The Pickering Masters

The Works of Charlotte Smith

What Is She?
Conversations Introducing Poetry
A Natural History of Birds

Edited by
Judith Pascoe

Routledge

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VOLUME 13

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Volumes 11–14

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CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

What Is She?

Charlotte Smith, in the add-a-poem collection of her *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784–97), refined and perfected a literary persona notable for its mournfulness, its acute sensitivity, its moral righteousness. The narrator of the sonnets demands our sympathy through multiple renditions of her own wretchedness, claiming to envy, in one poem, the corpses laid bare by the erosion of a coastal graveyard, and, in another, a lunatic who wanders the shoreline. The world view of the elegiac sonnets is so grim and their narrator is so earnest that these poems do not prepare us for Smith's foray into the more madcap realm of sentimental comedy. The gimlet-eyed view of literary production that Smith provides in the 1799 play *What Is She?* stands as a significant departure, and one that signals her canny awareness of the literary fashions that had advanced her reputation.

The play multiplies disguised lovers and long-separated siblings in a manner worthy of a Shakespearean comedy. Lord Orton passes himself off as Mr Belford so as to ingratiate himself with Mrs Derville. Orton's sister Lady Zephyrine Mutable, who hasn't seen her brother since they were children, disguises herself as Lord Orton in order to discover whether Mrs Derville is enamoured of Lady Zephyrine's beau, Mr Bewley. And Mr Bewley sets out to incite Lady Zephyrine's jealousy by feigning nonchalance. Mr Jargon, to whom Lady Zephyrine is yoked by debt, propositions Mrs Derville as well, promising her 'a house in Marylebone, a black boy, and a curricle' (p. 43). Jargon's cousin Period impersonates Lord Orton so as to determine whether Mrs Derville is privy to the deception being practised by Orton's other impersonator, Lady Zephyrine. For good measure, Smith also throws in a suitor-hidden-in-a-closet scene and a jewel robbery.

The play's title question might be posed of several of its characters. It perhaps refers to the mysterious Mrs Derville, a woman with a past who elicits the curiosity and passion of Lord Orton, her absentee landlord. Or the question may apply to Orton's sister, Lady Zephyrine Mutable,

whose remote uncle, Sir Caustic Oldstyle, knows her only from the modest countenance depicted in a miniature portrait. Oldstyle fears, upon meeting her, that she is a woman of 'modern whim whams' (p. 40), with the kind of 'foil and tinsel qualities' (p. 32) that he abhors. The title question, however, also serves as a knowing query into the nature of Smith's own literary careerism: the most amusing scenes in *What Is She?* feature droll caricatures of aspiring authors. The opportunistic travel writer Period adopts the credo 'nothing sells like private anecdote', and is thrilled by the 'material' provided by a carriage collision (p. 33). Mrs Gurnet, whose nervous system has been altered by the Minerva press, sees in the mystery of Mrs Derville's past the inspiration for a four-volume history. The play mocks the kind of literary sensibility that Smith's serially released sonnets encouraged. Roused by a reference to his niece's 'sensibility', Sir Caustic Oldstyle scoffs: 'I suppose she sighs over the distresses of a novel – wipes her eyes while a ghost in an opera comes out of his tomb to accompany the orchestra; but is shock'd too much at real misery to suffer its approach, and avoids sickness and poverty as though she herself were not human – These fine feelings won't do for me' (p. 32).

What Is She? was first performed at the Covent Garden theatre as the main piece performance on Saturday, 27 April 1799, along with Henry Bate's comic opera *The Flitch of Bacon*. It was performed again on Monday, 29 April, on Wednesday, 1 May, on Thursday, 2 May, on Thursday, 9 May, and on Monday, 20 May. According to the *London Stage*, Smith is named in the account book on her benefit day, but her name did not appear on the playbill. The author of the play was also not specified on the title pages of the three editions of the script published by the London publisher T. N. Longman, nor was it revealed on the title page of one of the (presumably pirated) Dublin editions published by George Folingsby. Smith's name was, however, printed on the title page of a subsequent Dublin edition.[1] But when Elizabeth Inchbald reprinted the play in her 1811 *The Modern Theatre*, Smith's name was once again absent from the title page.

The play's anonymous publication raised questions about its authorship, especially from Florence Hilbish. In her 1941 dissertation on Smith, Hilbish provides a list of reasons why a Smith attribution was probably spurious. Some of Hilbish's evidence has been overturned by new findings. She claims the play was first published anonymously in Dublin in 1799, followed by a second anonymous edition that appeared in London the same year, and a third the year following. We know now that the Dublin editions followed a London edition published by Longman (like the two subsequent London editions) in 1799. Hilbish did not have access to the

[1] Stuart Currran discovered a copy of this edition in the British Library (catalogue number BL 11779.aa.79). Published by Folingsby in Dublin, it bills itself as the third edition.

promptbook that the editors of the *London Stage* use to ascribe the play to Smith, or to George Folingsby's Dublin third edition.[1] Nevertheless, Hilbish's documentation of stylistic differences between Smith's other writings and *What Is She?* usefully highlights the anomalous status of the play in Smith's oeuvre as a whole. Hilbish writes, 'Here the style is totally different. It is not plaintive or querulous but sprightly and robust ... The thoughts, sentiments, and moral teachings are not those of Charlotte Smith, as elsewhere expressed'. Hilbish reveals her investment in a particular construction of Charlotte Smith as she goes on to disparage the play's characters: 'They are flippant and coarse in their speech and low and bold in their conduct. The heroine lacks that charm of soft simplicity, purity, and goodness, characteristic of all Mrs. Smith's heroines'. Hilbish concludes, 'The play is one of manners. It teems with the customs of the times of both town and country. But in contrast to Mrs. Smith's weaving casually and seemingly unconsciously such manners as are an integral part of the situation at hand into the fabric of her story, here manners are displayed as if on exhibition, labeled, contrasted, commented upon'.[2]

Hilbish's objection to a Smith who was capable of categorizing and curating the manners of her peers helps us to understand why Smith would have insisted upon preserving her anonymity in the first place. Her literary career up to that date had been premised upon the cultivation of a particular persona – the melancholy speaker of the *Elegiac Sonnets*, who vouchsafed the authenticity of the mournful poems through references to Smith's own hardships.[3] While Smith performed a particular persona in her poetry, one who bore a striking resemblance to the Gothic heroine who was a mainstay of the novel and of theatrical productions like the ones that surrounded her own play's performance, she had no desire to call attention to the theatricality of her poetic presentation. *What Is She?* risked breaking the fourth wall of her poetry career. Smith's very association with the

[1] Judith Phillips Stanton's *Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) provides no further documentation of Smith's authorship of *What Is She?*, but it does reveal that Smith was engaged in writing a comedy for the theatre. In a letter to an unknown recipient that Stanton dates to 10 February 1788, Smith describes the difficulty of writing those 'strange compositions [which] are by the courtesy of the Town, call'd *Comedies*' (p. 14). She writes: 'The scenes I have written I will not trouble you with till they are more worthy of being attended too [*sic*]. I have only to say that possibly you may believe I shall be much circumscribed in point of time, as a Comedy of three acts is no light undertaking' (p. 15).

[2] Florence May Anna Hilbish, 'Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist (1749–1806)', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1941), pp. 199–200.

[3] See Sarah Zimmerman's discussion of how Smith's emphasis on interiority 'turns a focus on the personal into a cult of personality'. Zimmerman shows that the explanatory notes to Smith's sonnets ground the poems in Smith's reading and in her public biography, and she analyses Smith's increasingly autobiographical prefaces. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 55, 67.

theatre, her display of herself as a knowing playwright, might have cast a shadow over her poetic effusions, calling their sincerity into question.

Smith, in contrast to several of her romantic peers, had a pragmatic relationship with the stage. Unlike her contemporaries who either wrote unstageable plays (Byron, Shelley) or claimed no interest in seeing their plays staged (Wordsworth), Smith turned to the theatre as a means of expanding her literary enterprise. Judith Stanton, in her introduction to *Emmeline*, recounts Smith's negotiations with theatre managers when she was trying to place 'a Comedy of three acts with Songs' in 1786. The Covent Garden manager Thomas Harris considered this play but never staged it. Twelve years later, Smith dedicated *What Is She?* to Harris in flattering terms, either papering over, or dismissing, any hard feelings about the earlier episode. She writes, 'I wish to persuade Writers of better Talents, who have a Turn for Dramatic Composition, that the formidable and repulsive Tales of Delay and Difficulty, incident to a Communication with Managers, are not always to be credited' (p. 3). She claims to have found in Harris 'an encouraging Candor and Politeness' (p. 3). Harris provided a company of well-known and highly respected actors who stepped in and out of a variety of roles over the course of a Covent Garden theatrical season.

