

Helen Craik,
Adelaide de Narbonne,
with Memoirs of
Charlotte de Cordet

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Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

Marianna D'Ezio

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INTRODUCTION

Published by William Lane in London in 1800, Helen Craik's *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet* is the third of five novels that Craik wrote between 1796 and 1805, all of them published anonymously at the Minerva Press.¹ Craik's authorship of four of her five novels—*Henry of Northumberland*, *Adelaide de Narbonne*, *Stella of the North*, and *The Nun and her Daughter*—is confirmed in Dorothy Blakey's *The Minerva Press*,² yet *Julia de St. Pierre*, supposedly Craik's first novel, has also been attributed to her, as Adriana Craciun notes, since the novel includes the poem "The Maid of Enterkin," ascribed to Craik in an essay on Craik's poetry published in the *Glasgow Herald* on 8 March 1919 and written by one of her descendants, George Neilson.³

¹ *Julia de St. Pierre* was Craik's first novel (1796), followed by *Henry of Northumberland, or the Hermit's Cell. A Tale of the Fifteenth Century* (1800), *Adelaide de Narbonne* (1800), *Stella of the North, or the Foundling of the Ship. A Novel* (1802) and *The Nun and her Daughter; or, Memoirs of the Courville Family. A Novel* (1805).

² Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790-1820*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 197.

³ George Neilson, "The Maid of Enterkin. Burnsiana I," *Glasgow Herald*, 8 March 1919, p. 7, and "The Maid of Enterkin: Poems by Helen Craik and Burnsiana," *Transactions and Journal of Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society* No. 44 (1925), pp. 64-76. On Craik's authorship, see Adriana Craciun, "'The New Cordays': Helen Craik and British Representations of Charlotte Corday, 1793-1800," in *Rebellious Hearts. British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, eds. A. Craciun and K.E. Lokke, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 193-232 (esp. p. 223, note 2). Adriana Craciun has been the first scholar to "discover" and focus her attention on Helen Craik, otherwise very little known besides her friendship with Robert Burns, and therefore this introduction is extremely indebted to her research and writings on Craik. Besides Craciun's exhaustive biographical and bibliographical details in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, her work on Craik also resulted in her excellent essay "The New Cordays," followed by her full-length studies *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005).

With the sole exception of *Henry of Northumberland*, set in the fifteenth century and based on Thomas Percy's "Hermit of Warkworth," Craik's novels are deeply rooted in the contemporary social and historical milieu of her time, with insistent references to the French Revolution and the beginning of the Napoleonic era, and are characterized by the author's interest in the issue of women's rights and their participation in political events in France. Like *Adelaide de Narbonne*, *Julia de St. Pierre* (1796), Craik's first novel, is directly engaged with the revolutionary period, and tells the story of French émigré Julia in the years 1792-92, with overt references to Craik's own biographical details.⁴ The story of *Henry of Northumberland* (1800), instead, narrated through the expedient of the "manuscript found," closely follows Thomas Percy's ballad "The Hermit of Warkworth," published in 1771, where Henry Percy, the Earl of Northumberland's son, supposedly killed on the battlefield at Shrewsbury by King Henry IV, is doomed to wander for about twenty years to escape the King's rage, until the hermit of Warkworth eventually reunites him with his faithful lover Eleanor. *Stella of the North* (1802) and *The Nun and her Daughter* (1805) turn the trope of the wandering character into a female heroine, usually an orphan, who becomes a fervent representative of women's right to self-determination, after several vicissitudes that employ the historical background and setting of early nineteenth-century Britain, Ireland, and France.

Among Craik's novels, *Adelaide de Narbonne* in particular, as Craciun also observes in her entry on Craik in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, may well be considered "a unique hybrid of historical Gothic," an early, if not the very first example of a historical novel in British literature dealing with the aftermath of the French Revolution and "possibly the first British fictional account of Marat's assassin, Charlotte Corday."⁵ The novel is indeed permeated with Gothic elements that draw their material directly from the more celebrated novels by Ann Radcliffe and Horace Walpole. As a matter of fact, Helen Craik's own biography can be read as a "Gothic" tale in itself. Born at Arbigland, Scotland around 1750, by the end of the century Craik seems to have fallen in love with "a groom or horsebreaker [...], a young man, whose name was said [...] to be

⁴ See A. Craciun, "The New Cordays," pp. 217-18, and p. 231, note 62.

