

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

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degree of Doctor in Philosophy

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For George Condliffe
(1925-2014)

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Abstract

This thesis considers the place of Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* in the eighteenth-century sonnet revival. Smith is often credited with reviving the sonnet form, and has attracted attention as a 'Romantic' poet. This thesis seeks to rebalance the existing critical focus by locating Smith's sonnets in their eighteenth-century context and by considering her engagement with tradition alongside her innovation and influence. It offers a new history and evaluation of the eighteenth-century sonnet, and locates Smith's sonnets within it. It traces the expansion of *Elegiac Sonnets* through its multiple editions from 1784 to 1800, charting Smith's changing approach to – and the interactions between – form, literary tradition and place. Thus, the thesis clarifies Smith's real significance as a writer and her place in literary history.

Introduction

In 1802, *The Critical Review* announced that the ‘sonnet has been revived by Charlotte Smith: her sonnets are assuredly the most popular in the language, and deservedly so’.¹ After almost two hundred years of critical neglect – confirming Wordsworth’s prediction that she was a poet ‘to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered’ – Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) now once again rightly assumes a prominent position in the history of the sonnet.² In 1715 John Hughes described the sonnet as ‘a Species of Poetry so entirely disus’d, that it seems to be scarce known among us at this time’, yet by 1793, it was observed in the *The Critical Review* that the sonnet ‘has been so much cultivated of late years, [...] that, to say the truth, we begin to be almost satiated with *sonnets*’.³ This thesis assesses the place of Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) in this revival, as the sonnet, which had fallen from favour in the years following Milton’s death, became one of the most ubiquitous literary forms of the late-eighteenth century, and a major Romantic form. Curran writes that the sonnet’s ‘rebirth coincides with the rise of a definable woman’s literary movement and with the beginnings of Romanticism. The palm in both cases should go to Charlotte Turner Smith’.⁴ Indeed, the focus of critics has been on Smith as a ‘Romantic’ poet, and her influence. Curran writes elsewhere that she is ‘the first poet in England whom in retrospect we would call Romantic’, and Jacqueline Labbe’s two monographs on Smith, as well as an edited collection of essays, are deeply concerned with Smith’s place within ‘Romanticism’, as their titles indicate.⁵ Although Smith is often credited with reviving the form, when *Elegiac Sonnets* was first published in 1784, the sonnet’s revival had already been initiated. In January 1785, the year following the first edition of Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*, a commentator in *The New Annual Register* observed how ‘No one can be insensible how much the sonnet hath of late years

¹ *The Critical Review*, 34 (1802), p. 393.

² William Wordsworth, ‘Notes’, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), pp. 395-470 (p. 403). The comment is made in a note to ‘Stanzas suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees’ Head, on the coast of Cumberland’ (1833).

³ John Hughes, *The Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser [...]*, 6 vols (London: J. Tonson, 1715), I, p. cviii; *The Critical Review*, 10 (1794), p. 114. Here and throughout the thesis, original capitalisation has been maintained in quotations of both poetry and prose.

⁴ Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 30.

⁵ Curran, ‘Introduction’, in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. xix-xxix (p. xix). Jacqueline Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (2003); *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807* (2011); *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism* (2008).

become a favourite mode of writing; and a judicious critic may possibly think that it has been cultivated something more than it deserves'.⁶

As these periodical observations suggest, critical opinion on the sonnet form was ambivalent and unsettled; and the worth and correct manifestation of the form were much-debated topics throughout the last decades of the eighteenth century. Smith's chief eighteenth-century predecessors in the sonnet were Thomas Edwards (*d.* 1757), Thomas Gray (1716-1771), Thomas Warton (1728-1790) and William Hayley (1745-1820), whose sonnets were widely read, and whose sonnets she knew.⁷ The relationship between her sonnets and those of her contemporaries and predecessors is yet to be fully considered, however, as is her relationship with more remote sonnet tradition, from Petrarch to Milton, and the context of their eighteenth-century status and appropriation. Despite the recent renewed scholarly interest in Smith's sonnets, a full-length study of the literary and formal context of *Elegiac Sonnets*, grounded in the eighteenth century, has not yet been made, which this thesis redresses. Critical interest in the sonnet as a 'Romantic' form has also meant that the earlier history of the sonnet form in the eighteenth century has often been neglected or overlooked. While it builds on the work of critics such as Curran and Labbe, who have established Smith's importance, this thesis reconnects Smith with the earlier history of the eighteenth-century sonnet and the first chapter offers an historical overview of the sonnet in the eighteenth century, before the publication of Smith's first edition of sonnets in 1784. Subsequent chapters trace the development of Smith's volume within a formal context.

Throughout her sonnets – and indeed all her works – Smith 'holds an almost obsessive dialogue with other literature', as Curran has observed, which extends beyond the sonnet form.⁸ This 'dialogue' takes a variety of forms: the direct quotations and allusions recorded in the notes to *Elegiac Sonnets*, as well as the unacknowledged borrowings; the appearance of past poets in her sonnets; and the negotiations necessarily involved in the sonnets translated 'from Petrarch' and 'Supposed to be written by Werter'. It is also embedded in the use of the sonnet form, an aspect Daniel Robinson has stressed in his work on the sonnet of the period: like 'any negotiation with form, sonnet writing is also a way to place the poet within a specific literary tradition', he writes, and he also refers to how 'the very act of

⁶ *The New Annual Register* (1785), p. 269.

⁷ As will be seen, Smith makes direct references to Edwards, Gray and Hayley and although she does not directly refer to Warton's sonnets, phrases and tropes are echoed in *Elegiac Sonnets*, and other poems of Warton's *Poems* which included the sonnets are directly quoted from. In *Elegiac Sonnets*, she references only one later eighteenth-century sonnet – by Sir Brooke Boothby from his *Sorrows. Sacred to the Memory of Penelope* (1796), although her prose includes mention of sonnets by William Lisle Bowles.

⁸ Curran, 'Charlotte Smith: Intertextualities', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), pp. 175-188 (p. 175).

writing a sonnet is an allusion to every well-known sonnet written prior to that act'.⁹ Elsewhere, Robinson argues that women poets claimed legitimacy through the sonnet, by writing in 'an established literary tradition that had largely been defined by men' whereby the appropriation of the sonnet becomes an 'act of self-canonisation'.¹⁰ Moreover, appropriating the form necessitates engagement with different sonnet traditions, modes and predecessors, through the formal – and thematic – choices made when writing a sonnet, which can encode both affiliation and rejection. These various literary dialogues and negotiations are at the crux of this thesis, which considers Smith's position in literary history and the ways in which she positions herself.

Smith's 'obsessive' literary dialogues have been read in different ways, and her use of quotation, in particular, has attracted critical attention. In 1789 Anna Seward described Smith's sonnets as 'hackneyed scraps of dismality, with which her memory furnished her from our various poets'.¹¹ More recently, Adela Pinch writes that Smith's sonnets are 'like echo chambers, in which reverberate direct quotations, ideas and tropes from English poetry'.¹² She has argued that it does not make sense to understand Smith's quotations thematically, but rather as a way of 'writing in, the very feelings she expresses', leading to 'epistemological conflict over the origins of feelings', where it is difficult to know whether something expressed is personal or public, staged or genuine.¹³ Pinch also shows how Smith's quotations offer insight into her position as a woman poet, 'reviving and reinventing the moribund English sonnet'.¹⁴ She draws attention to the paradox of this position, reminding us that [...] woman's position in the sonnet has typically been that of the object, not the subject, of feelings'.¹⁵ Indeed, Smith's concern, through her use of quotation, does seem chiefly to be with literary tradition and her position in relation to it, often complicated by gender. The very first sonnet in *Elegiac Sonnets* appropriates the last line of Pope's 'Eloisa to Abelard' (1717), which 'testifies to her continuing in the main line of English poetic tradition', Curran suggests, and also encodes a complex set of gender negotiations, as

⁹ Daniel Robinson, 'Introduction', *A Century of Sonnets: The Romantic-Era Revival, 1750-1850*, ed. by Paula R. Feldham and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 6; Robinson, "'Still Glides the Stream": Form and Function in Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets', *European Romantic Review*, 13 (2002), 449-64 (p. 450).

¹⁰ Robinson, 'Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim', *European Romantic Review*, 6 (1995), 98-127 (pp. 99 and 100).

¹¹ Anna Seward, *Letters: Written Between the Years 1784-1807*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, etc., 1811), II, p. 162.

¹² Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 60.

¹³ Pinch, p. 65.

¹⁴ Pinch, p. 61

¹⁵ Pinch, p. 61.

Pinch discusses.¹⁶ As presented in her sonnets, Smith's own place within tradition is both playful and uneasy. She frequently draws on and simultaneously departs from her sources, and invokes a range of predominantly male authors, only to present her position in relation to them as inferior. In an essay on Smith's appropriations of Shakespeare, Joy Currie draws attention to the dual aspect of 'Smith's allusive practice – the hesitant and self-defensive, and the bold and self-promoting', whereby 'conventional disclaimers' of women poets as inferior or unwilling coincide with bold acts of associating her poetry with that of 'the greats of English poetry'.¹⁷ Susan Wolfson, writing on Smith's political poem *The Emigrants* (1793), focuses on Smith's 'series of critical engagements with the texts and voices of male literary tradition':¹⁸

In some views, such a practice can look dependent and derivative: a female poet's internalization and imitation of male canonical authority and prestige, by which she hopes to pass muster in its garb, to pay a daughterly tax to progenitors and influences, or display cultural capital in the absence of the credit of formal education. Yet Smith vexes her textual field to effects more disruptive and confrontational: a sustained interaction with tradition and history that issues a politics of literary form.¹⁹

Several of these aspects come into play in Smith's sonnets, which move between aspects of imitation, and frequent nods to the absences and lacks experienced by the woman poet; and more 'disruptive and confrontational' aspects. With a similar focus on the playful and disruptive, this thesis tracks how Smith's distinctive female voice and use of form – albeit (largely) not a political one as is Wolfson's focus – emerges out of her engagements with male tradition.

Critics have sought multiple ways in which to read women writers in relation to literary tradition, canon formation and influence. Smith's sonnets actually instruct the reader in this respect, for they frequently invoke a male literary tradition and model for it. Paula Bakscheider – drawing on Barbara Lewalksi – cautions against 'balkanized', gendered scholarship, and I follow Bakscheider by placing Smith within a wider literary context of male poets; indeed, as Bakscheider shows, across the century, women poets emulate male poets, yet also contest them in both content and form, and also develop independent strains

¹⁶ Curran, 'Intertextualities', p. 179; Pinch, pp. 62-63.

¹⁷ Joy Currie, "'Mature Poets Steal?': Charlotte Smith's Appropriations of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism*, ed. by Joseph M. Ortiz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 99-120 (p. 102).

¹⁸ Susan Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 14.

¹⁹ Wolfson, p. 14

within a form, revealing an agency which segregated canons obscure.²⁰ Jennie Batchelor's recent introduction to a special edition of *Women's Writing*, 'Beyond Influence, 1680-1830', takes Smith's preface to *The Young Philosopher* as a model for considerations of the position of women writers in relation to influence. Unlike her sonnets, Smith's preface to *The Young Philosopher* places her novel within a tradition of eighteenth-century women's writing and thus 'illustrates but one of the many and highly complex ways in which women writers of the long eighteenth century both understood the relationship between their works and those of others'.²¹ Batchelor writes:

Declaring the novel's originality, while establishing its intertexts, and asserting its author's agency, while acknowledging her debts, the preface to *The Young Philosopher* provides further evidence, were it needed, in support of the feminist case against the patrilineal Bloomian account of influence, famously articulated in *The Anxiety of Influence*.²²

Bloom's model of course excludes women poets, and as Olivia Murphy writes, his formation 'renders literary influence almost as arbitrarily unjust and misogynistic as the actual system of patrilineal inheritance which, having been consolidated in the eighteenth-century, formed the backbone of the British economy and law'.²³ Indeed, these systems also formed the crux of how literary traditions and genealogies were understood and experienced in the eighteenth century. Jane Spencer has shown how in the period 1660-1830 'kinship relations between writers played a central part in the process of building the national literary tradition [...] understood as a genealogy in which individual writers figured as fathers and sons', a patrilineage which had its roots in biblical genealogies and the creation myth, as well as in Aristotle's theory of reproduction, and also based on the more recent common-law systems of male primogeniture concerning land and property.²⁴ She shows that the literary canon which emerged was thus 'predominantly masculine, and symbolically male, but in which women had always a marginal, shifting, and sometimes unsettling place'.²⁵ Smith's sonnets frequently dramatise this position, which the ensuing chapters on *Elegiac Sonnets* investigate, following the literary lineages Smith's sonnets themselves present. As Murphy

²⁰ Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. xxii.

²¹ Jennie Batchelor, 'Influence, Intertextuality and Agency: Eighteenth-Century Women Writers and the Politics of Remembering', *Women's Writing*, 20 (2013), 1-12 (p. 2).

²² Batchelor, p. 3.

²³ Olivia Murphy, 'Rethinking Influence by Reading with Austen', *Women's Writing*, 20 (2013), 100-14 (p. 101).

²⁴ Jane Spencer, *Literary Relations: Kinship and the Canon, 1600-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 5, 10 and 21.

²⁵ Spencer, p. 17. Spencer also shows how women writers did have a place in the literary family: see chapter 2 on the mother, for example. Smith's sonnets feature in Spencer's book regarding her influence on Martha Hanson in which 'unhappiness [...] authorizes her to imitate Smith', in an enabling sisterly sort of relationship (p. 196).

urges, regarding the operations of influence post-Bloom, the ‘solution is to focus not on *who* is great enough to exert influence, or strong enough to grapple with the “anxiety” of their literary inheritance, but rather on *how* influence operates’; indeed, this thesis is interested in the way Smith, as a woman poet, experiences and presents her relationship with literary inheritance, necessarily widening Bloom’s focus on strong male poets operating within a limited and rigid set of different modes of influence.²⁶ In her sonnets, Smith’s treatment of influence, inheritance and tradition operates in multiple shifting and nuanced ways, both enabling and disabling, as she inherits from some male predecessors and displaces others.

Importantly, Smith’s dramatisation of influence and of her place in literary tradition changes as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops. Indeed, modern editions of Smith’s sonnets and their commentators rarely reflect or acknowledge the development of the volume. First published tentatively in 1784, containing just sixteen sonnets, it expanded through multiple editions until it filled two volumes and contained ninety-two sonnets (as well as other poems) in 1800, spanning considerable changes in the literary landscape.²⁷ By focusing on Smith’s place in relation to male literary tradition, I depart from recent studies of Smith, which have largely been concerned with Smith’s influence and with a specifically female lineage.²⁸ Wolfson places Smith in a male context in her study of the ‘dynamics of interaction’ in the literature of the period.²⁹ She describes Smith’s *The Emigrants* as ‘a virtual seminar on interactions’, in which Smith fashions her ‘authorial persona from a series of critical alliances and realignments with Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Thomson, Collins Burns’.³⁰ Whereas Wolfson’s focus is on *The Emigrants*, and Smith’s political voice, her reading of the ‘critical engagements with the texts and voice of male literary tradition’ that Smith herself invokes is an approach shared by this thesis.

²⁶ Murphy, p. 101.

²⁷ Curran and Labbe both base the text of Smith’s poems on the ninth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, volume one, and the second edition of volume two, both published in 1800 and the last editions over which Smith had editorial control. Labbe’s edition does include a short textual history of *Elegiac Sonnets*: ‘Elegiac Sonnets, Volumes I and II’, *Poems*, pp. 1-3. Carrol L. Fry is one of the few critics who observe some of the changes between editions as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops (*Charlotte Smith* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996)).

²⁸ Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women’s Literature of the Romantic Period* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008); Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Amy Christine Billone, *Little Songs: Women, Silence, and the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); Stephen C. Behrendt, *British Women Writers and the Romantic Writing Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

²⁹ Wolfson, p. 1.

³⁰ Wolfson, p. 9.

I follow the development of *Elegiac Sonnets* largely chronologically, charting Smith's changing approach to literary tradition and the sonnet form, with a focus on place and landscape, which is central to Smith's sonnets, and indeed the eighteenth-century sonnet more widely. Smith was tutored in art as a child by George Smith (1713/14–1776), one of the so-called 'English Claudes' and one of three brother-artists known as the 'Smiths of Chichester'. With his brother John, George Smith took inspiration from their native Sussex landscape, painting the areas surrounding Chichester – including the Arun valley – in the style of Claude.³¹ Smith's sister, Catherine Dorset, records the employment of George Smith:

Her father, desirous of cultivating her talent for drawing, engaged George Smith, a celebrated artist, and a native and inhabitant of that city [Chichester], to instruct her in the rudiments of his art, and she was taken two or three times in a week to his house to receive lessons.³²

George Smith also turned his hand to poetry and his *Pastorals* were published in 1770 by James Dodsley, which announced its author on the frontispiece as 'George Smith, Landscape Painter, at Chichester, in Sussex'. The landscape of Smith's sonnets also changes as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops, as Anna Barbauld observes of Smith, she

resided in various places, mostly on the coast of Sussex; for she was particularly fond of the neighbourhood of the sea. The frequent changes of scene which, either from necessity or inclination, she experienced, were no doubt favourable to that descriptive talent which forms a striking feature of her genius. Her frequent removals may be traced in her poems and other works.³³

Smith's sonnets are rooted in and 'written at' real locations which can be mapped according to her biography, yet they also have a literary significance pertinent to Smith's evolving relationship with literary tradition and approach to form, which these changing landscapes inscribe.

³¹ See fig. 1 for an example of one of his landscape paintings. He won the first premium of Society of the Arts for a landscape in 1760, and won again in 1761 and 1763.

³² Catherine. A. Dorset, 'Charlotte Smith', in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1852), iv, pp. 20-70 (p. 21).

³³ Anna Barbauld, 'Introduction to *The Old Manor House*', *The British Novelists [...]*, 50 vols (London: Rivington, 1810), xxxvi, pp. i-vii (p. iv).



1. George Smith, 'Classical Landscape' (c.1760-1770)

Through this focus, my approach bears some resemblance to, and draws upon, David Fairer's model of poetic relations pertaining to Thomas Warton, in which textual relations are mapped upon the landscape. Fairer offers a revised reading of the poetry of the 'revolutionary decade': rather than breaking with the literary past, he shows how writers of this period were in creative dialogue with each other, and with poets of previous decades, sharing an 'organic' intertextual relationship marked by kinship and shared poetic language. Poets engaged with 'various organic geographies (streams, paths, cottages) and organic histories (national and local, literary and personal)'.³⁴ In contrast to Smith critics such as Curran and Labbe, Fairer 'is not concerned to characterise or in any way validate a category of the 'Romantic''.³⁵ At the heart of this 'creative dialogue' is Warton, an important figure in the sonnet revival. Fairer reveals 'various lines of connection' from the poetry of Warton and his school – a group of poets formed around Warton at Trinity College, Oxford – in the 1770s and '80s to the poetry of the Coleridge circle and beyond in the decades that followed.³⁶ Moreover, Fairer shows how Warton became 'a channel of communication between young poets and their literary past'.³⁷ Warton was deeply interested in the poetry of the past, which Fairer shows to be intrinsically bound with place in his poems: 'In tracing

³⁴ David Fairer, *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2.

³⁵ Fairer, p. 3.

³⁶ Fairer, pp. 95-6. Indeed, Fairer's fourth chapter "'Sweet native stream!': Approaching Tintern Abbey' is a 'bio-history in its literary relations', approaching Wordsworth's poem through the poetry of Warton and his school (p. 97).

³⁷ Fairer, p. 106.

links with the past [...] Warton becomes an investigator of spaces' and in his poems 'hidden entries into the past regularly open, as ruined and empty spaces are peopled and filled with light and music'.³⁸ Such ruins and 'secret places' often contain springs, 'literally sources from which the poet can draw', dramatising the way in which Warton takes inspiration from the literary past.³⁹ These literary connections, fosterings and recoveries – central to the 'organic history' with which Fairer is concerned – come together in Warton's influential sonnet 'To the River Lodon' (1777), which is steeped in reconnecting with the past, and also inspired several young poets. Smith is included in Fairer's chapter on this, and while she is not counted among the poets of the school of Warton, the 'noticeable Wartonian accent' of her sonnets is observed.⁴⁰ Indeed, Fairer's concern is with a specific male poetic lineage. Situating Smith in relation to Warton and his school, the main output of which was sonnets published contemporaneously with her own, is a major concern of this thesis, which naturally replaces Warton with Smith at the centre of the poetic landscape. Although her sonnets may display a 'Wartonian accent', they also encode a different relationship with both place and their literary context.

While this thesis connects Smith with different traditions, her disruption of them remains a central concern. As observed, she is frequently associated with somehow breaking from the literary past, as embedded in Wordsworth's description of Smith in 1836 as the 'first *Modern* distinguished in that Composition [the sonnet]'.⁴¹ It is through balancing Smith's engagement with tradition alongside her innovation and influence that I seek to clarify her place in literary history and illuminate her real significance as a writer. At the crux of Smith's innovation and agency is, of course, her use of the sonnet form. As well as her role in reviving it, critics have drawn attention to Smith's formal innovation, and the frequency with which she departs from and experiments with sonnet forms, which often interact with content. Labbe has written much on this aspect of Smith's sonnets, and in the introduction to her edition of Smith's poetry argues that the

notice she pays to the details of composition and the ways in which she intertwines content and structure to open up a sonnet firmly establish Smith as the first Romantic poet to understand the opportunities available if one is willing to experiment with form rather than be bound by it. Such is her interest in and skill

³⁸ Fairer, p. 103.

³⁹ Fairer, pp. 104-105.

⁴⁰ Fairer, p. 101.

⁴¹ Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years. Part III: 1835-1839*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, rev. by Alan G. Hill, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 149-50.

with structural innovation that the reader begins to notice how, overall, the more 'perfect' and seamless a sonnet, the less Smith endorses it.⁴²

Again, Smith's use of the form is something which shifts and changes as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops, becoming more irregular and experimental, with an increased propensity to intertwine 'content and structure', which will be tracked and explored in the ensuing chapters. Smith's sonnets are also conceived as the hybrid form of the 'elegiac sonnet', which as well as inscribing their melancholy tone and content, also makes interesting formal qualifications. As Robinson has shown, the name broadcasts their 'illegitimate' nature, designating a new kind of sonnet by converging the formal traditions of sonnet and elegy.⁴³ Smith's title is also suggestive of her position in relation to literary tradition, which is frequently characterised by an elegiac sense of inferiority, loss or dispossession. Regarding Smith's formal experimentation and its impact on poetic meaning, Labbe is concerned with how Smith's sonnets perform complex strategies relating to identity and gender: 'the illegitimacy that many of her sonnets embody confronts issues of identity and selfhood, emphasising that for all their seamless grief the sonnets are about how identity is lost, multiplied and complicated'.⁴⁴ Her first monograph shows how Smith contests gender roles even while superficially endorsing them, offering an alternative mode of subjectivity through multiple personae. Labbe emphasises the importance and complexity of Smith's sonnet forms in several illuminating close readings, in which the layering of multiple sonnet forms reflects the layers of identities and complexities of gender in the sonnets. My approach to Smith's sonnets is indebted to Labbe's work on Smith's use of form, and the experimental aspect she has highlighted. It departs from Labbe's, however, by showing how Smith's formal innovations and intertwining of content and structure are bound up with her treatment of both landscape and literary tradition rather than gender, identity and subjectivity. I show how landscape or subject matter is often reflected or worked in to the structure of the sonnet form, and also how Smith's literary relationships are negotiated through form, and how these areas coalesce.

As noted, Labbe's interest in Smith is a 'Romantic' one, 'the very 'Romantic' idea of the nature and meaning of the Self' as Smith is re-instated alongside Wordsworth as

⁴² Labbe, 'Introduction', *Poetry*, in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran, 14 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), XIV, pp. vii-xx (p. x).

⁴³ See Daniel Robinson, 'Elegiac Sonnets: Charlotte Smith's Formal Paradox', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 39 (2003), 185-220.

⁴⁴ Labbe, 'The Seductions of Form in the Poetry of Ann Batten Cristall and Charlotte Smith', in *Romanticism and Form*, ed. by Alan Rawes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 154-170 (p. 167).

‘consummate Romantic builder of selfhood and subjectivity’.⁴⁵ Her most recent monograph shows how Smith and Wordsworth jointly co-found, and ‘write’ Romanticism, reading and drawing upon each other’s poetry, characterised by ‘cross-fertilizations of the two poets’, a ‘conversation’, and ‘shared poetic project’.⁴⁶ Again, Smith’s innovative use of form is a central aspect of the book, as is landscape and place, with a strong emphasis on the innovative aspects of Smith’s and Wordsworth’s approach to both. A chapter focuses on their geographically-specific poems, those with dates and places in the titles, which are shown radically to rework the tradition of the ‘loco-descriptive’ poem. Labbe argues that they ‘transform the description of place into a mapping of the act of poeticizing place’, in which place informs the way the poet is constructed.⁴⁷ Regarding Smith’s sonnets, the emphasis is on their unsettling aspect: ‘in being “written at,” these poems use the local and the known as springboards for a journey into locations wherein the permanence of writing is used to suggest transience, ephemerality, and loss’, including that of the poet’s own ‘selfhood’.⁴⁸ Again, in my readings, these aspects are framed in the context of Smith’s experience of literary inheritance as dramatised through place, concerned with a ‘mapping of the act of poeticizing place’ in a different way. On form, Labbe follows Robinson in thinking about Smith’s sonnets as ‘experiments’ and argues that through their poetic hybridity (and in their prefatorial material) both Smith and Wordsworth use their experimental collections to push boundaries of genre and style, engaging with the rules of poetry in order to bend, or reject them.⁴⁹ Achieving a novel self-reflexivity, which raises questions about the very nature of poetry, they thus ‘create the model Romantic poem’.⁵⁰ Again, my thesis shares Labbe’s sense of Smith’s importance to ‘English verse’, and the extent of her innovation and influence with regards to the sonnet form, yet grounds this in the history of the sonnet, looking more specifically at the negotiations she makes with predecessors and contemporaries, in her appropriation and re-visioning of the sonnet.

⁴⁵ Labbe, *Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 18 and 8.

⁴⁶ Labbe, *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 4, 14, and 18. Smith’s influence on Wordsworth has been a major concern of critics, although there has been an important shift in emphasis within this discourse from the wish by critics such as Bishop C. Hunt Jr., ‘to understand why a great poet [Wordsworth] becomes very interested in a very minor one’, to Curran’s redressing of this relationship, and latterly to Labbe’s more nuanced reading of the relationship (Hunt, ‘Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith: 1970’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 35.2 (2004), 80-91 (p. 83).

⁴⁷ Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 82.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 48. Labbe reads the experiments of Wordsworth and Smith largely in relation to two prose works which she suggests are likely to have informed their understanding of poetry: John Newbery, *The Art of Poetry* (1762), and Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Closely connected with this ‘Romantic’ concern, scholarship on Smith has largely been concerned with the nature of the ‘I’ of her sonnets, and the extent to which the speaker represents Smith herself. In his influential essay, ‘Romantic Poetry: The I altered’, Curran describes Smith as ‘virtually an archetype of the female condition of the late eighteenth century, and in her wide influence a promulgator of its values’, and critics of the 1980s and ’90s read Smith’s ‘I’ as largely autobiographical, representative of a specific female subjectivity.⁵¹ Labbe’s work interrogated and overturned this, revealing multiple personae in Smith’s sonnets, which radically disrupt traditional notions of gender, and subjectivity itself. This concern with subjectivity, gender, performance, and the melancholy, suffering ‘I’ of Smith’s sonnets has continued to inform Smith studies. Dolan brings the context of medicine and science to the discourse, focusing on the importance of vision in Smith’s sonnets, and how Smith uses its associations with ‘subjectivity, sensibility, and rational thought in order to negotiate the challenges of claiming melancholia as a woman’.⁵² Knowles follows Labbe in her argument that ‘by carefully revealing and concealing aspects of her “real-life” in her poetry, Smith performed in her poetry a sensibility that was widely read by her audience as being sincere’.⁵³ To Knowles, Smith’s persona is both performative yet still representative of a specific feminine subjectivity based on her biography, which she sees as influencing subsequent women writers.⁵⁴ Thus, Knowles holds two different strands of Smith scholarship in dialogue. As Christopher Stokes writes, following Labbe’s ‘corrective’ to Curran’s notion of the particular female ‘I’ of her sonnets, criticism on *Elegiac Sonnets* ‘now has two strong, if opposed, positions. On the one hand, one can read the poems as expressive of female subjectivity; on the other, one can see the femininity in the sequence as performative and theatrical’.⁵⁵ Stokes himself offers a reading that falls somewhere in between. He argues that ‘under the pressure of the feminine “being always already written”’, commodified and objectified, Smith meets a traumatic self-dispossession and thus, in her sonnets, ‘develops subjects that are not subjects. They are incomplete,

⁵¹ Curran, ‘Romantic Poetry: The I Altered’ in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 185-207, p. 200. See (amongst others) Stella Brooks, ‘The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith’, *Critical Survey*, 4 (1992), 9-21 and Deborah Kennedy, ‘Thorns and Roses: The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith’, *Women’s Writing*, 2 (1995), 43-53. Labbe does draw on Sarah Zimmerman, whose chapter on Smith in her *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* considers Smith’s self-presentation, which she shows is designed to attract an audience while, paradoxically, turning her back on them, complicating our sense of ‘lyric’ poetry (Sarah M. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 39-72). Labbe goes much further in her investigation of Smith’s personae and self-presentation, however.

⁵² Dolan, p. 45. Smith is also the subject of a chapter in the second part of Dolan’s book, which focuses on how her poetry and novels present botany – a certain way of ‘seeing’ – as therapy for melancholia.

⁵³ Knowles, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Knowles, p. 40

⁵⁵ Christopher Stokes, ‘Lorn Subjects: Haunting, Fracture and Ascesis in Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*’, *Women’s Writing*, 16 (2009), 143-69 (p. 144).

alienated, fragmented, de- or unconstituted'.⁵⁶ Smith does not identify a female "I", says Stokes, but many sonnets present a distinctly female "non-I", 'what we might identify, by using one of Smith's favourite words, as *lorn* (lost, forlorn) subjectivities'.⁵⁷ I take a similar position to Knowles and Stokes, reading the speaker of Smith's sonnets as autobiographical and representative of Smith herself, yet take into account the way she frequently plays with the speaking 'I' of her sonnets, not least in the sonnets 'supposed' to be written by Werter, the translations from Petrarch, and sonnets transposed from novels in which they are frequently composed by male characters. Rather than the pre-dominant concern with gender shared by Labbe, Dolan, Knowles and Stokes, I consider the speaking 'I' and experiments with it in a literary context, and in relation to Smith's position as a woman poet negotiating male literary and sonnet tradition. This is partially the concern of Billone, who explores the connection between 'femininity, silence and the sonnet', arguing that female poets appropriated the sonnet 'at a time when women could only with difficulty enter the lyric tradition were drawn to its structural affinity for reticence' arguing that the sonnet allowed women poets 'to investigate and promote gendered interpretations of silence'.⁵⁸ Her chapter on Smith examines how she fuses silence and speech in *Elegiac Sonnets*; how 'unspeakability' – the 'blank despair' of sonnet XLIII – 'co-exists with a fragmented but sustained poetic language'.⁵⁹ Indeed, the concerns of these recent critical studies with the themes of suffering, melancholy, dispossession, loss and silence in Smith's sonnets can be shown to arise from her experience as a woman poet, entering and negotiating the 'lyric tradition'.

A full history of the fate of the sonnet in the eighteenth century has not been made since R. D. Havens's *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (1922), in which a chapter covers the sonnet and a bibliography lists poems published in the form between 1700 and 1800. Albeit old-fashioned, Haven's history of the sonnet is comprehensive and remains useful, and includes women writers long before their recovery by feminist critics in the 1980s and '90s. He unapologetically favours certain poets over others, however. Warton, Thomas Russell and John Bampfylde are clearly preferred to Smith, whose 'elegies' are 'quite impossible', and Havens puts her use of English and irregular sonnet forms down to her 'unwillingness to work hard over her productions'.⁶⁰ He cannot deny her influence, however:

⁵⁶ Stokes, p. 144.

⁵⁷ Stokes, p. 145.

⁵⁸ Billone, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Billone, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Raymond Dexter Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), pp. 503-504.

In encouraging the use of these easier arrangements of rimes, in introducing quatorzains into her popular novels [...] and in fastening the elegiac mood upon the genre so firmly that it remained throughout the century and was regarded by many as indispensable, – in these things she is a force to be reckoned with.⁶¹

As well as showing the influence of Milton on the revival of the sonnet, Haven's study also importantly identifies different types of sonnet that emerged in its eighteenth-century development, chiefly the Miltonic and 'non-Miltonic' form (still nonetheless influenced by Milton), which is vital to elucidating Smith's position. A more recent study which has given critical attention to the eighteenth-century sonnet also identifies a split in its tradition. Roger Meyenberg assesses the subject through Capel Lofft's sonnet anthology *Laura* (1813-1814), arguing that the 'best way to assess and evaluate the history of a genre in a given period is to examine the anthologies it produced which, by definition, were selected to satisfy the demand and taste of the reading public'.⁶² Following Lofft, Meyenberg observes that both 'masculine' and 'feminine Romanticism' discovered the sonnet, 'each appropriating the genre in its own way for distinctly different poetic voices';

To understand either, it is necessary first to understand the nature of the sonnet revival that came from two different avenues. One derived guidance and inspiration from the poetic tradition of Milton, whilst the other engendered the sonnet of sensibility, a variant mode of the genre first cultivated by the women poets of the 1780s and 90s.⁶³

The following chapters track the different traditions in the sonnet form which emerge in the eighteenth century as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops, following Havens and Meyenberg in showing how the appropriation of form links sonneteers with – or distinguishes them from – various predecessors. Rather than Meyenberg's retrospective viewpoint, however, it focuses on the negotiations undertaken by Smith – and other sonneteers – in their sonnets as they were published, affording a different perspective, from which a more complex picture emerges, especially regarding the gender terms Meyenberg sets out.

Contrary to the scant attention paid to eighteenth-century tradition after Havens, the nineteenth-century sonnet has been the subject of monographs by Jennifer Ann Wagner, Joseph Phelan, Amy Billone and Marianne Van Remoortel, which begin in the mid-1780s – at the earliest – and quickly move forwards.⁶⁴ Thus, while commentators are able to observe

⁶¹ Havens, p. 504.

⁶² Roger Meyenberg, *Capel Lofft and the English Sonnet Tradition 1770-1815* (Tübingen: Francke, 2005), p. 7.

⁶³ Meyenberg, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Jennifer Ann Wagner, *A Moment's Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century English Sonnet* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996); Joseph Phelan, *The Nineteenth-*

that the ‘Romantic sonnet revival has been exhaustively documented and perceptively analysed’, it is not possible to say the same for the eighteenth century sonnet.⁶⁵ And, as noted, while the beginning of this revival has been put back to Smith, it has rarely looked beyond her, or connected her up with earlier trends and attitudes – in the sonnet and beyond. Indeed, Smith has occupied an unsettled position canonically. A recent chapter by R. S. White on the sonnet ‘from Milton to the Romantics’ includes a consideration of Seward (who actually began publishing sonnets after Smith), yet notes that two other women sonneteers Smith and Mary Robinson ‘extended the range of the sonnet in ways that properly take them into the next chapter [‘The Romantic Sonnet’], though a few words on each are relevant here to link them to the literary line outlined in this chapter’.⁶⁶ A ‘few words’ indeed has been what often links Smith to eighteenth-century predecessors. Backscheider reads Smith ‘as an eighteenth-century rather than a nineteenth-century, or ‘pre-Romantic,’ poet’, although the huge scope of her books prevents a full analysis of the connections between Smith’s sonnets and wider trends and traditions.⁶⁷ As observed, Fairer has connected Smith with Warton’s sonnet mode and lineage, yet it is not a relationship which he explores. In a recent article, Michael Hansen has argued for realigning ‘Romantic’ Smith, for ‘she is also very much still in the company of the eighteenth-century graveyard school’, a mode which is deeply connected with the sonnet, although again Smith is not Hansen’s focus.⁶⁸ As noted, this thesis offers an overview of, and reconnects Smith with, earlier eighteenth-century sonnet tradition. It also maps wider sonnet trends. Duff does go on to observe that while the Romantic sonnet’s revival has been well-documented, ‘what is not fully appreciated, however, is the scale of the critical controversy it provoked, or the level of ambivalence towards the same genre shown by most of its practitioners’.⁶⁹ In tracking the development of Smith’s sonnets from 1784 to 1800 the following chapters also address the ‘critical controversy’, dialogues and debates surrounding the form, which Smith’s sonnets were often at the centre of, clearly heading into the ‘Romantic’ period,

Century Sonnet (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Amy Billone, *Little Songs*; Marianne Van Remoortel, *Lives of the Sonnet, 1787-1895: Genre, Gender and Criticism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). While Smith is named in all these studies, her sonnets are only really discussed by Billone.

⁶⁵ David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, p. 15. The ‘Romantic’ sonnet revival has indeed been well-served by several illuminating articles and chapters, most notably Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, chapter 3; Robinson, ‘Reviving the Sonnet’; Brent Raycroft, ‘From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom: Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet’, *European Romantic Review*, 9 (1998), 363-92; Robinson, ‘Introduction’, *A Century of Sonnets*; Phelan, *The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*, introduction and chapter I; Mark Raymond, ‘The Romantic Sonnet Revival: Opening the Sonnet’s Crypt’, *Literature Compass*, 4/3 (2007), 721-36.

⁶⁶ R. S. White, ‘Survival and change: the sonnet from Milton to the Romantics’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*, ed. by A. D. Cousins and Peter Howarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 166-184 (p. 179).

⁶⁷ Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. xxv.

⁶⁸ Michael Hansen, ‘Elegy, Ode, and the Eighteenth-Century Sonnet Revival: The Case of Charles Emily’, *Literary Imagination*, 12.3 (2010), 307-18 (p. 312).

⁶⁹ Duff, p. 15.

through which they also supplement existing criticism on the sonnet with the insights of the earlier contexts.

Thesis Structure

Chapter one offers a new history of the sonnet in the eighteenth century prior to the publication of the first edition of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1784. It considers why the form had fallen into disuse in the decades following Milton's death, and traces its revival from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, assessing attitudes towards the sonnet and reasons for its renewed popularity. Smith's appropriation of the sonnet is then situated within this history and context, and the textual history of *Elegiac Sonnets* is outlined.

After establishing this groundwork, the interactions between form, literary tradition and place in Smith's sonnets become the central focus. In the subsequent chapters, the thesis is largely defined by two different spaces or settings in Smith's sonnets – the river and sea – and the shift between them in *Elegiac Sonnets* as the volume develops. Chapter two, 'Tradition', begins by locating the beginnings of *Elegiac Sonnets* in the landscape of the nightingale – the woodland or grove – which is steeped in matters of inspiration and voice. The nightingale encodes not only a model of authorship for Smith but important literary lineages. Closely connected with, and sometimes part of, this landscape is a nameless stream which carries with it a notable Italian influence. Between the first (1784) and third (1786) editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, this stream becomes the more weighty River Arun, the landscape and significance of which becomes the main focus of this chapter. Through her treatment of the River Arun, Smith undertakes a range of specific literary negotiations, encompassing both place-specific and sonnet traditions. The chapter explores how the river functions as a metaphor for literary 'influence', and dramatises Smith's engagement with a range of poetic predecessors and contemporaries; and also shows how through the Arun the wider literary landscape can be mapped.

After the third edition, a shift is evident as the seascape emerges as the dominant space of Smith's sonnets, replacing the river in importance, and inscribing a rather different poetic outlook. The third chapter, 'Innovation', traces this shift, and considers the literary significance and context of Smith's sea setting, which emerges from the fifth edition (1789) onwards. At the crux of this section is Smith's striking sea sonnet XLIV, 'Written in the churchyard at Middleton in Sussex' (1789), which in many ways is also at the crux of this thesis, for it encodes much about Smith's literary position, negotiations with, and breaks from the past and her contemporaries. Although a coastal sonnet, this setting is combined with that of the churchyard, an important literary site, the significance of which is also

considered. The chapter traces the shift from shore to prospect view and explores the important integration of place and form the seascape affords.

The thesis then broadens in scope in the fourth chapter, 'Wider Prospect', to situate Smith within the wider context of the sonnet revival, its key publications, trends, and debates. The locations of river and sea – and what they represent – remain central, yet other prominent settings of Smith's sonnets and their literary significance are also considered. This initial section is largely based around Smith's position in a male context, in particular her relation to the school of Warton, yet her important relationship with Seward is also considered.

The final, fifth chapter, 'Botany to Beachy Head', returns to focus on Smith, with the insights of the previous chapter. Rather than a specific landscape, it is concerned with a certain way of looking at and engaging with it: the interest in botany and natural history which informs the final two editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797 and 1800). The landscapes of river and sea remain prominent, yet are re-situated. Indeed, through this closer focus, Smith's engagement with the sonnet form and relationship with literary tradition is reconceived and recast as she heads towards the end of her literary career, which the chapter considers. It ends with a coda, viewing her sonnets through the lens of Smith's posthumous collection *Beachy Head* (1807) as a final way of situating of her.

Chapter 1

The Eighteenth-Century Sonnet

The title of R. D. Havens's monograph, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry*, which contains a history of the eighteenth-century sonnet, is telling, for indeed the beginnings of the form's revival was largely bound up with the popularity of Milton, and more widely in an interest in older poetry.¹ Fairer has written much about this return to or recovery of the past:

From the 1740s ambitious young poets were becoming, through their reading of Spenser and Milton, increasingly conscious of the body of English poetry that antedated the Restoration of 1660, when a French neo-classicism had become pre-eminent. They felt they wanted to widen poetry's scope and recapture the more daring imagery of the past [...] In locating the bedrock of their native tradition, poets like the Wartons, Gray, Collins and Akenside felt they were simultaneously recovering a more pristine poetry that had become overlaid by the prescriptions of the 'petits maîtres' of French criticism [...] The mid-century return to the literary tradition of Spenser and Milton was not a move away from the classical, but towards a 'classic' literary past of great originals.²

This move towards the literary past is realised through form as the heroic couplet is exchanged for blank verse, Spenserian stanzas, odes and sonnets. The avoidance of the sonnet by the major poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Dryden and Pope, can be seen to be central to both the form's widespread disuse, and to its newfound popularity. Mark Raymond argues that use of the sonnet enabled its appropriators 'to work against neo-classical tradition' and 'challenge the dominant modes of decorum and wit. The sonnet functions as a signature displacement from the poetic models of the just-concluded ages of Pope and Johnson'.³ As will be seen, the poetry of the Warton brothers, in particular, involves a displacement of Pope.

Although they may not write in the form, Dryden and Pope both make references to the sonnet. In his 'Dedication to the Aeneid' (1697), Dryden makes a comparison between the 'Purity' of French and 'Masculine Vigour' of English, and observes that the 'genius' of French poets, 'light and trifling in comparison of the English; [is] more proper for Sonnets, Madrigals, and Elegies, than Heroick Poetry', clearly invoking a set of gender-based

¹ As Havens notes, the 'number of eighteenth-century sonneteers who felt his influence was so considerable that a student of the subject remarked in 1803, "Milton has been studied and imitated by almost every one who has resorted to this kind of composition"' (p. 527). For Milton's influence and popularity in the eighteenth-century see Dustin Griffin, *Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), although the sonnet is not much discussed.

² Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1789* (Harlow: Longman, 2003), p. 150. See Fairer's chapter 8 more widely on this theme and his chapter 'Creating a National Poetry: The Tradition of Spenser and Milton', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 177-201.

³ Raymond, 'The Romantic Sonnet Revival', p. 731.

binaries.⁴ Dryden also ‘revised’ the translation of Boileau’s *Art poétique* (1674) made by William Soames as *The Art of Poetry* (1683) which includes a section on the sonnet, and presents the form in rather different terms. The sonnet is addressed in a section on the ode in which Boileau presents Apollo as devising the sonnet form as a challenge to the ‘Fops’ and ‘Scriblers’ (as translated by Soames and Dryden) and their overly lengthy compositions:

For the short Sonnet order’d this strict bound:
Set Rules for the just Measure, and the Time,
The easy running, and alternate Rhyme;
But, above all, those Licenses deny’d
Which in these Writings the lame Sense Supply’d;
Forbad a useless Line should find a place,
Or a repeated Word appear with grace.
A faultless Sonnet, finish’d thus, would be
Worth tedious Volumes of loose Poetry.
A hundred Scribling Authors, without ground
Believe they have this only Phoenix found:
When yet th’ exactest scarce have two or three
Amongst whole Tomes, From Faults and Censure free.
The rest, but little read, regarded less,
Are shovel’d to the Pastry from the Press.
Closing the Sense within the measur’d time,
'Tis hard to fit the Reason to the Rhyme.⁵

The sonnet is thus presented as an elite form, strictly rule-bound, and one that is rarely executed well. It is also given classical weight, through its supposed invention by Apollo, and appearance alongside the ode and epigram. The sonnet here has rather different associations from the ‘light and trifling’ of Dryden’s observation, and in *The Art of Poetry* there are also the ‘Tomes’ of bad sonnets ‘shovel’d to the Pastry from the Press’, as the sonnet stratifies poets. Boileau’s key French neo-classical text is often quoted from in eighteenth-century sonnet discourse in connection with the Italian or ‘legitimate’ sonnet – although the actual ‘rules’ of the sonnet are not given by Boileau – and to invoke the challenging, difficult and superior nature of the form.

Pope alludes to the low status of the form in his reference to the ‘starv’d hackney sonneteer’ in *Essay on Criticism*, and his ‘hoax’, found sonnet, supposed to be written by Milton, constitutes a curious counterpart to the numerous later sonnets more seriously influenced by Milton.⁶ Pope’s reference to the sonnet is perhaps closer to the second definition in

⁴ Dryden, *The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics, and Æneis [...]*, 3 vols (London: J. Tonson, 1721), II, p. 415.

⁵ Nicholas Boileau, *The Art of Poetry, Written in French by the Sieur de Boileau. In four canto's. Made English, by Sir William Soames. Since revis'd by John Dryden* (London: H. Hills, 1710), p. 14.

⁶ Alexander Pope, ‘An Essay on Criticism’, *The Major Works*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 17-39 (l. 419). ‘Sonnet written upon occasion of the Plague, and found on a Glass-Window at Chalfont. (In Imitation of Milton.)’ was published in volume one of Thomas

Johnson's *Dictionary* – a 'small poem' – however.⁷ Raymond also draws attention to Pope's reference to the sonnet in *Peri Bathous* (1728), on a section on the dangers of the suppression of poetry to the state: 'We find by Experience, that the same Humours which vent themselves in Summer in Ballads and Sonnets, are condens'd by the Winter's Cold into Pamphlets and Speeches for and against the Ministry'.⁸ As Raymond points out, the sonnet (with the ballad) seems to epitomise poetry in its lowest form, connected with the body, rather than the 'intellectual activity of "wit"', yet as he shows, 'the very terms with which Pope would condemn the sonnet, its natural expression of passion, would within Romanticism represent a major objective of the "new" activity of poetic language'.⁹ He argues that it is this restructuring of poetic ideals which allows for the sonnet to become popular again.¹⁰ Indeed, the new emphasis on 'natural expression' has also been perceived to be central to the sonnet's ascendancy, which can be seen in the references of Smith, and other poets, to their sonnets as 'effusions'. As Robinson notes, the revival of the form is tied up with the 'cult of Sensibility, with its heavy emphasis on feeling and mood, and with the need to find a poetic form that was both demanding and accessible to convey thoughts and feelings in a more natural way'.¹¹ Thus, the turn to the literary forms of the past, and the emergence of a more lyrical poetic mode both involve a departure from Pope and his 'age'. That Smith's first sonnet ends with a quotation from Pope's 'Eloisa to Abelard', and the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* includes a poem – 'The Origins of Flattery' – in heroic couplets indicates that these processes are not so clear-cut, however, and that Smith may not follow wider modes and trends in her poetic and formal negotiations.

In addition to Boileau, another critical voice resounds strongly throughout eighteenth-century sonnet discourse. In his *Dictionary* (1755), Samuel Johnson defines the sonnet as 'not very suitable to the English language, and [it] has not been used by any man of eminence since Milton', drawing attention to the sonnet's disuse, and seemingly seeking to perpetuate it.¹² Most sonnet writers of the eighteenth century defend or in other ways situate their use of the sonnet in relation to Johnson's remarks. He commented further on the form in *Lives of the Poets* (1779-1782), writing on Milton's sonnets:

Birch's *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton* (1738), and also in *The Poetical Calendar* for August 1763. The 'sonnet' is actually comprised of two abab quatrains.

⁷ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language [...]*, 2 vols (London: J. and P. Knapton, etc., 1755), s.v. 'SO'NNET'.

⁸ Pope, 'Peri Bathous, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry', *The Major Works*, pp. 195-238 (p. 199).

⁹ Raymond, p. 730.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Robinson, 'Introduction', p. 10.

¹² Johnson, s.v. 'SO'NNET'.

of the best it can only be said that they are not bad, and perhaps only the eighth and the twenty-first are truly entitled to this slender commendation. The fabrick of a sonnet, however adapted to the Italian language, has never succeeded in ours, which, having greater variety of termination, requires the rhymes to be often changed.¹³

Johnson's view is not representative of wider opinion at this time; as noted, many sonneteers appropriated the sonnet in Milton's name.

Indeed, it is largely through the influence of Spenser and Milton that early eighteenth-century sonneteers turned to the form. There was also a separate – although also concomitant – interest in Italian sonnets, particularly those of Petrarch. Conversely, Shakespeare's sonnets were little known and widely disliked until later in the century; his popularity and place in the 'native canon' stemmed only from his plays. His sonnets were omitted from all the complete works edited by Rowe, Pope, Hanmer, Theobald, Warburton, Capel and Johnson. The sonnets had been made available in 1710 by Charles Gildon in his unauthorised supplement to Rowe and Tonson's *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear [sic]* (1709), later appended to Pope's editions of 1725 and 1728, yet a more significant publication was Edmond Malone's two-volume 'Supplement' to George Steevens's revised edition of *The Plays of William Shakspeare [sic]* (1778), which included all of Shakespeare's poems omitted by Johnson and Steevens in their editions. At the invitation of Malone, however, Steevens added notes, which appear alongside those of Malone and a vehement footnote argument on the sonnet form ensued. Steevens condemns not only Shakespeare's sonnets, but the form in general: 'perhaps, indeed, quaintness, obscurity, and tautology are to be regarded as the constituent parts of this exotick species of composition [...] I profess I am one of those who should have wished it to have expired in the country where it was born'.¹⁴ Malone tentatively defends the sonnets, and although he does 'not feel any great propensity to stand forth as the champion of these compositions', he does acknowledge that the 'many beautiful lines scattered through these poems will, it is supposed, strike every reader who is not determined to allow no praise to any species of poetry except blank verse or heroick couplets', highlighting a division or incompatibility between the predominant eighteenth-century forms and the sonnet.¹⁵ Steevens completed his condemnation of Shakespeare's sonnets in his fourth edition of *The Plays of William Shakespear* (1793), published largely in retaliation to Malone's 1790 edition, writing in the preface: 'we have not reprinted the *Sonnets*, &c. of Shakespeare, because the strongest act of

¹³ Samuel Johnson, 'Milton', *The Oxford Authors: Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) pp. 698-716 (p. 702).

¹⁴ George Steevens, *Supplement to the Edition of Shakspeare's Plays [...]*, ed. by Edmond Malone, 2 vols (London: C. Bathurst, etc., 1780), I, p. 682).

¹⁵ Edmond Malone, *Supplement*, I, p. 685.

Parliament that could be framed would fail to compel readers into their service'.¹⁶ The sonnets are also clearly problematic to their early editors in addressing another man.

Some of the first comments made in the eighteenth century on the sonnet are found in John Hughes's 'Remarks on the Writings of Spenser' in his six-volume *Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser* (1715), which can be seen as part of the new-found interest in older poetry, and provides several insights into the contemporary status of the form. The sonnet is, Hughes writes,

a Species of Poetry so entirely disus'd, that it seems to be scarce known among us at this time. Here again we find our Author copying the *Italians*. The *Sonnet* consists generally of one Thought, and that always turn'd in a single Stanza, of fourteen Lines, of the Length of our Heroicks, the Rhime being interchang'd alternately [...] The famous *Petrarch* is the Original of this kind of little Odes, and has fill'd a whole Book with them in honour of his *Laura* [...] The uncommon Ardor of his Passion, as well as the Fineness of his Wit and Language, establish'd him the Master of Love Poetry among the Moderns. Accordingly we find his Manner of Writing copy'd soon after by the Wits of *Spain, France, and England*; and the *Sonnet* grown so much into fashion, that *Sidney* himself; who had written a great Number on his beloved *Stella*, has pleasantly rally'd his Cotemporaries [*sic*] in the following one; which for the Sprightliness of it, and the beautiful Turn in the Close, the Reader may not be displeas'd to find here inserted.

[Sonnet XV, *Astrophel and Stella* follows]

I have the rather set down the foregoing Lines, because the Thought they are turn'd upon is likewise the Rule for this kind of Writings, which are only recommended by their natural Tenderness, Simplicity and Correctness. Most of *Spenser's Sonnets* have this Beauty. *Milton* has writ some, both in *Italian* and *English*, and is, I think, the last who has given us any Example of them in our own Language.¹⁷

Thus, the 'disus'd' and 'scarce known' form of the sonnet is presented in the formal terms of the current age, the lines are 'the length of *our* Heroicks' (my emphasis). Hughes interestingly conceives the form in terms of copying and imitation: Spenser is found 'copying the Italians' through his use of the sonnet, and Petrarch's 'Manner of Writing [is] copy'd soon after' his invention of the sonnet. There is also an emphasis on tracing the sonnet's tradition, or lineage; from Petrarch, to 'Moderns', the 'Wits of Spain, France, England', Sidney, Spenser and Milton, the 'last' in line: a concern shared by later commentators. The qualities for which the form is admired, 'natural Tenderness, Simplicity and Correctness', foreshadow those for which eighteenth-century sonnets too are praised, as poets would appear to recover these qualities from earlier writers.

¹⁶ Steevens, *The Plays of William Shakspeare*, 4th edn, 15 vols (London: T. Longman, etc., 1793), I, p. viii. Although Shakespeare's poetry may not have exerted much influence on eighteenth-century poetry, his plays did, as Fairer has shown: 'Shakespeare in Poetry', in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 99-117.

¹⁷ John Hughes, *The Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser*, I, pp. cviii-cx. Original emphasis.

Thomas Edwards (1699-1757), the first poet of importance in the sonnet's revival, turned to the form after reading Spenser, perhaps in Hughes's edition, as he writes in a letter to Samuel Richardson:

The reading of Spenser's Sonnets was the first occasion of my writing that species of little poems, and my first six were written in the same sort of stanza as all his and Shakespeare's are. But after that Mr. Wray brought me acquainted with the Italian authors, who were the originals of that sort of poetry, and whose measures have more variety and harmony in them, — ever since, I wrote in that stanza; drawing from the same fountains as Milton drew from; — so that I was complimented with having well imitated Milton when I was not acquainted with his Sonnets. I hope I shall never be ashamed of imitating such great originals as Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, whom to imitate with any degree of success is no small praise. But why is my writing of sonnets, imitation any more than theirs? At least, it is not imitating them, but the same authors whom they imitated.¹⁸

Again, writing in the sonnet form amounts to an 'imitation', perhaps even for the 'great originals' themselves. Thirteen sonnets by Edwards were included in the second volume of the second edition of Robert Dodsley's popular anthology *A Collection of Poems in Three Volumes. By Several Hands* in 1748, the first real year of significance in the sonnet revival.¹⁹ In 1755 these sonnets were included in Dodsley's *Collection* again, and in 1765, twenty-seven other sonnets by Edwards, plus the thirteen sonnets already in print, were published in the posthumous, sixth edition of his *The Canons of Criticism [...]*, an attack on William Warburton's editing of Shakespeare, to which three of Edwards's sonnets are directed.²⁰ A final four sonnets by Edwards were included in John Nichols's *A Select Collection of Poems* (1780). In sonnet XXXVIII, Edwards refers to Spenser as 'the sweetest Bard that ever sung', and his sonnets frequently invoke and celebrate the native tradition of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, as in sonnet XVII: 'do not Thou native language scorn; | In which great

¹⁸ Edwards, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson [...]*, ed. by A. L. Barbauld, 6 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1804), III, pp. 91-2.

¹⁹ Another sonnet precedes those of Edwards in the *Collection*: 'A Sonnet. Imitated from the Spanish of Lopez de Vega', by Richard Roderick (bap. 1710, d. 1756), a friend of Edwards. The Spanish poet Lope de Vega (1562-1635) was known for his witty, satiric, epigrammatic sonnets, and the sonnet translated by Roderick is a sonnet on the sonnet form itself, counting down each of its fourteen lines. Prior to Edwards, sonnets were already being written yet remained in manuscript until later. Philip Yorke wrote a (Miltonic) sonnet to his brother in 1741, first published in 1806; Gray's sonnet was composed in 1742 yet not published until 1775; Charles Yorke wrote two sonnets to his brother 'in imitation of Milton' in 1743, published in 1913; and eight sonnets were written by Benjamin Stillingfleet published in 1811, also indebted to Milton, one of which is dated at 1746 (see Havens, pp. 489-492).

²⁰ The untitled sonnet prefacing *Canons* (addressed to the 'Tongue-doughty Pedant'), another untitled sonnet in the appendix, sonnet XXVI 'On the Edition of Mr. Pope's Works with a Commentary and Notes', and 'Sonnet XXXII. To the Editor of Mr. Pope's Works'. Edwards was best known for *The Canons of Criticism*. It had first appeared in 1748 as *A Supplement to Mr. Warburton's Edition of Shakespear. Being The Canons of Criticism*, renamed in the third edition of 1750, borrowing Warburton's own title.

Shakespear, Spenser, Milton sang, and in a letter to Richardson, Edwards makes clear that he is recovering the language and form of an earlier, less polished poetic age.²¹ He defends the diction he borrows from ‘classical authors’, and continues to ‘wish it were more practised [...] it would enrich our language with a better ore than we can have from the French mint, which is so much in fashion’.²² Like Gray, Collins, Akenside and the Wartons, Edwards seeks to reconnect to a native English tradition antedating the French. John Duncombe gently chides Edwards in a sonnet of 1764 on his literary regression:

Why then dost thou, great Spenser’s genuine son,
Too fondly emulous, that vestment wear,
Which in Eliza’s court adorn’d thy sire?

in an age ‘From sonnets durance freed’.²³ When Edwards’s sonnets are included posthumously in *The Canons of Criticism*, after being ‘so well received by the best Judges’ in Dodsley’s *Miscellany*, it is observed that

The twenty-seven Sonnets, which now appear for the first time, are in the same taste with those in Dodsley’s volume, correct, simple, not aiming at points or turns, in the phrase and structure rather ancient, for the most part of a grave, or even of a melancholy cast; formed in short upon the model of the Italians of the good age, and of the Imitators among us, Spenser and Milton.²⁴

The sonnets are noted for their remote, antiquarian qualities, their ‘ancient’ phrase and form; again, ‘imitation’ and the lineage of the sonnet from the ‘Italians of the good age’, to Spenser and Milton – the predecessors Edwards himself names – is an interest. In fact, only four of Edwards’s own published sonnets take the Spenserian form (the first three published by Dodsley and a later sonnet) and none the Shakespearean: Edwards presumably refers to the three quatrains and a couplet of the English ‘sort of stanza’ common to both Spenser and Shakespeare. All the remaining forty-eight sonnets take the Italian form – the fountain Milton ‘drew from’. However, Havens and Dennis Donovan have pointed out that the displacement of Milton may be misleading as ‘clearly the strongest influences reflected in

²¹ Thomas Edwards, ‘Sonnet XVII. To the same [Isaac Hawkins Browne]’, *The Canons of Criticism; and Glossary, Being a Supplement to Mr. Warburton’s Edition of Shakespear [sic]*, 6th edn (London: C. Bathurst, 1758), p. 323 (ll. 9-10).

²² Edwards, *Correspondence*, III, p. 92.

²³ John Duncombe, ‘To Thomas Edwards, Esq.’, *The Poetical Magazine* (1764), p. 259 (ll. 9-13). This appears to be the only sonnet Duncombe wrote. He was part of Richardson’s circle, and married Susanna Highmore. His poem *The Femiinad* (1754) praises women writers, include Hester Chapone and her sonnet exchange with Edwards (see below). The preservation of the literary past in a sense informs Edwards’s *Canons*, which champions the sensible editing of Shakespeare. Edwards also planned an edition of Spenser although it never materialised (see letter to Richardson, *Correspondence*, III, pp. 14-16). Three of Edwards’s sonnets are on editing.

²⁴ Anonymous, ‘Advertisement’, *Canons*, sig. *A2 and *A2v.

Edwards' sonnets are those of Milton, and yet Edwards himself seems to deny them'.²⁵

Edwards perhaps refers to his initial use of the sonnet; the letter dates from 1754, before the bulk of his sonnets were published. His sonnets do follow Milton in a major respect thematically, for out of Edwards's fifty-two published sonnets, all but ten are written 'to' someone. Those addressed range from public figures such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chancellor, to Edwards's close family and friends.

As the 'advertisement' to *The Canons of Criticism* highlights, many of Edwards's sonnets are of a 'grave, or even of a melancholy cast'. The most frequently anthologised, and also the most poignant and personal of his sonnets is that 'On a Family-Picture', in which Edwards contemplates the loss of all his immediate family members: 'Amidst our House's ruins I remain | Single, unpropp'd, and nodding to my fall'.²⁶ Several others are 'elegiac', including IX 'To the Memory of Mrs. M. Paice', XXXIII 'To the Memory of John Hampden, Esq', XXV 'To the most Honorable the Lady Marchioness Grey', and XXXVII 'On the Death of Miss J. M.'. Another significant aspect of Edwards's literary life is his support for and encouragement of women sonneteers. Edwards became acquainted with Hester Mulso (1727-1801), later Chapone, and Susanna Highmore (1725-1812), later Duncombe, upon entering Samuel Richardson's circle in 1748. He exchanged letters and poems with both, encouraging them to write and publish their work. His exchange with Mulso began in 1749 when she composed the (non-sonnet) poem 'Occasioned by reading Sonnets written in the Stile and Manner of Spenser, by T. Edwards, Esq; 1749', published in her *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1775). Edwards's reply was published in *The Canons of Criticism*: sonnet XXIV 'To Miss H.M.', which was also reprinted with Mulso's poem in her *Miscellanies* where two sonnets of her own are also printed, one original 'To a Robin-Redbreast' and a translation of an Italian sonnet from the *Rime degli Arcadi* anthology of the Arcadia Academy (1716). Both of her sonnets take the irregular form *abbacddceffegg*, a blend of Italian and English forms that is later favoured by Smith and others.²⁷ In her poem to Edwards, Mulso professes to imitate and learn from his 'song', yet she does not follow him in her choice of sonnet form. Edwards's poetic exchange with Mulso is concerned with issues of poetic lineage and imitation, as Mulso's title presents Edwards's sonnets as 'written in the Stile and Manner of Spenser' and within the poem he is heralded as the 'Blest Bard! to whom the Muses,

²⁵ See Dennis G. Donovan, 'Introduction', *The Sonnets of Thomas Edwards* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1974), pp. ii-x (p. viii); see also Havens, *The Influence of Milton*, p. 494.

²⁶ Edwards 'Sonnet V. On a Family-Picture', *Canons*, p. 311 (13-14)

²⁷ The original 'Sonnetto' she translates is fully Italian in form. Although her sonnets are an indication of what was to come formally, the conservative, moral emphasis of her poems distinguishes them from later eighteenth-century sonnets such as Smith's, and indeed she later criticised the sonnets of Smith and Bowles (See 'On Reading Sonnets by Mrs. Charlotte Smith, and by the Reverend Mr. Bowles' (1806, written c. 1789)).

grateful, gave | That pipe which erst their dearest Spenser won', and now 'Once more they listen, while with mimic hand | Thou tun'st his rustic reed'.²⁸ At the end of Mulso's poem, the theme of imitation and influence is applied to Edwards and herself, as she 'Tries her weak voice, and twitt'ring, aims to sing'.²⁹ Edwards's reply directly engages with Chapone's earlier poem, and he wonders

How shall my verse thy melody repay?
If my weak voice could reach the age to come,
Like *Colin Clout*'s, thy name should ever bloom
Through future times, unconscious of decay'.³⁰

The 'weak voice' is now that of Edwards rather than Mulso; it is he who assumes the persona of the uncertain woman poet, while hers is the lasting voice, received 'Of high *Parnassus*', 'crown'd with amaranthine flowers'.³¹

The first poem of Edwards's other pupil Susanna Highmore appeared in 1753 in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and eight of her poems were published in volume seven of *The Poetical Calendar* in 1763, including translations of three sonnets – two by Petrarch and one by the popular Italian woman poet Faustina Maratti Zappi (1679/80-1745), another member of the Arcadia Academy. All her sonnets are in the irregular form *ababcdcdefgefg*.³² Highmore addresses two sonnets to Edwards, although one exists in manuscript only, and the other was not published until 1821, although it is dated 1749. Highmore's published sonnet is presented as an 'answer to' Edwards's sonnet, which was published in Nichols's *A Select Collection of Poems* (1780) praising Highmore and encouraging her to publish. Like Mulso's poem written in the same year, Highmore assumes a diffident persona:

with a muse so weak, so young as mine,
I should not on presumptuous wings have dar'd

²⁸ Hester Chapone, 'Occasioned by reading Sonnets written in the Stile and Manner of Spenser, by T. Edwards, Esq; 1749', *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse [...]* (London: E. and C. Dilly, etc., 1775), pp. 126-127 (ll. 1-2 and 13-14).

²⁹ Chapone, 'Occasioned by reading Sonnets', ll. 29-30.

³⁰ Edwards, 'Sonnet XXIV. To Miss H. M.', *Canons*, p. 330 (ll. 5-8).

³¹ Edwards, 'Sonnet XXIV. To Miss H. M.', ll. 11 and 13.

³² As the sonnets of Mulso and Highmore indicate, women writers were already writing irregular sonnet translations prior to Smith. A more reticent translator of sonnets is depicted in Samuel Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). The female character Emily Jervois translates a sonnet from the Italian of Vincenzo da Filicaja, yet her 'little translation is in plain prose: Had it not, I should have been very much afraid to have it seen', and in her 'diffidence and sweet humility' refuses to be considered a 'poetess' (Richardson, *The History of Charles Grandison*, ed. by Jocelyn Harris, 3 parts (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) I, p. 433). The novel includes both the original sonnet and the prose translation (a practice which became popular with Smith and Radcliffe among others). This 'sonnet' was later anthologised by Mary Wollstonecraft in *Female Reader* (1789).

To imitate, with my unhallow'd tongue,
Numbers like Spenser's, Milton's, or like thine.³³

The triad of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton Edwards invokes in his sonnets here becomes that of Spenser, Milton and Edwards himself. The sonnet is also concerned with lineage and imitation; to write in the sonnet form is necessarily 'to imitate' the 'numbers' of a forbear. As in his sonnet to Mulso, Edwards himself presents a diffident persona, yet for his recipient, 'A larger share of fame is but your due, | Who write so well, and, while you praise, inspire.'³⁴

The sonnets of Edwards and Warton met in Dodsley's 1755 *Collection*, a publication that was thus instrumental in the revival of the sonnet, and also indicates wider mid-century changes in taste.³⁵ Edwards's comments on the form would suggest that his venture into the past is characterised by trepidation and anxiety. As well as his references to 'imitation', writing to Richardson, he wonders 'whether I shall ever transgress in that way again I cannot tell', and for his existing transgression must 'beg leave to vindicate or at least excuse myself in prose'.³⁶ In Warton's sonnets, and wider oeuvre, however, this trepidation and concern with imitation is replaced by a more happy absorption and recovery of the past. His influential edition *Poems. A New Edition* (1777) thus marks another significant year in the sonnet revival. It reprinted the two sonnets already published by Dodsley, alongside seven new sonnets, as well as 'miscellaneous poems' and odes. A reviewer of a later collection of Warton's poems observes that

Mr Warton possessed a classic taste with a Gothic Muse. Whether it arose from his imagination having been early seized and taken possession of by our earlier poets, or, perhaps, from having been strongly struck during his residence at Oxford, with the picturesque grandeur of the collegiate buildings, which, in his Triumph of Isis, he thus beautifully apostrophises:

Ye fretted pinnacles, ye fanes sublime,
Ye towers that wear the mossy vest of time;
Ye massy piles of old munificence,
At once the pride of learning and defence;
Ye cloisters pale, that lengthening to the sight,
To contemplation, step by step, invite;

³³ Susanna Highmore, 'Sonnet to Mr T. Edwards, Esq. By Miss Highmore.—1749', in *Kentish Poets, A Series of Writers in English Poetry, Natives of or Residents in the County of Kent [...]*, ed. by Rowland Freeman, 2 vols (Canterbury: G. Wood, 1821), I, p. 385 (ll. 11-14). The volume also reproduces one of the translations from Petrarch and the Faustina Maratti Zappi sonnet published in *The Poetical Calendar*.

