The Poetic Works of Charlotte Smith: Philosophy, Sympathy, and Forging Community

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The Poetic Works of Charlotte Smith: Philosophy, Sympathy, and Forging Community

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Anthony Jarrells and Dr. Rebecca Stern for their continued faith in this project. Also, to my parents who have spent many long years excitedly waiting for me to complete this milestone in my life. And last, but not least, to the one who tells me to keep my head up and persevere; who always insists that my life is waiting on me. I can never thank you enough for reminding me that every day I must choose the best version myself. I know: “silly rabbit.”
Abstract

This work will focus on Charlotte Smith’s poetic works and how, over the course of her entire poetic career (the late eighteenth century/early nineteenth century), she exhibits a concrete sense of a poetic ethos regarding sympathy in her writing. I seek to account for the overwhelming focus on suffering subjects by illuminating her view of the relation between poetry and sympathy for others. I will also place her within a history of writers and philosophers who examined the epistemological and practical nature of feeling, sympathy, and emotional connection among human beings.

Smith feels that poetry renders suffering visible to others, fostering the possibility for sympathy among a wide audience. Smith primarily focuses on an audience that shares common experiences of pain and creating a community among them. At the very center of this community, the one who orchestrates bringing together of common sufferers, is the figure of the poet. As evidenced in “Sonnet I” of Elegiac Sonnets, the duty of the poet is to record painful emotions and situations despite her own pain of keen sensitivity, or “sensibility.” The poet is the most fitting recorder of human emotion since she possesses both a heightened awareness of the world and the skill to convert emotions and situations into art. Smith feels that the poet has a duty to those pained individuals. Elegiac Sonnets and her epic-length works, Emigrants and Beachy Head, demonstrate how poetry becomes the space in which the poet guides the creation and dissemination of
sympathy. Poetry renders misery and suffering visible to anyone who reads about them and makes understanding such pain a possibility.

However, poetry also renders pain visible to a larger readership that includes those who cannot understand the commonly shared experience to which Smith reaches out. Her poetry is open to a more general reading public that finds entertainment value or self-satisfaction in, as David Hume says, “she[dding] a generous tear” for emotional turmoil. In this way, Smith divides her readership: the larger group that responds to thrills and drama and those she wishes to bring together as a community of fellow sufferers. She makes use of both groups of readers, as one audience enables her to live and make money and the other enables her to fulfill her poetic duty through sympathy. She navigates her dual readership with choices of vulnerable subjects in dire situations, as they appeal to both audiences (albeit for different reasons). Yet, despite availability to anyone who reads the poetry, shared experience remains a necessity in Smith’s poetic ethos regarding sympathy for those alone in suffering.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

A female exile, a mother, sits alone on a rock next to the sea waiting for a ship to bring her good news she fears will never come. A mother worries for the safety of her children, terrified that she cannot provide them security. She would die to protect them. A hermit, despite having renounced society, dies to save the members of a sinking ship. These scenes call for sympathy for their subjects and provide a clear sense of the appropriate and reasonable emotional response to the sufferer.

The poetry of Charlotte Smith (4 May 1749—28 October 1806) often features such images of pain. Suffering subjects pervade her poetry and I seek to account for the preponderance of these subjects in her writing by demonstrating the connections among suffering, sympathy, and the role of the poet. For Smith, pain figures deeply in her poetic ethos, her sense of what poetry means and does. Poetry renders sympathy possible among human beings, acting as the vessel for expressing painful experience. Smith develops over the entirety of her career a consistent ethos regarding sympathy: the importance of pain for the creation of the poet, the need to foster sympathy for those in pain, the essential development of a community of sufferers, and the responsibility of putting a voice to that distress. In addition to demonstrating the importance of sympathy to Smith’s poetry, I will also place her perspective in conversation with a history of
writers and philosophers who examined the nature of feeling, sympathy, and emotional connection among human beings.

Charlotte Smith relies on the figure of the poet and the creation of community in her sense of sympathy and emotional connection. Sympathy fosters community among a group of common sufferers (and perhaps elicited from a wider audience). Poetry functions as the most fitting avenue for the creation of sympathy. Her approach to sympathy highlights what she felt the job of a poet actually entailed. If sympathy finds its home in poetry, then what is the duty of a poet? What is the poet’s duty to the subject and the world to which she bequeaths her work? Through her poetry, Smith informs us what use sympathy has to the poet, to her subject, and to those who read her words.

In Smith’s perspective of the function of sympathy, the poet is the orchestrator of emotions and makes them accessible to sympathy through words. The duty of the poet, as most evidenced in “Sonnet I” of Elegiac Sonnets, is to record painful emotions and situations despite her own pain caused by keen sensitivity, or what came to be called “sensibility.” The poet is best able to fill this role as recorder of human emotion, for she possesses both a heightened awareness of the world and the skill of converting emotions and situations into art. As Wordsworth describes this process, poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility,” the poet acting as the translator of intense feeling.

Poetry becomes the space in which sympathy can be created and transmitted, and the poet represents the most fitting conductor for this process. Poetry’s use-value is that

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it acts as the gateway for sympathy and emotion between human beings. Poetry renders misery and suffering visible to anyone who reads it and makes understanding that pain a possibility. Smith hopes to reach a readership that feels similar emotions as the subjects in her poetry as well as a general reading public that finds entertainment value or self-satisfaction in “she[dding] a generous tear” for emotional turmoil.²

In fact, Smith divides her readership: those she wishes to draw in with thrills and drama and those she wishes to bring together as a community of fellow sufferers. She needs both as a writer, although her primary goal remains reaching those in pain. One audience enables her to live and make money and the other enables her to fulfill her poetic duty through sympathy. She navigates her dual readership with choices of vulnerable subjects in emotional and situational turmoil, as they appeal to both audiences. Yet, despite the availability of poetry to anyone who reads it, shared experience remains a necessity for Smith’s poetic ethos regarding sympathy. Her work focuses on understanding among people who have similarly suffered, often deriding those who have had an easy path to walk in life. The literature assures those in pain they are not alone and there are others who know what it feels like to experience loss and struggle.

Nonetheless, the public nature of poetry’s message to pain-filled readers unlocks the potential for shaping a general, large audience of sympathizers. Smith appears to speak directly to a small subset of her audience that knows the pain of a poet like herself, but poetry disseminates her words widely through publication. Although the general, commercial audience may never fully understand what it means to suffer, they can

perhaps *imagine themselves* in a similar situation. Smith then reaps the benefits of two worlds: she can speak to those whom she truly wishes to comfort and sympathize with as well as gain a larger readership through her tales of loss and woe. Hurt and misery should be made known through the written word so that others may read, sympathize, and perhaps offer much needed aid and understanding. This instantiation through writing may affect some change in the world, thus helping those that suffer needlessly.

In what follows, I will first outline the time period in which Charlotte Smith wrote her poetry, beginning with a discussion of what is known as the age of sensibility. Smith’s engagement with this historical moment, one of upheaval, volatility, and heightened emotion registers everywhere in her poetry, particularly in the central role she gives to sympathy. In the subsequent section, I will turn to the core principle of sensibility: sympathy. The works of philosophers Adam Smith and David Hume explicitly question sympathy and outline its role in society. Their works provide a context for placing Charlotte Smith in the conversation regarding sympathy. Although it is presumptive to say that Charlotte Smith necessarily read their works, she clearly embraces and relies on the principle of sympathy in her own writing. I then transition into close readings of her early poetry in *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems*, outlining their expression of the function of her poetic ethos regarding sympathy. I will examine how her philosophy of sympathy implicitly filters out into her epic-length poems, *The Emigrants* and *Beachy Head*. Her collection of shorter poems intensely focuses on loss, struggle, and the sadness of painful life experiences. The longer works deal less explicitly or strongly with the same sympathetic subjects. They do reflect Smith’s focus on community building around shared painful experience as well as articulate the
connection between forging sympathetic community and the act of writing. The continuance of her philosophy into her later poems indicates a career-long commitment to promoting sympathetic connections among people.
Chapter 2: A Historical Framework of Sensibility and its Literature

Smith started writing her poetry during the mid to late 1700s, or “the age of sensibility,” part of a century that found importance in examining the nature of feeling. For her and many others, suffering had become a prevalent issue of the time with the French Revolution (1789-1799), exiles fleeing from devastation or persecution, families torn apart by war, and rampant injustices to the poor and disadvantaged. Her poetry highlights these issues dramatically and fits well into the literature of sensibility. However, the age of sensibility has become widely known (and criticized) for its seeming fixation on one response to experience: passion of feeling. Janet Todd explains in Sensibility: an Introduction that “1771 [was] the middle of the high period of sensibility, when it met a public hungry for sentimental scenes and emotionally prepared to receive them; a few decades later, it was ignored or greeted with embarrassed laughter” (3). The literature of sensibility is branded the literature of effusive emotion; whimpering over the transitive beauty of a flower; falling apart over lost love; mewing over the lines of some hope-filled sonnet. Such effusions were popular literature, and Charlotte Smith made use of their popularity in her own works (both prose and verse). Although many critics highlight the sudden downfall of the literature of sensibility due to its focus on excessive emotion, I will counter that Charlotte Smith utilized the lasting allure it possessed to
attract a general readership, providing sensibility a much needed indication of purpose with her view of sympathy.