⁵ Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes *et al.*, *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women: From the Earliest Times to 2004*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 82-83.

Dunn.”⁶ As “clandestine meetings took place between them,” Arnott reported, “the affair was brought to the knowledge of the Craik family, with the usual inevitable result”:

their anger blazed out furiously. Then came the tragedy. According to the tale, Dunn was sent to Dumfries for a message on horseback, and about the time he was due to return, the horse he had ridden came home riderless, and shortly afterwards the unfortunate man was found lying dead quite near Arbigland entrance, having been recently shot.⁷

“Public feeling,” continued Arnott, generally rejected the possibility that Dunn had committed suicide, and instead “was almost unanimous that it was a case of murder, and guilt was supposed to belong to one of the family.”⁸ William Craik, however, Helen Craik’s father, was a distinguished member of the local community, an “eminent agriculturist”⁹ and a “Justice of the Peace,”¹⁰ and the episode of Dunn’s death was therefore tacitly put aside. Shortly afterwards, Helen Craik left Arbigland and her father’s house never to return, and moved to her uncle’s, James Craik, at Flimby Lodge, Cumberland. Reminiscent of Giovanni Boccaccio’s Gothic tale on Lisabetta da Messina and her pot of basil (*Decameron* IV, 5), where an inconsolable Lisabetta learns that their brothers killed her lover Lorenzo whose body she later exhumes to bury his head in a pot of basil, the legend surrounding Craik has it that Dunn’s skeleton was removed from his loft in “a little hamlet called The Borrone” and “eventually sent to Miss Craik in England.”¹¹ According to another local folk tale (or “Some Kirkbean Folklore”), the ghost of a young man, supposedly that of Dunn, and that of a “lady in white” were said to have continued to haunt the spot where “the lifeless body of Dunn was found”:

A young woman living at a neighbouring farm was in the habit of meeting her sweetheart at a part of the road near the haunted spot, and in order to

⁶ Samuel Arnott, “The Romance of Helen Craik of Arbigland,” *Transactions and Journal of Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society* No. 11 (1923-24), pp. 77-83 (p. 78).

⁷ S. Arnott, “The Romance of Helen Craik,” pp. 78-9.

⁸ S. Arnott, “The Romance of Helen Craik,” p. 79.

⁹ James Grierson, “Account of William Craik, Esq. of Arbigland,” *The Farmer’s Magazine* No. XLVI (June 1811), pp. 145-54 (p. 145).

¹⁰ J. Grierson, “Account of William Craik,” p. 153.

¹¹ S. Arnott, “The Romance of Helen Craik,” p. 79.

secure herself from annoyance was wont to wear a white sheet when going to the trysting place.¹²

The mystery at play in Helen Craik's personal story indeed recurs in her *Adelaide de Narbonne*. Craik's novel draws heavily upon customary and well-oiled Gothic visual elements, from the landscape surrounding the castle and the rock of Narbonne, with its "thick and almost impenetrable forests" and "the venerable turrets of an old monastery, or half-ruined edifice magnificently great," to the "grottos," "recesses," "serpentine walks" and "labyrinths" framed into the "tremendous roar" of a majestic "cascade" that contribute to inspire a "thousand undefined sensations of horror or pleasure," "pleasing solemnity," and "sublime meditations." Furthermore, the spot seems to be "haunted by the spirits of bad people," and "strange things" happen in that place: lights issue from the rock ("strains of soft and celestial harmony seemed to issue from its solid substance"), mysterious music at times can be heard mingling with the roaring sound of the waterfall, "a large and very beautiful bird" appears several times, and, last but not least, "a lady in white" can be seen wandering through the intricate paths that lead from the castle to the rock of Narbonne. Craik also seems to have borrowed some elements of the plot and characters' names from Robert Jephson's tragedy *The Count of Narbonne*, first acted at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, on 17 November 1781, itself an adaptation from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).¹³ As one of the most successful Gothic dramatic adaptations of the time, Jephson's *Count of Narbonne*, a pseudo-Shakespearian tale written in blank verse, enjoyed a great deal of popularity and was performed twenty-one times between its opening night and the following year.¹⁴

¹² Samuel Arnott, "Some Kirkbean Folklore," *Transactions and Journal of Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society* No. 11 (1896), pp. 11-17 (p. 12).

