The Pickering Masters

The Works of Charlotte Smith

Desmond. A Novel (1792)

Edited by
Stuart Curran

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VOLUME 5

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INTRODUCTION

By the time of *Desmond*, Charlotte Smith's only venture in the popular eighteenth-century form of the epistolary novel, the conventions of this fictional genre had been elaborated in Britain's literary culture for some sixty years. The first great master of the genre was Samuel Richardson who created three monumental experiments exploiting its formal possibilities, *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747–8), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–4). In their ability to develop rich complexities of character and social milieus within an oxymoronic form that was at once intimate and temporally distanced, these novels presented themselves in the aggregate as a major artistic challenge to all who wrote in Richardson's wake. And there were many, naturally, who vied to inherit his laurels. For Smith, three novelists, in particular, help shape her own reconstruction of the form. Tobias Smollett's *Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) greatly broadened the class and gender tonalities of the epistolary novel: in *Desmond* one can detect his influence generally in Desmond's experiences at Margate in volume I as well as, later on, in the sparkling satirical voice of Fanny Waverly and, on the plane of class, very directly in the letter from Waverly's servant, Anthony Booker, that concludes the first volume with a deliberate, startling shift of ideolect and class-orthography. A second influence on the form is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). More than any other single work *Julie* established the cult of sensibility in which the late eighteenth-century novel is steeped. Here the letter becomes a form into which the frustrated passions of a protagonist are deflected and given free vent; and from the very first letter the love-lorn Lionel Desmond enacts this characteristic role. Smith, however, also learned from a third and more contemporary source, Frances Burney, whose *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782) are the strongest influences on all her early novels, to distinguish such a pouring forth of emotional anxiety according to gender codes. It may take more than one reading of *Desmond* to account for the remarkable shift in timbre that takes place when we negotiate the transition into the second volume. By then, we have become so habituated to the voices of the restraining mentor Erasmus Bethel and the impetuous Desmond, his one-time ward, that we take it for granted that

the interests and even the literary contexts they share – much quotation of Shakespeare and Milton, the continuing banter provided both writers by the wry hyper-masculinity of Sterne – constitute the entire tonal palette we will expect from the novel. With great artistry Smith delays introducing the principal female voices of Geraldine Verney and her sister Fanny Waverly until the second volume, but with the female dialogue with which it opens they wholly alter the novel's stylistic centre. Smith intensifies this shift by absenting Desmond's voice, which has dominated the opening volume, from long stretches of the second and third volumes; and, in gradually realigning Bethel's view of Geraldine over the last half, she artfully gives her heroine an intellectual as well as moral centrality to a novel in whose first volume she never appears.

Creating character through voice alone is, perhaps, the greatest challenge to the writer of an epistolary novel. In *Desmond* there is no question of the tonal distinctions to be observed among the four voices, a contrived balance of two masculine and two feminine presences, whose correspondence dominates the novel. The fifth principal voice that enters very late in its course, however, may be Smith's crowning touch of art, because in just two letters of the last volume (XXI and XXV) she makes it apparent, as a matter of wonderfully calibrated style, why it is that Jonville de Montfleuri, originally represented in the novel through Desmond's political concerns and there translated, as it were, into Desmond's characteristic style, now at last is allowed to express his private emotions in a voice that is characteristically French and reveals him in tone and personality as perfectly suited to become Fanny Waverly's husband.

As important to this self-consciously literary author as the preceding fifty-year history of the epistolary novel is, there is a closer and arguably more significant influence on her designing her novel within the sequential elaboration of letters, one that aligns Charlotte Smith with the political strategies of linked women radicals of the early 1790s. And to document this, it might be useful to remark on the curious meeting she had in the autumn of 1791, as she was just beginning her novel, with a man who had attained his majority only six months earlier and who was as yet not known as an author, let alone as a living testament to Smith's own influence. It was at this point that William Wordsworth, who would, a little more than a decade later, establish himself as the principal inheritor from Charlotte Smith of the sonnet of sensibility and in *The Prelude* extend to epic proportions the desultory blank verse of her *Emigrants*, stopped in Brighton on his way to France and detained Smith for much of Saturday 26 October, in order to procure a letter of introduction to the person who was the subject of his first published poem, 'On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress', which appeared pseudonymously in the March 1787 issue of the *European Mag-*

azine.[1] Smith was an avid reader of Williams,[2] but otherwise, it has generally appeared, remained unlinked to her since after 1792 Williams passed her life on the continent. But now we know, and Wordsworth, at this point politically sympathetic to the French Revolution and ambitious as a poet, must himself have learned of it, that Charlotte Smith had herself undertaken a brave, daunting trip to France in the late summer of 1790. Her allusion to it in the fourth paragraph of her preface to *Desmond*, which might have seemed inserted simply as a means of establishing her credentials to report so extensively on the current French scene, is, instead, a statement of fact. Although the exact dates of her trip are unsure, we might revert to the chronology and landscape of Geraldine Verney's trip to France in the third volume, because it too occurs in the late summer of the same year. Her long letter from the Paris suburb of Meudon, letter X of volume III, is dated 16 August 1791. As Jacqueline Labbe has argued, Smith must have been in France a couple of weeks later.[3] The exactitude of detail observed in Geraldine's letters, so different from the generic representations of landscape in the scenes set in the Auvergne, suggests, indeed, that Smith kept a travel journal and transformed parts of it into her novel. As Geraldine approaches Rouen, for instance, she writes: 'we entered the long double avenue of elms, which begins a mile from the town' (p. 256). In Meudon she notes the salient detail that this small town southwest of Paris was once the residence of Rabelais (p. 262). Her careful delineation of Meudon's geographical features likewise suggests that Smith had at least visited the town herself if she had not actually taken up residence there during her sojourn in France.

And it is not to be believed that a woman political radical who had the means of providing Wordsworth with an introduction to Williams had not either met her in England during this year or sought her out during her visit to France. Williams and her family, having spent the better part of late 1790 in France, had also re-embarked for the continent in August 1791, probably leaving from Brighton where Smith was living a little before she herself did, and by the time of Smith's own trip a few weeks later they were resident in Rouen and highly celebrated there for their political sympathies.[4] The fictional Geraldine Verney, having undertaken the crossing from Brighton to Dieppe that Smith would likewise do,

[1] On the dating see *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 38 and 38n2.

[2] See, for instance, *Collected Letters*, pp. 25, 34.

[3] 'Gentility in Distress: a New Letter by Charlotte Smith (1749–1806)', *The Wordsworth Circle* 35 (2004), pp. 91–3.

[4] For details of Williams's travels during these years, see Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, and London: Associated University Presses, 2002), ch. 2.

spends a couple of days in Rouen on her way to Paris. Whether or not the two writers met there, two years later, indeed, both Smith and Williams would be publicly linked in Paris when some eighty sympathizers with the revolution from England, Ireland and Scotland, known as the British Club, assembled at White's Hotel on 14 November 1792 for a dinner to celebrate the liberation of the Low Countries from Prussian domination. Williams appears to have been present with her partner, John Hurford Stone, and would seem identical with the woman whom a contemporary French newspaper notes as having sung an English poem of her composition set to the 'Marseillaise'. As usual on such an occasion there were a series of toasts, the eleventh of which was to 'the Women of Great Britain, particularly those who have distinguished themselves by their writings in favour of the French revolution, Mrs. Smith and Miss H. M. Williams'.[1]

What makes something of a literary and political collusion between Smith and Williams especially probable is the certainty that *Desmond*, in a most ingenious and pointed way, renegotiates the terms and even the time-frame of the first volume of Williams's *Letters Written in France*, published by the publisher of all of Smith's works before *Desmond*, Thomas Cadell, in November 1790. That with her epistolary novel Smith transferred her association from Cadell to G. G. and J. Robinson could reflect the latter firm's greater willingness to back a radical novel, but it is surely of remark to note that the seven further volumes of Williams's *Letters* likewise transferred publishers from Cadell to the Robinsons. This was the publishing house that was fined for selling Paine's *Rights of Man* in 1793 and to which Coleridge turned a few years later to undertake his often inflammatory *Poems on Several Subjects* (1796): its liberal political credentials seem, then, to have been widely understood.