This repute for self-gratifying, excessive sentiment in the literature of sensibility emerged from a mid-eighteenth century interest in the nature of human emotion, morality, and social action. The literature of sensibility found its roots in the principle of sentimentalism. Janet Todd describes sentimentalism as “the movement discerned in philosophy, politics and art, based on the belief in or hope of the natural goodness of humanity manifested in a humanitarian concern for the unfortunate and helpless” (7). This period was philosophically concerned with the moral character of humanity and actions prompted during situations of ethical quandary. Philosophers such as Frances Hutcheson, Jean Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, and Adam Smith analyzed the human drive to do good for others (in its varying degrees).

The issue of humanity’s desire to do good deeds in society leads to questioning the motive towards decency. What spurs human beings to magnanimity? To what degree does that motivation rest on self-satisfaction rather than selflessness? Does that difference matter at all if the result provides general happiness? Leland E. Warren’s essay, “The Conscious Speakers,” notes that even literature from the previous century evidences “not only an emphasis on the need to cultivate a sense of responsibility toward others and a desire to do good for them, but a powerful expression of the pleasure that comes from the satisfaction of knowing that one has committed such goodness” (30 [emphasis added]). Here lies the vein through which the magnanimous feeling of “responsibility toward others” becomes a self-gratifying display of emotion. The responsibility of meeting someone else’s needs transforms into pleasure through the
contentedness of a job well done. Predictably, this leads to “powerful expressions” verging on excess, with effusive tears and sighs as outward proof of one’s interior worth.

Thus, sentimentalism incorporates sensibility by privileging attentiveness to others and the surrounding world. The consideration for others’ feelings and their situations extends into a governing principle. In short, sentimentalism is the principle of responding to pathos and painful experience with a strong emotional reaction. Sensibility is a keen and profound awareness of the surrounding world and experience, especially human suffering. As such, this awareness often produces a strong emotional response. If sensibility is an *ability*, sentimentalism is that ability put into *practice*. Janet Todd describes sensibility as a word that “came to denote the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering” (7). Sensibility alerts us to distress and allows for a compassionate reaction. This definition highlights the link to sentimentalism, for “extremely refined emotion” indicates feeling honed by principle.

The refining of emotion also redeems sensibility from the accusation of merely being a capacity for thoughtless, knee-jerk emotion. In his essay, “Sensibility as Argument,” Stephen Cox explains sensibility’s defense against this charge: “The argument of sensibility might be very loosely defined as persuasive discourse that tends to equate intellectual authority with the power to display or elicit emotional susceptibility” (64). Sensitivity coupled with the figure of the intellectual gives sensibility a sense of “purpose” and legitimacy. Without the connection to reason and thought, sensibility meanders into characterization of unchecked passion, that it serves no purpose but self-indulgence in pleasures of affectation of inner virtue.
Unsurprisingly, the definition of sensibility as a capacity for refined emotional sensitivity began to blur, especially as the century neared the onset of the French Revolution. Divided allegiances and beliefs about the war’s moral implications rendered ethical assumptions unclear. The capacity of sensibility became muddled as misery and pain stretched across all sides of the war. How can one be emotionally moved by another’s plight if that person believes wholeheartedly in tenets of the “wrong side”? What if the one that now suffers has lived his life without regard for others, or has injured them? Does sensibility function without contingencies? Answers to these questions differed from individual to individual.

However, examinations on the issues of war found no lack of strength of feeling. As hardship and conflict began to affect all aspects of life, emotions intensified; individuals became more entrenched in their feelings. This filtered into the literature of the moment, perhaps leading to its increased characterization as overly sentimental. According to Syndy McMillen Conger in Sensibility in Transformation, “…the single most important cause of the eventual reaction against the literature of sensibility [was] its increasing moral complacency” (13). Literary works began to reflect both an intensified commitment to feeling and the notion that strength of feeling validates itself. Hence, the growing moral complacency of the time: feeling became valued in itself rather than a reaction qualified by a “humanitarian concern for the unfortunate and helpless.” Sensibility began to spread outward from its characteristic responsibility to suffering, reacting to trivial matters with the same fervor of emotion; even Wordsworth was charged with “a knack of feeling about subjects with which feeling had no proper
The literature of sensibility swiftly attained a reputation for overreaction, tears, and swooning.

The principles inherent in the literature of sensibility became suspect with its increasing focus on intensity of feeling regardless of its cause or subject. The literature began to emphasize the experience of feeling deeply rather than the principles of responsibility inherent in sensibility. The “purpose” within the literature devolved into the thrills of heaving bodices and the self-satisfaction of shedding a tear for the miserable and downtrodden: “This fiction initially showed people how to behave, how to express themselves in friendship and how to respond decently to life’s experiences. Later, it prided itself more on making its readers weep and in teaching them when and how much to weep.”

The elements that made this literature seem unworthy of respect also made it appealing. Readers sought out works that moved them emotionally, making them eager to read more about suffering and intrigue. This pathos-laden literature spurs readers to feel sympathy for the characters involved.

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Chapter 3: Sympathy and the Philosophies of David Hume and Adam Smith

Sympathy is integral to the discussion of feeling and sensibility, and it plays a crucial role in both Charlotte Smith’s poetry and the philosophy of the time. I will now turn to the philosophies of David Hume and Adam Smith, as their analyses of the nature of feeling (including sympathy) provide useful ways of approaching Charlotte Smith’s sense of sympathy in her work. Their essays lend insight into the treatment of sympathy and emotion as concepts during the period and serve as a foundation to contextualize Charlotte Smith’s contributions. As a concept, sympathy was (and is) difficult to define. Adela Pinch explains that “writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries [sought to] account for the relationships between persons and passion.”5 Hume, Adam Smith, Charlotte Smith, and many others wrote about the nature of feeling and the function of sympathy among people. Before I delve into Charlotte Smith’s poetry at length, it is important to outline the issue of sympathy as it existed at the time. These two philosophers’ works best illustrate the elements that she incorporates into her poetry. David Hume’s understanding of the connection between people and emotions is that feelings are conveyed through sympathy, allowing humans to be social and form a community. Sympathy functions as a bridge for all emotions among people; whether the feeling is happy, sad, or anywhere in between, sympathy is the connection. Adela Pinch

For Hume, sympathy is the mechanism by which people can catch the feelings of others. People’s ability to feel other people’s feelings is the sign of humankind’s essentially social nature. People are fundamentally linked through their common feelings, and what allows those feelings to be shared is sympathy. (24)

Hume’s sense of emotional communication is that it defines his understanding humanity. Feelings are meant to be “shared.” Sympathy acts as a conduit for humans to interact with each other and emotions are the common bond among us all. Janet Todd links Hume’s idea of commonality among humans to the notion of community: “he makes community a spontaneous formation, a combination of self and other through sympathy and tenderness that elide individual differences” (27). The community forged through sympathy allows individual differences to be erased through common feeling. Sympathetic conditions make the “individual” disappear: that which forms community exists outside personal situations and personal experience. Thus, he emphasizes that the faculty of sympathy erases the particular situations that created it. Humanity is a community of fellow-feeling without boundaries.

To Hume, sympathy acts as the vehicle in which free-floating emotions shuttle among people and impress upon the self. The unattached nature of emotions further “elide[s] individual differences,” rendering people malleable to external impressions on the self. Adela Pinch notes that for Hume, “feelings are transpersonal, as autonomous entities that do not always belong to individuals but rather wander extravagantly from one person to another” (3). This makes sense for Hume, as he feels that emotions act as the elements sympathy “catches.” Many Romantic era poets, Charlotte Smith included,
speak directly of “Dejection,” “Melancholy,” “Pity,” and other emotions as if they were beings. Often regarded as outside oppressors (especially painful ones), their transpersonal nature renders these feelings common to all people. Hume describes emotions as “contagious,” emanating from others and yet affecting himself most profoundly: “my heart catches the same passion, and is warm’d by those warm sentiments, that display themselves before me” (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 308). The contagious nature of emotions lies in their ability to produce “correspondent” emotions. This highlights Hume’s idea that the emotions of others, in a way, take precedence over the self: “all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition” (Hume, *Treatise*, 167). Hume displaces feeling from one’s “natural temper and disposition,” and believes that he experiences a stronger sense of emotion as it impresses upon him from others. Sympathy as a vehicle allows people the ability to catch common, free-floating feelings.

Yet, Hume’s idea of the commonality of emotion can be problematic, especially with greater enquiry regarding how people individually view the world and feel in response. Of great importance during this period was a heightened concentration on subjectivity (that we each perceive things differently) and thoughts about the connection between the viewer and what or who is being seen. Elizabeth Dolan sheds light on how new medical sciences worked to label and evaluate the working parts of human beings, such as the eye. The analysis and labeling connected to more abstract notions of sight, seeing, and subjectivity. She also links these growths of thought to the matter of suffering. She says “two seemingly divergent late-eighteenth century cultural preoccupations—the materiality of vision and pressing social injustice issues—created
new modes of ‘seeing’ (and thus of expressing and alleviating) suffering in the Romantic era” (1). How one sees the world cannot be separated from the self. Suddenly, the individual as a physical body capable of sight and experience becomes connected to the world outside it. In turn, suffering caused by “pressing social injustice issues” gains a new significance. Those in pain, like all humans, have an individual view of the world that deeply affects them. This understanding informs “the Romantic era writers’ awareness of the radical physicality of perception, the commingling of mind and body with the world outside” and is responsible for many of the elements commonly attributed to that genre of literature (3). This era of literature touts such ideas as the validity of intense feeling in the individual, the effect of powerful landscapes on the viewer, and incorporates emotions described as living beings. These ideas are elements of mid to late eighteenth century literature and responses to “the radical physicality of perception.” The physical eye connects people to the world they see, and it is as unique to one individual as it is to another. Thus, Hume’s idea of unattached emotions that connect humanity through sympathy may be complicated by the authority of individual experience.

