Following Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets through the Press.PDF

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Entree aus Schrift und Bild
Titelblatt und Frontispiz im England der Neuzeit

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FOLLOWING CHARLOTTE SMITH’S ELEGIAIC SONNETS
THROUGH THE PRESS

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This essay examines the history of a work whose fame and influence upon a whole generation of British Romantic poets might not be deduced from the plain title pages of the successive editions that appeared during the author’s lifetime. From a collection containing only sixteen sonnets when it appeared in 1784, Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* evolved during its author’s lifetime through a sixteen-year sequence of editions – each displaying increasing technical, emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic sophistication – into two volumes whose nearly 250 pages finally included some 92 sonnets and nineteen “other poems” of various lengths. The discussion that follows is not primarily concerned with the intrinsic literary merit or the extrinsic formative influence of the poetry, however, but rather with the dynamics of the literary marketplace as they are revealed through the evolving details of the title pages and frontispieces for some eleven editions, together with the “front matter” that supplements, amplifies, and contextualizes those details. The discussion is in many respects therefore paradigmatic, intended to provide insight into some of the practices of authorship, publishing, marketing, book-buying, and literary criticism during the early Romantic period in England. That the author in question, Charlotte Smith, was immensely influential during and for some time after her lifetime, then largely “disappeared” for well over a century, and has now emerged (again!) as one of the most important British Romantic writers merely adds to the intrigue without detracting from the paradigmatic value of the following examination.

Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* is an unquestionable landmark of the later eighteenth-century British literary scene. Largely forgotten by traditional literary historians until the past decade or two, Smith was, we now understand in retrospect, exactly what Stuart Curran has called her: “the first poet in England whom . . . we would call Romantic.” When in 1784 she published her slim volume, *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays*, whose twenty-six pages contained only twenty poems, she could not have foreseen how great would be its consequences for subsequent poetry in

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England, and what a powerful shaping influence it would exert upon her contemporaries and successors. Indeed, of so little consequence did her original collection of poems seem at first to be that when she took her little manuscript to James Dodsley, who had in 1759 succeeded his extraordinary brother Robert in the publishing business but who possessed none of his brother’s intuitive literary sense, he merely glanced at them and professed his utter indifference. According to Smith’s first twentieth-century biographer, Florence Hilbish, in declining the manuscript Dodsley “assured her that for such things there was no sale,” and that “the public had long been satiated with shepherds and shepherdesses.”1 To Smith’s chagrin, Dodsley offered to print the poems at no cost, despite his reservations, and then recoup his expenses from any unlikely profits that might ensue. Smith correctly interpreted Dodsley’s offer as little more than charity toward an unknown author, and her pride would not permit her to accept this option. The poems were indeed strongly influenced by both the subject matter and the general tone of later eighteenth-century pastoral poetry, and Dodsley was largely correct in his opinion that the reading public had seen enough in that vein in recent years. What Dodsley failed to appreciate, however, was that even in these early poems Smith was doing something extraordinary with that venerable old poetic form, the sonnet, something that would evolve— as Smith added to and revised her collection over the next twenty-plus years— into a primary force in the resurgence of the sonnet tradition in English poetry.

Neither was Smith able to impress another potential first publisher, Charles Dilly, to whom her brother submitted the manuscript on her behalf and who flatly rejected the work. Finally, Smith employed an intermediary to send her manuscript to the influential dilettante poet and critic William Hayley, a sensible and sensitive reader who perceived in Smith’s poems what the more practical-minded publishers had failed to see: an aesthetic and an ethos that hinted at a new direction in the sonnet tradition. Hayley permitted Smith to dedicate her collection to him with a modest note of indebtedness that appeared in the first and several of the subsequent editions. With dedication in hand, Smith returned to Dodsley and arranged for publication at her own expense in a volume that appeared on 10 May 1784.

According to the date subscribed to Smith’s dedication to Hayley. The first edition was priced at two shillings, as was the second edition, which appeared later in the same year.

Publishing at her own expense, although it was a common enough option for many writers of the period, and especially for those just embarking on literary careers, was no simple thing for Smith, who by 1784 was already mired in a disastrous marriage whose circumstances would plague her for her entire life. In 1765, at the age of fifteen, she had married Benjamin Smith, the 21-year-old son of a wealthy merchant involved in the West Indies trade, who had been selected as a suitable partner for her by a father and stepmother anxious to be rid of the young Charlotte. The marriage was a disaster almost from the start: Benjamin Smith was an irresponsible spendthrift who kept her pregnant with a total of twelve children (four of whom died before Smith did) and who had run up such large debts that he was sent to King’s Bench Prison as a debtor for seven months in 1783-84, where his wife joined him for part of his term. After Smith’s release from prison she fled with her wife and children to France, where Charlotte’s twelfth child was born. Finally, she had had enough; she secured a legal separation from her husband, something that was unusual for a woman of the time to initiate. Although she never lived with her husband again, he continued to drain her physical, mental, and financial resources, since under British law the husband continued to have “ownership” of all of his wife’s resources unless there had been an explicit pre-nuptial agreement to the contrary. So Smith was, quite literally, stuck— with herself and her children to support by her own devices.2 Authorship became her means of doing so.

