The Works of Charlotte Smith

Rural Walks
Rambles Farther
Minor Morals
A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine

Edited by
Elizabeth A. Dolan

THE PICKERING MASTERS

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VOLUME 12

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INTRODUCTION

When Charlotte Smith proposed her first children's book to the publishers T. Cadell and W. Davies in 1794, Europe was in the midst of one of the most turbulent decades in its history and Smith herself was mired in ongoing financial and health crises. Educating her eleventh child, twelve-year-old Harriet Amelia, at home, Smith envisioned *Rural Walks* (1795), its sequel *Rambles Farther* (1796) and the subsequent *Minor Morals* (1798) as entertaining educational texts that would introduce children aged twelve to sixteen to history, literature, landscape aesthetics and natural history while refining their sociability. Like the children's books she admired by Anna Letitia Barbauld, Arnaud Berquin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Smith's brand of didactic literature is a variation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's pedagogical vision in *Émile* (1762). As in *Émile*, the 'curriculum' Smith's fictional teacher and pupils follow is driven by daily events that inspire the children's curiosity and develop their judgement. Some of the most important lessons result from unexpected experiences, for example encounters with people, such as a French priest seeking refuge in England, poor children gathering mushrooms and a group of boys stealing birds' nests; visions in the distance, such as war ships on the sea and the violent approach of a storm; and, of course, discoveries of various plants, animals, shells and minerals. Significantly, Smith's characters' interactions with the suffering of the people they meet on these educational walks also teach readers about pressing social issues in late eighteenth-century England, including the problems of poverty, war, slavery and animal cruelty. Struggling to support her own family as she wrote, Smith endeavoured to educate her child readers to be 'reasonable and happy,' that is, to develop intellectual and emotional resources that would enable them to weather difficult political and financial situations (p. 15).

As with all of her works, Smith's children's books are impressive experiments in form. She skilfully combines elements of three popular modes in the children's literature market: the literary anthology, the collection of tales for children and the natural history handbook. Her first three children's books, like the three that would follow, mingle factual lessons with fictional pleasures, bring her own suffering into conversation with the suffering of others, and balance the child reader's future

hopes with present reality. During the years in which she wrote these children's books, Smith also composed a narrative to raise money for the victims of a shipwreck. This journalistic piece, *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine, Venus and Piedmont Transports, and the Thomas, Golden Grove and Aeolus Merchant Ships, near Weymouth on Wednesday the 18th of November Last* (1796), depicts the precariousness of human life with a poet's eye, a novelist's attention to narrative structure, and a fellow sufferer's heart, that is, with the clarity, innovation and sympathy that characterize Smith's children's literature.

Writing Life

The material circumstances of Smith's life between 1794 and 1798 are manifest in the children's works she wrote during this period. Managing her own health, caring for her critically ill daughter Anna Augusta, raising funds to place her son Lionel at Oxford, and educating her youngest children, Smith, as always, struggled financially. In March 1794, she retired to Bath for what she thought would be a 'Month or six weeks' to treat both rheumatism and the depressive effects of her constant worry about finances and about her children.[1] Six weeks turned into four months as she sought help not only for herself, but also for her best-loved daughter Anna Augusta, who fell ill during her pregnancy and required expensive medical care. Faced with these pressures, Smith took Thomas Cadell Sr's advice to venture into children's literature. On 11 June 1794, shortly after Anna Augusta had joined her in Bath, she wrote to Cadell Sr: 'I think of undertaking … a work such as you once recommended. A sort of School book, calculated not for mere children, but for young persons from twelve to sixteen, intended to form their taste for Poetry, drawing & natural History, or rather to give them, without the alloy of romance, a relish for the beauties of Landscape &c. To be call'd "Rural Walks."'[2] Because Cadell Sr was retiring from the firm, Smith followed up with William Davies two weeks later, offering him a book

> design'd for the use of Young people, who being too young to read novels or romances, are yet superior to the usual run of books offer'd to children. Walks in The Country, which shall give an opportunity of discoursing on Landscape on the simple parts of botany, and natural history, with short stories of suppositious persons (whose houses may be seen in the distance, or may be brought to recollection) such as may be at once interesting and moral,

[1] *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 103. The biographical information that follows is also culled from the letters.

[2] *Collected Letters,* p. 127.

> A Work less desultory than Mrs. Barbaulds 'Evenings at Home' (which have had & still have an amazing sale) & calculated for young persons three or four years older.[1]

Smith asked for payment on submission of the first volume, and suggested that the work would extend to 'three if not 4' volumes.[2] Like Barbauld's *Evenings at Home* (1792–6), each volume of Smith's proposed children's book would be published individually; unlike Barbauld's collection of tales, the individual dialogues of *Rural Walks* would cohere in plot and character.

A month after Smith submitted this proposal and began drafting the first volume, Anna Augusta delivered a son who died in his grandmother's arms a few days later. In August, Smith offered to translate *Rural Walks* into French with the help of Anna Augusta's husband Alexandre de Foville, but Cadell and Davies were not interested in bringing out the translation.[3] She had completed five of the seven planned dialogues in Volume I of *Rural Walks* by 25 August, and began to write bank drafts, incorrectly presuming an advance of £50 and thus damaging her relationship with Cadell Jr.[4] In spite of her lack of money, Smith sent her feeble daughter to Clifton for treatment in the Bristol Hotwells at the end of August. Meanwhile Smith herself lived economically on the outskirts of Bath and kept writing, holding off her creditors and sending the full manuscript for Volume I of *Rural Walks* in mid-September, and the complete Volume II by October 1794.[5] *Rural Walks* appeared early in 1795 and within five weeks sold more than 500 of the 1,000 copies printed for five shillings each.[6] The second edition was printed later that year.

The first line of *Rural Walks* resonates with Smith's living situation during its composition: 'At the distance of sixty miles from London, and in a small country town, or rather a large village, Mrs. Woodfield had chosen the retirement which her circumstances rendered necessary' (p. 5). The teacher Mrs Woodfield, her daughters Elizabeth (13) and Henrietta (11), and her brother's daughter Caroline (13) form a peripatetic school whose travels shadow Smith's movement around southern England as she was writing. The group goes on local excursions, including charitable visits to the impoverished ill in their rural village, botanical explorations and walks to picturesque vistas for drawing practice. Writing from a small village outside Bath and working to move Anna Augusta to the Bristol Hotwells,

1 *Collected Letters*, pp. 130–1.

2 *Collected Letters*, p. 131.

3 Smith notes, 'a French translation wd be highly advantageous' (*Collected Letters*, p. 145).

4 *Collected Letters*, pp. 132, 136, 152.

5 *Collected Letters*, pp. 162, 168. Cadell and Davies chose to publish the two volumes together, rather than separately as Smith had proposed.

6 *Collected Letters*, pp. 132, 136, 152; the price of the volume is found in an advertisement appended to *Rambles Farther* (1796).

Smith sends her characters to visit a seaside resort for Mrs Woodfield's health, and disdainfully depicts a wealthy visitor to the Woodfield home who goes to the spa not to heal but to socialize.

The reviews of *Rural Walks* are favourable, each quoting Smith's own account of the book's goals. The *New Annual Register* reviewer uses Smith's words as his own: 'Mrs. Charlotte Smith's Two volumes of "Rural Walks, in Dialogues, for the Use of Young Persons," contain pleasing information on subjects in natural history, and instructive lessons on manners, accompanied with some elegant pieces of poetry. They are well adapted by their form, in which Mrs. Smith has united the interest of the novel with the instruction of the school book, to engage the attention of the young, and to introduce them to what are called *les petites morales*.'[1] The *Monthly Review* and the *Analytical Review* also defer to Smith's account of the book: 'We cannot, perhaps, give a more fair and just view of this pleasing performance than by a few extracts from the lady's own preface';[2] and 'In announcing to the public this first attempt of the ingenious and indefatigable Mrs. Smith, to write a book for the use of children, it is proper that she should be allowed to speak for herself, concerning her design. It is thus modestly and sensibly expressed in the preface.'[3] The only journal to offer a negative comment, the *Monthly Review*, regrets Smith's occasional affectation in phrasing and Mrs Woodfield's repeated remarks on the behaviour of others.

In February 1795, Smith completed *Montalbert* for Sampson Low and asked Cadell and Davies if they wished to publish a two-volume continuation of *Rural Walks*. They declined, asserting that a children's book should not exceed two volumes. In the meantime, Smith fought to keep her personal library from being sold by her landlady in Sussex, to whom she owed rent. Exceeding even these stresses, a devastating loss darkened the spring of 1795. After struggling for eight months with consumption, Anna Augusta became acutely ill in March and died in April. In the midst of her grief, Smith kept writing, though not at her usual pace. In May, she informed Cadell and Davies that the Duchess of Devonshire wished her to write the additional volumes of *Rural Walks* and dedicate them to her eldest daughter, Lady Georgiana Cavendish. Cadell and Davies relented. However, ignoring Smith's observation that Barbauld had just come out with a fourth volume of *Evenings at Home*, they insisted that Smith choose a different title for what she understood to be the third and fourth volumes of *Rural Walks*. Smith began writing from Bath in late May, and mailed sections of what would be titled *Rambles Farther* to Cadell and Davies from Exmouth in early November. She moved to the seaside health resort of

1 *New Annual Register* 16 (1795), p. 283.
2 *Monthly Review* ns 17 (1795), p. 349.
3 *Analytical Review* 21 (1795), p. 548.

