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Frances Burney d'Arblay in England to Alexandre d'Arblay in France: Long-Distance Sociability

Peter Sabor

TEXTE

1 On 15 April 1802, the novelist and dramatist Frances Burney d'Arblay left her home in the Surrey countryside, Camilla Cottage, to join her beloved but penniless émigré husband Alexandre d'Arblay in France. It was her first-ever visit to his native country. The signature of the Peace of Amiens in October 1801 had enabled him to return to France for the first time in eight years, with a view to regaining some of his property, confiscated during the Revolution, and qualifying for his pension as an army artillery officer. Frances, together with Alexander, their seven-year-old son, followed him six months later, assuming that the family would return in a year or so, but the renewal of war between France and England in May 1803 overturned their plans. The d'Arblays resided first in Passy and then, from 1805, in Paris, and Frances would not return to England until August 1812.

2 After eight years abroad, Frances made her first concerted effort to visit her friends and family—above all her father, Dr Charles Burney, now aged eighty-four, confined to his apartment at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, and in poor health. In May 1810, she succeeded, thanks to the efforts of the comte de Narbonne and Joachim Lebreton, in obtaining a passport for herself and her son: it has been preserved in the Archives nationales, where it was recently discovered by the historian Simon Macdonald, to whose assistance with this article I am much indebted. In a retrospective account, written in about 1825, Frances states: "I forget, now, for what spot the passport was nominated—perhaps for Canada—but certainly not for England[1]." In fact, as the passport itself indicates, she had received permission to travel to Norway, which was not at war with France; she probably hoped to board a vessel bound for Norway, which would allow passengers to disembark at an English port. The passport had been granted, as she notes in her account, because she

"was known to have lived a life the most inoffensive to Government, & perfectly free from all species of political intrigue; & as I should leave behind me such sacred Hostages as my Husband & my son." By 1825, fifteen years after the passport was issued, Burney had apparently forgotten that Alexander was included in the document and given permission to leave France with her. In the event, however, the plan was aborted when she learned that Napoleon's blockade was becoming more severe than ever: "a universal Embargo," as she wrote, "was laid upon every Vessel, & … not a Fishing Boat was permitted to quit the Coast[2]."

3 After undergoing a mastectomy for breast cancer, without anaesthetic, on 30 September 1811 and recuperating sufficiently to travel, Frances renewed her plans to return to England. Once again she applied for a passport for herself and Alexander. No such application could be made for her husband; as a French military officer, any attempt by him to travel to an enemy nation would have been considered treasonable. On this occasion, the passport (which is not extant), issued in June 1812 and "procured with much less facility than the first," as she recalled in her retrospective account, was assigned for travel either to Newfoundland or to "some Coast of America."[3] They would travel on an American ship, the *Mary Ann*, bound for New York but intending to call first at Dover, where passengers could disembark. Frances and Alexander, now aged seventeen, set sail from Dunkirk in mid-August, arriving two days later not at Dover but at Deal, where the ship was seized as an enemy vessel—the United States having declared war on Britain two months earlier. As British subjects, however, Frances and her son were free to remain in the country—and she would do so for over two years, separated for most of this period from Alexandre.

4 During their Passy and Paris years, the d'Arblays had had little communication with family and friends in England. Most letters sent through the regular mails were confiscated by the French authorities. On rare occasions, individuals travelling from and to France agreed to carry letters with them, but this was a risky procedure; such documents were frequently intercepted and confiscated, and both the bearer and the recipient, as well as the sender, were likely to incur heightened surveillance of their activities. For this reason, Dr Burney seldom attempted to communicate with his daughter during her long

absence from England, and even discouraged other would-be correspondents from doing so [4]. The d'Arblays took part in an active social world in Paris, while her father did likewise in London, but there was, of necessity, little contact between their respective milieus. Frances also made a point of carrying no letters with her on board the *Mary Ann* from her French friends wishing to get in touch with exiled friends and relations, agreeing instead to write such letters herself on their behalf after she had landed and, where necessary, to meet these exiles in person [5].

