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# Modes of Spatiality and Charlotte Smith's National Identity

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MODES OF SPATIALITY AND CHARLOTTE SMITH'S NATIONAL IDENTITY

by

Tyler J. Reese

B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2009

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts

Department of English in the Graduate School  
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

MODES OF SPATIALITY AND CHARLOTTE SMITH'S NATIONAL  
IDENTITY

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Tyler J. Reese

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the field of English

Approved by:

Scott J. McEathron, Chair

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
November 9, 2010

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

TYLER J REESE, for the Master of Arts degree in ENGLISH, presented on November 9, 2010, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: MODES OF SPATIALITY AND CHARLOTTE SMITH'S NATIONAL IDENTITY

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Scott McEathron

Charlotte Smith appears to maintain a rather tenuous relationship with spatiality throughout her poetry and novels, which tends to correlate with her own fluctuating political ideologies. For Smith, we see these issues as a mode of progression, a product of her growing frustration with England's colonial agenda and inherent sense of nationalist superiority. For Smith, reaching the final conclusion of vacating England, subsequently relinquishing an inherently English identity, is one which is problematic at best, and does not alleviate or reconcile England's internal struggles. While she is not entirely reluctant to portray an identity which will invalidate or disassociate with English nationalism, she can never fully digress from it, despite the location or placement of her characters. Smith presents an England which, while flawed, can be retraced and redeemed despite spatial transgressions. *Beachy Head* and *Desmond* both show this by way of which even when she moves throughout the world, England will forever be a defining force for better or worse, serving as *the* model of nationalism and superior global power. Desmond is welcomed back to England, albeit through his own isolated social group. While *Beachy Head* clearly condemns England's course, Smith fails to offer any feasible alternative other than internal reform. *The Young Philosopher* is functioning quite

differently, but nevertheless reaches the same conclusion, despite Smith's closest attempt to cut all ties with an English identity. Throughout the text we see that conceptually, identity is presented as autonomous, and as critics like Leanne Maunu have suggested, this is Smith's attempt to allow one to 'choose' his or her own identity. While we may certainly appreciate the ability to identify with something of one's choosing, this in itself does not aim to reconsider or reevaluate the problems in England, it merely diverts them through a decidedly different cultural medium. Smith then, is in a rather liminal state between internal reform and all out emigration throughout her work, and both sides seemingly do not present a modified or improved England which is her ultimate goal.

### *Modes of Spatiality and Charlotte Smith's National Identity*

Throughout Charlotte Smith's literary career she manifested a rather tenuous relationship with spatiality, especially as this correlates to representations of national identity, and her own fluctuating and at times inconsistent political ideologies. For Smith, these issues reflect her growing frustration with England's colonial agenda and fluctuating sense of nationalist superiority. This is seemingly projected chronologically throughout Smith's novels and poetry. In her earlier works like *Desmond* (1792) and *The Old Manor House* (1793), she shows spatial transplantation as being retraceable; for instance, in *The Old Manor House*, Orlando is eventually welcomed back to England after spending significant time in America. His movement back to England emblemizes, reinforces and re-establishes, a singularly English identity, which then suggests, England's political climate as seemingly stable, and reconcilable through internal reform. Critics like A.A. Markley have even gone so far to describe Orlando's return to England as a "symbolic return to life" (94) further emphasizing this point. As Smith's career progressed, she became increasingly frustrated with how this identity was conveyed, and felt the need to disassociate herself and seek answers through other outlets, as internal reform was no longer a feasible solution. *The Emigrants* (1793), published only shortly after *Desmond* and the same year as *The Old Manor House*, already reflects Smith's changing emphasis. Furthermore, if we look to Smith's later works, *The Young Philosopher* (1798) and, the posthumously published *Beachy Head* (1807), convey Smith's political mindset as no longer complacent in furthering her polemics of internal

reform: she needed to find another solution which quite literally involved vacating England altogether, for what we primarily perceive to be an inhabiting of America. My attempt in this essay is not to merely recognize or establish an internal shift in Smith's politics, as many critics already have. Rather, I want to suggest that for Smith, reaching the final conclusion of vacating England, subsequently relinquishing an English identity, is one which is problematic at best, and does not alleviate or reconcile England's internal struggles. These issues become paramount especially if we are to view Smith as a polemicist, and someone who was really quite adamant about changing and reforming the various problems in England. While Smith is not entirely reluctant to portray an identity which will invalidate or disassociate with English nationalism, she can never fully digress from it, despite the location or placement of her characters. Smith presents an England which, while flawed, can be reclaimed and redeemed despite spatial transgressions. Adriana Craciun has prompted the idea of Smith's use of the 'citizen of the world' motif in establishing an autonomous identity, separate from English nationalism (170). However, this in itself does not aim to reconsider or reevaluate the problems in England; it merely diverts them through decidedly different cultural mediums. Smith, then, is in a rather liminal state between internal reform and relocation throughout her work, and neither side presents a modified or improved England, which I suggest to be her ultimate goal.

