“The placard ‘No translations wanted,’ which repels aspirants from the doorway of one of our publishing houses most noted for its success with translations, is not sufficient to convince the eager herd that translations are for the most part even harder to market than most MSS,” sighed Publishers’ Weekly in 1878,

and the sad lady in black who calls in behalf of a friend in reduced circumstances and wishes the publisher would look at this translation of a most delightful German story is still as disappointed as ever when the not unkindly publisher, aware of the chronic subterfuge, tells her the honest truth. There are a good many of the sad ladies in black in these sad days; for writing and still more translating, will always be a last resort for the victims of hard times, and it is the general testimony that publishers have never been more flooded with MSS. than during these past seasons of general distress. The publisher’s desk is no easy position for a man of kindly heart.¹

The author thus presented a sorry picture of an industry dominated by pragmatic (though tender-hearted) male publishers and served by female occasional laborers whose wages were volatile. Still, he went on to admit, Lippincott and Wister had formed a felicitous partnership, and Wister’s name had become a “valuable trade-mark,” immediately stamping a work as a “marketable book.”²

Wister had truly done well. By 1878 she had published fifteen translations and had many more ahead of her. In his own interests, Lippincott supported
her work, providing a reliable outlet for it, vigorously advertising it under her name, and gaining for her recognition denied to most translators. It did not matter, moreover, if Lippincott paid her poorly—and there is no proof that he did—since unlike the “sad woman in black,” she did not translate out of economic necessity to begin with.

By contrast, after the Civil War, the southerner Mary Stuart Smith, the mother of eight surviving children and wife of a professor of natural philosophy, needed money badly. As of 1878 Smith had struggled for around ten years to gain a foothold in the market for novels in translation and had yet to see one of her translations appear in book form. *At a High Price* became her first the following year. Subsequently, over twenty-one years, she published thirty translations as books with an array of publishers. Her last translation in book form appeared in 1900—this time a translation from French, namely, Alexandre Dumas’s *Monsieur de Chauvelin’s Will*. While she rendered some of the same novels and authors as Wister, she never gained an equally secure footing in the publishing world and seldom had the satisfaction of reading a laudatory review in a prominent print venue. Her publishers did not use her name to guarantee readers an American quality production. While Wister relied on Lippincott, Smith had to seek opportunity, peddle her manuscripts to multiple publishers, work quickly—sometimes to meet publishers’ deadlines and sometimes to best competitors—and haggle over honoraria. When publishers did accept her work, she emphatically laid claim to it. Unlike the genteel Coleman and Wister, she often forewent her “Mrs.,” thus cultivating a public persona that was neither visibly circumscribed nor elevated by her marital status. Eventually, she built a reputation as a translator sufficient for her to receive work “unsought.”

A tiny grave marker nearly sunken from sight in Philadelphia’s Laurel Hill Cemetery commemorates the publicity-shy Wister. Contrasting starkly with Wister’s minuscule stone, Smith’s large and communicative tombstone at the University of Virginia lists among other things her work as a translator. Smith had learned to put herself forward. Although a “victim of hard times,” she provided a spirited counterimage to *Publishers’ Weekly*’s sad lady in black. Her energetic and obsessive translation over three decades reveals motives that, while not divorced from profit, were mixed.

**BY THE CONCLUSION** of the Civil War, few students remained at the University of Virginia. Faculty salaries, dependent on student tuition, had plummeted, and professors had been cast into penury. In 1867 the thirty-three-year-old Smith, university wife, daughter, and granddaughter, found opportunity amid this misery and began translating Mühlbach’s *Der große*
Kurfürst und seine Zeit for Appleton. Despite the demands of running a house on a university campus and tending to a large family and a professorial husband suffering from chronic dyspepsia, she determined to increase the family’s income with her pen through journalism, creative writing, and translation, largely of German popular fiction by women. She had, after all, been educated at home in classical and modern foreign languages and possessed uncommon energy and intelligence. She was confident she could turn some of this learning into cash; and, although she seldom owned up to it, at bottom she knew that applying her talents to improving family finances would also expand the boundaries of domesticity for her. Twenty years later, however, she still felt compelled to justify her work: “the opposition to my being literary continues at home and often unnerves me,” she wrote her son. Coupling an idea of stewardship and cultivation of talent that is to benefit her family, she continued, “I well know that results are beneficial to the family and necessary if I am to give an account of the talents committed to my charge.” If Goethe’s individualistic self-cultivation resonated with her, then she doggedly submerged it in domestic altruism.

For three and a half decades Smith, described by contemporaries as “frail” and as bearing a likeness to Murillo’s Madonna in Dresden “with one of [her] first children in [her] arms,” was nearly always working on a translation project. Now forgotten, she has nevertheless left historical traces. A stained glass window designed by her son Duncan and installed ca. 1921 in the chapel of the University of Virginia commemorates her—the sentimental Smith would no doubt be pleased by the many weddings celebrated in this nostalgic spot. Her tombstone in the university graveyard commemorates her work and familial devotion: “As daughter, sister, mother she excelled. As correspondent, author, translator, and teacher, she left no moment idle.” Most important, dozens of her letters have been preserved in the fifty-five boxes of the Tucker-Harrison-Smith family papers at the University of Virginia and provide an intimate look at the life of a woman who translated for more than thirty years “interrupted as usual.”

Smith was born and died on the Lawn of Thomas Jefferson’s university, an institution that did not admit women until 1972 but that, like many such universities, trades in its historic and historicist architecture coupling nostalgia with the purveyance of knowledge. Brown College on Monroe Hill, the residential campus opened in 1986, boasts twelve portals, named for nineteenth-century professors, as a tribute to the university’s (all male) past. These portals include three named for Smith’s husband, father, and grandfather—Smith, Harrison, and Tucker, respectively. While the university honored its male professors and forgot their families, who also lived on the Lawn
and supported university life, the American publishing industry proved porous to women’s intellectual activity long before the university officially did. Smith’s book publications outnumber those of her professorial husband, father, and grandfather combined. While Wister’s Marlitt translations, representing the state of Pennsylvania, found a place of honor in the Women’s Building at the World Exposition in Chicago in 1893, Smith, empowered by her literary activity, arrived in person, speech in hand, to represent the state of Virginia.  

Translation belonged to a broadly based strategy to turn a profit from her pen. Smith tried her hand at writing a cookbook, a collection of household hints, historical fiction, a Sunday school book, and book reviews. She compiled a song book, contributed to Harper’s Cook Book Encyclopaedia, and wrote dozens of occasional pieces for newspapers and magazines including Harper’s Bazar and Munro’s New York Fashion Bazar. Yet her translations of novels, most of them by German women, took up the greatest space on her shelf and perhaps also in her mental life. Initially, Smith characterized translation as a duty, often speaking of it with the imperative “must.” “I only feel urged to exert every power and energy while I have strength for the benefit of our little family,” she wrote her husband in 1871. “If I try and fail I do not feel disheartened but comforted by the consciousness of having at least made the effort.” But however modestly and altruistically she began, however modestly and altruistically she presented herself, her letters testify to obsession with that “slow, laboring, artistic and yet thankless task of translating.”  