Smith's play was ushered onto the stage by a crack team of seasoned performers. Joseph Munden was renowned for leading comic business, but when he performed Polonius in *Hamlet*, Byron claimed the role would die with him as Lady Macbeth would die with Sarah Siddons.[1] Likewise, Mrs Litchfield, who performed the role of Winifred, managed a year later to breathe new life into the role of Lady Macbeth, proving that Siddons would not, in fact, take it to her grave. John Fawcett, who played Jargon, was a leading portrayer of rustic or eccentric characters, and a favourite speaker of prologues and epilogues.[2] Joseph Holman, who played Lord Orton, was a thespian workhorse who played dozens of leading roles in comedy and tragedy.[3]

The play's performance was bracketed by the father and daughter team of Mr and Miss Betterton, who spoke the Prologue and Epilogue. Both actors had arrived in London in 1797 after stints in Irish provincial theatres. Julia Betterton's star was on the rise; although criticized by the *Monthly Mirror* for being too mechanical, she became one of the foremost actresses of the early nineteenth-century London stage. Her father, who had a reputation for playing rakes and fops, was faulted by the same reviewer for 'the consumptive monotony of his voice'. The reviewer conceded, however, '[A]s

[1] *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, et al*, ed. by Philip Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhaus, 16 vols (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973–93), vol. x, p. 381.

[2] *A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. v, p. 199.

[3] *A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. vii, p. 385.

he speaks judiciously, possesses a handsome figure, treads the stage with confidence, and deports himself like a gentleman, we think in *secondary* characters, he is likely to prove useful.'[1]

Betterton's dignified demeanour and stage presence presumably lent authority to his declamation of a prologue that traced theatrical taste from a past golden age to a decadent present, and which introduced a timid but determined female playwright who sought her audience's ears while refusing to gratify their avid eyes with special effects. Miss Betterton, in the Epilogue, sought mercy for the playwright but assumed a more aggressive stance before her critics. Calling them 'birds of prey', she began by taking aim at them – she claimed to be 'Prepar'd at flocks of Critics to let fly' – before shifting to a more conciliatory stance, and asking female audience members to withhold their smiles until their male companions had applauded the play with all their might (p. 58). Betterton concluded: 'Yet, while on well known kindness I presume, / Our Authoress, trembling, waits from you her doom' (p. 58).

Although Smith played up her novice status, mentioning her 'inexperienc'd Muse' (p. 5), her Prologue demonstrates both an acute awareness of theatre trends and a confident determination to defy them. She notes the popularity of large-scale spectacle and innovative special effects: 'The siege, th' explosion, nightly concourse draws, / And castles burn and fall – with vast applause' (p. 5). She describes the theatrical recreation of 'infernal regions'(p. 5), possibly invoking the popular *Blue-Beard* that was being performed in tandem with *The Castle of Montval* and with *The Iron Chest* just days before *What Is She?* hit the stage. A highlight of *Blue-Beard* was a glimpse of the mysterious Blue Chamber which, according to one of that play's stage directions, appears 'streaked with vivid streams of blood'. A sinking door reveals an interior apartment in which 'ghastly and supernatural forms are seen; – some in motion, some fix'd', and in which sits 'a large Skeleton seated on a tomb, (with a Dart in his hand)', and with the captions 'THE PUNISHMENT OF CURIOSITY' written over his head in 'characters of Blood'.[2]

The playwright of *What Is She?* confidently offers the play as a counter to the spectacular excess of a *Blue-Beard*. She claims her 'inexperienc'd Muse' has formed no plan to 'raise the Spectre, or direct the Storm', but instead calls on the playgoer to listen rather than stare: '[I]f her pen no genuine plaudits steal, / From ears – to eyes she offers no appeal' (p. 5). In insisting that her words fall on her audience's ears with no grandiose enactments of ghostly happenings or bad weather to divert their eyes, Smith drew attention to the changing soundscape of the romantic theatre. As theatres

[1] *A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. ii, p. 100.

[2] George Colman the Younger, *Blue-Beard*, in *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama*, ed. by Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer (Petersborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003), pp. 84–5.

grew larger and some sectors of the audience were pushed farther and farther from the stage, actors' voices were increasingly challenged, and actors' words were at greater risk of going unnoted. Smith did not neglect visual effects; Lady Zephyrine's entrance in act four, dressed 'in the extreme of the fashion' (p. 39), carries with it great comic potential. But Smith wanted her best speeches to stand on their own without the distraction of special effects. When Mrs Derville tells Mr Belford he should not expect her to become the panegyrist of his whole sex, she goes on to enquire eloquently, 'Alas! does the wrecked mariner describe, with a flattering pencil, the rock where his hopes perished?' (p. 13) Such a line requires no visual gimcrackery.

Allardyce Nicoll claims *What Is She?* belongs to the genre of sentimental comedy also practised by Elizabeth Inchbald. Nicoll praises the play's mix of sentimentalism and satire, rightly noting its playful take on the Gothic romance of Anne Radcliffe.[1] Mrs Derville's secret history parallels the plight of a Radcliffe heroine. Sequestered in an Italian convent by an uncle with designs upon her inheritance, she eloped with an Englishman who frittered away her fortune and died after falling from his horse. Realizing 'the horrors of [her] situation' (p. 53), and set upon by the importuning uncle, Mrs Derville made her way alone from Florence to Leghorn to Wales. We read Mrs Derville's Gothic history, however, partly through the lens provided by Mrs Gurnet, whose literary oeuvre includes the romance of 'The Horrid Concavity' and 'The Subterraneous Phantom'. Mrs Gurnet inevitably conjures up the Gothic excesses of Smith's own poetry when she announces that she has just finished a sonnet to the screech owl 'and 'tis the most pathetic thing' (p. 22). *What Is She?* invokes standard features of Gothic drama – for example, in its opening scene description, which sets Mrs Derville's cottage against the sublime backdrop of the abbey, mansion house and 'a distant View of the Welch Mountains' (p. 7). But the play also, knowingly, undercuts its Gothic elements. Period places the Welsh landscape in the context of travel writing that feeds a societal hunger for novelty.[2] Upon learning that Sir Caustic has received letters from India, Period jumps at the opportunity to embellish his tour of Caernarvonshire with 'some little domestic anecdote of the Bengal tyger, or the amours of Tippoo Saib, or some secret history of a Nabob' (p. 40).

Critical commentary on Smith's literary oeuvre draws attention to her canny manipulation of generic conventions. Kathryn Pratt notes the

[1] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama, 1660–1900, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), vol iii, pp. 152–3.

[2] According to Moira Dearnley, eighteenth-century fictions 'are riddled with stereotypical representation of Wales and the Welsh'. Wales was both idealized as a retreat from the corrupt values of the city and ridiculed as the land of a poor, dishonest and credulous people. Smith's play conjures up these literary associations, the first in Mrs Derville's escape to Wales, and the second in its depiction of Ap-Griffin. Moira Dearnley, *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-Century Fictions of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. xv, xvi.

extent to which the speaker of Smith's poem 'To Melancholy' appropriates theatrical poetic conventions in order to dramatize her own literary performance, going on to argue that, for Smith, 'to mix theatrical conventions with poetic performances is to blur the separation and hence the respective standings of different artistic genres and forms'. Pratt is unsurprised that Smith conceals her authorship of *What Is She?* since 'the comedy's mockery of writers of sensibility sounds an authorial voice antagonistic to theatrical sensibility, one that would interrupt the melancholic speech of Smith's authorial persona'.[1] Betsy Bolton, in a similar manner, sees Smith's play presenting social existence 'as a conflict between different genres, each with its own sedimented forms of literary meaning and social experience'. She notes Mrs. Derville's emphasis on the 'tedious familiarity of the marriage plot'.[2]