While Smith is conceptually challenging the idea of an English identity, or perhaps one's ability to establish their own identities separate from this, she



simultaneously implicates gender within these issues, which I would suggest, reflects her own liminal status as a woman, attempting to reconcile not only her own political views, but those of her readership. If we interpret Smith's utilization of gender within spatial mediums, then this becomes entirely implicit in her political ideologies, and subsequently influences how Smith is representing England. Throughout Smith's novels, much more so than her poetry, female characters have a decidedly more challenging time establishing an identity which digresses or is even recognized as separate from England, despite spatial placement. As Craciun has touched on Smith's 'citizen of the world' concept, she seems to suggest that Smith equates this 'worldly' status to men and women comparably (169). This seems to be inaccurate, and while Smith certainly presents the possibility for women to take on a different identity, it is never fully accepted by society at large, or perhaps more specifically English society at large. Other critics who have written on Smith's use of this 'citizens of the world' concept like William Brewer, define this as, "A title given to enlightened and altruistic characters who are able to transcend 'the love of power and wealth' and the 'local prejudices' of nation and class" (56). While this definition seems appropriate, Smith seemingly only applies this toward her male characters. In what is perhaps the best example of Smith's attempt at challenging English identity, *The Young Philosopher*, she portrays, through the Glenmorris women, a consistent marginalization, where the subsequent convolution of identity is seen negatively, especially by those who identify themselves as strictly English. We see this in Mrs. Crewkherne early in the text when talking about Delmont: "Marry

an American girl, who may be a stroller for aught he can tell! Here in the very face of his family, and next door almost to *me* and to his sisters! Here, on the very spot where his family, inferior to none in England, have been the very first people since the conquest” (41). There are several interesting things to note about this passage. Mrs. Crewkherne is seemingly commenting on her disdain for cross cultural unions; however, she broadens this, and creates this issue as a national concern, rather than a local and isolated one. It is not just Delmont’s identity and reputation at stake, but rather England’s as a whole. What is perhaps more ironic about this passage is the fact that, as Leanne Maunu has pointed out, Delmont’s family is actually French in origin, only planted in Britain since the Norman Conquest. Maunu goes on to suggest that Mrs. Crewkherne’s “inability to notice this foreign genesis of the Delmont family attests to the very sort of narrow-mindedness that Smith ridicules throughout many of her novels” (63). While this is certainly a valid point, it may be plausible that Delmont’s identity is not questioned because Smith is producing a larger commentary on the implications of gender and identity. Perhaps it is because Delmont is seen as masculine, which seemingly stratifies his perceived English identity, at least as viewed by Mrs. Crewkherne. Delmont’s moral sensibility and humanitarian characteristics also seemingly divert issues of identity; however, when these values are applied toward women, they are seemingly irrelevant, as identity always comes into question. Medora is further marginalized by Mrs. Nixon as well, whose initial concerns gravitate around national identity, rather than class and status. It is not an issue that Delmont would marry below his status, but that

he would marry an American girl, which is decidedly negative. Smith then seems to represent a very ethnocentric and socially hegemonic England, which refuses to let in women who are culturally dissimilar. Smith is seemingly able to integrate male characters within this society; however her denial of women within this construct, perhaps speaks to her own marginalized status as a woman and writer.

It becomes clear Smith's English characters throughout *The Young Philosopher* have a distinctly myopic view of America, which seems to be in direct contrast to the fact that likeable characters in the text are essentially hybridized. We see that the Glenmorris', for instance, have quite a different view of what America represents, as Mr. Glenmorris states, "I was now among a new race of people-a people who with manners, customs, and general habits of thinking quite unlike my own, had one great and predominant feature in their character which I loved and honored they were determined to be *free*, and were now making the noblest exertions to resist what they deemed oppression" (148). This concept of freedom, which Mr. Glenmorris alludes to, is quite a detestation of English society, and perhaps supports Smith's own views of the tyranny and oppression which were rampant within the government at the time. We see this explicated to a greater extent through Delmont, who expresses his criticism of English government quite early on in the text: "From detestation against individuals, such as justices and overseers, he began to reflect on the laws that put it in their power thus to drive forth the nakedness and famine the wretched beings they were empowered to protect; and he was led to enquire if the

complicated misery he everyday saw could be the fruits of the very best laws that could be framed in a state of society said to be the most perfect among what are called the civilized nations of the world” (21). While Delmont provides an uninhibited view toward the internal strife within English society, these views are in many ways contingent upon how we view his identity. Again, it must be assessed whether we associate Delmont as being inherently English, or is he himself hybridized much like the Glenmorris’. Despite how we allocate Delmont’s identity, he nonetheless represents the possibility that English society is not entirely irreconcilable, regarding current social or political issues. This is best explicated through Medora when she says, “No indeed; but to tell you the truth, my dear friend, were it not for you England would be utterly intolerable to me” (154). While Medora expresses her wishes to be taken to America, it seems clear that Delmont is acting as a diversionary medium, which here at least; love can serve as a means of alleviating the political or social instability within England. This passage also evokes Smith’s attempt at genderizing issues of identity, as we see later: “Oh! My dear Delmont, if ever I should belong to you, take me, take me to America” (154). It becomes clear, that Medora, as a woman, is unable to establish her own identity. Delmont must serve as a catalyst for her to leave England, and allow any attempt to establish herself in America, or anywhere else for that matter. Again, Smith seems to deny her female characters the agency to establish an individual identity; she is essentially creating a dependency paradigm which will not, or simply cannot grant women access to create their own individual lives. Medora is certainly not an isolated

case; we see this enacted in many ways with Laura as well, who is similarly dependent upon Mr. Glenmorris for basic subsistence and recognition. Of course, it is quite simple to say that this perhaps reflects Smith's own life and her relationship with her husband Benjamin; however, it seems more plausible that this is a more focused commentary regarding the liminal space women inhabited in not only English society, but the rest of the world as well. Despite the Glenmorris women as having hybridized identities, they are still left to question their place in English society, which in many ways is predicated and contingent upon their relationships with the men in their lives.

