

*Romantic Reconfigurations:
Studies in Literature and Culture 1780–1850*

*Charlotte Smith
and the Sonnet*



*Form, Place and Tradition in
the Late Eighteenth Century*

BETHAN ROBERTS

Romantic Reconfigurations:
Studies in Literature and Culture 1780–1850

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Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

Form, Place, and Tradition
in the Late Eighteenth Century

Bethan Roberts

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For George Condliffe
(1925–2014)

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Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

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Introduction

Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* was first published in 1784 in a slim quarto edition containing just sixteen sonnets. In the preface Smith (1749–1806) writes diffidently that 'these little Poems which are here called Sonnets, have, I believe, no very just claim to that title.'¹ Yet, meeting with popular and critical acclaim, the volume expanded through multiple editions and by 1800 contained ninety-two sonnets in two volumes. In 1802 a commentator in *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'.² The sonnet form had fallen from favour after Milton's death, yet it became one of the most ubiquitous literary forms of the late eighteenth century. In 1796 Samuel Taylor Coleridge noted that it was Smith, along with William Lisle Bowles, 'who first made the Sonnet popular among the present English' and in 1836 William Wordsworth described Smith as the 'first Modern' poet distinguished in the sonnet.³ To him, Smith was 'a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either

¹ Charlotte Smith, dedication to *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems*, in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, gen. ed. Stuart Curran, 14 vols., Pickering Masters (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005–2007), XIV: p. 10. All further references to Smith's poem and paratextual material are to this volume, and all references to Smith's other works are to other volumes in the edition.

² Anonymous, 'Art. V. *The Poetical Works of John Milton, &c.*', *The Critical Review*, 34 (1802), p. 393.

³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, introduction to *A Sheet of Sonnets*, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), II: p. 1139; William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years. Part III: 1835–1839*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Alan G. Hill, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 149–50.

acknowledged or remembered'.⁴ This book offers the first full-length study of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, her most important publication and the foundation of her poetic fame. Smith's sonnets foreground changing tastes not only in form but in subject. Rather than the traditional subject of love, or Milton's 'notes of glory', they look to nightingales and rivers, seascapes and storms, flowers and gossamer.⁵ Smith was tutored in art as a child by prominent landscape artist George Smith, and Wordsworth describes how she wrote with 'true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English poets' (note to 'Stanzas', p. 403). From sonnet V 'To the South Downs' (1784), to her prospect poem 'Beachy Head' (1807), Smith was a poet of place and 'rural nature', and as such, when John Constable visited Sussex in 1835, he sketched sites made familiar by her sonnets. Smith's poems also work through a weave of allusion and association, drawing on a host of predecessors, including Francesco Petrarca, William Shakespeare, John Milton, James Thomson, and Alexander Pope, to name but some. This gives *Elegiac Sonnets* its unique texture, celebrated for 'making it new' yet deeply engaged with the literary past. In this book, I argue that Smith's sonnets are constituted by these three intertwined concerns: with tradition, place, and the sonnet form itself. It is a book about literary history, and about how Smith formulates her 'place' – in multiple ways – within it.

Wordsworth's note regarding Smith's legacy proved prophetic, as her high literary status diminished in the nineteenth century. Yet, following a long period of critical neglect, work on Smith has risen significantly in recent decades. With the publication of her complete works between 2005 and 2007, two conferences in 2006 and 2016, many conference papers and panels, essays, articles, book sections, an essay collection, and two monographs dedicated to her work, Smith scholarship has finally come of age. In his seminal book *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), which did much to bring Smith back to critical attention, Stuart 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.'⁶ And, in his (the first modern) edition of Smith's poetry (1993), he introduces Smith as 'the first poet in England whom in retrospect we would

⁴ William Wordsworth, note to 'Stanzas suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees' Head, on the coast of Cumberland' (1833), in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), p. 403.

⁵ As Walter Savage Landor writes, Milton 'caught the Sonnet from the dainty hand | Of Love, who cried to lose it; and he gave | The notes to Glory' (*The Last Fruit Off an Old Tree* [London: Edward Moxon, 1853], p. 473).

⁶ Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 30.

call Romantic.⁷ Much scholarship following Curran's work has presented Smith as a 'Romantic' poet, celebrating her newness.⁸ Her relationship with literary tradition can thus appear contradictory. In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* Curran shows how poets of the period engaged with the forms of earlier poetry much more than had been understood, dispelling 'the myth of a radical generic breakdown in European Romanticism' (p. 5). However, in celebrating Smith as a 'Romantic' poet, she becomes aligned with a literary-historical model prevalent since M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) whereby Romantic writers appear to break with the past. I argue that in order to understand fully *Elegiac Sonnets* Smith's engagement with tradition needs to be more thoroughly assessed. While it builds on the work of critics such as Curran and Jacqueline Labbe, who have established Smith's importance, this book rebalances the existing critical focus by locating Smith's sonnets in their eighteenth-century context and by considering her engagement with tradition alongside her innovation. Thus, this book for the first time acknowledges fully Smith's knowledge of other writers. It shows that Smith's sonnets engage more deeply with tradition than has hitherto been realised, and revises our understanding not only of Smith's career but also of the sonnet in eighteenth-century England. I am also interested in 'placing' Smith in a different way, for I argue that as well as encoding her experience of tradition, as a woman writer, her sonnets anticipate her place in posterity, as she came to understand herself as an influential poet who would be subsequently obscured in literary history. I illuminate some of the complex processes underpinning Smith's paradoxical, shifting place in this regard, from the late eighteenth century to the present day.

⁷ Stuart Curran, introduction to *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xix.

⁸ Jacqueline Labbe's two monographs on Smith, as well as an edited collection of essays, are concerned with Smith's place within 'Romanticism': *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003); *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784–1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008). 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 it (Bishop C. Hunt Jr., 'Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith: 1970', *Wordsworth Circle*, 35: 2 [2004], p. 83). For critics who have observed the importance of reading Smith in an eighteenth-century context, see Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and Keith Haspberg, "'Saved by the Historic Page": Charlotte Smith's Arun River Sonnets', *Studies in Romanticism*, 53: 1 (2014), pp. 103–31.

In January 1785, the year following the first edition of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, a commentator in *The New Annual Register* observed that 'No one can be insensible how much the sonnet hath of late years become a favourite mode of writing.'⁹ As this would suggest, the sonnet revival was already under way when *Elegiac Sonnets* was first published. 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 she knew and references in her own. While the role of poets such as Warton and Gray in the sonnet revival is acknowledged by Curran, they are situated somewhat uneasily in the form's history: Warton is an antiquarian whose sonnets 'point British literature in a new direction', yet they are not "pre-Romantic" in theme or style' (p. 20). Gray's single, scholarly sonnet is the 'motive force underlying the entire Romantic revival of the sonnet' rather than part of it, located firmly in the 'Enlightenment' (p. 30). The relationship between Smith's sonnets and those of her contemporaries and predecessors is yet to be fully considered, as is her relationship with more remote sonnet tradition, from Petrarch to Milton. I suggest that Smith's meaning in *Elegiac Sonnets* relies on a knowledge of these traditions and contexts. Thus, the first chapter of this book maps the history of the sonnet – new sonnets alongside attitudes to those of earlier periods – in the eighteenth century. In doing so, what I bring to light in this and in the ensuing chapters that build on this history is that Smith departs from her male predecessors both in her use of the sonnet form and in the literary tradition that she engages with.

In reading Smith this way, one of the interests of this book is in how literary history was fashioned in the late eighteenth century, and how eighteenth-century versions of literary history have been inherited. I suggest that these processes have contributed to the reception of Smith as a 'Romantic' poet, serving to obscure both the earlier history of the sonnet revival and the intricate workings of Smith's sonnets. There are different, competing versions of the sonnet revival in the eighteenth century: in 1785 'the sonnet hath of late years become a favourite mode of writing', yet in 1802 the 'sonnet has been revived by Charlotte Smith'. Critics reinstating Smith in the Romantic canon, keen to stress her newness, embraced statements such as that made in 1802, and those of Wordsworth and Coleridge which support it. Prior to this, however, different proclamations by Wordsworth and Coleridge held sway. For example, publicly, Wordsworth never acknowledged his debt to Smith, claiming instead that he 'took fire' from Milton's sonnets, and with critics taking him at his word it was still possible to argue in 1973 that Wordsworth 'resurrected the sonnet from [...] virtual oblivion'.¹⁰ Coleridge

⁹ Anonymous, 'Domestic Literature for the Year 1784', *The New Annual Register* (1785), p. 269.

¹⁰ Quoted by Joseph Phelan from the notes Wordsworth dictated to Isabella Fenwick,

credits Smith's place in the sonnet revival in his privately printed essay of 1796, yet misses her out of his widely read *Biographia Literaria* (1817), leading to Smith's absence from and Bowles's importance in M. H. Abrams's influential essay on the 'Greater Romantic Lyric' (1965).¹¹ The earlier history of the sonnet is subsumed, which is why Warton and Gray appear strange in studies such as Curran's. While he may be absent or minor in these accounts, Warton was an important figure both in the sonnet revival, and in the formulation of an influential version of – what would become 'Romantic' – literary history, from which he has subsequently, ironically, been effaced. However, works by David Fairer and Robert Griffin that have shown Warton's importance in eighteenth-century literary history have not, for the most part, included Smith.¹² Indeed, Smith does not fit easily into existing versions of tradition, and women writers are largely missing from these studies of male literary relations. The Harold Bloom model of an 'anxiety of influence', which Griffin shows fits for relationships such as those between Warton and Pope, and in turn Wordsworth and Pope (rather than Milton), does not apply to women poets, and critics have sought multiple ways in which to read women writers in relation to influence post-Bloom.¹³ I argue that Smith's sonnets instruct the reader in this respect by invoking a male literary tradition and a model for it through the settings and subjects of her sonnets, whereby the literary associations of places and aspects of the natural world facilitate intertextual relations.¹⁴ Moreover, I show that her sonnets reveal relationships between texts, bridging gaps and denials implicit in

The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 10; Lee M. Johnson, *Wordsworth and the Sonnet* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1973), p. 10.

¹¹ See Brent Raycroft, 'From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom: Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet', *European Romantic Review*, 9 (1998), pp. 363–92.

¹² David Fairer, *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790–1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope: A Study in Literary Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Smith does feature in Fairer's study, noted for having a 'noticeable Wartonian accent' (p. 101), yet his focus remains on a male literary school.

¹³ See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), especially chapter 2; Jane Spencer, *Literary Relations: Kinship and the Canon, 1600–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Jennie Batchelor (ed.), *Beyond Influence, 1680–1830*, special edition, *Women's Writing*, 20 (2013).

¹⁴ I depart from recent studies that consider Smith in a female poetic tradition. See Amy Christine Billone, *Little Songs: Women, Silence, and the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Period* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008); Stephen C. Behrendt, *British Women Writers and the Romantic Writing Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780–1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

male genealogies. This book, for the first time, unpicks these complex inheritances, taking its cue from Smith to read across Milton, Pope, and Warton to her own sonnets, and then on to Bowles, Wordsworth, and Coleridge through to modern critics. Tracing the lineages that Smith's sonnets themselves present reveals a different picture of the literary landscape of the late eighteenth century and 'Romanticism'. This in no way diminishes Smith's importance, for showing how closely Smith engages with the literary culture of her day enables us to see how she transforms it. It is for this reason that my study focuses on Smith, as a poet who occupies an exceptional place in literary history, rather than considering her in the context of a wider study of women writers.

Aside from through her use of the sonnet form itself, Smith registers her interest in literary tradition through quotation, allusion, invocation, translation, and the impersonation of past writers or their characters. In 1789 Anna Seward described Smith's sonnets as 'hackneyed scraps of dismality, with which her memory furnished her from our various poets' and the intertextuality of her verse has attracted (largely more positive) critical attention ever since.¹⁵ Smith's use of quotation appears playful, marginalising, liberating, and disruptive by turns. 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. Women writers' relationship with literary tradition is of course problematised by the roles women assume in the works of their male forbears, something particularly pertinent to the sonnet form, where women traditionally have functioned as non-speaking object rather than authorial subject. Daniel 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'.¹⁶ Smith is keenly aware of her position as a woman writer in a male literary tradition, which animates her sonnets. Through the formal choices Smith makes in her sonnets, she variously aligns herself with, reworks, and rejects different sonnet traditions and predecessors. My main concern in this book is with how Smith's relationship with literary tradition is also inscribed in the subjects of her sonnets. Smith experienced

¹⁵ Anna Seward, *Letters: Written Between the Years 1784–1807*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, etc., 1811), II: p. 162. For more recent accounts of Smith's use of quotations see Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Susan Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); and Joy Currie, "'Mature Poets Steal": Charlotte Smith's Appropriations of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism*, ed. Joseph M. Ortiz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 99–120.

¹⁶ Daniel Robinson, 'Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim', *European Romantic Review*, 6 (1995), pp. 99 and 100.

place and the natural world as literary. In her works for children, such as *Rural Walks* (1795) and *Rambles Farther* (1796), this experience is figured through the way in which, during walks in the countryside, various aspects of the natural world bring poems to mind. Smith's sonnets configure the cultural experience of nature in a different way, and the literary associations of the sites, settings, flora, and fauna of Smith's sonnets are a constitutive aspect of them.

In its foci, this book departs from scholarship on Smith that, closely connected with the interest in her as a 'Romantic' poet, has been dominated by a concern with the nature of the 'I' of her sonnets. The work of Curran and other critics in the 1980s and 1990s read Smith's 'I' as largely autobiographical, representative of a specific female subjectivity.¹⁷ Labbe's work interrogated this, revealing multiple personae in Smith's sonnets. The concern with subjectivity, gender, performance, and the melancholy 'I' of Smith's sonnets has continued, however, with critics reading Smith's speaker as expressing a female subjectivity, or as performative with regard to gender. I follow critics such as Claire Knowles and Christopher Stokes who hold these two strands in dialogue, reading Smith's speaker as autobiographical, yet also taking into account the way she frequently plays with subjectivity, not least in the sonnets 'supposed to be written by Werter' and the translations from Petrarch.¹⁸ The concerns of these recent critical studies with suffering, melancholy, dispossession, loss, and silence in Smith's sonnets are shown to arise instead from her experience as a woman poet negotiating male literary tradition.

As noted, chapter one will outline the history of the eighteenth-century sonnet in England, presenting a different story from that usually told and one necessary for a full understanding of Smith's sonnets. Placing Smith accurately within this history also revises our understanding of the career of the eighteenth-century sonnet. The subsequent chapters are organised (largely) both chronologically and thematically, in a way that reflects the development of *Elegiac Sonnets* and forms part of the overall argument I make about them. Central to this is the contention that Smith's relationship with tradition changes as *Elegiac Sonnets* is developed through revision and expansion between 1784 and 1800. In 1810 Anna Laetitia Barbauld observed that throughout her life Smith '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

¹⁷ See Stuart Curran, 'Romantic Poetry: The I Altered', in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 185–207; Stella Brooks, 'The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith', *Critical Survey*, 4 (1992), pp. 9–21; and Deborah Kennedy, 'Thorns and Roses: The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith', *Women's Writing*, 2 (1995), pp. 43–53.

¹⁸ Knowles, *Female Poetic Tradition*; and Christopher Stokes, 'Lorn Subjects: Haunting, Fracture and Ascesis in Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*', *Women's Writing*, 16 (2009), pp. 143–60.

scene [...] were no doubt favourable to that descriptive talent which forms a striking feature of her genius' and that '[h]er frequent removals may be traced in her poems'.¹⁹ Reading *Elegiac Sonnets* chronologically reveals these 'frequent changes of scene'; yet, rather than forming a reflective backdrop, I argue that these 'scenes' actively inscribe Smith's sense of literary tradition and use of the sonnet. New sonnets were added to the third (1786), fifth (1789), and sixth (1792) editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*.²⁰ A second volume was published in 1797 and a second augmented edition in 1800 completed the sequence.²¹ The story this book tells about *Elegiac Sonnets* is that, as it expands, the volume moves from being predicated on various aspects of tradition to formulating a more autonomous stance in relation to it, before finally working through a model that encompasses both versions and illuminates Smith's own 'place' in tradition and posterity. Chapter two, 'Tradition', shows how in the first and third editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* matters of lineage are embedded in the predominant poetic figures of nightingales and rivers, from the nameless streams of the first edition to the specific location of the River Arun in the third. In chapter three, 'Innovation', I argue that the sea comes to replace the river in importance, emerging as the dominant setting from the fifth edition onwards and, in contrast to earlier settings, is one of originality. In this chapter I also explore the churchyard setting, which is brought into dialogue with the seascape through sonnet XLIV 'Written in a Churchyard in Middleton in Sussex'. As this would suggest, the shift from 'tradition' to 'innovation' in Smith's verse is not straightforward: the churchyard is also a figure, by its very nature, of the past, and different versions and symbols of tradition coalesce as Smith reworks her relationship with it. Chapter four looks to the wider context of the sonnet revival – the key publications, trends, and debates of the 1780s and 1790s, as the sonnet reaches the height of its popularity – and also considers Smith in posterity, further illuminating her 'place' in the sonnet revival. Building on the history of the sonnet revival given in chapter one, the chapter continues to revise our understanding of the fate of the sonnet in the eighteenth century, and also how the sonnet revival has been presented

¹⁹ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, introduction to *The Old Manor House*, in *The British Novelists* [...], 50 vols. (London: Rivington, 1810), XXXVI: p. iv.

²⁰ The significance of Smith's reworking of *Elegiac Sonnets* has often been overlooked by critics. This has been redressed by Michael Gamer, who has shown the importance of Smith's revision of the work between the third and fifth editions in *Romanticism, Self-Canonization, and the Business of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²¹ Both volumes continued to be republished without additions. The first volume reached its tenth edition, and the second volume its fourth edition, in 1812. After 1800, no further sonnets appeared in any works by Smith, although two additional sonnets have been attributed to her: 'Evening. A Sonnet' in *The Universal Magazine* (1789) and 'Original' in George Henderson's sonnet anthology *Petrarca* (1803).

in more recent criticism. Through this history, I show how Smith is at once the sonnet's foremost practitioner, yet is easily subsumed within the masculine history of those who inherit from her. I consider the various responses to Smith's best-known sonnet XLIV, which – I suggest – shed light on Smith's literary reputation and posthumous fate, as well as the processes underpinning it. Chapter five considers the final two editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797 and 1800). The poems of the second volume are defined less by a specific setting than by Smith's interest in botany and natural history. I argue that through this different way of engaging with nature, Smith reconceives her relationship with tradition as she heads towards the end of her career. The book concludes by considering two poems in her final collection *Beachy Head* (1807). While they are not sonnets, I suggest that in 'Beachy Head' and 'Saint Monica' Smith offers a final posthumous model for understanding *Elegiac Sonnets* and its paradoxical 'place' in literary history.

CHAPTER ONE

The Eighteenth-Century Sonnet

This chapter tells the story of the sonnet in the eighteenth century, and Smith's role in it. In contrast to the dominant narrative we have inherited of a sudden revival of the sonnet by Smith in 1784, I show that the renewed interest in the form was more gradual. Some aspects of the eighteenth-century sonnet – such as Warton's poems and influence, and the popularity of Petrarch – have been addressed in recent criticism, while Paula Feldman and Daniel Robinson's anthology *A Century of Sonnets: The Romantic-Era Revival* provides a valuable overview of poems in the form from 1750 to 1850.¹ However, critical interest in the sonnet as a 'Romantic' form has meant that the earlier history of the sonnet form in the eighteenth century has often been overlooked, and a full history 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 1800.² Havens's history is comprehensive and useful, and includes women writers long before their recovery by feminist critics, yet it is also necessarily old-fashioned and outdated. Havens celebrates the sonnets of Warton, Thomas Russell, and John Codrington Bampfylde, while Smith's sonnets perplex – 'elegies' which are 'quite impossible' – and he puts Smith's use of English and irregular sonnet

¹ Fairer, *Organising Poetry*; Edoardo Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Paula Feldman and Daniel Robinson (eds.), *A Century of Sonnets: The Romantic-Era Revival, 1750–1850* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

² The nineteenth-century sonnet has been the subject of monographs by Jennifer Ann Wagner, *A Moment's Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century English Sonnet* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996); Phelan, *The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*; Billone, *Little Songs*; and Marianne Van Remoortel, *Lives of the Sonnet, 1787–1895: Genre, Gender and Criticism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

forms down to her 'unwillingness to work hard over her productions'.³ He cannot deny her influence, however: in 'encouraging the use of these easier arrangements of rimes' and 'in fastening the elegiac mood upon the genre', for the remainder of the century 'she is a force to be reckoned with' (p. 504). When Smith is later fully reinstated into the literary canon, her status has of course changed. In studies such as *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, Smith is at the forefront of the sonnet revival, and earlier sonnets sit uneasily alongside hers rather than the other way around. Here, I pay due attention to the earlier decades of the eighteenth century, while illuminating Smith's achievement.

