

THE CELEBRITY OF CHARLOTTE SMITH

THE CELEBRITY
OF
CHARLOTTE SMITH:
PRIVATE SORROWS,
PUBLIC TEARS

By

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Abstract

The celebrity of Charlotte Smith was initiated by the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1784. The large subscription lists that successive editions garnered confirms her status as a popular writer. Smith's celebrity is unique when compared to other late eighteenth-century celebrities as she resided outside of London, and did not associate, in public, with other famous writers, artists, and actors of her time. Her solitary existence away from the public view created speculation and gossip about the melancholic poet, which in turn led to an outpouring of financial support.

Her celebrity, instigated by the public display of her private sorrows, is inextricably tied to two dominant cultural features: the cult of sensibility and the neoclassic tradition. The culture of sensibility created an ideal atmosphere in which to publish an emotive text, as the public sought out works that would trigger an emotional response. She creates sympathy within her reader, eliciting a strong emotional reaction and acts of charity. Smith also uses a neoclassical poetic convention, quoting profusely from other famous authors to create a connection between her poetry and theirs. Smith foregrounds herself as an educated author, slightly modifying each poetic quotation, and in doing so establishes her own unique niche within the poetic tradition.

Smith's celebrity is heavily dependent upon her ability to arouse pity and more importantly charity within the reader. Smith's goal, prior to publication, was to be self-sufficient and garner enough money to provide for her family. Her celebrity can therefore be viewed as a deliberate move into the public sphere.

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Introduction

Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays by Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, in Sussex*¹ (1784) was a celebrated text in the late eighteenth century enabling her to gain prominence as a literary figure. Smith sought out fame in order to support her family, and her celebrity is largely based upon the public flaunting of her private sorrows. Smith sought out the public sphere, promoting herself through the use of revealing personal prefaces. As Habermas states, "whatever was submitted to the judgment of the public gained *Publizitat* (publicity)" (26). Smith's writing which initially glossed over her personal sorrows, become over time more forthright and more telling. Smith uses the public sphere deliberately to create awareness of her situation, to garner sympathy, and to expose those who have betrayed her. Yet, it is important to remember that public representation "was still dependent on the presence of people before whom it could be displayed" (Habermas 10). Smith's desire to be a famous author depended on her ability to provide the public with what they desired.

I rely upon Curran's 1993 edition of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* unless otherwise stated

Smith's relies upon the idiosyncrasies of the culture of sensibility to ensure that her poetry finds a reading audience. The public, including the gentry, were eager and willing to manipulate their emotions through text, art, or visits to asylums to gaze upon suffering. Her sonnets have a powerful emotional impact upon the reader, which is what the public craves. The sympathy that she elicits, and the emotion that she creates through her subject matter, appealed directly to a public fascinated with mind states melancholia, sorrow, and madness. As Judith Stanton observes, Smith's sonnets place her "squarely in the cult of sensibility: she believed in the virtue of kindness, in generosity to those less fortunate, and in the cultivation of the finer feelings of sympathy and tenderness for those who suffered needlessly" (Stanton xxx). Smith relies upon the prevalent language and themes of the culture of sensibility in her work: vivid descriptions of pain and suffering, gothic scenes set amongst the violence of nature, and solitary scenes of melancholic reflection combine to provoke the psychological impact of Burke's sublime. Smith's reliance upon the images and language of sensibility worked well for her, which is evident with the favourable reviews, and the large subscription lists that were sold immediately for new editions. The curiosity and emotion of the reader is piqued, and many wrote to her asking if she

needed assistance. Her celebrity can be directly attributed to the intimate bond she creates between herself and the reader.

The feminine voice is felt strongly in *Elegiac Sonnets*, emerging as the voice of the distraught mother, the despair of a woman with no legal rights, or as the voice of a woman fallen from grace and seeking redemption. In Smith's poetry you can see a "survey [of] the selves available to women" in the eighteenth century (Labbe 3). The sonnets clearly depict the changing roles of women in the late eighteenth century and mark a moment in history when women's rights were just becoming a topic of public conversation. The private world of the feminine is exposed to public view by allowing access to the personal reflections of a female poet. Smith speaks publicly, lifting the veil of silence and casting aside the rules of conduct that silence woman's voices. Smith continually undercuts her claim to the public sphere and the masculine role of authorship by relying upon emotional and sorrowful recollections that are predominantly viewed as feminine experiences. Smith's voice emerges as a vehicle of her "'real' self, which operates at the centre of the text...[and] masks her constructed nature by continually appealing to her readers' emotions in what becomes a developing conversation" (Labbe 25). What Labbe views as Smith's constructed self I view as another aspect of Smith's personality. Smith is simultaneously the strong, intellectual, educated

voice and the weak, vulnerable, emotional voice—a tension that is not easily resolvable. The duality of presence in her work appeals to a wide audience, including both the gentry and the general, reading public. She inspires a charitable mood within her reader, evidenced by the large subscription lists her work elicited. The sonnets appear in the print market at a time in which “advice to young ladies’ tends to stress a fatalistic view of female life that is marked by loss, increasing powerlessness, and social worthlessness” (Straub 3). Smith’s sonnets express this fatalism clearly, yet her determination to be a successful author and support her children is an indication of the changing status of women in the late eighteenth-century culture.

Part of Smith’s appeal to the female reader is her success as a female poet in a male literary world. Smith openly foregrounds herself as a national poet who should be associated with other celebrated British authors. Her ample use of neoclassic allusions combined with the utilization of borrowed lines from famous authors such as Shakespeare, Milton, Petrarch, Goethe, and Pope creates a connection between her work and theirs. Smith’s use of other poets’ writings also emphasizes her extensive education and places her on an equal footing with the poets whose work she extensively quotes from. She lays claim to the public sphere as a player in dialogue with other writers.

Smith's celebrity following the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets* relies heavily upon the language of sensibility and foregrounds her skills as a writer in order to establish herself firmly in the national poetic tradition. The increasing use of the private details of her life, particularly in the prefaces, clearly marks an effort on Smith's part to continue in her role as celebrity in the public sphere.

My own analysis of *Elegiac Sonnets* has been strengthened by the biographical insights presented by Florence Hilbish and Loraine Fletcher, which together with Judith Stanton's collected letters have given me a full picture of her life. Stuart Curran's complete collection of Smith's poetry along with his insightful notes was the central resource for my analysis. My analysis stands in opposition to the position taken by Kathryn Pratt who conjectures that "Smith's melancholia [is] intensely theatrical" (5), and that her poetry "rejects the dividing line between art and experience" (9). Pratt states that "the footnotes and the prefaces to the collection are no more spoken in Smith's 'real' voice than are her poems" (8), which is in conflict with my assertion that Smith's public appearances are performed through the prefaces. Adela Pinch's vital assertion that Smith's sonnets "highlight the *literariness* of the melancholy they express" (66) is similar to my own view that Smith's connection to other melancholy artists through her quotations connects her to the national, literary heritage. Pinch

argues in opposition to Pratt that Smith's production of sentimentality highlights the impossibility of reconciling writing and experience (Pratt 8), a notion that is vital to my own claim. Elizabeth Dolan's central argument that the "efforts in her poetry to balance emotion and intellect...led her to paint a new portrait of melancholic genius for the culture" (251) adds credence to my argument that Smith's celebrity helped to create a new niche for melancholic verse. I agree strongly with Jacqueline Labbe's significant claim that "Smith's poetry shows...a writer able to play with gender as simply another aspect of identity" (167). Similarly, I view Smith as a multi-faceted individual with a driving ambition to write in order to support her family, which is evidenced by her continual foregrounding of herself as a national poet. Labbe argues against the attempt by other critics to label the text as one that contains an inflexible gender model, and my assertion that Smith foregrounds herself first and foremost as a writer is also based upon this assumption.

Smith's sonnets, with their focus upon the inner life of the poet, eventually helped to "shift the focus of British contemplative melancholic poetry from a preoccupation with the general transitory nature of life to an interest in the speaker's own state of mind" (Dolan 244). Her use of the language of feeling, particularly at a time when the culture of sensibility

was popular, helped to create a loyal readership among an adoring and sympathetic public who supported Smith through much of her life.

The eighteenth-century celebrity needed to maintain a public persona through a combination of public appearances and private gossip. Smith initiates speculation about herself through increasingly provocative prefaces that stir up public interest. She also links herself to the national poetic tradition and to other celebrated authors through her impressive quoting and name-dropping. Finally, Smith uses facets of the culture of sensibility within her work to create sympathy and provoke enough gossip to be a continual topic of conversation.

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage for Smith's celebrity

Biography

Smith was fortunate to have been raised in an affluent household, where she was well educated, a privilege rarely afforded to women of the time. She was instructed in painting under the tutelage of George Smith, a noted landscape painter, and was schooled at Kensington in dancing and acting. The education that Smith received during her idyllic childhood at Bignor Park, Sussex proved invaluable later in life. Her marriage in 1765 to Benjamin Smith, just prior to her sixteenth birthday, changed her life drastically and thrust her out of the family home in which she was raised. She was pregnant or recovering from childbirth for the first 15 years of her marriage, giving birth to 12 children, 4 of whom died in early childhood. Her husband's gambling problem led to a rapid decline in their financial state of affairs, and culminated with his imprisonment as a debtor in 1783. The loss of social standing affects Smith severely as friends and acquaintances desert her. While her children were placed in the care of her brother, Smith lived in prison with her husband, for the majority of his term. It is at this low-point in her life that Smith decided that she would

write in order to support and care for her children. She began to compile her writing and create new poems until she was able to approach booksellers with a complete manuscript.

Smith's initial efforts at publication through James Dodsley were rejected. She was finally able to persuade William Hayley, whom she had never met, to allow a dedication of her sonnet collection to him. His patronage led to the publication, at her own expense, of *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays by Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, in Sussex*.

Following the publication of her sonnet collection she moved to France with her husband and family in order to avoid creditors. Smith's financial situation continued to worsen as she struggled to publish translations, novels and further editions of her initial work. Although Smith separated from Benjamin Smith in 1787, she was legally obliged to share her earnings and her marriage settlement interest payments with her husband. He lived in Scotland, hiding from creditors, but would arrive in England under a pseudonym in order to collect the payments. Smith was forced to hide her income in special accounts or with her publishers to ensure that she had money to support her family.

Smith's life was also overshadowed by a legal battle that ensued following the death of Richard Smith, her husband's father. He died in 1776 and intended Smith's children to be the beneficiaries of his estate.

However, no monies were forthcoming until four months after Smith's death. The thirty-year legal battle over this estate reduced it from 36,000 to 4,000 pounds, and Lorraine Fletcher sees this case as a source for Jarndyce v. Jarndyce in Charles Dicken's *Bleak House*. Despite her financial predicaments Smith continued to view herself as a woman of social standing and as a respectable writer. However, given her strained relationship with her childhood friends, due to legal and financial troubles, she lived a solitary existence. It is understandable that she would write to her solicitor Sam Rose, "Alas, for the friends I have lost – for the days that are gone!" (9 Feb 1803). The loss of her friends and her inability to regain her social status are common themes throughout her sonnet collection, signaling the impact of her impoverished and solitary life upon her work. When she died on the 28 October 1806, crippled by illness, "she was widely lamented, particularly by other women poets...[who] testified to her personal struggle...and to the public position she so long sustained as a beacon to writers who emulated her popularity" (Curran xxviii).

Social Context: Class, Gender and the Culture of Sensibility

Immediately evident from the full title of the sonnet collection is the inclusion of the name of her family's estate, which places her origins in the

gentry and which reminds readers just how far from her noble beginnings she has fallen. In her poetry she publicly displays the interior life of a gentry woman whose situation has drastically changed. This allows Smith to connect with the upper classes, her original station, and with middle-class women whose lives have changed through marriage or childbearing. An increasing number of women readers helped facilitate the positive reception of her work. The large number of female subscribers to Smith's work is evidence that women made up the majority of Smith's audience. The swell in women readers was partly prompted by the protestant belief that everyone should be able to read the Bible, and also partly due to the increasing number of charity schools for poor women. In general, reading was thought to corrupt the female mind, because of its impressionability. It was widely believed that "the woman reader could become a different self or subject through the process of reading" (Beetham 58). However, reading poetry was deemed a much more worthy leisure activity than reading a novel, and Smith capitalizes upon this increasingly public debate with her initial publication of poetry, although she would write and publish numerous novels later in life.