In 1887, after she had labored for two decades, she characterized translation as a “quiet[,] interesting occupation, better than teaching perverse pupils for instance,” but added, “I dread the engrossment of mind.” Dread it she may have, for she knew the long hours and sheer determination required to complete such projects. Yet as a woman of drive and talent, she also sought out that engrossment along with its reward of honoraria and publicity.

A letter from 1896 to her son Tucker provides a picture of how determinedly she translated even as she balanced the challenges of doing so with the tasks of mothering her children and running a large household. She recalled rendering The Great Elector:

You were only two years old . . . and you used to sit at the table by my side for hours holding the pen in your hand, as grave as a judge, all the while evidently believing yourself to be sharing my labors. I had to think it so sweet and smart of you. Long years afterwards, Elise too used to insist upon “translating,” and when I gave her pencil and paper would look at me, in disgust, and say “But, Grandma where’s the book.”
Literary translation was a way of life in the Smith home, an occupation pursued by the matriarch, who while doing so became uncommunicative, a sight so familiar that a young grandchild knew the objects that had to be assembled to perform the task and could not be fooled by pencil and paper alone. In 1896, still feeling compelled to justify her absorbing occupation to her husband, she continued to speak of her intellectual work as undertaken for the sake of her family. “I feel lost without regular work in which there is hope of helping the family,” she wrote him. But then she admitted what it meant for her to be intellectually engaged over decades, voicing a cautious affinity to contemporary women’s movements: “Spoiled you see, by the aspirations or habits of modern womanhood, I should be comforted if I had a few good, useful works to read and review . . . of course I do what I can to help here, but I am used to having something besides domestic things to attend to.” In expressing the wish to have something “besides domestic things to attend to,” sixty-two-year-old Smith, stolid southern Methodist though she was, pushed against the doctrine of separate spheres that in her day had preached that her place was in the home. Yet, for her, “home” had always been literally on a university campus. In the Virginia system of pavilions, home was the locus of university classes for young men taught by older men; it was where students boarded. Despite the prohibitions on women’s admission to the university, the interior spaces of her home itself had thus not exactly constituted a separate sphere. Smith was deeply interested in the affairs of the university and the behavior of its male students. She owed her own education in foreign languages to her father and to foreign tutors who were also university students.

In the speech she delivered at the Congress of Women at the World’s Columbian Exposition, a nearly sixty-year-old Smith spoke of the situation of Virginia women in generalities that illuminate her own position as an intelligent and ambitious woman in a region and of a social class that steadfastly preserved ideals of domesticity. Outlining expectations placed on women, she stressed conservatism as “an attribute peculiarly cherished in Virginia, yet more if possible by the women than by the men.” Virginia women, she noted, smile when they are asked if they favor women’s rights, so live they to bless and be blessed in the sunshine of domestic happiness, that if there be a yoke upon them they are perfectly unconscious of its existence; or, can it be that the yoke is softly lined with the velvet of courtesy and mutual respect, devotion and self-sacrifice, that its pressure can never gall. Let Virginia women long rest in their happy contentment, blind to any wrongs to be righted in the nature of their own lot. (409)
Today this wish for Virginia women might seem to drip with irony, but in 1893, in the context of a patriotic speech on behalf of the speaker’s home state, it did not. Yet hardly had she affirmed an unreconstructed domesticity when she veered into an account of a Virginia woman pioneer in medicine, Oriana Moon—like herself born in 1834—followed by mention of the achievements in literature of female pupils at Hollins Institute and then by a review of women’s education (and the support of it) in Virginia. She also praised Virginia women’s endeavors in art and literature and their labor on behalf of the state’s exhibit at the fair. In its mix of insistent domesticity and interest in women’s intellectual and artistic achievements, Smith’s talk resonates with the ambiguity of Hillern’s *Only a Girl*, which Amanda Durff, we recall, had received just two years earlier. Smith cast about for a compromise, for the coexistence of domesticity, culture, and intellectual endeavors. Yet she was not willing to own up to the fact that her intellectual work allied her with women who were pushing for concrete rights. “I cannot imagine which part of my little essay you thought favored *Woman’s Rights,*” she exclaimed a year and a half later to her son Tucker. “I was perfectly unconscious of giving so false an impression of my views.”

Nevertheless, Smith’s speech had concluded in praise of the experience of attending the World Exposition and the opportunity to converse there with “women of other lands and different training,” offering a greeting from Virginia to “the genial, liberal women assembled here from all parts of the world” (411). She thus declared her allegiance to women who pushed out—even against—the boundaries of domesticity, feeling the pulse of the age and yet remaining under the spell of “the fair images of the women whom her mamma and grandmamma admired in their childhood” (408). As the Virginia woman grows older, Smith told the assembled, “her highest delight is to have pictured for her the life in which these lovely, revered beings moved. As she hears their virtues extolled, her eye kindles and her bosom dilates with the desire to be just such an [sic] one as they were, and to equal them would be to attain to the acme of her ambition” (408). Smith spoke of model Virginia women and had written of them in her essay “The Women of the Revolution,” but the virtuous women of yore whose lives she longed to have pictured for her pleasure and emulation also populated the German fiction she translated.

Smith came to value her work as a translator. She saw translation as an exacting art, was critical of the work of other translators, and set standards for herself. If she sometimes couched translation in terms of self-abnegation and labor to earn money for her family, she elsewhere displayed personal ambition in her wish to cultivate her skills and her striving for perfection.
She recognized, too, that translation required interpretation. Often one had to “cut loose from dictionaries and just interpret from one’s own inner sense of the author’s meaning,” she wrote her son Harry in 1887: “Sometimes I have thought and thought over a passage and the elucidation will come like an inspiration as it were—and yet thankless task! The publishers as well as public can make believe anybody can translate and make no efforts to secure the best work. Now, I never can succeed to please myself, and always hope to translate the next one perfectly.”

“Slavish literalism” was to be avoided. The translator needed temporarily to “lose his own identity and become imbued with the very spirit and life of his original, and thus clothe his impressions in such words as are the simple and spontaneous overflow of any cultivated mind seeking expression for a clearly defined train of thought.”

Smith worried about her lack of “technical knowledge of English grammar” and her usage, setting high expectations for herself and others. “If publishers could only be made to perceive the difference between one translation & another,” she grumbled in 1890. “Do you notice the quantity of translations advertised and yet no publisher has any to give to one so especially trained for the task as poor me?” While Smith’s translations were not reviewed nearly so often or prominently as Wister’s, when they were, they were generally deemed acceptable. A review of At a High Price characterized her work fairly: “The translation is good on the whole, although in some places the meaning is a trifle obscure or awkwardly expressed.” Smith’s renderings are competent, often truer to the word of the original than Wister’s, but they lack the light, playful grace and daring that characterize the latter.