As Havens's title suggests, the sonnet revival was initially largely bound up with the popularity of Milton. The argument of this chapter is that eighteenth-century interest in the sonnet was inspired not only by Milton but by a new interest in the literature of the past more widely. Fairer has written much about what he sees as a return to or recovery of the past in the early decades of the eighteenth century:

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.⁴

This return to the literary past was realised through form as the heroic couplet was gradually overtaken in popularity by Spenserian stanzas, odes, and sonnets. The major poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, including John Dryden and Pope, avoided the sonnet. To Dryden, the 'Masculine Vigour' of English is suited to 'Heroick Poetry', yet the 'light and trifling' French is 'more proper for Sonnets, Madrigals and Elegies', and Pope alludes to the low status of the form in his reference to the 'starv'd hackney sonneteer' in *An Essay on Criticism* (1711).⁵ The avoidance of the sonnet by the poets of 'neo-classical' age is often read as the basis of both the form's

³ R. D. Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), p. 504.

⁴ David 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. John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 177–201.

⁵ John Dryden, *The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics, and Æneis* [...], 3 vols. (London: J. Tonson, 1721), II: p. 415; Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), line 419.

widespread disuse and its newfound popularity, enabling its appropriators to work against the poetic models of Pope and Samuel Johnson. In *Peri Bathous; or, The Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728) Pope writes 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’ (*Major Works*, p. 99).⁶ As Mark Raymond points out, the sonnet (with the ballad) seems to epitomise poetry in its lowest form, connected with the body rather than with intellectual activity, yet ‘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.’⁷ The turn to the literary forms of the past and later emphasis on natural expression and sensibility underpin the sonnet’s renewed popularity, yet this does not necessarily involve a wholesale departure from Pope and ‘neoclassicism’. While some poets, such as Thomas Warton, did seek to reach back through form in a way that avoided Pope, in the hands of other writers the sonnet was able to coincide with and follow what had come before. Smith refers to her sonnets as ‘effusions’ (p. 9), suggesting spontaneity and expression (effusion is ‘the act of pouring out’ both water and words, according to Johnson’s *Dictionary*) yet her first sonnet ends with a quotation from Pope’s ‘Eloisa to Abelard’ and the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* includes a poem, ‘The Origin of Flattery’, in heroic couplets.⁸

In addition to Milton, it was through the influence of Spenser that many eighteenth-century sonneteers turned to the form. There was also a separate – although 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 canon stemmed only from his plays. His sonnets were omitted from all the complete works edited by Nicholas Rowe, Pope, Thomas Hanmer, Lewis Theobald, William Warburton, Edward Capell, and Johnson. The sonnets had been made available in 1710, yet it was through Edmond Malone’s two-volume ‘Supplement’ to George Steevens’s revised edition of *The Plays of William Shakespeare [sic]* (1778) that they reached a wider readership.⁹ At the

⁶ Pope’s ‘hoax’, found sonnet, supposedly written by Milton, presents a counterpart to the numerous later sonnets more seriously influenced by Milton: ‘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 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 Mark Raymond, ‘The Romantic Sonnet Revival: Opening the Sonnet’s Crypt’, *Literature Compass*, 4: 3 (2007), p. 730.

⁸ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: J. and P. Knapton, etc., 1755), I, s.v. ‘EFFU’SION’.

⁹ The 1709 publication was by Charles Gildon in an unauthorised supplement to Nicholas

invitation of Malone, however, Steevens added notes to the supplement in which he 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.'¹⁰ Malone tentatively defends the sonnets, acknowledging that there are 'many beautiful lines scattered through these poems' if readers permit themselves to enjoy poems that are not in 'blank verse or heroick couplets', still the predominant literary forms at this time (p. 685). Steevens completed his condemnation of Shakespeare's sonnets in his fourth edition of *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1793), however, published largely in retaliation to Malone's 1790 edition, writing in the preface that 'the strongest act of Parliament that could be framed' would not force the editors to include them.¹¹ They remained little-read until the nineteenth century, when they slowly grew in popularity.

Thomas Edwards (1699–1757) turned to the form after reading Spenser's sonnets, yet soon after discovered and thereafter used the Italian form, 'drawing from the same fountains as Milton drew from'.¹² 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 and again in 1755.¹³ In 1765 twenty-seven sonnets, plus the thirteen sonnets already in print, were published in the posthumous sixth edition of Edwards's *The Canons of Criticism* [...], an attack on William Warburton's editing of Shakespeare, and a final four 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 celebrate the native tradition of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, as in sonnet XVII: 'do not Thou native language scorn; | In which great *Shakespear, Spenser, Milton* sang'.¹⁴ Four of

Rowe and Jacob Tonson's *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear* [sic] (1709), later appended to Alexander Pope's editions of 1725 and 1728.

¹⁰ George Steevens, note in Edmond Malone, ed., *Supplement to the Edition of Shakspeare's Plays* [...], 2 vols. (London: C. Bathurst, etc., 1780), I: p. 682.

¹¹ George Steevens, preface to *The Plays of William Shakspeare*, 4th edn., 15 vols. (London: T. Longman, etc., 1793), I: p. viii.

¹² Anna Laetitia Barbauld, ed., *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson* [...], 6 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1804), III: p. 91.

¹³ 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 being written, yet remained in manuscript until much later, by Philip Yorke, Charles Yorke, Benjamin Stillingfleet, and of course Thomas Gray, all indebted to Milton (Havens, *Influence of Milton*, pp. 489–92).

¹⁴ Thomas Edwards, 'Sonnet XVII. To the same [Isaac Hawkins Browne]', in *The Canons*

Edwards's published sonnets take the Spenserian form and the remaining forty-eight sonnets take the Italian form.

When Edwards's sonnets are included posthumously in *The Canons of Criticism*, it is observed that they are 'formed [...] upon the model of the Italians of the good age, and of the Imitators among us, Spenser and Milton' (sig. A2v.). At this time, using the sonnet was perceived to amount to copying or imitation. In his edition of Spenser's poetry John Hughes remarks on the sonnets that '[h]ere again we find our Author copying the *Italians*', while Edwards's own letters belie a concern with imitation: 'I hope I shall never be ashamed of imitating such great originals as Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton. [...] But why is my writing of sonnets, imitation any more than theirs?' (*Correspondence*, III, p. 91).¹⁵ As well as in form, Edwards's sonnets also follow Milton in a major respect thematically, for out of Edwards's fifty-two published sonnets all but ten are written 'to' someone, ranging from public figures such as the archbishop of Canterbury and the lord chancellor to Edwards's close family and friends. While place does inform some of Edwards's sonnets, the emphasis in these is elsewhere, such as on the promotion of retirement in sonnet I 'To R. Owen Cambridge, Esq.' and contentment in XXI 'For the Root-House at Wrest'.¹⁶ 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. (*Canons*, lines 9–14)

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, the last 'tottering remnant of some splendid fane', and in sonnet XLIV 'To Matthew Banyard' he looks to his own death and burial. Several others

of Criticism; and Glossary, Being a Supplement to Mr. Warburton's Edition of Shakespear [sic], 6th edn. (London: C. Bathurst, 1758), lines 9–10.

¹⁵ John Hughes, 'Remarks on the Shepherd's Calendar, &c.', in *The Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser. In Six Volumes. With a Glossary Explaining the Old and Obscure Words Publish'd by Mr. Hughes*, 6 vols. (London: J. Tonson, 1715), I: p. cviii.

¹⁶ 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.'

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.'. Edwards supported and encouraged women writers, becoming acquainted with Hester Mulso (1727–1801), later Chapone, and Susanna Highmore (1725–1812), later Duncombe, upon entering Richardson's circle in 1748. In letters and poems, Edwards encouraged them to write and publish their work and, indeed, both Highmore and Duncombe went on to publish sonnets (among other poems).¹⁷

Thomas Warton's sonnets were also published in Dodsley's 1755 *Collection*, and his influential *Poems. A New Edition* (1777) reprints the two sonnets published by Dodsley alongside seven new sonnets, as well as 'miscellaneous poems' and odes. A later reviewer observes that:

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 [...] certain it is, his Poems show a strong predilection for the days of chivalry and romance.¹⁸

The reviewer highlights the interconnectedness of place and the literary past in Warton's poetry. Warton entered Trinity College, Oxford in 1744 and remained there for the rest of his life, becoming a perpetual fellow in 1753 and professor of poetry between 1757 and 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 producing the celebratory poem *The Triumph of Isis* (1750). It was at Oxford that Warton pursued his interest in the literary past, firstly in *Observations on the Faerie Queene* (1754, rev. 1762) and then in his three-volume *The History of English Poetry* (1774–1781). Contrary to Edwards, whose use of the sonnet and 'imitation' of earlier writers is beset by anxiety (he described his use of the sonnet as a

¹⁷ Hester Mulso's (non-sonnet) poem 'Occasioned by reading Sonnets written in the Stile and Manner of Spenser, by T. Edwards, Esq; 1749' was published in Hester Chapone, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* [...] (1775), with Edward's reply 'To Miss H.M.'. There are two further sonnets in her *Miscellanies*, one original 'To a Robin-Redbreast' and a translation of an Italian sonnet from the *Rime degli Arcadi* anthology of the Arcadia Academy (1716). Susanna Highmore published three sonnets (as well as five non-sonnet poems) in volume seven of *The Poetical Calendar* in 1763; all are translations – two of sonnets by Petrarch and one of a sonnet by the Italian woman poet Faustina Maratti Zappi (1679/80–1745), another member of the Arcadia Academy. She wrote two further sonnets, both addressed to Edwards, although one exists in manuscript only, and the other, dated 1749, was not published until 1821.

¹⁸ Anonymous, review of *The Poems on Various Subjects, of Thomas Warton, B. D., The Critical Review*, 10 (1794), p. 20.

‘transgression’, *Correspondence*, III: p. 91), Warton’s sonnets and other poems are characterised by a positive relationship with the literary past. Place also has much greater significance. Fairer has shown how the settings of Warton’s poems dramatise the way he reaches into the 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’.¹⁹ His sonnets display a defining interest in places and artefacts of historical interest, such as those ‘Written at Stonehenge’, ‘Written after seeing Wilton-House’, ‘On King Arthur’s Round Table’, and ‘Written in a Blank Leaf of Dugdale’s Monasticon’, and his own past in ‘To the River Lodon’.²⁰ In contrast to Edwards’s ‘tottering remnant of some splendid fane’, the last in a disintegrating tradition, to Warton remains and remnants become special places to be revived. Samuel Johnson offered his view on Warton’s 1777 volume in a poem of the same year:

Phrase that time hath flung away,
Uncouth words in disarray,
Trick’d in antique ruff and bonnet,
Ode, and elegy, and sonnet.²¹

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 Sir William Dugdale’s *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655), the fruits of Dugdale’s own antiquarian research (on historical sites – cathedrals, churches, abbeys, and monasteries – of 1640s England), but also a defence of the pursuit and celebration of its pleasures:

Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers. (*Poems. A New Edition*, lines 13–14)

Warton’s sonnet rhymes *abbaababcdcdcd*, which is typical of his use of form: based around an Italian octave-sestet structure, yet deviating from the strict model, and enjambing line-endings and the octave-sestet divide. Warton’s

¹⁹ Thomas Warton, ‘Ode III. Written at Vale-Royal Abby in Cheshire’, *Poems. A New Edition, with Additions* (London: T. Becket, 1777), lines 74–5.

²⁰ The River Loddon (rather than Lodon) is a tributary of the River Thames. Its source is in Basingstoke (where Warton was born and grew up) and it runs through Hampshire and Berkshire, meeting the Thames near the village of Wargrave.

²¹ Samuel Johnson, ‘On Archaism in Poetry’, in *The Oxford Authors: Samuel Johnson*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), lines 5–8. The poem is often given the title ‘Lines on Thomas Warton’s Poems’.

model for the sonnet was Milton, whose sonnets he edited in 1785, yet, unlike most contemporary commentators, he does not trace a lineage from Petrarch to Milton, and disliked Petrarch's sonnets.²² 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 subjects of his sonnets have often been obscured or worn away. In sonnet VIII 'On King Arthur's Round-table at Winchester' time has 'fade[d] the British characters away' (line 12), and in sonnet IX 'To the River Lodon' 'pensive memory traces back the round' (line 6) – both from the 1777 *Poems*. Warton's sonnets are interested in capturing the partial, forgotten, and obscure, mimed by Warton's use of form, which itself is faded and incomplete, another pleasurable, exploratory 'tracing' of the past.

In the 'Advertisement' to his brother's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1791), which included the sonnets, Joseph Warton (bap. 1722, d. 1800) wrote that 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'.²³ In the case of the Warton brothers, the return to older poetic forms was an active elision of Pope and the perceived 'refinement' he had brought to poetry. Fairer and Griffin have shown that Pope was a problematic poet for the Warton brothers, disrupting the native poetic tradition they sought to establish. Both poets were drawn to and identified with Pope, yet purposefully repressed his influence, constructing Pope as a poet of solely of reason, witty rhyme, and the polished couplet, while other aspects they were drawn to, such as the Gothic melancholy of 'Eloisa to Abelard', were suppressed, enabling them to claim the 'true line of poetry' themselves. The Wartons' influential construction of Pope

²² In his edition of Milton poems, Warton writes that his 'Italian Sonnets have a remarkable air of gravity and dignity [...] free from the metaphysics of Petrarch' (*Poems Upon Several Occasions: English, Italian, and Latin, with Translations, by John Milton* [London: J. Dodsley, 1785], p. 338). In his *History of English Poetry*, Warton dedicates most attention to Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, whose 'sentiments are for the most part natural and unaffected; arising from his own feelings', unlike Petrarch, whose mind was 'too much overlaid by learning' (*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: p. 12). The sonnets of Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip 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. Warton also briefly discusses the sonnet in the continuation of his *History* (c. 1782), unpublished in his lifetime (*A History of English Poetry: An Unpublished Continuation*, ed. Rodney M. Bain [Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1953]).

²³ Joseph Warton, advertisement to *The Poems on Various Subjects, of Thomas Warton, B. D. Late Fellow Of Trinity College* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1791), sig. A2. See also Joseph Warton's *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 4th edn., 2 vols. (London: J. Dodsley, 1782).

has shaped subsequent conceptions of 'Romanticism' and eighteenth-century literary history, not least the model propounded by M. H. Abrams, which has contributed to the obscuration of the way in which the revival of the sonnet was more gradual and complex.²⁴

As well as looking to the past, Warton's sonnets also looked forward, and had a significant, tangible influence. At Oxford a group of younger poets formed around Warton, the main output of which was sonnets. Robert Southey names John Bampfylde (1754–1797), Thomas Russell (1761–1788), William Lisle Bowles (1762–1850), and Henry Headley (1765–1788) 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 both identified as having a Wartonian accent (*Organising Poetry*, pp. 100–1). I suggest that Edmund Cartwright (1743–1823), Robert Holmes (bap. 1748, d. 1805), Edward Hamley (bap. 1764, d. 1834), and Thomas Warwick (?) could also be included.²⁵ 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 Joseph Warton, who became headmaster there in 1766. While we do not know if Smith was familiar with them, Bampfylde's widely read – including by Southey and Coleridge – *Sixteen Sonnets* (1778), published the year after Warton's *Poems*, was the first publication of the century to be devoted entirely to sonnets.²⁶ Bampfylde briefly

²⁴ See Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope*.

²⁵ Robert Southey, 'ART. III.-The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper; including the Series edited, with Prefaces Biographical and Critical, by Dr. Samuel Johnson; and the most approved Translations', *The Quarterly Review*, 12 (1814), pp. 60–90. Robert Holmes studied at Winchester College and New College, Oxford and published *Alfred. An Ode. With Six Sonnets* in 1778. The sonnets celebrate the natural world and rural life; all are Italian in form and bear some resemblance to Bampfylde's sonnets. Oxford poets Edmund Cartwright and Thomas Warwick both published sonnets in 1783. Cartwright's *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 sonnets of Warwick appear in his *Abelard to Eloisa. An Epistle. To which are prefixed, Sonnets. With a Rhapsody Written at Stratford-Upon-Avon* (1783). The sonnets, all Italian or nearly so, largely arise from visiting specific places and landscapes, informed by a Wartonian sense of Oxford, place, and the past. Edward Hamley matriculated from New College, Oxford in 1783 and published *Sonnets* in 1789, which contain Wartonian references and themes.

²⁶ In 1776, an anonymous volume of twelve *Sonnets* appeared yet while it is the first publication of the century to be devoted entirely to sonnets through its title, it does also contain three other poems. All twelve sonnets take the Italian structure and while they appear to be parodies of sorts, and were reviewed badly, they take subjects which would soon be very popular, such as nightingales and rivers.

attended Winchester College in 1770 and although he was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge he spent time at Oxford.²⁷ His sonnets are similar to Warton's in their emphasis, describing landscapes – of the Teign valley in the Devon countryside – and looking to the past, taking the Italian form to do so. Sonnet X is addressed 'To 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'.²⁸ Sonnet V 'On the Evening' is typical in the rural scene and interest in 'times of old' it presents:

[W]ilst 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[.] (lines 8–11)

Shortly after the publication of *Sixteen Sonnets*, forced to move to London, Bampfylde suffered a breakdown, was briefly imprisoned at Newgate and was then confined to a private madhouse, bringing his poetic career to a poignant end at the age of twenty-four and limiting his influence.

Between the publications of Edwards and Warton, Thomas Gray's sole sonnet 'on the Death of Mr. Richard West' was posthumously published, first in a minor edition of 1773, in which it was presented as an 'epitaph', and then in the more substantive *The Poems of Mr. Gray. To which are prefixed Memoirs of his Life and Writings*, edited by William Mason (1775).²⁹ The sonnet was widely read and hugely influential, yet this is somewhat at odds with the spirit of the sonnet itself, which is characterised by a hidden, repressed, unheard aspect. It is dated August 1742 in Gray's commonplace book, and he showed an embarrassment or dislike for it: 'I will not send you the Sonnet', he wrote to a friend, 'but here is something else full as bad'.³⁰ West, before his death, had been the only audience for Gray's poems and translations and as such 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

²⁷ Friend and fellow Wykehamist George Huddesford (1749–1809) provided the occasion recorded in Bampfylde's sonnet 'On Having Dined at Trinity College, Oxford', where he was a student. In 1804 Huddesford published *The Wiccammical Chaplet, a Selection of Original Poetry*, a collection of verses by former pupils of Winchester College, including sonnets by Bampfylde, Bowles, and Russell, and two sonnets by Huddesford himself.

²⁸ John Bampfylde, 'Sonnet X. To Mr. Warton, on reading his History of English Poetry', *Sixteen Sonnets* (London: J. Millidge, 1778), lines 10–11.

²⁹ The earlier appearance of the sonnet is in *Poems by Mr. Gray* (Edinburgh: J. Balfour and W. Creech, 1773).