What modern commentators find most interesting about the play – its metacommentary on the publishing business of Smith's day – may have held less of an appeal to her contemporaries. It is impossible to know exactly why *What Is She?* closed after a comparatively brief theatrical run, and why, despite its inclusion in Inchbald's pantheon of *The Modern Theatre* anthology, it did not become part of the standard theatrical repertoire. Certainly the box office take was paltry when compared to some of the plays that were in rotation at Covent Garden when *What Is She?* was performed there. The receipts for the initial performances of *What Is She?* peaked at its second staging on Monday, 29 April 1799, when £209 10*s*. was collected. At the debut performance on Saturday, 27 April, receipts amounted to only £161 11*s*., and at the third and fourth performances, on Wednesday, 1 May (a benefit day for the author), and on Thursday, 2 May, the ticket sales amounted to £176 2*s*. and £199 1*s*. To put these earnings in perspective, we can compare them to the £640 that a performance of *Hamlet* took in on April 18, the £532 that a performance of *A Cure for the Heart Ache* brought in on 19 April, or the £706 collected at a showing of *The East Indian* on 22 April. *What Is She?* was resurrected for a final performance on Monday, 20 May, 'by command of their Majesties', and this royal imprimatur may have accounted for the play's biggest receipts: £402 19*s*. The comparatively weak ticket sales explain the play's short theatrical life in simple economic terms – however cordial Smith's dealings with Thomas Harris turned out to be, the theatre manager surely made scheduling decisions with receipts foremost in mind. But they do not explain why the play was not a bigger draw for theatre audiences. We can only surmise that the Gothic special effects to which Smith's play sardonically refers,

[1] Kathryn Pratt, 'Charlotte Smith's Melancholia on the Page and Stage', *Studies in English Literature* 41.3 (2001), pp. 572, 578.

[2] Betsy Bolton, 'Epilogue: What Is She?', in *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 230, 231.

and which were prominent features of the plays that alternated with *What Is She?*, won out over the smaller-scale witticisms of her own theatrical offering.

Conversations Introducing Poetry and *A Natural History of Birds*

Charlotte Smith's *Conversations Introducing Poetry: Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History* (1804) and *A Natural History of Birds, Intended Chiefly for Young Persons* (1807) were written during her last years when she was debilitated by illness and aggravated by the dispute over an inheritance that had consumed her energies for decades. The *Conversations* was completed around the same time that Smith's library was being appraised; by the time she was completing the *Natural History of Birds*, she had been forced to sell her books. These harsh circumstances make the calm, authoritative air that Smith creates for the narrators of her nearly last works all the more remarkable. With her health steadily declining, her finances in chaos and her reference library disbanded, Smith managed to compile two orderly collections of natural historical lore and poetry. Hybrid works aimed at children, *Conversations Introducing Poetry* and *A Natural History of Birds* are telling enactments of the early nineteenth-century preoccupation with natural history collecting, as well as oblique commentaries on a more fraught order of things, the class structure of war-torn British society.

Pitching the *Conversations* to the publishers Thomas Cadell Jr and William Davies in December 1802, Smith described the work as 'a School book of Poetry to exercise the memories of Children between the ages of five & nine years old to which I meant to have added plates of the subject from my own drawings, which, as they are chiefly on natural history, I can do with some precision & perhaps taste'.[1] A few months later, Smith would write of caring for the five-year-old daughter of her second son, a child sent over from India: 'I have become passionately fond & fancy that she has a very uncommon understanding, & I have written some little pieces of poetry to exercise *her* memory'.[2] In the Preface to the *Conversations*, also, Smith describes altering some of the poems she included by other authors so that they would better serve her 'first purpose' of 'teaching a child to repeat them', although she apparently lost sight of this first purpose as her work progressed (p. 61). 'It will very probably be observed, that the pieces

[1] 16 December 1802, *Collected Letters*, p. 503. Earlier that same year, Smith had written in a letter to Davies that she had had 'many applications to write another School book' and that she would 'very readily' set about writing it, since she had already given it much thought and 'had some of the materials collected' (18 February 1802).

[2] To Samuel Rose, 9 February [1803], *Collected Letters*, p. 532.

towards the end of the Second Volume are too long for mere children to learn to repeat, and too difficult for them to understand,' she writes, before confessing that in the progress of her work she began to hope 'it might, at least the latter part, be found not unworthy the perusal of those, who are no longer children' (p. 62).

The *Conversations* presents itself as a collection and takes up collecting as a topic of interest throughout, and in so doing intertwines this avocation with the exercise of memorization. Smith's Mrs Talbot, a more benevolent version of the dictatorial guardian figure that Mary Wollstonecraft created in her *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), helps her daughter Emily compile a collection of poems addressing topics related to the study of natural history. When Emily's brother George tells of spotting a hedgehog, Mrs Talbot says, '[W]e will try if something cannot be made of it, to encrease our collection of animals, as subjects of natural history in verse' (p. 83). At another point, Mrs Talbot says, 'I have a bird or two hatching for you, but they are not yet in a state to make a figure in our Museum of animals' (p. 142). The poems are presented as texts which serve to exercise the memory, but also as aides to memory. After a visit to the beach, Mrs Talbot asks 'if the images we have thus collected may not be fixed in our memories by putting them into verse' (p. 215). (The poem that follows, 'Studies by the Sea', is, ironically, one of the poems that Charlotte Smith alludes to in her Preface when confessing that some of the last poems in the volume may be too long and difficult for memorization by children.) Emily compiles a book that parallels Smith's two-volume work, but she also composes a mental archive through memorization. In conversation with Mrs Talbot, she says, 'You thought, Mamma, that I should not have all our present collection complete, both in my book and my memory, before my aunt, my brother and sister, and my cousin Fanny came; but I believe I can go through without missing a line' (p. 122).

The study of natural history was growing in popularity in the first decade of the nineteenth century as more people from all walks of life became caught up in the collecting of birds, shells, fossils, butterflies, seaweed and other artefacts of the natural world. They were inspired and abetted by the proliferation of collecting guides and descriptions of the natural world. David Ellison Allen charts the rise of the naturalist in Great Britain during the eighteenth century, and also the search for a scheme by which to explain the natural world.[1] In 1749 Georges-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon, published the first volume of his *Historie naturelle*, an attempt to describe the entire known world of nature, which would be completed fifty-five years later, around the time Smith was compiling the *Conversations* and *A Natural History of Birds*. The rival system of classification devised by Carl

[1] David Ellison Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* (1976; repr. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Linnaeus and laid out in his *Species Plantarum* and *System Naturae* was disseminated in England by Richard Pulteney's *A General View of the Writings of Linnaeus* (1759) and by popular guides to botany, paleontology and entomology that adopted the Linnaean system of nomenclature.[1]

If the vogue for natural history collecting helped inspire Smith's final works for children (as well as her final ambitious poem for adults, *Beachy Head*, which includes botanical catalogues), her creation of a poetry anthology links her to a literary collecting impulse that ran through the eighteenth-century miscellany, the antiquarian anthologies of ancient English poetry compiled by Thomas Percy and Walter Scott, and the ornamental gift books marketed for women readers from the second decade of the nineteenth century.[2]

Although Smith's *Conversations* takes the form of a collection, it also turns a critical eye towards the ethics of collecting, presenting the activities of the Talbot family as a kind-hearted alternative to the accumulation of animal specimens. Recalling her childhood enthusiasm for catching butterflies, Mrs Talbot chronicles as well her disgust with attempts to kill them. 'It appeared so cruel', she writes, 'to impale an insect on a pin, and let it flutter for hours and even days in misery, that I could never bear to do it'. She was later taught to kill them 'by pouring a drop of aether on their heads', but was still troubled at depriving the creatures of their short existence. 'And therefore', she goes on to write, 'I contented myself with copying from flies in collections already made' (p. 85). The work makes frequent references to the collections of others, with George going to see 'a collection of natural curiosities, most of them from the East and West Indies', belonging to his friend Beechcroft's uncle (p. 170). George's descriptions of Mr Beechcroft's extensive bird holdings cause Mrs Talbot to recall a prior visit to the Leverian Museum, but the recollection inspires more troubled musing on the ethics of natural history collecting. Mrs Talbot expresses a preference for seeing gatherings of plants rather than birds because of the contrived and awkward placements of the birds on display. She declares, '[A]ltogether, their formal or awkward appearances, when stuffed and set on wires, always convey to my mind ideas of the sufferings of the poor birds when they were caught and killed, and the disagreeable operations of embowelling and drying them' (p. 179).

Embedded in Smith's meditation on the uses and abuses of collecting is an undercurrent of protest against the striation of British society and the excesses of the very rich. Early in Volume I, George encounters his friend Harry Scamperville (the son of a baronet, as he is always eager to recall), who functions solely as a figurehead of aristocratic disdain for the less for-

[1] Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain*, pp. 36–7.