³⁴ Edwards, '1. To Miss Highmore; Sent on Valentine's Day, never before printed', *A Select Collection of Poems*, ed. by John Nichols, 6 vols (London: 1780 [1782]), VI, pp. 103-104 (ll. 9-14).

³⁵ On the significance of Dodsley's *Collection* in this respect, see Harry M. Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley: Creating a New Age of Print* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), pp. 111-117 and Havens, 'Changing Taste in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of Dryden's and Dodsley's Miscellanies', *PMLA*, 44 (1929), 501-36.

³⁶ Edwards, *Correspondence*, III, p. 91.

Ye high-arch'd walks, where oft the whispers clear
 Of harps unseen have swept the poet's ear;
 Ye temples dim, where pious duty pays
 Her holy hymns of ever-echoing praise;
 Lo! your lov'd Isis, from the bordering vale,
 With all a mother's fondness bids you hail!

From whatever cause, certain it is, his Poems show a strong predilection for the days of chivalry and romance.³⁷

The reviewer highlights the interconnectedness of place, the literary past and Warton's own poetry, which is indeed at the crux of his oeuvre, and plays an important part in the development of the eighteenth-century sonnet. Warton entered Trinity College, Oxford in 1744 and remained there for the rest of his life, becoming a perpetual fellow in 1753. He was also professor of poetry from 1757-1767. He frequently wrote on Oxford itself in publications ranging from humorous guidebooks, to serious biographies of men associated with Trinity College, as well as the celebratory poem *The Triumph of Isis* (1750), written in response to William Mason's critique of Oxford *Isis: An Elegy* of the preceding year. It was at Oxford that Warton pursued the interest in the literary past that defines his career, firstly in *Observations on the Faerie Queene* (1754, rev. 1762) and then his three-volume *The History of English Poetry*, published in three volumes between 1774 and 1781. At Oxford and beyond, place is central to Warton's poetry and its relationship with the literary past. Place does inform some of Edwards's sonnets, but not in a major sense, and the emphasis of these sonnets is elsewhere, such as on the promotion of retirement and contentment, as in sonnet I 'To R. Owen Cambridge, Esq.', and XXI 'For the Root-House at Wrest' which celebrates the 'hallowed grove' where 'sweet contentment dwells, | Bring here no heart, that with ambition swells'.³⁸ In Warton's sonnets – and other poems – place becomes much more significant. As noted, Fairer has shown how the settings of Warton's poems dramatise the way he reaches into the literary past, uncovering obscure sources, as in his ode 'Written at Vale-Royal Abby in Cheshire' (1777) in which the speaker enters the 'inmost cell' 'to pluck the grey moss from the mantled stone'.³⁹ His sonnets display a defining interest in places and artefacts of historical interest, such as his sonnets 'Written at Stonehenge', 'Written after seeing Wilton-House', 'On King Arthur's Round Table', and 'Written in a Blank Leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon', as well as his own past, in the influential 'To the River Lodon'. Samuel Johnson offered his view on Warton's 1777 volume in a poem of the same year:

³⁷ *The Critical Review*, 10 (1794), p. 20.

³⁸ Edwards, 'Sonnet XXI. For the Root-House at Wrest', *Canons*, p. 327 (ll. 1-3). See also sonnet XXV 'To the most Honorable the Lady Marchioness Grey. The Hermitage at Turrick to the Root-House at Wrest', and XXIX 'To W. Heberden, M. D.'

³⁹ Warton, 'Ode III. Written at Vale-Royal Abby in Cheshire', *Poems. A New Edition, with Additions* (London: T. Becket, 1777), pp. 31-35 (p. 35; ll. 74-5).

Phrase that time hath flung away,
 Uncouth words in disarray,
 Trick'd in antique ruff and bonnet,
 Ode, and elegy, and sonnet.⁴⁰

Warton's poetry was perceived (fondly) as antiquarian and out-moded in both form and style. His sonnet 'Written in a Blank Leaf of Dugdale's *Monasticon*' is not only 'written' in *Monasticon*, the fruits of Dugdale's own antiquarian research, but it is also a defence of the pursuit, and celebration of its pleasures.⁴¹

Deem not, devoid of elegance, the sage,
 By Fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd,
 Of painful Pedantry the poring child;
 Who turns, of these proud domes, th' historic page,
 Now sunk by Time, and Henry's fiercer rage.
 Thinkst thou the warbling Muses never smil'd
 On his lone hours? Ingenious views engage
 His thought, on themes, unclassic falsely stil'd,
 Intent. While cloyster'd Piety displays
 Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
 New manners, and the pomp of elder days,
 Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
 Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways
 Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers.⁴²

The sonnet seems to locate the 'poring child' – notably a he ('his lone hours') – in the environs of Oxford: 'these proud domes'. As well as celebrating 'the winding ways | Of hoar Antiquity', it also appears to question the view that 'the warbling Muses never smil'd | On his lone hours' – that antiquarian pursuit and poetry are in some way unsuited to each other, which Warton's own poetry of course powerfully refutes. Warton's sonnet rhymes *abbaababcdcdcd*, which is somewhat typical of his use of form, which is based around an Italian octave-sestet structure, yet usually deviates from the strict model, and enjambes sense and the octave-sestet divide, recalling Milton's sonnet form. Indeed, it would seem that Warton's model for the sonnet is Milton, whose sonnets he edited in his *Poems upon Several Occasions, English, Italian, and Latin, with Translations, by John Milton* (1785). Five of Warton's sonnets take the full Italian sonnet form, with the sestet rhyming *cdcdcd*, while the remaining four are, in varying degrees, irregular variations on the Italian. Warton's resistance to a fully legitimate use of form contrasts with Edwards's rigidity, and reflects the sense of his sonnets in content; place and the past are experienced in an exploratory, 'winding' and 'pensive' way, and the sonnet's subjects have often been obscured or worn

⁴⁰ Johnson, 'On Archaism in Poetry', in *The Oxford Authors*, p. 32 (ll. 5-8). The poem is often given the title 'Lines on Thomas Warton's Poems'.

⁴¹ Place is also central in Sir William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655), which relates to the historical sites – cathedrals, churches, abbeys and monasteries – of 1640s England.

⁴² Warton, 'Sonnet III. Written in a Blank Leaf of Dugdale's *Monasticon*', *Poems*, p. 77.

away. In sonnet VIII ‘On King Arthur’s Round-table at Winchester’, time has ‘fade[d] the British characters away’, and in sonnet IX ‘To the River Lodon’, ‘pensive memory traces back the round’; both sonnets are interested in different ways in recapturing the partial, forgotten and obscure, mimed in Warton’s use of form, which itself is something faded, and incomplete, yet through which he can take a pleasure in ‘tracing’ in his explorations of the past.⁴³

A more personal aspect also runs through Warton’s sonnets, as in the first of his sonnets, ‘Written at Wynslade in Hampshire’ (first published in Dodsley’s anthology). It describes a landscape, ‘thy beech-capt hills, with waving grain | Mantled, thy chequer’d views of wood and lawn’, which inscribes a loss, an absent ‘he’, ‘with whom I trac’d their sweets’.⁴⁴ For this the landscape affords a type of melancholy pleasure, ‘they please, howe’er forlorn, | That still they can recal those happier days’.⁴⁵ The untitled sonnet VII and ‘To the River Lodon’ are similar in mode, and these sonnets most keenly anticipate those of Smith.⁴⁶ The recovery of an element of personal past through place connects them with the sonnets with a more explicit historical emphasis.

Warton offers some commentary on the sonnet and its history in his prose. As noted, Milton would appear to be his model in the form yet, unlike many contemporary commentators, he does not trace a lineage from Petrarch to Milton:

Milton had a natural severity of mind. For love-verses, his Italian Sonnets have a remarkable air of gravity and dignity. They are free from the metaphysics of Petrarch, and are more in the manner of Dante.⁴⁷

It is with apparent regret that he notes in his edition of Milton that ‘he calls his seventh Sonnet, in a letter printed from the Cambridge manuscript by Birch, a composition in the PETRARCHAN stanza’.⁴⁸ In *The History of English Poetry*, Warton also expresses a dislike for Petrarch, via his praise of Surrey, whose sonnets he gives the most attention to in the *History*:

⁴³ Warton, ‘Sonnet VIII. On King Arthur’s Round-table at Winchester’, *Poems*, p. 82 (l. 12) and ‘Sonnet IX. To the River Lodon’, *Poems*, p. 83 (l. 6). ‘Trace’ occurs three times in Warton’s sonnets, and suits the essence of Warton’s poems, with its suggestions of different kinds of tracking, reaching back, exploring, deciphering, marking, copying and so on.

⁴⁴ Warton, ‘Sonnet I. Written at Wynslade in Hampshire’, *Poems*, p. 75 (ll. 1-2 and 11).

⁴⁵ Warton, ‘Sonnet I. Written at Wynslade in Hampshire’, ll. 13-14.

⁴⁶ The formal irregularity – albeit Italian – in conjunction with the emphasis on place with the increased presence of an ‘I’ indeed pre-echo Smith’s sonnets, despite major differences.

⁴⁷ Warton, *Poems Upon Several Occasions: English, Italian, and Latin, with Translations*, by John Milton (London: J. Dodsley, 1785), p. 338.

⁴⁸ Warton, *Poems Upon Several Occasions*, p. 338.

In the sonnets of Surrey, we are surprised to find nothing of that metaphysical cast which marks the Italian poets, his supposed masters, especially Petrarch. Surrey's sentiments are for the most part natural and unaffected; arising from his own feelings, and dictated by the present circumstances. His poetry is alike unembarrassed by learned allusions or elaborate conceits [...]. Petrarch would have been a better poet had he been a worse scholar. Our author's mind was not too much overlaid by learning.⁴⁹

The sonnets of Spenser and Sidney are only mentioned, yet Warton goes into detail on other sonnet writers such as Henry Constable and Richard Barnfield, upon which the volume ends. It is curious that Warton should find Petrarch's roles of poet and scholar somewhat incompatible considering he was a scholar himself, and his poetry so intertwined with his study of the literary past, 'Phrase that time hath flung away'. Although it would seem that Warton himself sought the qualities praised in the sonnets of Surrey and indeed Petrarch, 'natural and unaffected; arising from his [Surrey's] own feelings', 'a track of tenderness, simplicity and nature'.⁵⁰ Warton also briefly discusses the sonnet in the 'unpublished continuation' of his *History* (c. 1782), in which he compares Spenser and Shakespeare.⁵¹

As well as looking to the past, Warton's sonnets also looked forward, and had a significant, tangible influence. Indeed, at Oxford, a school of poets emerged around Warton, the main output of which was sonnets. As Fairer writes, as well as a historian,

as a poet too he was an influence on the next generation, not least in the way he drew on the materials of history for inspiration [...] Warton's verse is interested in texts from the past, in authentic lost voices, however 'minor'; but they are revived not as something dead, but as a resource that can feed into the work of the modern poet. If his *History* gave the British reading public of the 1780s and 1790s a sense of the capaciousness of the literary past, his *Poems* (1777) offered a model for its infusion into the poetry of the present. To young poets coming to maturity he offered something paradoxically old and fresh, and as teacher with wide circle of poetical friends and pupils, he was well placed to be a literary mentor to some of them.⁵²

John Bampfylde (1754-1797), Thomas Russell (1761-1788), William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850) and Henry Headley (1765-1788), are named by Robert Southey as the main members of Warton's school, to which Fairer adds Thomas Park (1758/9-1834), Henry Kett (1761-1825) and George Richards (1767-1837) – although they were writing slightly later – and beyond this 'immediate group', Edward Gardner (?1752-1823) and Smith herself, who are

⁴⁹ Warton, *The History of English Poetry, From the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*, 4 vols (London: J. Dodsley, etc., 1774-1781), III (1781), p. 12.

⁵⁰ Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, III, p. 12.

⁵¹ 'Perhaps in brilliancy of imagery, quickness of thought, variety and fertility of allusion, and particularly in touches of pastoral painting, Shakespeare is superior. But he is more incorrect, indigested, and redundant: And if Spenser has too much learning, Shakespeare has too much conceit' (Warton, *A History of English Poetry: an Unpublished Continuation*, ed. by Rodney M. Bain (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1953), p. 8).

⁵² Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 99.

both identified as having a ‘noticeable Wartonian accent’.⁵³ Edmund Cartwright (1743–1823), Robert Holmes (bap. 1748, d. 1805), and Thomas Warwick (?) could also perhaps be included. With the exception of Richards, all these poets published sonnets. As well as writing from, or having connections with Oxford, some poets had also been educated at Winchester College under Warton’s brother Joseph Warton (bap. 1722, d. 1800), who had previously been a scholar there, and after an earlier career in the church, took the position of usher in 1755 and headmaster in 1766. He remained at the school until his retirement in 1793, and his brother also spent time there each year. Thomas Warton’s nurturing of the poetic talent of the male members of his school thus contrasts with Edwards’s encouragement of women poets within Richardson’s circle.

In between the publications of Edwards and Warton, as noted, Thomas Gray’s sole sonnet was published in 1775. Critics have attached much significance to the sonnet ‘on the Death of Mr. Richard West’, and indeed it was hugely influential.⁵⁴ This is somewhat at odds with the spirit of the sonnet itself, which is characterised by a hidden, repressed, unheard aspect. The sonnet was published posthumously – it is dated August 1742 in Gray’s commonplace book, two months after West’s death – and Gray shows an embarrassment or dislike for it when in 1758 he wrote to Edward Bedingfield, refusing to send the sonnet as requested, ‘but here is something else full as bad’.⁵⁵ Before his death, West had been the only audience for Gray’s poems and translations. He sent ‘Ode to Spring’ in a letter to West in 1742, which was returned, unread. Thus, Gray’s sonnet is in part about this loss or lack of audience, ‘I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear’, and correspondent: ‘These ears, alas! for other notes repine’.⁵⁶ The sonnet is coloured by a futility and invalidity of sorts, and it seems fitting that it went unpublished in Gray’s lifetime. Although it finally found an audience in 1775, it lacked a speaker, as such, due to its posthumous publication. And, as Lonsdale suggests ‘perhaps because, for all its restraint, it is so totally self-enclosed in a grief for which no resolution can be discovered. The poet is trapped syntactically by the self: ‘My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine’’.⁵⁷ The sonnet begins and ends with ‘in vain’, and mourns the one person who could have sympathised with his grief:

⁵³ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 100-101.

⁵⁴ The poem is just given the title ‘sonnet’ in Gray’s commonplace book, the latter part being added by Mason in his edition. Curran describes it as ‘the motive force underlying the entire Romantic revival of the sonnet, a model for hundreds of poets’ (*Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, p. 30).

⁵⁵ Gray, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), II, p. 560.

⁵⁶ Thomas Gray, ‘Sonnet [on the Death of Mr Richard West]’, *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1969), pp. 67-68 (ll. 14 and 5).

⁵⁷ Roger Lonsdale, ‘The Poetry of Thomas Gray: Versions of the Self’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LIX (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 105-123 (p. 115).

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
 And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire:
 The birds in vain their amorous descant join,
 Or cheerful fields resume their green attire:
 These ears, alas! for other notes repine,
 A different object do these eyes require.
 My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;
 And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.
 Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
 And new-born pleasure brings to happier men:
 The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;
 To warm their little loves the birds complain.
 I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
 And weep the more because I weep in vain.⁵⁸

This sense of enclosure is also mimed by the repetitions between the octave and sestet: ‘smiling mornings’ becomes ‘morning smiles’, and the birds and fields similarly reappear, while the rhyme scheme – *ababababcdcdcd* – also gives this effect, especially as the rhymes in the sestet echo those of the octave. Place is important in Gray’s sonnet, although it is an unspecified and generic one. Its centrality is curiously simultaneously undercut, however, by the mismatch between speaker and environment; its inability to afford that for which they ‘repine’ and ‘require’. Although Gray’s sonnet may be something of a model for future sonneteers in its personal, subjective and elegiac aspects and the interrelation between place and the ‘I’, the sonnet itself is informed by its disassociation. Warton’s sonnet I, which works on a similar model, is an interesting contrast: ‘they [views] please, howe’er forlorn, | That still they can recal those happier days’; and other sonnets are also able to ‘recall’ personal as well as literary past through place.⁵⁹

Gray’s interest in the literary past would appear to inform his appropriation of the sonnet too. Curran describes Gray as a ‘scholarly antiquary’, the ‘one person who knew his literary heritage and wrote consciously in reference to it’ and Lonsdale observes that ‘one seems at times to be confronting a kind of literary kleptomania, such is his dependence on the phrasing and thoughts of others poets’ in his poems, which Lonsdale’s copious footnotes indeed reveal to be infused with echoes and allusions.⁶⁰ Zuccato has noted the kinship between Gray’s sonnet and Petrarch’s ‘Zephiro torna’ sonnet (310 in modern editions), a resemblance which was also noted by Egerton Brydges in 1821.⁶¹ Indeed, in the weeks preceding West’s death, Gray had been reading Petrarch’s sonnets, which he found ‘sometimes very tender and natural’ and as Zuccato points out, Gray matches the lesser-used

⁵⁸ Gray, ‘Sonnet [on the Death of Mr Richard West]’, *Poems*, pp. 67-68.

⁵⁹ Warton, ‘Sonnet I. Written at Wynslade in Hampshire’, ll. 13-14.

⁶⁰ Lonsdale, ‘Preface’, *Poems*, pp. xiii-xviii (p. xvii).

⁶¹ Lonsdale, *Poems*, p. 66

open rhyme scheme of Petrarch's sonnet 310 and his turning point, at 'yet' in line 9.⁶² We know that Gray had studied the various sonnet forms, which he outlines in his essay 'Metrum' written in 1760-1, identifying two modes of sonnets which 'are the true Sonnet of the Italians', one of which he appropriates.⁶³

When Gray wrote the sonnet in 1742, some years before there was any real interest in Petrarch, his appropriation of it does indeed appear to be rooted in his explorations of the literary past. In his essay 'Metrum' and in the sketch for a history of English poetry Gray sent to Warton in 1770, Gray identifies 'the first *Italian* School (commonly call'd the Sicilian) about the year 1200 brought to perfection by Dante, Petrarch, Boccace, & others', which is situated among several others.⁶⁴ His translation-of-sorts thus constitutes a return to this remote literary school, encasing his voice in a forgotten form and mode, rather than the school of 'our times', initiated after the Restoration and realised by Waller, Dryden, Addison, Prior and Pope.⁶⁵ The sonnet also draws upon other poetic sources, and although Petrarchan in form is noticeably Miltonic in expression and style.⁶⁶ Fairer has compared Warton's relationship with the literary past with that of Gray, which he shows to be characterised by an inability to connect meaningfully with his sources and the past, suggested in the plan Gray made for a history of poetry, full of 'categories, discontinuities and endings':⁶⁷

Where Warton, in his *History of Poetry* and his own verse, reached back into the past to establish continuities and recover a tradition of which he felt himself a part, Gray is at his most powerful and interesting when confronting disconnections and loss, texts that find no sympathetic reader, voices that echo with a momentary chill, break off, or expire.⁶⁸

He finds this to be reflected in the sonnet, for it 'draws power from its inability to recover the past and give it meaning in the present', a present in which the 'first-person singular is trapped'.⁶⁹ However, in addition to expressing an inability to connect with the present, the

⁶² Gray, *Correspondence*, III, p. 202. Edoardo Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 29. The rhyme scheme is used in only twelve of Petrarch's 317 sonnets.

⁶³ Gray, 'Metrum. Observations on English metre, on the pseudo-rythmus, on rhyme, and on the poems of Lydgate' in *The Works of Thomas Gray in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Edmund Gosse, 4 vols (London: Macmillan, 1884), I, p. 349.

⁶⁴ *Correspondence*, III, p. 1123. A version of the letter was printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 3 (1783), pp. 100-101.

⁶⁵ *Correspondence*, III, p. 1124.

⁶⁶ See Lonsdale's introduction and notes to the poem, *Poems*, pp. 64-68.

⁶⁷ Fairer, 'Thomas Warton, Thomas Gray, and the Recovery of the Past', in *Thomas Gray: Contemporary Essays*, ed. by W. B. Hutchings and William Ruddick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), pp. 146-170 (p. 149).

⁶⁸ Fairer, p. 161.

⁶⁹ Fairer, p. 156.

sonnet can also be seen as a return to, and enclosure within the past via the Petrarchan form in this semi-translation.

The influence of Petrarch connects Gray with an important impulse in the sonnet revival. An interest in translating Petrarch and other Italian poets is evident from as early as 1683, in Philip Ayres's *Lyric Poems Made in Imitation of the Italians*.⁷⁰ Indeed, Ayres's volume contains an interesting apologetic preface:

If any quarrel at the Oeconomy, or Structure of these Poems, many of them being Sonnets, Canzons, Madrigals &c., objecting that none of our great men, either Mr. Waller, Mr. Cowley, or Mr. Dryden, whom it was most proper to have followed, have ever stoop'd to any thing of this sort; I shall very readily acknowledge, that beings sensible of my own Weakness and Inability of ever attaining to the performance of one thing equal to the worst piece of theirs, it easily dissuaded me from that attempt.⁷¹

Here Ayres displays a Bloomian 'anxiety of influence' of sorts, in which he swerves from 'great' poets by appropriating the forms they avoided. Ayres uses a range of forms across his sonnets – Italian, English, irregular mixes, and the couplet – and a tendency to deviate from Petrarch's original sonnet form characterises many translations throughout the form's history. Indeed, the sonnets translated from Petrarch by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1516/7-1547) in Tottel's *Miscellany* appear to invent the English sonnet form. Mary Monck (*née* Molesworth, c. 1678-1715), translates two sonnets from Petrarch in her posthumous *Marinda. Poems and Translations upon Several Occasions* (1716), published by her father.⁷² Both sonnets take the form *aabbccddeeff*, and the additional six 'sonnetto' translations of the volume are also irregular in form.⁷³ As already noted, Highmore's two translations were published in the *Poetical Calendar* in 1763, again irregular in rhyme, and in John Langhorne's *The Poetical Works of John Langhorne. In Two Volumes* (1766) four sonnets are translated from Petrarch, two in couplets, one fully Italian, and one almost so; it also includes one original 'Sonnet in the manner of Petrarch' in the Petrarchan form and mode. Sir William Jones's *Poems* (1772) groups together and translates several of Petrarch's sonnets as part of a poem in couplets, 'Laura an elegy', which footnotes the source sonnets. Thus, in many of these publications, the meeting of sonnet and couplet interestingly dramatises the shift in tastes and forms as interest in the sonnet form develops out of an era

⁷⁰ It also includes another three translations from Italian, as well as thirty original sonnets by Ayres.

⁷¹ Philip Ayres, *Lyric Poems, Made in Imitation of the Italians*, in *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, ed. by George Saintsbury, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), II, pp. 262-351 (p. 269).

⁷² On *Marinda*, see Gillian Wright, *Producing Women's Poetry, 1600-1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter 5.

⁷³ A sonnet translated from Giovanni Battista Guarini is in sixteen lines of couplets, two from Giovanni della Casa are in fourteen unrhymed lines, one from Giambattista Marino is in fourteen unrhymed lines; two sonnets are from Antonio Marina Salvini – one made by a 'friend' and in couplets, and the other by Monck in twenty lines of quatrains.

in which the couplet was prevalent. John Nott's anonymously published *Sonnets, and Odes Translated from the Italian of Petrarch* (1777) was the first collection of Petrarch's poetry in translation. It contains thirty sonnets, as well as some of Petrarch's 'odes'. Most, but not all of the translations reflect their original in form, and several sonnets deviate slightly from the Petrarchan form. Zuccato argues that Nott's volume is significant for the selection he made from the *Rime sparse*, for 'more than half of them are meditations in a landscape or contain natural descriptions', showing a 'pre-Romantic taste' in selection.⁷⁴ Indeed, Petrarch's sonnets, in which a solitary, melancholy speaker wanders in a landscape upon which his feelings are mapped, clearly befitted emerging modes in the late eighteenth century, and a core set of Petrarch's sonnets were popular among translators, especially his 'Zephiro torna' sonnet, which Gray draws upon.⁷⁵ Following Nott, William Preston included four translations from Petrarch, Petrarchan in form, in his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1781), as well as nineteen original sonnets, Petrarchan in theme.⁷⁶ Charles Burney's *General History of Music* also included two sonnets – both in the Italian rhyme scheme – in the second volume (1782); as will be seen, Hayley also translated sonnets by Petrarch in the same year. Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Essay on the Life and Character of Petrarch. To which are added, Seven of his Sonnets* was published in 1784, the year in which Smith's first translations from Petrarch were also published in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*.⁷⁷

As Zuccato shows, an interest in Petrarch's biography coincided with the revival of his poetry, and Susannah Dobson's *The Life of Petrarch* (1775) – a translation of the Abbé de Sade's *Mémoires pour la vie de François Pétrarque* (1764) – was widely read, and went through six editions.⁷⁸ It focuses on Petrarch the poet and lover, who is presented as a melancholy hero of sensibility, complementing contemporary trends in the novel.⁷⁹ Within the biography, however, Petrarch's sonnets – and other poems – are translated into prose rather than the verse Sade had maintained. Critics have attached much importance to Dobson's translation and its female authorship is particularly significant.⁸⁰ Indeed, women writers had a considerable role in the revival of interest in Petrarch, and the early translations of Monck and Highmore were followed by those of Smith, Seward, Mary Robinson and

⁷⁴ Zuccato, p. 39.

⁷⁵ See Zuccato, pp. x-xi.

⁷⁶ Preston's sonnets were published again in 1793, with an essay on the form.

⁷⁷ Two of Tytler's sonnets take the form *ababbcdccfef*, creating two five-line stanzas and a quatrain, two are fully English in form, two take the combined *abbacddceffeg* form and one takes a curious form of twenty lines of differing lengths and a highly irregular rhyme scheme.

⁷⁸ Zuccato, p. 1.

⁷⁹ In Smith's own novels, her heroes often follow Dobson's portrayal of Petrarch: handsome men of feeling and sensibility, yet also prone to rashness and jealousy, and who also write sonnets.

⁸⁰ Zuccato names 1775 as the year 'that marks the real beginning of the eighteenth-century revival of interest in Petrarch' due to Dobson's publication (p. 1).

others.⁸¹ Translation offered a more genteel and acceptable route into publication for the woman writer, perhaps, and languages were more likely to form part of their education. For instance, in his preface to her poems, Monck's father stresses the propriety of her turn to poetry through translation. As Zuccato notes, however, the relation between women writers and Petrarch was somewhat complex, as they both identify with and distance themselves from Petrarch and Laura, negotiating both a male poetic voice, and the way it encodes the female subject.⁸²

The last of Smith's chief eighteenth-century sonnet predecessors, Hayley, included sonnets in two rather different publications in 1781 and 1782. The first was incorporated into his popular *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781), a didactic work in six cantos of rhyming couplets, aspiring to 'delineate the more engaging features of Female Excellence' in the character of Serena, a response to Pope's Belinda in *Rape of the Lock*.⁸³ The sonnet is written to Serena by a male admirer, and the poem breaks from the couplet to incorporate it. The sonnet is fully English in form, and the sonnet itself is implored to deliver a message:

Tell her, the Bard, in Beauty's ample reign,
Has seen a virgin cheek as richly glow,
A bosom, where the blue meandering vein
Sheds a soft lustre thro' the lucid snow,
Eyes, that as brightly flash with joy and youth,
And locks, that like her own luxuriant flow:
Then say, for then she cannot doubt thy truth,
That the wide earth no Female form can shew
Where Nature's legend so distinctly tells,
In this fair shrine a fairer spirit dwells.⁸⁴

The sonnet references stereotypical, hyperbolic aspects of beauty, and the perfect 'female form', with which the form of the sonnet has traditionally been intertwined; indeed, Hayley appears to nod to an earlier mode of love sonnet. *An Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782) also juxtaposes sonnets and couplet, yet in a different mode. The poem is 'in Five Epistles to the Revd. Mr. Mason', and as its title suggests seeks to rehabilitate a different poetic form. The poem encourages poets to appropriate the epic, without being restricted by neoclassical rules; it ranges through the form's history, spanning Homer, Chaucer, Spenser and Pope. The seven sonnets appear within footnotes to the poem itself, and are all translations. Indeed, Hayley was known for his interest in and proficiency in languages, including Latin, Greek, French,

⁸¹ Zuccato contrasts the popularity of Petrarch with the limited interest of women writers in Dante, which he suggests lies in Dante's more 'masculine' quality and appeal (p. ix).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ William Hayley, 'Preface', *The Triumphs of Temper* (London: J. Dodsley, 1781), p. ix.

⁸⁴ Hayley, *The Triumphs of Temper*, ll. 213-222.

Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and German. As Robert Southey observes, in the mid-eighteenth century

a revival was beginning; it was brought about, not by the appearance of great and original genius, but by awakening the public to the merits of our old writers, and of those of other countries. The former task was effected by Percy and Warton: the latter it was Hayley's fortune to perform. A greater effect was produced upon the rising generation of scholars, by the Notes to his *Essay on Epic Poetry*, than by any other contemporary work, the *Relics of Ancient Poetry* alone excepted.⁸⁵

Invested with considerable influence, Hayley's translations and biographical sketches of European writers are equated with the historical recoveries of Warton and Thomas Percy, through which the sonnet form meets.⁸⁶

The first of Hayley's sonnets is a translation from Dante, the second from the Spanish sonnet of 'Lady Leonora de Iciz, Baroness of Rafales, to Don Alonzo de Ercilla', which appears in a note to a section on the epic poet Ercilla, whom the sonnet praises. Three sonnets are from the Portuguese Camoens, and the final two are a pair, one by Italian woman poet Giustina Levi-Perotti, addressed to Petrarch, and Petrarch's reply. Significantly, this sonnet-exchange is translated in a note to a section of the *Essay* which defends the right of women to poetry, bemoaning how 'prejudice' has restricted the woman poet:

How often has thy voice, with brutal fire
Forbidding Female hands to touch the lyre,
Deny'd to Woman, Nature's fav'rite child,
The right to enter Fancy's opening wild!⁸⁷

The speaker looks forward to the day when 'Britain sees | Her fair-one cancel such absurd decrees' in a train led by Seward, and implores 'Proceed, ye sisters of the tuneful Shell, | Without a scruple, in that Art excel'.⁸⁸ In the note to these lines Hayley states that 'for the advice which I have thus ventured to give such of my fair readers as have a talent for poetry, I shall produce them a much higher poetical authority': that of Petrarch.⁸⁹ Levi-Perotti's sonnet asks for advice from Petrarch, as 'stupified by Custom's blank decrees' those 'void of

⁸⁵ Southey, 'ART. I.-Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.', *The Quarterly Review*, 31.62 (March, 1825), pp. 263-311 (p. 283).

⁸⁶ Similarly, Henry Francis Cary writes that 'The taste which has been lately excited amongst us for Spanish and Italian literature, after having slept nearly since the age of Elizabeth, may be attributed in a great measure to the influence of his [Hayley's] example. Gray, Hurd, and the two Wartons, had done something towards awakening it, but the spell was completed by him' (Henry Francis Cary, 'The Life of William Hayley', *London Magazine*, 10 (November, 1824), pp. 502-512 (p. 511)).

⁸⁷ William Hayley, *An Essay on Epic Poetry; In Five Epistles to the Revd. Mr. Mason*. (London: J. Dodsley, 1782), IV, ll. 83-86.

⁸⁸ Hayley, *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, IV, ll. 103-104.

⁸⁹ Hayley, *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, p. 287

liberal fire, | Bid me, with scorn, from Helicon retire'.⁹⁰ Petrarch's reply is one of encouragement: 'I pray thee, Nymph of graceful song, | Indulge thy spirit in its noble bent'.⁹¹ The form the sonnets take is interesting, for Petrarch uses the same rhymes as Levi-Perotti's original – answering the sonnet formally as well as thematically – which Hayley replicates. Indeed, of his translations in *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, six sonnets take the Italian form, reflecting the rhyme scheme of the originals, yet one of the sonnets from Camoens 'on the death of the Poet's mistress, Donna Catalina de Ataide, who died at the age of twenty', is transposed from the Italian into the English form, thus rendering it into a more 'elegiac' mode. As well as poetically, Hayley supported women writers as a friend and patron of sorts, notably to Seward, and to Smith herself who dedicates *Elegiac Sonnets* to her West Sussex neighbour. Similarities can thus be drawn between Edwards and Hayley, as a sonnet writer encouraging women writers in the form, and who engaged in poetic exchanges with him. Moreover, Reggie Allen has highlighted how Hayley often assumes the persona of the uncertain, apologetic woman poet here and elsewhere in his work; and also wrote sonnets in his wife's name.⁹² Allen also points out the importance of the poetic or 'gift' exchange to Hayley, and suggests that the Petrarch-Levi-Perotti exchange was perhaps a model for his own exchanges.⁹³ Hayley's *Collected Poems and Plays* (1785) collected together nine of his sonnets all addressed to people, and are dated from 1779 onwards, and all take the English sonnet form.

Although Edwards, Warton, Gray and Hayley were Smith's chief eighteenth-century predecessors in the sonnet, other sonneteers should be mentioned who were less clearly influential. The year following the coincidence of the sonnets of Warton and Edwards in Dodsley's *Miscellany*, Thomas Percy (1729–1811), turned to the form, another poet deeply interested in the poetry of the past and associated with its recovery, chiefly following his publication of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisted of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of our Earlier Poets* (1765). Two sonnets by Percy were published in Christopher Smart's *Monthly Visiter* (1756), and in various places thereafter. The sonnets are redolent of those of Edwards in their use of the Spenserian sonnet form and in addressing women. Also, Percy similarly implies that there is an aspect of 'imitation' embedded in his use of the sonnet; the title of the first of Percy's sonnets, 'after the manner of Spencer', is

⁹⁰ Hayley, 'The Sonnet of Giustina to Petrarch', *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, p. 289 (ll. 5-7).

⁹¹ Hayley, 'The Answer of Petrarch', *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, p. 289 (ll. 13-14). Dobson also translated the exchange in prose in her *Life of Petrarch*.

⁹² Reggie Allen, 'The Sonnets of William Hayley and Gift Exchange', *European Romantic Review*, 13.4 (2002), 383-92 (pp. 387 and 388).

⁹³ Allen argues that his translation of the Spanish sonnet in praise of Ercilla, and of the Levi-Perotti sonnet 'demonstrates the incredible attraction such literary exchanges held for Hayley. He must have recognized the women as putting the sonnet to the same use he did – to praise another artist and to initiate a correspondence' (p. 387).

later re-phrased ‘in imitation of Spenser’.⁹⁴ A third sonnet by Percy was published in 1771, a dedicatory sonnet ‘To her grace, Elizabeth, Duchess and Countess of Northumberland’ in his *The Hermit of Warkworth. A Northumberland Ballad*. The sonnet also recalls the dedicatory sonnets of the *Faerie Queene*, and Percy again adopts the Spenserian form. Thus, in *The Hermit of Warkworth*, the sonnet is juxtaposed with the ballad, another ‘old’ form. The sonnet itself places an interesting emphasis on place:

DOWN in a northern vale wild flowrets grew,
And lent new sweetness to the summer gale;
The Muse there found them all remote from view,
Obscur’d with weeds, and scattered o’er the dale.⁹⁵

The way Percy takes inspiration from the forms and modes of the past is presented through place, a remote location, wild and forgotten, which the muse locates, resonating with the Wartonian special space.⁹⁶

Space is also significant in the sonnets of Charles Emily (1734-1762), who made a curious contribution to the sonnet revival with his *Death. A Poem* (1762), one of only two sonnet sequences published in the century.⁹⁷ Emily was educated at Cambridge, and *Death* was an unsuccessful submission for the Cambridge Seatonian Prize; composed in 1759, it was published (aptly enough) posthumously in 1762 in the *The St. James’s Magazine* and was variously republished in periodical and collections through the remainder of the century. The sonnets are self-consciously poetic and archaic in tone, and unusually for the time Emily appropriates the English sonnet form, although the last line of each sonnet is an alexandrine, which, together with the sequential nature of the eighteen sonnets, grouped together as ‘A Poem’, recalls the Spenserian stanza; the sonnets also recall Milton formally through the use of enjambment.⁹⁸ In the first sonnet of ‘Death’, the speaker departs from the college environment, ‘the warm glow | Of brisk-ey’d joy, and friendship’s genial bowl’, to enter the space of the ‘graveyard’ poem:

Permit me, ye time-hallow’d domes, ye piles

⁹⁴ The title is changed in Pearch’s *Collection*. Although there is an allusion to the Blatant Beast of *The Faerie Queene* in the sonnet, the reference to imitation does appear to be in relation to form.

⁹⁵ Percy, ‘To her grace, Elizabeth, Duchess and Countess of Northumberland, in her own right Baroness Percy. &c. &c. &c.’, *The Hermit of Warkworth, a Northumberland Ballad [...]*, 2nd edn (London: T. Davies, etc., 1771), p. v (ll. 1-4).

⁹⁶ Percy’s ballad is itself deeply concerned with place. The advertisement to *The Hermit of Warkworth* describes the location of the remains of the hermitage, which has provided the inspiration and subject-matter for the poem.

⁹⁷ The second is Mary Robinson’s *Sappho and Phaon* (1799).

⁹⁸ See Hansen, ‘Elegy, Ode, and the Eighteenth-Century Sonnet Revival’, p. 313. Hansen also points out the relationship between Emily’s sonnet and the elegy and ode, and also how, importantly, the sonnets ‘incorporate the “elegiac” quatrain, as Smith’s sonnets would two decades later’ (p. 313).

Of rude magnificence, your solemn rest,
 Amid your fretted vaults and lengthening isles,
 Lonely to wander; no unholy guest,
 That means to break, with sacrilegious tread,
 The marble slumbers of your monumented dead.⁹⁹

The university landscape is here a darker and more gothic vision than Warton's Oxford. The setting of *Death* appears to be Cambridge; in sonnet X, the speaker implores 'ye Nymphs of Camus hoar, | Weep – for YE oft have seen him on your haunted shore', redolent of Milton's 'Lycidas', another Cambridge publication.¹⁰⁰ Sonnet IV is more overtly informed by an awareness of a poetic lineage, although Emily now looks forward:

Know, on the stealing wing of time shall flee
 Some few, some short-liv'd years; and all is past;
 A future bard these awful domes may see,
 Muse o'er the present age as I the last.¹⁰¹

Death is also concerned throughout with a sense of the speaker's own demise. As Hansen points out, the influence of Gray's 'Elegy' can be detected here, and the lines also anticipate Warton, with their 'undertones of epitaph and an ideal of continuity from one generation of poets to the next'.¹⁰² For Emily, haunting the landscape, and 'musing' over the last poetic age seems to be at the crux of the poet's role. The posthumous publication of the sequence also curiously confirms Emily's sense of his own impending demise, part of an expiring or expired 'age'. In Emily's sequence, being part of poetic tradition is closely involved with death. Although Emily remains obscure, he was named by Southey as an exception in the 'juncture when there was no poet of any great ability, or distinguished name in the field', lamenting how 'Emily and Bampfylde had been cut off in the blossom of their youth', associating Emily with another ill-fated sonneteer.¹⁰³

Horace Walpole included a sonnet in the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), a dedicatory 'Sonnet To the Right Honourable Lady Mary Coke', a friend of Walpole's who was known in court circles for her eccentricity. It is suitably (Gothically) irregular; its fourteen lines rhyme *ababcdcdeefggf* and are in a mixture of six and eight syllables in length. The sonnet gently chides its recipient for her excess of sensibility, and perhaps parodies the dedicatory sonnets of the Renaissance. Walpole expresses a dislike for the form in his

⁹⁹ Charles Emily, 'Death. A Poem', *The St. James's Magazine*, 1 (1762), pp. 91-99 (I, ll. 1-2 and 9-14).

¹⁰⁰ Emily, 'Death', X, ll. 13-14.

¹⁰¹ Emily, 'Death', IV, ll. 1-4.

¹⁰² Hansen, p. 315.

¹⁰³ Southey, *The Works of William Cowper [...]*, 15 vols (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1835-7), II (1836), p. 181.

correspondence.¹⁰⁴ In 1768, *The Land of the Muses: A Poem, in the Manner of Spenser. With Poems on Several Occasions* by the poet and physician Hugh Downman (1740–1809) contained five sonnets. Downman was educated at Balliol College, Oxford before moving to Edinburgh. One sonnet is dedicatory, and the remaining four are ‘wrote at Inversnaid, in Scotland, in the year 1767’, as they are introduced in the volume and a sense of place does inform the sonnets, although not the full sense of later sonnets. All the sonnets are irregular in form, blending English and Italian forms. The syntactical breaks are also idiosyncratic across the sonnets, at odds with the rhyme.

A somewhat curious sonnet publication appeared in 1776: an anonymous volume of twelve *Sonnets*. It is the first publication of the century to be devoted entirely to sonnets through its title, yet it does also contain three other poems. All twelve sonnets take the Italian structure of *abbaabbacced* and although they are poor in quality, take subjects which will soon be considerably popular, such as the nightingale, and the river (Thames); thus, they sometimes read like parodies in a pre-emptive way.¹⁰⁵ The edition met with bad reviews, described as ‘frequently feeble, incoherent, and injudicious’ in *The Monthly Review*, and they received a one-word review elsewhere: ‘Feeble’.¹⁰⁶ Two years later, the more striking sonnets of John Bampfylde were published, another poet strongly connected with the school of Warton. As Roger Lonsdale has shown, Bampfylde briefly attended Winchester College in 1770 and although he was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge he was connected to Oxford, chiefly through his friend and the poet George Huddesford (1749-1809). Huddesford was a fellow Wykehamist and was a student at Trinity College, Oxford – although he later transferred to New College – where his father was President, providing the occasion recorded in Bampfylde’s second sonnet, ‘On Having Dined at Trinity College, Oxford’.¹⁰⁷ A double portrait of the friends by Sir Joshua Reynolds (c. 1778) depicts Bampfylde holding an engraving of Reynolds’s portrait of Joseph Warton. Bampfylde’s sonnet X is addressed ‘To

¹⁰⁴ In a letter of 1795, Walpole praises the sonnets of Lorenzo de’ Medici, finding them less ‘inharmonious as Petrarch’s’, whose ‘thicket of words was occasioned by the embarrassing nature of the sonnet — a form of composition I do not love, and which is almost intolerable in any other language but Italian, which furnishes such a profusion of rhymes. To our tongue the sonnet is mortal, and the parent of insipidity’ (Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. by W. S. Lewis, 48 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1937-1983), xv (1952), pp. 260-261).

¹⁰⁵ They could perhaps reference Edwards, whose sonnets do feature both river and nightingale.

¹⁰⁶ *The Monthly Review*, 54 (1776), p. 338; *Westminster Magazine* (1776), p. 380.

¹⁰⁷ In 1804 Huddesford published *The Wiccamicall Chaplet, a Selection of Original Poetry*, a collection of verses by former pupils of Winchester College, including sonnets by Bampfylde, Bowles, Russell and two sonnets by Huddesford himself.

Mr Warton, on reading his History of English Poetry', and celebrates how his 'skill' 'Forbids in cold Oblivion's arms to lie, | Dear long-lost masters of the British Song'.¹⁰⁸

Bampfylde's *Sixteen Sonnets* is the first publication of the century actually to be devoted entirely to sonnets, and all take the Italian form, albeit with a variety of sestet.¹⁰⁹ Largely, the sonnets describe and celebrate the life of peaceful, rural, retirement Bampfylde had elected for himself in the Teign valley of the Devon countryside: 'Here in this safe retreat and peaceful glen | I pass my sober moments, far from Men'.¹¹⁰ In addition to the sonnet addressed to Warton, Bampfylde looks to the past in others sonnets, such as V 'On the Evening', as

whilst the watch-dog barks, and ploughmen lie
Lull'd by the rocking winds, let me unfold
Whate'er in rhapsody, or strain most holy
The hoary Minstrel sang in times of old;¹¹¹

Considering his use of the sonnet, Lonsdale suggests that the 'archaic associations' of the sonnet rendered it 'not inappropriate to another theme in Bampfylde's verse, the attraction of earlier English literature and history'.¹¹² Lonsdale detects this attraction in a previously unpublished sonnet, 'On hearing the woods of Canon-Teign in Devon were to be cut down' which contrasts Elizabethan splendour with the sordid present in which trees are cut down to pay debts:

Sweet were thy banks, O Teign! Thy murmurs sweet,
Thy dark brown wave that brawls along the grove,
Where the lone Druid oft was wont to rove
And 'midst the Ivy-mantled Caves retreat[.]¹¹³

In another sonnet, again unpublished in Bampfylde's lifetime, 'To the Muse', Bampfylde himself 'Tune[s] the rude Gothic Lyre' 'To Teign's neglected roar', invoking inspiration from a remote source, as seen in the poems of Percy and Warton.¹¹⁴ Landscape informs Bampfylde's sonnets to a greater extent than those which precede them. It was shortly after the publication of *Sixteen Sonnets* that Bampfylde was forced by his family to relinquish his

¹⁰⁸ John Bampfylde, 'Sonnet X. To Mr. Warton, on reading his History of English Poetry', *Sixteen Sonnets* (London: J. Millidge, 1778), p. 10 (ll. 10-11).

¹⁰⁹ 'Sonnet XIV. To the Evening' is the only sonnet which takes an open rhyme scheme in the octave, rhyming *abababab*; the fifteen others rhyme *abbaabba*.

¹¹⁰ Bampfylde, 'Sonnet XII. Written at a Farm', *Sixteen Sonnets*, p. 12 (ll. 12-13).

¹¹¹ Bampfylde, 'Sonnet V. On the Evening', *Sixteen Sonnets*, p. 5 (ll. 8-11).

¹¹² Lonsdale, 'Introduction', *Poems of John Bampfylde*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Perpetua Press, 1989), pp. 1-35 (p. 17).

¹¹³ Bampfylde, 'Sonnet on hearing the woods of Canon-Teign in Devon were to be cut Down', *Poems of John Bampfylde*, p. 69 (ll. 1-4).

¹¹⁴ Bampfylde, 'Sonnet To the Muse', *Poems of John Bampfylde*, p. 5 (ll. 3-5).

life of retirement in the Teign valley and move to London, where he rapidly suffered a breakdown following his unsuccessful pursuit of ‘Miss Palmer’ – niece of Sir Joshua Reynolds – to whom *Sixteen Sonnets* is dedicated.¹¹⁵ He was briefly imprisoned at Newgate and was soon after confined to a private madhouse, bringing his poetic career to a poignant end at the age of twenty-four. Thus, Bampfylde’s influence has been somewhat limited; no reference is made to him in the sonnet discourse of the 1780s and it seems unlikely that Smith would have known his sonnets.¹¹⁶ Bampfylde is usually later mentioned in regards to his misfortune and wasted talent, ‘cut off in the blossom of their youth’, as Southey groups sonneteers Bampfylde and Emily.¹¹⁷

Robert Holmes also published sonnets in 1778. A Biblical scholar, he began at Winchester College in 1760, and matriculated from New College, Oxford, in 1767. It is thus likely that he was acquainted with both Warton brothers via these institutions; Holmes was one of Warton’s successors as Professor of Poetry and held the post from 1783 to 1793. *Alfred. An Ode. With Six Sonnets* was published in 1778. The sonnets celebrate the natural world and rural life, addressing subjects such as evening and birds; all are Italian in form and bear some resemblance to Bampfylde’s sonnets. In the year prior to the publication of Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*, two more little-known poets with associations with Oxford, Edmund Cartwright and Thomas Warwick, both published sonnets. Cartwright began at University College, Oxford in 1757 and became a Fellow of Magdalen College in 1764.¹¹⁸ His *Sonnets to Eminent Men. And an Ode to the Earl of Effingham* (1783) contains six sonnets, one of which is written ‘To Mr. Warton’ and celebrates his excursions into the past: ‘the skill divine | To strike the solemn lyre with Pindar’s rage’, ‘Or dig, unwearied in thy toilsome mine, | Antiquity, with wealth time-hidden fraught’.¹¹⁹ All of Cartwright’s sonnets are irregular, yet they lean more to the Italian form. The sonnets of Warwick, ‘Late of University-College Oxford’, appear in his *Abelard to Eloisa. An Epistle. To which are prefixed, Sonnets. With a Rhapsody Written at Stratford-Upon-Avon* (1783), and all fourteen are Italian in form, or nearly so.¹²⁰ The sonnets largely arise from visiting specific places and landscapes and one is a re-visitation

¹¹⁵ Another of Bampfylde’s sonnets not included in his edition, ‘To Miss Palmer’s Monkey’, was published in the *Morning Post* (1779).

¹¹⁶ A nineteenth-century transcription of Bampfylde’s poems – made by his friend and mentor William Jackson (c.1798) – includes a sonnet by Hugh Downman ‘on reading the Sonnets of Mr. John Bampfylde’, which celebrates Bampfylde as something of an inspired genius, and emphasises the importance of place (see Lonsdale, *Poems of John Bampfylde*, p. 76).

¹¹⁷ As well as the sixteen sonnets, and the sonnet to Miss Palmer’s monkey, there is another sonnet by Bampfylde in *Poems, Chiefly by Gentlemen of Devonshire and Cornwall* (1792) as well as three more which went unpublished until Lonsdale’s edition (1989).

¹¹⁸ His writing was fostered under the (private) tutelage of John Langhorne, who also wrote sonnets.

¹¹⁹ Edmund Cartwright, ‘III. To Mr. Warton. Written in the year 1776’, *Sonnets to Eminent Men. And an Ode to the Earl of Effingham* (London: J. Murray, etc., 1783), p. 5 (ll. 1-5).

¹²⁰ Several take the open Italian rhyme in the octave of *abababab*.

sonnet, set in Warwick's university landscape of Oxford. In Warwick's edition, different poetic forms thus curiously coalesce. The Popean couplets of 'Abelard to Eloisa', which also of course connects with Pope thematically, are juxtaposed with the rather un-Popean form of sonnet and the 'rhapsody', which is disconnected from tradition formally. Warwick's advertisement to his sonnets sets out his views on the form. He writes that the 'example of Petrarch, and the authority of Boileau, might of themselves serve to give a decided superiority to the Sonnet over all the smaller kinds of poetry' and takes on Johnson in wondering 'what a loss must English poetry sustain in being declared incapable of, or at least improper for that species of composition?'.¹²¹ The argument however, is 'far from conclusive', Warwick observes:

It is true, that the sonnet has been intirely neglected by those of our latter poets, who have been most remarkable for ease, and gracefulness; that it has failed in the hands of some others through their fondness for the manner and expression of the first writers who introduced it into this country, which to a modern reader have given it an air of quaintness, and affectation; but above all, that its rules, and limitations have been little attended to. Yet more than one instance of success, where the above errors have been avoided, might easily be produced, (such as that of Mr. Edwards, on the Hermitage at Wrest) which at the time they prove the possibility of adapting our language to the sonnet, will be the best commentary to the sentiments of Boileau upon that subject, which I shall at my own peril submit to the reader.¹²²

A quotation from *Art poétique* follows. Warwick thus gives a useful insight into the status of the sonnet on the eve of the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets*. He highlights the lingering antiquarian associations of the form, its 'quaintness and affectation' and his criticism of this approach looks forward, yet his condemnation of irregularity, and promotion of 'rules' and 'limitations', drawing on Boileau, does not. In a review of Warwick's sonnets, *The Critical Review* displays little patience with Warwick's views on the sonnet form: 'as to the loss we should sustain by their annihilation [...] we think it might be endured with patience and resignation', deeming that the subject does not deserve 'much critical investigation'.¹²³ Despite this pronouncement, over the next twenty years, much 'critical investigation' and attention was indeed paid to the sonnet form, largely inspired by the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Far from being annihilated, the popularity of the form and its appropriation only increased.

¹²¹ Warwick, p. v.

¹²² Warwick, pp. vii-viii.

¹²³ *The Critical Review*, 57 (1784), pp. 6 and 7.

Elegiac Sonnets

Such was the sonnet scene upon which Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* emerged in 1784. Six of her sonnets had appeared before the edition, however, in periodicals from September 1782 onwards.¹²⁴ As the first preface to *Elegiac Sonnets* communicates:

Some of my friends, with partial indiscretion, have multiplied the copies they procured of several of these attempts, till they found their way into the prints of the day in a mutilated state; which, concurring with other circumstances, determined me to put them into their present form.¹²⁵

(10)

Such 'circumstances' permit Smith to assume a somewhat diffident persona with regards to publishing her poetry, entering into print with reluctance. According to biographical sources, although she began composing verse during her schooldays (none of which survives), Smith first began writing sonnets in 1777 – the year of Warton's *Poems* – after relocating to the countryside from London at her request.¹²⁶ Lys Farm (also known as Brookwood and Brockwood; see fig. 3) in Hampshire was purchased in 1774, where 'she fondly imagined that she should escape from existing evils; but she was soon awakened from her dream of happiness'.¹²⁷ With already a hundred acres of land, 'Mr Smith launched into farming with more avidity than judgment, and purchased other parcels of land'.¹²⁸ While her husband was failing at being a gentleman farmer, Smith was engaging with the Hampshire landscape in another way. According to Mary Hays's account of Smith in the *British Public Characters* series, during this time

Surrounding circumstances [...] and ill-judged expences, which she could not prevent, rendered her [Smith] extremely unhappy; and when a few hours of solitude she had learned to love was allowed her, her thoughts and feelings were expressed in

¹²⁴ Sonnets I and VII 'On the Departure of the Nightingale' in *The European Magazine* (September, 1782); sonnet V 'To the South Downs' in *The European Magazine* (October, 1782) and *The New Annual Register* (January, 1784); sonnets XI 'To Sleep' and II 'Written at the Close of Spring' in *The European Magazine* (December, 1782) and sonnet III 'To a Nightingale' in *The New Annual Register* (January, 1784).

¹²⁵ All references to Smith's poetry, and paratextual material, are from *Poetry*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe, in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran, 14 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005-2007), XIV and are given in the text. References to prose (prefaces, notes, and so on), and sonnets quoted in their entirety are given by page number; other references to poetry are given by inclusive page numbers and line number in the first instance, and then by line number. All references to Smith's other works are also from *Works of Charlotte Smith* and are given in the text by volume and page number. See bibliography for further details.

¹²⁶ After her marriage to Benjamin Smith in 1765, their first home was in Cheapside, over the business premises of Richard Smith, Benjamin's father, a West India merchant and a director of the East India Company. The family moved to Southgate and Tottenham before Hampshire.

¹²⁷ Dorset, 'Charlotte Smith', p. 34.

¹²⁸ [Mary Hays], 'Mrs. Charlotte Smith', *Public Characters of 1800-1801* (London: Richard Phillips, 1801), pp. 43-65 (p. 48). Dorset quotes from the *Public Characters* account, which would appear to confirm its accuracy.

some of those little poems, which she has since called Sonnets: but so far were they from being intended for the public eye, that her most intimate friends never saw them till many years afterwards.¹²⁹

Smith's sister gives the more specific year and circumstances for her turn to the sonnet:

In the spring of 1777 she lost her eldest son in his eleventh year [...] To divert her mind from this irremediable calamity, and from the contemplation of the many anxieties which oppressed her, she amused herself by composing her first Sonnets, which were never intended for publication.¹³⁰

Her turn to the form is thus given a specific 'elegiac' context, recalling Gray perhaps. Smith's husband was already in financial difficulty at this time and 1776 had seen the death of his father and the beginning of the complex legalities surrounding his will which would trouble Smith and her family for the remainder of her life. Thus, Lys farm was sold in 1783 and by December of that year Benjamin Smith was in King's Bench prison for debt and embezzlement, where he would remain for seven months. It was during this period that Smith negotiated the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets* with James Dodsley, with the assistance of Hayley. *Elegiac Sonnets, and other Essays by Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, Sussex* appeared in June 1784, although this was not quite Smith's permanent address; aside from her actual location at King's Bench she had left the childhood home Bignor Park at fifteen upon her marriage and it had since passed to her younger brother.



2. S. H. Grimm, Watercolour view of the entrance front of Bignor Park (1780)

¹²⁹ Hays, p. 48.

¹³⁰ Dorset, pp. 37-38. According to Dorset, Smith was encouraged by the writer (later planter and politician) Bryan Edwards (1743–1800) (see p. 38).

Smith's title-page echoes those of publications of both her father and brother in 1757 and 1784 respectively, rather different types of publication, which engage with place and landscape in a different way from Smith's sonnets: *A Proposal for Raising Timber, and for Effectually Supporting the Poor in Great Britain*, by Nicholas Turner, 'of Bignor Park in Sussex' was published in 1757, and *An Essay on Draining and Improving Peat Bogs* by Nicholas Turner 'of Bignor, Sussex' was published in 1784, going through three editions.¹³¹

Smith addresses Hayley in the dedication of her sonnets as a predecessor in the sonnet form:

While I ask your protection for these essays, I cannot deny having myself some esteem for them. You permit me to say, that did I not trust to your candour and sensibility, and hope they will plead for the errors your judgment may discover, I should never have availed myself of the liberty I have obtained – that of dedicating these simple effusions to the greatest modern Master of that charming talent, in which I can never be more than a distant copyist.

(9)

Despite the references to her sonnets as 'essays' and 'simple effusions', this is undercut by the 'esteem' Smith herself has for them; as is typical of Smith, she appears simultaneously deferential and bold. Although she deems Hayley to be the 'greatest modern Master' of the sonnet, and describes herself as his 'distant copyist', her first-edition sonnets are notably different from his eight published sonnets, all of which lack a personal aspect. Smith invokes Hayley again in the preface:

The little Poems which are here called Sonnets, have, I believe, no very just claim to that title: but they consist of fourteen lines, and appear to me no improper vehicle for a single Sentiment. I am told, and I read it as the opinion of very good judges, that the legitimate Sonnet is ill-calculated for our language. The specimen Mr. Hayley has given, though they form a strong exception, prove no more, than that the difficulties of the attempt vanish before uncommon powers.

(10)

Smith's comments in the preface echo contemporary sonnet discourse and prevailing attitudes to the form. The Italian or Petrarchan form was considered the only 'legitimate' version of the sonnet, yet also 'not very suitable to the English language' according to Johnson, which Smith here invokes. As opposed to the ubiquitous Italian form, the little-used English or Shakespearean form was known as the 'illegitimate' form and – as will be seen – thought not even to warrant the appellation 'sonnet' by some. Hayley's 'specimen' would appear to refer to his six translated sonnets which take the Italian form, and while they 'prove [...] that the difficulties' of the legitimate sonnet 'vanish before uncommon powers',

¹³¹ Smith's father also apparently wrote poetry – 'no contemptible poet himself' according to Hays (p. 44).

they are the ‘exception’ (with the implication that there are others which have not been as successful). Smith uses the English form in roughly half of her sonnets, while the remainder are irregular, and range in their experimental nature. Only one of her sonnets is fully Italian in form, another one nearly so, and another is Spenserian. This is of vital importance when assessing Smith’s place in the history of the sonnet; for in this way her sonnets signal a shift from those of her eighteenth-century forbears, who mostly use the Italian form. The only instances of the English form occur in Emily’s *Death* and Hayley’s sonnet in *Triumphs of Temper*, and his ‘elegiac’ sonnet in *An Essay on Epic Poetry*; although, as seen, some other sonnets prior to Smith’s do also lean towards or blend the English form. Thus, Smith can be credited with reviving the English sonnet form at this time.

Moreover, aside from Hayley’s *Triumph of Temper* sonnet, which she refers to in her sonnet XIX (1786), Smith only invokes one other sonnet in the English form in her oeuvre: Michael Drayton’s sonnet VI from *Idea* (1619), also the only Renaissance sonnet she names; nowhere does she mention sonnets by Spenser, Shakespeare or Sidney in her oeuvre.¹³² Indeed, aside from eighteenth-century contemporaries and predecessors, the only sonnets she refers to or draws upon are by Petrarch and Milton. Drayton’s sonnet appears in Smith’s work for children *Rural Walks* (1795) in which Smith’s autobiographical character Mrs. Woodfield speaks of the immortalising powers of poetry, observing how ‘the charms of so many lovely women live now only in the memory of mankind by the poets who have celebrated their names’, and recites Drayton’s sixth sonnet as an example – noting somewhat apologetically that it is not so polished as modern poetry – which is explicitly about how the poet ‘to *thee* eternity shall give, | When nothing else remaineth of these days’ (XII, 35-36).¹³³ Throughout its history, the sonnet has been used to immortalise a subject (usually female), most notably by Petrarch, Shakespeare, Spenser and Sidney, as well as Drayton. That Smith should draw attention to Drayton’s sonnet as being ‘apposite to this topic’ (XII, 35) would suggest that she perhaps was not familiar with contemporary sonnets in which it is a dominant theme – in Shakespeare’s sonnets for example. The fact that the one English sonnet named by Smith should be imbued with such immortalising powers also establishes an interesting formal contrast for her ‘elegiac’ sonnets, which make no such claims to longevity.

¹³² Drayton’s sequence of fifty-one sonnets, *Idea Mirrour: Amours in Quatorzains*, was published in 1594. He later revised the sequence as *Idea* in 1619, dropping twenty-one of its sonnets, and adding new ones; the sonnet Smith’s quotes from among them. *The Works of Michael Drayton, Esq; A Celebrated Poet in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth, King James I and Charles I*, including his sonnets, were collected in 1748, and enlarged into four volumes in 1753. Drayton is mentioned very little in eighteenth-century sonnet discourse, and was known in the eighteenth century chiefly for his topographical poem *Poly-Olbion* (part one, 1612).

¹³³ Prior to the sonnet, Smith quotes from Pope’s ‘Part of the ninth ode of the fourth book of Horace’ (1751), perhaps bringing the polish of ‘modern poetry’ to endorse Drayton’s presence, yet also locating the immortalising power of poetry invoked by Drayton in its classical origins.

The first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, published in 1784, contains sixteen sonnets, a song translated from French, and a poem in couplets (the ‘other essays’ of the edition’s title). A second edition rapidly followed the first, with only slight amendments, while the third and fourth editions (1786) introduced twenty new sonnets; the non-sonnet poems were removed. A new preface was added, now dated from Woolbeding. The fifth edition of 1789 perhaps marks the high point of Smith’s sonnet success. The edition was published by Thomas Cadell, by subscription, with a list of the names of over eight-hundred ‘noble, literary, and respectable names [...] a brilliant assemblage’, as Smith describes them in the new preface.¹³⁴ The edition also includes five illustrations, engraved by the eminent Thomas Stothard among others. As well as twelve new sonnets, the non-sonnet poems were now re-inserted due to popular demand, together with an elegy and ode.¹³⁵ The sixth edition was published in 1792, with eleven new sonnets and four non-sonnet poems, which completed the first volume, together with the new preface bemoaning Smith’s personal circumstances. Although it continued to be republished, reaching its tenth edition in 1812, no further poems were added.

The second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* finally appeared in May 1797 after a period of delay and difficulty. The subscription list was now much shorter, falling to 283 names. The volume’s long preface offers an explanation, cataloguing the woes Smith has suffered, not least those due to the ‘unheard acts of injustice’ of those embroiled in the Smith estate, explicitly blamed for the losses she has endured: ‘they can neither give back to the maimed the possession of health, or restore the dead’ (66-67). Indeed, Smith’s gravest loss had been the death of her favourite daughter, Anna Augusta, in 1795, which can be felt throughout the volume. It takes as an epigraph a suitably morose quotation from 268 of Petrarch’s *Canonziere*. The edition includes twenty-five sonnets, as well as fifteen non-sonnet poems, a significant increase. The volume also includes a portrait and four illustrations. The second edition of the second volume was published in 1800, with the vehement preface suppressed. It added eight new sonnets and four longer poems, completing the development of the second volume, which reached a fourth, unaltered edition in 1812. After 1800, no further sonnets appeared in any works by Smith. Two further sonnets have also been attributed to her: ‘Evening. A Sonnet’ in *The Universal Magazine* (1789) and ‘Original’ in Henderson’s *Petrarca* (1803), taking the total number of her sonnets to ninety-four.

¹³⁴ Subscribers included the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Duchess of Cumberland, Frances Burney, Elizabeth Carter, William Cowper, Mary Delany, Richard Payne Knight, William Pitt, Samuel Rogers, Horace Walpole, and Thomas and Joseph Warton.

¹³⁵ In a note to ‘The Origin of Flattery’ Smith states that it has been reprinted at the behest of ‘very respectable subscribers’, for the ‘sonnets have been thought too gloomy’ (55).

In addition to her sonnets, Smith published various other works concomitantly. After publishing two translations: *Manon Lescaut* (1786) – although this was soon withdrawn – and *The Romance of Real Life* (1787), she turned to the novel, with *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), and published ten more over the next decade.¹³⁶ In addition, she published a blank verse political poem *The Emigrants, a Poem, in Two Books* (1793); four works for children, and a shipwreck narrative.¹³⁷ A comedy of 1799, *What is She?*, is also attributed to Smith, and posthumously, *Beachy Head: With Other Poems* and *The Natural History of Birds, Intended Chiefly for Young Persons* were both published in 1807.¹³⁸ The ensuing chapters span Smith's literary career, following it roughly chronologically, thus starting with Smith's initial official venture into print in 1784.

¹³⁶ *Ethelinde; or, The Recluse of the Lake* (1789); *Celestina* (1791); *Desmond* (1792); *The Old Manor House* (1793); its sequel, *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794); *The Banished Man* (1794); *Montalbert* (1795); *Marchmont* (1796) *The Young Philosopher* (1798) and *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer: Containing Narratives of Various Descriptions* (1800-1802).

¹³⁷ *Rural Walks; In Dialogues: Intended for the Use of Young Persons* (1795); *Rambles Farther. A Continuation of Rural Walks* (1796); *Minor Morals, Interspersed with Sketches of Natural History, Historical Anecdotes, and Original Stories* (1798); *The History of England: From the Earliest Records to the Peace of Amiens, in a Series of Letters to a Young Lady at School* (two of three volumes; 1806). *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine, Venus and Piedmont Transports [...]* (1796).

¹³⁸ Several of these works contain sonnets that were transposed to and from *Elegiac Sonnets*, and in the ensuing chapters, the context in which they occur in these works is often considered, serving variously to illuminate, confuse, or shift the sonnets in meaning, as well as Smith's literary position.

Chapter 2 Tradition

Woodlands

In the first two editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, the prevalent setting is that of the woodland locale of the nightingale. The landscape corresponds with the Lys Farm estate in Hampshire where Smith first began writing sonnets in 1777. In the preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1791) Smith recalls first turning to poetry: ‘when in the Beech Woods of Hampshire, I first struck the chords of the melancholy lyre, its notes were never intended for the public ear! It was unaffected sorrows drew them forth: I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy’ (13). Here, Smith locates the very origins of *Elegiac Sonnets* within the nightingale landscape, and implicitly associates her poetry – retiring, private, unaffected and sorrowful – with the nightingale’s song. Indeed, she is responding to the accusation of a friend that her ‘plaintive tone’ in earlier editions has returned: ‘toujours Rossignols, toujours des chansons tristes’ [always nightingales, always sad songs] (13). The bird is the focus of two sonnets in the first edition, III, ‘To a nightingale’ and VII, ‘On the departure on the nightingale’, yet concomitant tropes and features – the moon, spring, injured breast, rose and thorn – are woven across the volume, drawing other sonnets into the nightingale’s landscape. Curran writes that the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*

consists of safely literary sorrows: a sonnet to the moon, another to a nightingale, adaptations of Petrarch, realizations drawn from another icon of European sensibility, Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*. Given Smith is so highly conscious of the provenance, so to speak, of her every subject, it is some wonder that she touched so resonant a chord with her audience. Her command of the sonnet form at this point is polished but the content is largely derivative.¹

Indeed, Smith’s first edition is informed by an interest in literary ‘provenance’ and tradition. The consciously literary and ‘derivative’ aspect of her early sonnets is central to her negotiation of tradition and the establishment of poetic voice as she emerges onto the literary scene, and is more nuanced and playful than has been acknowledged. Throughout *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith places herself in a strong lineage of canonical poets, yet positions her own poems as marginal, illegitimate, inferior effusions, dramatised in this initial set of sonnets with their carefully-patterned imagery, which draw on the nightingale as canonical, literary subject and emblem of the elegiac, female poet. Identification with the bird also enhances the important relationship between self and place, as Smith indicates in her posthumous work *The Natural History of Birds* (1807): ‘Nearer the sea, the birds peculiar to the rocks and sands scream round the cliffs, or wheel over the expanse of water; and are not less in

¹ Curran, ‘General Introduction’, *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, I, pp. xii-xxvii.

harmony with the scene, than the thrush, the woodlark, and the nightingale, with the tender green and reviving beauty of spring' (XIII, 243-244).