³⁰ Thomas Gray, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), II: p. 560.

notes repine'. The sonnet is coloured by a futility and invalidity of sorts, which its unpublished state befits. The sonnet begins and ends with 'in vain', and mourns the one person who could have sympathised with the speaker's grief:

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.³¹

The sense of enclosure is enhanced by the repetitions between the octave and sestet: 'smiling mornings' becomes 'morning smiles', and the birds and fields similarly reappear, while the rhyme scheme – *ababababcdcd* – contributes to the effect, especially as the rhymes in the sestet echo those of the octave. Setting is important in Gray's sonnet, although it is an unspecified and generic one and does not carry the same significance as in, for example, his 'Ode on Distant Prospect of Eton College' (1747) and 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1751). While Gray draws upon place for meaning, there is mismatch between speaker and environment and it is unable to afford that for which they 'repine' and 'require'.

An interest in the literary past is also what drew Gray to the sonnet form, although, unlike Warton, Gray's relationship with it was a vexed one.³² Gray studied the poetry of the past, which often informed his own poems, echoing the phrasing and modes of earlier works. A number of critics have noted the kinship between Gray's sonnet and Petrarch's 'Zephiro torna' sonnet (310 in modern editions), with which it share a rhyme scheme. In the weeks preceding West's death Gray had been reading Petrarch's sonnets, and we know that he

³¹ Thomas Gray, 'Sonnet [on the Death of Mr Richard West]', *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1969), pp. 66–7.

³² See Fairer, 'Thomas Warton, Thomas Gray, and the Recovery of the Past', in *Thomas Gray: Contemporary Essays*, ed. W. B. Hutchings and William Ruddick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), pp. 146–70.

studied the various sonnet forms, outlined in his essay 'Metrum' (1760–1761). In the plan for a history of poetry Gray sent to Warton in 1770 he identifies 'the first *Italian School* (commonly call'd the Sicilian) about the year 1200 brought to perfection by Dante, Petrarch, Boccace, & others' (*Correspondence*, III: p. 1123). Gray wrote the sonnet some years before there was any real interest in Petrarch, and his translation-of-sorts constitutes a return to a remote 'School', sealing his lament in a forgotten form and mode for which there was no audience. This was completely reversed after the sonnet finally found publication, however, and Gray's sonnet illuminates the changing status of the sonnet in the eighteenth century. While it was not published by Gray or publishers of his collected works in his lifetime, when finally published in 1773/5 it enjoyed considerable popularity and was frequently referred to, not least in the revised preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800.³³

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*.³⁴ Ayres's volume contains an interestingly apologetic preface, which reflects the disuse of the sonnet in the age of the couplet:

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.³⁵

Ayres displays a Bloomian 'anxiety of influence' of sorts, by which the disused sonnet provides a form in which to swerve from the 'great men' who precede him. In the eighteenth century translations of Petrarch's sonnets appeared in various locations, by Mary Monck (1716), Susanna Highmore (1763), John Langhorne (1766), William Preston (1781), Charles Burney (1782), Hayley (1782), and Alexander Fraser Tytler (1784), prior to Smith herself (1784).³⁶

³³ Collected editions published in his lifetime were Thomas Gray, *Poems* (Glasgow: R. and A. Foulis, 1768) and *Poems by Thomas Gray. A New Edition* (London: J. Dodsley, 1770).

³⁴ It also includes another three translations from Italian, as well as thirty original sonnets by Ayres.

³⁵ Philip Ayres, *Lyric Poems, Made in Imitation of the Italians*, in *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, ed. George Saintsbury, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), II: p. 269.

³⁶ Mary Monck (*née* Molesworth, c. 1678–1715) translates two sonnets from Petrarch

In his *Poems* (1772) William Jones groups together and translates several of Petrarch's sonnets as part of a poem in couplets, 'Laura an Elegy', showing how the prevalent form of the century did sometimes facilitate the growing interest in sonnets. There was also an interest in Petrarch's biography: Susanna 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. However, within the biography – in which Petrarch is depicted as a novelistic hero of sensibility – sonnets and other poems are translated into prose rather than the verse Sade had maintained. 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 and contains thirty sonnets. As Nott's selection shows, many of Petrarch's sonnets, in which a solitary, melancholy speaker wanders in the Vaucluse countryside, accorded with the increasing popularity of landscape and topographical poetry in eighteenth-century England.

The last of Smith's chief eighteenth-century sonnet predecessors, William Hayley, included sonnets in two publications in 1781 and 1782, in the context of poems which both take the couplet form. The first was incorporated into his popular *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781), a didactic work in six cantos of rhyming couplets that aspired to 'delineate the more engaging features of Female Excellence' in the character of Serena, a response to Belinda in Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (1712, rev. 1714).³⁷ 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,

in *Marinda. Poems and Translations upon Several Occasions* (1716), published posthumously by her father. In addition, she translates sonnets from Giovanni Battista Guarini, Giovanni della Casa, Giambattista Marino, and Antonio Marina Salvini, yet in a range of non-sonnet forms. Highmore's two translations were published in the *Poetical Calendar* in 1763. In John Langhorne's *The Poetical Works of John Langhorne* (1766), four sonnets are translated from Petrarch, two in couplets, one fully Italian, and one almost Italian in form; it also includes one original 'Sonnet in the manner of Petrarch'. William Preston included four translations from Petrarch in his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1781), Charles Burney's *General History of Music* included two translations in the second volume (1782), William Hayley translated a sonnet by Petrarch in his *An Essay on Epic Poetry [...] (1782)* (discussed below) and Alexander Fraser Tytler included seven translated sonnets in his *Essay on the Life and Character of Petrarch* (1784).

³⁷ William Hayley, preface to *The Triumphs of Temper; A Poem: In Six Cantos* (London: J. Dodsley, 1781), p. ix.

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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. (lines 213–22)

The sonnet references stereotypical, hyperbolic aspects of beauty, and the perfect 'female form', with which the form of the sonnet has traditionally been intertwined. An *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782) also juxtaposes sonnets and couplet. The poem is 'in Five Epistles to the Revd. Mr. Mason', written in praise of the epic form, which it seeks to rehabilitate. The seven sonnets appear in footnotes to the poem itself, and are all translations. They all lack a subjective aspect and Hayley's sonnets are much more clearly translations than Gray's sonnet, for example. Hayley was known for his interest in and proficiency in languages, including Latin, Greek, French, 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.³⁸

Hayley's translations and biographical sketches of European writers are equated with the historical recoveries of Warton and Bishop Thomas Percy, meeting through the sonnet (Percy also published in the form), and Hayley is clearly interested in historical forms, yet not in a way that entails avoiding the couplet and the influence of Pope.³⁹ Hayley translates sonnets by Dante, by the Spanish 'Lady Leonora de Iciz, Baroness of Rafales, to Don Alonzo de Ercilla', three sonnets from the Portuguese of Camoens, and a sonnet exchange between woman poet Giustina Levi-Perotti, addressed to Petrarch, and Petrarch's reply. Of these translations six sonnets take the Italian form, reflecting the rhyme

³⁸ Robert Southey, 'ART. I.-Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.', *The Quarterly Review*, 31: 62 (March 1825), p. 283.

³⁹ Two sonnets by Percy were published in Christopher Smart's *Monthly Visiter* [sic] (1756), and one appears as a dedicatory sonnet 'To her grace, Elizabeth, Duchess and Countess of Northumberland' in his *The Hermit of Warkworth. A Northumberland Ballad* (1771). All are in the Spenserian form and address women, thus recalling Edwards. Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisted of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of our Earlier Poets* (1765) had of course established him as a revivalist and preserver of the literary past.

scheme of the originals, yet one of the sonnets from Camoens 'on the death of the Poet's mistress' is transposed from the Italian into the English form. The sonnet exchange between Petrarch and Levi-Perotti is translated in a note to a section of the *Essay* that defends the right of women to poetry, bemoaning how 'prejudice' has restricted the woman poet. The speaker looks forward to the day when 'Britain sees | Her fair-one cancel such absurd decrees' in a train led by Anna Seward, and implores 'Proceed, ye sisters of the tuneful Shell, | Without a scruple, in that Art excel' (p. 75, lines 103–4). 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 (p. 287). Levi-Perotti's initial sonnet asks for advice, as, 'stupified by Custom's blank decrees', those 'void of liberal fire, | Bid me, with scorn, from Helicon retire' (p. 289, lines 5–7), and Petrarch's reply is one of encouragement: 'I pray thee, Nymph of graceful song, | Indulge thy spirit in its noble bent' (p. 289, lines 13–14), which the lines of Hayley's poem echo. Like Edwards – and in contrast to Warton and his male pupils – Hayley supported women writers and exchanged poems and sonnets with them, including Anna Seward and, of course, Smith herself, who dedicates *Elegiac Sonnets* to him. Hayley was native to Chichester, and was a near neighbour of Smith's: his family seat, Eartham house, was approximately three miles from Bignor Park.

Such was the sonnet scene upon which *Elegiac Sonnets* emerged in 1784, although six of Smith's sonnets had also appeared before the edition, in periodicals from September 1782 onwards.⁴⁰ The first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* contains sixteen sonnets, and a song translated from French, 'Origin of Flattery' – the 'other essays' of the edition's title. Smith's use of 'essay' (suggesting modest attempts) contrasts with Hayley's more authoritative appropriation in his title *Essay on Epic Poetry*. Hayley, along with another Sussex neighbour-poet John Sargent, helped *Elegiac Sonnets* into print while Smith resided at King's Bench Prison with her husband. The paratextual materials of *Elegiac Sonnets* help to present Smith as a genteel Sussex poet – the author is 'of Bignor Park, Sussex' – with literary connections, yet the mentions of Hayley also have considerable significance in a literary context, which has often been overlooked.⁴¹ Smith addresses Hayley as a predecessor in the sonnet form:

⁴⁰ 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).

⁴¹ Publisher James Dodsley initially declined to publish *Elegiac Sonnets*, misjudging public taste when he assured Smith 'that for such things there was no sale, [...] the public had been satiated with shepherds and shepherdesses' (quoted by Mary Hays, 'Mrs. Charlotte Smith', *Public Characters of 1800–1801* [London: Richard Phillips, 1801], p. 50).

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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. (p. 9)

Despite the references to her sonnets as ‘essays’ and ‘simple effusions’, this is undercut by the ‘esteem’ Smith herself has for them. This is typical of Smith, who frequently appears simultaneously deferential and bold. While women writers did precede Smith in publishing sonnets in the eighteenth century, *Elegiac Sonnets* is the first volume of sonnets to be published by a woman writer. Her references to Hayley as the ‘greatest modern Master’ of the sonnet, and herself as his ‘distant copyist’, are redolent of the language used by Hughes regarding Spenser’s sonnets, and Edwards regarding his own. Smith’s first-edition sonnets are notably different from Hayley’s eight published sonnets, however, and their interest in the natural world aligns them more closely with those of Warton or Bampfylde. Moreover, twelve of the sonnets take the English form, while the remaining four vary in their irregularity. Overall, across all ninety-two, 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 – Edwards, Warton, Bampfylde, Gray – who use the Italian form, and in a way that looks back to the literary past either to Petrarch or Milton. Smith refers to Hayley again in the preface to the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*:

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. (p. 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 in his widely read dictionary definition

(II: s.v. 'SONNET. n.s'). He commented further on the form in *Lives of the Poets* (1779–1782), writing on Milton's sonnets: 'The fabrick of a sonnet, however adapted to the Italian language, has never succeeded in ours' (*Oxford Authors*, p. 702).⁴² As opposed to the ubiquitous Italian form, the little-used English or Shakespearean form was known as the 'illegitimate' form and thought not even to warrant the appellation 'sonnet' by some. Hayley's 'specimen' would appear to refer to his six translated sonnets that take the Italian form and, while they 'prove [...] that the difficulties' of the legitimate sonnet 'vanish before uncommon powers', they are the 'exception' (with the implication that there are others that have not been as successful). Prior to Smith's sonnets, in the eighteenth century, the only instances of the English form occur in Charles Emily's (1734–1762) sonnet sequence *Death* (1762), Hayley's sonnet in *Triumphs of Temper*, and his 'elegiac' sonnet in *An Essay on Epic Poetry*. Emily's archaic *Death* was composed in 1759, published posthumously and variously republished in periodicals and collections through the remainder of the century and into the nineteenth. Writing in 1835, Robert Southey lamented how 'Emily and Bampfylde had been cut off in the blossom of their youth', describing both as writers of exception in the 'juncture when there was no poet of any great ability, or distinguished name in the field'.⁴³ Emily's sonnets are self-consciously poetic and archaic in tone, steeped in the Gothic environs of Cambridge, the 'Lycidas'-infused shores of Camus, and display a keen awareness of a poetic lineage: 'A future bard these awful domes may see, | Muse o'er the present age as I the last'.⁴⁴ While his poems may take the English sonnet form, 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.⁴⁵ Thus, I argue that Smith should be credited with reviving the English sonnet form at this time: she steers the sonnet form away from eighteenth-century practice by taking it in a different formal direction. At a time when Shakespeare's sonnets were little known and only the Italian, 'legitimate' sonnet form has an established poetic past, the English sonnet form was disconnected from literary tradition.

⁴² Johnson's judgement of Milton's sonnets was that 'of the best it can only be said that they are not bad' (p. 702). While his opinion on the sonnet had a considerable impact on the form's status at this time, his take on Milton's sonnets was at odds with popular opinion of the time; as this chapter makes clear, Milton's sonnets were very popular and inspired many eighteenth-century writers to appropriate the form.

⁴³ Robert Southey, *The Works of William Cowper* [...], 15 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1835–1837), II: p. 181.

⁴⁴ Charles Emily, 'Death. A Poem', *The St. James's Magazine*, 1 (1762), X, lines 13–14.

⁴⁵ On Emily's interesting use of form see Michael Hansen, 'Elegy, Ode, and the Eighteenth-Century Sonnet Revival: The Case of Charles Emily', *Literary Imagination*, 12 (2010), pp. 307–18. Emily's sequence is one of only two sonnet sequences published in the eighteenth century, the second being Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* (1796).

Aside from Hayley's *Triumph of Temper* sonnet, which she refers to in her sonnet XIX (1786), Smith invokes only 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 works or letters.⁴⁶ The other sonnets she refers to or draws on – by Petrarch, Milton, and her contemporaries – are all Italian in form. Drayton's sonnet appears in Smith's work for children, *Rural Walks* (1795), in which the 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 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: pp. 35–6). Throughout its history, the sonnet has been used to immortalise a subject, 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: p. 35) would suggest that she was not familiar with other contemporary sonnets in which it is a dominant theme – Shakespeare's sonnets, for example. It is something of an interesting choice for Smith to include: Drayton is mentioned very little in eighteenth-century sonnet discourse, being known chiefly for his topographical poem *Poly-Olbion* (part one, 1612). The fact that the one English sonnet named by Smith should be imbued with such immortalising powers also establishes a contrast for her 'elegiac' sonnets, as female subject becomes female poet. The transient, illegitimate 'elegiac' sonnets of a woman writer may have 'no very just claim to that title', yet in positioning her sonnets outside eighteenth-century male sonnet tradition and critical opinion, in *Elegiac Sonnets* Smith effects a significant shift in the sonnet's history and establishes a new type of poem. Moreover, when Smith introduces Drayton's sonnet in *Rural Walks*, she apologises that it is 'not so polished as modern poetry' and precedes it with a quotation from Pope's 'Part of the Ninth Ode of the Fourth Book of Horace' (1751), which articulates the same sentiment as Drayton's poem, suggesting that Smith conceives literary history somewhat differently from her forbears. The ensuing chapters span the development of *Elegiac Sonnets* roughly chronologically, and track the emergence of Smith's original, influential voice and form out of these tentative beginnings while charting her changing sense of literary tradition, thus starting with Smith's initial official apologetic venture into print in 1784.

⁴⁶ Michael Drayton's sequence of fifty-one sonnets, *Ideas Mirrour: Amours in Quatorzains*, was published in 1594. He later revised the sequence as *Idea* in 1619. An edition of Drayton's works, including his sonnets, was published in 1748, and enlarged in four volumes in 1753.

CHAPTER TWO

Tradition

This chapter focuses on the first (1784) and third edition (1786) of *Elegiac Sonnets*, which are steeped in the highly literary environs of the nightingale and the river. I group my readings by these figures to argue that in her sonnets Smith uses inherited themes to engage with different literary traditions and place herself as a woman writer within them. In his introduction to Smith's *Works* Curran writes that the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* 'consists of safely literary sorrows', and that Smith is 'so highly conscious of the provenance [...] of her every subject, it is some wonder that she touched so resonant a chord with her audience (I: p. xxii). My contention is that this is what Smith's sonnets are about: their consciously literary aspect is integral to meaning, and is fuller, more nuanced, and more important than has been acknowledged. I show that Smith uses the nightingale trope to establish a model of authorship, and the figures of nightingale and stream to set out the relationship between her sonnets and those of Petrarch and Milton. In the third edition the River Arun is Smith's main poetic theme, which places 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.¹ Smith was the first poet to engage with the river sonnet founded by Warton, although it is an engagement that has been largely overlooked in critical discussions. 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 Hayley, all of whom had associations

¹ J. B. Bamborough, 'William Lisle Bowles and the Riparian Muse', in *Essays & Poems Presented to Lord David Cecil*, ed. W. W. Robson (London: Constable, 1970), p. 101.

with that river' (p. 101). Smith's sonnets are named in David Fairer's analysis of the river sonnet tradition, yet his concern is with a specific male poetic lineage; and, while Daniel Robinson notes Smith's importance to the development of the genre in an essay on river sonnets, his focus is on Wordsworth and the Derwent.² The relationship between the river sonnets of Warton and Smith is not a simple or straightforward one; her sonnets display a 'Wartonian accent' (Fairer, p. 101) yet are simultaneously 'rather different in tone' (Bamborough), and 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 interest in the literary past is dramatised as she encounters West Sussex predecessors Otway, Collins, and Hayley along the banks of the river. In the second half of this chapter I explore fully the different interwoven literary lineages of Smith's river sonnets and their significance, tracing *Elegiac Sonnets* from its origins in the Hampshire woodland and through the Arun's winding ways, before the volume bids the river farewell and looks downstream to where the river meets the ocean waves. The chapter also looks across to 'other poetic landscapes' – of Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713) and Smith's own (non-river) sonnet written at Penshurst Place – which signal more widely how Smith's sense of tradition differs from that of her contemporary sonneteers.