Countering David Hume, Adam Smith adopts an outlook on emotion and sympathy that depends more on the authority of individual perception and will. He also implements a definition of sympathy closer to a contemporary understanding: commiserating with another’s feelings of suffering. His view is that emotions are contagious only insofar as a person can imagine how they would feel in the same situation. Smith sees receptiveness to others’ emotions as something that requires thoughtfulness and effort. Sympathy requires that a human being place himself, by effort of the imagination, in another person’s place. Janet Todd in Sensibility explains that
“This imaginary changing of places makes sympathy less optimistic than in Hume’s construction, for it becomes not an original spontaneous feeling but more of a moral duty” (27). Adam Smith’s sympathy does not have the “contagious” nature of Hume’s sympathy. Rather, it is the product of scrutiny and judgment. The power of sympathy for Smith comes from within rather than from without (as in Hume’s theory). For Adam Smith, reason should always be the master of the passions; it helps decide what deserves our sympathy and our moral duty. He explains in *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* that “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (11). The individual must look within him or herself to find sympathy, for without having “immediate experience” of the situation, understanding depends on resolve of the imagination. Emotion does not speak to the individual in the way it does in Hume’s construction. There are no emotions floating between people, waiting to be embraced through the all-encompassing capacity for sympathy. For Smith, sympathy is the product of effort and thought.

However, the appropriateness of a subject’s feelings must be judged before sympathy comes to fruition in Smith’s philosophy. If the feeling is deemed proper to the circumstance, it is a moral obligation to sympathize and help if possible. The capacity for sympathy does not function as a way to “elide individual differences,” as it does for Hume. Sympathy depends on understanding what caused the feeling and the belief that the response has been appropriate to the circumstance. Smith calls this “reasonableness” (20). He explains that “Sympathy […] does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it” (15). In stark contrast to Hume’s
philosophy of free-flowing passions impressing on the individual’s emotions, Smith regards the context of feeling as most important. Would it be a fitting response to experience that level of sorrow or pain in this situation? Imagination forms around the circumstances of feeling. Also, strength of feeling does not justify itself, as it could be interpreted in Hume’s theory. For Hume, moral questions are simply answered: if the action provides the most agreeable outcome for most people, it is the virtuous thing to do. Sympathy represents a moral choice for Smith, and the individual is taxed with helping in response to genuine need. He explains that “Man […] rejoices whenever he observes that they adopt his own passions, because he is then assured of that assistance” (17). A man may be “assured” that others will help if they have the ability to put themselves in his place and imagine that they would feel the same. Heavy emphasis is placed on the judicious mind of the individual in Smith’s theory of sympathy, allocating both a moral and social duty to aid “reasonable” sufferers.

These two interpretations of sympathy could be assessed in practice on a large political and social landscape during the turbulent years of the mid eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. These centuries prompted difficult questions about suffering, deserved aid, and responsibility. David Simpson’s chapter “At the Limits of Sympathy” in Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern helpfully outlines this landscape. Hume’s and Adam Smith’s works were fundamental to dialogue in the same troubled, war-ridden environment in which Charlotte Smith would write her poetry. Their literature was penned during “voluminous eighteenth-century debates about how to treat the poor” and shortly “evolved into the systematic social welfare scheme devised by so

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6 Hume, Treatise, (245).
many during the nineteenth century” (17). The French Revolution heightened concerns regarding suffering subjects, responsibility to the disenfranchised (on all sides of the war), and what should be done for them. It brought in its wake emigrants, orphaned children, mothers who had lost their children, widows, and the ever-present impoverished population.

Solutions were not as simple as providing aid to everyone with an outstretched hand. Simpson explains that debates about the poor and social welfare systems were both “intended to relieve the woes of those that were felt to deserve such relief, but also…to keep somebody else poor—the so-called ‘undeserving’ poor whose neglect maintained the integrity of a disciplinary paradigm for the rest of us” (18). What should be done and how to implement that help were complicated by judgments of “deserving” and “not deserving” subjects. Decisions were also challenged by the desire to keep a subset of poor for which the higher classes could act as a model. It provided an opportunity for the upper classes to collectively feel moral satisfaction in teaching self-reliance to the undeserving group. Herein rests the problem with Adam Smith’s sense of sympathy: it assumes human beings will react in the morally responsible way and that individuals will assess need judiciously.

The tension caused by questions of suffering, sympathy, and virtue also affects the consideration of potential community and fellow-feeling among individuals. As earlier evidenced, Hume and Smith hold differing thoughts on the effort required to create such connections. The inherent anxieties of navigating sympathy theoretically and practically found their way into creative literature as well. Some poets, such as Wordsworth, played in the liminal space that debates of the time period fostered.
Simpson analyzes Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* and focuses on the image of the “hunger bitten child.” He explains that the speaker’s connection with this image of suffering “is not a simple, uncomplicated sympathy, an outpouring of empathetic identification with a fellow being”; that instead, “the girl is an emblem of poverty, a still-life figure or spectacle of grief” (22). The image of a hungry, poverty-stricken girl strikes as a seemingly clear instance of deserved sympathy. For Hume, the impact of the girl’s quiet dejection would sufficiently move an observer to help with “an uncomplicated sympathy.” Though for Smith, the girl’s situation and story are necessary to judge her reasonableness of reaction. Her outward emotion reduces her to “emblem” or “still-life figure,” divested of the context that Smith’s observer must imagine to make sympathy possible. Community is impossible without the humanity of its members or an attempt to share in emotion, even for Hume. According to Simpson, Wordsworth’s subjects are “often ghastly strangers open only to minimal intimacies that dramatize alienation rather than community” (27). Fellow-feeling and sympathy fall short with subjects unwilling to communicate. For Wordsworth, stoic and off-putting expressions of emotions can isolate individuals from each other instead of invite community. Even poetry explored the intricacies of emotional connection among human beings, indicating that such questions were pervasive, important, and complex enough to engage at length.

Nevertheless, extreme or seemingly inaccessible emotions that are outside the reach of others still have their place within the conversation of sympathy: they are made more agreeable through various efforts of self-restraint. For example, Adam Smith suggests lessening the outward intensity of heightened emotions. The tempering of strong emotion makes a situation seem more accessible to others’ imaginations and
appear more “reasonable.” A human being gains sympathy “by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone” (27). Some extremes of emotion, deep sorrow or unbounded happiness, must be dulled for acceptance as reasonable and sincere responses.

Seeming emotionally “reasonable” on the inside for others’ satisfaction is an effort in maintaining an outward appearance. For example, ambitious women writers who felt hindered by gender biases (specifically the stereotype that women are compelled by extreme emotion) found ways of similarly “flattening.” They sought to display their abilities of honing strength of feeling into literature, with many following the model of the melancholic genius: that “one must temper sensibility with rational reflection”.

David Hume also speaks of this ability to temper the self with rational reflection, much like the melancholic genius. Through the development of finer perceptions and interests, “delicacy of taste” works to remove the delicacy of passion that causes acute sensitivity. In his Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, Hume says “I am persuaded, that nothing is so proper to cure us of this delicacy of passion, as the cultivating of that higher and more refined taste” (I.I.4). To be clear, Hume does not regard this delicacy of taste as necessary for sympathy from others; it merely makes life easier and more pleasurable to live. This delicacy of taste still promotes an agreeable presentation of emotional stability, making sympathy more likely.

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Keeping the historical and philosophical contextualizations above in mind, the next sections shift focus to this project’s primary goal: illuminating Charlotte Smith’s unique perspective of sympathy. For Smith, sympathy is poetry’s most essential and significant social function. Throughout the corpus of her verse, Smith explores the same concepts of sympathy and shared emotion that intrigued both Hume and Adam Smith. This does not suggest that she necessarily read their works and responded to them. However, the assumption can be made that given the prevalence of their philosophies, these concepts were readily available for popular discussion. Smith takes up the mantle of sympathy in her verse, guiding readers through her poetic philosophy with the keen sensibility of a pain-filled poet.
Chapter 4: Charlotte Smith’s Struggle, Poetic Ethos, and *Elegiac Sonnets*

Charlotte Smith constructs her own sense of sympathy and feeling throughout her career. She uses poetry as a conduit for sympathy, conveying the extremity of her feelings but tempering them through verse. She explores sorrow as a universal emotion and truth, but one that is understood only by those who have experienced deep trauma. Emotions become filtered through the mind and transformed through reason into poetry. However, painful emotion is most important to her poetic ethos.

As I will show in the following chapters, the emotions that Smith is primarily concerned with stem from suffering and pain. She highly distrusts joy. She finds no respite in happiness. Contentment is transitory, fades away, or is taken away. The epigraph to her *Elegiac Sonnets* exhibits this emotional mindset and also lends insight into her feelings about her own life experience. She says,

> 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 (Epigraph to Volume II of Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*; Stuart Curran translation of Petrarch).