[2] See Laura Mandell's discussion of miscellanies and anthologies in *Misogynous Economies: The Business of Literature in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), pp. 112–26.

tunate. When they come upon a boy seeking help for his drowning little sister, George responds with alacrity but Harry drags his feet. 'Don't go – You'll be pulled into the water', he calls, before grumbling at the stupidity of hazarding one's life 'for a beggar's brat' (p. 75). The episode is one of several that illustrate the cruelty of aristocrats. On another occasion, George meets a Master Headham whose grandson was mowed down by the speeding carriage of two grand gentlemen. The boy was running to open a gate for them when he was knocked down. To underscore their diabolism, George notes that the boy's long-suffering grandparents would not have minded the misfortune so much 'if these very *grand* gentlemen, though they saw him fall, and knew he was very much hurt, had not sworn at him most terribly, struck at him with a whip, and then drove away faster than ever' (p. 101). The episode serves as an opportunity for Mrs Talbot to discourse at length on the depravity of the rich. 'Self gratification is their governing principle, and while they fly about from one place to another in search of pleasure, the wants and woes of the humble class of society, without whose toil these flashing men could not exist, are wholly overlooked', she tells Emily (p. 102). While Smith's *Conversations* sets out to open children's minds to the wondrous variety of the natural world, and to train those minds through the exercise of memorization, the work also provides lessons in the inequities of England's class structure.

Smith's *A Natural History of Birds* takes the form of an epistolary field guide organized around Linnaeus's orders of birds. Smith acknowledges systems of bird classification that deviate from the Linnean plan, but writes, '[T]he attachment which, as a very humble student in botany, I have felt for the Swedish naturalist, makes me desirous of preferring his system, and the more so as it is the most simple' (p. 310). The work might be read as the scientific counterpart of the poetic preoccupation with birds, which manifests itself in the dozens of contemporary poems addressing particular birds – Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and Shelley's 'To a Skylark', most famously, but also Coleridge's 'Nightingale' and Wordsworth's 'To the Cuckoo', 'To a Sky-Lark' and 'The Sparrow's Nest'. The poetic fascination with birds gets carried to an extreme by Coleridge, who identified with birds, especially awkward ones. Walter Jackson Bate chronicles Coleridge's depictions of himself as a 'Starling self-encaged', as an ostrich who lays too many eggs 'with Ostrich carelessness & ostrich oblivion', and as a 'metaphysical Bustard, urging its slow, heavy laborious earth-skimming Flight, over dreary & level Wastes'.[1] In compiling a 'natural history of birds' aimed at children, Smith sought to infuse their minds with a wealth of ornithological detail which might inspire future poets.

Smith was composing her *Natural History of Birds* at a moment when the knowledge of bird species and the enthusiasm for collecting them was

[1] Walter Jackson Bate, *Coleridge* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 111.

increasing at an exponential rate. Her work draws on collecting guides like *A Natural History of Birds: Containing a Variety of Facts Selected From Several Writers and Intended for the Amusement and Instruction of Children* (London: J. Johnson, 1791) and Charles Stewart's *Elements of Natural History: Being an Introduction to the Systema Naturae of Linnaeus* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1801–2), and she comments sceptically on bird fancier societies which met in London 'to exhibit the most curious birds'. Smith writes, '[P]remiums are assigned according to the distance of these productions from the original stock; that is, to the most extraordinary specimens of the power of art over nature' (p. 310). She goes on to say, 'What is called a *Fancier*, whether in flowers or birds, is always a trifling and subordinate character' (p. 312).

As she moves through the orders of birds, Smith creates a miscellany of scientific data, mythology, folklore, anecdotal evidence and poetry. She sets out to 'give a general view of the six orders of Birds', dwelling especially on those that have something remarkable in their histories and that are natives of Europe, and touching afterward on their appearances in fables 'where their qualities or attributes are often mingled with the passions and affections of human beings, in order to give lessons of morality' (p. 244). In her entry for the goose, she begins by describing the goose's habitat and behaviour, and then proceeds to a survey of the goose's place in Roman history, and to a retelling of the fable of the goose that laid a golden egg, with an emphasis on the lesson to be learned from the ungrateful master who killed the goose so that 'he might possess himself of all the treasure at once' (p. 281). The moral of this story calls to her mind a horse that gets overworked by his 'barbarous owner'. She goes on to write, 'The same thing has, I fear, been done in those countries where the unhappy negroes are purchased, and compelled to labour to raise sugar, and coffee, and cotton for the use of Europeans' (p. 281). The natural history of the goose fans out to encompass political history, personal morality and the slavery debate, and expands further to take in the use of goose feathers in the manufacturing of pens and beds. Smith creates a miscellany of goose knowledge drawn from a wide range of sources, but she also uses the sometimes scattershot array of information to provoke right thinking on the human appropriation of birds.

The publication history of *A Natural History of Birds* was a long-running saga of aggravation and delay; the work was finally ushered into print by Joseph Johnson in 1807, three months after Smith's death. In April of 1804, with the *Conversations* in press, Smith wrote of the 'excellent and worthy' Mr Johnson, who, 'tho a little tardy … is so really benevolent & liberal with so little parade that I never was so well pleased with a bookseller'.[1] By July of that year she was still waiting on the proofs of the

[1] Charlotte Smith to Sarah Rose, 18 April 1804, *Collected Letters*, p. 617.

Conversations, and her enthusiasm for Johnson was waning: 'The printers are either sleeping out the heats, or are encreasing them by printing handbills for the Middlesex elections, and my birds & fishes & creeping things will not appear till the feast of St Bartholemew. Grizzle herself of forbearing memory would I think have required all the quietism of her character to be exerted if she had been an Authoress & M^r^ Johnson her publisher'.[1] By May of 1805, she was writing optimistically of the *Natural History* which would go to press within a fortnight: 'So it may, if I have a very industrious printer, appear in September which you know is an excellent time for publication'.[2] As we know, her cheerful prediction was not borne out; two years would pass and Smith would die before the work was available for purchase.

Smith composed the *Conversations* and the *Natural History of Birds* at a heady moment when the sciences of ornithology, geology, palaeontology, botany, anatomy and zoology were all just beginning to take on their modern forms. Her works' unsifted accumulations of knowledge that we now see as unscientific – mythology, folklore, personal anecdote – provide a snapshot of a moment when poetry and science were neither distinct nor incompatible. In order to teach her child audience about natural history, Smith draws on the scientific authorities whose works probably made up part of the library she was forced to sell, but also, and even more so, the poetry of Milton, Thomson and Cowper. She quotes these poets copiously but not always with perfect accuracy, which makes one strongly suspect that she was quoting from memory, perhaps because of the loss of her library, or perhaps because she *could* do so – her mind was a mansion of lovely forms. Two years before she died, Smith wrote with pride of her literary celebrity, which, she said, precluded her from 'presuming on name only, to sell to the public the emptyings of a port folio'.[3] *Conversations Introducing Poetry* and *A Natural History of Birds* stand as Smith's nearly last efforts, portfolio collections perhaps, but ones that reveal the undifferentiated and wondrous state of natural history in the early nineteenth century.

[1] Charlotte Smith to Sarah Rose, 16 July 1804, *Collected Letters*, p. 642. As Judith Stanton notes, 'Grizzle' (Griselda) was a folk-tale character known for her patience.

[2] Charlotte Smith to Sarah Rose, 14 May 1805, *Collected Letters*, p. 687.

[3] Charlotte Smith to Thomas Cadell Jr and William Davies, 2 September 1805, *Collected Letters*, p. 711.

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WHAT IS SHE?

A COMEDY,

IN FIVE ACTS,

AS PERFORMED AT THE

THEATRE ROYAL, COVENT GARDEN.

SECOND EDITION.

London:

PRINTED FOR T. N. LONGMAN AND O. REES, NO. 39,
PATERNOSTER-ROW

1799.

[*PRICE TWO SHILLINGS*.]

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DEDICATION.

TO THOMAS HARRIS, ESQ.[1]

SIR,

THE formal Dedication of so trifling a Performance, may, I fear, have the Appearance of Vanity; and I am perfectly aware, that the Suffrage of an Anonymous Author, is of small Value, where the Esteem of the World has already been so amply and so justly bestowed: but my Object in this Address is, I trust, more laudable than the Indulgence of Literary Egotism, and more reasonable than the Hope that such Praise as mine can be of Consequence. I wish to persuade Writers of better Talents, who have a Turn for Dramatic Composition, that the formidable and repulsive Tales of Delay and Difficulty, incident to a Communication with Managers, are not always to be credited; and that, judging from my own Experience, I venture to assure them, they will, in you, Sir, find an encouraging Candor and Politeness, which the timid and inexperienced Dramatist will feel how to appreciate, better than any Language can suggest. Such a Motive will, I hope, plead my Excuse, and however I may fail in being useful to others, I have the highest Gratification myself in an Opportunity of expressing those Sentiments of Respect and Esteem, with which I am,

SIR,

Your most obedient,

And very humble Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

May 17*th*, 1799.