Nightingales

In the first two editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* of 1784, the prevalent setting is that of the woodland locale of the nightingale. This 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' (p. 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] (p. 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

² Fairer, *Organising Poetry*, chapter 4; Daniel Robinson, "'Still Glides the Stream": Form and Function in Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets', *European Romantic Review*, 13 (2002), pp. 449–64.

sonnets into the nightingale's landscape. Sonnets I and VII 'On the Departure of the Nightingale' were also the first two sonnets of Smith's to be published, together in *The European Magazine* in 1782. 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 both a canonical subject and an emblem of the elegiac, female poet. In Smith's later work, *A Natural History of Birds*, she observes how the nightingale has been 'celebrated by the poets more than any other of the feathered race' (XIII: pp. 337 and 334), naming several poems together with her own sonnets III and VII, and relates the 'mournful' – a favourite adjective of Smith's – story of the Ovidian Philomela myth – the chief literary connection with the bird. As Smith tells the tale, it is one largely about the suppression of voice: Philomela, raped by her brother-in-law Tereus, threatens to make her rape known. Tereus, incensed 'by the eloquence of her sorrow, and the justness of her indignation', cuts out her tongue (p. 337). She first finds a voice by weaving her story in a tapestry – a translation of sorts – for her sister, who is struck by the 'dumb eloquence of the poor injured Philomela' (p. 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. The nightingale has long been the most popular of ornithological poetic subjects, its song frequently aligned with poetic voice. In *Birds*, Smith's two sonnets appear under the playful introduction of 'an inferior poet, to whom perhaps you may notwithstanding be partial', a typically self-marginalising statement contradicted by the juxtaposition of her own sonnets with those of Petrarch and Milton (p. 340). Smith selects extracts – that precede her own sonnets chronologically – 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 James Thomson's 'Spring' (1728); and two sonnets by Petrarch.³ The later poems quoted from are Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791) and Coleridge's 'The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem, April, 1798' (1798), and she also refers to his earlier poem 'To the Nightingale' (1795) through a quotation: 'minstrel of the moon' (p. 337). As this selection indicates, the nightingale offers a direct route into sonnet tradition. Smith's two nightingale sonnets III and VII draw on Petrarch and Milton respectively, the two main poets through whom the sonnet found renewed popularity in the eighteenth century, and a genealogy which runs through the Italian sonnet

³ Francesco Petrarca (1304–74) is thought to have composed the sonnets and other poems of *The 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 variously published and translated.

form. However, as well as connecting with sonnet tradition, Smith typically departs from it, chiefly through form and her use of 'illegitimate' English and irregular sonnet forms. 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 aspect of Philomela's voice.⁴ As noted, however, there is nothing to suggest that Smith knew Shakespeare's sonnets. Prior to Smith, several eighteenth-century women poets drew on the nightingale and 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.⁵ In her sonnets and her wider oeuvre, Smith rarely draws on 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, which Smith's first edition is naturally interested in, 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. The sonnet sets up the interdependence of pain and poetry at the crux of *Elegiac Sonnets*, indicated in the preface to the first editions: 'Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought' (p. 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' (lines 6, 8 and 9), and, as the sonnet concludes: 'how dear the Muse's favours cost, | If those paint sorrow best – who feel it most!' (lines 13–14). The nightingale has often been described pressing her breast against a thorn: in Finch's 'To

⁴ William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 102', *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Thomson, 1997), line 10. Smith consistently refers to the nightingale as female and throughout eighteenth-century works of ornithology the sex of the singing bird is variously presented as both female and male. By the end of the century, it became more widely known that it is the male bird that sings, and is presented as such in Thomas Bewick's widely read *A History of British Birds (Land Birds)*, 1797).

⁵ See Elizabeth Singer Rowe, *Poems on Several Occasions: Written by Philomela* (London: John Dunton, 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 individual poems are collected in a section on the nightingale in Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine E. Ingrassia, ed., *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century: An Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). For the ways in which women writers 'self-authorized' through the nightingale trope see Kirsten Juhas, *'T'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).

the Nightingale' (1713) the speaker describes how 'th'unhappy Poet's Breast, | Like thine, when best he sings, is plac'd against a Thorn'.⁶ As evidenced in *Birds*, Smith also knew of the connection between the nightingale and rose from the 'Asiatic poets', who tell that the 'Nightingale is enamoured of the rose' (p. 338), and she quotes from 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' (p. 338). A poem 'The Swallow' also 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? (lines 36–40)

Montagu goes on to turn her 'literal' translation into 'the stile of English Poetry', and into couplets, becoming 'Now Philomel renews her tender strain, | Indulging all the night her pleasing Pain'.⁷ The nightingale, as it will be for Smith, is a vehicle for translation and transformation – processes in which the Ovidian myth is steeped – of voice, language, and form.⁸

Smith's sonnet II is 'Written at the close of Spring', linking it seasonally with the nightingale, as well as through its grove-like setting, and 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?

⁶ Anne Kingsmill Finch, countess of Winchilsea, 'To the Nightingale', *Selected Poems*, ed. Denys Thompson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987), lines 12–13.

⁷ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, '108. To Alexander Pope 1 April 1717', *Selected Letters*, ed. Isobel Grundy (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 156.

⁸ In an article on this poem, 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', whereas the domestic, maternal swallow 'authorizes and legitimates Smith's publications' ('Charlotte Smith and "The Swallow": Migration and Romantic Authorship', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 72 (2009), pp. 61 and 66). However, Smith's identification in *Elegiac Sonnets* is certainly with the nightingale, and she evades the erotic associations of the bird (as do her female predecessors). The literary associations of the nightingale legitimise her authorship in a different way.

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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,
To sigh, and sing at liberty – like thee! (p. 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' (p. 18) – 311 in modern editions – which Smith includes in her list of nightingale poems in *Birds*. 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'.⁹ This is thus the 'idea' Smith takes from Petrarch, as her sonnet also considers the source of the nightingale's sadness.

In his edition of Smith's poems Curran suggests that the 'specific influence' of Petrarch on this sonnet is 'at most slight' (p. 14), yet other critics, such as Robinson ('Formal Paradoxy', pp. 209–11) and Zuccato (pp. 53–4) show otherwise. As the first sonnet to connect explicitly with existing sonnet tradition the debt is significant. 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. 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, and can be seen as a prelude to the separate translations 'from Petrarch'.

Despite the contrast Smith draws between speaker and nightingale at the end of sonnet III, other sonnets do make the identification. In sonnet III the

⁹ Francesco Petrarca, '311', in *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. and ed. 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', pp. vii–xii).

bird ‘Tell’st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe’ (line 2), while the following sonnet IV is addressed ‘To the Moon’, and 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’, while John Thelwall refers to Smith as ‘Philomela of the Muse’s grove’.¹⁰ In her second nightingale sonnet, VII ‘On the departure of the nightingale’, Smith draws on Milton. Although Smith describes Milton as ‘the greatest of English poets’ (XIII: p. 338), she 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. The nightingale features in several poems by Milton: as Warton observes in his 1785 edition of Milton’s poems, ‘No poet has more frequently celebrated the nightingale’ (p. 331). The sonnet Smith quotes from is Milton’s first, written early in his poetic career; 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 youthful sonnet ‘O nightingale’ was written contemporaneously with his five Italian sonnets, canzone, and ‘*Elegia quinta. In advertum veris*’ [‘Elegy V. On the Coming of Spring’], which 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 poetic voice, inspiration, and the muse. His early poems are rural, set during spring, feature nightingales, shepherdesses, and maidens, and are steeped in the landscape and language of Italy. Milton’s speaker is ‘an artless youth, [...] simple in his love’, a role assumed in the first sonnet:¹¹

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,

¹⁰ Samuel Egerton Brydges, ‘Memoirs of Mrs. Charlotte Smith’ in *Censura Literaria* [...], 10 vols. (London: Longman, etc., 1807), IV: pp. 83–4; John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic* [...], 3 vols. (London: For the Author, 1793): I: pp. 123–4. Brydges’s own sonnets were written while he was a student at Cambridge, in imitation of Milton, yet also influenced by the sonnet editions of Warton and Bampfylde (*Sonnets and Other Poems; With a Versification of the Six Bards of Ossian* [London: G. and T. Wilkie, 1785]). He went on to publish more sonnets in 1807, which are closer to Smith’s in their English and irregular forms as well as in content.

¹¹ John Langhorne, ‘Son. V’, *Milton’s Italian Poems Translated* [...] (London: T. Becket, 1776), line 1.

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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.¹²

The sonnet alludes to the idea that it is good luck in love to hear the nightingale before the cuckoo. Thus, through the nightingale the poet announces their allegiance to both poetry and love, vowing to serve both. It is this announcement that 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,
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! (p. 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. (p. 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

¹² John Milton, 'Sonnet I', *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey, 2nd edn. (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 92–3.

Smith's sonnet restores the amorous association, and adds 'Sorrow' (the more Smithian sentiment) to the nightingale's remit. The relationship between the two sonnets is an uneasy 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, dramatising Smith's own 'departure' from Milton, while appearing to herald his influence through the quotation. The 'love-lorn youth [who] shall glide | Thro' the lone brake that shades thy mossy nest' in the sestet is reminiscent of Milton's young poet, and the way he 'glides' through the landscape suggests a ghostly presence, anticipating the poetic predecessors who haunt Smith's Arun sonnets. 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 that sets out to prove that it possessed a 'grace' superior to the 'legitimate' sonnet.¹³ 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? (p. 414)

Thelwall's essay shows how Smith's use of inherited poetic figures invites the drawing of parallels and contrasts between poets and across traditions.

One more sonnet in the first edition features a nightingale, which sits outside Smith's other nightingale poems and their interest in tradition. Sonnet XXII 'To Solitude' is one of the sonnets 'Supposed to be written by Werter', in which the speaker 'methinks in that long plaintive strain, | Thine own sweet songstress weeps my wayward fate!' (lines 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 are underpinned by a necessarily different way of engaging with other literary texts. Johann Wolfgang von 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.¹⁴ The novel was immensely successful and Smith's sonnets can be seen as part of the 'Werther Fever' that swept Europe. Each of Smith's Werter sonnets is taken from a specific episode in Goethe's novel which relies on setting for meaning.

¹³ 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), p. 413.

¹⁴ I follow Malthus and Smith in their spelling of 'Werter'.

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The Werter sonnets thus also involve an element of ‘translation’ (from the German). While the translations from Petrarch overtly engage with the literary past and sonnet tradition, the Werter sonnets do not. Smith instead draws on Werter for the immediacy and sublimity, *Sturm und Drang* [storm and stress] aspects of Goethe’s novel. No ghostly poetic presence glides through Werter’s environs; indeed, sonnet XXII is addressed ‘to solitude’ and takes enjoyment in ‘wild-woods, and untrodden glades’ (line 5). It seems significant that Werter’s favourite poet in the novel is Ossian, celebrated as an authentic voice of untutored genius, and the ‘The Songs of Selma’ recited by Werter in the novel displays a deep, immediate connection with the coastal Scottish environment.¹⁵ Smith’s sonnets ‘Supposed to be Written by Werter’ could also be supposed to draw on his favourite poet and, while Smith’s Werter sonnets are clearly intertextual, they engage with their source material in a way that divorces them from literary tradition, as such, to present a powerful, unmediated connection with place.

As *Elegiac Sonnets* expands after 1784, the importance of the nightingale and its woodland locale recedes. This is highlighted by looking forward to sonnet LV ‘The Return of the Nightingale. Written in May 1791’, published in the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (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!
(lines 9–14)

The first two lines here seem to refer back to VII, and a previous poetic self. The nightingale’s redundancy to the speaker, whose woes have gone beyond the nightingale as an apt symbol, is now evident. Indeed, in later poems the pleasing sounds of the ‘songster’, private and hidden, are replaced with the non-musical cries of more raucous sea birds, as in ‘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’, of the seventh edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797), which takes place during a storm:

¹⁵ This appropriation of ‘Ossian’ is of course despite the question surrounding the authenticity and originality of James Macpherson’s ‘translations’ (see Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988]).

Here the scathed trees with leaves half-drest,
 Shade no soft songster's secret nest,
 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. (lines 31–6)

The poem is indicative of the shift in Smith's poetic persona, setting, and relationship with tradition across her career. The nightingale would not be found here for environmental reasons, but also for literary and authorial ones too.¹⁶

Streams

Closely associated with and sometimes part of the nightingale setting is the poetic figure of a nameless stream, which is also salient in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* and carries with it an Italian influence. The stream features in two out of the three translations from Petrarch, XV and XVI, both 'in morte' sonnets, included in the first edition. It also features in sonnet IV 'To the Moon':

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. (lines 1–4)

The sonnet bears a resemblance to Petrarch's sonnet 35, which had been translated by Mary Monck and Susanna Highmore prior to Smith: the speaker appears 'alone and pensive' in both Highmore's translation and Smith's sonnet.¹⁷ The main setting of Petrarch's *The Rime Sparse* is the secluded valley of Vaucluse, home to the source of the Sorgue river, which the pastoral, melancholy landscape of Smith's early sonnets recalls. A river also features in one of Milton's Italian sonnets, landscaping the poet's use of Italian through place, as Langhorne translates the poem in 1766: 'he has 'tune[d] my lays in language little tried' and 'Tamis' [Thames's] forsook for Arno's flowery

¹⁶ The main literary appearance of the cormorant can be found in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan takes the form of the bird on entering paradise. It has little presence outside of that work, however.

¹⁷ Susanna Highmore, 'Sonnet. From Petrarch. By the Same', in *The Poetical Calendar* [...], ed. Francis Fawkes and William Woty, 2nd edn., 12 vols. (London: J. Coote, 1763), VII: lines 1–2.

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Side'.¹⁸ Smith's translations have an interesting and playful relationship with Petrarch's originals, and is an aspect of her engagement with tradition that has been thoroughly documented by critics.¹⁹ As a woman writer she must negotiate both a male poetic voice and the way it encodes the female subject. One way in which Smith does this is through place: as she translates Petrarch and reworks his landscape, she removes Laura from it. The valley's fields, woods, cliffs, and streams constitute both a real and metaphorical landscape in Petrarch's sonnets: the river carry his sighs and tears, and Laura is couched both figuratively and orthographically in the breeze – *l'aura*, golden light – *l'oro*, and laurel – *lauro*. In translation, this wordplay is lost, and Smith further removes Laura through her use of the English sonnet. In both of Smith's translations, she refers to Laura's 'angel form', which carries with it a suggestion of poetic form, especially as Laura, *lauro*, is bound up with the essence of Petrarch's poetry. As Smith translates 'from Petrarch' and his eponymous form into her own 'illegitimate' sonnet, she also displaces Laura. Between sonnets XV and XVI, the presence of Laura disappears physically from the landscape. Sonnet XV 'From Petrarch' is a translation of *The Rime Sparse* sonnet 279, in which Laura seems to live on through place:

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[.] (lines 1–7)

The speaking 'I' is located on the riverbank, where the ghost of Laura appears, afforded immortality through place. The sonnet was translated at least twice before Smith in the eighteenth century, by Langhorne in 1766 ('Fell the fair stream in murmurs down the dale') and Nott in 1777 (the rather more sublime

¹⁸ Langhorne, 'Son. II', *Milton's Italian Poems Translated*, lines 11 and 13.

¹⁹ Daniel Robinson, 'Elegiac Sonnets: Charlotte Smith's Formal Paradox', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 39 (2003), pp. 185–220. Luca Manini, 'Charlotte Smith and the Voice of Petrarch', in *British Romanticism and Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting*, ed. Laura Bandiera and Diego Saglia (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 97–108; Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England*, pp. 52–66; and Mary Anne Myers, 'Unsexed Petrarch: Charlotte Smith's Lessons in the Sonnet as a Social Medium', *Studies in Romanticism*, 53 (2014), pp. 239–63. See also Mary Moore's *Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and Petrarchism* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

‘While down the rude rock the big torrent’s borne’), indicating its relevance to contemporary poetic trends.²⁰

In Smith’s next translation (of Petrarch’s sonnet 301), the river valley is again 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! (lines 1–8)

The landscape here is an audience of sorts to Petrarch’s grief. Whereas in the preceding translation Laura’s ‘angel form’ had appeared within it, now she is the ‘angel form I shall behold no more! | To heaven she’s fled!’ (lines 12–13), an extreme statement that is not in the original, and by the end of the sonnet ‘nought to me remains | But the pale ashes which her urn contains’ (lines 13–14). Laura has been removed fully from the environs of the Sorgue – not only figuratively and orthographically, but also in the sense that her ghost or spirit has been banished: only ‘ashes’ remain.

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 amid European countryside composing sonnets, the presentation of the river is indicative of the differences between these two literary sources, and Smith’s engagement with them, as Werter sonnet XXIII, ‘To the North Star’ suggests:

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!

²⁰ Langhorne, ‘Sonnet CCXXXVIII | MDCCLXV’, *Poetical Works of John Langhorne*, II, line 3; John Nott, ‘Sonnet XXIV’, *Sonnets, and Odes Translated from the Italian of Petrarch* (London: T. Davies, 1777), line 2.

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So o'er my soul short rays of reason fly,
Then fade: – and leave me to despair, and die! (lines 5–14)

The sonnet presents a similar scene to sonnet IV 'To the moon', which also depicts a night-time wanderer musing upon their favourite celestial body, 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 tranquil stream of the Petrarch sonnets. While it is not given as its source, sonnet XXXIII recalls a different episode in Goethe's novel in which Werter beholds the flooding of the Wahlheim valley, a sublime scene congruous with Werter's state of mind: 'the whole valley was as a stormy sea, tossed by furious winds. [...] The echoes repeated and redoubled the roarings of the wind and the waters. I drew near the precipice; I wished and shuddered'.²¹ In Smith's sonnet, the North Star episode (in Goethe's novel given by Smith as the source) has been merged with the overflowing river scene. With no female subject to negotiate in this instance, Smith's 'I' blends more seamlessly with that of Werter, and the characteristic voice and landscape that later emerge in her sonnets are much closer to Werter's. 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 the interest is in 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!' (line 14). Rather than immortality, the Werter sonnets are concerned with the death and oblivion that Petrarch resists.

In the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* Smith also introduces a fourth sonnet 'From Petrarch', which makes a different statement regarding place. 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: (lines 1–4)

The juxtaposition of extremes continues and the sonnet concludes that 'My heart, O Laura, still is thine' (line 12), regardless of context. 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 reflects the relationship between speaker and place in the sonnet,

²¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Werter: A German Story*, trans. Daniel Malthus, 2 vols. (London: J. Dodsley, 1779), I: pp. 103–5.

characterised by a lack or discrepancy. The unimportance of specific setting here 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. In the first two editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, the Petrarch and Werter sonnets were clearly separated from the ten original sonnets, yet in the third, they are placed among the original sonnets: the four Petrarch sonnets XIII–VI are followed by four new original sonnets, then the five Werter sonnets XXI–V. 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 an entirely different relationship with place and tradition.

River Arun

When the third edition appears as *Elegiac Sonnets. By Charlotte Smith. The Third Edition. With Twenty Additional Sonnets* in 1786, the volume is now dated from the small West Sussex village of Woolbeding and it is in this edition that Smith's childhood landscape is most strongly invoked. Smith had settled in the village in the autumn of 1785 and this new locale is reflected in the 'twenty additional sonnets' included. Situated some miles north of Bignor Park, her paternal family home, where the Arun – the river of her childhood – could not be seen, only sensed 'in the vale below' (sonnet V, line 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'. The source of the Arun, a collection of gills, is found in St Leonard's Forest in West Sussex. The western River Rother, its major tributary, joins the Arun at Stopham, from where the Arun journeys down to meet the English Channel at Littlehampton, passing approximately two miles east of Bignor Park on its way. The Rother flows west to east approximately two miles north and meets the Arun to the north-east of Bignor Park.²² The clearest sense of the topography of Smith's childhood landscape is given in the second book of her poem *The Emigrants* (1793), in which the speaker is located 'on an Eminence on one of those Downs, which afford to the South a View of the sea; to the North the Weald of Sussex'. The sun 'illuminate[s] hills, and woods, and fields' and Smith observes how the Arun 'Make[s] its irriguous course thro' yonder meads', where she played as a child (lines 331–2). Understanding this topography is important, for the way Smith's sonnets move through it informs their intertextual relationships.

²² The Rother was also known as the Arun in the eighteenth century and for clarity, I will follow Smith in referring to the river she addresses as the Arun.

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

Smith's Arun sonnets situate her in a range of contexts: literary, artistic, and historical. As noted, 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 Lorrain. 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.²³

The popularity of landscape painting in the eighteenth century influenced the reflowering of the topographical – or loco-descriptive – poem at this time, which had its antecedent in John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1640). Examples include John Dyer's *Grongar Hill* (1726), Gray's 'Ode on Distant Prospect of Eton College' (1747), and Richard Jago's 'Edge-Hill' (1767); many of these poems have a river at their centre. Smith's river sonnets, written on location, also nod to the mode of the picturesque traveller. As William Gilpin writes, the picturesque traveller should take the rivers of England as 'the great directing lines of his excursions'.²⁴ The popularity of recording written and visual observations of Britain grew exponentially during the eighteenth century. The first volume of Daniel Defoe's *A Tour Thro' the whole Island of Great Britain* (1724) contains an account of his travels in Sussex made in 1722, although Defoe's references to the Arun and its environs are made from the tourist town of Arundel – popular for its medieval castle – and largely pertain to navigation, trade, and the river's famous mullet. Later in the eighteenth century, the route across the South Downs between Rye and Chichester became particularly popular with antiquaries. The most prominent of these was William Burrell, who commissioned a vast number of topographical paintings between 1774 and 1791. As part of this commission, Samuel Hieronymus Grimm produced two watercolour sketches of Bignor Park, made in 1780, for Burrell was particularly concerned with landed properties and the genealogies of landowning families. In addition, Smith's father and brother had published works dated from Bignor Park on farming

²³ Catherine A. Dorset, 'Charlotte Smith', in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1852), IV: p. 21.