The title page for the first (and second) edition of Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays (fig. 1) is in some respects the most ambitious. The all-capital letterpress spans virtually the full horizontal and vertical extent of the large (c. 19 x 23 cm) quarto pages, and the “Other Essays” of the title receive nearly equal visual prominence on the page as the “Elegiac Sonnets.” Moreover, the author is announced not just as Charlotte Smith

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2 Smith spent the rest of her life in a monstrous legal tangle, trying to gain possession of the money that had been left to her by her father. Smith refers often in her works—and especially in the various Prefaces to them—to this seemingly endless legal battle, a battle that never was satisfactorily resolved in her lifetime. The terms of her separation from Benjamin Smith had stipulated that he was to provide her with £100 per year for the remainder of her life, but it seems that he often defaulted on this sum. For a brief account, see Carrol L. Fry, Charlotte Smith (New York: Twayne, 1996), chapter 1.
but as “Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, in Sussex.” Only the second edition (also 1784) repeats this geographical locator; beginning with the third edition it vanishes. Smith had spent much of her life in and around Surrey, where she was born, and Sussex; Bignor Park was her home at the time of Benjamin Smith’s release from King’s Bench Prison in 1784. Including the geographical locator thus accomplished several things for Smith. First, it at once identified and conferred a compound measure of dignity and respectability upon the author, who is not from London but who is from a desirable county near London. As Caroline Franklin puts it, linking the geographical locator with her own name announced to her prospective reader that “the poetry would focus on the particularity both of the Sussex landscape and on the autobiographical circumstances of composition.” Second, for the literary cognoscenti, it affiliates the author with an impressive array of writers associated with the near environs of Bignor Park: Thomas Otway, Alexander Pope, William Collins, and William Hayley himself, who was frequently visited by William Cowper. In adding “Bignor Park, Sussex” to her title page, then, Smith was engaging in a discrete but telling sort of name-dropping that could only enhance her volume with its anticipated readership.

Smith’s preface to her volume was repeated in the second edition and indeed carried forward (with successive prefaces added) all the way through the ninth edition (1800), the last one published during Smith’s lifetime, and included (with all subsequent prefaces) in the posthumous tenth edition of 1811. In the preface Smith calls her sonnets “little poems” and expresses her hope that they will find readers “who to sensibility of heart join simplicity of taste” (p. vii). She also makes her famous assertion that as a poetic form the sonnet “appear[s] to me no improper vehicle for a single sentiment” (p. vii). In explicitly deferring to the “uncommon powers” revealed in Hayley’s sonnets, Smith implicitly enters into a (presumably friendly) rivalry with him, a rhetorical point that reveals her considerable literary ambitions even at this early stage of her career. The first and second editions contain nineteen poems, sixteen of which are sonnets. Of these sixteen, three are ostensibly translations from Petrarch, and three others are “supposed to be written by Werther”; these six sonnets are grouped at the end, after the three poems (“Chanson par le Cardinal Bernis,” “Imitation. ‘Fruit of Aurora’s tears, fair rose,’” and “The Origin of Flattery”) that employ other forms. Separating them in this fashion brackets them from the ten that are most clearly Smith’s “own” sonnets. At the same time, like the dedication to Hayley and the announcement of Smith’s association with Bignor Park, the “translations” from non-English sources like Bernis and Petrarch and the references to Goethe’s immensely popular novel further establish Smith’s authority and erudition, something that is of particular import in any author’s “first” collection of poems, and especially so when the author is a woman.

Unlike the first edition, which bears only J. Dodson’s name, the second is inscribed as being sold by the London booksellers Dodson, Gardner, Baldwin, and Bew, the latter of whom was at the time also the publisher of the Poetical Magazine, before it was acquired by John Murray. In 1786 appeared the third edition, announced now as being printed for J. Dodson, H. Gardner, and J. Bew. Baldwin by 1786 having gone his separate way. The third edition now bears a plainer title – Elegiac Sonnets – that reflects its exclusion of any poems but those in the sonnet form. It has grown, too, “with Twenty Additional Sonnets” to bring the total to 36. This edition, which was priced at three shillings, included as front matter an errata page and the previously published “Preface to the First Edition” [sic], followed by a new two-page “Preface to the Third Edition.” The title page of this quarto edition is visually similar to that of the first and second editions, although the printer’s name is now deleted, and its physical dimensions are likewise similar. Smith appears to have signed some copies of this edition (as she would do also with copies of some subsequent editions), inscribing her name at the bottom of the final page.

Smith’s preface to the third edition is subscribed and dated with a new geographical locator: “Woolbeding, March 22d, 1786.” Woolbeding was a village located about nine miles from Bignor Park, and it was there, after their return from France in the spring of 1786 that Smith and her children eventually moved into “the ancient mansion then belonging to Sir Charles Mill.” This preface, which appears in all subsequent editions through 1827...

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6 The British Library has one such copy, shelfmark 1346.i.34. Also at the British Library is a copy of the fourth edition (also 1786) inscribed in the same fashion at the bottom of the final page: shelfmark 11633 dd.4.