Weymouth in January 1796, interrupting her progress on *Rambles Farther* in February in order to write *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine*.[1] Smith sent the last sections of *Rambles Farther*, including the dedication, by the end of April 1796 and the book appeared in August. In *Rambles Farther*, Smith takes her characters to a seaside resort again and portrays their eventful seven-week stay in London. Mrs Woodfield continues to educate the girls in manners and natural history; the group visits the major attractions in the city; Caroline's father, Colonel Cecil, adopts an English child who grew up in Jamaica; Caroline falls in love and gets married; and Mrs Woodfield takes in the orphan of a French refugee. Living in Exmouth, Weymouth, and Oxford while writing *Rambles Farther*, Smith depicts her characters traversing similar ground, though surely with lighter hearts. The notice of publication in the *New Annual Register* is brief and positive.[2]

In late 1797 or early 1798, Smith began *Minor Morals* in London, where she attended to business related to the settling of her father-in-law's estate.[3] In this children's book, Smith imagines a new teacher, Mrs Belmour, who resides 'in a village near London' (p. 214). Having unsuccessfully proposed a botanical guide to Cadell and Davies in August 1797, Smith infused *Minor Morals* with a great deal more botanical detail than she included in her previous children's books, a feature shared by her novel *The Young Philosopher*. *Minor Morals* was published with Sampson Low in June 1798, the same month that Cadell and Davies brought out *The Young Philosopher*.[4] Mrs Belmour and her charges – her deceased sister's four daughters, Sophia (12), Fanny (11), Mary (9) and Louisa (7), and their brothers, Lionel and Julius – undertake more extensive botanical study than does Mrs Woodfield's group. In addition, a journey to Southampton for the summer affords Mrs Belmour the chance to teach her pupils about the Baronial Revolt, the Magna Carta and the War of the Roses. Once in Southampton, Mrs Belmour introduces the children to mineralogy and discusses Columbus's gold-motivated journeys to the Americas. The reviews of Smith's third children's book are on the whole positive, several praising the original poetry that Smith included in the text.[5] However, Mrs

[1] *Collected Letters*, p. 222. There is no mention of *A Narrative* in her surviving letters, though she does request that Cadell and Davies send her two copies of the *Elegiac Sonnets* (7th edn) to present to 'two medical friends' attached to a regiment in Weymouth, possibly Dr Edward Jenner and Mr Henry Jenner, surgeon, relatives of Lieutenant Jenner who perished in the wrecks (*Collected Letters*, p. 228).

[2] *New Annual Register* 17 (1796), p. 267.

[3] Smith's father-in-law, Richard Smith, had left his estate in part to her children in an ambiguously written will, and Smith was in conflict with the trustees of the estate from 1783 until her death.

[4] Smith writes to Cadell and Davies that 'Mr. Low solicited me to put some work into his hands, either a school book or a Novel, & he wd have given me fifty guineas pr vol & have advanced what money I wanted' (*Collected Letters*, p. 305).

[5] *Monthly Visitor* 6 (1799), pp. 214–16.

Belmour seems to have irritated one reviewer by reprimanding her niece for reading a letter belonging to a servant character and then hypocritically reading it herself.[1] Although there is little mention of *Minor Morals* in Smith's surviving letters, in January and February of 1798 she asked Cadell and Davies to borrow several reference books, including James Lightfoot's botanical guide *Flora Scotica* (1777), which informed her 'Explanation of the Plants named in the verses' (pp. 254–5), and Thomas Gisborne's *Walks in a Forest*, which she quotes directly (pp. 267–8).[2] Smith's inclusion of extensive passages from literary works she admired is, as we shall see, one of the most distinctive features of her children's books.

Genre

In her proposal for *Rural Walks*, Smith cites the 'universal complaint that there is no such book' as the one she envisions.[3] And yet Smith's children's literature does enter into a tradition, however new. Like Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories. Designed for the Instruction of Children, Respecting their Treatment of Animals* (1786) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), Smith's children's books create a woman-centred variation of the experiential curriculum Rousseau developed in *Émile*. Smith herself explicitly identifies several models for her books. In the preface to *Rural Walks*, she notes that her aim is to create stories that, like those by Berquin in his *L'Ami des Enfans* (*The Children's Friend*) (1782–3), will be 'attractive to children, yet not uninteresting to others farther advanced in life' (p. 3). Smith mentions Berquin's text along with *Evenings at Home* in a discussion of appropriate literature for children in one of the dialogues in *Minor Morals*. Mrs Belmour explains to her nieces that 'it is the good sense and nature, as well as the instruction which both these works contain … that make them at once pleasant to me and to younger readers; and the simplest recital of facts, or fictitious narrative representing real life, is understood and felt by every one who has plain sense – even although it may relate to persons out of their rank of life, or whom they may never have had occasion to see' (p. 227). Mrs Belmour's words echo Smith's descriptions of her own children's books in her letters and prefaces. In their discussion of instructional books in *Practical Education* (1798), Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth classify *Rural Walks* with the children's works that Smith identifies as models. Discussing Berquin's *The Children's Friend* at length, the Edgeworths also point to the 'excellent nutriment' to be found in both Barbauld's *Evenings at Home* and 'Mrs. Smith's *Rural*

1. *Monthly Review* ns 28 (December 1798).
2. *Collected Letters*, p. 304, 310.
3. *Collected Letters*, p. 131.

Walks'.[1] What, then, did Smith understand to be distinctive about her didactic literature?

Written for children a bit older than were the works by these other authors, *Rural Walks*, *Rambles Farther* and *Minor Morals* ingeniously interweave several strands of popular children's literature. Like Rousseau, Trimmer and Wollstonecraft, Smith depicts teachers and children learning from the 'real' world they encounter on walks. Yet Smith also includes scenes in which the characters tell one another stories. The storytelling reflects the structure of Barbauld's and Berquin's collections of tales, a form that, as Aileen Fyfe notes, invites parents to expand their children's knowledge in discussion after the family has read the individual tales aloud together.[2] Rather than leave the discussion to the parents, however, Smith depicts her characters in the act of interpreting not only the natural world, but also poetry and fiction. In this way she combines the teacher-centred didactic narrative developed by Trimmer and Wollstonecraft and the collection of tales made popular by Barbauld and Berquin with what might be called a living anthology. Rather than compile poetry and fiction in a separate anthology as Wollstonecraft does in *The Female Reader* (1789), Smith offers literary texts to her child characters and readers as immediate touchstones for their life experience. Intermingling literary texts and lived experience, Smith corrects Rousseau's 'culture free' approach to Émile's education. In *Minor Morals*, she politely describes Rousseau as '[a]n author, who, amid many fanciful and some erroneous strictures on the subject of education, has undoubtedly many excellent thoughts' (p. 222). One of his 'erroneous strictures', Smith implies, is the exclusion of all literature from Émile's education, except for *Robinson Crusoe* when Émile reaches the age of fifteen. Rousseau, William McCarthy observes, associates books 'with the transmission of culture [, and] culture, in a Rousseau-inspired ideology, is a force for oppression'.[3] If Barbauld, Trimmer and Wollstonecraft restore literature to the Rousseauan curriculum and portray female teachers as positive, even ideal, transmitters of culture, Smith further develops the potential of teacher and text in her combination of the educational reader and didactic children's book.

Even more richly allusive than her poetry and novels, then, *Rural Walks*, *Rambles Farther* and *Minor Morals* imagine a bookshelf for children on which the most well-worn volumes are William Cowper's *The Task*, James Thomson's *The Seasons*, Shakespeare's plays, Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, John Milton's major poems, Alexander Pope's prose and poetry,

1 Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), p. 332.

2 Aileen Fyfe, 'Reading Children's Books in Late Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Families', *Historical Journal* 43:2 (2000), p. 468.

