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DISABLING CHARLOTTE SMITH: A MARXIST, CRIP THEORY ANALYSIS OF CLASS,
GENDER, LABOR, AND DISABILITY IN ROMANTIC POETRY

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ABSTRACT

DISABLING CHARLOTTE SMITH: A MARXIST, CRIP THEORY ANALYSIS OF CLASS,
GENDER, LABOR, AND DISABILITY IN ROMANTIC POETRY

BY JACOB CEPOLLINA

This thesis analyzes the correlations between labor, class, gender, and disability in Charlotte Smith's poetry, while specifically using a Marxist frame of analysis in conjunction with contemporary disability studies theories to argue for the structural determination of her laboring position. As she continues laboring from this position that is determined by her status as a working-class woman writer, Smith becomes disabled, and the manifestations of her disability change over time. In addition to her need to write constantly to survive, Smith was caring for twelve children without her husband (who was in debtor's prison) present. As a result, Smith's labor needs to be analyzed not only from a laboring-to-survive framework, but also in conjunction with the reality that she needed to constantly transition between working to survive and providing emotional and care labor for her children with very little assistance. By using an intersectional analysis to see how these systems of oppression impacted Smith's lived experience—namely gender, class, and disability-based oppression—I hope to argue for the presence of a systemic process by which Smith becomes disabled, and that this process results in a near inevitability of disability often times. At the same time, however, I will posit disability as a positive identity, and fight strongly for disabled people's validity whether or not they have a medical diagnosis, as these diagnoses always need to be defined in terms of access, rather than being considered the only avenue through which disability is possible.

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Introduction

In her *Elegiac Sonnets*, “The Emigrants,” and “Beachy Head,” Charlotte Smith’s speakers demonstrate a progression of bodily experience that spans not only the experience of the speakers in her poems but also across the body of Smith’s work and writing career as a whole. Through these bodily experiences, Smith’s gender and class position become direct determinants of the type of labor she is required to perform, whether it is caring for her children or writing to provide for them. As Smith labors and writes the experiences of this labor in her poetry, she becomes emblematic of the laboring-class poet, a figure which can also be represented—albeit differently—by Robert Bloomfield and his poem “The Farmer’s Boy.” Whereas Bloomfield writes from his position as a laboring-class man, Smith’s position as a laboring-class woman prescribes different societal expectations about the types of labor she needs to perform, including emotional labor. To further frame this analysis, William Wordsworth writes from an opposite position as Smith as both a non-laboring-class poet and a man. When analyzing their works in comparison with one another, it becomes clear that the gender and class positions of Smith, Bloomfield, and Wordsworth directly determine the types of work that they perform; more to the point, there is a process by which workers, and especially laboring-class women, are often times (and, I argue, in Smith’s case) impaired and disabled by the repetitive emotional and physical labor they perform over time and under normative time constraints, and particularly when the labor they are expected to perform for survival is compounded with the emotional labor society expects them to perform as women. Finally, I argue that Charlotte Smith represents this process in her writing by using poetry as a medium to talk about these struggles in her daily life, thus establishing intricate connections between her speakers and her own lived experiences. This analysis of gender, class, labor, and disability over time will be heavily

influenced by the theories of labor and productivity that Karl Marx puts forward in *Capital: Volume 1* as well as the contemporary disability studies framework of crip theory that Alison Kafer discusses in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*.

In incorporating these two frameworks, I argue that Smith was writing about disability and its relation to gender, class, and labor long before disability studies scholars began to write about these same relationships, and that Smith and her characters have experiences of disability and impairment that deserve examination, recognition, and application to contemporary gender, class, and labor positions that resist normative conceptions of what labor should consist of and how specifically non-normative bodies engage with capitalistic labor expectations.

Charlotte Smith represents the centerpiece of this conversation around gender, class, labor, and disability in Romantic poetry that was written around 1800, and her poetry provides an essential framework for how an author's works develop over time: from her *Elegiac Sonnets* to "The Emigrants," Smith's writing and the experiences of her characters are directly influenced by her own embodied experience. In her article "Charlotte Smith: to live only to write and to write only to live," Susan Wolfson describes the high stakes of Smith's work, discussing how Smith's writing "was always a dire stay against 'the probability that my family will be starved'" (Wolfson, 639). The incredible amount of pressure Smith was under to provide for her family also permeates her writing, especially in her *Elegiac Sonnets*. In "Sonnet VI," Smith's speaker seems to reference the incredible amount of stress Smith is under, stating: "A prey to fear, anxiety, and pain, / Must I a sad existence still deplore?" (9-10). This section of "Sonnet VI" provides a key, initial example of how Smith's state of stress, fear, and anxiety about providing for her family is directly translated to one of her characters who feels a similar "fear, anxiety, and pain." Charlotte Smith is an example of someone who undergoes the systematic process of

being disabled by the work she performs, which is a concept that is also incredibly prevalent in Marx's *Capital: Volume 1*. Marx argues that:

Capital oversteps not only the moral but even the merely physical limits of the working day. It usurps the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body... capitalist production... produces a deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal moral and physical conditions of development and activity (Marx, 375-376).

Marx's analysis of capital's relation to the limits of physical labor parallels how the conditions that Charlotte Smith labors under take an immense physical and emotional toll on her body, revealing how there is an intimate connection between labor and disability, and especially labor under capitalism.

My paper will also include a section that outlines the basic foundations and principles of disability studies as a discipline and how disability studies can be used to reread texts with a framework that draws from one or more of the prominent models of disability, including the social model and the identity model, among others. In this section, I will briefly trace how the original conceptions of disability and impairment have evolved as the field has grown, especially in the changes from a complete focus on the social model of disability to some of the more prominent contemporary disability frameworks like crip theory.

Literature Review

Generally, much of the scholarship around Romantic poets, class, labor, and disability in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries either does not include a gender-based analysis, does not discuss disability, or it tends to only compare two authors at a time. For example, there are plenty of articles and books written about Wordsworth and Smith, like "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith" by Bishop Hunt and *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807* by Jacqueline Labbe. Because of the fact that there is little

scholarship discussing the relationships between multiple Romantic poets from varying labor, class, disability, and gender positions, I am going to incorporate William Wordsworth and Robert Bloomfield as framing pieces around Charlotte Smith so that I can put the class, gender, and labor positions of these authors in conversation with one another. In doing this, I hope to intervene into current scholarship by offering an analysis of these three poets who are not often compared. Furthermore, in creating this relationship, I believe I can expand the importance of the work Charlotte Smith does because she occupies a unique gender, labor, class, and eventually disabled position.

As Donald Zimmerman claims in “The Medium of Antipastoral: Protest Between the Lines of Bloomfield’s *The Farmer’s Boy*,” Robert Bloomfield’s *The Farmer’s Boy* provides an “idealization of labor through the detailing of quotidian tasks” (37). Bloomfield, as an “uneducated poet,” provides a distinct analysis of class and labor in *The Farmer’s Boy*, and, as Zimmerman argues, “between its lines lies a critique of Britain’s rural labor system that departs markedly from previous ways of writing about land and labor” (37). With Bloomfield’s poetry and Zimmerman’s analysis of it in mind, I hope to place Bloomfield in this conversation as a poet who occupies the laboring class and is concerned with the repetitive labor that many members of the laboring class are forced to perform. In doing this, I believe Zimmerman’s work will strengthen my argument by helping me create a more solid framework of the authors I am writing about and how their class positions relate to their labor.