7 Hilbish, p. 117.
(the last one I consider here), unostentatiously credits the earlier edition’s favorable reception by both “the public” and by “my particular friends” as her motive for now adding “such other Sonnets as I have written since, or have recovered from my acquaintance, to whom I had given them without thinking well enough of them at the time to preserve any copies myself” (v). Smith’s language is in some ways the standard, formulaic self-effacement that typifies the introductory preface as a genre during the later eighteenth century: again and again authors claim that they have published only to gratify their friends and without personal pretensions of literary excellence, a rhetorical ploy designed to a large extent to blunt the criticism of the professional reviewers, who were after all known for a variety of literary and personal invective that often surprises even jaded and desensitized twenty-first century readers. But Smith’s remarks also reiterate her ambitions by reminding both her familiar readers and her new ones that her poems have already met with success in both her private circle and the broader arena of the public critical gaze. Moreover, the fact that her new edition appears in the same generous physical size as the first two editions serves in a visual and tactile manner to maintain the “standard” set by the first two. Finally, Smith engages in some additional calculated name-dropping by dedicating individual poems to notable figures: poems like “To Hayley.” “To Mrs. G.” “To the Earl of Egremont,” and “To the Countess of Egremont” suggest the author’s “connections” with the intellectual, artistic, and economic elite, her own already straitened circumstances notwithstanding.

The fourth edition, which its title page declares to be “corrected,” also appeared in 1786. The quarto pages continue, but the title page is rendered visually sparer than its third-edition predecessor through the exclusion of some of the language (e.g. the announcement of the addition of more sonnets) and the elimination of some horizontal rulings. Aside from minor revisions to correct typographical errors and second thoughts about some of the punctuation and capitalization, the fourth edition is virtually identical with the third, and it was priced at the same three shillings.

With the fifth edition, published in 1789 (Fig. 2), Elegiac Sonnets may be said to have “arrived” on the literary scene. Well known as it already was, Smith’s collection now grew by a dozen sonnets to a total of 48, while Smith returned to the volume’s final pages two of the three poems she had excised from the first and second editions, “The Origin of Flattery,” and “Song. From the French of Cardinal Bernis,” which title replaces the original French one of “Chanson par le Cardinal Bernis.” To these Smith now added “Ode to Despair. From the Novel of Emmeline” and “Elegy.” The title page to this new edition therefore announced that the book came to its reader “with Additional Sonnets and Other Poems.” It did so on smaller pages, however, the large octavo pages being replaced now by smaller ones measuring some 10.5 by 17 centimeters. Moreover, this new edition was priced more steeply than its predecessors: the flyleaf announces “Elegiac Sonnets &c. [Price 10s. 6d.]” Even considering adjustments for inflation, this is a steep rise over the three shillings of only three years earlier.

Indeed, the 1789 edition marked several important changes in the collection’s history. First, this new edition was issued by the important bookseller Thomas Cadell, whose bookshop in the Strand was described as “the first in Great Britain and perhaps in Europe.” Cadell maintained an extensive list of novelists and had in 1788 published Smith’s first novel, Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle, and who would publish several subsequent novels: Ethelinde, or The Recluse of the Lake (1789), Celestina (1791), The Banished Man (1794; the publisher now noted as “T. Cadell, jun. and W. Davies [successors to Mr. Cadell]), and The Young Philosopher (1798; Cadell, jun., and Davies). Second, this edition was issued by subscription, which enabled Smith to secure adequate financing in advance and, more important, to insert with the front matter a list of 817 subscribers that spans eight pages of double-column type and includes the names of dignitaries (like William Pitt, Horace Walpole, and William Cowper) and “unknowns” alike — including in the latter category a young Cambridge student by the name of William Wordsworth. In acknowledging in the new, brief Preface to this fifth edition “so many notable, literary, and respectable names” (vii), of course, Smith implicitly authorizes herself also by her association with them.

Finally, the fifth edition is the first to contain engraved illustrations, which may account for its significantly higher price. The edition seems to have five such engravings, although there was no frontispiece. Two of the five illustrations were engraved from designs by the fashionable artist Thomas Stothard, while the other three were based on designs by the less fashionable but no less important artist Richard Corbould. The presence of faux frontispieces in some extant copies is attributable to the industry of individual owners (and perhaps enterprising booksellers) who

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pasted in or otherwise inserted images opposite the title page in the fashion of conventional frontispieces. One such copy at the British Library contains the frontispiece portrait engraved by P. Condé for the 1797 eighth edition published by Cadell and Davies (it is dated “May 15th 1797”).