¹³ Robert Jephson, *The Count of Narbonne. A Tragedy* (1781), Dublin: Printed by R. Marchbank, for the Company of Booksellers, 1781. On the textual relationship between Walpole's novel and Jephson's tragedy, see Sandro Melani, "Dal romanzo alla scena: *The Castle of Otranto* e *The Count of Narbonne*," *Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate* 60:3 (2007), pp. 299-320.

¹⁴ "It was performed an additional five times between 3 October 1782 and 22 May 1783," Temple J. Maynard, "Robert Jephson," in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Dramatists: Third Series*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989), p. 274. On Robert Jephson's career as a dramatist, see also Temple J. Maynard, "Introduction" to *The Plays of Robert Jephson*, ed. Temple J. Maynard (New York and London: Garland, 1980), and Martin Severin Peterson,

Within this stereotypical Gothic background, Craik inserts the complex plot of the main storyline of her novel, the story of the Countess Adelaide de Narbonne, whose character partly represents Craik's own rebellion to parental authority. Fashioned as the traditional Gothic heroine characterized by refined sensibility and virtue in distress, who staunchly reacts to the oppression of male authorities—her father, her first husband, and her second husband—Adelaide de Narbonne eventually succeeds in maintaining herself uncorrupted, and significantly survives to become a living testimony of untainted virtue and faithful love (although her true lover had long been dead at the very beginning of the novel), an example of a “free agent,” “uncontroled by the hand of despotism or caprice [and] sole mistress of [her] own actions.” What Helen Craik may have felt towards her own father, given that “the female part of his family were never permitted to interfere, in the smallest degree, with those occupations and pursuits, which he considered as more particularly his own,”¹⁵ the evident impossibility to become herself the “free agent” that she attempted to transfer onto the character of Adelaide de Narbonne, who overtly “execrate[s] such a tyrant” as her father, turned into an “attach[ment] to retirement from inclination,” for the author as well as for her fictional Adelaide. “Fond of independence” like Adelaide, Craik resentfully observed that her father had left her almost penniless, and yet she also proudly noted that she would be “the sole and last survivor of my name and family,”¹⁶ like Adelaide, who “still retained the name of her family.” In the bitterness of her life Adelaide de Narbonne, who had been “sacrificed in early youth to the avaricious disposition of a despotic and ambitious father” by a forced marriage and then finds herself once again under the yoke of a second imposed union with Monsieur De la Ville, carves out a niche for herself, that is, the rock of Narbonne, where she spends most of her time contemplating her family portraits, a retreat that allows her to be “secure from intrusion,” and where even her second husband dares not enter. Here Adelaide can find the long desired “emancipation from the heavy chains parental authority had imposed upon her” and indulge in her memories of a beloved past. Within the tradition of

Robert Jephson (1736-1803): A Study of his Life and Works, University of Nebraska Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism, No. 11 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1930).

¹⁵ “The natural consequence was, we were kept in total ignorance of every transaction that came under this prohibited denomination,” Helen Craik, “Letter, Miss Craik to James Grierson, Esq. dated Flimby, May 1810,” Appendix to J. Grierson, “Account of William Craik,” pp. 156-63 (p. 156).