She warns that such poetry is not for those seeking “serenity and renewal.” This book calls to the sufferer, the widow in black who belongs within the community of kindred sufferers. What could cause such a defeated outlook? She found that she could vent the sadness of her life, riddled with loss and suffering, through her writing.
Charlotte Turner was born in 1749 and married Benjamin Smith when she was sixteen. She lived an affluent youth, was well-educated, and enjoyed a happy childhood. Her father married a second wife who “effectively disinherited” her and “she discovered herself effectively ruined by her own.” Her husband proved a poor manager of the business he inherited from his father, lived beyond his means, and plunged himself and his family into massive debt. After failing to pay his debts, Smith joined her husband in prison at the end of 1783, leaving her children with an uncle. She wrote her *Elegiac Sonnets* in prison, seeking to aid her family with its sales. She would later expand this collection and return to it often over the next sixteen years. However, she did spend the decade between 1788 and 1798 writing novels that entered her into a new arena of literary critique and financial success. She wrote to care for her family and settle their legal struggles. Unfortunately, her father-in-law’s attempt to leave security for her children was unsuccessful. The will’s convoluted legal language kept it in limbo well past the Smiths’ deaths. Nonetheless, she did what she could to ease the damage to herself and her children.

Through her writing, she found an avenue to give voice to her grievances, to make known the pain she has suffered by fate and the hands of others. She wished to defend herself against those that she felt should be accountable for those actions. In her 1797 Preface to the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*, she bitterly defended herself against impatient patrons and those who have kept her in indigence. She says of them: “Nor should I to any of these have found it necessary to state the causes that have rendered me miserable as an *individual*, though now I am compelled to complain of those who have

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crushed the poor abilities of the *author*” (8-9). The world around her kept her underfoot. For most of her life, she had been a mother single-handedly caring for her children while also fighting a long legal battle for their rights to an inheritance. Since she was the breadwinner of her family, those events that “crushed the poor abilities of the *author*” made her “miserable as an *individual.*”

Smith’s life is inextricably tied to her experience as a writer. Her struggle to produce a second volume at a quick pace directly related to her continuing hardships: “The injuries I have so long suffered under are not mitigated; the aggressors are not removed: but however soon they may be disarmed of their power, any retribution in this world is impossible—they can neither give back to the maimed the possession of health, or restore the dead” (9). Angry in tone and quite accusatory, she makes known that she suffers and *others* are to blame. Note that she turns away from the desire to have “retribution,” for it cannot be attained. Permanent damage remains. She and her children were affected in ways that lasted forever: sons that were maimed in the army and a favorite daughter lost to illness. Her losses filter into her writing, giving her a platform on which to present her experience and open herself up to sympathy.

This tone of her Preface, spiteful against those who have systematically wronged her, pairs well with her “Sonnet LVII: To dependence.” It describes someone who would work tirelessly and thanklessly for herself rather than perform obsequious gestures for a despised employer. She explains that it is better to be one who “Lives but to labour—labouring but to live. / More noble than the sycophant, whose art / Must heap with taudry flowers thy hated shrine” (8-11). Her work is painful, written in an effort to escape what has been thrust upon her. She removes any possibility that she will be one to “heap
taudry flowers” on the “hated shrine” of those who encumbered her ability to have a
decent life, those who take and do not give. Her work is in spite of them, “laboring but to
live.” She ends her Preface with an intense message, one that flows perfectly into her
epigraph. Her poetry will not indulge in “[…]those 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”
(12). Smith wishes her audience could understand that while it may seem that she revels
entirely in the bleak, given her circumstances and the world in which she has been forced
to live, she has reason to do so (although Adam Smith might suggest “flattening” her
intensity of emotion). Happiness and hope are “veils” that only mask pervasive
problems; they keep individuals like her fighting against a seemingly endless experience
of suffering.

Those unique experiences of hardship informed her understanding of what a poet
is and does. Charlotte Smith channeled these frustrations, the pain she endured for years,
into her work. Beyond experiencing real adversities, she was creating a poetic persona
filled with the rage of sensibility. She wanted to be viewed as a melancholic genius:
pained by a heightened sense of feeling, but graced with the skill to transform that
passion into refined art. For Smith, the burden (and gift) of the poet is the painful
experience of over-sensitivity. Not only has she been subject to much suffering, but she
has the mental capacity to transform intense feeling into art. Smith’s view of the poet
reflects both Dolan’s description of the “melancholic genius” and Hume’s “delicacy of
taste” in the previous chapter. Also, she creates her poetry with the expectation she may
be shunned by readers for her focus on pain. Adela Pinch says that Smith, like many
female poets, “may be in the odd position of sympathizing with her own feelings” because of the bias that women indulge too much in their emotions (8). However, she will counter this bias with her explanation of the poet in her first sonnet. Her speaker turns painful feeling into a reasonable, flattened art with poetry.

Her “Sonnet I” provides a glimpse of her governing, poetic ethos; it defines the characteristics of the poet and that figure’s unique experience. The poem provides a skeleton, a structure through which to apply its view of the poet to her other poems. The speaker of this poem considers herself a member of the community of pained poets. In the first few lines of “Sonnet I,” the speaker explains that “The partial Muse has from my earliest hours / Smiled on the rugged path I’m doomed to tread” (lines 1-2). These lines express two possible ideas: that she has possessed poetic power from a young age (indicating that she has suffered from her youth), or that the Muse enjoys the pains she experiences and looks favorably on them with a smile. Smith moves from this sense of affliction by her past and laments her painful situation by saying: “But far, far happier is the lot of those / Who never learn’d her dear delusive art” (5-6). She grieves for her lack of happiness, but notes that happiness does not hone poetic ability. Those who live carefree and unburdened by genius may indeed be happier than she, but they have not been versed in the “art.”

There remains something beautiful in the Muse’s “art” lesson: only a select few individuals become part of the poetic community of fellow-sufferers. The happy majority of society escapes the afflictions of melancholy genius and sensibility. They “never learn’d” from the partial Muse, the partial, biased force that specifically selects those that suffer (although it does not stop them from enjoying the poetry and its drama).
Not all learn to transform pain into poetry, for the poetic Muse selects them. This Muse forces the poet to look on the world’s travesties with a sensitive eye while the Muse seems unable to fix them: “For still she bids soft Pity’s melting eye / Stream o’er the ills she knows not to remove” (9-10). It seems that the Muse understands the isolating nature of suffering, that there are those that suffer unaided by anyone or anything. This reminds the reader of Smith’s Preface in which she says that there remains permanent damage that can find no “retribution,” “ills” that it would be impossible to “remove.” So, when this speaker views others’ suffering with “Pity’s melting eye,” she understands that there exists some pain that cannot be fixed through common means. Sympathy, or “Pity,” is the only form of aid here.

Although the poetic Muse cannot teach how to remove these “ills,” she reaches out with a sympathetic gesture, feeling pity for the poet’s suffering state. The pained poet responds strongly to “ills” in the world. The Muse, in another reading of those lines, “knows not to remove” the reason for suffering. Her decision not to remove the ills suggests that the Muse considers context before intervening, much like Adam Smith’s privileging the cause rather than the feeling. Pain is necessary to the poet’s abilities, and perhaps the Muse knows not to remove it (or does not know how to remove it). The Muse’s partiality also has an inherent flaw: those who reproduce suffering artistically experience its ravages most poignantly: “Ah! then how dear the Muse’s favours cost, / If those paint sorrow best—who feel it most!” (14). Poetry is a constant exercise in pain, and the tormented poet is the most fitting translator for this emotion. The poet, attuned to the finest details of emotion, “paints” sorrow in its truest likeness. The sensible poet represents an elite subset of pained individuals: they are particularly susceptible to life’s
miseries. As a female writer in a male-dominated literary world, a wife at the mercy of her husband’s financial troubles, and as a mother that has experienced the loss of children and the difficulty of providing for them, Smith reaches across many planes of sorrowful experience. This can foster a connection with others who have felt similar traumas, beginning a community of understanding, fellow-sufferers. This poem introduces the basic elements of Smith’s view of sympathy and functions as a guide with which to look at Smith’s poems through her long career.

In “Sonnet III: To a nightingale,” Smith carries her delineation of the poet figure into her assessment of another “poet.” The speaker in this poem listens to the melancholy song of the nightingale and comes to identify with the bird as a fellow poet of suffering. She recognizes the song and wonders what pain this bird-poet could have experienced to produce this art: “Tell’st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe; / From what sad cause can such sweet sorrow flow, / And whence this mournful melody of song?” (2-4). Again, the feeling of being blessed with an unfortunate gift surrounds the creation of art/poetry. This beautiful song must be the result of a “sad cause,” providing a sound of “sweet sorrow.” Telling the song of “tender woe” to the moon will factor greatly in other poems as well, as I will discuss later. The moon represents a sympathetic listener with whom sad and pained souls share their heartbreaks. The speaker identifies in the nightingale a “poet’s musing fancy,” and wishes that the bird-poet would commiserate with her and “translate / What mean the sounds that swell thy little breast” (5-6). Its capacity of poetic sensibility allows for the translation of sad emotion into a song of “sweet sorrow.” Importantly, the speaker labels its song as that of a “poet.” However, by the end of the
poem, she marks a difference between her own poetic powers and those of the
nightingale:

        Pale Sorrow’s victims thou wert once among,
        Tho’ now released in woodlands wild to rove?
        Say—hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong,
        Or died’st thou—martyr of disastrous love?
        Ah! songstress sad! that such my lot might be,
        To sigh, and sing at liberty—like thee! (9-14)

The speaker wonders at the ability of this sad bird to fly away and sing its song,
speculating as to the reasons it leaves its nest. How can it leave the community of “Pale
Sorrow’s victims”? It must have been shunned by friends or by a lover (she brings human
experiences into these questions, forming a bridge of experience from herself to the bird).
She comes to wish that she, as a fellow sufferer, (one that “sigh[s]”) could express herself
as freely as the nightingale.