Regardless of how we interpret Smith's utilization of gender and identity, it is perhaps beneficial to first assess what one actually has to gain from changing, or rather shedding a pre-circumscribed English inhabitation. While Smith's portrayal of America in *The Young Philosopher* might be described, or seen as utopic, especially by the Glenmorris's, it is certainly only such by comparison to England. While America is a welcome reprieve from the corruption and scandal which was occurring in England, Smith's portrayal of it lacks specificity and circumscription as a definite solution for those who were unsatisfied with English society, and were attempting to disassociate or emigrate. This seems to be endemic across Smith's work, as she herself never went to America; her views were very much restricted and expressed through what was being published at the time. Melissa Sodeman has noted the physical incongruities within Smith's America, and suggests that, "This can be seen particularly in *The Old Manor House* (1793), in the descriptions of North America that accompany Orlando's

journey there to fight in the American War of Independence. Smith's portrait is mediated through the literary, drawing as it does upon William Bartram's 1791 *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*" (132). While Sodeman here is referencing a much earlier text in *The Old Manor House*, it does not diminish the idea that Smith's description of America was entirely constructed through outside sources. While there was certainly more material to draw upon by the time *The Young Philosopher* was published, Smith's descriptions of America throughout her work are ultimately undercut by the lack of first-hand interaction and empirical knowledge. It becomes difficult then to view America as the end all solution to the problems plaguing England, especially as it is represented toward the end of Smith's career. There is simply too much ambivalence to see the plausibility.

Despite how Smith presents her physical descriptions of America, the way in which it is viewed in *The Old Manor House* reflects, I believe, to a greater extent her political mindset. Again this is where we begin to apply this idea of progression, where Smith's writing becomes a clear indicator of her own fluctuating political ideologies. Being one of Smith's earlier works, she is seemingly still confident that England can be reformed from within, and she expresses this throughout the text with Orlando's rather negative experience and savage view of America, "Giddy and disturbed as was the unhappy Orlando from the effects of the blow, he now began to awaken to a sense of his condition; and in believing that the injury he had received was not of so fatal a nature as he had on the first sensation of pain imagined, he felt infinitely more miserable in

supposing that he should live in such insupportable anguish as his fears for Monimia and his family would inflict upon him – condemned probably as long as his life lasted, to drag on a wretched existence among the savage tribes of the American wilderness, and cut off from all communication with his country” (357). Despite the savagery described here through the narration, Orlando himself seems like a poor medium in which to convey an accurate portrayal of America. Joseph Bartolomeo has propagated the idea of Orlando as a feminized character, which would then lend itself more toward a sentimental reading of this passage, that he simply misses Monimia, thus affecting his interpretation. In fact, Bartolomeo suggests that “Smith champions the ideals of the American Revolution and condemns the British abuses that caused and accompanied it, not merely through the animadversions of her protagonist, who serves as a British officer, but even in her own voice through footnotes” (160). If Smith really was sympathizing for the American cause, her descriptions of America throughout *The Old Manor House* seem to be directly influenced by acceptability within the literary marketplace. It would have been difficult for Smith to romanticize or sentimentalize an America, which would have been widely received by her readership as going against English populous views. Therefore, it seems at this point in Smith’s career she was reluctant to express her true ideological concerns, in favor of her own subsistence as an author. While Smith might subversively be hinting at her disdain for English colonialism, she essentially had to maintain and convey a reestablishment of English identity by the end of *The Old Manor House*. Even this in itself is not entirely fluid, as

Orlando has a difficult time integrating back into the society from which he left. While spatial boundaries are clearly transgressed in *The Old Manor House*, we see at this point, that these have no bearing on identity and English nationalism is ostensibly left to prosper.

Smith seemingly uses sentimentality as a means to divert or perhaps mitigate her ideas of rebellion, or anti-populous political views. We see this in *Desmond* as well, which written before *The Old Manor House*, perhaps further speaks to Smith's understanding of the literary market place. While argued by critics as an overtly political text, it is ultimately undercut by modes of sentimentality, as has been suggested by Elanor Wikborg, who asserts that "As the novel shifts from the political to sentimental mode, then, Desmond abandons his revolutionary fervor and by implication becomes an agent of patriarchy" (524). Through Desmond's reversion to the 'sentimental mode', as Wikborg has described, Smith is subsequently abandoning her political views, in order to appropriate her novel for acceptance in the literary marketplace. She is unable to continue a narrative of rebellion, for sheer sake of practicality; and while Smith is not necessarily ascribing populous political views, she is somewhat silenced and mitigated through the sentimental narrative.