3 William McCarthy, 'Mother of all Discourses: Anna Barbauld's Lessons for Children', *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 60 (1999), p. 200.

and poems by Barbauld, Robert Burns, William Collins and Thomas Gray. Smith stocks the shelf also with the novels of Sarah Fielding, Frances Burney and Anna Seward, and the prose works of Samuel Johnson, Joseph Addison and other eighteenth-century periodical writers. Her own poems hold as firm a place in this canon as do Milton's, a reflection of her culture's endorsement of her poetry as appropriate for children. Wollstonecraft, for example, includes two of Smith's sonnets in her *Female Reader*, and John Evans includes eight of Smith's poems in his literary anthology for children, *The Parnassian Garland* (1807).[1] Reviewers, likewise, seem delighted to reprint Smith's original poems that appear for the first time in the children's books.[2] Presenting readers with the text of Smith's 'The Kalendar of Flora', the reviewer of *Minor Morals* for the *Monthly Visitor* admits to being unable to 'withhold from our young Readers the following charming piece, which, as the season advances, we would advise them to get by heart'.[3]

The poetry that Smith includes in *Rural Walks*, *Rambles Farther* and *Minor Morals* offers additional information about the natural world that the children encounter; Smith thus carries out John Aiken's charge that poets should strive to depict nature accurately rather than fancifully.[4] Smith's references to botany in her children's literature have been the major focus of scholars writing about these texts.[5] Both Judith Pascoe and Ann B. Shteir credit the poems in Smith's didactic literature for shaping a tradition of verse designed to educate children about natural history. Pascoe observes that Smith's teacher figures demonstrate to the children 'how to look at

[1] John Evans's *The Parnassian Garland; or, Beauties of Modern Poetry: Consisting of Upwards of Two Hundred Pieces, Selected from the Most Distinguished Poets of the Present Age. With Introductory Lines to each Article. Designed for the Use of Schools and the Admirers of Poetry in General* (London: Albion Press, 1807). See also Elizabeth Mant's *The Parent's Poetical Anthology: Being a Selection of English Poems Primarily Designed to Assist in Forming the Taste and the Sentiments of Young Readers*, which features five of Smith's sonnets (London: P. C. and J. Rivinginton, 1821).

[2] The *Analytical Review* reprints 'To the Lily of the Vale' from *Rural Walks* (21 [1795], pp. 548–9). Smith later published it as Sonnet LX 'To an amiable girl' in the *Elegiac Sonnets*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (1800), vol. ii.

[3] *Monthly Visitor* 6 (1799), p. 214. Jane Austen or her cousin Sophy Ruxton apparently followed this advice: a copy of 'The Kalendar of Flora' was found among Austen's papers, in her handwriting. Austen's cousin Sophy Ruxton brought Smith's *Minor Morals* to Austen's attention in 1800. See Deirdre Le Faye, 'Jane Austen and the "Kalendar of Flora": Verses Identified', *Notes and Queries* 46:4 (1999), pp. 450–1.

[4] Smith read Aiken's *Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777) in 1796 while writing *Rambles Farther* (*Collected Letters*, p. 218).

[5] In addition to the works referenced below, see Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); and Labbe, '"Transplanted into more congenial soil": Footnoting the Self in the Poetry of Charlotte Smith', in *Mar(k)ing the Text: The presentation of meaning on the literary page*, ed by Joe Bray, Miriam Handley and Anne C. Henry (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2000), pp. 71–86.

the world' and portray 'the distancing vantage of the painter' as 'inferior to the amplifying awareness of the botanical poet'.[1] Donelle Ruwe argues that the children's works herald Smith's deepening engagement with scientific botany. She contrasts Smith's more fanciful references to flowers in the first edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) with her attention to botanical detail in her later works, especially *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (1804) and *Beachy Head* (1807).[2] Smith's botanical instruction in *Minor Morals* is a great deal more specific than in *Rural Walks* and *Rambles Farther*, including for the first time a table comparing the English with the Linnaean names of plants mentioned in the poems. While Ruwe attributes Smith's Linnaean references to her increased mastery of botany, I argue elsewhere that Smith drew on her already impressive botanical knowledge for comfort in the wake of Anna Augusta's death.[3] In a footnote to her poem 'To the Goddess of Botany', published for the first time in Volume II of the *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797), Smith claims that botany is the only reliable therapy for melancholia: 'The wearied eyes and languid spirits find relief and repose amid the shades of vegetable nature. – I cannot now turn to any other pursuit that for a moment soothes my wounded mind' (Volume 14, p. 82). In *Minor Morals*, Mrs Belmour recommends that young women botanize to prevent ennui: 'The young person, who, tired of her work, and without any book that may be amusing or instructive at hand' can collect flowers and 'describe them singly with their various parts (of stalks, leaves, calyx, corolla, stamen, pistil, anther and sigma, with the pollen or dust)' (p. 222). Botany, Mrs Belmour claims, 'is soothing to [a girl's] mind' as well as supportive of her intellectual and physical development (p. 223). In addition to the potential therapeutic aspects of botany, Smith's instruction in natural history enacts what she explicitly argues – girls ought to be well-educated in history, literature, drawing, languages and natural history, rather than merely encouraged to develop shallow 'accomplishments'.

Exhibiting an enthusiasm for fiction that equals her dedication to poetry, Smith includes original fictional pieces that, like her original poems, enjoyed a textual life beyond the publication of these children's books. Striving to create a text that would 'unite the interest of the novel with the instruction of the school book', Smith's experiment with didactic literature is as novelistic as it is moralistic (p. 3). The *Analytical Review* praises *Rural*

[1] Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England 1760–1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Judith Pascoe, 'Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith', in *Re-visioning Romanticism, 1776–1837*, ed by Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 203.

[2] Donelle R. Ruwe, 'Charlotte Smith's Sublime: Feminine Poetics, Botany, and *Beachy Head*', *Prism(s): Essays in Romanticism* 7 (1999), pp. 117–32.

[3] Elizabeth Dolan, 'Scientific Botany as Therapy in Charlotte Smith's Literature', in *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, forthcoming).

Walks as 'something better than a novel for children', by which the reviewer seems to mean it is primarily like a novel and secondarily instructive.[1] Destabilizing Charles Lamb's later complaint to Samuel Taylor Coleridge that Barbauld and other women authors 'banished … Tales and old wives fables' from 'the nursery' in favour of 'Geography and Natural History',[2] Smith offers her child readers fiction in a number of popular modes: the gothic, the sentimental, the *Bildungsroman*, the fairy tale, the adventure story and the exotic tale.[3] At the end of *Rural Walks*, Mrs Woodfield spins a gothic tale that was republished as the 'Story of Mrs. Widdrington' in two instalments of the *New York Magazine or Literary Repository*.[4] The *Monthly Review* cloaks enthusiasm for this tale in its complaint that '[t]he story of Eupheme at the conclusion of the work might surely have admitted, as it merited, a larger scope'.[5] Similarly, the gothic tale that finishes Volume I of *Minor Morals,* 'The Witch of the Wold', was republished in multiple American periodicals, including the *Lady's Monitor*, the *Weekly Visitor, or Ladies' Miscellany* during Smith's lifetime, and posthumously in *The Guardian*, the *Literary Companion* and the *Prisoner's Friend: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Criminal Reform, Philosophy, Science, Literature, and Art* between 1808 and 1824.[6] The first volume of *Rambles Farther* concludes with a miniature *Bildungsroman* of its heroine, 'Lydia Meadows', who, orphaned by the death of her grandmother, is sent to a distant relative in London and is robbed along the way, becomes apprenticed unhappily, and attempts to escape on foot back into the country. Several dialogues in *Rambles Farther* Volume II cast Caroline as a character very like Frances Burney's sentimental heroine, Evelina. Navigating through the attention of male flatterers in London's social scene, Caroline eventually marries her fiancé, after coming to understand his true value.[7] Volume II of *Minor Morals* ends with an amalgamation of fictional modes. Lost in the woods in

1 *Analytical Review* 21 (1795), p. 549.

2 *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, *1801–1809*, ed. by Edwin W. Marrs, Jr, 2 vols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), vol. ii, pp. 81–2.

3 In spite of her obvious enjoyment of a number of fictional modes, Mrs Woodfield comments to her daughter: 'You, Elizabeth, have been rather taught to see every object around you as it really is, than to be either pleased or frightened by the fables which, when I was in the nursery, were admitted there' (p. 135).

4 *New York Magazine or Literary Repository* (October 1797), p. 520 and (November 1797), p. 569.

5 *Monthly Review* 17 (1795), pp. 349–50.

6 *Lady's Monitor* 1:27 (20 February 1802), pp. 209 and 1:28 (27 February 1802), p. 217; *Weekly Visitor, or Ladies' Miscellany* 3:51 (21 September 1805), pp. 401 and 3:52 (1 October 1805), p. 409; *The Guardian* 1:29 (4 June 1808), pp. 113 and 1:30 (11 June 1808), p. 117; *The Literary Companion* 1:1 (16 June 1821), p. 10; and the *Prisoner's Friend: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Criminal Reform, Philosophy, Science, Literature, and Art* 1:2 (26 June 1824), p. 9.