²⁴ William Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772 [...]*, 2 vols. (London: Blamire, 1786), I: p. 202.

and land management in 1757 and 1784 respectively.²⁵ Smith is thus interestingly situated in this landscape of tourists and travellers: ‘of Bignor Park’ and of a landowning family, yet a female member, who cannot inherit. She is also – unlike the tourist writers and artists – a native of Sussex. Smith’s solitary, wandering speaker is uninterested in the antiquarian, and turns their attention to the natural world, the contemplation of melancholy, and, most significantly, the literary history of place, an alternative literary genealogy of native Arun writers. Smith’s river – upstream from the more populated, fished, and navigable Arun – is a peaceful, gentle, melancholy, and largely overlooked place of poetry.

As noted, her four river sonnets situate Smith in an emergent tradition of river sonnets. 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, Wansbeck (addressed by Bowles as 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 Daniel 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’ (‘Form and Function’, p. 450). 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 original authentic text, a native stream from which succeeding poets could, directly or indirectly draw’ (*Organising Poetry*, p. 108). 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 both poetry and wider literary discourse. Pertinent to the sonnet, Edwards described his

²⁵ Nicholas Turner, *A Proposal for Raising Timber, and for Effectually Supporting the Poor in Great Britain* [...] (London: Edward Owen, 1757), and Nicholas Turner, *An Essay on Draining and Improving Peat Bogs by Nicholas Turner* [...] (Chichester: Dennett Jaques, 1784). The authors are presented as ‘Of Bignor Park, Sussex’ and ‘Of Bignor, Sussex’, respectively.

appropriation of the form as ‘drawing from the same fountains as Milton drew from’ (*Correspondence*, III: p. 91), while in 1805 *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.’²⁶ Both these quotations refer to the Italian sonnet form and, accordingly, using a different metaphor, Smith refers to her English sonnets as ‘effusions’. 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’.²⁷ The figure of the river represents tradition itself – sonnet and beyond – with each poet contributing to its increasing flow. Prior to Smith, the Arun makes a limited poetic appearance, yet in works that also emphasise its literariness: Collins himself invokes predecessor Otway in ‘Ode to Pity’ (1746), and Samuel Egerton Brydges’s sonnet IX ‘To Evening’ (1785) heralds ‘the Bard sublime of Arun’s stream’ (*Sonnets*, line 3), 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’ (‘Memoirs’, p. 70).²⁸

Befitting the ‘real father of the eighteenth-century sonnet’ (Havens, p. 492), the first river sonnet published in the century is by Thomas Edwards. His sonnet to the poet Richard Owen Cambridge (1717–1802) was published in Dodsley’s *Miscellany* and as sonnet I ‘To R. Owen Cambridge, Esq;’ in *Canons*. Like the majority of his sonnets, it addresses a friend and 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:

²⁶ William Herbert, review of *Isabel, from the Spanish of Gareilaso de la Vega*, *The Edinburgh Review*, 6 (1805), p. 297.

²⁷ *OED Online*, s.v. ‘influence, n.’ and ‘derivation, n.1’.

²⁸ Brydges also invokes the literary Arun in his poem ‘Retirement’ (1805), in which Smith joins Otway and Collins on the riverbank.

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. (*Canons*, p. 307)

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, an interesting if tenuous connection between sonnet and non-sonnet landscapes.²⁹ The river is used to celebrate 'private life', and rural, peaceful retreat, which the poeticised 'Sabrina' comes to represent, promoting similar values to those informing Edwards's sonnet XXI 'For the Root-House at Wrest', 'a hallowed grove' where 'sweet contentment dwells' (*Canons*, lines 1–4) free from ambition and avarice. Landscape assumes a more metaphorical function in the sestet of his river sonnet, to issue a moralistic warning against the '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. In the context of 'influence', the presence of 'Sabrina' is significant: the tale of the nymph who gave her name to the river is told by both Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* (books I–III, 1590; books IV–V, 1596) and Milton in *Comus* (1637), two poets Edwards is aware he is following in his use of the sonnet and who he also celebrates along with Shakespeare as part of a native tradition.³⁰

It is Warton's sonnet of 1777, published in *Poems. A New Edition*, that 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, as the sonnet is largely concerned with the subjective 'I', place, and the connections between them. 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:

²⁹ See *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), IV: pp. 342–3 and 351–2, n.

³⁰ 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. Anon., 'Sonnet VII. On the Thames', *Sonnets* (London: For the Author, 1776), line 14.

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

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 chear 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. (p. 83)

The sonnet's structure roughly reflects the past–present dichotomy Warton explores, the infusion of past into present, that Fairer has shown to underpin Warton's poems. Rhyming *abbaabccdedede*, the irregular take on the Italian form suggests two sestets, representing past and present, divided by the *cc* couplet, which 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. Warton's poems were published in the same year as Nott's *Sonnets and Odes* translated from Petrarch, and different traditions interestingly converge through the river trope and the emphasis on place. In Nott's sonnet XXVII, 'since Laura there first taught my steps to stray' (line 8) recalls the opening two lines of Warton's poem, and his reference to a 'native bloom' (line 9) is reminiscent of Warton's 'native stream'. Nott's sonnet similarly sets up a past–present contrast through a river landscape, with an emphasis on memory. However, as noted, Warton disliked Petrarch's sonnets and did not follow him in his use of the sonnet form; and, by writing in a select native tradition, and as a male poet, his verse is not informed by the same complexity of literary and gender issues that animate Smith's river sonnets.

The Arun first appears in Smith's sonnet V, 'To the South Downs', initially published in 1782, and then in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. It is the first of her sonnets to address the landscape of her childhood:

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! (p. 20)

Like Warton, Smith contrasts the happiness of childhood with melancholy adulthood, although Smith's is a deeper, more hopeless melancholy than Warton's lighter sense of regret. Rather than residing on the riverbank, however, Smith looks out on the Arun 'in the vale below' of her South Downs landscape. Smith's sonnet is engaged with a different poem here: Gray's 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College', another revisitation poem, which is characterised by temporal, physical, and poetic distance. 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. (*Poems*, ed. Lonsdale, lines 8–10)

Drawing on Gray, Smith's sonnet presents the 'distant prospect' of her own childhood landscape, from which she too has become alienated. Like Gray's Thames, the River Arun – personified as the classical 'Aruna' – is temporally, physically, and poetically (through its highly literary presentation) distant. Smith's female river contrasts with Gray's 'father Thames' (line 21), however, and her Aruna recalls other feminised rivers such as Milton's Sabrina and Pope's Lodona in *Windsor Forest* (1713). Gray and Warton are both echoed in the repetition of 'Ah! hills' in Smith's sonnet, an echo of 'Ah, happy hills' from Gray's 'Ode' and the opening 'Ah!' of Warton's sonnet. This confluence of sources serves to articulate the departure of Smith's sonnet from Warton's own, as 'infusion' is replaced by Gray's distance and disjunction. Both Warton's and Smith's sonnets begin with the exclamation, yet the second quatrain that the 'Ah!' opens in Smith's sonnet is imbued with a sense of disconnection, which is completed by the final couplet in which 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 two-part Italian form fuses past and present.

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

The revisitation poem works differently for Smith as a woman writer, and is further complicated by her dispossession and personal misfortune, placing Smith 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.³¹ 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. While the title-page of the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* presents the author as ‘of Bignor Park’, Smith hadn’t resided at the family seat since before her marriage, and of course negotiated the publication of the work from Kings’ Bench, where Benjamin Smith had been imprisoned for debt. 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’ revisitation poems. Her poetic, literary dispossession is in a way matched by her legal position and personal sense of loss. She began writing sonnets in 1777, the year Warton’s Loddon sonnet was published, and her circumstances were 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 a 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 that 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? (lines 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

³¹ Charlotte Smith, *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 625.

manhood's prime mature', a line 'which encapsulates the organic connect-
edness of life' (*Organising Poetry*, p. 112). Smith appears to reject Warton's
paradigm in these lines, however, seeking to deny 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. This
departure becomes more apparent, and is realised differently, in her river
sonnets.

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 resituating the river from Smith's new riverbank
perspective, where it begins:

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. (lines 1–8)

Contrary to the distant, classicised 'Aruna' of 'To the South Downs', 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. It is imbued
with deep power by the 'votary' Otway, who – replacing Laura of sonnet XV
– 'consecrates the stream'.

The appearance of the first of her literary predecessors is explained in a
note by Smith:³²

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. (p. 32)

³² A significant new aspect of the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* is the inclusion of
a section of 'Quotations, Notes and Explanations'. The first edition had included some
idiosyncratic footnotes, giving literary and natural details, yet the third edition is much
more comprehensive, giving sources for new poems as well as those of the first editions.

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

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'.³³ 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.³⁴ 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 poem it is the childhood of another poet the river recalls. It is the infant Otway who is visited and 'bade' by the muse as the Arun connects literary past and present. 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 articulation of the Arun is still not a Wartonian 'infusion'. The sonnet is a celebration of the Arun's literary past, a spelling out of influence, and a sense of connectivity with the present is lacking. A poetic 'I', notably, is absent. Although the sonnet implies that the speaker is situated on the riverbank – and the dedication of *Elegiac Sonnets* informs the reader that the poet is located at Woolbeding – there is an underlying personal and poetic disconnect from the landscape. Indeed, while the sonnet ends by indicating the continuation of poetic tradition, the speaker is displaced; it is other 'kindred spirits' who 'pitying, shall relate | Thy Otway's sorrows, and lament his fate! (lines 13–14), and Smith strangely seems to 'unwrite' her own sonnet. While Smith may have replaced Laura with Otway, she faces a different kind of dispossession as a woman poet in her own locale.

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! (lines 1–4)

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 | And stately Severn

³³ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Bee*, 8 (1759), p. 238.

³⁴ 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: p. 280).

for her shore is praised', and so it continues, with a different river celebrated in each line.³⁵ Thus, both Drayton's and Smith's sonnets distinguish a particular river from others, for, as Drayton's sonnet ends: 'Arden's sweet Anker, let thy glory be, | That fair Idea only lives by thee' (lines 13–14). 'Idea', the real interest of the sonnet, lived on the banks of the small Warwickshire river the sonnet addresses and as such Drayton's sonnet bears the influence of Petrarch. Smith shifts the emphasis of the sonnet from love to poetic tradition, and, as she does so, the traditional gendering of the subject as a female poet writing about a male subject. Drayton himself of course later revised his interest in rivers, as his influential topographical poem *Poly-Olbion* travels through the country, documenting its geography and local history.

Established as an alternative river space, then, in sonnet XXX the Arun is an artistic, elegiac landscape dear to the 'mourner's' as well as the 'lover's' heart, a 'willow'd shore' (line 8). The sestet is given over wholly to Smith's poetic predecessors, 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! (lines 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. Jane Spencer has shown how during this period literary history was understood through a model of kinship, 'as a genealogy in which individual writers figured as fathers and sons' (*Literary Relations*, p. 5). 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, it was 'always a marginal, shifting, and sometimes unsettling one' (p. 17). In sonnet XXX, again Smith's 'I' is absent from the scene and 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. He also

³⁵ Michael Drayton, 'XXXII. To the River Anker', *Daniel's Delia and Drayton's Idea*, ed. Arundell Esdaile (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), lines 1–2.

appears in another sonnet introduced in the third edition, sonnet XIX 'To Mr. Hayley, on receiving some elegant lines from him'. Nearly all of Hayley's own sonnets are written 'to' a recipient and six new sonnets of Smith's own in the third edition are similarly apostrophic ('recovered from my acquaintance', the preface informs us), recalling both Milton and Edwards.³⁶ The poem that Smith responds to seems to be Hayley's own 'Sonnet to Mrs. Smith' (he began publishing original sonnets in 1785), occasioned by reading Smith's own sonnet I, published later in Hayley's *Poems and Plays* (1788). 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' (lines 1–2), an artless garland of 'buds so brief' (line 4), while the muse decrees for Hayley a crown of 'immortal leaves' (line 13). The sonnet recalls that translated by Hayley 'From the Lady Leonara de Icz, Baroness of Rafales, to Don Alonzo de Ercilla' in the notes to *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, which praises a male poet and refers to the 'laurels, that reward the Poet's strain' (p. 213, line 2), and also recalls the sonnets of Edward's female pupils. Susanna Highmore's sonnet to Edwards, for example, 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'.³⁷ Smith attributes her unexpected poetic success to the 'deathless leaf' (line 6) Hayley has thrown to her, befitting the way she apologetically ventures into print with Hayley as dedicatee and her as 'distant copyist', and mimed by her absence from the patrilineal 'classic stream' of sonnet XXX.

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

³⁶ 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' (p. 3).

³⁷ 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. Rowland Freeman, 2 vols. (Canterbury: G. Wood, 1821), I: lines 11–14.

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’. (p. 35)

Harting, referred to in the lines above, 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. Collins (1721–1759) was born at Chichester and, like Otway before him, attended Winchester College and Oxford before heading to London. 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 disorder and died at the age of fifty-seven. Both thus benefit Smith’s melancholic, ‘elegiac’ landscape; she too already knew personal and financial suffering. 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.³⁸ Collins published *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* in 1747 – originally planned to be co-authored with Joseph Warton – and included the two odes Smith quotes from here. He also invokes his Arun predecessor in ‘Ode to Pity’ in the stanza directly following that quoted by Smith: ‘There first the wren thy myrtles shed | On gentlest Otway’s infant head’ and remarks in a footnote that the ‘River Arun runs by the Village in Sussex, where Otway had his Birth’ (*Poems*, ed. Lonsdale, p. 414 and lines 19–20).³⁹ Smith also includes a quotation from ‘Ode to Pity’ in ‘Sonnet XXVIII. To Friendship’. Collins honours Otway as not only a precursor of the Arun but also a tragedian. Collins’s pair of odes to pity and fear explore the emotions purged by Aristotle’s catharsis. Yet in his ‘Ode to Pity’, Collins replaces the Ilissus of Greece with the Arun, which already carries a strong current of tragic pathos through Otway:

But wherefore need I wander wide
To old Ilissus’ distant side,

³⁸ John Langhorne, *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins*, ed. John Langhorne (London: T. Becket, etc., 1765), pp. 148–9.

³⁹ Collins pays further homage to Otway in two (undated) fragments: ‘Lines on Restoration Drama’, and ‘No longer ask me, gentle friends’.

Deserted stream and mute?
Wild Arun too has heard thy strains. (lines 14–17)

'Ode to Pity' continues to play on this classical–present contrast, a contrast Smith also employs in her sonnet XXVI. Collins may have found additional, emotional correspondences with his predecessor as a similarly melancholic, solitary figure of sensibility. He accompanied his poetic homage to Otway with a physical marble memorial placed by Collins and Joseph Warton at Winchester College. In turn, a memorial was erected to Collins in Chichester cathedral in 1795 with an epitaph written by fellow Arun-native Hayley (Hayley also instated an 'Otway's Walk' in the garden of his home at Eartham, and the poet was the subject of one of the portraits Hayley commissioned for his library by William Blake). Smith's elegiac sonnet memorials of both Otway and Collins match these concrete memorials for which the river is a fitting trope, as one common to the elegy, itself a form bound up with poetic inheritance. 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 influence of Smith and Bowles – are both set on the Thames, for example, and poets, elegies and rivers had been intertwined as far back as the Orpheus myth. 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'.⁴⁰ The surviving, continuing liquids, which 'retain a direction and a continuing force, associated as they must be with the melodious tear and the lofty rhyme' (p. 97), seem 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' (p. 37), not just of property, but of cultural legacy and poetic voice. 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' (and Sacks draws attention to how liquid symbolism is suggestively male), while she, in Jane Spencer's terms, assumes 'a marginal, shifting, [...] unsettling' position as a woman poet within this patrilineal model.

There is a sense that Smith reclaims Otway and Collins from the Wartonian institutions both attended for her Arun landscape. Smith's description of how 'No glittering fanes, or marble domes appear' along the Arun's banks in

⁴⁰ Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 97.

sonnet XXII recalls Warton's description of Oxford in his longer river poem *The Triumph of Isis* (1750), which features 'fanés sublime' and 'bright domes', similarly drawing on a classical landscape.⁴¹ The Isis also features in Warton's sonnet 'On Bathing', while the Isis and Cherwell both feature in other poems of the 1777 *Poems*. Oxford and its rivers also feature in the poems of his pupils. Bampfyld describes Oxford as the 'Muse[']s bower' in his sonnet 'On having dined at Oxford' (line 3), an echo from Warton's *The Triumph of Isis*, but (aptly) originating in Milton's own sonnet VIII. And, in a sonnet 'On revisiting the University of Oxford', Thomas Warwick describes how 'Again I trace from Cherwell's willowy tide | Yon Gothic towers with peaceful trophies hung'.⁴² Smith's landscape may not be the 'Muse's bower', yet, as she writes of the Arun in sonnet XXVI, still 'the mournful Muse thy course adorn[s], | And still to her thy rustic waves be dear', endorsed by the presence of Otway and Collins. As a woman Smith would have been unable to attend Winchester or Oxford, of course. Smith lamented her inferior, female education, yet her literary, learned sonnets at the same time vindicate it. As Smith's sister records, she 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. [...] Mrs. Smith's education, though very expensive, was superficial' and 'she often regretted that her attention had not been direct to more useful reading, and the study of languages' (pp. 23–4). Smith's connections with Winchester and Oxford were in the capacity of a mother rather than as poet or pupil. 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 (Charles did matriculate at Oxford in July 1794 but joined the army soon after).

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. 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:

WHEN latest Autumn spreads her evening veil,
And the grey mists from these dim waves arise,

⁴¹ Thomas Warton, 'The Triumph of Isis, Occasioned by Isis an Elegy', *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, B.D.*, ed. Richard Mant, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1802), I: pp. lines 149 and 236.

⁴² Warwick, 'Sonnet VIII. On revisiting the University of Oxford', *Abelard to Eloisa*, lines 1–2.

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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! (p. 36)

The sonnet's scene is strange indeed, shrouded in mist and replete with ghostly 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, while this, the first in *Elegiac Sonnets* to do so, takes the Italian.⁴³ 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' (p. 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. The reference to the 'legitimate' sonnet in the preface to the first editions has been modulated to 'Italian' in a subtly assertive evasion of the hierarchised terms used by critics. Thus, to readers of *Elegiac Sonnets*, sonnet XXXII takes a suddenly unfamiliar poetic shape, befitting its strange and uncanny scene. 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' ('Lorn Subjectivities', pp. 144 and 148–9). Stokes reads three Arun sonnets – XXVI, XXX, and XXXII – as all constitutive of this uncanny, lorn space. Sonnet

⁴³ Another sonnet in *Elegiac Sonnets* is almost fully Petrarchan (XXXIV). Another sonnet by Smith, with the interesting title 'Original', published in George Henderson's sonnet anthology *Petrarca* (1803), is also Petrarchan.

XXXII figures a particularly strange and alienating landscape, and can also be read as a reaction to male literary and sonnet tradition. 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 it applies to Otway rather than Smith. Smith's indulgence in melancholy through place in this sonnet also recalls Warton's earlier poem *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747), which references Otway, although the poem's setting (a ruined abbey) is one that Smith later brings challenges to. In addition, in sonnet XXXII, Smith 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, steeped in looking back to the literary past. 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 (Stokes, p. 148). 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 English form, and the 'I' disappears once more:

GO, rural Naiad! wind thy stream along
 Thro' woods and wilds: then seek the ocean caves
 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! (pp. 36–7)

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'

(p. 37). 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.⁴⁴ 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). 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. The reference to laurels in sonnet XXXIII recalls sonnet XIX, addressed to Hayley, in which Hayley throws Smith a ‘deathless leaf’ for her ‘simple band’. 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’, mirroring the immortality imbued in the sonnet form itself (‘Form and Function’, p. 455). 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. As in her nightingale sonnets, Smith configures herself as a present-absence in literary tradition, poised between poetic longevity and inferior transience. Each poetic figure seems to present a different kind of simultaneous empowerment and dispossession.