        Consequently, the nightingale is the ultimate poet that the speaker wants to
emulate as well as come together and create a sympathetic community of sighing,
singing, pity-giving poets. To her, the bird-poet feels intensely, suffers from sadness and
sings of it beautifully, yet still has the fortitude to not let it weigh her down. She wishes
that “[her] lot might be / To sigh, and sing at liberty—like thee!” The speaker, like
Charlotte Smith herself, feels inhibited by the pain that life has dealt her. She cannot fly
away, to be “released in woodlands wild,” and “sing at liberty” like the nightingale. This
sentiment relates back to Smith’s Preface to the second edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Smith
reminds her audience of her inability to devote herself completely to her writing, for the
demands of a lifetime’s hardships falls squarely on her shoulders. The speaker (and
Smith herself) wishes she could be like the “songstress sad,” singing of the pains of her world, but also having a heart light enough to fly away. In the case of this poet-speaker, it is indeed true that “those who paint sorrow best—feel it most.” To be like the bird is to paint sorrow best, feel it most, and to maintain a heart undamaged by depth of feeling. Smith’s other nightingale poem, “Sonnet VII: On the departure of the nightingale,” leaves no room for questioning her understanding of the nightingale’s nature, calling it “The gentle bird, who sings of pity best” (12). Again, the qualities of this bird-poet she envies are the ability to best convert emotion into art and the ability to freely escape its depressive elements. To be emotionally light and fly away from the pull of “Pale Sorrow’s victims.” Without the ability to “fly,” she and other sufferers must bear each other up with the arms of sympathetic community.

Many of Smith’s poems focus on the need for succor among a group of understanding, sympathetic sufferers. Shared, painful experience finds its conduit in the capacity for sympathy among individuals. Community lessens the strain of individual suffering, providing a release. Reminiscent of “Sonnet III,” Smith’s speaker in “Sonnet IV: To the moon,” envisions the community driven as a collective toward the moon:

And oft I think—fair planet of the night,
That in thy orb, the wretched may have rest:
The sufferers of the earth perhaps may go,
Released by death—to thy benignant sphere;
And the sad children of Despair and Woe
Forget, in thee, their cup of sorrow here. (7-14)

Here, those that suffer can find some respite, a “rest” as sure and quiet as “death.” As Smith said in the Preface, she is afflicted by the presence of irremediable wrongs, for
“any retribution in this world is impossible” (my emphasis). Perhaps refuge from such problems is instead an otherworldly place. She imagines that death provides an area where “the wretched,” such as her, may meet and finally be rid of their weighty “cup of sorrow.” This begs enquiry of the moon’s significance to community. Why does she not say that in heaven they may find relief or simply that death will give them peace? In her “Sonnet XLIV: Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex,” she offers a description of the moon that provides an answer. The speaker labels the moon “mute arbitress of tides” and with “the loud equinox its power combines” (1-2). The moon governs, gives order to, and controls the push and pull of the tides. The moon is a celestial regulator of apparent chaos.

Feelings of sorrow and experiences of great trauma derive from lives stripped of order and control. Sufferers become lost and helpless within their own lives and seek to relocate the feeling of self-governance. Charlotte Smith herself felt that she had very little control of her life. It seems fitting that the place for fellow sufferers to congregate would be on the surface of an “arbitress.” She also connects the image of the moon to close friendship in “Sonnet XXVIII: To friendship”:

To thy soft solace may my sorrows steal!
Like the fair moon, thy mild and genuine ray
Thro’ Life’s long evening shall unclouded last;
While Pleasure’s frail attachments fleet away (4-7).

She seeks to find a place to unload her sadness, and she finds that the solace of a friend is like the light beams of the “mute arbitress.” Her life, like one “long evening” of dejection, may find one repose, and it is not in the petty “veil” of happy pleasures she
warned of in her Preface. Her repose may be found in the community of one who stays with her through the long night, offering a “mild and genuine ray.”

Yet, this begs the question: who can be part of this community of sufferers? To whom can she offer a “mild and genuine ray” of fellow-feeling? Sympathy is integral to the poet, but who should receive that sympathy (and who is outside of the bounds of that feeling)? At this point, I will shift into discussion of Smith’s particular choices of subjects to better understand who she regards as figures, or emblems, of sympathy. An important class of suffering subject that Smith’s speakers make a connection with through sympathy is the exile. As I will explain more during my discussion of *The Emigrants*, the French Revolution sent many exiles from war-torn France looking for refuge. In “Sonnet XLIII,” the speaker spies an “unhappy exile” (1). She connects the experience of the exile to her own and to the feeling of suffering people at large. As she noted in her Preface, and throughout her poetry, she considers the notion of happiness a “veil” that simply masks inevitable sadness and suffering in life. Hope inescapably leads to disappointment: “Sun after sun, he hopeless sees decline / In the broad shipless sea—perhaps may know / Such heartless pain, such blank despair as mine” (6-8). His waiting for a change that never comes links her to him in his experience (for she also feels like an exile). In anxiously waiting for good word from the sea, for a ship to bring him homeward, she imagines that his feelings are similar to her own. Day after day, “sun after sun,” people like themselves wait for goodness only to find “blank despair.” In another poem about an exiled subject, Smith’s speaker finds someone with whom she shares an intense connection. She even comes to speak directly to this subject in a way she did not to the previous. What is the difference with this subject?—she is a female
exile. Thus, the closer the subject’s own experience of loss is to the speaker’s, the more connected that subject is to the speaker’s community.

In her poem, “The female exile. Written at Brighthelmstone in November 1792,” the speaker sees that “Beneath that chalk rock, a fair stranger reclining, / Has found on damp sea-weed a cold lonely seat” (5-6). Much like the male exile, this exile stations herself at a point that she may watch the sea for ships. Interestingly, she waits to see a ship that may not help her at all, but only bring worse news than before: “She watches the waves where they mingle with air; / For the sail which, alas! all her fond hopes deceiving, / May bring only tidings to add to her care” (10-12). Thus far, these subjects and the poet that transcribes their plights seem to share similar feelings and woes; there is an implicit sympathetic connection among them. However, the poem takes a turn when the speaker notes that the female exile has children to care for: “Amused with the present, they heed not to-morrow, / Nor think of the storm that is gathering to day” (19-20). This reminds the reader of “Sonnet XXVII” as the speaker watches carefree children at play. These children, however, do not recognize their current plight. They are already the victims of suffering, but their youth and naïveté allow them happiness. The adult is burdened with care and fear. Then, the speaker addresses this exile, reaching out with sympathy:

Poor mourner!—I would that my fortune had left me
The means to alleviate the woes I deplore;
But like thine my hard fate has of affluence bereft me,
I can warm the cold heart of the wretched no more! (33-36)
This sympathy finds its foundation on a similarity of experience and perception; the speaker’s subjective perception of the world closely coincides with that of the subject. The speaker clearly articulates that money is not the way in which she can be of service. Her own “fortune had left” and she cannot “warm the cold heart of the wretched” in that way. What she does and can provide is sympathy and understanding. What she can offer is through this written poem: the knowledge that her own experience has been the same and that if she could provide assistance in a tangible means, she would. Smith splits her audience through this assertion. She cannot offer the sufferer money or take her in when she has her own family she struggles to support. She can offer these words, in pen, and put it out into the world for others to see. She will publish this suffering for the wider audience to view and be made aware of this plight. Perhaps, the world may then see its errors and be able to help those in need.

Of course, the community of sufferers and mutual sympathy has its boundaries. Much like Adam Smith’s notion of sympathy governed by judgment of another’s reasonableness of feeling, some individuals may be unsuitable within a community of common feeling. She outlines her particular consideration of these boundaries through a few of her poems. Interestingly, some instances qualify as neither a refusal nor acceptance. In “Sonnet LXXIII: To a querulous acquaintance,” the speaker angrily chides this individual for her whining about trivial things. She says, “Thou! whom Prosperity has always led / O’er level paths, with moss and flow’rets strewn” (1-2). The tone from the outset is angry and accusatory. She speaks to someone ignorant of “the rugged path” that the speaker is “doomed to tread” (drawing on “Sonnet I” with her language). This person walks “O’er level paths” instead. Astounded, she wonders:
Wilt thou yet murmur at a mis-placed leaf?
Think, ere thy irritable nerves repine,
How many, born with feelings keen as thine,
Taste all the sad vicissitudes of grief. (5-8)

She asks this subject, who would feel strongly about something as small as a leaf marring their walk, to imagine feeling something as deeply as grief with that high-powered perception. The speaker might even use Adam Smith’s own words here in that sympathy “is quite otherwise with grief. Small vexations excite no sympathy, but deep affliction calls forth the greatest” (51). She reminds this person that there are those that must feel more horrible experiences with the same level of acuteness. However, Hume and Adam Smith might warn against indulging in “tast[ing] all the sad vicissitudes of grief” with such “feelings keen” as it would lead to a miserable life (for Hume) and a lack of sympathy from others (Smith). The speaker, in regard to the warnings of Hume and Adam Smith, might implement them as useful reminders to her difficult acquaintance. It could work to instill an understanding of subjective experience, to imagine the life devastated by loss or the individual so afflicted by passionate feeling that no one can sympathize with them.