3. Brookwood Hall (Lys Farm) in J. P. Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen, in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Second Series* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1824), vol I

In *Birds*, Smith relates the ‘mournful story’ of the Ovidian Philomela myth – the chief literary connection with the bird – and also observes how the nightingale has been ‘celebrated by the poets more than any other of the feathered race’ (XIII, 337 and 334), naming several poems together with her own sonnets III and VII (although others sonnets feature the bird, it is these two initial sonnets that she selects for her canon).² Kirsten Juhas has shown how the Philomela persona is used as a means of ‘self-authorization’ for eighteenth-century women writers, including Smith, who ‘fashioned and empowered themselves as (female) authors’.³ Indeed, in *Elegiac Sonnets*, the invocation of the nightingale permits Smith to locate herself within a strong literary lineage, yet through the Philomela myth, the bird’s song comes to represent a specifically ‘elegiac’ and female voice; in a sense it encodes the position of the woman writer. As Smith tells the tale, it is one largely about the suppression of voice: when Philomela threatens to make her rape known Tereus is provoked ‘by the eloquence of her sorrow, and the justness of her indignation’ to cut out her tongue (XIII, 337). She first finds a voice by weaving her story in a tapestry – a

² Smith does not feature in the two cultural histories of the nightingale: Richard Mabey, *Whistling in the Dark: In Pursuit of the Nightingale* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993) and Jeni Williams, *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender Class and Histories* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). I follow Smith’s spelling of ‘Philomela’.

³ Kirsten Juhas, “‘I’le to My Self, and to My Muse Be True’”: *Strategies of Self-Authorization in Eighteenth-Century Women Poetry* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 14.

translation of sorts – for her sister, who is struck by the ‘dumb eloquence of the poor injured Philomela’ (XIII, 337). At the end of the tale, Philomela’s voice, her ‘eloquence’, is finally restored fully through her transformation into the bird with its expressive and melancholy song.



4. Illustration to ‘Nightingale’ in Charlotte Smith, *A Natural History of Birds* (London: J. Johnson, 1807)

As Smith acknowledges in *Birds*, ‘this article would be too much enlarged, if I were to add a twentieth part of all that has been said and sung about this “Minstrel of the Moon”’: the nightingale has long been the most popular of ornithological poetic subjects, its song frequently aligned with poetic voice (XIII, 342). Her own two sonnets appear under the playful introduction of ‘an inferior poet, to whom perhaps you may notwithstanding be partial’, a somewhat typical self-marginalising statement contradicted by the juxtaposition of her own sonnets with those of Petrarch and Milton (XIII, 340). In her genealogy, preceding her own sonnets chronologically, Smith selects extracts from a translation by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1763); Milton’s sonnet I (1645), and extracts from *Paradise Lost* (1667) and ‘Il Penseroso’ (1645); two extracts from Thomson’s ‘Spring’ (1728); and two sonnets by

Petrarch.⁴ The later poems quoted from are Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791) and Coleridge's 'The Nightingale' (1798). As this selection indicates, the nightingale offers a direct route into sonnet tradition; and Smith's two nightingale sonnets III and VII name Petrarch and Milton respectively, the two main poets through which the sonnet found renewed popularity in the eighteenth century, an Italian genealogy. However, as well as connecting with sonnet tradition, Smith typically departs from it, chiefly through form and her use of English – 'illegitimate' – and irregular sonnet forms: transgressive 'effusions' more befitting the nightingale analogy formally. At least one 'illegitimate' nightingale sonnet preceded Smith's own: Shakespeare's sonnet 102 (1609), in which the speaker's voice is aligned with the 'mournful hymns' of Philomela (yet curiously in the bird's silence), nodding to the elegiac – 'mournful' – aspect of Philomela's voice.⁵ As noted, however, there is nothing to suggest that Smith knew Shakespeare's sonnets, and her illegitimate sonnets appeared largely without precedent in the eighteenth century. Prior to Smith, several eighteenth-century women poets drew on the nightingale-Philomela as poetic subject or persona: Elizabeth Singer Rowe published under the *nom de plume* 'Philomela', while Anne Finch, Sarah Nixon and Catherine Talbot addressed the bird in their poems.⁶ In her sonnets and her wider oeuvre, however, Smith rarely invokes female forbears, and she does not refer to other nightingale poems by women writers, with the exception of Montagu's translation. Her interest is in a male tradition, and her own place within it.

Nightingale poems are often concerned with poetic inspiration, voice and the muse, in which Smith's first edition is naturally interested, particularly the introductory, untitled, sonnet I, which also makes reference to the muse and poetic garlands. Although it does not name the nightingale, sonnet I is typical of the way in which Smith's speaker is more implicitly aligned with the bird.⁷ The sonnet sets up the interdependence of pain and poetry at the crux of *Elegiac Sonnets*, their 'elegiac' aspect, indicated in the preface to the first editions, which

⁴ Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) is thought to have composed the sonnets and other poems of *Rime sparse* – also known as the *Canzoniere* – between 1327 and 1368 and in 1366 began work on a definitive version of the collection, which he revised and re-ordered until the year of his death, after which it was much published and translated.

⁵ William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 102', *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Thomson, 1997), p. 102 (l. 10).

⁶ See Elizabeth Singer Rowe, *Poems on Several Occasions: Written by Philomela* (1696), reprinted as *Philomela* in 1737 by Edmund Curll; Anne Finch, 'To the Nightingale' (1713); Sarah Nixon, 'The Nightingale' (1740); and Catherine Talbot, 'Sonnet In ye Manner of Petrarch –', written 1758-1761, but unpublished in her lifetime. These are collected together in a section on 'The Nightingale in Poetry', in *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine E. Ingrassia (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 857-866. The appropriation of the nightingale by eighteenth-century women writers is discussed by Juhas in *Strategies of Self-Authorization*, pp. 195-250.

⁷ Indeed, sonnets I and VII 'On the Departure of the Nightingale' were the first two sonnets of Smith's to be published, together in *The European Magazine* (1782).

suggests the nightingale persona: ‘Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought’ (10). In sonnet I, the ‘dear delusive art’ of the muse ‘decks the head with many a rose’ yet ‘Reserves the thorn to fester in the heart’ (17, ll. 6-8). The nightingale has often been described pressing her breast against a thorn: in Anne Finch’s ‘To the Nightingale’ (1713), the speaker describes how ‘th’ unhappy Poet’s Breast, | Like thine, when best he sings, is plac’d against a Thorn’.⁸ The image inscribes the relationship between pain and poetry, as enunciated in the final lines of sonnet I: ‘Ah! then, how dear the Muse’s favours cost, | *If those paint sorrow best – who feel it most!*’ (13-14), echoing Finch but drawing on Pope’s ‘Eloisa to Abelard’, connecting its speaker with the future poet of Pope’s poem. There is a somewhat complex switching of genders here across all three poems, but the nightingale may go some way to resolve this: it is the male nightingale which sings, while the female does not.⁹

As evidenced in *Birds*, Smith also knew of the connection between nightingale and rose from the ‘Asiatic poets’ who tell that the ‘Nightingale is enamoured of the rose’; in *Birds* she quotes from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s translation of a Turkish poem made in a letter to Pope of 1717: ‘The Nightingale now wanders among the vines; | His [her] passion is to seek Roses’ (XIII, 338). A poem, ‘The Swallow’ also published in *Birds* – as well as *Beachy Head* in the same year – invokes the nightingale in an eastern context in conjunction with the Ovidian myth:

Were you in Asia? O relate,
If there your fabled sister’s woes
She seem’d in sorrow to narrate;
Or sings she but to celebrate
Her nuptials with the rose?

(187-189, ll. 36-40)

Curiously, Montagu goes on to turn her ‘literal’ translation – ‘a fable as well known here as any part of Ovid amongst us’ – into ‘the stile of English Poetry’, and into couplets, becoming

⁸ Anne Finch, ‘To the Nightingale’, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Denys Thompson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987), pp. 67-68 (ll. 12-13).

⁹ Smith consistently refers to the bird as female, yet does make one reference to the singing bird as ‘he’ in *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (XIII, 139). The mythologizing of the song bird as female in a sense dramatises the woman poet’s position, appropriating a male (dominated) role, especially pertinent to the sonnet. When Smith’s sonnets I and VII were first published in *The European Magazine*, the editor refers to the author as a ‘he’. Shakespeare’s sonnet 102 has confounded editors by the apparent switching of the bird’s sex (see *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones, p. 314, n. 8). In Pliny’s *Natural History* (AD 77), the bird is gendered as female. In eighteenth-century works of ornithology the sex of the singing bird is variously presented as both female and male. Thomas Bewick’s *A History of British Birds* (1797) clarifies it is the male bird that sings.

‘Now Philomel renews her tender strain, | Indulging all the night her pleasing Pain’.¹⁰ The nightingale, as it will for Smith, is a vehicle for translation and transformation – processes in which the Ovidian myth is steeped – of voice, language and form.

In an article on Smith’s ‘The Swallow’, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook finds the swallow to be a personally appropriate emblem of authorship for Smith. Cook surveys the natural and cultural history of the nightingale to show why Smith chooses to invest in the swallow instead: the nightingale is ‘too passive and too eroticized to serve the needs of Smith’s literary product’.¹¹ Conversely, the domestic, maternal swallow ‘authorizes and legitimates Smith’s publications’; associated with both the familiar and the exotic, and identified domestic virtues, ‘the swallow serves exceptionally well as an emblem of the female Romantic poet, who must claim access to the extremes of emotional experience but without overstepping the bounds of female decorum’.¹² However, Smith’s identification in *Elegiac Sonnets* is certainly with the nightingale, and she curiously manages to evade the erotic associations of the bird (as do her female predecessors such as Singer Rowe). The literary associations with the nightingale authorise and legitimise her authorship in a different way, as Juhas also suggests, and undercut any ‘passive’ aspect.

Smith’s sonnet II is ‘Written at the close of Spring’, linking it seasonally with the nightingale, which sings from April to June (according to Smith in *Birds*), as well as through its pastoral, ‘grove’ setting. The first sonnet to address the bird directly, III ‘To a nightingale’ follows:

Poor melancholy bird – that all night long
 Tell’st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe;
 From what sad cause can such sweet sorrow flow,
 And whence this mournful melody of song?

Thy poet’s musing fancy would translate
 What mean the sounds that swell thy little breast,
 When still at dewy eve thou leavest thy nest,
 Thus to the listening Night to sing thy fate?

Pale Sorrow’s victims wert thou once among,
 Tho’ now released in woodlands wild to rove?
 Say – hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong,
 Or died’st thou – martyr of disastrous love?
 Ah! songstress sad! that such my lot might be,

¹⁰ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, ‘108. To Alexander Pope *1 April 1717*’, *Selected Letters*, ed. by Isobel Grundy (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 156.

¹¹ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, ‘Charlotte Smith and “The Swallow”: Migration and Romantic Authorship’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 72 (2009), 48-67 (p. 61).

¹² Cook, p. 66.

To sigh, and sing at liberty – like thee!

(18)

Although the first edition does not include a note, the third edition informs the reader that ‘the idea [is] from the 43d sonnet of Petrarch’ (18) – 311 in modern editions – which Smith also cites in her list of nightingale poems, along with Petrarch’s preceding sonnet ‘Zefiro torna’, which invokes the Ovidian myth. Only one other of his sonnets (10) features the nightingale. In sonnet 311, Petrarch hears and attempts to decipher the nightingale’s song: ‘That nightingale that so sweetly weeps, perhaps for his children or for his dear consort, fills the sky and the fields with sweetness in so many grieving, skilful notes, || and all night he seems to accompany me and remind me of my harsh fate’.¹³ This is thus the ‘idea’ Smith takes from Petrarch, as her sonnet also considers the source of the nightingale’s sadness. Curran suggests that the ‘specific influence’ of Petrarch on this sonnet is ‘at most slight’, yet other critics such as Robinson and Zuccato show otherwise.¹⁴ Indeed, as the first sonnet to connect explicitly with existing sonnet tradition the debt seems significant, and as Zuccato suggests, the word ‘translate’ is at the crux of the sonnet.¹⁵ The poem is steeped in different modes of translation: of the nightingale’s song, from Petrarch, gender – Petrarch’s male nightingale transforms into Smith’s ‘songstress’ – and the sonnet form itself, which Smith translates from Petrarch’s Italian to her irregular form.¹⁶ Sonnet III is the first irregular sonnet of the volume, which it draws attention to by its appearance on the page: broken up into two quatrains and a sestet. Rhyming *abba cddc effegg*, it begins with an Italian quatrain, before ‘translating’ into the English sonnet form, doing so with the word ‘translate’ itself, which introduces a new rhyme and interrupts the Petrarchan form. After the hybrid *cddc* quatrain, the sonnet ends with a fully Shakespearean sestet, *efefgg*, completing the translation from Italian to English. In this way, the sonnet can be seen as a prelude of sorts to the separate translations ‘from Petrarch’.

There are curious parallels between Smith’s sonnet III and a poem by Catherine Talbot (written 1758-1761), ‘Sonnet In ye Manner of Petrarch –’ which opens thus:

¹³ Francesco Petrarca, ‘311’, in *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. and ed. by Robert M. Durling (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 490. Durling’s is the standard modern translation of Petrarch’s sonnets and the complete *Rime sparse*, and I have drawn on his translations for their less ‘interpretative’ aspect: literal prose translations that seek to convey the original sense of Petrarch’s poems as straightforwardly as possible (see ‘Preface’, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*, pp. vii-xii). When John Nott translates the sonnet, the bird is not given a sex.

¹⁴ Curran, *Poems*, p. 14, n.; Robinson, ‘Formal Paradox’, p. 209-211; Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England*, pp. 53-4.

¹⁵ Zuccato, p. 54.

¹⁶ Juhas reads the quatrain as ‘a comment on the sonnet’s basic strategy of ‘translating’ the manifold poetic echoes of the nightingale motif in literary history’, and argues that Smith ‘attempts a free reconstruction of the motif’, outside of the Ovidian, Petrarchan and Miltonic pretexts (*Strategies of Self-Authorization*, p. 245).

The nightingale that sits on Yonder spray,
 Tho' all of night she plains her hapless Fate,
 Yet since she can in liberty relate
 Her griefs, that freedom does those griefs allay.—
 But I, aye me! must all the livelong day,
 Conceal with sembl'd cheer a cheerless state[.]¹⁷

As in Smith's sonnet, a contrast is established between the nightingale, at liberty to sing of her 'hapless Fate', and the speaker, who is not. In both poems, the nightingale is an idealised version of the woman poet, rather than one the speaker can identify with. Talbot's 'sonnet' goes further than Smith's, inscribing a troubling repression and restraint: 'Reasons eye' forbids 'every fond delusive thought', ordering the speaker to 'Restrain thy looks, thy Sighs, & every kind | Indulgence, of a Vain, Imagined Woe'.¹⁸ The sonnet is strangely poised between expression and restraint; as in Smith's sonnet, Talbot's speaker – to an extent – expresses the woe they profess they are not at liberty to. This is mirrored by form, the strictness of the sonnet suggests restraint, yet both poets transgress it: Talbot's sonnet has an extra two lines, rhyming *abbaabbacdcdefef*. Translation from Petrarch similarly encodes a deference or modesty, yet both Smith and Talbot depart from Petrarch's 'idea' and 'manner', as well as form. Smith's poems are clearly more 'at liberty' than Talbot's, however; she does not 'restrain' indulgence of woe elsewhere, and Talbot's sonnet remained unpublished in her lifetime. Although Smith could not have known of Talbot's sonnet, the similarities between them interestingly demonstrate the ways in which the nightingale was appropriated as a pertinent trope for the exploration of voice for the woman poet (together with Petrarch's mode and form).

Despite the contrast Smith draws between speaker and nightingale at the end of sonnet III, other sonnets do seem to make the identification. In sonnet III, the bird 'Tell'st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe' (2), while the following sonnet IV is addressed 'To the Moon'. Smith's readers keenly associated her with the nightingale. Egerton Brydges writes that 'Sorrow was her constant companion, and she sung with a thorn at her bosom, which forced out strains of melody, expressive of the most affecting sensations, interwoven with the rich hues of an inspired fancy', while John Thelwall, applauding Smith's 'illegitimate' sonnets, laments 'that this Philomela of the Muse's grove had not been more frequent in her

¹⁷ Catherine Talbot, 'Sonnet in ye Manner of Petrarch –' in *Bluestocking Feminism; Volume 3: Catherine Talbot & Hester Chapone*, ed. by Rhoda Zuk (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), p. 158, ll. 1-6. The poem is followed in Zuk's edition by 'Another', which is a fourteen-line Petrarchan sonnet.

¹⁸ Talbot, 'Sonnet', ll. 8-9 and 15-16.

transgressions', a somewhat unfortunate term considering the sexual context of the myth, which Smith's sonnets – and other Philomela poems – manage to avoid.¹⁹

Smith's second nightingale sonnet, VII 'On the departure of the nightingale' invokes Milton, as seen, the major influence on the eighteenth-century sonnet revival; almost all eighteenth-century sonneteers in some way establish a connection with him. Although she describes Milton as 'the greatest of English poets' in *Birds* (XIII, 338), Smith cannot be described as a 'Miltonist', and unlike her male predecessors, and female successors (Mary Robinson and Anna Seward both draw on Milton as a formal precedent), does not follow Milton in form. Milton's appeal to women writers is perhaps curious, and somewhat at odds with the inhibiting effects of 'Milton's bogey' feminist critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have identified.²⁰ Joseph Wittreich has explored Milton's appeal to eighteenth-century women poets, and although he does not consider his influence on the sonnet, does consider the significance of the 'embedded' sonnets of *Paradise Lost*, two of which are spoken by Eve. Moreover, she 'invents' the genre in book IV, yet is unencumbered by rules: hers are unrhymed 'illegitimate' sonnets.²¹ The nightingale features in several poems by Milton, as acknowledged in *Birds* by Smith, and as Warton observes in a note to Milton's first sonnet in his 1785 edition, 'No poet has more frequently celebrated the nightingale than Milton'.²² Further notes to the sonnet by Thomas and Joseph Warton give other examples of the nightingale in poetry.

Befitting Smith's first edition of sonnets, the sonnet she quotes from in sonnet VII is Milton's own first sonnet written early in his poetic career (c. 1629). Curiously, the only other sonnet by Milton Smith engages with is his last sonnet XIX ('Methought I saw my late espoused saint'), in her own final edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (sonnet LXXXIX), connecting with a specific type of Milton, elegiac and private. Milton's first youthful sonnet 'O nightingale' was written contemporaneously with his five Italian sonnets and a canzone, as well as his '*Elegia quinta. In advertum veris*' ['Elegy V. On the Coming of Spring'], which

¹⁹ Samuel Egerton Brydges, 'Memoirs of Mrs. Charlotte Smith' in *Censura Literaria [...]*, 10 vols (London: Longman, etc., 1807), IV, pp. 69-82 (pp. 83-84); John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic [...]*, 3 vols (London: For the Author, 1793), I, pp. 123-124.

²⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 188.

²¹ 'The sonnet may have been, in the Renaissance, gender-oriented and biased, and from one perspective these lines might seem to be an instance of Eve's appropriation of a male discourse', writes Wittreich, yet he points out that in book IV, Eve actually originates the genre, which she returns to in book XII and through which she utters last spoken words of *Paradise Lost* (Joseph Wittreich, *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 103)).

²² Warton, *Poems upon Several Occasions*, p. 331. For the significance of the nightingale in Milton, see J. L. Lievsay, 'Milton Among the Nightingales', *Renaissance Papers* (1958-60), 35-45; Jeni Williams, 'The Voice Out of Darkness: Milton and the Nightingale', *The Swansea Review*, (1990), 10-30; John Kerrigan, 'Milton and the Nightingale', *Essays in Criticism*, 42 (1992), 107-22.

were translated into English by John Langhorne in 1776. Links thus emerge with Smith's own early sonnets: Milton's sonnet I is prefatory, concerned with finding poetic voice, and with inspiration and the muse; immersed in an Italian influence and linked to an elegy which aligns itself with Philomela's song. These early poems by Milton are rural, pastoral, set during spring, and feature nightingales, shepherdesses and maidens, and invoke an Italian setting, matching their language and form. The Italian poems are amorous, Petrarchan in theme and style (although in form closer to Della Casa), and in them, the speaker is presented as 'an artless youth, [...] simple in his love', a figure who appears in Smith's sonnet VII, as well as others.²³ Milton's first sonnet is something of a prelude to the Italian sonnets in which the speaker assumes this role:

O nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray
 Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
 Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
 While the jolly hours lead on propitious May,
 Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
 First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill
 Portend success in love; O if Jove's will
 Have linked that amorous power to thy soft lay,
 Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate
 Foretell my hopeless doom in some grove nigh:
 As thou from year to year hast sung too late
 For my relief; yet hadst no reason why,
 Whether the Muse, or Love call thee his mate,
 Both them I serve, and of their train am I.²⁴

The sonnet alludes to the idea that it is good luck in love to hear the nightingale before the cuckoo, which it is thought Milton was familiar with through John Clanvowe's poem 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale' in Speght's edition of Chaucer.²⁵ Thus, through the nightingale the poet announces allegiance to both poetry and love; the speaker implicitly aligns himself with the bird, vowing to 'serve' both the Muse and Love, to which the nightingale is 'mate'. It is this announcement which Smith transposes to her own sonnet VII:

SWEET poet of the woods! – a long adieu!
 Farewel, soft minstrel of the early year!
 Ah! 'twill be long ere thou shalt sing anew,
 And pour thy music on 'the Night's dull ear.'
 Whether on Spring thy wandering flights await,
 Or whether silent in our groves you dwell,
 The pensive Muse shall own you for her mate,

²³ Langhorne, 'Son. V', *Milton's Italian Poems Translated [...]* (London: T. Becket, 1776), p. 15, l. 1. Smith's own sonnet speaker assumes a similar male lover persona in the translations from Petrarch and sonnets 'Supposed to be written by Werter' (as well as some of the novel sonnets).

²⁴ John Milton, 'Sonnet I', *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 92-3.

²⁵ Carey, *Complete Shorter Poems*, p. 93, n. 9.

And still protect the song she loves so well.
 With cautious step the love-lorn youth shall glide
 Through the lone brake that shades thy mossy nest;
 And shepherd girls from eyes profane shall hide
 The gentle bird, who sings of pity best:
 For still thy voice shall soft affections move,
 And still be dear to Sorrow, and to Love!

(21)

The reference to Milton is made in line seven, whereby a note at the end of the line directs the reader to the final two lines of Milton's sonnet:

'Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate.
 Both them I serve, and of their train am I.'
Milton's First Sonnet.

(21)

Within Smith's sonnet, the lines have been revised, however: the 'pensive Muse' is a mate of the nightingale, but not 'Love', although the final line of Smith's sonnet restores the amorous association, and adds 'Sorrow' (the more Smithian sentiment) to the nightingale's remit. Indeed, the relationship between the two sonnets is an uneasy and curious one. While Milton's poet welcomes and wishes for the nightingale's song and presence, Smith's sonnet focuses on the 'departure' or silence of the bird. Milton presents his poetic project as jointly concerned with love and poetry, dependent on hearing the nightingale; the nightingale's disappearance in the octave and the suppression of 'love' from the textual borrowing in Smith's sonnet thus in a sense denies Milton's poetic voice and project.

Thus, sonnet VII dramatises its 'departure' from Milton, while appearing to herald his influence through the quotation. It opens by bidding farewell to the 'Sweet poet of the woods! – a long adieu! | Farewel soft minstrel of the year!'. Contrary to sonnet III, the nightingale is not given a sex, and together with its anthropomorphism, the 'sweet poet of the woods' or 'minstrel' bears resemblance to the young poet of Milton's first and Italian sonnets, who here departs from Smith's landscape and to whom her speaker bids 'adieu'. The sestet presents a somewhat different scene, however, in which the nightingale is present after all, as the bird's return is apparently envisaged. Again there is a possible representation of Milton's early poet in the guise of the 'love-lorn youth [who] shall glide | Thro' the lone brake that shades thy mossy nest'. It is unclear if the bird is being hidden from the youth by the 'shepherd girls' who 'from eyes profane shall hide | The gentle bird', but they are at least restored to the same landscape, and 'Love' is again dear to the bird. The way the youth 'glides' through the landscapes suggests a ghostly presence, redolent of the poetic predecessors which inhabit Smith's Arun sonnets, such as the 'shadowy phantom pale, |

[that] Oft seems to fleet before the poet's eyes' of sonnet XXXII (36, ll. 5-6); perhaps Milton haunts the woodland space in a similar way.

Thelwall places a comparison of these two nightingale sonnets at the centre of his 1792 essay on the sonnet, a rebuttal to conservative critics who refused to recognise the 'illegitimate' sonnet form. Thelwall juxtaposes Milton's sonnet I and Smith's sonnet VII to refute the idea that 'the grace that is characteristic of the legitimate sonnet' can never belong to the 'illegitimate' sonnet, setting out to prove the latter possesses a superior 'grace'.²⁶ Following the two sonnets, Thelwall asks 'the lover of poetry'

which of these sonnets fills his mind, his fancy, his ear, with the sweetest associations of sentiment, imagery, and harmony? Which flows with the easiest and most attractive grace, the true sonnet-like versification of Milton, or the elegiac stanza of Charlotte Smith? Nay, and what more than all exposes the disadvantages of the regular sonnet, is, that in almost all of the sonnets of Milton, the last six lines, for which there is more licence, and which indeed are left entirely to the taste of the writer, are eminently superior to the eight that precede.²⁷

Through the shared trope of the nightingale, Smith's formal departure is dramatised, and the comparison is used to show how Smith brings challenges to established literary codes and forms, and disrupts the traditions in which she appears.²⁸

One final poem of the first edition features the nightingale: XXII, one of the Werter sonnets, addressed 'To solitude', which is set amidst 'wild-woods, and untrodden glades' (30, l. 5), and in which 'methinks in that long plaintive strain, | Thine own sweet songstress weeps my wayward fate!' (11-12). In the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, the three sonnets 'from Petrarch' and 'Supposed to be Written by Werter' are separated from the ten original sonnets by the two non-sonnet poems, and thus appear as different types of 'essay'. Three Werter sonnets had appeared in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, increased to five in the third edition. Goethe's *Die Leiden Des Jungen Werthers* was published in Leipzig in 1774, and first translated into English as *The Sorrows of Werter: A German Story* – via a French translation – by Daniel Malthus in 1779, published by Dodsley in two volumes.²⁹ The novel was immensely successful and "Werther Fever" swept Europe, seeing spin-off operas, poems and novels – as well as themed fashion items and crockery – a phenomenon in which

²⁶ J T [John Thelwall], 'An Essay on the English Sonnet; Illustrated by a Comparison Between the Sonnets of Milton and those of Charlotte Smith', *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, 91 (1792), pp. 408-414 (p. 413).

²⁷ Thelwall, p. 414.

²⁸ Smith's sonnet VII has also been the focus of enquiries into her own literary legacy, thematically and formally. See G. W. Whiting, 'Charlotte Smith, Keats, and the nightingale', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 12 (1963), 4-8 and B. R. Pollin, 'Keats, Charlotte Smith, and the nightingale', *Notes & Queries*, 211 (1966), 180-1.

²⁹ Smith follows Malthus in her spelling of 'Werter', which I will also follow.

Smith's sonnets can be situated. Each of Smith's sonnets 'supposed to be written by Werter' is taken from a specific episode in Goethe's novel, in which landscape and setting is often central. Labbe draws on sonnet XXII as an important episode of Smith's 'cross-gendering' and experimental approach to subjectivity, as through Werter's appropriation of the nightingale his voice becomes linked 'with the distressed I of other sonnets'.³⁰ As well as complicating subjectivity, the appearance of the nightingale in the Werter sonnet also complicates Smith's engagement with literary tradition. While the translations from Petrarch involve a necessary engagement with the literary past and sonnet tradition, the Werter sonnets do not, defined by an immediacy and sublimity befitting the 'Sturm und Drang' provenance of Goethe's novel. The presence of the nightingale in Werter's landscape complicates this, yet signals Smith's ability to occupy different literary positions simultaneously – as her sonnet speakers are able to 'cross-gender' – pulled between past and present, which the nightingale, as a symbol of tradition as well as of spontaneity and artlessness, perhaps permits. As *Elegiac Sonnets* expands after 1784, the importance of the nightingale and its woodland locale recedes, exchanged for other models of literary influence. As the association between Werter and the nightingale suggests, however, different models and landscapes co-exist, gradually supplanted rather than straightforwardly replaced as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops.

The nightingale makes a prominent textual return in the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1791), in sonnet LV 'The Return of the Nightingale. Written in May 1791':

With transport, once, sweet bird! I hail'd thy lay,
 And bade thee welcome to our shades again,
 To charm the wandering poet's pensive way
 And soothe the solitary lover's pain;
 But now! – such evils in my lot combine,
 As shut my languid sense – to Hope's dear voice and thine!

(48, ll. 9-14)

The first two lines here seem to refer back to VII, and a previous poetic self. Indeed, the nightingale's redundancy to the speaker is now evident. Later sonnets and poems feature other, more raucous, birds, a shift dramatised in a poem first published in *Marchmont* (1796) and then the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797) as 'Descriptive Ode, Supposed to have been written under the Ruins of Rufus's Castle, among the remains of the ancient Church on the Isle of Portland' amidst a storm:

Here the scathed trees with leaves half-drest,
 Shade no soft songster's secret nest,

³⁰ Labbe, *Culture of Gender*, p. 108.

Whose spring-notes soothe the pensive ear;
 But high the croaking cormorant flies,
 And mews and awks with clamorous cries
 Tire the lone echoes of these caverns drear.

(95-97, ll. 31-36)

The poem is indicative of the shift in Smith's voice and poetic persona as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops; as sonnet LV suggests, her woes have gone 'beyond' the nightingale as an apt symbol, as the pleasing sounds of the 'songster', private and hidden, have been replaced with the non-musical mews, awks and cries of the less reticent sea birds.

Streams

In the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1786), the River Arun becomes the central setting, which shares some characteristics with the melancholic locale of the nightingale. Indeed, the bird makes an appearance in the new sonnet XXVI 'To the River Arun', and the two landscapes overlap in some ways. Rivers do feature in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*: the Arun is named in sonnet V 'To the South Downs', while a nameless stream appears in sonnet IV and in two translations from Petrarch. Although also of a similar setting, the 'stream' is positioned somewhat differently from the Arun in relation to tradition, and seems to represent a specifically Italian influence.

Sonnet IV is addressed 'To the Moon' by a speaker who wanders on the banks of a stream:

QUEEN of the silver bow! – by the pale beam,
 Alone and pensive, I delight to stray,
 And watch thy shadow trembling in the stream,
 Or mark the floating clouds that cross thy way.

(18, ll. 1-4)

The sonnet presents a feminised landscape, in many ways typical of the landscape of the first edition – remote, rural, deserted, befitting the Philomela-like speaker. The 'stream' here seems only significant in its ability to reflect the moon – the main focus of the sonnet – and in the accompanying illustration in the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789), the eyes of the female figure are directed firmly upwards (fig. 5). It is a nameless 'stream' which also features in two of the translations from Petrarch, XV and XVI – both 'in morte' sonnets – aligning these similar non-specific landscapes, which provide a backdrop for the elegiac feelings of the speaker, who has been shown to be most Petrarchan in the first edition.³¹ Moreover, sonnet IV bears some resemblance to another Petrarch sonnet (35) that had been translated by Mary Monck and Susanna Highmore prior to Smith; indeed the speaker appears

³¹ Robinson, 'Formal Paradoxy', p. 200.

‘alone and pensive’ in both Highmore’s translation and Smith’s sonnet.³² Robinson also shows the presence of Petrarch in sonnet I, and Zuccato his presence in sonnet II, while nightingale sonnet III is of course more directly informed by Petrarch, drawing the ‘stream’ into the nightingale landscape.³³ The Italian influence on the first edition, through Petrarch and the young Milton, is reflected in its suggestively Italian landscape, which is at the crux of the sonnet’s early history, of course, and indeed very origins; although this is undercut through Smith’s use of the English form; and indeed, the title-page presents the author as ‘of Bignor Park’, and sonnet V is place specific. A river also features in one of Milton’s Italian sonnets, a means of negotiating the use of Italian, and poetic voice, through place, as Langhorne translates the poem in 1766: ‘All for the Sake of lovely Lady fair, | And tune my Lays in Language little tried’, thus ‘Tamis’ forsook for Arno’s flowery Side’.³⁴



5. Illustration to sonnet IV ‘To the Moon’, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789)

³² Highmore’s sonnet opens: ‘Alone and pensive, thro’ deserted meads, | Slowly and with measur’d step I wandering go’, (Highmore, ‘Sonnet. From Petrarch. By the Same’, *The Poetical Calendar [...]*, ed. by Francis Fawkes and William Woty, 2nd edn, 12 vols (London: J. Coote, 1763), p. 78 (ll. 1-2)).

³³ Robinson, ‘Formal Paradoxy’, pp. 203-6; Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England*, p. 55-8. Zuccato also explores the Petrarchan influence on Smith’s sonnet IV.

³⁴ Langhorne, ‘Son. II’, *Milton’s Italian Poems Translated*, p. 12 (ll. 9-10 and 12). The sonnet perhaps draws on Petrarch’s sonnet 308 which opens ‘She for whom I exchanged Arno for Sorgue’ (Durling, ‘308’, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*, p. 486).

Smith's translations 'from Petrarch' are clearly significant in terms of her engagement with sonnet tradition, form and place. As noted, interest in Petrarch was already well-established and Smith's sonnets joined a growing body of translations. Her sonnets have an interesting and playful relationship with Petrarch's originals, which has been quite thoroughly documented by critics.³⁵ Daniel Robinson points out the similarities between the settings of the sonnets, 'pastoral and melancholy; Smith's muse, however, wanders the South Downs instead of Vaucluse' and as an anonymous sonnet 'To Miss Smith, of Bignor Hall, on her excellent Imitations of Petrarch' published in the *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* (1784) wonders, 'That Bignor Hall's become a new Vaucluse?'.³⁶ Translation and appropriation – or rather 'imitation' – is framed in terms of place. The chief setting of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* is the secluded valley of Vaucluse, home to the source of the Sorgue river, which features in several of his sonnets.³⁷ The importance of place and landscape was central to Petrarch's renewed popularity in the eighteenth century, reflected in Nott's selection of sonnets for translation, which is dominated by sonnets in which place is significant. The valley's fields, woods, cliffs and streams constitute both a real and metaphorical landscape in many of Petrarch's sonnets; his melancholy is often imbued in the breeze or the river which carry his sighs and tears. Indeed, the chief function or significance of setting is in mediating Petrarch's love for and grief regarding Laura, who is also couched figuratively and orthographically within Petrarch's surroundings: as l'aura (the breeze), l'oro (golden light), and as lauro (the bay tree and poetic laurel): the very essence of Petrarch's poetry, infused in place. The first of Smith's three translations from Petrarch included in the first edition is an 'in vita' sonnet, rhyming *abba cddc effe gg*. The other two, which feature the 'stream' are from the 'in morte' section of *Rime sparse*, which, as Robinson points out, reminds us 'how deeply infused the sonnet, in its very origins, is with elegiac lament'; both are also fully English in form, and thus constitute 'elegiac' river sonnets formally and thematically.³⁸

The importance of the river in relation to the female subject and desires of the poet also informed English sonnet tradition. Three of Michael Drayton's sonnets – the only

³⁵ Robinson, 'Formal Paradoxy'; Luca Manini, 'Charlotte Smith and the Voice of Petrarch' in *British Romanticism and Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting*, ed. by Laura Bandiera and Diego Saglia (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 97-108; Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England*, pp. 52-66. Smith is also the focus of a chapter in Mary Moore's *Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and Petrarchism* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), which considers the Petrarchan sonnet sequence in the hands of women poets, although Moore does not consider Smith's translations of Petrarch.

³⁶ Robinson, 'Formal Paradoxy', p. 200; anonymous, 'To Miss Smith, of Bignor Hall, on her excellent Imitations of Petrarch', *The Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 1271 (22 November, 1784), l. 14.

³⁷ See, for example, sonnets 148 and 162 of the *Rime sparse*.

³⁸ Robinson, 'Formal Paradoxy', p. 202.

Renaissance examples of the form Smith appears to have known – feature rivers, and are redolent of Petrarch’s. In this way, Drayton curiously dramatises a divergence in traditions of river poetry, for in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its amorous associations were replaced with a topographical emphasis, largely influenced by Drayton’s longer river poem *Poly-Olbion* (part one, 1612). The poem travels through the country documenting its topography along with elements of local history, informing topographical river poems such as John Denham’s *Cooper’s Hill* (1642) and Pope’s *Windor-Forest* (1713). The divergence is dramatised, in particular, in Drayton’s sonnet XXXII ‘To the River Anker’, which is something of a miniature version of *Poly-Olbion* in its cataloguing of British rivers: ‘Our flood’s-queen Thames for ships and swans is crowned, | And stately Severn for her shore is praised’, and so it continues, with a different river celebrated in each line. However, as the sonnet ends: ‘Arden’s sweet Anker, let thy glory be, | That fair Idea only lives by thee’.³⁹ Anna Goodere – Drayton’s ‘Idea’ – lived on the banks of the small Warwickshire river the sonnet addresses, and the love object is clearly the main concern of the poem.⁴⁰ Contrary to *Poly-Olbion*, and the topographical mode it inspired, place itself is not of great importance.

As Robinson shows, in translating and drawing on Petrarch, Smith ‘must also speak to Laura, perhaps the most glorified extra-Biblical female subject in Western Literature’.⁴¹ Indeed, prior to the eighteenth century, of course, the sonnet form was not only almost solely used by men, but largely to couch male desire for, and depict a passive, female subject. Robinson shows that for eighteenth-century women writers, the appropriation of the male sonnet form was a way of self-legitimation and canonisation, yet simultaneously involved ‘claiming a literary tradition that had largely excluded, in its very origins, the active existence of women’.⁴² This is redolent of the ‘anxiety of authorship’ Gilbert and Gubar have argued that the woman writer faces, a different version of Bloom’s ‘anxiety of influence’: a ‘radical fear that she cannot create’ arising from the way in which women are depicted and reduced in the literature of their male predecessors to extreme stereotypes.⁴³ Although Petrarch did encourage the woman writer – his sonnet-reply to the Italian woman poet Giustina Levi-Perotti, translated by Hayley in 1782, reads as a defence of the right of women

³⁹ Michael Drayton, ‘XXXII. To the River Anker’, *Daniel’s Delia and Drayton’s Idea*, ed. by Arundell Esdaile (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), p. 99 (ll. 1-2 and 13-14).

⁴⁰ Again, in sonnet LIII, for example, although the river is central, it is only important in articulating something about the female subject, and is redolent of Petrarch’s sonnets in this respect: ‘Clear Anker, on whose silver-sanded shore | My soul-shrined saint, my fair Idea, lies, | Oh blessed brook, whose milk-white swans adore | The crystal stream refined by her eyes’ (*Daniel’s Delia and Drayton’s Idea*, p. 120 (ll. 1-4)).

⁴¹ Robinson, ‘Formal Paradox’, p. 201. Robinson shows how Smith brings challenges to Petrarch’s presentation of Laura in each of her translations.

⁴² Robinson, ‘Reviving the Sonnet’, pp. 103-104.

⁴³ Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 48-9.

to poetry – his presentation of Laura is indeed somewhat problematic for the woman writer who follows him in the use of the sonnet.

As Smith translates from Petrarch and appropriates his landscape, she removes Laura from it in different ways. Both of Smith's translations – the elegiac river sonnets XV and XVI – refer to Laura's 'angel form', which also carries with it a suggestion of poetic form, Petrarch's eponymous sonnet, especially as Laura, 'lauro', is so bound up with the essence of Petrarch's poetry. As Smith translates 'from Petrarch', from his form into her own 'illegitimate' sonnet form, she is in a sense displacing Laura's 'angel form'. Moreover, between these two translations Laura disappears from Petrarch's river landscape. Smith's second sonnet 'From Petrarch', XV, is taken from sonnet 279 of *Rime sparse* in which Laura seems to live through the landscape:

WHERE the green leaves exclude the summer beam,
And softly bend as balmy breezes blow,
And where, with liquid lapse, the lucid stream
Across the fretted rock is heard to flow,
Pensive I lay: when she whom earth conceals,
As if living to my eyes appears,
And pitying Heaven her angel form reveals[.]

(26, ll. 1-7)

Here, the speaking 'I' is located on the riverbank, where the ghost of Laura appears, afforded immortality through place. Her presence in the landscape is affirmed by one of the many orthographical plays in the original, as she is the summer breeze moving through it: 'a l'aura setiva'.⁴⁴ The sonnet was translated at least twice before Smith in the eighteenth century, indicative of its relevance to contemporary poetic trends. Langhorne's 1766 version opens thus:

Wail'd the sweet warbler to the lonely shade;
Trembled the green leaf to the summer gale;
Fell the fair stream in murmurs down the dale,
It's banks, it's flowery banks with verdure spread,
Where, by the charm of pensive Fancy led,
All as I fram'd the love-lamenting tale,
Came the dear object whom I still bewail[.]⁴⁵

Nott's 1777 translation presents a curiously different version of Smith's 'lucid' and Langhorne's 'fair' stream:

⁴⁴ '279', *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, p. 459 (l. 2).

⁴⁵ Langhorne, 'Sonnet CCXXXVIII | MDCCLXV', *The Poetical Works of John Langhorne* (London: T. Becket, etc., 1765), II, p. 181 (ll. 1-7).

Oft as I tread the flow'r-embroider'd vale;
 While down the rude rock the big torrent's borne,
 While music warbles from the blossom'd thorn,
 And o'er the green wood sports the frolic gale;
 All Laura's beauties on my fancy steal[.]⁴⁶

Nott's 'big torrent' clearly departs from Petrarch's original, and the peaceful space presented; indeed it is significant that this is not the type of river that runs through Petrarch's landscape for Smith, more suited to Werter's – and her own later – sonnets. There is a suggestion of the nightingale in the translations of Langhorne and Nott, which although absent in Smith's, befits the type of landscape presented. In the sestet of the sonnet, Laura speaks to Petrarch, and Smith as a woman poet must thus curiously re-appropriate the female voice of the dead Laura in her translation. Looking back to sonnet IV 'to the moon', through its echo of Petrarch's sonnet 35, it thus subtly updates the sonnet's subjectivity, as the ghostly female figure on the riverbank is aligned with the speaker and *poet*, confirmed by the illustration to the sonnet in the fifth edition, which depicts a female figure on the riverbank (fig. 5).

In Smith's next translation (of Petrarch's sonnet 301), the river valley is addressed:

YE vales and woods! fair scenes of happier hours;
 Ye feather'd people! tenants of the grove;
 And you, bright stream! befringed with shrubs and flowers;
 Behold my grief, ye witnesses of love!

For ye beheld my infant passions rise,
 And saw thro' years unchang'd my faithful flame;
 Now cold, in dust, the beauteous object lies,
 And you, ye conscious scenes, are still the same!

(26-27, ll. 1-8)

Again, the landscape is important as a backdrop or audience to Petrarch's grief, although in Smith's version, the feelings of the speaker are disconnected from setting: in Nott's translation, the vales are 'made vocal by my plaintive lay', and the 'streams, embitter'd with the tears of love!', as Petrarch's melancholy is infused into the landscape, which in Smith's it merely 'beholds'.⁴⁷ The sonnet does in a sense look forward to the river sonnets of the eighteenth century, as it works on a contrast between past and present, a river landscape represents 'Fair scenes of happier hours', and is 'still the same' despite a personal change or loss. Whereas in the preceding translation Laura's 'angel form' had appeared in the landscape, here she is the 'angel form I shall behold no more! | To heaven she's fled!' (12-

⁴⁶ Nott, 'Sonnet XXIV', *Sonnets, and Odes Translated from the Italian of Petrarch* (London: T. Davies, 1777), p. 49 (ll. 1-5).

⁴⁷ Nott, 'Sonnet XXVII', *Sonnets, and Odes*, p. 55 (ll. 1-2).

13), an extreme statement that is not in the original. Moreover, as the sonnet continues: ‘and nought to me remains | But the pale ashes which her urn contains’ (13-14). Here Laura has been removed fully from Petrarch’s landscape – not only has Laura been figuratively and orthographically removed from place, and her ghost banished, but as Robinson states, ‘Smith exhumes and cremates Laura’s body’, for in the sestet of the original sonnet we are informed that the place Petrarch has come to visit is where Laura is buried.⁴⁸ And, as noted, this is in a sense mimed via form, as Smith replaces Petrarch’s sonnet form – so bound up with the form of Laura – with the English.

In the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith introduces a fourth sonnet ‘From Petrarch’, which makes a somewhat strange statement regarding place as it is largely about an imperviousness to surroundings:

OH! place me where the burning noon
 Forbids the wither’d flower to blow;
 Or place me in the frigid zone,
 On mountains of eternal snow:

(25, ll. 1-4)

The juxtaposition of extremes continues and the sonnet concludes that ‘My heart, O Laura, still is thine’ (12), regardless of context. Curiously, Smith’s translation – English in form – is in iambic tetrameter, the only one of her sonnets to deviate from pentameter (aside from the final-line alexandrines in several sonnets), which in a sense reflects the relationship between speaker and place in the sonnet, characterised by a lack or discrepancy. The unimportance placed on specific setting is in stark contrast to the centrality of place in Smith’s new, original sonnets in the third edition, as the nameless Petrarchan stream becomes the specific, native River Arun.

A ‘stream’ also features in the first of the new sonnets ‘supposed to be written by Werter’ introduced in the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Although Petrarch and Werter appear as similar lovelorn figures in the volume, wandering about a European landscape composing sonnets, the presentation of the river is indicative of the differences between these two literary sources, as Werter sonnet XXIII, ‘To the North Star’ suggests:⁴⁹

Towards thy bright beams I turn my swimming eyes,

⁴⁸ Robinson, ‘Formal Paradoxy’, p. 216.

⁴⁹ While Smith’s Petrarch sonnets are translations, the Werter sonnets also involve an element of ‘translation’ from the German. The setting of Werter sonnet XXII ‘To Solitude’ – which also features the ‘songstress’, and complicates a simple dichotomy between different types of landscape – is most redolent of the Petrarchan space: ‘Oh, Solitude! to thy sequester’d vale | I come to hide my sorrow and my tears, | And to thy echoes tell the mournful tale’ (1-3).

Fair, fav'rite planet! which in happier days
 Saw my young hopes, ah! faithless hopes! – arise;
 And on my passion shed propitious rays!
 Now nightly wandering 'mid the tempests drear
 That howl the woods, and rocky steeps among,
 I love to see thy sudden light appear
 Thro' the swift clouds – driven by the wind along:
 Or in the turbid water, rude and dark,
 O'er whose wild stream the gust of Winter raves,
 Thy trembling light with pleasure still I mark,
 Gleam in faint radiance on the foaming waves!
 So o'er my soul short rays of reason fly,
 Then fade: – and leave me to despair, and die!

(30)

The sonnet presents a similar scene to sonnet IV 'To the moon', which also depicts a night-time wanderer musing upon his/ her favourite 'planet', reflected in a nameless 'stream'. What is peaceful and tranquil in that sonnet is here tempestuous and wild; the water is 'turbid [...] rude and dark', a 'wild stream', rather different from the earlier 'stream' of 'To the Moon' and the Petrarch sonnets. Its presentation anticipates the later depiction of the sea in *Elegiac Sonnets*. Indeed, Smith's characteristic voice and landscape – and the relationship between them – which emerges in her later sonnets are much closer to that of Werter here than of Petrarch.

In the source Smith gives for sonnet XXXIII, Werter recalls his fondness for 'the greater Bear – favorite of all the constellations; for when I left you this evening it used to shine opposite your door', yet it also recalls another central episode in the novel in which Werter beholds the flooding of the Wahlheim valley (a fictional Garbenheim).⁵⁰ The reader is presented with a sublime scene, congruous with his state of mind:

it was a gloomy and awful sight! the moon was behind a cloud, but by means of a few scattered rays I could perceive the foaming waves rolling over the fields and meadows, and beating against the bushes; the whole valley was as a stormy sea, tossed by furious winds. The moon then appeared again, and rested on a dark cloud; the splendor of her light increased the disorder of nature. The echoes repeated and redoubled the roarings of the wind and the waters. I drew near the precipice; I wished and shuddered; I stretched out my arms, I leaned over, I sighed, and lost myself in the happy thought of burying all my sufferings, all my torments, in that abyss, and tossing amidst the waves.⁵¹

In Smith's sonnet, the North Star episode has been merged with the overflowing river scene.

⁵⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Werter: A German Story*, trans. by Daniel Malthus, 2 vols (London: J. Dodsley, 1779), I, p. 164.

⁵¹ *The Sorrows of Werter*, I, pp. 103-105.

The ‘disorder of nature’, here finds an echo in many of Smith’s sea sonnets. It also seems significant that Werter’s favourite poet is Ossian, who supplants Homer in his esteem (while also aligning the two). Despite the question surrounding the authenticity and originality of Macpherson’s translations, the poetry of Ossian was celebrated as the authentic voice of untutored genius, displaying a deep, immediate connection to place, and the works were influential in the emergence of the sea’s popularity in the eighteenth century.⁵² In *The Sorrows of Werter* Malthus lifts a passage directly from Macpherson – although a shorter extract than Goethe had translated in the original – from ‘The Songs of Selma’, which is recited by Werter in the novel.⁵³ The sonnets ‘Supposed to be Written by Werter’ could also be supposed to draw on his favourite poet.

Smith’s Petrarch and Werter sonnets are also defined by another, key distinction. While Petrarch’s sonnets are concerned with securing fame and immortality for both himself and Laura through place and poetic form, in Werter’s sonnets his interest is in death, and his own oblivion. Each of Smith’s Werter sonnets refer to death, and foreshadow his suicide, often bound up with his immersion in place, as in sonnet XXIII, which ends with Werter imploring to be left ‘to despair, and die!’ (14), which again is echoed in Smith’s later sea sonnets. It is perhaps telling that in the third edition, only one new sonnet ‘From Petrarch’ is introduced, while two new sonnets ‘Supposed to be Written by Werter’ are included, shifting the balance in favour of Werter’s more sublime and immediate landscape, especially as the new Petrarch sonnet is the strange iambic tetrameter sonnet XIII which undoes the relationship between place and speaker. In the first two editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, the Petrarch and Werter sonnets were clearly separated from the ten original sonnets by two non-sonnet poems, yet in the third, they are placed among the original sonnets: the four Petrarch sonnets XIII-XVI, followed by four new original sonnets, then the five Werter sonnets XXI-XXV. Immediately following this is the first new sonnet to feature the Arun, as Smith shifts the setting of the river sonnet to her native landscape, encoding a different relationship with place and literary tradition.

River Arun

When the third edition appeared as *Elegiac Sonnets. By Charlotte Smith. The Third Edition. With Twenty Additional Sonnets* the volume was now dated from Woolbeding. Smith had

⁵² See Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).

⁵³ ‘Alone on the sea-beat rock my daughter was heard to complain. Frequent and loud were her cries; nor could her father relieve her. All night I stood on the shore. I saw her by the faint beam of the moon. All night I heard her cries [...]’ (*The Sorrows of Werter*, II, pp. 138-139).

settled in the small West Sussex village in the autumn of 1785, after returning from Normandy where her family had been seeking refuge from creditors. She was now separated from her husband. This new locale is reflected in the ‘twenty additional sonnets’ now included in the third edition. Situated some miles north of Bignor Park, where the Arun could not be seen, only sensed ‘in the vale below’ (sonnet V, 9) of the South Downs, at Woolbeding Smith was now situated on the banks of the River Rother – a tributary of the River Arun – which she addresses as the Arun in four new sonnets: XXVI ‘To the River Arun’, XXX ‘To the River Arun’, XXXII ‘To Melancholy. Written on the banks of the Arun, October 1785’ and XXXIII ‘To the Naiad of the Arun’.⁵⁴

These four river sonnets situate Smith in a distinct eighteenth-century sonnet tradition. As J. B. Bamborough observes, Warton’s sonnet ‘To the River Lodon’ (1777) ‘established almost a miniature genre of River Sonnets’, inspiring a multitude of topographical sonnets similarly based around the visitation of a river known in childhood.⁵⁵ Although largely written by members of the school of Warton, the genre also transcended their practice. Sonnets that can be identified as forming part of this ‘miniature genre’ include Smith’s four sonnets to the River Arun (1786), William Lisle Bowles’s sonnets to the Itchin, Cherwell, Wensbeck and Tweed (1789), Henry Kett’s ‘To the River Wye’ (1793), Coleridge’s ‘To the River Otter’ (1796), Thomas Park’s ‘To the River Witham’ (1797), Edward Gardner’s ‘On Revisiting the Banks of the Avon near Bristol Hotwells’ (1798), Anna Seward’s ‘Sonnet VII’ to the Derwent (1799), and Wordsworth’s sonnet ‘V. To the River Derwent’ (1802), as well as those comprising his 1820 sonnet-sequence *The River Duddon*. While the lineal flow of the river is somewhat incongruous with the compact sonnet form, the meandering development of the river-sonnet ‘genre’ renders the trope considerably more apt. As Robinson writes, ‘prevalent as a symbol for the flow of human life in sonnets by Thomas Warton, Anna Seward, Smith, Bowles, and many others who adapted the topographical poem to suit the sonnet form [...] the river also becomes a symbol for the sonnet’s tradition’.⁵⁶ To Fairer, the river of Warton’s sonnet becomes a metaphor for the influence and tradition it inspires: ‘its mood, phrases, even syntax, flowed into the work of many 1790s poets [...] acting itself as an

⁵⁴ As Robert H. Goodsall notes, the Rother was also known as the Arun (Robert H. Goodsall, *The Arun and Western Rother* (London: Constable, 1962), p. 67). For clarity, I will follow Smith in referring to the river she addresses as the Arun, rather than the Rother. The source of the Arun, a collection of gills, is found in St. Leonard’s Forest in West Sussex and the river eventually flows into the English Channel at Littlehampton. The western River Rother is its major tributary, which joins the Arun at Stopham.

⁵⁵ J. B. Bamborough, ‘William Lisle Bowles and the Riparian Muse’, in *Essays & Poems Presented to Lord David Cecil*, ed. by W. W. Robson (London: Constable, 1970), pp. 93-108 (p. 93).

⁵⁶ Robinson, ‘Form and Function’ p. 450.

original authentic text, a native stream from which succeeding poets could, directly or indirectly draw'.⁵⁷

Such symbolism was also in operation during the period itself: rivers, streams and sources often function as metaphors for literary influence, lineage, originality and inspiration, in poetry and wider literary discourse. Pertinent to the sonnet, in 1754, Thomas Edwards described his appropriation of the form as 'drawing from the same fountains as Milton drew from', while in 1805 the *The Edinburgh Review* stated that 'Milton and Gray both drunk from the sweet streams of Italy, where a single sonnet can give immortality to its author', recalling the streams frequently found in Petrarch's sonnets.⁵⁸ Significantly, both these quotations refer to the Italian sonnet form, specifically; the English form, at this time, was not bound to a sense of the past. Accordingly, Smith referred to her sonnets as 'effusions', a term later appropriated by Bowles and Coleridge for their similarly 'illegitimate' sonnets. Moreover, both 'influence' and 'derivation' are suggestively riverine by definition: influence is 'the action or fact of flowing in; inflowing, inflow, influx' and derivation is 'the action or process of leading or carrying a current of water, or the like, *from* a source, *to* another part'.⁵⁹

Smith was the first poet to engage with the river sonnet founded by Warton, although it is an engagement that has been largely overlooked. Bamborough identifies Smith's four sonnets addressed to the River Arun, but he dismisses them from his reading, for they are 'rather different in tone and are largely concerned with paying tribute to [Thomas] Otway, [William] Collins and [William] Hayley, all of whom had associations with that river'.⁶⁰ As noted, Smith's sonnets are named in Fairer's analysis, yet his concern is with a specific male poetic lineage, and while Robinson stresses Smith's importance to the development of the eighteenth-century river sonnet, his focus is on Wordsworth and the Derwent.⁶¹ As Bamborough and Fairer suggest, the relationship between the river sonnets of Warton and Smith is not a simple or straightforward one; her sonnets display a 'Wartonian accent' yet are simultaneously 'rather different in tone', as Smith both draws upon and departs from Warton's literary model. As Bamborough observes, Smith's Arun sonnets celebrate the literary nature of her riparian location: her propensity to invoke the literary past is dramatised as she encounters West Sussex predecessors Otway, Collins and Hayley along the banks of the river.

⁵⁷ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 108.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Correspondence*, III, p. 91; *The Edinburgh Review*, 6 (1805), p. 297.

⁵⁹ *OED Online*, s.v. 'influence, n.' and 'derivation, n.1'.

⁶⁰ Bamborough, p. 101.

⁶¹ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 101.

Prior to Smith, the Arun makes a limited poetic appearance, yet in works which also emphasise its literariness: Collins himself invokes predecessor Otway in ‘Ode to Pity’ (1746), and Samuel Egerton Brydges’s sonnet IX ‘To Evening’ heralds ‘the Bard sublime of Arun’s stream’, identified in a footnote as Collins – who Brydges follows in addressing evening – and as he also writes of Smith, ‘amid scenery, which had nursed the fancies of Otway and of Collins, she trod on sacred ground’.⁶² After Smith, Henry Francis celebrates the Arun’s literary past in two sonnets in his *Sonnets and Odes* (1788).⁶³ At Woolbeding, Smith also found herself in the poetic space of Warton’s sonnet ‘To the River Lodon’, traversing the banks of her own childhood river. Thus, in her Arun sonnets, local and sonnet traditions meet and Smith both realises and reconfigures the poetic landscape through the river trope.

A significant new aspect of the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* is the inclusion of a section of ‘Quotations, Notes and Explanations’, which in a sense mimes the shift in its relationship with tradition. The first edition includes some idiosyncratic footnotes, giving literary and natural details,⁶⁴ yet the third edition is much more comprehensive, giving sources for new poems as well as those of the first editions. The way that the provenances of the two nightingale sonnets are not given in the first editions befits the retiring, hidden aspect of the bird itself; yet in the third edition, not only are these given in the notes, but multiple other traditions and lineages are announced, within the sonnets themselves as well as in the notes. The explicit invocation of the Arun’s literary past and its actualisation within the landscapes of the sonnets themselves thus revises the hidden aspect of the nightingale’s literary past in the first edition.

⁶² Samuel Egerton Brydges, ‘Sonnet IX. To Evening’, *Sonnets and Other Poems; with a Versification of the Six Bards of Ossian* (London: G. and T. Wilkie, 1785), p. 9 (l. 3); ‘Memoirs of Mrs. Charlotte Smith’, p. 70; Brydges notes the poems in which the Arun appears. Brydges also invokes the literary Arun in his poem ‘Retirement’ (1805), in which Smith joins Otway and Collins on the riverbank. His *Sonnets* (1785) were written while he was a student at Cambridge in imitation of Milton yet also influenced by the sonnet editions of Warton and Bampfylde. They explicitly draw on Warton: one sonnet refers to ‘fairy ground’, for example (‘Sonnet VIII. To a Lady in Illness’, *Sonnets and Other Poems*, p. 8 (l. 1)). All are Petrarchan in form, and six interestingly end with an alexandrine. His sonnets were poorly received, causing ‘six years of depression’ according to the account in *ODNB*. Brydges published more sonnets in 1807, which are closer to Smith’s in their English and irregular forms as well as in content.

⁶³ In ‘Sonnet IV. To William Hayley, Esq.’ it is Hayley who is the ‘sweet Bard!’ on the banks of the Arun, ‘a classic tide’ (Henry Francis, *Sonnets and Odes* (London: J. Robson, etc., 1788), p. 10 (l. 7-9)); another sonnet features Collins as ‘the wild Arun’s solitary swain’ (‘Sonnet XIV. To Fancy’, *Sonnets and Odes*, p. 20 (l. 6)).

⁶⁴ For example, ‘*Anemony Nemeroso*. The wood Anemony’ (17, note to sonnet II) and ‘Shakespeare’s King John’ (21, note to sonnet VI).

Befitting the ‘real father of the eighteenth-century sonnet’, the first original river sonnet published in the century is by Thomas Edwards.⁶⁵ His sonnet to the poet Richard Owen Cambridge (1717–1802) was published in Dodsley’s *Miscellany* (1748) as ‘Sonnet VII’ and again as sonnet I ‘To R. Owen Cambridge, Esq;’ in *The Canons of Criticism* (1758). Like the majority of his sonnets, it addresses a friend, and in reflection of this heralds not Edwards’s own native river, but the Severn which ran near Cambridge’s home at Whitminster in Gloucestershire:

CAMBRIDGE, with whom, my pilot and
my guide,
Pleas’d I have travers’d thy Sabrina’s flood;
Both where she foams impetuous, soil’d with
mud,
And where she peaceful rolls her golden tide;

Never, O never let ambition’s pride,
(Too oft pretexted with our Country’s good)
And tinsell’d pomp, despis’d when understood,
Or thirst of wealth thee from her banks divide:

Reflect how calmly, like her infant wave,
Flows the clear current of a private life;
See the wide public stream, by tempests toss’d,
Of every changing wind the sport, or slave,
Soil’d with corruption, vex’d with party strife,
Cover’d with wrecks of peace and honor lost.⁶⁶

The River Frome, a tributary of the Severn, ran through the grounds of Cambridge’s house; he made the river navigable, and spent much of his time boat building, the fruits of which Edwards describes here. Edwards provided Pope – with whom he was acquainted – with minerals for his grotto through Cambridge from the banks of the Severn, curiously connecting sonnet and non-sonnet landscapes.⁶⁷ The river is used to celebrate ‘private life’, rural, peaceful retreat, which the poeticised ‘Sabrina’ comes to represent, promoting similar values to those which inform his sonnet XXI ‘For the Root-House at Wrest’, ‘a hallowed grove’ where ‘sweet contentment dwells’, free from ambition and avarice.⁶⁸ Landscape assumes a more metaphorical function in the sestet, to issue a moralistic warning against the

⁶⁵ Havens, *The Influence of Milton*, p. 492.

⁶⁶ Edwards, ‘Sonnet I. To R. Owen Cambridge, Esq’, *Canons*, p. 307.

⁶⁷ See *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. by George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), IV, pp. 342-343 and 351-352, n. In *The Works of Richard Owen Cambridge*, edited by his son, the friendship between Cambridge and Edwards is discussed, and details are given about the ‘mundic or shining mineral stone’ Edwards procured for Pope; a quotation from a letter by Edwards to Cambridge is included: ‘as this grotto, made by so celebrated a man, will be likely virium volitare perora, we shall be carried up to fame along with it like the fringe at the tail of a kite’, which articulates a literary connectivity of sorts between the poets (*The Works of Richard Owen Cambridge, Esq.*, ed. by George Owen Cambridge (London: L. Hansard, 1803), p. xxxiv).

⁶⁸ Edwards, ‘Sonnet. XXI. For the Root-House at Wrest’, *Canons*, p. 327 (ll. 1-4).

‘the wide public stream, by tempests toss’d’. The sonnet is indicative of the general nature of Edwards’s sonnets: private, retiring, concerned with their addressee rather than himself, and despite some clear differences, the majority of subsequent eighteenth-century river sonnets similarly promote such remote, rural locations. In the context of ‘influence’, the presence of ‘Sabrina’ may be significant. The tale of the nymph who gave her name to the river is told by both Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* and Milton in *Comus*, two poets Edwards is aware he is following in his use of the sonnet and who he also celebrates more generally along with Shakespeare as part of a native tradition in his sonnets. A river sonnet also features in the anonymous volume of *Sonnets* published in 1776, which describes and celebrates the Thames – ‘No River flows so wealthy, deep and clear’ – yet lacks both a subjective and topographical aspect.⁶⁹

It is Warton’s sonnet of 1777 which clearly establishes the format of the ‘miniature genre’ which developed over the next two decades, however. While similarly valuing the rural and remote, elements only marginal in Edwards’s sonnet here become central; the sonnet is largely concerned with the subjective ‘I’, place, and the connections between them. Sonnet IX ‘To the River Lodon’ was the last of the nine sonnets published in his 1777 *Poems*, and in the sonnet, the river fulfils the re-connective function between past and present in which the volume is steeped, as Warton looks to his personal past. Informed by a pleasing melancholy, the sonnet centres upon Warton’s childhood river as he contrasts the idyllic happiness of youth with the melancholy of adulthood:

Ah! what a weary race my feet have run,
 Since first I trod thy banks with alders crown’d,
 And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
 Beneath thy azure sky, and golden sun:
 Where first my muse to lisp her notes begun!
 While pensive memory traces back the round,
 Which fills the varied interval between;
 Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.
 Sweet native stream! those skies and suns so pure
 No more return, to cheer my evening road!
 Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure,
 Nor useless, all my vacant days have flow’d,
 From youth’s gay dawn to manhood’s prime mature;
 Nor with the Muse’s laurel unbestow’d.⁷⁰

The sonnet’s structure roughly reflects the past-present dichotomy Warton explores, the ‘infusion’ of past into present. Rhyming *abbaabccdedede*, the irregular take on the Italian form suggests two sestets, representing past and present, divided by the *cc* couplet which

⁶⁹ Anon., ‘Sonnet VII. On the Thames’, *Sonnets* (London: For the Author, 1776), p. 7 (l. 14).

⁷⁰ Warton, ‘Sonnet IX. To the River Lodon’, *Poems*, p. 83.

forms the ‘varied interval between’. The sonnet ultimately serves to resolve this past-present dichotomy; although the gulf between past and present remains, the ‘Muse’s laurel’ offers consolation for Warton’s ‘days flow’d’, and his status as poet confounds and gives meaning to the passing of time. In Fairer’s terms, the ‘infusion’ of personal past into present is emblematic of the way Warton draws upon the forms and ‘phrase’ of the literary past in his poems, which the river trope symbolises.

Warton’s poems were published in the same year as Nott’s translations of Petrarch’s sonnets, and some curious resemblances can be identified. Sonnet XXVII of Nott’s edition, discussed above, sets up a past-present contrast through a river landscape, with a similar emphasis on memory, and echoes Warton’s sonnet: ‘since Laura there first taught my steps to stray’ recalls the opening two lines of Warton’s poem, and the reference to a ‘native bloom’ is reminiscent of Warton’s ‘native stream’.⁷¹ However, these similarities serve to highlight the diverging concerns of the two sonnets, as Warton’s river is witness to his personal or poetic growth, while the emphasis of Nott’s translation of Petrarch is on love and the female subject. As noted, Warton disliked Petrarch’s sonnets and did not follow him in his use of the sonnet form. Such resemblances dramatise the way different traditions in the eighteenth-century sonnet meet through the river trope.

The Arun first appears in Smith’s sonnet V, ‘To the South Downs’, first published in 1782, and then in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. It is the first place-specific sonnet of the volume, and describes something of a prospect view, working on a similar re-visitation model as Warton’s Loddon sonnet:

AH! hills below’d – where once a happy child,
 Your beechen shades, ‘your turf, your flowers among,’
 I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild,
 And woke your echoes with my artless song.
 Ah! hills below’d! your turf, your flowers remain;
 But can they peace to this sad breast restore;
 For one poor moment sooth the sense of pain,
 And teach a breaking heart to throb no more?
 And you, Aruna! – in the vale below,
 As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,
 Can you one kind Lethean cup bestow,
 To drink a long oblivion to my care?
 Ah, no! – when all, e’en Hope’s last ray is gone,
 There’s no oblivion – but in death alone!

(20)

⁷¹ Nott, ‘Sonnet XXVII’, *Sonnets, and Odes*, p. 55 (ll 8 and 9).