Other Poetic Landscapes

Returning to sonnet XXXIII, having previously disestablished the Arun from the classical world, 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), which distinguishes her from Warton in a different way. In this section I will consider Smith’s position in relation to Wartonian and thus Romantic literary history through the river trope as well as in her 1789 non-river sonnet XLVI ‘Written at Penshurst, in Autumn of 1788’, which is drawn into the literary negotiations of the Arun through its position in *Elegiac Sonnets*. In *Windsor-Forest*, the River Loddon (Pope’s own childhood 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 (*Major Works*, lines 203–4). 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, where ‘eternal

⁴⁴ Sargent was a friend and supporter of Smith who, along with Hayley and the Reverend Charles Dunster from Petworth, was an early Sussex reader of her work.

wreaths shall grow' (line 265), the site of topographical poetic predecessor John Denham's similar riverine *Cooper's Hill* (1642) as the Thames becomes intrinsically linked with poetic fame and longevity. The poem's speaker

seem[s] 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[.] (lines 267–86)

These poets are also joined by Surrey: 'noble SURREY', 'SURREY, the GRANVILLE of a former age' (lines 291–2). 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' that 'winds' the Arun along – 'Aruna' of sonnet V, perhaps – recalls the Loddon–Lodona, while 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 and the river represents a powerful poetic lineage, an actualisation of literary influence. Aside from the poets named and heralded, numerous other classical and Renaissance predecessors and literary 'currents' inform Pope's poem, not least the Lodona episode, which draws upon multiple Ovidian myths.⁴⁵ The Thames is also an 'elegiac' place of willow and mourning here, for, like Smith's

⁴⁵ See Pat Rogers, *The Symbolic Design of Windsor-Forest: Iconography, Pageant, and Prophecy*

predecessors, Abraham Cowley died young; his body was floated down the river in the 'sad pomp' to which Pope alludes.

The influence of Pope upon Smith's sonnets is interesting considering its coalescence with Warton's sonnet paradigm. Warton and Pope shared the same native river in the Loddon, yet, as discussed in chapter one, Pope was a problematic poet for the Warton brothers, disrupting the native poetic tradition of Chaucer–Spenser–Milton they sought to establish. 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' (*Organising Poetry*, p. 109). Thus, Warton's Loddon sonnet actualises this reaching back 'upstream' through literary history. His childhood setting of Basingstoke is literally upstream from Pope's at Binfield, allowing him to reclaim the Loddon, return to the past and divert the path of literary history through Milton and himself and on towards Bowles and other members of the Warton school, forcefully realised through their continuous flow of river sonnets. However, the river trope reveals lines of influence that are elsewhere diverted and suppressed. The topographical river poem can be seen to originate with Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1642), and the phrase 'native stream' is not actually 'native' to Warton himself, and originates in a somewhat non-Wartonian source: Dryden's drama *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards* (1672), which celebrates heroic figures in heroic couplets.⁴⁶ In writing about rivers, Warton inherits a genealogy – one of refinement, which he has sought to resist in reaching back to earlier writers – which runs through the couplets of Denham, Edmund Waller, Dryden, and Pope.

Although Smith clearly departs from Pope in some ways (not least in her use of the sonnet), he manifests more positively in her poems, and she frequently identifies herself as his successor.⁴⁷ As well as drawing on his riparian landscape in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith quotes from Pope's canon three

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.

⁴⁶ It also appears in 'A Descriptive Poem' by John Dalton, which was published in Dodsley's 1755 *A Collection of Poems* and goes on to appear, post-Smith, in Wordsworth's *River Duddon* sonnet sequence (1820) and in book six of (the fourteen-book) *The Prelude* (1850).

⁴⁷ 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 in their river poems. See Anna Barbauld, 'The Invitation: To Miss B*****' (1773), and Anne Wilson, *Teisa: A Descriptive Poem of the River Teese, its Towns and Antiquities* (1778).

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). Smith's disestablishment of her Arun landscape from Oxford is also significant here, for it was at Oxford (and at Winchester) that a mode of the imagination steeped in the past was fostered, and attitudes to Pope – physically removed from the urban settings he was associated with – were shaped.⁴⁸ As noted, she appropriates 'Eloisa to Abelard', Pope's most popular poem in the 'Romantic' era, in the first of her *Elegiac Sonnets*. She quotes from the end of the poem, assuming the role of the future poet to whom Eloisa calls out, reappropriating the female voice from the male in a direct continuation. The melancholy, 'visionary' Eloisa presents an antecedent of sorts for the woman writer. In Pope's poem, Eloisa is a 'visionary maid' who resides where 'ever-musing melancholy reigns' (*Major Works*, lines 3 and 162) and, in Smith's Arun sonnet XXXII addressed to melancholy, the speaker declares that such is the 'magic power' of melancholy, 'That to the soul these dreams are often sweet, | And sooth the pensive visionary mind!'. 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'.⁴⁹ Rather than suppressing this particular, more emotional aspect of Pope, as the Wartons had done, Smith draws it out, and, while she may depart from Pope, she is also his successor, continuing poetic tradition. Smith is not interested in reaching back to the past, which becomes clearer and more forcefully articulated in her sonnets that 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'. In later 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 sea setting:

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

⁴⁸ See Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope*, pp. 53–63 and David Fairer, 'Oxford and the Literary World, in *The History of the University of Oxford. Volume V: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. L. S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 779–806.

⁴⁹ Alexander 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. John Butt, 2nd edn. (London: Methuen, 1953), lines 1 and 3–4.

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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
Is the false fleeting meteor, Happiness,
That still misleads the wanderers of the earth! (lines 1–8)

Although the sea is not explicitly mentioned here, the sonnet perhaps addresses one of the ‘sea-nymphs’ of sonnet XXXIII, who differs from the rural naiad of the Arun, quietly winding the river along its way. Here, Smith looks forward to assuming a similar position to the nymph of the rock, whose ‘dauntless 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. By the summer of 1787 Smith was living at Wyke near Guildford in Surrey, several 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! (p. 43)

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 *abbababacdcdcd*, it is one of the few sonnets that 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.

Sonnet XLV is followed by another new addition in the fifth edition of

Elegiac Sonnets: XLVI ‘Written at Penshurst, in autumn 1788’. 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 birthplace 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). 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*. 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) is ‘heiress of these shades’ in Coventry’s poem.⁵⁰ The estate had fallen into disrepair, however. Horace Walpole had visited in 1752, and wrote in a letter: ‘This morning we have been to Penshurst – but, oh! how fallen! [...] instead of Sacharissa’s cipher carved on the beeches, I would sooner have expected to have found the milk-woman’s score.’⁵¹ It is this Penshurst that Smith encountered in 1788, rather than that of Coventry’s celebratory poem, 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. As Smith writes in the note to the sonnet: ‘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’ (p. 44), and her sonnet features one of the pictures she mentions.

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!

⁵⁰ Francis Coventry, *Penshurst. Inscribed to William Perry, Esq; and the Honble. Mrs. Elizabeth Perry* (London: R. Dodsley, 1750), line 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’ from which the house had fallen. See Ann Radcliffe, *Posthumous Works* [...], 4 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1833), I: pp. 82–6.

⁵¹ Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1937–1983), XXXV: p. 141.

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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! (p. 44)

The way the sonnet is written 'at' follows Waller rather than Jonson. The fallen Penshurst estate echoes the sounds of several of Smith's other sonnets: sighing, the 'hollow blast', and 'discordant' birds. Rhyming *ababaccddcdee*, it would be fully English, yet the interlocking rhymes create a form redolent of the Spenserian sonnet. The final turn at the sonnet's end brings a new, staying rhyme, corresponding with its concern with the defiance of time and decay. The sonnet is reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnets in theme and in particular recalls his sonnet 64:

When I have seen by time's fell hand defaced
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down razed. (lines 1–3)

Unlike Shakespeare, however, Smith does not invest power in the transcendent, immortalising couplet. When Smith's couplet celebrates the ability of 'the poet's tender lay' to 'defy decay' – in a way that the 'fading canvas' cannot – she refers, not her own modern sonnet, but an older literary text, 'the historic page' of an earlier poet.

It is tempting to make the connection between Penshurst and the sonnet's past through Sidney, yet Smith does not make reference to Sidney as a sonneteer. His sonnets were little-known in the eighteenth century and are not mentioned in Thomas Warton's *The History of English Poetry* or the unpublished continuation.⁵² Smith mentions two different Sidney family members in her sonnet: Algernon Sidney (1622–1682), champion of liberty executed for his

⁵² 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

part in the 'Rye House plot', and his sister – as Waller's 'Sacharissa' – Lady Dorothy Spencer [née Sidney] (1617–1684). A section of Smith's *A Natural History of Birds* 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; [...] 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. (XIII: p. 288)

Philip Sidney is the only family member named here who does not appear in Smith's sonnet, and her comments offer a rare insight into her sense of literary history. A divide is posited between Sidney, a literary curiosity of the 'age in which he lived', and 'our' Waller, the 'correct' poet. 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-Warntonian) 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.'⁵³ Thus, in sonnet XLVI, through Penshurst, Smith encounters the couplet (rather than the sonnet form), which Waller was, along with Denham, credited with refining and popularising before Dryden and Pope. In a letter, Smith writes that she likes the 'last line of a Sonnet, to have forcible and correct' (p. 128). Despite the irregularity of her sonnets, it seems that Smith, to an extent, counted herself as a correct and modern poet, in the polished sense of Waller and Pope. Playfully, then, Smith's sonnet also contains a Warntonian 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, while Smith is not concerned with these acts of historical recovery.

Indeed, her treatment of Penshurst can be interestingly compared to that

(1752 and 1787; the latter edition by Joseph Warnton), and Sidney was known largely for this and *Arcadia*. Real interest in Sidney was revived only early in the nineteenth century.

⁵³ Francis Atterbury, preface to *The Second Part of Mr. Waller's Poems*, in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Waller* [...] (London: C. Cooke, 1797), p. iv. Waller's works were popular and were published consistently throughout the eighteenth century.

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of Wartonian poet Edward Hamley, who also published two sonnets 'Written at Penshurst', in his collection of *Sixty Sonnets*, in the same year as Smith's. Hamley was a contemporary of Bowles and Thomas Russell at Oxford, and their sonnets were also published in the same year. His sonnet XXIII is 'On the Death of Mr Russel' [*sic*], and two other sonnets address the River Itchin of Winchester and the River Cherwell of Oxford. They are all Italian in form. That Smith and Hamley should take the same subject in Penshurst Place is perhaps not surprising: the sonnets of Warton's pupils frequently share Smith's 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) also 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'.⁵⁴ 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.
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. (p. 48)

Hamley's description of Penshurst is notably 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. The sestet set 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. Like Smith, Hamley presents a wanderer; yet, rather than tracing Waller's walks, they muse upon 'Deeds of old prowess and romantic tales': a

⁵⁴ Edward Hamley, 'Sonnet XII. Written at Penshurst', *Sonnets* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1789), lines 9–10.

different, more remote sense of Penshurst, and a more Wartonian one, 'for gallantry and knighthood famed'.

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 'obscured' walks, 'Which Waller's soothing lyre were wont to hear, | But where now clamours the discordant hern!' 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.'⁵⁵ 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 brought with it a literary fall from Waller's soothing lyre and ordered nature to the clamours of the discordant hern, overgrown fern, and the irregular sonnet of the woman poet. 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' (*Poetical Works*, lines 15–16) suggests his own couplet form, while in Smith's sonnet nature is in disarray, suggestive of her irregular sonnet form and poetic voice. Thus, Smith's elegiac, discordant, female sonnet *can* follow the ordered, refined couplets of Waller, as she simultaneously disrupts the 'patrilinear order'.

Reading sonnet XLVI in light of the preceding Arun sonnet XLV, which features Collins, further illuminates Smith's sense of literary history. 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 with Collins, yet also posits both as succeeding Waller, continuing and disrupting tradition. 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, 'From Waller's myrtle shades retreating', attempts to gain access to Milton's Eden, 'With many a vow from hope's aspiring tongue, | My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue' (*Poems*, ed. Lonsdale, lines 69 and 70–1). As Lonsdale observes in a note to the poem,

⁵⁵ Christopher Rovee, *Imagining the Gallery: The Social Body of British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 105.

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’, mapped through space (p. 435). While Collins retreats from Waller’s myrtle shades to attempt to enter Milton’s poetic space, Smith’s wanderer does inhabit Waller’s shades, and traces his ‘walks’. Smith’s sonnet XLVI – accentuated by its position in *Elegiac Sonnets* – again reveals connections and lines of influence elsewhere suppressed. Collins was a friend of the Wartons of course, and shared their view of literary history. Here Smith presents a genealogy that runs through Milton, Pope, Waller, Collins, and, however reticently and deferentially, Smith herself.

The River Arun does feature in two later, non-sonnet poems: in the second book of *The Emigrants* the speaker bids ‘Memory come!’ to recall how ‘When on the banks of the Arun [...] I play’d’ (lines 313 and 332–4). And, in ‘April’, included in volume two of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797), Smith again recalls her childhood: ‘from thy wild-wood banks, Aruna! roving, | Thy thymy downs with sportive steps I sought’ (lines 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. 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). Ultimately, the haunted river landscape of laurel-strewn meads is one Smith leaves behind. And as ‘Sighing I resign | Thy solitary beauties’, a new setting in *Elegiac Sonnets* becomes dominant, befitting the new type of sonnet and relationship with literary history that emerges from it.

CHAPTER THREE

Innovation

As Smith bids ‘farewel’ to the Arun in sonnet XLV, the sea replaces it in importance in *Elegiac Sonnets*, the main focus of this chapter. It is in the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789) that the sea becomes the prevalent poetic figure, and its presence then increases with each subsequent edition. I argue that it is in her sea sonnets that Smith’s distinctive voice and innovative use of the sonnet form really emerges. As her sonnets replace the river with the sea, Smith disentangles her sonnets from literary tradition, which she does through the sea setting, as – contrary to the river – it lacks a poetic past. The chapter begins by outlining this, before turning to focus on sonnet XLIV ‘Written in the church-yard at Middleton at Sussex’, Smith’s pivotal coastal sonnet. In his 1792 ‘Essay on the English Sonnet’ Thelwall wrote of this sonnet 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: vivid painting, numerous harmony, sublimity of thought and expression, and pathos of sentiment. What, in particular, can surpass the thought of breaking the silent sabbath of the grave? (p. 414)

Smith’s sonnet has continued to attract the attention of critics and commentators ever since, and it is her most widely anthologised and discussed sonnet. Sonnet XLIV is at the heart of Thelwall’s essay, in which he defends Smith’s ‘illegitimate’ sonnet forms and celebrates the way she prevails over the ‘pedantic prejudices’ of critics ‘by which the wings of aspiring genius are shackled, and the efforts of modern invention censured and restrained’ (p. 408). More recent critics have also used Smith’s influential Sonnet XLIV to place her in a literary sense, chiefly in relation to the ‘graveyard’ school of poetry, established by poems such as Thomas Parnell’s ‘A Night Piece on Death’ (1721), Robert

Blair's *The Grave* (1743), and Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–1746). Jacqueline Labbe, for example, has drawn attention to the generic quality of Smith's sonnet: 'its details of decomposed bodies [are] more conventional than is usually acknowledged', she writes, evincing a 'generic continuity' that should be more remarked (*Writing Romanticism*, p. 115). Other critics, however, argue that the innovation Smith brings to the genre also needs to be acknowledged. Stella Brooks writes that, while it may draw on its conventions, Smith's sonnet, '[f]ar from belonging to the "Graveyard School" [...] is not a wistful vignette in the late Augustan mode, but a turbulent Romantic fantasy' ('Sonnets of Charlotte Smith', p. 14). Brooks points to how Smith's sonnet is poised between different modes, at the crux of a literary shift, and hints – as does Thelwall – at how Smith's 'turbulent' landscape may suggest something of her own literary force. My reading of Smith's sonnet shows how she uses the sublime sea storm to dramatise challenges to her sonnet forbears Edwards, Gray, and Warton, all of whom had associations with the 'graveyard' school. I explore how Smith also highlights these challenges in her graveyard 'Elegy' and in two later novels, as her works move between the sea and churchyard, between a playful engagement with her predecessors and emancipation from them. Rather than literary predecessors, Smith's sea sonnets are populated by more marginal characters, which she uses to set out her different relation with tradition and to play with the construction of the sonnet. Having claimed the sea space as her preferred setting, Smith's innovative use of form, I show, emerges from it, as she intertwines content with form to transform the small and compact sonnet into a vast and sublime literary form.

The Sea

The first of Smith's sonnets to address the seascape is also introduced in the third edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*: 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. Despite their proximity, the tranquil, green, gently undulating landscape of the South Downs contrasts starkly with the rugged coast and turbulent sea that lie just beyond. Written in the first person, on location, the set-up of sonnet XII is similar to that of Arun sonnet XXXII 'To Melancholy'. Both are marginal poems, temporally and spatially, set in the same month and 'written on' shore and bank respectively. Rather than looking to the past, however, like Smith's – and Warton's – river sonnets, sonnet XII is striking in its immediacy:

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. (pp. 23–4)

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 the speaker's 'soul'. As well as with the poetic I, the scene also accords with Smith's sonnet form; both landscape and form are irregular, and both are characterised by fragmentation and fracture.

Critics have drawn attention to Smith's formal innovation and the frequency with which she departs from and experiments with established forms. Labbe has written much on this aspect of Smith's sonnets and in her introduction to Smith's poems 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. (Smith, *Works*, XLIV, p. x)

Regarding Smith's formal experimentation and its impact on poetic meaning, Labbe has been concerned with how Smith's sonnets perform complex strategies relating to identity, gender, and subjectivity. I suggest that content is intertwined with structure through the sea setting, and it is in her sea sonnets that Smith's experimental use of form really comes to the fore. 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, 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 combines English and Italian forms yet adheres to neither; rhyming *abba cddc effegg*, it is made up of 'fragments' 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 Smith's use of it increases as *Elegiac Sonnets* expands. 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. Smith does not explain or elucidate on her use of the alexandrine, and there is no real precedent for it in the sonnet's history (with the exception of Emily's sonnet sequence). It can be seen as part of the way Smith transcends parameters and boundaries, as Johnson writes, 'the English Alexandrine breaks the lawful bounds, and surprises the reader with two syllables more than he expected', and they are often referred to as being in dialogue with content.¹ The alexandrine is most frequently associated with the couplet in eighteenth-century discourse and in particular Pope's use of them in his translations of the *Iliad* (1715–1720) and the *Odyssey* (1725–1726).² In the notes to his translations, Pope himself posits that he has appropriated the alexandrine to represent content. In a note to a line in the *Iliad* that describes waves 'Wide rolling, foaming high, and tumbling to the shore', he writes of how he has 'endeavour'd in this verse to imitate the confusion, and broken sound of the original, which images the tumult and roaring of many waters'.³ This disrupts the notion of the ordered and correct Pope, and Smith brings the way he 'breaks the lawful bounds' of the heroic couplet to that of the final line of the sonnet, entwining form and content through the same subject as she does so.

The trope of a female figure situated on the shore is used repeatedly by Smith throughout her poems and novels, and, contrary to the river bank, Smith's seashore is free from ghostly predecessors. The characters who do appear in Smith's seascapes are not poets but dispossessed wanderers, exiles, and outcasts of various kinds who share an experience or find a similar correspondence with place to Smith's speaker, such as the shipwrecked mariner of sonnet XII or the 'unhappy exile' of sonnet XLIII, 'whom his fates confine | To the bleak coast of some unfriendly isle' and 'perhaps may know | Such heartless pain,

¹ Samuel Johnson, 'Dryden', in *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*, 10 vols. (London: J. Nichols, 1779–81), III: pp. 307–8.