Some subjects of the speaker have remained untouched by sadness, and in Smith’s poetry she consistently looks at these subjects with envy (provided they do not bemoan trivial occurrences) or with intense concern for their future. There are those that seem more innocent in their untouched nature and seem content with what they are given and have not a care in the world. In “Sonnet IX,” the speaker notes a shepherd unperturbed by worry or care: “Blest is yon shepherd, on the turf reclined, / Who on the varied clouds which float above / Lies idly gazing” (1-3). The shepherd has the ability to
indulge in idleness, his mind interested in divining the clouds above rather than the pains and difficulties of the world. She envies that “he has never felt the pangs that move / Th’ indignant spirit” (5-6). She sets him apart from others like herself in that he has not experienced what she has gone through. A shepherd’s pastoral life must have different, less painful types of care. He is not part of the group of “Children of Sentiment and Knowledge born, / Thro’ whom each shaft with cruel force is felt” (12-13). He cannot possibly sympathize with her experience. She looks at him as she does those in “Sonnet 1” who have not been touched by the Muse’s painful, delusive art. In many ways, those individuals are to be envied for their pain-free existence. Sensibility happily escapes them.

Similarly, children remain outside of experience and understanding of suffering. In “Sonnet XXVII,” she describes children playing: they are “By Sorrow yet untouch’d, unhurt by Care” (2). However, children hold a special place in Charlotte Smith’s poetry; they do not know of the pain that she has experienced in her lifetime. She feels for children deeply because she had so many of her own that she tried desperately to provide for. Yet, children are full of potential and grow into adults that must enter into the world. She experiences an intense feeling of fear for them, even as they play without care: “Ah!—for their future fate how many fears / Oppress my heart—and fill mine eyes with tears” (13-14). Smith’s own children had to endure the challenges of their mother’s marriage and financial struggles. It seems fitting that she would worry about children as subjects in her writing. Here, her speaker tries to make a connection of experience with them: they may not have experienced deep pain yet, but she feels strong sympathy for the pain they may endure as time goes on.
With her *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith begins her entry into the conversation regarding sympathy. She explores the figure of the poet and her frustrations with the burden of a heart made heavy by sensibility. She then takes this sense of the poet and uses it as her speakers for her other poems. She presents her speakers with a variety of figures to delineate how her understanding of sympathy works (there are those sufferers that deserve sympathy, those that are unsympathetic due to their easy life, or those special few who need no sympathy as they are blissfully ignorant of experience). The speaker is drawn to them for the immediate sense of their suffering, or in the special case of children, their future pain in life when they grow up. She is greatly affected on the Humean level of sympathy, drawn to them naturally. However, she begins to dissect their situations or the possible reasons for their suffering. This tends more to the Smithian sense of sympathy in that for a connection to be made, someone else’s emotions must be deemed “reasonable” through the reflection and the ability to “imagine” oneself reacting the same in that situation.

Nevertheless, sympathy for Adam Smith and Hume acts as the bridge between ourselves and others as it does for Charlotte Smith. Her contribution to this conversation with *Elegiac Sonnets* places sympathy directly in the arena of poetic skill and painful emotions. The poetic speaker is responsible for relaying the experience of suffering through the written word. Smith (and her speakers) focus their efforts on those in pain, although the help of her larger, hurt-free audience is welcomed. She explored this perspective quite fully in the many editions of her collection of shorter poems and it continued into her later, longer works as an undercurrent.
Chapter 5: The Epic-Length Poems, *The Emigrants* and *Beachy Head*

This section turns to Smith’s later and much longer works of poetry and explores her engagement with sympathy within them. The poetic ethos she outlined in her earlier works is also identifiable in her later poems. This evidences a career-long engagement with the principle of sympathy and its significance to her poetry and her audiences. *The Emigrants* was published over a decade after she penned her first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets and other Poems*. She republished and added to her *Sonnets* over many years, but she shifted to longer projects over time (such as her novels and these epic-length poems). I seek to show in examining these two poems Smith’s culmination of her poetic ethos. She creates a concrete, lengthy, in-depth picture of sympathy produced by pain, community forged through shared experience of suffering, and the necessity of writing as a means of alleviating pain.

With *The Emigrants*, Smith returns to the figure of the exile she introduced in her earlier poems. However, Smith tackled a difficult and potentially dangerous exiled subject in *The Emigrants*: the political exile during the French Revolution. Susan J. Wolfson explains in her book, *Romantic Interactions*, that “French emigrants were no easy purchase […] In a scornful Republican judgment, the emigrants were the backwash of the ancien regime, complicit with a selfish, luxurious aristocracy that still enjoyed
connections and property in England” (24). With this description, one might wonder why Smith would deal with the subject of such entitled, privileged people at all. This is not so clear a sympathetic subject as her female exile from *Elegiac Sonnets*. Smith had already described such “selfish” subjects unfavorably in her “Sonnet LXXIII: To a querulous acquaintance.” Her speaker could not sympathize with complaints about the smallest disturbance to a life made so easy. Yet, despite their privileged existence, emigrants have now been struck by a horrible change in fate. They suffer as she has suffered and deserve her attention (and the attention of others). Wolfson says that Smith knew the experience of falling from relative well-to-do stature and “had a ready sympathy for abject aristocrats” (24). She treats these sufferers with that uniqueness of sympathy found throughout her poetry, one that centers on a sympathetic community forged through connections made by sharing similar feelings of pain in life. Wolfson explains that “adversity is a democrat, the great leveler” (33). These emigrants have been displaced; they have lost their fortunes, the security of their family, and an entire way of life. Smith understood this feeling well. She married with the hope of a secure husband, home, and place to raise her children, but paid for a dreadful mistake the rest of her life.

*The Emigrants* focuses on the damage caused by the French Revolution, especially production of sympathetic subjects. Smith’s descriptions of her subjects and their situations are greatly detailed, allowing for her readers to imagine themselves in the same context (the integral practice in Adam Smith’s notion of sympathy and judgment). Instances of pain and hopelessness are common to the human condition; the force of pathos in these poetic descriptions may in fact work to construct and mold her audience so that they can appropriately react. She focuses on those that truly commiserate with
suffering, but Smith also remains open to allowing her general readership to “catch” the emotions of her subjects (in Hume’s terminology). The historical subject matter of *The Emigrants* focuses on the displacement of French exiles to England during the French Revolution; the beginning of the poem embarks with a representative image that depicts their struggle, and it is an image that Smith frequently uses. Smith invokes sea imagery to convey the constant struggle of exiles:

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Slow in the Wintry Morn, the struggling light
Throws a faint gleam upon the troubled waves;
Their foaming tops, as they approach the shore
And the broad surf that never ceasing breaks
On the innumerous pebbles. (Book 1, lines 1-5)
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Represented in the repetitive movements of the waves crashing upon the shore, the battle against suffering is not only continuous, but as inevitable as the water’s movement. Words like “slow,” “struggling,” “troubled,” and “never ceasing,” convey the grueling hardship of a pain-filled life. Importantly, the image is of a sea-shore, presumably the English beach from which the French exiles would look toward France. The exiles, like the waves, should in “never ceasing” toil carry on despite inevitable “breaking.” There remains a “struggling” and “faint” light of hope on their sea of troubles. This is reminiscent of the exiles in her shorter poetry as they gaze out at the sea, waiting for a hopeful ship to arrive with good news. She brings these images into *The Emigrants*. Again, like Smith did in her earlier poetry on exiles, the speaker tries to create a link to her subject with common experience. She conjures the same imagery when speaking of her own difficulty with life’s unavoidable woes:
Onward I labour; as the baffled wave,
Which yon rough beach repulses, that returns
With the next breath of wind, to fail again.—

Ah! Mourner—cease these wailings: cease and learn. (Book 1, lines 71-74)

The speaker applies human qualities to the wave and couples it with a simile, providing direct correlation between herself and the image. Much like her speaker’s reaction to the male exile in her “Sonnet XLIII,” this speaker also knows what it is like to keep returning with hope, only to be dashed away once more. She also forms a connection with the exiles, as she too is represented by a wave crashing against the shore. She functions “as the baffled wave” given force by the “breath of wind,” moving onward in confusion and helplessness despite its inevitability. Smith’s poetic speaker becomes this wave as a metaphor to represent her trials as a mother, a woman-poet, and a fellow suffering human being. The presence of the beach ambiguously “repulses” in both senses of the word: it continually thwarts her progress as well as inspires a deep hatred for its existence. Like she expresses in her Preface to the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*, this beach is an ever-present immovable force: “The injuries I have so long suffered under are not mitigated; the aggressors are not removed” (Preface). The last line speaks to herself and to others experiencing the same trials. She forcefully gives the advice to “cease and learn,” for “wailing” does not translate into melancholy genius. This tends more to Hume’s delicacy of passion, giving in to the pains of life. Smith’s speaker asks the sufferer to stop and think.

