of poetic fragments and references in the prose. Similar to the discussion of Smith, the argument centers on a reflection of the fraught political atmosphere of the 1790s. She determines that the play between lyric and prose might "represent something about the struggle going on in the wider world, reconstituting a grand journey in which moments of pause and reflection must be repeatedly sought" (138).

<6>In chapter four, Horrocks looks at Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence* and analyzes its syntactical wandering in dashes and meditations as part of a greater reluctance to imagine wandering as a form of relief. Within this reading, Wollstonecraft's text inhabits a crisis of the self and its ability to articulate a coherent voice that can represent a generalizable community. Horrocks positions *A Short Residence* as a feminist revision of sentimental literature, including the sentimental's political leanings in the 1790s. Wollstonecraft's sentimentality attempts to overwrite the commercial motivations for the author's journey, but Horrocks focuses specifically on disruptions and breaks within this rhetorical performance. She argues that Wollstonecraft's text is "trapped in a framework of excessive involvement, or of repetition, not quite able to move in a new direction" but it nevertheless ceaselessly attempts to try (159).

<7>In the last analysis chapter, Horrocks focuses on Burney's longest and most difficult novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), which despite its later publication date is positioned as at home in the turmoil of the 1790s. Burney's wanderer is stripped of most markers of identity and mobility—she is nameless and friendless for much of the novel before losing her purse and economic capital. Burney's Juliet wanders through various English towns and inhabits an ever-changing subject role, rewriting the travel narrative from the point of view of one who has the least ability to voluntarily travel. Horrocks' argues that the novel explores "how difficult it is for a single, unsupported, voice to direct and speak its own narrative" (200), drawing together themes from all four chapters into an analysis of perhaps the most homeless speaker.

<8>Reflecting its subject matter, *Women Wanderers* resists easy categorization or summation of its arguments. Much of the discussion centers on what cannot be easily interpreted and how language, text, and form facilitate but simultaneously fail to express pain, sorrow, and the articulation of the self. It is an argument that deliberately reads resistance and discursive digressions as obscuring an easily identified subject, voice, or argument. This could be initially unsatisfying to the casual reader, and students below the graduate level may find frustrating Horrocks' deliberate choice to not pin down what her authors refuse to pin down themselves. But Horrocks' clear structure, cogent recitation of theory, and intertextual references should reward careful readers and more importantly offer significant insights to the study of travel narratives and women writers of this period.