The massive reading audiences that purchased newspapers and magazines ensured that debates over conduct, advertisements for books, reviews of books, and gossip about authors, actors, and the gentry

reached a large portion of British homes. Reviewers and editors helped to create a new kind of consumer by guiding potential buyers with their advice, and readers “seemed to require a steady diet of ‘sensations’ to be savoured and consumed” (Briggs 273). This also meant that a bad review or a scandalous report could seriously damage the value of a book or the reputation of an author or actor. The importance of maintaining a ‘good’ name became synonymous with the ability to sell the product that your name was attached to. This notion is of particular consequence for women authors who were also stepping outside of the realm of proper female behaviour. Smith’s social position shifts dramatically following the removal of her husband to debtor’s prison, when her friends and acquaintances shunned her due to the dramatic lowering of her social status. Smith was able to sell her writing to the public, despite her lack of the right friends, largely due to the patronage of William Hayley. The first publication required Hayley’s name to enable the unknown author access to publication, but future editions were reprinted on their own merit.

Smith’s reduced station and the misfortunes that marked her life, forced her to rely upon her skills for survival. It is slightly ironic that the inspiration for her celebrated text stems from the unfortunate situations that she is desperate to escape from. The *Elegiac Sonnets* can be viewed as a confessional text in which Smith exposes her name and her private

life to a public that loved her exposé, calling for re-prints with newly appended sonnets. Women were expected to behave with decorum particularly in the public sphere, and the exposure of Smith's sorrows, which were normally reserved for the privacy of home, reflects a shift in the social understanding of public and private decorum.

Increasingly, the public became interested in exploring the psychological states of other individuals. This fascination is reflected in the popularity of novels such as *Fanny Hill*, *Clarissa*, and *Evelina* in which the inner thoughts of central female characters are revealed in great detail to the public eye via the use of letters, journals, and detailed conversation. The preoccupation with notions of fashioning the female self is linked to the increased importance of a woman's reputation, which hinged upon the way she appeared in the public and private spheres: her manner, her dress and her overall comportment. An emphasis on proper conduct, and the effect of a "bad" reputation in public, attempted to act as an ideological deterrent against improper behaviour. Men were less constrained by reputation, but still needed to ensure they were highly regarded so they would be worthy of credit (Barker-Benfield 82). Yet having your name known in public circles also had a positive impact upon your social status, particularly as a celebrity, when the extent of your fame depended upon

being linked with certain social functions, dinner parties, and with the names of members of other literati and cultural producers.

Smith's celebrity was fated to be performed largely outside of the eighteenth-century celebrity sphere. She spent much of her time as a celebrated author outside of London, in France fleeing creditors, or in the English countryside. As Loraine Fletcher asserts, "the volume would have turned her into a celebrity if she had remained [in Sussex] long" (68). However, her lack of participation in the public realm of celebrity did little to dampen the reader's enthusiasm for Smith's work. Smith's celebrity seems to be correlated directly to the narrative in the sonnets, which created gossip and speculation about the truthfulness of her sonnets. It is difficult to imagine a celebrity who can survive without a public link to mainstream literary circles, yet Smith appears to have accomplished this feat. Her private revelations replace public appearances, as the reading public is able to access personal information about Smith without seeing her in public. She continually places herself in the public sphere through the numerous editions of her sonnets. Her connection to literary circles is solidified through her text and its numerous quotations. She portrays herself as the solitary, melancholic poet and in doing so creates an image, whether real or contrived, that explains her lack of personal appearances, and which urges the reader to become acquainted with Smith through her

work. The conflation between author and text is more obvious in Smith's celebrity than with other eighteenth-century celebrities who relied more heavily upon public appearances. Smith was represented literally by her work, since she was unable to appear before the public. Through her sonnets the public can witness her association with other literary celebrities, and increasingly they begin to 'know' the woman behind the sonnets. The autobiographical element of her work may have helped to ensure her celebrity status. While Frances Burney was often conflated with her central character Evelina, it was unusual for literary celebrities to be strongly associated with their texts. Richardson would not be confused with his character Pamela, nor Cleland with Fanny Hill. Perhaps it is the female voice, or the autobiographical nature of the sonnets, or her lack of public appearances that fueled speculation and celebrity for Charlotte Smith.

As practices of cultivating both a public and private persona began to emerge, so too did the culture of sensibility. The emphasis upon creating feeling in one's self by witnessing directly or by reading about the actions and suffering of others became known as "sentimental fashion" (Barker-Benfield xix). Sentiment and sensibility are linked by their reliance upon the creation of feeling in the self and in others. Sensibility is "related to immediate moral and aesthetic responsiveness, refinement of character

and sensation,” while sentiment is related more to a “refinement of thought” that seems to be linked strongly to the gentry class (Van Sant 4, 9). Smith takes advantage of this cultural phenomenon by using the language of feeling vividly in her sonnets in order to elicit emotion in the reader. Smith is not alone in her use of the culture of sensibility in a literary work. Many other literary celebrities relied upon facets of this cultural phenomenon in order to ensure strong connections between the reader and their characters. The popularity of epistolary novels, which enabled the reader to read in detail about the actions and suffering of characters, is just one example of the prolific use of sensibility in literature.

The immediacy of sensibility works to Smith’s benefit by creating a reader who is willing to publicly support her work by purchasing a subscription. Sentimental writing transfers an emotional state from the writer to the reader. The increase in sentimental literature, particularly novels, was marked by the notion that a work was successful if the reader felt emotion. The prevalence of sensibility contributed to an increased interest in and portrayal of charity. In the male world, acts of sentimental charity translated into “civic improvements” and “community charity,” which were largely viewed as “an altruistic façade behind which to pursue self-centered ambition” (Barker-Benfield 92). Women’s charitable duties included visiting the sick, tending to the poor in their cottages, and

practicing duties of piety and mercy (Barker-Benfield 228). It was largely thought that the novel created and sustained the proper sentimental gender roles by depicting charitable acts and right behaviour. The increase in charitable works and the positive public image this created also helped to ensure that an audience in search of charitable causes were willing to subscribe to new editions.

The changing status of women ensured that Smith was able to find a publisher and an audience for her work. Her reduced station, which would have barred her entry into the public sphere of printing only a decade earlier, proved inconsequential. She was fortunate to write at a time when the culture of sensibility stressed the importance of sympathy and charity, and her elegiac verse found a market in the public sphere as a result of these shifting social tides.

Print Culture: Finding a Place in the Public Sphere

The culture of sensibility was in many ways more suited to the female writer, imagined as emotional and irrational, than the male writer, cast as objective and rational. It was thought that women were prone to sensibility because of the delicacy of their constitutions and the physiology of their nerves, which were thought to render them unfit for abstruse and

elaborate thoughts (Barker-Benfield 26). The emergence of female authors as strong contenders in the largely male field of authorship also coincided with the shift from patronage to market-based sales. Authors at the beginning of the eighteenth century relied on wealthy patrons for “money...an annual pension, a letter of credit...[and] hospitality,” while authors in the mid to late eighteenth century relied more heavily on booksellers and publishers, who offered advances and advertising (Griffin 18-19). Publishing is linked more heavily to the demands of the market instead of being controlled by the whims of patrons and their wealthy friends. Many writers of this time were torn between loyalty to the old system and the opportunities of the new. Samuel Johnson defines *patron* in 1755 in his *Dictionary*, as “one who countenances, supports or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery” (qtd. in Lipking 24). This vision of patronage points to a decline in the reputation of that system, while creating space for a new way of viewing the patron as the purchasing public and not as the protecting gentry.

Female authors entering the market were faced with unique historical problems as they “confronted an almost entirely masculine literary establishment, from editors and publishers’ readers through to publishers and reviewers” (Shattock 3). Instead of seeking patronage from the gentry, who were often prominent, wealthy women, they had to

persuade male bookseller that their product and their name would sell books. Booksellers and “publishers were willing to exploit the desperation of those who sought to earn a living by one of the few means open to a genteel woman” (Clery 13). Clery suggests that Smith had no other option for supporting her family than writing, which may explain her desperate search for both a publisher and a patron, following her initial rejection by the publisher Dodsley. Her appeal to Hayley for patronage, while in essence begging, also reflects Smith’s independent spirit, since she would not allow him to fund the project but rather paid for the printing expenses herself.

Smith was more likely to receive patronage as a poet rather than as a novelist, since the latter usually garnered more money, but had a less respectable reputation. The female novel writer was regarded and “portrayed as vain, publicity-seeking, and self-assertive” (Showalter 20). The relative newness of the novel form meant that established writers treated it with some disdain, although many writers, including Smith, eventually wrote novels as a means of making money. Female poets usually would seek patronage since it was “an established and prestigious genre [that] was said to find less favour than prose with the booksellers” (Dustin Griffin 288). Each genre, with its different reputations, also attracted its own readership. The upper class and gentry believed that

poetry had “higher status...and [that] the production of fiction [was] a more nakedly commercial operation” (Clery 7). As a result the subscription lists for later editions of Smith’s work read like a who’s who of late eighteenth-century life. It was generally understood that “poetry had [a] much higher literary status than novels” (Feldman 47).

Regardless of genre, a woman writer was cut off from her fellow writers because the literary circle was largely male at this time. One way of circumventing this problem is to acknowledge in print the expertise and skill of the male poets, which is evident with Smith’s praise of Hayley in her dedication and sonnet, and which is evident by her prolific quotations from Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Pope. In spite of a woman writer’s talent, education, and connections, she was viewed as stepping into public, unescorted by a man. In order to circumvent a negative impression and to gain sympathy and understanding, a female author tended to “exploit a stereotype of helpless femininity to win chivalrous protection from male reviewers and to minimize their unwomanly self-assertion” (Showalter 17). Smith’s helplessness and sadness, which is evident in her verse, is an obvious example of a female author seeking sympathy from the largely male print culture in order to make money. Married female authors were often further handicapped by “estranged or spendthrift husbands [who could] appropriate earnings under the law of

coverture” (Clery 13), as was the case with Charlotte Smith. Although they were legally separated in 1785, her husband was able to seize any earnings that she made without consequence.

Woman writers had two central strategies available to them: they could either hide their femininity behind a pseudonym or anonymity on the one hand, or choose to draw attention to their gender in an attempt to create sympathy and gain entrance into the world of print on the other. If a woman chose the latter option, it “was the equivalent of declaring her proprietorship of the ideas expressed, her possession of mastery over the artistic techniques employed” (Ezell 66). Yet this is the route that Smith takes as she “directs her readers to understand her poems: as the work of a woman writing in the face of overwhelming sorrows and trials...[by] appealing to her readers’ familiarity with the roles women play” (Labbe 5). On the one hand she sweeps the reader into the depths of her despair, and on the other she flaunts her skills as a poet. Smith’s confidence in her writing is clearly evident in a letter to Cadell and Davies, “I will not affect to say I am not conscious of being some degrees above most of the Lady-writers of the day” (Sept 2, 1805). Smith’s tone is haughty given her reduced station, but also necessary as she seeks to find a publisher for her work. It is clear that the competition between female authors is fierce due to the few publishing contracts that were available.

The assignment of value upon the author, by readers rather than patrons or subscribers helps to create a celebrity culture that hinged upon successful reviews, large sales and exposure to the public eye through public appearances. As the book becomes “a commodity to be sold rather than a gift to be given away...the value of the commodity...extends itself back...to the author as origin of value” (Robert Griffin 3). Mark Rose writes, “the name of the author becomes a kind of brand name, a recognizable sign” (1). It is this brand name that the consumer wants to know more about, and which the bookseller can exploit when the sales of the work are increased due to interest in the author’s life. It is no coincidence that Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets* (1781), containing anecdotal stories about 50 writers, was highly successful.

For the first time in print history, the media began to control the success or failure of commodities and celebrities. William Warner posits that the publication of *Pamela* in 1740 is the first media event in history, since positive reviews are directly linked to Richardson’s success (216). The media came to have much more ‘say’ over which publication was popular and which celebrity was in the spotlight. Increased interest in public figures led to an increase in painting, wax figures, and drawings in order to “preserve and publicize the image of an individual in the absence of his or her person” (Roach 213). It is no accident that a portrait of Smith

is eventually attached to the *Elegiac Sonnets* in order to have her face become literally attached to her work. Since Smith herself did not appear often before the public, her portrait was a way of ensuring that the public 'knew' who she was. While preserving images of the famous was also prevalent during prior centuries, it was not until the eighteenth century that a larger segment of the population was able to afford to be immortalized in this fashion.