Like Warton, Smith contrasts the happiness of childhood with melancholy adulthood. Rather than residing on the riverbank, however, Smith heralds the Arun ‘in the vale below’ of her South Downs landscape; the speaker can perhaps be located in the grounds of Bignor Park (from where the first edition is dated), which affords a view over the Downs. Smith’s sonnet is engaged with a different poem here: Thomas Gray’s ‘Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College’ (1747), another re-visitation poem which she quotes from in the second line of her sonnet, and echoes in the fourth line. Smith slightly misquotes from a section of Gray’s original, which also features his – somewhat more weighty – childhood river:

Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among
Wanders the hoary Thames along
His silver-wandering way.⁷²

In his poem, Gray presents an entire ‘prospect’ of the Eton landscape, the physical distance of which reflects the temporal distance of his Eton school days, and is also recreated in the ‘Ode’ by a sense of poetic distance – in the personification of the Thames, for example.⁷³ As Lonsdale says of the poem, this is not ‘that characteristic kind of Romantic poem in which, through the interplay of memory, imagination and nature, the individual contemplating a significant landscape can work through a private predicament towards self-discovery and reaffirmation’, and in the poem ‘there exists a gulf between past and present selves which cannot be explored or given meaning’.⁷⁴ Following Lonsdale, as discussed, Fairer contrasts this gulf with Warton’s meaningful engagement with the past, which is shown to characterise a number of his poems, apparent in the presentation and function of the river itself: the immediate Loddon facilitates connectivity with the past, while the distant, personified Thames almost acts as a barrier to it for Gray.⁷⁵ Smith’s river is poised somewhere between the rivers of Warton and Gray, yet is ultimately closer to Gray’s. Drawing on his ‘Ode’, her sonnet V presents the ‘distant prospect’ of her own childhood landscape, from which she too has become alienated, and like the Thames, the River Arun is temporally, physically and literally distant, personified as the classical – potentially ‘Lethean’ – ‘Aruna’.⁷⁶ However, the

⁷² Thomas Gray, ‘Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College’, in *Poems*, ed. by Lonsdale, pp. 56-63 (ll. 8-10).

⁷³ This aspect of Gray’s poem met the criticism of Johnson. He writes that Gray’s ‘supplication to Father Thames [...] useless and puerile’ and that ‘Gray thought his language more poetical as it was more remote from common use’ (Johnson, ‘Gray’, *The Oxford Authors*, pp. 765-768 (p. 765)).

⁷⁴ Lonsdale, ‘Versions of the Self’, p. 116.

⁷⁵ Fairer, ‘Recovery of the Past’, p. 157.

⁷⁶ Smith’s female river contrasts with Gray’s ‘father Thames’ (‘Ode’, l. 21), however, and her Aruna recalls other feminised rivers such as Milton’s Sabrina and Pope’s Lodona in *Windsor Forest* (1713).

sonnet is closer to ‘that characteristic kind of Romantic poem’ Lonsdale refers to; there is a closer relationship between the poem’s ‘I’ and the surrounding landscape.⁷⁷

An echo of Gray’s ‘Ah happy hills’ (11) can also be heard in the repetition of ‘Ah! hills below’d’, in lines one and four of Smith’s sonnet, which also encodes the presence of Warton, whose Loddon sonnet opens with the exclamation ‘Ah!’. The combined echo from both Warton’s Loddon sonnet and Gray’s ‘Ode’ dramatises Smith’s poise between the poems, articulating and iterating the departure of Smith’s sonnet from Warton’s own as ‘infusion’ is replaced by Gray’s distance and disjunction. Both sonnets begin with the exclamation, yet the second quatrain it opens in Smith’s sonnet is informed by a sense of disconnection, which is completed by the final couplet, where the exclamation has morphed into ‘Ah, no!’. In this way, Smith uses the developmental structure of the English sonnet – to which she here conforms – to inscribe her ‘distance’ from both the river scene and Warton’s sonnet, in which the Italian form fuses past and present. A sense of physical distance is also reflected formally through the position of the ‘vale below’ in the sestet of Smith’s sonnet, ‘below’, as such, the octave.

The re-visitation poem also works somewhat differently for Smith as a woman writer, and is complicated by her sense of dispossession and disinheritance – arising from her personal misfortune – which together with her sex places her in a different position from her male contemporaries in relation to her childhood landscape. Smith was married in 1765, aged fifteen – a ‘legal prostitute’ – as she described herself, and she dates her misery from this time.⁷⁸ When her father died in 1774, Bignor Park passed to Smith’s younger brother Nicholas Turner according to the laws of primogeniture. After the death of her father-in-law in 1776, Smith was engaged in legal battles over his complex will and experienced severe financial difficulty for the remainder of her life, raising her several children alone. Thus, Smith’s life was defined by a discrepancy between the genteel life that had been set out for her, born into landed gentry, and the misery of her existence, which finds expression in her ‘elegiac’ re-visitation poems. Her poetic, literary dispossession is in a way matched by her financial and legal position, and personal sense of loss. As noted, when she began writing sonnets in 1777, the year Warton’s Loddon sonnet was published, her circumstances were

⁷⁷ Critics such as Brent Raycroft have reinstated Smith in the history of the ‘Greater Romantic Lyric’ (Lonsdale’s ‘characteristic kind of Romantic poem’, perhaps) outlined by M. H. Abrams in his influential essay of 1965, in which he traces the development of the genre from the eighteenth-century topographical poem through Gray’s ‘Ode’ to the lyrics of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, a lineage in which the river is central (see Raycroft, ‘Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet’).

⁷⁸ Smith, *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 625. Subsequent references to Smith’s *Letters* are to this edition and will be given in the text by page number.

rather different from his own. Warton was well-established at Oxford, where he had been elected a perpetual fellow in 1753, while Smith was living at Lys Farm, embroiled in financial difficulties by her husband, and mother to eight children, one of whom – a son, Benjamin Berney – died that year.

In the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, the distance of sonnet V is replaced by the immediacy of the riverbank, and the river itself becomes the focus in the four sonnets which address it. Of the new additions to the edition, Warton's Loddon sonnet first finds an echo in Smith's non-river sonnet X, 'To Mrs. G', integrated into the existing sequence. The sonnet is coloured by the sense of personal misery and dispossession outlined above, as it opens:

AH! why will Mem'ry with officious care
 The long-lost visions of my days renew?
 Why paint the vernal landscape green and fair,
 When Life's gay dawn was opening to my view?

(22-23, ll. 1-4)

The sonnet works on a structure similar to that of sonnet V: the first and fourth quatrains both open with the exclamation 'Ah!', yet the sonnet presents a more metaphorical 'distant prospect' of the childhood landscape. As Fairer has identified, the fourth line reworks Warton's 'From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature', a line 'which encapsulates the organic connectedness of life', and which is thus fittingly – he argues – 'repeatedly reworked' in later sonnets, Smith's among them.⁷⁹ Smith appears to reject Warton's paradigm in these lines, however, bemoaning and seeking to deny or suppress the processes of memory and the renewal of 'long-lost visions'. She may connect with Warton's sonnet, yet ironically to regret 'connectedness'; her sonnet is characterised by a desire for disconnection, articulated through her borrowing from Warton. Fairer observes that 'temporal permutations of the Wartonian riverbank sonnet [...] vary, and indeed such variations are a feature of this minor genre', yet although 'variations' may be a key facet of Warton's genre, Smith's sonnet signals a somewhat more significant departure in her eschewal of personal memory, a departure which becomes more apparent, and is realised in different ways, in her river sonnets.⁸⁰

Indeed, in the first two Arun sonnets, both entitled 'To the River Arun', the focus is not on personal memory or Smith's own past, but on the Arun's literary past, which the river seems to couch. The first Arun sonnet, XXVI 'To the River Arun' begins by re-situating the river from Smith's new riverbank perspective, where it begins:

⁷⁹ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 112.

⁸⁰ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 111.

ON thy wild banks, by frequent torrents worn,
 No glittering fanes, or marble domes appear,
 Yet shall the mournful Muse thy course adorn,
 And still to her thy rustic waves be dear.
 For with the infant Otway, lingering here,
 Of early woes she bade her votary dream,
 While thy low murmurs sooth'd his pensive ear,
 And still the poet – consecrates the stream.

(32, ll. 1-8)

Contrary to the distant, classicised 'Aruna' of 'To the South Downs', from which Smith seeks Lethean qualities, the Arun here is modest and unadorned. Established in contrast to classical Greece – with its 'fanies' and 'marble domes' – the Arun's site is still 'dear' to the Muse, a place of poetic inspiration to match the classical landscape and imbued with religious power as the 'votary' Otway 'consecrates the stream'.



6. Illustration to sonnet XXXVI 'To the River Arun', *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789)

Laura, who haunted the riverbank of sonnet XV has been directly replaced with the lingering Otway, dramatising the difference between the two streams and Smith's new concern with the local literary past. The appearance of the first of her literary predecessors, Thomas Otway (1652-1685), is explained in a note:

Otway was born at Trotten, a village in Sussex. Of Woolbeding, another village on the banks of the Arun (which runs through them both), his father was rector. Here it was, therefore, that he probably passed many of his early years. The Arun is here an inconsiderable stream, winding in a channel deeply worn, among meadow, heath and wood.

(32)

In fact, Otway was born at Milland, a little north of Trotton, yet this area was certainly his childhood landscape. His tragedies *The Orphan* (1680) and *Venice Preserv'd* (1682) had found renewed popularity with an eighteenth-century audience of sensibility. In 1759, Oliver Goldsmith declared that Otway was 'next to Shakespeare, the greatest genius England has produced in tragedy'.⁸¹ Smith herself pays homage to *The Orphan* in her novel *The Old Manor House* (1793), the heroine of which shares the name of Otway's tragic heroine, Monimia, as well as some similarities of plot.⁸²

Smith's sonnet presents a curiously historical scene, then, as it is Otway 'the infant' who resides on the banks of the Arun, as represented in the illustration accompanying the sonnet in the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (fig. 6). While Warton revisits the scene of his own childhood in his Loddon sonnet, where first his 'muse to lisp her notes begun', in Smith's it is the childhood of another poet the river recalls; it is the infant Otway who is visited and 'bade' by the muse. Thus, the Arun here connects literary past and present, which coalesce strangely as young Otway is yet 'lingering', 'still the poet – consecrates the stream'. The river has taken on a more connective function, closer to Warton's Loddon than Gray's Thames, which seems to constitute a barrier to the past in his 'Ode'. Yet, this is still not a Wartonian 'infusion'. The sonnet is a celebration of the Arun's literary past, spelled out rather than suggested, yet a sense of full connectivity with the present is lacking. An 'I', notably, is absent: although the sonnet implies that the speaker is situated on the riverbank, and the new preface of *Elegiac Sonnets* informs the reader that the poet is located at Woolbeding, there is an underlying personal and poetic disconnection from this literary landscape. As the Petrarchan river landscape becomes that of Smith's Arun, the focus on love is exchanged for a literary emphasis, and the female subject of the sonnet becomes its author, Smith faces a different kind of dispossession, as a woman poet in a male literary landscape. The illustrations to sonnets IV and XXVI reflect this, as the female figure-speaker of 'To the Moon' has been replaced by the male Otway on the riverbank. Indeed, the sestet of the sonnet is ambiguous, shifting to the future tense:

Beneath the oak and birch that fringe thy side,

⁸¹ Goldsmith, *The Bee*, 8 (1759), p. 238.

⁸² The resemblance between the two Monimias is noted in Smith's novel by the character Warwick, who teasingly quotes from *The Orphan* to his friend and eventual husband of Monimia (VI, 280).

The first-born violets of the year shall spring;
 And in thy hazles, bending o'er the tide,
 The earliest nightingale delight to sing:
 While kindred spirits, pitying, shall relate
 Thy Otway's sorrows, and lament his fate!

(9-14)

The landscape is familiar from Smith's earlier sonnets, yet as presented here it is not yet in existence as the speaker looks forward seasonally to the 'first-born violets' and 'earliest nightingales', with an emphasis on beginnings and primacy which is somewhat at odds with the sonnet's literary backwards gaze. Although the sonnet ends by indicating continuation, the speaker is displaced: it is other 'kindred spirits', who 'pitying, shall relate | Thy Otway's sorrows, and lament his fate!'.

Smith's next Arun sonnet of the same title: sonnet XXX 'To the River Arun', further presents the riverside as a male poetic space. Again it takes on a religious hue:

BE the proud Thames of trade the busy mart!
 Arun! to thee will other praise belong;
 Dear to the lover's, and the mourner's heart,
 And ever sacred to the sons of song!

(35, ll. 1-4)

Established as an alternative river space, the Arun is an artistic, elegiac landscape dear to the 'mourner's' as well as the 'lover's' heart, a 'willow'd shore' (8), befitting the literary lineage it homes. The sonnet's opening line is redolent of Drayton's sonnet 'To the River Anker', 'Our flood's-queen Thames for ships and swans is crowned'; both poems disestablish a particular river from others, although Smith's concern is with the male literary predecessors along the riverbank, rather than the feminised landscape of 'Idea', Anne Goodere, who 'lives by thee'. As with her sonnets from Petrarch, Smith shifts from love to a literary emphasis, and from female to male, leading to a mismatch which Smith must negotiate as both a woman and poet.

Indeed, the sestet is given over wholly to Smith's poetic predecessors – 'the *sons* of song!' – as Collins and Hayley join Otway on the riverbank:

Banks! which inspired thy Otway's plaintive strain!
 Wilds! – whose lorn echoes learn'd the deeper tone
 Of Collins' powerful shell! yet once again
 Another poet – Hayley is thine own!
 Thy classic stream anew shall hear a lay,
 Bright as its waves, and various as its way!

(9-14)

Here, the river becomes explicitly associated with male poetic tradition, as the various lays of its inhabitants are equated with the motion of the river: ‘bright’ and ‘various’. The linear motion of the river is clear and evokes inheritance-based male succession, emanating forth from source. Smith’s model of literary relations is not dissimilar to that of ‘kinship’ Jane Spencer identifies in the period, ‘an organizing principle of literary history’ which was ‘understood as a genealogy in which individual writers figured as fathers and sons’.⁸³ Smith’s patrilineal river motif in a sense landscapes the metaphor, actualising ‘influence’ through its etymological root. As Spencer says of women’s place in such a ‘predominantly masculine, and symbolically male’ canon, they ‘had always a marginal, shifting, and sometimes unsettling one’, which becomes increasingly apparent in Smith’s river sonnets.⁸⁴ Indeed, in sonnet XXX Smith’s ‘I’ is again absent from the scene, and again, the sonnet looks forward, shifting with the couplet to the future tense: it is Hayley who appears to be the new poet whom the Arun will hear. ‘Thy classic stream anew shall hear a lay’, yet the ‘lay’ does not appear to be Smith’s.

Hayley’s presence is particularly pertinent as Smith’s immediate predecessor in the sonnet form, and one of the few to use the English form, the ‘greatest Modern master of that charming talent’, as she describes him in the dedication. He also appears in another sonnet introduced in the third edition, sonnet XIX ‘To Mr. Hayley, on receiving some elegant lines from him’, highlighting another aspect in which Smith follows Hayley, as nearly all of his sonnets are written ‘to’ a recipient and six new sonnets of her own in the third edition are similarly apostrophic.⁸⁵

The poem that Smith responds to seems to be Hayley’s own sonnet ‘to Mrs. Smith’ published in Hayley’s *Poems and Plays* (1788), and a note states that it has been occasioned by reading Smith’s own sonnet I; its composition can be dated sometime before her reply published in 1786. As already seen, Hayley was interested in poetic exchanges. His sonnet to Smith explicitly engages with and echoes Smith’s first sonnet and its premise that ‘Ah! then, how dear the Muse’s favours cost, | If those paint sorrow best – who feel it most!’ (13-14), which Hayley criticises:

⁸³ Spencer, *Literary Relations*, p. 5. The metaphor is also central to Harold Bloom’s theory of influence.

⁸⁴ Spencer, p. 17.

⁸⁵ As Smith writes in the preface to the edition, ‘the reception given by the public, as well as my particular friends, to the two first editions of these poems, has induced me to add to the present such other Sonnets as I have written since, or have recovered from my acquaintance, to whom I had given them without thinking well enough of them to preserve any copies myself’ (3). Hayley and Smith also follow both Milton and Edwards in addressing sonnets to people.

Speak not unjustly of poetic fires,
 Nor the pure bounty of thy Muse arraign:
 No, not the source, the soother she of pain.⁸⁶

In sonnet XIX, Smith makes references to both sonnets, and contrasts her own transience with Hayley's fame and poetic immortality:

FOR me the Muse a simple band design'd
 Of 'idle' flowers that bloom the woods among,
 Which, with the cypress and the willow join'd,
 A garland form'd as artless as my song.
 And little dared I hope its transient hours
 So long would last; composed of buds so brief;
 'Till Hayley's hand among the vagrant flowers
 Threw from his verdant crown a deathless leaf.
 For high in Fame's bright fane has Judgment placed
 The laurel wreath Serena's poet won,
 Which, woven with myrtles by the hands of Taste,
 The Muse decreed for this her favorite son.
 And those immortal leaves his temples shade,
 Whose fair, eternal verdure – shall not fade!

(28)

Garlands and poetic wreaths are a recurrent feature of Smith's sonnets; in her first sonnet, Smith dons a garland of 'wild flowers' and here her 'simple band' of 'buds so brief' – joined by the mournful cypress and willow befitting the 'elegiac' sonnet – contrasts with Hayley's 'deathless crown' of 'immortal leaves'. 'Serena's poet' refers to Hayley both as author of *The Triumph of Temper*, yet also the poet within it who composes a sonnet addressed to Serena. Like Edwards's sonnets to Mulso and Highmore, and their poems to him, the sonnets exchanged between Smith and Hayley are concerned with the Muse and inspiration, and Smith is similarly deferent to a higher male authority. She attributes her unexpected poetic success to the 'deathless leaf' Hayley has thrown to her, picking up the theme of fame and longevity on which Hayley's sonnet to her ends:

bid the breath of fame thy life renew;
 Sure to excite, till nature's self decays,
 Her lasting sympathy, her endless praise.⁸⁷

Yet in sonnet XIX, Smith sets up her female, transient position in contrast to a male 'deathless' model of authorship, echoing Smith's presentation of herself as Hayley's 'distant copyist' and mimed by her absence from the patrilineal 'classic stream' of sonnet XXX. This

⁸⁶ Willam Hayley, 'Sonnet to Mrs. Smith', *Poems and Plays, by William Hayley, Esq.*, 6 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1788), I, p. 170 (ll. 3-5).

⁸⁷ Hayley, 'Sonnet to Mrs. Smith', ll. 12-14.

recalls Highmore's sonnet to Edwards, which contains the similar theme of 'imitation' and sense of exclusion from a male genealogy:

I should not on presumptuous wings have dar'd
To imitate, with my unhallow'd tongue,
Numbers like Spenser's, Milton's, or like thine'.⁸⁸

Similarly in the dedication of *The Emigrants* (1793) to William Cowper, Smith invokes and celebrates *The Task* as a formal precedent to her own poem, although hers is 'far from aspiring to be considered as an imitation of your inimitable Poem [...] I am perfectly sensible, that it belongs not to a feeble and feminine hand to draw the Bow of Ulysses' (132); as in *Elegiac Sonnets*, her attempt in a shared poetic form is an inferior female version. Smith's sonnet XIX could also recall the sonnet translated by Hayley 'From the Lady Leonara de Iquiz, Baroness of Raffles, to Don Alonzo de Ercilla' in *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, which also praises a male poet, and refers to the 'laurels, that reward the Poet's strain'.⁸⁹

As a popular contemporary poet and dedicatee of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Hayley needed no introduction in Smith's volume, yet Collins is given a note:

Collins, as well as Otway, was a native of this country, and probably at some period of his life an inhabitant of this neighbourhood, since, in his beautiful Ode on the Death of Colonel Ross, he says,

The Muse shall still, with social aid,
Her gentlest promise keep;
E'en humble Harting's cottag'd vale
Shall learn the sad repeated tale,
And bid her shepherds weep.

And in the Ode to Pity:

'Wild Arun too has heard thy strains,
And Echo, 'midst thy native plains,
Been sooth'd with Pity's lute'.⁹⁰

(35)

Collins (1721-1759) was born at Chichester, and his biography shares some similarities with that of Otway: both were educated at Winchester and Oxford before heading to London, and both met somewhat tragic fates. Otway died in abject poverty – widely thought to have choked on a piece of bread as recorded in Johnson's *Lives* – at the age of thirty-three after falling from renown; and Collins, after his poems fared badly, suffered from a nervous

⁸⁸ Highmore, 'Sonnet to Mr T. Edwards, Esq.', ll. 12-14.

⁸⁹ Hayley, 'Sonnet from the Lady Leonara de Iquiz, Baroness of Raffles, to Don Alonzo de Ercilla', in *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, p. 213 (l. 2).

⁹⁰ Harting is yet another West Sussex village, a little south of the Arun and further west than Trotton; like Smith's Arun, the 'cottag'd vale' is a neglected, pastoral place honoured by the Muse.

disorder, and he died, unmarried, at the age of fifty-seven. Both thus befit Smith's melancholic, 'elegiac' landscape; she too already knew personal and financial suffering, and the fates of her predecessors also sadly foreshadow her own.⁹¹ Collins's eighteenth-century editor John Langhorne pointed out the similarity between the misfortunes of Otway and Collins, and also noted that the Arun 'had the honour of giving birth' to both.⁹² Collins himself invokes his Arun predecessor in 'Ode to Pity' (1746) in the stanza directly following that quoted by Smith: 'There first the wren thy myrtles shed | On gentlest Otway's infant head' and includes a footnote: 'The River *Arun* runs by the Village in *Sussex*, where Otway had his birth'.⁹³ Collins honours Otway not only as a precursor of the Arun, but also as tragedian. Collins's pair of odes to pity and fear explore the emotions purged by Aristotle's *catharsis*, yet in his 'Ode to Pity', the Ilissus of Greece is replaced by the Arun, which already carries a strong current of tragic pathos through Otway:

But wherefore need I wander wide
To old Ilissus' distant side,
Deserted stream and mute?
Wild Arun too has heard thy strains.⁹⁴

'Ode to Pity' continues to play on this classical-present contrast throughout, a contrast Smith also employs in her sonnet XXVI.

Collins's poetic homage to Otway was also joined by an actual, marble, memorial placed by Collins and Joseph Warton at Winchester College, and in turn, a memorial was erected to Collins in Chichester Cathedral in 1795 with an epitaph written by fellow Arun-native Hayley.⁹⁵ These are matched by Smith's 'elegiac' sonnet-memorials of both Otway and Collins, to which the river is a fitting trope, as one common to the elegy – a form connected with issues of poetic inheritance and lineage. Collins's own 'Ode occasioned by the death of Mr. Thomson' (1749) and Wordsworth's similarly elegiac, derivative 'Remembrance of Collins' (1798) – which developed out of a sonnet written whilst at Cambridge under the

⁹¹ Smith died in 1806 – aged fifty-seven – after a long period of illness, financial hardship and personal sorrow.

⁹² Langhorne, *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins*, ed. by John Langhorne (London: T. Becket, etc., 1765), pp. 148-149.

⁹³ William Collins, 'Ode to Pity', in *Poems*, ed. by Lonsdale, pp. 414-418 (ll. 19-20 and p. 416). Smith also includes a quotation from 'Ode to Pity' in 'Sonnet XXVIII. To Friendship'. Collins pays further homage to Otway in two (undated) fragments: 'Lines on Restoration Drama', and 'No longer ask me, gentle friends'. See *Poems*, pp. 524-526 and 548-553 respectively.

⁹⁴ Collins, 'Ode to Pity', ll. 14-17

⁹⁵ There was also an 'Otway's Walk' in the garden of Hayley's home at Eartham and Otway was the subject of one of Blake's eighteen portraits in the 'Heads of the Poets' series (c. 1800) commissioned by Hayley for his library.

influence of Smith and Bowles – are both set on the Thames, for example.⁹⁶ Peter Sacks identifies a ‘cluster’ of images in Milton’s great elegy ‘Lycidas’ based around a ‘saving and surviving liquid, the figure for ongoing desire and creativity, hence of successful mourning’, closely aligned by Sacks with male sexual power.⁹⁷ These liquids, ‘unlike the barren diffusion of the sea, retain a direction and a continuing force, associated as they must be with the melodious tear and the lofty rhyme’.⁹⁸ This surviving, continuing liquid seems to correspond with the issues of inheritance Sacks also identifies as central to the elegy, and both, can be recognised in the elegiac river trope. As Sacks writes, ‘the connection between mourning and inheritance has remained a close one throughout history [...] few elegies can be fully read without an appreciation of their frequently combative struggles for inheritance’, not just of property, but of cultural legacy and poetic voice.⁹⁹ Smith’s river sonnets present an interesting alternative to this model, as she is absent from the river scene; in sonnet XXX it is Hayley who is the ‘continuing force’ in this patrilineal model. She replaces the river with the ‘barren diffusion of the sea’ in later sonnets, with interesting implications for the elegy and issues of inheritance.

As indicated above, Collins was a contemporary of Joseph Warton at Winchester College, and in 1746 they had planned a joint publication of odes, although this never materialised and both poets published separate editions of odes in the same year. Like Collins, Otway was a Wykehamist and an Oxonian and in her Arun sonnets Smith is perhaps reclaiming the poets for her West Sussex landscape from these two institutions at the heart of the school of Warton where many eighteenth-century sonnets were cultivated. Indeed, it is the ‘infant Otway’ who lingers on the Arun’s banks, suspended in his native landscape before he left for Winchester. Moreover, Smith appears to define her West Sussex landscape against that of Warton’s Oxford in her sonnets. Her description in sonnet XXVI ‘To the River Arun’ of how ‘On thy wild banks, by frequent torrents worn | No glittering fanes, or marble domes appear’ recalls – in addition to a classical landscape – Warton’s description of Oxford in his longer river poem *The Triumph of Isis* (1750), with its ‘fretted pinnacles’, ‘fanes sublime’ and

⁹⁶ Wordsworth’s early sonnet is number IV of the so-called ‘evening sonnets’, transposed from the banks of the River Cam. It was revised in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* as ‘Lines Written near Richmond, upon the Thames, at Evening’, and in the second edition was split into two poems, ‘Lines written when sailing in a boat at evening’ and ‘Lines Written near Richmond upon the Thames’, later retitled ‘Remembrance of Collins, composed upon the Thames near Richmond’.

⁹⁷ Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 97.

⁹⁸ Sacks, p. 97.

⁹⁹ Sacks, p. 37.

‘bright domes’ (which indeed makes classical associations).¹⁰⁰ Emily’s ‘Death’ depicts Cambridge in a similar way. The Isis also features in Warton’s sonnet ‘On Bathing’, while the Isis and Cherwell both feature in other poems of the 1777 *Poems*.¹⁰¹ Unsurprisingly, Oxford also features in sonnets by Warton’s pupils and contemporary poets. Although not a river sonnet, Bampfylde describes Oxford as the ‘Muses bower’ in a sonnet ‘On having dined at Oxford’ (1778), an echo from Warton’s *The Triumph of Isis*, but actually originating – somewhat appropriately – in Milton’s own sonnet VIII.¹⁰² Following Warton’s description, in a sonnet ‘On revisiting the University of Oxford’ (1783), which also contains echoes of Warton’s Loddon sonnet, Thomas Warwick describes how ‘Again I trace from Cherwell’s willowy tide | Yon Gothic towers with peaceful trophies hung’, ‘where many a sage hath mus’d, and poet sung’.¹⁰³ Slightly later (1789), Thomas Russell similarly describes the landscape:

Oxford, since late I left thy peaceful shore,
 Much I regret thy domes with turrets crown’d,
 Thy crested walls with twining ivy bound,
 Thy Gothic fanes, dim isles, and cloysters hoar.¹⁰⁴

Again, Oxford is presented as a remote, antiquated idyll. Fairer has shown the importance of Warton’s Oxford as a site in which literary values of the eighteenth century were both reflected and realised.¹⁰⁵ By the time Smith’s first edition of sonnets was published, in addition to Warton, Bampfylde and Warwick, other poets associated with Oxford and the Warton School – Robert Holmes, Edmund Cartwright – were already publishing sonnets, legitimate in form; and as *Elegiac Sonnets* expanded, several others published sonnets contemporaneously. Although Smith’s landscape may not be the ‘Muse’s bower’, through which the Isis flows, as sonnet XXVI asserts of the Arun, still ‘the mournful Muse thy course adorn[s], | And still to her thy rustic waves be dear’, endorsed by the presence of Otway. Smith appropriates Warton’s Loddon sonnet paradigm as she addresses her own

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Warton, ‘The Triumph of Isis, Occasioned by Isis an Elegy’, in *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, B.D.*, ed. by Richard Mant, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1802), I, pp. 3-23 (ll. 149 and 236).

¹⁰¹ See ‘On the Death of King George the Second’, ‘Ode V. Sent to Mr. Upton, on his edition of the Faerie Queen’ and ‘Ode VIII, The Complaint of Cherwell’, which gives a voice to the river, which complains of the Isis’s eminence.

¹⁰² Bampfylde, ‘Sonnet II. On Having Dined at Trinity College, Oxford’, *Sixteen Sonnets*, p. 2 (l. 3); Warton, ‘The Triumph of Isis’, l. 63; Milton, Sonnet VIII, *Complete Shorter Poems*, p. 289 (l. 9).

¹⁰³ Warwick, ‘Sonnet VIII. On revisiting the University of Oxford’, *Abelard to Eloisa [...]* (Bath: R. Crutwell, 1783), p. 12 (ll. 1-2 & 4).

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Russell, ‘Sonnet III’, *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems* (Oxford: D. Prince, etc., 1789), p. 3 (ll. 1-4).

¹⁰⁵ See David Fairer, ‘Oxford and the Literary World’, in *The History of the University of Oxford. Volume V: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. by L. S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 779-806, and Griffin, *Wordsworth’s Pope*, pp. 53-63, who stresses the importance of both Winchester and Oxford to the Wartons’ literary negotiations.

childhood river, yet rather than exploring or connecting with personal past, she uses it to establish an alternative literary tradition and space, disestablished from Oxford and reflected and impelled by her use of the English and illegitimate sonnet form. Smith's connections with Winchester and Oxford were in the capacity of a mother rather than as poet or pupil; as a woman, she would have been unable to attend Winchester or Oxford of course, and she often lamented her inferior, female education.¹⁰⁶ Her sons Lionel and – for a shorter time – Charles were pupils at Winchester College and she aspired to send her sons to Oxford, although financial reasons prevented her.¹⁰⁷ Smith corresponded with Joseph Warton, who was headmaster at Winchester while Lionel was a student there, and does refer to Warton's 'partial opinion in regard to the powers I possess', in reference to her novel *Celestina* (*Letters*, 36). Both Warton brothers had subscribed to the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1789. Curiously, Smith's sister records that

so highly were her talents estimated, that, on the death of Dr Warton, she was requested to supply his epitaph, which she declined, though she could not but feel the value of such a compliment, from the members of a society so fertile in poets as Winchester College.¹⁰⁸

Despite having occupied a marginal position on the fringes of the poetic 'society so fertile', which is encoded in her elegiac sonnets, Smith is asked to mark its end, and supply its epitaph.

Turning to the next Arun sonnet, the lingering presence of the past manifests in sonnet XXXII 'To Melancholy. Written on the banks of the Arun, October 1785', the most strange and unsettling of Smith's river collective. It takes a different format from the previous two, one of Smith's several sonnets 'written' at stated locations and times, and as Labbe has shown, it is one of a number of sonnets written at a transitional, Autumnal time, adopting a 'Liminal aesthetics and a border tonality'.¹⁰⁹ Significantly, it is the first Arun sonnet in which the poetic 'I' appears in the landscape – 'the poet' of line six, notable for its absence in the previous Arun sonnets. As the sonnet's title informs us, it is written on location in the immediate present of the poem:

¹⁰⁶ As Smith's sister records, Smith left school at the age of twelve, and was taught by masters at home, 'but very little advantage could have been derived from their instructions, for she was at that early age introduced into society [...] It is evident that Mrs Smith's education, though very expensive, was superficial, and not calculated to give her any peculiar advantages [...] she often regretted that her attention had not been direct to more useful reading, and the study of languages' (Dorset, 'Charlotte Smith', p. 23-24). Latterly Smith built up a library and read independently. As Wolfson points out, Smith's use of quotation can be regarded as a display of "'cultural capital' in the absence of a formal education' (Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions*, p. 17).

¹⁰⁷ Charles did matriculate at Oxford in July 1794 but joined the army soon after. Lionel left Winchester College early due to his part in the so-called 'rebellion of 1793'.

¹⁰⁸ Dorset, p. 57.

¹⁰⁹ Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 87.

WHEN latest Autumn spreads her evening veil,
 And the grey mists from these dim waves arise,
 I love to listen to the hollow sighs,
 Thro' the half-leafless wood that breathes the gale:
 For at such hours the shadowy phantom pale,
 Oft seems to fleet before the poet's eyes;
 Strange [s]ounds are heard, and mournful melodies,
 As of night-wanderers, who their woes bewail!
 Here, by his native stream, at such an hour,
 Pity's own Otway, I methinks could meet,
 And hear his deep sighs swell the sadden'd wind!
 Oh Melancholy! – such thy magic power,
 That to the soul these dreams are often sweet,
 And sooth the pensive visionary mind!

(36)

The sonnet's scene is strange indeed, shrouded in mist and replete with strange sounds and figures; suddenly, the Arun's banks constitute a very different space from the rustic idyll previously portrayed. The sonnet also takes a different form: the previous Arun sonnets all take the English sonnet structure, whilst this, the first in *Elegiac Sonnets* to do so, takes the Italian.¹¹⁰ As Smith writes in the preface to the third edition: 'A few of those [sonnets] last written I have attempted on the Italian model; with what success I know not; but I am persuaded that, to the generality of readers, those which are less regular will be more pleasing' (11). Smith announces a movement in two different formal directions: she has consciously attempted sonnets on the established, traditional 'Italian model', yet it is those sonnets written in a 'less regular' form – unattached to a particular tradition – that she predicts will be the more pleasing, anticipating the popularity of the irregular, illegitimate form.

Thus, to readers of *Elegiac Sonnets*, sonnet XXXII takes a suddenly unfamiliar poetic shape, befitting its strange and uncanny scene. It is also characterised by a discrepancy between the fully Italian, 'legitimate' form and the abundance of half-formed, shadowy substances and sounds that the sonnet describes. Christopher Stokes reads the spectral Arun scene as a reaction to the alienating effect of eighteenth-century inscriptions of gender, which manifests in the 'haunted subjectivity' – one of several 'lorn' subjectivities' he identifies in *Elegiac Sonnets* – of the Arun sonnets: 'They react to the lack of fullness and self-possession that Smith's speakers feel by actively figuring the Arun as a haunted margin, where things are doubled and ghostly: the lorn subject [...] feels in place within this non-place'.¹¹¹ Stokes

¹¹⁰ Another sonnet in *Elegiac Sonnets* is almost fully Petrarchan (XXXIV). Another sonnet by Smith, with the interesting title 'Original', was published in George Henderson's sonnet anthology *Petrarca* (1803) is also Petrarchan.

¹¹¹ Stokes, 'Lorn Subjects', pp. 144 and 148-9.

reads three Arun sonnets – XXVI, XXX, and XXXII – as all constitutive of this uncanny, lorn space. However, despite the somewhat marginal nature of the Arun in preceding sonnets, sonnet XXXII figures a particularly strange and alienating landscape, and can also be read as a reaction to male literary and sonnet tradition.

Indeed, it is in sonnet XXXII, with the poetic ‘I’ present, that Smith finally directly engages with Warton’s sonnet-space, as her riverbank location fully matches his. This spatial correspondence is recognised by Smith through an unacknowledged borrowing from the sonnet of her predecessor, as ‘native stream’ occurs in line nine of both sonnets, although significantly in Smith’s sonnet it is in reference to Otway.¹¹² Smith’s indulgence in melancholy through place in this sonnet also recalls Warton’s earlier poem *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747), in which ‘thoughtful Melancholy loves to muse, | Her fav’rite midnight haunts’, although the poem’s actual setting (a ruined abbey) is one which Smith later brings challenges to.¹¹³ Smith also shares, or perhaps matches, Warton’s formal space, as all of his sonnets – ‘To the River Lodon’ included – take the Italian sonnet structure, albeit with some irregularity, as did the majority of Smith’s eighteenth-century sonnet predecessors, steeped in looking back to the literary past, either to Milton or Italian poets. As formal and poetic spaces converge, in sonnet XXXII Smith finds herself in a strange, ghostly landscape, belying the ‘lack of fullness and self-possession’ Smith experiences not only as a woman but as a woman writer and sonneteer, traversing Warton’s space.¹¹⁴ As it is through her invocation of Warton’s sonnet paradigm that Smith recalls and negotiates the Arun’s literary past, it is in this sonnet of spatial and formal coincidences that different tributaries of ‘influence’ combine to unsettling effect.

After the strangeness of the previous ‘To Melancholy’, the last of Smith’s Arun sonnets, sonnet XXXIII ‘To the Naiad of the Arun’ returns to the Shakespearean form, and the ‘I’ disappears once more:

GO, rural Naiad! wind thy stream along
Thro’ woods and wilds: then seek the ocean caves

¹¹² The phrase is not ‘native’ to Warton himself, however, and originates in a somewhat non-Wartonian source: Dryden’s drama *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards* (1672). It also appears in ‘A Descriptive Poem’ by John Dalton, which was published in Dodsley’s 1755 *A Collection of Poems* and, post-Smith, in the first of Wordsworth’s *River Duddon* sonnets and in book six of (the fourteen-book) *The Prelude* (1850).

¹¹³ Thomas Warton, ‘The Pleasures of Melancholy’, *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 374-376 (l. 20). As will be seen, Smith engages with Warton’s poem in more depth in her later sonnet LXVI ‘Written in a tempestuous night, on the coast of Sussex’. Warton also makes references to Otway’s tragedies in the poem (ll. 211-220).

¹¹⁴ Stokes, p. 148.

Where sea-nymphs meet their coral rocks among,
 To boast the various honors of their waves!
 'Tis but a little, o'er thy shallow tide,
 That toiling trade her burden'd vessel leads;
 But laurels grow luxuriant on thy side,
 And letters live along thy classic meads.
 Lo! where 'mid British bards thy natives shine!
 And now another poet helps to raise
 Thy glory high – the poet of the MINE!
 Whose brilliant talents are his smallest praise:
 And who, to all that genius can impart,
 Adds the cool head, and the unblemish'd heart!

(36-37)

The sonnet is another celebration of the male accomplishment the Arun has given rise to; its 'British bards' are noted as being 'Otway, Collins, Hayley'. Smith also adds another name to her riparian contingent: John Sargent (1750-1831), poet of *The Mine* (1788) – a dramatic poem about fossil life in mines – was a lifelong friend of Hayley and settled in West Sussex after his marriage.¹¹⁵ Sargent was a politician and one-time head of the bank of England, which is presumably why he 'adds the cool head' to genius in Smith's sonnet. There is a female presence here, yet the feminised Arun and its 'rural Naiad' contrasts with the male, 'classic' longevity of the Arun's banks. Robinson uses this sonnet to show how for Smith and other eighteenth-century sonneteers, the river 'becomes an eternizing conceit for the poet who writes of it'.¹¹⁶ The river takes on the immortality imbued in the sonnet form itself: 'All of these sonneteers [Smith, Bowles, Seward, Wordsworth] implicitly or otherwise exploit the metrical allusion to Shakespeare's "So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" but direct the sonnet's immortal gaze upon themselves, claiming immortality as poets in the sonnet form'.¹¹⁷ Robinson's argument echoes the reference in *The Edinburgh Review* to 'the sweet streams of Italy, where a single sonnet can give immortality to its author'. Although the Arun's banks have conferred longevity on her male predecessors, however, it is unclear if Smith herself is similarly honoured. *The Edinburgh Review* refers to the Italian sonnet form, of course, the history and tradition of which is bound up with its 'immortal' aspect, which Smith's effusive, English form lacks. The reference to laurels in sonnet XXXIII recalls sonnet XIX to Hayley, in which Hayley throws Smith a 'deathless leaf' for her 'simple band'; Smith perhaps does recognise the potential for her own longevity by occupying a space in which, due to its poetic past, 'laurels grow luxuriant'.

¹¹⁵ Hayley had also honoured his friend in 'Sonnet to John Sargent, esq. On his Doubts of publishing his Drama, intitled, "The Mine". 1784' in his *Poems and Plays* (1785). Sargent was a friend and supporter of Smith who, along with Hayley and the Reverend Charles Dunster from Petworth, was an early proof-reader her work, as recorded in Smith's letters.

¹¹⁶ Robinson, 'Form and Function', p. 455.

¹¹⁷ Robinson, p. 455.

Other Poetic Landscapes

Having previously disestablished the Arun from the classical world, in sonnet XXXIII Smith now seems to invoke it. The sonnet also heralds a non-Arun influence, as it recalls a rather different poem replete with rivers: Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* (1713). In the poem, the River Loddon, also Pope's native river, appears as the nymph Lodona, who, after being pursued by Pan, is transformed into the river bearing her name, 'melting as in tears she lay, | In a soft silver stream dissolved away', and becoming a curious 'glass' which reflects the surrounding landscape.¹¹⁸ After the Loddon rushes into the Thames, Pope follows the course of the river, which comes to represent a powerful poetic lineage as he finds himself in the same space as his predecessors. First he passes Cooper's Hill, the site of his chief topographical poetic predecessor John Denham's similar riverine *Cooper's Hill* (1642), which also features the Thames. Pope observes that '(On COOPER'S HILL eternal wreaths shall grow, | While lasts the mountain, or while Thames shall flow)': decked with laurels, the Thames is intrinsically linked with poetic fame and longevity. *Windsor Forest* continues:¹¹⁹

I seem through consecrated walks to rove,
I hear soft music die along the grove:
Led by the sound, I roam from shade to shade,
By god-like Poets venerable made:
Here his first lays majestic DENHAM sung;
There the last numbers flow'd from COWLEY'S tongue.
O early lost! what tears the river shed,
When the sad pomp along his banks was led?
His drooping swans on every note expire,
And on his willows hung each Muse's lyre.
 Since fate relentless stopped their heavenly voice,
No more the forests ring, or groves rejoice;
Who now shall charm the shades, where COWLEY strung
His living harp, and lofty DENHAM sung?
But hark! the groves rejoice, the forest rings!
Are these revived? or is it GRANVILLE sings?
'Tis yours, my lord, to bless our soft retreats,
And call the Muses to their ancient seats;
To paint anew the flowery sylvan scenes,
To crown the forests with immortal greens,¹²⁰

Unlike Smith, Pope does present a poetic 'I' here, yet he too calls on another poet to continue this poetic tradition: George Granville (like Hayley, the dedicatee of the volume in which the poem appears). In Smith's compressed sonnet version, the 'rural Naiad' which 'winds' the Arun along – 'Aruna' of sonnet V, perhaps – recalls the Loddon-Lodona, while

¹¹⁸ Pope, 'Windsor Forest', in *The Major Works*, pp. 49-62 (ll. 203-204).

¹¹⁹ Pope, ll. 265-266.

¹²⁰ Pope, ll. 267-286. The invocation of past poets spans ll. 259-299.

the sestet's invocation of past male poets on the riverbank strongly recalls *Windsor-Forest* (establishing a similar gender contrast to sonnet XXXIII). Like Smith's, Pope's riparian landscape is 'consecrated' by previous writers, here Denham and Cowley and Granville, who are later joined by Surrey: 'Here noble SURREY felt the sacred rage, | SURREY, the GRANVILLE of a former age'.¹²¹ Like the Thames, Smith's Arun represents a powerful poetic lineage, an actualisation of literary influence. The Thames is also an 'elegiac' place of willow and mourning here, for like Smith's predecessors, Cowley died young; his body was floated down the river in the 'sad pomp' to which Pope alludes. Aside from the poets named and heralded here, numerous other classical and Renaissance predecessors and literary 'currents' have been identified as informing *Windsor Forest*, not least the Lodona episode, which draws upon multiple Ovidian myths.¹²²

The influence of Pope upon Smith's sonnets is particularly interesting considering its coalescence with Warton's sonnet paradigm. Warton and Pope shared the same native river in the Loddon (the river appears 'with alders crown'd' in both poems),¹²³ yet as critics such as Robert Griffin and Fairer have shown, Pope was a problematic poet for the Warton brothers, disrupting the native poetic tradition of Chaucer-Spenser-Milton they sought to establish.¹²⁴ Griffin has shown that the Warton brothers were drawn to and identified with Pope, yet in Bloomian, revisionary manner, purposefully displaced and repressed his influence.¹²⁵ Thus, Pope was constructed solely as a poet of reason, witty rhyme and the polished couplet, while other aspects that the Wartons were drawn to, such as the Gothic melancholy of 'Eloisa to Abelard', were suppressed. The influence of Milton posed something of a problem. Griffin shows how 'both Wartons quickly became jealously possessive of Milton and begin to consider Pope as a usurper of the poetic tradition': while Pope shamelessly stole from Milton, the Wartons claimed the true line of poetry, and Milton, themselves.¹²⁶ As Joseph Warton writes in the 'Advertisement' to his brother's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1791), which included the Loddon sonnet, 'A reader of taste will easily perceive, that the ingenious Author of the following Poems was of the School of Spenser and Milton, rather than Pope', echoing sentiments from his *An Essay on the Writings and Genius*

¹²¹ Pope, ll. 291-292.

¹²² See Pat Rogers, *The Symbolic Design of Windsor-Forest: Iconography, Pageant, and Prophecy in Pope's Early Work* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), chapter 4, and *Pope and the Destiny of the Stuarts: Pope and the Destiny of the Stuarts: History, Politics, and Mythology in the Age of Queen Anne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapter 7.

¹²³ 'Windsor Forest', l. 342 and 'To the River Lodon', l. 2.

¹²⁴ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 109

¹²⁵ See Robert Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope: A Study in Literary Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 28-45.

¹²⁶ Griffin, p. 35.

of Pope (1756; second volume, 1782).¹²⁷ This elision of Pope permitted the Wartons to evade the perceived ‘refinement’ Pope had brought to poetry and return to older poetic modes. Griffin also shows how place – the Wartons’ habitation of the conservative, reclusive retreats such of Winchester and Oxford, rather than more modern urban sites – was central to shaping this.¹²⁸ The return to older poetic modes is not least apparent in Warton’s appropriation of the sonnet, a notably un-Popean, and Miltonic form. Warton also strengthened his claim to Milton by publishing an edition of his shorter poems, including sonnets, in 1785 and in the ‘preface’ stated in similar terms that ‘the School of Milton arose in emulation of the School of Pope’.¹²⁹ As Fairer points out, Warton’s Loddon sonnet can be seen as a ‘reclaiming of his own childhood river from Pope’; he explores this literary retrogression through the river metaphor: Pope ‘was someone against whom they [the Wartons] needed to define their own literary principles – they wished to reach back beyond him to neglected places upstream’.¹³⁰ Thus, Warton’s Loddon sonnet actualises this reaching back ‘upstream’ through literary history. His childhood setting of Basingstoke is literally upstream from Pope’s, allowing him to reclaim the Loddon, return to the past and divert the path of literary history through himself and on towards Bowles and other members of the Warton school, forcefully realised through their continuous flow of river sonnets.¹³¹ Utilising a similar metaphor, in the ‘Advertisement’ to his *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746), Joseph Warton hopes that his edition will be recognised as ‘an attempt to bring back Poetry into its right channel’.¹³²

Although Smith clearly departs from Pope in some ways, he manifests more positively in her sonnets, and she frequently identifies herself as his successor.¹³³ As well as drawing on his

¹²⁷ Joseph Warton, ‘Advertisement’, in Thomas Warton, *The Poems on Various Subjects* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1791), sig. A2.

¹²⁸ See Griffin, pp. 53-59.

¹²⁹ Thomas Warton, *Poems upon Several Occasions*, p. xi.

¹³⁰ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 109.

¹³¹ Bowles also disparaged Pope, embroiling himself in the so-called ‘Pope Controversy’ concerning Pope’s canonical position, involving, amongst others, Byron and Hazlitt. See Jacob Johan van Rennes, *Bowles, Byron and the Pope Controversy* (New York: Haskell House, 1966) and James Chandler, ‘The Pope Controversy: Romantic Politics and the English Canon’, *Critical Enquiry*, 10 (1984), 481-509.

¹³² Joseph Warton, ‘Advertisement’, *Odes on Various Subjects* (London: R. Dodsley, 1746), p. 4.

¹³³ A major difference between their river poems is formal. Pope also heralds the ‘proud Thames’, which Smith defines her isolated Arun against; although Pope may begin at his childhood Loddon, his poem soon moves away from the provincial riverbank. Other eighteenth-century women writers did follow Pope more closely stylistically. Anna Barbauld’s, ‘The Invitation: To Miss B*****’ (1773), is a celebration of place centred on the River Mersey in couplets, with some pre-echoes of Smith’s Arun sonnets. The longer 1600-line poem in rhyming couplets, Anne Wilson’s, *Teisa: A Descriptive Poem of the River Teese, its Towns and Antiquities* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: For the Author, 1778), follows Pope more closely, and indeed frequently expresses its literary debt to Pope’s *Windsor-Forest* and Denham’s *Cooper Hill*. See Bridget Keegan, ‘Writing against the Current: Anne Wilson’s Teisa and

riparian landscape, in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, she quotes from Pope's canon three times (alongside Milton, without the division into two incompatible 'schools'), twice from 'Eloisa to Abelard' and once from an imitation of Horace's first ode of the fourth book, 'To Venus' (1737). As noted, she appropriates 'Eloisa to Abelard' in the first of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, which 'testifies to her continuing the main line of English poetic tradition'.¹³⁴ She quotes from the end of the poem, assuming the role of the future poet to which Eloisa calls out (re-appropriating the female voice from the male), in a direct continuation. Indeed, 'Eloisa to Abelard' was Pope's most popular poem in the 'Romantic' era. In the later imitation of Horace, Pope finds himself back in the passionate and emotional world of such 1717 poems as 'Eloisa to Abelard', as the poem opens: 'Again? new Tumults in my breast!', 'I am not now, alas! the man | As in the gentle Reign of My Queen Anne'.¹³⁵ Rather than suppressing this particular aspect of Pope, as the Wartons had done, Smith draws it out. Thus, despite the uneasy position Smith may occupy in the formal and spatial male literary tradition she invokes, influence here does not act in a disabling way. Smith's role as Pope's successor, continuing poetic tradition, clearly departs from Thomas Warton's own: her sonnets do not enact a reaching back or return to the past, inscribed in her use of the English, and irregular variations on it, rather than Italian sonnet form. This becomes clearer and more forcefully articulated in Smith's sonnets which take the sea as their subject.

In sonnet XXXIII 'To the Naiad of the Arun' there is a sense of getting closer to the Arun's destination, 'the ocean caves': 'Tis but a little, o'er thy shallow tide, | That toiling trade her burden'd vessel leads'. Smith's poetic gaze indeed soon shifts downstream, as the seascape replaces the river in importance to *Elegiac Sonnets*. It is not the place of 'toiling trade' that lies beyond the river, however, but a poetic space disestablished from the 'classic', patrilineal Arun in more vital ways. Sonnet XXXV 'To Fortitude', the penultimate sonnet of the third edition, looks forward to the seascape:

NYMPH of the rock! whose dauntless spirit braves
 The beating storm, and bitter winds that howl
 Round thy cold breast; and hear'st the bursting waves
 And the deep thunder with unshaken soul;
 Oh come! – and shew how vain the cares that press
 On my weak bosom – and how little worth

the Tradition of British River Poetry', *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 31 (2002), 267-85.

¹³⁴ Curran, 'Charlotte Smith: Intertextualities', p. 179. Smith features in Claudia N. Thomas's *Alexander Pope and his Eighteenth-Century Women Readers* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press 1994) as a woman writer inspired by 'Eloisa to Aberlard' (see pp. 174-175).

¹³⁵ Pope, 'Part of the First Ode of the Fourth Book of Horace', *Imitations of Horace with An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot and The Epilogue to the Satire*, ed. by John Butt, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1953) pp. 147-153 (ll. 1 and 3-4).

Is the false fleeting meteor, Happiness,
That still misleads the wanderers of the earth!

(37-38, ll. 1-8)

Although the sea is not explicitly mentioned here, the sonnet perhaps addresses one of the ‘sea-nymphs’ of sonnet XXXIII, who here differ somewhat from the rural naiad of the Arun, quietly winding the ‘classic’ river along its way. Smith appears to be looking forward to assuming a similar position to the nymph of the rock, whose ‘spirit’ she wishes to possess, embracing the elemental forces of the seascape.

The Arun features in only one sonnet in subsequent editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, sonnet XLV ‘On leaving a part of Sussex’, in the fifth edition (1789), in which Smith bids farewell to her beloved river. Like sonnet XXXV, and Werter sonnet XXIII ‘To the North Star’, it is a transitional sonnet, although working in the other direction. By the summer of 1787 Smith was living at Wyhe (now Wyke) near Guildford in Surrey, quite a few miles north of the Arun. It is with a final, backwards glance to the Arun that it becomes ‘Aruna’ once again:

FAREWEL, Aruna! on whose varied shore
My early vows were paid to Nature’s shrine,
When thoughtless joy, and infant hope were mine,
And whose lorn stream has heard me since deplore
Too many sorrows! Sighing I resign
Thy solitary beauties – and no more
Or on thy rocks, or in thy woods recline,
Or on the heath, by moonlight lingering, pore
On air-drawn phantoms – While in Fancy’s ear
As in the evening wind thy murmurs swell,
The Enthusiast of the Lyre who wander’d here,
Seems yet to strike his visionary shell,
Of power to call forth Pity’s tenderest tear,
Or wake wild Phrenzy – from her hideous cell!

(43)

Curiously, as Smith leaves the Arun, and Warton’s space, her sonnet opens in adherence to his formula, focusing on personal memory and history, with the ‘I’ present, and describing the joyful river scene of childhood. As Smith leaves the Arun, however, Warton’s paradigm recedes – or is ‘resign[ed]’ – at the moment it is realised, reflected in the sonnet’s strange form. Rhyming *abbabacdcdcd*, it is one of the few sonnets which are notably redolent of the Italian form, yet the heavy enjambment – with lines running over between quatrains and the sestet-octave divide – creates something much more fluid.

The Arun does feature in two later, non-sonnet poems: in the second book of *The Emigrants* (1793) Smith bids ‘Memory come!’ (119-147, ll. 313), recalling how ‘When, on the banks

of the Arun, which I see | Make its irriguous course thro' yonder meads, | I play'd' (II, ll. 332-334).¹³⁶ 'April', included in volume two of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797), also recalls Smith's childhood: 'from thy wild-wood banks, Aruna! roving, | Thy thymy downs with sportive steps I sought' (108-110; ll. 29-30). Both poems thus recall personal past through the river in the Wartonian way that Smith's sonnets resist, creating a formal mismatch, as such. Indeed, by the end of the final Arun sonnet XLV, it has taken on a landscape, once again, all too strange, both visually and temporally. As Smith relinquishes the Arun, to inhabit it 'no more', she leaves it to 'air-drawn phantoms' to her male predecessor Collins, 'The Enthusiast of the Lyre'. Indeed, the very phrase 'lorn stream' belongs to Collins himself: Smith transposes it, without acknowledgment, from his riparian, elegiac 'Ode occasioned by the Death of Mr. Thomson' (1749). And as 'Sighing I resign | Thy solitary beauties', a new setting becomes dominant.

¹³⁶ Smith refers to the Arun proper here, giving a sense of its course to the sea which we do not get in the sonnets. Indeed the speaker assumes an elevated position 'on an Eminence on one of those Downs, which afford to the South a View of the Sea' (147) rather than the riverbank of her Arun sonnets. The river is also named in a short unpublished poem inscribed by Smith in the friendship book of Rev. James Stanier Clarke (1766-1834), signed and dated by Smith 23 January 1793 from Brightelmstone. It is transcribed at <<http://www.artworksgallery.co.uk/media/pt1.pdf>> [accessed 1 August 2013]. The book includes over one-hundred drawings, poems, and autographs by – among others – Hayley, Cowper, George Romney, Seward, and Richard Sheridan and John Kemble.

Chapter 3 Innovation

The Sea

As Smith bids ‘farewel’ to the Arun in sonnet XLV, the sea replaces it in importance in *Elegiac Sonnets*, and it is in her sea sonnets that her distinctive voice and innovative use of the sonnet form really emerges. It is in the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789) that the prevalence of the sea becomes clear, and its presence then increases with each subsequent edition.¹ As her sonnets replace the river with the sea, Smith increasingly disestablishes her sonnets from literary tradition, which the seascape encodes through its lack of a poetic past, and suggests the way Smith has been perceived by contemporary poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, as well as the more recent critics who characterise her as a ‘Romantic’ poet.



7. Illustration to sonnet XII, ‘Written on the Sea Shore – October 1784’, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789)

¹ It is a central feature in Smith’s first novel *Emmeline* (1788), and two of its three sonnets are written on or near the sea, which are then transposed to the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*.

Curiously, the first of Smith's sonnets to address the seascape is also introduced in the third edition: sonnet XII 'Written on the Sea Shore – October 1784', which acts as a prelude of sorts to her later sea sonnets. Moreover, it is integrated into the existing sequence, appearing after 'To the South Downs' but before the new River Arun sonnets, disrupting the directional flow and complicating a simple linearity. Amidst the vernal, pastoral landscapes of the earlier sonnets, it offers a distinctively different scene and voice. Written in the first person, on location, its set-up is similar to Arun sonnet XXXII 'To Melancholy'. Both are marginal poems, temporally and spatially, set in the same month and 'written on' shore and bank respectively. Indeed, the two sonnets constitute an interesting river-sea dichotomy, offering different poetic outlooks. Rather than looking to the past, like Smith's – and Warton's – river sonnets, sonnet XII is striking in its immediacy. In contrast to the ghostly Arun landscape, ever belonging to another, the seascape is entirely and autonomously the speaker's own:

ON some rude fragment of the rocky shore,
 Where on the fractured cliff the billows break,
 Musing, my solitary seat I take,
 And listen to the deep and solemn roar.

O'er the dark waves the winds tempestuous howl;
 The screaming sea-bird quits the troubled sea:
 But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me.
 And suits the mournful temper of my soul.

Already shipwreck'd by the storms of Fate,
 Like the poor mariner, methinks, I stand,
 Cast on a rock; who sees the distant land
 From whence no succour comes – or comes too late.
 Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries,
 'Till in the rising tide the exhausted sufferer dies.

(23-24)

Gone are the sights and sounds of spring, replaced by the breaking billows and howls of the 'wild gloomy scene', which is now in full accordance with Smith's 'soul'. The scene also accords with Smith's sonnet form; both landscape and form are irregular, and both are characterised by fragmentation and fracture. Indeed, the innovative approach Smith brought to form, the frequency with which she experiments with the sonnet, and 'intertwines content and structure', is particularly apparent in her sea sonnets, which display a congruence between poet, form and place – characterised by irregularity – which eludes her river sonnets.² In sonnet XII, the 'rude fragment of the rocky shore | Where on the fractured cliff the billows break' is mirrored by the poem's structure: the sonnet naturally 'breaks', as such, between the octave and sestet, yet here the octave is again split into two autonomous stanzas,

² Labbe, 'Introduction', p. x.

accentuated by the sonnet's layout, physically broken up on the page. Like sonnet III, 'To a Nightingale', set out in the same way, it draws attention to its own irregularity. The sonnet is also fragmentary in the way it combines English and Italian forms yet adheres to neither; rhyming *abba cddc effegg* it is made up of 'fragments' or elements of both sonnet forms.

The sonnet is also notable for the use of an alexandrine in the final line. Twenty-four of Smith's sonnets end with an alexandrine, or twelve-syllable line, and her use of it increases as *Elegiac Sonnets* develops. It is another way in which form and content are fused; in sonnet XII it suggests the overwhelming, 'rising tide' in its length, as the expiration of both mariner and sonnet coincide. The preceding sonnet XI 'To sleep' (1784) is the first sonnet to end with an alexandrine: 'To calm the anxious breast, to close the streaming eye' (23, l. 14) and again its length correlates with meaning, through the motion 'streaming' and the closing of both eye and sonnet. Smith includes a pause after the sixth syllable – common to the alexandrine – in thirteen of her sonnets, including sonnet XI, usually marked by a dash. When reference is made to the alexandrine in eighteenth-century discourse, it is indeed usually discussed in terms of being in dialogue with content, and is also associated with slowing down the line. Johnson describes it as 'a tardy and stately measure'.³ It is most frequently associated with Pope and his use of alexandrines in his translations of the *Iliad* (1715-1720) and the *Odyssey* (1725-1726), as well as his reference in 'An Essay on Criticism': 'A needless Alexandrine ends the song, | That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.'⁴ The last line recreates the effect, as an alexandrine itself of course. Pope also uses an alexandrine in the fourth book of his translation of the *Iliad*: 'So, great *Atrides!* show'd thy sacred Blood, | As down thy snowie Thigh distill'd the streaming Flood' and in a note comments that the blood has been made to 'trickle thro' the Length of an *Alexandrian Line*', again linking content with the elongated line.⁵ Smith's use of the alexandrine remains somewhat elusive and confounding, however; she does not refer to it anywhere in her oeuvre, and there is no real precedent for ending a sonnet thus, with the exception of Charles Emily's sonnet sequence *Death. A Poem* (1762), which recalls the Spenserian stanza through its appearance as one poem. The alexandrine was associated with French poetry, and the Spenserian stanza, although Smith does not appear to draw on these links. It can be seen as part of her experimental approach to the sonnet, transcending its parameters; as Johnson also writes, 'the English Alexandrine breaks the lawful bounds, and surprises the reader with two

³ Samuel Johnson, 'Numb. 92. Saturday, Feb. 2, 1751', *The Rambler*, 6 vols (London: J. Payne, 1752), III, pp. 190-201 (p. 200).

⁴ Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', ll. 354-357.

⁵ Pope, *The Iliad of Homer Books I-IX*, ed. by Maynard Mack (London: Methuen, 1967), IV.176-177; p. 229, n.

syllables more than he expected'.⁶ Although Smith's use of the alexandrine can be seen as part of her innovation, breaking 'the lawful bounds' of the sonnet, in a letter of 1794 Smith refers to wishing the final chapters of a novel 'like the last line of a Sonnet to have forcible and correct' (*Letters*, 128). The alexandrine can be seen as imbuing the terminating line which such qualities, yet it is formally incorrect, as such.

The importance of sonnet XII is again attested by its selection for illustration in the 1789 edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (fig. 7). The female figure is realigned with place after having been replaced with Otway on the riverbank between sonnets IV and XXVI. The trope of a female figure situated on the shore is used repeatedly by Smith throughout her novels as well as her poetry and the sea scene appears to constitute a more female space. As well as the sea's more womb-like watery connotations – in contrast with the gushing male river – its tides are governed by the female moon, allied with Diana, 'mute arbitress of tides' (sonnet XLIV, 43, l. 1). Kinsley has discussed the female aspect of the sea space, as well as the importance of the shore to Smith's female characters, and argues that it is used by Smith 'as a powerfully symbolic space for the exploration of the relationship between female identity and patriarchal authority', and that Smith draws on the 'transgressive potential of this [coastline] as both a topographical and conceptual space which women can inhabit'.⁷ This has particular resonance for Smith's sonnets when considered in their literary context. While the river represents a successive, patrilineal progression, which Smith's own Arun sonnets strongly invoke, the sea constitutes a non-linear, non-hierarchical space. Thus, although she still continues to draw on male literary tradition – and in sonnet XII, a note states that line eight is indebted to 'Young' – no predecessors or ghostly figures populate the shore, and the seascape frees Smith from the alienating effects of a literary patrilineage.⁸ The figures that do sometimes appear in Smith's seascapes are not poets, but (dispossessed, male) wanderers, exiles and outcasts of various kinds – matching Smith's literary position – who find a similar correspondence with place, such as the 'unhappy exile' of sonnet XLIII, 'whom his fates confine | To the bleak coast of some unfriendly isle' (47, ll. 1-2); he 'perhaps may know | Such heartless pain, such blank despair as mine' (7-8). Kinsley argues that despite the

⁶ Johnson, 'Dryden', *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*, 10 vols (London: J. Nichols, 1779-1781), III, pp. 307-308.

⁷ Zoë Kinsley, "'Ever restless waters": Female Identity and Coastal Space in Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher*', in *Gender and Space in British Literature, 1660–1820*, ed. by Mona Narain and Karen Gevirtz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 101-115 (pp. 101 and 115).

⁸ As Curran notes, the debt seems to be to Edward Young's play *The Revenge* (1721), which opens with a sea scene (Curran, *Poems*, p. 12). Young was concerned with the nature of literary originality, and in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* makes an association, of sorts, between originality and the sea: 'Something new may be expected from Britons particularly; who seem not to be more sever'd from the rest of mankind by the surrounding sea, than by the current in their veins' (Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison*, 2nd edn (London: A. Millar, etc., 1759), p. 76).

‘potential emancipation and empowerment of women’ the coastline appears to offer, it is the ‘female suffering which takes place at these marginal locations that is most persistent’; yet, as will be seen, it is this dual aspect of empowerment and sense of marginality, exile and suffering which is at the crux of the sea space in Smith’s sonnets.⁹

‘All the charms of novelty’

Indeed, despite Smith’s reference to Young in sonnet XII, the seascape lacks the established poetic past of the river; autonomy is inscribed into the seascape by its limited poetic appearance prior to the ‘Romantic’ period. In his vast survey of the eighteenth-century topographical poem, Robert Aubin notes that contrary to the multitude of river poems of the period ‘remarkably few poems undertake the sea as exclusive subject’, and Alain Corbin dates the very discovery of the sea’s attractions in the western world to the mid-eighteenth century: ‘The irresistible awakening of a collective desire for the shore arises in the period from 1750 to 1840’, an awakening he locates in the new-found popularity of sea-bathing for therapeutic reasons, and the discovery of the ‘sublime’.¹⁰ The desolate, sublime aspect of the seaside attracts Smith more strongly than the resort. One of her sonnets is ‘written at’ the resort of Weymouth (LXXI), yet out of season, ‘at winter’, displaced from the time when ‘on the peopled strand | Pleasure shall all her varied forms display’ (76-77, ll. 5-6). Before the discovery of the seaside, attitudes to the sea were coloured by fear or disgust, arising from Biblical stories of the creation and flood.¹¹ In his introduction to *The Oxford Book of the Sea*, Jonathan Raban highlights the absence of the sea in the literature of the English Renaissance, which is full of ships and voyages, yet ‘the surprising thing is there is so little sea in it’.¹² The sea was a space to be traversed, a place for voyage, commerce, colonial conquest and war, not an aesthetic source.

In Smith’s own *Rural Walks* (1795), Mrs. Woodfield – a thinly-veiled Smith herself – observes that

⁹ Kinsley, “‘Ever restless waters’”, p. 103. Kinsley is one of the few critics who have noted the importance of the sea space to Smith’s sonnets; see also her “‘In moody sadness, on the giddy brink’”: Liminality in Home Tour Travel Narratives’, in *Mapping Liminalities: Thresholds in Cultural and Literary Texts*, ed. by Lucy Kay and others (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 41-67 (p. 47)) and ‘Beside the Seaside: Mary Morgan’s *Tour to Milford Haven, in the Year 1791*’ in *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Benjamin Colbert (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 31-49.

¹⁰ Robert Aubin, *Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1936), p. 113; Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840*, trans. by Jocelyn Phelps (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 53.

¹¹ Corbin, pp. 1-2.

¹² Jonathan Raban, ‘Introduction’, *The Oxford Book of the Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 1-34 (p. 3).

A tempest at sea, though one of the most awful and sublime spectacles the world can shew, has, I think, been less frequently described in poetry than any other phenomenon of Nature. But, indeed, the unfortunate sufferers in such a case, are not likely to be in a condition to analyse their sensations, or to remark appearances around them. There is however, the *Shipwreck*, by Falconer, which has some fine passages. How very correct, in all he describes is that charming poet, Thomson! If you recollect what we have remarked to-day, you may observe how closely he has traced the progress of the storm:

(XII, 81)

A section from *Winter* follows. The observation occurs in dialogue IX of *Rural Walks*, ‘The Fisherman’, in which Mrs. Woodfield and her wards walk by the sea, revealing much about Smith’s attitude towards it. As well as literary, the sea view affords a personal sense of originality: ‘The sea prospects had all the charms of novelty’ it is observed, while a child is ‘as much captivated with it as if it were entirely new to *me*’ (XII, 75). Contrary to the river scene, which remains constant, the same for Smith as for Collins and Otway who yet ‘linger’ there, the sea is perpetually ‘new’. Mrs. Woodfield is also keen to refute the idea that ‘the sea view is monotonous’: ‘There is hardly an hour that does not present some new and beautiful appearance; and, so little am I wearied with continually looking on the sea, that it is to me the object of all other the most amusing’ (XII, 75). In *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (1804) the similarly Smithian Mrs. Talbot composes the poem ‘Studies by the Sea’ ‘to refute the idea that the sea has not variety’ (XIII, 215). Prior to that late poem, the sense of variety it evokes and describes informs Smith’s diverse sea sonnets, which take a range of settings – shore, headland, port, churchyard, resort – and in a range of conditions, mimed by the variety of sonnet forms she uses. A hybrid space, where water meets land, ever-changing and shifting, the seascape is peculiarly suited to Smith’s use of the sonnet.