On the other end of these gender, labor, and class positions, William Wordsworth represents a group of people who do not have the same pressure or requirement to perform labor that is likely to result in physical or emotional harm. For this analysis, the main Wordsworth poem I am planning to focus on is “Simon Lee,” as it depicts a character that labors over a long

period of time and as a result is unable to perform a task that he would likely have been able to complete earlier in his life. In “Wordsworth, ‘Simon Lee,’ and the Craving for Incidents,” Brian McGrath claims that: “In its complicated concluding lines, the poem raises as a question the ability of the poet-narrator to respond appropriately to Simon Lee’s struggles, both his more general struggle to survive in a modern world that has no use for him, as well as his more specific struggle...to sever a root” (569). In this article, McGrath’s analysis of “Simon Lee” reveals the difficulties that the poet-narrator has not only with accurately depicting the subject of the poem, Simon, and his daily struggles, but also the trouble this poet-narrator has with connecting to Simon Lee’s struggles as a laborer, since strenuous manual labor is something that Wordsworth, the poet, does not have the same experience with. Additionally, Wordsworth did not undergo the same “struggle to survive in a world that has no use for him” as Simon Lee did because Wordsworth’s class and occupation allowed him to eventually gain the title of Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. Relatedly, in “Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, and the Problem of Peasant Poetry,” Scott McEathron describes how “Wordsworth presented himself as Britain’s sole contemporary poet of ‘low and rustic life’ and suggested that his experiments with ‘the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes’ marked such a departure from prevailing literary norms” (4). In my analysis, I am going to compare the way Wordsworth writes about “low and rustic life,” labor, and impairment to the ways that Smith and Bloomfield do the same types of writing in order to frame Smith as a sort of centerpiece between Wordsworth and Bloomfield in terms of the way her labor was structurally determined.

The current conversations around Charlotte Smith’s poetry focus primarily on her position among Romantic poets, why she is often left out of discussions of the Romantic literary canon, and her relationship to her writing as a means of survival for both her and her children.

For example, Melissa Sodeman's "Charlotte Smith's Literary Exile" claims that, "forced by financial hardship to write, "Smith" was "'compelled to live only to write & write only to live...every body seems to think...that I am bound to do it, forgetting that I was a mere child when they talk'd me into bonds'" (134). Sodeman furthers this discussion by incorporating Smith's gender and class positions, stating: "Smith's rehearsal of a biography of constraint and grinding poverty--so common among women writers of her day—suggests...that she understood her situation as structurally determined" (135). Susan Wolfson's offers an analysis of Smith's position as "a mother twelve times over" whose writing is "'addressed by a mother to her children, whose future fate, from a long series of calamitous circumstances in their family, seemed to be doubtful" (637). Finally, the article "Collaborative Motherhood: Maternal Teachers and Dying Mothers in Charlotte Smith's Children's Books" by Elizabeth Dolan completes this conversation of Smith's position to her writing and her family's survival by arguing that "effective mothers or surrogate mothers in Smith's narrative teach their daughters the strength or practical skills needed to weather financial advocacy, in particular. The dying mothers, collapsing in the face of financial and emotional distress, serve as counter-models for their daughters" (Dolan, 110). I want to use Dolan's analysis of Smith's writing serving as a teaching method to see how Smith writes her own hardships into her poetry and how the need to provide for her family relates to the financial and emotional stress that Dolan discusses. In all, these sources are representative of the current writing about Smith's personal life, as they detail her personal struggles with her work and how she saw it only as a means of providing for her family while she also had to deal with her position in "grinding poverty," and they will contribute to my argument by adding a historical framework of women and women writers and the labor they were expected to perform (Sodeman, 135).

Where the current state of literature is lacking is in any analysis of Smith, her labor, and the effects of this labor on her body and mind: in other terms, any analysis of the relationship between the ways that labor conditions under capitalism can result in impairment and disability, especially for Smith as a laboring-class woman who has to perform both the labor required for the survival of her and her children as well as the emotional labor of raising 12 children on her own; as Knowles states, Smith “made the very unusual move of separating from her husband, but this left her with the responsibility for providing for their numerous children. She did this almost entirely through her literary productions” (*Charlotte Smith: Major Poetic Works*, 24). Though literature about Charlotte Smith and disability is lacking, Eric Parisot’s article “Living to Labour, Labouring to Live: The Problem of Suicide in Charlotte Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets” does gesture towards potential questions of mental health and the way Smith’s references to suicide in her poetry may or may not have been indicative of her real-life experiences and feelings.

Marxism, Labor, Class, Gender, and Disability

To ground my thinking and analysis of Smith’s laboring and class positions, I am going to incorporate a Marxist framework that specifically draws on what theorists have said about labor, disability, and capitalism and how that relates to Marx’s own works, including *Capital: Volume 1* and the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.” In the article “Economy and Disability: Labor Market Conditions and the Disability of Working-Age Individuals,” Rourke O’Brien argues that:

Workplace stress can have a negative effect on the health status of workers and that workers at organizations experiencing downsizing are likely to experience even greater health consequences, due in part to the real health consequences of increased job insecurity (325).

O’Brien’s points about workplace stress are incredibly relevant to my analysis of Charlotte Smith’s workplace (her home) and the stress that comes from her working at home, which

includes having to take care of her children and being isolated from any true social interaction.

O'Rourke continues to argue:

Economic insecurity...increases psychological distress and, notably, nonspecific physiological illness. These studies provide support for a disabling pathway through which increased economic insecurity has a negative impact on health that may prove to be disabling (325).

The correlation between workplace stress, economic insecurity, and health will be incredibly important to my analysis of Smith's constant stress to provide through her work and the impacts this stress has on her body and mind.

When addressing Smith's laboring position from a Marxist point of view, I am going to be sure to include a gender-based analysis of labor and laboring conditions, and the article "Marx and Feminism" by Silvia Federici does an excellent job of laying out the correlations between labor and gender positions under capitalism. Federici states that

It is not surprising that Marx's discussion of "simple reproduction" was a ...confirmation of our suspicion that never would the capitalist class have allowed so much domestic labour to survive if it had not seen the possibility to exploit it. Reading that the activities that reproduce labour power are essential to capitalist accumulation brought out the class dimension of our refusal (473).

Federici's argument about the essential nature of reproducing labor power is in direct correlation with Smith's labor, as Smith is laboring to provide for the future of labor power, her children, while also doing the domestic labor to ensure that the labor power she reproduced is able to stay alive and one day contribute to the workforce. Federici finishes this argument by writing:

This much despised, always taken for granted labour, always dismissed by socialists as backward, has in reality been the pillar of the capitalist organisation of work... as women, we did not have to join men in the factories to be part of the working class and conduct anti-capitalist struggle.. capitalism has empowered men to command our unpaid labour and discipline our time and space (473).

In including Federici's arguments about Marx and feminism, I hope to build off of her strong analysis of domestic labor and its exploitation under capitalism to create an anti-capitalist,

Marxist critique of the conditions Charlotte Smith was confined to labor under for the majority of her life.