While celebrities such as Laurence Sterne “cut a wide swath among the people who mattered and at the same time established a broad public visibility” (Briggs 253), Smith was seldom in the public eye. Her celebrity is not based upon personal appearances, but rather upon personal revelations. Eighteenth-century celebrities became role models for the adoring public, who followed their escapades through the gossip columns in newspapers and magazines. David Garrick and his wife Eva “were among the ‘beautiful people’ of their time, celebrated as the epitome of virtues toward which many people...aspired—grace, taste, control, presence—virtues which had value both onstage and off” (Briggs 267). Smith’s celebrity relied more heavily upon the culture of sensibility than upon her display of virtues. Garrick and Sterne, like Smith, rely heavily upon their connection to other fashionable cultural producers: Garrick and

Sterne through public appearances and Smith by her abundant use of other celebrities work.

In the “Preface to Volume II” (1797) Smith appears overwhelmed and grateful for the public’s support of her first volume, but she is also quick to dismiss any suggestion that she is a beggar or a charity case. She asks the public to view her as a writer whose work is being supported by the public, and not as someone who begs for subscriptions. Smith writes, “with a single exception I have never made any application myself” (9-10). It is thought that Smith is referring here to her initial application to Hayley for support. Although Smith claims to be above the collection of subscription lists, her extant letters are full of requests to various parties for money to cover her expenses and to support her children. Smith does not wish to be viewed, as a public beggar, but seems content to allow the private donations of charity to occur. Her reticence to collect subscriptions is slightly misleading, since her sons and her sister sold subscriptions under her direction because she was too proud to beg.

While Smith refuses to personally collect subscriptions, she acknowledges that, “publishing a book by subscription, and knowing that it had been so often done by persons with whom it is honourable to be ranked” (13-14) makes the process less embarrassing. Smith realizes that subscription lists are a way of affirming the reader’s status by being

placed among other rich and famous persons, and that her prominence as a writer is increased because of the names on her subscription list. For Smith the drawback of the subscription system is the amount of work required on the part of the writer to sell subscriptions. Instead of seeking the protection and monetary help of a single patron Smith must now solicit subscriptions in order to survive as a writer. Smith's "pride...long withheld my consent from this manner of publication" (15-16), but it is evident that she needs money so badly that she has no choice but to pursue, via her family, potential subscribers. Her inclusion of some key aspects of an eighteenth-century writer's life, within her preface, points to the impact that the printing industry had upon a writer's life.

Chapter 2: Smith's Celebrity: Initiating and Maintaining Public Interest

The public's attention is drawn to Charlotte Smith following the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets*, but she would not have published without the patronage of William Hayley. The use of his name, at the height of his fame, would have initiated interest in the text, and ensured publication. Hayley's prominence was linked to his prodigious writing career, and to his circle of powerful friends and poets, including William Cowper and William Blake. His celebrity status, particularly in Smith's view, is evident by her impromptu visit to Hayley's estate. In what is thought to be a faked illness she collapsed on the grounds of Hayley's estate, four months after the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Hayley's housekeeper was forced to take Smith and her daughter Charlotte into his central residence. Hayley wrote about the incident to his wife on 28 September 1784: "I played the physician with some success; and by a seasonable medicine soon restored the sick Muse. The chaise had been ordered in their first alarm, and as it could not arrive till between four and five, I insisted on their taking a poetical dinner" (qtd. in Fletcher 69). Smith's desperation to meet her famous patron is evident by her actions and points to the drastic

measures that Smith will undertake in order to gain access to one sphere of eighteenth-century literary celebrity.

Smith initially relied upon their mutual friend John Sargent to approach Hayley. In a letter to publisher James Dodsley, following his initial refusal, she writes “I have reason to believe I shall have his permission to dedicate them to him: with such other assistance as he can give me towards publishing them to advantage. Tho we are near neighbours, I have not courage to address myself directly to him & have therefore been obliged to wait till his friend, Mr. Sargent, could undertake to prefer my request” (4 May 1784). It seems ironic that only four months later she visits him unannounced when she portrays herself as lacking in courage to her publisher. You can sense the conflict between her confidence in her work, believing that he will grant her permission, and her initial lack of courage to directly correspond with him.

Smith’s gratitude towards Hayley and her esteem for him are evident in the dedication as she “plead(s) for the errors [his] judgment must discover ” (3-4). Her lack of confidence is in part tied to the neo-classic tradition of maintaining a humble demeanour regarding your work, but is also tied to the then unknown reaction of the reading audience. Smith’s status as an unknown writer is emphasized in the dedication as she elevates Hayley. She addresses him as “the greatest modern Master”

(6) and depreciates her talents as that of “a distant copyist” (2). She acknowledges that she “should never have availed [herself] of the liberty [she] has obtained” (4-5) by dedicating her sonnets to Hayley. Yet despite her own protestations she seems confident that he will approve of the work that she “cannot deny having...some esteem for” (1-2). While Smith is following the neoclassic tradition of heaping praise upon patrons, the dedication, particularly given her intrusion on his estate, seems more like celebrity worship.

In Sonnet 19 “To Mr. Hayley, on receiving some elegant lines from him.” she expresses the gratitude that she feels towards Hayley for recognizing her artistic ability:

For me the Muse a simple band design'd
Of “idle” flowers that bloom the woods among,
Which, with the cypress and the willow join'd,
A garland form'd as artless as my song.
And little dared I hope its transient hours
So long would last; composed of buds so brief;
'Till Hayley's hand among the vagrant flowers
Threw from his verdant crown a deathless leaf.
For high in Fame's bright fane has Judgement placed
The laurel wreath Serena's poet won,
Which, woven with myrtles by the hands of Taste,
This Muse decreed for this her favorite son.
And those immortal leaves his temples shade,
Whose fair, eternal verdure—shall not fade!

Smith seems certain about the quality of her poetry on the one hand and diminishes her poetic talent on the other. Her praise of Hayley and his

work is set up in opposition to her own work. She refers to her poetry as “simple effusions” in the dedication and she develops the theme of simplicity in sonnet 19. She emphasizes the plainness of her verse by referring to her poet’s garland as a “simple” (1) band. Instead of a traditional laurel wreath, Smith has been attired with a “cypress” and “willow” (3) wreath made from trees typically associated with mourning. The sorrow in her elegiac poetry is depicted here as the only subject for Smith’s poetic work, since the muse has crowned her with a wreath of grief. Smith will not allow herself to be accused of writing poetry that is too simple or too unhappy, since she has been fated by the muse to wear a crown of sorrows. Her wreath is interwoven with “idle flowers” (2), which she sets apart by putting quotation marks around the word idle. She may intend this description to further emphasize to the reader that any beauty within her work is unused and merely a decoration for her real inspiration: sorrow. In comparison to Smith’s idle flowers, Hayley’s wreath is constructed of “immortal leaves” (13) of myrtle, which will never “fade!” (14). The myrtle, symbol of love and passion, represents Smith’s adoration and admiration for Hayley, whose name will live on through his immortal writing.

Smith’s praise for the celebrated author continues unabated throughout the sonnet. Smith places her poetry in the natural world far

beneath Hayley's poetry, which is "high" in "Fame's bright fane" (9). In her mind, her poetry is "artless" (4) when compared with poetry of the muse's "favourite son" (12). Smith appears grateful to Hayley for ensuring that her own name will live on because of its connection to his. She writes, "little dared I hope its transient hours / So long would last" (5-6). It is clear that Smith did not really believe that the poetry written within her hours of despair would gain Hayley's approval. The confident tone of the dedication is remote within this sonnet, although she leaves the final judgment of her work up to the reader. The dedication was dropped from later editions as Smith's name garnered enough authority to appear on its own.

In November 1784, positive reviews of *Elegiac Sonnets* helped to sell the entire second edition. The *Monthly Review* critic writes: "The Poetess apologizes, in her Preface, that her Sonnets are not of the legitimate kind. We cannot, however, agree with her" (368). The critic speaks publicly in favour of Smith's sonnets launching her popularity as a poet. The review criticizes Smith for not understanding the value of her own work. There follows a discussion of the central difference between Italian and English sonnets which concludes that sonnets "are in general harsh, formal, and uncouth: faults entirely owing to the pedantic and childish affectation of interchanging rhymes, after the manner of the

Italians” (368). The general view of sonnet writers is, as Johnson wrote, unsuited for the English tongue. Yet, the reviewer notes, “Plaintive tenderness and simplicity characterize the Sonnets before us” (368). For the reader of sentimental literature, the review would have prompted a visit to the bookseller to purchase this unique work that would play with the heartstrings in a simple yet elegant manner.

Reviews similar in content and tone increased interest in what was deemed by many to be an unpopular poetic form. A review in *Gentleman’s Magazine*, following the printing of the third edition, states: “A very trifling compliment is paid Mrs. Smith, when it is observed how much her Sonnets exceed those of *Shakespeare* and *Milton*. She had undoubtedly conferred honour on a species of poetry which most of her predecessors in this country have disgraced” (1786: 334). A much later review of her second volume of poetry states, “the sonnets of Charlotte Smith, have a pensiveness peculiarly their own. It is not...the gloomy melancholy of Gray...It is a strain of wild, yet softened sorrow, that breathes a romantic air” (*Monthly Review* 1797: 18). These reviews together clearly show Smith’s reputation as a talented, yet melancholic poet. However, a critic in *The Critical Review* of 1797 suggests that the public is growing weary of Smith’s elegiac tone, he writes, “Poor Charlotte! Still weeping and wailing, and gnashing thy poetical teeth!...even for us

thou hast wailed too much...In sooth, we have had so much lamentation, that we are tempted to cry out..."Oh! 'tis so moving, we can read no more" (1797:149). The clearly differing opinions surrounding Smith's reputation, illustrate clearly her increasingly contentious celebrity status.

Initially, *Elegiac Sonnets* went through five sold-out editions by 1789, with a subscription list growing to include 781 names of the leading nobility and public figures of late eighteenth-century society, including prominent poets William Cowper and William Blake, prime minister Charles James Fox, painter George Romney, actress Sarah Siddons, and many fashionable aristocratic women. The subscription list is overwhelmingly female, although there are also a large number of male clergy who subscribed. Many subscribers bought multiple editions, including the Duke and Duchess of Chandose who purchased 20 copies. Due to the popularity of the text, in 1797 the collection was expanded into a two-volume set, illustrated by Thomas Stothard. *Elegiac Sonnets* went through eight subscribed editions while Smith was alive, and three further editions after her death in 1806--the last edition being printed in 1851.

It was not until a second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* was published in 1797 that Smith appeared before the general public. A portrait of Smith, by George Romney, precedes the text and helps acquaint the reader with her image. Beneath her portrait she writes in the epigraph: "Oh! Time has

changed me since you saw me last. / And heavy Hours with Time's
deforming Hand / Have written Strange Defeatures on my Face." The
poem intimates that the reader has known her for a long time through the
reading of her poetry. Smith addresses the reader as a close friend who
will be unable to recognize her due to the sorrowful passage of time. As
Jacqueline Labbe writes, "the interplay between picture [and]
caption...creates a sense of intimacy that relies on understanding the
writer as a 'real' woman" (1). The reader has been unable to meet Smith
or to witness first hand the devastation that her life experiences have
imprinted upon her features. Smith offers the reader an opportunity to see
the writer behind the work. The sentimental writing that captivates readers
and powerfully connects them to the author is strengthened by providing
proof of her inner afflictions in the form of a downcast and demure portrait.

In the "Preface to the First and Second Editions" (1784), Smith
reiterates her loyalty and thankfulness towards her new patron. She
asserts that Hayley's sonnets are a "strong exception" (6) to the common
belief that the sonnet is not an esteemed poetic form. Smith apologizes
for her feeble use of the English language, which is a direct response to
Samuel Johnson whose *Dictionary* definition for sonnet, which reads, "not
very suitable to the English language" (qtd. in Curran 3). Smith writes in
response, "I read it as the opinion of very good judges, that the legitimate

sonnet is ill calculated for our language” (3-4). She argues against Johnson’s opinion using Hayley’s sonnets as proof that “the difficulties of the attempt vanish before uncommon powers” (7). Smith balances popular opinion, expressed by Johnson, with her belief that the sonnet form can be put to exceptional use. She sets up her writing in the framework of an established British tradition by asserting that the sonnet form is “no improper vehicle for a single sentiment” (3).

Smith’s title already suggests that her work will be melancholic and simply by using the word elegiac she links herself to the public debate over the proper use of elegy. The Critical Review section of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in April 1784 contains a lengthy letter to the editor, Mr. Urban, regarding his dismissal of Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” as a verse that “ought not to be published” (281). Justitia’s central objection to the editor’s criticism is that they “profess not to know whether the author, in general, is serious, or ironical” (281). Her letter exposes the on-going debate about whether using the elegiac form is an expression of real sentiment or a contrived poetic device. The sincerity of Smith’s writing becomes the source of speculation, particularly as further editions were published. Her continued use of the elegiac form combined with her absence from the public view contributed to increasingly negative publicity as time went on.