As Mrs. Woodfield observes, a stormy sea is one of the most ‘sublime spectacles the world can shew’ and, as noted, the ‘sublime’ was central to the sea’s rise in popularity in the eighteenth century, and from its very origins sublimity is associated with the sea. The concept first came to the attention of English readers via Boileau’s French translation (1674) of the Greek treatise *Peri Hýpsous* or *On Sublimity* attributed to ‘Longinus’ (1st c. AD). Although other translations into English were made, William Smith’s *Dionysius Longinus On the Sublime* (1739) became the standard English version. Longinus’s theory is primarily rhetorical, concerned with the grand and elevated in thought and language, yet the driving impulse of the sublime is located in nature: ‘the impulse of nature inclines us to admire, not a little clear transparent rivulet that ministers to our necessities, but the Nile, the Ister, the

Rhine, or still much more, the ocean'.¹³ As Longinus's treatise reached English readers and thinkers in the eighteenth century, the concern with the great in nature became central, and from the very beginning of the eighteenth century, the ocean is persistently identified as a source of sublimity. As Joseph Addison remarked in *The Spectator* in 1712, the imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity'; thus, 'of all objects that I have ever seen, there is none which affects my imagination so much as the sea or ocean'.¹⁴ Similarly, in Edmund Burke's seminal 1757 treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* it is observed that

A certain plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean: but can it ever fill the mind with anything so great as the ocean itself?¹⁵

The sublimity of the sea makes an interesting contrast with the close association between the river and picturesque.¹⁶ Throughout sublime discourse, the emphasis is on the sheer size – and apparent limitlessness – of the sea and thus Smith's coincidence of the sea and sonnet is something of a feat. As Ian Balfour has observed, the 'sublime sonnet' is an incongruity; the smallness which characterises the form is systematically associated with the beautiful by Burke, whereas the sublime is linked with the vast, even infinite.¹⁷ As Burke compares the two: 'sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent [...] the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate'.¹⁸ The gender implications of Burke's theory also curiously match those of the sonnet, so often used to describe the female subject. Moreover, while the sonnet is 'strictly circumscribed', the sublime is 'unbounded' and thus, 'on the face of it, the aesthetic mode of the sublime and the strictly delimited genre of the sonnet would seem to be worlds apart'.¹⁹ In 1785, Richard Polwhele had made a similar observation: 'the Sonnet seems peculiarly turned to the Beautiful [...] But the

¹³ William Smith, *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime: Translated from the Greek [...]* (Dublin: G. Risk, etc., 1740), p. 64.

¹⁴ Joseph Addison, No. 489, 'Saturday, September 20, 1712', *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), IV, pp. 233-236 (p. 233).

¹⁵ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 53.

¹⁶ As William Gilpin writes: 'I have often thought, that if a person wished particularly to amuse himself with picturesque scenes, the best method he could take, would be to place before him a good map of England; and to settle in his head the course of all the chief rivers of the country. These rivers should be the great directing lines of his excursions' (Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty [...]*, 2 vols (London: R. Blamire, 1786), I, p. 202).

¹⁷ Ian Balfour, 'The Matter of Genre in the Romantic Sublime', in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Charles Mahoney (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 2011), pp. 503-520 (p. 505). See also Ian Balfour, 'The Sublime Sonnet in European Romanticism', in *Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Angela Esterhammer (Philadelphia PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 181-196.

¹⁸ Burke, p. 113.

¹⁹ Balfour, 'The Matter of Genre', p. 505.

sublime, (though some Writers in this Line have attempted it) is obviously incompatible with such Miniature-Painting'.²⁰ Yet, as Balfour points out, sublimity was embraced in multiple sonnets. As examples, Balfour cites Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* sequence (1796), also oceanic in part; Keats's 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer' (1816); Shelley's 'Ozymandias' (1818); Wordsworth's 'Mutability' (1822); as well as Smith's sonnets, which constitute the first examples of the truly sublime sonnet chronologically. Smith brings sublimity to the sonnet by way of the sea, of course, its ultimate manifestation, which she renders into the smallest and most bounded of literary forms.

The two poems Smith does name in *Rural Walks* as notable for describing a storm at sea are William Falconer's *Shipwreck: a Poem, in Three Cantos, by a Sailor* (1762) and James Thomson's earlier poem *Winter* (1726), two landmark poems in the sea's eighteenth-century literary emergence. Falconer (bap. 1732, d. 1770), was an actual seaman as well as a poet and was one of only three survivors of the *Britannia*, which was wrecked on its return to Britain in 1749. His poem describes the journey and disaster in rhyming couplets, from the true position of one of the few 'unfortunate sufferers' Mrs. Woodfield describes. Thus, attention is drawn to *The Shipwreck* by Smith for its authenticity and immediacy of experience, which she draws on in her own poems. In sonnet XII, the speaker identifies with the 'poor mariner' 'cast on a rock', and a boat can be seen being tossed about in the waves in the sonnet's illustration. Smith not only invokes the mariner in a metaphorical context, but draws on the immediacy of his real and immediate experience of a storm from the position of the 'unfortunate sufferer' – which becomes the 'exhausted sufferer' of sonnet XI – foreshadowing William Cowper's 'The Castaway' (1799).

The second and earlier of the poems Smith names, Thomson's *Winter*, presents a more abstract, 'picturesque' seascape. The extract Smith quotes from is one of three sea storms described in the poem:

The cormorant on high
Wheels from the deep, and screams along the land.
[...]
Then issues forth the storm with sudden burst,
And hurls the whole precipitated air
Down in a torrent. On the passive main
Descends the ethereal force, and with a strong gust
Turns from its bottom the discoloured deep.
Through the black night that sits immense around,
Lashed into foam, the fierce-conflicting brine
Seems o'er a thousand raging waves to burn.

²⁰ Richard Polwhele, *Pictures from Nature. In Twelve Sonnets* (London: C. Dilly, 1785), p. iii.

Meantime the mountain-billows, to the clouds
 In dreadful tumult swell'd, surge above surge,
 Burst into chaos with tremendous roar,
 And anchor'd navies from their stations drive,
 Wild as the winds across the howling waste
 Of mighty waters:²¹

Vast, noisy, and tempestuous, replete with shrieking seabirds, Thomson's sea scene indeed pre-echoes Smith's own presentation of the sea. However, a clear sense of an 'I' is lacking, as well as the central relationship Smith's sonnets establish between seascape and speaker. Although Thomson's poem does open in this mode: 'Welcome, kindred glooms! | Congenial horrors, hail!', recalling how 'Pleas'd have I wander'd through your rough domain', 'Heard the winds roar, and the big torrent burst', after the first paragraph the 'I' disappears and the depiction becomes more remote and generalised.²² Thomson's vast seascape – befitting his expansive blank verse – is highly visual, and indeed *The Seasons* was celebrated for enriching 'poetry with a variety of new and original images, which he painted from nature itself, and from his own actual observations'.²³ Smith clearly also continues this 'original' mode of natural observation and visual emphasis in her poetry, yet in combination with the immediate, authentic experience of Falconer's poem, with an increased subjective and place-specific element.

As well as lacking a poetic past generally, the sea appears in very few sonnets specifically prior to Smith's own. In the sonnets of her Renaissance forbears the sea features in a metaphorical capacity. Drayton's sonnet I presents its speaker as 'Like an adventurous seafarer', who was been 'called to tell of his discovery, | How far he sailed, what countries he had seen', establishing an analogy between the seafarer's travails and Drayton's trials in love.²⁴ Sonnet LXVII implores 'Idea' to look 'Into the ocean of a trouble mind, | Where my poor soul, the bark of sorrow, lies'.²⁵ Although Smith also draws on the sea as a metaphorical source for her suffering, it is grounded in her immediate situation on the shore or headland, faced by the elements. Although it is less certain if Smith knew them, in sonnets by Spenser and Shakespeare the sea also assumes a metaphorical function, and both establish a fundamental contrast between the longevity of the sonnet form and destructive sea, a relationship which Smith's sea sonnets dramatically undoes. Sonnet LXXV of Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595) opens:

²¹ James Thomson, 'Winter', *Poetical Works*, ed. by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 184-225 (ll. 144-166).

²² Thomson, 'Winter', ll. 5-6 and 10-12.

²³ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 2 vols, 4th edn (London: J. Dodsley, 1782), I, p. 42 and II, p. 185.

²⁴ Drayton, 'I', *Daniel's Delia and Drayton's Idea*, p. 68 (ll.1-4).

²⁵ Drayton, 'LXVII', *Daniel's Delia and Drayton's Idea*, p. 145 (ll. 2-4).

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
 but came the waves and washed it away:
 agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
 but came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.²⁶

The *abab* rhyme of the initial quatrain mimes the motion of the erasing tide, as ‘her name’ is written on the strand then washed away by the waves. Although the sea initially undoes the poet’s attempt to make permanent ‘her name’, in the sestet the sonnet begins to defeat the destructive power of the sea, and succeeds in immortalising ‘her’ in the sonnet form: ‘you shall live by fame | my verse your vertues shall eternize’.²⁷ Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 60’ (1609) works on a similar premise:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
 So do our minutes hasten to their end,
 Each changing place with that which goes before,
 In sequent toil all forwards do contend.²⁸

Again, although more figuratively, the motion of the waves represents time’s inevitable passing, the enemy of longevity and again, the sonnet form seems to replicate the motion of the waves: the rhyme moves forward, yet is pulled back by the *abab* quatrain, with each line ‘changing place with that which goes before’. Yet Shakespeare’s sonnet, like Spenser’s, manages to conquer the ‘cruel hand’ of time, with the ending couplet staying the sonnet’s rhyme and the motion of the tide: ‘And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand, | Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand’.²⁹ Sonnets 64 and 65 continue the distinction. Often fragile and fragmentary, indeed frequently set on the ever-eroding south coast, Smith’s sea sonnets permit no such longevity and often invoke and align themselves with the sea’s destructive abilities.

The sea features in the sonnets of only one of Smith’s eighteenth-century predecessors: John Bampfylde, whose treatment of the sea does in some ways foreshadow Smith’s own. Largely, Bampfylde’s sonnets describe and celebrate his life of peaceful, rural, retirement in the Teign Valley. A pair of sonnets on the sea constitute notable exceptions, and the first, VI ‘On a Stormy Sea-Prospect’ (1778), is particularly striking:

How fearful ’tis to walk the sounding shore,
 When low’rs the sky, and winds are piping loud!
 And round the beech the tearful maidens croud,

²⁶ Edmund Spenser, ‘Sonnet. LXXV’, *Spenser: Poetical Works*, ed. by J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 575 (ll. 1-3).

²⁷ Spenser, ‘Sonnet. LXXV’, ll. 10-11.

²⁸ Shakespeare, ‘Sonnet 60’, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, p. 231 (ll. 1-4).

²⁹ Shakespeare, ‘Sonnet 60’, ll. 13-14.

Scar'd at the swelling surge and thunder's roar.
 High o'er the cliffs the screaming Sea-mews soar,
 Lost is th' adventurous bark in stormy cloud,
 The shrill blast whistles through the fluttering shroud;
 And, lo! the gallant crew, that erst before
 Secure rode tilting o'er the placid wave,
 Scarce know to stem the black and boisterous main,
 And view, with eyes aghast, their watery grave.
 So fares it with the breast of him, the S[w]ain,
 Who quits Content for mad Ambition's lore,
 Short are his days, and distant far the shore.³⁰

Bampfylde's sonnet is certainly different from contemporary sonnets. While anticipating Smith, Bampfylde's treatment of the sea is also characterised by some differences. The sonnet presents a nameless stormy 'Sea-prospect' that does not appear to be based in immediate experience or a definite place, especially as an 'I' is lacking: although the speaker states that it is 'fearful' to walk upon the seashore, it is unclear if this insight has been gleaned from personal experience. Moreover, the scene does not appear to afford any particular enjoyment; as well as the 'fearful' speaker, those whom inhabit the seascape are 'scar'd and 'aghast', without experiencing the pleasurable element of the sublime. Indeed, Bampfylde's sonnet is one of a pair. Sonnet VII 'On a Calm Sea-Prospect' presents the same scene yet is characterised by serenity: 'How pleasant 'tis to walk the silent shore, | When scarce the humming tide can reach mine ear!'.³¹ It is this serene scene that accords with Bampfylde's 'Swain', 'Who quits Ambition for Contentment's lore, | For joyful are his days, and near the shore', clearly more akin to Bampfylde than the swain of sonnet VI, who 'quits Content'.³² Read as a pair, the sea scene itself recedes in importance as its promotion of 'contentment' emerges as the main concern. In contrast with Smith's first sea sonnet, similarly set on the shore, she emphasises how the 'wild gloomy scene has charms for me, | And suits the mournful temper of my soul', and she identifies with the shipwrecked mariner who Bampfylde defines himself against in sonnet VI.

Thus, while the river trope draws together and symbolises a range of male poetic traditions encompassing Pope, Warton and regional predecessors, as well as Petrarch and the sonnet's Italian element, the sea is not connected with any particular poet or tradition, notwithstanding the few examples that precede Smith in both the sonnet and more widely. It is a more apt space for the English sonnet form, therefore, which is not tied to a poetic past. Whereas the riverbank constitutes a dispossessing space, and in 'To Melancholy' it

³⁰ Bampfylde, 'Sonnet VI. On a Stormy Sea-Prospect', *Sixteen Sonnets*, p. 6.

³¹ Bampfylde, 'Sonnet VII. On a Calm Sea-Prospect', *Sixteen Sonnets*, p. 7 (ll. 1-2). Bampfylde is perhaps indebted to John Donne's pair of poems 'The Storme' and 'The Calme' (1597), and other poetic diptychs such as Milton's 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' (1645).

³² Bampfylde, 'Sonnet VII. On a Calm Sea-Prospect', ll. 12-14.

constitutes a haunted margin, Smith's shore matches it as a non-haunted one, which she can possess more fully. The very position of the seascape outside of tradition permits originality and innovation, and through it Smith brings a new force not only to the sonnet, but also to the wider literary landscape. This is reflected in the shift in the position of Smith's speaker in later sea sonnets. Rather than the shore of sonnet XII, the majority of her sea sonnets are written from the elevated stance of the prospect viewer. As sonnet LXXX 'To the Invisible Moon' states, 'I prefer from some steep rock to look | On the obscure and fluctuating main' (83, ll. 7-8; original emphasis). Although a marginal location, the headland overlooking the sea is a place of visual power, correlating with the autonomy and sense of poetic power inscribed into Smith's seascape sonnets. Labbe has shown landscape perception in the Romantic era to be inherently gendered. She exemplifies a defining dichotomy between the male prospect view, closely bound with the male ability to abstract, and the female landscape, rooted in the particulars of a scene and concerned with detail. Labbe shows how, through a variety of different avenues, women were entirely cut off from the prospect view: 'the complex interrelatedness of land, land ownership, and the privileges of view suspend the possibility of a full prospect view for a woman culturally and legally disassociated from the land'.³³ While the eminence is a place of privilege for the male writer, 'an extension of the social privileges his gender brings him', the opposing viewpoint is that of the disenfranchised perspective of the woman writer who lacks 'the advantage of the (legal) proprietary eye'.³⁴ In specific relation to Smith she writes:

Elegiac Sonnets construct a poet-persona who paces a physical, imposing landscape [...] in these sonnets, hers is not the imperious prospect view, but an invested, personalized involvement with 'the rugged path I'm doom'd to tread'.³⁵

Thus, Smith is firmly located in the landscape, which would seem to match the riverbank and shores she traverses. However, while Smith may not gain the traditional male 'imperious prospect view' in her sonnets, she does achieve a somewhat different eminence, not overlooking the land, of course, but the sea.³⁶ Smith's wielding of the headland and seascape is more fully embraced in the longer, historically and geologically informed (albeit unfinished) 'Beachy Head' (1807), yet her claim upon it begins firmly in her sonnets.

³³ Jacqueline Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 27. Tim Fulford has shown how in eighteenth-century discourse, landscape and the prospect view inscribe issues of authority, ownership, politics, authority and power for male writers and commentators, to which the prospect view is central (see *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)).

³⁴ Labbe, *Romantic Visualities*, pp. xii-xiii.

³⁵ Labbe, *Romantic Visualities*, p. 27.

³⁶ Smith does assume the position of the prospect viewer in sonnet V 'To the South Downs', yet it only serves to highlight her dispossession, as in Gray's poem upon which it draws.

Contrary to the landscape, the seascape constitutes an autonomous space without an owner, which the culturally and legally disinherited woman could possess, with particular resonance for Smith, considering her literal inheritance problems.

Breaking ‘the silent Sabbath of the grave’: Sonnet XLIV

These negotiations are central to sonnet XLIV, ‘Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex’, which is at the crux of the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. As the sonnet’s note informs us, it is located on the ‘margin of the sea’ itself, a margin that is actually in flux as land is being devoured by the encroaching tide:

Middleton is a village on the margin of the sea, in Sussex, containing only two or three houses. There were formerly several acres of ground between its small church and the sea, which now, by its continual encroachments, approaches within a few feet of this half-ruined and humble edifice. The wall, which once surrounded the church-yard, is entirely swept away, many of the graves broken up, and the remains of bodies interred washed into the sea; whence human bones are found among the sand and shingles on the shore.

(43)

Indeed, by the late eighteenth century, the churchyard of the medieval St. Nicholas Church in Middleton (now Middleton-on-Sea) had been engulfed by the tide, as well as part of the church itself. In 1838 a very high tide destroyed much of the remaining building, rendering it unusable. Some ruins survived in 1847 but had disappeared by c. 1849, when a newly-built church was consecrated.³⁷ As a marginal space, the churchyard inscribes a peculiar sense of dispossession, as the position from which the speaker writes literally disintegrates as the sonnet is written, yet it also affords Smith’s speaker with the elevated view of the prospect viewer. It is from this typically precarious and empowered position that Smith’s vision of the seascape is first fully realised. Describing a storm, the sonnet redresses the lack identified in *Rural Walks*:

PRESS’D by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
 While the loud equinox its power combines,
 The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
 But o’er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
 The wild blast, rising from the Western cave,
 Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
 Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
 And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
 With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore
 Lo! Their bones whiten in the frequent wave;

³⁷ T. P. Hudson, ‘Middleton-on-Sea’, in *The History of the County of Sussex. Volume 5, Part I*, ed. by T. P. Hudson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 190-204 (pp. 191 and 203).

But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
They hear the warring elements no more:
 While I am doom'd – by life's long storm opprest,
 To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.

(43)

Sublime, highly visual, huge in scope, and innovative in form, the uprooting, transforming forces at work within the sonnet's landscape become emblematic of the re-visioning force Smith brings to the form, and her radical departure from her sonnet predecessors. It is in this sonnet that Smith first presents the seascape from the stance of the prospect viewer and again, the scene presented is notably different from the vernal settings of Smith's earlier sonnets; the seascape is full of violent movement and sound, blasting, shrinking, raving and warring. The 'swelling surge' of the tide, overseen by the moon – the 'mute arbitress' – constitutes a suggestively different, female space from the male river of previous sonnets and its 'classic' aspect, as well as the feminised nightingale landscape. Indeed, this sonnet is far removed from Smith's early pastoral sonnets, replete with nightingales and streams, and the literary past that they represent. The setting of the later poem 'A Descriptive Ode [...]' (1796), in which the nightingale is replaced with the 'croaking cormorant', can be read as another alternative version of the churchyard of XLIV. Both poems are written during an 'equinoctial' storm, and as a note to the ode elaborates:³⁸

On an high broken cliff hang the ruins of some very ancient building, which the people of the island call Bow and Arrow Castle, or Rufus' Castle. Beneath, but still high above the sea, are the half-fallen arches and pillars of an old church, and around are scattered the remains of tomb-stones, and almost obliterated memorials of the dead.

(IX, 103)

The castle is described (by the character who composes the poem) as a 'residence of desolation and despair', and a scene 'perfectly in unison with my feelings' (IX, 327). As in sonnet XLIV, a historical site has been eroded, 'memorials' of the dead and the past are broken up, 'Chaotic pile of barren stone, | That Nature's hurrying hand has thrown' (1-2). The nightingale would not be found here, the poem tells us, for environmental reasons, but also perhaps for literary and authorial ones too. Although the nightingale can be found in Smith's River Arun sonnets, the more forceful challenges to the literary past and tradition encoded in the seascape sonnets and poems suggest a more extreme and full departure from it.

³⁸ In sonnet XLIV the 'loud equinox its power combines' (2), while Marchmont composes the poem in the novel when an 'equinoctial storm' is gathering (X, 327).

Sonnet XLIV also establishes another characteristic aspect of Smith's sea sonnets, as the prospect of the seascape is reflected in the sonnet's composition. Here the eye is directed down through the landscape as the sonnet is read, beginning at the sky (moon), moving through sea, to shore and ending with the poem's narrator: the gazing 'I' in the churchyard 'at Middleton' where the poem has been written. The traditionally closed, compact sonnet form appears strangely suited to the vast seascape view, as the shifts between quatrains and couplet, octave and sestet reflect the breaks in seascape between sky, sea, and shore. Her sea sonnets are continually interested in lines, edges and brinks which make up the seascape, as form and place coincide. Irregular in rhyme, *abbacddceceff*, the *c*-rhyme's transgression of the octave-sestet divide in sonnet XLIV also reflects the way in which the sea overrides the land. This sonnet-seascape integration becomes more pronounced in later sonnets, as will be explored: an 'intertwining' of content and structure, which Smith continues to experiment with throughout her sonnet career. Rachel Crawford identifies an interesting congruence of poetic and topographical forms during the eighteenth century: a 'rampant' tendency 'to equilibrate the intellectual systems of poetry (words) and topography (space)' as 'representational conceptions of space intersect with representational forms in literature'.³⁹ This intersection is identified within Crawford's wider explication of how a preference for enclosure and small places replaced the celebration of the unbounded landscape during the eighteenth century, and the growing preference for small spaces, such as the cottage garden, is reflected in the rise in popularity of small lyric forms. It is in the sonnet's rise in popularity that this shift is most apparent, suggests Crawford, as one of the smallest and most compressed of literary forms. While, in Smith's later sonnets, a more fitting spatial correspondence is apparent in the sonnets with a botanical focus, in Smith's sea sonnets, what is interesting is the way in which the small, circumscribed form of the sonnet *does* coincide with and is mapped out upon the vast, unbounded, sublime prospect of the sea.

Smith's striking sonnet XLIV and its unusual setting caught the attention of contemporary readers, artists and commentators. In his 1792 essay on the sonnet, Thelwall declared that 'Perhaps it is not saying too much to declare, that in the narrow compass of these fourteen lines, are included all the requisites of good poetry', praising its 'vivid painting'.⁴⁰ Indeed, Smith's sonnet attracted attention for its visual quality, drawing artists to the site. Three illustrations of the church accompanied by written accounts highlighting its precarious position were submitted to *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1796, 1797 and 1805, driven by an apparent urge to 'preserve' the site – persistently associated with Smith and her sonnet –

³⁹ Rachel Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 9.

⁴⁰ Thelwall, 'An Essay on the English Sonnet', p. 411.

through artistic representation (fig. 8, 9, 10). A letter pertaining to the first illustration notes that the ‘church, and sea-washed cemetery, have been retrieved from obscure oblivion by the poetical painting of Charlotte Smith’, while the second recalls how

the inclosed poor remains of Middleton church struck me as worthy of preservation in your Magazine; not from any beauty that it can boast, but from its remarkable situation, then half swallowed up, and perhaps now entirely so, by the devouring ocean. Small and insignificant as the church appears, yet, as the site of it has been immortalized by the elegant pen of that poetess of the country, Mrs. Smith, in her volume of Sonnets, those who have read her pensive strain (Sonnet 44), written in the above church-yard, will perhaps be pleased to see the same scene humbly attempted by a sister-art.⁴¹

In 1805, the scene is linked with Smith’s sonnet once again, and is similarly concerned with preservation and longevity; the artist hopes to ‘perpetuate the representation of an original, which in a few months may be reduced to ruins’.⁴² Thirty years later, John Constable visited and sketched the church-yard in pencil and watercolour (fig. 11) adding the caption in his 1835 sketch-book: ‘Middleton Church coast of Sussex – in part washed away by the Sea see Charlotte Smith’s Sonnet’.⁴³ He also sketched a partly exhumed skeleton visible in the chalky bank underneath the church (fig. 12). The erosion of the land curiously reflects Smith’s literary fate and it seems somewhat fitting – aside from the way the sonnet dramatises her innovation – that Smith should be most closely associated with this crumbling, disappearing landscape, which she has ‘immortalized’ according to the commentator above, rather than the more permanent and stable Arun, which affords the fame of her predecessors.⁴⁴ More recently, it has become perhaps Smith’s best known and widely anthologised sonnet. In another foreshadowing of her tenuous posthumous fate, Smith’s final poetic masterpiece ‘Beachy Head’ also ends with the fragmentation of place, again as the result of an ‘equinoctial’ storm:

the bellowing cliffs were shook
Even to their stony base, and fragments fell
Flashing and thundering on the angry flood.

(155-176, ll. 717-720)

In sonnet XLIV the image of the impotent skeletal remains washed up on the shore is a powerful one, especially as many of Smith’s early predecessors imbued the sonnet with eternising power, championing the transcendent potential of the form. Smith would be

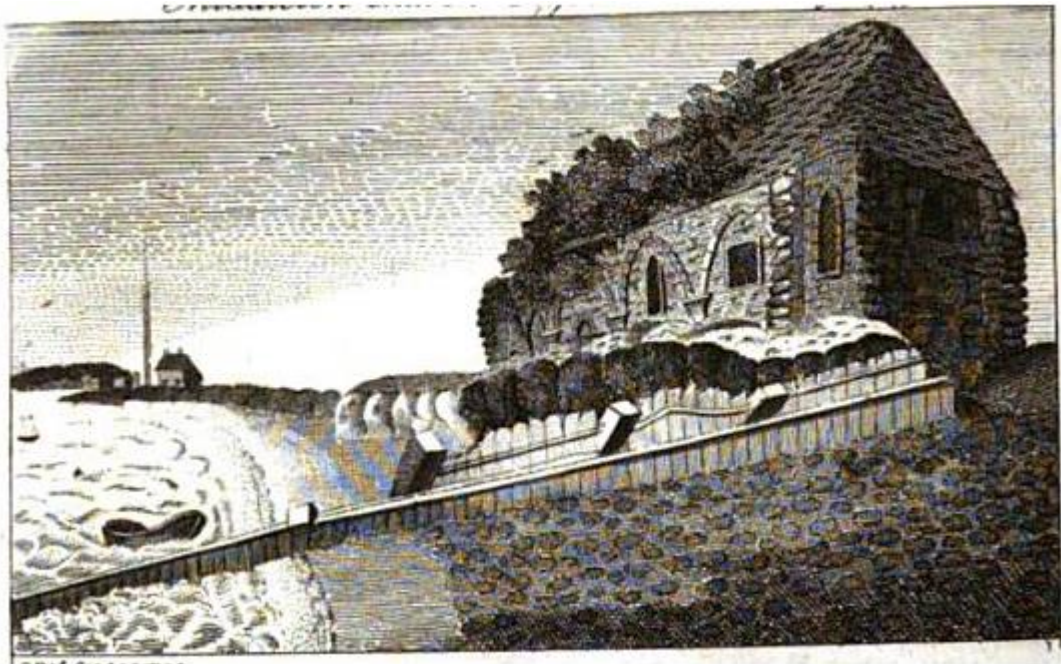
⁴¹ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 66 (1796), p. 489 and 67 (1797), p. 729.

⁴² *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 98 (1805), p. 801.

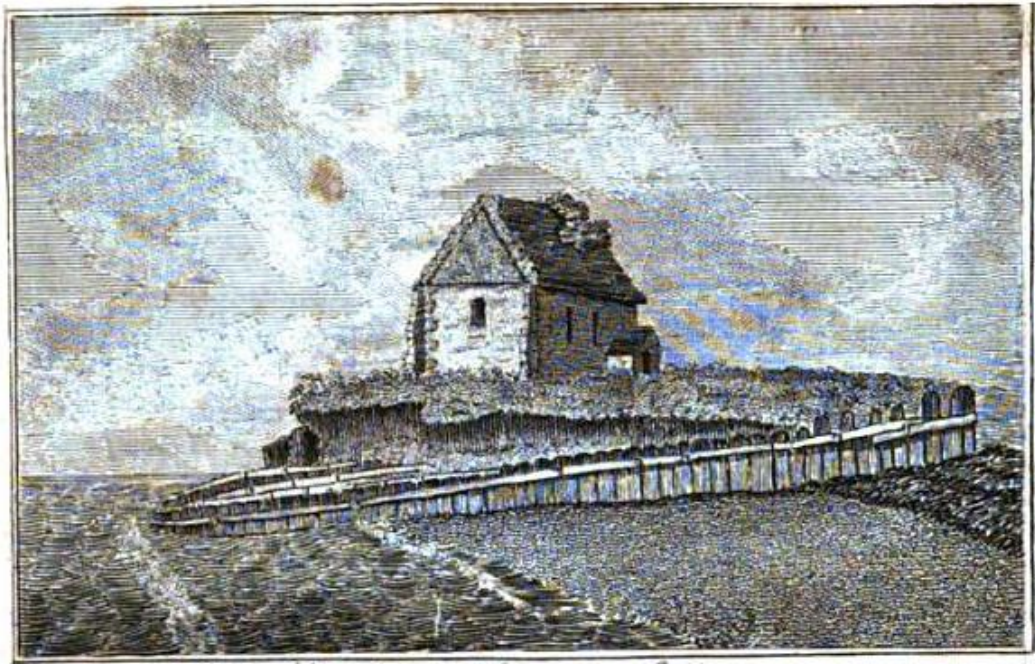
⁴³ Graham Reynolds, *The Later Paintings and Drawings of John Constable*, 2 vols (London: Yale University Press, 1984), I, p. 278.

⁴⁴ On Smith’s posthumous fate see Louise Duckling, ‘Tell My Name to Distant Ages’: The Literary Fate of Charlotte Smith’, in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, pp. 203-217.

familiar with the immortalising tradition from the sonnets of Petrarch and Drayton at least; as the Drayton sonnet she quotes from in *Rural Walks* ends: ‘So shalt thou fly above the vulgar throng, | Still to survive in my immortal song’, which informs the relationship between sea and sonnet set up by Spenser and Shakespeare noted above. Smith’s sonnet confounds such claims, as skeletal remains are mercilessly uprooted and devastated by the storm her sonnet enacts. Moreover, Smith longs for the extinction her predecessors attempt to resist, as she ‘gaze[s] with envy’ on the ‘gloomy rest’ of the village dead. Smith’s translation of Petrarch’s sonnet 301 is also interesting in the context of this sonnet; as Robinson pointed out, Smith in various ways ‘exhumes’ Laura from the landscape of Petrarch’s original; and sonnet XLIV thus presents another, more extreme version of exhumation. A shift in gender roles has of course taken place here, as the – frequently memorialised – female subject of many sonnets earlier in the form’s history is now the writer of the sonnet, ‘gazing’ out upon the landscape and human remains.



8. ‘Middleton Church Sussex’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 66 (1796)



9. 'Middleton Church, Sussex, N.E.', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 67 (1797)



10. 'Middleton Church, Sussex', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 98 (1805)



11. John Constable, 'Middleton Church Coast of Sussex-in part washed away by the Sea see Charlotte Smith's Sonnet 10 July', Sketchbook (1835)



12. Constable, 'Middleton Churchyard and form of a sceleton in the bank of the Churchyard', Sketchbook (1835)

The fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* significantly shifts the balance to the more experimental in sonnet form. The edition contains twelve additional sonnets, bringing the total to forty-eight and only two of the new sonnets are Shakespearean. Curiously, however, one of the new sonnets is Spenserian, the only one in Smith's oeuvre to take this form: sonnet XLII 'Composed during a walk on the Downs, in November 1787', which is informed by a somewhat different relationship between form, place and content from her sea sonnets. As

noted, in the eighteenth century, unlike the English form, and irregular variations, the Spenserian form was connected with the literary past; it remained little-used, however, barely appropriated beyond Edwards and Percy. It is also Smith's only 'composed' poem. As Labbe writes:

Specific to time and place, the poem is also specifically a composition in a way most of Smith's sonnets are not: it follows the Spenserian rhyme scheme, its imagery plotted onto a poetical map often characterized as the hardest to master.⁴⁵

Labbe also draws attention to the self-consciously poetic nature of the sonnet, 'predicated upon the past in both, in both structure and imagery'.⁴⁶ Firmly land-locked, for the most part the sonnet is concerned with natural processes and motions rather than place. In sonnet XLII, Smith does not use the Spenserian form to recover an element of the past, but to capture the natural processes of the changing seasons. At odds with the title, the aspects of nature described in the sonnet are less than fully formed or 'composed'. As in her fully-Petrarchan sonnet XXXII – in which partial things abound – sonnet XLII invokes decomposing subject matter, although there is little of the pleasure the scene in sonnet XXXII affords to be taken from them:

THE dark and pillowy cloud, the sallow trees,
Seem o'er the ruins of the year to mourn;
And, cold and hollow, the inconstant breeze
Sobs thro' the falling leaves and wither'd fern.

(42, ll. 1-4)

'Composed' on location, during a walk, in the present tense, the sonnet appears to join in with the mourning, falling motions at work. With the sestet the sonnet shifts to the future, looking forward to new life, before swiftly changing again:

Ah! yet a little – and propitious Spring
Crown'd with fresh flowers shall wake the woodland strain;
But no gay change revolving seasons bring
To call forth pleasure from the soul of pain!

(9-12)

The sonnet seems to tap into the cycles of nature, the 'revolving seasons', which the Spenserian form, with its 'revolving' rhyme, captures; yet immediately works to undo the coincidence of content and rhyme, as 'no gay change' will be brought about for the speaker. With the couplet the sonnet shifts away from the natural scene, the circumstances of 'composition', and indeed the motions of rhyme, invoking a different kind of future or objective from 'propitious Spring' in the guise of hope: 'Bid Syren Hope resume her long-

⁴⁵ Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 86.

⁴⁶ Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 86.

lost part, | And chase the vulture Care – that feeds upon the heart’ (13-14). It is these final lines which are unusually self-consciously poetic, especially for the fifth edition, perhaps nodding to the heritage of the Spenserian sonnet, heightened by the use of an alexandrine. Unlike Smith’s sea sonnets and more innovative use of form, by the sonnet’s end ‘the structure and imagery’ predicated upon the past both overrides and supersedes Smith’s more naturalised and distinctive mode. There is also a suggestion of this motion within Smith’s sequence, which ‘revolves’, as such, between different sonnet types.

Smith’s sonnet XLIV also engages with and brings challenges to her more immediate eighteenth-century forbears Gray, Edwards and Warton. The sea hardly features in their sonnets, and its centrality to Smith’s own articulates her departure from them.⁴⁷ All three do have associations with the churchyard setting, however, which in different ways inscribes their connection with the past – a different version of the river – and as Smith’s sea scene engulfs the churchyard, her ‘modern’, illegitimate version of the sonnet also replaces their tradition-bound legitimate form. The churchyard is a somewhat suitable location for undertaking negotiations with past poets, especially as the elegy and elegiac are steeped in issues of inheritance and lineage.

In the literature of the eighteenth century, acts of revisiting and recovering the literary past are often presented through tombs, graves, remains and monuments, as the title of Percy’s collection, *Reliques* (1765), suggests. The frontispiece of Henry Headley’s *Select Beauties of Ancient Poetry* (1787) depicts a tomb and includes the epigraph ‘The monument of banish’d mindes’.⁴⁸ Ruined buildings and sites are among the special places Fairer has shown to be central to Warton’s poetry – and often feature in the poems of his pupils – and like the river and other sources of water, they offer a line of connection with the past. As Walter Scott writes, ‘a Horace Walpole, or a Thomas Warton is not a mere collector of dry and minute facts, which the general historian passes over with disdain. He brings with him the torch of genius, to illuminate the ruins through which he loves to wander’.⁴⁹ Tombs and graves often feature in these sites, as in Warton’s ode ‘Written at Vale-Royal Abby in Cheshire’ of the

⁴⁷ Edwards does make reference to the sea in one sonnet, VIII ‘On the Cantos of Spenser’s Fairy Queen, lost in the Passage from Ireland’ in which ‘ample spoils thy treacherous waves obtain’d, | Which sunk one half of *Spenser’s* deathless fame’; somewhat fittingly in this context, the sea claims a literary text, and part of Spenser’s ‘fame’ (*Canons*, p. 314 (ll. 13-14)).

⁴⁸ Henry Headley’s *Select Beauties of Ancient Poetry* (London: T. Cadell, 1787), frontispiece. Esther Schor also points to these examples and others in the 1760s and 1770s and states that ‘in literary histories and anthologies, the inventors of the literary dead typically pose as mourners erecting monuments to a lost heritage’ (*Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 55). Headley was greatly influenced by Warton and his *History*; his anthology collects poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁴⁹ Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, III, p. 306.

1777 *Poems*, in which the speaker wanders amid ‘forgotten graves, and scatter’d tombs’.⁵⁰ Smith associates Warton with the churchyard setting in an episode in her novel *Montalbert* (1795), which inspires a sonnet, while bringing disruptions to Warton’s mode. Indeed, Smith’s enjoyment of the storm in sonnet XLIV is indicative of her disinterest in reviving the past in a Wartonian way, felicitously embracing the destruction of such ‘forgotten graves, and scatter’d tombs’ in the present, which Smith’s note to her own ‘ode’ echoes as ‘around are scattered the remains of tomb-stones’.

The churchyard space was most strongly associated with Gray, however, following his ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (1751). Smith brings her sonnet XLIV and an ‘Elegy’ of her own into dialogue with both Gray’s elegy and sonnet through intertextual play. Smith’s title, ‘Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex’, echoes Gray’s own, although Smith’s introduces a geographical specificity. Gray describes his churchyard thus:

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree’s shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.⁵¹

Despite the resemblance in location, Smith’s churchyard presents rather a different scene from Gray’s quiet, pastoral space, in which those interred – male ‘forefathers’ – are ‘for ever laid’. Noisy and violent, Smith’s sea ‘tears from the grassy tomb the village dead’. The sea does feature in Gray’s poem: ‘Full many a gem of purest ray serene, | The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear’, yet the force of Smith’s elegy and sonnet stem from such ‘dark unfathomed caves’: ‘the wild blast’ rises ‘from the Western cave’ in her sonnet, in a reversal of the unseen and suppressed.⁵² At the end of the ‘Elegy’, Gray places himself among the dead interred in the churchyard, as the death of the speaker is envisaged, and the epitaph which would mark his grave imagined. Thus, as Smith’s sonnet uproots the village dead, she appears to uproot Gray himself: ‘forefather’ of the sonnet, rather than of the hamlet, perhaps.⁵³ Gray’s own ‘elegiac’ sonnet is brought into dialogue with the churchyard setting

⁵⁰ Warton, ‘Ode III. Written at Vale-Royal Abby in Cheshire’, l. 24. This poems can be situated in the wider eighteenth-century tradition of ‘graveyard poetry’; earlier well-known examples are Thomas Parnell’s ‘A Night Piece on Death’ (1721), Robert Blair’s *The Grave* (1743) and Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742-1746).

⁵¹ Gray, ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’, *Poems*, ed. by Lonsdale, pp. 103-141 (ll. 9-16).

⁵² Gray, ‘Elegy’, ll. 53-54.

⁵³ Esther Schor is one of few critics who have pointed out the dialogue between the poems of Smith and Gray. She reads sonnet XLIV as a figuration of Smith’s ‘failure as a gendered exclusion from the moral authority of the “rude forefathers” – from Gray’s cult of sympathy for the patriarchal dead. Her most incisive meditation on her failure to authorize pathos lies in her own churchyard poem’ (*Bearing the Dead*, p. 65). The reading reflects Schor’s wider argument that the expansion of Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* and accumulative prefaces narrate ‘an increasingly pessimistic tale of her own rhetorical

of Smith's sonnet XLIV through her non-sonnet 'Elegy', which is also included in the same, fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, and is set in the same churchyard. The poem fictionally re-imagines the scene of sonnet XLIV, and here the speaker is swept away by the encroaching tide, as the note informs us:

This elegy is written on the supposition that an indigent young woman had been addressed by the son of a wealthy yeoman, who resenting his attachment, had driven him from home, and compelled him to have recourse for subsistence on the occupation of a pilot, in which, in attempting to save a vessel in distress, he perished.

The father dying, a tomb is supposed to be erected to his memory in the church-yard mentioned in Sonnet the 44th. And while a tempest is gathering, the unfortunate young woman comes thither; and courting the same death as had robbed her of her lover, she awaits its violence, and is at length overwhelmed by the waves.
(52)

While several of the 'other poems' in *Elegiac Sonnets* are transposed from novels, this is the only poem to be accompanied by such a note, providing a narrative or imaginative context within the volume: here giving an actual, patriarchal father, whose grave – the 'proud aggressor's tomb' (67) – gets washed away. The poem itself describes the moments leading up to what is effectively a suicide, a different version of the back-story to Pope's 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady' (1717), perhaps, although here voiced by the 'lady' herself. Sonnet XLIV is echoed throughout Smith's 'Elegy', similarly full of violent motion and sound:

Loud and more loud, ye foaming billows! burst;
Ye warring elements! more fiercely rave,
Till the wide waves o'erwhelm the spot accurst
Where ruthless Avarice finds a quiet grave!

(52-54, ll. 9-12)

Exclamations punctuate the passionate outbursts throughout, as the flooding landscape matches the emotional outpouring of the speaker. The poem is illustrated, depicting the female figure rushing to meet the death the speaker in sonnet XLIV seems to desire (fig. 13). Elegy and sonnet collide as the *abab* form of Gray's 'Elegy' is matched, yet it is in this poem that the reference to his sonnet is made:

Forth to the world, a widow'd wanderer driven,
I pour to the winds and waves the unheeded tear,
Try with vain effort to submit to Heaven,
And fruitless call on him – "who cannot hear."

(29-32)

failure to evoke pathos' (pp. 63-64). See also Daniel E. White, 'Autobiography and Elegy: The Early Romantic Poetics of Thomas Gray and Charlotte Smith', in *Early Romantics*, ed. by Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 57-70 in which the relationship between Smith and Gray is also read in terms of communities and sympathetic responses.

The note makes the acknowledgement: “I fruitless mourn to him who [that] cannot hear, | And weep the more because I weep in vain.” Gray’s exquisite Sonnet; in reading which it is possible not to regret that he wrote only one’ (52). There is something elegiac about the observation, acknowledging with ‘regret’ the isolation of Gray’s sad, solitary, ‘fruitless’ sonnet, with a suggestion of Gray himself in the the one ‘who cannot hear’, as Smith’s dead poetic forbear.



13. Illustration to ‘Elegy’, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789)

Although Smith may draw on Gray, the borrowing serves to highlight the differences between the poems; Gray’s understated, unheard sonnet contrasts with the extremity of feeling and elemental forces Smith’s dramatic elegy and sonnet both display. The differences in setting are stark as Gray’s generic, nameless ‘cheerful fields’ at odds with the speaker’s melancholy have become Smith’s wild, stormy sea scene which is in accordance with the speaker’s state of mind. Smith’s borrowing in her ‘Elegy’ also draws attention to the presence of Gray’s sonnet in Smith’s sonnet XLIV: ‘but vain to them the winds and waters rave; | *They* hear the warring elements no more’. Here, the words are applied to the dead rather than the living, and are closer to Gray’s first ‘in vain’ as ‘In vain to me the smiling morning shines’ becomes ‘but vain to them the winds and waters rave’, in a direct exchange

of setting, as Gray is again brought into dialogue with the elements and Smith's preferred scene.

Smith's negotiations with Gray are also mimed by the form of Smith's sonnet XLIV. As Robinson has pointed out, since the mid-eighteenth century, the elegy had become known as a formal as well as a thematic distinction, the heroic couplets of Pope usurped by the 'elegiac quatrain' of James Hammond's *Love Elegies* and, especially, Gray's 'Elegy':

The title of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* [...] is a complex play on literary terms. Ostensibly, the title designates the thematic qualities of the sonnets, but it also announces their formal qualities as well. Smith's "illegitimate sonnet" consists of three elegiac quatrains and a couplet, thus combining both English elegiac meters. The defining metrical feature of the sonnet, therefore, is that it is *elegiac*.⁵⁴

At this time, the 'illegitimate' sonnet does appear to have been associated with the elegy: critics referred to sonnets in the English form disparagingly as mere 'little elegies', while in 1819, Keats deemed English sonnets to be 'too elegiac'.⁵⁵ Although the form of Smith's 'Elegy' conforms to the *abab* elegiac quatrain, her Middleton sonnet is not formally 'elegiac'; and instead is irregular, resisting the English sonnet form that she uses elsewhere. Through her sonnet's irregularity Smith disrupts Gray formally. The rhyme scheme of Gray's sonnet, *ababababcdcdcd*, is also the more 'elegiac' of Italian forms, which Smith's closed quatrains, *abbacddceceff*, reverses: a less 'elegiac' version (as such) of the English form.

Thus, as Smith brings Gray's sonnet and elegy and her own into the same landscape, and the four poems collide, the place of Smith's sonnets in relation to Gray's own is interestingly dramatised. As noted, Gray's poetry is tied to the literary past, his sonnet included. Fairer reads Gray's relationship with the churchyard space as representative of his troubled relationship with this past, the frustrations of the 'Elegy' as symptomatic of Gray's inability to connect meaningfully with his sources.⁵⁶ Indeed, it seems significant that a 'mute inglorious Milton' may be interred within Gray's churchyard: a potential literary source closed off and silent; it is difficult to imagine Warton, editor of Milton's poems, envisaging such a cessation.⁵⁷ Moreover, Gray himself mimes this position, interring himself in the churchyard along with his sources. In 1768, Gray also acknowledged a debt to Petrarch in the 'Elegy': 'Ev'n from the tomb the voice of nature cries, | Ev'n in our ashes live their

⁵⁴ Robinson, 'Formal Paradoxy', p. 189.

⁵⁵ H. White, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 56 (1786), p. 1110; John Keats, 'Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February – 3 May 1819', *The Oxford Authors: John Keats*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 449-475 (p. 475).

⁵⁶ Fairer, 'Recovery of the Past', p. 155.

⁵⁷ Gray, 'Elegy', l. 59.

wonted fires', the source of which he gives as the last three lines of Petrarch's sonnet 203 (in modern editions), which Gray had earlier translated into Latin.⁵⁸ As Durling translates the lines of Petrarch's sonnet, 'for in my thoughts I see, O my sweet fire, a tongue cold in death and two lovely eyes closed, which after us will remain full of embers', fittingly concerned with the physical remains of the poet.⁵⁹ Curiously then, by the end of the poem, interred within the churchyard are Petrarch – from whom Gray's own sonnet is sourced – with 'cold tongue', 'Mute, inglorious Milton', and Gray himself: three silenced, unheard, sonneteers; a position heightened by the posthumous publication of Gray's own sonnet.

Petrarch's sonnet is also concerned, however, with how a lack of fulfilment lives on, paradoxically, in death: 'full of embers'. The poem is concerned with its own poetic continuation and longevity, as something simultaneously dead and able to live on, waiting to be re-ignited. Indeed, the reference in the 'Elegy' to sparks or embers, akin to the turf which 'heaves', hints that the unrealised may be realised after all, although Gray is not the one to do it; interring himself, perhaps he looks to a 'kindred spirit' instead.⁶⁰ This offers a model of sorts for the sonnet revival. Tentatively appropriated by Gray in a retrogressive, suppressed way, the form is then taken in a radically different direction by his successors, beginning with Smith, in a shift from archaic to modern, legitimate to illegitimate, dramatised by the way her storm breaks open the heaving turf. Curran's influential description of Gray's sonnet – 'the suppressed record of his unfulfilled secret life [...] the motive force underlying the entire Romantic revival of the sonnet, a model for hundreds of poets' – highlights an interesting discrepancy between the 'suppressed', 'unfulfilled' aspects of Gray's sonnet and its considerable influence.⁶¹ Curran's description of Gray's sonnet as the 'underlying' force is instructive; it is not actually identified as part of the revival proper and Smith is the poet ultimately credited with the sonnet's 'rebirth'. Similarly, in Wordsworth's critique of Gray's sonnet in the 1800 'preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* the poem is cited as a chief example of how poets 'have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition', describing how Gray is 'more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction', representative of an outmoded poetic school, which

⁵⁸ Gray, 'Elegy', ll. 90-92. The translation was first published in 1814, and Lonsdale dates Gray's transcription in his *Commonplace Book* to 1737-1738.

⁵⁹ Durling, '203', *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, p. 348. Lonsdale translates the end of Gray's Latin version thus: 'even when we two will each be no more than a handful of ashes, then alas, the flames of my eyes will lie deprived of light, and my cold tongue forget how to speak: but the ill-starred Muse will breathe out eternal love and many a spark will glow in my urn' (*Poems*, p. 309).

⁶⁰ It has been suggested that the kindred spirit is some kind of imagined substitute for West, again looking to the audience absent in Gray's sonnet. See Joshua Scodel, *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 326.

⁶¹ Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, p. 30.

Wordsworth's own poetic project is defined against.⁶² However, an element of his sonnet is deemed acceptable – the lines he italicises (6-8 and 13-14), 'the only part of this Sonnet which is of any value' – and worthy of continuation.⁶³ Wordsworth's comments about Gray here contrast with his identification of Smith as the first 'modern' sonnet writer. The implication is that Gray is on his way to being 'modern' in his sonnet, but still belongs to – or rather is 'at the head of' – a different literary age. Smith's own sonnet and elegy bring challenges to the sonnet before Wordsworth, as what is variously archaic, hidden and repressed in Gray's sonnet is burst open, and the sonnet revival is brought into the present by Smith's intertextual play.

Smith also associates Edwards with the churchyard space. In *Celestina* (1791), the eponymous heroine composes a sonnet in a country churchyard, 'not without some recollection of Edwards' thirty seventh and forty fourth sonnets' (IV, 121). Several of Edwards's sonnets are elegiac in tone, and the two *Celestina* recalls here are particularly so. Sonnet XXXVII is 'On the Death of Miss J. M.' and in sonnet XLIV 'To Matthew Barnard' – which shares the same number as Smith's churchyard sonnet – Edwards imagines his own death and burial. A sense of loss and isolation imbues several of Edwards's sonnets, and Edwards often presents himself as part of something outmoded and defunct, which is matched by his use of the moribund sonnet form. This is particularly apparent in his best-known – and also most personal and melancholy – sonnet V, 'On a Family-Picture':

It seems that like a Column left alone,
The tottering remnant of some splendid Fane,
Scape'd from the fury of the barbarous Gaul,
And wasting Time, which has the rest o'erthrown;
Amidst our House's ruins I remain
Single, unpropp'd, and nodding to my fall.⁶⁴

Edwards's poignant position as the last member of his family matches his literary position. As almost the only writer to appropriate the sonnet at this time, he is a 'Column left alone', a 'tottering remnant' of a lost literary age, the last in a genealogical line. His familial isolation – 'only I survive' – corresponds with the literary isolation the appropriation of the disused sonnet form necessitates, 'single' and 'unpropp'd'. Here, the tottering 'fane' becomes emblematic of a disintegrating literary tradition rather than a special place revisited by the Wartonian poet. Having nodded to his 'fall' in sonnet V, sonnet XLIV looks to his burial; it

⁶² William Wordsworth, 'Preface', *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 252.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Edwards, 'Sonnet V. 'On a Family-Picture'', *Canons*, p. 311 (ll. 9-14).

is addressed 'To Matthew Barnard' – 'the Sexton of the Parish' as a note informs us – to whom Edwards gives instructions:

Matthew, whose skilful hand and well-worn spade
 Shall soon be call'd to make the humble bed,
 Where I at last shall rest my weary head,
 And form'd of dust again in dust be laid;

Near, but not in the Church of God, be made
 My clay-cold cell, and near the common tread
 Of passing friends; when number'd with the dead,
 We're equal all, and vain distinctions fade:

The cowslip, violet or the pale primrose
 Perhaps may chance to deck the verdant sward;
 Which twisted briar or hasle-bands entwine;
 Symbols of life's soon fading glories those —
 Do thou the monumental hillock guard
 From trampling cattle, and the routing swine.⁶⁵

The effect of the sonnet is heightened by its posthumous publication in *Canons*; moreover, the epitaph to Edwards's grave is given in the 'Advertisement' of the edition, which affirms the elegiac tone of his sonnets; they appear as 'remains' or relics of an already expired age:

For his character we may with the strictest justice refer to his Epitaph, in the Churchyard of Ellesborough in Buckinghamshire:

Under this stone are deposited the Remains of
 Thomas Edwards, Esq; of Turrick in this parish,
 Where he spent the last seventeen years
 of a studious, usefull life.⁶⁶

It continues to praise his poetry, criticism and character. Edwards's churchyard sonnet bears resemblance to Gray's 'Elegy' (it is uncertain which poem was written first) in its imagination of a burial, echoing its theme of levelling death: 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave'.⁶⁷ Both also envisage a humble, modest burial 'Near, but not in the Church of God' as Edwards's sonnet specifies, matching Gray's country churchyard. The posthumous reprinting of Edwards's epitaph also curiously constitutes a real counterpart to that of Gray's poem. As previously pointed out, Edwards makes clear in several sonnets that he is recovering the language and form of an earlier age, yet rather than Warton's pleasing, meaningful infusion of past and present, Edwards's recovery of the past is characterised by anxiety. To Edwards, the appropriation of the sonnet form necessitates imitation, and cannot permit originality. This corresponds with Edwards's presentation of himself as the last in

⁶⁵ Edwards 'Sonnet XLIV. To Matthew Barnard', *Canons*, p. 350.

⁶⁶ 'Advertisement', *Canons*.

⁶⁷ Gray, 'Elegy', l. 36.

line, a ruin himself; his sonnet-writing does not represent the continuation of tradition, and instead already belongs to a past. Thus, Edwards's relationship with the literary past is, like Gray's, fraught; while Gray struggles to connect with the past in a meaningful way, Edwards sees the impossibility of doing so; both are unable to find a place in the literary present, or envisage continuation, reflected in the self-burials they imagine. Following his sonnet XLIV, like Gray, Edwards can be seen as an interred sonnet 'forefather', tied to the past, disrupted by the storm of Smith sonnet XLIV.⁶⁸

Between Sea and Churchyard

As ever with Smith, however, her sonnets complicate this simple disruption and rejection of place and tradition. Indeed, the churchyard sonnet *Celestina* composes follows Edwards's own very closely – almost amounting to an imitation itself – and appears after sonnet XLIV in the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1792) when it is transposed there. In *Celestina* (1791) – Smith's next publication after the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* – the circumstances in which the eponymous heroine composes the sonnet during a walk are described thus:

These melancholy reflections led her on, till a turn out of the road brought her to the style [*sic*] of the church yard. She leant pensively over it, and read the rustic inscriptions on the tomb stones. One was that of a young woman of nineteen: it was her age; and *Celestina* felt an emotion of envy towards the village girl, whose early death the rural poet lamented in the description.

“Merciful heaven!” cried she, “is early death ever really to be lamented? and should I not be happier to die now than to live; as perhaps I shall not be forgotten?”

Insensibly this idea took possession of her fancy; and with her pencil she wrote the following lines in her pocket book, not without some recollection of Edwards' thirty seventh and forty fourth sonnets[.]

(IV, 121)

The novel provides an interestingly and unusually explicit context regarding the act of the sonnet's composition. This is the only sonnet which has a declared and direct debt to sonnets of an eighteenth-century predecessor, yet when the sonnet is transposed to *Elegiac Sonnets* in the sixth edition, the debt to Edwards is not acknowledged. In a different way from sonnet XLIV and its debt to Gray, the close relationship with an immediate sonnet predecessor is displaced. *Celestina*'s sonnet appears as sonnet XLIX ‘Supposed to have been written in a church-yard, over the grave of a young woman of nineteen’:

O THOU! who sleep'st where hazle-bands entwine
The vernal grass, with paler violets drest;
I would, sweet maid! thy humble bed were mine,

⁶⁸ It seems significant that Warton, unlike Gray and Edwards, does not appear interred within the churchyard setting not only because he offers models of connectivity and continuation, but also because as he was still alive – he died in 1790 – when Smith began writing and publishing sonnets.

And mine, thy calm and enviable rest.
 For never more by human ills opprest
 Shall thy soft spirit fruitlessly repine:
 Thou canst not now thy fondest hopes resign
 Even in the hour that should have made thee blest.
 Light lies the turf upon thy virgin breast;
 And lingering here, to Love and Sorrow true,
 The youth, who once thy simple heart possest
 Shall mingle tears with April's early dew;
 While still for him, shall faithful Memory save
 Thy form and virtues from the silent grave.

(45)

Thus, in Smith's sonnet the graves of the two sonnets which she draws on are conflated, as nineteen-year-old Celestina identifies with the young 'Miss J. M.', while imagining her own death through the paradigm of sonnet XLIV: 'I would, sweet maid! thy humble bed were mine, | And mine thy calm and enviable rest'. In these and the following two lines, the final lines of Smith's own sonnet XLIV are echoed.⁶⁹ In sonnet XLIX Smith borrows directly from Edwards's sonnets in two notable appropriations.⁷⁰ Edwards's imagined burial where 'hazle-bands entwine' re-appears as the grave of the young woman, 'who sleep'st where hazle-bands entwine' (1), while 'light lie the earth upon thy lovely breast' of sonnet XXXVII becomes 'Light lies the turf upon thy virgin breast' (9) in Smith's.⁷¹ Through the combination, as well as appropriating the 'I' of Edwards's sonnet XLIV, Celestina's (and Smith's) gender means that she matches the dead female subject of Edwards's elegiac sonnet XXXVII. This play with subjectivity is enhanced through an echo, in the second key appropriation from Edwards noted above, from Pope's 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady': 'Yet shall thy grave with rising flowers be dressed, | And the green turf lie lightly on thy breast', a reworking of the classical epitaph *Sit tibi terra levis* ('May the earth rest lightly on you').⁷² Pope's poem acts as an alternative to the epitaph for his 'unfortunate lady' who, following her suicide, is 'without a stone, a name'.⁷³ Edwards's sonnet is closer to the original *Sit tibi terra levis*, and indeed reads like an epitaph in its final lines:

Light lie the earth upon thy lovely breast;

⁶⁹ Both sonnets utilise the same opprest-rest rhyme and Gray's 'vain' becomes Celestina's 'fruitlessly repine'.

⁷⁰ The close relationship between the three poems has been pointed out by Roger Meyenberg, but not explored. See Meyenberg, *Capel Lofft and the English Sonnet Tradition*, p. 105.

⁷¹ Edwards, 'Sonnet XXXVII. On the Death of Miss J. M.', l. 10.

⁷² Pope, 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady', *The Major Works*, pp. 147-149 (ll. 63-64).

⁷³ Pope, 'Elegy', l. 69. In both his 'Elegy' and 'Eloisa to Abelard', attention is drawn to the poet's role in the perpetuation of the memory of the female subjects (both flawed heroines). However, while 'Eloisa to Abelard', spoken by Eloisa herself, seems to offer a voice to the female poet (despite its supplication to the future bard) which Smith draws on in sonnet I, Pope's 'Elegy' – despite its similar female concern – does not. In Smith's own 'Elegy' she gives a voice to the suicidal female subject.

And let a grateful heart with grief oppres'd
 To thy dear memory consecrate this verse;
 Though all too mean for who deserves the best.⁷⁴

In Smith's sonnet, the epitaph formulae is subtly modulated again, to the confirmation that indeed 'light lies the turf upon thy virgin breast'. The final matching up of female speaker and subject enables such a statement and confirmation to be made, perhaps.

The light turf which Smith's sonnet confirms recalls the 'heaving' nature of the turf in Gray's 'Elegy', and similarly hints at a continuation of the dead and buried. If Edwards's sonnet XLIV cuts himself and sonnet tradition off from continuation, shut in the past, the dead female figure offers a tentative subject of continuation. Celestina/ Smith envies and identifies with the dead girl, while assuming the role of sonneteer in following Edwards. As Smith's sonnet ends: 'shall faithful Memory save | Thy form and virtues from the silent grave!' (31, ll. 13-14): the elegiac female subject becomes female elegiac sonneteer, as perpetuation of a female 'form' is replaced by that of the poetic 'form' – the moribund sonnet.

Smith also experiments with subjectivity and gender in the earlier Werter churchyard sonnet XXIV, published in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, in which Werter gives instructions for his burial, 'MAKE there my tomb, beneath the lime-tree's shade, | Where grass and flowers in wild luxuriance wave' (1-2) and imagines

when the sun with parting rays
 Gilds the long grass that hides my silent bed,
 The tears shall tremble in my CHARLOTTE'S eyes;
 Dear, precious drops! – they shall embalm the dead!
 Yes – CHARLOTTE'S o'er the mournful spot shall weep,
 Where her poor WERTER – and his sorrows sleep!

(9-14)

The sonnet seems to be in conversation with the elegies of both Gray and Pope, as Gray's 'kindred spirit' becomes the 'faithful friend', yet like Pope's 'lady', the 'unhappy suicide' will have 'no memorial'. It is also drawn into dialogue with the sonnets of Smith/Celestina and Edwards through the imagined burial. The sonnet plays with gender and subjectivity, as Goethe's original 'Lotte' becomes the English 'Charlotte' in Malthus's translation.⁷⁵ Here Smith seems to be nodding to and playing with some of the complexities that arise for the

⁷⁴ Edwards, 'Sonnet XXXVII. On the Death of Miss J. M.', ll. 11-14.

⁷⁵ Smith clearly delights in the nominal coincidence, which leads to an 'implosion of identity' according to Labbe, where 'one version of the self surveys another' (Labbe, *Culture of Gender*, pp. 108 and 109).

female writer appropriating from the male, as well as from imagined burials, and imagined recorders of the dead.⁷⁶

Smith's engagement with Edwards's sonnets in sonnet XXXVII is also reflected through form. Celestina's sonnet takes the unusual rhyme scheme of *ababbaabbcbddd*, blending Edwards's two favoured sonnet forms – Spenserian and Italian. The opening English quatrain *abab* is followed by a reversed Italian quatrain *baab*, yet the repeated rhyme simultaneously creates a sense of a Spenserian quatrain, fully realised in the next quatrain with its interlocking – rather than repeated – rhyme *bcbc*, a form which thus implies both tradition and a challenge to it through its irregularity and experimentation.

Edwards may have appealed to Celestina and Smith as a friend and tutor to aspiring young women writers such as Mulso and Highmore. As noted, his poetic exchange with Mulso is steeped in issues of poetic lineage and imitation, which is presented through the churchyard space, as Mulso's poem to Edwards presents him as 'pensive and alone, | Strewing sweet flow'rs upon his [Spenser's] hallow'd grave'; inspiration and the use of the sonnet form are presented as elegiac.⁷⁷ In Edwards's own sonnet-reply 'To Miss. H.M.', she appears as a 'Sweet Linnet, who from off the laurel spray | That hangs o'er *Spenser's* ever-sacred tomb'.⁷⁸ Edwards frequently praises and seeks the approbation of women in his letters to Richardson, also evident in his three 'Sonnets to Three Ladies, sent with the Book' which prefaced *The Canons of Criticism*. Also, in 1782, the following appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine*:

The late Mr. Edwards, author of the *Canons of Criticism*, who, though an old bachelor also, was more attentive to the fair sex than the Pindaric Mr. Gray, endeavoured to supply what he thought a defect in the admired Church-yard Elegy, by adding the two following stanza (which I do not remember to have seen in print) immediately after

'Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood'

"Some lovely fair, whose unaffected charms
Shone with attraction to herself unknown,
Whose beauty might have blest a monarch's arms,
And virtue cast a lustre on the throne:

"That humble beauty warm'd an honest heart,

⁷⁶ Punning on the name Charlotte also has interesting repercussions in light of the Petrarch sonnets in which orthographical play on Laura's name is central. As noted, Petrarch's punning is lost in Smith's translations, as is his sonnet form; and, while Smith's translations from Petrarch empty the sonnet landscape of Laura, the female subject, Werter sonnet XXIV puts 'Charlotte' into it.

⁷⁷ Chapone, 'Occasioned by reading Sonnets' ll. 5-6.

⁷⁸ Edwards', 'Sonnet XXIV. To Miss H.M.', *Canons*, p. 330 (ll. 1-2). Throughout their poetic exchanges, Edwards and Mulso present themselves as birds.

And cheer'd the labours of a faithful spouse;
That virtue form'd, for every decent part,
The healthful offspring that adorn'd their house."⁷⁹

Although the women written into Gray's churchyard do not assume very inspiring roles, Gray's 'defect', his omission of women from his churchyard, has nonetheless been rectified. The lines recall Edwards's two elegiac sonnets to women – XLIV to 'Miss J. M.' and IX 'To the Memory of Mrs. M. Paice' – an older, married woman – which are here written into Gray's elegy.⁸⁰

Thus, while the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* seems concerned to break from existing sonnet tradition, this sonnet of the sixth edition reconnects it, as Smith playfully invokes and jettisons eighteenth-century sonnet tradition by turns. Indeed, a very different moment of sonnet inspiration is described later in *Celestina*, after the novel has relocated to the Hebrides. As *The Critical Review* observes, Smith has 'employed the colours of Ossian' in the novel and *Celestina*'s sonnets indeed display a more unlearned, immediate connection with the Scottish landscape.⁸¹ *Celestina* can often be found listening to 'the roaring of the waters, and the sighings of the wind round the naked rocks against which it incessantly beat' and her attachment to the wild Hebrides is such that she claims a small, uninhabited island as her own, which 'was remarkable for the grotesque form of the cliffs which arose round it, and for a stream of the purest water, that bubbled up at the highest ground, and fell into the sea through a chasm of the rock', a symbol of originality and of *Celestina*'s artlessness (IV, 211). It is here that *Celestina* composes her first Hebridean sonnet (sonnet LI in *Elegiac Sonnets*), which rises as naturally as the island's pure stream, and 'without recollection' of any existing sonnets. Her thoughts about her absent lover are mapped out upon the 'lone island', as she imagines solace and contentment with the barest of sustenance upon the rude and scant landscape:

ON this lone island, whose unfruitful breast
Feeds but the Summer-shepherd's little flock
With scanty herbage from the half-cloathed rock,
Where osprays, cormorants, and sea-mews rest;
Even in a scene so desolate and rude
I could with *thee* for months and years be blest;

(46, ll. 1-6)

⁷⁹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 52 (1782), p. 120.

⁸⁰ Smith herself removes the sex of Gray's interred churchyard poet in an appropriation from his 'Elegy' in *The Emigrants* (1793), in which she imagines her own death: the borrowing is given in quotations marks, "I gave to misery all I had, my tears" (II, 386), yet the source has been modulated: 'He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a Tear' (Gray, 'Elegy', l. 123).

⁸¹ *The Critical Review*, 3 (1791), p. 321. In addition to Ossianism, Thomas Pennant, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell further marked Scotland and the Hebrides on the literary map, which became increasingly popular sublime destinations (see Corbin, *Lure of the Sea*, pp. 129-137).

Here the nightingale, its landscape and associations, have firmly been replaced, and interestingly, the traditional gendering of the sonnet has been reversed, as this is essentially a love sonnet to an absent male lover. Celestina's next Hebridean sonnet is more typically Smithian, concerned with the prospect of the seascape itself, which coalesces with form. Entitled 'The Pilgrim' – one of Smith's several marginal seascape figures – it is composed at 'the close of a very lowering and cheerless day, when her [Celestina's] way was along the rugged cliffs that, on the western side of the island, hung over the sea' (IV, 218):

FALTERING and sad the unhappy Pilgrim roves,
 Who, on the eve of bleak December's night,
 Divided far from all he fondly loves,
 Journeys alone, along the giddy height
 Of these steep cliffs; and as the sun's last ray
 Fades into the West, sees, from the rocky verge,
 Dark tempest scowling o'er the shortened day,
 And hears, with ear appall'd, the impetuous surge
 Beneath him thunder! – So, with heart oppres'd,
 Alone, reluctant, desolate, and slow,
 By Friendship's cheering radiance *now* unblest,
 Along Life's rudest path I seem to go;
 Nor see where yet the anxious heart may rest,
 That, trembling at the past – recoils from future woe.