When this “intelligent and highly cultivated Christian lady” naïvely and determinedly set out from Pavilion V on the Lawn at the University of Virginia to earn money for her family through translation, she was ill-prepared for the Gilded Age book trade, which was industrializing and diversifying unimpeded by international copyright. She had to learn how and to whom to sell her wares and how to talk to publishers in person in New York, which in 1896 she still referred to as “the hub of Yankeedom.” Over time, she became better schooled in the business side of translation.

In 1882 she thanked twenty-one-year-old Harry for doing business errands for her in Berlin, reflecting, “I used to suffer severely from disappointed hope, but long training has taught me to separate the business from the personal and to care little individually while I use equal diligence to ensure publication as ever.” Smith’s husband objected to her using Harry as her agent—Harry had not long been in Germany and did not yet speak good German—but Smith felt justified in introducing him to business and insisted that “no great harm was done [him].” As she pushed Harry to become involved in her
business, she also recognized that even after years of writing and translating she was handicapped by her sex.

In 1888 she wrote Harry, who was collaborating with her on a translation of Paul Lindau’s *Spitzen*, of her recent exchange with the publisher S. S. McClure:

> I think I must enclose my portion ready of “Spitzen” or “Lace” in spite of your objections, for as you started the prospect with him, he would prefer doing business with you I am sure, and you see there’s no prestige attached to me, as you flatteringly thought for although I spoke of you as my son he addressed me as Miss. Men can get better attention and terms too than women.  

Still, in 1890, when she sought to penetrate the schoolbook market with her historical novella *Lang Syne*, she proved a determined businesswoman, doggedly collecting endorsements from school superintendents nationwide.

Smith mainly worked with the aggressive publishers of cheap books for a mass reading public, the presses thought to be ruining the book trade with their shoddy products. When she published with the reputable, higher-end publisher Appleton, she had bad luck: although she was paid, the press misplaced her manuscript, which did not resurface until decades later. Whereas Wister’s translations for Lippincott cost $1.50 a book, most of Smith’s cost twenty-five cents or less and were thus available to a new class of reader. In *1877 Publishers’ Weekly* supposed that these readers were “largely the clientele of the weekly story-papers” who by means of these cheap editions were being led into a “higher class of reading.”

From 1865 to 1919 new publishers entered the book trade who, like the publishers of magazines, had a sense for what the public enjoyed. Smith’s work appears with many of these new publishing houses in series that promise to fill leisure hours with pleasurable reading at affordable prices. While such series served clergymen who opposed the reading of novels as targets of disapprobation, their somewhat tarnished reputation owed perhaps more to the opposition of other publishers whose profits they diminished. In fact, their lists of authors overlap significantly with those published by more reputable presses. Munro’s much-pilloried Seaside Series, for example, included Austen, Carlyle, Cervantes, Cooper, Dickens, Hardy, Scott, de Staël, and Turgenev, alongside now-forgotten authors who were also published by, among others, Lippincott.

Of the entrepreneurs prepared to publish not merely reprints but also new translations as cheap books, Munro proved the most significant to Smith.
As she conceded, Munro, however niggardly, was “the only one to give [her] steady employment.” Of fifty German titles in the pocket edition of the Seaside Library, thirteen can with certainty be attributed to Smith.

Munro founded his Seaside Library in May 1877 with the publication of Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*. The series, at first printed as quartos with two or three columns to the page, expanded at breakneck pace over the next decade; David Dzwonkoski describes the volumes as appearing “almost daily.” The titles in the series eventually numbered in the thousands, and on average, sales for each amounted to ten thousand copies, initially available at ten or fifteen cents apiece.

Later editions in the so-called pocket library were sized down to the handy twelvemo format. Their cover design reiterates the purpose of a “seaside library.” The cover of *Gold Elsie* (1887), translated by Smith and her son nineteen years after Wister had first translated the book for Lippincott, resembles an upended crocodile suitcase bound with two buckled leather straps. Recalling a luggage tag, the label “Seaside Library. Pocket Edition” is slipped under one strap. A postcard with an image of a couple seated on a rocky shore with a lighthouse and sailboats in the distance is tucked under the other strap, evoking the vacation at the shore where, of course, the book owner would read the novel (see Figure 9.1).

While pirated editions—although Munro would have disputed the label—of English books remained most desirable for inclusion in the Seaside Library since they required only the cost of printing, there were already many editions of these same English books on the American market. Translations from the German and from other foreign languages, especially French, enlivened the list. In the specific case of books originally written in German, Munro occasionally reprinted British translations of German women’s fiction, for example, *Raymond’s Atonement*, Christina Tyrrell’s translation of Werner’s *Gebannt und erlöst*. However, the firm also calculated that the expanded variety and quantity of books offered by new American translations of popular German novels warranted paying a small translator’s fee, thus providing one Mary Stuart Smith a dubious lifeline. The absence of international copyright was critical to the enterprise. In 1893 Munro’s enterprise collapsed for multiple reasons: the panic and depression of 1893, the glutted market, poor management, and the passage of the international copyright law.

To make a profit, Munro and publishers like him kept costs down and cut corners where possible. As a translator, Smith keenly felt this economy. In letter after letter she complained about her honoraria. Yet even as she became more assertive in asking for more money and tried mostly in vain to place her translations with better-paying publishers, she effectively resigned herself to
Figure 9.1 E. Marlitt, *Gold Elsie* (New York: Munro, 1887). Copy held by Rare Books and Manuscripts in The Ohio State University Libraries.
the conditions of the cheap book trade. The poor remuneration did not stop her from undertaking the next translation or from returning to Munro in the hopes that he would continue to be interested in new translated fiction to grow his Seaside Library. Nor did the incommensurate financial returns stop her in 1887 from encouraging her son, who was trying to establish himself as a lawyer in Kansas City, Missouri, to join her in the poorly paid enterprise.\textsuperscript{38}

In her letters Smith presented herself as a pragmatist who earned money through translation, yet she repeatedly undermined this rationalization by complaining that her labor was poorly paid. “There is little money in literature, our humble unappreciated brand of translation especially,” she wrote Harry, but then she justified working for paltry honoraria by outlining what even this little money could buy and claiming that intellectual labor translated into good works: “I always rate [translation work] by what the money accomplishes. Now our $15 will support Eliza’s school at Kading 3 months.”\textsuperscript{39}

While Appleton paid Mrs. Chapman Coleman more than $3,000 in the late 1860s for her translations of Mühlbach, and Smith $600 for her translation in two volumes of \textit{The Great Elector and His Times}, in the 1880s and 1890s Munro offered, by comparison, a mere pittance—$75 to $100.\textsuperscript{40} Smith believed that original popular work written in English unjustly fared far better. In 1891, she fumed, “The N.Y. Ledger pays Mrs. Amelia Barr $25,000 for a novel & offers me as representative of W. Heimburg a better novelist $100. Too great a contrast is it not? They certainly should be ashamed.”\textsuperscript{41} Smith, who deemed translation a “high art,” knew that sums of $75 to $100 did not honor the effort and artistry involved. Yet she translated on, continuing to defend translation as profitable.\textsuperscript{42}