Disability Studies Literature Review

This specific area where the literature and analysis is lacking is where I plan to make my intervention--there has not been a disability studies, and specifically a crip theory analysis of Charlotte Smith that focuses on the ways she has labor structurally imposed upon her, how this labor affects her body and mind, how capitalist norms of production enforce a productivity standard that further increases the stress Smith is subjected to, especially when her family's survival also depends on her ability to produce constantly. Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* offers a strong contemporary theoretical framework I can apply to Charlotte Smith's writing, both in its feminist analysis and its discussions of crip time and the ways normative expectations of bodies and time can be made flexible to accommodate for non-normative, disabled bodies. I am also planning on using Sami Schalk's recent book *Bodyminds Reimagined*, which provides an excellent introduction to and analysis of the concept of the bodymind, which I believe will prove to be especially useful in my conversations about Charlotte Smith and the ways the stress she encounters from her labor impacts both her body and her mind. Finally, in "Crip theory and the disabled identity: why disability politics needs impairment," Andrew Jenks advocates for the importance of recognizing impairment in disability studies and conversations around disability while also comparing this recent turn in recognizing impairment to earlier emphases on the medical model "which views disability as being some condition of the individual which must be fixed" and the social model which argues that "disability itself is not natural, but a social construction based on how impaired bodies are unable to navigate the world around them" (Jenks, 454). In drawing from the positive aspects of previous work in disability studies, like

some of the beneficial aspects of the social model, I hope to create a frame of analysis that is considerate of impairment, temporal situation, and social structures that disable Smith and her characters.

Before getting into some of the more contemporary, and arguably more radical and accessible models of disability, it is essential to outline a few of the models that have been fundamental to the development of the field thus far. The medical model and the social model of disability are two lenses for conceptualizing disability that have been at the forefront of disability theory. Simply put, the social model argues for disability as a social construction, and the medical model posits disability as something that can (and should) be fixed through medical technology and interventions. In the article “Crip theory and the disabled identity: why disability politics needs impairment,” Andrew Jenks advocates for the importance of recognizing impairment in disability studies and conversations around disability while also comparing this recent turn in recognizing impairment to earlier emphases on the medical model “which views disability as being some condition of the individual which must be fixed” and the social model which argues that “disability itself is not natural, but a social construction based on how impaired bodies are unable to navigate the world around them” (Jenks, 454).

To further explain this distinction between the medical model and the social model of disability, there are two main sources that provide excellent examples of the fundamental differences between the two. The first is Chandra Kavanagh’s “What Contemporary Models of Disability Miss,” which lays out the three main facets of the medical model:

First, disability is a mental, physical, or psychological deficit that afflicts what otherwise could have been a normal person. Second, disability is a medical problem that requires a medical solution. And, third, the site of the disability lies within the individual, so any action undertaken to solve the problem of disability should be directed at the individual (64).

Conversely, in “The Social Model of Disability: Dichotomy Between Impairment and Disability,” Dimitris Anastasiou writes that:

Social constructionists apply the social construction argument to every disability in order to equate these conditions with social ideas...Finkelstein asserted that physical disability is purely social: Once social barriers to the reintegration of people with physical impairments are removed, the disability itself is eliminated (Anastasiou, 443).

Both of these models of disability have their issues; on one hand, the social model tends to ignore impairment, which is something I will focus heavily on in the next section as it is an essential way of viewing and validating Charlotte Smith’s position as a disabled woman. On the other hand, the medical model positions disability as some sort of fundamental error that a person has, and since this disability is an error, it needs to be fixed. While both models have been heavily utilized, they do have their glaring flaws, which makes them inadequate for my own analysis. Rather, I will be utilizing crip theory, which will be discussed more later on, in order to try to make the most accurate arguments for Smith’s disability that I possibly can.

Impairment vs. Disability distinction

In any analysis of disability and its effects on labor, life, and social acceptance, it is essential to discuss and be mindful of the distinction between impairment and disability, how the two interact, and how models of disability treat them differently. The article “The Social Model of Disability: Dichotomy between Impairment and Disability” by Dimitris Anastasiou claims that: “Impairment refers to physical/bodily dysfunction, whereas disability refers to social organization. It should be noted that impairment is also considered as culturally produced and socially constructed from a postmodern perspective of the social model” (442). Many recent disability scholars and activists have critiqued the social model, which was widely used as one of the main formations for conceptualizing disability for some time. Anastasiou argues that proponents of the social model:

First... draw a vertical line between biological properties and social dimensions of disabilities. After that, they argue only about social processes, that is, subject-dependent properties. However, by choosing to theorize only on sociological grounds, they detach biological and mental elements from the disabled subject. As a consequence, by neglecting or denying the underlying biological conditions of people with disabilities, they leave out a big part of their existence and activity (445).

Crip theory, on the other hand, argues heavily *for* using impairment- often drawing on the following question/s: In a perfectly accessible society, is my body still in pain, do I still have a mental illness that affects the way I experience the world, et. cetera? In these arguments for impairment, conversations around disability have become more rooted in the body and bodily experience in relation to an ableist society, rather than strictly focusing on society's discrimination against disabled people.

Crip Theory and its Applications to Charlotte Smith

As a more contemporary mode of analysis, crip theory and crip terminology heavily emphasizes temporality in relation to disability. In "Disability Nationalism in Crip Times," McRuer recounts how in the history of disability studies, "able-bodiedness quickly came to appear as though it were completely natural rather than localizable in time and space. The social construction of disability under capitalism was, of course, one of the main themes of early British disability studies" (170). Alison Kafer, in her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, similarly points to the way time is a vital lens through which we can analyze embodiment. Kafer writes:

We can then understand the flexibility of crip time as being not only an accommodation to those who need 'more' time but also, and perhaps especially, a challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds (27).

Charlotte Smith is an example of a disabled person whose body is bent to fit into normative expectations of productivity, and I argue that a truly accessible society would take into account her gender, labor, class, and disabled positions to determine how much work she is expected to

do, especially when factoring in her domestic and care labor with her labor to write to survive. Additionally, Kafer points out how disability is often described “in reference to time. ‘Chronic’ fatigue, ‘intermittent’ symptoms, and ‘constant’ pain are each ways of defining illness and disability in and through time; they describe disability in terms of duration” (25). Kafer’s arguments about disability’s relation to time are incredibly pertinent to Smith’s position as a disabled writer, as the permanence of her labor combined with her inability to escape this position meant that not only was her disability consistently aggravated and reinforced through her labor, but that it was also likely getting worse over time, as the effects her labor had on her body continued to mount as the years she spent in this position went on.

Framing Charlotte Smith: Robert Bloomfield and William Wordsworth

In order to set up Smith’s position as a laboring-class woman poet, I believe it is vital to put her in comparison with other prominent poets of the time who did not occupy the same gender, class, labor, and disabled positions as she did, namely Robert Bloomfield and William Wordsworth. To begin, Wordsworth’s *Simon Lee* is an excellent example of a poem in which a laboring-class character performs labor for an extended period of time and this labor has a visible toll on his body. However, the position from which Wordsworth writes this poem brings into question how accurately Wordsworth can really write about issues of class, labor, and impairment when he does not occupy the position of a laboring-class poet (he is, in fact, quite near the opposite). Wordsworth, as Scott McEathron argues, “breached the implicit class boundaries of literature in the other direction. In appropriating lowly rustic voices and literary forms, he could be seen as invading the demographic domain of peasant writers, occupying the class-specific territory from which they derived their tenuous (and perhaps only) artistic authority” (4). As McEathron claims, Wordsworth does take on the same “lowly rustic voices

and literary forms” that Smith and Bloomfield often do, but he does this while “invading” a position in which he has no experience, thus simultaneously occupying space that could be afforded to someone like Charlotte Smith, who struggles to survive writing about her own authentic experience. Wordsworth’s invasive nature is seen early on in “Simon Lee” by the way he sets up Lee’s tale. In a chapter titled “The Romantic Ballad and Labouring-Class Culture,” Simon White argues that “Simon Lee’s previous employment as a huntsman and the social implications of his position are significant. But in terms of Wordsworth’s poetics... the details of Simon’s life and of the incident described in the poem are secondary” (36). This statement reveals a flaw in the authenticity of Wordsworth’s telling of Lee’s story, as to someone who actually occupies this laboring-class position, these details would never be secondary. For example, Wordsworth’s speaker distances themselves from any authentic retelling of the story by including the phrase “I’ve heard he once was tall,” indicating that their knowledge of Simon Lee only comes from what they have heard, and not their actual experience (4). This lack of authenticity sets up a conversation in which Wordsworth is attempting to use his speaker to tell a story that Wordsworth himself has no experience with, whereas poets like Bloomfield and Smith are able to accurately depict labor and class.