² This is in addition to his reference in *An Essay on Criticism*, itself an example of an alexandrine: 'A needless Alexandrine ends the song, | That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along' (lines 354–7).

³ Alexander Pope, *The Iliad of Homer Books X–XXIV*, ed. Maynard Mack (London: Methuen, 1967), book XIII: lines 1004–5, and pp. 152–3.

such blank despair as mine' (lines 1–2 and 7–8). 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 Edward Young – no predecessors or ghostly figures populate the shore, and the seascape frees Smith from the alienating effects of a literary patrilineage.⁴

The sea features in much literature of the Renaissance, yet it is a space to be traversed for voyage, commerce, colonial conquest, and war, rather than an aesthetic source. And, in the eighteenth century, contrary to the multitude of topographical river poems of the period, very few poems take the sea as a subject. Attitudes to the sea were coloured by fear or disgust, arising from Biblical stories of the creation and flood. However, as Alain Corbin has documented, an 'irresistible awakening of a collective desire for the shore arises in the period from 1750 to 1840', owing to the new-found popularity of sea-bathing for therapeutic reasons and the discovery of the 'sublime'.⁵ Smith was one of the first poets to embrace the sea as a subject in her poems and other works.⁶ It was the desolate, sublime aspect of the seaside rather than the pleasure of the resort that attracted her. One of her sonnets is 'written at' the resort of Weymouth (LXXI), yet out of season, 'at winter', removed from the time when 'on the peopled strand | Pleasure shall all her varied forms display' (lines 5–6). In Smith's *Rural Walks* (1795), Mrs Woodfield – a thinly veiled Smith herself – observes that:

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

⁴ As Stuart Curran notes, the debt seems to be to Young's play *The Revenge* (1721), which opens with a sea scene (Smith, *Poems*, p. 12).

⁵ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750–1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 53. See also Jonathan Raban, introduction to *The Oxford Book of the Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 1–34 and Robert Aubin, *Topographical Poetry in XVIII–Century England* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1936).

⁶ Zoë Kinsley is one of few critics to have explored the importance of the sea in Smith's works. See her "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. Mona Narain and Karen Gevirtz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 101–15; "In moody sadness, on the giddy brink": Liminality and Home Tour Travel', in *Mapping Liminalities: Thresholds in Cultural and Literary Texts*, ed. Lucy Kay and others (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 41–67; 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. Benjamin Colbert (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 31–49.

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: p. 81)

The sea view also affords a personal sense of newness: '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: p. 75). It is perhaps significant that Smith's first sea sonnet should draw on Young, whose *Conjectures on Original Composition*, published in 1759, draws on the symbolism of the sea in this regard: 'Something new may be expected from Britons', he writes, 'who seem not to be more sever'd from the rest of mankind by the surrounding sea, than by the current in their veins' predisposed 'to give us Originals'.⁷ Young's theory of originality chipped away at Pope's ascendancy, yet Smith's echo of Pope's *Homer* and use of the Alexandrine in the same sonnet again shows how she complicates the models of inheritance inculcated by Young and the Wartons.

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 *Winter* (1726), two landmark poems in the sea's literary emergence. Falconer (bap. 1732, d. 1770) was a 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 (deemed 'very correct' by Mrs Woodfield) from the position of one of the few 'unfortunate sufferers' able to record their experience. Thus, attention is drawn to *The Shipwreck* by Smith for its authenticity 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 his first-hand, immediate experience of a storm from the position of the 'exhausted sufferer': something of a literary predecessor after all, but one that foregrounds a different connection with place. Falconer is another 'untutored' poet, who had little schooling before going to sea as an apprentice – experiences that inform his poetry and nautical dictionary, *The Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (1769).

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:

⁷ 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.

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.
 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[.]⁸

Vast, noisy, and tempestuous, replete with shrieking seabirds, Thomson's sea scene pre-echoes Smith's own. However, the central relationship Smith's sonnets establish between seascape and speaker is not apparent. 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' (lines 5–6 and 10–12), after the first verse paragraph the 'I' disappears and the depiction becomes more remote and generalised. Thomson's seascape is highly visual, and *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', according to Joseph Warton (*An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, I: p. 42). Smith clearly 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 and a place-specific element. Intertextual references here, paradoxically, foreground originality.

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 (*Idea*, lines

⁸ James Thomson, 'Winter', *Poetical Works*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), lines 144–66.

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1 and 3–4). 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 the destructive sea, a relationship that Smith's sea sonnets dramatically undo. Sonnet LXXV of Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595) opens:

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.⁹

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' (lines 10–11). 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. (*Sonnets*, lines 1–4)

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' (lines 13–14). Sonnets 64 and 65 continue the distinction.

The sea features in the sonnets of only one of Smith's eighteenth-century predecessors. Largely, Bampfyld's *Sixteen Sonnets* describe and celebrate his life of peaceful retirement in the Teign valley, yet a pair of sonnets are exceptions: VI 'On a Stormy Sea-Prospect' and VII 'On a Calm Sea-Prospect'. The first clearly departs from the contemporary sonnet mode:

⁹ Edmund Spenser, 'Sonnet. LXXV', *Spenser: Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), lines 1–3.

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,
 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. (p. 6)

While anticipating Smith in its 'screaming Sea-mews' and the 'boisterous main', Bampfylde's sonnet presents a nameless stormy 'Sea-prospect', and an 'I' is again absent. While for Smith's speaker in sonnet XII the stormy sea 'has charms' and 'suits the mournful temper' of their soul, Bampfylde's speaker is simply 'fearful' and others are 'scar'd and 'aghastr'. Bampfylde's sonnet '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!' (lines 1– 2).¹⁰ 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' (lines 12–14). Read as a pair, the sea scene itself recedes in importance as the promotion of 'contentment' emerges as Bampfylde's main concern.

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. Through the sea setting, Smith's sonnets appear new and original, matched by their disconnected English and irregular sonnet form. 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' (lines 7–8; original emphasis). Numerous studies have shown how the position of the prospect

¹⁰ 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).

viewer is one of male visual power.¹¹ Labbe argues that, in contrast to men, women were 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.'¹² 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', as reflected in Smith's poet-persona, who 'paces a physical, imposing landscape' (pp. xii–iii and 27). However, while Smith may not write from the traditional male prospect position, she frequently writes from an eminence overlooking the *sea* in her sonnets and other poems, not least her great prospect view poem 'Beachy Head' (1807).¹³ Contrary to the landscape, the seascape constitutes a more autonomous space, which the culturally and legally disinherited woman could in some sense 'possess', with particular resonance for Smith considering her literal inheritance problems.

Breaking 'the silent Sabbath of the grave': Sonnet XLIV

The first sonnet to be written from this elevated stance overlooking the sea is sonnet XLIV, 'Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex'. Describing a storm, the sonnet redresses the lack of poems on this subject 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,

¹¹ See John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730–1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, ed., *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹² Jacqueline Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 27.

¹³ 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.

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;
 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 oppress,
 To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest. (p. 43)

As Smith's own note to the sonnet informs us, Middleton church was located right on the 'margin' of the Sussex coast:

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. (p. 43)

The seascape Smith depicts in this sonnet is full of violent movement and sound, blasting, shrinking, raving, and warring. In the sonnet, the sea 'sublimely rides' over the land and, as Mrs Woodfield observes in *Rural Walks*, a stormy sea is one of the most 'sublime spectacles the world can shew'. The sublime was central to the sea's rise in popularity in the eighteenth century, and is persistently associated with the sea. As Joseph Addison remarked in *The Spectator* in 1712, '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 '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 association of the sublime and the sea goes back to the Longinian origins of the concept. The Greek treatise *Peri Hýpsous* or *On Sublimity* attributed to 'Longinus' (first century AD) is primarily rhetorical, concerned with the grand and elevated in thought and language, yet the driving impulse of the sublime

¹⁴ Joseph Addison, No. 489, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), IV: p. 233.

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

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.'¹⁶ And, as Longinus's treatise reached English readers and thinkers in the eighteenth century, the concern with the great in nature became central.¹⁷ The sublimity of the sea makes an interesting contrast with the close association between the river and picturesque. 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 the small, circumscribed sonnet is something of a feat. In 1785 Richard Polwhele observed that: 'the Sonnet seems peculiarly turned to the Beautiful [...] But the sublime (though some Writers in this Line have attempted it) is obviously incompatible with such Miniature-Painting.'¹⁸ Smith's sea sonnets refute this, bringing the sublime to the sonnet by way of its ultimate manifestation.¹⁹

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 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'. Smith's sonnet confounds such claims, as skeletal remains are mercilessly uprooted and devastated by the storm of sonnet (reworking Smith's previous, more subtle removal of Petrarch's Laura). 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. 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 seascape and human remains.

Smith's sonnet XLIV also engages with her more immediate eighteenth-century forbears Gray, Edwards, and Warton. The sea barely features in their sonnets, and its centrality to Smith's own articulates her departure from them. All three do have associations with the churchyard setting, however.

¹⁶ William Smith, *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime: Translated from the Greek [...]* (Dublin: G. Risk, etc., 1740), p. 64.

¹⁷ The concept first came to the attention of English readers via Boileau's French translation (1674). Although other translations into English were made, Smith's *Dionysius Longinus* became the standard English version.

¹⁸ Richard Polwhele, *Pictures from Nature. In Twelve Sonnets* (London: C. Dilly, 1785), p. iii.

¹⁹ See Ian Balfour, 'The Matter of Genre in the Romantic Sublime', in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. Charles Mahoney (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 2011), pp. 503–20 and 'The Sublime Sonnet in European Romanticism', in *Romantic Poetry*, ed. Angela Esterhammer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 181–96.

The transforming forces at work within the scene of sonnet XLIV become emblematic of the revisioning force Smith brings to the form, and of her departure from her predecessors, the quiet spaces of their sonnets, and their antiquated form and mode. The churchyard space was most strongly associated with Gray, following his 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. Smith's title echoes that of Gray's poem, yet her churchyard presents rather a different scene from Gray's quiet, pastoral space in which those interred are 'for ever laid':

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. (*Poems*, ed. Lonsdale,
lines 9–16)

The sea does feature in Gray's poem: 'Full many a gem of purest ray serene, | The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear' (lines 53–4), 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. At the end of the 'Elegy', as the death of the speaker is envisaged and the epitaph that would mark their grave imagined, Gray appears to place himself among the dead interred in the churchyard. Thus, as the sea 'tears from the grassy tombs the village dead', Gray, 'forefather' of the sonnet as such, is uprooted by the literary forces of Smith's sonnet.

Smith's negotiations with Gray are also mimed by the form of Smith's sonnet XLIV. As Daniel 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* (1743) 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 combing both English elegiac meters. The defining metrical feature of the sonnet, therefore, is that it is *elegiac*. ('Formal Paradox', p. 189)

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'.²⁰ Thelwall refers, more positively, to Smith's use of 'elegiac stanzas' in

²⁰ H. White, 'Letter', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 56 (1786), p. 1110; John Keats, letter

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his 'Essay' (p. 414). 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.

Gray's own elegiac sonnet is brought into dialogue with the churchyard setting of Smith's sonnet XLIV through her non-sonnet 'Elegy', which is also included in the same, fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. The poem, Smith establishes in a note, is set in the same churchyard as Sonnet XLIV, the scene of which is reimagined as the speaker is swept away by the encroaching tide:

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. (p. 52)

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), 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! (lines 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. Elegy and sonnet collide as the *abab* form

to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February–3 May 1819, in *The Oxford Authors: John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 475.

of Gray's 'Elegy' is matched, yet it is in this poem that the explicit 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.' (lines 29–32)

The note makes the acknowledgement:

'I fruitless mourn to him who 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. (p. 52)

There is something elegiac about the observation, acknowledging with 'regret' the isolation of Gray's sad, solitary, 'fruitless' sonnet. 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 displayed by both Smith's dramatic elegy and sonnet, attuned with the speaker's state of mind. In Wordsworth's well-known critique of Gray's sonnet in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Gray – 'more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction' – is placed at the head of an outmoded poetic school, against which Wordsworth's own poetic project is defined.²¹ His comments about Gray contrast with his identification of Smith in a letter as the 'first *Modern* distinguished' in the sonnet. Smith's own sonnet and elegy bring challenges to Gray before Wordsworth, as what is variously antiquated, suppressed, and unheard in Gray's sonnet is dramatically uprooted. The sonnet revival is brought into the present through Smith's intertextual play.

Smith associates Edwards and Warton with the churchyard space in two of her novels in which sonnets appear. In *Celestina* (1791) the eponymous heroine composes a sonnet in a country churchyard:

She [...] 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.

²¹ William Wordsworth, 1800 'Preface', *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 252.

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‘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: p. 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’, Edwards imagines his own death. Addressed to the sexton of the parish, sonnet XLIV gives instructions for his burial, where ‘The cowslip, violet or the pale primrose | Perhaps may chance to deck the verdant sward’ (*Canons*, lines 9–10), lines that recall Gray’s ‘Elegy’ (it is not certain which poem was written first). The effect of the sonnet is heightened by its posthumous publication in *Canons*, in which the epitaph to Edwards’s grave is reproduced in the ‘Advertisement’ of the edition – ‘under this stone are deposited the Remains of Thomas Edwards, Esq’ (sig.*A2v.) – which affirms the elegiac tone of his sonnets: they appear as ‘remains’ or relics of an already expired age. Together with his sonnet XLIV, Edwards can be interred, like Gray, within the space of his own poetic landscape, the churchyard space that Smith’s storm uproots. The trope of ghostly predecessors haunting Smith’s river sonnets has been replaced with that of their skeletal remains.

Notwithstanding, the churchyard sonnet *Celestina* composes follows Edwards’s own closely. When it appeared in *Elegiac Sonnets* as XLIX ‘Supposed to have been written in a church-yard, over the grave of a young woman of nineteen’, the debt to Edwards wasn’t acknowledged:

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,
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 possesst
Shall mingle tears with April’s early dew;
While still for him, shall faithful Memory save
Thy form and virtues from the silent grave. (p. 45)

In Smith's sonnet the graves of the two sonnets by Edwards on which she draws 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' (lines 3–4). Smith borrows directly from Edwards's sonnets in two notable appropriations.²² Edwards's imagined burial where 'hazle-bands entwine' (*Canons*, line 11) reappears as the grave of the young woman 'who sleep'st where hazle-bands entwine' (line 1), while 'light lie the earth upon thy lovely breast' of sonnet XXXVII (*Canons*, line 10) becomes 'Light lies the turf upon thy virgin breast' (line 9) in Smith's (a reworking of the classical epitaph *Sit tibi terra levis* ('May the earth rest lightly on you'), both more bold and affirmative statements than in Edwards's originals. 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. Edwards may have appealed to Celestina owing to his encouragement of young women writers. In his poetic exchange with Mulso issues of poetic lineage and imitation are 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.²³ 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'.²⁴ Edwards also 'endeavoured to supply what he thought a defect in the admired Church-yard Elegy' by writing two extra stanzas for the poem in which he envisaged two *female* villagers buried in the churchyard, published in 1782 in *The Gentleman's Magazine*.²⁵

Other sonnets composed by Celestina in the novel are closer to Smith's own original poetic voice and her preferred sea setting. A very different moment of sonnet inspiration is described later in the novel, after it has relocated to the Hebrides, and Celestina's sonnets display an unlearned, immediate connection with the Scottish landscape. As was observed in *The*

²² 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 1770–1815* (Tübingen: Francke, 2005), p. 105.

²³ Chapone, 'Occasioned by reading Sonnets', ll. 5–6.

²⁴ Edwards, 'Sonnet XXIV. To Miss H.M.', *Canons*, p. 330 (ll. 1–2).

²⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 52 (1782), p. 120. Interestingly, 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: p. 386), yet the source has been modulated: 'He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a Tear' (Gray, 'Elegy', line 123).

Critical Review, Smith has ‘employed the colours of Ossian’ in the novel.²⁶ 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’, symbolic of Celestina’s artlessness (IV: p. 211). Celestina composes a sonnet that rises as naturally as the island’s pure stream, here without any recollection of sonnet predecessors. Her thoughts about her absent lover are mapped out upon the ‘lone island’, as she imagines solace and contentment with the barest of sustenance on the rude and scant landscape: ‘Where osprays, cormorants, and sea-mews rest’ in a ‘scene so desolate and rude’ (lines 4 and 5). Celestina’s next Hebridean sonnet is composed at ‘the close of a very lowering and cheerless day, when her way was along the rugged cliffs that, on the western side of the island, hung over the sea’ (IV: p. 218). Entitled ‘The Pilgrim’, the sonnet explores a corresponding experience with a marginal seascape figure, who, like the speaker, ‘Journeys alone, along the giddy height | Of these steep cliffs’ (lines 4–5), and the emphasis here is on isolation and rootlessness.

Smith engages with Warton through a churchyard scene in her novel *Montalbert* (1795). The character Walsingham composes a sonnet in the grounds of a ‘ruined chapel, or small parish church, in which service is performed only once in six weeks’, indulging in a ‘melancholy species of pleasure’ and ‘cherishing the same spirit with which Young says in his Night Thoughts, “Throughout the vast globe’s wide circumference | No being wakes but me”’ (VIII: p. 244). The quotation is not from Young, however, but a different ‘graveyard’ poem, Warton’s *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747), with which the sonnet engages more than this misremembrance would suggest. The ‘melancholy [...] pleasure’ Walsingham experiences echoes Warton’s title and the sonnet itself draws on the poem, not least in setting. In Warton’s poem, the speaker is situated ‘Beneath yon’ ruin’d abbey’s moss-grown piles’ in the moonlight, while an owl ‘builds his bow’r | Amid the mould’ring caverns dark and damp’ (*Poetical Works*, I: lines 28 and 33–4), recalling Gray’s ‘Elegy’. Smith’s sonnet has a similar setting: written at night by a ruined building, it features a ‘ravenous Owl’ (line 6) and ‘moulding tomb’ (line 11). In both poems, the speaker finds emotional correspondence with their surroundings, congenial to their melancholy, as Warton’s ‘solemn glooms | Congenial with my soul’ (line 18) becomes Walsingham’s ‘to my heart, congenial is

²⁶ Anonymous, review of *Celestina. A Novel, in Four Volumes. By Charlotte Smith, The Critical Review*, 3 (1791), p. 321.

the gloom' (line 9).²⁷ It is, however, correspondence of a different kind. In Warton's poem 'all is motionless around! | Roars not the rushing wind' (lines 52–3), 'And every beast in mute oblivion lie; | All nature's hush'd in silence and in sleep' (lines 54–5), yet Smith's speaker courts the 'chill horrors of the howling blast' (line 4) as the 'Earth seems to shudder at the storm aghast' (line 2). The speaker finds the congeniality of Warton in the more Smithian tempestuous setting. Indeed, in the novel the churchyard is next to the sea (although this is lost in the transposition to *Elegiac Sonnets*); Walsingham can hear its 'hollow murmur' and describes a bleak vista of 'marshes that extend to the sea' and 'a broad spit of sand and stones, where nature seems to refuse sustenance even to the half-marine plants, [...] thinly sprinkled among the saltpetre of the beach' (p. 236).

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' (lines 13–14). Despite its stormy, coastal aspect, the sonnet is not actually centred on Smith's favoured seascape, and 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' (p. 244). Moreover, another sonnet is composed by Walsingham earlier in the novel, which features a disintegrating coastal headland. 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', when 'great fragments of rock fell on the belt of stones beneath' (p. 236). His 'gloomy disposition' is 'gratified in describing the effect of this, and thus assimilating [*sic*] outward circumstances to my own sad sensations' in a sonnet, later LXVI in *Elegiac Sonnets*; 'Written in a tempestuous night, on the coast of Sussex', it is much closer to Smith's preferred mode, as 'Above the desolate and stormy deep | Gleams the wan moon' (lines 9–10) and 'Mined by corrosive tides, the hollow rock | Falls prone' (lines 5–6). Here the scene does 'assimilate' to the speaker's sensations; the sea 'mourns' (line 3) and peace eludes both:

Along I wander – Calm untroubled rest,
 'Nature's soft nurse,' deserts the sigh-swoln breast,
 And shuns the eyes, that only wake to weep! (lines 11–13)

²⁷ Both poems are indebted to Thomson's *Winter*: 'Welcome, kindred glooms! | Congenial horrors, hail!' (lines 4–6).