5 Once she was settled in England, however, it was imperative for Frances to correspond with Alexandre as frequently as possible. She was eager to give him news of the extended Burney family, and of the friends he had left behind in 1801, as well as to seek his advice on practical matters. Alexandre, in turn, was much concerned about his wife and son's wellbeing and about her progress in completing what would be her final novel, *The Wanderer*. They wrote to each other frequently throughout a separation that would last for almost two years, until Alexandre returned briefly to England at the end of April 1814, but most of these missives were intercepted or went astray. In a letter to her husband of 31 August-post 23 September 1812 Frances switched briefly from English to French to ask plaintively: "Quand aurai-je encore de vos nouvelles, Oh mon ami! que deviennent toutes vos Lettres, et où vont elles? car de les posseder même ne me rendroit pas plus sûr que je ne suis de leurs existences. Cinq fois je vous ai écrit, sans savoir si jamais vous avez reçu une seule ligne de moi [6]."

6 One of the intercepted items, however, has come to light: an exceptionally long and interesting letter from Frances to her husband of 18-25 May 1813, together with a letter to him from Alexander and the passport issued to Frances in 1810. All are in a file discovered by Simon Macdonald, housed with the huge mass of confiscated documents in the Archives nationales at Pierrefitte-sur-Seine. The letters by Frances and Alexander had been seized by French authorities. The one by Frances, published for the first time in the second volume of *The Additional Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, throws much new light on her life in England in 1813, on her friends and family members there, and on her work on *The Wanderer* [7] .The letter by Alexander, which has not yet appeared in print, also contains some

revealing information on the Burney family, and especially on his uncle, the classical scholar, bibliophile, and former headmaster of Greenwich School, Charles Burney, Jr.

7 Frances's letter is in part a response to one from Alexandre, sent from Paris on 12 April. It reached her in the same way that some of his other letters had done: enclosed in a letter from the French traveller and author François-Balthazar Solvyns to his English wife Mary Anne (Greenwood) Solvyns, then living in England, who forwarded it to its recipient. Solvyns had useful connections both in France, with members of the Imperial Government such as Joseph Fouché, duc d'Otranto, Minister of Police, and in England with John Reeves, Superintendent of Aliens. These affiliations allowed him to send his own letters from France and England with relative impunity, while enclosing within these sealed documents the letters of favoured friends, such as Alexandre d'Arblay.

8 In his letter of 12 April, Alexandre urges Frances to write to him whenever she can and to do so in French, not in English: "Au nom du ciel ne neglige aucune occasion de m'en donner des nouvelles et surtout ayez soin de m'ecrire toujours en français, comme tu l'as fait dans ta lettre du 8 qui m'est parvenue si promptement, tandis que je <n'ai encore reçu qu'1> ou 2 qui <étaient en anglais [8]>." Replying to her remark that she has received only seven letters from her husband in eight months—since her arrival in England in August 1812—Alexandre assures her that he has written over sixty, "quelquefois deux dans le même jour, quand deux occasions se sont presentées." It seems, then, that only about one in nine of his letters survived the journey across the channel: the remainder were confiscated and presumably destroyed by authorities in France or in England. According to Alexandre, letters sent to France in English were more likely to be confiscated than those written in French; there is no evidence to support his claim, however, and Frances continued to write to him primarily in her mother tongue.

9 In her letter of 18-25 May 1813, Frances expresses confidence at the outset that it would reach Alexandre safely. It was to be delivered in person by Mary Anne Solvyns, who was then returning to France, and Frances believed that this would guarantee its safe arrival. At the same time, she regretted that in future she would have no way of

communicating with her husband. "I must grieve," she wrote, "that Mrs. Solvyns departs—how will you, then, hear of us at all? It seems as if all my other conveyances had failed." [9]

10 Taking advantage of what she saw as a final opportunity, then, Frances not only wrote a letter of extraordinary length but also included a substantial number of other items, none of them known to be extant, in what must have been a bulky package. These include a copy of a sermon by her brother Charles, preached at St Paul's Cathedral, and drawings by her novelist half-sister, Sarah Harriet Burney, of the infant daughter of their niece Charlotte Barrett, whom Alexandre had never seen. There was also a cache of additional letters: from Alexander to his mother; from Sarah Harriet Burney to Alexandre; from Amelia Angerstein, a family friend, to Frances; and three letters by Dr Charles Burney, one to Alexandre himself and two others [10].