¹⁶ H. Craik, “Letter,” p. 154.

the codified plot of the “female Gothic” novel,¹⁷ according to which “the orphaned heroine in search of an absent mother [or lover] is pursued by a feudal patriarchal father or his substitute,”¹⁸ the Countess of Narbonne also embodies the Gothic literary trope of a morbid “obsession with portraits.” The rock of Narbonne, as Angela Wright suggests, represents Adelaide’s “self-displacement”: her obsession for “inanimate canvas” thus “replaces [her] participation in societal structures” and the historical events that surround her.¹⁹ The setting of *Adelaide de Narbonne* is in fact the Vendée, the French region that in the years following 1793 witnessed the uprising of the population against the new Republic. The “Grand Royal Catholic Army of La Vendée” employed one of the earliest examples of a “guerrilla” campaign, but the Republican forces defeated the “rebellious Vendéans,” as Craik calls them, in the decisive battle at Savenay, on 23 December 1793, afterwards marked as the first modern genocide.²⁰ While, however, the events of the French Revolution and the Terror rage from all sides around her, the Countess of Narbonne remains safe in the rock, from where she and Victorine, Marie Antoinette’s secret niece, will eventually be rescued to a “happy” ending and a safe escape to Britain.²¹

Significantly, Adelaide’s story is *not* the only storyline in the novel. The story of Charlotte de Cordet, i.e. Charlotte Corday, Jean-Paul Marat’s

¹⁷ Ellen Moers first coined the definition of “female Gothic,” “a genre written by women for women [...], the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic,” in *Literary Women. The Great Writers*, New York: Doubleday, 1976, rpt. Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 90-8 (p. 90).

¹⁸ E. Moers, *Literary Women*, p. 90.

¹⁹ Angela Wright, “‘To live the life of hopeless recollection.’ Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic, 1780-1800,” *Gothic Studies* 6:1 (2005), pp. 19-29 (p. 20).

²⁰ See Reynald Secher, *A French Genocide: The Vendée*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

²¹ There really existed a Count de Narbonne-Lara who escaped to Britain. He was the illegitimate son of King Louis XV, was brought up in Versailles and later became Minister of War. During the revolution, the Count escaped to Britain and mostly resided with other aristocratic French émigrés, in particular at Juniper Hall. Madame de Staël helped him run away from France: “[he] was concealed in her house when she learnt one morning that his name was placarded at the corner of her street as a traitor,” Constance Hill, *Juniper Hall. A Rendezvous of Certain Illustrious Personages during the French Revolution including Alexandre d’Arblay and Fanny Burney*, London: John Lane, 1914, pp. 19-20. The Count returned to France in 1801 and joined Napoleon’s army. He died in Germany in 1813.

murderer, is undoubtedly more than a mere “appendix” to Adelaide’s story, as the title of the novel would seem to suggest. On one hand, Countess Adelaide de Narbonne embodies all the traditional definitions of respectable feminine values and virtues, resulting in the strong public approval by her friends, her neighbours, and every character who happens to meet her, so that “[t]he widowed bride had the good fortune to be deservedly adored in the neighbourhood,” and “had ever been remarked to possess female delicacy in an eminent degree.” On the other hand, Charlotte de Cordet blatantly voices the violation of all codes of feminine behaviour that Adelaide ideally represents. Charlotte is repeatedly described in terms of differentiation with respect to Adelaide: while the Countess viewed “the world and its enjoyments [...] with indifference,” Charlotte is depicted as “[a]nxious to dispel the mist of prejudice, and eager to convince her that the opinions of the virtuous, the rational, the wise and the just, are nearly the same on all occurrences of moment.” Adelaide’s “temper and disposition” are extremely reserved, while Charlotte, rather than living in seclusion and painful contemplation of the past, “[i]n times of public danger she thought the moral duties of active life of much greater importance.” More significantly, and in clear-cut opposition with Adelaide’s overt femininity, Charlotte is often remarkably characterized in terms of her unusual masculine traits (“the masculine fortitude of mind she possessed,” for instance), and while her mind and soul are acknowledged as “superior to the generality of her sex,” her sensibility is “so acute” and her “passions so sanguine.” Unlike Adelaide, Charlotte thus seems to be unable (or unwilling) to endorse any model of resignation and docility; instead, she openly defies the traditional patriarchal system of values that Craik, as well as many other women authors writing on the French Revolution, symbolically viewed in the characters of Marat, Robespierre and the whole system of the Terror in post-revolutionary France.

