

Charlotte Smith, *The Story of Henrietta*. Edited by Janina Nordius. Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2012. ISBN 978-1-934555-54-5. 166 pages.

Continuing her work of literary reclamation of some of the lesser-known examples of the Gothic novel, Janina Nordius, who is a Professor Emerita of the University of Gothenburg, has once again succeeding in saving a long-lost classic of female writing from critical oblivion. Her republication of Anna Maria Mackenzie's *Swedish Mysteries* in 2008 has now been followed by a new edition of Charlotte Smith's novel, *The Story of Henrietta*, which was originally published as the second volume in Smith's five-volume series of *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* in 1800. Professor Nordius's recovery of such neglected Gothic texts is a project that continues in the pioneering tradition of feminist literary historical research into women's writing previously buried in the archives.

In the case of Charlotte Smith's *The Story of Henrietta*, it is not only a powerful example of the female Gothic shocker, it also represents an early expression of anti-colonial writing that links the portrayal of the condition of 18th century women with the issue of slavery in the New World. As Professor Nordius writes in her introduction:

The novella-length *Story of Henrietta* is amongst her least known but clearly most interesting works, for here Smith leaves the ruins and castles of Europe behind to make a significant foray into another, yet so far little explored field of gothic terror and brutality. Setting her story in the British colony of Jamaica, she expands her political concerns to embrace also the controversial issue of colonial slavery, a system supported by powerful financial interests in the metropolis but also increasingly criticized there by the growing abolitionist movement. In representing the slaveholding island as a location so fraught with horrors and anxieties as to chill the blood of the most seasoned gothic reader, Smith conjures up a parallel between women's disempowerment and the situation of the enslaved, while at the same time considerably radicalizing her critique of the West Indian slave regimes already begun in her short novel *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794). (p vii)

The novel's critical exploration of both gender, class and racial oppression is also successfully dramatised by its focus on the fate of Henrietta herself, daughter of a tyrannical slaveholding father, who plans to marry her off to a man she hates in Jamaica. Her dramatic escape from the clutches of these brutally manipulating men lead to her even more dramatic involvement in a violent slave rebellion on the island. The story is therefore full of action, suspense, romance and twists of the plot, all of which still continue to thrill the modern reader.

The re-issue of this remarkable and innovating novel is a welcome addition to the canon of 18th century Gothic literature. Both Professor Nordius and her enterprising publisher should be thanked for making this classic text available in such an attractive and extensively annotated edition.

*Ronald Paul*