Williams famously began her *Letters* with three enthusiastic missives devoted to the Festival of the Federation on 14 July 1790, having, she notes in her first sentence, arrived just the day before.[2] Similarly, Lionel Desmond in his initial account to Bethel from Paris, volume I, letter VII, dated 19 July 1790, immediately reverts to the sublime spectacle of this great symbolic enactment of revolutionary national unity that he appears to have witnessed. Certain other elements in the plotting of the first volume of *Desmond*, moreover, seem deliberately to reinvigorate the strategies of Williams's 1790 *Letters*. There, a long novelistic account of the family of one M. du F—, who is actually the husband of the woman who had been Williams's French tutor earlier in England, Monique du Fossé, traces the iniquities of the *ancien régime*, including du F—'s being

[1] See David V. Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790–1793* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1986), pp. 219–31.

[2] See *Letters Written in France*, ed. by Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), pp. 64–73.

incarcerated by a *lettre de cachet* authorized by his own father, the Baron du Fossé. As Williams visits him at his estate near Rouen and recounts at length how he has reconstituted its operations so as to function according to democratic protocols, we see the prototype for the similar restitution undertaken by Smith's Jonville de Montfleuri in the Lyonnais district to the south. Williams's incorporation of actual quotidian detail within the arching historical perspective thus also justifies Smith's borrowing from two ephemeral French revolutionary pamphlets (neither of which is today traceable in a British library) in letters XIII and XIV of volume I.

It may well be that Smith's reading of Williams's *Letters Written in France* immediately after its publication in November 1790 started her thinking about writing an epistolary novel. She does not, however, mention projecting a novel in letters until the summer of 1791 and even then does not suggest that it would have a political cast, though she observes a need for procuring information from abroad for its substantiation.[1] By 20 January 1792 she reports having completed 131 pages of the new project, a substantial amount of the first volume.[2] The preface is dated 20 June 1792, five months to the day later, and within a couple of weeks, on 4 July, Smith was requesting personal copies of the now-published novel.[3] Yet, even as Smith is moving forward quickly with a determination to be the first (and, indeed, the only) British novelist to incorporate the current scene in France into her fiction, she is also, and with great deliberation, looking backward. As Desmond, like Williams, begins his account of events in France with the Festival of the Federation on 14 July 1790, he will also respond in volume II, letter VI, on 8 January 1791, to the recent publication of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Late Revolution in France*, which dates from November of the previous year, the month in which Williams's reportage from France was also published. Yet Smith's recuperative strategy is actually even more sophisticated than simply recovering the unfolding polemical controversy of two years earlier, for in the fictional chronology, before the timeline would allow for the publication of Burke's defence of the *ancien régime*, Smith inserts Burke's general sentiments into the mouth of the utterly archaic and inconsequential Count d'Hauteville, and she demonstrates the wholesale abuses of power practised by the aristocrats whose unconditional sway Burke defends through the account of the Breton who has found work in Montfleuri's vineyards after being dispossessed of his ancestral land by a Bretonese count.

[1] Charles Thomas-Stanford archive, Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton & Hove, on deposit in the East Sussex Record Office: ACC 8997 (Letter L/AE/57 – 27 July 1791).

[2] *Collected Letters*, p. 43.

[3] *Collected Letters*, p. 46.

The timeline of Smith's novel, then, reverts to two years before its publication so as to rehearse not just the history but the contemporary writing of that history as well. If Desmond responds with indignation in volume II, letter VI, to the very idea of a British writer, like Burke, defending absolute autocracy, Bethel accompanies a later letter – letter IX, dated 18 March 1791 – with a copy of Paine's *Rights of Man*, allowing Desmond to respond forcefully in his ensuing letter of 10 April with a defence of Paine against Burke's partisans. Although Williams's spirited first-hand defence of the Revolution in *Letters Written in France* could only engage Burke indirectly through its simultaneous representation of a vastly different depiction of France from the one he characterized as descending into savage anarchy, Smith is forcefully engaged, though also indirectly, in renewing the rebuff to Burke issued by another female radical, Mary Wollstonecraft, in *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, published within weeks of Burke's *Reflections* in November 1790. As Wollstonecraft had there attempted to wrest the writing of the French Revolution from Burke's reactionary conception of it, so, with a year-and-a-half intervening, Smith recreates the entire timeline from June 1790 to late 1791 in retrospect not simply to write a novel with a vital investment in the current scene, but, much more ambitiously, to retrieve the radical view of history that still, a year before the Terror, has a chance of countering Burke's influential polemic with a totalizing reconfiguration of the historical scene as it might yet be inscribed in Britain's cultural memory.

No reader, however, can miss Smith's point that, on the level of public resonance, more than French politics is at stake in her novel. The tenor of the Bethel–Desmond correspondence begins with the vapid high life of Margate, against which is set Bethel's rueful memorial of his youthful follies in a similar world void of principle and humane standards. Paradoxically, if the transparent evils of the French class system have been overthrown, those in British society are very much still in place. The juxtaposition of Lord Newminster in Desmond's circle and Sir Robert Stamford in Bethel's indicts a political and social world in which aristocratic appurtenances, whatever Burke's sense of them as the enduring anchor of British culture, are in actuality bought and sold like every other commodity. So, too, are the benefices of the established church, as we learn from the encounter with the nameless Doctor of volume I, letter IV, who, defending the wealth accumulated by the hierarchy of the French church, allows us to derive the implication that, whatever the rhetoric by which the British over centuries have dissociated the Church of England from Catholicism, in practice the two hierarchical institutions are cut from the same clerical cloth.

Aside from the correspondents themselves, there is not a single British subject introduced in the novel who has a good word to say about the

value of a revolution meant to relieve French citizens of their long history of oppression. Again, on the subject of the values of British liberty, self-satisfied, jingoistic pontification substitutes for deeply-held political ideals. Stamford's chicanery is admired by all his neighbours with the exception of Bethel. Even within the novel's closed circle of correspondents, Smith, while ostensibly agreeing with Bethel's justification of the British constitutional system as the best thus far devised in the world in volume III, letter VIII, places that defence so late in the course of the novel as to make it a weak buffer against what the events and opinions adumbrated before it have overwhelmingly established, which is that the actual political and social state of present-day Britain is inferior to that of France as it emerges from its long history of feudal subordination. Indeed, one senses that this panegyric is meant to provide Charlotte Smith with her own buffer against what she expects to be a harsh critical reaction to her political candour from supporters of the established order.

