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# Snippets, Excerpts, and Epigraphs: Ann Radcliffe and the Transatlantic Quotation

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## Abstract

Eighteenth-century English novelist Ann Radcliffe is widely recognized as an important figure in the history of American letters, her gothic novels such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) helping to spark an appetite for sensationalist European novels that critics deemed an impediment to the development of an indigenous American literature and a threat to the morals of young readers, women in particular. While Radcliffe is generally recognized as a generic progenitor of Hawthorne and Poe, she also functioned as an unspoken antagonist for sentimental women writers, who sought to avoid the critiques leveled at Radcliffe by grounding their novels in everyday American life and promoting conventional morality and conduct. Though sentimental women writers tried to evade comparison to Radcliffe, they nevertheless emulated her by persistently employing a literary form that Radcliffe pioneered: the epigraph. Though we typically overlook these brief quotations that often begin chapters or prose works, this literary form originated, amid considerable controversy, in Radcliffe's gothic novels, and they were, from the very outset, recognized as a gendered literary form, due to their putative prolixity and tendency to clutter the printed page. This essay will examine the transatlantic history of the epigraph, as it originated in the novels of Ann Radcliffe and took root in the nineteenth-century American sentimental novel, where it was habitually used by such writers as Susanna Maria Cummins, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Susan Warner. The epigraph bears witness to the irresistible transatlantic circulation of gendered novelistic forms despite the prohibitions of genre and nationalism that would impede their transmission. As a form, the epigraph bears witness to the power of text to circulate outside the parameters of its original setting, and this is nowhere more evident than in the unlikely popularity of a late-eighteenth-century British literary form among nineteenth-century American women writers.

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