7 Loraine Fletcher, however, argues that this happy event is marred by the suggestion that Caroline's husband has been unfaithful. See *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998), pp. 236–7.

true fairy-tale fashion, Sophia, Mary and their friend Charlotte are rescued by an acquaintance who, in a reference to Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, answers their singing with his clarinet. This soon-to-be sentimental hero (he marries Charlotte) tells them an adventure story with an *Arabian Nights* flair about 'the fair Zulmine' (p. 301).

Although *Rural Walks*, *Rambles Farther* and *Minor Morals* depict the marriages of several of their female characters, a major goal of these texts is to teach young women how to live without the assurance of a sentimental ending. Even as they allow their pupils to read imaginative works, the teachers Mrs Woodfield and Mrs Belmour repeatedly point out the gap between fantasy and reality. Mrs Woodfield, for example, explains to the children that pastoral literature teaches little about a real shepherd's daily life, and 'in a thousand more material instances, [there is a] mortifying difference between the pictures of life we are shewn and the sad realities we are obliged to accept' (p. 153). The 'sad reality' Smith depicts most often is a woman's fall in class status, something Smith was acutely aware of in her own life as she wrote these texts; she describes herself to Cadell and Davies as 'fallen . . . from quite another rank of life to the necessity of writing for her daily bread'.[1] Smith's reduced circumstances, then, determined not only the various settings in which the stories unfold, but also the primary theme in *Rural Walks*, *Rambles Farther* and *Minor Morals* – how to stay emotionally steady in the face of loss and uncertainty.

One of the goals of her children's literature, Smith asserts, is to help girls 'repress discontent; to inculcate the necessity of submitting cheerfully to such situations as fortune may throw them into' (p. 3). Caroline Cecil of *Rural Walks* and *Rambles Farther* and Sophy Harland of *Minor Morals* are parallel characters, each struggling to adopt more 'moderate views of her future life' after the death of her mother (p. 213). Smith links the unexpected changes in these individual girls' lives to a widely shared sense of uncertainty in 1790s England and France. Mrs Woodfield encourages her niece to 'cultivate her talents for drawing' as a potential 'resource against the inconveniencies of adversity' (p. 24). She reminds Caroline that her father, a soldier who has not saved his money, could be killed, leaving her only a small pension. Comforting Caroline, who unsurprisingly is upset by this suggestion, Mrs Woodfield urges her to think about this distressing scenario in the context of the loss and financial insecurity experienced by French émigrés:

> Reflect, my child, how many persons, who were born in a higher rank of life than you were, even in the first classes of the nobility of France, are now reduced to the necessity of labouring for their daily bread in a strange land; how many derive their support from the little ornamental acquirements of their more fortunate days. Nor is this confined to the natives of a country

1 *Collected Letters*, p. 161.

> where the overthrow of its ancient government has overwhelmed the nobility in its ruins. Even in this prosperous land, how often do we see such sad vicissitudes of fortune! How often does the luxury, the folly, or the misfortune of parents leave destitute and helpless young women exposed to insult, too often to infamy! (p. 24)

Speaking with unusual frankness for this genre, Mrs Woodfield explains that the financial distress of a young woman's family can press her into 'infamy' or prostitution if she has not developed other skills. Furthermore, in Smith's children's books, parents who take their financial security for granted do not simply experience misfortune, but also die. In several of the stories that Mrs Woodfield and Mrs Belmour relate, mothers who become accustomed to comfort perish, while their resourceful daughters serve as models of resilience. In one narrative, Mr Harley commits suicide when he discovers he has lost all of his assets. His wife dies, 'unable to bear so cruel a reverse of fortune', but her daughter, sadly deserted by her fiancé when it is clear she is no longer wealthy, recovers from a period of depressed spirits to live with dignity and a degree of happiness in her reduced circumstances (p. 52). In the dialogue 'Flora Maccarryl', a mother's lack of education becomes lethal when her soldier husband dies and she must fend for her family on her own. She had acquired little 'beyond reading and writing', Mrs Woodfield reports: 'Mrs. Maccarryl was as helpless, and as much dispirited by her present calamity, as if she had been always accustomed to ease and prosperity. Her health suffered from the sad state of her mind, and Flora saw her declining every day without having any means to help her' (p. 127). Like Miss Harley, Flora Maccarryl learns to support herself. In addition to expressing a degree of aggression toward women who have not experienced hardship, Smith's mother–daughter portraits proclaim to the young women who read her books that they no longer live in their mothers' world; they must educate themselves to survive.

Social Issues

As this advice to girls suggests, Smith's children's literature portrays a range of issues capturing the British imagination and conscience in the 1790s – particularly the problems of poverty, war, slavery and animal cruelty. Late eighteenth-century readers would have expected to find social commentary and criticism in children's literature. Norma Clarke notes that 'women who wrote rational literature for children were consciously or inadvertently offering those children, and the adults they would grow into, tools for reappraising their social and political situations'.[1] Mitzi

1 Norma Clarke, '"The Cursed Barbauld Crew": Women Writers and Writing for Children in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Opening the Nursery Door: Reading, Writing,*

Myers argues that 'Georgian maternal pedagogy, linking private and public spheres, insists on the communal consequences of domestic instruction'.[1] Drawing lessons in *Rural Walks*, for example, open the domestic scene of instruction out into a larger social context. As the girls perch on top of a hill to capture a landscape in their sketchbooks, Mrs Woodfield contrasts the residents of the two houses in the distant view – a titled gentleman who exploits rather than cares for the local cottagers, and an untitled yet wealthy man who is generous and kind to his neighbouring labourers. Later in the same dialogue, Mrs Woodfield and the children encounter the Abbé Barnard standing in the ruins of an abbey they are sketching. Mrs Woodfield speaks to him and then situates this French priest, who was forced to flee his country during the Revolution, within the history of the ruin, which was destroyed during the Reformation: 'could his figure, on paper, be made to represent the effect on it of the melancholy reflections which, I have no doubt, occupied him at that moment; when, from the recent destruction of religious houses in his own country, he was led, by accident, to contemplate the dilapidation of such buildings, which was effected, many years since, in ours' (p. 27). With these two scenes, Smith depicts a complex field of forces at play in 1795. Like French revolutionaries and English reformers, she does not have faith that the aristocracy will take care of the poor, yet she also regrets the suffering the revolutionaries have caused the French clergy. In Smith's pedagogy, drawing serves less as an accomplishment than as an introduction to political and social issues of deep significance.

Smith's first three children's books were published during a severe economic crisis in England. Following a short harvest in the autumn of 1794, wheat prices rose precipitously; 1795 was the first of several years of scarcity and of food riots all over England.[2] The crisis led to a variety of suggestions for reform to the 1601 'Act for the relief of the poor', discussed in publications such as Edmund Burke's polemical *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), Sir Frederick Morton Eden's more sociological *The State of the Poor* (1797) and Robert Malthus's famous *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798, 1803). Entering into this conversation, *Rural Walks*, *Rambles Farther* and *Minor Morals* paint a panoramic picture of poverty in rural England, or what I discuss elsewhere as a 'fictional ethnography' of

and Childhood 1600–1900, ed. by Mary Hilton, Morag Styles and Victor Watson (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 93.

1 Mitzi Myers, 'Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames, and Moral Mothers: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Female Tradition in Georgian Children's Books', *Children's Literature* 14 (1986), p. 37.

2 See J. L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760–1832: A Study in the Government of England Before the Reform Bill* (London: Longhmans, Green, and Co, 1920), J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795–1834* (London: Routledge, 1969) and Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

the poor.[1] As the girls learn about the natural world, they run into a series of impoverished people – including a recovered labourer, a crippled beggar, a French immigrant, British soldiers maimed in the war, several orphans, widows and the impoverished ill – all of whom Mrs Woodfield and Mrs Belmour aid. After a visit to a sick cottager, Mrs Woodfield encourages her squeamish niece to consider that the poor are no different from her: 'It did not occur to [Caroline], that these unwholesome habitations, which she could not bear to enter for a few moments, were the perpetual abodes of creatures whose feelings and necessities were the same as her own' (p. 11). Answering her daughter Elizabeth's question about why she does not discriminate more among those she helps, Mrs Woodfield replies: 'I have not for my part sagacity enough to distinguish what are called common beggars, from poor men disabled by illness from working, or accidentally distressed in a strange country, where they have no claim to parochial relief' (p. 19). Although Mrs Woodfield makes these comments while on a botanical excursion teaching the girls to classify plants, she refuses to classify, or 'distinguish' among, the poor. Teaching the girls to offer charity, a common lesson that serves to reify class structure in children's literature by Trimmer and others, Smith's teachers also characterize the parish relief system as dysfunctional and ruled by favouritism (pp. 9, 67–8). In Smith's representation, the problem of poverty is too widespread and too desperate to be solved by charity alone.