11 More important than any of these missing letters was one that has survived: from seventeen-year-old Alexander, written in French of remarkable stiffness, with Frances herself observing that Alexandre would be amused by his son's "solemn preachings [11]." Alexander begins by urging his father to take better care of his health: "au nom de Dieu ne travaillez pas à cet excès sûrement dangereux, et qui peut être serait fatal [12]." Despite its sanctimonious tone, however, Alexander's letter contains some revealing information. Eager to impress his father with the breadth of his studies, he tells him in some detail about the remarkably rigorous curriculum at Greenwich School, where he was in the final year and being taught by his cousin, Charles Parr Burney. The boys, he writes, work diligently at Latin, Greek, and mathematics in particular, and, knowing how to please his father, who was himself a poet, he boasts of his prodigious feats of memorizing Latin, French and English poetry:

> J'apprends par coeur à peu près 100 vers de Racine ou de Corneille ou de Voltaire tous les jours dans les vacances de Midsummer, et aussi de Milton, Shakespeare, Dryden, ou Pope, jusqu'à ce que je sache tous leurs plus beaux morceaux, dont je sais déjà un assez bon nombre; j'ai dans ma tête tout l'art Poëtique de Boileau, et j'espere dans peu en pouvoir dire autant de la Henriade et des Odes d'Horace dont j'apprends 2 ou 3 par jour.

12 Alexander also provides a fascinating sketch of the "magnifique bibliotheque," as he calls it, of his uncle Charles Burney, who had been headmaster of Greenwich School for many years and now held a clerical living at nearby Deptford. In this collection:

> des livres rangés par ordre & matières remplissent une chambre d' à peu près 20 pieds de large sur 80 ou 100 de long; quelque jour je m'amuserai à les compter. Cependant il parait que dans la vôtre il y a beaucoup de livres Grecs et autres très rares qu'il donnerait tout au monde pour trouver; et il y a tel livre rare pour lequel il a donné jusqu'à 50 louis, que vous avez eu pour presque rien. D'ailleurs ses livres ne sont pas dans une chambre confortable comme celle-là, mais humide, et dernierement plusieurs d'entre eux ont été fort endommagés par l'humidité.

13 Charles had been an avid book-collector since his youth; quite unbeknownst to Alexander, he had been sent down from Cambridge University in 1778, after only a year of studies at Gonville and Caius College, for stealing ninety-two volumes of classics from the University Library[13]. Despite this setback, which blighted his professional life for many years, he went on to amass one of the finest libraries of his time. After his death in 1817, his vast collection of books, manuscripts and newspapers was bought by the British Museum for £13,500[14]. As Sophie Coulombeau observes, "in the parliamentary debate addressing its acquisition, ministers declared it 'peculiarly calculated for the Library of a Public Institution', predicted that it would provide 'a valuable encouragement to literature', and repeatedly compared it, in terms of value, to the Elgin Marbles [15]".

14 Young Alexander was fortunate to see his uncle's library shortly before it would be dispersed. His remark about several of the books having been badly damaged by dampness is echoed in a letter from Dr Charles Burney to Charles sent just two days later, on 21 May 1813. Here Dr Burney tells his son of a disturbing report that has reached him through his friend Lady Crewe:

> she tells me a frightful story of what has happened at Deptford by the *dry rot*! I hope the acc^{t} has reached Gros. Street by rumor, not from yourself: for she is anxious to hear that your Lib^{y} may not have suffered "more than it has done already by *diseased timber*!"— How is

> this, my dear son? No such calamity was ever hinted to me by yourself[16].—

15 Charles Burney's reply, presumably confirming or denying the bad news, is not known to be extant—but Alexander's remark might well have had some substance, while also bringing some consolation to his exiled father: Alexandre's library was, admittedly, far smaller than his brother-in-law's, but at least his books were undamaged. Five months previously, in a letter to Dr Burney, Frances had exulted over her visit to Camilla Cottage, which she was seeing for the first time since her return from France and "which contained our whole Library *in these parts*." Although Alexandre "had prepared himself to hear" that it was now "a mass of moths, mildew, Cobwebs, & insects," Frances had found the books in perfect repair:

> The few that were new & handsomely bound, are as bright as if just bought; the many which he had himself sewed in various coloured paper, are dry, sound, and clean: Not a pamphlet has a single leaf curled at the corner; not a label of the hundreds neatly written with his own hand, has dropt off, or is effaced. All the virtuous toils of his diligent leisure are now amply repaid[17].

16 Alexandre, as Frances tells her father, had sealed his books in a closet at Camilla Cottage, inaccessible to their tenants, and had thus succeeded in preserving them—unlike Charles Burney, who had apparently ignored the menace of "dry rot."