The preponderance of the political commentary thus accumulated in the course of the novel is retailed by its male figures. British women, as Smith's defence of her independence in the preface indicates, are not supposed to talk about political repression but rather either to abet it, like Mrs Fairfax and Mrs Waverly, or to suffer it, like the two daughters of the latter. It is of the nature of a novel of this period, even one that eschews the focus on courtship that Smith has developed in her first three such endeavours, to have a happy ending, but if one senses, as is usually the case with Smith, that, in the end, happiness has been barely snatched from the jaws of incipient disaster, Fanny Waverly's happy marriage to a rich, virtuous, French idealist is not at all what might have been anticipated from the functioning of the marriage market of Bath. More to the point is what Mrs Waverly has already managed to create through her commodification of her daughters within that market, a sordid degradation of her elder daughter under the coverture of a husband who would prostitute her to finance the ostentatious expenditure of his fortune on gambling, horses and wine. Smith never points the moral directly, but it is everywhere evident to the observant reader that Geraldine Verney subsists under a feudal oppression almost as dire and certainly as degrading to her humanity as could be found anywhere in pre-revolutionary France. When in volume III, letter V, Desmond comments on Verney's demand that Geraldine leave her children and proceed to join him in his quixotic expedition to restore the ancient order of France, he expresses his hope that this summons 'will rouse that proper spirit of resistance against usurped and abused authority' (p. 224). His language is overtly political, suggesting Smith's own continuously renewed sense of the intolerable wrong by which her existence had been put under the dominion of a worthless, spendthrift husband with legal control over every aspect of it. What Desmond yearns for here is a

domestic revolution in Britain as wholesale as that which has altered the nature of French cultural values. In the end the novel will have to settle for much less, and it is likely that Smith intended each reader individually to calibrate just how much less this means. Although Lionel Desmond is an exceptional man in the high society in which he is born to live, he cannot entirely slip its inherited reins. In the last letter of the novel, placed in the position of virtually all the female protagonists of Smith's novels, Geraldine Verney must supply the ballast that keeps Desmond's emotional life from drifting into hazardous waters: 'I believe', he acknowledges, 'I sometimes frighten her by my restless and vehement temper' (p. 334). And the novel ends with a litany of possessives by which Desmond expects to reenact the coverture that has already once dehumanized Geraldine Verney. Of course, we know as satisfied readers of a novel in its moment of closure that this will not happen, but the legal circumstances embedded in this society are nonetheless as constricting as they ever were, and the object of constraint is any woman under the power of any man – 'My Fanni' (pp. 298–9); 'My Geraldine' (p. 335).

A long perspective on this novel should recognize that it constitutes a departure in more than its overt political sympathies from Smith's previous novels. In focusing so directly through the epistolary form on the inner lives of male figures, Smith greatly expands her sense of novelistic range; indeed, as noted, she sets herself the unusual challenge of confining herself to masculine interests and stylistic timbres for the entire first third of the novel. It is a measure of the enlargement of Smith's conceptual field that from this point on in her novelistic career her main protagonists will all be male, often by title explicitly so, and they will inhabit a sphere of full male activity rather than the often confined domestic spaces in which her first three novels had largely been set. In thus directing her course into waters entirely uncharted for a woman novelist, Charlotte Smith breaks free of the model provided her by Frances Burney (though it should be stressed that she had already in her earlier novels and in many salient ways expanded upon the horizons Burney offered in her own courtship novels). It may be that Smith, though obviously admiring of and indebted to Burney, wishes deliberately to signal this departure, for that might explain why she has Geraldine, in volume II, letter XII, confined to a prototypical woman's domestic retreat in which she lives alone with her children in Hertfordshire, reflect on the current state of fiction and drama, referring to characters derived from those of Burney and going on to parody the hothouse excesses of common women's fiction (pp. 163–4). The crossing of Geraldine Verney into France in the final volume thus acts as something of a rite of passage for her own novel, as Smith slowly increases the pressure until she forces her heroine into the critical scenes in the dangerous interior of France where Smith maintains a suspense that is determinedly

masculine in both concept and compass. Interestingly, this is the only occasion in the novel where Geraldine enacts the part of the timorous, physically delicate heroine of sensibility. Yet, even here, her mental resilience is called upon to rescue her from the stereotypical role into which circumstances have thrust her, so that she is able to confront her severely wounded husband with presence of mind and reserves of stamina. One senses that her long letter of 29 October 1791 (volume III, letter XXIII), which is her final utterance in the novel, is meant to signify Geraldine's ascent into a newly acquired independence commensurate with the experience of her own creator, who had seized the occasion to go unaccompanied to France because the exigencies of her professional career demanded it.

There are certainly occasions in the earlier novels where Smith's rhetoric had been determinedly unladylike. In *Desmond*, though, the epistolary form demands that she thoroughly ventriloquize her characters, men as well as women; indeed, formal exigency may be thought to liberate Smith to write in the direct, earthy mode of a Fielding or Smollett. When Fanny confronts Major Danby, Desmond's uncle, in Bath, he talks in the cant of gallantry, and it is in that mode she satirically reports him to her sister. When Bethel encounters him, however, it is all blustery man's talk: 'these times are very good times, if the damned scoundrels of Presbyterians and non-conformists let us be quiet that think them good; and not be disturbing the public tranquility, and be cursed to the round-headed sons of b—s' (p. 273). Even Desmond, fastidious in his diction and comportment, indulges in this masculinist discourse. When the Duc de Romagnecourt arrives at the country inn in volume II, letter XIX, and tries to communicate to its host without benefit of English, the bemused Desmond allows that 'there is a language in all countries by which eating or love may be expressed' (p. 198). The notion of separate spheres of language and conduct pervades *Desmond*, as of course it pervaded British culture in the late years of the eighteenth century. This must explain what is otherwise the almost inexplicable device of the plot, the one aspect of the novel commonly criticized by its contemporary reviewers. Desmond's sexual liaison with Josephine de Boisville, even as he observes the strictest propriety in often extremely difficult circumstances with Geraldine Verney, accentuates the double standard of British society. But for Charlotte Smith to pivot the novel around this liaison is, truly, to throw it in her reader's face, demanding that we own up to what our hypocrisy refuses to countenance socially. The *Monthly Review* characterized this as 'a *criminal* amour with a married woman',[1] which suggests how deeply and deliberately transgressive was this move on Smith's part.

[1] *Monthly Review*, ns 9 (1792), p. 412.

The writer of the *Monthly* review has been identified as William Enfield, a prominent Dissenting intellectual.[1] It is interesting to observe how Enfield responds to the experimental nature of Smith's novel. 'Novels, which were formerly little more than simple tales of love, are gradually taking a higher and more masculine tone', he notes, adding approvingly that Smith has 'in the present publication, ventured beyond the beaten track, so far as to interweave with her narrative many political discussions.'[2] The *European Magazine*, likewise disturbed by Desmond's relation with Madame de Boisville, strongly praises the novel's political tonalities, arguing that Smith 'has certainly vindicated the cause of French liberty with much acuteness' and concluding that the work 'towers above the common productions of the day'.[3] In this context it is odd that Mary Wollstonecraft, though assessing *Desmond* as 'a more interesting, as well as a more finished production than any of [Smith's] former novels', scarcely touches upon its political overtones, except to say that 'the cause of freedom is defended with warmth'.[4] Among the major reviews the only demurral on the subject of politics comes from the conservative *Critical Review*, but its critique is all but self-effacing: 'Her politics we cannot always approve of. Connected with the reformers, and the revolutionists, she has borrowed her colouring from them, and represented their conduct in the most favourable light … We know not if this be a fault … History may confirm her sentiments, and confute ours.' In terms of the novel's construction, however, the reviewer finds no fault except for Desmond's sexual morality: the writing is such as 'to fix this last work of Mrs. Smith in the very first class'.[5] Since it has generally been assumed that Smith's *Desmond* met with a sharp critical response to its political fervour, the fact that it really did not speaks volumes about the actual political climate of the summer of 1792 when it was still possible in Britain to hear a civil debate. Within months, however, the climate changed drastically. The September Massacres of 1792 reinforced Burke's view of France's descent into barbarity, and by February 1793, with the execution of its king and queen, England was at war, and a rigid censorship descended on print culture. As a result, Smith's ensuing novel, *The Old Manor House*, would retreat from contemporary references to lodge its political overtones

[1] *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles; Volume I: 1770-1799*, ed. by Antonia Forster, James Raven, with Stephen Bending (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 575.

[2] *Monthly Review* ns 9 (1792), p. 406.