In the first preface, Smith suggests the “mutilated state” (12) of her sonnets is due to her haste to publish sonnets that her friends had already copied and distributed, and which were hard to track down. It is evident that Smith was in a hurry to publish but the reason for writing the sonnets is veiled behind the mysterious phrase, “other circumstances” (13). Smith does not have time to edit or change her sonnets, and she begs the audience to accept them in “their present form” (13). She sweeps the reality of her changed circumstances under the rug, perhaps as a way of creating gossip about her. It is evident that Smith’s poetry had already proven popular with her friends, since they were copied without her permission. This seems like a ploy on Smith’s part to tell her reader that others have a high opinion of her writing. Smith envisions her readers as a chosen group, who are not necessarily part of the general, reading public. She believes that the reader who enjoys her sonnets will have “sensibility of heart” and “simplicity of taste” (14-15). Smith hints to the reader that her work relies upon the notion of sensibility, and reiterates that her text is simple yet emotive. Smith’s compliments to the audience put the reader into a positive frame of mind before reading her work. She congratulates the reader for having exquisite taste, and for being among the “few” (14) who will enjoy her work. As Labbe writes, “the careful craft of the prefaces combines the standard ‘don’t mind me’ stance with a style

that absolutely demands notice” (29). While she downplays her skills as a poet she classifies her readers as a select group with impeccable taste.

Smith also believes the reader who enjoys her text will be highly educated and well read. A sentence in the original Preface, omitted in later editions, states, “the readers of poetry will meet with some lines borrowed from the most popular authors” (qtd. in Curran 3). Smith expects that her reader will know all of the allusions and references that she makes to other eminent poets. Smith is using a conventional neoclassic poetic technique, which would be expected by the reader. Smith’s expectation of an educated reader seems to be misplaced as her deletion of the previously discussed sentence attests. Her addition of a section, in the third edition, called “Quotations, Notes, and Explanations” in which she precisely lists the source of her borrowed lines also points to a less educated reader than Smith anticipated.

In the “Preface to the Third and Fourth Editions” (1786), Smith tells the reader that she has attempted the more challenging Italian sonnet in addition to the English model (6). She presents herself as an experienced poet who is adept at using a variety of poetic forms. Her increased confidence stems from the positive “reception” that “the public, as well as [her] particular friends” (7) have given her work. She again compliments the reader of her poetry for having good taste. She writes, “I am

persuaded that, to the generality of readers, [the poems] which are less regular will be more pleasing” (7-8). She acknowledges that her poetry is not typical in subject matter, but she assures the reader that they will like her uncommon poetry. Her direct appeal to the reader, while a common neoclassic tactic, also suggests that Smith is attempting to find a separate niche for her poetry and her reader. By separating her work from other poetry of the time she carves out a place for herself in the realm of eighteenth-century celebrity.

The “Preface to the Fifth Edition” (1789) is short and poignant, and her tone is that of an astonished and grateful writer. She looks in awe upon her subscription list, which contains “so many noble, literary, and respectable names” (1). The large subscription list is proof that Smith has been able to find a celebrity niche for herself in a market saturated with other writers. She suggests, in a modest tone, that her celebrity is due to “those friends, to whose exertions in my favour...I owe the brilliant assemblage” (2-4). Smith seems overwhelmed by the positive response to her work, and by the support she is receiving from those in positions of power. However, Smith continues to be dismissive of her talents, and her modesty may be linked to the literary tradition in which poet’s downplayed their talents. She represses her happiness and thankfulness with difficulty (4). While Smith would like to speak openly of the friends that have

helped her, she does not wish to cause them discomfort by naming them. By asserting that her friends do not wish to be named she suggests that they are well known, which creates speculation among readers as to which of the famous names on the subscription list are her closest friends. Smith claims she is too proud to “speak of those particular obligations, the sense of which will ever be deeply impressed on my heart” (7-8). While she draws attention to her subscriber’s generosity she is unable to speak openly due to her own sense of propriety, a gentle reminder to her reader of her long lost gentry background. It is evident that Smith’s celebrity status is now well established and that she has many supporters, particularly among the rich and famous of the time.

The tone of the “Preface to the Sixth Edition” (1792), differs from previous prefaces, and it is evident that in the three years between editions that Smith’s reputation has changed. Smith presents the preface in the form of a recollected conversation with an unidentified male friend, who is thought to be her fellow poet and friend Bryan Edwards (Curran 4). The use of a conversation to convey information is an effective way of indirectly addressing the public. She does not directly confront her audience, which would have been far too bold for a female author. By allowing the reader to overhear a private conversation with a friend, she opens one aspect of her personal life to public view, which helps to create

an air of intimacy that a direct appeal to the public would not have attained. As Labbe suggests, “the technique of relaying a private conversation in order to communicate private information to a wide audience, without compromising herself, relies on control and restraint; the reader is put in an amenable frame of mind, ready to sympathize” (29). Smith must carefully negotiate the line between public and private to ensure that her privacy is not invaded, while feeding enough information to the audience to render them sympathetic to her cause.

It is evident from her recollected conversation that the public is growing bored with her melancholic poetry. Her friend requests that she write poems “of a more lively cast [that] might be better liked by the Public” (9-10). This statement relates the central reaction that readers, at this time, are having towards her poetry. Smith makes a concerted effort to ensure that she argues convincingly against this statement. Her first argument is that her poems were never intended for the “public ear” (19). This emphasizes the personal nature of her poetry, signaling to the reader that the melancholic sentiment is real, and notifying the audience that Smith was compelled to publish her work. Smith outlines the reason for her melancholic writing in the form of a proverb: “are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? Or can the *effect* cease, while *cause* remains?” (15-16). This biblical verse conveys that she is still in

mourning, and so is incapable of producing any other form of poetry than an elegy. Smith also openly states that the cause of her sorrow continues, which is astonishing given the nine years between the initial publication and this edition. It is understandable that the reading public may have tired of Smith's sorrows or were questioning the truthfulness behind her elegiac verse, particularly given the public debate surrounding this issue before her poetry was published.

Smith seems very frustrated by the accusation of her friend, and she begins to let the details of her personal sorrows out into the public eye. She no longer hides her lament behind the veil of poetry but instead states openly the reason for her "unaffected sorrows." (19-20). Perhaps Smith is tired of the whispered allegations that she could not possibly be melancholic for this long, and she must be frustrated by those who ask her to write in another poetic form. She defies the convention of silence imposed upon women when she speaks out directly and derogatorily against "The Honourable Men" (23)--the lawyers she hired who "undertook to see that my family obtained the provision their grandfather designed for them" (23-24). This sentence with its allusion to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, is full of irony as indicated by the single quotations placed around the phrase honourable men. She loudly relates, via italics, how she "receives *scorn* and *insult* when I apply to these gentlemen" (28) who

initially proclaimed that they were acting in her best interests. Smith seeks to allay the public's suspicions of 'fake' melancholia by relating that this struggle has been ongoing for "*nine years*" (23). Smith also confides in the public that she is very ill, which she blames upon the lengthy lawsuit that has made her "heart sick" (27).

Smith's frustration and anger are readily observed, particularly when she writes, these gentlemen "will neither tell me *when* they will proceed to divide it, or *whether they will ever do so at all*" (29-31). Her emphasis is a reflection of the enormous stress and strain that the legal battle is having upon her. Smith is quick to point out to the reader that her gender and her position in society give her no power. Despite the prejudice she is proud of her ability to survive in the world of men, and she relates that "few Women could so long have contended them" (34).

Smith's predicament draws attention to the lack of women's rights in the late eighteenth century, particularly surrounding marriage and estate laws. This preface, unlike the others, allows the reader to see Smith's determination and strength. It is evident from this text that she will see the lawsuit through to the bitter end. Smith does not reveal all of the details of the lawsuit, and she claims that she will not "trouble the Public" (35) with the details surrounding this "domestic and painful" (35) issue. However, it

seems obvious that she is drawing attention to her plight, piquing the reader's interest, and causing them to gossip about her.

Smith seems confident that the public already knows “the circumstances under which [she has] long been labouring” (31-32). This sentence acknowledges Smith's presence in the public realm of celebrity as a source of gossip and conjecture. This preface acts as a public defense against those who are maligning her. She apologizes to the reader for her continual and “apparent despondence” (39) offering them an explanation for her condition. Smith realizes that she cannot exist on a solitary island cut off from the public, and this preface is a way of ensuring that the public is aware of story. In order to ensure continued support, Smith tells the reader that she will expose more intimate details of her life if her current situation is not remedied. She writes, “I shall be sorry, if on some future occasion, I should feel myself compelled to detail its causes more at length” (40-42). Her remark acts as a teaser for the public who are sure to buy the next volume in order to find out more about Smith's predicament. It is also a direct threat and a warning to those involved in the legal battle against her.

Smith uses her celebrity status to her advantage. She writes, “I am thus frequently appearing as an Authoress, and have derived from thence many of the greatest advantages of my life, (since it has procured me

friends whose attachment is most invaluable)” (43-45). Smith makes use of her new public role by threatening to use the power of her new friends to her benefit. Her role as a public figure, despite her lack of public appearances, gives her access to a powerful circle of wealthy friends. It is evident from a quick glance at the subscription lists that she has powerful connections among prominent political figures and among the gentry. Her exploitation of her new friendships gives us a different view of Smith’s character. The blatant manipulation of the charity of her subscribers is a very bold move for a female writer. Smith’s tone has changed in the eight years since the initial publication of her text. She appears to be more confident of herself and of her role as a well-connected writer.

She does acknowledge her unorthodox stance yet makes no apology for her boldness. She closes the preface with a quote from Joseph Addison’s *Cato*, “I am well aware that for a woman—“The Post of Honor is a Private Station”” (45-46). Her use of Cato’s advice to his son, on how to survive in a wicked world, is well placed and the reader would have gasped at her bravado. She places the typically male role of honor within the female realm asserting that she will remain honorable despite the dishonorable men that surround her. She plays with the accepted societal view that a woman must be silent. Smith candidly reveals the details of her private life, asserting her right to speak in the public sphere.

Her boldness is understandable given the success of her work and the support of the rich and powerful.

The “Preface to Volume II” (1797) reads more like a gossip column than a preface. The threat that Smith makes five years earlier in the fifth edition is actualized as she divulges the details of her drawn-out court battle. Before Smith launches into her exposé, she admits to some uncertainty about publishing a second volume of poetry since “a second attempt in any species of writing” is “rarely” equal to the first (1-2). Regardless of the popularity of the first volume she looks upon her new work “with a considerable degree of diffidence and apprehension” (4). Her humble demeanor is a reflection of her status as a female writer who cannot forcefully push herself into the spotlight. She draws attention to her friends, blaming them for pressuring her into publishing a second volume. Unlike the first preface, William Hayley is not her patron, but she draws attention, via a footnote, to “Joseph Cooper Walker, Esq. Of Dublin, by whose friendly and successful applications in Ireland I am particularly obliged” (Curran 7). Instead of using the name of a famous poet, she names Walker, a well-known antiquarian, who wrote about the early Irish poets and who studied Italian drama. The use of his name lends credibility to her project and gives the impression that she is well connected.

The exposé as Smith promised the reader is startling in its detail. She launches into a long list of the tragedies that have marked her life. She draws attention to the plight of her son, whom she calls the “lieutenant of invalids” (30) because he “was maimed during [his] first campaign [overseas]” (29). Charles was injured in battle and “suffered the amputation of his leg at the siege of Dunkirk in 1793” (Curran 7), and Smith’s use of the word maimed instead of amputated makes her son sound more heroic and garners more sympathy. Smith also relates that she is mourning the death of Anna Augusta De Fovile, her favourite daughter. Smith refers to Anna as “the loveliest, the most beloved of...daughters, the darling of all the family” (30-31). She speaks from the authority of maternity about the losses that have shattered her family life. Smith believes that her children are the ones who have suffered the most due to the injustices of the legal system. Her sons must “seek in other climates the competence denied them [here]” (27), while her daughters are “deprived of every advantage to which they are entitled” (31-32). Smith builds up sympathy in her audience towards the plight of her family by openly discussing the impact that her unjustified poverty has had upon them.