17 Alexandre, of course, could read neither the letter from his son nor that from his wife, since both were confiscated before Mrs Solvyns could deliver her package. If he had read Frances's letter, he would have found that it consisted of three parts with separate dates—18, 24 and 25 May—and numbered, respectively, 13, 14, and 15. These numbers indicate what the letter itself confirms: that Frances had sent twelve previous letters to her husband in Paris, of which nine had been confiscated or gone astray. In a mock reproach, she tells him:

> because you have received three Letters only out of 12, [you] think, I presume, that All I have written has been included in the three you have read, & that the 9 others contained 00000!—*Comment*

> *cela*, *Monsieur*? However, I have no time, unluckily, for scolding, so I must leave you to reprimand yourself, while I strive to go over again with all the subjects which you mention as omitted: but which, perhaps, may arrive hereafter, to punish you by their redundance [18].

18 In practice, of course, those nine missing letters were unlikely ever to reach their destination, although on one occasion, at least, a letter from Frances, sent to her father from Paris on 29 May 1812, eventually arrived in London almost a year later, on 11 May 1813 [19]. Convinced that Mrs Solvyns would succeed in delivering letters thirteen to fifteen, Frances filled them with every imaginable detail concerning her friends and family, including the education of Alexander at Greenwich School. She could assure Alexandre that although their son had been "a little cloathed," the cost was small, since at school "dress is of small importance." Books and tutors for him, however, were "enormously dear," and eating into their savings [20].

19 Frances also told her husband of the increasing infirmity of her aged father, who was, she wrote:

> now completely retired from the World. In the Winter he will not even leave his Bed room. His Tables & Desks are covered with Books, & his almost sole delight is in reading. His Eye-Sight is strong & perfect. He never uses spectacles, though not one of his children except myself, can do without them.... He is grown so fond of solitude, & solitary reading, that all attempts to see him, even of his family, with a very narrow exception, seem irksome to him [21].

20 Dr Burney, then aged 87, had less than a year to live when Frances wrote this account, which provides a vivid portrait of her formerly sociable, constantly active father now in melancholy retirement in his apartment at Chelsea Hospital. She also tells Alexandre that her father "destines you a large portion of the french part of his library [22]," although in fact Dr Burney's will had made no such provision: Alexandre would receive only a single, English reference work, *A New and General Biographical Dictionary* (12 volumes, 1784), while his large French collection was bequeathed jointly to his daughter Sarah Harriet Burney and his granddaughter Frances Phillips—with the exception of the works of Voltaire and Bolingbroke, which were "unfit for the perusal of Females [23]."

21 Much of the letter concerns financial matters: a source of constant anxiety to the d'Arblays since their marriage in 1793. Frances was rightly concerned about the future of Camilla Cottage, let out to tenants since 1802. It was located in Norbury Park, owned by the late William Lock, who had failed to give the d'Arblays a deed to the land on which it was built, and an acrimonious dispute over its ownership between Alexandre and Lock's son, William Lock, Jr, would shortly ensue. Frances, however, was not yet aware of this problem; at this stage, she was primarily concerned with the expense of the cottage's upkeep, which together with taxes was swallowing up most of the rent received. She also kept Alexandre informed of her other miscellaneous expenses, including charitable gifts that Alexandre wished to make to some of their French friends exiled in England but which she felt were straining their budget.

22 Long-distance sociability, for both Frances and Alexandre, entailed not only informing each other about their respective lives in London and Paris but also entering imaginatively into the circle of friends and family that had been left behind. For Frances, this took the form of asking her husband for detailed information on the female friends and acquaintances she had made during her Paris years: Mme de Souza, author of the popular novel *Adèle de Sénange*; Mme de Maisonneuve, the closest of her French friends; Mme de Poix, Mme de Simiane, Mme d'Henin, Mme de Tessé, Mme de Grandmaison, Mme de Tracy and several others. She is equally concerned with her husband's male friends, including his physician, Pierre Esparron; the celebrated army surgeon Baron Larrey who had performed her mastectomy; the civil servant Marie-Alexandre Lenoir; and Alexandre's former superior at the Ministry of the Interior in Paris, Jean-Pierre Barbier de Neuville. D'Arblay would surely have been moved by his faraway spouse's concern for his wellbeing, manifested in passages such as the following:

> And beg M. l'Esparron to keep you always in his care: & M. Lenoir to be Judge supreme that you neglect not to call upon him, even upon a *soupçon* of occasion. I wish I could hear of my dear & excellent Dr. Larrey. I am sorry you are no longer in the division of M. Barb<ie>r Neuville. His Eye has the penetration of friend<ship> for watching you. Oh watch yourself [24]!