Although Craik’s two heroines endorse two opposite political views—Countess Adelaide de Narbonne is an aristocratic who aims at maintaining her property and status as a *ci-devant* member of the nobility, while Charlotte de Cordet is a Republican who “wished for reforms”—they both try to challenge and subvert the stereotype of the delicate, passive woman (whether wife or daughter), thus introducing the archetype of the “new woman,” still suspended between the private and the domestic space of the house, and the political and public sphere of politics and current events,

thus signalling a substantial reformation in women's position in society.²² For Craik, women were indeed ready to pursue a more active participation in public and political events of their time. Through their mutual protection and support, Adelaide and Charlotte ideally represent a strong critique and opposition, with all their facets, to male power, which in turn is represented by Marat as a synecdoche of the Terror and unjust oppression. "Sanguinary" and "bloodthirsty," Marat exemplifies the traditional Gothic villain in that he threatens the heroines' virtue, property and most of all their willingness to become "free agent[s]." Possibly inspired by Helen Maria Williams' description of Charlotte Corday as "a rational political actor" rather than a "sexless monster" or an "angel of assassination,"²³ Craik's female characters are "revolutionary" in the genuine sense of the word: they both refuse to be domesticated, and are also unconventional heroines, since their final pursuit in the novel is not love, as would be demanded of the heroine of an eighteenth-century novel, but change.

In fact, excluding Austin Marat (Jean-Paul Marat's supposed nephew) and a few other characters linked to the regime of the Terror, all of the male characters in *Adelaide de Narbonne* are only cursorily described and gradually fade away in the fabric of the novel. Their heroism only belongs to the realm of battlefields, in opposition, for example, to De la Ville's "rapacity and profusion, ostentation and thoughtless folly." Such colourless male characters are constantly obscured by their female counterparts, for whom, as in the case of Charlotte de Cordet, they even feel a sense of reverential awe and inferiority:

During [Charlotte's] harangue De la Ville's countenance underwent several changes; her reasoning was so just, and her elocution so graceful, easy, and persuasive, that, in spite of his usual vanity, he found himself secretly forced to acknowledge that a woman was for once his superior in abilities.

²² On this point, see also Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries. Five Women Novelists of the 1790s*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. From this perspective, as Adriana Craciun argues, Craik can be considered on the same page as other British women writers commenting on the French revolution and its repercussions on women's position in society, such as Helen Maria Williams, Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson, given also that Craik quotes extensively, for example, from Williams (*Letters written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England*, 1791) and Robinson (*Walsingham; or, the Pupil of Nature*, 1797) throughout the novel.

²³ Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, Caroline Wigginton, *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 313-14.

Craik closes Adelaide de Narbonne with a neutral maxim (“No degree of acknowledged evil ought, therefore, to be tolerated, even though occasional good may sometimes happen to result from it”) that cleverly allows her to describe Charlotte’s “transaction” impartially (i.e. Marat’s murder) and thus remain on the safe side with respect to the political views she illustrates throughout the novel. Both Adelaide de Narbonne and Charlotte de Cordet, however, contributed in demonstrating, through Craik’s skilful use of a “double-voiced discourse,”²⁴ that the opportunity for women to come out of the private sphere of the domestic—the house, the seclusion of a Gothic castle, the isolation of the rock of Narbonne—and pursue a dynamic participation in the public sphere was more than attainable. Only a few years later, Jane Austen’s novels, and particularly *Emma* (1815), will definitively show that the road to change was open to women (and women writers) who were finally willing to challenge all “masculine social prerogatives”²⁵ even at the cost of their own happiness.

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²⁴ E. Ty, *Unsex’d Revolutionaries*, p. 116.