Another copy, also in the British Library, is much more curious. Inserted opposite the title page is a square print (fig. 3) that is clearly too big for the book and which has therefore been cropped at top and bottom (sacrificing some of the inscription in the process) and folded over upon itself approximately a third of the way in from its left margin. It depicts a fashionably dressed, seated woman who rests her chin on the back of her right hand as she gazes pensively over a moonlit country scene through which a river winds. The inscription beneath the cameo-shaped image attributes both the original image and the engraving to J. K. Sherwin, “Engraver to the King & Prince of Wales.” This is John Keyes Sherwin (1751-1790), a pupil of Bartolozzi who worked only sparingly in the book trade and died in poverty. He completed some commercial engravings for Bell’s edition of Shakespeare (1773-74) and a later edition of Shakespeare (1788). He also contributed to a 1779 edition of Matthew Prior’s poetry and to a 1786 edition of Thomas Gray’s poems. The image in the Smith volume is made doubly curious by its inscription: “Ah! then that I to thy soft scenes might go / Poor wretched wanderer in this vale of Woe.” Beneath this is the publisher’s information, but it has been cropped so severely as to be unreadable. A small superscription, though, reads: “See Mrs. Smith’s address to the...” The final word is missing or wholly obscured, and the quoted lines do not appear in any of Smith’s verse, including poems published after 1789. The poem that would appear most logically to correspond to both the visual image and the sense of the words is “To the Moon,” which had appeared in the volume from its very first edition. Perhaps the engraving was in fact prepared by Sherwin as a commercial print for separate sale, with the artist possibly adapting or paraphrasing Smith’s words to create the inscription. This would at least account for the incompatible size and format that required the print be folded (after some slight trimming at top and bottom) for it to fit inside the book in the fashion of a frontispiece.

In 1790 appeared a new edition, published in Dublin by Bernard Dornin and inscribed as “The Sixth Edition.” This appears to be an intermediate edition, for while it follows the 1789 fifth edition in the number and order of poems, it does not contain the preface to the fifth edition, nor does it have the new preface that appears in the 1792 London version of the “sixth edition.” It does, however, contain as a frontispiece a re-engraved version of one of the illustrations from the fifth edition, the plate originally prepared by James Neagle after Stothard to illustrate the sonnet called “Written on the Sea Shore, October 1784” and inscribed with the poem’s opening line. In the Dublin edition, however, the engraving has been reversed, presumably as a consequence of its re-engraving, and the names of the original artist and engraver have been eliminated, while the original publisher’s attribution has been replaced by one to Dornin. Although this appears to be the only Irish edition of Elegiac Sonnets, Smith’s works were regularly republished in Ireland, as part of the larger common practice, especially during 1780-1800, of reprinting London editions without authorization from author or publisher and without paying royalties. Among her novels, for instance, there are Irish editions of Emmeline; or, The Orphan of the Castle (Belfast, c. 1788), Celestina, a Novel (Dublin, 1791), Desmond, a Novel (Dublin, 1792), The Old Manor House (Dublin, 1793), Montalbert, a Novel (Dublin, 1795), and Marchmont, a Novel (Dublin, 1797). Her long poem, The Emigrants (1793), likewise appeared in an Irish edition (Dublin, 1793), while there are also Irish editions of Rambles Further (a continuation of her 1795 Rural Walks; Dublin, 1796), Minor Morals (Dublin, 1800), and Letters of a Solitary Wanderer (Dublin, 1801), as well as an edition of her stage comedy, What is She? (Dublin, 1799).

Smith’s poetry and prose alike appeared in contemporary pirated American editions, while both her fiction and her non-fiction prose were also published in contemporary French translations. After what in America was called a “new edition” of the third edition of Elegiac Sonnets appeared in Philadelphia, a “seventh edition” of Elegiac Sonnets was published in 1795 by the emigrant Irish booksman William Spotwood, who had left Philadelphia, “The heart of the American book trade” during the later

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10 See Richard Cargill Cole, Irish Booksellers and English Writers 1749-1800 (London: Manksell, 1986), p. 21. Cole notes that Irish booksellers refused to admit that their reprints were piracies because there was no copyright law in Ireland and no declared intent to sell the copies in England (p. 21).
eighteenth century, for "a brief stint as bookseller and stationer in Boston." 11 Another (different) edition that announced itself as the "First Worcester Edition" but which was based upon the sixth English edition, was published by Isaiah Thomas, who advertised "English, Scotch, and Irish editions" and who was by 1795 already emerging as a pre-eminent American publisher. 12 The Spotswood edition is typical of pirated American editions of British (and other) works in that it is "cut down" for production as a less expensive volume. The edition's small format (c. 8 x 13.5 cm.) cramms the contents into seventy pages by printing the sonnets continuously on the pages rather than employing the one-to-a-page arrangement of the English editions, by retaining only the prefaces to the first through fourth editions, and by eliminating the dedication to Hayley.

Back in England, Smith's new preferred publisher, Cadell, issued the sixth English edition of Elegiac Sonnets in London in 1792, with a title page announcing that it now contained "additional sonnets and other poems." 2 The number of sonnets now swelled to 59, printed consecutively following the front matter. The "other poems" added to this edition are "The Peasant of the Alps," "Song ("Does Pity give, tho' Fate denies"), the uncharacteristically light-hearted autobiographical "Thirty-Eight," and "Verses, intended to have been prefixed to the Novel of Emmeline." The volume again closes with "Quotations, Notes, and Explanations."