[3] *European Magazine* 22 (July 1792), pp. 22–3.

[4] *Analytical Review* 13 (1792), p. 428; see *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols (New York: New York University Press, 1978; rpt London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989), vol. vii, pp. 450–1.

[5] *Critical Review* ns 6 (1792), p. 100.

obliquely within the context of the divisive war for American independence, lost just a decade previous but certainly in a very different and seemingly far-off time.

Because of this abrupt shift in receptability it was impossible for *Desmond*, with its overt revolutionary sympathies, to be reprinted in England after its second edition, also of 1792. It was, however, translated into German and published the next year in Hamburg as *Desmond: eine Geschichte in Briefen* [a History in Letters]. Of greater interest, it was also rendered into French as *Desmond, ou l'Amant Philanthrope* [or the Philanthropic Lover] (Paris, Chez Denné, Libraire, Palais de l'Egalité, 1793). The translator is identified only by the initials, L. C. D., but (assuming it is a man), his control of both English and French is sufficiently impeccable that he continually refines Smith's French and is able to translate an English oath not in the *OED* – 'Why how the murrain' (p. 199) – with an apt French slang expression – 'mais comment fistre' – that is not officially sanctioned today by the Academie Française. In this version much of the extensive poetic quotation of British origin is assimilated without acknowledgement into the epistolary texts, and, as one might anticipate with war dividing the two cultures, the little in Smith's novel that is palliative for a British reader is minimized where it is not simply omitted. Yet, this translation stands as a mirror created by a devoted Englishwoman to the regenerate France envisioned by Mirabeau and Brissot just as it begins its catastrophic transformation into the blood-fest of Robespierre. There is nothing comparable to its hard-headed idealism in contemporary British literature.

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DESMOND.

A NOVEL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

CHARLOTTE SMITH.

SECOND EDITION.

VOLUME I.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON,
PATER-NOSTER-ROW, 1792.

PREFACE.

IN sending into the world a work so unlike those of my former writings, which have been honoured by its approbation, I feel some degree of that apprehension which an Author is sensible of on a first publication.

This arises partly from my doubts of succeeding so well in letters as in narrative; and partly from a supposition, that there are Readers, to whom the fictitious occurrences, and others to whom the political remarks in these volumes may be displeasing.

To the first I beg leave to suggest, that in representing a young man, nourishing an ardent but concealed passion for a married woman; I certainly do not mean to encourage or justify such attachments; but no delineation of character appears to me more interesting, than that of a man capable of such a passion so generous and disinterested as to seek only the good of its object; nor any story more moral, than one that represents the existence of an affection so regulated.

As to the political passages dispersed through the work, they are for the most part, drawn from conversations to which I have been a witness, in England, and France,[1] during the last twelve months. In carrying on my story in those countries, and at a period when their political situation (but particularly that of the latter) is the general topic of discourse in both; I have given to my imaginary characters the arguments I have heard on both sides; and if those in favour of one party have evidently the advantage, it is not owing to my partial representation, but to the predominant power of truth and reason, which can neither be altered nor concealed.

But women it is said have no business with politics. – Why not? – Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them, in which they have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged! – Even in the commonest course of female education, they are expected to acquire some knowledge of history; and yet, if they are to have no opinion of what *is* passing, it avails little that they should be informed of what *has passed*, in a world where they are subject to such mental degradation; where they are censured as affecting masculine knowledge if they happen to have any understanding; or despised as insignificant triflers if they have none.

Knowledge, which qualifies women to speak or to write on any other than the most common and trivial subjects, is supposed to be of so

difficult attainment, that it cannot be acquired but by the sacrifice of domestic virtues, or the neglect of domestic duties. – *I* however, may safely say, that it was in the *observance*, not in the *breach* of duty, *I* became an Author; and it has happened, that the circumstances which have compelled me to write, have introduced me to those scenes of life, and those varieties of character which I should otherwise never have seen: Tho' alas! it is from thence, that I am too well enabled to describe from *immediate* observation,

> 'The proud man's contumely, th' oppressors wrong;
> The laws delay, the insolence of office.'[2]

But, while in consequence of the affairs of my family being most unhappily in the power of men who *seem to exercise all these with impunity*, I am become an *Author by profession*, and feel every year more acutely, '*that hope delayed maketh the heart sick*,'[3] I am sensible also (to use another quotation) that

> ——— 'Adversity –
> Tho' like a toad ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in its head.'[4]

For it is to my involuntary appearance in that character, that I am indebted, for all that makes my continuance in the world desirable; all that softens the rigour of my destiny and enables me to sustain it: I mean friends among those, who, while their talents are the boast of their country, are yet more respectable for the goodness and integrity of their hearts.

Among these I include a female friend, to whom I owe the beautiful little Ode in the last volume;[5] who having written it for this work, allows me thus publicly to boast of a friendship, which is the pride and pleasure of my life.

If I may be indulged a moment longer in my egotism, it shall be only while I apologize for the typographical errors of the work, which may have been in some measure occasioned by the detached and hurried way, in which the sheets were sometimes sent to the press when I was at a distance from it; and when my attention was distracted by the troubles, which it seems to be the peculiar delight of the persons who are concerned in the management of my children's affairs, to inflict upon me. With all this the Public have nothing to do: but were it proper to relate all the disadvantages from anxiety of mind and local circumstances, under which these volumes have been composed, such a detail might be admitted as an excuse for more material errors.

For that asperity of remark, which will arise on the part of those whose political tenets I may offend, I am prepared. Those who object to the matter, will probably arraign the manner, and exclaim against the impropriety of making a book of entertainment the vehicle of political discussion. I am

however conscious that in making these slight sketches, of manners and opinions, as they fluctuated around me; I have not sacrificed truth to any party – Nothing appears to me more respectable than national pride; nothing so absurd as national prejudice. – And in the faithful representation of the manners of other countries, surely Englishmen may find abundant reason to indulge the one, while they conquer the other. To those however who still cherish the idea of our having a *natural* enemy in the French nation; and that they are still more *naturally* our foes, because they have dared to be freemen, I can only say, that against the phalanx of prejudice kept in constant pay, and under strict discipline by interest, the slight skirmishing of a novel writer can have no effect: we see it remains hitherto unbroken against the powerful efforts of learning and genius – though united in that cause which *must* finally triumph – the cause of truth, reason, and humanity.

CHARLOTTE SMITH.

London,
June 20, 1792.

DESMOND.

LETTER I.

TO MR. BETHEL.

June 9, 1790.

YOUR arguments, my friend, were decisive; and since I am now on my way – I hardly know whither, you will be convinced that I attended to them, and have determined to relinquish the dangerous indulgence of contemplating the perfections of an object that can never be mine. Yes! – I have torn myself from her; and, without betraying any part of the anguish and regret I felt, I calmly took my leave! – It was five days ago, the morning after she had undergone the fatiguing ceremony of appearing, for the first time since her marriage, at court on the birth-night.[6] –

I had heard how universally she had been admired, but she seemed to have received no pleasure from that admiration – and I felt involuntarily pleased that she had not. – Her husband – I hate the name – Verney, had already escaped from the confinement, which this ceremony of their appearances had for a day or two imposed upon him, and was gone to I know not what races. She named the place faintly and reluctantly when I asked after him; and I did not repeat the question. There was, however, another question which I could not help asking myself; does this man deserve the lovely Geraldine? – Alas! – I know he does not; cannot: the sport of every wild propensity or rather of every prevailing fashion, (for it is to that he sacrifices rather than to his own inclinations) I have too much reason to believe he will dissipate his fortune, and render his wife miserable. – But is it possible she can love him? – Oh, no! – it is surely not possible – When through the mild grace and sometimes tenderness of her manner, I remark the strength and clearness of her understanding; when I observe, how immediately she sees the ridiculous, and how quickly her ingenious and liberal mind shrinks from vice and folly – I believe it impossible that the hour can be far distant, if indeed it is not already arrived, when the flowers, with which the mercenary hands of her family, dressed the chains they imposed upon her, will be totally faded; and when, what-

ever affection she now feels for him, if any does exist, will be destroyed by the conviction of Verney's unworthiness – Ah! where will then an heart, like hers, find refuge against the horrors of such a destiny – Would to heaven I had become acquainted with her before that destiny was irrevocable – or that I had never known her at all.