She blasts the “inhuman trustees” (34) who want to “keep possession” (35) of her money “on false and frivolous pretences” (35-36).

It is the men who control her finances whom Smith blames for the “irremediable misfortunes” (37) that have befallen her. She singles out “the men, who have withheld my family property” (61-62) as the root of all sorrow in her life. Smith must be hoping to find a sympathetic ear among the public and to simultaneously shame the men whom she has named. She describes her enemies as callous and insolent and a “a disgrace” to their “profession” (92-93), referring to their actions as “tormenting chicaneries” (95) that have “put it out of the power of Heaven itself to remedy!” (97-98). Her tone is vehement and the anger and frustration of the protective mother are overwhelmingly evident. The detailed description of her foes builds a negative image of them, and helps to create sympathy for Smith. She portrays herself as a victim who has been needlessly oppressed and who is in need of rescue. The overly descriptive rhetoric ensures that the reader has a very clear picture of Smith’s torments. This ensures that Smith garners more sympathy from an audience who has become wary of her continually elegiac and somber tone.

Smith also uses this preface to answer her reader’s accusations. Smith is aware of the gossip that has been fueled by her ongoing sorrow, and by her never-ending gathering of subscriptions. Smith seeks to quell the rumor that she was “gathering subscriptions for a work [she] never

meant to publish” (48). She dismisses those who believe she is capable of fraud as having “either never understood, *or...forgotten*, what I was, what I am, or what I ought to be” (50-52). She appeals to her genteel upbringing as proof that she is not capable of fraudulent behaviour. She asks the reader to accept her words as honorable because of her prior station in life, a veiled reference to the end of the fifth preface. Smith must also be uneasily thinking of her husband’s bad credit, and hoping that readers will take her on her own merit.

Smith urges those who are drawn to gossip not to judge her as quickly as they would “the colour of a ribband, or the cut of a cape...even in regards to things almost equally trifling” (119-120). Smith’s asserts that her celebrity is not fickle or fleeting, but that her good name and her fame will continue based upon her honest representations of sorrow and her good use of the subscription monies. Smith does not want her celebrity to be compared to the latest fashion trends. Smith wants her fame to last while other trends fade away. Smith’s links her honest revelations of self to her celebrity asserting that if she were a fraud she would not have become famous. She credits the reader for being astute enough to know instinctively whether her sorrow was real or not.

She anticipates that readers will disagree with her opinions when she writes, “*there are* [those] who can never forgive an author...[who has]

ventured to hint at any opinions different from those which these liberal-minded personages are determined to find the best” (121-124). Smith takes a very unfeminine stance here by standing up for her own opinion, despite popular belief. Smith mocks the reading public for being drawn to the ‘proper’ opinion of the few and the powerful. Her outspoken views fly in the face of public decorum and are not very wise given her dependence on the public’s support. Her emphasis of ‘there are’ clearly lends a sarcastic air to the sentence, which would alienate some readers. She divides her readers into two camps those who are loyal to her and those who rely too heavily upon public opinion. It is clear that Smith is severely frustrated with the fickleness of the public, and that she has reached her breaking point.

While she speaks out against the unpredictable public, she also begs the reader for lenience and understanding. She is fully aware of the consequences of her public confession, but Smith is willing to risk her career and the “notice of any future readers” (100) to bring an end to her legal battle. Smith hopes that following the publication of volume two she will take her “last leave of the public” (102). It is likely that she is hoping for a timely resolution of her legal affairs. Perhaps she hoped that her detailed expose´ would lead to a swift end of her financial problems. Unfortunately, the preface did not have the effect that Smith hoped for.

While it did provide ample material for the gossiping public, she did not embarrass her enemies into resolving their lawsuit. In fact, this preface had the opposite effect, and Smith lost many subscribers, including Hayley, due to her unconventional use of the public sphere. The text was deemed too risqué to be published again and was withdrawn from subsequent reprints of volume two. It is clear that those who are named or referred to in this text had enough power to ensure that it did not surface again. However, this may have had the opposite effect, ensuring that the preface was read because of the public furor it obviously created.

Smith's flaunting of private knowledge seems largely therapeutic for her, since it helps restore "some degree of pride" (112). While she admits to having "sinned against some...friends" (125-126) by exposing her life to the public eye, she does not apologize for her actions. Smith justifies her actions by asserting, "friendship should be made of stronger stuff" (128). You can feel the frustration that boils up within this preface. She lashes out against those who "erected themselves into patrons and patronesses" (130) when she "first obtained popularity" (129). She does not hesitate to lay blame upon those who have supported her career. She seems completely nonplussed by her blatant abuse of those who have supported her. She justifies her anger by insinuating that there should be more trust between the public and the author or the patron and the author. Smith

again encounters the loss of friends, who are abandoning her now because of the many rumors surrounding her name.

Smith seems to view celebrity as a series of reciprocal relationships in which she supplies the writing and her friends supply the money. Smith is able to create associations between her friends' names and her product, capitalizing on their reputation while creating her own. It is almost a parasitic relationship in which Smith is able to become a celebrity based upon the celebrity of those who sponsor her. Yet, Smith must continue to supply quality writing in exchange for the use of her friends' names. The consequence of speaking out in public about private matters is the removal of subscriber's names from her product. While Smith does not expect subscribers to continue their support for her throughout her career she seems shocked to learn that many of her initial supporters will no longer help her. Following ten years of writing Smith finds it hard to accept that people have abandoned her cause. She writes, "I am unhappily exempt from the suspicion of *feigning* sorrow" (165). Smith reminds the reader that she does not want to be unhappy, but that the circumstances of life have forced her mental state. Smith again addresses the criticism that she is faking her grief. It must be as unbelievable for Smith as it is for the reader to see that her life has changed so little since her initial publication. Her continual reliance upon

the support of the public in order to sustain her family would, understandably, have grown wearisome for both writer and reader. Her bitterness is understandable given her circumstances, but it also seems to cloud her judgement, making her susceptible to the gossiping public.

As in the preface to the fifth edition, one of Smith's excuses for her melancholic verse, and her long overdue second volume, is an on-going illness. Smith goes into a detailed portrayal of her sickness, describing herself as an invalid without the capacity to "superintend the publication of even this small volume...or collect subscriptions" (141-143). Her personal revelations are dramatically concluded by the announcement of her last request, signaling that her illness is probably fatal. Smith is obviously seeking sympathy from an increasingly hostile audience, since she is overly dramatic in the portrayal of her life's sorrows. Perhaps her increasingly personal revelations are an attempt to garner charity from a reading public who have been over saturated with the literature of sensibility.

Smith is aware of the shifting popular literary taste, which at this time favoured comedy. Part of her overly sensationalized preface may be to garner attention from an audience who increasingly is turning to other genres for their reading pleasure. Her celebrity relies upon good reviews from the critics "who carry into their closets the same aversion to any thing

tragic, as influences, at the present period, their theatrical taste” (158-160). It is doubtful that her spiteful preface will create better reviews for this work, but in order to grab the reader’s attention she seems desperate enough to try any ploy. She even takes a swipe at the public’s increasing fascination with “lighter and gayer amusements, which exhilarate the senses, and throw a transient veil over the extensive and still threatening desolation, that overspreads this country, and in some degree, every quarter of the world” (164-167). Smith refers here to the vogue of walking in the park, gathering in coffee houses, and going to masques. While the upper class passes their time frivolously, the real world of injustice and desolation is masked by their amusements. Smith’s political views come to the foreground as she struggles against the social injustices of eighteenth-century life.

It is evident that Smith’s celebrity required work on her part in order to maintain public interest. Her fame relies heavily upon sustaining a good reputation in the print market, and the continual gossip surrounding the legitimacy of her sorrow seems to eventually overwhelm her. While initially she accessed the publishing market through the already famous Hayley, she attained her own celebrity status quickly. Her celebrity is negotiated largely through her increasingly personal prefaces instead of through public appearances. It is also clear that public gossip surrounded

her name and that her success hinged upon ensuring the reader had something to gossip about.

Chapter 3: The Poetic Tradition - Foregrounding herself as a Famous Author

Smith's celebrity was established and maintained through her personal prefaces instead of through public appearances. Most eighteenth-century celebrities were associated with other famous persons with whom they attended public events and private dinner parties, which were a source for public gossip. Smith initiated idle talk by her own means, using her writing to stimulate public reaction. Her association with the rich and famous is performed largely through textual references. Her connection to Hayley was created through the use of his name as her patron, and by addressing him directly in sonnet 19.

Smith's name eventually becomes linked to other famous subscribers; however, initially she was an unknown and female author. She connects herself and her work to other celebrated poets by quoting from their texts or by writing poems about them. She circumvents public perception of women writers by flaunting her poetic talent, placing her poetry on par with others. It could be argued that Smith is merely following neoclassical convention, which stressed a regard for tradition shown through classic allusions, and a strict adherence to the standards

of literary convention. However, her use of the sonnet form, which was not popular at the time, and her use of British and European authors rather than Greek or Roman shows a deviation from neoclassic norms. By proving her skill as a poet and by connecting herself to other poets, Smith creates her own group of celebrities to be associated with.

Smith begins *Elegiac Sonnets* traditionally with an invocation to the muse:

The partial Muse has from my earliest hours
Smiled on the rugged path I'm doom'd to tread,
And still with sportive hand has snatch'd wild flowers,
To weave fantastic garlands for my head:
But far, far happier is the lot of those
Who never learn'd her dear delusive art;
Which, while it decks the head with many a rose,
Reserves the thorn to fester in the heart.
For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye
Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove,
Points every pang, and deepens every sigh
Of mourning Friendship, or unhappy Love.
Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favours cost,
If those paint sorrow best—who feel it most!

She refers to the classic muse, and following the epic standard the muse is not dismissed until the final sonnet of the first edition, Sonnet 84, "To The Muse." Smith's "partial Muse" (1) is not typical of inspiring deities, since it does not motivate her with happiness. The idea of a beautiful, happy, singing muse inspiring melancholia verse for a single elegy would have been somewhat normal, but Smith's overwhelmingly elegiac text was

unusual. She traces the history of her inspiration back to her life as a child, emphasizing her extensive education and her experience with poetic form. The appearance of a muse in her early childhood also represents her calling or destiny to be a writer. The muse can only watch from afar as she follows the “doom’d” (2) path of unhappiness. Her muse is depicted as an outside observer more than a full participant in her life. As in sonnet 19, her head is garnished with a poetic wreath, although this time it is comprised of wild flowers that are woven, by the muse, into “fantastic garlands for [her] head” (4). Unlike the traditional laurel wreath, hers is lined with roses, whose thorns fester in her heart. These deviations from the traditional view of the muse would have intrigued readers and provoked discussion. Her unique portrayal of the muse signifies a change in perspective from traditional sonnet love poetry. Her verse will be elegiac in order to evoke compassion and charity or melt pity’s eye (9). Smith’s task will not be to uplift the reader but to “point every pang, and deepen every sigh” (11) through her personal tales of loss. Smith’s intention is clearly to gain sympathy from the reader and attract patrons.

In order to foreground herself as a poet worthy of patronage she refers often to her education, presenting herself as a highly educated woman, a fact that she flaunts and regrets simultaneously. She compares

herself to other educated male writers of her time, but stresses that she regrets her learning since it opens her eyes more fully to her tragedies. She writes, “far, far happier are those / Who never learn’d her dear delusive art;” (5-6). The regret she feels about her education is explained fully in a letter written shortly after her marriage: “the more my mind expanded, the more I became sensible of personal slavery; the more I improved and cultivated my understanding, the farther I was removed from those with whom I was condemned to pass my life” (1768-70, Stanton 2). Her attitude towards the education of women has been jaded by her unhappy marriage, which she depicts as a prison in which she is treated as a slave. The reader would not have been privileged to this information, but her disparaging attitude towards education, in the first sonnet, creates interest in the reader and foreshadows the content and tone of her elegiac sonnets. Smith may also be adding her own opinion to the ongoing debate over educating women. Participating in the public debate surrounding women’s rights creates publicity for Smith and her cause by keeping her name in public conversation.

Smith connects herself to the national poetic tradition by quoting from Pope’s melancholic love poem, “Eloisa to Abelard”. She slightly changes Pope’s line to read, “how dear the Muse’s favours cost, / *If those paint sorrow best—who feel it most*” (13-14). Smith speaks with regret of

her ability to hear the Muse's song, since her inspiration stems from "mourning Friendship, or unhappy Love" (12). She foreshadows the content of her sonnet collection, and piques the curiosity and sympathy of the reader. By connecting herself to Pope within the opening sonnet, and by changing his verse, she presents herself as a worthy colleague whose poetry touches upon similar themes as the famous neoclassic writer.