As she had done in the earlier editions, Smith retained all of her previous prefaces, now adding a new "Preface to the Sixth Edition." This preface is far more explicit than its predecessors had been in discussing the nature and origin of the melancholy tone and the theme of unremitting, unmerited suffering that characterizes Smith's poetry. In chastising a well-meaning friend (she says in her preface) who had remarked on her characteristic "plaintive tone" and encouraged her to add poems of "a more lively cast" that employed "a more cheerful style of composition," Smith spelled out the fundamentally expressive nature of her work:

You know that when in the Beech Woods of Hampshire, I first struck the chords of the melancholy lyre, its notes were never intended for the public ear! It was unaffected sorrows drew them forth: I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy — And I have unfortunately no reason yet, though nine years have since elapsed, to change my tone. (p. x)

Smith goes on to detail her protracted and still unsuccessful struggle to pry loose her and her children's inheritance from the legal labyrinth that had impeded its disbursement for years. Smith closes by assuring her readers that she hopes she will not need to burden them with this recital of perceived injustice and injury, but her language also contains a threat: "I shall be sorry, if on some future occasion, I should feel myself compelled to detail its causes more at length" (p. xii). She is prepared, in other words, to employ the public forum of the print medium to present her case — to "name names" — if justice fails to be served by other, less public means. Unfortunately, Smith was forced after all to bear the humiliation that attended that more public airing of her grievances.

By 1795, two years after Cadell's retirement in 1793, the seventh edition of Elegiac Sonnets appeared in London. Cadell had been succeeded by his son, Thomas Cadell, Jr., and his father's trusted partner William Davies, the two of whom had taken over the elder Cadell's premises in the Strand. The 1795 volume, which follows exactly the order and the pagination of the sixth edition of 1792, reappeared two years later as the first volume of the eighth edition. That edition, also published by the younger Cadell and Davies, initiated a complication in the naming and numbering of editions and volumes, for it seems that the two volumes of Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems henceforth bear separate edition numbers. Thus while Volume I of the 1797 edition is identified as "The Eighth Edition," Volume II (which appears for the first time in 1797) bears no edition number at all, signifying that its publishers regarded it as a separate "work." Indeed, at the end of Volume I of the 1797 eighth edition (pp. 107-08) there appears a two-page advertisement of new publications from Cadell and Davies, one of which is in fact Volume II of Elegiac Sonnets; this further suggests that Volume II was a separate publication that may have been priced and sold independently from Volume I. The 1797 printing of Volume II was followed in 1800 by a "second" edition (paired with the ninth edition of Volume I),


in 1806 by a “third” (also paired with the ninth edition of Volume I), and in 1811 by a “fourth” (paired with the tenth edition of Volume I).

With the 1797 eighth Edition, Elegiac Sonnets finally acquired an “official” frontispiece, in the form of the engraved portrait of Smith (fig. 4) that would become her best-known image. The engraving, by Peter Condé, bears an inscription:

Oh! Time has Changed me since you saw me last.
And heavy Hours with Time’s deforming Hand,
Have written strange Defeatures in my Face.

This is a variation on Aegeon’s lament in Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors:

O. grief hath changed me since you saw me last.
And careful hours with time’s deformed hand
Have written strange defeatures on my face. (VI, 296)

Smith was notorious for her half-approximations of the words of earlier and contemporary authors, and Shakespeare and Milton were among her favorites. Indeed, she often took pains to absolve herself from accusations of plagiarism by pleading a tendency to misremember. It is therefore likely that she supplied the passage that appears on her portrait, a passage that effectively glosses her own misfortunes even as it dramatizes them both literally and figuratively as the stuff of Shakespeare. It is impossible to say for certain whether Smith has simply misquoted out of carelessness (or from not having a copy of Shakespeare near at hand) or whether she was deliberately inviting her astute reader to substitute Shakespeare’s “grief” for her own “Time” in the first line and therefore to read more into the already clearly autobiographical context. But Smith was both a subtle and a resourceful writer, and she knew her readers well, which suggests that the “misquotation” (which is, after all, unattributed on the plate) is no mere accident.

The base of the 1797 Condé portrait frontispiece is inscribed, “Published May 15th 1797 by Cadell and Davies. Strand,” which same inscription appears on the illustrations for Volume II, all of which are new to the collection. This frontispiece, which became standard in subsequent editions, seems to have held up production of Volume II itself, for at the end of the fourth volume of Smith’s 1796 novel, Marchmont (offered by the London printer Sampson Low) appears within a two-page announcement of Low’s new and forthcoming publications the following notice:

Mrs. Smith takes this Occasion of informing the Subscribers to the Second Volume of Poems, with a Portrait and Engravings, that the domestic Misfortunes, and personal ill Health, together with Difficulties that arose in procuring a Likeness, have unavoidably delayed the Publication of the Work greatly beyond the Time it was intended to appear; but it is now in such Forwardness, and the Ornamental Parts are in such Hands, that she hopes in a very short Time to fulfil [sic] her Engagements with the Public. 13

Low’s advertisement is dated “Oct. 31, 1796,” which helps to date the reassuring notice to Smith’s readers – and especially her subscribers – that she is transmitting through Low. It is not clear what the particular circumstances were that delayed the new volume, although her letters indicate that during 1795-97 she was even more strapped for money than usual, unable at times even to pay local tradespeople. 14 And, of course, her favorite daughter Augusta had died in 1795 after a long illness following childbirth. In any event, the sheer physical and emotional drain of the ongoing difficulties she faced in supporting herself and her family helps to account for the nature and tone of her prefaces, in which Smith occasionally seems seriously to over-react to even the most innocent criticism, and to see in every comment both a personal slight and a malicious intent.