Robert Bloomfield’s *The Farmer’s Boy* provides an effective framing piece for analyzing Charlotte Smith’s poetry, as even though he does depict repetitive labor and its effects on the body over seasons from a laboring-class perspective, his poetry is not laced with themes of melancholy, fatigue, pain, and anxiety that Smith’s is that ultimately render her, and her characters, as having impairments. I argue that this is because Bloomfield, as a man, does not have the same expectations of emotional labor placed upon him, and similarly his life is not filled with the same pressure to provide for twelve children alone like Smith’s is. Early in *The*

Farmer's Boy, Bloomfield's main character, Giles, is introduced: "Twas thus with GILES: meek, fatherless, and poor;/ Labour his portion, but he felt no more;/ No stripes, no tyranny his steps pursu'd;/ His life was constant, cheerful, servitude;/ Strange to the world, he wore a bashful look,/ The Fields his study, Nature was his book" (5). Here, Bloomfield presents Giles as having more of a mutual relationship to his labor, and the inclusion of the "Fields his study, Nature was his book" line indicates that there is something that he can learn from his labor rather than just performing it because he has to (5). Similarly, Bloomfield's depiction of Giles's labor is much different than Smith's depictions of labor, as Giles's labor is described as "cheerful" compared to Smith's characters, who, for example, are described as being "In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind" (Sonnet XXXIX, ll. 5-8). In this introduction, Bloomfield places Giles in very specific class and labor positions: he is "poor" and his life consists of "constant, cheerful, servitude," thus making Giles a character that does occupy similar class and labor positions as Smith and her characters, but who also performs "cheerful" labor, thus making his experience, and the results on his body that come from this labor, profoundly different.

Establishing an Intimate Connection Between Smith and her Speakers

The final piece in setting up the conversation of labor, gender, class, and disability is establishing a connection between Smith and her speakers that makes the two of them virtually inextricable. To do so, it is essential to draw upon the theorists who have contributed to lyric theory as a whole and who also emphasize the importance of the connection between lyric poets and their speakers as an intimate one. First of all, Jonathan Culler's "Lyric, History, and Genre" is one piece that does an excellent job of explaining lyric poetry and its authors' relationships to the speakers in their poetry. Culler argues that, "One way in which lyrics may hyperbolically mark this combination of indirection and address is through the figure of apostrophe, a turning aside from supposedly real listeners to address to someone or something that is not an ordinary,

empirical listener” (68). In Smith’s writing, this unordinary listener is herself, and in turning aside from the readers of her poetry, she is essentially talking to herself. Since she labors from a position of isolation while simultaneously writing instances of apostrophe, Smith’s “turning away from real listeners” is a turn back towards her own position, where the speaker she writes speaks directly to, and as, Smith’s own self.

Culler continues to state that “the fundamental characteristic of lyric, in this account, is...the performance of an event in the lyric present, a time of annunciation” (68). As Culler argues, the use of apostrophe and performativity makes the lyric resemble a monologue, or “a literary composition written in the form of a soliloquy,” where soliloquy is defined as “the act of talking to oneself” (Merriam-Webster). Essentially, since Charlotte Smith is using apostrophe in this lyric form, she is talking to herself, and therefore we can read the “I” from Smith’s speakers in her poetry as her “personal I”-- this is Smith speaking, it is her experience. Virginia Jackson’s “Dickinson’s Misery” provides a similar argument that is more in tune with Smith’s physical experiences of pain, writing:

‘This Chasm’ proceeds from its ‘mention’ of painful experience to the progress of its internalization, its *incorporation* by a subject who, like a sentimental lyric, can disclose her meaning only by performing it—that is, by being read...lyric testimony will inevitably be read as only the figurative performance (rather than the historical performance) of that referent (222).

Both Jackson and Culler’s works emphasize how essential the connection between Smith and her speakers was, as well as how this connection is something that is seen throughout lyric poetry. By drawing a correlation between performance, apostrophe, and audience, Jackson and Culler’s writing allows for an analysis of Charlotte Smith that positions her as one with the speakers in her poetry.

Up until this point, the majority of this work has considered Smith's writing and its literary implications along with a discussion of her positions among other writers of the Romantic period and her intimate connection to her speakers. In covering these dimensions of Smith's work, however, I hope to have set the foundation for a more important discussion of the social categories Smith occupies and moves throughout, as the implications of her positions on the receiving end of multiple axes of oppression are more vital to her life, and the life of others occupying similar gender, class, laboring, and disabled positions than any isolated discussion of the specifics of literature. The following sections will include, in order: a class-and-gender-based analysis of how class and gender determine the types of labor Smith performs, a subsequent labor-based analysis, and finally an analysis of Smith's disability.

Smith and Class

The discussion of Charlotte Smith's labor, gender, and disability in relation to her work needs to be founded first upon an analysis of her class position and how this class position is the first of many direct determinants of the labor she performs, which, as I will argue later, results in impairment and disability. Specifically, Smith's class position determined and restricted the types of labor she was able to perform, both physically and materially. Melissa Sodeman provides an excellent introduction to and analysis of Smith's structural position in the article "Charlotte Smith's literary Exile," as she writes "Smith's rehearsal of a biography of constraint and grinding poverty--so common among women writers of her day—suggests...that she understood her situation as structurally determined" (135). Sodeman also argues that:

Forced by financial hardship to write, Smith was 'compelled to live only to write & write only to live,' and continuing on to include Smith's own claim that 'every body seems to think...that I am bound to do it, forgetting that I was a mere child when they talk'd me into bonds' (134).

Sodeman's points about Smith's labor, which include Smith's own writing about her class position and the labor that results from it being something she was forced into from an incredibly young age. Additionally, Smith's "financial hardship" reveals that the necessity to perform her labor was directly influenced by her class position, which becomes especially important as the discussion of Smith's labor and its effects on her body begin to shift towards her need to escape her labor and her inability to do so.

Charlotte Smith's class position is one of the two essential aspects that restricts her labor, and this is because she is bound into a very specific type of labor that required her to labor from home and to take care of her children simultaneously. The introduction to *Charlotte Smith: Major Poetic Works* begins with the statement:

Given that novelist and poet Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) was forced by necessity to expend so much energy on the business of simple daily survival—dealing with creditors; negotiating with lawyers and publishers; managing the fall-out from the shady dealings of a recalcitrant ex-husband; and providing for their eleven surviving children—it is remarkable that she also managed to become one of the most popular, influential, and important literary voices of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (17).