“I entirely agree with you,” she wrote her son Tucker rather disingenuously; “it is ill-advised in me to allow myself to be so engrossed by the rather slavish art of translation. But you see there alone I find certain & tolerably remunerative employment. I always have some special task to accomplish.”\textsuperscript{43} Besides, “tolerably remunerative” did apply somewhat better to her current project—\textit{The Pearl} for New York International News—for which she was to be paid $200, by comparison with $100 three years earlier for a Heimburg novel.\textsuperscript{44} Earnings, small though they were, went for extras that made life more tolerable and supported her values—trips, sojourns at Chautauqua, help for her children, her church, the mission school in China honoring her deceased daughter. Her honoraria gave her greater freedom, keeping her from having to ask her penurious husband for money to do what she deemed vital. She planned to save the fee earned for \textit{The Pearl} for a trip to California.

Her handwritten account of Harry’s life testifies yet again to her conviction that her translation schemes turned the family’s learnedness into cash.
She insists here that her son “used to accept gratefully this ill-paid tedious work [translation], saying he could not have paid his board without that aid.” Smith had felt justified in encouraging the impecunious Harry to translate. When in February 1887 she proposed collaboration, she pointed to translation as a source of extra income and a way of “looking busy” while he was waiting for work in his chosen profession of law: “You could get through your part in a month,” she cajoled, “and thus look busy and pay your board by present work, while waiting for briefs.” One wonders whether Coleman offered her son, Chapman, similar advice about translating while he waited for gainful employment after the Civil War.

After Smith had experienced a boom in translation work only to have it fall off to next to nothing in the late 1890s, her ability to rationalize translation as profitable finally wore thin. She confessed to her son Tucker, who had advised her to cease translating: “It is well to be saved from one’s self. I have sacrificed too much of my life to translation.” Her belated insight suggests that for all her rationalization, her persistent translating over decades had as much to do with the addictive challenge it presented as it did her earnings. As we shall see below, especially her correspondence with Harry reveals how wedded she became to this exacting, all-absorbing intellectual work.

Among complaints about the miserly honoraria for translation, there is only scant mention of the rights of the original authors. Her correspondence confirms that she established contact with two German novelists—Werner and Paul Lindau—and implies that both received compensation. In February 1878 Smith mentioned her attempt to secure permission from Werner to “act for her.” While it is not clear in what capacity Smith could and would act, she does appear to have acquired some kind of consent from Werner through her publisher, Ernst Keil. Eight months after she had complained about a delay in receiving installments of *Die Gartenlaube* containing Werner’s novel *Um hohen Preis*, she received an apologetic letter from Keil. Through Keil, Werner agreed as compensation to accept only a third of the “usual honorarium” (“des bisher üblichen Honorars”) for her novel and gave Smith the right to include on the title page the designation “with permission of the authoress” (“Mit Genehmigung der Verfasserin”). A year later, the title page of *At a High Price* boasted that it was an “author’s edition.” Likewise, when Smith’s next published Werner translation, *What the Spring Brought*, appeared with Munro three years later in 1881, the title proclaimed “Translated with the author’s permission by Mary Stuart Smith.” Two years later Smith was, however, dismayed to discover that a new serialized novel by Werner, *Der Egoist*, had already appeared as a book in Germany and in translation in England as *Partners* (both in 1882). She had written to Keil and
Werner, she told Harry, but thought that there was little hope “in securing its translation.”\(^{53}\) In 1885 Munro reprinted *Partners*, the British translation.

When Harry visited Werner in Leipzig in 1883, Smith averred that her only thought in urging him to do so was to give him the chance “to see a German literary woman, and maybe through her get access to literary society and see something of that phase of German life, than with any view to furthering my own schemes.”\(^{54}\) Six months later she assumed that she had, via her son’s visit and her translations, secured a personal relationship with Werner and was emboldened to ask Harry to solicit help for his sister Lelia, an aspiring painter: “I have no doubt but that a lady like Miss Buerstenbinder [=Werner] might know of suitable quarters and would take an interest in helping Lelia if you would tell her of her work and plans. Literary & artistic people are apt to associate together,” she conjectured, “and a sensible elderly woman like her would understand readily the needs of the situation. As a German she would like foreigners to form an agreeable impression of her home and your official position would assure her of its being right to befriend you.”\(^{55}\) While Smith translated Werner’s novels throughout the 1880s, there is no further mention in her correspondence of contact with Werner or of an agreement or honorarium. Indeed, she disparagingly refers to Munro’s publication of their translation of *St. Michael* as deemed by the world a “piratical undertaking,” blaming Munro, however, and not herself.\(^{56}\)

Smith and Harry also made contact with Paul Lindau when they determined to translate *Spitzen* in 1888. Smith informed Harry in April that she had written to the “StaatZeitung [sic] for the first numbers of *Spitzen*.”\(^{57}\) By May she had procured advanced sheets from Lindau himself and, on Harry’s advice, had secured his permission for the translation.\(^{58}\) A year later, however, after the translation had appeared with Appleton, Smith suspected that Lindau was not happy with his honorarium since he had not written: “If he is affronted at getting so little I wonder how he thinks we feel.”\(^{59}\) Their tenuous relationship with him having deteriorated, Smith dismissed him “as not worth regarding more than an old stick” and suggested that they go ahead with their plans for a new translation of one of his works regardless of what he said: “He cannot retract his word, so let us use him, if he pleases, and pay his share, when he asks for it politely.”\(^{60}\) The agreements Smith had with Werner and Lindau were not contractually binding, and Smith honored them as suited her purposes. Until 1891 the United States’ failure to sign on to international copyright supported her actions.\(^{61}\)

In December 1890, when “the bill of International Copyright [was] threatening to pass,” Smith and Harry worried over its impact on their work. As a lawyer Harry presumably understood better than his mother how it might
impede their ability to translate contemporary authors. Smith continued to believe that merely forming a personal relationship with the authors to act as their agent in America would guarantee access to their works: “Why mourn over passage of International Copyright law?” she chided Harry. “It is the very thing for us, with two popular authors committed to us viz E. Werner & Lindau. The latter cannot eat his own words and his written permit is all we want, and he ought to be too thankful to have such respectable proxies if he did but know it.”

The implied exclusive commitment of Werner guaranteeing Smith rights to her works—apparently based on informal agreements from the early 1880s and possibly only on the above-cited nonbinding letter from Keil—seems farfetched since two weeks previously Smith admitted to having lost Werner’s address and since other translators had rendered Werner’s works during the ten years following the publication of What the Spring Brought. In any event, when Smith’s Clear the Track (Werner’s Freie Bahn) appeared in 1893 with the Federal Book Company after the passage of international copyright, that is, in the first full year in which international copyright went into effect, “Ernst Keil’s Nachfolger,” Werner’s German publisher, was designated as the holder of the copyright of the translation.