²⁵ Susan M. Korba, “‘Improper and Dangerous Distinctions’: Female Relationships and Erotic Domination in *Emma*,” *Studies in the Novel* 29:2 (1997), pp. 139-63. See also Marianna D’Ezio, “Musing on the difference of woman’s destiny”: Reconsidering *Emma*’s ‘Happy’ Ending,” in *Jane Austen’s Emma: Revisitations and Critical Contexts*, eds. F. Marroni and G. Lauri-Lucente, Rome: Aracne, 2011, pp. 169-83.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet was published anonymously in four volumes by William Lane at the Minerva Press in 1800 and never reprinted, nor translated in other languages.

The present text is taken from the original edition. We have retained the spelling and punctuation of the original, except for a few cases in which, in our judgment, editorial interventions only aimed at simplifying the reading of the novel.

**ADELAIDE DE NARBONNE, WITH MEMOIRS
OF CHARLOTTE DE CORDET**

**A TALE IN FOUR VOLUMES
BY THE AUTHOR OF HENRY
OF NORTHUMBERLAND**

“War! civil war!

Ensanguin’d fury, with each horror fraught,
Pour’d forth by vengeful Heav’n on erring man,
To humble human pride, and prove how weak
Is boasted wisdom, when o’er reason’s bounds
Wild passion holds the sway!”

“Regretter ce ceux qu’on aime, est un bien,
en comparaison de vivre avec ce qu’on hait.”

ROCHEFAUCAULT¹

VOLUME I

CHAPTER I

“Time’s wheel moves on,
With life’s dread changes fraught.”

Sacrificed in early youth to the avaricious disposition of a despotic and ambitious father, Adelaide de Narbonne² had the supreme felicity of finding herself a widow almost from the hour she became a bride.

As she was universally adored in the neighbourhood, and had never concealed her unconquerable aversion to this union, so sudden an emancipation from the heavy chains parental authority had imposed upon her, was considered as a fortunate circumstance by all her acquaintance; and she had now nearly completed her seventh lustre in a state of “single blessedness,”³ when a hasty summons, on business of an important, but private nature, required her immediate presence in the capital. Fond of independence, and attached to retirement from inclination, she had long and uniformly rejected every idea of renewing similar engagements with those into which she had formerly entered with so much reluctance. The world and its enjoyments were by her viewed with indifference; consequently it was not without regret that she saw herself once more compelled to enter it, and quit her peaceful country residence “for the busy haunts of men,”⁴ in the now agitated and sanguinary city of Paris.

To persevere in retaining the free, but solitary condition of widowhood, had hitherto apparently been the Countess’s determined intention. But weak are the resolutions of a woman not yet in the decline of life. Every one concluded that Madame de Narbonne would never a second time appear at the altar of Hymen, and Madame de Narbonne certainly concluded so herself: what then was the astonishment of the neighbourhood when Madame de Narbonne returned from the metropolis with a husband! A husband too in appearance every way the reverse of herself in temper and disposition! Strange as this circumstance may be thought, it is nevertheless true; and, should any inconsistency be remarked in it, let those, whom it may concern, apply to that heterogeneous composition, *Human Nature*, for a solution of the case, and its attendant difficulties. At present matters of greater consequence demand our notice.

Uncontrolled mistress of herself and actions, it could not, of course, be supposed that her inclinations had suffered any violence by submitting to

so unexpected a change of situation; yet the soft traces of melancholy, long visible on her beautiful countenance, seemed considerably deepened since her mysterious journey to the capital had taken place. Nothing indeed bespoke an increase of happiness, though surrounded with all the advantages that are generally imagined conducive to its attainment. Indebted to nature and education for every endowment, every amiable qualification hitherto possessed by the mind of woman, her face and figure were formed in a mould worthy of the soul that in earlier days had once illuminated them. Her height rose to the majestic; her manners were femininely mild, and elegant; every movement was graceful, every thought and look replete with good sense, innate modesty, benevolence, and sensibility. Her eyes were a deep blue; her hair a light brown, with dark eyebrows and lashes. Though verging on her thirty-fifth year, she appeared considerably younger: the tranquil and regular style of life in which she had long indulged, contributed, no doubt, to this deception. The bloom of early youth was however fled; but the striking expression of her fine features had become more interesting, and her figure preserved all its pristine attractions. This fabric, so nearly allied to perfection, seemed, nevertheless, now hastening fast to decay. Secret grief, that slow but sure underminer of the human frame, already began to sap its fragile foundations, and, in spite of every endeavour to the contrary, too plainly discovered that the world and its concomitant miseries bore hard upon a constitution ill calculated to resist their depredations.