In any discussion of Smith's labor, it is important to analyze Smith as a laboring-class woman who had to perform both the labor required for the survival of her and her children as well as the emotional labor of raising 12 children on her own; as Knowles states, Smith "made the very unusual move of separating from her husband, but this left her with the responsibility for providing for their numerous children. She did this almost entirely through her literary productions" (*Charlotte Smith: Major Poetic Works*, 24). Smith is systemically and situationally bound to her children and the responsibility to take care of them, and the labor she performs is determined by her inability to ever separate herself from her children: she always has to provide for them as their mother, but she is also never able to be separated from them, since her husband

is not around to care for them and leaving them would almost certainly entail their demise. This is why Wolfson emphasizes Smith's position as "a mother twelve times over" whose writing is "addressed by a mother to her children, whose future fate, from a long series of calamitous circumstances in their family, seemed to be doubtful" (637). Both Knowles and Wolfson's depictions of Smith's familial life reveal an intense pressure on Smith to be able to perform her labor effectively enough to take care of her family, as their fate seems "doubtful," and this pressure undoubtedly had an immense effect on her mental and physical health in addition to determining what type of labor she was required to perform.

Smith and Gender

One of the essential aspects of women's labor is the gendered expectation that women will work and perform labor to take care of their families no matter what their physical or emotional condition may be. The article "Defining Women's Sickness and Work" by Andrea Rusnock argues that "Domestic chores were necessary obligations sometimes unavoidable by even the sick; fulfilling them, however, cast doubt upon a woman's claim to be ill and unable to perform remunerative work" (pg. 71). Here, Rusnock lays out an important distinction that is vital to analyzing Charlotte Smith's position as well; if a woman is able to work or perform domestic labor, then they are not seen as 'sick,' but a failure to perform this domestic labor would oftentimes be unacceptable. Rather, it was the expectation that this domestic labor was to be performed regardless of the status of a person's health, leaving women in a position where they can neither stop laboring nor claim to be unable to labor. Similarly, sick and disabled women were often bound to their laboring position in the home, as Rusnock continues on to argue that "as long as she was not generating income, a sick woman could engage in some vital activities, presumably in the home" (Pg. 71). Rusnock's arguments in conjunction with Smith's poetry and its connections to her lived experience reveal how sick, disabled women were viewed

during this time period: which rights they had, how “human” they were presumed to be, and how their humanity depended on their function and ability to work.

Blindness, habitual lameness, insanity,” and other permanent disabilities did not qualify; such conditions did not interrupt a normal working life, they precluded one. The blind, lame, and insane still received assistance, with, for example, one society giving members who became blind half the weekly benefit for life, but their special treatment reflects the centrality of the ability to work—past, present, and future—to societies’ conception of health and illness (70).

Gesturing back to Sodeman’s discussion of the frequency of “a biography of constraint and grinding poverty--so common among women writers of her day” in relation to Smith’s poetry, it becomes evident that this issue is not one that is restricted to or contained within Smith’s situation (135). Instead, this “constraint” is something that many women writers experience because they too are expected to perform this duality of labor- first to provide financial means for survival, and second to provide care for survival. Charlotte Smith’s labor is always gendered: whether it is the labor of staying home and taking care of her children or her writing to provide for them, there is always an aspect of a necessity to conform. Smith is often forced to write about tropes that other women writers adhere to because those are what sell, and she is forced to perform the gendered labor of care without any sort of compensation for this care.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s *Care Work* discusses the gendered politics of labor, especially caretaking labor, which Charlotte Smith performs daily for her children.

Piepzna-Samarasinha argues that one of the pitfalls of care work is:

Not paying attention to the gendered/raced/classed dynamics of care—a.k.a., are the poor and working class disabled femmes doing all the work all the time? Care is feminized and invisibilized labor. Care is something that many (not all) poor/working-class folks do like breathing (66).

Additionally, although there is existing scholarship on women’s labor around 1800, Charlotte Smith, labor, class, and gender, this scholarship lacks any true intersectional and disability

studies analyses outside of a basic discussion of “condition,” suffering, and gendered labor. Jane Humphries’s article “Off the Record: Reconstructing Women’s Labor Force Participation in the European Past states:

One influential explanation for the underrecording of women’s work cites certain distinctive features of the work itself...women’s work often looked like and blended into the unpaid care and domestic work that women performed for their families in the home and that was firmly excluded from nascent labor statistics... The implicit contrast was with men’s work, which was assumed to be stable, year-round, full time, continuous, performed in centralized workplaces, specialized, skilled, and always paid (pg. 45).

In the introduction to Book 1 of *The Emigrants*: Smith states that “The following performance is far from aspiring to be considered as an imitation of your inimitable Poem, THE TASK; I am perfectly sensible, that it belongs not to a feeble and feminine hand to draw the Bow of Ulysses” (Knowles, 127). This quote introduces a relationship between pain, impairment and gender, where Smith indicates how both the condition of her hand as well as the “feminine” appearance of it has a direct impact on her poetic authority. Similarly, Smith’s own writing combined with Humphries’s piece about women’s labor indicate how women’s labor was devalued to the point where it was often not considered worthy of being paid labor and it was also often ignored in conversations around the laboring class. This devaluation contributes to the fact that Smith’s constant writing to survive is often viewed as an isolated experience of labor, and not one that is always in conversation with her domestic and care labor that was arguably more draining than her writing ever was. In ignoring the domestic aspects of Smith’s labor, any isolated analysis of Smith as a laboring poet ignores the gendered aspect of her labor in a manner that is far too common: labor is only considered valid labor when it is for pay and performed by men outside of the home, and the structural binding of Smith to her home subsequently signals that in the

absence of a gender and class-based analysis, one aspect of her labor will always be ignored or considered not worthy of being work.

Smith and Labor

Mariarosa Dalla Costa's "Development and Reproduction" provides an excellent framework with which to begin the analysis of Smith's labor, and specifically how her labor relates to the care she is performing for her children and the care she does not receive after laboring. Dalla Costa argues that women's "condition, which has been created by capitalist development, is unsustainable, in its typical form in the 'advanced areas,' insofar as she is an *unwaged worker*, who is responsible for reproducing labor-power in a *wage economy*... On the other hand, her situation has become increasingly unsustainable as an unwaged worker in an unwaged *subsistence economy*" (29). Charlotte Smith, as a woman laborer, fits into both aspects of Dalla Costa's description of women's role in reproducing labor power: she is reproducing labor-power (twelve times over), she is caring for it, and then she is providing for it, all as an *unwaged worker* and as a member of the *unwaged subsistence economy*: that is, she labors to ensure the continuation of labor-power, and she performs this labor while, as Dalla Costa states, "the expansion of capitalist relations increasingly deprives her of the means to fulfill the tasks of reproduction for herself and the community" (30). By analyzing Smith's laboring position in this way, we uncover an interesting question about Smith's position: what does it mean for Charlotte Smith that she is deprived of "the means to fulfill the tasks of reproduction," but she still needs to fulfill these tasks or else her children will not survive?

Additionally, I argue that the "means" Dalla Costa discusses extend beyond that which (not so) simply keeps Smith alive: Charlotte Smith is a person, and therefore she requires things like care and social interaction, which should be considered in the conversation of "basic needs"

or “means.” These means obviously include basic human necessities, but Smith also needs ample time to rest, time to recover from her long work days and her long days of caring for her children--she needs care as well, and as far as we know she was not getting any care. Charlotte Smith labored from a position of isolation. What Smith’s isolated, mean-less labor means for her well-being is that this labor takes an even greater physical and emotional toll than it would have had her laboring conditions been different, had she been laboring with a support system, and had she not been required to labor for the survival of thirteen people all by herself. The relationship between laboring conditions and disability is discussed in Kafer’s *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, where she argues that:

Of course, disability is more fundamental, more inevitable, for some than others: the work that one does and the places one lives have a huge impact on whether one becomes disabled sooner or later, as do one’s race and class positions. Yet these patterns can also be understood in terms of temporality: *frequency, incidence, occurrence* (26).

