

Wanderlust or Wanderlost: Gender, Mobility, and Sympathy in Late-Eighteenth-Century Literature

Sijie Wang

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

Contact: Sijie.Wang@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

Abstract:

Departing from traditional figurations of the male traveler-explorer, Ingrid Horrocks's *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814* analyzes women writers' thematic as well as formal representations of the 'reluctant woman wanderer' figure. Situating the writings of Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Frances Burney in the larger context of mobility and sympathy studies, Horrocks emphasizes two important gendered privileges unavailable to the majority of women: traveling as a liberating quest for individual identity and sympathy as an ethical product of detached observation. As Horrocks meticulously illustrates the absence of sympathy or freedom in a woman's painfully endless movement, she sheds light on not only women's social and psychological status in late-eighteenth-century Britain but also the role of traveling in British literature at large.

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Horrocks, Ingrid: *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 306 pages, 64.99 GBP. ISBN: 978-11-0718223-3.

Abstract:

Departing from traditional figurations of the male traveler-explorer, Ingrid Horrocks's *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814* analyzes women writers' thematic as well as formal representations of the 'reluctant woman wanderer' figure. Situating the writings of Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Frances Burney in the larger context of mobility and sympathy studies, Horrocks emphasizes two important gendered privileges unavailable to the majority of women: traveling as a liberating quest for individual identity and sympathy as an ethical product of detached observation. As Horrocks meticulously illustrates the absence of sympathy or freedom in a woman's painfully endless movement, she sheds light on not only women's social and psychological status in late-eighteenth-century Britain but also the role of traveling in British literature at large.

Departing from the traditional male traveler-explorer figure, Ingrid Horrocks analyzes women writers' thematic as well as formal representations of "the reluctant woman wanderer" in the larger context of mobility and sympathy studies (p. 3). Defining wandering as traveling with "neither destination nor homecoming," Horrocks argues that traveling as a liberating quest for individual identity and sympathy as an ethical product of detached observation can both be gendered privileges unavailable to the majority of women (p. 1). As Horrocks painstakingly illustrates the absence of sympathy or freedom in a woman's arduous journey through a perilous world, she sheds light on not only women's social, political, and psychological status in the so-called pre-Romantic era but also the motif of traveling in British literature at large.

In her first chapter, Horrocks uses the long poem as an example to illustrate how, in eighteenth-century English literature, the disinterested prospect viewing of a lofty, static gentleman is gradually

replaced by the alienated yet sympathetic observation of a vulnerable, mobile wanderer. According to Horrocks, Charlotte Smith's *The Emigrants* rejects the moral authority of "the prospective eye" by establishing a close connection between the historically real refugees of the French Revolution and the poet in her own exile (p. 44). With Smith's speaker "depicted as literally houseless and placeless," the "relocating of both subject and object of the poem involves a fundamental revolution in imaginings of the position of the poet-observer" (p. 72). This concept of a homeless, female "poet-observer" is further expanded in the following chapters.

Turning her attention to Charlotte Smith's sonnet sequence *Elegiac Sonnets*, Horrocks examines in the second chapter how "tropeic and formal resonances of wandering" help create an increasingly depressive atmosphere of general displacement (p. 80). In terms of trope, Smith's rootless woman wanderer-speaker constantly expresses "a sense of personal and political loss too deep (and blank) for either nostalgia or for successful imaginings of sympathetic community," while monotonous repetition as an important formal feature of the sequence helps register this profound sense of loss (p. 81). Reading the sonnets in chronological order, Horrocks clarifies how communal sympathy evoked through sentimental pauses within wandering is gradually replaced by global despair as a result of perpetual movements.

In chapter three, Horrocks compares the thematic wandering of the Gothic heroine with the formal wandering of the poetic text in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, arguing that "the presence and absence of poetry in particular becomes a tool for exploring – and resisting – the implications of the gothic itself" (p. 116). While the quotations and compositions of poems in a prose narrative as a sign of textual mobility can alleviate the sense of isolation created by Gothic journeys, this soothing effect of literature can no longer protect the Gothic heroine when the overwhelming emotion of horror alienates her from her own subjectivity. Taking into consideration the political upheavals of the 1790s, Horrocks explains how lyrical elements in Radcliffe's novel offer a limited yet liberating space of "sympathetic expansiveness" to a traumatized heroine (p. 127).

