

## Book Reviews

**Smith, Andrew and Mark Bennet, editors. *Locating Ann Radcliffe*. Routledge, 2021.**

<https://www.routledge.com/Locating-Ann-Radcliffe/Smith-Bennett/p/book/9781032088815>

Review by Laurence Roussillon-Constanty

*Locating Ann Radcliffe*, edited by Andrew Smith and Mark Bennett, is a collective volume comprising seven articles written by various international scholars. All the articles in the volume were previously published as an issue of *Women's Writing*, volume 22, issue 3 (August 2015), also entitled "Locating Ann Radcliffe" and edited by the same publisher. In the introduction to the volume, the editors (Andrew Smith, Professor of Nineteenth Century Literature at the University of Sheffield, UK, and Mark Bennett, author of a Ph. D. thesis on Ann Radcliffe, and scholar of travel writing and Victorian popular fiction) state that the volume "broadens the critical understanding of Ann Radcliffe's work and includes explorations of the publication history of her work, her engagement with contemporary accounts of aesthetics, her travel writing, and her poetry" (1).

The selection of articles tackles several aspects of Ann Radcliffe's writing and offers a stimulating discussion of Radcliffe's multifaceted writing. The contributions are evenly distributed between Ann Radcliffe scholars and/or Gothic fiction experts. The introduction to the volume underlines the well-known aspects of Ann Radcliffe's importance as a key figure and a pioneer – foregrounding her as a forward-thinking and subversive writer. Beyond these well-documented aspects of Radcliffe's writing, this volume aims to "relocate her work within a much broader literary, cultural and historical context" (1): eighteenth century print culture and publishing networks, poetry, travel writing, and aesthetic theories are drawn upon and rearticulated in such texts. As a whole, the volume nicely moves from articles devoted to the publishing history of some

of Radcliffe's novels to the body of some of her lesser-known works, including topics such as the commonplace book or the influence of her Gothic novels on the sonnet.

The opening article, by JoEllen DeLucia, focuses on the impact the famous radical bookseller George Robinson had on the circulation/reception and understanding of Radcliffe's literature when he published both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* (1795). The first part of her article recognizes the role played by Radcliffe's first publisher, the circulating library proprietor Thomas Hookham. The main argument in her article is that "Robinson's network positions Radcliffe and her work outside of the insular worlds of the British novel and the fashionable milieu of the circulating library and makes her a significant part of early conversations about human rights and even what we might today call global citizenship" (7). The first part of the article reminds us of how the contractual terms with Radcliffe's first publisher, Hookham, resulted in very little profit for even best-selling authors such as Mary Robinson (Radcliffe's contemporary) and sums up previous scholarship on the connection between circulating libraries and anonymous female writers. While DeLucia praises previous critical readings that have "developed compelling and necessary frameworks for understanding Radcliffe's influence on and position in eighteenth-century print culture" (10), she offers to expand what she sees as a narrowing view of the author's political commitment and outreach by placing Radcliffe within a broader "media empire" led by George Robinson. In particular, DeLucia reconsiders Radcliffe's fiction alongside her other literary productions, which she considers in the light of Robinson's firm and the publisher's effort "to support and encourage a group of authors interested in exploring and theorizing universal rights" (13). Conversely, DeLucia convincingly demonstrates how Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* may have informed Godwin's own Gothic novels (*Caleb Williams* (1794), for instance) as well as other political essays. Such a line of inquiry

that “connects Radcliffe and Godwin through Robinson” (14) highlights the value of previous research about the influence of radical Dissenting culture on her work and paves the way for further research into other texts that were published alongside Radcliffe’s novels and presents us with a finer assessment of the role played by publishers and circulating libraries in shaping the reception of Radcliffe’s works.

The next couple of essays both examine Radcliffe’s engagement with aesthetics. Robert Miles aims to demonstrate Radcliffe’s talent at crafting complex art by retracing the various encounters of Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolfo* and the various “red herrings” (22) in the novel’s plot. He then goes on to discuss the significance of the name “La Voisin,” which he concludes can be identified both as “a noble peasant conditioned by a naturally graceful sensibility and an echo of the most infamous poisoner in French history” (24).