(47)

The formation of the sonnet reflects the prospect of the 'rugged cliffs' it describes, as the line endings 'giddy height' and 'rocky verge' mirror the brinks they name. The octave-sestet divide is also dramatised as the volta is delayed through enjambment and the way 'the impetuous surge | Beneath him thunder!' is mimed in the poem's construction: the impetuous surge is 'beneath' both the overhanging cliffs of the seascape and beneath the octave of the sonnet. The sonnet is irregular, *ababcdcdefefef*: an open rhyme scheme which corresponds with the ongoing wandering motion of the pilgrim – and Celestina – through the landscape; the continuous movement of the rhyme is not stayed by the motionless ending couplet. This is also evoked through the sonnet's present tense – 'the unhappy pilgrim roves', he 'journeys alone' – as well as through the enjambment. The final-line alexandrine again invokes motions which can be linked to its two movements, divided by the internal pause.

Soon after the composition of this sonnet within *Celestina*, a violent storm is felicitously described at length, and in a rather gothic and macabre incident, during the night Elphinstone's 'disfigured corpse' (IV, 304) is thrown onto the beach by the tide, observed by both his wife and Celestina. The scene is redolent of Smith's earlier 'Elegy' and Elphinstone is later interred within a ruined chapel; Celestina finds herself in a churchyard for the second

time in the novel, yet its ruined, moonlit aspect close to the sea strongly recalls the churchyard of Middleton. Although the scene is calm, the ‘ruined monuments’ (IV, 310) among which Celestina sits, act as a reminder of the violent forces and challenges to certain literary landscapes have only temporarily been quelled.

The relationship between Smith’s sonnet LXVII and the Wartonian churchyard space which it engages with is also dramatised through its novelistic context. In *Montalbert* (1795), the second of the novel’s two sonnets engages with Warton and is composed amidst a storm near the sea, although when it is reprinted in the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797) as sonnet LXVII ‘On passing over a dreary tract of country, and near the ruins of a deserted chapel, during a tempest’, its proximity to the coast is no longer evident. The character Walsingham describes the moment of the sonnet’s inspiration as he travelled from Eastbourne to Hastings up the East Sussex coastline:

It [the storm] overtook me on a place so wild and dreary, that I could have supposed it the scene where Shakespeare imagined the meeting between Macbeth and the Weird Sisters. The spot I allude to is a wide down; in some places scattered over with short furze, in others barren even of turf, and the unclothed chalk presenting the idea of cold desolation; - on the left is a ruined chapel, or small parish church, in which service is performed only once in six weeks; on the right are, in some places, marshes that extend to the sea - in others a broad spit of sand and stones, where nature seems to refuse sustenance even to the half-marine plants, which, in most places, are thinly sprinkled among the saltpetre of the beach.

‘The hollow murmur of the distant sea, on which the lightning faintly flashed, foretold the coming storm some time before I reached this heath - there it overtook me; but as there are times when outward accidents make little or no impression on me, I quickened not my pace; and shall I own it without incurring the charge of affected eccentricity, that I found a melancholy species of pleasure in surveying the gloomy horrors of the scene - in fancying I was the only human being abroad, within the circuit of many miles - in cherishing the same spirit with which Young says in his Night Thoughts -

“Throughout the vast globe’s wide circumference
No being wakes but me.”

Yet I was more moderate, and more philosophical in my sombre enjoyment; and, when I came to my lodgings, I wrote what follows, which I beg you will put into the fire when you have read[.]

(VIII, 243-244)

What becomes sonnet LXVII, ‘On passing over a dreary tract of country, and near the ruins of a deserted chapel, during a tempest’, follows:

SWIFT fleet the billowy clouds along the sky,
Earth seems to shudder at the storm aghast;
While only beings as forlorn as I,
Court the chill horrors of the howling blast.

Even round yon crumbling walls, in search of food,
 The ravenous Owl forgoes his evening flight;
 And in his cave, within the deepest wood,
 The fox eludes the tempest of the night.
 But to *my* heart congenial is the gloom
 Which hides me from a world I wish to shun;
 That scene, where ruin saps the moulding tomb,
 Suits with the sadness of a wretch undone.
 Nor is the darkest shade, the keenest air,
 Black as my fate, or cold as my despair.

(74-75)

As the recent editors of *Montalbert* have pointed out, the quotation which Walsingham recalls is not from Young's *Night Thoughts*, but from Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747). Again, the source – correct or otherwise – or rather ‘spirit’ behind the poem is not transposed to *Elegiac Sonnets*, yet the sonnet engages more deeply with Warton's poem than this episode of misremembered quotation (another displacement) indicates. The ‘melancholy species of pleasure’ Walsingham experiences prior to the sonnet's composition echoes Warton's very title and the sonnet itself draws on Warton's poem, while also articulating important departures from it. Indeed, the sonnet's setting is poised between Warton's favoured landscape and her own: ‘on the left is a ruined chapel’, on the right is the sea. Although not a sonnet, Warton's early, well-known poem sets up the importance of and connections between place and the past which will inform Warton's sonnets and much of his poetic output.

Indeed, as its title would suggest, in Warton's poem the speaker indulges in melancholy, and the poem explores a ‘congeniality’ between place and poet:

O lead me, queen sublime, to solemn glooms
 Congenial with my soul; to cheerless shades,
 To ruin'd seats, to twilight cells and bow'rs,
 Where thoughtful Melancholy loves to muse,
 Her fav'rite midnight haunts.⁸²

The poem's speaker finds himself within a moonlit Gothic landscape where he sits ‘Beneath yon' ruin'd abbey's moss-grown piles’ at twilight in the company of an owl ‘who builds his bow'r | Amid the mould'ring caverns dark and damp’.⁸³ Smith's sonnet has a similar setting: written at night by a ruined chapel (rather than an abbey), it features tombs, an owl and mouldering objects, which also appear in Gray's ‘Elegy’, drawing all three poems into the same space. Warton's poem also invokes the witch scenes of *Macbeth*, the setting of which Walsingham compares to the landscape of his own poem, indicative of the way elements of

⁸² Warton, ‘The Pleasures of Melancholy’, ll. 17-21.

⁸³ Warton, ‘The Pleasures of Melancholy’, ll. 28 and 33-34.

Shakespeare accorded with eighteenth-century tastes for Gothic and the sublime.⁸⁴ Like the speakers of many of Smith's sonnets, here Walsingham finds correspondence with his surroundings, which befit his melancholy, and his avowal to this effect – that 'to my heart, congenial is the gloom' – echoes that of Warton: 'solemn glooms | Congenial with my soul'.⁸⁵

Despite these correspondences, however, the congeniality Walsingham/ Smith finds differs somewhat from Warton's own. Situating the quotation from Warton within the context of the poem reveals a rather different cherished 'spirit':

lo, all is motionless around!
 Roars not the rushing wind; the sons of men
 And every beast in mute oblivion lie;
 All nature's hush'd in silence and in sleep.
 O then how fearful is it to reflect,
 That thro' the still globe's awful solitude,
 No being wakes but me!⁸⁶

While Warton's surroundings are silent and motionless, Smith's speaker courts the 'chill horrors of the howling blast' and contrary to Warton's 'still globe', in Smith's poem the 'Earth seems to shudder at the storm aghast'. In this way, the speaker of her sonnet bears more resemblance to female Contemplation to whom Warton applies at the start of the poem. She is situated 'upon the topmost rock | Of Teneriff; 'mid the tempestuous night' and the 'murmurs indistinct | Of distant billows sooth thy pensive ear | With hoarse and hollow sounds';⁸⁷ similarly Walsingham can hear the 'hollow murmur of the distant sea' before composing his sonnet. Warton's sea is thus associatively female, and he does not appear to have any interest in it, asking to be led to a different place of 'ruin'd seats [...] twilight cells and bow'rs' which are suited to his soul. In his sonnet, Walsingham seems to find the congeniality of Warton in a more Smithian tempestuous sea space.

However, the congruousness Walsingham finds in his surroundings is in fact limited, and the sonnet ends with an acknowledgement of a discrepancy between internal and external: 'Nor is the darkest shade, the keenest air, | Black as my fate – or cold as my despair'. Despite its stormy, coastal aspect, the sonnet is not actually centred on Smith's favoured seascape, and

⁸⁴ The landscape of Macbeth's meeting with the witches was imagined in at least two well-known paintings of the period: John Wootton, *Macbeth and Banquo Meeting the Weird Sisters* (1750) and Francesco Zuccarelli, *Macbeth Meeting the Witches* (1760).

⁸⁵ Both poems are indebted to Thomson's *Winter*: 'Welcome, kindred glooms! | Congenial horrors, hail!' (Thomson, 'Winter', ll. 4-6).

⁸⁶ Warton, 'The Pleasures of Melancholy', ll. 52-58.

⁸⁷ Warton, 'The Pleasures of Melancholy', ll. 2-3 and 11-12.

the sonnet is, after all, effectively an exploration of Warton's poetic space. Indeed, Walsingham actually suggests that his sonnet will depart from the spirit of Warton's poem somewhat, for after the quotation he states that 'yet I was more moderate, and more philosophical in my sombre enjoyment' (VIII, 244).

Another sonnet written by Walsingham earlier in the novel, featuring a disintegrating coastal headland, is more akin to sonnet XLIV, and also looks forward to the ending of 'Beachy Head'. Walsingham recalls how he was wont to 'wander of a night along the beach or on the cliffs, on which the sea is continuously encroaching' (VIII, 236).⁸⁸ The specific episode of the sonnet's inspiration is recalled thus:

After a long succession of stormy weather, with heavy rains, great fragments of rock fell on the belt of stones beneath: the crash of their separation and fall echoed along the shore, like thunder intermingled with the incessant roar of the wintry waves... *My* gloomy disposition was gratified in describing the effect of this, and thus assimilating [*sic*] outward circumstances to my own sad sensations[.] (VIII, 236)

The sonnet – later LXVI, 'Written in a tempestuous night, on the coast of Sussex' – follows,

THE night-flood rakes upon the stony shore;
 Along the rugged cliffs and chalky caves
 Mourns the hoarse Ocean, seeming to deplore
 All that are buried in his restless waves –
 Mined by corrosive tides, the hollow rock
 Falls prone, and rushing from its turfy height,
 Shakes the broad beach, with long-resounding shock,
 Loud thundering on the ear of sullen Night;
 Above the desolate and stormy deep,
 Gleams the wan Moon by floating mists opprest;
 Yet here while youth, and health, and labour sleep,
 Along I wander – Calm untroubled rest,
 'Nature's soft nurse,' deserts the sigh-swoln breast,
 And shuns the eyes, that only wake to weep!

(74)

Similarly, the sonnet is set at night, and again draws on Warton (in its final line).⁸⁹ However, contrary to the later sonnet which shrinks from full congeniality with place, this sonnet revolves around fully 'assimilating' place to feeling through the seascape. Indeed, Walsingham's lament and sense of loss is mapped upon the landscape. Here the sea itself appropriates an elegiac voice; it 'mourns' and 'deplores' as it claims human life and the land

⁸⁸ In the novel, the sonnet is recited, although not composed, on the shore underneath Beachy Head and prior to its recital Walsingham relates the story of the Beachy Head hermit, and admits that he is 'disposed to try some such experiment myself' (VIII, 234). Darby's story is told more fully in 'Beachy Head'. For the factual information of the hermit see Labbe's footnote (XIV, 250, n.).

⁸⁹ The reference in the last line is to Warton's 'Ode to Sleep', although the quotation marks are removed when the sonnet is transposed to *Elegiac Sonnets*.

itself. Assimilation also extends to form. The sonnet almost retains regularity, rhyming *ababcdcdefeffe*, yet the English form is undermined, like the ‘hollow rock’ of the landscape, by the final two lines which do not take the *gg* couplet that would complete the regular English form. The last six lines of the sonnet are also redolent of a Petrarchan sestet; sonnet forms are blurred and destabilised as they are combined in irregularity, coalescing like land and sea in a destabilising way. This more typically Smithian seascape sonnet in *Montalbert* precedes the coastal churchyard sonnet, the more Wartonian space, which remains intact as Smith thus shifts between and plays with poetic spaces. The resemblance between the character Walsingham and Petrarch also complicates matters.⁹⁰ Ultimately, Smith herself becomes associated with the churchyard space, through sonnet XLIV and the illustrations it inspired. It is a disintegrating coastal churchyard, however, and a landscape that encodes Smith’s relationship with her sonnet predecessors.

Giddy Brinks and Lucid Lines

Smith’s two sonnets from *Montalbert* appear in the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* and begin a run of seven coastal sonnets which explore place and experiment with form in intriguing ways. Indeed, more than any other edition, the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* is dominated by seascape sonnets, in which the integration of form and seascape, and the prospect view, are central.

Sonnet LXX, with its long and suggestive title, ‘On being cautioned against walking on an Headland overlooking the Sea, because it was frequented by a Lunatic’, is one of Smith’s best-known sonnets and together with its accompanying engraving, is one of Smith’s most interesting visually:

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
 To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
 And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
 Its distance from the waves that chide below;
 Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
 Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
 With hoarse, half-utter’d lamentation, lies
 Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
 In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
 I see him more with envy than with fear;
 He has no *nice felicities* that shrink
 From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,

⁹⁰ His fiancé – suggestively named Leonora – has died, and after speaking of her in the novel, ‘he repeated one of the tenderest sonnets of Petrarch, and then an imitation of it, which he had written’ (VIII, 206). The second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* takes its epigraph from one of Petrarch’s canzones.

He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe!

(76)

The relationship between seascape and form in the sonnet is accentuated by the engraving (fig. 14), similar to the sonnet in size and shape upon the page, visually emphasising how Smith extends the spatial scope of the compact sonnet form. Smith took considerable interest in the engravings for the second edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. ‘I shall make the drawings or at least give ample directions for their exec[ution] myself, & will take care to have them extremely well done & in a much better style than the others’, she proposed to her publishers, and suggested that the proposals for the subscription should indicate that the drawings were to be made by her or under her immediate instruction.⁹¹ When the volume was finally published, Smith critiqued the engraving of sonnet LXX, as well as others, in a letter to her publishers, with an artist’s eye.⁹²

The sonnet rhymes *ababacadedebb*, ‘anything but regular’, according to Labbe, ‘as deranged as the lunatic’.⁹³ Rather than the mental state of the lunatic, however, the rhyme scheme more closely corresponds with the landscape in which he stands. Although it may appear irregular, the sonnet is essentially regular, retaining the structure of the English form of three quatrains and a couplet. Its irregularity stems from the prolonged *a* rhyme – creating an octave – and the return to the *b* rhyme at its end, through which Smith highlights the relationship between different parts of both the sonnet and seascape. At the crux of the sonnet is the reference to the ‘giddy brink’ of the headland, the first line of the sestet, nodding to the way in which the sonnet form curiously matches the formation of the seascape, creating horizons and brinks within its structure. As the engraving of the sonnet shows, the seascape is broken into three bands or parts – sky, headland and sea – which are reflected by the three sections of the sonnet formed through the rhyme – octave, the third quatrain and couplet. The way the sky meets sea, forming a backdrop of sorts, is suggested by the way the *a* and *b* rhymes are continued, as the *dede* quatrain couching the distinct headland is the only part of the sonnet with an independent rhyme. The return of the *b* rhyme at the end of the sonnet also creates a sense of spatial distance; in the opening quatrain, the wretch is measuring the distance of the ‘waves that chide below’, and the return to this rhyme in the know-woe of the couplet suggests this distance within the sonnet.

⁹¹ Letter to Thomas Cadell 13 March 1794, Thomas-Stanford Collection, Preston Manor, East Sussex Record Office, BH/P/L/AE/88.

⁹² Smith complains that ‘the expression of the Lunatic is quite changed & instead of a Madman the figure is that of a fool with a black Wig on, & his mantle looks like a piece of ploughed field flying in the Air’ (*Letters*, 267).

⁹³ Labbe, *Culture of Gender*, p. 17.



14. Illustration to sonnet LXX, 'On being cautioned against walking on an Headland overlooking the Sea, because it was frequented by a Lunatic', *Elegiac Sonnets*, vol. II (1797)

Labbe situates Smith's sonnet within her presentation of the headland as a privileged place of visual power corresponding with the 'social prominence afforded to masculinity'.⁹⁴ In this sonnet, the speaker is 'moving quickly to occupy a traditionally male space; the male figure already there is rendered unfit because of his madness' and a comparison is set up, Labbe suggests, between the two 'unfit' figures of Smith and the lunatic, reinforced by the accompanying engraving.⁹⁵ As suggested, however, while the place affording a prospect view of the land does correspond with a certain male social prominence, the 'headland' overlooking the sea is not necessarily a male space. Unlike the landscape, the seascape is an autonomous space which the disempowered can in some sense possess and find correspondence with, as the speaker of Smith's sonnets often does. As Labbe suggests, the two figures in the illustration are aligned and, out of all the engravings to the sonnets, the female figure approaching the headland is the only one which could conceivably be Smith, bearing resemblance to the portrait also included in the edition.⁹⁶ Despite the correlation between Smith and the lunatic, however, the sonnet takes a 'complex stance towards reason and lunacy, simultaneously claiming and rejecting the one, and admiring but denying the

⁹⁴ Labbe, *Culture of Gender*, p. 15.

⁹⁵ Labbe, *Culture of Gender*, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Labbe, *Culture of Gender*, pp. 15 and 42.

other', as Labbe remarks.⁹⁷ Indeed, Smith observes the differences between them, presenting her own fate as the less favourable. The lunatic 'has no nice *felicities* that shrink | From giant horrors; wildly wandering here', while reason prevents Smith's ultimate absorption into the seascape. Smith acknowledges her debt to Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* (1768, pub. 1791) in these lines, uttered by the eponymous mother in the play who goes on to commit suicide which the lunatic appears to be contemplating in Smith's sonnet:

Wretches like me, good Peter, dread no storms.
'Tis delicate Felicity that shrinks,
When rocking winds are loud.⁹⁸

The borrowing is not entirely appropriate in Smith's sonnet, which aligns her with those who do 'dread' and 'shrink' from storms, which Smith emphatically does not in other sonnets. Sonnet LXX is poised between correspondence with – especially through the visual alignment – and separation from the suicidal 'wretch', permitting Smith daringly to align herself with the figure, and to enjoy vicariously the 'giddy brink', while maintaining a genteel distance, with 'delicate felicity'.

This simultaneous alignment and departure accrues further significance in the poetic and artistic context of the depiction of the lunatic, which bears resemblance to contemporary similarly suicidal figures. Most notably, Gray's 'The Bard' (1757) appears

On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
Robed in the sable garb of woe,
With haggard eyes the poet stood;
(Loose his beard and hoary hair
Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air)[.]⁹⁹

The ode ends as 'headlong from the mountain's height | Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night' with a suicidal leap.¹⁰⁰ Gray's poem is again deeply engaged with the literary past, and Smith's reconstitution of the prophetic Bard as a mere 'solitary wretch' uttering hoarse lamentations is characteristic of Smith's simultaneous continuation and disempowerment of Gray; another version of the reappearance of the poet of his 'Elegy' in

⁹⁷ Labbe, *Culture of Gender*, p. 42.

⁹⁸ Horace Walpole, 'The Mysterious Mother', in *Five Romantic Plays*, 1768-1821 ed. by Paul Baines and Edward Burns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-69, ll. 3. 305-307.

⁹⁹ Thomas Gray 'The Bard. A Pindaric Ode', *Poems*, ed. by Lonsdale, pp. 177-200 (ll. 15-20).

¹⁰⁰ Gray, 'The Bard. A Pindaric Ode', ll. 143-4.

her sonnet XLIV as a disinterred skeleton.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Lonsdale has shown how the bard, another isolated and doomed poet-figure, represents Gray himself.¹⁰² ‘The Bard’ was a much-illustrated poem; an engraving accompanied the poem in Dodsley’s *Collection* and later paintings were by Thomas Jones (1774), John Martin (1817) – curiously similar to the lunatic engraving – and illustrations by Blake, commissioned by Flaxman. Moreover, Gray’s own source for the bard was pictorial.¹⁰³ Smith’s lunatic also bears resemblance to other contemporary suicidal figures such as Werther, Thomas Chatterton, Warton’s poet in ‘The Suicide’ (1777) and Mary Robinson’s depiction of Sappho in *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), all of which are depicted on a brink overlooking water (although with the exception of Sappho, rivers).¹⁰⁴ Sonnet LXX thus aligns the speaker with – while genteelly stepping back from – rather different figures from those on the Arun’s banks, notwithstanding the tragic fates of Otway and Collins. Indeed, in the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* there is a shift to an interest in figures of ‘native Genius’ (sonnet LXIV, 7), called forth by landscape, lacking, like Smith, the formal education of Otway, Collins and Hayley. The suicidal ‘giddy brink’ also acts as a striking visual reminder of how Smith’s later sonnets operate outside the genealogy or tradition the continuing flow of the river represents; immobile, and concerned with oblivion rather than longevity.

With its curiously definitive title, sonnet LXXXIII ‘The Sea View’ also plays with the relationship between forms of seascape and sonnet. As the title suggests, the sonnet has a visual emphasis:

THE upland Shepherd, as reclined he lies
 On the soft turf that clothes the mountain brow,
 Marks the bright Sea-line mingling with the skies;
 Or from his course celestial, sinking slow,
 The Summer-Sun in purple radiance low,
 Blaze on the western waters; the wide scene
 Magnificent, and tranquil, seems to spread
 Even o’er the Rustic’s breast a joy serene,
 When, like dark plague-spots by the Demons shed,
 Charged deep with death, upon the waves, far seen,
 Move the war-freighted ships; and fierce and red,
 Flash their destructive fires – The mangled dead

¹⁰¹ Drawing on Lonsdale, Fairer shows the poem to be characterised by a similarly fraught relationship with the past as Gray’s other poems; see Lonsdale, ‘Versions of the Self’, p. 120 and Fairer, ‘Recovery of the Past’, pp. 161-163.

¹⁰² Lonsdale, ‘Versions of the Self’, p. 120.

¹⁰³ His correspondence reveals that the figure was inspired by Raphael’s *Vision of Ezekiel* and Parmigiano’s fresco *Moses* (Lonsdale, *Poems*, p. 185).

¹⁰⁴ The poet of Warton’s ode (1777) ‘Of [..] wont, in hasty fit, | Abrupt the social board to quit, | And gaze with eager glance upon the tumbling flood’ (‘Ode VI. The Suicide’, *Poems*, pp. 43-48 (ll. 28-30)). Unlike Gray however, the hermit-poet does not correspond with Warton himself, and the end of the poem takes a firmly disapproving stance towards the suicide.

And dying victims then pollute the flood.
Ah! thus man spoils Heaven's glorious works with blood!

(84-85)

Viewed from another position of height, 'the high down called Beacon Hill' (84), the opening octave presents a pastoral, idyllic scene, looking back to the early sonnet IX in which 'Blest is yon shepherd, on the turf reclined, | Who on the varied clouds which float above | Lies idly gazing' (22, ll. 1-3). The elevated position of the speaker, affording the view of a 'wide scene', is also similar to that of the speaker in *The Emigrants* (1793), situated 'on the Cliffs to the Eastward of the Town of Brighthelmstone' (125). Pulled between the earlier vernal, apolitical mode and a darker, more contemporary political landscape, sonnet LXXXIII is defined by this jarring juxtaposition. Indeed, despite its definitive presentation, the 'sea view' here does differ from the majority of Smith's seascape sonnets in its introduction of a political aspect. Smith's sonnets are private and personal in their focus, lacking a sense of the political and historical context many of her novels and her poem *The Emigrants* – as well as some other non-sonnet poems – address.¹⁰⁵ Many of the coastal locations where Smith was based were politicised due to their proximity to tumultuous France, with which England was at war by February 1793. Smith's sonnet LXXXIII was, she tells us, 'Suggested by the recollection of having seen, some years since, on a beautiful evening of Summer, an engagement between two armed ships, from the high down called Beacon Hill, near Brighthelmstone' (84): published in 1797, Smith looks back to this more political period of her writing career, when she broke from writing sonnets and published political, anti-war works such as *Desmond* (1792) and *The Emigrants* (1793).

As in sonnet IX, the view, 'magnificent and tranquil', is viewed through the eyes of the shepherd; it spreads a 'joy serene' through even the rustic's breast and has a unifying effect on those who view it (a reversal of sonnet IX, in which the prospect reveals a disparity between the speaker of sensibility and the rude shepherd). In the sestet, however, historical context invades the seascape, and sullies the view and simplistic, pastoral scene. The language is highly charged, vehement, as the excessively alliterated 'dark', 'demons', 'deep', 'death', 'destructive', 'dead', 'dying' would suggest (replacing the sibilance which suffuses the octave).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Two poems in the 1797 second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* are adapted from *The Emigrants*: 'Fragment, Descriptive of the miseries of war [...]' and 'The Female Exile', while the ballad-like 'The Forest Boy' is similarly anti-war.

¹⁰⁶ Smith had also been affected personally by political events – her son Charles, an ensign, lost a leg at Dunkirk in 1793

Despite its political hue, the sonnet's ultimate concerns seem to lie with seeing, viewing, marking and form. The sonnet is irregular in rhyme, *ababbcdcdcddee*, which divides it into three sections of five, seven and two lines, but this is at odds with the content. Like other seascape sonnets, attention is drawn to a division in the landscape, here the 'bright Sea-line mingling with the skies'. Other sonnets which highlight lines and edges often do so at a formal divide within the sonnet itself – 'the giddy brink' of sonnet LXX for example – yet here we are told the shepherd 'marks' the sea line, rather than the speaker or indeed the sonnet, which does not 'mark' such a line formally. Curiously we are not viewing 'the sea view' through the eyes of the speaker and composer of the sonnet. The description of a 'bright Sea-line mingling' is somewhat paradoxical: distinct yet also 'mingling' with the skies, suggesting a lack of distinction. This can be read as a comment on the form of the sonnet, which is divided formally, yet simultaneously blurred, most apparent between lines eight to nine: there is a discernible shift at the beginning of line nine – 'When' – yet the rhyme undercuts such a strict division, as the same rhymes span lines six to twelve. In other instances, new rhymes create a divide, yet this divide is blurred through enjambment, as in the final three lines, where the rhyming couplet is at odds with the sense, enjambed between lines twelve and thirteen, with line fourteen constituting an independent sentence. Through the description of the 'bright Sea-line mingling', the sonnet seems to be drawing attention to its resistance to or transcendence of formal divides, its ability to occupy two spaces or states simultaneously. Smith's later sonnets indeed play with the capability of the sonnet form to shift in this way, pulled between form and sense. In sonnet LXXXIII, moreover, we don't know for sure that the shepherd does 'mark' the 'bright Sea-line' – we are given the possibility that he might instead be marking the sun 'Blaze on the western waters'. The seascape then changes and shifts, of course; the sonnet holds two scenes within the same space: unspoilt and spoilt, idyllic and 'war-freighted', that of 'Heaven's glorious works', and man's ruined version.

Smith's experimentation with the sonnet seascape, and its ability to occupy two spaces simultaneously, is at the crux of her final seascape sonnet LXXXVI 'Written near a Port on a dark Evening'. It first appeared in Smith's novel *The Young Philosopher* (1797), in which it is written near the port of Milford Haven, before its introduction in the second edition of the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1800), where it is not given a particular geographical location. The sonnet is displaced slightly from the site of activity, it is written only 'near' a port, yet the sounds and signs of the busy port replete with ships and seamen mingle with the seascape's familiar 'roar':

HUGE vapours brood above the clifted shore,
 Night on the Ocean settles, dark and mute,
 Save where is heard the repercussive roar
 Of drowsy billows, on the rugged foot
 Of rocks remote; or still more distant tone
 Of seamen in the anchor'd bark that tell
 The watch reliev'd; or one deep voice alone
 Singing the hour, and bidding 'Strike the bell,'
 All is black shadow, but the lucid line
 Mark'd by the light surf on the level sand,
 Or where afar the ship-lights faintly shine
 Like wandering fairy fires, that oft on land
 Misdlead the Pilgrim – Such the dubious ray
 That wavering Reason lends, in life's long darkling way.

(86)

The emphasis of the sonnet's opening is on size, a reminder of the curious coincidence of the small sonnet form and 'huge' scale of the prospect described. Throughout the sonnet there is an emphasis on elements and parts which join or are juxtaposed within the seascape, 'above' or 'on', akin to the parts and elements which constitute the poem, such as the 'rugged foot' (with its suggestion of poetic feet). The sonnet is regularly Shakespearean in form, yet again the enjambment creates a different picture. The first significant break comes at the end of the octave, dividing the sonnet into two sentences which correspond between octave and sestet, mimed in the way 'all is black shadow, but the lucid line' – at line nine itself – is 'mark'd by the light surf on the level sand': a formal 'line' or break amidst the obscurity brought about by the enjambment.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, within the octave and sestet, things are more shadowy. The repetition of 'or' in the octave offers different possible sources of sound, matching the different possible spaces the lines fall into, grammatically and formally. The enjambment is accentuated visually by the repetition of 'Of' at the beginning of lines four to six, while an alternative pattern is formed by the break in lines five and seven: the repetition of 'or' following a semi-colon.

The sestet, too, offers different possibilities, this time for the all-important visual 'line', for as well as the surf meeting the sand, another line is created by the 'ship-lights' in the distance. This line is somewhat less 'lucid', however: the lights 'faintly shine', likened to 'wandering fairy fires that oft on land | Misdlead the Pilgrim', unfixed and faint, like the 'dubious ray' of 'wavering reason'. If the 'lucid line' suggests the octave-sestet divide, Smith nods to another formal division or line here, perhaps, yet one that is unfixed, and potentially 'misleading' to the reader. There is a shift with the couplet, for example, yet it comes part way through the thirteenth line: this structural divide or line is not quite clear and

¹⁰⁷ When the sonnet appears in *The Young Philosopher*, there is a full-stop at the end of line eight, rather than the comma in *Elegiac Sonnets*.

‘wanders’ as such between the break created by the rhyme, and by the grammatical sense. This is enhanced by the final-line alexandrine, the length of which recalls the references to the ‘dubious’, ‘wavering’ and ‘long’ in the final two lines. The enjambment also lengthens the final line further in a way, attached to exactly half of line thirteen syntactically.

The alternative possibilities offered in both octave and sestet are brought about by the sonnet’s setting ‘near a port’. The ‘repercussive roar’ of the sea is the initial sound which can be heard, before the ‘more distant’ sounds of the seamen and watchman are discerned. Similarly, the ‘lucid line’ – a natural occurrence – is what is immediately apparent, before the line ‘afar’ of the ship lights. Again this gives the impression of occupying two different spaces at once, between which the sonnet is poised: indeed it is written ‘near a port’, neither one place nor another, mimed by the way form and sense are pulled into two different spaces.

Thus by 1800 *Elegiac Sonnets* has moved some distance from the riverbank and nightingale’s grove. The shift from these spaces to the vast seascape not only dramatises Smith’s changing relationship with literary tradition, and the emergence of her characteristic poetic voice, but also highlights her increasingly experimental use of the sonnet. As her final sea sonnet shows, aside from her innovative exploration of the relationship between form and content, her sonnets transcend and destabilise the formal parameters of the sonnet itself. In the context of Smith’s sonnet LXXXVI, her modest presentation in 1784 of her inferior ‘little Poems which are here called Sonnets, have, I believe, no very just claim to that title’ is transformed into a more empowered statement of her play with and destabilisation of the sonnet in later editions. This is also evident in other late sonnets which take a more close-up, botanical view, the focus of the final section of this thesis.

Chapter 4

Wider Prospect of the Sonnet Revival

Before considering that mode of engagement with nature and form, a ‘wider prospect’ of the sonnet revival will be taken in this chapter, situating *Elegiac Sonnets* within the context of the debates about and attitudes to the sonnet, and the different traditions and genealogies – and breaks with them – which emerged around the form in the 1780s and ’90s. These continue to be landscaped in interesting ways in the sonnets of Smith and others. The locations of river and sea remain central to this, yet other important literary sites through which negotiations are mapped, such as Bristol Hotwells and Penshurst Park, are also considered. By the time the second edition of the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* was published in 1800, completing the volume, the sonnet’s revival was well-established, as reflected in the observation of *The Critical Review* – quoted in the introduction – from 1802, that the sonnet has been ‘revived’ by Smith, and her poems are ‘the most popular in the language’. Despite the prehistory of Smith’s sonnets – Edwards, Warton, Gray, Bampfylde, Hayley – it is she who is celebrated for its revival. As noted, Wordsworth describes Smith as the first ‘modern’ to use the sonnet, and Coleridge based his conception of the form on the sonnets of Smith and William Lisle Bowles: it is ‘they who first made the Sonnet popular among the present English’ and he thus deduces its ‘laws’ from their practice.¹ The place of Warton, and others, has been lost, and the way in which Smith’s ‘modern’ and formally innovative sonnets emerge out of – and transcend – a male tradition, dramatised in the river-sea shift, is obscured. This has been replicated, in a sense, by the way modern critical discourse credits Smith with reviving the sonnet and celebrates her as the first ‘Romantic’ poet. As Coleridge’s comment suggests, Bowles is often associated with Smith and both are credited with jointly inaugurating a new type of sonnet, breaking with the past. Bowles occupies a curious and important position in these developments, as he is simultaneously of the school of Warton, connected with an earlier eighteenth-century sonnet mode, and his sonnets dramatise a divergence in the sonnet’s development at this time.

As shown, the Italian sonnet dominated the sonnet’s eighteenth-century revival prior to Smith, and she should be credited with reviving the English or ‘illegitimate’ sonnet form, which as her preface to the first editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* indicates, was not an established mode of sonnet at this time. This is reflected in contemporary reviews of Smith’s sonnets. In 1784, *The Monthly Review* responded to Smith’s preface with the assertion that:

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Introduction’ to *A Sheet of Sonnets*, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), II, pp. 1139-1140 (p. 1139).

The Poetess apologizes, in her Preface, that her Sonnets are not of the legitimate kind. We cannot, however, agree with her. That recurrence of the rhyme which, in conformity to the Italian model, some writers so scrupulously observe, is by no means essential to this species of composition, and it is frequently as inconvenient as it is unnecessary. The English language can boast of few good Sonnets. They are in general harsh, formal and uncouth: faults entirely owing to the pedantic and childish affectation of interchanging rhymes, after the manner of the Italians.²

Many reviewers were open to new forms and versions of ‘legitimacy’. *The Critical Review* is more tentative in its acceptance of Smith’s ‘claim’ to the sonnet, although does not ‘object’ to her use of it: ‘These are only sonnets, as they consist of fourteen lines, and include a single sentiment’, however, ‘We do not object to the author’s having neglected these rigid rules. Our pleasure, in reading, is seldom increased by the difficilis labor ineptiarum’.³ In a review of *Emmeline* in 1788 Smith’s irregular sonnets were again praised for showing

that a species of poetry, the most artificial, might be rendered natural and pleasing in our language, by taste and judgement. Even fetters may be made to hang with grace, and add to beauty, though our fair author does not always put on the chains which so strictly bind the Italian sonneteer.⁴

Thus, from their initial publication, Smith’s sonnets were celebrated for their freer, more natural mode, a welcome break from the perceived formality, restraint and artificiality of the Italian form. Here, and throughout much sonnet discourse, the legitimate sonnet form is aligned with an older, rule-bound and authority-based critical and poetic order. As David Duff has argued, ‘like other disputes over ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ versions of genres’, the critical debate on the sonnet ‘could be seen as a touchstone in the shift from a prescriptive (neoclassical) to a descriptive (Romantic) poetics – though in this case there was no clear outcome’.⁵ As Duff acknowledges, these terms are problematic, and the neoclassical-Romantic antithesis has been overstated and obscures important continuities; however, ‘that there were tensions’ between the two ‘is undeniable, and ideas of spontaneity, originality, and organicism did indeed pose a radical challenge to the conceptual premisses of neoclassical thought’, and some of these tensions are apparent in sonnet discourse.⁶ As Duff himself points out, in the period ‘in many cases, generic and anti-generic tendencies – the urge to form and formlessness – coexist within the same text’.⁷ The ‘illegitimate’ and irregular sonnet seems to embody some of these inconsistencies and contradictions: simultaneously highly formal and formless, generic and anti-generic.

² *The Monthly Review*, 71(1784), p. 368.

³ *The Critical Review*, 61 (1786), 467.

⁴ *The Critical Review*, 65 (1788), 531.

⁵ Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, p. 16.

⁶ Duff, p. 20; he details some of the ‘continuities’ on p. 31.

⁷ Duff, p. 19

Indeed, as noted, more conservative commentators were highly critical of Smith's use of form and the popularity of the illegitimate sonnet it inspired. As the critic H. White writes in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1786:

Little elegies, consisting of three stanzas and a couplet, are no more sonnets than they are epic poems. The sonnet is of a particular and *arbitrary* construction [...] The sonnet is certainly the most difficult species of all poetic composition.⁸

His views were later echoed by his cousin Anna Seward in the preface to her *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects; and Odes Paraphrased from Horace* (1799), in which she announces that they are 'with only nine exceptions out of the hundred, strictly sonnets [...] and thus they bear no more resemblance than their associates to those minute Elegies of twelve alternate rhimes, closing with a couplet, which assume the name of Sonnet'.⁹ Seward frequently disparaged Smith, and vehemently promoted the 'legitimate' form; the acrimonious relationship between the two writers is central to the illegitimate-legitimate sonnet debate. Indeed, Seward's volume of *Original Sonnets*, containing one-hundred sonnets, presents something of a riposte or antidote to Smith's sonnets, although it comes rather late in the development of *Elegiac Sonnets* and within the wider revival of the sonnet form. Thirteen of Seward's sonnets had however been published earlier in the century and she offered her first public statement on the form in a sonnet of 1788, the first of two sonnets which preface Henry Francis Cary's *Sonnets and Odes* (1788).¹⁰ Seward's sonnet celebrates the legitimate sonnet form Cary himself appropriates in the volume:

Prais'd be the Poet, who the Sonnet-claim,
Severest of the Orders, that belong,
Distinct and separate to the Delphic Song,
Shall reverence; nor it's appropriate name
Lawless assume. Peculiar is it's frame,
From him deriv'd who shunn'd the City-Throng,
And warbled sweet, thy rocks and streams among,
Lonely Valclusa! – and that "Heir of Fame,"
Our greater Milton, hath by many a lay,
Wov'n on this arduous model, clearly shown,
That *English Verse* may happily display
Those strict energetic measures, that alone
Deserve the name of Sonnet, and convey
A grandeur, grace and spirit, all their own.¹¹

⁸ H. White, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 56 (1786), p. 1110.

⁹ Anna Seward, *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects, and Odes Paraphrased from Horace* (London: G. Sael, 1799), p. iii.

¹⁰ Her first sonnet was published in 1784 in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and other sonnets were published in periodicals and Seward's *Llangollen Vale* (1796); the majority are included in the 1799 volume. Henry Francis Cary (1772-1844) was a young Lichfield poet whom Seward befriended and encouraged. His *Sonnets and Odes* included twenty-eight legitimate sonnets.

¹¹ Seward, 'To the author of the following poems. Sonnet', in Cary, *Sonnets and Odes [...]* (London: J. Robson, 1788), p. 5.

Fully conforming to the legitimate form itself, rhyming *abbaabbacdcddc*, the sonnet presents Seward's particular conception and history of the form, the 'Severest of the Orders'. Indeed, her emphasis is on the strictness of its 'laws', a 'peculiar' and 'arduous model'. Here Seward offers a direct challenge to Smith's version of the sonnet, poems which 'it's appropriate name | Lawless assume', the lawlessness Smith herself refers to in her first preface – her 'no very just claim' to the form – which is echoed and reversed in line one of Seward's sonnet, as well as in her 1799 preface. In a letter to Hayley in 1789 Seward 'confessed' that in this sonnet she 'wished, and designed to combat the doctrine, held out by Mrs Smith, in her preface [...] that the legitimate sonnet is not suited to the genius of our language'.¹² The sonnet's volta, marked by the dash in the eighth line, coincides with the shift from Petrarch to Milton, Italian to English in the sonnet history delineated; a fluid change, an easy transmutation. It is not only Milton who has shown that '*English Verse*' can conform to the Italian model, yet Seward's own, of course, which is based on Milton's sonnet form. One other of Seward's sonnets is on the sonnet form itself, CVI of *Original Sonnets* which is 'translated from Boileau' – the section on the sonnet in *Art poétique* – and again a letter situates the sonnet in opposition to Smith: 'it was the legitimate sonnet which Boileau meant, not that facile form of verse which Mrs Smith has taken'.¹³

Indeed, Seward adopted the sonnet in Milton's name and she follows him formally. In her letters Seward repeatedly praises Milton's sonnets, 'the model for sonnet-writing'.¹⁴ She describes Milton's sonnets as possessing 'Hardness', 'majesty', 'grave energies', and 'majestic plainness', one sonnet is identified as having a 'manly firmness': all notably masculine qualities.¹⁵ Her letters show an awareness of a legitimate sonnet lineage: 'Petrarch's, and Milton's, and Warton's sonnets are legitimate'.¹⁶ Several sonnets quote from and engage with his poems, although her sonnets do not seek a return to the past in a Wartonian way, and are noticeably 'modern' in tone. Seward was not alone in identifying Milton as a predecessor, of course; in different ways, and to differing extents most sonneteers, including Warton, Smith and Mary Robinson, all claim Milton as their predecessor in a splitting of sonnet tradition through the same influence. The relationship between the sonnets of Smith and Milton is interestingly situated here. Smith does not follow Milton formally, but one of her sonnets invokes his first nightingale sonnet, and another his elegiac sonnet twenty-three, establishing a thematic rather than formal correspondence. By

¹² Seward, *Letters*, II, p. 222-223.

¹³ Seward, *Letters*, II, p. 162.

¹⁴ Seward, *Letters*, II, p. 223.

¹⁵ Seward, *Letters*, I, p. 201; II, p. 256; I, p. 191.

¹⁶ Seward, *Letters*, V, p. 162.

contrast, Seward did not favour these two sonnets by Milton, observing that ‘there is beauty also in the sonnet to the nightingale, and in that to his deceased wife, but they are less perfect’, lacking the ‘plain majestic energy’ of others; there is a suggestion that they are less masculine.¹⁷

Curiously, the way in which Seward claims Milton as a forbear bears resemblance and foreshadows Wordsworth’s similar claim, and indeed their sonnets are the most conspicuously Miltonic in form. It was only three years after the publication of Seward’s volume that Wordsworth rediscovered and ‘took fire’ from Milton’s sonnets in 1802, struck by their ‘dignified simplicity and majestic harmony’, informing his first major sonnets in his *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807).¹⁸ He went on to write over five-hundred sonnets. Wordsworth’s sonnets have been read as heralding a new era in the form, ‘a decisive moment’ in its history, and his literary positioning as an evasion of the perceived feminisation of the sonnet, not only by women writers, but by William Lisle Bowles and others.¹⁹ Wordsworth also corrects his own earlier poetic self: his first published poem was the illegitimate, elegiac sonnet ‘On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress’ (1787). Complicating this female to male shift, Seward’s canonical positioning and claiming of the Miltonic form foreshadows Wordsworth’s swerve from contemporary tradition, and his description of Milton’s sonnets in a letter – ‘manly and dignified’ – echoes Seward’s own comments.²⁰ Moreover, the sonnets of both display influences at odds with those publicly broadcast. Dorothy Wordsworth records how her brother was also ‘turning over the leaves of Charlotte Smith’s sonnets’ in 1802.²¹

Indeed, despite Seward’s avowed dislike of Smith’s sonnets, several take similar subjects to Smith’s own. This is illuminated in reviews of Seward’s *Original Sonnets*, many of which pit Smith and Seward against each other. *The British Critic* states that they ‘may be considered as the leaders of two poetic parties, the one patronizing the irregular, the other the regular Sonnet’.²² *The Anti-Jacobin Review* selects three sonnets by Smith and Seward to

¹⁷ Seward, *Letters*, II, p. 163.

¹⁸ Quoted by Phelan, *The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*, from the notes Wordsworth dictated to Isabella Fenwick.

¹⁹ Phelan, *The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*, p. 9.

²⁰ Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: Volume I. The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, rev. by Chester L. Shaver, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) p. 379.

²¹ Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. by Pamela Woolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 135. For Wordsworth’s turn to the sonnet and relationship with earlier eighteenth-century tradition see Phelan, *The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*, chapter 1; Peter Spratley, ‘Wordsworth’s Sensibility Inheritance: The Evening Sonnets and the “Miscellaneous Sonnets”’, *European Romantic Review*, 20 (2009), 96-115, and Daniel Robinson, ‘Form and Function’.

²² *The British Critic*, 14 (1799), p. 166

‘discriminate the characters of the rival Sisters’, yet draws attention to their similarities by selecting sonnets which take the same subjects and includes a comparison of Smith’s sonnet XII and Seward’s similar (untitled) sonnet XCV, her only seascape sonnet:

On the damp margin of the sea-beat shore
 Lonely at eve to wander; – or reclin’d
 Beneath a rock, what time the rising wind
 Mourns o’er the waters, and, with solemn roar,
 Vast billows into caverns surging pour,
 And back recede alternate; while combin’d
 Loud shriek the sea-fowls, harbingers assign’d,
 Clamorous and fearful, of the stormy hour;
 To listen to the deep thought of those awful sounds;
 Gaze on the boiling, the tumultuous waste,
 Or promontory rude, or craggy mounds
 Staying the furious main, delight has cast
 O’er my rapt spirit, and my thrilling heart,
 Dear as the softer joys green vales impart.²³

Like Smith’s sonnet, Seward’s features billows, winds and a ‘solemn roar’, while her sea-fowls recall Smith’s sea bird.²⁴ There are also conspicuous differences, however. Seward’s speaker is located on the ‘damp margin’ rather than ‘rude fragment’ of Smith’s shore. As my reading of Smith’s sonnet XII suggested, the sonnet is characterised by fracture, both in landscape and sonnet form, which is physically broken up on the page. Seward’s ‘damp margin’ and her sonnet form are more cohesive, befitting the rigidity of form she advocates. Within the seascape, the ‘craggy mounds’ are ‘Staying the furious main’, recalling her description of Milton’s sonnets as possessing a ‘certain hardness’ and she indirectly compares his sonnet form to a rock, writing that to ‘the pointed and craggy rock, the grace of which is its roughness, I should as soon think of applying the epithet polished, as smoothness of numbers to the sonnets of Milton’.²⁵ There is also something wave-like in the way the ‘Vast billows into caverns surging pour, | And back recede alternate’. Seward’s sonnet offers an alternative location for the speaker, ‘reclin’d beneath | A rock’: interestingly ‘beneath’ rather than ‘on’ the rock as in Smith’s sonnet. This locates Seward in the same landscape as Smith, yet in a slightly different place within it, reflective of their differences within the same literary landscape. Seward’s sonnet also diverges from Smith’s in its lack of full congruence between seascape and speaker. Although Seward’s speaker experiences ‘delight’, there is no distinction between the pleasure imparted by the sea scene and ‘green

²³ Seward, ‘Sonnet XCV’, *Original Sonnets*, p. 97.

²⁴ Helen Maria William’s sonnet ‘To the Curlew’ (1795), set on the seashore, also bears considerable resemblance to Smith’s sonnet. The sea is also an important feature in the sonnets of Mary Robinson, especially her sequence *Sappho and Phaon* (1796). Behrendt has highlighted how the sonnets of Smith, Robinson and Seward meet through the sea setting (*Romantic Writing Community*, p. 125).

²⁵ Seward, *Letters*, I, p. 201.

vales', and while she enjoys and finds pleasure in the seascape, it does not suit or symbolise her state of mind or soul.²⁶

Illegitimate sonnet

Despite something of a backlash against the illegitimate sonnet, in the 1780s and '90s the form initiated by Smith really did hold sway. As noted, Bowles was frequently aligned with Smith in establishing a new approach to the sonnet. In 1798, for example, Nathan Drake praises Smith and Bowles 'for their success in cultivating the sonnet, and in particular for abandoning any vestigial attachment to the Petrarchan origins of the form'.²⁷ Despite his association with Smith, Bowles was certainly a poet of the school of Warton. He was educated at Winchester College under Joseph Warton and at Trinity College, Oxford, under Thomas Warton. The influence of both brothers is evident in Bowles's sonnets, as well as in his wider oeuvre. His sonnets were first published in 1789, and three of these address rivers. 'To the River Itchin, near Winton' most closely resembles Warton's 'To the River Lodon', contemplating past and present through the river. The Itchin is not Bowles's childhood river, however, and runs 'near Winton', an archaic Winchester, where Bowles first came under Joseph Warton's influence (the Oxford River Cherwell is the subject of a sonnet in the second edition). Thus, Bowles uses the river-sonnet paradigm of Thomas Warton to situate the formative influence of his brother. The sonnet laments the passing of his schooldays: it opens by asking 'Itchin, when I behold thy banks again' 'Why feels my heart the shiv'ring sense of pain?', wondering in the sestet, 'Is it that those, who circled on thy shore, | Companions of my youth, now meet not more?'.²⁸ The influence of Joseph Warton, 'who didst first inspire my timid Muse', is also the subject of Bowles's elegiac 'Monody on the Death of Dr Warton' (1801).²⁹ The poem celebrates the combined influence of place and

²⁶ Seward's *Original Sonnets* also includes translations from Petrarch and sonnets written in the character of Werther, and a sonnet (VII) which is addressed to the River Derwent. Moreover, despite Seward's frequently professed commitment to the legitimate sonnet, only thirty-eight of her one-hundred sonnets are actually fully legitimate. Twenty-six of the remaining sonnets would be if they did not end with a couplet, a form Seward clearly thought to be legitimate. Seward herself states in her preface that nine of her sonnets have an extra rhyme in the octave – firmly assuring the reader of their legitimacy – and in addition to these another eight would be regular if it wasn't for a slight variation of the rhyme in the octave, such as *abbaabab*. The remaining sixteen vary in irregularity. Another review of Seward's sonnets – in *The New London Review* – juxtaposes the sonnets of Smith and Seward in a formal context, highlighting Seward's use of irregular forms and Smith's use of the Italian (*The New London Review*, 2 (1799), pp. 59-72).

²⁷ Nathan Drake, *Literary Hours or Sketches Critical and Narrative* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1798), p. 66.

²⁸ William Lisle Bowles, 'Sonnet VIII. To the River Itchin, Near Winton', *Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive. Written During a Tour* (London: R. Cruttwell, 1789), p. 9 (ll. 1-4 and 9-10). A later poem by Bowles is 'On Leaving Winchester School. Written in the year 1782' (1796).

²⁹ Bowles, 'Monody on the Death of Dr Warton', *Poems, by the Reverend Wm. Lisle Bowles. Vol II* (London: T. Cadell etc.; Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1801), pp. 137-146 (l. 2).

turning to the literary past that Warton inspired in his pupil, and indeed the two often merge: ‘So I lov’d to lye | By the wild streams of Elfin Poesy’.³⁰ The poem names a specific literary genealogy, from Homer through Shakespeare, Milton and Ossian to Warton and then Bowles himself. In addition to their general influence upon him, Bowles follows the Wartons canonically in his ten-volume edition of Pope’s works (1806), including hostile comments on his poetry and life.³¹

Bowles first published his *Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive* anonymously. Despite the influence of the Wartons on Bowles, his English and irregular sonnet forms, combined with descriptions of natural scenes in relation to a speaking ‘I’ earned Bowles the reputation of imitator of Smith. ‘The author is evidently an imitator, and not an unhappy imitator of Mrs. Smith’ writes a reviewer in *The General Magazine*, while another in *The Analytical Review* observes that ‘The Author of these Sonnets evidently endeavoured to imitate Mrs. Charlotte Smith’s little elegant compositions; they are certainly very inferior’.³² Bowles published a second edition of sonnets later in 1789, this time attaching his name and dropping the pretence of being ‘found’ in a traveller’s book. The volume was re-entitled *Sonnets, Written Chiefly on Picturesque Spots, During a Tour*, removing the term ‘elegiac’, and an association with Smith, perhaps. A new ‘Advertisement’ stated:

It having been said that these pieces were written in imitation of the little poems of Mrs. SMYTH [*sic*], the Author hopes he may be excused adding, that many of them were written prior to Mrs. SMYTH’S Publication. He is conscious of their great inferiority to those beautiful compositions, but such as they are, they were certainly written from his own feelings.³³

As Robinson notes, Bowles’s sonnets bear ‘too great a resemblance to Smith’s in form, tone, and subject not to make some claim upon her legitimacy’, and shows that his claim to chronological precedence is ‘almost certainly false’.³⁴ In Bowles’s first edition of sonnets, as well as the three addressed to rivers, four describe sea-scenes, imbued with a similar Smithian melancholy and congruence between mind and external nature.³⁵ Bowles also follows Smith formally. All fourteen of his first-edition sonnets are irregular, and nine take a blend of English and Italian forms – *abbacddceffegg* – a form used by Smith. Of Bowles’s

³⁰ Bowles, ‘Monody’, l. 164. The poem is full of streams, waterfalls, rivers and rills; the only named river – fittingly – is the Itchin.

³¹ See Griffin, *Wordsworth’s Pope*, p. 61.

³² *The General Magazine*, 3 (1789), p. 211 and *The Analytical Review*, 3 (1789), p. 339.

³³ Bowles, *Sonnets, Written Chiefly on Picturesque Spots, During a Tour [...]* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1789), p. 8.

³⁴ Robinson, ‘Introduction’, p. 12.

³⁵ Raycroft offers a series of comparisons of sonnets by Bowles and Smith, showing their resemblance: see ‘Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet’, pp. 371-381.

remaining sonnets, one takes a slight variation on the above, and four are irregular takes on the Italian sonnet form, suggestive of Warton.³⁶

Considering the charges of imitation brought against Bowles, his cause is not helped by the numerous sonnets in which he appears to be following in another's footsteps; he frequently muses upon the wanderers and pilgrims who have preceded him, such as the 'stranger' in sonnet V 'To the River Tweed', who 'Delighted turns thy beauteous scenes to greet', and in sonnet X, 'On Dover Cliffs' is 'Sure many a lone wanderer has stood' atop the cliffs.³⁷ In Smith's sonnets, her speaker is often presented as a wanderer, 'straying' through various landscapes, and as she precedes Bowles in travelling along the riverbank and cliff-top, appears to constitute Bowles's imagined wanderer. Bowles also describes attending the 'rugged paths' of poverty in sonnet IX, directly echoing the 'rugged path' Smith is 'doom'd to tread' in her very first sonnet, dramatising the way Bowles follows Smith in a literary sense, in both sonnet form and content.³⁸

The very first of Bowles's sonnets certainly recalls Smith:

AS slow I climb the cliff's ascending side,
 Much musing on the track of terror's past
 When o'er the dark wave rode the howling blast,
 Pleas'd I look back, and view the tranquil tide,
 That laves the pebbled shore; and now the beam
 Of evening smiles on the grey battlement,
 And yon forsaken tow'r, that time has rent.
 The lifted oar far off with silver gleam
 Is touch'd, and the hush'd billows seem to sleep.
 Sooth'd by the scene, ev'n thus on sorrow's breast
 A kindred stillness steals and bids her rest;
 Whilst the weak winds that sign along the deep,
 The ear, like lullabies of pity, meet,
 Singing her saddest notes of farewell sweet.³⁹

Indeed, the sonnet seems to dramatise Bowles's assumption of Smith's sonnet position, as it describes his ascent to her prospect-viewing stance over the seascape. However, his sonnets are marked by some notable differences. Bowles relishes a calm and tranquil scene rather than Smith's wilder seascapes; he almost seems to have stepped out of the space of Smith's sonnets – 'terror's past | When o'er the dark wave rode the howling blast'. Many of his

³⁶ Curiously, whether by conscious design or not, all three of Bowles's river sonnets are closer to the Italian form in which Warton's river sonnet originated.

³⁷ Bowles, 'Sonnet V. To the River Tweed', *Fourteen Sonnets*, p. 14 [6] (l. 4) and 'Sonnet X. On Dover Cliffs', *Fourteen Sonnets*, p. 11 (l. 4).

³⁸ Bowles, 'Sonnet IX' *Fourteen Sonnets*, p. 10 (l. 5).

³⁹ Bowles, 'Sonnet I. Written a Tinemouth, Northumberland, After a Tempestuous Voyage', *Fourteen Sonnets*, pp. 1-2.

sonnets operate in a similar way, exploiting Smith's sublime sea aesthetic without fully realising it, holding back from an identification with it, and often replacing it with one of tranquility. In the sonnet above, 'the howling blast' is replaced by the somewhat less sublime 'weak winds that sigh along the deep' and the sonnet's speaker also seems to disappear from the landscape as soon as they get there: the 'I' is absent after line four. In a new addition to the second edition of Bowles's sonnets, in which he disavows Smith's influence, addresses a 'thou' similar to Smith herself – 'THOU whose stern spirit loves the storm', taking a somewhat admonitory tone to the addressee and disestablishing himself from them.⁴⁰

Bowles's timidity befits his status as a more conservative figure, destined for the church: although he embraces the riverbank and spatial retreats of the Wartons, the contrary sublime and extreme spaces of Smith are traversed with care. Bowles's sonnets also lack the integration between seascape and form that marks Smith's own sonnets. Bowles's use of the sonnet is curious; sonnet I rhymes *abbacddceffegg*: as noted, an irregular form Smith herself uses. The structure does not coincide with the syntactical sense – or experiment with it – however, which divides the sonnet up in an unusual way, most noticeably in its split into an 'octave' of nine lines (split into two stanzas of four-and-a-half lines) and a 'sestet' of five lines. Indeed, despite their English rhyme scheme, Bowles's sonnets are often divided along the lines of the Italian form syntactically, permitting Seward – in response to Coleridge's 'Introduction' – to deem Bowles's sonnets to be 'Miltonic, if not so strictly regular as are Milton's'.⁴¹ Bowles did not conceive his sonnets in this way, however: 'I thought nothing about the [...] Italian model' he later recalled.⁴² The way Bowles holds back from a full immersion with Smith's seascape matches the way he does not integrate form and subject or experiment with form. Bowles is curiously placed then; with a strong position in the school of Warton, yet departing from it; clearly influenced by Smith, yet distancing himself from her. In his first edition of sonnets, Bowles addresses the sea as well as three different rivers – the Wenbeck, Tweed and Itchin – a plurality suggestive of the different lines of influence at work in his sonnets, pulled between the Wartons' academic, historic and Smith's 'modern' mode, river and seascape, Italian and English sonnet forms. Indeed, as noted in the introduction, Havens and Meyenberg both identify the emergence of different sonnet types at this time, yet distinctions between Miltonic and non-Miltonic, male and female, legitimate and illegitimate forms – and others – become somewhat blurred and destabilised.

⁴⁰ Bowles, 'Sonnet XVII. In a Storm', *Sonnets, Written Chiefly on Picturesque Spots During a Tour*, p. 27 (l. 1). See Raycroft, p. 507.

⁴¹ Seward, *Letters*, v, p. 59; Curran also notes the Italian element of Bowles's sonnet structure (*Poetic Form and British Romanticism*), p. 32.

⁴² Bowles, *Scenes and Shadows of Days Departed* (London: W. Pickering, 1837), pp. xli-xlii.

The different influences and predecessors detectable in Bowles's sonnets come into play in his sonnet IV 'To the River Wenbeck' ('Wensbeck' in the second edition; now 'Wansbeck'), which features one of his several wandering figures. As a river sonnet, Bowles's sonnet IV recalls Warton's Loddon sonnet, yet through Smith's sonnet XXXII 'Written on the banks of the Arun, October 1785', with which it has more in common. In Smith's sonnet the speaker listens to the 'hollow sighs' of 'night-wanderers, who their woes bewail!'. Smith imagines Otway to be one such night-wanderer, yet, as I have suggested, Warton himself also seems to haunt his river-sonnet space in Smith's sonnet, a welcome visitor to Bowles's riverbank, we can presume. Bowles's sonnet clearly recalls Smith's as the Wansbeck seems to bring with it recent sonnet tradition:

As slowly wanders thy forsaken stream,
 Wenbeck! the mossy-scatter'd rocks among,
 In fancy's ear still making plaintive song
 To the dark woods above: ah! sure I seem
 To meet some friendly Genius in the gloom,
 And in each breeze a pitying voice I hear
 Like sorrow's sighs upon misfortune's tomb.⁴³

Following her sonnet, Smith's own 'pitying voice' joins those along the riverbank, and as Bowles's more immediate predecessor she replaces Warton as the riparian 'friendly Genius' who lurks in the gloom. Moreover, as argued, it is in her sonnet XXXII that Smith expresses her uneasy position in relation to Warton's sonnet paradigm and male literary tradition: a position with which Bowles thus incidentally becomes aligned as he draws on Smith's strange, unsettling river landscape, rendering 'other' Warton's mode. In the second edition, Bowles amends several of the sonnets, and significantly, in 'To the River Wensbeck' the 'friendly Genius' is removed, as is the 'pitying voice I hear | Like sorrow's sighs upon misfortune's tomb', which becomes 'I listen to the wind, | And think I hear meek sorrow's plaint'.⁴⁴ As Bowles attempts to obscure Smith's influence in the second edition, he empties the sonnet of the spectral voices and figures which had previously inhabited it. Bowles also amends the rhyme scheme of this sonnet: the previously Italian sestet is altered to conform to Bowles's favoured, more English, form: *abbacddceffegg*, which curiously furthers it from Smith formally here, as sonnet XXXII is her only fully Italian sonnet.

Somewhat playfully, Smith includes the later version of 'To the Wensbeck' in her work for children *Rural Walks* (1795), yet alongside her own sonnet IV 'To the Moon' (1784), in which the speaker wanders 'Alone and pensive' beside a stream, prefiguring the 'him' of

⁴³ Bowles, 'Sonnet IV. To the River Wenbeck', *Fourteen Sonnets*, p. 5 (ll. 1-7).

⁴⁴ Bowles, 'Sonnet V. To the River Wensbeck', *Sonnets, Written Chiefly on Picturesque Spots During a Tour*, p. 15 (ll. 6-7).

Bowles's sonnet who 'passes weary on his way' along the Wansbeck.⁴⁵ In *Rural Walks*, as the group walks alongside a stream in the moonlight, the Smithian figure asks the children to recite a poem, with the child who selects Smith's sonnet 'avowing her inferiority both in choice and manner' (XII, 73) to the cousin who has chosen Bowles's sonnet, echoing Bowles's second-edition advertisement to his sonnets, in which 'he is conscious of their great inferiority' to Smith's. Moreover, in *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine, Venus, and Piedmont Transports* (1796) Smith cites an entire seascape sonnet by Bowles in a note. The two sonnets by Bowles are the only sonnets she cites in their entirety in her prose works, and indeed her oeuvre, aside from the sonnet by Drayton and one by Milton, attesting to her awareness of the close relationship between her sonnets and those of her successor, perhaps. In a section of the *Narrative* condemning the plundering which is rife on the coast, Smith

cannot help wishing that on this fatal part of it [the coast] some such establishment was possible, as that which has been founded at Bamborough Castle, in Northumberland [...] the account of this place is given by Mr. Bowles, in a note to the admirable Sonnet written on the spot, which I cannot resist copying.
(XII, 323)

The sonnet and Bowles's note to it follows. The reference to 'copying' is again perhaps a playful one. The sonnet was published in Bowles's first 1789 edition of sonnets and bears the influence of Smith's own; as reviewers identified in their accusations of imitation, she had been the victim of a sort of literary 'plundering'.⁴⁶ At the very least she strangely displaces herself, including a sea sonnet of another, rather than one of her own; while *Rural Walks* presents her river sonnet as 'inferior' to Bowles's own, here she effaces her poetic self completely.

Curiously, in the context of these avowals of originality and inferiority, Smith was subsequently excluded from the history of the sonnet and early 'Romantic' period. Brent Raycroft redressed this in an important article of 1998, in which he shows how Smith was written out of the sonnet's history by the 'Coleridge-Bowles connection', 'a central genealogical link [...] constructed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and reiterated in the twentieth century by influential critics such as W.K. Wimsatt and M. H. Abrams'.⁴⁷ As Raycroft points out, while Coleridge aligns Smith and Bowles in his introduction to his 1796 sonnet anthology he does not mention Smith again, yet continues to praise and avow his debt to Bowles. He shows how this 'genealogical link' was most notably upheld by M. H.

⁴⁵ Bowles, 'Sonnet V. To the River Wensbeck' (l. 10).

⁴⁶ Smith has already identified herself as a victim of plundering earlier in the text: her desire 'to assist the unfortunate person in question, have together induced me to suspend, for a few days, the labour I am condemned to for the support of my own plundered family' (XII, 315).

⁴⁷ Raycroft, 'Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet', p. 364.

Abrams in his influential 1965 essay, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric'. Abrams sources Coleridge's invention of the genre in Bowles's sonnets of 1789, in which the local poem becomes 'lyricized'.⁴⁸ However, as Raycroft shows, Abrams's comments on Bowles's sonnets apply equally to Smith's own, and it is her sonnets which effect this lyricisation. Indeed, her sonnets fit particularly well into the history of Abrams's genre, as Raycroft shows through a comparison of Bowles's 'To the River Itchin' – Abrams's example – and Smith's sonnet V 'To the South Downs', which draws on Gray's Eton 'Ode', afforded a central place in the development of Abrams's genre. Notably, Warton is also missing from Abrams's genealogy, in which his Loddon sonnet should occupy a central place; indeed, in *Organising Poetry*, the destination of Fairer's chapter on Warton's sonnet and its influence is Wordsworth's 'Greater Romantic Lyric' 'Tintern Abbey'.⁴⁹ All of these poems feature the all-important river trope, through which – as previously shown – various traditions meet, are mapped and negotiated across a long chronological period, amid which different shifts and beginnings have also been identified.

'Other Song': 1789 and Beyond

Genealogical precedence, wider lineages, and the differences between the sonnets of Smith and Bowles aside, their combined influence does seem to have effected a change upon the sonnet and attitudes to it. Coleridge's 'Introduction' to his *Sonnets from Various Authors* (1796) – a small anthology of sonnets privately printed which he intended to be bound up with Bowles's sonnets – is an important articulation of this shift. As noted, he deduces the sonnet's 'laws' from the compositions of Smith and Bowles, rather than those of Petrarch and the terms set out by Boileau and William Preston:⁵⁰

Respecting the metre of the Sonnet, the Writer should consult his own convenience. – Rhymes, many or few, or no rhymes at all – whatever the chastity of his ear may prefer, whatever the rapid expression of his feelings will permit.⁵¹

Bowles echoes this in the introduction to his poems in 1837, where he recalls his choice of sonnet form in 1789: 'I thought nothing about the strict Italian model; the verses naturally

⁴⁸ M. H. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays presented to Frederick A. Pottle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 527-560 (p. 540).

⁴⁹ A. Harris Fairbanks was one of the first critics to call to attention the place of Warton's influence on Coleridge's 'To the River Otter', in conjunction with that of Bowles's sonnets (A. Harris Fairbanks, "'Dear Native Brook": Coleridge, Bowles, and Thomas Warton, the Younger', *Wordsworth Circle*, 6 (1975), 313-5).

⁵⁰ Coleridge 'Introduction', p. 1139. Preston quotes from Boileau in his essay on the sonnet, included in *The Poetical Works of William Preston* (1793), which also praises Petrarch. His own sonnets included in the volume are all Petrarchan in form and theme and five are translations from Petrarch.

⁵¹ Coleridge, pp. 1139-1140.

flowed in unpremeditated harmony, as my ear directed'.⁵² Coleridge goes on to express his vehement dislike of 'artificial' English appropriations of the Italian sonnet, with their 'inverted sentences [...] incongruous mixture of obsolete and Spenserian words[...] toiled and hammered to fit into shape'.⁵³ It is for this reason that Coleridge dislikes Warton's sonnets, perhaps – which are clearly disestablished from Bowles's own – the greater part of which he argues are 'severe and masterly likenesses of the Greek [‘epigrammata’]'.⁵⁴ In his selection of twenty-eight sonnets, the majority are English in form. Befitting the formal alignments Coleridge makes here, both Bowles and Coleridge apply the term 'effusions' to their sonnets, which Smith first applied to her own sonnets in 1784, foreshadowing Wordsworth's poetic manifesto for a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling', perhaps.⁵⁵ Coleridge's ideas on the content of the sonnet are also important: 'those Sonnets appear to me the most exquisite, in which moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings, are deduced from, and associated with, the scenery of Nature', setting out an important – and immediate – interrelationship between place, feeling and form.⁵⁶ He writes that Bowles's sonnets have a 'marked superiority over all other Sonnets', and indeed Bowles's early influence on Coleridge has attracted much critical interest.⁵⁷

In addition to Bowles's two editions, 1789 was the year of Smith's fine fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, with which she reached the height of her success, and which marks a shift from river to sea as well as an increase in her formal experimentation. Smith's departure from tradition in her sonnets also had wider cultural resonances and the sonnets of Smith and Bowles can be taken as the key publications of the revolutionary year.⁵⁸ Some of Smith's works are overtly political, such as her blank-verse poem *The Emigrants* (1793) and several of her novels, most notably *Desmond* (1792). In November 1792 Smith was one of the

⁵² Bowles, *Scenes and Shadows of Days Departed*, pp. xli-xlii.