Year after year Smith combed Die Gartenlaube for appropriate literature. She knew that she was not alone in mining the magazine for entertaining and wholesome fiction to translate, lamenting, for example, in 1890 the dearth of appropriate novels: “all in Die Gartenlaube are snapped up so soon & I know of no novel myself to which I incline.” Like Wister, she translated Marlitt, but she fastened in particular on Werner, in the end translating at least nine of her novels for book publication. If Munro had followed Lippincott’s marketing strategies and had taken notice of the number of Werner translations Smith had completed for the Seaside Library, the publishing house might have featured Smith as “the translator of popular novels from the German by E. Werner.” Instead her work was submerged in eclectic international lists of popular and classic literature and never advertised under her name.

In 1887 Smith began a five-year collaboration with Harry that commenced with Gold Elsie (1887) and closed with Auerbach’s Villa on the Rhine (1892). When their collaboration began, Smith had established at least a small beachhead as a translator and occasional writer, having published at least seven titles with Munro: six translations and her own Art of Housekeeping. In the case of their first collaboration, Gold Elsie, Smith happily wrote Harry, for once she did not have to “hawk about” a manuscript. In February 1887 Munro had contacted her about a new translation of Goldelse for the “pitiful sum” of $75. She in turn called upon Harry, pointing out that he was “used to study” and that the task would interest him: “working 2 hours a day,
she calculated, “you could get through your part in a month.” 67 A few months later, Munro also asked Smith for a translation of St. Michael, this time promising her $100. 68

Six of the translations that emerged from that five-year collaboration credit Harry, including Gold Elsie, in which case Harry is identified only by the designation “and son”—perhaps in imitation of “Mrs. Coleman and her daughters”—Bride of the Nile (1887); The Owl-House (1888); Fairy of the Alps (1889); and A Judgment of God (1889). The sixth of these translations, Beacon Lights, completed in 1891, did not appear until 1899, seven years after Harry’s death. Smith’s correspondence indicates that the two collaborated on several additional published translations of German fiction, including the above-mentioned Villa on the Rhine, St. Michael (1888), and Paul Lindau’s Lace (1889). 69 Appleton did not credit either of them for Lace, but their letters reveal that the work is theirs; moreover, the copy held by the University of Virginia contains a handwritten notation under the author’s name on the title page: “Translated by MS & G. H. Smith.” 70 When St. Michael appeared without Harry’s name, Smith wrote him an apologetic letter offering to put his name alone on The Owl-House “to make things square.” 71 She did not follow through, perhaps upon Harry’s demurrals; Owl-House is attributed to them both. Harry died unexpectedly in February 1892, yet the failure to acknowledge his work on Villa, which appeared later that year, is peculiar in view of Smith’s scrupulousness. We will return to this omission below.

The five years of collaboration were filled with translation projects, some of which never reached book publication. Smith’s letters tell of futile attempts to place their “Lore von Tollen,” implying that someone scooped them with Munro—Munro published an unattributed Lenore von Tollen in 1890. 72 They indicate as well that mother and son worked on Lindau’s Im Fieber and possibly also on Heimburg’s story “Unser Männe,” which Smith suggested they translate as “Our Brownie.” 73 The manic Smith also mentions other possible projects: Ida Boy-Ed’s Nicht im Geleise (“Off the Track,” which the Smiths could have found in the Deutsche Library, volume 224), Friedrich Adami’s biography of Queen Luise, Hermann Jahnke’s book on Bismarck, and juvenile books. 74

Letters that emanated from this busy collaboration of mother and son offer insight into Smith’s feelings about her activity as a translator. In Harry as collaborator, she had at last found someone with whom she could speak at length about this addictive work, and she wrote him with unparalleled intensity. She wished he were in Charlottesville with her, declaring that it would be “delightful . . . if we were near enough to hold consultations over our work and read our versions aloud to one another.” 75 A few months later
she sketched out the pleasures of a lengthy summer visit: “You and I could translate so nicely side by side about 3 hours a day, which used to work as you are, would only make your vacation more pleasant.”

Smith generally played a domineering role in Harry’s life. There are hints that the sensitive son was smothered by his mother’s predilections on many fronts. The year before their collaboration began she expressed at length her strong reservations about a young woman whom Harry wanted to marry. No marriage took place. Four years later, in 1890, she instructed him to stop smoking in his current state of depression, also warning him that his depression likely came from overwork. He must beware, for “Satan takes advantages of such a condition of things to make his fiercest assaults.”

While Smith was ready to curtail Harry’s professional work for the sake of his moral and spiritual well-being, she pushed him hard to translate, even when she knew that he found translation tedious. She hoped that once he got started, he would “find entertainment in it.” She cajoled him with the intellectual benefits of translation: “The practice of translating will certainly aid you in forming a good style of composition, and in acquiring facility in expressing your ideas.” When his pace did not suit her, she admonished him to work harder and faster. “So put on steam, my boy,” she urged when they were working on *Gold Elsie*. A month earlier she herself had excitedly turned over the running of the household to her daughter Mary “to clear the track for translating” with him.

With Harry as collaborator Smith could strive toward the perfection she sought, discussing word choice and difficult passages. Their uncertainty about a line in Marlitt’s *Goldelse* is telling of the challenge they faced as non-native speakers dependent on dictionaries. The original line reads “‘Der Flederwisch hat uns noch gefehlt,’ meinte er ärgerlich” (“This flibbertigibbet is all we need,” he grumbled) and pertains to the unwelcome presence of an annoying but harmless young lady whose head is full of frivolous plans for a birthday celebration. The problematic word is “Flederwisch,” which can mean feather duster (made of a goosewing, as Smith correctly notes) or used metaphorically. “About the meaning of Der Flederwisch etc.,” Smith began in a letter to Harry, “it evidently means to show contempt for the newly arrived lady, as you observe the listeners both laughed. I find the meaning to be ‘Goosewing used instead of a whisk for dusting’—Could it be?—‘The duster has missed us again?’ . . . I do not think this would have much sense for us Americans, though.” Smith’s suggestion fortunately did not prevail. In 1868 Wister had rendered the line with feeling for the spirit of the German: “‘That scatter-brain completes our misery,” he said with vexation.” The Smiths settled on “‘The vixen is there!’ he said, evincing his displeasure.”
Their rendering misses the eye-rolling humorous exasperation of the German expression “Das fehlte noch” (that’s all we needed).

Although concerned with accuracy, Smith also did not hesitate to repack-age her product for American readers. “I name my chapters, you do the same. It helps a novel amazingly,” she instructed Harry.86 Three years later she reminded him: “Let us always head our chapters. It quickens interest I’m convinced.”87 The original German novels have no such chapter titles, but the prescient Smith recognized that American readers were used to them and that as constituents of tables of contents they could sell books, titillate readers, and entice them to read on.