It is not until the closing sonnet of her first edition, Sonnet 84 "To the Muse," that Smith outlines her goals as a writer:

Wilt thou forsake me who in life's bright May
Lent warmer luster to the radiant morn;
And even o'er Summer scenes by tempests torn,
Shed with illusive light the dewy ray
Of pensive pleasures?—Wilt thou, while the day
Of saddening Autumn closes, as I mourn
In languid, hopeless sorrow, far away
Bend thy soft step, and never more return?—
Crush'd to the earth, by bitterest anguish prest,
From my faint eyes thy graceful form recedes;
Thou canst not heal an heart like mine that bleeds;
But, when in quiet earth that heart shall rest,
'Haply may'st thou one sorrowing vigil keep,
Where Pity and Remembrance bend and weep!

Her motivation for writing, like that of other writers, is to be remembered by future generations. She states that she is intentionally inspiring pity in order to be remembered. Smith writes, "Pity and Remembrance bend and weep" (14) over her grave. She reiterates the task that her muse has set before her, and connects the last sonnet to the first by casting the reader

as the character Pity. Smith's authorial intention is clearly stated, and the popularity of her text evident through the large subscription lists is proof that her writing created a sympathetic and supportive audience.

Unlike the classic writers, Smith's dismissal of the muse signals the metaphoric death of the writer. The muse's burden of "bitterest anguish" (9) has crushed Smith to the earth. As its "graceful form recedes" (10) Smith wonders if the muse will ever return to inspire her. Instead of looking forward to the next visit from the muse, Smith questions whether her muse has forsaken her, and left her to live alone "in languid, hopeless sorrow, far away" (7). Her invocation and dismissal of the muse differs from other writers, signaling her unique approach to poetry. Together these sonnets frame her initial text, signaling to the reader the subject matter of her poetry. While linking herself to classic literature she also sets her muse apart from the mainstream challenging convention and piquing the interest of her reader.

Smith draws attention to her use of the sonnet form by connecting herself to the beginning of the sonnet tradition. The link between Petrarch and Smith is established at the beginning of Volume I within four sonnets each titled "From Petrarch." Each sonnet is loosely interpreted by Smith and translated into English, which has raised speculation over whether she is insecure in her knowledge of Italian or so fluent that it is stored in

her memory (Curran 1). Her use of Petrarch's sonnets as a base for her own also foregrounds her education, and her extensive knowledge of the sonnet's origins. By titling her poems "From Petrarch" she presents herself as a worthy spokesperson, confidant, and friend of the ancient poet. This is a bold move for a female poet, particularly given the disuse of the form since Milton. Smith presents her skills as a poet by dialoguing with the creator of the sonnet and connecting herself to its origins. By translating his poetry into English she proves how suitable the English language is for sonnet writing, and builds upon the tradition of national poets like Milton, Shakespeare, and Sidney who were also inspired by Petrarch.

Sonnet 13 translates Sonnetto 112 and uses the traditional Italian sonnet rhyme scheme instead of the English rhyme scheme.

Oh! Place me where the burning noon
Forbids the wither'd flower to blow;
Or place me in the frigid zone,
On mountains of eternal snow:
Let me pursue the steps of Fame,
Or Poverty's more tranquil road;
Let youth's warm tide my veins inflame,
Or sixty winters chill my blood:
Tho' my fond soul to heaven were flown,
Or tho' on earth 'tis doom'd to pine,
Prisoner or free—obscure or known,
My heart, O Laura, still is thine.
Whate'er my destiny may be,
That faithful heart still burns for thee!

Smith connects strongly to Petrarch's concept of undying love. By translating and rephrasing this sonnet Smith makes the eternal struggle of the poet her own. She personalizes the sonnet by accentuating the arduous road of the poet who pursues "Fame" (5) instead of taking "Poverty's more tranquil road" (6). Smith's authorial intention to become famous is juxtaposed against her fear of being "obscure" (11) and unknown. Petrarch's sorrow is Smith's sorrow, the unhappiness of the 'true' poet. Smith relates fully to Petrarch's grief over the unchangeable aspects of life. While he pines for Laura she pines for the loss of her own happiness. The sorrows of a poet's life are depicted as a universal inspiration that reaches across time to create empathy between Petrarch and Smith. His unrequited love expresses the same depth of loss that life has provided her.

The connection between Smith and Petrarch is emphasized in Sonnet 15, based upon Sonnetto 21:

Where the green leaves exclude the summer beam,
And softly bend as balmy breezes blow,
And where, with liquid lapse, the lucid stream
Across the fretted rock is heard to flow,
Pensive I lay: when she whom earth conceals,
As if still living to my eyes appears,
And pitying Heaven her angel form reveals,
To say—"Unhappy Petrarch, dry your tears;
Ah! why, sad lover! Thus before your time,
In grief and sadness should your life decay,
And like a blighted flower, your manly prime

In vain and hopeless sorrow fade away?
Ah! yield not thus to culpable despair,
But raise thine eyes to Heaven—and think I wait thee there.

The original text is a recollection of the poet's time with Laura. Petrarch places the process of poetic inspiration in the mind and in memory of the poet, a theme that Smith continues throughout her work. In the original sonnet Petrarch writes, "I sit down and think of love and write, / I see, I hear, I feel her" (5-6). For Smith too the poetic process stems from the recollection of vivid memories. Smith's memories are also full of pain over the loss of friends, family and financial stability. She feels empathy for Petrarch's loss, and the advice, which flows from Laura's lips, is a caution to all poets. Smith advises Petrarch to turn his eyes away from the grief and sadness of the world towards heaven where his love awaits him. She places herself in the role of advisor to the great poet Petrarch, a role typically taken by men.

Smith sets up her conversation with Petrarch in the tranquility of the natural world. The quietness of nature is portrayed as the ideal setting for poetic inspiration and communion with poets of the past. The natural world, as depicted in Sonnet 16, is a place in which to grieve and recollect memories of the past:

Ye vales and woods! Fair scenes of happier hours;
Ye feather'd people, tenants of the grove;
And you, bright stream! Befringed with shrubs and flowers;

Behold my grief, ye witnesses of love!
For ye beheld my infant passion rise,
And saw thro' years unchang'd my faithful flames;
Now cold, in dust, the beauteous object lies,
And you, ye conscious scenes, are still the same!
While busy Memory still delights to dwell
On all the charms these bitter tears deplore,
And with a trembling hand describes too well
The angel form I shall behold no more!
To heaven she's fled! And nought to me remains
But the pale ashes which her urn contains.

Nature is a silent witness to the grief of the poet and is depicted as the ever-present and silent guardian of memory. Smith is a 'natural' poet whose intimacy with an unpredictable and ungovernable natural world provides tranquility from the world of men. This vision of nature differs drastically from the common literary view, which portrayed the natural world as a controllable entity, constrained by scientific rules. Pope's famous assertion, "whatever is, is right" in the *Essay on Man* is an example of this rule bound philosophy.

Smith's accentuation of the power of memory also sets her apart from her neoclassic contemporaries. Memory is portrayed as a powerful poetic device for the writer that will make the hand tremble (11) as it "describes too well" (11) the scenes that are stored there. The recollection of images "that are still the same" (8) as when they form, emphasizes the perfection of a remembered image. By writing from Petrarch's point of view, Smith links her own losses to his powerful images of loss. While

connecting herself to the origins of the sonnet tradition Smith is also establishing her source of inspiration, which is given credibility by its use within Petrarch's sonnets. By providing the reader with examples of his sonnets, she affirms that her subject matter is based upon tradition.

By the publication of her second volume of poetry, Smith no longer feels that she must justify her use of the sonnet form. Her confidence as a writer is evident in the epigraph to Volume II, which is taken from the conclusion to Petrarch's Sonnetto 268: "Flee serenity and renewal; approach not, my song, where there be smiles or singing, no, only tears: it will not do for you to remain among happy people, disconsolate widow, clothed in black." This text, written in Italian, is not translated for the public. Smith must trust that her educated audience will be able to translate the text themselves. In this epigraph, Smith reminds the reader that her work is not written for those who are happy, but for those who want to occupy a place of sorrow. The text is also a reminder to her reader that her subject matter, based upon the classic works of Petrarch, is a fitting theme for poetry.

Smith connects herself to the national poetic tradition in Sonnet 46 "Written at Penshurst, in autumn 1788." Here she emulates Ben Jonson and William Waller who both wrote poems about Penshurst:

Ye towers sublime! Deserted now and drear!

Ye woods! Deep sighing to the hollow blast,
The musing wanderer loves to linger near,
While History points to all your glories past:
And startling from their haunts the timid deer,
To trace the walks obscured by matted fern,
Which Waller's soothing lyre were wont to hear,
But where now clamours the discordant hern!
The spoiling hands of Time may overturn
Those lofty battlements, and quite deface
The fading canvas whence we love to learn
Sydney's keen look, and Sachrissa's grace;
But fame and beauty still defy decay,
Saved by the historic page—the poet's tender lay!

Smith's inspiration is drawn from the decaying ancestral home of the Sidney family, and like Waller and Jonson she remembers its past glory despite the crumbling edifices. Smith provides more detail regarding the state of the grounds in a footnote, "the house is at present uninhabited, and the windows of the galleries and other rooms, in which there are many invaluable pictures, are never opened but when strangers visit it" (Curran 43). Her description allows the reader to feel as if they were present alongside the poet surveying the scene. The historic past is saved by "the poet's tender lay!" (14). The power of the poet's pen brings to life the memory of its historic inhabitants whose "fame and beauty still defy decay" (13). Together with Waller and Jonson, Smith will preserve the memory of Penshurst; while the buildings crumble into the ground they are immortalized within the national poet's song. Smith presents herself as a preserver of British heritage, restoring the glories of the past to their

rightful splendor. The use of Penshurst as a subject places her firmly within the national poetic tradition.

Sonnet 82 “To the shade of Burns,” is written in memory of this famous ‘natural’ poet:

Mute is thy wild harp, now, O Bard sublime!
Who, amid Scotia’s mountain solitude,
Great Nature taught to “build the lofty rhyme,”
And even beneath the daily pressure, rude,
Of labouring Poverty, thy generous blood,
Fired with the love of freedom.—Not subdued
Were thou by thy low fortune: But a time
Like this we live in, when the abject chime
Of echoing Parasite is best approved,
Was not for thee.—Indignantly is fled
Thy noble Spirit; and no longer moved
By all the ills o’er which thine heart has bled,
Associate worthy of the illustrious dead,
Enjoys with them “the Liberty it loved.”

She refers to Burns as an “original genius” and a “genuine poet” and places his life on a parallel with her own. In a footnote she writes, you “cannot surely fail to lament his unhappy life...nor his premature death” which Smith blames upon the “employment to which such a mind as his must have been averse” (Curran 71). Smith urges her readers to support his family by purchasing subscriptions for his work. She openly compares their circumstances--“for one, herself made the object of *subscription*, is it proper to add, that whoever has thus been delighted with the wild notes of the Scottish bard, must have a melancholy pleasure in relieving by their

benevolence the unfortunate family he has left?” (Curran 71). By strongly advising her subscribers to support Burns’s family she takes on the role of guardian for Burns’ legacy. By drawing this comparison she reminds her readers to support her writing, while she is still able to benefit from their kindness. The footnote acts as a reminder that the national poets need support while they are still living. The kinship she feels for the sorrowful Petrarch is also felt for the impoverished Burns.

She compares their financial situation drawing attention to the “labouring poverty” (5) that marks their lives. Smith also compares their solitary existence, paralleling her life as a social outcast with his life among the wild Scottish mountains. There is a poignant pause in the flow of the sonnet while Smith reflects upon the misfortunes of a natural genius who cannot survive by writing alone. She asserts that society is not fulfilling its duty towards the poet since the greatest living poets find it difficult to survive by writing. She states, “such a time / like this we live in, when the abject chime / Of echoing Parasite is best approved” (7-9). She signals her disapproval of the rigid codes that stifles original thought by not supporting new ideas. Smith treads carefully here, ensuring that her statements do not anger her reader but gently remind them of their obligation to support new ideas and new authors. Smith blames those who did not support Burns while he was alive for his untimely death,

shaming them into supporting her while she is still among them. She reminds the reader that in death Burns has joined the ranks of “the illustrious dead” (13), but that while he was living he was destitute.