Copies of the 1797 edition exist both with and without the Condé frontispiece. This suggests that both its insertion and its physical placement may sometimes have been at the discretion of the publisher (or perhaps the individual purchaser or subscriber), although it is entirely possible that all copies were issued uniform with the portrait included, and that individual owners removed or relocated the plate. The inconsistency among extant copies – whatever its actual causes – also helps to explain the appearance in a copy of the 1789 fifth edition of this 1797 image (as I mentioned earlier), which clearly resulted from embellishing an earlier copy. It accounts, too,

13 Charlotte Smith, Marchmont: A Novel, 4 vols. (London: Sampson Low, 1796); IV,444.
14 See Fry, pp. 10-1.
for the still more curious copy of the same 1789 edition containing the oversized, folded picture of the woman beside a moonlit shore, also discussed earlier.

The edition of 1797 introduced a new title page specifically for Volume II. While it is visually consistent in layout with that for Volume I, it is notable for the inclusion of an epigraph from Petrarch. Given the conventions of her time, Smith’s title pages are on the whole unusually plain; this is especially apparent with a novel like Montalbert (1795), which was printed by Low for the London bookseller E. Booker and which is characterized by an unusually “plain” – even “cheap” – letterpress and overall visual appearance. Moreover, in an age in which many books sported extensive title-page quotations, this sort of intertextual embellishment is conspicuously absent from most of Smith’s title pages. The text page of the Dublin edition of The Banished Man (1794), which bears a quotation (in French) from Montaigne, is in fact the exception rather than the rule. Interestingly, it appears that only after her death did the title pages to Smith’s works carry the explicit references to her other publications that are such a common feature of title pages of the period. The title page to an 1814 Minerva Press edition of Ethelinde; or The Recluse of the Lake, cites Smith as “Author of Emmeline, Montalbert, Young Philosopher, &c. &c.”

The title page for Volume II of Elegiae Sonnets is, therefore, remarkable for its inclusion of four lines from Petrarch, significantly printed in Italian rather than in translation:

Non t’appressar ove sia riso e canto
Canzone mio, ma, ma pianto:
Non fa per te di star con gente allegra
Vedova sconsolata, in veste nigr.

15 Despite the evidence of this title page, “E.” Booker is usually identified in contemporary directories as Thomas Booker, bookseller and stationer, and occasionally as Joseph Booker. See Maxted, p. 24.

16 Two other notable exceptions exist: the title page to The Old Manor House (1793) bears an untranslated quotation from Ariosto, and the title page to The Young Philosopher (1798) has four lines of English verse.


Retaining the untranslated Italian serves, like the geographical locators discussed earlier, to enhance the status of author and reader alike, implying a shared intellectual elitism and cosmopolitanism. At the same time, however, the passage, which comes from the end of Petrarch’s Sonnet 268, is not quite correctly quoted. Stuart Curran observes of this inexactitude that “throughout her frequent citations of Petrarch Smith quotes loosely, a practice open to opposing interpretations, indicating an Italian either insecure or so fluent as to be stored in her memory.” This inexactitude in quotation is related to what I observed earlier about Smith’s handling of Shakespeare and others. The fact that it occurs repeatedly, in a variety of contexts, sometimes with attribution and sometimes without, suggests that while some of this slippery allusiveness may represent a deliberate intertextuality, probably more of it stems from mere carelessness, faulty memory, or the absence of handy available copies against which to check her citations, combined with the day-to-day aggravations to which Smith’s personal and financial difficulties subjected her.

Indeed, for the 1797 Volume II Smith wrote a new preface that is notable for both its unprecedented length (it runs fifteen pages) and its uneasy mixture of self-deprecation, self-justification, and plain anger. Given the production delays to which the note at the end of Marchmont refers, and given too that Volume II was issued by subscription, it is not surprising that Smith defends herself angrily against charges that she has imposed upon her public by citing her many successive personal misfortunes — and not any cavalier attitude toward her subscribers — as the cause of the delays. As she puts it, “it becomes in some measure a matter of self-defence, to account for that delay,” even though to do so is to expose to the public gaze grievances and perceived injustices — “the mortifications I have within these last years been subjected to” (pp. v-vi) — which she professes she would prefer to keep private. Of course, this is in some measure a rhetorical ploy aimed at generating additional sympathy for the author, who portrays herself as a much-sinned-against and long-suffering woman who wishes nothing more than to support her family.

