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978-1-107-03283-5 - Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic

Edited by Dale Townshend and Angela Wright

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ANN RADCLIFFE, ROMANTICISM AND THE GOTHIC

This book offers unique and fresh perspectives upon the literary productions of one of the most highly remunerated and widely admired authors of the Romantic period, Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823). While drawing upon, consolidating and enriching the critical impulses reflected in Radcliffe scholarship to date, this collection of essays, composed by a range of renowned scholars of the Romantic period, also foregrounds the hitherto neglected aspects of the author's work. Radcliffe's relations to Romantic-era travel writing; the complex political ideologies that lie behind her historiographic endeavours; her poetry and its relation to institutionalised forms of Romanticism; and her literary connections to eighteenth-century women's writing are all examined in this collection. Offering new considerations of the well-known Gothic fictions and extending the appreciation of Radcliffe in new critical directions, the collection reappraises Radcliffe's full *œuvre* within the wider literary and political contexts of her time.

DALE TOWNSHEND is Senior Lecturer in Gothic and Romantic Literature at the University of Stirling, Scotland. His most recent publications include *Macbeth: A Critical Reader* (co-edited with John Drakakis, 2013) and *The Gothic World* (co-edited with Glennis Byron, 2013).

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‘Mrs Radcliffe has a title to be considered as the first poetess of romantic fiction’, claimed Sir Walter Scott in his retrospective appraisal of her work in 1826. Scott’s assessment was by no means an isolated case: even as they articulated reservations with her style, such prominent Romantic figures as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Lord Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey, Nathan Drake, William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt praised Ann Radcliffe in terms similar to those of Scott, often favourably comparing her abilities to conjure horror, terror, fear and suspense to the talents of William Shakespeare. During the Romantic period, Radcliffe’s works were widely discussed, debated, adapted, translated, anthologised and dramatised. In fact, so renowned was the writer in both Britain and mainland Europe that, later in the nineteenth century, Radcliffe herself would feature as the head of a crew of vampire hunters in the French author Paul Féval’s *La Ville Vampire* of 1875.

The year 2014 marks the 250th anniversary of Ann Radcliffe’s birth in 1764. Partly by way of commemoration, *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic* seeks to reignite critical interest in, and debate upon, this extraordinary writer, situating her achievements not only within the immediate context of early Gothic writing but also within the literary cultures of British Romanticism more generally. Divided into three sections, the collection aims, firstly, to address the literary-cultural contexts in which her fictions first circulated, be that in relation to critical assessments of her work in the period 1789–1850, her relation to earlier eighteenth-century writers, her complex political engagements or her singular position within Romantic-era print culture. The chapters in the second section seek to provide a fresh and systematic re-examination of Radcliffe’s *œuvre*, taking care, in each instance, to situate her works in relation to some of the major preoccupations of Romantic aesthetics. The chapters in the third and final section seek to chart Radcliffe’s relations to Romantic poetry, her influence upon other prose writers of the period and the adaptations of

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her popular romances on the Romantic stage. Composed by an international cast of scholars, *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic* aims to extend the appreciation of Radcliffe in critical directions that, to date, are only in the early phases of development, particularly with regards to those aspects of her *œuvre* that lie beyond the narrow confines of the Gothic.

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Our sincere and heartfelt thanks also go to the twelve contributors who signed up with such enthusiasm and alacrity to this project, were fully supportive of its aims and wrote such excellent essays. We are grateful to them for their contributions and for matching their own passion for Ann Radcliffe with ours. 'I have a curiosity to hear it', the Englishman in the Prologue to Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1796–7) observes of the manuscript offered to him. If anything, our curiosity and interest in Ann Radcliffe have been piqued even further by these essays. We hope that yours are too.