She ends the poem by alluding to Pope’s epitaph to Sir William Trumbull, which clearly places her elegy on a par with his. By writing this commemorative sonnet she places herself firmly among the living national poets. She also quotes from James Thomson’s elegy to Burns’s, which depicted him as a poet of “nature’s own creation” (Curran 71). Her use of two quotations from prominent eighteenth-century poets confirms her own place among them. She creates a dialogue between their work and her own, building upon common ideas and themes in a unique manner to ensure that her poetry stands apart, while simultaneously connecting her to the literary crowd.

The sonnets discussed in this chapter do not accurately reflect the extent of Smith’s quotations. Smith quotes extensively from Pope, Gray, Shakespeare, Milton, Petrarch, Goethe and Rousseau. She includes herself among the most esteemed and revered national poets, establishing her connection to a literary circle that is immortal. By placing her poetry on par with theirs she displays confidence in her abilities as a writer. Although she follows some of the neoclassic conventions she also breaks away from this tradition, establishing her own unique place within

poetic history. She asks the reader to accept her poetry as a reflection of the changing eighteenth-century culture, reminding the reader that the poets who are shunned in public one day, will be the heroic bard of tomorrow. Smith establishes her own unique support group among the national poets by using their work to augment her own ideas.

Chapter 4: Smith's Celebrity and the Culture of Sensibility

The celebrity of Smith is inextricably woven with the language and imagery of sensibility in her poetry. The culture of sensibility permeated all facets of life and was a dominant popular culture trend in late eighteenth-century society. The reader sought out sentimental texts that heightened emotion, often through a manipulation of the senses. Smith chooses a variety of themes, such as madness, grief, and melancholia to captivate the reader. Her sonnets are often set in isolated, sublime, and solitary landscapes such as crumbling ruins, graveyards at night, overgrown streams, and wild seascapes. As Brewer points out, “[c]ertain sorts of landscapes were thought to affect the imagination more powerfully than others” (582). Smith’s sonnets work forcefully on the reader’s emotion through her chosen settings and themes ensuring that her text would be remembered.

The spirit of sensibility is evident in Sonnet 70, “On being cautioned against walking on an headland overlooking the sea, because it was frequented by a lunatic”:

IS there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes

Its distance from the waves that chide below;
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
With hoarse, half utter'd lamentation, lies
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
I see him more with envy than with fear;
He has no nice felicities that shrink
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe.

The poet finds herself in a solitary location, despite public warnings, gazing upon the suffering of a lunatic. We gaze as readers upon Smith's encounter, empathizing with the lunatic's suffering on one level and sympathizing with Smith on the other. Smith's reader is "implicitly urged to participate in the drama of sensibility as reactor to suffering" (Spacks 83). Smith's reaction to the scene before her is not typical; she does not turn away in sorrow, but instead gazes directly upon his madness "more with envy than with fear" (10). The lunatic is "uncursed with reason" (13), a position that Smith with her rational educated mind is unable to attain. She, unlike the madman, knows too keenly the depth and duration of her woe. She stresses her own impoverished poetic life by drawing a comparison between her situation and the lunatic's bed of poverty and suffering. Smith's deep empathy with a deranged character draws attention to her own affected state of mind, increasing the reader's sympathy. The fascination with altered minds is prompted by the common

belief that interior emotion could be altered and directed by well-chosen words and actions.

Smith's empathy for her subject is accentuated by quoting Walpole: "He has no nice felicities that shrink / from giant horrors" (11-12). Her use of other poet's work accentuates the common use of madness as a theme for writing, connecting her text to Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Thomas Gray's "Eton College." While relying upon the reader to make these connections, she continues to foreground herself as an important national poet.

Smith wanders alone, at night, upon a high cliff overlooking the raging sea. She and the lunatic look upon the dashing surf lamenting their existence, and the reader can feel the suicidal impulse of both subjects through the vivid description of the terrain. By creating a dark scene depicting the power of the untamed natural world she creates a "sublime view whose grandeur provoked awe and fear" (Brewer 582).

The connection between the natural world and emotion is the subject matter of Sonnet 32, "To melancholy. Written on the banks of the Arun, October 1785":

WHEN latest Autumn spreads her evening veil,
And the grey mists from these dim waves arise,
I love to listen to the hollow sighs,
Through the half-leafless wood that breathes the gale:
For at such hours the shadowy phantom, pale,

Of it seems to fleet before the poet's eyes;
Strange sounds are heard, and mournful melodies,
As of night wanderers, who their woes bewail
Here, by his native stream, at such an hour,
Pity's own Otway I methinks could meet,
And hear his deep sighs swell the sadden'd wind!
O Melancholy!—such thy magic power,
That to the soul these dreams are often sweet,
And sooth the pensive visionary mind!

Her melancholy is accentuated by her solitary interaction with a scene that has inspired other famous poets. In a footnote she advises the reader that the seventeenth century poet Thomas Otway passed his youth on the banks of the Arun, and she describes it further as “an inconsiderable stream, winding in a channel deeply worn, among meadow, heath, and wood” (Curran 30). Smith feels empathy for this popular poet, who “lived in extreme poverty in his final years” (Curran 30). She connects herself to his tragic life, creating sympathy in the reader, while she continues to foreground her poetic worth. Smith writes, “Pity’s own Otway I methinks could meet, / And hear his deep sighs swell the sadden’d wind!” (10-11). Her melancholic sighs echo along the banks of the Arun as the ghost of the dead poet visits her solitary musings.

The sonnet becomes a type of gothic, ghost story in which she communes with his ghost while “strange sounds are heard, and mournful melodies” (7). The detailed description of her interaction with the “shadowy phantom, pale” (5) creates the sensation of horror within the

reader. The ghostly, twilight scene prompts the poet to wonder if she too is a “night-wanderer” (8) living in the space between the living and the dead. Smith’s heightened senses allow her access to the land of the dead, creating awe and terror in the reader. It is the “magic power” of “melancholy” (12) that allows Smith to commune with the ghost of her male predecessor. She describes herself as a visionary inspired by the spiritual and natural world, emphasizing that her melancholic poetic mind makes her more sensitive to the world that surrounds her.

The melancholic sorrow of her poetic heart is captured succinctly in Sonnet 90 “To oblivion”:

Forgetfulness! I would thy hand could close
These eyes that turn reluctant from the day;
So might this painful consciousness decay,
And, with my memory, end my cureless woes.
Sister of Chaos and eternal Night!
Oblivion! Take me to thy quiet reign,
Since robb’d of all that gave my soul delight,
I only ask exemption from the pain
Of knowing “such things were”—and are no more;
Of dwelling on the hours for ever fled,
And heartless, helpless, hopeless to deplore
“Pale misery living, joy and pleasure dead:”
While dragging thus unwish’d a length of days,
“Death seems prepared to strike, yet still delays.

In this sonnet Smith’s eyes are depicted as the window to the poet’s soul. She is capable of transforming the world of her memories into images that are then transferred to the page. While Smith cries out to forgetfulness to

take the pain of her remembrances away she is reluctant to turn away (2) from her inspiration. It is the reality of her continually recalled memories that provoke her melancholia and drive her to write. Smith appears torn between remembering and forgetting the sorrows of her life.

She seeks the forgetfulness of the grave, knowing that she cannot escape from her memory until she, along with her poetic mind, decays. This sonnet strongly suggests that the speaker has a death wish, leaving the reader wondering if Smith feels the same way. Smith's "cureless woes" (4) initiate her suicidal tendencies as she longs for the "quiet reign" of "Oblivion!" (6). Perhaps the reader would be prompted into an act of charity in order to help Smith escape from her painful reality, and in order to intervene before she kills herself.

In particular, Smith seems to focus upon the events of a single day as the catalyst for her sorrow. She tells the reader that in a single day she was "robb'd of all that gave [her] soul delight" (7). Her lack of detail creates a mysterious tone, leaving the reader to wonder what happened on *the* day that Smith refers to in the poem. She prompts the reader to ask why Smith would seek death because of the memory of a single day? The curiosity of the reader is piqued promoting speculation and sympathy in the reader.

Smith does leave clues for the reader, but is never explicit about the cause of her grief. She relates that she seeks out death as “exemption from the pain” (8) of knowing “that ‘such things were’—and are no more” (9). Her reference to Macduff’s lines in *Macbeth*, spoken following the murder of his wife and children is a central clue for the reader. She also uses a verse from Sir Brook Boothby’s *Sorrows. Sacred to the Memory of Penelope* written in memoriam of his only child who died at an early age. Together these quotes signal to the reader that she is mourning the death of a family member.

She creates a vivid image of her state of grief, describing her condition as “heartless, helpless, [and] hopeless” (11). Her altered state of existence causes the sentimental reader to feel a deep empathy for Smith’s mental state. The final line of the sonnet, “death seems prepared to strike, yet still delays” (14) leaves the reader with an image of Smith on the cusp between living and dying, between death’s sickle and the arduous movement of her life. While creating sympathy and eliciting emotion she is also inviting the reader to compare her suffering with that of other poets, and with their own. Smith “directs her readers to understand her poems: as the work of a woman writing in the face of overwhelming sorrows and trials...[by] appealing to her readers’ familiarity with the roles women play” (Labbe 5). The sympathy of the female reader

would be amplified by their personal experience, and they would relate to her state of mind completely.

The manipulation of the reader's emotion is carried further in Sonnet 47, "To fancy":

THEE, Queen of Shadows! shall I still invoke,
Still love the scenes thy sportive pencil drew,
When on mine eyes the early radiance broke
Which shew'd the beautiful, rather than the true!
Alas! long since, those glowing tints are dead,
And now 'tis thine in darkest hues to dress
The spot where pale experience hangs her head
O'er the sad grave of murder'd Happiness!
Thro' thy false medium then no longer view'd,
May fancy'd pain and fancy'd pleasure fly,
And I, as from me all thy dreams depart,
Be to my wayward destiny subdu'd;
Nor seek perfection with a poet's eye,
Nor suffer anguish with a poet's heart!

She provides the reader with a more detailed description of her muse, whom she dubs the Queen of Shadows (1). Smith's inspiring deity lives among the shadows, ruling the twilight, the space between darkness and light. Her Queen of Shadows is 'fancy,' a synonym for Smith's imagination, which seeks inspiration from the 'shadows' of her life. Karen Weisman argues that Smith "*becomes* a queen of shadows in so far as she substitutes the minutiae of experience...for the concreteness of a nature that can only function as a symbolic pointer to unnamed grief" (26). The reader creates a parallel between the muse and the speaker who

lives in the shadows of proper society. Her grief cannot be amply described within her sonnets, and she can only attempt to convey the full impact of her life within the shadows. Writing poetry is the only way that Smith has to adequately convey her sorrow.

In order to make the reader understand her losses more clearly, the sonnet relates the sad progression of Smith's life beginning with the fond memories she has of her youth. As the sonnet develops we are taken on an autobiographical trip through Smith's memories. She depicts her early childhood as a still life or "scene" (2) that to her experienced eyes now seems illusory. The memory of her happy childhood only serves as a bitter contrast to the gloomy portrayal of her life experiences. Her happiness dwells within the shadows of her life proving that her radiant memories are "beauteous rather than the true" (4). She emphasizes that beautiful memories, like a beautiful work of art, cannot accurately describe or convey the truth or the reality of the world. Keats' speculation in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819): "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,--that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50) is strikingly similar to Smith's lines and may have served as inspiration for his poem.

With the beauty of her childhood behind her she becomes the voice of "pale experience" (7). Smith cannot draw inspiration from the "glowing tints" (5) of her happy memories since they are a "false medium" (9).

Instead she states that it is her “wayward destiny” (12) to live among the shadows of her glorious past. As in previous sonnets, she seeks the grave as a refuge from her life, since she cannot dwell within the “perfection” of the “poet’s eye” (13) nor can she dwell in the “anguish” of the “poet’s heart” (14). She places herself within the shadows between her memories and her realities, between her innocence and her experience. The reader feels sympathy for the poet who must rely upon their kindness to escape her predicament. Although Smith does not explicitly ask for their charity, the reader would feel bound to support the melancholic poet in order to ease her burden.

Sonnet 44, “Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex”
strengthens the reader’s view of Smith as a sentimental poet:

PRESS'D by the moon, mute arbitress of tides,
While the loud equinox its power combines,
The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
The wild blast, rising from the western cave,
Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore,
Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
They hear the warring elements no more:
While I am doom'd—by life's long storm oppress,
To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.