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PROLOGUE,

Spoken by Mr. BETTERTON.[2]

'TWAS said, long since, by sev'ral[a] moral sages,
That man's short life comprises diff'rent ages;
From childhood first, to manhood we attain,
And then, alas! to childhood sink again.
The same progressions mark Dramatic taste,
When manhood 'twixt two infancy's is plac'd.
When first the scene, the moral world display'd,
The Muses limp'd without Mechanic Aid:
Then Bards and Monsters labour'd side by side,
And equal fame, and equal gains divide.
Together Actors, Carpenters rehearse,
And the wing'd Griffin helps the hobbling verse.
The saddest tale demands (the heart to seize)
Confed'rate lightning, and the show'r of peas;[3]
Nor wit, nor pathos Audiences require,
But quaint conceits, with dragons, storms, and fire.
  At length Taste's manhood came, the Stage improv'd,
Without a Storm Monimia's sorrows mov'd;
Then Love and Valentine could charm the Fair,
Tho' not one Cupid dangled in the Air;
'To Scenic Monsters Bevil was preferr'd,
Nor found a rival in some fierce Blue-Beard.'[4]
Th' empassion'd verse, Wit's pointed moral aim,
The Audience charm'd, and fix'd the Author's fame.
  But all must change – behold the Muses mourn,
And, drooping, see Taste's infancy return;
Again the Bard calls forth red stocking'd legions,
And show'rs of fire from the infernal regions;
Again, storms darken the Theatric sky,
And strung on ropes the fearful Cupids fly:
Again pale ghosts stalk tunefully along,
And end their visit, just as ends the song.
The siege, th' explosion, nightly concourse draws,
And castles burn and fall – with vast applause!
  To-night a female Scribe, less bold, appears,
She dreads to pull the house about your ears;
Her inexperienc'd Muse no plan durst form,
To raise the Spectre, or direct the Storm;
And if her pen no genuine plaudits steal,
From ears – to eyes she offers no appeal;
Her Muse, tho' humble, scorns extrinsic art,
And asks her meed – from judgment to the heart.[b]

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.[5]

SIR CAUSTIC OLDSTYLE . . . . . *Mr. Munden*.
BELFORD (LORD ORTON) . . . . *Mr. Holman*.
BEWLEY . . . . . *Mr H. Johnston*.
PERIOD . . . . . *Mr. Lewis*.
JARGON . . . . . *Mr. Fawcett*.
AP-GRIFFIN . . . . . *Mr. Townsend*.
GURNET . . . . . *Mr. Emery*.
GLIB . . . . . *Mr. Farley*.
Servant.

MRS. DERVILLE . . . . . *Mrs. Pope*.
LADY ZEPHYRINE MUTABLE . . . *Miss Betterton*.
MRS. GURNET . . . . . *Mrs. Davenport*.
WINIFRED . . . . . *Mrs. Litchfield*.

SCENE – *Carnarvonshire*.[6]

THE TIME – *From the Morning of one Day, till the Evening of the next*.

☞ The words between inverted commas are omitted in the representation.

WHAT IS SHE?

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A small House with a Garden before it, and a Seat on which* WINIFRED *is discovered Spinning. – In the Front of the Stage a River and a Bridge. – In the back Ground the Abbey, Mansion-House, and a distant View of the Welch Mountains.*

WINIFRED. (*singing*)

'She thank'd him, and said, she could very well walk,
For should she keep a coach, how the neighbours would talk.'[7]

HEIGHO! I believe the dismal buz, buzzing of this wheel gets from my ears to my heart. Perhaps, after all, 'tis Mrs. Derville's fault – She is too good, or, at least, too silent for one to be comfortable with her. What signifies her good humour, if she never talks enough to shew it? Ah! if she was but like my poor dear late mistress, Mrs. Everclack! to be sure she died of a consumption; but while she did live, it did one good to hear her – so lively, such a charming larum[8] from morning till night.

Enter Lord ORTON (*as Mr.* BELFORD.)

Well, my Lord, I'm glad you're returned.

Belford. Hush, hush, good Winifred! You will certainly forget yourself, and call me by this title in Mrs. Derville's presence. But tell me, how has she been in my absence?

Winif. Bad enough, I can assure your Lordship – Mr. Belford, I mean.

Belford. You make one miserable, Winifred. What has happened, is[a] she ill? is she unhappy? (*anxiously*.)

Winif. Oh, worse! there are remedies for bad health and bad spirits; but that sort of neither one thing or other like feel, I believe the first doctors,

or the merriest bells in Caernarvonshire, can't cure it. Lord, we've been as dull as the black mountains.

Belford. You surprize me. Why, I thought Mrs. Derville had been elegant cheerfulness personified; every smile on her countenance seems to declare war against melancholly.

Winif. Mrs. Derville cheerful! Good lack, good lack, what hypocrites we women are!

Belford. Surely, Winifred, you cannot mean Mrs. Derville, she is not –[a] (*in an accent of alarm and suspicion*)

Winif. Yes, but I say she is; and no more like what she seems than I am to Edward the Black Prince.[9]

Belford. You distract me – Have you perceived any thing improper in Mrs. Derville's conduct? (*still in a tone of interest*)

Winif. To be sure I have; every moment she passes alone, she grieves, and pines, and sings such woe-begone ditties, 'twou'd make a Turk yearn to hear her. Yet, when she leaves her room, she is as sprightly as the river Dee; smiles like the vale of Glamorgan – in short, she is just what your Lordship has been pleased to fall in love with, and to woo in masquerade.

Belford. Extraordinary! And has she always been thus?

Winif. Always – from the moment I entered her service on the death of my late mistress at Leghorn, till this blessed morning, I have never seen her wear a smile, but as a mere holiday dress to meet the world in.

Belford. Incomprehensible woman! Her situation, her mind, every thing about her, is mysterious. Yet my heart mocks at the doubts of my reason, and I have scarcely courage to wish them satisfied – yet I must know more of her, or endeavour to forget that I have known her at all.

Winif. Aye, my Lord, you're quite right – one can bear to see one's friends miserable; but not to know why, is too much for christian patience. Dear me, how I stand talking here, and have forgot to tell your Lordship the news.

Belford. What news! does it concern me; does it relate to Mrs. Derville?

Winif. Why, as to concerning my mistress, I can't say; but I'm sure it concerns your Lordship to know, that since you left the village, your sister Lady Zephyrine Mutable, Mr. Deputy Gurnet, her guardian, and a mort[10] of company are arrived at the Abbey.

Belford. Arrived at the Abbey! This is, indeed, unlucky: 'tis impossible, then, I can remain long undiscovered. Yet hold – You are certain you never communicated my secret to any one, and that I am not suspected in the village?

Winif. Oh, quite sure – I can keep a secret myself, though I own I do like to know other people's. Not a doubt is entertained of your being any thing more than what I have introduced you for to my mistress; that is, as

Mr. Belford, a relation of my own, who has met with misfortunes in trade, and is come here to live cheap, and to seek employment.

Belford. I may yet then remain till I can satisfy my doubts, and come to some explanation with your charming mistress. My sister, Lady Zephyrine, was brought up here in Wales, with her grand-mother, and I have been so much abroad, that we have not met since we were children, and should now scarcely recollect each other.

Winif. Yes; but then her guardian, Mr. Deputy Gurnet.

Belford. I know he used to transact money-matters for my father, but I have never seen him; and then as for tenants or servants, you know this estate has lately descended to me, and I have never seen it but in the assumed character of Mr. Belford. But tell me, have you observed nothing which can lead to a discovery of Mrs. Derville's real situation?

Winif. No; nor do I know why you persist in believing her higher born than she says she is, I'm sure now, my mistress isn't half so smart as farmer Gloom, or farmer Hoard-grain's daughters.[a]

Belford. 'Tis the simplicity of Mrs. Derville's dress and manners which distinguishes her from the vulgar. Then such active, and yet discriminating benevolence[b] – such unobtrusive sorrow, such a love of retirement – all mark at least an elegant[c] and cultivated mind, if not a noble birth. Unaccountable woman! Then her aversion to marriage, her hatred to mankind –

Winif. Why, to be sure, my Lord, as I tell her, that's the most unnatural thing – Indeed, I know of nothing more so, except your Lordship's expecting my mistress to fall in love with you, under the character of my relation.