When I was admitted to her dressing-room the last time I saw her – she was reading; and laid down her book on my entrance – I was ill, or had appeared so to her, when I had seen her a few days before – She seemed now to recollect it with tender interest – and when, in answering her inquiries, I told her I intended going abroad for some months, I should have thought – had I dared to indulge the flattery of fancy – that she heard it with concern: 'we shall not then see you this year in Kent,' said she, 'I am very sorry for it': – she paused a moment, and added, with one of those smiles which give such peculiar charms to her countenance, 'but I hope you will regain your health and spirits – and I think we shall certainly have you among us again in the shooting season.' – I know not what was the matter with me, but I could not answer her; and the conversation for some moments dropped.

She resumed it after another short silence, and asked me when I had seen her brother? – 'He talks,' said she, 'of going to the continent also this summer, and I wish you may meet him there – your acquaintance could not fail of being advantageous in any country, but particularly a foreign country, to a young man so new to the world as he is; and one, so unsettled in all his plans, from temper and habit, that I am ever in pain least he should fall into those errors, which I every day see so fatal to those who enter into the world unexperienced like him – without a guide. – Should you happen to meet with him abroad, I am sure you have friendship enough for us all, to direct him.' –

I seized with avidity an opportunity of being serviceable to any one who belongs to her – I had not seen Waverly for some time, and I imagined he was gone back to Oxford; but I assured her, that if Mr. Waverly could make it convenient to go when I did to Paris, I should be extremely glad to be useful to him, and happy in his company.

Pleased with the earnest manner in which I spoke, she became more un-reserved on this subject. 'You know a little of my brother,' said she, 'but it is impossible, on so slight an acquaintance, to be aware of the peculiarities of his temper – peculiarities that give me so many fears on his account. – It is not his youth, or the expensive style in which he sets out, that disquiet me so much as that uncommon indecision of mind, which never allows him to know what he will do a moment before he acts; and some how or other he always continues, after long debates and repeated changes, to adopt the very worst scheme of those he has examined. I may say to you that this defect originated in the extreme indulgence of his par-

ents – A very considerable part of my father's estate would have gone into another branch of the family, had he not had a son – and it happened his six eldest children were daughters, so that when this long wished-for and only son was born, he became of more consequence to my father and mother than the rest of their family; and we, his three sisters, who survived, have through our lives hitherto uniformly seen our interest yield to his. – But, believe me, we should never have murmured (at least I can answer for myself) at whatever sacrifices have been made, had they contributed to render him really and permanently happier; but the continual enquiries that were made of what he would do, and what he would like, while nothing was ever offered to him but variety of gratification, have, I think, coincided with his natural temper to produce that continual inability, to pursue any study or even any pleasure steadily. – My father's death, and his being of age, have rendered him master of himself and his fortune; but he cannot resolve what to do with either of them, and my apprehensions are, that he will fall into the hands of those who will determine for him, and dispose of both, rather for their own advantage than for his. I have therefore encouraged, as much as possible, his half-formed inclination to go abroad – but he talks so vaguely about it, and varies so much in his projects, that I doubt whether he will ever execute any of them. – If you really would allow him to accompany you – yet I know not how to ask it, your society would perhaps determine him to the journey, and prevent his meeting any of those inconveniencies to which young travellers are exposed.'

I believe my lovely friend mistook the expression which my eager acquiescence threw into my countenance, for what might be produced by the embarrassment of wishing to escape with civility from an unwelcome proposal – for she hesitated – yet, without giving me time to reply, said, 'but perhaps I am taking a very improper liberty with you – I ought to have recollected, that in this expedition you have probably a party, to which any addition may be unwelcome; and that you have so slight an acquaintance with my brother' –

I interrupted her. – 'It is enough for me, that he *is* your brother – that alone would make me wish to render him every service in my power – even if I had never seen him.' – I had said more than I ought; more than I intended to say. – I felt instantly conscious of it, and I now confusedly hurried into professions of personal regard for Waverly, far enough from being sincere; and assurances, that, as I went for change of air and scene, which my health and spirits required, I should make no party, unless it was with one friend, to whom my society might be useful – 'and when that friend,' added I, 'is your brother.' – I was relapsing fast into the folly, of which, but a moment before, I repented. – I saw her change colour, and

for the first time since the rise of this attachment – which will end only with my life – I had said, what to a vain woman might have betrayed it.

Geraldine seemed now solicitous to change the conversation; but this I would not do, till I had made her promise to write to her brother, as soon as she could learn where he was, and mention to him my intended journey, and my readiness to begin it with him immediately.

I assured her, that if I met Waverly before I left London, I would endeavour to fix his departure with me, and giving her my address, that he might write to me at Margate, reluctantly, and with pangs, such as are felt only when 'soul and body part'[7] – I bade her adieu!

She looked concerned, and gave me her lovely hand, which I dared not press to my lips – but, as trembling, I held it in mine, she wished me health and happiness, a pleasant journey, and a prosperous return, in that soul-soothing voice which I always hear with undescribable emotions. – More tremulously sweet than usual, it still vibrates in my ears, and I still repeat to myself her last words – 'Farewell, Mr. Desmond, may all felicity attend you.'

Now, you will call this wrong, ridiculous, and romantic. – But spare your remonstrances, dear Bethel, since I obey you in essentials, and am going from England, rather because you desire it, than because I am convinced that such an affection as I feel, ought to be eradicated. – Do you know against how many vices, and how many follies, a passion, so pure and ardent as mine, fortifies the heart? – Are you sure that the evils you represent, as attending it, are not purely imaginary, while the good is real? – I expect, however, a heavy lecture for all this, and it were better not to add another word on the subject.

Your's ever, with true regard,
LIONEL DESMOND.

I forgot to add, that though my journey is certainly decided upon, because I hope to find, in the present political tumult in France, what may interest and divert my attention; yet, I will not fail to deliver to your relations the letter you enclosed in your last – and to avail myself of it as an introduction to Mrs. Fairfax, and her family, as soon as I arrive at Margate. – You imagine that the charms of one or other of your fair cousins will have power enough to drive, from my heart, an inclination which you so entirely disapprove – though I am too well convinced of the inefficacy of the recipe, I try it you see – in deference to your opinion – just as a patient, who knows his disease to be incurable, submits to the prescription of a physician he esteems. – As soon as I have delivered my credentials you shall hear from me again.

LETTER II.

TO MR. DESMOND.

Hartfield, June 13, 1790.

YES! – you have really given an instance of extreme prudence – and, in consequence of it, you will, I think, have occasion to exert another virtue; which is by no means the most eminent among those you possess; the virtue of patience. – So! – you have really undertaken the delightful office of bear-leader[8] – because the brother of your Geraldine cannot take care of himself – and this you call setting about your cure, while you continue to dispute, whether it be wise to be cured or no – and, while you argue that a passion for another man's wife may save you from abundance of vice and folly, you strengthen your argument to be sure wonderfully, by committing one of the greatest acts of folly in your power. – And as to vice, I hold it, my good friend, to be a great advance towards it, when you betray symptoms (which no woman can fail to understand) of this wild and romantic passion of yours, or, as you sentimentally term it, this ardent and pure attachment – an attachment and an arrangement, I think, are the terms now in use. I beg pardon if I do not always put them in the right place.