The inevitability of Smith’s disability comes as a result of her consistent physical and emotional labor, but *also* because she was doing this labor without receiving care in return. In *Capital: Volume 1*, Marx acknowledges that labor does have an effect on the body and the mind, stating that:

Labor is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man... sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, his legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature (Marx, 283).

Here, Marx’s point about labor fundamentally changing man’s nature implies that labor, at its core, has an effect on the way people’s bodies and minds, or aspects of their nature, exist. Through this labor, bodies and minds are changed to the point where they may be able to labor in different capacities than before, but in a system that expects a consistent, normative productivity

level, a fundamentally changed body may have an increasingly difficult (or even impossible) time performing labor at the same rate. As a result of this, people whose bodies and minds have been changed and who are forced to continue laboring are subjected to exclusion from working and further harm to their bodies and minds. In Charlotte Smith's case, the change that her body and mind undergo over the course of her laboring period render it incredibly difficult for her to complete her work due to pain, fatigue, and existing in a melancholic state undoubtedly imposed by her structurally determined need to always be at work.

Labor and Repetition

Something we see throughout the entirety of Smith's writing is her being subjected to the consistent, repetitive, normative labor that is expected under capitalism. These examples of repetitive labor occur throughout her "Elegiac Sonnets," and they not only speak to the condition of her labor but also to the immense effect it has on her body. The number of times she references her labor, and the spread of works over which she mentions it indicate that this labor was not only something that she was constantly engaged with, but that it was something that was always on her mind. This repetition is seen early on in Smith's poetry, like in "Sonnet XXI," where she states: "I hurry forward, Passion's helpless slave!/And scorning Reason's mild and sober light/Pursue the path that leads me to the grave!/So round the flame the giddy insect flies,/And courts the fatal fire, by which it dies" (10-14). When writing about her labor through her poetry, Smith's speakers often emphasize a cycle of repetition and longing for an eventual release through death, which becomes emblematic of Smith's own desire to escape her seemingly endless labor.

In *The Emigrants*, Smith provides references to Sisyphus and the Danaids to equate her own labor to that of these mythical characters, writing: "But, like the fabled Danaids—or the wretch,/Who ceaseless, up the steep acclivity,/Was doom'd to heave the still rebounding

rock,/Onward I labour; as the baffled wave,/Which yon rough beach repulses, that returns/With the next breath of wind, to fail again” (133). Here, the use of “doom’d” and “still rebounding” gesture towards the seeming endlessness of Smith’s labor, and she even invokes her labor directly after using these terms with “onward I labour” to draw a definite connection. Smith’s repeated mention of the repetitive nature of her labor further develops into a longing to remove herself from her labor’s hostile conditions that act as a detriment to her well-being. This desire for removal first connects to Marx’s theme of alienation from the products of a person’s work, as Smith is unable to get anything out of her products other than being able to provide for her children. Similarly, Smith’s labor is an incredibly painful and stressful experience, which makes her an excellent example of Marx’s discussion of products of workers:

If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some *other man than the worker*. If the worker’s activity is a torment to him, to another it must give *satisfaction* and pleasure. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man (Marx, “Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts of 1844).

Smith gestures to this same idea of some “other man” having control over the products of a person’s labor shortly after recounting the repetitive labor she performs earlier in *The Emigrants*, writing: “The simple shepherd...taught to the bare-foot peasant, whose hard hands/Produc’d the nectar he could seldom taste,/Submission to the Lord for whom he toil’d” (172-174). Secondly, Smith’s desire for, but inability to distance herself from her work reinforces how her laboring position is structurally determined: she cannot leave the house because she must take care of her children, she cannot stop writing because she has to take care of her children, which draws upon Wolfson and Sodeman’s earlier discussions of Smith laboring against the doubtful fate of her children’s survival.

Throughout Smith's structurally determined labor, there is a process by which the repetition begins to take its toll on her body and mind: first, Smith is forced to engage in repetitive, endless labor, and as a result she longs to stop working because of this labor's impact on her body. "Sonnet IX" provides an excellent example of this longing to stop working, as Smith writes: "Blest is yon shepherd, on the turf reclined,/Who on the varied clouds which float above/Lies idly gazing-while his vacant mind/Pours out some tale antique of rural love!" (ll. 1-4). Here, Smith is clearly longing for a state of idleness, and from a position where she can see this state of idleness and relaxation but cannot reach it. The phrase "yon shepherd" indicates her own proximity to this shepherd- the shepherd is not just an imagined figure, but one that she can actually witness in their state of rest. Along similar lines, Smith's observation of the shepherd's "Vacant mind" provides a stark contrast to her constant stress and worry about her own survival. This longing continues in "Sonnet XII," where Smith writes: "Like the poor mariner, methinks, I stand/Cast on a rock; who sees the distant land/From whence no succour comes—or comes too late/Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries,/’Till in the rising tide the exhausted sufferer dies" (ll. 10-14). In this sonnet, Smith pits the isolation she feels against her constant need to continue working, emphasizing the lack of relief from her work and the ways this lack of relief eventually lead to death (or a fate much like it).

Smith's Isolation

Both the thematic elements of Smith's writing and her actual process of writing revolve around and take place in experiences of solitude, and this solitude finds its roots in Smith's labor in much the same way that Marx writes about workers being alienated from their labor. In book one of *The Emigrants*, Smith writes, "I mourn your sorrows; for I too have known/Involuntary exile; and while yet/England had charms for me, have felt how sad/It is to look across the dim

cold sea” (ll. 155-159). The “involuntary exile” Smith describes here is represented in her own life by her embodied position having its labor structurally determined; since she must care for her children, Charlotte Smith is involuntarily exiled to her home, and this exile represents a separation from her social communities as well as erotic life, resulting in a sense of overbearing isolation that permeates throughout Smith’s writing, whether it is her poetry or her personal documents. By using a Marxist mode of analysis to examine Smith’s life, it can be argued that Smith’s labor alienates her from others because of its isolating conditions while simultaneously making it so that her writing is completed from and is delivered through a position of complete social isolation—that is, Smith’s intimate speaker-poet connection reveals an additional aspect of isolation in her own life, which is that she can only write from a position intimately connected to her own because her own position is her only intimate connection. In Marx’s “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” he argues that “an immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life activity, from his species-being, is the *estrangement of man* from man.” As Smith’s speakers can be read as an extension of her own personal sentiments, the isolation that her speakers experience is representative of Smith’s own isolation, and an example of this comes in *The Emigrants* when Smith describes “the bare-foot peasant, whose hard hands/Produc’d the nectar he could seldom taste” (ll.172-173). Here, Smith presents the isolation of “man” from the “product of his labor,” as the peasant “Produc’d nectar he could seldom taste,” while simultaneously writing about this isolation from her own isolated position where she experiences what Marx calls the “*estrangement of man* from man.”

Smith’s labor does not just contribute to her isolation and solitude in relation to the work she produces, but it also leads to an immense sense of social, and thus erotic isolation. As Audre Lorde argues in “The Uses of the Erotic:”

The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need - the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfilment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love (88-89).