Depicting maimed soldiers and the widows of war in her ethnography of the poor, Smith nonetheless positions herself as a pacifist rather than as explicitly opposed to the war with France. Her pacifist conviction may have resulted from personal loss; her third son Charles lost his leg in the siege of Dunkirk in September 1793, just seven months after England declared war on France. Well aware of the outbreak of seditious libel trials in England and Scotland and of the suspension of Habeas Corpus in May 1794, Smith also may have taken a pacifist position in order to criticize the war in a politically secure way. When Caroline comments in *Rural Walks* on the beauty of a fleet sailing by, Mrs Woodfield quickly steps in to de-romanticize her vision, commenting that such a sight conveys to her 'only painful ideas', including the thought that many of the soldiers aboard the ships would soon 'become mangled carcasses for the prey of the monsters of the deep, and dye, with their blood, the waves over which they were now so gaily bounding' (p. 76). Lamenting the potentially gruesome loss of British lives in what might have served as a patriotic passage, Mrs Woodfield also considers that the soldiers are on their way to inflict 'equal evils' on humans they 'never saw before, and with whom they have no manner of quarrel' (p. 76). Her quarrel, then, is with war itself. In *Minor*

1 Dolan, 'Seeing the Social Context of Suffering: Smith and Wollstonecraft's Fictional Ethnographies', in *Seeing Suffering*.

Morals, Mrs Belmour compares soldiers to butchers and then asks her nephews, 'which could we best do without?' (p. 260). The answer, of course, is soldiers. In addition to this resistance to war, Smith indirectly registers her objection to increasing governmental restrictions on freedom of expression. Reciting lines from Mark Akenside's 'For a Column at Runnymeade' that recount the signing of the Magna Carta, Mrs Belmour's nephew Julius notes that when he learned them at school, his teacher objected: 'when the Doctor understood what lines I had chosen, he ordered me to give them up, and learn something else. He would not suffer any of us, he said, to repeat any such rant about liberty and nonsense' (p. 283). Mrs Belmour encourages him to recite the lines to his family. Describing the early history of Briton in *Minor Morals*, Mrs Belmour lingers on the question of whether or not the British Isles were joined geographically to France prior to 'some violent concussion of the earth' (p. 263), and expresses regret about past wars with France, arguing that the two nations would have been wiser to have developed mutually beneficial trade and agriculture rather than 'having manured the fields of both countries, and of America, and even Africa and Asia, with blood' (pp. 265–6).

Embedded in this pacifist comment may be an objection to the bloodshed caused not just by wars, but also by the African slave trade. Although the Mansfield Judgment (1772) had made slavery less common on British soil, the many bills put forward to end the slave trade beginning in 1784 had all been unsuccessful and would remain so until the year after Smith's death in 1806. In addition, Smith's hopes for her children's future were tied up in the settlement of an estate that included two sugar plantations in Barbados, from which she regularly received earnings. Nonetheless, the first dialogue of *Rambles Farther* offers a measured and factual account of slavery that is ultimately abolitionist in its sentiments. Colonel Cecil's adoption of his deceased friend's young daughter, who was born in Jamaica, leads to an extended discussion of plantation life that distinguishes between house slaves and slaves who work in the fields. Mrs Woodfield explains to the children that while the lives of house slaves are similar to those of servants, 'another set are occupied, I am sorry to say, as we employ our horses and oxen' (p. 119). She also refers to the horrors of the middle passage, the beatings of slaves, and the living conditions that 'drive them to despair and death' (p. 119). Although she never directly objects to slavery, Smith's focus on the suffering of slaves coincides with well-known abolitionist arguments by Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce and others.

Mrs Woodfield's comparison between the treatment of slaves and the treatment of horses and oxen should be understood as an objection both to slavery and to the harsh treatment of animals. During the same period of time that Parliament debated the abolition of the slave trade and the end of slavery in the colonies, they considered a number of bills to pre-

vent cruelty to animals. The 1822 'Act to Prevent the Cruel and Improper Treatment of Cattle', which protected oxen, sheep, cattle and horses, was the first proposal to become law. Smith joins other children's writers such as her sister Catherine Dorset, Barbauld, Trimmer, Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth and William Roscoe in her attempt to teach children kindness to animals by representing animals as intelligent and sentient beings.[1] In his *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), Jeremy Bentham links animals to humans in their shared ability to feel pain: 'The question is not, Can they reason?, nor can they talk?, but can they suffer?'[2] For animal rights activists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the suffering of animals proved their connection to humanity and thus their entitlement to protection. When her sons buy a nest of baby nightingales that some local boys have stolen, Mrs Woodfield encourages them to think of how it would feel to be the mother bird who comes home to find her babies gone (pp. 31–2). The bird's nest incident leads to a discussion of the mistreatment of horses and oxen by 'the lower classes of people' that reflects reformers' focus on the working class's treatment of animals rather than on upper-class activities such as hunting (p. 31). However, in *Minor Morals* Smith's Mrs Belmour also decries the abuse of animals in hunting (p. 270). In all of her social criticism, Smith encourages children to identify themselves with people or animals who suffer.

Shipwrecks

Living in Weymouth for her health as she worked on *Rambles Farther*, Smith was asked by some members of the South Gloucester Militia to write an account of a group of deadly shipwrecks that occurred nearby. Smith's astonishingly vivid *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine, Venus and Piedmont Transports, and the Thomas, Golden Grove and Aeolus Merchant Ships, near Weymouth on Wednesday the 18th of November last. Drawn up from Information taken on the Spot by Charlotte Smith, And published for the Benefit of an unfortunate Survivor from one of the Wrecks, and her Infant Child* was published by subscription in one edition. All proceeds from the sale of copies at the publisher Sampson Low's office in London and in two of Weymouth's circulating libraries – Wood's and Delamotte's – went to the widow Burns and her child. Itself a form of charity then, *A Narrative of the*

[1] See Moira Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780–1900: Patriots, Nation, and Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Nandita Batra, 'Animal Rights in the Romantic Period: Legal Jurisdiction in England and the Intellectual Milieu', *Atenea* 15:1–2 (1996), pp. 99–113.

[2] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles and Morals of Legislation*, ed by J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1970), p. 283.

Loss enacts the charitable lessons Smith conveys in her children's literature. As in the children's texts she writes in this decade, Smith's own suffering opens up a window into the suffering of others.

As it chronicles the dead, the narrative brings to life the perilous and purposeful activity taking place in the English Channel in 1795. Transport ships carried troops and ordnance ships hauled supplies to the continent and to the West Indies, the two major theatres of the war with France, while merchant ships headed to Europe, the West Indies, the East Indies and Africa for trade of various kinds, including, of course, the slave trade. Leaving from St Helen's on the Isle of Wight, the six ships of Smith's narrative were headed west down the Channel to the Atlantic Ocean, five bound for the West Indies and one for Portugal. When the gale began to pick up on the evening of Tuesday, 17 November, the ships, under Sir Hugh Cloberry Christian's command, sought safe harbour only to be dashed up against the rocks at Chesil Beach, scattering more than 200 bodies between Portland and Bridport by Wednesday the 18th.[1] Three days later, the *London Times* reports the wrecks in the 'Ship News':

> Weymouth, Nov. 19: I am sorry to inform you, that on Tuesday evening, about eight or nine o'clock, it began blowing from the S.W. and S. S. W. and increased all night in a most dreadful manner. – The gale continued rather increasing all Wednesday morning, when it began to rain, and moderated about three or four o'clock: in the evening quite calm. Many of the West India Fleet, that had passed the day before, came to anchor in Portland Road; among them the Alfred, of 74 guns, and a frigate. Several more in Weymouth Road. One large ship, loaded with gunpowder and stores, lay off the North Shore, entirely dismasted; another with only a foremast standing; and another on shore near the Mills.
>
> The following ships are lost or stranded: –
>
> The ship Thomas, of London, for Oporto; soon after she struck, she went to pieces; the Captain, his son, a surgeon, seven seamen, a young man, and three women passengers were drowned. A young lad, passenger whose name is Smyth, and two seamen, are saved.
>
> The Golden Grove, Robert Boff, Master, bound to St. Christopher's, laden with sundry goods, soon after she struck she went to pieces.
>
> The Aeolus transport, Isaac Duck, Master, with masts and other naval stores, [unreadable text], crew saved.
>
> The Piedmont transport, bound to the West Indies with troops on board; the Captain, greatest part of the crew and all the troops except 11 are drowned.
>
> The Venus transport, bound to the West Indies with troops on board; the Captain drowned, a part of the crew and troops are saved.

[1] The location and number of bodies is taken from William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, from the Declaration of War by France in 1793 to the Accession of George IV* (London: R. Bentley, 1886), p. 281.