Mary Wollstonecraft's travel narrative *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* is discussed in chapter four. Wollstonecraft's revolutionary representation of a woman wanderer who travels abroad to escape her domestic miseries is at the same time defiant and despairing. Rewriting 'the sentimental journey' through detailed descriptions of lower-class women's financial troubles, these letters initially facilitate sympathetic exchanges between the traveler-observer and the local observed. When this sympathy develops into "destabilizing anguish," however, the wanderer's feeling of "excessive involvement" cannot be erased by a simple image of home or homecoming (p. 156, 159). This sense of despair is also reflected by the form of the narrative, in which

quotations, instead of offering communal consolation to the letter-writer, intensify her agony in their inability to fully represent her individual – female – perspective.

Juliet Granville's aimless movements in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* are analyzed in detail in the fifth chapter. Juliet's wandering, directed by accident rather than intention, frequently attracts suspicion and censure, thus exposing the physical, social as well as psychological difficulties of female mobility in 1790s Britain. As extremely harsh circumstances gradually deprive Juliet of her subjectivity, her "suppression of desire" is mirrored by Burney's lengthy, clumsy, and often negatively phrased sentences, a syntactic feature that signals "the novel's failure of narrative direction" (p. 178). This significant difference between privileged male travelers and pained female wanderers is further highlighted in Horrocks's conclusory chapter, in which the marginalized status of women wanderers in Wordsworth's Romantic poems is contrasted with their central role in late-eighteenth-century women's writings.

Covering a wide diversity of genres from long poems and sonnet sequences to Gothic novels and travel narratives, Horrocks's monograph on the interrelated issues of gender, mobility, and sympathy can be recommended to anyone interested in late-eighteenth-century British literature. Of course, one may argue that it is rather problematic to ignore the class differences between the landowning Emily St. Aubert and the dispossessed refugees of the French Revolution. One might also point out that Horrocks's binary structure of adventurous male travelers versus troubled women wanderers invites further examination. The sense of homelessness, fear, and vulnerability – identified by Horrocks as distinctive characteristics of female mobility – can also be found in male experiences: in Captain Booth's reluctant voyages to the battlefield in Fielding's *Amelia* for instance, or in Vincentio di Vivaldi's forced journey to Rome in Radcliffe's *The Italian*. But then, any practice of literary criticism has to involve a certain selection of topics, methods, and primary sources. Horrocks approaches a well-selected group of literary texts from an interesting perspective, uses theoretical jargons very sparingly, and presents her research in a language that is professional but not pedantic. This interdisciplinary, cross-genre study clarifies the general features of wandering as well as the fine differences between wanderers, offering an insightful view of not only male Romanticists' wanderlust but also women writers' 'wanderlost' – lost in their painfully perpetual movement.

German Abstract:

Wanderlust oder Wander-lost: Gender, Mobilität und Sympathie in Literatur des späten achtzehnten Jahrhunderts

Ingrid Horrocks *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814* lässt die traditionellen Figurationen des männlichen Reisenden und Entdeckers hinter sich und analysiert sowohl die thematischen als auch formalen Repräsentationen der ‚widerwilligen Wanderin‘ in Werken weiblicher Schriftstellerinnen. Sie bettet dazu die Arbeiten von Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft und Frances Burney in den größeren Kontext der *Mobility* und *Sympathy Studies* und betont zwei wichtige gegenderte Privilegien, die der Mehrheit der Frauen nicht zur Verfügung standen: das Reisen als eine befreiende Suche nach individueller Identität, und Sympathie als ein ethisches Produkt von losgelöster Beobachtung. Indem Horrocks die fehlende Sympathie in den schmerzvollen, endlosen Bewegungen von Frauen minutiös aufzeigt, gewinnt sie nicht nur Erkenntnisse über den sozialen und psychologischen Status der Frau in Großbritannien im späten achtzehnten Jahrhundert, sondern auch über die Rolle des Reisens in der britischen Literatur allgemein.

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