Mary Stuart Smith as Reader

Smith must have long wondered why her voluminous manuscript of Der große Kurfürst und seine Zeit, which she had completed in 1868 and for which she had been paid, had never been published. She herself had not forgotten it or what she saw as its potential appeal. Nearly twenty years later, in December 1887, she reminded Appleton about the manuscript. The time was ripe for its publication, she maintained, for, as she saw it, Mühlbach’s historical novel addressed material that was in the news: “I wrote to Messers Appleton, reminding them of ‘The Great Elector,’” she told Harry, “saying I thought the eyes of all the world being directed to the poor Crown Prince made it a peculiarly suitable time to bring it out. He replied that he saw no connection. I answered that to my mind the connection was a striking one. Prussia’s First Frederick William and her last.”88

Smith alluded here to Frederick’s cancer of the larynx, which would kill him in June 1888 after he had reigned as emperor for only ninety-nine days. Although Appleton was unimpressed, Smith rightly saw that the family romance of illness corresponded to Mühlbach’s brand of history writing. If the private pathos of the Hohenzollerns was newsworthy, then Smith had translated stories of Frederick’s great-great-great-great-grandfather of equal pathos, and it was time to publish them: “The scene in the Old Palace at Berlin is thrilling,” she wrote Harry. “I could think of nothing but the Young Elector and the Jewess who gave her life for him as I walked through those spacious halls, the first palace I had ever entered.”89 In recalling this particular episode from The Youth of the Great Elector, Smith thrilled to themes of love, conjugal loyalty, morality, and noble sacrifice. Her evaluation of the Great Elector novels and her thoughts about their potential appeal for American readers make visible that she, like Cole-
man and Wister, was also a reader, indeed an attentive reader of books by German women. Her active reading mattered in the selection and translation of German texts.

Smith had firm ideas about appropriate reading that were rooted in her Christian faith, her southern heritage, and her idealism. She liked Walter Scott's novels but was not entirely convinced by George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, which she found too long. Besides, she was unsure of “Mrs. Lewis's” piety. Nowhere do her views become more explicit than in her violent reaction to the novels of Amélie Rives, an author who lived rather too close for comfort on an estate near Charlottesville and was thus a painful thorn in the proper Smith's flesh.

In April 1888 Rives's novella *The Quick or the Dead?* appeared in toto in *Lippincott's Magazine* in keeping with the magazine's year-old policy of foregoing serialization. Wister's translation of Werner's patriotic, chaste, and idealistic *Spell of Home* had appeared in February and would most certainly have met with Smith's approval. By contrast, Rives's novel describes a woman's physical longing for her dead husband and her sexual feelings for his living cousin who resembles him physically. The “quick or the dead” of the title refers to the deliberations of the protagonist as to whether she should remain a widow, true to her deceased husband, or marry his attractive cousin. The novella shocked the pious Smith, even as the American reading public rushed to buy the April issue. Smith was aghast. “Everybody will talk about Amélie Rives and ‘The Dead or the Living,’” she wrote Harry in May 1888. Young men—presumably students at the University of Virginia—had remarked to her that Rives's writing tended “to lower the whole female sex in the eyes of men.”

Smith, who was collaborating with Harry on their translation of Marlitt's *Owl-House*, in which as always virtue is rewarded, asserted of Rives's fiction that there could be “no greater evil than Satan could desire a woman's pen to accomplish than this” and pronounced the author a “monster.” There was surely no “other such coarse, vulgar minded woman in her state, born in her sphere of society.” But in a paroxysm of southern patriotism, Smith went on to blame northern publishers for deliberately insulting the South by publishing books depicting southern women as sensual beings. She thought that Rives's novel could only be explained by her being in “the incipient stage of lunacy or an opium eater and crazed by the fulsome adulation of those cold-blooded Yankees cunningly pretending to admire her in order to send the keenest thrust yet given at the South whose greatest glory has hitherto been the virtue of her men and [sic] modesty and refinement of her women.” Rives, “this deluded girl,” Smith fumed, had
disgraced herself and cast a reproach upon her country as hard to be removed as the blood from Lady MacBeth’s hand. Oh the far-reaching wrong done the many generations of youth by the $1500 paid for that story (Harper $1000 for Virginia of Virginia) who can calculate, when you remember that the highest-toned Magazines in the Country endorse such writings, you know how young girls blindly follow fashions & will do whatever men admire and what will we come to? Miss Burney introduced the pure novel. Alas! if Miss Rives shall inaugurate the return to coarse vileness, profanity and even blasphemy—Let’s all strive with all our might to stem the tide, and pray that this poor girl be converted & her publishers taught by money losses that the United States are a Christian people yet.92

The mention here of the “pure” novels of Fanny Burney suggests the reading Smith favored. While Rives’s novels are frank and explicit about women’s sexual feelings, Burney’s courtship novel *Evelina* (1778), as Ruth Yeazell has argued, dissociates the self by rendering the modest heroine unconscious of her own desire. As Yeazell formulates it, Evelina “has internalized the prohibition against knowing her own desire—or at least against knowing it until her future husband ‘speaks,’ and thus speaks it for her.”93 When Evelina becomes conscious of her feelings, the narrative must labor to keep her from taking responsibility for them for the short time remaining before she marries. The novel thus supports a “taboo on woman’s speaking her love.”94 In this respect Burney’s novel displays an affinity with the German novels that Smith had translated so eagerly for Munro, for example, *Gold Elsie* and *The Old Mamiselle’s Secret*.

Smith worried about the contents of the works she rendered and even wondered whether the translator might exercise censorship. Concerns arose especially with two male German authors whom she translated with Harry in the 1890s. Just as she believed Rives damaged the honor of the South, she felt Berthold Auerbach’s *Villa on the Rhine* spread lies about the Confederacy. Initially Smith was excited by the request from the United States Book Company for a new translation of *The Villa on the Rhine*. She liked “its moral tendency,” she told Harry in January 1891.95 Five days later she was still pleased: “Auerbach is dead but a beautiful writer.”96 *Villa* was considered a “chef d’oeuvre,” she noted. Thereafter she procured copies of Munro’s German edition of the novel, and she and Harry began translating. By the end of the summer Smith had arrived at the final section of the novel, which consists of fictive letters, pro-Union and antislavery, written in the United States during the Civil War. Smith was outraged by the presentation of the South in them and did not want to mediate what she believed to be mendacities:
“and anybody looks over my writing after I am dead, I should bless them for expunging the sentence—and so I believe would Auerbach,” she declared. “Neither you nor I can ever be poor enough to have to compromise principle. Hardy as we have worked we had better throw away the pittance promised than aid in perpetuating wrong done to our afflicted people.”