*Desmond* and *The Old Manor House* show how Smith is able to understand and manipulate the literary marketplace. While we conceivably see her relinquishing a more fervent political tone, for sentimentality, the political elements of her work, are by no means completely silenced, but rather enacted as a mode of subversion. We cannot assume that Smith herself was somehow



intimidated by how she was to be perceived in the literary world, as has been suggested by Elizabeth Harries, who states that “Smith unlike many other women writers of the time, was ready to assert herself as a full member of a thinking public. Her writing is not a violation of her domestic duties but a necessary extension of them; almost simultaneously she claims a discursive space in the public sphere of political discussion and opinion” (472). While she was conscious of how her work would be received by a larger readership, Smith continually finds a way to balance her political discourse with public acceptability, which is a challenge that she is seemingly able to navigate through quite well. While we have seen how Smith achieves this balance through her larger and more intricate novels, it might be beneficial to see how her poetry is functioning. Unlike her novels, Smith’s poetry seemingly enacts her political ideologies in a way that is quite direct. The poetry does not give Smith the same outlet for subtext, or other narrative devices, which would subsequently obscure her political motivations. While it is certainly a more direct view into Smith’s political mindset, it deals with many of the same issues regarding space, as well as reconciling England’s internal struggles. We may first turn to *The Emigrants* to see how Smith is using these concepts to convey her political views.

While Smith’s representation of America may seem ambiguous to a large extent, as we have witnessed through the physical descriptions presented throughout her novels, we cannot discount how she is utilizing other geographical space other than America. This undoubtedly lends some insight toward her political motivations. Throughout her poem, *The Emigrants*, Smith

seems to present a much clearer geographical understanding, regarding the spatial relationship between France and England. This has been observed in greater detail by Michael Wiley, who suggests that “Smith’s map in *The Emigrants* challenges the dominant organizations and significations of British and European spaces, offering instead a peaceful, egalitarian replacement, a replacement which, she suggests, is imminent in nature itself” (57). Wiley essentially proposes that Smith is creating an ‘egalitarian’ space, where issues of national identity are relegated through the representation and experience of the emigrants themselves. They become paramount within the poem, thusly mitigating issues of spatial transgression. This in itself becomes entirely problematic in regards to how the emigrants presently chose to identify themselves in Smith’s poem. She seems to be again raising complex questions regarding identity or rather creation of one’s own identity. When the emigrants leave France, do they then relinquish their French identity? This seems to be what Wiley is attempting to address, essentially he sees Smith as conflating the emigrants’ identity as English and French, based on how Smith is representing the spatial relationships throughout the poem. Katharina Rennhak has also commented on spatiality within *The Emigrants*, especially as it relates to regaining identity; she suggests that “The French emigrants are shown to *have had* a fairly happy home; a home which they hope they have only temporarily lost. In other words, they can look back to a past which currently, as exiles, they struggle to regain in the future” (582).

Rennhak is not only raising issues of spatiality throughout the poem but temporality as well, which we will see occurring to a much greater and more significant extent in *Beachy Head*. It seems throughout *The Emigrants*, Smith is portraying an England which is quite welcoming, and seeing as she wrote this poem rather early in her career, (the same year as *The Old Manor House*), this seems to also reflect her own political ideologies at the time. It becomes clear that Smith very explicitly sympathizes with the French emigrants here, something that she was unable to do in *The Old Manor House* regarding the American Revolution. We see this sympathy explicated rather well toward the end of Book 1: "Awhile, suspend your murmurs! Here behold / The strange vicissitudes of fate while thus / The exil'd Nobles, from their country drive, / Whose richest luxuries were their's, must feel / More poignant anguish, that the lowest poor" (313-317). We see Smith portraying England as quite warm and accepting several lines later, "In England an asylum well deserve / To find that (every prejudice forgot, / Which pride and ignorance teaches), we for them / Feel as our brethren; and that English hearts, / Of just compassion ever own the sway" (365-369). Smith is clearly not attempting to veil her sympathies, or political motivations throughout *The Emigrants*. The inevitable question will then become, if as Bartolomae suggests, Smith was a sympathizer with the American cause, but had to hide it through a sentimental narrative, why is she then able to openly express her sympathies for the French Revolution here? There seems to be several possibilities, which may lend some more insight as to how Smith is personalizing her political motives. On the one hand we may view the explicit sympathizing as

a formalist product of poetry itself. Unlike Smith's novels, there was no room for sub-text or ulterior narrative outlets; she needed a direct way to convey her message in support of French emigration. Another possibility, which is perhaps more applicable as it relates to concepts of spatiality, is the fact that Smith's readership would have been much more concerned, and perhaps divided through an issue which was much closer to home, than what was happening over in America. Conceivably, we may interpret this as Smith again, manipulating the literary marketplace, she knew that her readership would be deeply concerned with the French Revolution, but more specifically the Reign of Terror, which was occurring during the same time *The Emigrants* was published. This was undoubtedly a smart move on Smith's part, as she accomplished her two primary goals of selling her work, while simultaneously and uninhibitedly conveying her polemics.