But seriously – do you know what you have undertaken in thus engaging yourself with Waverly? – and can you bear to be made uneasy by the caprices of a man who is of twenty minds in a moment, without ever being in his right mind? – Your only chance of escaping, as you have now managed the matter is, that he will never determine whether he shall go with you or no. – Some scampering party will be proposed to a cricket-match in Hampshire, or a race in Yorkshire: one friend will invite him to a ball in the West of England, and another to see a boxing-match in the neighbourhood of London: and while he is debating whether he shall make any of these engagements, or which, or go to France with you, you will have a very fair opportunity of leaving him – unless (which from the style of your last letter I do not expect) you should yourself change your resolution on the best grounds; and find your romantic and your patriotic motive for a journey to France, conquered at once by the more powerful enchantments of one of my fair cousins.

While, from your fortune's being entrusted to my management by your grandfather till you were five-and-twenty, I considered myself as your

guardian, I forbore to recommend to you either of these young women, because they were my relations – But now as you are master alike of yourself and of your estate, yet are still willing to attend (at least you say you are) to the opinion of a friend who has lived fourteen years longer in the world than you have, I am desirous that you should become acquainted with them, and that you should judge fairly, since that must be to judge favourably, of women who are so universally and justly admired; who certainly are most highly accomplished; and who have[a] fortunes to assist whomsoever they marry, in supporting them in that rank of life to which they will do so much honour – This you call an extraordinary style of advice, from a man who, in the noon of life, has renounced that world, whose attractions he recommends to you: but that, at hardly nine-and-thirty, I have no longer any relish for it, arises, not from general misanthropy, but from particular misfortune; and against those calamities of domestic life that have embittered *my* days, I wish to guard yours – by giving you some of my dearly-bought experience.

You have talents, youth, health, person and fortune – a good heart and an ardent imagination – these, my dear Desmond, are advantages very rarely united, and when they do meet, all the first are too often lost by the fatal and irregular indulgence of the last. This is what I fear for you – but my lecture must terminate with my paper – my good wishes ever follow you; let me hear from you soon – and believe me ever

Yours,

E. BETHEL.

LETTER III.

TO MR. BETHEL.

Margate, June 16, 1790.

MY visit to your friends is paid, and I met such a reception as I might expect from your recommendation. – Would I could tell you, that it has answered all the friendly expectations, or rather hopes, you formed of it: but you expect an ingenuous account of my sentiments in regard to these ladies; and you shall have them.

Mrs. Fairfax has been certainly a very fine woman, and even now has personal advantages enow to authorise her retaining those pretensions, which it is easy to see she would, with extreme reluctance, entirely resign. – It is however but justice to add, that her unwillingness to fade, does not influence her to keep back the period when it is fit her daughters should bloom – she rather runs into the contrary extreme; and with a solicitude, which her maternal affection renders rather an amiable weakness, she is always bustling about, to shew them to the best advantage; and, as she is perfectly convinced that they are the most accomplished young women of the age, so she is very desirous of impressing that conviction on all her acquaintance – For the rest I believe she may be a very good woman; and I have only to object to a little too much parade about it; and that she talks rather too loud – and rather too long.

My first introduction to her was not at her own house: for entering one of the libraries about two o'clock on Thursday noon, I observed, that the attention of the few people who so early in the season assemble there, was engrossed by a lady who was relating a very long story about herself, in a tone of voice, against which, whatever had been the subject, no degree of attention to any other could have been a defence. I was compelled therefore, instead of reading the paper where I was anxious to see French news, to join the audience who were hearing – how her lease was out, of an house she had in Harley-street, and all the conversation held between herself, her landlord, and her attorney about its renewal; but how at last they could not agree; and so she had taken another in Manchester-square, which she described at full length – 'The Dutchess,' continued she, 'and lady Lindores, and lady Sarah, were *all so delighted* when they found I had determined upon it – and lady Susan assured me it would delay at least her winter's journey to Bath – Oh! my dear Mrs. Fairfax, said lady Susan,

you have no notion now, how excessively happy we shall all be, to have you *so* near us – and your sweet girls! – their society is a delightful acquisition – Miss Fairfax's singing is charming, and I so doat upon Anastatia's manner of reading poetry, that I hope we shall see a great deal of both of them.' –

Though I at once knew that this was the lady to whom I was fortunate enough to have a letter of recommendation in my pocket, it was not easy with all that *mauvais honte*[9] with which you so frequently accuse me, to find a favourable moment to make my bow and my speech, between the end of one narrative and the beginning of another, with such amazing rapidity did they follow each other; and I should have retired without being able to seize any such lucky interval, if this inexhaustible stream of eloquence had not been interrupted by the sudden entrance of a young man who seemed to be one of Mrs. Fairfax's intimate acquaintance, and who said he came to tell her, that a raffle, in which she was engaged at another shop, was full, and that her daughters had sent him to desire she would come. 'There is nobody now, madam, to throw,' said this gentleman, 'but you and I; and Miss Anastatia being the highest number, thinks she shall win the jars – but as for me, I cannot go back this morning, for I am engaged to ride' – 'Oh, but I desire you will,' replied Mrs. Fairfax, 'it wont take you up a minute, and I will have it decided – for I hate suspence.' – 'Yes, madam,' said another gentleman who had been among the listeners, 'you may hate it – but there is nothing that Waverly loves so much, if one may judge by the difficulty he always makes about deciding upon every thing – and if the determination of the raffle depends upon him, you will hardly know who the jars are to belong to this season.' – 'I protest, Jack Lewis,' cried Waverly, whom I now immediately knew, though his cropped hair and other singularities, of dress had at first prevented my recollecting him – 'I protest you do me injustice – I am the steadiest creature in life – and I would go now willingly – but upon my soul I'm past my appointment.'

'And what signifies your appointment?' replied the other – 'What signifies whether you keep it or no?' – 'Why, that's true,' answered my future fellow-traveller, 'to be sure it is of no great consequence, neither – so if you desire it, I'll go with you, Ma'am, though really I hardly know.' – He was beginning to hesitate again, but Mrs. Fairfax took him at his word, and they went out together. However, before they had reached the place where the possession of the China jars was to be decided, I saw Waverly leave the lady, and go I suppose to keep the engagement, which he allowed a moment before was of no consequence. As for myself, as soon as I recovered from the effects of the first impression made by Mrs. Fairfax's oratory, which perhaps the weakness or irritability of my nerves rendered more forcible than it ought to be, I collected courage enough to

follow her; and in a momentary pause that succeeded her losing her raffle, which would now have been finally settled, she said, had Waverly been present, I advanced and delivered your letter.

She received it most graciously; and even retired from the groups she was engaged in, to read it. I took that opportunity of addressing myself to Miss Fairfax, who is certainly a very pretty woman: she seemed however cold and reserved; and, I thought, put on that sort of air which says – 'I don't know, Sir, whether you are in style of life to claim my notice.' These little doubts, however, which I readily forgave, were immediately dissipated, when her mother appeared with your letter in her hand – and said, 'Margarette, my dear, this is Mr. Desmond – the friend and ward of Mr. Bethel. I am sure you will be as rejoiced as I am in this opportunity of being honoured by his acquaintance.' – I saw instantly, that the young lady recollected, in the friend and ward of Mr. Bethel, a man of large, independent fortune. – The most amiable expression of complacency was immediately conveyed into her countenance; and, as I attended her and her mother home, I perceived that two or three gentlemen, who came with her also, and towards whom she had before been lavish of her smiles, were now almost neglected, while she was so good as to attend only to me – At the door of their lodgings I took my leave of them, after receiving the very obliging invitation to dine with them the next day. Anastatia was not with them. Miss Fairfax told me, that, as soon as she had thrown for the jars, she went home, 'for Anastatia,' said she, 'is excessively fond of reading and reciting – and, her reading master, a celebrated actor at one of the theatres, happening to be here by accident, she would not lose the opportunity of receiving a lesson.' 'She does excel, assuredly,' said the elder lady, 'in those accomplishments, as Mr. Desmond, I think will say, when he hears her.' – I expressed my satisfaction at the prospect of being so gratified, and then took my leave.