⁵³ Coleridge, p. 1140. He also expresses a dislike for Petrarch's sonnets.

⁵⁴ Coleridge, p. 1139.

⁵⁵ Wordsworth, 'Preface', *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 246. Coleridge switches between the appellations 'sonnet' and 'effusion', as well as that of sonnets 'in the manner' of Bowles. He later went on to parody the contemporary sonnet in 1797 under the pseudonym 'Nehemiah Higginbottom'. On this and Coleridge's relationship with the sonnet more widely, see Daniel Robinson, "'Work Without Hope": Anxiety and Embarrassment in Coleridge's Sonnets', *Studies in Romanticism*, 39 (2000), 81-110. Coleridge first sonnets 'on Eminent Characters', were published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1794. These and others were collected in *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796) to which Charles Lamb also contributed sonnets.

⁵⁶ Coleridge, p. 1139.

⁵⁷ Coleridge, p. 1139; see Robinson, "'Work Without Hope"'.

⁵⁸ In terms of poetry, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* was the other main work of the year, although the individually-produced illuminated books were rather a different type of publication, of course, and sold to collectors rather than by booksellers. 1789 also saw both Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823) and Mary Robinson (1756/1758?–1800) turn to the sonnet form, a posthumous edition of poems including sonnets by Thomas Russell (bap. 1762, d. 1788), and an edition of sonnets by the lesser-known Edward Hamley (bap. 1764, d. 1834).

‘Women of Great Britain’ toasted by the British Club ‘who have distinguished themselves by their writings in favor of the French Revolution’.⁵⁹ Accordingly, Smith has attracted much critical attention as a politically radical writer.⁶⁰ Wolfson has explored the relationship between Smith’s political voice and male literary tradition in *The Emigrants*. Although less obviously political – and indeed largely apolitical with a few exceptions – Smith’s sonnets become politicised formally by context and their ‘sustained interaction with tradition and history [...] issues a politics of literary form’ in a different way.⁶¹ Indeed, Smith’s experiments with form, and break with the past, clearly spoke to a wider historical moment, receiving an answer from – amongst other commentators – the politically radical Thelwall. His essay ‘on the English sonnet’ is a rebuttal to conservative critics who refused to acknowledge Smith’s English and irregular ‘illegitimate’ sonnet forms. It acquires a political hue in its references to the ‘shackles’ and ‘chains’ of both the Italian sonnet form – which echoes periodical reviews of Smith’s sonnets – and the critical conservatism Thelwall censures. This became more overt in *The Peripatetic* (1793) in which Thelwall writes that Smith’s sonnets are ‘condemned [...] by the critics as illegitimate: though, according to my opinion, they owe much of their beauty to the glorious crime – if such it be to burst the unnatural fetters of arbitrary authority’.⁶² Smith’s break with tradition through her formal innovation becomes aligned with a revolutionary impulse, and Duff has shown how here was a temptation for later ‘Romantic’ writers to make alignments between politics and their poetic approach.⁶³ Indeed, opposition to the revolution drew on a strong sense of (patrilial) tradition and inheritance, as Burke writes:

an entailed inheritance, derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity [...] we have an inheritable crown; and inheritable peerage and an

⁵⁹ Quoted by Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 22. Smith was later accused of a political turnaround, although Garnai has shown how Smith’s works dealing with French events continued to show her ‘progressive, reformist thinking’ (*Revolutionary Imaginings*, p. 15).

⁶⁰ For the political nuances of Smith’s sonnets see Kari E. Lokke ‘The Mild Dominion of the Moon’: Charlotte Smith and the Politics of Transcendence’, *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. by Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 85-106.

⁶¹ Wolfson, p. 17.

⁶² John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, I, p. 123. Thelwall’s comments on form are somewhat reminiscent of Milton’s reference to the ‘modern bondage of rhyming’ in *Paradise Lost*, although in the context of blank verse, of course (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 2. In 1795, Thelwall was actually imprisoned. Thelwall was a sonneteer himself, and included twelve political sonnets in his *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, Under a Charge of High Treason* (1795). All are, of course, illegitimate and irregular. See Judith Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle: The Silenced Partner* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chapter 9: ‘Poetry and Reform: Reviving the Sonnet’.

⁶³ See *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, p. 30.

house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises and liberties, from a long line of ancestors.⁶⁴

Smith's sonnets, as shown, bring challenges to 'forefathers' and modes of literary inheritance through her sonnet experiments. Pertinently, Thelwall selects sonnet XLIV, 'Written in the churchyard at Middleton in Sussex' (first published in 1789), which dramatises these challenges, as including 'all the requisites of good poetry [...] what, in particular, can surpass the thought of breaking the silent sabbath of the grave?'.⁶⁵ His essay ends with the (perhaps extravagant) exclamation which reveals that Smith's break from patrilineal literary tradition and modes of 'entailed inheritance' has permitted her access to a major canonical position within it: 'Every province has its separate competitors. Over the epic field, Milton [...] Shakespeare in the dramatic, and in the sonnet, Charlotte Smith' – a revolutionary premise indeed.⁶⁶

A significant exception to the illegitimate sonnet tradition emergent in 1789 are the sonnets of Thomas Russell. Russell's *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems, by the Late Thomas Russell, Fellow of New College*, were published the year following his premature death, cutting short a promising career. Seven of Russell's twenty-three sonnets are translations from Italian, German and Portuguese; and his own original sonnets are rich in literary and classical allusion. The majority are Italian, or nearly so, and three are fully English and three irregular in form. While Russell's sonnets show some contemporary sonnet influence, they largely differ in tone and style, as they turn away from feeling, sensibility and landscape and towards intellectual exercise, and an interest in the past, matched by his preference for the Italian form. Reviews of Russell's sonnets were largely favourable, yet the disadvantages of the increasingly unpopular Italian form did not go un-noted:

The original sonnets are inferior to the imitations of Petrarch, indeed it requires great labour to turn a thought in a sonnet, and after all this mechanical trouble, vigour is mostly lost in prettiness, and the artificial construction appears very obvious, if not concealed by a skilful hand; a play of words may delight an Italian ear, but is particularly unsuited to the genius of the English language.⁶⁷

The presentation of the Italian form as 'mechanical' and 'artificial' contrasts with the simplicity and naturalness associated with the English sonnet at this time. Russell was a close friend of Bowles, and a fellow pupil under Joseph Warton at Winchester, to whom his

⁶⁴ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 33.

⁶⁵ Thelwall, 'An Essay on the English Sonnet', p. 411-412.

⁶⁶ Thelwall, p. 414.

⁶⁷ *The Analytical Review*, 3 (1789), p. 337.

posthumous edition of poems is dedicated by the editor William Howley.⁶⁸ Indeed, Russell was also firmly of the school of Warton and like Bowles had the ‘twin parentage’ of both Warton brothers at Winchester and Oxford.⁶⁹ While at Oxford, Russell wrote papers in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* defending Thomas Warton against Joseph Ritson’s 1782 attack on *The History of Poetry*. Two of his sonnets celebrate the Wartonian space of Oxford. As seen, sonnet III is a nostalgic, elegiac address to Oxford’s ‘peaceful shore’ in which it appears with ‘Gothic fanes, dim isles, and cloysters hoar, | And treasur’d rolls of Wisdom’s ancient lore’.⁷⁰ The sonnet is archaic in tone, promoting Oxford as an isolated, historic retreat, and Russell’s first two sonnets suggest that he sets out to reconnect with the poetic past. Sonnet I celebrates the impassioned and unimpeded ‘strains’ of the ‘days of old’, bemoaning the check of ‘want’ on poets of the current age, ‘Yet is not Genius dead: the song sublime | might burst in tides as copious as yore’, and sonnet II, again bemoaning ‘want’, ‘whose threatening mien | Oft drives the Bard to quit th’ unfinish’d race’, celebrates Spenser, Homer, Camões, Tasso and Chatterton.⁷¹

Russell’s sonnets also celebrate the collegiality of Oxford. Sonnet III goes on to list the aspects of Oxford missed by the speaker:

Much too thy moonlight walks, and musings grave
 Mid silent shades of high-embowering trees,
 And much thy Sister-Streams, whose willows wave
 In whispering cadence to the evening breeze;
 But most those Friends, whose much-lov’d converse gave
 Thy gentle charms a tenfold power to please.⁷²

Russell’s references to moonlight walks, musings and streams, recall the experiences of the solitary speaker of Smith’s sonnets (who inhabits a landscape disestablished from these educational settings), which here the nature of Oxford’s collegiality – ‘but most those Friends’ – supersedes. A sonnet by Bampfylde ‘On Having Dined at Oxford’ also celebrates this aspect of Oxford: ‘when to the *Muses Bower* I blithesome went: | Pass’d the dank noon

⁶⁸ Howley (1766–1848), four years younger than Bowles and Russell, had close associations with Wartonian institutions although he was not a poet. He was scholar at Winchester College and New College, Oxford, and was later elected as a fellow and tutor at Trinity College and a fellow of Winchester College. He went on to become the Archbishop of Canterbury.

⁶⁹ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 101.

⁷⁰ Russell, ‘Sonnet III’, *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 3 (ll. 1-5).

⁷¹ Russell, ‘Sonnet. I’, *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 1 (ll. 11-12); ‘Sonnet II’, *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 2 (ll. 7-8).

⁷² Russell, ‘Sonnet III’, *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 3 (ll. 9-14).

away in social glee'.⁷³ Russell's next sonnet IV continues to lament the loss of this 'lov'd retreat'.⁷⁴

Published in the same year, the volumes of contemporaries Bowles and Russell demonstrate something of a split in the sonnet's development. Bowles himself is pulled between the two traditions: his sonnets of 1789 are drawn to river(s) and sea, Warton and Smith, legitimate and illegitimate sonnet forms, yet it is Bowles's English sonnet and associated formal approach which prevails and with which he was associated by readers. As Russell's sonnets are published posthumously, they are imbued with a sense of cessation, which the archaisms and nostalgia of the volume's content also promotes. This sense of a lost tradition is also communicated in an elegy by Bowles, 'Written at the Hot-wells, Bristol', where Russell – seeking the curative benefits of the waters – had died. The Hotwells had become a popular resort earlier in the eighteenth century; its dramatic, picturesque landscape inspired numerous writers and artists, including Smith herself, who records her visit in a sonnet of 1794. Bowles's poem is dated 1789, yet was published in 1791. In the poem, Bowles eulogises Russell as a school friend and Oxford contemporary yet also as a fellow poet, invoking the poetics of inheritance which, as Peter Sacks has shown, can often be read in the elegy. Bowles the illegitimate sonneteer eulogises the legitimate and academic Russell, and towards the end of the poem seems to eulogise the school of Warton and its sonnet mode. The poem also recalls the 'consoling invigorating liquid' Sacks identifies in the elegy, overcoming the blockage of death to retain direction and the continuing force of the surviving poet. The main Hotwell spring gushed out at the foot of St. Vincent's rock; amidst the elegiac landscape of illness and death, run the 'Waters of health'.⁷⁵

The poem also takes the 'elegiac' *abab* form, and recalls Gray's 'Elegy' in places. It is not until the sixteenth stanza that Russell himself appears, after a more general lament for the ill and dying: 'Such was lamented Russel's hapless doom, | The lost companion of my youth's gay prime'.⁷⁶ Russell's appearance also heralds the influence of Thomas Warton and the remaining stanzas of the poem recall lines from Warton's sonnets of 1777. The second line quoted above echoes 'From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime nature' from 'to the River Lodon', as Bowles moves from lamenting Russell's death to a general lament on the lost youth of Winchester and Oxford:

⁷³ Bampfylde, 'Sonnet II. On Having Dined at Trinity College, Oxford', ll. 3-4.

⁷⁴ Russell, 'Sonnet IV', *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 4 (l. 1).

⁷⁵ Bowles, *Elegy Written at the Hot-Wells, Bristol. Addressed to the Revd. William Howley* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1791), l. 46.

⁷⁶ Bowles, *Elegy*, ll. 63-64.

So sinks the scene, like a departed dream,
 Since late we sojourn'd blythe in Wykeham's bow'rs,
 Or heard the merry bells by *Isis*' stream,
 And thought our way was strew'd with fairy flow'rs!⁷⁷

Again, the last line of the above stanza recalls Warton's Loddon sonnet, 'And thought my way was all thro' fairy ground', blended with Warton's sonnet 'Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon': 'Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways | Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers'.⁷⁸ The stanza invokes the landscapes of both Warton brothers as it moves from 'Wykeham's bower's' to Oxford's *Isis*. Bowles may also be thinking of other Wartonian poets. As well as Russell, another close friend had also died in 1788: Headley, a contemporary at Oxford, is elegised by Bowles in a separate poem, 'On the Death of Henry Headley, of Trinity College, Oxford' in the third edition of his *Sonnets* (1794). Headley's published works included a sonnet, 'To Miss Aikin (now Mrs. Barbauld), written in a blank leaf of Sir William Davenant's *Gondibert*', included in his *Poems and Other Pieces* (1786).⁷⁹ Headley also published an anthology in 1787: *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry*, inspired by Warton's *History*. The fate of Bampfylde may also be lamented. Southey groups Russell and Bampfylde poetically and in terms of their fate: 'The first pupils of Warton's school – the True English school – were Bampfylde and Russell – both of the highest promise, and both cut off in early youth'.⁸⁰ Moreover, 1790 – the year before the elegy was finally published – was the year of the death of Thomas Warton himself, imbuing the poem with greater relevance and poignancy surrounding the poetic era it elegises.

Befitting the elegy of a fellow poet, in the final stanzas of the poem, Bowles draws attention to his own surviving poetic powers: 'I yet survive, now musing other song | Than that which early sooth'd my thoughtless years'.⁸¹ Of the Warton school, it is Bowles who survives in 1789, yet he is musing *other* song: the illegitimate, sonnet mode of Smith, perhaps. Although 'he whom later I saw all-drooping pale' – William Howley, to whom the poem is addressed – also survives, Howley is a not a poet, yet rather preserver of Wartonian poets' works, as editor of Russell's 1789 volume.⁸² The first stanza above again strongly recalls the Loddon sonnet. The terms of Warton's sonnet are used to elegise not only the passing of school days, but also the 'song' that 'sooth'd my thoughtless years': the poetic voice and influence of

⁷⁷ Bowles, *Elegy*, ll. 75-76.

⁷⁸ Fairer also notes these echoes in *Organising Poetry*, p. 112.

⁷⁹ The sonnet responds to an essay 'On the Heroic Poem *Gondibert*' in the *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (1773) of John and Anna Letitia Aikin (later Barbauld). The sonnet thanks Barbauld for bringing attention to the forgotten poem *Gondibert* (1651) – an uncompleted romantic epic by Sir William D'Avenant – and the sonnet celebrates the recovering of the literary past in a Wartonian manner, 'written in a blank leaf' of an old text.

⁸⁰ Robert Southey, 'ART. I.-Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.', p. 289.

⁸¹ Bowles, *Elegy*, ll. 85-88.

⁸² Bowles, *Elegy*, l. 90.

Warton's 1777 sonnets. Moreover, as Fairer has shown, springs abound in Warton's poems, making the Hotwells landscape an especially fitting one for Bowles's elegy; indeed, Warton's last poem 'Birthday Ode for 1790', takes springs as its central concern, and features Bristol Hotwells, among other health-giving landscapes.

Bowles's elegy ends with his departure from the Hotwells landscape – a Wartonian space, then – as Bowles sets out alone on his poetic journey as the elegy's survivor in a scene that recalls *Lycidas*: 'Enough:– Through the high heavens the proud sun rides, | My wand'ring steps their silent path pursue'.⁸³ And, as shown, Bowles's sonnets, published the year the elegy was composed, pursue a certain 'path', as they record the picturesque tour of a traveller, who appears to follow in Smith's literary wake. Writing in 1825 on the school of Warton, Southey communicates the sense of loss that is apparent in Bowles's elegy:

They [the Warton brothers] brought us back to the study of the Elizabethan writers; and under the elder brother, Winchester may also be said to have become a school of poets [...] Headley, who, had his life been spared, would have trod in the steps of those predecessors whose merits he so judiciously appreciated; Russel, whose early death is perhaps more to be lamented than even that of Chatterton, so beautiful was the promise of his youth; and Bowles, who yet lives, and to whom we gladly offer thanks for the pleasure which we derived from his poems in our younger days. Bampfylde, though not a Wickhamist, should be mentioned with Russel, as closely resembling him in the cast of his poetry:⁸⁴

The poetry of Bampfylde and Russell is aligned, and thus implicitly disestablished from Bowles's own; both poets were also 'cut off in early youth' as Southey later notes. The observation that Bowles 'yet lives' mimes the way he steps out of the Wartonian landscape in his elegy, its sole survivor, yet taking his poetry – of a different 'cast', it is implied – in another direction.

Warton's influence and elements of his school did continue in several poems of the 1780s and '90s, however; although many are imbued with or surrounded by a sense of loss in relation to it. As noted, Fairer adds Kett and Park to Southey's Bowles, Headley, Russell, and Bampfylde, as well as observing the 'accent' of Gardner and Smith.⁸⁵ Kett's *Juvenile Poems* (1793) present the author as 'M.A. Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford', and includes twelve sonnets, one of which is addressed 'To the River Wye' (although it is not a re-visitation sonnet). The majority of his sonnets take the *abbacddceffegg* blend favoured by

⁸³ Bowles, *Elegy*, ll. 97-98.

⁸⁴ Southey, 'ART. III.-The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper [...]', *The Quarterly Review*, 12. 23 (October, 1814), pp. 60-90 (p. 89). Bampfylde was, in fact, a 'Wickhamist'.

⁸⁵ Fairer also names – alongside Kett and Park – the poet George Richards (*bap.* 1767, *d.* 1837), another student and scholar at Trinity College, Oxford, although Richards did not publish any sonnets (see *Organising Poetry*, p. 100).

Bowles. There is a sense that Kett aspired to a Warton-like position at Oxford, and he made an unsuccessful application to become professor of poetry. Following Warton's death in 1790, George Huddesford is said to have written on a wall of Trinity College in chalk: 'The glorious sun of Trinity is set, | And nothing left but farthing candle Kett'.⁸⁶ *Juvenile Poems* includes 'Verses on the Death of Mr. Headley', which contains an elegiac reference to Warton's Oxford: 'On Cherwell's sedgy banks with Warton stray'd; | And woo'd the Muse in gothic stole array'd'.⁸⁷ However, his sonnet VI – the only one to address a poet – is 'To Charlotte Smith', rather than Warton. Park's *Sonnets and Other Small Poems* (1797) includes a sonnet 'To the River Witham' which explicitly draws on Warton's Loddon sonnet, as a note by Park acknowledges.⁸⁸ Working on the same past-present contrast, it is based around the river scene where

past delights, like spectres, grimly shine:
So did they erst round pensive Warton gleam,
Warton the laureate boast of Britain's Academe!⁸⁹

While it may appear to continue Warton's river sonnet mode, it is used in an elegiac way which nods to its demise. Park's sonnet was published after Warton's death, and the couplet moves to the past tense – 'So did they erst round Warton gleam' – Warton and his sonnet are placed in the past; and the river sonnet revolves around a literary as well as a personal re-visitation. The sea features more heavily than the river in Park's volume and one sonnet (VI) is, again, addressed 'To Charlotte Smith', still in the literary present. Park uses both English and Italian forms in his thirty sonnets, although mainly he blends the two in a variety of ways. The Bristol poet Gardner, about whom little is known, also published a re-visitation river sonnet in his two volume *Miscellanies, in Prose and Verse* (1798): 'Sonnet on revisiting the banks of the Avon near Bristol Hotwells', a suitably Wartonian space. However, in the sonnet, the re-visitation of the river of childhood is followed immediately by a departure from it, as the speaker bids 'Farewell dear stream, ah far from thee I go, | Perhaps from paths of peace to those of tearful woe', redolent of the end of Bowles's 'Elegy'.⁹⁰ Another river sonnet in the collection 'To horror, written on the banks of the Severn' is of rather a different type, far removed from the Wartonian riverbank: 'Here where scarce heard by me the wild waves roar, | I pour the bursting torrent from my eye'.⁹¹ Nearly all of

⁸⁶ Lonsdale, 'Introduction', *The Poems of John Bampfylde*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Henry Kett, 'Verses on the Death of Mr. Headley', *Juvenile Poems [...]* (Oxford: J. Fletcher, 1793), pp. 12-15 (ll. 33-34).

⁸⁸ Thomas Park, *Sonnets, and Other Small Poems [...]* (London: G. Sael, 1797), p. 116.

⁸⁹ Park, 'Sonnet XXV. To the River Witham', *Sonnets*, p. 25 (ll. 12-14).

⁹⁰ Edward Gardner, 'Sonnet on Revisiting the Banks of the Avon near Bristol Hotwells', *Miscellanies, in Prose and Verse*, 2 vols (Bristol: Biggs and Cottle, 1798), II, pp. 127-8 (ll. 13-14).

⁹¹ Gardner, 'Sonnet to Horror [...]', *Miscellanies*, II, pp. 117-118 (l. 5-6).

Gardner's twenty-three sonnets are English in form, and twelve have an alexandrine for the final line, curiously, which may recall Smith.⁹²

Thus, disestablishing Smith from the school of Warton, and acknowledging her own influential mode, a shift emerges, articulated by how – among other ways – in the editions of both Kett and Park, Warton's ghostly presence is combined with direct addresses to Smith's living one. While Warton's influence may continue beyond this school, as Fairer shows, informing the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the 1790s, both poets associate Smith with a break or new sonnet impulse. Simultaneously, such perceived breaks obscure Smith's relation to Warton's school and to sonnet tradition; situating her within it, while acknowledging her departures from his context, is key to understanding fully both Smith's literary position and the sonnet's development at this time.

Hotwells and Penshurst

In 1794, Smith appropriates the landscape of Bristol Hotwells to a sonnet of her own, which makes an interesting comparison with Bowles's 'Elegy', and highlights distinctions from the Wartonian aspects embedded within it. The sonnet first appeared in Smith's novel *The Banished Man* (1794), written by Mrs. Denzil, another of Smith's autobiographical characters, and republished in the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797) as sonnet LXIV 'Written at Bristol in the summer of 1794'. In the novel, during a visit to Clifton, the long-suffering Mrs. Denzil is encouraged by her friend to reside there:

'you complain that your spirits, overwhelmed by long suffering, no longer allow you to exert those talents heaven has given you – I am persuaded you would find them revive here – it is the very scene of inspiration.' My mother, after a moment's farther conversation of this subject, wrote in a blank leaf of her pocket book, the following answer to her friend.

(VII, 444)

'Inspiration' works quickly on the mind of Mrs. Denzil, befitting the symbolic Hotwells spring:

HERE from the restless bed of lingering pain
The languid sufferer seeks the tepid wave,
And feels returning health and hope again
Disperse 'the gathering shadows of the grave!'
And here the romantic rocks that boldly swell,
Fringed with green woods, or stain'd with veins of ore,
Call'd native Genius forth, whose Heav'n-taught skill

⁹² Four take Bowles's blend of forms, and one is of twelve lines and takes a peculiar rhyme scheme.

Charm'd the deep echos of the rifted shore.
 But tepid waves, wild scenes, or summer air,
 Restore thy palsied Fancy, woe-deprest?
 Check they the torpid influence of Despair,
 Or bid warm Health re-animate the breast;
 Where Hope's soft visions have no longer part,
 And whose sad inmate is – a broken heart?

(73)

The sonnet is indeed concerned with the nature of the 'scene of inspiration', how 'native Genius' – identified in a note as referring to Thomas Chatterton and Ann Yearsley – has been 'call'd forth' by the 'romantic' landscape.⁹³ Contrary to Bowles's poem, the Clifton landscape here inscribes and celebrates the absence of influence, schools and poetic fostering; the poets who inhabit it are 'Heav'n-taught'. Curiously then, line four of the sonnet is taken from Hayley's 'Epistle to a Friend on the Death of John Thornton' (1780), which elegises a close friend he made at Cambridge. Like Bowles's 'Elegy', Hayley's poem laments the premature death of a contemporary, celebrating and elegising their college days, and addresses the theme of awakening poetic talent, set in Cambridge. Smith's own lack of a university education differentiates her not only from members of the school of Warton, but also from her own native predecessor. Unlike them, the poets of Smith's Hotwell landscape are solitary geniuses with little or no schooling, and it is with Chatterton and Yearsley that Smith rather boldly aligns herself. Moreover, the one specifically elegiac sonnet of Smith's volume is her sonnet LXXXII 'To the Shade of Burns', also included in the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797), written on Burns's death – at the age of thirty-seven – in 1796. Burns is celebrated as the 'Bard sublime! | Who, amid Scotia's mountain solitude, | Great Nature taught to 'build the lofty rhyme' (84, ll. 1-3), as in sonnet LXIV, place is of paramount importance and Burns was celebrated as another native genius, a 'Heaven taught ploughman', and was often aligned with Chatterton.⁹⁴ Unlike Smith's other sonnets, in which place and literary negotiations are entwined, Smith does not occupy the same landscape as Burns – who has a rather different connection with it – in sonnet LXXXII, however. The borrowing from *Lycidas* in line three situates it within that poem's elegiac space of poetic inheritance, and Smith draws correspondences between herself and Burns, through the reference to Burns's 'low fortune' (7) within the sonnet and in a note to the sonnet's title, which connects the two as 'object[s] of *subscription*' (84). Smith's note also refers to the

⁹³ Both Chatterton (1752–1770) and Yearsley (bap. 1753, d. 1806) came from Bristol. Coleridge's 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' (1794) locates Chatterton in the same landscape as Smith's sonnet, and similarly presents it as one of inspiration (see ll. 122-129). The poetry of Yearsley, the 'Milkwoman of Bristol' strongly invokes place, and she also wrote sonnets, included in *Rural Lyre* (1796), redolent of Smith's own.

⁹⁴ Henry Mackenzie, *Lounger*, 97 (9 December 1786), p. 388.

‘original genius [...] of this genuine Poet, a Poet ‘of nature’s own creation’ (84), which, as in sonnet LXIV, makes bolder poetical alignments.⁹⁵

Indeed, returning to the Hotwells sonnet, the reference of Mrs. Armitage to the ‘talents heaven has given’ Mrs. Denzil in *The Banished Man*, is echoed in the sonnet by the ‘Heav’n-taught skill’ of Chatterton and Yearsley, linking them to Smith herself. An implicit correlation is also perhaps made between the poet of landscape, the ‘scene of inspiration’ with its spring pouring forth, and the English sonnet – a natural ‘effusion’. The literary connotations of the spring here are somewhat different from those of the Wartonian ‘special place’, often a means of reaching or reviving the past; Smith’s Hotwell spring is a *fons et origo* symbol of originality. There is perhaps a nod to Warton in the observation in *The Banished Man* that Mrs. Denzil writes her sonnet ‘in a blank leaf of her pocket book’ recalling Warton’s sonnet ‘Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale’s Monasticon’, which celebrates antiquarian, scholarly activity, and actualises the way his poetry reaches back into the past; a mode Smith disestablishes her sonnet from as Mrs. Denzil writes the sonnet on location in a simple pocket book.⁹⁶

The relationship between landscape and poet celebrated in the octave of sonnet LXIV is undercut, however, by the disconnection from place which characterises the sestet. Contrary to Bowles’s sonnet, there is no sense of a continuing liquid or its concomitant poetic power. Despite the inspiration and composition of the sonnet, fancy remains ‘palsied’ and ‘woe-deprest’, and the ‘torpid influence of Despair’ suggests a stagnation and lack of movement at odds with the restoration, reanimation, and poetic ‘inspiration’ the Hotwells resort is supposed to afford. This is ultimately not Smith’s favoured seascape, which – while it may not offer any relief either – is more fully in accordance with both feeling and form, and does not have the Wartonian associations of the spring.

Smith’s position in relation to the school of Warton, place and the literary past, is also dramatised in a sonnet included in the 1789 edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*: ‘Written at Penshurst, in autumn 1788’; which can be compared with two other sonnets also ‘Written at Penshurst’ by Edward Hamley published in the same year in his collection of sixty *Sonnets*. Hamley was a contemporary of Bowles and Russell at Oxford, and their sonnets were all

⁹⁵ Burns read Smith’s sonnets and wrote four of his own, although only one was published in his lifetime – the elegiac ‘Sonnet, on the Death of Robert Riddel, Esq. of *Glen Riddel*, April 1794’ in periodicals in 1794.

⁹⁶ Celestina also writes her churchyard sonnet in a similar fashion to Mrs. Denzil: ‘with her pencil she wrote the following lines in her pocket book’; we are also told that she has ‘a natural turn for poetry’, a ‘talent she had received from nature’ (IV, 121), although in that instance her sonnets are indebted to those of another (Edwards).

published in the same year. Hamley has attracted little critical attention, and is not mentioned by other Wartonian poets. His sonnets are all Italian in form, placing him closer to Russell, and a further resemblance can be found in his inclusion of translations from Petrarch and an imitation of another Italian poet Tommaso Castellani, as well as two sonnets on Tasso. His sonnet XXIII is ‘On the Death of Mr Russel’ [*sic*], and two other sonnets address rivers of Winchester and Oxford – XXXV ‘To the River Itchin, near Winchester’ and XXXVIII ‘To the River Cherwell’. Despite some overlaps in subject – night, autumn, spring, rivers, birds – and a similar emphasis on feeling and the natural world, they do not bear much resemblance to Smith’s sonnets; tellingly, they do not feature the sea or indeed any landscape of particular sublimity.

Smith’s sonnet XLVI ‘Written at Penshurst’ is a significant one in relation to place and literary tradition. Indeed, it is interestingly situated in *Elegiac Sonnets*, immediately following XLV ‘On leaving a part of Sussex’, the last of Smith’s Arun sonnets. While sonnet XLV bids farewell to the literary Arun, sonnet XLVI locates Smith in a different poetic landscape. Penshurst Place has strong literary associations, as the birth place of Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), and the subject of Ben Jonson’s poem ‘To Penshurst’ (1616). It is also the subject of two poems ‘At Penshurst’ (1645) by Edmund Waller (1606-1687), who is the literary presence in Smith’s sonnet. Prior to Smith’s own, another Penshurst poem, *Penshurst* by Francis Coventry – who was better known as a novelist – was published in 1750 and reprinted throughout the remainder of the century in Dodsley’s *A Collection of Poems* (1755-1782). Coventry’s poem celebrates Penshurst’s literary aspect and is ‘inscribed to William Perry, Esq; and The Honble Mrs. Elizabeth Perry’, who then occupied Penshurst Place. The estate had passed to two female members of the Sidney family in the mid-eighteenth century, after a long legal battle over ownership following a lack of male heirs: Elizabeth Perry (née Sidney), niece of the seventh earl of Leicester is ‘heiress of these shades’ in Coventry’s poem.⁹⁷ The estate had fallen into disrepair, however, and when Smith visited the house it was uninhabited, as detailed in the note to her sonnet.⁹⁸ Horace Walpole had visited in 1752, and wrote in a letter: ‘This morning we have been to Penshurst – but, oh! how fallen! [...]

⁹⁷ Francis Coventry, *Penshurst. Inscribed to William Perry, Esq; and the Honble. Mrs. Elizabeth Perry* (London: R. Dodsley, 1750), l. 19. Elizabeth Perry purchased the other half of the estate from the heir of her sister Mary after her death in 1758, and maintained ownership until her own death in 1783 when Penshurst passed to her grandson. Ann Radcliffe visited Penshurst – a suitably Gothic pile – in 1811 and recorded detailed information about Mrs. Perry, gleaned from the housekeeper who appears to have given tours of the house; the housekeeper remembers the ‘fine times’ of Mrs. Perry from which the house had fallen. See *The Posthumous Works of Anne Radcliffe*, 4 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1833), I, pp. 82-86.

⁹⁸ Smith writes in the note that ‘The house is at present uninhabited, and the windows of the galleries and other rooms, in which there are many invaluable pictures, are never opened but when strangers visit it’ (44).

instead of Sacharissa's cipher carved on the beeches, I would sooner have expected to have found the milk-woman's score'.⁹⁹ It is this Penshurst which Smith encountered in 1788 rather than that of Coventry's celebratory poem; interestingly, a male poetic space, yet also a contested site (which in some ways recalls Smith's own legal troubles), recently under the ownership of a female family member, and now deserted and fallen – another fitting 'elegiac' subject.

Like Walpole, the literary figure Smith associates with Penshurst is Waller, the only literary figure outside of the Arun collective, aside from Burns, to appear in her sonnets:

YE towers sublime! deserted now and drear!
 Ye woods! deep sighing to the hollow blast,
 The musing wanderer loves to linger near,
 While History points to all your glories past:
 And startling from their haunts the timid deer,
 To trace the walks obscured by matted fern,
 Which Waller's soothing lyre were wont to hear,
 But where now clamours the discordant hern!
 The spoiling hand of Time may overturn
 These lofty battlements, and quite deface
 The fading canvas whence we love to learn
 Sydney's keen look, and Sacharissa's grace;
 But fame and beauty still defy decay,
 Saved by the historic page – the poet's tender lay!

(44)

The sonnet is one of a number in *Elegiac Sonnets* written 'at' – following Waller rather than Jonson in this respect – a specific location and also at a transitional, autumnal time. The fallen Penshurst echoes the sounds of several of Smith's other sonnets: sighing, the 'hollow blast', and 'discordant' birds. Again, the nature of the site is perhaps matched by Smith's irregular, 'elegiac' sonnet form. Rhyming *ababacccdcdee*, it is poised between the regular and irregular: it would be fully English, yet the interlocking rhymes creates a form redolent of the Spenserian sonnet. The final line is also an alexandrine. Thus, it is the continuity of rhyme which 'defaces' form, suggesting in its motion the 'spoiling hand of time'. The final turn at the sonnet's end does bring a new, staying rhyme with it, corresponding with its concern with the defiance of time and decay. Indeed, the sonnet is reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnets in theme – the poetic longevity that Smith elsewhere denies and resists. In particular, it recalls Shakespeare's sonnet 64:

When I have seen by time's fell hand defaced
 The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;

⁹⁹ Walpole, *Correspondence*, xxxv, p. 141.

When sometime lofty towers I see down razed.¹⁰⁰

The series of reflections on time leads to the understanding that ‘Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate: | That time will come and take my love away’.¹⁰¹ Although she does not appear to have known them, throughout *Elegiac Sonnets* Smith invokes subjects which in Shakespeare’s sonnets are associated with destructive time, such as the sea, which informs another of the ruminations of sonnet 64. Yet, while Shakespeare’s sonnets often end with the transcendent, immortalising couplet, Smith’s sonnets do not invest the form with such power. In sonnet XLVI, although Smith’s couplet appears to celebrate the ability of ‘the poet’s tender lay’ to ‘defy decay’ – in a way that the ‘fading canvas’ cannot – she refers to a different ‘lay’: not her own modern sonnet, but an older literary text, ‘the historic page’ – of Waller, perhaps.

Although it is tempting to make the connection between Penshurst and the sonnet’s past through Sidney, Smith’s sonnet does not. Sidney’s sonnets were little known in the eighteenth century; they were only published twice and are not mentioned in Thomas Warton’s *The History of English Poetry*, or the unpublished continuation.¹⁰² Smith mentions two different Sidneys in her sonnet: Algernon Sidney (1622-1682), champion of liberty who fought on the Parliamentary side in the English Civil War, and later executed for his part in the ‘Rye House plot’, and his sister – as Waller’s ‘Sacharissa’ – Lady Dorothy Spencer (1617–1684).¹⁰³ A section of Smith’s *A Natural History of Birds* (1807) on the heronry at Penshurst, the ‘hern’ of which appears in her sonnet, is illuminating on Smith’s sense of Penshurst’s literary aspect:

This house was remarkable for being the birth place of the gallant and accomplished Sir Philip Sidney, who excelled not only as a soldier but as an author. The ‘Arcadia,’ a sort of pastoral romance, in the taste of the age in which he lived, is now little read, and only as a curiosity; but in him elegance of mind was accompanied by the most manly and generous heart. [...] At Penshurst, Waller, one of our first correct poets, wrote his light and pleasant pieces to lady Dorothy Sidney, under the name of ‘Sacharissa;’ and at Penshurst was born Algernon Sidney, who died on a scaffold with the noble fortitude, to which such sentiments as he felt and avowed must elevate a great and powerful mind.

(XIII, 288)

¹⁰⁰ Shakespeare, ‘Sonnet 64’, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, p. 239 (ll. 1-3)

¹⁰¹ Shakespeare, ‘Sonnet 64’, ll. 11-12.

¹⁰² In the eighteenth century, Sidney’s sonnets were published in the fourteenth edition of a collected works published in London in 1725 and the fifteenth edition published in Dublin in 1739. Of Sidney’s works, only *An Apology for Poetry* was published later in the century (1752 and 1787; the latter edition by Joseph Warton), and Sidney was known largely for this and *Arcadia*. Real interest in Sidney was only revived early in the nineteenth century.

¹⁰³ As something of a martyr to freedom, Algernon Sidney would in all likelihood appeal to Smith politically. He appears again in Smith’s sonnet LXXVI alongside John Hampden.

Smith's comments offer a rare insight into her sense of the literary past. A divide is posited between Sidney, a literary curiosity of the 'age in which he lived', and 'our' Waller, the 'correct' poet of 'light and pleasant pieces'. Smith's Penshurst is not a place for reaching back into the past, but a site connected with poetic refinement and correction – the standard (non-Wartonian) Augustan view of literary history represented by Francis Atterbury in his preface to Waller's poems (1690): 'The Tongue came into his [Waller's] hands, like a rough Diamond; he polish'd it first [...] He undoubtedly stands first in the List of Refiners'.¹⁰⁴ Thus, in sonnet XLVI, rather than the sonnet from, through Penshurst Smith encounters the couplet which Waller was, along with Denham, credited with refining and popularising before Dryden and Pope. Indeed, Pope sets out the lineage in 'An Essay on Criticism': 'And praise the easy vigour of a line, | Where Denham's strength, and Waller's sweetness join'.¹⁰⁵

In Waller's two Penshurst poems, 'Dorothea' exerts considerable influence over the landscape of Penshurst in the poem: her presence has a civilising, ordering effect on nature curiously likened to that of Orpheus's lyre:

If she sit down, with tops all tow'rds her bow'd,
They round about her into arbours crowd;
Or if she walk, in even ranks they stand,
Like some well-marshall'd and obsequious band.¹⁰⁶

By the second poem – which is not particularly 'sweet' – Sacharissa has become a 'cruel Nymph! from whom her humble swain | Flies for relief unto the raging main', rejecting Penshurst and its pastoral landscape for the relief offered by a wilder one.¹⁰⁷ Another poem by Waller is 'On my Dorothy Sidney's Picture': the picture in the celebrated picture gallery at Penshurst invoked by Smith in her sonnet, and which Waller's poems – 'the poet's tender lay' – has transcended.

In Smith's sonnet, the presentation of Waller in relation to the speaker – and to Collins in the preceding sonnet – is interesting. The speaker traces

the walks obscured by matted fern,
Which Waller's soothing lyre were wont to hear,
But where now clamours the discordant hern!

¹⁰⁴ Francis Atterbury, 'Preface To the Second Edition of Mr. Waller's Poems, after the Restoration, printed in the Year 1690', in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Waller [...]* (London: C. Cooke, 1797), pp. iv-ix (p. iv). Waller's works remained popular and were published consistently throughout the century.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', ll. 360-361.

¹⁰⁶ Edmund Waller, 'At Penshurst [I]', *The Poetical Works of Edmund Waller*, pp. 28-29 (ll. 13-16).

¹⁰⁷ Waller, 'At Penshurst [II]', *The Poetical Works of Edmund Waller*, pp. 32-33 (ll. 41-42).

The soothing lyre is reminiscent of the correct, 'light and pleasant' Waller of *Birds*, who the speaker seems to follow in tracing his path. There is also a discontinuity, however. The walks are 'obscured', and Waller's soothing lyre has been replaced by discord, which more strongly suggests Smith's poetic voice. Christopher Rovee has argued that in the sonnet 'overgrown nature, overturned "battlements," and decaying paintings describe a juncture when the patrilinear order [...] is under intense strain' also apparent in lines 7-8, 'which contrast the gentle sounds of a (masculine) lyric tradition with the raucous song of (feminine) nature [...]. The hern is a projection of the sonneteer'.¹⁰⁸ The sonnet is perhaps not this explicit, but the hern does seem to represent something of the literary present in the way it has replaced Waller's sound. As well as Penshurst's fall, the 'spoiling hand of Time' has effected a literary fall from Waller's soothing lyre and ordered nature to the clamours of the discordant hern, overgrown fern and the irregular sonnet. Indeed, the different landscapes both poets present are reflected in their poetic form: in Waller's first Penshurst poem, the way the plants 'in even ranks they stand, | Like some well-marshalled and obsequious band', suggests his own couplet form, while in Smith's sonnet, nature is in disarray, suggestive of her irregular, illegitimate sonnet form. The male-female shift between the two poems is also not as simple as Rovee implies, and Waller's poems do offer a female continuity of sorts: it is Sacharissa who exerts the influence on nature in the first poem, assuming an Orpheus-like poetic role, and feminising Penshurst and Waller's 'masculine' lyric tradition.

Reading sonnet XLVI in light of the preceding Arun sonnet XLV, which features Collins, further illuminates Smith's sense of the literary past. The same terms slip between sonnets. In sonnet XLV Collins is 'The Enthusiast of the Lyre who wander'd here', while in XLVI the speaker is the 'musing wanderer', and Waller is in the possession of a 'soothing lyre'. Smith appears to align her own verse and wanderer-persona with Collins, irregular and discordant, yet also posits both as succeeding Waller, in a simultaneous continuation and disruption. Waller features in Collins's own 'Ode on the Poetical Character' (1746), which also realises canonical negotiations spatially. In the final section of the poem, Collins invokes Milton's Eden to which he attempts to gain access 'in vain':

From Waller's myrtle shades retreating,
With many a vow from hope's aspiring tongue,
My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue:
In vain – such bliss to one alone
Of all the sons of soul was known,
And Heaven and Fancy, kindred powers,
Have now o'erturned the inspiring bowers,

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Rovee, *Imagining the Gallery: The Social Body of British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 105.

Or curtained close such scene from every future view.¹⁰⁹

As Lonsdale notes, here Collins is ‘announcing his allegiance to the poetic line of Spenser and Milton and dissociating himself from the Augustan mode initiated by Waller, the first ‘correct’ English poet’.¹¹⁰ This is mapped on to landscape, as Collins retreats from ‘Waller’s myrtle shades’ to attempt to enter Milton’s poetic space, pursuing his ‘guiding steps’ (conversely, Smith’s wanderer does inhabit Waller’s shades, and traces his ‘walks’). Rather than a rejection of the Augustan line Waller represents, Griffin reads Collins’s retreat as a ‘temporary defeat’.¹¹¹ He shows that ‘whereas the Wartons turn to Milton unproblematically, Collins knows, it is what his poem is about, that to go from “Pope” to “Milton” is to go from the frying pan into the fire’.¹¹² Whether a retreat or a defeat, Smith’s sonnet XLVI – accentuated by its position in *Elegiac Sonnets* – again reveals connections and lines of influence elsewhere suppressed, and couplet becomes sonnet.¹¹³

The two Penshurst sonnets of the Wartonian Hamley are thus interestingly situated. That Smith and Hamley should meet at Penshurst is perhaps not surprising: the sonnets of Warton’s pupils frequently share with Smith’s something of an ‘elegiac’ hue, and an interest in abandoned places. Contrary to Smith, however, their use of the sonnet form is aligned with the historical subjects they explore, steeped in looking back. Hamley’s first sonnet ‘Written at Penshurst’ (XII) features Sir Philip and Algernon Sydney and, like Smith’s, invokes Penshurst’s fallenness: ‘How art thou chang’d! beside the murm’ring fall | Of some lone rill, that seems in fairy ground’: its Wartonian nature is confirmed by an echo of Warton’s Loddon sonnet in ‘fairy ground’.¹¹⁴ The second sonnet of the same title (XLIV) is closer to Smith’s own:

Ye Walls, for gallantry and knighthood fam’d,
Which oft with sounds of social pleasure rung;
Ye groves and lawns, where Waller’s tuneful tongue
To gales and murm’ring streams his love proclaim’d,
And each wild echo Sacharissa nam’d;
Your white cascades, with foamy tumult flung
Down the steep slope, and glades so sweetly sung;
No poet now explores with feet unblam’d.

¹⁰⁹ Collins, ‘Ode on the Poetical Character’, *Poems*, ed. by Lonsdale, pp. 427-435 (ll. 63-76).

¹¹⁰ Lonsdale, *Poems*, p. 435, n.

¹¹¹ Griffin, *Wordsworth’s Pope*, p. 63.

¹¹² Griffin, p. 63.

¹¹³ Waller also features in an earlier untitled poem by Collins unpublished in his lifetime, which is in couplets, and presents the standard view of Waller’s place in literary history: ‘tuned with polished sounds our barbarous tongue’ (Collins, ‘[Lines addressed to Jacob Tonson]’, *Poems*, ed. by Lonsdale, pp. 530-533 (l. 12)). Thus, a discrepancy is revealed between Collins’s published ‘Ode’, rejecting Waller, and the unpublished fragment which shows a greater debt and allegiance.

¹¹⁴ Hamley, ‘Sonnet XII. Written at Penshurst’, *Sonnets*, p. 16 (ll. 9-10).

Yet suffer me to breathe your vernal gales,
 A poet, no! but of that gentle train,
 Who love to mark in woods and pathless vales
 Each rural sweet; and, wand'ring o'er the plain,
 Deeds of old prowess and romantic tales
 To muse, and hear the nightingale complain.¹¹⁵

Hamley's description of Penshurst is indeed similar to that of Smith's. Although Waller also features in Hamley's sonnet, the speaker does not explore the 'groves and lawns' in those terms: 'No poet now explores with feet unblam'd' Waller's poetic space, in a self-deprecating gesture. The sestet sets out a different approach, as the speaker invokes an alternative, 'gentle train', perhaps the 'train' of Milton's first sonnet, the space of which the final line recalls through the presence of the nightingale, important to the Wartonian genealogy (yet also connecting it with Smith's sonnets, indicative of the overlaps between different modes). Like Smith, Hamley presents a wanderer, yet rather than tracing Waller's walks, they muse upon 'Deeds of old prowess and romantic tales': a different, more remote sense of Penshurst, and a more Wartonian one, 'for gallantry and knighthood famed'. Smith's own Penshurst sonnet also contains a Wartonian echo: the 'historic page' of the final line also appears in Warton's sonnet III, 'Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon'. In Warton's sonnet, the 'poring child' studies, recovers, and inscribes his sonnet onto the 'historic page' itself. Smith is not concerned with these acts of historical recovery – her Hotwells sonnet is written in a simple pocket book – and the phrase appears in the couplet after the turn of Smith's sonnet, which enacts a split between her own transient verse and the 'historic' poet's lay. Smith's 'historic page' here seems to be that of the refined Waller, the sort of poet Warton's historical recoveries evade, moreover; Smith too differentiates herself from Waller in sonnet XLIV, yet also follows from him, in a complex set of literary negotiations.

Smith ends *Elegiac Sonnets* with another 'country house' poem: the final sonnet XCII is 'Written at Bignor Park in Sussex, in August 1799' (1800), echoing the title of the earlier 'Written at Penshurst, in autumn 1788', and a link is implicitly – and perhaps boldly – drawn between the literary locations of Penshurst and Bignor Park, her childhood home. The sonnet recalls the title-page of the very first editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, 'by Charlotte Smith, of Bignor Park, in Sussex', which presents a gentlewoman poet, yet is underpinned by an 'elegiac' discrepancy between real and presented circumstances. As Curran writes in a note to sonnet XCII, Bignor Park 'served as a reminder of the placid genteel existence once promised but then denied to her'.¹¹⁶ Throughout *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith is continually shut

¹¹⁵ Hamley, 'Sonnet XLIV. Written at Penshurst', *Sonnets*, p. 48.

¹¹⁶ Curran, *Poems*, p. 78, n.

out and excluded from happiness, place, literary tradition: an exile and wanderer, dispossessed and disinherited. As noted, as a literary form, the elegy has long-standing connections with inheritance and Smith's sense of dispossession is built into the form of the 'elegiac sonnet', and encoded in the frontispiece of these early editions, with a sense in this final sonnet of having come full circle. A letter from Smith in 1805, as the house was on the point of being sold, articulates the significance of Bignor Park to Smith:

Among the various trials of a life, which has been occupied by many severe ones since I was fifteen is that I am to undergo tomorrow when I must take leave for ever of this place —The residence of my family for about 100 years, having become my Grandfathers property in his youth in 1707. Beauty of situation & the remembrance of my first & only happy days have always made it particularly agreeable to me, even when peu a peu, I have seen all the fine estates near it which once belonged to my father vanish [...]

Well! Local attachments are extremely foolish.

(*Letters*, 686)

Throughout her life, the estate has represented Smith's 'first and only days' of happiness (prior to her marriage at fifteen), and also the stature and distinction of her family which has been gradually reduced, as the familial claim upon the landscape has been lost 'peu and peu'. Smith's somewhat vexed relationship with her native landscape means that her poetic 'local attachment' has been replaced with a more practical, defeated – and not a very Romantic – one, a resolution that such attachments are 'extremely foolish'. Smith's letter gives details of how the house has come to be sold 'somehow', as she repeats, after becoming the property of her sister's husband, due to the inability of her brother to pay Catharine Dorset her annuity from their father's fortune. Patrilineage has been disrupted, but only temporarily, passing through Dorset to her husband, who was then forced to sell the house in order to support their daughter and her husband.¹¹⁷ The situation is somewhat redolent of that of Penshurst Place, which also passed temporarily to a female family member. Smith perhaps draws on her experience of leaving her family home in sonnet L, originally published in *Celestina*, where the eponymous heroine is forced to leave a beloved home, although it is a maternal rather than paternal scene she leaves:

FAREWEL, ye lawns! – by fond remembrance blest,
As witnesses of gay unclouded hours;
Where, to maternal Friendship's bosom prest,
My happy childhood past amid your bowers.

(46, ll. 1-4)

¹¹⁷ Bignor Park was bought by Cornish tin miner John Hawkins, who knocked down the original house and built the present house in 1826-9, the subject of a sketch by Constable in 1834 – who also sketched the view from the house (fig. 16). The original house was built around 1584 and is depicted in two 1780 watercolour drawings by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (fig. 2, 15).

Houses are invested with much importance in Smith's novels. Property and its ownership is central to *Emmeline*, *Celestina*, *The Old Manor House*, and *Marchmont*. In *Emmeline*, the dispossessed heroine eventually comes into her rightful ownership of Mowbray Castle, which is fundamental to her fulfilment and happiness; and Smith's other novels also often feature female characters who come into an inheritance which Smith herself woefully lacked.

Smith's final sonnet was written six years prior to the letter quoted above, in August 1799. Unusually, the specific circumstances of the sonnet can be located in Smith's correspondence. Smith writes of her ill-health, pronounced 'to be undoubtedly dropsical owing to extreme weakness from over fatigue & uneasiness of mind' (*Letters*, 332). She has been advised to go to the seaside, but due to financial difficulties and a belief that the legal issues which 'have so long perplex'd & impoverished my family and myself' are on – so she dares to hope – 'the eve of being concluded', she is 'lending' Bignor Park from her sister and writes:

I have found very great benefit from this my native air, but many very disagreeable symptoms still remain [...] I have used every moment of my convalescence (save what the necessity of going out in a Park chair for exercise has robbed me of) in trying to finish in the best manner the little poems I owe you which I trust will not be worse done for being retouched in the beautiful & beloved spot.
(*Letters*, 332)

Thus, Smith anticipates the final resolution of her children's inheritance, back at her childhood home.¹¹⁸ She is but 'lending' the house from her sister, though – a temporary, tenuous inhabitation – and no longer able to wander freely, she is limited by a chair. The letter is dated to the same month given in the sonnet's title – August, not the usual liminal, autumnal time – and finds Smith at this 'beautiful spot', although the benefits of her 'native air' are not overly apparent:

LOW murmurs creep along the woody vale,
The tremulous Aspens shudder in the breeze,
Slow o'er the downs the leaden vapours sail,
While I, beneath these old paternal trees,
Mark the dark shadows of the threaten'd storm,
As gathering clouds o'erveil the morning sun;
They pass! — But oh! ye visions bright and warm
With which even here my sanguine youth begun,
Ye are obscured for ever!—And too late
The poor Slave shakes the unworthy bonds away
Which crush'd her! — Lo! the radiant star of day
Lights up this lovely scene anew — My fate

¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, Smith's optimism was misplaced: the new trustees, Lord Egremont and Smith's brother, who took over from Robinson presented yet new difficulties.

Nor hope nor joy illumines — Nor for me
Return those rosy hours which here I used to see!

(89)

The sonnet presents an unsettling landscape of strange murmurs, shudders and shadows; populated by ‘paternal trees’ it is characterised as male. It is not overly irregular in its rhyme, *ababcdcdeffegg*, deviating only slightly from the English form, but the discrepancy between form and sense creates a more unsettling picture. The opening six lines are relatively straightforward, despite the strange scene they set, yet with line seven, the sonnet begins to undo and split; reflecting the divide between real and metaphorical scenes, past and present which the sonnet explores. The gathering clouds which ‘o’erveil’ the sun pass, but the ‘visions bright and warm’ of youth remain ‘obscured’. Past, present, real and desired circumstances split and jar, mimed by the dashes and exclamations which break up the lines as they are simultaneously enjambed. The sonnet creates an effect of being out of joint, meaning and form cannot quite match or keep up, miming the circumstances of Smith’s life: the ‘unworthy bonds’ have been shaken away ‘too late’. It seems significant that Smith’s volume ends with this landscape, rather than the seascape which does offer relief and integration between content and form elsewhere. Her letter reveals that she has been advised ‘to go immediately to the Sea side’, but legal affairs prevent her: the volume could have ended with a characteristic sonnet on the seascape, a location firmly in the present and lacking issues of inheritance and ownership – decisively not ‘paternal’ – which Smith is able to claim in some sense or possess. However, despite the sonnet’s elegiac mode, and sense of dispossession and disinheritance, it showcases Smith’s innovation and influential mode: its infusion of form with content; self with place; past and present, in its re-visitation mode. Curiously, the two have become fused: Smith’s ‘elegiac’, outsider, dispossessed and miserable position (which is, after all her signature theme, that for which she is known) is intertwined with her innovative use of form. Although the sonnet may look back to the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, and works on a similar model to sonnet V ‘To the South Downs’, this literary re-visitation or echo serves to highlight the difference from Smith’s earlier sonnet approach.¹¹⁹ Although not a sea sonnet, the sonnet undoes or destabilises the form in a similar way to sonnet LXXXVI, a mode which is here used both to inscribe and undercut the alienation and dispossession of sonnet V. While in the first edition the ‘little Poems which are here called Sonnets, have, I believe, no very just claim to that title’, by 1800,

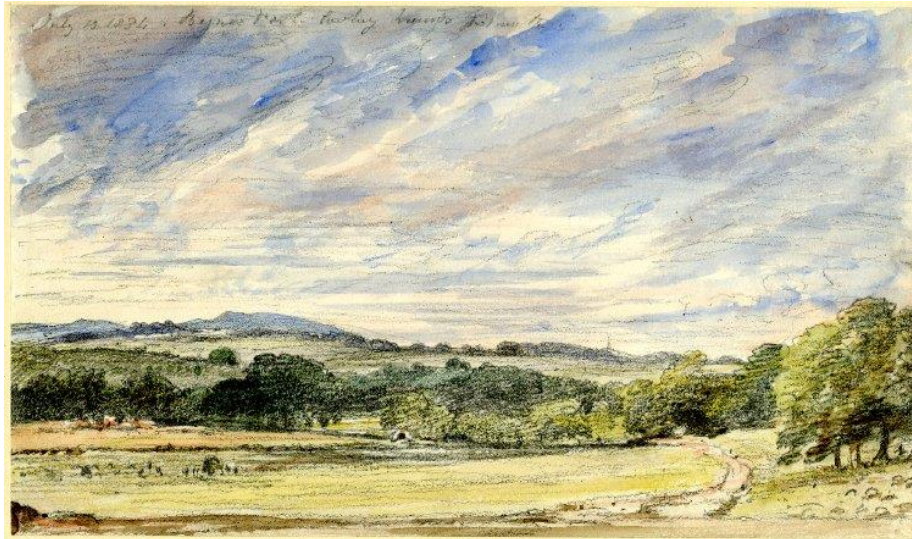
¹¹⁹ Rovee finds an echo of Gray’s sonnet in this final sonnet, and argues that ‘the denial of Smith’s property doubles as the impossibility of returning to the “rosy hours” of her childhood. And yet this defeat is expressed through an active usurpation [...] Smith freely accesses the treasure of a literary past’ (Rovee, p. 126). As seen, Gray’s poetry is variously echoed and disrupted throughout *Elegiac Sonnets* and the echo here is not particularly strong, yet through her negotiations elsewhere – as I have shown – Smith can be said to usurp Gray and other eighteenth-century sonnet predecessors, which indeed undercuts the defeat of this final sonnet.

Smith's 'claim' upon the form is fully established, she is credited with its revival and with initiating a certain brand of the form, above male contemporaries (despite the subsequent usurpations), as this chapter has shown. Her actual disinheritance and dispossession, with no legal 'claim' on Bignor Park, is offset by her literary claim to the sonnet and influential position, which despite her modesty Smith was indeed aware of.¹²⁰ Similarly, through the relationship between sonnets XLVI 'Written at Penshurst' and XCII 'Written at Bignor Park', although Smith's speaker may remain on the margins of both properties, a dispossessed outsider, the implicit alignment of these two literary homes, and thus the poets who have inhabited them, places Smith in a stronger, more empowered literary position. As the final literary location of the volume, Bignor Park seems a fitting one in which to leave Smith as *Elegiac Sonnets* ends; heightened by her own sense that it is but a temporary stay before her familial home and is sold and her access to this 'paternal' space is lost.



15. S. H. Grimm, Watercolour view of the back of Bignor Park (1780)

¹²⁰ 'I, who am fetter'd eternally by the most eminent literary Men' as she wrote in 1791 (*Letters*, 40). By 1802, however, Smith believed that she had fallen firmly into literary obscurity: 'I [...] see that the *ci devant* celebrated Charlotte Smith may sink as quietly into the gulph of oblivion, as if she had only been Shakespeares matron & had suckled fools & chronicled small beer without having done much else' (*Letters*, 451). This sentiment is contradicted however by her poem 'To My Lyre', written shortly before her death in which Smith imagines her posthumous fate: 'Pity shall my strains rehearse, | And tell my name to distant ages' (214-215, ll. 47-48).



16. Constable, 'July 10 1834. Bignor Park looking towards Petworth'

Chapter 5 Botany to Beachy Head

This final section narrows in focus, following Smith's own gaze in her late sonnets and poems: in the editions which completed *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797 and 1800), several sonnets display an involvement with nature in rather a different mode from the vast seascape, as the prospect view is exchanged for the close-up observation of the botanist or naturalist, necessitating an engagement with form on a somewhat different scale. Thus, rather than a specific landscape, at the crux of Smith's late poems is a certain mode of engaging with or looking at place; which can also be used to locate Smith in a different way in literary tradition. These sonnets reflect the development of Smith's wider interest in botany and natural history which informs many of her late works, especially those written for children: *Rural Walks* (1795), *Rambles Farther* (1796), *Minor Morals* (1798) and *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (1804), as well as her novel *The Young Philosopher* (1798) and the poems of *Beachy Head* (1807). Smith proposed the composition of a botanical guide to her publishers in 1797, to be illustrated by her sister, although this never materialised.¹ She also corresponded with the president of the Linnaean society, Dr. James Edward Smith, to whom she wrote in 1798, after having relocated to London from the country,

my passion for plants rather increases as the power of gratification diminishes; and although I must henceforth [...] botanize on annuals in garden pots out at a window, it will be a considerable consolation to have an opportunity of being known to the principal of that delightful and soothing study.

(*Letters*, 283)

The 'soothing' nature of botanical study seems to be its principal attraction for Smith, who turned to it in earnest after the death of her daughter Anna Augusta in 1795; the shift also seems bound up with Smith's sense of the imminence of her own death, and that her literary career was reaching its end.

Accordingly, Smith features prominently in critical works that have explored the rise of botany as a female pursuit in the late eighteenth century, which found fruition in a variety of modes, ranging from poems and drawings to fashion items.² Smith's poem 'Flora' in particular – first published in *Conversations* and then *Beachy Head* – assumes a significant place within the body of botanical poetry (with scientific notes) by women writers of the

¹ See *Letters*, 283.

² See Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Sam George, *Botany, Sexuality & Women's Writing 1760-1830: From Modest Shoot to Forward Plant* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

time.³ The science had been popularised by the work of the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné, or Linnaeus (1707–1778), whose system for plant classification *Systema Naturae* (1735) supplied simplified binomial names for plants and founded the influential ‘sexual system’ of classification, versified by Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) in his wildly popular *The Loves of Plants* (1789), from which Smith quotes in multiple sonnets of her second volume. While botany was an acceptable and encouraged female pursuit in the late eighteenth century, the discourse of sexuality Linnaean taxonomy exposed female readers to was not without its perceived dangers, and Smith was one of the poets named by Richard Polwhele in his poem *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), which attacked botanising women.⁴

In an essay on Smith’s engagement with botany, Judith Pascoe argues that Darwin’s “‘minuteness”, his way of ‘holding a magnifying glass to the tiniest facets of natural world acted as a force for liberation’ for Smith in her later works.⁵ Dispensing with the prospect view in favour of the close-up attention of the botanist, ‘Smith’s late poetry points to a different attitude toward nature from what we have come to expect of Romantic poets’, exchanging transcendence for a more intimate acquaintance and thus challenging prevailing aesthetic principles.⁶ Notwithstanding the opening of ‘Beachy Head’, Pascoe argues that Smith ‘moves quickly from the majestic to the minute, from the sublime to the beautiful, refusing to reinscribe her contemporaries’ hierarchization of these terms’: not surprising, Pascoe says, given the fact that women could not ramble with the abandon of their male contemporaries.⁷ In this way, writes Pascoe, ‘Smith’s poetry seems in an odd way to break the bonds of containment by celebrating the infiniteness of particularity’, the ‘limitations of a female vantage point become a force of liberation’ and botany thus empowers the woman poet.⁸ Pascoe’s focus is not on the sonnet here, but her comments are pertinent to the form considering its size. Indeed, while Smith’s seascape sonnets massively extend its scope, her botanical sonnets ‘break the bonds of containment’ in a different way. Despite the increased appropriation of the botanist’s gaze in Smith’s later works, however, it never replaces the

³ The poem features prominently in George’s book, and is included in her appendix of ‘Botanical poems by women’.

⁴ Polwhele also praises Smith’s sonnets in the note to her name in the poem, however. He also wrote sonnets of his own – first published in *Pictures from Nature. In Twelve Sonnets* (1785), which includes a ‘Few Observations on Sonnet Writing’ in which Polwhele writes that he ‘has endeavoured to produce Specimens of the old [Italian] and new Construction; happy – if he has caught a Portion of Simplicity and Sweetness from the pensive Muse of Bignor-Park’ (Polwhele, *Pictures from Nature*, p. iii). Indeed, he uses both the Italian and English sonnet forms; two are in couplets in eight-syllable lines. As well as ‘pictures of nature’, four sonnets take Polwhele’s wife Laura as their subject.

⁵ Judith Pascoe, ‘Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith’, in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. by Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) pp. 193-209 (pp. 202 and 203).

⁶ Pascoe, p. 203.

⁷ Pascoe, p. 204.

⁸ Pascoe, pp. 204-205.

prospect view in her sonnets – that transcendent ‘Romantic’ connection with nature Pascoe sees Smith as challenging. The second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797), for example, which reflects Smith’s botanical interests, also contains more seascape sonnets than any other edition. The botanically-informed 1798 novel *The Young Philosopher* contains multiple sublime sea scenes and introduces the significant sonnet ‘Written near a Port on a dark Evening’, reprinted in the final edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Indeed, the two differing modes of engaging with nature coalesce in the last two editions, and are both empowering and liberating in different ways, to which use of ‘form’ is central. Smith’s posthumous masterpiece ‘Beachy Head’ goes some way to reconcile the two views – which this chapter will end by considering – and the poem shifts between them within the same landscape.

Several of Smith’s sonnets refer to botanical drawings: most notably LXV ‘To Dr. Parry of Bath, with some botanic drawings which had been made some years’ (1797) and XCI, ‘Reflections on some Drawings of Plants’ (1800). Sonnet LXXXV, first published in *The Young Philosopher*, is also written to accompany botanical drawings in the novel and an earlier sonnet, XXXVII, is ‘Sent to the Honorable Mrs. O’Neill, with painted Flowers’ (1789). Thus, in these sonnets the pictorial context surrounding her land and seascape sonnets is exchanged for a different mode of *ut pictura poesis*. The exchange is illuminated by a passage in volume one of *Minor Morals* (1798), which is worth quoting from at length:

As for you, my dear Mary, you know, that when your father proposed cultivating the talent he thought he perceived you had for drawing, by having masters attend you at great expence to teach you to draw figures and landscapes, I desired you might, at least for the present, decline his intended kindness, and that you might learn to draw flowers. For this choice I had many reasons [...] For this pursuit [landscape painting], however, it appeared to me that the shortness of your sight disqualified you; but not so for the delineation of plants and flowers. They offer themselves in millions of different forms, all equally beautiful and curious, in the woods, under the shelter of hedges rows and copses, on the high downy hills, or the luxurious meadows among the grass. They clothe the rocks that bound the hollow ways, and some slightly tapestry even the rugged chalk or gravelly cliffs that are washed by the spray of the sea. Others float on the surface of the river, or bend over the streams among the reeds; while some species cover, with purple bells or golden papilionaceous blossoms, the stony or sandy heath; and not a few find nourishment among the intersices of the decayed wall, or on the roof of the cottage.

(XII, 221)

The drawing ‘master’ Mary’s father has engaged for her recalls Smith’s own tuition as a child by the landscape artist George Smith, and like Mary, Smith is also known to have been short-sighted.⁹ Fletcher states that Smith’s ‘gift was for close studies of flowers and leaves’,

⁹ In the *Public Characters* biographical account, Smith’s fondness for drawing landscapes is documented, yet ‘the shortness of her sight precluded her from attaining any degree of perfection’ in the art (Hays, p. 45).

and refers to her ‘detailed, coloured line drawings’ although she does not give any further evidence of these.¹⁰ However, Hilbish’s 1941 dissertation reproduces a watercolour painting of some flowers by Smith from her childhood (fig. 17). The monochrome reproduction is poor in quality, yet Hilbish describes ‘skill in tinting and shading’, ‘color and fine pen lines’, and names ‘blue bells and pink and blue anemones’ amongst the flowers.¹¹



17. Charlotte Smith, watercolour, from Hilbish, *Charlotte Smith: Poet and Novelist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1941)

Goddess of Botany

Although sonnets with a botanical emphasis precede it, sonnet LXXIX ‘To the Goddess of Botany’ (1797) heralds Smith’s interest in the pursuit:

¹⁰ Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 13. In *The Young Philosopher*, Medora and her mother Mrs. Glenmorris are both adept at making botanical drawings.

¹¹ Florence May Anna Hilbish, *Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist (1749-1806)*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1941), pp. 14 and 15. Curiously, this watercolour is not mentioned by Fletcher, or in any of the critical material on Smith’s botanical writing and drawing; I have been unable to trace the current whereabouts of the watercolour.

OF Folly weary, shrinking from the view
 Of Violence and Fraud, allow'd to take
 All peace from humble life; I would forsake
 Their haunts for ever, and, sweet Nymph! with you
 Find shelter; where my tired, and tear-swoln eyes,
 Among your silent shades of soothing hue,
 Your 'bells and florets of unnumber'd dyes'
 Might rest – And learn the bright varieties
 That from your lovely hands are fed with dew;
 And every veined leaf, that trembling sighs
 In mead or woodland; or in wilds remote,
 Or lurk with mosses in the humid caves,
 Mantle the cliffs, on dimpling rivers float,
 Or stream from coral rocks beneath the Ocean waves.