Further analyzing the temporal implications within the poem as Rennhak has touched upon briefly; it is interesting to see what Smith is attempting. We clearly see a shift in time from the two books, which is indicated by the passing of five months. Despite this passage of time, Smith refuses to show an improvement regarding France's internal struggle as we see later in Book 2, "Shuddering, I view the pictures they have drawn / Of desolated countries, where the ground, / Stripp'd of its unripe produce, was thick strewn / With various Death the war-horse falling there / By famine, and his rider by the sword" (216-221). This passage seems to suggest the pervasive nature of war, and more importantly assigns a certain permanence regarding the identity status of the

emigrants. Smith seems to be positing that France perhaps may never return to form, and the way in which she ends the poem, leaves this possibility open to interpretation, “Their native country; private vengeance then / To public virtue yield; and the fierce feuds / That long have torn their desolated land, / May (even as storms, that agitate the air, / Drive noxious vapours from the blighted earth) / Serve, all tremendous as they are, to fix / The reign of Reason, Liberty, and Peace” (536-542). We are never given a direct affirmation that if the emigrants were to return, that France would establish a model of liberty and peace. The French emigrants, unlike Smith’s English characters, which we saw throughout her novels, are unable to retrace spatial transgression. They are forced into a convolution of their own identities based upon their movement to England. This passage is seemingly only urging France to adopt a model, which Smith seems to suggest, is quite similar to that of England. As a result, she almost seems to be saying that adopting an English identity will only benefit the emigrants, which they then will be welcomed with open arms to England, and effectively be assimilated in some form or fashion.

Smith is certainly integrating geography to a large extent throughout *The Emigrants*, however; her physical descriptions lack the specificity we see throughout some of her other poetry. *Beachy Head* which was published nearly 14 years after *The Emigrants*, shows Smith’s evolution as a poet regarding her treatment of space. It is also highly reflective of her political mindset, as it is essentially the last piece of Smith we have, in order to distinguish and determine how she felt about England’s progress as a nation. *Beachy Head* also gives us a

unique look of America as well, and again Smith is challenging her readers to consider whether England's problems are truly irreconcilable, and if this then prompts people to literally leave the country for the promise of something better. As a point of reference here, I would also like to bring in Barbauld, as her views on America and England's internal struggles, undoubtedly shaped Smith's own ideologies. Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1811) explicates this rather well, and while portraying an America that is rather utopic in nature, it still presents uncertainty and indecision as a point of departure from England. Pairing these two poems together is quite beneficial, as they generally share the same political views, especially regarding the current state of England. Of course Barbauld and Smith were great influences on each other, but it is not enough to say that this alone shaped their political views. While the poems are seemingly similar regarding their politics, they digress from each other in how they treat spatiality as well temporality. Furthermore, both poems are treating nature in distinct ways, and how nature is represented, is by no means unrelated to political ideology, as at times we see it used as a diversionary device from a reality which is difficult to handle, or we see that it is effectively used for spatial demarcation, which aims to shape our interpretations of various spaces throughout the poems.

On the most basic level Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head* and Anna Letitia Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*; implement spatiality and temporality in a way which undermines the British colonial agenda. While this certainly seems to be the case, the usage of time and space throughout the two poems serves

more than merely a political marker. As Penny Bradshaw has argued that the literary use of spatiality and temporality is in some ways an eroticized medium for marginalized female writers, it seems to be doing much more in these poems. Bradshaw further argues that the theme of 'time travel', which is a term in itself I take issue with, provides the mobility that women were so desperately seeking, which could not be accessed through their own societies. This argument seems a bit extreme, especially when looking at the overall success Smith and Barbauld had as writers. Time travel was not a tool of fantasy, or as Bradshaw might call, 'science fiction' for these women (3). It was not used to escape the toils of everyday life; but rather serves as an integral function which is represented throughout these poems in two ways. One primarily aims to legitimize these two women through their extensive knowledge, not only of British history, but that of the world around them. This extensive knowledge base arguably placed Barbauld and Smith on par with their male counterparts, if not surpassing them in some areas.

While it was quite controversial for women to be writing on subjects such as war, and while both of these poems were certainly not void of controversy, as Maggie Favretti has noted the political criticism toward *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* as overtly critical, especially from men (99), It is this very depth of historical knowledge that in many ways led to the overwhelming attention both poems received. This point that Favretti alludes to about men being overly critical, perhaps deserves some further attention. While she applies this toward Barbauld, I would even suggest that Smith had to deal with this to a far greater

extent. Both women produced a great deal of anxiety for men in general, as Baurbalud and Smith possessed not only historical knowledge but knowledge of that natural world, which was seen as threatening, and genuinely challenged the more conventional male writers at the time, who felt that this subject matter was inherently theirs. For Smith at least, again if we think about her work as a progression, by the time *Beachy Head* is published she seems to be showing the breadth of her knowledge, especially regarding natural history. I would suggest that in her earlier novels, we perhaps saw some of this knowledge suppressed, or even diverted through other outlets, which would have naturally been deemed as more acceptable for the literary marketplace.

Throughout these two poems, Smith and Baurbauld, quite distinctly, represent the permanence of nature through time and space, and expose the ephemerality of man and society, at least in context of Britain's colonial course. Understanding this is essential when assessing the polemical qualities of these two works. Despite whatever time or space is passed or transgressed, throughout these poems, nature serves as a model of balance, sublimity and even mitigating force from the fears and anxieties presented in a fluctuating and in many ways deteriorating England. Nature is presented, especially in Smith, as what Stuart Curran calls an 'irreducible alterity', which will always hold an idealized space, seemingly unaffected by human interaction (67). Before further explicating the spatial and temporal methodologies of *Beachy Head* and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, I would like to examine two smaller poems which



further emphasize this power of nature, which will help shed some light upon exactly what time and space symbolize in the former two.