Lorde's analysis of the erotic captures the multi-faceted structural oppression that determines Smith's laboring position; on one hand, Smith is trapped in a system that requires her to labor to survive without regard to the "psychic and emotional components" of her life. If her labor were defined in terms of human need, as Lorde states, then Smith would certainly not be forced to labor endlessly to provide for her family. On the other hand, her gendered position as a woman structurally confines her to her home, taking care of her children and performing domestic labor. Between laboring for survival, domestic labor, and caretaking labor, Smith has virtually no time for any sort of social interaction that Lorde would consider vital to the erotic. Without this erotic experience, Smith's labor becomes simply a means to survive, and connecting back to Wolfson's "to live only to write and to write only to live," Smith writes only to live because her writing is stripped of its erotic value. Smith also experiences isolation, and the reason she does not have this erotic experience within her labor is because she does not have anyone to share it with. As Lorde states:

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference (89).

Smith's constant isolation both leads to and is a symptom of conditions relating to her mental health, which is incredibly important in the correlations between laboring position and disability.

In constructing a relationship between labor and disability, I want to start by arguing that the isolation Smith experiences in her laboring life significantly contributes to various mental health issues and symptoms. One of the reasons Smith experiences this isolation is that her labor places her in a position where she has no company besides the objects of her labor, whether that is her income-generating labor and the work it produces or the labor of caring for her children. Drawing on my earlier argument that Smith and her speakers are intricately linked, I further posit that Smith does not even have the company of a separate speaker in her writing, and therefore she is so alienated and isolated that she writes, and speaks, alone. For Smith, there is no solitude in the pleasurable sense--which is something many of the other Romantic poets, like Wordsworth, gesture to and exalt—but instead only isolation. In “Sonnet XXII” as well as in the previously mentioned sections of *The Emigrants* where Smith mentions her “involuntary exile,” we see Smith’s isolation firsthand. “Sonnet XXII” begins with the phrase “O SOLITUDE!,” but finishes with the lines:

In yon deep copse thy murm’ring doves relate;
And, hark, methinks in that long plaintive strain,
Thine own sweet songstress weeps my wayward fate!
Ah, Nymph! That fate assist me to endure,
And bear awhile—what Death alone can cure! (ll. 10-14).

In contrast to the first line discussing solitude, the last few lines of this sonnet convey a much different and more inescapable feeling that is indicative of isolation. Whereas solitude indicates a chosen and intentional state, the type of isolation Smith depicts by the end of “Sonnet XXII” is escapable only upon her death. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides an important note on the difference between solitude and isolation, stating: “solitude may imply a condition of being apart from all human beings or of being cut off by wish or circumstances from one's usual associates... isolation stresses detachment from others often involuntarily.” Continuing on this

theme of isolation in Smith's work and life, we can also examine the alienating effects of her position among a number of axes of oppression- specifically the way her disabilities themselves can be isolating and how these disabilities, in conjunction with her laboring conditions, could further aggravate her symptoms of mental illness, how her continuous writing could further injure her hands, and how her class and gender positions prevent her from doing any other form of labor.

Finally, to bring the discussion of labor into a discussion of disability, I will incorporate Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's vital argument that for disabled people, "Crip emotional intelligence is understanding isolation. Deeply. We know what it's like to be really, really alone. To be forgotten about, in that way where people just don't remember you've ever been out, at meetings and parties, in the social life of the world. How being isolated, being shunned, being cut off from the social world of community is terrifying because you know that it can literally kill you" (71). Piepzna-Samarasinha's work reveals how isolation can be seen as a shared condition, and this shared condition of isolation is directly applicable to Smith's life. In all likelihood, Smith is not alone in feeling isolated, as this is something that many disabled people and people who are deprived of their erotic lives experience, but perhaps she did not have the resources, the terminology, and the care webs to have a support system that understood isolation that disabled people may have access to in the present day.

Smith and Disability

By analyzing class, gender, and laboring positions and their impact on Charlotte Smith's life and work, we come to the most flexible category in this analysis of Smith's identity, which is her disability. The flexibility of disability comes from the human body and mind's ability to change or be changed at any moment, and therefore while Smith's gender, class, and labor may remain constant, her disabilities change over time. With these changes come changes in her

symptoms and her ability to perform her labor as she previously was able (and expected) to. Within this analysis of disability, I will move from the most physically evident and traditionally accepted manifestation of disability to the most abstract and likely most controversial argument for disability for any who are unfamiliar with contemporary disability justice movements and frameworks. Before beginning these analyses of disability, I must make one essential point clear: I am arguing for Charlotte Smith as a disabled woman writer and validating her disability, but I am *not* diagnosing her, because an “official” diagnosis does not matter to her, or anyone’s, position as a disabled person. Disabilities do not need to have a diagnosis to be valid, as the validity of someone’s personal experience is in no way determined by medical or professional diagnosis, especially when these diagnoses are often accessible to very few and there are structural obstacles that prevent people from obtaining medical diagnoses. Additionally, throughout this analysis disability will never be portrayed as a negative aspect of someone’s identity, but rather the symptoms will be examined in comparison with the structural conditions that lead to disability and subsequently fail to provide for disabled people.

Smith and Pain

Something that has become increasingly prevalent among contemporary disability studies scholars as well as in conversations around disability as a whole is the way that pain factors into and disrupts the category of disability. Pain as a disability disrupts existing conceptions of disability because it is not necessarily something that is the result of existing social barriers, which is what advocates for disability frameworks like the “social model” would view as the main avenue for disability-related activism and scholarship. However, and simultaneously, pain factors into the conversation around disability because it deserves to be considered regardless of whether it has a definite or doctor-approved cause. In connecting this conception of pain to

Kafer's chapter from *Feminist, Queer, Crip* on "Identifying Disability," Smith's experiences relate to how Kafer argues for: "Including folks who identify as or with disabled people but don't themselves 'have' a disability...arguing for the necessity of including within disability communities those who lack a 'proper' (read: medically acceptable, doctor-provided, and insurer-approved) diagnosis for their symptoms (12)." As Wolfson claims, Smith's "own hands cramped, deformed, and swollen...she was 'so harass'd my constitution already over fatigued, that all my complaints threaten to return & I write with the greatest difficulty and pain,'" and Smith's personal account of her writing experience is vital to the analysis of her chronic pain and the fight for its validity (636).

Following Kafer's lead, I argue that Smith's description of her "trembling hand" that is "cramped, deformed, and swollen" is something that may not have a definite medical diagnosis (and there would certainly be no "insurer-approved" diagnosis either during this time period), but that does not mean that the effects Smith's writing had on her hands did not have an impact on her life and her ability to write. In "Sonnet XVI," Smith states: "And with a trembling hand describes too well/ The angel form I shall behold no more" (ll. 10-11). Smith's indication that she no longer has her "angel form" reveals a definite effect that her labor has had on her "trembling hand" that has not only changed the shape and physical appearance of her "deformed, and swollen" hands, but also on their ability to function without pain. Though scholars do discuss this chronic hand pain, and these sources are incredibly useful to look to for contextual evidence and historical validation of the correlations between Smith writing about her pain in her personal writing and her writing about it in her poetry, I argue that even if we only had Smith's personal account of, for example, her chronic hand pain, that this personal account is all we need to give an accurate and valid analysis of her position as a disabled laboring woman.