She creates a vivid picture of a desolate seaside village that evokes feelings of awe and unease within the reader's mind. As in the Penshurst sonnet Smith enhances the scene by providing a detailed footnote:

Middleton is a village on the margin of the sea, in Sussex, containing only two or three houses. They were formerly several acres of ground between its small church and the sea, which now, by its continual encroachments, approaches in a few feet of this half-ruined and humble edifice. The wall, which once surrounded the church-yard, is entirely swept away, many of the graves broken up, and the remains of bodies interred washed into the sea; whence human bones are found among the sand and shingles on the shore.

Curran 42

Smith describes the scene of devastation thoroughly in order to make the reader more clearly relate to her source of inspiration. The descriptive footnote augments the sonnet scene creating a realistic depiction that places the reader in the role of spectator alongside Smith. Smith's use of an ancient national ruin works upon the reader to "conjure up melancholic reflections on the transitory nature of life" (Brewer 582). The reader also creates a connection between the ruins of the village and the ruined life of the poet inspiring sympathy. Smith purposely guides the reader to make these links by asserting, "I am doom'd—by life's long storm opprest, / To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest" (13-14).

This sonnet ties Smith to the graveyard poetry of the eighteenth century by using similar language and setting as Gray's "Elegy written in a

Country Churchyard” (1751). The scene, as in previous sonnets, is similar to a ghost story setting, with the wind howling, the surf crashing, and the moon shining upon the bones that gather on the shore in the moonlight. The destructive force of nature, capable of breaking the sanctity of the grave is inspirational for Smith, reminding her of the inevitable ending to her life. She views death as a natural sanctuary from her life’s problems. Her inspiration is not the calm realities of life but the tempest in which the destructive forces of her life seem natural. Smith’s unusual perspective on life would provoke speculation in the readers as to the fleeting scenery of their own life.

Sonnet 67, “On passing over a dreary tract of country, and near the ruins of a deserted chapel, during a tempest” emphasizes the solitary road of the melancholic poet:

Swift fleet the billowy clouds along the sky,
Earth seems to shudder at the storm aghast;
While only beings as forlorn as I,
Court the chill horrors of the howling blast.
Even round yon crumbling walls, in search of food,
The ravenous Owl foregoes his evening flight,
And in his cave, in the deepest wood,
The Fox eludes the tempest of the night.
But to *my* heart congenial is the gloom
Which hides me from a World I wish to shun;
That scene where Ruin saps the mouldering tomb
Suits with the sadness of a wretch undone.
Nor is the deepest shade, the keenest air,
Black as my fate, or cold as my despair.

The setting, clearly encapsulated in the title, is described in minute detail throughout the poem. She is depicted as a solitary presence, walking midst the ruins, in a storm from which all other creatures hide. Smith writes, “to *my* heart congenial is the gloom / Which hides me from a World I wish to shun (9-10). She is drawn to the devastation in search of respite from her black fate and cold despair (14). She emphasizes her solitary existence connecting herself to the subject matter of other famous poems: James Thomson’s “Hymn to Solitude” and Alexander Pope’s “Solitude: An Ode.” Each poet asserts that solitude is necessary in order to find inspiration.

Smith’s continual emphasis of her sorrow, of her solitude, and of her troubled mind leaves the reader with an overwhelmingly dark portrait of Smith. Her constant longing for death to take away her suffering, adds a sense of urgency to her requests for attention and financial support. She also frequently reminds the reader of her refined upbringing, using it as a stark contrast to her current position, drawing attention to the magnitude of her suffering.

Smith comments directly upon her memories of childhood in Sonnet 92, “Written at Bignor Park in Sussex, in August, 1799”:

Low murmurs creep along the woody vale,
The tremulous Aspens shudder in the breeze,
Slow o’er the downs the leaden vapours sail,

While I, beneath these old paternal trees,
Mark the dark shadows of the threaten'd storm,
As gathering clouds o'erveil the morning sun;
They pass!—But oh! Ye visions bright and warm
With which even here my sanguine youth begun,
Ye are obscured for ever!—And too late
The poor Slave shakes the unworthy bonds away
Which crush'd her!—Lo! The radiant star of day
Lights up this lovely scene anew—My fate
Nor hope nor joy illumines—Nor for me
Return those rosy hours which here I used to see!

Bignor Park was the site of Smith's upbringing and her sonnet reminds readers of the "placid genteel existence once promised but then denied her" (Curran 76). She writes in a rare moment of tranquility from beneath the aspens on her father's estate. Smith's tone is lighter, giving the reader an unexpected break from her melancholy. Yet, Smith reminds the reader that the "visions bright and warm" (7) spawned by her childhood home are "obscured for ever!" (9). Smith again provides the reader with an opportunity to ponder the unexpected twists of life, raising sympathy for the poet who no longer belongs to the tranquil world of the gentry.

Despite her brief freedom from melancholy Smith realizes that she is incapable of returning to a state of happiness. Smith writes, "My fate / Nor hope nor joy illumines—Nor for me / Return those rosy hours which here I used to see!" (12-14). The momentary lapse into happiness slips away beneath her grim reality, encapsulating the reader once again in her melancholic world. Smith garners more sympathy from the reader by

comparing her current condition to that of a freed slave, who will never actually be free of their emotional bonds. This sonnet forcibly reminds the reader that she relies on their charity in order to protect herself from the slavish bonds of poverty.

Sonnet 57, "To dependence" offers the reader a despondent view of the life of an author in the late eighteenth century:

Dependence! heavy, heavy are thy chains,
And happier they who from the dangerous sea,
Or the dark mine, procure with ceaseless pains
A hard-earn'd pittance—than who trust to thee!
More blest the hind, who from his bed of flock
Starts—when the birds of morn their summons give,
And waken'd by the lark—" the shepherd's clock,"
Lives but to labour—labouring but to live.
More noble than the sycophant, whose art
Must heap with tawdry flowers thy hated shrine;
I envy not the meed thou canst impart
To crown *his* service—while, tho' pride combine
With Fraud to crush me—my unfetter'd heart
Still to the Mountain Nymph may offer mine.

Smith writes in order to draw attention to the "chronic problem artists face of securing patronage without sacrificing freedom" (Curran 51). She creates awareness of the artist's plight in late eighteenth-century society, and suggests that the reader must support the hardworking writer. She compares the plight of an author to the dangerous and lower class jobs of mining, sailing and labouring. This reminds the reader that the artist faces a road of poverty unless the public is willing to sponsor them. She draws

attention to the inadequacies of the patronage system informing the reader that it takes “ceaseless pains” (3) to make “an hard-earn’d pittance” (4). Smith longing to be free from the bonds of writing for a living reminds the reader that she relies upon the kindness and charity of readers in order to survive. She depicts herself as an independent poet whose heart remains “unfetter’d” (13) despite the bonds of the publishing industry. She leaves the reader with a picture of a fiercely independent poet in need of respect and support in order to remain free.

The dominance of the culture of sensibility in the late eighteenth century allows Smith to readily garner sympathy from her audience. It is doubtful whether her text would have generated as much interest had the public’s mindset been different. Her ability to create a sympathetic audience, and to offer them a glimpse into the mind of the melancholic poet, creates a unique niche for her work. It is evident that her writing inspired a charitable spirit within the reader who sought out literature that would change their emotional state. Her ability to analyze the melancholic moments of her life, and to vividly describe these scenes, enables the reader to feel her sorrow from a distance.

Conclusion

In a letter to the publishers Cadell and Davies Smith writes, "It is on the Poetry I have written that I trust for the little reputation I may hereafter have and know that it is not the least likely among the works of modern Poets to reach another period" (18 August, 1805). Smith's confidence as a poet is evident in this statement, and her desire to be remembered by future generations reminds us that she was also writing to become a part of the national literary tradition. Her status as a celebrity was initiated by her poetry and it was largely these poetic works that inspired future generations.

While she was writing she earned the reputation as a "lady of signal sorrows, signal woes" (qtd in Stanton xxx). Hayley's description of Smith is a concise portrayal of the public's view of this melancholic writer. While the reader's initial fascination with Smith's unhappiness is replaced over time with skepticism for her apparent display of 'false' sentiment, she continued to be a popular writer. Her reliance upon the culture of sensibility, in order to establish empathy towards her sorrows and create a charitable mood in her audience, was a risky endeavor particularly as new cultural trends gained prominence, a fact that she openly acknowledges in the preface to the sixth edition of her sonnets. Her increasingly detailed

prefaces, and the addition of her portrait, are evidence that Smith sought to focus attention upon her personal life in order to maintain the public's attention.

However, Smith's increasingly revealing prefaces also work as a reminder to the audience that despite her sorrows and the content of her poems she is first and foremost an excellent writer, who can channel the realities of her life into the rigid sonnet form. Smith's use of a neoclassic convention, borrowing lines from and making allusions to other famous authors, ensured her own place in the national literary heritage. She creates a connection between her work and others, establishing her own literary circle, despite her lack of association with the prominent social circles of her time. While she was initially connected to the famous Hayley their friendship ended unexpectedly in 1794, and it is conjectured that her personal revelations, which he called "public floggings" were partially responsible for this.

She did meet William Cowper, through Hayley, in 1792 to whom she dedicated her blank verse poem "The Emigrants," but his descent into madness put an end to their budding friendship. William Wordsworth visited her in 1791, and made her the subject of his first published poem, but she was typically viewed as a solitary poet, and was not associated with other literary names during her lifetime. The reference to her

powerful friends within the prefaces is to the prominent names within her subscription lists, and not to personal friends since. As Stanton states, Smith was “sadly isolated from other writers and literary friends” (xviii).

Curran refers to Smith’s work as being Romantic “in retrospect” (xix), and her impact upon these poets is clear from Wordsworth’s mention of her in the notes, which accompanied “Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees’ Heads” (1833). He writes, “Charlotte Smith [is] a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered. She wrote little, and that little unambitiously, but with true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English Poets; for in point of time her earlier writings preceded, I believe, those of Cowper and Burns.” Wordsworth places her as the predecessor to the nature poets, naming those whom she admired in verse.

Smith is often referred to as the mother of ‘romanticism’ given her inspiration upon Wordsworth, Keats and Coleridge. Coleridge acknowledged Smith along with William Bowles as revivers of the sonnet form and writes, “I am justified therefore...in deducting its laws from their composition” (qtd in Dolan 239). Like Smith, Keats writes about the melancholic, solitary poetic process particularly in “When I have Fears that I may Cease to Be” (1818). Keat’s use of the dichotomy between beauty

and truth in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (1820) may be influenced by Smith’s own use of this duality, although this is strictly speculative.

Her acquaintance with Blake is rumored and they could possibly have been introduced through Hayley. His familiarity with her work can be attested to by his name on the subscription list to the fifth edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets*. Smith’s conflation of the innocence of youth with the experience of life may have inspired Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in which Blake too explores the wide ranges of the human experience. Blake would also have empathized with the solitary, impoverished condition that marked both poets’ lives.

Aside from her poetic legacy she also had an impact upon British novelists. She regularly corresponded with the gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe influencing her work, and Stanton argues that Jane Austen who openly disparaged Smith’s work “actually borrowed plot, character, and incident from them” (xxxix). Her influence upon national writers was fleeting, and her work has only recently been acknowledged as an important part of literary history.

Although Smith’s celebrity is not a social event like that of Laurence Sterne she was nevertheless a well-respected and famous author in her time. Smith’s reputation as a melancholic poet confined her to a solitary celebrity status in which her sorrow was the subject of gossip and

conjecture and in which her fame earned her charitable donations but not social invitations. Her text came to represent her person within the public realm, and the prefaces serve as a necessary supplement to the vague details of her sonnets. According to Marshall “the celebrity works in the culture as a figure who wrests the various forms of affective power into rationalized configurations” (56), either as a representative of the dominant culture or as an expression of the subordinate culture. Smith’s reliance upon the culture of sensibility places her within the dominant sphere, yet her status as a female poet clearly connects her to the subordinate culture. Smith’s position between the two poles may in part explain the initial popularity of her text. Smith’s celebrity away from the mainstream runs against Marshall’s conjecture that there must be a “unifying thread that links entertainment celebrities to other public personalities” (185). Yet, if my assertion regarding the representation of Smith in the public sphere through her text is correct, then her connection to other writers is also established in this manner.

Smith’s status as a celebrated literary figure captures the changing cultural shift between neoclassic and romantic texts, between sentimental literature and gothic literature, and between melancholic poetry and nature poetry. Her celebrity brings to the foreground, issues of class and gender and the inadequacies of the legal system that, as Bourdieau states “are

already present in a latent state amongst all the members of the class or group of [her] addressees” (131). Smith’s positioning of herself in the public sphere is distinctive, creating a celebrity status that is as unique as the text that represents her.

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