Smith's *Flora* and Barbauld's *The Caterpillar* are two primary testimonials of the power nature holds over individuals. Curran has noted the anthropomorphic qualities of *Flora*, which further explicates his idea of nature's 'otherness' represented throughout Smith's work. We see this mainly in the third stanza: "Enamoured Fancy now the sea-maids calls, / And from their grottos dim, and shell-paved halls, / Charmed by her voice, the shining train emerge" (185-187). Smith often uses 'fancy' as a vehicle of exploration through nature, which seemingly has quite a bit of mobility, and also aims to separate nature from tangible human interaction. Another notable feature of the poem is the highly localized natural taxonomy, which we will see appearing to a greater extent in *Beachy Head*. Among its many functions, this localized language enhances Smith's credibility as a poet by showing her possession of this very knowledge, while simultaneously enhancing the aesthetic qualities of the poem. Botany in this context is not to serve a utilitarian function, but rather an aesthetic one. *Flora* may be read as a testament to nature's beauty, one that places nature on a pedestal above man. *The Caterpillar* functions in similar ways, and seemingly takes an anti-Cartesian approach toward animals. The caterpillar in this poem is clearly represented as having a soul, as we see towards the middle, "Making me feel and clearly recognize / Thine individual existence, life, / And fellowship of sense with all that breathes" (25-28). It is the human recognition of the transgressions placed against nature, and specifically in this example, the

caterpillar, which holds particular significance. This carries implications for the larger poems as well, in that nature is used as an innocent bystander in subjection to the desire of human conquest. Despite human desire, nature proves to be an unwavering entity; it is never invalidated and serves as a point of permanence regardless of time or space.

Now, analyzing key concepts of time and space in the two larger poems, we may first look to *Beachy Head*, which implements natural and Linnaean taxonomy to a great extent. According to Theresa Kelley this was the most annotated of Smith's poems (284). She is seemingly using her annotations as means of highlighting the natural world around her, and it may also be suggested that she is showing off this knowledge to her readers. Rather than limiting our focus on Smith's annotations, it might be beneficial to approach the poem through a formalist lens, which will help explain how time and space is being utilized. Kelly has explicated, rather well, the hybrid nature the poem presents as both a piece of epic and local narrative (286). Smith was seemingly able to reconcile the conventional problems of the grand narrative, by employing a plethora of local terminology, while preserving the epic qualities of the poem. Another formalist interpretation of the poem by John Anderson, calls *Beachy Head* a 'Romantic Fragment' poem, in much the style of a Wordsworth, Coleridge or even Cowper (550). While Anderson notes that this style was seen by some Smith critics as plagiarizing her male counterparts, the form reinforces Smith's usage of time and space. This reading of *Beachy Head* as fragmentary is especially useful, as the poem follows a non-linear progression, and seems

fractured at times. Anderson goes on to comment that *Beachy Head's* "fragment is more a reflection on its view of reality than in an imaginative confirmation of it" (551). Smith's view of reality certainly does seem fragmented to an extent, especially as past events seemingly shape present perspectives. We see the first real glimpse of this in the sixth stanza: "Contemplation here, / High on her throne of rock, aloof my sit, / And bid recording Memory unfold / Her scroll voluminous" (117-120). A couple of interesting things to note: in this passage is Smith's chooses to abstract "memory", which places additional emphasis on the past, symbolizing a previous transgression, which we later come to find out is represented by Norman and Scandinavian invasions. Throughout the poem Smith digresses to the past while assessing the current and future situation of England. This certainly lends itself toward Penny Bradshaw's reading of *Beachy Head* as a dystopian narrative; Smith is seemingly unable to envision a utopian England due to past transgressions. The inevitable question will then become, does Smith offer us any opportunity for a utopian England, or will people forever be forced to repeat their past mistakes, essentially framing *Beachy Head* as anti-progressive?

Smith seems rather conflicted at times when depicting the present. What becomes evident throughout *Beachy Head* is that Smith's present England is one, for better or worse, fully immersed in the global economy. There is a sense of universality throughout the poem which would tend to demystify more conventional representations of England as the center of the world. We see this quite early in the poem: "The ship of commerce richly freighted, makes / Her