Yesterday morning I saw Waverly, who seemed to embrace, with avidity, the project of going with me to Paris – I represented to him the necessity of his knowing, precisely, his own mind, as I cannot remain here more than four or five days. – He assures me, that nothing can prevent his going, and that he will instantly set about making preparations. – Indeed, my good friend, you were too severe upon him. – He is young, and quite without experience; but he seems to have a good disposition, and an understanding capable of improvement. – There is too, a family resemblance to his sister, which, though slight, and rather a flying than a fixed likeness, interests me for him; and in short, I am more desirous of curing than of reckoning his faults.

He dined with Mrs. Fairfax yesterday, where I was also invited, and where a party of nine or ten were assembled. The captivating sisters displayed all their talents, and I own they excel in almost every

accomplishment. – I have seldom seen a finer figure, taken altogether, than the younger sister, and indeed, your description of the personal beauty of both, was not exaggeration. – To their acquirements, I have already done justice: yet, I am convinced, that, with all these advantages, my heart, were it totally free from every other impression, would never become devoted to either.

It would be nonsense to pretend to give reasons for this. – With these caprices of the imagination, and of the heart, you have allowed that Reason has very little to do.

One objection however, to my pretending to either of these ladies, would be, that very degree of excellence on which you seem to dwell. – Always surrounded by admiring multitudes; or, practising those accomplishments by which that admiration is acquired, they seem to be in danger of forgeting they have hearts – appearing to feel no preference for any person, but those who have the sanction of fashion, or the recommendation of great property; and, affluent as they are themselves, to consider only among the men that surround them, who are the likeliest to raise them to higher affluence or superior rank.

Of this I had a specimen yesterday – Waverly seems to have an inclination for Miss Fairfax, and as he and I were the two young men in the party of yesterday, who seemed the most worthy the notice of the two young ladies, I was so fortunate as to be allowed to entertain Miss Anastatia, while Waverly was engaged in earnest discourse by Miss Fairfax, who put on all those facinating airs which she so well knows how to assume. – I saw that poor Waverly was considering whether he should not be violently in love with her, or adhere to the more humble beauty, for whom he had been relating his *penchant* to me a few hours before, when the door suddenly opened, and a tall young fellow, very dirty, and apparently very drunk, was shewn into the room – The looks of all the ladies testified their satisfaction: and they all eagerly exclaimed, 'Oh! my lord, when did you arrive, who expected you? how did you come?' – Without, however, attending immediately to these questions, he shook the two young ladies hands; called them familiarly by their Christian names; and then throwing himself at his length on a sopha, he thus answered – 'Came! – why, curse me if I hardly know how I came here – for I have not been in bed these three nights – Why, I came with Davers, and Lenham, and a parcel of us. – We were going to settle a wager at Tom Felton's – But, rat me, if I know why the plague we came through this damned place, twenty miles at least out of our way. – How in the devil's name do ye contrive to live here? Why, here is not a soul to be seen.' – Then, without waiting for an answer to this elegant exordium, he suddenly snatched the hand of the eldest Miss Fairfax, who sat near him, and cried, 'But, by the Lord, my sweet Peggy, you look confoundedly handsome – curse me if you don't. – By Jove, I

believe I shall be in love with you myself – What! – so you have got out of your megrims and sickness, eh! – and are quite well, you dear little toad you, eh?' – The soft and smiling answer which the lady gave to an address so impertinently familiar, convinced me she was not displeased with it; the mother seemed equally satisfied; and I saw, that even the sentimental Anastatia forgot the critique on the last fashionable novel, with which she had a moment before been obliging me; and cast a look of solicitude towards that part of the room, where this newly-arrived visiter, whom they called Lord Newminster, was talking to her sister in the style of which I have given you an example – while poor Waverly, who had at once lost all his consequence, sat silent and mortified, or if he diffidently attempted to join in the conversation, obtained no notice from the lady, and only a stare of contemptuous enquiry from the lord – As, notwithstanding the favour I had found a few hours before, I now seemed to be sinking fast into the same insignificance, I thought it better to avoid a continuance of such mortification, by taking my leave. Waverly, as he accompanied me home, could hardly conceal his vexation – yet was unwilling to shew it: while I doubt not but Mrs. Fairfax and the young ladies were happily entertained the rest of the evening by the delectable conversation of Lord Newminster.

I shall probably write once more from hence.

Your's, ever and truly,
L.D.

LETTER IV.

TO MR. DESMOND.

Hartfield, June 20, 1790.

I AM sorry my prescription is not likely to succeed. I had persuaded myself that the youngest of my fair cousins, was the likeliest of any woman of my acquaintance, to become the object of a reasonable attachment. – Surely Desmond you are fastidious – you expect what you will never find, the cultivated mind and polished manners of refined society, with the simplicity and unpretending modesty of retired life – they are incompatible – they cannot be united; and this model of perfection, which you have imagined, and can never obtain, will be a source of unhappiness to you through life.

I told you in a former letter, that I would endeavour to give you a little of my dearly-bought experience. – You know that I have been unhappy; but you are probably quite unacquainted with the sources from whence that unhappiness originates – In relating them to you I may perhaps convince you, that ignorance and simplicity are no securities against the evils which you seem to apprehend in domestic life; and that the woman who is suddenly raised from humble mediocrity to the gay scenes of fashionable splendour, is much more likely to be giddily intoxicated than one who has from her infancy been accustomed to them.

At one and twenty, and at the close of a long minority, which had been passed under the care of very excellent guardians, I became master of a very large sum of ready money, and an estate the largest and best conditioned that any gentleman possessed in the county where it lay. – I was at that time very unlike the sober fellow I now appear – and the moment I was free from the restraint of those friends, to whose guardianship my father had left me, I rushed into all the dissipation that was going forward, and became one of the gayest men at that time about town.

With such a fortune it was not difficult to be introduced into 'the very first world.'[10] – The illustrious adventurers and titled gamblers, of whom that world is composed, found me an admirable subject for them; while the women, who were then either the most celebrated ornaments of the circle where I moved, or were endeavouring to become so, were equally solicitous to obtain my notice – and the unmarried part of them seemed generously willing to forget my want of title in favour of my twelve or

thirteen thousand a year. – I had, however, at a very early period of my career, conceived an affection, or according to your phrase, an ardent attachment to a married woman of high rank – but I had at the same time seen enough of them all, to determine never to marry any of them myself.

Two years experience confirmed me in this resolution; but by the end of that time I was relieved from the embarrassment of a large property. – In the course of the first, the turf and the hazard table had disburthened me of all my ready money; and, at the conclusion of the second, my estate was reduced to something less than one-half. – I then found that I was not, by above one half, so great an object to my kind friends as I had been – and, when soon afterwards I was compelled to pay five thousand pounds for my sentimental attachment – when the obliging world represented my affairs infinitely worse than they were, and I became afraid of looking into them myself, I found the period rapidly approaching when to this circle I should become no object at all.

My pride now effected that, which common sense had attempted in vain; and I determined to quit a society into which I should never have entered. – I went down to my house in the county where almost all my estate lay; sent for the attorney who had the care of my property, and with a sort of desperate resolution resolved to know the worst.