23 Frances also had much to say about her novel manuscript in progress, *The Wanderer*, or "mon ouvrage," as she termed it, which she had begun writing in the late 1790s, at Camilla Cottage, and brought with her, packed in a trunk, on her return to England in April 1812 [25]. "I have," she informs Alexandre:

> but little satisfaction to give you, for it is not yet finished. Sketched it was, to the conclusion, before I left you—nay, before my illness & confinement: but, a work so long, & begun so many years ago, requires much over-looking, & correcting & arranging. The very names that I had pitched upon in the early part, were changed in the middle, & again not retained at the end [26].

24 She then tells Alexandre about her anxieties over the novel's reception and her hopes that its sale will provide them with a small annual income:

> expectation is awake, &, of course, criticism! I dread Gallicisms, & study Dr. Johnson's Dict[y]. from Morning till Night. I have nothing to say of the result, the Book that is not finished not being a subject for Book Sellers. Whatever it may be, you will hold, I trust, to its aiding nos vieux jours, & consequently, that the *principal* shall be unbroken, to produce annual amelioration, more or less, however small [27].

25 Frances had had her own copy of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) since at least 1786, when the German novelist Sophie von La Roche saw it among her books in her rooms at Windsor Castle [28] .Despite her efforts to avoid Gallicisms, however, contemporary reviews of *The Wanderer* would be severely critical of the author's style. According to the *British Critic* for April 1814, for instance:

> during her long residence in France, she appears to have forgotten the common elegancies of her native tongue; and, throughout her preface, to have indulged her impartiality between the rival nations, by adopting a phraseology which is neither French nor English, but uniting the bombast of the one with the awkwardness of the other [29].

26 At the beginning of the final part of her letter, Frances told Alexandre that she would soon have to cease writing: "Another sheet I will venture to hope our obliging M[e]. Solvyns will take in charge, that I

may converse with mon meilleur ami to the last moment of our intercourse, for this evening she is so kind as to come to take leave, & to take my packet[30]." In the event, Mrs Solvyns did not leave London for another week. She must have taken the package with her, only for it to be confiscated before she arrived in Paris: probably at the customs house of the French port at which she landed. It is possible that only the letters by Frances and Alexander were preserved by the French authorities and the other items destroyed; it is also possible, however, that they were destroyed at a later date, or even that they have been preserved in some other, as yet unexplored file in the Archives nationales.

27 Just before leaving London, as Frances wrote to Alexandre a week later, in a letter of 31 May, Mrs Solvyns made arrangements with one of her contacts, François-Paul David, to act as courier in her place and take this letter with him when he travelled from London to Paris. Rather surprisingly, he was successful in doing so. In Paris he gave the letter to his uncle, Jacques Récamier, who would have found on the cover sheet a note in the hand of Mrs Solvyns: "Je prie M. Recamier de faire remettre l'incluse en mains propres en disant c'est remis par le celebre M^{me} d'Arblay auteur d'Evelina, Cecilia &c[31]." It would be pleasant to suppose that this endorsement eased the letter's passage past customs officials, but the truth is likely to be more mundane. The d'Arblays, like all those who tried to circumvent Napoleon's restrictions on the transit between France and England of people, goods and letters, were suspect figures to the French authorities, who succeeded in intercepting and confiscating most of their correspondence between 1812 and 1814. A few letters, however, made their way through by chance; Napoleon's system of surveillance, like all such systems, had its flaws. And thanks to the elaborate French undertaking of preserving certain confiscated items in the archives nationales, we ourselves can now participate in Frances Burney d'Arblay's social world by reading one of her best letters, over two hundred years after she sent it to her husband—who would never see it himself.

NOTES

1 "Dunkirk and Deal," *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)*, VI, ed. Joyce Hemlow *et al.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 705.

2 *Journals and Letters*, VI, 705, p. 706.

3 *Journals and Letters*, VI, p. 708, p. 710.

4 In a letter to his daughter Frances of 5-c.10 May 1810, Dr Burney tells her that he has been "in prudence, imploring all your living old correspondents, & my friends, not to venture a letter to you, even by a private hand, lest it sh^{d} accidently miscarry, & being observed & misconstrued as coming from this country, it sh^{d} injure M. d'A in the eyes of zealous Fr. Men" (*The Letters of Dr Charles Burney*, VI, ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025)).

