



In Tearing Haste: Letters between Deborah Devonshire and Patrick Leigh Fermor

Patrick Leigh Fermor, Deborah Mitford Devonshire

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In the spring of 1956, Deborah, Duchess of Devonshire, youngest of the six legendary Mitford sisters, invited the writer and war hero Patrick Leigh Fermor to visit Lismore Castle, the Devonshires' house in Ireland. The halcyon visit sparked a deep friendship and a lifelong exchange of highly entertaining correspondence. When something caught their interest and they knew the other would be amused, they sent off a letter—there are glimpses of President Kennedy's inauguration, weekends at Sandringham, filming with Errol Flynn, the wedding of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles, and, above all, life at Chatsworth, the great house that Debo spent much of her life restoring, and of Paddy in the house that he and his wife designed and built on the southernmost peninsula of Greece.

There rarely have been such contrasting styles: Debo—smart, idiosyncratic, and funny—darts from subject to subject, dashing off letters in her breezy, spontaneous style. Paddy, the polygot and widely read virtuoso, replies in the fluent polished manner that has earned him recognition as one of the finest writers in the English language.

As editor Charlotte Mosley writes, "Much of the charm of the letters lies in their authors' particular outlook on life. Both are acutely observant and clear-sighted about human failings, but their lack of cynicism and gift for looking on the bright side bear out the maxim that the world tends to treat you as you find it. On the whole, the people they meet are good to them, the places they visit enchant them, and they succeed splendidly in all they set out to do. This lightheartedness—a trait that attracted many, often less sunny, people towards them—gives their letters an irresistible fizz and sparkle."

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