The case, however, was widely different with M. de la Ville; he entered upon his newly acquired possessions with much the same kind of pleasurable sensations as those experienced by *that respectable* character, the *owner of a Guineaman*, while surveying his cargo of human merchandise on its first departure from the coast of Africa.⁵ Heedless of the means by which it has been procured, he coolly reckons over ideal profits, without once taking into consideration those future and numberless accidents which may probably occur to disappoint expectation before the vessel arrives at the “man-degrading mart”⁶ in the West. With feelings of a similar description did M. de la Ville contemplate the venerable and magnificent Castle of Narbonne and its extensive domains, as he led its dejected looking heiress up to the gate of the first court, and, proudly swelling with ideas of ill-concealed importance, whispered to himself, with a haughty air, “All that I now see, is henceforth mine!” In fact, M. de la Ville was one of those considerate personages who ever faithfully adhered to the practical part of a certain old proverb, which informs us “that charity begins at home;” a proposition so interestingly self-evident,

as scarcely to have been once overlooked where it could prove experimentally beneficial to his views or intentions.

Vain, insolent, and versatile in temper, the ardour of gratification seemed equally unchecked by retrospection on the past, or anxiety for the future. Self was the bloated idol before which he bent; and, provided no impediment occurred to frustrate any favourite scheme of his own, he cared little whether she, by whom he acquired his consequence, was happy, or otherwise. Madame de Narbonne seemed merely considered in the light of a necessary appendage annexed to the title by which he held his present possessions—not as the principal source of its derivation. To such treatment, however, she was evidently insensible; and it was only when he had some point to carry, or when the changeableness of his disposition led him to an opposite but momentary line of conduct, that the intenseness of her feelings became painfully heightened, and her distress too much for concealment to endure with any degree of patient resignation.

Rapacity and profusion, ostentation and thoughtless folly, had no small share in the composition of De la Ville's mind; but though in general a slave to his passions, and often completely blinded by the uncommon portion of vanity which Nature, in a playful mood, had assigned as the most certain and inoffensive means of counteracting more dangerous propensities, he was not, nevertheless, so continually its dupe, as not to see and detest at times the servility and selfishness of those, who availing themselves of this prominent feature in his character, endeavoured, by the grossest adulation, to turn it to their own advantage. It must be confessed, however, that this seldom happened to be the case; the infatuation of unexpected prosperity smoothed the way to flattery, and left but few impediments to its progress. It was even tacitly felt as the strongest acknowledgment of his own superiority; of course, what would have put another person on his guard against the machinations of the designing and interested, only served in this instance to increase the fatality of self-deception, which had taken hold of his ideas from the sudden attainment of an elevation, once, perhaps, infinitely beyond his most sanguine expectations to reach. He appeared to be some years younger than his wife, no way remarkable in person or manners, unless where the success of some favourite project rendered it necessary to call in the assistance of the latter as an auxiliary; and then his whole deportment and behaviour assumed a degree of pliability and accommodating softness otherwise foreign to his real character and sentiments.

In the domestic line, however, these gentler traits were but sparingly administered. There, as too frequently happens, his natural disposition

appeared in its genuine colours, while the brighter ones were reserved for public exhibition. Apparently not born, and only of late accustomed, to figure in the higher walks of life, his education had probably been too superficial to restrain powerful or perverted propensities within the laudable bounds of moderation and self-command. The most transient knowledge of this man's principles and conduct was sufficient to convince the world that Madame de Narbonne had rather paired than matched herself, and certainly by no means changed her former condition for a better one. Such a choice, if from choice it proceeded, proved a strong instance of the inconsistency of the female heart; but as that, in either sex, is a difficult matter to develop, we shall leave the investigation of its intricate composition to those who are fonder of, or fuller qualified for, so disagreeable an undertaking; and therefore conclude the subject, as Josephus concludes almost every chapter in his books, by saying, with all due deference to human nature, that "of this every woman will judge as she thinks proper."⁷

Such seemed to be the situation of Madame de Narbonne and her Parisian husband; and such the ideas entertained upon it, at the commencement of their matrimonial career, in the neighbourhood of La Vendee.