This lawyer, whose father had been steward to mine, and to whom at his death the stewardship had been given by my guardians, was a clear-headed, active and intelligent man: and when he saw himself entrusted with fuller powers to act in my business than he had till then possessed, he set about it so earnestly and assiduously, that he very soon got successfully through two law-suits of great importance; raised my rents without oppressing my tenants – disposed of such timber as could be sold without prejudice to the principal estate – sold off part of what was mortgaged to redeem and clear the rest; and so regulated my affairs, that in a few months, from the time of his entirely undertaking them, I found myself relieved from every embarrassment, and still possessed of an estate of more than five thousand pounds a year. The seven that I had thrown away gave me however some of the severe pangs that are inflicted by mortified pride. – Nabobs and rich citizens became the ostentatious possessors of manors and royalties in the same county, which were once mine; and some of my estates – estates that had been in my family since the conquest, now lent their names to barons by recent purchase, and dignified mushroom nobility.

I fled therefore from public meetings, where I only found subjects of self-reproach, and made acquaintance with another set of people, among whom I was still considered as a man of great fortune; and where I found more attention, and, as I believed, more friendship than I had ever experienced in superior societies.

More general information and more understanding I certainly found; and none of my new friends possessed a greater share of both than my solicitor, Mr. Stamford – He had deservedly obtained my confidence; and I was now often at his house, which his family seemed to vie in trying to render agreeable to me.

His wife was pleasing and good humoured, and he had several sisters, some married and two single, who occasionally visited at his house; and it was not difficult to see, that in the eyes of the latter, Mr. Bethel, with his reduced fortune, was a man of greater consequence than he had ever appeared to the high born damsels among whom he had lived in the meridian of his prosperity.

I was not however flattered by their attention or attracted by their coquetry – They were pretty enough, and not without sense, but they had both been very much in London; and I thought too deeply initiated, if not into very fashionable societies, yet into the style of those which catch, with imitative emulation, the manners and ideas those societies give. – Mr. Stamford seemed desirous of giving both these ladies a chance of success with me, for they were alternately brought forward for about twelve months – at the end of which time they were both perhaps convinced that they had neither of them any great prospect of it, for then the family of a widow sister was invited, none of whom I had ever seen, or hardly heard mentioned before.

The father of this family, a lieutenant in the army, had married the eldest of Stamford's sisters, when he was recruiting in the town where she then lived – by which he so greatly disobliged the friends on whom he depended, that though he had a very large family, they never afforded him afterwards the least assistance; and about two years before the period I now speak of, he had died at Jamaica, leaving his widow and seven children, with very little more than the pension allowed by government to subsist upon. – Of these children the two eldest were daughters; who, from the obscure village their mother was compelled to inhabit in Wales, were now come to pass the winter at the house of their uncle in a large provincial town. – On entering one morning Stamford's parlour, in my usual familiar way, I was struck with the sight of two very young women who were at work there; the elder of whom was, I thought, the most perfect beauty I had ever seen. – When I met Stamford, I expressed my admiration of the young person I had just parted from, and enquired who she was – He told me she was his niece, and briefly related the history of his sister's family.

At dinner, as Stamford invited me to stay, I could not keep my eyes from the contemplation of Louisa's beauty, which the longer I beheld it, became more and more fascinating. The unaffected innocence and timidity of her manners, rendered her yet more interesting – she knew merely

how to read and write; and had, till now, never been out of the village, whither her mother had retired when she was only six or seven years old – and her total unconsciousness of the beauty she so eminently possessed, rivetted the fetters which that beauty, even at the first interview, imposed.

Her uncle was not, however, so blind to the impression I had received: yet he managed so well, that, without any appearance of artifice on his part, I was every day at the house; and, in a week, I was gone an whole age in love. I soon made proposals, which were accepted with transport. I married the beautiful Louisa – and was for some time happy.

Mr. Stamford had immediately the whole management of my fortune, in the improvement of which, he had now so much interest; and in his hands it recovered itself so fast, that, though I made a very good figure in the country, I did not expend more than half my income. – The money thus saved, Stamford put out to the best advantage – and I saw myself likely to regain the lost consequence I so much regretted: a foolish vanity, to which I sacrificed my real felicity.

Stamford, who had all the latent ambition that attends conscious abilities, as a man of business, had, till now, felt that ambition repressed by the little probability there was of his ever reaching a more elevated situation. – But he saw and irritated the mortified pride which I very ill concealed, and, by degrees, he communicated to me, and taught me to adopt those projects, by which he told me I should not only be relieved from this uneasy sensation, but rise to greater consequence than I had ever possessed. – 'You have talents,' said he, 'and ought to exert them. – In these times, any thing may be done by a man of abilities, who has a seat in Parliament. Take a seat in the House of Commons, and a session or two will open to you prospects greater than those you sacrificed in the early part of your life.' – I took his advice, and the following year, instead of selling, at a general election, the two seats for a borough which belonged to me, I filled one myself, and gave the other to Stamford; who, conscious as he was of possessing those powers, which, in a corrupt government, are always eagerly bought, had long been solicitous to quit the narrow walk of a country attorney, and mount a stage where those abilities would have scope.

In consequence of this arrangement, I took a large house in town; where Stamford and his family had apartments for the first four or five months. – At the end of that time, he had managed so well, that he hired one for himself. – Artful, active, and indefatigable, with a tongue very plausible, and a conscience very pliant, he soon became a very useful man to the party who had purchased him. Preferments and fortune crowded rapidly upon him, and Stamford, the country attorney, was soon forgotten, in Stamford the confident of ministers, and the companion of peers.

I was not, however, entirely without acquiring some of the advantages he had taught me to expect – I obtained, by what I now blush to think of, (giving my voice in direct opposition to my opinion and my principles,) a place of six hundred pounds a year; which, though it did little more than pay the rent of my house in town, was, as Mr. Stamford assured me, the foretaste of superior advantages. – But, long before the close of this session of Parliament, I discovered, that far from being likely to recover the fortune I had dissipated, I was, in fact, a considerable loser in pecuniary matters. – Alas! I was yet endeavouring to shut my eyes against the sad conviction, that I had sustained, a yet heavier and more irreparable loss; domestic happiness, and the affection of my wife.

Dazzled and intoxicated by scenes of which she had till then had no idea, Louisa, on our first coming to town entered, with extreme avidity, into the dissipation of London – and I indulged her in it, from the silly pride of shewing to the women among whom I had formerly lived, beauty which eclipsed them all. – They affected to disdain the little rustic, whom they maliciously represented as being taken from among the lowest of the people. – The admiration however with which she was universally received by the men, amply revenged their malignity; but, while it mortified them, it ruined me.

Louisa lived now in a constant succession of flattery, by which perhaps a stronger mind might have become giddy. – She had princes at her toilet and noblemen at her feet every day; and from them she soon learned to imagine, that had she been seen before she threw herself away on me, there was no rank of life, however exalted, to which such charms might not have given her pretensions. – That love, which till this fatal period she seemed to have for me – that gratitude of which her heart had appeared so full (for I had provided for all her family), even her affection for her children, was drowned in the intoxicating draughts of flattery, which were every day administered to her – and when the time came for our returning into the country, she returned indeed with me, but I carried not back the ingenuous, unaffected, Louisa; whose simplicity, rather than her beauty, had won my heart. – Ah! no! – I saw only a fine lady eager for admiration; willing to purchase it on any terms; and sullen and discontented when she had not those about her from whom she had been so accustomed to receive it. – That happiness was lost to me for ever. I had long been conscious, but I still hoped to preserve my honour – and that I might detach my wife from those by whose assiduity it seemed to be the most endangered, I determined to make a journey into Italy. – She neither promoted or objected to the scheme; but a few days before that, which I had fixed on to begin our journey, she left the house, and put herself under the protection of a man who disgraces the name he bears.