slower progress, on her distant voyage, / Bound to the orient climates” (42-44). Obviously the idea of making a voyage to the Far East is a true signifier of global trade, which aims to expand England’s consumerist base. As we see, Smith is not only traveling through time, but through space as well. We will come to see Barbauld take this mode of travel even further, but first we must analyze what Smith is saying in this passage. Several lines later we come to see the problematic nature of global trade: “There the Earth hides within her glowing breast / The beamy adamant, and the round pearl / Enchased in rugged covering; which the slave / With perilous and breathless toil, tears off / From the rough sea-rock, deep beneath the waves” (50-54). Smith’s abstraction of ‘earth’ humanizes nature, and equates the mining of diamonds to literally taking a piece of oneself. Again we see that anthropomorphizing nature tends to produce quite a bit of sympathy. These descriptions also elicit the notion that at least in this moment, nature is transient; it does not possess the same power we saw in *Flora* or in other sections of *Beachy Head*. It is at the complete will of human consumption, and desire for material wealth. This particular section is almost Rousseauvian in essence. Bernhard Kuhn has noted the disdain Rousseau had for those interfering with nature, especially those involved in pharmacology, as Kuhn says, “It divides man from man and man from nature, and replaces judgment and knowledge with opinion and prejudice and leads to the corruption of morals” (3). While pharmacology and diamond mining are quite different, the idea is essentially the same. Nature is represented here as finite, while man’s desires will forever be infinite. The global economic paradigm Smith sets up is

one which will forever deplete natural resources, and will serve as a problematic reminder for future generations as we will come to see later on.

While we have clearly witnessed Smith representing a transitory nature at the hands of human intervention, we also witness a compensating one as well. Again this harks back to a fragmentary reading of the poem, as we again travel through time in the eighth stanza, “How gladly the reflecting mind returns / To simple scenes of peace and industry, Where, bosom’d in some valley of the hills / Stands the lone farm; its gate with tawny ricks” (168-170). This passage is significant for several reasons. The movement from past to present here is signified by the wandering mind, which tends to mitigate what we saw earlier in the poem regarding more concrete physical descriptions. Again if we think about Smith’s use of wandering ‘fancy’ it is perhaps commenting on a future, which is not entirely irreconcilable. Perhaps one’s past transgressions will not necessarily have bearing on future events, and it was merely the lightness of thought driving the previous passages. This also is emblematic of a coexisting relationship between nature and society. Peace and industry are emblemized in a ‘simple’ scene, which is something we might first associate with nature rather than an industrialized society. While we witness some elements of it here, Smith is never fully complacent with the idea of full coexistence between nature and society, and furthermore, Smith is almost portraying a nature which is created by humans, and therefore in many ways is devalued in regards to how she is representing a more natural portrayal throughout other parts of the poem. This seems then to explain why we have such an exemplary relationship with nature,

as it is essentially self-constructed. Nature does seemingly provide a redeeming quality regardless of time and space, as one may always come back, “Ah! Hills so early loved! In fancy still / I breathe your pure keen air; and still behold, / Those widely spreading views, mocking alike / The poet and the Painter’s utmost art” (368-370). This reversion back to nature’s idyllic qualities aims to re-establish the sense of permanence which was lost in the previous passages. Nature here is ascribed with an almost innocence, which will perhaps provide a clearer vision of the future and present.

Before analyzing Barbauld in more detail it might be beneficial to look at one more section in *Beachy Head* which I believe will serve as an important counterpoint to *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. If we again think about the formalist qualities of the poem, Smith seems to create a personal narrative which is perhaps not quite apparent on a surface reading of the poem, but may be plausible. Susan Wolfson has noted that in Smith’s other poems, such as *The Emigrants*, the overtly political is never without personal implications, which we have already seen to a great extent (553). That is to say, no matter how valiant an attempt to create an overtly political narrative, the personal is always utilized to create a desired effect, whether this takes the form of sympathy, pity or something different. While I will not claim *Beachy Head* is as overtly positioned as *The Emigrants*, we still see the personal seeping through. This becomes especially apparent in the lines, “Ah! Who is happy? Happiness! A word” and “Childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned, / a guiltless exile, silently to sigh, / While Memory, with faithful pencil, drew/ the contrast” (261-289). I would

suggest this to be Smith's own melancholy permeating the page. Again we see here that 'memory' is abstracted, emphasizing the past. In this instance however, time travel does not take the context of English society, but rather Smith's own life. It is a personal travel, which envisions the innocence of youth fading into a bleak and lifeless existence. This interpretation is perhaps extreme, but necessary to create a desired effect within the poem. Again going back to Wolfson, this is possibly Smith's attempt to elicit sympathy or even pity from readers. It is also through youth, which Smith philosophizes on the nature of death, as we see several lines earlier: "Yet *they* are happy, who have never ask'd / What good or evil means. The boy / That on the river's margin gaily plays, / Has heard that Death is there. He knows not Death" (259-261). For Smith, youth is a tool to curtain off the reality of death, it is this obliviousness that she cherishes, and she painfully shows this to be quickly fleeting. Smith's personal voice presents an additional problem as it calls into question the true authoritative speaker of the poem. These various narratives of history and the personal tend to again, fragment the poem, as Jacqueline Labbe suggests that, "Of the competing speakers within the poem, the Historian seems to have the edge over the Poet; Smith seems to support the facts over fanciful imagery" (5). While I am not in full agreement that the poet is drowned out completely, I agree that there is a narrative split which inevitably raises questions of authenticity and authorship, but perhaps speaks more appropriately to Smith's inner conflict during the composition of the poem, figuring out exactly the best narrative model for which to convey her ideological concerns.