> The ship Hannah, of London, Andrew Hickman, Master, bound to the West Indies with ordnance stores; the Master and crew saved.[1]

Reading through several instalments of the 'Ship News' in the *London Times,* one realizes how common shipwrecks were in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In fact, ten years after the shipwrecks Smith depicts, William Wordsworth's brother John, captain of the East India Company's merchant ship the *Earl of Abergavenny*, was wrecked in a storm on his way to China in exactly the same location off the coast of Weymouth. After being driven into the bank, his ship set out to sea again only to go down a few miles off the coast, killing more than 300 passengers and the captain.[2] If shipwrecks were frequent off the coast of Weymouth, storms of the magnitude Smith describes were rarer. In his 1886 naval history, William James details the severity of the November 1795 storm:

> On the 17th and 18th of November the English Channel was visited by a westerly gale of such extraordinary violence, as scarcely to fall short of a West Indian hurricane. Rear-admiral Christian, with a squadron of eight sail of the line, having in charge a fleet of 200 transports and West Indiamen with upwards of 16,000 troops on board, was compelled to return to Spithead, after having had the ships of his convoy, with which he had quitted St. Helen's only a day or two before, scattered in every direction. Several of the transports and merchantmen foundered, and others went on shore and were wrecked. Above 200 dead bodies were taken up between Portland and Bridport. While the gale was at its height the shock of an earthquake was felt in several parts of the kingdom. The repairs of the squadron and remaining ships of the convoy made it the 5th of December before the rear-admiral could again put to sea; but the fleet was again separated in a dreadful storm, which continued for two or three weeks.[3]

What distinguishes *A Narrative* from the *London Times*'s matter-of-fact reporting and James's detached historical account of the wrecks is Smith's inclusion of stunning sensory detail and her attention to the individual voices of sufferers. A review in the *New Annual Register* recommends Smith's narrative both for its emotive style and for the additional information it supplies about the wrecks: 'drawn up from information taken on the spot, [the narrative] contains an elegant detail of truly melancholy and affecting circumstances, some of which are not generally known'.[4] Smith's narrative begins with a reflection on the troubles she puts aside in order to write the piece for the benefit of the widow Burns. She describes herself

1 *London Times* (21 November 1795), p. 3, col. c. There is no mention of the *Catharine* in the *London Times*, although Smith reports that all the passengers except one perished.

2 Maureen Boddy and Jack West, *Weymouth: An Illustrated History* (Stambridge, Wimborne, Dorset: Dovecoat Press, 1983), pp. 79–80. Wordsworth dedicated his *Elegiac Stanzas* (1807) to his brother John.

3 James, *The Naval History of Great Britain*, p. 281.

4 *New Annual Register* 17 (1796), p. 228.

as being '[u]nder depression of sorrow that can end only with my life, and vainly contending against the weight of oppression, heavy in proportion as it is prolonged' (p. 315). She is moved to 'suspend, for a few days, the labour I am condemned to for the support of my own plundered family', in order to write about the suffering brought about by the shipwrecks (p. 315). In a text that visits a palpable sense of outrage on the local residents who rob the bodies of the dead rather than help the survivors, Smith describes her own family as 'plundered', presumably by the trustees of her father-in-law's estate (p. 315). This introduction suggests that the energy propelling Smith's description of the disaster reflects an immersion in the suffering of others that somehow relieves or validates her own struggle.

Smith incorporates into the narrative haunting cries and stories of loss, often in the shipwreck victims' own voices. After a vivid and poetic description of the storm, Smith reconstructs the events occurring on each ship as it was wrecked. On the *Piedmont*, a Fifer with the 63rd Regiment who sees a woman in the water was heard to cry, 'Oh, my poor wife!', and returning to the waves to save her, drowns himself (p. 319). The son of the Master of the *Thomas*, on seeing his father carried away in the surf was reported to call out, 'Oh, my father! My poor father!', before being swept away after him. Mrs Burns's startling first-person account of the events on the *Catharine*, the centrepiece of the narrative, is peppered with the voices she hears during the disaster, including that of the Mate, who cries, 'Save yourselves, if you can' (p. 321). Thus in *A Narrative of the Loss* Smith develops her interest in collecting individual stories of suffering in order to expose social problems. She explains that her purpose in writing the text is first to help the widow Burns, and second to transform personal sorrow into national grieving. The gentlemen who asked her to write the narrative thought that, as a novelist, she would be able 'to connect, in one detail, several detached anecdotes of calamity, alas! but too real!' and thus inspire the 'country … [to] join in the tribute of just regret' (p. 315). The narrative also anticipates Smith's moving portrait of the Hermit in *Beachy Head*, who 'learn'd to augur … when tempests were approaching' (ll. 692, 699, in *Works of Charlotte Smith*, Volume 14, pp. 175–6) so that he might either save or bury the victims of shipwrecks. '[L]ong disgusted with the world / And all its ways', he, like Smith, nonetheless works to prevent the suffering of others (ll. 674–5, in Volume 14, p. 175).

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RURAL WALKS:

IN

DIALOGUES.

INTENDED FOR THE USE OF YOUNG PERSONS.

By CHARLOTTE SMITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON:
Printed by A. Strahan, Printers-Street
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PREFACE.

So numerous and so excellent are the books which have been written for the use of Children and Young Persons, within a very few years, that, on the great duties of life, nothing can, perhaps, be added, which is either new, or which can be addressed to them in any new form.

In this little Work, therefore, I have confined myself rather to what are called *les petites morales*.[1] To repress discontent; to inculcate the necessity of submitting cheerfully to such situations as fortune may throw them into; to check that flippancy of remark, so frequently disgusting in girls of twelve or thirteen; and to correct the errors that young people often fall into in conversation, as well as to give them a taste for the pure pleasures of retirement, and the sublime beauties of Nature; has been my intention.

In the very little time that the incessant necessity of writing for the support of my family allows me to bestow on the education of a girl between twelve and thirteen,[2] I have found, notwithstanding the number of excellent books, that something of this kind was still wanting. I wished to unite the interest of the novel book with the instruction of the schoolbook, by throwing the latter into the form of dialogue, mingled with narrative, and by giving some degree of character to the group. To do this, however, I have found it less easy than I imagined. It seems to be the peculiar felicity of the author of L'Ami des Enfans[3] to have written stories which are attractive to children, yet not uninteresting to others farther advanced in life. In general, such works must appear insipid to all but those for whom they are immediately designed, and should not therefore be judged of as they frequently are, by persons who seem not sufficiently to consider that such books were not meant for their entertainment, but for the instruction of the rising generation.

That there are but few poets whose works can be put indiscriminately into the hands of very young people, the extracts which are daily offered for their use must fully evince. Indeed, I know of none but Gray and Collins[4] which are wholly unexceptionable; and sublime as *their* poetry is, not many of their compositions can be relished by readers but just emerging from childhood.

In closing each of the following short Dialogues with some lines of poetry, I have endeavoured to select pieces likely to encourage a taste for

simple composition; and if I have indulged the vanity or the fondness of an author, by inserting two or three of my own, I have done so, rather to gratify some young friends, than because I suppose them better than others. A copy of verses in the Second Volume is the production of a beloved and regretted[a] friend,[5] which I was glad of an opportunity to rescue from the injury they had received, by mutilated copies in manuscript.

CHARLOTTE SMITH.

Nov. 19, 1794[b]

INTRODUCTION.

AT the distance of sixty miles from London, and in a small country town, or rather a large village, Mrs. Woodfield had chosen the retirement which her circumstances rendered necessary.

Born in prosperity, and educated in all those accomplishments which are cultivated to adorn society:[a] having passed five and thirty years of her life in the splendors and enjoyments of affluence, a sudden reverse in the fortune of her husband, whose death, occasioned by disquiet and mortification, soon followed, reduced her to the necessity of retiring from the world.

Her sons (except the two youngest, who were yet children) had left her, to enter on the professions for which they were designed; but she had two daughters, one of thirteen, and the other of eleven years old.

To educate these children, so as to render them happy in that rank of life to which it now seemed to be their destiny to belong, was the great object of her life. The eldest was of an age to remember their former manner of life, though not of a disposition to remember it with regret; but the youngest[b] had, in the simplicity of infancy, neither recollection of their past, nor concern for their present situation.

But in addition to the cares of Mrs. Woodfield on account of her own children, were those she had assumed on behalf of Caroline Cecil, the daughter of her brother, an officer, who was abroad in the service of his country. His wife, a dissipated woman, related to nobility, was lately dead, and had left her daughter, who was a few months older than Elizabeth Woodfield, in a situation so friendless and desolate, as induced Mrs. Woodfield to take her immediately under her protection, though she was well aware, that the manner in which she had been brought up hitherto, had given her notions so different from those in which Mrs. Woodfield wished to educate her own daughters, that it could hardly fail to interfere with her present scheme of life.

In proportion as the character of Caroline Cecil became more known to her, she was more persuaded of the difficulty that would attend the task she had undertaken. But the affection she had for her brother, and the resentment she felt for the cruelty of her niece's other relations, (who refused to take the least notice of her, orphan and desolate as she was,) determined Mrs. Woodfield, who had an excellent heart, to redouble her vigilance,

rather than suffer the unfortunate Caroline Cecil to be consigned to strangers, to whom her welfare must be indifferent.