Susan Wolfson's work contains Smith's own statement that "I write with the greatest difficulty and pain," and there should be no circumstance where any further diagnosis or medical evaluation should be required in order to determine that Charlotte Smith's chronic hand pain had a definite effect on her ability to carry out her work. How would someone who had to work all day to provide for twelve children have had time to go to the doctor, and especially since going to a doctor would require her to leave her children unaccompanied? Even more importantly, why would we *not* believe what she has to say about her own body? What do we gain from denying her disability, and why would we even do it in the first place? Additionally, we need to avoid statements like "we should look for more medical evidence of her disability" or "we should see if anyone else who knew her talked about her pain," as Charlotte Smith's experience in her own body is, and will always be more than enough for us to believe her.

Melancholy

The discussion of melancholy bridges the gap between physical disability and what I will argue for as fatigue as (or a symptom of) disability, because contemporary analyses of melancholy and similar conditions often ascribe and compare it to mental disabilities like depression. At the same time, however, mental disability is often invalidated and considered secondary to physical disability because it is not visible, and because of this I posit that it occupies a middle ground between physical disability and fatigue in both the ways it is perceived and the ways it is received in disability justice movements. Charlotte Smith used themes of melancholy in her poetry and talked about her sadness, but frequently did not have the language to describe what she was going through—there was nothing to say that she was a disabled woman writer yet, and terms like "melancholy" that were common at the time have contemporary meanings that correspond more to "a pensive mood" than any sort of mental disability (Merriam-Webster). However, when analyzing Smith's use of melancholy in

conversation with her poetry and the ways she talks about her mental condition, it becomes obvious that her melancholy was not a “pensive mood” that she was in—it was not any mood at all, but rather a melancholic state of persistent, repetitive nature that resembles mental illness and mental disability more than anything else. Smith confirms the repetitive state of her melancholy in the “Preface to the Sixth Edition” of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, where she writes “I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy—And I have unfortunately no reason yet, though nine years have elapsed, to *change my tone*” (55). Despite incredibly telling statements like these, we do not yet see her writing “I wrote mournfully because I was *depressed*,” which would likely be a more frequently used term to describe her state in contemporary times.

In addition to her use of melancholy, Smith also uses language often, although problematically, associated with mental disability in her “Sonnet XXXIX” while discussing her symptoms of mental illness. She writes: “In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind/Will to the deaf cold elements complain,/And tell the embosom’d grief, however vain,/To sullen surges and the viewless mind” (pg. 82-83). The term “enfeebled” is an interesting term here, especially considering the history that the word “feeble” has and its harmful, repeated use towards mentally disabled people. Although the historical circumstances around the word and its usage were likely vastly different, Smith’s use of it does connote some correlation with disability, as she uses it to directly describe a mind sunk in “deep depression.” Interestingly, her use of depression in this sonnet indicates a separation in her thinking about her own condition and the condition of her speaker, even though the two are virtually the same person, revealing how her own mental condition was likely something she was unable to describe by herself, but something she could easily write in one of her speakers.

Finally, in “Sonnet XXI,” Smith’s melancholy progresses from a state of depression and unhappiness to a state of despair (70-71). She writes: “Ah! Why should Love inhabit with Despair?/Like the poor maniac I linger here,/Still haunt the scene where my treasure lies” (4-6). Here, “with” (4) implies that despair and love inhabit her mind separately, and that her despair is intimately connected to her self-description as the “poor maniac.” This despair is not without its cause, however, as later on in the sonnet Smith connects this position of despair back to her labor, writing: “I hurry forward, Passion’s helpless slave...Pursue the path that leads me to the grave!/ So round the flame the giddy insect flies,/ And courts the fatal fire, by which it dies” (9-14). Here, Smith alludes to her laboring conditions by describing herself as “passion’s helpless slave,” which is a reference to her being helpless in regards to the structural determination of her labor, and also with the line “round the flame the giddy insect flies,” indicating how she is bound to a repetitive cycle that eventually leads to the consistent, nonstop deterioration of her body and mind.

Fatigue

In order to finalize the conversation around Smith’s disability and the ways it manifests in her life, we need to move away from a focus solely on the physical and visible aspects of disability. This distinction between visible and invisible disabilities is one that is heavily discussed in disability studies as a field as well as in disability justice movements. In Smith’s case, her hands would represent a disability that is visible, whereas fatigue and melancholy are invisible disabilities (although this distinction is never really completely solidified for anyone). In the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx argues that: “in his work, therefore...does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind” (Marx). Marx makes a vital argument that supports my own arguments about Smith’s fatigue as a

disability, which is that labor has a profound negative impact on the body that works directly against “physical and mental energy,” therefore causing fatigue. When fatigue comes as a direct result of labor that “mortifies” and “ruins” the body and mind, I argue that this fatigue can be seen as a product of *both* the conditions of labor *and* what Marx considers the mortification of the body, which I will consider, in this case, disability.

The first instance where we see Smith’s fatigue is, as argued earlier, in her labor, where in sonnet XII she refers to herself as an “exhausted sufferer” that longs for a temporary reprieve from her labor. The next place we see Smith’s fatigue is as a symptom of her disabilities, and this ranges from feeling exhausted as a symptom of mental illness to being tired of performing the necessary care to ensure that her hands are well enough to continue to write day after day. Finally, we see fatigue as a symptom of her symptoms: when Smith is in pain for hours on end as a result of the condition of her hands, this pain most certainly has an effect on her body beyond just the pain, and this effect is that the pain makes her tired. This pain makes her tired along with her melancholic state, which also likely makes her tired, along with her constant labor, which is no doubt exhausting, on top of caring for her twelve children alone. When reading Charlotte Smith’s disability, fatigue becomes both a symptom of her condition and a condition of her symptoms; it is never isolated from her physical and emotional labor or from her physical and emotional states, but rather it is always in conversation with the amount of labor she is expected to perform. When Charlotte Smith writes that: “The exhausted sufferer dies,” we should read the exhausted sufferer as none other than Smith herself: exhausted and suffering at the hands of a system that will not ever allow her to stop working until she dies.

Conclusion

Looking forward towards some of the more practical applications for this work, I believe that the process I used is a process that we can and should apply to other writers, because arguing

for and validating their positions as disabled members of the laboring class bring new meaning and value to their works. Along these same lines, any failure to acknowledge disabled people's existence and presence throughout history leads to the erasure of disabled people as a whole. Additionally, I believe it is incredibly important to consider access to diagnosis and care while analyzing disability, because as we see with Smith, access is oftentimes incredibly restricted while conditions and symptoms continue nonetheless. Not only is this access to diagnosis often restricted by racial, class, and gender inequities, but access to someone who takes your symptoms seriously is oftentimes just as restricted. I hope to use Smith's experience as an example for contemporary conversations around disability as well: symptoms do not ever need to have a medical name, cause, or diagnosis for their validity. If someone says that they are in constant pain and that their pain has an unknown cause, does their inability to give the pain a definite source or medically acceptable diagnosis mean that they are not in pain?

If there is one thing you should take away from this work, I want you to listen to disabled people *first*. Do not wait to see what a doctor says, or what a family member says, or if their symptoms persist, or if they are faking it, or for any sort of external confirmation of their disability—just listen. Disabled people will always be the leading experts on their own bodies, and there is no way that someone who is not the disabled person should try to guess what they are going through. Just as we will never know exactly how Charlotte Smith felt while she was writing and caring for her children, we will never be able to fully understand disabled people's lives because we are not living them. Please stop trying to understand, and instead listen to what we have to say about our own bodies.

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