

## Loss of Innocence: A Novel of the French Revolution

**Anne Newton Walther**

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It is a little known fact of the French Revolution that a team of Americans plotted with members of the French *ancien régime* to relocate the French monarchy to Azilum, a secret town located on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. Walther's historical novel, *Loss of Innocence*, chronicles the involvement of the fictional Comtesse of Beaumont, Eugenie Devereux, in this and other underground plots during her country's epic journey toward the ends of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The beautiful, spirited Eugenie is simultaneously committed to the ideals of revolution as well as to her monarchy. The title alludes to the betrayal of these ideals during the course of that revolution.

Walther is the author of well-known practical guides to divorce, *Divorce Hangover* and *Not Damaged Goods*. This is her second historical romance featuring Eugenie Devereux and Bermudan shipping captain, Bridger Goodrich; the first is a story of the American Revolution.

Sparked by the intrigue and adventure of these two major Revolutions, the romance between Eugenie and Bridger is contingent upon things beyond their control—the distance of an ocean, Atlantic winds, imperial trade patterns, civil unrest. Eugenie defends her involvement in the French political turmoil, saying, “I may take risks for my political beliefs, but are the risks you take at sea any less grave? We made a pledge to each other, long ago, to celebrate the gift of our love without restraint.” This love story, underlain by adventure and intrigue, drives the plot of the novel.

Throughout the story, Walther employs the conventional language of love—its endless passion and customary endearments—to depict the relationship between Eugenie and Bridger. A closer attention to the nuances of dialect would have improved the modern day, Anglo-American sounding dialogue. Her prose style might have been energized by a more detailed engagement with the revolutionary fervor and energy of the historical moment. Rather, the historical element of the novel is delivered almost exclusively through the dialogue of trusted servants, emissaries, and Eugenie herself discussing the situation in Paris.

Walther's novel appears at a time when a number of fictional texts, such as Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, are offering different perspectives on the French Revolution, ones which are sympathetic to the monarchy and the *ancien régime*. In addition to being sympathetic to the French monarchy, Walther's novel engages the possibility of a well-read and enlightened nobility whose dreams of political reform were crushed by the devastating course of France's revolution. And yet, unlike the history of the ill-fated French monarchy, Eugenie Devereux's story is one of faith in the love, political freedom, and basic humanity that makes revolution conceivable in the first place.

KEYA KRAFT (August 8, 2007)

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