From an house in the neighbourhood of Berkley Square,[6] much larger than Colonel Cecil's fortune could with prudence allow him to inhabit; from passing the summer at public bathing-places, and the winter in a continual round of company;[7] Caroline Cecil entered, with a degree of affright and amazement, on a manner of life very different from that to which she had been accustomed.

It was the end of December when Mrs. Woodfield sent her servant to London, to attend her niece to her habitation. The road was every where tedious, from the badness of the weather; and that part of it which led across the country from the country[a] town, was rough, and, in the imagination of Caroline, who had never travelled but upon the turnpike roads that lead from London to places of great resort, it was so dangerous, that she expected to be overturned every moment. Her companion was a blunt uneducated country woman, who had nothing but honesty to recommend her, and who had no idea of the sensations of her fellow-traveller, but contented herself with remarking, that 'it was a pity Miss was so dull;' – an observation that did not much contribute to make her otherwise.

Wind and rain, the darkness of a December night, and the fatigue and fear occasioned by plunging through roads of clay and mud, gave to the countenance of Caroline Cecil so much dejection, that Mrs. Woodfield was struck with concern and amazement when she entered the room, where her aunt and her cousins had expected her the whole evening.

It was three years since they had last met; and since that period, Miss Cecil had been abroad with her mother, had been introduced into a great deal of company, and was so changed, that only the likeness she bore to her father gave to Mrs. Woodfield the idea of its being the same person whom she had seen three years before. She was dressed, though in deep mourning, in the extremity of fashion;[8] and, amidst her dejection, there was an air of haughty superiority, mingled with something of concealed disdain, as she cast her eyes round the room, which, though neat, was small, and furnished with great simplicity. Mrs. Woodfield, as she made these remarks on her niece, felt all the possible inconvenience of the engagement she had entered into; but when she again traced, in the countenance of Miss Cecil, her strong resemblance to her brother, she was sensible of all that compassion and tenderness for her niece, which might enable her to fulfil the task she had undertaken.

Elizabeth and Henrietta Woodfield received their cousin with the ingenuous warmth of their age; delighted with having another companion; and, without the least tincture of jealousy in their tempers, they considered her arrival as one of the most agreeable events of their lives. Far from supposing that their cousin thought of her future abode with them as of a species

of banishment from human society, they imputed her melancholy to the recent loss of her mother, and the absence and danger of her father and brothers.

After an early and simple supper, Mrs. Woodfield, attended by her two daughters, conducted their visitor to the apartment that had been prepared for her. It was still more plain than the room they had left. A field bed,[9] with white cotton curtains, two or three painted chairs, a Scotch carpet,[10] a table for her glass,[11] and a chest of wainscot drawers,[12] composed the whole of the furniture; but over the latter there were some shelves, where Mrs. Woodfield told her she should have her books placed, as soon as they could be unpacked. 'I have but very few, Madam,' answered Caroline, sighing. 'Well, my love,' replied her aunt, 'perhaps I shall find means to increase your collection; but of those arrangements we will talk to-morrow;[a] it is now time that you take some repose after the fatigue of your journey.'

DIALOGUE I.

THE SICK COTTAGER.

[CAROLINE CECIL, going to the Window of her Bedchamber.]

Caroline.

OH! merciful Heaven, what a dreary place! – Good God! what will become of me! – To be buried alive in such a place as this! A wide common,[b] with nothing in sight but those miserable cottages yonder, or a few clumps of mournful fir trees! – Heigh ho! – This time last year I was at Bath with mamma.

[ELIZABETH and HENRIETTA WOODFIELD enter the room.]

(*Both speak*.) My dear cousin! – my dear Caroline! – are you ready for breakfast?

Caroline (*sighing*). Yes; quite ready, Miss Woodfield.

Elizabeth. Miss Woodfield! – Ah! how formal that is; but I am afraid you have not slept, Caroline – your eyes seem inflamed.

Caroline (*dejectedly*). No; it is only the cold wind yesterday that has affected them; and the wind in the country is so much sharper than I have been used to. I fancy it is very bleak here in the winter. – But had we not better go down? Mrs. Woodfield, I remember, told me she breakfasted early.

Henrietta. You cannot imagine, cousin, how we long to hear you play on the piano forté.[13] Mamma has had it tuned on purpose for you; for, as

it was of no use to either of us, because we do not play now, it was got quite out of order.

Caroline (*coldly*). I cannot play worth any one's hearing.

Henrietta. I am so fond of music! – Dear cousin, I hope you will play to us.

Caroline (*still more coldly*). I am only sorry I cannot play well enough to amuse you. [They go down.]

The breakfast passes with little conversation. Mrs. Woodfield makes tender inquiries after her niece's health. Caroline appears cold and dejected.

Mrs. Woodfield. And now, Caroline, will you remain in the house, or go with Elizabeth and me to visit a poor family, who are in a situation to want even the little assistance we can give them?

Caroline. I will go, if you please, Madam.

A frost, which followed the heavy rain of the preceding evening, made the short walk they now undertook less disgusting to the delicacy of Caroline, who dreaded the dirt, and still trembled at the cold they must encounter in crossing the common; but any thing was to her less irksome than being alone, and she determined, since it was her hard fate to be shut up in the dreary solitude of the country, to accustom herself to go out as well as she could. The discontent that hung upon her features did not escape the observation of her aunt, who was glad of this opportunity of shewing her what real misery was, and checking that disposition to repine, which makes so much of the artificial calamity of life.

They entered a cottage, of which the mud walls were in many places falling down, the thatch[14] broken, and the windows darkened by paper and rags, that were stuffed between the broken panes. Over a few embers, which the green sticks that were laid upon them could not make aspire to a flame, sat a Cottager, whose pale squalid countenance, and emaciated figure, presented too strong an image of disease and famine. He was wrapped in a tattered great coat, and hung cowering over the fire with a child upon his knee, which he appeared hardly to have strength to support, and to whom he had given a piece of bread, which he seemed equally unwilling and unable to share with it. His wife, with stifled anguish in her countenance, was preparing, as she stood at a table, a mixture of something that was to serve as food for the family, while three children, the eldest not six years of age, stood watching till it should be ready for them, with the impatient eagerness of hunger. Opposite to the unhappy father, on the other side of the fire, was a cradle, with an infant in it only a few weeks old.

On the entrance of Mrs. Woodfield and her family, a ray of joy seemed to illumine the eyes of the poor woman.

'Ah! madam,' said she, 'how good is it[a] in you to come again! – But, bless me! what a place for you and the young ladies to come into!'

Mrs. Woodfield. Never mind the place – How is your husband? – Come,[a] go on with what you are about.

Poor Woman. Dear Madam, if it had not been for you, I verily believe he would not have been alive. For, Ma'am, it was to no purpose I went to farmer Denns; he was quite in a rage when I asked for some little matter more of help, and bid me I should go again to the justices next Saturday at Bench,[15] and see if they'd make a new order, to help us to live in idleness another month.

The poor Man (*sighing, and in a tremulous voice*). As if it was my desire to remain idle! and to see my children starve around me! I who, till I got this fever and ague[16] last barley harvest, never have left work one day since I was married, now seven years come May.

Poor woman (*half crying*). I do think it cruel hard, Madam; for nobody in the parish can say that we ever were troublesome, even in the hardest times. But all goes by favour in our parish![17] Hows'ever, Ma'am, my poor husband, thank God, is not worse this morning; and the wine-whey[b18] you sent him did him more good than the doctor's stuff.

Mrs. Woodfield then proceeded to inquire into the man's complaints; and, promising them farther relief from her kitchen, she put half-a-crown[19] into the woman's hand, and left the house.

Elizabeth and Henrietta shewed by their countenance, as well as by the questions they asked their mother, that the situation of the poor family had affected them; but their cousin continued silent, till Mrs. Woodfield spoke to her.

Mrs. Woodfield. Well, Caroline, what do you think of the scene we have just witnessed? Are not sickness and poverty real evils? And do not such spectacles teach us the wickedness and folly of that discontent we are so apt to indulge, if we are not exactly in the place which we prefer, or with the people who amuse us? Tell me, my dear, have you been used to consider the situation of millions of your fellow creatures, who are not better situated than the poor family we have just seen?

Caroline. You know, Madam, that we did not live in the country at all when my mamma was alive; and in London one never thinks of the poor people –

Mrs. Woodfield. Though in no place on earth there is so much misery![20] When we return home, my dear Caroline, you shall copy for me a few lines from Thomson,[21] on the subject of the thoughtlessness of the affluent and fortunate. I wish to teach you to think on subjects which, I believe, you have never yet been led to reflect upon; you have a very good understanding, and I think you have a good heart.

Caroline. I hope, Madam, I have not a bad heart. I am sure I wish no ill to any body; but in regard to acts of charity, Madam, I suppose I was too young for mamma to require *me* to give away what we could spare.