Lineal descendant, and sole remaining heir of her illustrious House, the Countess had long retired from the world to the uninterrupted enjoyments of her favourite pursuits in the tranquil and princely domains of her noble ancestor. There the children of want or misfortune found a sure relief to their misery. Pecuniary assistance, or the soothing resources drawn from a superior mind, as either happened to be required, were ever ready at the call of distress. Madame de Narbonne delighted to indulge in those sensations of mental luxury, only experienced by the happy few, whose hearts are sufficiently humanized to feel the good they dispense to others, reflected back on their own bosoms: and fortunately wealth and inclination here united equally for that purpose.

The Castle of Narbonne was situated in a deep and romantic valley, not far from the town of Fontenay-le-Comte, in the late province of Poitou.⁸ Thick and almost impenetrable forests in many parts covered the high cloud-capped tops of the mountains that surrounded the back, and one side of the building: here and there the venerable turrets of an old monastery, or half-ruined edifice magnificently great, in spite of the devastations of all-subduing time, proudly rose to view on some awe-inspiring eminence, amidst trees with which it was nearly coeval; while the distant sound of the Convent bells in the neighbourhood, gave a pleasing solemnity to the scene, and in a particular manner led the mind to the calm, still enjoyment

of the sublime meditations produced by such a prospect. On the front of the Castle lay an extensive park well furnished with deer, and completely sheltered from the variations of the season by a number of beautiful and thriving plantations. Several ornamental structures, of a more modern date, were here placed by the hand of superior taste and judgment, equally formed for the purposes of use or embellishment. To the east of the park were some grottos finished with shell-work; and many valuable productions, from the bowels of the earth, glittered on their vaulted roofs. These recesses were formed in excavations of the rocks that fantastically hung over the river La Vendee, or confined its waters to their proper channel. That stream, of late so fatally celebrated, here wound calmly along, unless when impeded in its passage by the intervention of those steep and rugged fragments that in different situations presented themselves to view; then, with collected force, it rushed over every difficulty, and dashing down the irregular sides of its rocky and towering obstructions, stunned the musing inhabitant of the grotto with a thousand undefined sensations of horror or pleasure, as he listened to its tremendous roar, or observed the white foam of the cascade partially sparkling through the verdant foliage in picturesque and innumerable directions.

The Castle itself stood on a gentle acclivity; the outer court, spacious and extensive, where, in the days of former times, the prancing steed, adorned with warlike trappings, and the shining coat of mail, distinguished by the antiquity of its armorial bearings, were once proudly contemplated, now exhibited a very different and less hostile aspect. A collection of the finest shrubs, composed of every thing rare and beautiful in nature, met the eye on every side; amongst these a thousand little feathered songsters hopped about, fearless of danger, because unaccustomed to molestation; and repaid their mistress with vocal harmony, for being allowed to feast, with impunity, on the rich fruit-trees, whose luxuriant branches bent beneath the weight of their own blooming and delicious productions.

A number of serpentine walks were formed in a grove between the building and the river; these ultimately led to the latter, but were so contrived, that the stranger often found himself involved in labyrinths from whence it was difficult to extricate his steps. The situation of this grove was low, and such as did not exclude the river from view, though the prospect was occasionally interrupted by it. On the banks of the stream was an extensive rock, of a gloomy and grotesque appearance, whose enormous size was in some measure concealed by the thick, high, and sombre foliage that shaded it round. One side of it hung, frowning in terrific majesty, over a part of the water, which traditional report described as fatal to venture upon, and never attempted without certain danger.