

Charlotte Smith

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Charlotte Smith, originally Charlotte Turner, was born in 1749 into the landed gentry (the lowest segment of the upper class) in the city of London, England. Her father owned two large estates, making their family temporarily wealthy. He spent most of their funds on a severe gambling addiction. Smith's mother was not present in her life as she died due to complications during childbirth when Charlotte was three years old. Smith was married off to a wealthy man, Benjamin Smith, when she was fifteen years old and together they had twelve children.

Smith's husband had a lax work ethic and, like her father, acquired large gambling debts. These drove the family of eleven into poverty and forced them to flee their home to avoid prosecution by creditors after Benjamin was briefly imprisoned. It was these actions that caused Smith to take her children and finally leave her husband. She supported her family through her published works as a novelist and poet.

Smith published sixty-three volumes of work, including children's literature and novels. As seen in *Celestina*, Smith had a great affinity for writing works regarding infant and child mortality because of her experience with these topics. After losing two of her own children at less than ten years of age and her own mother from complications in childbirth, Smith reflected heavily on these experiences throughout her career.

Smith passed away in 1806 during an intensely convoluted legal dispute over familial funds that she was owed. While an actual cause of death was never determined, it is likely that the fifty-seven-year-old woman's many illnesses, including arthritis, pleurisy, neuritis, and gout, caught up to her, causing her body to shut down.

"Sonnet XLIX. Supposed to have been Written in a Church Yard, over the Grave of a Young Woman of Nineteen" is a sonnet that follows the English pattern of rhyme scheme and is in iambic pentameter. It falls within the genre of morbidity poems as well as the larger umbrella genre of sonnets. This poem was published in 1791 by Thomas Cadell within Smith's *Celestina: A Novel in Four Volumes*. This novel follows an orphaned French girl, Celestina de Moray, as she struggles through the English countryside with her caretaker, Mrs. Willoughby, an English Widow.

Further Reading

Buesking, Renee. "Charlotte Smith's Forms of Protest." *European Romantic Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2021, pp. 261–77.

Fletcher, Loraine. *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography*. Macmillan, 1998.

Sodeman, Melissa. "Charlotte Smith's Literary Exile." *ELH*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2009, pp. 131–52.

Sonnet XLIX, Supposed to have been Written in a Church Yard, over the Grave of a Young Woman of Nineteen, from the Novel of *Celestina*¹²⁹

OH, thou! who sleep'st where hazle¹³⁰ bands¹³¹ entwine
 The vernal¹³² grass, with paler violets drest;¹³³
 I would, sweet maid! thy humble bed were mine,
 And mine thy calm and enviable rest.
 For never more by human ills oppress,¹³⁴ 5
 Shall thy soft spirit fruitlessly repine:¹³⁵
 Thou canst not now, thy fondest hopes resign
 E'en in the hour that should have made thee blest.¹³⁶
 Light lies the turf upon thy virgin breast;
 And ling'ring here, to Love and Sorrow true, 10
 The Youth who once thy simple heart possest¹³⁷
 Shall mingle tears with April's early dew;
 While still for him shall faithful Memory save
 Thy form and virtues from the silent grave.



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¹²⁹ *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems.* the Thomas and Andrews reprinting of the sixth London ed., 1795, p. 69. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive.*

¹³⁰ *Hazle*: hazel, "a kind of deciduous shrub or small tree, which have simple rounded leaves" (*OED*).

¹³¹ *Bands*: entwining branches, "a flat surface with parallel sides running across or around an object" (*OED*).

¹³² *Vernal*: "coming, appearing, happening, occurring in spring" (*OED*).

¹³³ *Drest*: covered, decorated, or dressed.

¹³⁴ *Opprest*: oppressed; "to put down, subdue, suppress, or put an end to" (*OED*).

¹³⁵ *Repine*: "to regard with discontent or dissatisfaction; to grumble at; to complain about to a person" (*OED*).

¹³⁶ *Blest*: blessed.

¹³⁷ *Possest*: possessed, "to own, to have or gain ownership of; to have as one's own; to hold as property" (*OED*).