Mrs. Woodfield. No person is too young to be taught to think, my dear Caroline. My daughters are younger than you are; no family, Heaven knows, have less to give away than we have; but yet I have been fortunate enough to awaken, in the hearts of Elizabeth and Henrietta, so much reflection, that more than once, when I have offered them some little indulgence, they have preferred giving the money it would have cost, to such distressed objects as happened then to be most immediately in their recollection. Tell me now, which would give you the most pleasure; to be able to relieve the wretched family we have just seen, or to go to the ball which is to be held, on the 7th of January, in the Town Hall at W—?

At the mention of a ball, all the habits of her former life returned to the recollection of Caroline Cecil; and though a Christmas ball at a provincial town was, she knew, very unlike those splendid assemblies she had been used to frequent, yet it was not without its allurements. She had been told that she was very handsome, very elegant, had a look of fashion, and something superior in her air and manner; all which she implicitly believed. She knew that she danced particularly well, and in the most fashionable style; – what an impression then must all these accomplishments make on the frequenters of a country assembly! how much admiration she should excite! how much praise she should hear! – Her heart beat high as all this occurred to her; but she knew she must check its emotion. After a moment's hesitation, therefore, she answered:

Caroline. To be sure, Madam, I should be very glad, were it in my power, to do good to these or any other poor persons; but I imagine that I am not, in my circumstances … in a situation to …. to be able to help them to any purpose. As to going out, I hope I shall never wish to go against your inclinations. Certainly I am fond of society, and have been used to think that young people should be allowed some innocent pleasure:[a] but I am a stranger here, and have no thoughts, I am sure, of asking you to go to a ball on my account.

Mrs. Woodfield (*entering immediately into the thoughts that her niece imagined she concealed*). No, my dear; I dare say you would not. And I am glad you would not, because I should be sorry to refuse you the first request you made me. I mentioned the ball at W. merely as the only public amusement within our reach, for I have no intention of going; the weather is too cold, and the expence greater than I can afford. But that is not all. You are in your first mourning[22] for your mother; she has not been dead more than six weeks; and, though fashionable folks have got above all such forbearance, it will little become a young person of very small fortune to emulate such unfeeling carelessness; for, if ever you hope to amend that fortune, it must be done by shewing that you possess the virtues of sensibility, gratitude, and humility.

Caroline sighed deeply, but did not reply. Mrs. Woodfield, for the remainder of their short walk, addressed her conversation to her own daughters, while her niece again looked round in despondence on the dreary scene they were passing.

A driving sleet rendered every object more chill and obscure; and Caroline, having changed her clothes, attended at the dinner table with a gloomy and discontented air. Involuntarily she compared the present with the past; but in a very different manner from what her aunt had intended by the lesson of the morning.

Alas! thought she, is it thus my life is to pass! All the morning in visiting the miserable mansions of a parcel of beggars! I am sure I am not hard-hearted, and would give them halfpence or sixpence at any time, with all my heart, if I happened to have any small money about me; but to go into such nasty unwholesome places, and hear of nothing but such dismal stories! I believe very few young persons would like that; it is enough to lower their spirits, and make mopes of them for the rest of their lives.

It did not occur to her, that these unwholesome habitations, which she could not bear to enter for a few moments, were the perpetual abodes of creatures whose feelings and necessities were the same as her own; and very certainly she did not know, that to inquire into and relieve distress, was so far from having a depressing effect on the minds of youth, that never does the heart feel so light, never are the enjoyments our own situation affords, so keenly relished[a] as when we are conscious, proudly conscious, of having done our duty, and of being the means of mitigating the evils incident to humanity.

These ideas, however, which are sometimes innate, but oftener, perhaps, arise from an early habit of reflection, Caroline Cecil had not yet acquired. She saw indeed her two cousins gay and cheerful; nor was that cheerfulness obscured by the remarks they made on the scene of sickness and sorrow to which they had that morning been witness; on the contrary, they seemed to feel pleasure in imagining little projects of their own, for the relief of the younger individuals of this unhappy family. Elizabeth asked her mamma's leave to cut up a gown she had ceased to wear, to make a frock for one of the children; and Henrietta desired to be permitted to lay out a few shillings she had saved, in flannel for the other. Their mother readily acquiesced in their plans, without, however, giving to either that sort of praise, as if she thought that in these instances of humanity they made any extraordinary or unusual exertion.

Mrs. Woodfield, however, observed with concern, that this first lesson of humility and charity had failed in regard to her niece, who continued silent and almost sullen. In the evening of winter, it was sometimes her custom to give her daughters a short lesson from some favourite author,

as an exercise of nice writing: that[a] she chose for this evening, was from Thomson:

> 'Ah! little think the gay licentious proud,
> Whom pleasure, power, and affluence surround,
> They, who their thoughtless hours in giddy mirth
> And wanton, often cruel riot waste;
> Ah! little think they, while they dance along,
> How many feel, this very moment, death,
> And all the sad variety of pain;
> How many sink in the devouring flood,
> Or more devouring flame; how many bleed
> By shameful variance between man and man;
> How many pine in want, and dungeon glooms,
> Shut from the common air, and common use
> Of their own limbs; how many drink the cup
> Of baleful grief, or eat the bitter bread
> Of misery: Sore pierc'd by wintry winds,
> How many shrink into the sordid hut
> Of cheerless poverty!'[23]

DIALOGUE II.

THE DORMOUSE.

SLOWLY and heavily, for Caroline Cecil, passed the remainder of the month of January. February was cold and stormy, and the prolonged winter hovered over them with even a more gloomy aspect than it had worn in the frosts of his mid career. The snow-drop,[24] however, faintly peeped forth amidst the tempest, and some other wintry flowers announced the return of spring. The first that reared its tender head above the fallen leaves and dead grass, in a corner of their little shrubbery, gave inexpressible pleasure to Henrietta, who every morning passed that way to feed some favourite poultry, lodged in an adjoining out-house. She came in with that simple innocent joy, so pleasing in early youth to every one, but so particularly interesting to a mother.

[Mrs. WOODFIELD and ELIZABETH were at work – CAROLINE was drawing at a table near the fire.]

Henrietta. Oh! my dear mamma, do you know we have got snow-drops in the garden already? there are twenty or thirty that will be quite blown out to-morrow! And there is a pale yellow flower, or rather a greenish

flower, with a little red about it. Mamma! you will be delighted to see them! I wish you would come out to look at them.

Mrs. Woodfield. It rains, my love, and I have got a sad cold; but I will see them to-morrow. It is always delightful to mark the first approach of spring.

Caroline. It seems to me[a] as if there never was any spring in the country.

Mrs. Woodfield. Indeed, Miss Cecil! – The remark is so new to me, that, had I made one on the same subject, I should have reversed it, and have said, that it seems to me[b] there is never any spring in London.

Caroline (*sighing*). Ah! dear Madam, you certainly have forgotten[c] the delightful roses, lilies, and I know not how many charming flowers, for I always forget their names, which one used to have from that delightful man in Bond-street.[d25] Mamma used to have them sent her twice a week; and she had such elegant bureaus made of wire, and painted green; our drawing-room used to be quite a little paradise. And we used to have such lovely nosegays of roses –

Mrs. Woodfield. Roses! when they were eighteen pence or two shillings a-piece! Alas! dear Caroline, those luxuries, like many others, are not only totally unfit for persons of small and precarious fortunes, but by creating artificial wants, they destroy the enjoyment of natural pleasures. I allow, that nothing is more lovely than an hot-house rose; light, free from insects, glowing with the softest colours, it is perhaps more beautiful than the roses we gather in the first week of June; but[e] when we have enjoyed these forced productions for two or three months, June offers us her roses in vain; we see them in every cottage garden; and their charms are become common and uninteresting. I allow, however, that[f] to persons of large independent fortune, this is one of the most innocent, and would be to me, were I in that situation, one of the greatest gratifications. But for you, I rather regret your having acquired a notion, that the beauty of spring consists in an ornamented drawing-room, dressed with flowers procured by art, because those you perhaps will never be able to procure; whereas a taste for the genuine beauties of nature is,[g] at all times, and in all seasons and situations, a source of the purest and most innocent delight.

Caroline remained silent, and probably unconvinced. A party to Ranelagh,[26] a card meeting, in which five or six girls of her own age could get into a corner and giggle together, or titter round the uniform insipidity of a commerce table,[27] she still thought preferable to all the fine views that ever were beheld. The country, to her, was still a blank, and the people she had hitherto seen were all twaddlers and quizzes.[28] She was not, therefore, much delighted, when her aunt thus addressed herself to Elizabeth:

Mrs. Woodfield. My dear, as my cold may be increased[h] if I venture out this evening, I shall send you and your cousin to Mrs. Gervais's, to pay my visit, and apologize for me.