Auerbach’s fictitious character wrote of the Confederacy having barbarously mistreated prisoners of war, but Smith insisted that she herself knew from eyewitnesses that this was not so. The original read, “Gerade die über die Grenzen der Menschlichkeit gehende Erbitterung, gerade die Rachsucht, mit der sie kämpfen und die Gefangenen behandeln sind mir Zeichen, daß sie wohl in [sic] den Sieg im Kriege glauben, aber nicht an einen Sieg in Frieden” (Precisely the bitterness, which surpasses the boundaries of humanity, precisely the spirit of revenge with which they fight and treat the prisoners are to me signs that they certainly believe in victory in war, but not in victory in peace [my translation]). James Davis’s authorized translation of 1874 omitted the reference to the treatment of prisoners of war, as did Charles C. Shackford’s translation for Roberts Brothers (1869). If Smith read either of these translations before reading the German—as the John W. Lovell Company suggested she should to save herself labor—she would have been all the more unprepared for the German original. Despite Smith’s dismay, the Smiths ultimately remained true to the original: “The very bitterness, which exceeds the bounds of all humanity, the very vengeance with which they fight and with which they treat their prisoners, are to me signs that they may hope to be victorious in battle but not in peace.”

Smith must have struggled with her conscience before giving in. In November 1891 she insisted on morality as important to the relationship and responsibility of the translator to and for the text: “As to stickling for morality being an insuperable obstacle to the translator, I do not believe it.” In the end she insisted on her obligation to voice what she saw as truth against the original text. A “translator’s footnote” to a passage concerning Lincoln’s assassination asserts that southerners were not responsible for either the murder or the practice of slavery. Instead, finding slavery “planted among them,” they took the responsibility for Christianizing Africans and making of them “law-abiding men qualified for the franchise.”

Harry’s death and Smith’s outrage at the view of the South mediated in these final pages may explain the absence of Harry’s name from the jointly translated book. Smith may have wished to avoid any stain on his honor by not identifying him as cotranslator of these offending passages. If so, she thereby commenced her labor to shape and preserve her son’s memory, labor that would eventually culminate in a fifty-page manuscript and in the tall-
est grave marker on the family plot. Harry’s obituary reported that he had finished translating a German book “a few days ago.” “It is supposed,” the obituary continued, “that his illness and death were the result of a too close attention to these engagements [translating and lawyering] which taxed too severely an already impaired state of health.”

Smith, who pushed him so hard to translate, had reason to feel guilty and may have preferred not to see Harry’s name on the dubious Villa on the Rhine.

Lindau’s novels also disturbed Smith even as she devised schemes for making the author better known in America to help sell Lace. “Any questionable passages?” she worried when they were contemplating a second Lindau translation. “He is abler than the rest without doubt,” she allowed, “but I do not want to compromise my character in any wise by translating a work whose moral may be misunderstood by the shallow.” Indeed, Lindau’s Lace had presented a quandary to the pious Smith. For one thing, unlike the novels by women that Smith, Wister, and others had translated, it did not end happily but instead boasted a plot involving perjury, burglary, and adultery and ending in insanity and death. Smith wondered, “Can you not alter P. Lindau so as to winnow out any criminal tone to which neither of us should become a party.”

While she was only too happy to be working with Appleton, who paid better than Munro, she urged Harry, who was translating the first part of the novel, not to read the “tragic end” of Lace until he had finished with his part.

Smith worried about the effects of reading such literature on her depressive son. It may be telling, then, that the Smiths were not credited at all for Lace, especially since Smith otherwise saw to it that her name appeared on the title pages of her translations. The author of a Sunday school book and of patriotic historical fiction (Lang Syne, 1889), which she hoped would sell on the school textbook market, was perhaps not prepared to have her good name associated with a “criminal tone.” When working on a second Lindau translation, Smith noted the effects of the fiction on her own state of mind: “It has a queer oppressive effect upon me, so weird, so vivid in its descriptions. I can see that horrible old professor and his poor victims as plainly as if I had known them actually.” She worried about the novel’s unhappy ending: she wanted to translate the first part, “for, to tell the truth, I shrink from the tragic close.” Her shrinking from tragedy points again to the decades-long allure of German happy endings for American novel readers of her ilk. Smith had enough pain in real life; indeed, Harry died just a few weeks later.

Although the Smiths began to translate male German authors whose books contained “questionable passages,” Smith remained more at home in women’s fiction in the vein of that generated by Gartenlaube authors. In 1888
she wrote Harry of liking Werner’s *St. Michael*: “If it goes as well as it begins it promises to be E. Werner’s *chef d’oeuvre*,” she conjectured. St. Michael adhered to Werner’s successful pattern in its focus on a male character in need of redemption whose fate is tied to family and national politics, the sort of man Smith herself had described in her essay on women of the revolutionary war, a man whose “fairest achievements” were “prompted by the desire to please the woman who stands closest to his heart.” A novel that concludes with the Franco-Prussian War and thus the unification of Germany, St. Michael brings about the reconciliation of a grandfather and grandson and the unification of an aristocratic family fractured along religious lines (Catholic and Protestant), geographical lines (north and south), and class lines (the central character, Michael, is the product of a misalliance). In the end North German Michael, now Captain Rodenberg, marries the South German countess Hertha Steinruck following the German victory over France, in a united Germany and in a double marriage ceremony that appeases both Protestants and Catholics. We can easily imagine why the southerner Smith relished such fantasies of familial and national reunion and harmony. Without the burden of real experience of the Franco-Prussian War, American readers could believe in and cherish ideas of union in a far-off elsewhere that life at home in the fractured United States frustrated.

Harmony was on Smith’s mind, and she must have relished in books the reconciliation of north and south that was not to be easily found in the American South, which, as she saw it, was ever vulnerable to insults from outsiders. A year later Smith, perhaps emboldened by her translation of Werner, published her own patriotic historical fiction, her one and only novella, *Lang Syne, or The Wards of Mt. Vernon*. The hundred-year anniversary of the commencement of Washington’s presidency provided Smith, the southerner, with an opportunity to write patriotic historical fiction without having to confront the Civil War, yet the Lost Cause informs the work. *Lang Syne* concludes with a picture of wholeness set in Virginia not motivated by the specific story but redolent with nostalgia for the Old South. In the final scene Washington, returned from the war to his plantation, is greeted by “colored people of all ages.” As the narrator emphasizes, “Assuredly without the setting of their dusky faces as a background, there would have been lacking a distinct element in what constituted a perfect picture of home life, whose absence must have been missed regretfully by Washington himself. For strong was the tie of affection that linked together the served and the servant in those old and well nigh forgotten days.” Indeed, as a letter to her son documents, Smith, like the Lost Causers, clung for years after the war to the fiction that slavery had been the “mildest domestic servitude the world ever saw and a
substitute for which the whole world now seeks in vain” and remained sensitive to insults of “zealots and ignoramuses.”