(82)

As I have shown, Smith's seascapes often correspond with her use of the sonnet, opening up the compact form. Her botanical sonnets are also concerned with form and structure, albeit on a much smaller, more closely observed, scale: Smith's interest is in learning about 'every veined leaf' in sonnet LXXIX.¹² Thus, formal and thematic space again converge, yet the sonnet is necessarily much reduced in scale, beautiful rather than sublime, in a more fitting spatial correspondence, perhaps. Critics have noted analogies drawn by Smith between poetic and botanical forms, although not in the sonnets.¹³ In 'To the Goddess of Botany', an initial correspondence can be identified in the 'variety' Smith's sonnet celebrates. The sonnet emphasises the variety of nature's forms, the "'bells and florets of unnumber'd dyes'" and the 'bright varieties' nurtured by the goddess of botany. The last four lines, offering a series of alternative locations for the 'veined leaf', again emphasise diversity, reminiscent of the passage quoted above on botanical drawing which similarly celebrates the 'millions of different forms' of plants, located in woods, on the riverbank and sea cliffs.¹⁴ Like earlier sonnets, sonnet LXXIX is concerned with the river and sea, which it moves between, engaging with the two landscapes in a different mode, and – as also seen in the *Minor Morals* passage – Smith's later works move more fluidly and easily between them within the

¹² The role of Smith's poet is thus interestingly different from that set out by Imlac in Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759): 'He does not number the streaks of the tulip' (Johnson, 'The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia', *The Oxford Authors*, pp. 335-418 (p. 352)). The role is also rather different from later, 'Romantic' conceptions, which the leaf recalls, most notably in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820), in which the interest is not in the particularities of the leaf itself, but how the poet moves through and transcends it, embracing wider concerns. This is also reflected through form: Shelley's use of the terza rima form nods to the sonnet, yet also transcends it.

¹³ Dolan suggests that *Conversations*, as much a textbook on poetry as on nature, 'posits an analogy between the structure of poems and the structure of plants. Just as she teaches the children to distinguish between species of plants and animals, Mrs. Talbot teaches them to distinguish among various poetic forms' (*Seeing Suffering*, p. 118).

¹⁴ The quotation "'bells and florets of unnumber'd dyes'" modulates the 'thousand hues' of Milton's *Lycidas*, enhancing multiplicity perhaps (Milton, 'Lycidas', *Complete Shorter Poems*, pp. 237-256 (l. 135)).

same work. The emphasis on multiplicity is echoed in a letter from Smith to her publishers Cadell and Davies concerning the 1797 volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*, in which sonnet LXXIX first appeared. She writes: ‘I wish to make as much variety of verse in this book as possible – & have studiously varied the measure of the quatrains &c’ (*Letters*, 269). Indeed, the sonnets and other poems of the volume do vary considerably in form: fifteen non-sonnet poems are included, while twelve out of the twenty-five sonnets take a variety of irregular forms. The ‘variety of verse’ named by Smith in the letter matches the ‘bright varieties’ of nature her sonnet’s speaker seeks to learn, while the study that botany entails is suggested in the way Smith has ‘studiously varied the measure’ of her poems, in a scientific way.

Sonnet LXXIX itself is irregular, and one of Smith’s more formally interesting and experimental sonnets: rhyming *abbacaccadede*, no recognisable sonnet form dominates as it opens with a closed Italian quatrain and closes with an English elegiac one, while a sestet or double tercet intervenes. The run-over lines of the sonnet and the continuation of the a-rhyme further complicate structure, and the sonnet eludes both Italian and English forms in equal measure. The rhyme suggests the variety, the innumerability even, of forms the sonnet is interested in. Indeed, sonnet LXXIX seems to occupy different formal spaces simultaneously, in a similar way to how it is concerned with different locations and types of leaf; the way it splits itself between mead, woodland, river and sea. Attention is drawn to this by the repetition of ‘or’, as in sonnet LXXXVI (‘Written near a Port’), similarly pulled between different forms and locations. The sonnet’s unusual form may also more specifically suggest the ‘veined leaf’ in its construction; with the couplet at its centre constituting the central vein from which other veins emanate out. The final line of the sonnet offers a different mode of congruence: ‘Or stream from coral rocks beneath the Ocean wave’ is an alexandrine and mimes the marine leaf in the way it streams out from beneath the sonnet – conspicuously long on the printed page.

The correspondences inferred between leaf and poetic forms in ‘To the Goddess of Botany’ has interesting implications in terms of the sonnet. Like the natural spring rising from the earth and the ‘spontaneous overflow’, the streaming leaf suggests originality and spontaneity. In *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), Young appropriates an organic metaphor to his exposition of originality: an ‘*Original* may be said to be of a *vegetable* nature; it rises *spontaneously* from the root of Genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*’, echoed by Coleridge in his translation of Schlegel on ‘organische’ form in 1811.¹⁵ The leaf analogy is

¹⁵ Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, p. 12. It is important to point out that Fairer’s *Organising Poetry* is informed by a rather different sense of the ‘organic’, which ‘carries a sense and set of associations at odds with those traditionally exploited in criticism of Coleridge and his

also invoked by Keats in his later ‘Romantic’ axiom that ‘if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all’.¹⁶ This is undercut through the emphasis on botanical study and learning, however, and how Smith ‘studiously varied the measures’ of her poems, in addition to their botanical content. Smith’s sonnets elude the formal and other divisions and distinctions underlying this discourse, such as organic and mechanic, and as previously discussed, the somewhat contradictory illegitimate and irregular sonnet is an interesting case in this respect, pulled between the generic and anti-generic. Indeed, contrary to sonnet LXXIX, Smith’s sonnets which display an interest in botanical drawing imply a less naturalised approach to form, and emphasise imitation. Sonnet LXV ‘To Dr. Parry of Bath, with some botanic drawings which had been made some years’ (1797) refers to ‘The slight botanic pencil’s mimic powers’ (73-74, l. 8) and sonnet XXXVII, ‘Sent to the Honorable Mrs. O’Neill, with painted Flowers’ to the ‘mimic pencil’ (38, l. 9). Sonnet XCI, ‘Reflections on some drawings of plants’, also emphasises mimicry:

I CAN in groups these mimic flowers compose,
 These bells and golden eyes, embathed in dew;
 Catch the soft blush that warms the early Rose,
 Or the pale Iris cloud with veins of blue;
 Copy the scallop’d leaves, and downy stems,
 And bid the pencil’s varied shades arrest
 Spring’s humid buds, and Summer’s musky gems;

(89, ll. 1-7)

Like ‘To the Goddess of Botany’, sonnet XCI takes a close-up view of plants and flowers – the ‘veins of blue’ of the iris and ‘scallop’d leaves’ – although here through the medium of drawing. Correspondences can perhaps be identified between the forms of plant life and the sonnet: like the edge of the leaf, the sonnet’s left-hand edge appears scalloped on the printed page through the alternating indentation of lines, reflecting the rhyme. Unlike sonnet LXXIX, however, with its suggestion of spontaneity, sonnet XCI emphasises the mimicry and copying of forms through drawing: these are ‘mimic flowers’, the leaves and stems a ‘copy’.¹⁷ Formally, the sonnet is not quite a copy, however, rhyming *abab cdcd efgg*. Sonnets XCI and LXV also have other interesting formal implications. In sonnet LXV, ‘form’ is used to refer to the specimens Smith has drawn: ‘Luxuriant Summer’s evanescent forms, | And Spring’s soft blooms with pencil light I drew’ (4), emphasising transience and insubstantiality. References to ‘evanescent forms’, the ‘light’ and ‘slight’ all evoke a sense of

associates [...] what is relevant to my purposes is a home-grown eighteenth-century organic of markedly different character, an empirical concept with very different critical implications’ (*Organising Poetry*, p. 2), focused on process, inheritance and continuity rather than new beginnings.

¹⁶ Keats, ‘Letter to John Taylor, 27th February, 1818’, *The Oxford Authors*, p. 380.

¹⁷ Labbe has explored the operations of *ut pictura poesis* in this sonnet: see ‘Every Poet Her Own Drawing Master: Charlotte Smith, Anna Seward and *Ut Pictura Poesis*’, in *Early Romantics*, pp. 200-215.

Smith's use of the sonnet, often aligned with transience and insubstantiality. The sonnet is one of five in the second volume which lament the death of Anna Augusta, often with a botanical element. A correlation is implied here between the flowers and Smith's family: 'the lovely family of flowers | Shrink from the bleakness of the Northern blast' (6) – as Smith's two modes of nature come into conflict – and 'like' this, 'So fail' the 'botanic pencil's mimic powers' (7-8). The poem is coloured throughout by a failure, in which Smith's sonnet, another 'evanescent form', also becomes implicated. In sonnet XCI, the 'form' is that of Anna Augusta herself: 'I have no semblance of that form adored, | That form, expressive of a soul divine, | So early blighted' (9-11), with the suggestion of plant-life in 'blight' (also present in sonnet LXV).¹⁸ The sonnet is defined by a discrepancy between Smith's ability to 'compose', 'catch', 'copy' and 'arrest' the plants through drawing, and the absence of a 'semblance of that form adored', an image or presence of her daughter. Smith's sonnet is about an absence or failure of form and representation. The sonnet's immovable, 'ceaseless grief' also contrasts with the soothing, 'streaming leaf' of sonnet LXXIX.

Smith's sonnet, and her other elegiac Anna Augusta sonnets, may be in dialogue with the sonnets of Sir Brooke Boothby (1744–1824), a baronet, poet, amateur botanist, and member of Seward's and Darwin's Lichfield circle. The sonnet prior to XCI in *Elegiac Sonnets*, XC 'To Oblivion', refers to sonnet XIII of Boothby's *Sorrows. Sacred to the Memory of Penelope* (1796), the only later eighteenth-century sonnet Smith directly quotes from in *Elegiac Sonnets*. The sequence of twenty-four sonnets – and other poems – in Boothby's *Sorrows* lament the death of his daughter who had died in 1791 in her sixth year, and his 'elegiac' sonnets clearly resonate with Smith's own. The influence of Petrarch colours Boothby's volume: all but three sonnets take the Italian octave of *abbaabba*, with a variety of sestet, while five are translations from Petrarch. A portrait of the child had been made during her lifetime by Joshua Reynolds in 1788, while after her death Boothby commissioned a marble monument in 1793 from the sculptor Thomas Banks, and a painting by Henry Fuseli, *The Apotheosis of Penelope Boothby* (1792). All three of these pieces are reproduced in stipple engravings in Boothby's *Sorrows* and two are the subject of sonnets (XII and XVI). When Smith bemoans that 'save the portrait on my bleeding breast, | I have no semblance of that form adored' in sonnet XCI, she could be thinking of Boothby's multiple semblances of Penelope. His use of the Italian form also contrasts with Smith's more insubstantial sonnet forms steeped in an absence and inability to represent. In sonnet XC 'To Oblivion' she clearly identifies with Boothby and his 'misery living, hope and

¹⁸ Smith also refers to her daughter's form in sonnet LXXXIX 'for never more the form | I loved' (11). In earlier sonnets 'form' also denotes dead young women: translations from Petrarch refer to Laura's 'angel form' (XV, l. 7 and XVI, l. 12) and the graveside sonnet XLIX originating in *Celestina* also refers to the 'form' (14) of the deceased young woman.

pleasure dead’ – the quotation she appropriates (88) – in what is perhaps her most despairing sonnet, ‘heartless, helpless, hopeless’ (88, l. 11).

To return to sonnet LXXIX, in an interesting essay, Judith Hawley reads Smith’s ‘To the goddess of botany’ in light of Sacks’s conception of the elegy, and the significance of life-giving springs and continuing rivers – as opposed to the desolate sea – he identifies within the genre. ‘Smith’s stream is buried under the sea, or rather the stream is a verb and what we have is a surreal streaming out of bells and florets’, Hawley writes, contrasting this with Smith’s sonnets which ‘situate the speaker on the sea shore on a perilous rocky cliff, contemplating the destructive forces of the sea’.¹⁹ She argues that the ending of sonnet LXXIX is much more ambiguous: ‘the subject of the elegy which is, I would argue, Smith’s own life, both streams with natural renewal and drowns’.²⁰ Although I do not necessarily agree that the sonnet must have an elegiac ‘subject’ (or that it must be Smith), there is indeed a movement and continuing force at the end of this sonnet in the form of the streaming leaf, which is absent in Smith’s seascape sonnets; many of Smith’s late poems enact a similar simultaneous loss and empowerment, death and continuation. The quotation from elegy ‘Lycidas’ – the poem which provides the material for Sacks’s reading – in sonnet LXXIX is rather apt in this context. Moreover, ‘Lycidas’ moves from death, ‘under the whelming tide’, like Smith’s leaf, to natural renewal and continuation; Lycidas is ‘sunk low, but mounted high’.²¹ Both poems are able to occupy two places or states at once.

Elizabeth Dolan has argued that Smith’s works of this time discover the ‘therapeutic value of the botanical gaze’, which Dolan locates in the context of Smith’s wider interest in therapeutic regimens for a variety of illnesses.²² Sonnet LXXIX grounds Smith’s engagement with botany explicitly in the context of her suffering, which its massive note, the largest in *Elegiac Sonnets*, situates in a literary tradition spanning Milton and Rousseau.²³

¹⁹ Hawley, ‘Losses and Gains’, ‘Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*: Losses and Gains’, in *Women’s Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730-1820*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 184-198 (p. 193).

²⁰ Hawley, p. 193. Hawley points out another indeterminate element of sonnet LXXIX – the subject of the sonnet’s final lines: is it the ‘veined leaf’ which lurks, mantles, floats and streams, or the ‘I’ introduced in line 3? ‘the syntax is so fluid that the speaker becomes lost in the imagined process’ (p. 193). Other poems and passages by Smith locate leaves in a variety of settings and move between them, suggesting that the subject is indeed the ‘veined leaf’ here, but the sestet can certainly be read it more ways than one; again the sonnet is unfixed.

²¹ Milton, ‘Lycidas’, ll. 157 and 172.

²² Dolan, *Seeing Suffering*, p. 102.

²³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) also turned to botany at the end of his life, and spent two years botanising in Switzerland before his death, where he found peace and solace after a lifetime of exile and unhappiness. Smith quotes from his *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) and draws on the persona of the solitary, botanising wanderer of *Rêveries*. In her note Smith also quotes from the end of

Smith's wild seascapes may correspond with her suffering 'soul', yet they offer no respite; botany's 'silent shades' offer shelter and alleviation. Indeed, there has been a clear shift from the earlier impassioned sea sonnet XXXV 'To Fortitude' (1786), in which Smith bids a different 'nymph' to 'come! – and shew how vain the cares that press | On my weak bosom' (5-6).

Economies of Vegetation

As well as occupying different sonnet spaces, Smith's sonnet LXXIX overrides another formal divide. Her poem addresses the speaker of Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1792, dated 1791), consisting of two long didactic poems in rhyming couplets, highly influential in the popularisation of botany, and which Smith names as 'one of my favourite books' (*Letters*, 332). Darwin – a physician, natural philosopher and poet – was based for most of his life in Lichfield where he was part of the literary circle which included Seward. The second poem, *The Loves of Plants*, had already been published in 1789, meeting with popular and critical acclaim. Based on Linnaeus's sexual system, in *The Loves of Plants* male and female anthropomorphised flowers attract each other, marry, and reproduce in light-hearted mode, offset by Darwin's extensive scientific notes to the poem. The more serious first part of *The Botanic Garden*, *The Economy of Vegetation*, massive in its scope, celebrates nature in all its forms – from the creation of the universe to plants rising from the earth – as well as contemporary natural philosophy, industrial advancement, chemistry and technological innovation; roving through history, myth and religion. As Smith herself writes in a note to her sonnet LXXVII, Darwin's imagination 'happily applies every object of Natural History to the purposes of Poetry' (81), and it is from this poem – rather than *The Loves of Plants* – that she quotes in footnotes to sonnets in the second volume.²⁴

The 'goddess of botany' is not specifically named as the speaker of *The Loves of Plants*, who is referred to as the 'Botanic Muse', as well as 'the Goddess',²⁵ while *The Economy of Vegetation* opens with an explicit invocation to the goddess of botany by the genius of the place:

Milton's *Il Penseroso* (1645) in which the melancholy poet imagines a solitary, peaceful existence engaged in the study of nature in later life and again clearly resonates with Smith.

²⁴ Darwin's poem is not only concerned with the close-up botanical view, but also includes vaster sublime descriptions. See, for example, the description of Hannibal crossing the Alps ('The Economy of Vegetation', *The Botanic Garden; A Poem, in Two Parts. Part I containing The Economy of Vegetation, Part II The Loves of Plants, with Philosophic Notes* (London: J. Johnson, 1791), II, ll. 521-541), a popular sublime subject.

²⁵ Darwin, 'The Loves of Plants', *The Botanic Garden*, I, l. 31; III, l. 469 and IV, l. 509.

Hither, emerging from yon orient skies,
 Botanic Goddess! bend thy radiant eyes;
 O'er these soft scenes assume thy gentle reign,
 Pomona, Ceres, Flora in thy train.²⁶

And then 'She comes! – the Goddess! – through the whispering air, | Bright as the morn' and speaks the poem – four cantos each on one of the four elements – to an audience of gnomes, sylphs, nymphs and fiery forms.²⁷ Smith's sonnet LXXIX may, however, draw on a section in *The Loves of Plants* which invokes the 'botanic muse':

Botanic Muse! who in this latter age
 Led by your airy hand the Swedish sage,
 Bad his keen eye your secret haunts explore
 On dewy dell, high wood, and winding shore;
 Say on each leaf how tiny Graces dwell;²⁸

Darwin presents Linnaeus as led by the botanic muse to 'each leaf' in a variety of different landscapes, echoed in Smith's sonnet as the speaker hopes to explore the 'silent shades' of the botanic goddess and learn the 'bright varieties' of 'every veined leaf' in different locations.

Darwin's ventriloquism firmly characterises botany as a female enterprise, and also offers a mode and voice for the woman writer in his presentation of the goddess of botany as a – highly knowledgeable and empowered – woman poet, which Smith thus re-appropriates as a woman writer. The frontispiece to *The Economy of Vegetation*, engraved by Henry Fuseli, shows the botanic goddess as Flora 'attired by the elements'.²⁹ This goddess is the subject of Smith's later botanical poem 'Flora', which is in a sense a realisation of Smith's sonnet LXXIX, in which she proposes to learn the goddess's 'bright varieties': 'Flora' evidences this learning, naming the plants that bear the leaves of the sonnet. Those that 'mantle the cliffs' in sonnet LXXIX are described and named, for example:

And half way up the clift, whose rugged brow
 Hangs o'er the ever toiling Surge below,
 Springs the light Tamarisk.

(189-196, ll. 171-173)

²⁶ Darwin, 'The Economy of Vegetation', *The Botanic Garden*, I, l. 43-46.

²⁷ Darwin, 'The Economy of Vegetation', I, ll. 59-60 and II, l. 78. These lines occur in a passage of the poem originally authored by Seward which had already been published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Annual Review*, with some amendments by Darwin. See Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin [...]* (London: J. Johnson, 1804), pp. 127-132.

²⁸ Darwin, 'The Loves of Plants', I, ll. 31-36.

²⁹ In Smith's 'Flora' the goddess descends in a similar way to the goddess of botany in Darwin's poem (see 'Flora', ll. 21-28).

A note gives further details and the Latin name. The streaming leaf also appears: ‘From depths where Corals spring from crystal caves, | And break with scarlet branch the eddying waves, Where Algæ stream’ (179-181); a motion echoed by the wider conception of the poem, as Flora is celebrated as the ‘fairest of the fabled forms! That stream, | Dress’d by wild Fancy, thro’ the poet’s dream’ (201-202). ‘Flora’ also opens with a therapeutic supplication similar to Smith’s sonnet LXXIX,

REMOTE from scenes, where the o’erwearied mind
Shrinks from the crimes and follies of mankind,
From hostile menace, and offensive boast[.]

(1-3)

Although Smith may invoke the speaker of Darwin’s poem in sonnet LXXIX, she does not follow the versification of the botanic goddess in her use of the sonnet. In her *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804), Anna Seward records Darwin’s dislike of the sonnet form:

Our botanic Poet had in general no taste for Sonnets, and particularly disliked Milton’s. The Characteristic beauties of the legitimate sonnet, it’s nervous condensation of idea, the graceful indulgence of it’s varied pause, which blends with the sweetness of rhyme the dignity of blank verse, were all lost on Dr. Darwin [...] Absorbed in the resolve of bringing the couplet-measure to a degree of sonorous perfection, which should transcend the numbers of Dryden and Pope, he sought to confine poetic excellence exclusively to that style.

“desiring much the letter’d world might own
“The countless forms of beauty only one.”³⁰

Seward does not miss the chance to champion her own favoured poetic form, of course. The somewhat ambiguous couplet, half-borrowed from Hayley, implies Darwin promoted exclusivity of poetic form, at odds with the ‘countless forms of beauty’ in the natural world his poems celebrate. Thus, Smith departs from Darwin in the variety of forms, poetic as well as botanical, her sonnet and the wider edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* appropriates and celebrates. As Seward associates Darwin with the ‘numbers of Dryden and Pope’, more recent critics have aligned Darwin with Pope and the ‘Augustan’ age.³¹ Desmond King-Hele argues that the poetic project of Wordsworth was based on a repulsion from Darwin’s Popean versification, despite his attraction to the works of his predecessor: ‘we have to thank Darwin for demonstrating so vividly that the couplet-form was a dead end, and forcing Wordsworth

³⁰ Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin*, pp. 386-387. The line seems to come from Hayley’s *An Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782), ‘Beauty’s countless forms are only one’ (I, l. 394).

³¹ Donald H. Reiman locates Darwin ‘at the end of the tradition of didactic poetry in the closed heroic couplet that had flourished from the time of Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* and *Essay on Man*’, while M. M. Mahood suggests that *The Loves of Plants* ‘out-Popes Pope’ (Reiman, ‘Introduction’, *The Botanic Garden* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1978), pp. v-xiv (p. v); Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 55).

to seek a new road' who accordingly broke out of the 'straitjacket of Darwinian verse'.³² The continued influence of Darwin's poetry on Wordsworth's own explored by King-Hele, however, belies a somewhat Bloomian relationship between the two poets, redolent of the relationship between Pope and the Wartons set out by Griffin. Wordsworth initially identified with Darwin, yet then sought to repress his influence. In 1842 he recalled his younger poetic self and admits that his 'taste and natural tendencies were under an injurious influence from the dazzling manner of Darwin', and credits the influence of Burns, Cowper and Percy's *Reliques* with counteracting it.³³

Again, Smith overrides such disjunctions, like her appropriation of Pope to her sonnets, she draws on Darwin as couplets are replaced by the sonnet form. Moreover, 'Flora' is in heroic couplets after Darwin. Her invocation of the 'Goddess of Botany' is particularly apt in this respect as Darwin's poem *The Economy of Vegetation*, voiced by the goddess, is much concerned with the transformation and transmutation of 'forms' in a dizzying range of modes, from the way water shifts between steam, clouds, rain, snow, dew, springs, rills, rivers and the sea, to how a leaf bud can change into a flower bud.³⁴ Like natural forms, literary forms transform, as heroic couplets morph into sonnets.³⁵ Moreover, like the 'economy of vegetation', Smith's sonnets engage in a literary economy, a network of influence and literary interrelations. In her sonnets Smith naturalises genealogical links, revealing lines of influence that are elsewhere suppressed.

It seems significant that Darwin's 'economy', and indeed the whole natural world, is overseen and directed by a female entity. The goddess of botany knows and governs the connections between all living things in their various forms. Smith's Flora takes a similar role; in the poem she

descends, to dress the expecting earth,
Awake the germs, and call the buds to birth,
Bid each hybernacle its cell unfold,
And open silken leaves, and eyes of gold!

(24-28)

Mrs. Talbot – who has composed the poem – in *Conversations* states that 'Flora may poetically be said to preside' over all vegetation (XIII, 226). In an especially relevant passage

³² Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 68. Smith does not feature in King-Hele's book.

³³ Wordsworth, *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Jared Curtis, revised electronic edn (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), p. 345. Moreover, the early *Descriptive Sketches* (1792) and *An Evening Walk* (1793) include allusions to *The Botanic Garden* and are in couplets.

³⁴ Darwin, 'Economy of Vegetation', III, ll. 11-56 and IV, ll. 461-460.

³⁵ Darwin's poem also celebrates industrial and technological processes and transformations.

of 'Flora', the speaker of the poem wishes to 'trace her power along the mountain stream' (140), and follows a river from source to sea:

See! from its rude and rocky source, o'erhung
With female Fern, and glossy Adder's-tongue,
Slowly it wells, in pure and crystal drops,
And steals soft-gliding thro' the upland copse[.]

(141-144)

The landscape is feminised from the start. This is the section which evidences the proposition made in sonnet LXXIX to 'learn' the 'bright varieties' of plants and flowers. Eventually, the naiad leads the goddess 'Down to the Sea; where even the briny sands | Their product offer to her flowing hands' (165-166). Like sonnet LXXIX and the passage from *Minor Morals* on drawing, botanical engagement is steeped in movements between river and sea. The river-sea shift is also mimed by the movement to the next poem in the *Beachy Head* volume 'Studies by the Sea', which follows the river-based 'Flora'. It is another scientifically-engaged poem, here concerned with marine biology. At times it seems to look back to earlier sonnet seascapes, in its 'equinoctial tempests' (7), and in 'The falling cliff, the shatter'd wreck, | The howling blast, the sufferer's cries' (63-64), for example; but these are framed in a different way, and within a wider landscape or economy. Here the wild sea scene quietens into one of calm:

For the soft breeze of evening sighs,
And murmuring seems in Fancy's ear
To whisper fairy lullabies,
That tributary waters bear
From precipices, dark with piny woods,
And inland rocks, and heathy solitudes.

(196-199, ll. 65-70)

Indeed, the scene holds sounds and elements from earlier, upstream locations of streams and their very sources.

The presentation of the river in 'Flora' is overtly different from that of the Arun in Smith's sonnets, wherein it represents an overpowering male lineage, of which the sonnet's speaker is not part. Indeed, the naiad in 'Flora' follows a similar course to that of the earlier sonnet XXXIII 'To the Naiad of the Arun': 'Go, rural Naiad! wind thy stream along | Thro' woods and wilds: then seek the ocean caves' the speaker instructs, yet it is a landscape 'where 'mid British bards thy natives shine!'. The female naiad and feminised river is subordinate to or dependent on the river's male literary aspect, in which the female poet does not seem to be involved, contrasting with the fully feminised 'Flora'. The poem also departs from previous

presentations of the female seascape, which although empowering and liberating is also a barren, desolate space and in a sense involves an unnatural jettisoning of influence. Empowering in a different way, ‘Flora’ reconnects source, river and sea: a fecund, feminised and naturalised connectivity. This can be related to the literary economy Smith oversees, which departs somewhat from the masculine Bloomian anxieties that characterise some of the relationships between her male contemporaries. Like Flora, who directs the source-river-sea lineage, Smith reveals, recognises and oversees these more nature-based literary links.

Moreover, Smith’s later works also locate her within a wider literary economy. Rather than just adding a note to a sonnet acknowledging the source of a quotation, in footnotes to some of her final sonnets Smith situates them within a textual framework. In the large footnote to ‘To the goddess of botany’, Smith places herself as following Milton and Rousseau in her poetic approach, and the footnote to another botanical sonnet, LXXVII ‘To the Insect of the Gossamer’, names works by Dr. Lister, Darwin, Shakespeare, and – when it appeared in *Conversations* – Gilbert White: works that she has not borrowed from, but which take the same subject. Other late works realise literary economies in different ways. In a section on rivers in *Rural Walks* (1795), as noted, one of her own sonnets is printed alongside one of Bowles’s, published after her own, and in her novel *Marchmont* a chapter epigraph is taken from one of her own sonnets.³⁶ ‘Letter X’ of *A Natural History of Birds* (1807) lists poems that feature nightingales, and includes two of her own sonnets (III and VII) as well as poems by Darwin, Milton, Thomson, Petrarch and Coleridge. Smith’s return to the nightingale here demonstrates the shift from her initial sonnets which feature the bird in 1784, where it encodes a deferential and hidden aspect.³⁷ Despite her modesty and continued avowals of her poems’ inferiority, Smith’s acknowledgment of what comes after her own sonnets – Coleridge and Bowles, for example – suggests an awareness of her own influence and place within a literary lineage or economy. The ‘streaming leaf’ of sonnet LXXIX may also suggest an element of literary continuation or influence, the surviving liquid of the successful elegy, not present in Smith’s desolate seascapes.

Curiously, ‘Flora’ names the speaker’s childhood river as the River Wey, rather than the Arun, the only poem to do so. Fancy is implored

To lend thy magic pencil, and to bring

³⁶ The epigraph to chapter VII, volume one is taken from Smith’s sonnet XLVI ‘Written at Penshurst’, while the preceding epigraphs in the volume are taken from Smith’s usual range of sources including Goldsmith, Pope, Shakespeare and Thompson.

³⁷ There has also of course been a shift to a more learned engagement with the bird in this work of ornithology.

Such lovely forms, as in life's happier Spring
 On the green margin of my native Wey,
 Before mine infant eyes were wont to play[.]

(7-12)

Smith's early childhood was spent between two other family homes aside from Bignor park – the London townhouse where she was born and the country estate Stoke Park (or Place), near Guildford in Surrey, which was sold in 1761; Smith was also baptised at Stoke Church. Thus, although Smith most strongly associates the South Downs and the River Arun with her childhood throughout her oeuvre, the River Wey was also 'native' to Smith at Stoke. She returned to this Surrey landscape at the end of her life: in October 1805, she moved to live in Tilford – a village near to Stoke – which was her final residence before her death. The two branches of the Wey flow through Tilford before converging nearby. This childhood landscape may also constitute a more maternal space: Smith's mother Anna, who died when she was three, was buried at Stoke and Smith expressed a wish to be buried there 'with my Mother', as indeed she was (*Letters*, 471). A contrast is thus perhaps established between the 'paternal' landscape of Bignor Park (sonnet XCII) and the more maternal environs of Surrey to which Smith returned. Smith persistently presents botany and natural history as an activity connected with motherhood and her works for children mainly take the form of a mother or mother-figure walking with and teaching her wards about natural history and poetry.³⁸

In this vein, in *Conversations*, before the poem 'Flora' is recited, Smith's autobiographical character Mrs. Talbot explains the poem she has composed: 'I am the supposed *seer* of the *vision*, and invoke Fancy on the margin of that river, where my early years were past, and for which I still retain a great partiality' (XIII, 227). 'The Thames'? Mrs. Talbot's daughter asks, to which she replies

No, one of his tributaries, the Wey; which formed by several brooks, one of which rises in Hampshire, wanders in a clear broad current till it becomes navigable at Godalming, and joins the Thames at Weybridge. It was on the banks of that river, Emily, I gathered the first flowers that ever conveyed pleasures to my mind.

(XIII, 227)

Through this different childhood river, Wey rather than Arun, she offers an alternative version of her past, one that matches her botanical interests and couches this mode of engaging with nature. While the Arun's landscape juxtaposes literary past and present, it is the 'lovely forms' growing on the margins of the Wey that recall childhood here, a more maternal space, and the river is free of literary precursors. Mrs. Talbot's comments on the

³⁸ Botany is also central in the mother-daughter relationship between Mrs. Glenmorris and her daughter in *The Young Philosopher*, poignantly reflected by Smith's botanical Anna Augusta sonnets.

Wey also demonstrate a more precise geographical awareness of the river, in contrast with Smith's more personal and romanticised notes on the Arun. What Smith refers to as the Arun in her sonnets is actually a tributary, the River Rother, and a clear sense of the Arun's course is not communicated in – although it can be discerned from – her sonnets. Her detailing of the source and course of the Wey suggests a more learned engagement with place, with more of a command over it. This is not a masculine or disempowering space, and it also in a way reflects Smith's clearer sense of her literary position within networks of 'influence'.³⁹

Gossamer

Smith's interest in natural history, and alternative way of situating herself in a literary sense, is also evident in two sonnets of the 1797 second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* which both take the same subject: LXIII 'The Gossamer' and LXXVII 'To the Insect of the Gossamer', in which natural and poetic forms also coalesce. Rather than the vast landscape, these sonnets are again concerned with the close-up view of intricate natural structures, here spread upon the land, 'the web, charged with innumerable globules of bright dew, that is frequently on heaths and commons in autumnal mornings' as stated in the note to sonnet LXIII (72); and, as the sonnet itself presents it:

O'er faded heath-flowers spun, or thorny furze,
 The filmy Gossamer is lightly spread;
 Waving in every sighing air that stirs,
 As Fairy fingers had entwined the thread:
 A thousand trembling orbs of lucid dew
 Spangle the texture of the fairy loom,
 As if soft Sylphs, lamenting as they flew,
 Had wept departed Summer's transient bloom:
 But the wind rises, and the turf receives
 The glittering web: –So, evanescent, fade
 Bright views that Youth with sanguine heart believes:
 So vanish schemes of bliss, by Fancy made;
 Which, fragile as the fleeting dews of morn,
 Leave but the wither'd heath, and barren thorn!

(72-73)

The delicate structure of the gossamer, fragile and evanescent, again presents a fitting subject for Smith's sonnet form, an alternative to the crumbling cliffs of some of her seascape sonnets. Like many other 'elegiac' sonnets, sonnet LXIII is concerned in a different way with transience, insubstantiality, loss and disintegration. This sonnet presents an aerial world

³⁹ Aside from Smith's 'Flora' the River Wey features in Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, as one of several tributaries of the Thames invoked: 'And chalky Wey, that rolls a milky wave' (l. 342); it is not involved in the literary aspect of rivers Pope heralds, which Smith draws on in her Arun sonnets, however.

of fairies and sylphs, redolent of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, in which the sylph's garments are made from gossamer:

Thin glittering textures of the filmy dew
Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,
Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes.⁴⁰

Smith's emphasis in sonnet LXIII is on minuteness and intricacy; this is form on a very small, fragile scale. The allusions to weaving and looms connect the gossamer with the workings of fancy and the imagination, associated with weaving elsewhere in *Elegiac Sonnets* and in other poetry of the period. The 'fairy loom' of line six appears in Smith's earlier sonnet XLVIII 'To Mrs. ****', in which it is observed how

Imagination now has lost her powers,
Nor will her fairy loom again assay
To dress Affliction in a robe of flowers

(45, ll. 6-8)

The product of imagination's fairy loom has – or has lost – a similar covering, transformative power to that of the gossamer, which transforms, albeit temporarily, the 'wither'd heath and barren thorn'. In sonnet LXIII, 'fancy', gossamer and the sonnet form are all aligned in their transience and impermanence. Rather than the traditional longevity afforded by the sonnet, Smith's poems seem destined to disappear, 'fragile as the fleeting dews of morn' and as seen, the 'illegitimate' sonnet form was associated by critics with ephemera, inferiority and insubstantiality, a 'facile form' as Seward describes it, while its advocates celebrated its capacity for naturalness and spontaneity, also gossamer-like qualities.

Webs and weaving spiders have long-standing associations with creativity and writing, particularly female creativity – and indeed its suppression – through the Arachne myth.⁴¹ Although Smith describes the lines of gossamer as a 'web', there is something of a difference between gossamer and the intricate structures of more elaborate spider's webs, however. Seward's sonnet on the legitimate form and its 'claim' describes how 'Our greater Milton, hath by many a lay, | Wov'n on this arduous model', suggesting the woven textile-text metaphor. Seward's legitimate sonnet form is an arduously woven complex structure, to Smith's network of flimsy gossamer lines, with no set, preformed pattern. In this way, Smith's sonnets are poised between careful craft and something much freer. Although the

⁴⁰ Pope, 'The Rape of the Lock', in *The Major Works*, pp. 77-100 (II, ll. 65-66). As Rogers points out in a note, gossamer was thought to be made by spiders from dew (p. 602, n.)

⁴¹ The Arachne myth appears in the same book (six) of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as that of Philomela; both can be read as tales of the suppression of female creativity.

sonnet here is regularly Shakespearean, in many of Smith's irregular sonnets, the form appears 'lightly spread', 'Waving in every sighing air that stirs', in its allusive shifts between English and Italian forms.

Sonnet LXXVII suggests further correspondences between poetic subject and form:

Small, viewless Æronaut, that by the line
 Of Gossamer suspended, in mid air
 Float'st on a sun-beam – Living Atom, where
 Ends thy breeze-guided voyage; with what design
 In Æther dost thou launch thy form minute,
 Mocking the eye? – Alas! before the veil
 Of denser clouds shall hide thee, the pursuit
 Of the keen Swift may end thy fairy sail! –
 Thus on the golden thread that Fancy weaves
 Buoyant, as Hope's illusive flattery breathes,
 The young and visionary Poet leaves
 Life's dull realities, while sevenfold wreaths
 Of rainbow-light around his head revolve.
 Ah! soon at Sorrow's touch the radiant dreams dissolve.

(80-81)

The 'line of | Gossamer' of the sonnet's opening suggests a mergence with the poetic lines of the sonnet itself, redolent of the 'lucid line' and 'bright sea-line' of Smith's seascape sonnets. The sonnet also makes explicit, in line nine, the connection between threads of fancy and of gossamer, implied in sonnet LXIII. In this sonnet, form is slightly less regular; it is English except for the first closed Italian quatrain. As it often is in Smith's sonnets, however, form is complicated through syntactical and grammatical sense, which often transcends line-endings and structural divides, with other breaks and pauses within the lines. This gives the effect of occupying different formal spaces simultaneously, which the sonnet floats between in an unfixed, shifting, gossamer-like way. The use of an alexandrine in the final line is also interesting in relation to its concern with dissolution and disintegration, which it mimes in the way it breaks free from the sonnet and its metrical regularity. Here the alexandrine has the opposite effect to the final line of sonnet LXXIX: there the alexandrine 'streamed', here it 'dissolves'.

Smith's focus in this sonnet is specifically on the 'insect' of the gossamer, of course, and in the sestet the correlation between poet and 'insect' – as the spider was still known in 1797 – is made explicit. Jennifer Keith, reading the sonnet in this context, suggests that the correlation highlights the fragility of the 'poetic character', suspended in 'one of Nature's

most fragile frames’ and ‘perpetually on the verge of destruction by external forces’.⁴² Keith convincingly suggests that the disappearance of late eighteenth-century poets in literary history is mirrored by such precious presentations of the poet, apposite to Smith. Again, the sonnet presents an aerial world of winds, fairies and flight, which the footnote places under the direction of the goddess of botany, through the reference to *The Economy of Vegetation*, in which Darwin ‘makes the Goddess of Botany thus direct her Sylphs – “Thin clouds of Gossamer in air display, | And hide the vales’ chaste lily from the ray”’, bringing the sonnet into the remit of the feminised botanical world, and also again recalling Pope.

Smith also quotes from the naturalist ‘Dr. Lister’ in her note, the second longest of *Elegiac Sonnets*, which bears interestingly on the poet-insect analogy in relation to form. Martin Lister (1639-1712), a physician and naturalist, was the first natural historian to study spiders and to make the discovery of ‘ballooning’ spiders with which Smith’s sonnet is concerned. Before Lister’s discoveries, gossamer had remained a great mystery, commonly thought to be formed from dew. His *Historiae Animalium* (1678) provided the first systematic description of the structure and habits of the spiders. As Smith observes of the gossamer in her note:

The almost imperceptible threads floating in the air, towards the end of Summer or Autumn, in a still evening, sometimes are so numerous as to be felt on the face and hands. It is on these that a minute species of spider conveys themselves from place to place; some-times rising with the wind to a great height in the air. Dr. Lister, among other naturalists, remarked these insects. ‘To fly they cannot be strictly to said, they being carried into the air by external force; but they can, in case the wind suffer them, steer their course, perhaps mount and descend at pleasure: and to the purpose of rowing themselves along in the air, it is observable that they ever take their flight backwards, that is, their head looking a contrary way like a sculler on the Thames[’].

(80)

As Labbe notes, this is not from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* – the source given by Smith – but the *Natural History of Birds, Fish, Insects and Reptiles* (1793) of the French naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon.⁴³ Buffon quotes heavily from Lister in his section on spiders and while the section Smith quotes from above is not presented as a quotation, it is possibly translated by Buffon from Lister’s Latin.

Thus, through this context a rather interesting conception of the ‘visionary’ poet is forged in Smith’s sonnet, likened to the ballooning spider, transcending life’s ‘dull realities’. There is

⁴² Jennifer Keith, “‘Pre-Romanticism’ and the Ends of Eighteenth-Century Poetry”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 271-290 (p. 284).

⁴³ Labbe, *Poetry*, p. 231, n.

a strong suggestion of the sublime here, associated with flight, elevation and transport, from Longinus onwards. Typically of Smith, however, this flight or transcendence is temporary and limited, dependent on external forces which also bring about its end. Other attributes of the gossamer spider detailed by Buffon, in the same section from which Smith quotes, further illuminate her ‘poet’. In *Natural History*, Buffon describes how gossamer shoots out from a small hole in the stomach of the spider, and relates Lister’s observation of a spider at work:

it darted out a thread with the violence and stream we see water spout out of a jet: this thread, taken up by the wind, was immediately carried to some fathoms long, still issuing out of the belly of the animal. Presently after the spider leaped into the air, and the thread mounted her up swiftly.⁴⁴

This recalls the liquidity of the streaming leaf of ‘To the Goddess of Botany’, again perhaps suggesting the supposed artlessness of the English sonnet form and Smith’s ‘effusions’. Indeed, Lister and Buffon both emphasise the innate ability of spiders to spin thread, an in-born faculty rather than a learned art. The appellation of the insect as an ‘aeronaut’ also suggests originality and invention; the term was only coined in 1784 in response to the invention of the hot-air balloon, in France, the year before.⁴⁵ The *OED* gives the year of the first English use of ‘aeronaut’ in 1784, and cites Smith’s sonnet as the first application of the term to a spider. The link to ballooning adventurers is made in Smith’s *Conversations*, when the sonnet is introduced there: both ‘have learned to float *in the air*, by *means of the air*’ (XIII, 155).⁴⁶ Interestingly, the *OED* cites a non-spider-related precedent in Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) to describe the instigators of the revolution, suggestively enough – ‘Standing on the firm ground of the British constitution, let us be satisfied to admire, rather than attempt to follow in their desperate flights the aëronauts of France’ – befitting the revolutionary impulse with which Smith’s use of form can be aligned, as previously suggested.⁴⁷

Interestingly, Lister and Buffon both gender the gossamer spider as female, yet in her sonnet Smith’s poet is male, creating a curious pull between the female poet, creator of the sonnet, and the ‘young and visionary’ male poet within it, both associated with the insect of the gossamer implicitly and explicitly. Smith’s borrowing from Darwin in the note complicates

⁴⁴ Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History of Birds, Fish, Insects and Reptiles*, 5 vols (London: J. S. Barr, 1793), v, p. 155.

⁴⁵ The French ‘aéronaute’ was coined in 1784 to refer to a balloonist. The first hot-air-balloon carrying humans – invented by the Montgolfier brothers – had made its ascent in France in November 1783.

⁴⁶ *OED Online*, s.v. ‘aeronaut, n.’.

⁴⁷ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 249.

this further, as ‘the Goddess of Botany’ ‘direct[s] her Sylphs’. Again, Smith’s sonnet seems to split, occupying two different positions or meanings simultaneously. Indeed, the whole sonnet is pulled between opposing states: male and female, transcendence and reality, flight and limitation, sky and earth, form and formlessness. Even the way the gossamer insect is looking backwards while moving forward – ‘like a sculler on the Thames’ – gives the impression of moving in two different directions at once. These tensions enhance the instability of the gossamer-sonnet, which ends by falling apart. As Keith argues, ‘such a loss of autonomy where the authorial subject even disappears may look less like a dim precursor of Romanticism and more like a paradigm of postmodernism’.⁴⁸ Despite its more positive ending with the streaming leaf, sonnet LXXIX ‘To the Goddess of Botany’, which follows two sonnets later, is similarly pulled between different meanings, places, forms and enacts a process whereby the poetic ‘I’ is lost or disappears.

The river is again present in sonnet LXXVII, in another incarnation, as the Thames on which the spider-poet is poised through the sculler analogy, taking ‘their flight backwards, that is, their head looking a contrary way’. In a different way, Smith transcends the linearity of the river and the lineages it has previously represented; the poet is able to look and move in two different directions at once. Critics have suggested a similarity between the ‘visionary Poet’ of Smith’s sonnet and that of Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’ (1816), looking forwards in this respect.⁴⁹ Yet her sonnet also looks back, here – in the note – to Shakespeare and, more prominently, to Darwin; and through him to Pope and the world of the couplet. Thus the sonnet is poised between two formal approaches or associations.

Coda: Beachy Head

After the 1800 edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith published no further poems in the form; although a letter lists three in the proposed contents of the *Beachy Head* volume, they did not appear in it (*Letters*, 705). In 1806 she wrote in a letter that ‘I am tired of Sonnets, & mine you know are almost all illegitimate & must go to the foundling Hospital’ (*Letters*, 731). Although *Beachy Head* does not contain sonnets, it looks back to and echoes images and tropes from Smith’s sonnet oeuvre, as seen in ‘Flora’; other poems of the volume also seem to situate Smith as sonneteer, dramatising her literary position, and they constitute a fitting,

⁴⁸ Keith, ‘The Ends of Eighteenth-Century Poetry’, p. 285.

⁴⁹ Keith, p. 284. She compares Smith’s ‘young and visionary poet’, suspended with ‘sevenfold wreaths | Of rainbow-light around his head revolve’ with Coleridge’s: ‘Weave a circle round him thrice, | And close your eyes with hold dread, | For he on honey-dew hath fed, | And drunk the milk of Paradise’ (ll. 51-54, quoted by Keith). Labbe’s note to the sonnet in *Poetry* directs the reader to these lines (231).

final retrospective lens through which to consider her. Smith herself invested the volume with considerable importance. As she wrote to her publishers regarding the volume:

I confess it is my ambition, as the time cannot be far off when my literary career will close, to make the whole as perfect as it will admit of – As it is on the Poetry I have written that I trust for the little reputation I may hereafter have & know that it is not the least likely among the works of modern Poets to reach another period.
(*Letters*, 705-706)

Indeed, Smith did not live to see its publication; she died in October 1806, and *Beachy Head: With Other Poems* was published in January the following year (as was *The Natural History of Birds*). This letter gives the impression that the volume was perceived by Smith to be bound up with her posterity, and literary – specifically poetic – self. This is most apparent in the title-poem ‘Beachy Head’ and in ‘Saint Monica’.

The second of these poems is particularly striking for its dramatisation of Smith’s literary position in eighteenth-century sonnet tradition and regarding her successors and her influence. Indeed, it is this poem which Wordsworth refers to in his well-known note to ‘Stanzas suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees’ Head, on the coast of Cumberland’ (1833):

The form of stanza in this Poem, and something in the style of versification, are adopted from the ‘St. Monica’, a poem of much beauty on a monastic subject, by Charlotte Smith: a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered. She wrote little, and that little unambitiously, but with true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English poets.⁵⁰

Wordsworth’s own poem follows Smith’s formally, which takes the unusual structure of nine-line stanzas made up of four rhyming couplets and a final ninth line which ends each time with ‘Saint Monica’ or ‘Monica’. Wordsworth’s ‘Stanzas’ follow this pattern, ending each verse with ‘St. Bees’. Although Wordsworth does not allude to the sonnet here, his comments in the note are particularly pertinent to Smith’s influence on the sonnet – and indeed there is a suggestion of poetic form in the ‘English verse’ under ‘great obligation’ to her – while also prophesying the fragility of her position in posterity. This aspect is present in Smith’s own poem, which simultaneously dramatises her influence and its obscuration.

‘Saint Monica’ takes a ruined abbey as its subject:

Among deep woods is the dismantled scite
Of an old Abbey, where the chaunted rite,
By twice ten brethren of the monkish cowl,

⁵⁰ Wordsworth, ‘Notes’, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, p. 403.

Was duly sung.⁵¹

(202-205)

The poem's setting is reminiscent of those favoured by Smith's sonnet predecessors and contemporaries, in particular Warton and his followers, and it also recalls her own earlier churchyard and ruin poems. As previously discussed, Smith resists Warton's approach to these special places, 'waiting to be brought back to life by imagination', however, which this poem makes explicit.⁵² Rather than fostering connectivity or inspiration, in her poem 'the rill, | Just trickling thro' a deep and hollow gill' is 'Choak'd and impeded' by reeds and rushes (28-32) and the sounds echoed are the hoots of the 'obscene owl' – a much less fitting or sympathetic presence than in the poems of Gray and Warton – and 'Sobs in low gusts [of] the melancholy wind' (46-49). Indeed, Smith seems to empty the poem of a Wartonian figure: 'The antiquary comes not to explore, | As once, the unrafter'd roof and pathless floor' (66-67), yet a figure does visit, 'a pensive stranger' (77), who does not seek items of antiquarian interest, but meditates on the nature which has claimed and transformed the ruin, the poem's main concern; how

The chapel pavement, where the name and date,
Or monkish rhyme, had mark'd the graven plate,
With docks and nettles now is overgrown;
And brambles trail above the dead unknown.

(37-40)

The 'pensive stranger' is later further disestablished from the Wartonian antiquary. In Warton's 'Ode Written at Vale-Royal Abby' (1777), the poet goes into the 'inmost cell' 'to pluck the grey moss from the mantled stone, | Some holy founders mouldering name to spell', an act repeated by Headley, who in his 'Written amidst the ruins of Broomholm Priory, in Norfolk' (1786), 'fain would eager snatch from ruffian Time | The moss-grown fragment of a monkish rhyme'.⁵³ In Smith's poem, however,

He comes not here, from the sepulchral stone
To tear the oblivious pall that Time has thrown,
But meditating, marks the power proceed
From the mapped lichen, to the plumed weed,
From thready mosses to the veined flower,
The silent, slow, but ever active power
Of Vegetative Life, that o'er Decay
Weaves her green mantle, when returning May

⁵¹ Smith is not explicit as to the location of the abbey: it is most likely St. Monica's Priory, Spetisbury, Dorset.

⁵² Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, p. 104.

⁵³ Henry Headley, 'Written amidst the Ruins of Broomholm Priory, in Norfolk', *Poems and other Pieces* (London: J. Robson, 1786), pp. 37-38 (ll. 17-18).

Dresses the ruins of Saint Monica.

(85-93; original emphasis)

Rather than ‘plucking’ or ‘tearing’ the vegetation from the monuments it has claimed, Smith invokes and celebrates its motions. She seems to replace the Wartonian poet with a different one. Her poem acts as a sort of fulcrum between Warton’s mode and her own, yet realised through a male figure; and her poem thus dramatises her own position and influence within the sonnet’s history at this time. Although the figure who populates the scene is male, highlighted by the italicisation of *he* in the stanza quoted above, the nature which has transformed the site of the abbey is female, and is suggestive of Smith herself. The feminised ‘silent, slow, but ever active power | Of Vegetative Life’ recalls the influence of the botanical goddess and ‘Flora’ of Smith’s other later poems, whom as Smith points out presides ‘over all vegetation’, and who’s influence mimes her own literary influence and governance.

Kari Lokke has noted the similarity between Smith’s pensive stranger and Wordsworth, and argues that ‘Saint Monica’ is Smith’s ‘assertion of her significance in English poetic tradition, an eloquent reminder to Wordsworth and the Romantic generation he represents of her power as a poet’, and an ‘assertion of her prior and ineradicable right to the characteristically Wordsworthian poetic realm evoked through the interaction of nature and memory’, her own ‘Tintern Abbey’.⁵⁴ Through the ‘pensive stranger’ Smith appears to ‘bequeath’ the landscape of the poem to her Romantic descendent, and presents her love of nature as being inherited by the next generation of poets.⁵⁵ Indeed, as the last stanza presents the figure:

Oh Nature! ever lovely, ever new,
He whom his earliest vows has paid to you
Still finds, that life has something to bestow.

(94-96)

The lines echo Smith’s own presentation of herself in Arun sonnet XLV – ‘My early vows were paid to Nature’s shrine’ (2) – and ‘Beachy Head’ – ‘An early worshipper at Nature’s shrine’ (346) – yet they also recall ‘Tintern Abbey’, in which Wordsworth describes himself

⁵⁴ Kari Lokke, ‘Charlotte Smith and Literary History: “Dark Forgetfulness” and the “Intercession of Saint Monica”’, *Women’s Studies*, 27 (1998), 259-80 (p. 261). This contrasts with Fairer’s approach to ‘Tintern Abbey’ via Wartonian poems in *Organising Poetry*, seeking to show the way in which the poem draws on Wartonian ‘inheritance, motifs, locations and temporal manoeuvres’ (*Organising Poetry*, pp. 113-116).

⁵⁵ Lokke, p. 265.

as ‘so long | A worshipper of Nature’.⁵⁶ ‘Saint Monica’ echoes Wordsworth’s poem in other places, too; ‘The silent, slow, but ever active power | Of Vegetative Life’ of Smith’s poem is reminiscent of some of the phrasing and ‘powers’ at work in ‘Tintern Abbey’: ‘The still, sad music of humanity’ and the ‘motion and a spirit, that impels | All thinking things’.⁵⁷ Labbe has also shown how ‘Saint Monica’ looks back to Wordsworth’s early poem ‘An Evening Walk’, which Smith also draws on elsewhere.⁵⁸

Lokke points out the links between ‘Saint Monica’ and Gray’s ‘Elegy’ yet the site also more widely recalls both Edwards, through the churchyard, and Warton through the ruined site, spaces which reflect or inscribe their use of the sonnet form, concerned with looking back.⁵⁹ In ‘Saint Monica’, the way in which Smith’s natural forces claim the graves and ruins mimes her own rejuvenating influence on the sonnet form, replacing the nostalgic or antiquarian mode of Warton, Gray and Edwards.⁶⁰ As the ‘antiquary’ is replaced by the ‘pensive stranger’ in her poem, old texts and ‘relics’ are overtaken by nature, the docks and nettles, brambles, lichen, mosses, weeds and flowers the poem names. And, the nature celebrated in the poem for being ‘ever lovely, ever new’, a perpetual natural renewal, recalls the ‘streaming leaf’ of Smith’s sonnet LXXIX, and the way in which her late poems identify a continuity or ‘influence’. The poem in a sense reworks sonnet XLIV, ‘Written in a churchyard at Middleton in Sussex’, in which the storm breaks open the churchyard space and the literary landscape it represents, yet in a more positive, fertile, sustainable way.

Somewhat typically, Smith absents herself as poet and replaces herself with a male, Wordsworthian ‘he’ in the landscape of ‘Saint Monica’, yet her identification with the feminine flora influence imbues her with more agency and indeed more accurately inscribes her literary position. To return to Wordsworth’s note on the poem, Smith’s influence on ‘English verse’, the sonnet itself perhaps, is unlikely to ‘be either acknowledged or remembered’ adequately. And, as the note continues, she wrote with ‘true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English poets’, in a way identifying

⁵⁶ Wordsworth, ‘Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey’, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by B. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, pp. 113-118 (ll. 152-3).

⁵⁷ Wordsworth, ‘Lines’, ll. 92 and 101-2.

⁵⁸ Smith uses the same gill-rill rhyme as Wordsworth in ‘An Evening Walk’, and adds a similar note to gloss the word: ‘Gill is also, I believe, a term confined to this country’ Wordsworth writes, and Smith: ‘Gill is a word understood in many parts of England, and more particularly in the North’ (Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 181, n. 11). Wordsworth himself uses a quotation from Smith’s sonnet V in ‘An Evening Walk’.

⁵⁹ Lokke also argues that Smith should be identified with the feminised power, an empowering alignment; ‘Smith celebrates nature, particularly in its subtly powerful botanical manifestations, “ever lovely, ever new,” [...] as they rejuvenate decaying cultural forms’ (pp. 263 and 264). Lokke does not allude to Smith’s formal influence here, yet her words seem particularly apposite to the sonnet.

⁶⁰ Perhaps in reference to this, Smith glosses words in the poem which have met objection for being ‘obscure’, and she draws on Spenser and Shakespeare in authorisation of her usage (203-204).

Smith with the ‘he’ of her poem ‘whom his earliest vows has paid’ to nature. Smith’s simultaneous absence and empowerment in ‘Saint Monica’ is seen in her other late sonnets and poems, such as sonnet LXXVII ‘To the Insect of the Gossamer’, in which the gossamer is woven and disintegrates; the sonnet also sets up a similar male-female relationship through the gendering of the ‘young and visionary Poet’. And, sonnet LXXIX ‘To the Goddess of Botany’ is concerned with the motion of the subsumed, streaming leaf and in the simultaneous drowning and renewal of the ‘I’. It also seems significant that the abbey is a feminised site through Saint Monica herself. As Labbe writes, Saint Monica’s feast day is the same day as Smith’s birthday, and she suggests that she is patron saint of women in difficult or abusive marriages.⁶¹ She is also best-known as a mother, to Saint Augustine of Hippo, which could correlate with Smith’s place as the ‘mother’ of Romanticism, as critics have deemed her.⁶² Attention to the presence of Monica in the poem is brought about by the repetition of her name as the last word of each stanza, creating a cyclical motion within the linearity of the couplet form, with perhaps a suggestion of the cycles of nature, and the way in which Smith ‘renews’ form.

Smith’s unfinished masterpiece ‘Beachy Head’ also encodes a simultaneous fragility and empowerment, and – in a different mode – inscribes Smith’s literary position through place. It is Smith’s longest poem, amounting to 731 lines of blank verse, which – unlike her sea sonnets – goes some way to match the scale of the landscape with which it is concerned. The poem opens ‘On thy stupendous summit, rock sublime!’ (155-176, l. 1) – which no lunatics now roam – with the speaker assuming the empowered position of the headland prospect viewer, and roves through a range of aspects and subjects pertaining to the headland. The poem is concerned with various histories, spanning the geological, personal, natural, European and global. In particular, it takes a special interest in remains, and the way in which remains of these various histories have become embedded within the headland itself, such as the ‘strange and foreign forms | Of sea-shells’ (373-374), the Neolithic

remains of men, of whom is left
No traces in the records of mankind,
Save what these half obliterated mounds
And half fill’d trenches doubtfully impart[.]

⁶¹ Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 177.

⁶² Indeed, in her article centred upon sonnet LXXIX, Hawley observes that ‘the role she [Smith] been assigned in literary history – that of midwife to the Romantic sonnet, or even mother of Romanticism – assumes that she laid herself down so that she could be transcended’ (Hawley, ‘Losses and Gains’, p. 188). She quotes from Wordsworth’s ‘St. Bees’ note, and identifying Smith as the ‘elegiac’ subject of the sonnet in a literary sense, argues that she is ‘the love-object whose literary death can be said to bring about a renewal of nature and the re-energizing of other poets’ powers. Her loss is Romanticism’s gain’ (pp. 188-189). Hawley does not refer to ‘Saint Monica’, yet her argument is particularly pertinent in the light of this poem, which does appear to enact the process she outlines.

(402-405)

The coalesce with the ‘enormous bones’ of elephants (l. 417) and the more recent bones of sailors drowned at sea, buried in the cliff-face by Hermit Derby, whose own bones are eventually similarly interred. Alongside these physical remains, the landscape is also studded with echoes and images from Smith’s earlier poems. John Anderson describes ‘Beachy Head’ as a

rethinking, reforging, and assemblage of materials from the range of Charlotte Smith’s reading and from her entire poetic career. It is composed of fragments resembling, perhaps, bits of the elephant or dinosaur bones that we have already rummaged through in this naturalist’s portmanteau of a poem.⁶³

Drawing on this, Lokke argues that ‘through the device of self-quotation and reference to her entire poetic works creates in *Beachy Head* [‘Beachy Head’] a complex tribute to herself’.⁶⁴ The poem, in particular, looks back to Smith’s sonnets. ‘Ah! hills below’d! – where once a happy child’ of sonnet V becomes ‘Ah! hills so early loved!’ (368) and sonnet XLV, ‘My early vows were paid to Nature’s shrine’ (2), is reworked as ‘An early worshipper at Nature’s shrine’ (346). The ‘upland shepherd’ of sonnet LXXXIII makes an appearance (322), and the way he ‘marks the bright Sea-line’ in that sonnet is an action repeated at the beginning of ‘Beachy Head’ by the speaker, who ‘From thy projecting head-land [...] would mark’ the seascape (12). The ‘wandering fairy fires, that oft on land | Misdlead the Pilgrim’ of sonnet LXXXVI also reappear as the ‘false fire, from marsh effluvia born | [which] Misdleads the wanderer’ (256-257). Most significantly, perhaps, the crumbling headland at the end of the poem has of course appeared in previous sonnets and poems, most strikingly sonnet XLIV and ‘Elegy’, similarly influenced by an equinoctial storm. Also, in the novel *Montalbert*, sonnet LXVI ‘Written in a tempestuous night, on the coast of Sussex’ is recited underneath Beachy Head itself by the character Walsingham, who also relates the story of hermit Darby:

Mined by corrosive tides, the hollow rock
Falls prone, and rushing from its turfy height,
Shakes the broad beach with long-resounding shock[.]

(5-7)

⁶³ John M. Anderson, “‘Beachy Head’: The Romantic Fragment Poem As Mosaic’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000). Anderson traces one single image across a range of her poems, the ‘moonbright line’ (115) of ‘Beachy Head’; as this thesis has shown, the ‘line’ of the seascape is at crux of Smith’s sonnets and her formal innovation. Anderson writes ‘This single image of the “moonbright line,” while it connects Smith to poetic predecessors and contemporaries, male and female, still more remarkably unites her own work: her sonnets, her other lyrics, and both of her extended poems in blank verse. *Beachy Head* [‘Beachy Head’] is in fact crafted of just such moments of self-echoing’ (p. 560).

⁶⁴ Lokke, ‘The Figure of the Hermit in Charlotte Smith’s *Beachy Head*’, in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, pp. 45-56 (p. 48).

In 'Beachy Head' the sonnet is echoed in the 'cavern mined by wintry tides' (674) and the way

the bellowing cliffs were shook
Even to their stony base, and fragments fell
Flashing and thundering on the angry flood.

(718-720)

Other 'objects more minute' (372), such as the multiple flowers and other specimens detailed in the Beachy Head landscape are also familiar from Smith's sonnets.

Indeed, 'Beachy Head' reconciles the prospect and close-up, botanical views of forms Smith takes in her sonnets, holding them in dialogue. This is particularly apparent in a central passage of the poem:

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.

And still, observing objects more minute,
Wondering remark the strange and foreign forms
Of sea-shells; with the pale calcareous soil
Mingled, and seeming of resembling substance.
Tho' surely the blue Ocean (from the heights
Where the downs westward trend, but dimly seen)
Here never roll'd its surge.

(368-378)

Here, Smith appropriates both modes at the same time, 'still' beholding 'those widely spreading views' 'and still, observing objects more minute', with a self-deprecating nod to how the seascape 'mocks' the art of the poet, when her own poem strives to represent such 'views'.⁶⁵ Other elements are also 'mingled' in the passage. 'Hills so early loved!' juxtaposes past and present, both personally and in a literary sense, through its echo of sonnet V, while through the fossils different locations and a more remote past coalesce. Indeed, Smith wonders how these 'strange and foreign forms' have arrived at their present location: 'Among the crumbling chalk I have often found shells, some quite in a fossil state and hardly distinguishable from chalk. Others appeared more recent; cockles, muscles, and periwinkles, I well remember, were among the number', as her note records (165). She ponders different explanations for the fossils' destination – 'Surely the blue Ocean'

⁶⁵ On the relationship between minute and vast, botanical and picturesque, see A. D. Wallace, 'Picturesque Fossils, Sublime Geology? The Crisis of Authority in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*', *European Romantic Review*, 13 (2002), 77-93.

Here never roll'd its surge. Does Nature then
 Mimic, in wanton mood, fantastic shapes
 [...] of the wa'try world?
 Or did this range of chalky mountains, once
 Form a vast bason, where the Ocean waves
 Swell'd fathomless?

(376-384)

The fossils appear to inhabit two different landscapes at the same time, inland and seascape.⁶⁶ The way the fossils are 'with the calcareous soil | Mingled, and seeming of resembling substance' mimes the way sonnet elements have become part of the fabric of this poem.⁶⁷

Thus, 'Beachy Head' seems almost to constitute an elegy to or memorial of Smith's sonnets and her sonnet career. Indeed, reviews of the *Beachy Head* volume are also elegiac, obituary-like, 'It is with a kind of melancholy pleasure that we prepare to pay a tribute of posthumous applause to the elegant genius of Mrs. Charlotte Smith' wrote a commentator in *The Annual Review*.⁶⁸ And, many reviews commemorate Smith as sonneteer, despite the lack of sonnets in *Beachy Head*, as in *The British Critic*:

Most sincerely do we lament the death of Mrs. Charlotte Smith. We acknowledged in her a genuine child of genius, a most vivid fancy, refined taste, and extraordinary sensibility [...] Her Sonnets in particular will remain models of that species of composition.⁶⁹

And, as *The Universal Magazine* observed:

Not a *Sonnet* have we been able to discover, throughout the miscellaneous poetry accompanying 'Beachy Head!' [...] We have always esteemed her as holding a very high rank among those who have in his country cultivated the composition of sonnets.⁷⁰

With sonnet remains and fragments interred in the headland, its final disintegration is particularly striking, and perhaps fitting. Smith was already associated with the disintegrating headland through sonnet XLIV and its artistic representations, which she

⁶⁶ They are also unfixed through the multiple explanations to their location offered. As Smith writes in a note 'I have never read any of the late theories of the earth, nor was I ever satisfied with the attempts to explain many of the phenomena which call forth conjecture in those books I happened to have had access to on this subject' (165). See Wallace, 'The Crisis of Authority' on this indeterminate aspect.

⁶⁷ This is also curiously reminiscent of the words of the 'advertisement' to *Beachy Head*, written by the editor, who refers to the poems being 'transplanted into a more congenial soil' in the volume (XIII, 154).

⁶⁸ *The Annual Review*, 6 (1807), p. 536.

⁶⁹ *The British Critic*, 30 (1807), p. 170.

⁷⁰ *The Universal Magazine*, 7 (1807), p. 231.

writes into 'Beachy Head' on a larger scale. Thus, both 'Saint Monica' and 'Beachy Head' in different ways rework sonnet XLIV, which as this thesis has suggested is Smith's most significant sonnet. Whereas sonnet XLIV can be read as a disinterment of her own sonnet predecessors, and as a re-visioning of the sonnet form, in 'Beachy Head' her own literary self is being eroded, as Smith's own literary history, her sonnet remains, have become embedded into the disintegrating chalk, the majestic headland. As noted, Smith's association with Middleton Churchyard continued after her death, as in Constable's sketches and note of 1835, whereby the landscape indeed seems to suggest the fragility and erosion of Smith's posterity. Made two years after Wordsworth's prophesy in his note to 'St. Bees', both encode Smith's literary fate in different ways. Moreover, at the end of 'Beachy Head', the focus shifts to the figure of hermit Darby, who lives in the cave beneath the headland, auguring storms and saving mariners 'from the wild billows'; when he is too late, and

with slow swell the tide of morning bore
Some blue swol'n corse to land; the pale recluse
Dug in the chalk a sepulchre[.]

(711-713)

Bodies are being interred into the land, as the very headland is being eroded, befitting Smith's fragile memorial. As Lokke observes, in the poem's unfinished, published state, the 'boundaries between Charlotte Smith, her poetic speaker and the lone seaside hermit seem to vanish', as – in its unfinished state – the hermit is presented as having inscribed the poem itself into the rock face itself.⁷¹ 'Beachy Head' (along with its sonnet references) appears to be 'chisel'd within the rock' itself by the hermit, who indeed becomes indistinguishable from Smith herself, and the poem indistinguishable from the headland. The poem ends with the hermit's death, as he too is claimed by the waves, fittingly submerged like the streaming leaf, 'sunk low, but mounted high' and the posthumous 'mournful lines' thus reflect the publication of 'Beachy Head' itself, published the year after Smith's own death; its elegiac, posthumous, memorial aspects confirmed, as the poem ends:

One dark night
The equinoctial wind blew south by west,
Fierce on the shore;– the bellowing cliffs were shook
Even to their stony base, and fragments fell
Flashing and thundering on the angry flood.
At day-break, anxious for the lonely man,
His cave the mountain shepherds visited,
Tho' sand and banks of weeds had choak'd their way –
He was not in it; but his drowned cor'se
By the waves wafted, near his former home

⁷¹ Lokke, 'The Figure of the Hermit', p. 47.

Receiv'd the rites of burial. Those who read
Chisel'd within the rock, these mournful lines,
Memorials of his sufferings, did not grieve,
That dying in the cause of charity
His spirit, from its earthly bondage freed,
Had to some better region fled for ever.

(717-731)

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