The next article, by Andrew Milnes, deals with Radcliffe’s aesthetics and the representation of holy mothers, exploring how “a Gothic aesthetic was negotiated at the end of the eighteenth century” (36). The main argument in Milnes’s analysis of Radcliffe’s fiction rests on an exploration of Edmund Burke’s notion of the Sublime as expressed in his closing account of writing in *A Philosophical Enquiry* (1757) where, Milnes argues, “he transforms his theory of obscurity into an account of aesthetics that has implications for the theory of Terror” (37). Thus, the article aims to demonstrate that Radcliffe’s “On the Supernatural in Poetry” is a response to Burke’s treatise. While the discussion of Burke’s Sublime terror is convincing, the second part of the argument, which includes the gendered reading of the Madonna figure by Elisabeth Bronfen (in her remarkable book, *Over Her Dead Body: Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992)) does not help clarify the overall argument as it tends to focus a lot more on Burke than on Radcliffe herself (as the author himself recognizes toward the end of his article). However, the explicit attention to

aesthetics and representation in fiction is stimulating and offers insights into how to enlarge the discussion of Radcliffe's writing into a larger cultural framework.

In the same way, the next article, by Jacob Lipski, intends to unveil another aspect of Radcliffe's work, which he names "quasi-masquerades" and includes the element of masking and play "similar narrative functions to masquerade scenes proper in well-known eighteenth-century novels" (50). In his article, Lipski draws an interesting parallel between the way Radcliffe represents landscapes and artistic performances to "amplify the effects of sensual enthrallment" (52). He then aptly shows how the quasi-masquerade scenes operate as plot catalysts, but he also debunks the traditional understanding of the masquerade as a "destabilizing force" (57). His conclusion that Radcliffe's work belongs to the modern regime of selfhood as it portrays "almost frantic workings of the imagination" (59) is both convincing and accurate.

By comparison to the first group of essays, the next three articles in the volume stress the way in which Radcliffe's novels draw on various sources, highlighting the intertextual nature of her works. In her article, Marianna D'Elzio thus aptly demonstrates how Radcliffe borrowed from her friend Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi to signal her support and understanding of her difficult position as a social and literary outcast from London society and to celebrate her innovative contribution to the literature of the grand tour. As far as influence is concerned, the article is well argued and indeed reveals yet another interesting aspect of Radcliffe's literary connections. To the present reader, though, the most striking article in the section, and indeed in the whole book, is undoubtedly Cheryl L. Nixon's essay, "Anne Radcliffe's *Commonplace Book*: assembling the Female Body and the Material text," which examines a little-explored primary source and offers insight into Anne and William Radcliffe's everyday life as well as a stimulating discussion of the connection between bodily pain and fiction. The article includes very moving reproductions in

both Anne's and William's handwriting and brilliantly demonstrates how Anne Radcliffe's first-hand experience of bodily pain informed her fiction and helped her shape her construction of the Gothic female body. In this respect, the connection between the commonplace book and the Gothic novel is convincingly supported by recent criticism on the body and affect theory. The most notable aspect of the article, however, lies in the way it draws attention to the material body of Radcliffe's text. In the same way, the last article in the volume, which traces the way Radcliffe's novels helped generate a whole new genre, "the Gothic sonnet," draws a relevant parallel between the confined space in the novel and the spatial dimension of the sonnet with examples by Keats and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, showing the subtle transition (from the Romantic and the Victorian sonnet) the Gothic trope allowed.

As a collection of essays, the volume covers many aspects of Radcliffe's literary achievement, and indeed reframes her in the broad context of literature and culture where she appears as an important writer. The book is well-informed and carefully edited and will be a very useful resource for literary scholars and students of the period and beyond.

**Laurence Roussillon-Constanty** is a Professor in Victorian Literature, Art and Epistemology. Her line of enquiry includes text and image relations (the PRB, John Ruskin). She currently teaches at the University of Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, in France.