5 See *Journals and Letters*, VI, pp. 710-713.

6 *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)*, VII, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 26-27. As Bloom and Bloom note, "such lamentations run throughout" Frances's correspondence during her separation from her husband. In a letter of 5 September 1813, her brother Charles told his son Charles Parr that she "has written 20 letters in the last two months, and has not received one line,—in reply" (*Journals and Letters*, VII, 26 n. 7).

7 See *The Additional Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, II, ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 204-220.

8 *Journals and Letters*, VII, p. 112. The angle brackets here indicate conjectural readings.

9 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, p. 204.

10 See *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, pp. 210-11.

11 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, 210. For Frances's dealings with her wayward son, see Peter Sabor, "The Education of Alexander d'Arblay: The 'Idol of the World,'" in *Writing Lives in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Tanya M. Caldwell (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2020), pp. 45-73; and "Creative and Uncreative Gloom: Frances Burney and Alexander d'Arblay," *European Spectator*, 11 (2010), pp. 19-41.

12 Alexander d'Arblay to Alexandre d'Arblay, 19 May 1813, Archives nationales, Paris.

13 See Ralph Walker, "Charles Burney's Theft of Books at Cambridge," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 3 (1962), pp. 313-326.

14 See Lars Troide, "Burney, Charles," *ODNB*.

15 Sophie Coulombeau, *Reading with the Burneys: Patronage, Paratext, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), p. 72.

16 *Letters of Dr Charles Burney*, VI.

17 *Journals and Letters*, VII, pp. 60-61.

18 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, p. 205.

19 See *Journals and Letters*, VI, 618-20; and *Letters of Dr Charles Burney*, VI.

20 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, 206, p. 207.

21 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, p. 208.

22 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, pp. 208-09.

23 *Letters of Dr. Charles Burney*, VI.

24 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, p. 10.

25 See *The Wanderer*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. viii-xii.

26 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, p. 219.

27 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, p. 220.

28 *Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. I, ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), p. 170.

29 *British Critic*, n.s. 1 (1814), p. 376.

30 *Additional Journals and Letters*, II, p. 215.

31 *Journals and Letters*, VII, p. 132.

RÉSUMÉS

English

This article examines the challenges and strategies of long-distance sociability between Frances Burney d'Arblay and her husband Alexandre d'Arblay during their prolonged separations between England and Napoleonic

France from 1802 to 1814, following the Peace of Amiens and the subsequent renewal of war. Drawing on newly discovered documents in the Archives nationales — including a confiscated 1813 letter from Frances to Alexandre, a letter from their son Alexander, and an earlier passport—the essay reconstructs the couple's attempts to sustain emotional, familial, and intellectual bonds across enemy borders. The letters also highlight the role of intermediaries such as the Solvyns family in smuggling correspondence, as well as the broader networks of sociability that linked literary, political, and émigré circles despite wartime barriers. By situating private letters within the structures of censorship and archival preservation, the article demonstrates how long-distance marriage under conditions of war depended on imaginative reconstruction, persistent negotiation with state authority, and fragile channels of trust.

Français

Cet article examine les défis et les stratégies de sociabilité à distance mises en place entre Frances Burney d'Arblay et son mari Alexandre d'Arblay pendant leur longue séparation, entre l'Angleterre et la France napoléonienne, de 1802 à 1814, après la paix d'Amiens et la reprise de la guerre qui s'ensuivit. S'appuyant sur des documents récemment découverts aux Archives nationales, notamment une lettre confisquée de Frances à Alexandre datant de 1813, une lettre de leur fils Alexander et un ancien passeport, ce chapitre retrace les efforts déployés par le couple pour maintenir des liens affectifs, familiaux et intellectuels par-delà les frontières ennemies. Les lettres mettent également en évidence le rôle d'intermédiaires tels que la famille Solvyns dans la contrebande de correspondance, ainsi que les réseaux de sociabilité plus larges qui reliaient les cercles littéraires, politiques et émigrés malgré la guerre. En situant les lettres privées dans le contexte de la censure et de la conservation des archives, l'article montre comment le mariage à distance en temps de guerre dépendait d'une reconstruction imaginative, de négociations persistantes avec les autorités étatiques et de fragiles canaux de confiance.

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Mots-clés

surveillance, censure, réseaux épistolaires, mariage, relations franco-britanniques, sociabilité épistolaire

Keywords

surveillance, censorship, epistolary networks, marriage, epistolary sociability, Franco-British relations

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