Belford. This reserve and mystery of Mrs. Derville, and her avowed hatred of men and marriage, made it impossible to assail her heart in any way but by interesting her benevolence. She would have feared and avoided me as Lord Orton; but to the poor and unfortunate Belford she listens with kindness.

Winif. Yes; with kindness enough to satisfy any reasonable man;[d] and I don't see why your Lordship should persist in this project of trying my mistress's sentiments – Love and a cottage against a coach and a coronet. Oh! 'tis too much[e] for poor woman's frailty, and I declare nothing but the gratitude I owe your Lordship for saving my father's life would persuade me to become your accomplice. But I hear my mistress. Pray retire a minute. [*Belford retires*.

Mrs. DERVILLE *enters, musing and disturbed*.

Mrs. Derv. (*as she enters*) Yes, Marry – be as miserable as you please – but I will neither be accessary to your folly, nor witness to your repentance. You shall leave me.

Winif. What can be the matter? You seem angry, Madam.

Mrs. Derv. Oh! nothing unusual – only a pair of idiots conspiring against the peace of their whole lives. – There's Alice says she's going to marry. (*with painful recollection*)

Winif. Lord, Ma'am, and if she does why should that make you angry? I'm sure its quite natural.

Mrs. Derv. So the vicious will tell you are their vices; but our reason was given us to correct them.

Winif. I'm sure, Ma'am, I never heard that people's reason was given them to prevent their marrying, though it might assist them to repent.

Mrs. Derv. Once more, I'll have[a] no marrying in my house.

Winif. Was ever any thing so barbarous!

Mrs. Derv. I'll not have my rest disturbed by the eves-dropping of your amorous clowns, who will swear and deceive you as systematically as a rake of quality. – But I wonder Belford does not return[b] – Heigho!

Winif. I'm glad, ma'am, you make some distinction in your hatred of the sex, however.

Mrs. Derv. Belford, you know, is useful to us; besides, he is your relation, and unfortunate; and I invent little services as a plea for assisting, without wounding him. (*in a tender melancholly accent*) Poor Belford has every claim – his manners are superior to his condition; and what is yet more rare, his mind is superior to adversity (*while speaking, Winifred goes into the house and*)

BELFORD *enters*.

Well, Sir, may I congratulate you? Have you succeeded in obtaining the employment you went in search of? or, if you have not found fortune in quitting our village, I hope at least you have found amusement. (*recovering her gaiety*)

Belford. I am indebted to you, Ma'am, for your good wishes; but I return with the unwilling independence of poverty; and for amusement, surely it is not a pursuit for the unhappy. (*in an humble and dependent tone*)

Mrs. Derv. (*gaily*) Ah! there, Sir, you mistake. What fills the haunts of dissipation, routs, balls, theatres? What crowds auctions with those who have no money, or exhibitions, with those who have no taste? What are the overflowing audiences of speaking puppets, and dumb-show dramas,[11] what but refugees from the misery of their own reflections?

Belford. Yes, Madam; and I believe amusement is as often furnished by the unhappy, as sought by them. Lord Cornuto's last *fête*, now,[c] was given only to convince the world, that the honours of his head did not make his heart ache: and Mrs. Forestall's great public breakfast by moon-light, was merely to ward off the crash of an unlucky monopoly. – Yes, Ma'am, the great secret of modern life is appearance – there would be no living with-

out concealing our miseries more cautiously than our vices. (*forgetting his disguise, and assuming an easy gaiety*)

Mrs. Derv. I fear, Sir, your severity is no more than justice; yet,[a] for a person who has not been in an elevated station, you are well acquainted with the follies of one.

Belford. (*recollecting himself*) Who so likely, Madam, to see the follies of the great, as the tradesman, who makes a fortune by their profusion, or is ruined by trusting them? – Oh! there is a great deal of fashionable knowledge to be acquired between the first humble solicitation for the honour of giving credit, and putting an execution in the house to recover the debt.

Enter Glib.

What a rencontre! By all that's unlucky, a servant of my father's, who must recollect me.

Glib. Good morning to you, Mrs. Winifred. (*seeing Mrs. Derville*) I beg pardon, Ma'am; but hearing the ladies at the Abbey talk of rambling this way, I thought you would like to have notice. Lady Zephyrine, Ma'am, and (*seeing Belford*) Lord Orton!!

Mrs. Derv. I understood his lordship was abroad. (*not perceiving Glib's surprize*)

Glib. Hem! I thought so too. (*to Winifred*) But, if I may believe my eyes, I see –

Winif. Well, and what do you see?[b] My brother's wife's first cousin, Mr. Belford. Is that any thing to gape at?

Belford. And now, I recollect, this is Mr. Glib. Nothing can be more lucky. Your mother's brother's wife, at her death, left you a trifling legacy, (*giving Glib a purse*) which I am very happy in having the honour to remit to you, Mr. Glib.

Glib. Faith, I'm my dead cousin's very humble servant, (*aside*) and my gratitude –

Belford. Oh, pray let your gratitude be silent. (*significantly*)

[*Mrs*. Derville *goes to another part of the stage, so as to hear, without joining the conversation*]

Winif. Well; but what company are arrived at the Abbey? I find there's to be great doings tomorrow on Lady Zephyrine's coming of age.

Glib. Why, at present, there's only Mrs. Gurnet; and the Deputy, come down to enjoy himself, as he calls it, though he's more tired of the country already, than ever he was of 'Change after dinner-time.[12] Then he fancies, because he's a citizen,[13] that every man who lives west of Temple-Bar has designs on his wife, and that all the morality in the kingdom centres in the city. 'Twas but yesterday he quarrelled with Mr. Jargon for picking up Mrs. Gurnet's glove.

Winif. Why, I thought he was an admirer of Lady Zephyrine's.

Belford. [*with impatience*) Is it possible Lady Zephyrine can admit such an admirer? Surely her birth –

Glib. Her birth! – Lord, Sir, you talk like one of Queen Elizabeth's maids of honour! Nobody minds these distinctions now. Money – money's your only master of the ceremonies, your usher of black rods, and white wands:[a] the Stock Exchange is the Herald's-office.[14] – A well-timbered estate supercedes all the genealogical trees in the principality; and a French cook and a turtle[15] shall bring together the peer of sixteen quarterings,[16] and his own shoemaker. It has, however, been reported, her ladyship's complaisance in admitting Mr. Jargon's visits, arises from her having lost a considerable sum to him at play.

Belford. (*with suppressed agitation*) Distraction! – that my sister – (*aside*) and that the necessity of this fellow's secrecy should oblige me to hear his impertinence. (*turning to Glib*) I thank you, Sir, for your very agreeable communications. But, pray, don't let us detain you.

Glib. Oh! I shall vanish. – Has your lordship any commands for the Abbey? (*aside, but with a tone of impertinence*.)

Belford. (*aside to Glib*) Yes, Sir – Silence, and a place in my service, or the indulgence of your tongue, and a tour through the horse pond. You understand me?

Glib. (*turning to Winifred*) Oh dear! yes – I have the readiest comprehension. – And you, my fair manufacturer of goat's whey, have you any commands?

Winif. Yes – silence, and my hand at the parish church; or a box on the ear – You understand me?

Glib. Oh, yes – But –

Winif. What are you debating between then – my lord's service and the horse-pond?

Glib. No, no – certainly not.

Winif. What, between matrimony and the box o' the ear?

Glib. Well, well – matrimony first, and the rest will follow of course. – But meet me by and bye at the next style,[17] and we'll deliberate on the choice of evils.

[*Exeunt Winifred and Glib separately*.

Mrs. DERVILLE, *who during the last part of the scene has sat down, comes forward*.

Mrs. Derv. This man's freedom seems to distress you, Mr. Belford.

Belford. No, Madam; I was only reflecting, that probably the lady at the Abbey was not very unjustly pourtrayed by this smart gentleman; for this

is one of the cases, where the manners of the artist vouch for the likeness of the picture.