Interestingly, the 1797 Volume II lists considerably fewer subscribers than had her earlier subscription volume. By 1797 the British economy was declining; one effect was the precipitous decrease in the number of finely produced books, including both large-scale illustrated books and
more modest ones. While Smith's new volume may have fallen victim to this market downturn, it is also possible that her friends and admirers had indeed grown fewer, since in the preceding several years her novels had taken on a decidedly political – and oppositional, republican – nature, both in their subject matter and in the politics professed in them by various characters and by Smith-as-narrator. Thus even when the literary merit of her fiction was praised in the popular press, her politics were frequently the subject of hostile and often highly personal criticism. This criticism, added to Smith's already notorious practice of rehearsing her woes in the prefaces to her works, may have discouraged some potential subscribers. Smith, however, offers another possibility, equally plausible:

Perhaps in addition to the friends, or soi-disant tel, whose notice and whose names have for some such causes as these, been withheld, I might add as another cause, that for many months past I have been so apprehensive of not having health enough to superintend the publication of even this small volume, that I had desired those few friends who had voluntarily engaged to collect subscriptions, not to persevere in their kind endeavours; and I had written to my elder sons, entreat them, should death overtake me before I could complete my engagements, to place, as soon afterwards as they could, in the hands of Messrs. Cadell and Davies, a sum sufficient to reimburse them any expenses they might have incurred, and to repay the subscriptions. (pp. xii-xiii)

This, too, may be as much a rhetorical ploy as an account of the true state of Smith's situation. Whatever the truth of the matter, though, Smith seems to have reconsidered the wisdom of her decision to publish these lengthy remarks, for when in 1800 appeared the tenth and last edition of Elegiac Sonnets to be published during Smith's lifetime – which issue included the second edition of Volume II – the self-dramatizing preface was suppressed.¹⁹

With Volume II Smith's collection expanded substantially. For one thing, another 25 sonnets were added at the beginning of Volume II, bringing the total to 84 in the combined two volumes. These new sonnets, some of which had first appeared in her novels, were followed in Volume II by fifteen primarily lyric or narrative poems of varying length. At the end of Volume II, after Smith's customary section of "Quotations, Notes, and Explanations," appears a list of Smith's works, presumably all available from Cadell and Davies. At 119 pages (plus front matter), Volume II now constituted a collection roughly the same size as Volume I, which had stabilized at 106 pages (plus front matter) beginning with the 1792 sixth edition.

When in 1800 a ninth edition appeared, Volume I again remained as it had been since 1792, while Volume II grew once more. Eight more sonnets were added, bringing the two-volume total to 92, while the "other poems" grew to nineteen, two of which Smith attributes to "a deceased friend." Three others had appeared in Smith's 1798 novel, The Young Philosopher. The volume again ends with advertisements for ten works by Smith published by Cadell and Davies.

Smith hoped to publish a still larger edition of Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems. In 1805 she began negotiations with William Davies, to whom she wrote that she had in hand "original and unpublished poems nearly if not quite sufficient to make another volume as large as those you published some years ago." The most ambitious of these new poems was "Beachy Head," the remarkable long poem on which she was still at work at the time of her death on 25 October 1806. Smith apparently envisioned a three-volume work that would add to the extant volumes this new long poem, together with several shorter ones. When she named the substantial price of £300 for this new work, Davies declined to pursue the matter any personal life and experience the incidents and emotions she assigns to her characters. See The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer: containing Narratives of Various Description, 5 vols. (London: Sampson Low, [1800-2]). Given Smith's penchant for doing precisely what her critics accuse her of – presenting autobiographical data under the guise of "fiction" and airing her personal grievances publicly in her prefaces – it is easy to question both the nature and the extent of her complaints, although the often desperate circumstances under which she labored ought properly to mitigate a good deal of both our own criticism and that of her contemporaries.

¹⁹ Smith did not entirely abandon the subject, however. When Volume IV of The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer appeared in 1802, the preface to that volume contained a detailed complaint about negative reviewers who seem to Smith unfairly to attribute to her own

²⁰ Smith's letter, dated 6 July 1805, and her subsequent correspondence with Davies and then with the prominent publisher Joseph Johnson, is quoted in Fry, pp. 30-1.
further. Smith then turned to Joseph Johnson, who had already published some of her books for children and whose extensive list (and still liberal politics) would have appealed to Smith for the potential it held for her to reach a broad, diverse, and largely sympathetic audience. Johnson did publish this new volume, *Beauchy Head: with Other Poems*, but it did not appear until nearly a year after Smith’s death. Meanwhile, a tenth edition did appear from Cadell and Davies in 1811: its contents are uniform with the ninth edition of 1800. The title page to Volume II is inscribed “Fourth Edition,” but its contents likewise repeat the previous edition. Smith’s uniform three-volume collection never did materialize.