Her speaker engages with another facet of exile and dejection—the strong desire to give up and give into overwhelming emotion. Again, this steers away from the genius
of tempered emotion, of the delicacy of taste, of Smithean reason, writing, and the melancholy poetry produced from it. The figure of the exile, and the speaker who identifies with the exile, are so keenly aware of injuries and pain that they fear they cannot brook the cruelty of the world and society. The poetic speaker from the outset of *The Emigrants* presents the struggle between feeling sorrow for her place in a world that is against her and overcoming it. As she witnesses the sunrise over the troubled waves, she says:

Alas! how few the morning wakes to joy!

[...] Changing the dreams

That soothe’d their sorrows, for calamities

(And every day brings its own sad proportion)

For doubts, diseases, abject dread of Death (Book 1, lines 8-15)

This sounds much like the “veil” of happiness she described in her Preface to the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Like the veil that is only a transitory cover for sadness and pain, the dreams she sinks into at night are temporary relief. Smith’s speaker tells the subject to stop and listen to her. She, like this exiled subject, feels the same overwhelming despair that comes with waking from a happy dream. Each succeeding day, painful in its own special way, becomes manifest with the rising sun, as predictable as the waves upon the shore. The speaker explains her own inclination to dejection, saying “How often do I half abjure Society / And sigh for some lone Cottage, deep embower’d” (Book 1, lines 42-43). She, too, would like to disappear from society and fly away like the nightingale in her “Sonnet III: To a nightingale.” However, she only *half* abjures society by passively “sighing” for the seclusion of a lonely place. She thinks about turning away from the world at times, but does not act on it: that would remove her
from poetic society. Doing so would mean rejecting the “never ceasing,” cyclical nature of poetic suffering and engagement with fellow sufferers: to experience pain, to write that pain out, to share it with others who understand, to participate in that sympathy that links humanity together.

The speaker in *The Emigrants* looks on the French exiles and forms a sense of community with them through sympathy and common experience. She says “Methinks in each expressive face, I see / Discriminated anguish” (Book 1, lines 112-113). She reads in the faces of the exiles something exceptional from other human beings, like those who have walked through life without care or strife. “Discriminated” can be read in two ways. It refers to the physical act of banishment for the French exiles, as they feel pain in being discriminated against, being turned from their home. Or (as is exemplified in “Sonnet I”), they are made exceptional by their heightened perception of ills in the world. The speaker detects “anguish” defined in the exile’s face. These exiles also help her in the same way she helps them at the beginning of the poem. She gave them (and every sufferer) the advice to bear the pain and loss inherent in the world. They return the favor “With lenient hands to bind up every wound / My wearied spirit feels, and bid me go / ‘Right onward’” (Book 2, lines 366-368). They provide some alleviation with their understanding and “lenient” care. They tend to her “wounds” as if she has been through battle and advise her to carry on. They seem to remind the reader of the friend in “Sonnet XXVIII: To friendship” who she seeks out to help ease her sorrows and whose friendship “Thro’ Life’s long evening shall unclouded last.” The community of poetic suffering envelops members of their own society, bearing each other up against the shore with a collective “breath of wind” that presses them forward.
The speaker alludes to biographical information in an attempt to connect to the exile through another painful experience: that of being a mother. Of course, this information can be linked to knowledge of Charlotte’s Smith’s own life; however, the speaker can also be taken as an entity on her own. Smith’s speaker addresses the French queen Marie Antoinette as a fellow mother who fears for her own children. The speaker brings the queen into the community of sufferers as she explains to her:

[…] Ah! who knows,
From sad experience, more than I, to feel
For thy desponding spirit, as it sinks
Beneath procrastinated fears for those
More dear to thee than life! (Book 2, lines 169-173)

She reaches out to Marie as another human falling to despair. The anxiety of a mother’s “sad experience” crosses the bounds of social status and, as in Adam Smith’s philosophy, can be “imagined” by other mothers. It “flattens” out the difference of class and brings them into a community with one another. The reader should look at the Queen with the same sympathy as the mother in “The female exile” from *Elegiac Sonnets*. For a mother, there is immense pain in imagining what her child will endure. Adam Smith remarks of a mother watching her sick child in distress: “What are the pangs of a mother, when she hears the moaning of her infant that during the agony of disease cannot express what it feels?” (A. Smith, *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, 15). It is the power of the imagination to put ourselves into another’s situation that allows us to feel sympathy, according to Adam Smith. Charlotte Smith’s own situation calls out for the same sympathy. These women all share a similar experience. The figure of the mother feels a deep sympathy and emotional connection for others, for she has children that she must
care for and that remain “more dear […] than life.” Through the exceptional sensitivity of a mother, the speaker invites the queen into the circle of poetic sympathy. For a mother, there is a constant anxiety and worry for the security of one’s children. However, the experience of children, for Smith, is one of carefree, worriless bliss. She calls out to a more innocent, unadulterated past: “Memory come! / And from distracting cares, that now deprive / Such scenes of all their beauty, kindly bear / My fancy to those hours of simple joy” (Book 2, lines 328-331). In calling out to memory of her past, she is calling out to a time like the children have in “Sonnet XXVII,” during which she “By Sorrow [was] yet untouch’d, unhurt by Care.” She wants to return to a time without pain, suffering, or worry.

The speaker in *The Emigrants* looks forward in time, imagining a moment devoid of suffering entirely: death. She says to her fellow exiles “[…] Ah! yes, my friends/Peace will at last be mine; for in the Grave / Is Peace” (Book 2, lines 371-373). The speaker finds solace in her death not as a defeated moment, but as a victorious one. This is reminiscent of “Sonnet IV: To the moon,” in which the speaker feels sufferers coming together beneath the light of the moon would feel like being “Released by death.” She will win peace as the prize for a lifetime’s worth of pain. Yet, what is gained “at last,” death, does not reflect the final outcome of the life she’s lived. She addresses her community of fellow sufferers and says “[…] be it yours / To vindicate my humble fame; to say, / That, not in selfish sufferings absorb’d, / ‘I gave to misery all I had, my tears’” (Book 2, lines 383-386). The close of her poem projects into the future, and it will be the task of her fellow sufferers to take its words and distribute them to others. She wants her words to circulate, to show that she was “not in selfish sufferings absorb’d” and was part
of a society that bears each other up with mutual understanding. She “gave to misery,” the impetus of her poetic voice, “all [she] had.” It forced her to live a life defined by tears. Her fame lies in her unselfishness, that her sufferings may be used to speak to another in pain and offer a “lenient hand” (Book 2, line 366). In this way, the speaker reaches out to others not by “ flattening” the expression of emotion as Adam Smith suggests, but by highlighting its excessiveness and pointing to others who have felt the same thing.

I will now turn to a close reading of Beachy Head, as it incorporates some of her principle of sympathy, although it does not deal so strongly with similar sympathetic subjects. It tends to move away from her previous concerns. Yet, sympathy is so engrained in her sense of what poetry is and how it functions, that her perspective can be identified in Beachy Head as well. The importance of community among its various characters is a focal point for the work. It also highlights the lasting mark of the written word, indicating once more that poetry performs vital work in creating sympathy and community. The end of The Emigrants leaves us with an image of the unselfish nature of one who truly deserves sympathy. The beginning of Beachy Head presents a scene of an unselfish sufferer laboring his life away, deserving of great sympathy: a slave on a merchant vessel. This figure works solely for the benefit of others and dives deep into the water to recover oyster shells:

There the Earth hides within her glowing breast
The beamy adamant, and the round pearl
Enchased in rugged covering; which the slave,
With perilous and breathless toil, tears off
From the sea-rock, deep beneath the waves (50-54).
The first presentation of a human being in the poem, the reader is met with a deeply sympathetic figure. The recklessness of those charged with his care stands far away from any sense of Humean or Smithian understandings of emotion and humanity. The ill-treated slave remains outside of the realm of sympathy in this power structure, for neither Humean nor Smithian sympathy admits this indifference to a human being in need. The speaker pointedly remarks that pearls

> [...] are the toys of Nature; and her sport  
> Of little estimate in Reason’s eye:  
> And they who reason, with abhorrence see  
> Man, for such gaudes and baubles, violate  
> The sacred freedom of his fellow man—  
> Erroneous estimate! (55-60).

Here, the speaker seems to be drawing on Adam Smith’s philosophy with her language. Imaging oneself in this situation would admit nothing but a feeling of “abhorrence” for it. Those who imagine themselves in the slave’s place use their faculty of “reason” to judge this moment. The speaker despairs for “man,” who possesses the capability of rational thought, but does not see his “erroneous estimate.”

The next human being *Beachy Head* presents is likewise a sympathetic character, but the situation in which he finds himself makes his deserving nature harder to determine. The speaker, as in *Elegiac Sonnets*, uses the subject of the shepherd. Smith uses this subject to present a person blissfully naïve in regard to the ways of the world. She complicates this subject in *Beachy Head* with the speaker explaining the shepherd’s illicit involvement in contraband shipments. The shepherd

> Watches the bark that for his signal waits
To land its merchandize:—Quitting for this
Clandestine traffic his more honest toil,
The crook abandoning, he braves himself
The heaviest snow-storm of December’s night (181-185).