Mrs. Derv. (*with gaiety and spirit*) Perhaps not altogether. Lady Zephyrine has beauty, vivacity, and elegance. Yet a votary to whatever is fashionable, anxious for the reputation of singularity; placing her vanity, not in being admired, but in being stared at; and wanting courage to avoid the follies herself, which she laughs at in others. But, with all this, generous and amiable, when she suffers her natural character to prevail over her assumed one.

Belford. She is fortunate, Madam, in an apologist: would it were possible to render you as favourable to our sex as you are to your own.

Mrs. Derv. (*seriously, and then assuming an air of melancholy*) Be satisfied, Mr. Belford, that I do justice to *your* worth as an individual; but do not expect me to become the panegyrist of your whole sex. – Alas![a] does the wrecked mariner describe, with a flattering pencil, the rock where his hopes perished?

Belford. (*with warmth and interest*) Wrecked at the very beginning of life's voyage! – Oh! Eugenia! (*correcting himself*) Madam! – Mrs. Derville! – would you but deign to confirm your good opinion of me, by explaining the mystery which hangs about you, perhaps the friendship that would participate your sorrows, might alleviate them.[b]

Mrs. Derv. 'Tis mere vulgar affliction which is relieved by communication: but you take this too seriously, (*resuming her gaiety*.) Come, you know you promised me to superintend our little harvest – I am as yet but a novice, and could as soon navigate a ship as regulate a farm.

Belford. (*with embarrassed earnestness*) I wish my time were of more value, that I might have more merit in devoting it to your service. Tell me, may I, in return, ask one hour's serious conversation?

Mrs. Derv. An hour! – impossible! – unconscionable! Have I not too many serious hours already? – So, call our reapers together – scold the clowns – and, pray, do not take it into your head that I am some princess tending goats incognita.

[*Exit*. (*singing*)

'Venus, now, no more behold me.'[18]

Belford. 'Tis thus she ever eludes any discovery of her real situation; and all I gain by the attempt, is a confirmation of that mystery which fills me with doubt[c] and apprehension. I wish Period were arrived – our stratagem will, at least, assure me of her disinterestedness. Yet, he is so whimsical with his double profession of lawyer and author, that I almost fear he may defeat the purpose of his disguise by his absurdities. Yet, if Mrs. Derville's mind is vain, or interested,[19] the temptations of title and fortune will not be diminished by a little of the ridiculous[d] in the possessor of them. [*Exit*.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I. – *A Saloon*.

Lady Zephyrine, Mutable, Gurnet, *and Mrs*. Gurnet.[a]

Lady Zeph. 'Twas delightful! – scoured the road, forded a river, took two hedges and a garden-gate, while all the male animals were left behind, gaping as though[b] they had seen a centaur.

Gurnet. Aye, you make my bones ache with the thoughts on't. I warrant your ladyship shall never get me on a hunter again. Lost my wig, frightened away my appetite – dogs yelping, puppies sneering – A plague of such sport, where all the glory is, who shall break their necks first.

Lady Zeph. Why, I thought, Mr. Deputy, you told me you had hunted before.

Gurnet. So I have; but not o'horseback. I have been twice at the Ball-fac'd Stag[20] on Easter Monday.

Lady Zeph. What, in a gig, I suppose, crammed with Mrs. Gurnet, all the children, and a plentiful provision of cold ham and cheesecakes.[c]

Gurnet. And very snug too. And, let me tell your ladyship, much more becoming than your mettlesome horse, dragoon caps,[21] and rivalship with your grooms.

Mrs. Gur. I beg, Mr. Gurnet, you won't expose us by your vulgarity. The Bald-fac'd Stag in Epping Forest indeed! 'Tis a martyrdom to a person of sentiment to hear you.

Gurnet. And yet I remember, my dear, when you used to make one of five, stuffed[d] in a little old chariot of the shape and dimensions of your father's till – and when the hunt was over, you wou'd[e] squeeze down country-dances at the Mansion-House, till your face was hardly distinguishable from your best red sattin gown.[f]

Lady Zeph. Now, really, Mr. Gurnet, you have the most uncivil memory. Nobody remembers any thing now, further back than the last year's almanack. Nothing makes more confusion in society than a retrospective head.

Mrs. Gur. Ah, Lady Zephyrine, my nerves were very robust then; but poetry, and the Minerva press,[22] refine the nervous system more than the whole college. I'm[g] become a mere sensitive-plant – pure æther.[23]

Gurnet. Like enough; but if your nerves have kept pace with your size or years, they're not much of the cobweb kind now; and as for æther – in my mind you partake more of the Dutch fog.

Mrs. Gur. Dutch fog! – Heavens! Mr. Gurnet! will nothing purify the grossness of your ideas? Was it for this that I addressed my ode to Ignorance, to you, in one of the morning papers? And didn't I strive to correct you, by drawing your character as a jealous German Baron in my

romance of 'The Horrid Concavity,' or 'The Subterraneous Phantoms?' But all my refinement is lost on you,[a] Mr. Gurnet.

Gurnet. No, no! I wish it was, Mrs. Gurnet, I shou'dn't care who found it. But I tell you, Mrs. Gurnet, I'm come here with my ward, to enjoy the country, and to breathe the fresh air; and its enough to be awoke in the night with your starting up to scrawl your ideas, as you call'em, without having my head stunn'd with your flights by day. 'Slife! one might as well be in the Stock Exchange.

Lady Zeph. Come, come,[b] you must consider the sublimity of Mrs. Gurnet's genius.

Gurnet. What business have women with any genius at all? Have I any genius at all?[c] Let her consider my poor head. I am sure I never argue with her, but I have a whizzing in my ears for four and twenty hours after, as though I had been in the heat of a battle. But now I think on't, how came your spark, Mr. Jargon, not to dine with us to-day?

Lady Zeph. Oh, fie! – he has, indeed, under pretext of visiting his uncle, followed me here; but we don't ask such people to our tables.

Gurnet. Not ask one to your dining-table, whom you admit every night to your card-table? Gad, that's comical enough!

Lady Zeph. If you had ever regarded my instructions, Mr. Gurnet, you wou'd have known that persons of fashion play cards with people at night, they are ashamed to speak to in the morning.

Gurnet. Then I say they're people of bad fashion. In the city, now, we eat with any body, but we play cards only with our friends.

Lady Zeph. Oh! mere Bank and Change notions. People of fine feelings are delicate in their society; but there's no society in a card-table: and the *rouleau*[24] of his Grace is neither brighter nor heavier than that of gambler, or –

Gurnet. Or a swindler. And let me tell your ladyship, that your people of *fine* feelings, are people of coarse morals. And I hope I shall never win a guinea that wasn't honestly got, or elbow a man round a table, whom I cannot shake by the hand in the street.

Lady Zeph. (*archly*) Why, really then, your card-parties must be on a small scale – No gambling; only now and then a snug job in the Alley.[25] No gambling there, guardian, eh?

Gurnet. Your ladyship's a wag – we only *speculate*; that's not gambling, you know.

Enter JARGON.

Jargon. Ladies, your devoted – I should have darted in upon you earlier – if I had supposed your ladyship ventured to encounter the horrors of the morning's sun.

Lady Zeph. Then you must have darted very soon; for we were out with the hounds before seven – wer'n't we, Mr. Gurnet?

Gurnet. Yes! oh yes! we were out. (*to Jargon*) Do you understand any thing of surgery? Can you set a few limbs?

Jargon. What, hunter a little too sprightly? None of your bowling-green work – Faith! your ladyship's a wonder. Every thing in every place. Why, I have seen you tremble at a bit of a gale in the Park, and swoon after a walk from the auction-room in Bond-street to Mrs. Puffabout's, your milliners.

Lady Zeph. Why, you wou'dn't have one bring one's opera-house languishings to Caernarvonshire: besides, 'tis Gothic to be delicate in the country. Lady Amazonia Suremark, who wou'd go into hysterics at the sight of a lame sparrow in Hanover-square, will kill you a couple of brace of birds before breakfast in Yorkshire.

Mrs. Gur. Elegant! What a subject for a sonnet in the manner of Petrarch!

Jargon. Gad, I like the idea. We'll adopt it, we'll propagate it. It shall be a system, and we'll call it Localism.

Lady Zeph. Do you know, Mr. Jargon, when you came in, we were discussing two of the most interesting topics –

Jargon. Afflict me with stupidity, but they must be eating or money.

Lady Zeph. You are very near it. Eating and cards.

Gurnet. Yes; and I was saying, that eating's the bond of society, and cards the bane of it.[a]

Jargon. Yes; but does your ladyship know we begin not to countenance eating – don't patronize eating much now – we don't feed voraciously – 'tis out.