Even as Smith hoped that she and Harry were translating a chef d’oeuvre when they took up St. Michael, she preferred Heimburg, her “favorite of all.” Heimburg won Smith’s approval because she was “so much more evangelical in her spirit.” This taste for the evangelical is reflected in her own writing. When Smith wrote Harry’s story after his untimely death, she worked the territory of the religiously colored domestic fiction that she preferred and produced an ending, albeit a sad one, worthy of that fiction. The death of Janie Harwood, Harry’s fiancée, two weeks after Harry died provided promising material. Smith was certain, she wrote on the final page of the commemorative biography, that Harry “was welcomed by his Redeemer into the assembly of saints, and appointed to do nobler and higher work than could have been possible here below.” Well schooled in sentimental German family romance, although of a happier sort, she concluded her account with a scene by Harry’s coffin. Harry’s fiancée placed “some lovely pale roses on his bosom. Her pathetic exclamation was ‘Ah Harry, how could you go? You promised never to leave me.’” Smith then provided a pious and strangely hopeful, though lachrymose, coda, one as close to a happy ending as she could muster in view of the circumstances: “God heard that cry of anguish and permitted them to be speedily reunited in the better land.”

Smith’s praise of Werner and Heimburg and her reservations about Lindau and Auerbach raise the issue of the worthiness of the enterprise of translating popular literature per se. Were such novels fit reading? Could reading of them be justified by their literary quality, their entertainment value, or their moral message? Smith had wrestled with these issues and in 1872 had made a public statement about worthy reading in the Southern Review. The journal editor, who did not entirely stand behind her assertions, framed her article with an asseveration of her piety and a disclaimer: “we do not wish to be understood as committing ourselves to the advocacy of novel-reading in any form or shape. We believe that the practice is, on the whole, decidedly pernicious.” Smith saw it differently and here said so in public.

Citing as premier examples Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dickens, of whom she did not wholly approve, she maintained, “fiction is a power.” The power of fiction rests in its ability both to instruct and charm, she affirmed, relying on the well-worn argument prodesse et delectare, the European novel’s oldest defense. She moreover enthusiastically cited the example of Charlotte Yonge, whose edifying Christian books she admired: “cold must be the heart that does not respond ‘Amen’ to the author’s endeavor to exalt her species, by first seeking to engage their sympathies, albeit in behalf of a
Advocacy of fiction’s edificatory powers was perhaps to be expected in the *Southern Review*, but Smith also lauded the entertainment value of fiction. While she condemned sensation novels as “beneath notice, save as one of those agencies for evil,” she asserted, “We think none will gainsay the position, that a first essential is the power to afford entertainment; for no one applies to fiction but with the hope of being amused; and if one must labor to read a novel, who does not esteem it labor misapplied?” (449–50). Entertainment, however, should not consist in fantasy. Smith demanded verisimilitude and insisted that characters should be lifelike; “in the most successful novels we have difficulty remembering that the characters are not real people,” she observed. “When we do indulge in novel-reading, we love to be lifted, as if by an enchanter’s rod, out of the every-day world into one in which ideal beings move to and fro, swaying . . . heart and mind, until becoming, as it were, for the time, an integral part of our very being” (450). Smith thus approximated in 1872 what Radway rediscovered in the twentieth century about the appeal of romance novels. Readers do not understand these novels with their happy endings and pleasurably idealized characters as belonging to a fantastical world apart but rather as contiguous with the world they know and as assimilable into their own experience.

If Smith in 1872 provided the rationale for her own translations, her example also strongly suggests, like that of Coleman and Wister, that women’s activity as translators can lead them to gain a sense of cultural agency, here an agency anchored in and supported by sentiment and virtue as articulated in popular novels by German women. Smith in fact came to feel that she had something to say to important men.

During his three years in Berlin (1882–85) where he enrolled as a student of civil engineering at the university and worked as vice consul general at the American consulate, Smith’s son Harry was mentored by none other than Chapman Coleman, Ann Mary Coleman’s son, who had served as First Secretary of Legation at Berlin since being appointed attaché by Grant in 1869. Smith presumably met Coleman himself when in 1884 she finally traveled to Germany and spent several weeks in Berlin with Harry, who had been given the use of the apartments of Consul Brewer and his family opposite the Tiergarten and within earshot of the famous Kroll gardens.

When six years later, in 1890, Smith published in *The Cosmopolitan* an essay on the New Berlin, overflowing with adulation for Prussia’s Queen Louise, she felt enough of a connection to Coleman, who was still with the American legation, to contact him. She wanted him to see to it that none
other than the young German emperor, William II, received a copy of her essay. “Would it be wild,” she asked Harry, “to send two copies to your friend Coleman asking him to present the others in the proper way, to the Emperor himself?” 121 Eighteen days later she informed Harry that she had sent off copies of her article to Berlin; she wished to instruct the emperor:

I really feel a deep interest in all Queen Louisa’s descendents, and I thought it could do a faulty young man, inclined to despotism no harm to be made aware of the reverence kindled in the hearts of Republicans by the virtues and heroic deeds of his predecessors. Even so humble an instrumentality might perchance kindle the desire to imitate them, and awaken kindly feelings toward the United States, whose people can admire goodness in king and emperor, while fondly clinging to the free institutions of their native land. What a visionary being I am surely, and yet when such impulses do come one fears not to yield to them. 122

Smith had read and hoped to translate Friedrich Wilhelm Adami’s popular biography of Queen Louise, William II’s great-grandmother, who, as the epitome of feminine virtue, had become a highly sentimentalized German national icon. 123 Queen Louise spoke to Smith, as it were, and Smith wanted to speak back to Louise’s great-grandson. Empowered by years of reading and translating, years of cultural mediation, Smith asserted in this letter the force of sentiment coupled with virtue and wielded by a woman to affect international relations by addressing the monarch personally.

That Smith operated here within a sense of expanded domesticity—domestic values extended into public life—becomes clear upon examination of the entire letter. In the same letter in which she expressed her wish to guide the German emperor, she described how she took a grandson strictly in hand. Francis Charles had pushed his sister, who fell and cut her forehead on the leg of Smith’s desk, the desk in the home where she wrote and translated for the public. Smith moved swiftly to discipline the boy: “I took the little boy off to a room where we were by ourselves and made him kneel down and thank God for saving him from doing a greater mischief, and keep him from hurting his sister ever again. I am going to take him with me to meeting henceforth, to keep him from like escapades, if nothing else.” 124 Francis Charles and William II, so Smith believed, both required a little feminine discipline.

A cranky writer for the Literary World had once declared, “Translations . . . are not wanted,” and speculated that American readers were indifferent to foreign fiction, because “they cannot sympathetically enter into the lives and thoughts of persons who represent a society so different from their
Smith, however, saw the matter differently, believing translations of German sentimental fiction engendered in American readers precisely the sympathy that makes the foreign familiar. The Germany of the novels she translated, so Smith thought, at bottom shared her values. How, then, could she have imagined at the height of translating the “pure” novels of Marlitt, Heimburg, and Werner that she would live to see the United States go to war against a Germany that had “put aside all restraints of law and humanity”?"
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