While we are perhaps able to draw some connections toward Smith's personal life through her use of temporality, this concept is vacant, or at least much less apparent in Barbauld. Both women use temporality to draw upon political and social issues, however; Barbauld seems to do so much less personally, which seems to be an isolated case in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. From the onset of the poem we are directly brought to scenes of war, "Still the loud death drum, thundering from afar, / O'er the vexed nations pours the storm of war: / To the stern call still Britain bends her ear, / Feeds the fierce strife, the alternate hope and fear" (1-4). Barbauld, in much the same fashion as Smith, uses 'still' constantly throughout her poem. This again is meant to emphasize; or rather to undermine the current British colonial agenda. War is portrayed as a perpetual cycle, where at least in the beginning of the poem, time is unable to stop this cycle. Barbauld, unlike Smith, feminizes England in this passage, referring to 'her' ear. This is significant in that, similar to Smith; Barbauld transforms conventional male subjects such as war, and makes them suitable and relatable to woman.

Barbauld portrays an England that was once great, and now has faded greatly: "Yes, thou must droop; thy Midas dream is o'er; / The golden tide of Commerce leaves thy shore, / Leaves thee to prove the alternate ills that haunt / Enfeebling Luxury and ghastly want" (61-64). Much like we saw in Smith, Barbauld seemingly places blame on over consumption and greed. The answer can no longer be found in England alone, and must be found elsewhere in the world. Christoph Bode interprets Barbauld as saying that, "The British Empire,



having once begun to take up and pass on the heritage of former civilization to fulfill a historical mission, is now exhausted and inwardly corrupt” (76). Bode goes on to comment that Barbauld’s poem displays the cyclical nature of the rise and fall of civilizations. As England traded and took precedence over the east, now the Americas are the youthful, dynamic civilization for which England aspires. While Barbauld presents a much more detailed view of the world than does Smith, it is her view of London that is perhaps most interesting, it is described later in the poem as, “Streets, where the turban’d Moslem, bearded Jew, / And woolly Afric, me the brown Hindu” (165-166). William Levine has commented on the fact that Barbauld presents her view of England in a much more commercial and cosmopolitan manner than do her contemporaries Wordsworth, Cowper and Coleridge (177). This caused the poem to be received much more critically than if she were to focus on more isolated areas, subsequently causing less anxiety. By portraying a ‘realistic’ London, the poem carries a much deeper polemical tone, which stretches beyond issues of England’s colonial agenda, by offering a feasible solution, of a multicultural London, however this solution is not entirely feasible. Barbauld, as Bradshaw has suggested, presents a dystopian view of England which again one must question, if change is possible. The poem reaches beyond the metropolitan London landscape; nature is also implicated in this downfall as we see later in the poem, “Even Nature’s changed; without his fostering smile / Ophir no gold, no plenty yields the Nile; / The thirsty sand absorbs the useless rill, / And sported plagues from putrid fens distill” (245-249). Unlike what we saw with Smith, nature

here seems to show far less resiliency in the face of human intervention. Once it is brought down by man, it stays down, until it is resurrected in a different space. The precedence that space has within the poem becomes all the more important. Barbauld is portraying an England which is quite literally lifeless. The only energy that is injected back into the poem is when we see her moving away from England and into the new world.

Barbauld's transition to the Americas is truly unique, and is not something we saw in Smith. Nicholas Birns has commented on this transition, suggesting that it was Barbauld's intention to reference the United States directly; however, the political tensions with England prevented her from doing so. Birns also suggests that the relationship Barbauld has with the new world is 'unstable' and that it, "underscores the poem's general point, that global hegemony is transient and self-undermining" (545). While I am not in complete agreement with this point, regarding the true absence of a hegemonic England, her representation is daunting at best, as we see toward the end of the poem, "midst mountains wrapt in storm, / On Andes' heights he shrouds his awful form; / On Chimborazo's summits treads sublime, / Measuring in lofty thought the march of Time" (323-325). Barbauld is doing a couple of interesting things here. Her transition toward the new world references the sublime, but more specifically the masculine sublime, which is seemingly vacant in *Beachy Head*. This furthers the interpretation, that the new world may have been filled with optimism, but still is an unknown land. The particular choice to use mount Chimborazo is also fascinating in that it is the highest mountain in the world from the equator. By

presenting such an overwhelming natural symbol, Barbauld is furthering the demise of England in favor of the new world. We also see in this passage a blending of time and space. Time here is represented as an almost inevitable force, and if we relate this toward the broader message of the poem, it is only a matter of time before England will be forgotten for the new world.

Charlotte Smith is truly unique in how she is able to reconcile her own ideologies, while simultaneously finding a way to appeal toward a larger literary audience. Smith's political views have at times proven demanding and even unpopular; however, these viewpoints never seem to inhibit her in any way. While at times we may view these ideas as veiled or even subversive, Smith cleverly weaves her polemics throughout all of her novels and poetry, in a way which preserves her own views, while stimulating the literary public. Her usage of spatiality proves an effective vehicle for her to explore issues of identity and nationalism, in a way that calls into serious question England's social, cultural and political course. While Smith was truly vocal in her views regarding internal reform within English government, this proved to be ineffective. Reaching her final conclusion of vacating England for the New World, seems more than anything, an act of frustration guided through a different cultural medium, which merely diverted the focus of England's internal strife. While one certainly cannot argue against Smith's effectiveness as a polemicist and overall popularity as an author, she proves that her voice alone is unable to reconcile a problem which is much bigger, and stretches far beyond her work.

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