Gurnet. Here's a fellow! Eating out! – Pray, Sir, do you eat in partnership? for I observe you seem to speak in the firm of the house.

Lady Zeph. Oh! don't you know – Mr. Jargon belongs to the order of ridicules?

Gurnet. What, is there more of them? Faith, I thought he'd been the only one of the sort.

Jargon. No – we're very numerous – I'll introduce you.[b]

Gurnet. Introduce me to a society where eating's out! I'd as soon be a capuchin.[c]

Jargon. Our business is to push fashions, oaths, phrases, shrugs, and gestures. Let a mode be ever so ridiculous, stamp it with the name of one of our order, and it passes current. Absurdity, absurdity is the grand secret to which we owe our success. The first three weeks we sport a thing, its laugh'd at; the fourth its abused, and the fifth becomes general.

Gurnet. But are you never, now, subject[d] to little accidents, such as hooting, pelting, and such sort of familiarities?

Jargon. Why, they do quiz[26] us now and then; but assurance does our business. If we were penetrable only five minutes, we should be scouted. So, we never trust dashing a new thing to a member who is not stare-proof. Our propagandists are all bronzed. Face – face is our motto – its your only system.

Gurnet. Aye, and a very proper one too; for, egad, I believe you're all face – and have neither brains, nor hearts.[a] But, odso,[27] Lady Zephyrine, what's become of the young man your father used to praise so? Why, he hasn't been here yet. Is he of the order of ridicules too?

Lady Zeph. You mean Mr. Bewley. (*aside, and sighing*) Alas! poor Bewley! That, Sir, has been over long since. (*affecting to recover her gaiety*) Oh! its ridiculous enough. You must know, when I first left Carnarvonshire, at my grandmother's death, the gentle swain followed me to town; and, for the first fortnight, we were the Damon and Pastora[28] of all our acquaintance; but I grew ashamed of being laugh'd at, and the gentleman grew angry with me for being so. And because I happen'd to go two nights in a week to Lady Rook's, he scolded, pouted, and set off for the country, to weave willows,[29] and sigh to the winds.

Gurnet. Nay, I don't wonder he shou'dn't like to trust his dove in Lady Rook's nest.[b]

Jargon. Sighs and winds – tears and streams – Gad, 'tis quite new[c] – It won't take, though. Your great passions are not the system now. We don't patronize the violent passions. (*sings*) 'To the winds, to the waves'[d30] – But we must see this Damon of your's[e] – a famous subject for quizzing.

Lady Zeph. (*with a tone of tenderness and dignity*) I doubt, Sir, if Mr. Bewley will renew his visits here. If he does, perhaps it may be charity to warn you that he has courage enough to make his virtues respected,[f] even by those who are too vicious to appreciate them.

Jargon. (*aside*) Whew! what, comedy on the stilts of sublime sentiments! – All[g] in the wrong system here.

Lady Zeph. (*to Gurnet*) Come, Sir, you know you were to attend us on a ramble to the pretty cottagers.

Gurnet. Aye, perhaps I may just step in, and take a syllabub.

Mrs. Gurnet. Well, now I think there's something most romantically interesting in a young woman's living in a farm here by herself, and nobody to know who she is, or whence she came. I'm sure there's some mystery.

Lady Zeph. 'Tis vulgar to be curious – and I really know no more, than that she is very young, very pretty, and very prudent, and doesn't seem accustomed to the state she is in.

Jargon. What, some farm-yard beauty, fresh from Marybone,[31] come to retrieve. I'll wait on you, ladies, though gallantry's not the existing system – But I love to scamper the rustics.

[*Exeunt Lady Zephyrine, Mrs. Gurnet, and Jargon*.[h]

Gurnet. If I had the making of laws, I think I could twist a system that should scamper you and your fraternity from Old North Wales to New South Wales.[a32] – Mr. Jargon – (*yawns*) – Well, 'tis vastly pretty, and rural here. Rooks cawing, and lambs bleating – (*yawns*) – I don't know how 'tis though, but the stillness of the night here prevents me from sleeping. Somehow, when one's in London, the rumbling of the late hackney-coaches and early stages, the jingling of the clocks, and the bawling of watchmen, does so lull one, as it were! – (*looks up*) – Yes, wind's fair for the West India fleet – hope sugars won't fall though.[33] Bad place for business this too – (*looks at his watch*) – But when one's come into the country to enjoy one's self, one shou'dn't be thinking of business.[b] No, I'll have done with Garlic-hill[34] – I'll retire, and end my days in the calm delights of a farm and a dairy – (*yawns*) – Now, if Alderman Credulous would but pop in, and let one know how things go on in the Alley – (*yawns*) – Nothing like rural retirement. [*Exit, yawning*.[c]

SCENE II. – *A Room at Ap-Griffin's House*.

Enter Ap-Griffin, *with a letter in his hand*.

Ap-Grif. Here's a pretty spark for you! His father mortgaged his estate twenty years ago, and now the law gives me possession, he writes to me about generosity. Aye, aye, when a man gets poor, he always talks a great deal about generosity. But, would generosity have built me this house? Would generosity have raised me from sweeping an office to be the master of one? Would generosity have rained a shower of diamonds on my head? – (*takes out a case of diamonds*) – There, now, was a lucky stroke! Comes an old fellow from the world's end, and before a soul could know who he was, or what was his business, dies suddenly in my house with these glitterers[d] in his pocket. Now, if I cou'd get rid of them! – Were either of my nephews honest, like myself – But no, Jargon's a rogue, and will cheat me; and Tim Period's an author and a fool, and will let others cheat him. – Ah! here comes Mr. Generosity.

Enter Bewley.

Bewley. I have called once more, Sir, to request I may remain in Bewley Hall a month longer.

Ap-Grif. It can't be, Sir – law must have its course. Zounds! hav'n't you had time enough? Hav'n't you appealed, reply'd, demurred, rebutted? – Why, you're the first man that ever thought a Chancery suit too short.

Bewley. And you are the first attorney that ever thought one long enough. But you know I have for some time been in expectation of hearing from

my uncle in India; and I still hope, through the kindness of my relations there, to be able to redeem my estate.

Ap-Grif. Why, you don't want to redeem your estate contrary to law? – Hav'n't[a] we a decree in our favour? Besides, one great estate always requires another to keep it up; and if we hadn't foreclosed, possession would have ruin'd you. So, the law only turns you out a little sooner than you'd have turn'd out yourself – I'm[b] for the just thing – Always respect the law.

Bewley. Hark you, Sir –[c] I'm no more bound by the law to tolerate your impertinence, than you are to possess gratitude or humanity – Therefore –

Ap-Grif. I'm gone, Sir – off the premises in an instant, though they're my own. So, Sir, to avoid ceremony about precedence, here's one door for me, and there's another for you. [*Exit*.

Bewley. Well said, old Quitam.[35] This fellow, now, was[d] the son of my father's coachman, and used to crop the terriers, catch moles, and scare the crows off the corn. But, hang him, he's beneath contempt. Heigho! what avails wealth to one who has lost the hope of happiness? Oh, Zephyrine! – But I lose time: I will at least make one effort to preserve her, if not for myself. With her lofty and volatile spirit, expostulation will be useless. No, I'll pique her – alarm her pride by impertinence – excite her jealousy by neglect – and who knows but she, who abandoned me as a rational and tender lover, may take a fancy to me as a rake and a coxcomb? – 'Allons! La feinte par amour.'[36]

SCENE III. – *Before Mrs. Derville's House*.

Enter Lady Zephyrine, *Mrs*. Gurnet, *and* Jargon.

Jargon. Really, now, 'twas atrocious and abominable[e] in your ladyship to quit Cheltenham[37] so early.

Lady Zeph. I can assure you, neither the atrocity or abomination of quitting Cheltenham (*in a ludicrous tone, in imitation, but not absolutely mimicking Jargon*) is imputable[f] to my inclination. But you know my rich uncle, Sir Caustic Oldstyle, after a family quarrel of twenty years[g] standing, has just emerged from his Cornish estate, and is coming to visit us. My father and Sir Caustic, though nearly of the same age, had the difference of a century in their manners. Lord Orton lived like his cotemporaries – my uncle like his ancestors; and I believe nothing but the death of Sir Caustic's only son[h] would ever have reconciled him to relations, who are so degenerate as to think and act like other people.

Jargon. What a loss he has inflicted on the fashionable world! – Why, your ladyship has scarce time to systemize the summer *costume*.