The soft language of the speaker hints that the reader should not judge this figure harshly. Unlike the slavers, the shepherd holds a job of “more honest toil” when he “abandons” the criminals. The shepherd shuns this illegal work the moment he has completed it. He goes home to his “honest” work at home and “braves himself” for harsh winters. He appears to be a man that struggles at home and does not have an easy road. Even when he participates in the action, the speaker continues to describe him in the kindest of lights:

> When with conflicting winds the ocean raves,
> And on the tossing boat, unfearing mounts
> To meet the partners of the perilous trade,
> And share their hazard. Well it were for him,
> If no such commerce of destruction known (186-190).

The language of the speaker again suggests that this shepherd’s struggles, even those caused by helping smugglers, should be viewed with sympathy. He is on an ocean of “conflicting winds,” remains “unfearing” despite the rough seas and dangerous task, and “share[s] their hazard.” He is a giving soul, sharing in their fear and struggle. With the last lines, the speaker suggests that his nature is too kind for this work (but also that the risk is high and he should not have been involved). Smith, through her speaker, examines the limits of sympathy with a very sympathetic character in the slave and one that we must question in the shepherd.

Like in *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith’s speaker muses on the happiness of those who do not feel the deep pains that life can produce (the naïve, like the shepherd, and children).
The speaker still places the shepherd in that blissfully content group that does not think about his troubles at length. She says that “they are happy, who have never ask’d / What good or evil means” (259-260). The shepherd tends to his work and his family. He does not ruminate on the profound meanings of right and wrong and how those definitions might affect him. Children also remain untouched by sensibility. The speaker notes that the boy that plays near the river “knows not Death, / And therefore fears it not” (262-263). Here, the speaker links emotion to experience. Since the child has not been faced with death, he does not know to fear it. Mothers know that such experience is to come to their children; facing death is part of life. As explained by the speaker in The Emigrants in regard to Marie Antoinette, a mother fears for the struggles that her children will have in the future. The speaker in “Sonnet XXVII” of Elegiac Sonnets knows this to be true simply while watching children at play. They play without a care for the future in store for them. Adam Smith notes that the child, “With regard to the future, […] is perfectly secure, and in its thoughtlessness and want of foresight, possesses an antidote against fear and anxiety” (Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 15). However, this “antidote” quickly passes away for children. The speaker explains that

And childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned,
A guiltless exile, silently to sigh,
While Memory, with faithful pencil, drew
the contrast […]” (287-290).

The image of the exile resurfaces in Beachy Head with the speaker again relating to that figure because of early sufferings. The speakers in The Emigrants and in Beachy Head seem to be the same, or at least have experienced a similar plunge into the adult world. Smith herself can feel sympathy for this plight, having been married off at sixteen and
suddenly finding herself in misery, financial distress, and quickly with children to care for and no one to aid her.

*Beachy Head* also explores the desire within those that suffer for community and to receive and provide help. In the forest hermit’s poetic writings (that he abandons when anyone comes near him), he hopes that the woman who broke his heart will take pity on him and not forget him. He says

> I think, I could endure my lot  
> And linger on a few short years,  
> And then, by all but you forgot,  
> Sleep, where the turf that clothes the spot  
> May claim some pitying tears (546-550).

He wishes for a very small community with the person with whom he shares a painful experience. It remains unclear what caused the break between them. It is only guessed “That he, poor youth! must have been cross’d in love” (521). Yet, he still wishes only for her company, even if that is merely the assurance of her remembrance. She alone understands their particular relationship and the circumstances that have caused him such pain. On that spot that he sleeps he focuses on the thought of her remembering him.

Then, he lets out the tears he hopes will be pitied, as if she could see them. In another poetic effusion from the forest hermit, he wishes to take care of this lady (who he imagines would be in need of his help):

> I’ll dress the sand rock cave for you,  
> And strew the floor with heath and leaves,  
> That you, against the autumnal air  
> May find securer shelter there. (621-624)
He wants to aid her in any struggle she may find. Importantly, he wishes to protect her from “the autumnal air” and provide her “shelter,” indicating also that he wishes to help her weather the storms of life and its hardships. He will share this strife with her.

Smith incorporates yet another pained, poetic exile with a weakness for rejecting society in the end of this poem; this figure gives in to the need to help others who suffer, highlighting the sense of community among them. Within the craggy rocks of Beachy Head “Dwelt one, who long disgusted with the world / And all its ways, appear’d to suffer life / Rather than live” (lines 683-685). The lone hermit in the caves of Beachy Head represents a similar figure to the speaker in *The Emigrants*. He is one who feels he cannot accept the ills of the world, so he languishes in exile, trying to stay away from the world and the community. However, there is an important characteristic for this hermit that will not allow him to completely “abjure society.” Although he has left society, he still feels a powerful sense of sympathy and emotion for fellow sufferers: “And outraged as he was, in sanguine youth, / By human crimes, he still acutely felt / For human misery” (lines 698-700). This represents a “never ceasing” sympathy for others despite the constancy of hurt and misery in life. He shares the qualities of painful sensitivity with the speaker of “Sonnet I,” having “learn’d” the partial Muse’s “dear delusive art.” That feeling they share “Points every pang, and deepens every sigh” (Sonnet I, line 11). The poetic exiles are a community distinguished by their heightened perception and sensitivities. The hermit’s heightened perception caused him to retreat from society in “outrage,” but it has also led him to feel “acutely” for other suffering beings. As in Hume’s sense of sympathy, emotions link us as fellow human beings. We are impressed upon by others’ feelings. This also connects to Adam Smith’s understanding of
sympathy in that this hermit is not only responding to emotion in others, but to their common experience of struggle. He reacts to those on the fringes, like himself. They are part of a small, separate community away from the general community of human beings.

*Beachy Head* culminates with the hermit dying after saving pirates imperiled by a storm. The actual words of the poem *Beachy Head* function as an epitaph for the selfless poet, with “mournful lines, / Memorials of his sufferings” (lines 727-728). Those who read the words are not made sad, but gain the assurance “That dying in the cause of charity / His spirit, from its earthly bondage freed, / Had some better region fled forever” (lines 740-742). Like the speaker in *The Emigrants*, the poetic exile of *Beachy Head* finds freedom in a death that aided the pain of others. Distribution of the message is of key importance. This stands in stark contrast to the deaths of conquerors remembered in *Beachy Head*. For these dead men, she bids “Hither, Ambition come!” (419). She calls out to the force that drives all conquerors to war, ambition, asking it to come and view what is left of its great champions. She points out “The pirate Dane, who from his circular camp / Bore in destructive robbery, fire and sword / Down thro’ the vale, sleeps unremembered here” (426-428). The unsympathetic pirate leaves no lasting memory but a few dilapidated stones. The truly sympathetic figure is the hermit who died making the ultimate, unselfish sacrifice. “Memorials to his sufferings” are left for all to see. The lines of the poem bring attention to his life and his pain. Sympathy may now be elicited from those willing to read them. These long poems end with a progressive message. A shared community of sufferers is indeed a means of succor, a way of aiding each other in a world that seems hopelessly cruel.
An important shift occurs with the end of these poems, one that could be glimpsed within the body of her smaller poetic works in *Elegiac Sonnets*. The message at the end of “The female exile” maintains that the speaker cannot *tangibly* help her suffering subject. She can offer no money to aid in her plight. What she *can offer* are her words. Taken a step further, what is given is sympathy memorialized in writing for everyone to read. Without writing, what does sympathy affect in the world? This brings suffering to the attention of a reading public in the way that Charlotte Smith used her Preface to her second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*. The community of human beings linked through sympathy (whether you find that to be as free-flowing as Hume or dependent on imagination and experience like Adam Smith) can be made larger and thrive through the act of writing. There is also a victory won in written words being left behind, making the feeling poet immortal. Somehow, their hand-written words might travel and link one writer and sufferer to another, making their situation better at some time to come.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Charlotte Smith’s sense of sympathy centers on common experience of suffering, the creation of a community of those who have similarly experienced trials, and the integral role of the poet in translating emotions into words. The corpus of her poetry engages her philosophy over the decades of her writing career. Smith’s work becomes part of the conversation regarding sympathy. She develops her own sense of sympathy and its relation to emotion. Feelings, both unique and universal, can be honed and memorialized in the act of writing. Poetry functions as the vessel for painful experience and the conduit for sympathy (for the poet possesses the skills necessary to transform emotions into art and serves as an example for people who also feel intense grief).

In a sense, the poet endures the sensitivity of experience for the betterment of others, those who must learn to bear themselves against pain. Even her general audience, those that have no commonality of experience with sufferers, can be moved by imagination into some feeling of understanding. However, they will never be able to truly sympathize. Smith’s sense of poetic responsibility of making emotion available for sympathy develops as she brings private, painful feeling into the open through publication. She feels a strong sense of duty toward those who feel the same pain, but she also offers that pain up to a more general audience who gains pleasure from reading
about suffering. That divided readership becomes the best of both worlds for her. She can reach those who need to hear a sympathetic word as well as gain a large following of readers for her financial and literary benefit. She has a duty as a poet to render suffering visible, but she also has a duty to herself and her family to make a living. Through the public nature of poetry, sympathy becomes possible on both a private and a commercial scale.

Those who have not experienced a pain-filled life cannot claim a seat in the community that Charlotte Smith tries to forge. However, she welcomes their attempts at sympathy. It is better for her and those about whom she writes that a large group of readers become aware of her tales of woe. They not only contribute to the end of her money troubles, but they also are awakened to their ability to alleviate the strife of others.
Bibliography