One final edition of Smith’s poems is important to consider here, one that did not appear until 1827, some twenty years after Smith’s death. Given the relative visual and typographical plainness that characterized both the editions published in her lifetime, one cannot help wondering what Smith might have thought of the ornate title page and frontispiece to this extraordinary little volume. For “little” it surely is: at only about two by three and a half inches, it is undoubtedly some sort of vest-pocket edition, with its text presented in a plain letterpress. Issued by the London publishers Jones and Company, this edition, the base of whose title page is inscribed “University Edition,” marks the last appearance of Smith’s collection in Great Britain during the Romantic period. Interestingly, the engraved title page now calls it *Sonnets, and Other Poems*, the adjective “elegiac” now having been unceremoniously dropped. The frontispiece (fig. 5) is a re-engraved rectangular version of the Condé image, surrounded now by a tracery of lines and inscribed at the bottom with the poet’s name but without any engraver’s name. Facing right, Smith gazes across the binding toward the ornately lettered title page (fig. 6), whose lower portion contains a vignette reminiscent of some of the outdoor scenes that had served as in-text illustrations for earlier editions. Here, though, the image is rendered with a characteristically early-Victorian softness. It portrays a young woman lying languidly on what appears to be a rocky bank, perhaps a river- or sea-side whose water approaches her extended foot. Balancing the image of the young woman, whose whiteness dominates the design, a leafy bough extends to the right from behind her, framing an open rural prospect in which two buildings (at least one of which is a dwelling) are visible.

The entire page is a study in visual contrasts: for the placidity and stasis of the image of the woman answers the decidedly “busy” nature of the lettering and the decorative lines that swirl about it in the title area. These contrasts are further bound by the presence of a single rectangular frame line that delimited the page’s white space even as it decorates it (in a fashion) by including small inset squares at its corners. This definitively margined page itself contrasts with the portrait frontispiece that stands opposite it and which contains no outer frame lines, despite the presence there of the ornamental lines surrounding Smith’s portrait. The dynamics of the double image presented here from frontispiece and title page ironically anticipate the literary quality of much of what follows, for Smith’s elegiac sonnets (even more so than her other short poetry) had from the first reflected both a powerful personal expressiveness and a determined awareness of the demands of form. This double image, then, epitomizes, more than forty years after *Elegiac Sonnets* first appears, a quality that had never before been adequately captured in visual form. This lends a particular poignancy to the fact that this 1827 edition represents the last full representation of Smith’s poems during the era.

Nevertheless, in 1851 Smith was still included in the fourth volume of the *Cabinet Edition of the British Poets* published by Henry G. Bohn, one of whose specialties was “anthologies” of multiple authors in which the text is presented in double columns in a tiny font. In this case, Smith was represented by the text of the 1797 eighth edition, complete with all the prefaces to the various editions through the eighth. Volume IV presents (in this order) John Dryden, George Lyttleton, James Hammond, Smith, David Lester Richardson, Robert Bloomfield, William Gifford, and George Canning, an eclectic assembly that includes some authors whose work is little remembered today but who were clearly still regarded as “important” in mid-nineteenth-century England. Smith’s inclusion among this compa-
ny reflects the paradoxical and always fragile nature of poetic reputation. That she is the only woman among the group indicates that as late as 1851 her fame and influence had resisted the powerful cultural and institutional bias against women poets (and women artists generally). At the same time, among this group only Dryden entered the traditional canon of British poets, which suggests that Smith’s presence among them – however notable it may be – is a questionable victory that merely places her in company with male poets whose lives and works have historically fared little better than her own. That literary scholarship at the beginning of the twentieth-century is at last beginning to reassess all these poets – women and men alike – suggests the healthy nature of that revisionist scholarship. All these names – but Smith’s in particular – have begun to appear once again on title pages, not this time as the authors but rather as the subjects of study. This can only be good.

Fig. 1. Title page. Charlotte Smith, *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays*, Second edition, Chichester 1794. Courtesy of University of Nebraska Libraries.

Fig. 2. Title page. Charlotte Smith, *Elegiac Sonnets*, Fifth edition, London 1789. Courtesy of University of Nebraska Libraries.
TITLE-PAGES AND FRONTISPICES
OF POPULAR TRIAL ACCOUNTS AND NEWGATE CALENDARS
(1600-1870)

Uwe Böker

Title-page and Frontispiece: Their Economic Function

The addition of title-pages to printed books, different from the usage during the manuscript area, has been "one of the most distinct, visible advances from script to print". It was developed not so much to display the printer’s skill than as a marketing tool. Thus it is considered to be "not a direct response to the technological change that printing embodies, but to the economics implicit in the technology". Researchers have, however, not always been unanimous about the meaning of the terms title-page and frontispiece. Although ‘title-page’ was sometimes used as an umbrella term for the beginnings of a book, it is by now common practice to consider the frontispiece, or to use H.D.L. Vervliet’s term frontispice ornée, a separate entity; separate from the title-page that is a book’s opening, and separate in turn from the table of contents and the text itself. The frontispiece usually faces the title-page; but both may contain woodcuts, engravings, and other kinds of illustrations.

The title-page with its more or less abbreviated identification of the

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1 See S.H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 145. For the competent information on the varieties of letters used on the title-pages under discussion, I would like to thank Dr. Dipl. Ing. Christoph Reske of the Institut für Buchwissenschaft, Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz.


3 Smith, *Title-page*, p. 13.


In September 2008,

Die Hamburger

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Eine kurze Geschichte der Frauenhöfe und ihrer Schwestern in der Geschichtszeiträume der Hammonischen Universitäten.

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