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With sonnet XLIV and its accompanying 'Elegy', Smith was already associated with the disruption of the churchyard site, and the disintegrating headland had become her poetic signature. Indeed, it was one with which she signed off her poetic career, in the last lines of her posthumously published 'Beachy Head', in which the headland crumbles as the result of an 'equinoctial' storm. In addition to Thelwall's comments, Smith's popular sonnet XLIV had attracted commentators and travellers to the site of Middleton churchyard, which gained some celebrity in the late eighteenth century because of its precarious situation. The setting of 'A Descriptive Ode [...]', in which the nightingale is replaced with the 'croaking cormorant', also reads like an alternative version of the churchyard of XLIV, written during yet another 'equinoctial' storm, and, as a note to the ode elaborates:²⁸

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. (p. 95)

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 from the troubled waves' (lines 1–2), a 'drear site of tempest-beaten graves' (line 6). By coalescing and moving between churchyard and sea, Smith reworks the river trope connection to her eighteenth-century sonnet predecessors. Ruined buildings and sites are among the 'special places' of Warton's poems and, like the river and other sources of water, they offer a line of connection with the past. As Walter Scott writes, '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.'²⁹ Tombs and graves often feature in these sites, as in Warton's ode 'Written at Vale-Royal Abby in Cheshire' of the 1777 *Poems*, in which the speaker wanders amid 'forgotten graves, and scatter'd tombs' (line 24).

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), a collection of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poems greatly influenced

²⁸ In sonnet XLIV the 'loud equinox its power combines' (line 2), while in the novel in which 'A Descriptive Ode' first appeared, the title character Marchmont composes the poem in the novel when an 'equinoctial storm' is gathering (X: p. 327).

²⁹ Sir Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1853), III: p. 306.

by Warton, depicts a tomb and includes the epigraph ‘The monument of banish’d mindes’.³⁰ Smith’s sonnets do not share this interest and she felicitously embraces the disintegration of the Wartonian special place. While Smith explores the alienating effects of the river and the patrilineage it carries, she eschews the churchyard and its connection to the literary past more forcibly.

Giddy Brinks and Lucid Lines

As well as landscaping challenges to her sonnet forbears, Smith’s sonnet XLIV establishes an important characteristic aspect of her sea sonnets, as setting is intertwined with the sonnet’s formation. The fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, which marks the shift from river to sea, also 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 regularly Shakespearean.³¹ In a different way from the rocky fragments of sea sonnet XII, the entire seascape is inscribed in form. In sonnet XLIV 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 is surprisingly 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. Irregular in rhyme, *abbacddceceff*, the *c*-rhyme’s transgression of the octave–sestet divide in sonnet XLIV also mimes the way in which the sea overrides the land. In a different way, the formation of sonnet LII ‘The Pilgrim’ mirrors the scene described. The ‘steep cliffs’ (line 5) of the seascape are suggested in the line endings: line four ends with ‘giddy height’ and line six ‘rocky verge’, nodding to the brinks they name. The octave–sestet divide, which is enjambed, is also suggested by the way in which ‘the impetuous surge | Beneath him thunder!’ (lines

³⁰ Henry Headley’s *Select Beauties of Ancient Poetry* [...] (London: T. Cadell, 1787), frontispiece.

³¹ 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. Firmly land-locked, for the most part the sonnet is concerned with natural processes and motions rather than place. In sonnet XLII, Smith uses the Spenserian form not to recover an element of the past (which the form was associated with) but to capture the natural processes of the ‘revolving seasons’ (line 11), taking an interest in how the clouds and trees ‘Seem o’er the ruins of the year to mourn’ (line 2), and looking forwards (albeit elegiacally) to ‘propitious Spring’ (line 9).

8–9): the impetuous surge is ‘beneath’ both the overhanging cliffs of the seascape and beneath the octave of the sonnet.

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’ (1797), is another of Smith’s best-known sonnets, and one of a number of sonnets in the second edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* that explore the relationship between seascape and sonnet:

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,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
 The depth or the duration of his woe! (p. 76)

The sonnet rhymes *ababacadedebb* and is essentially English in form, comprised of three quatrains and a couplet. It is rendered irregular, however, by the prolonged *a* rhyme – creating an octave – and the return to the *b* rhyme at its end, which 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 matches the formation of the seascape, creating horizons and brinks within its structure. The relationship between place and form is accentuated by the illustration that accompanied the sonnet on its publication, which was 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* and when the volume was finally published she critiqued that of sonnet LXX with an artist’s eye (*Letters*, p. 267). 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 drop to the ‘waves that chide below’, and the return to this rhyme in the know–woe of the couplet suggests this distance within the sonnet.

The lunatic is one of Smith’s most interesting marginal coastal characters, and Smith both identifies with and distances herself from him. While the lunatic is not explicitly a literary character, he bears resemblance to contemporary figures, most notably Gray’s ‘The Bard’ (1757), who 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)[.] (*Poems*, ed.
Lonsdale, lines 15–20)

The ode ends as ‘headlong from the mountain’s height | Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night’ with a suicidal leap (lines 143–4). Having reworked the poet of his ‘Elegy’ in her sonnet XLIV as a disinterred skeleton, Gray’s prophetic Bard – a figure whom again nods to his scholarly engagement with the literary past – is reconstituted as a mere ‘solitary wretch’, uttering hoarse lamentations.³² Smith’s sonnet also includes a quotation from Horace Walpole’s play *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), from lines spoken by the eponymous mother who commits suicide in the play. Walpole – of course closely associated with the Gothic – who was a friend of Gray, was similarly interested in reviving past forms and modes, and helped Gray’s ‘Elegy’ into print. ‘The Bard’ was a much-illustrated poem. An engraving accompanied the poem in Dodsley’s *Collection* and later paintings were by Thomas Jones (1774) and John Martin (1817) – strikingly similar to the lunatic engraving – and illustrations were made by Blake, commissioned by John Flaxman. Gray’s own source for the bard, moreover, was pictorial: his correspondence reveals that the figure was inspired by Raphael’s *Vision of Ezekiel* and Parmigiano’s fresco *Moses*. Smith’s lunatic also bears resemblance to other suicidal figures such as Werter. As noted, in Goethe’s novel, Werter contemplates suicide while stood upon a precipice, beholding the stormy ‘sea’ of the overflowing river,

³² Roger Lonsdale and David Fairer both show the poem to be characterised, like many of Gray’s poems, by a fraught relationship with the past. See Lonsdale, ‘The Poems of Thomas Gray: Versions of the Self’, in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LIX (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 20 and Fairer, ‘Recovery of the Past’, pp. 161–3.

which Smith reworks as sonnet XXXIII.³³ Similarly, Coleridge's 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' (1794) depicts the poet on the top of 'some rough rock's fearful brow', where he 'Would pause abrupt – and gaze upon the waves below' (*Complete Poetical Works*, I: lines 128–9). The suicidal 'giddy brink' is a strikingly different visual feature from the riverbank, concerned with cessation and oblivion rather than continuation and longevity.

As Labbe suggests, the two figures in the illustration to sonnet LXX are aligned and, out of all the engravings to the sonnets, the female figure approaching the headland is the only one that could conceivably be Smith (*Culture of Gender*, pp. 15 and 42). 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. 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 female Smith and the lunatic (p. 15). Reading the sonnet and its image in a literary context, this appears more playful and troubling. Smith is treading male literary territory in assuming the bard's position, entering a space she has been 'warned' from entering. However, as in sonnet XLIV, Smith reworks Gray's poetic figure in dispossessing fashion, as bard becomes lunatic. Moreover, the way that Smith advances towards the lunatic implies she is in a sense coming to replace him. For, as suggested, while the traditional prospect view does correspond with a certain male prominence, the 'headland' overlooking the sea is not necessarily a male space, and one which Smith can command.

Sonnet LXXXIII presents a definitive 'The Sea View', and is populated by a solitary shepherd. As the title suggests, the sonnet has a visual emphasis, and is about seeing, viewing, and marking both place and form:

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,

³³ See also the depiction of the poet in Thomas Warton's 'The Suicide' (1777) and Mary Robinson's Sappho in *Sappho and Phaon* (1796).

Flash their destructive fires – The mangled dead
 And dying victims then pollute the flood.
 Ah! thus man spoils Heaven's glorious works with blood!
 (pp. 84–5)

Viewed from another position of height, 'the high down called Beacon Hill over Brighthelmstone' (p. 84), the opening octave presents an 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' (lines 1–3). As in sonnet IX, the view, 'magnificent and tranquil', is viewed through the eyes of the shepherd; here it spreads a 'joy serene' through even the rustic's breast and has a unifying effect on those who view it. This is a reversal of sonnet IX, in which the prospect reveals a disparity between the speaker and shepherd, in whose 'rude bosom' no 'fine feelings melt'. Smith's earlier shepherd is a highly literary figure, whose 'vacant mind | Pours out some tale antique of rural love!' (lines 3–4). In the later sonnet, the shepherd is more naturalistic and positive, closely connected with the landscape, and his rusticity befits the untutored persona of Smith's later sonnets. Through the relationship Smith establishes with the shepherd, seeing the 'sea view' through his eyes, she plays with form. For, rather than the speaker, or poet, the sonnet is concerned with how the shepherd 'Marks the bright Sea-line mingling with the skies', although Smith's sonnet LXXXIII was, she tells us in the note, 'Suggested by the recollection of having seen, some years since, on a beautiful evening of Summer, an engagement between two armed ships' (p. 84). Many of the coastal locations where Smith was based were politicised by their proximity to France, with which England was at war by February 1793.³⁴ Like other seascape sonnets, attention is drawn to a division in the landscape, here the 'bright Sea-line mingling with the skies'. Other sonnets that 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 it comes in the middle of the first of three sections formed by the rhyme *ababbcdcddee*, which divides the sonnet into sections of five, seven, and two lines. While the shepherd 'marks' the sea line, the sonnet itself does not

³⁴ This is most apparent in her poem *The Emigrants* (1793). Smith's sonnets are, for the main, not explicitly concerned with this context, whereas novels such as *Desmond* (1792) are overtly political. 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. On the political aspect of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, see Kari Lokke, "'The Mild Dominion of the Moon': Charlotte Smith and the Politics of Transcendence", in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. Adriana Craciun and Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 85–106.

'mark' such a line formally. The description of a 'bright Sea-line mingling' also points to this, paradoxically both distinct and 'mingling' with the skies. The form of the sonnet is also divided formally, yet simultaneously blurred, most apparently 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, in which the rhyming couplet is at odds with the sense, which continues over 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. Indeed, 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'. Moreover, in the sestet the seascape changes and 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 later sonnets increasingly play with the capability of the sonnet form to shift in this way, pulled between form and sense. This is at the crux of her last seascape sonnet LXXXVI 'Written near a Port on a dark Evening' of the final edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1800). The sonnet is displaced from the site of activity, it is written only 'near' a port, yet the sounds and signs of the busy port mingle with the seascape's familiar 'roar':

Huge vapours brood above the clefted 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
Mislead the Pilgrim – Such the dubious ray
That wavering Reason lends, in life's long darkling way. (p. 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 that join or are juxtaposed within the seascape, 'above' or 'on', akin to the parts and elements that constitute the poem, such as the 'rugged foot' (with its suggestion of poetic feet). The sonnet is regularly Shakespearean in form, yet the abundant enjambment creates a different picture. The first significant break comes at the end of the octave, dividing the sonnet into two sentences that correspond with the 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'.³⁵ Within the octave and sestet, things are more shadowy. The repetition of ';' or 'or' in the octave offers different possible sources of sound, matching the different possible spaces the lines fall into, grammatically and formally. The sestet of sonnet LXXXVI, too, offers different possibilities, this time for the all-important visual 'line': as well as the 'light surf on the level sand', with another 'or' we are told a line is created by the 'ship-lights' in the distance. If the 'lucid line' suggests the octave–sestet divide, Smith nods to another formal division or line here, perhaps, yet one that is unfixed: the lights 'faintly shine' and potentially 'mislead' the reader as well as the wandering pilgrim. 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 is poised between the breaks created by the rhyme and by the grammatical sense. Like the shepherd in sonnet LXXXIII, the pilgrim offers a different perspective of the 'lines' of the horizon, instructing the reader as to the different ways of reading 'form'. 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 that 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: written 'near a port', it is neither one place nor another, mimed by the split between form and sense.

Thus, by 1800 *Elegiac Sonnets* has moved some distance from the riverbank and nightingale's grove. As this chapter has shown, the movement from these sites to the vast seascape, through the figure of the churchyard, not only dramatises Smith's disruption of her predecessors and her changing relationship with literary tradition, but shows the emergence of her characteristic poetic mode and highlights her increasingly experimental use of the sonnet. Replacing the poetic predecessors of the river scene with shipwrecked mariners, shepherds, pilgrims, and lunatics, and having bound form and content through the

³⁵ 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*.

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

seascape, Smith uses the perspective of these characters to innovate further. As her final sea sonnet shows, aside from her innovative exploration of the relationship between form and content, her sonnets transcend 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 daring destabilisation of the sonnet form.

CHAPTER FOUR

Wider Prospect

By the time the second edition of the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* was published in 1800, completing the work, the sonnet's revival was well established, as reflected in the observation of *The Critical Review* from 1802 that the sonnet has been 'revived' by Smith. The first chapter of this book gave a history of the sonnet in the eighteenth century prior to Smith's usage. This chapter situates *Elegiac Sonnets* within the context of subsequent attitudes to the sonnet, and the different traditions – and breaks with them – that emerged around the form. It further illuminates and clarifies Smith's 'place' in literary tradition, and the career of the sonnet at this time, showing how Smith becomes known for reviving the sonnet yet is subsequently written out of the early history of the form. The chapter also discusses the afterlives of Smith's influential sonnet XLIV – from Wordsworth's appropriations to picturesque travel-writing accounts and guidebooks – which, I show, shed important light on Smith's literary reputation during her lifetime as well as her posthumous obscurity, as Smith's posthumous fate is played out upon the churchyard landscape. From a contemporary perspective, the sonnet presents a fitting metaphor for Smith's place in literary history: both her transforming force (as detailed in chapter three) and how she disappeared from the literary canon. The discussion shows how the appropriation and presentation of place played an important part in the ways in which aspects of literary tradition and reputation were negotiated and understood in the late eighteenth century and beyond. The chapter concludes with a reading of Smith's final sonnet 'Sonnet XCII is 'Written at Bignor Park in Sussex, in August 1799', which is shown to inscribe Smith's fragile inheritance and, as the last sonnet of *Elegiac Sonnets*, it represents her own final word on that inheritance.

Wider Prospect of the Sonnet Revival

While the Italian sonnet dominated the sonnet's eighteenth-century revival prior to Smith, she revived the English or 'illegitimate' sonnet form and, following *Elegiac Sonnets*, the popularity of the English form held sway. As noted, Wordsworth describes Smith as the first modern sonneteer, and to Coleridge it is Smith and Bowles 'who first made the Sonnet popular among the present English', sentiments that echo throughout sonnet discourse. In 1794, a commentator in the *Monthly Review* remarks that the sonnet has been 'so much cultivated of late [...] especially since Mr. Bowles and Mrs. Smith have gratified the public ear with their elegant productions', and in 1798 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'.¹ The place of Warton and others in the sonnet revival has been lost, and the way in which Smith's 'modern' and formally innovative sonnets emerge out of a male tradition obscured. The year 1789 can be seen as that of the 'illegitimate' sonnet, as the year in which Smith's fine fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* was published, which saw the shift from river to sea and a noticeable increase in irregular forms in the volume. The edition marked the high point of Smith's sonnet success; published by Thomas Cadell, by subscription, it included a list of the names of over eight hundred 'noble, literary, and respectable names [...] a brilliant assemblage', as Smith described them in the new preface (p. 12). (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.) 1789 also saw the first publication of William Lisle Bowles's first edition of sonnets.

Overtaking the Italian sonnet in popularity, the English form was embraced by both poets and critics. In 1784, *The Monthly Review* responded to Smith's preface with the assertion that:

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

¹ Anonymous, review of *Sonnets. By a Lady*, *Critical Review*, 10 (1794), p. 113; Nathan Drake, *Literary Hours or Sketches Critical and Narrative* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1798), p. 66.

childish affectation of interchanging rhymes, after the manner of the Italians.²

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 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. This view was also propounded by Coleridge in his 1796 essay, in which he deduces the sonnet's 'laws' from the compositions of Smith and Bowles: 'Respecting the metre of the Sonnet, the Writer should consult his own convenience. – Rhymes, many or few, or no rhymes at all. [...] whatever the rapid expression of his feelings will permit' (pp. 1339–40). Coleridge goes on to express his dislike of Petrarch and of 'artificial' English appropriations of the Italian sonnet, with their 'incongruous mixture of obsolete and Spenserian words [...] toiled and hammered to fit into shape', and shows a dislike for Warton's sonnets, which are thus disestablished from those of Bowles (p. 1140). 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 interrelationship between place, feeling, and form (p. 1139). Bowles echoes this in the introduction to his poems published in 1837, in which he recalls his choice of sonnet form in 1789: 'I thought nothing about the strict Italian model; the verses naturally flowed in unpremeditated harmony, as my ear

² Anonymous, 'ART. XI. *Elegiac Sonnets, and other Essays*', *The Monthly Review*, 71 (1784), p. 368.

³ Anonymous, review of *Elegiac Sonnets. By Charlotte Smith. The Third Edition*, *The Critical Review*, 61 (1786), p. 467.

⁴ Anonymous, review of *Emmeline; or, the Orphan of the Castle*, *The Critical Review*, 65 (1788), p. 531.

directed.⁵ It is easy to perceive how the English sonnet form became branded as 'Romantic' in later criticism. Smith, Bowles, and Coleridge all refer to their sonnets as 'effusions'. Unlike Warton's springs, which act as a metaphor for reaching back and finding inspiration in the past, the water metaphor here suggests immediacy and originality. Thus, the way Smith presents her sonnets as the simple, elegiac 'effusions' of a woman poet apologetically entering into print gives rise to some of the qualities – spontaneity, a more naturalised mode, formal play – central to the agenda of masculine 'Romanticism'. 'Effusion' becomes a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling', the apologetic formal hybrid elegiac sonnet becomes the poetic 'experiment' of the lyrical ballad and Smith's sense of connection with the marginalised and dispossessed is reworked in an aesthetic of 'low and rustic life' (*Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 246, and 245).

Smith's departure from tradition in her sonnets also had wider cultural resonances. Published in 1789, Smith's and Bowles's sonnets can be taken as the key publications of the revolutionary year. Susan J. Wolfson has explored the relationship between Smith's political voice and male literary tradition in Smith's *The Emigrants*, in which, Wolfson argues, Smith shapes a female political voice within and against male literary tradition through a complex set of 'interactions'.⁶ Smith's sonnets, through their 'sustained interaction with tradition and history', issue 'a politics of literary form' (p. 17) in a different way, as *Elegiac Sonnets* becomes formally politicised by context. Smith's experiments with form and her break with the past clearly spoke to a wider historical moment. Thelwall's 1792 essay on the sonnet acquires a political hue in its references to the 'Bondage' and 'reiterated chains' of the critical conservatism he censures (p. 408), and which Smith has overcome (building on the formal 'fetters' and 'chains' identified by Smith's earlier reviewers). This becomes more overt in *The Peripatetic*, published the following year, 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' (I: p. 123).⁷

⁵ William Lisle Bowles, *Scenes and Shadows of Days Departed* (London: W. Pickering, 1837), pp. xli–ii.

⁶ Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions*, p. 17.

⁷ 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 (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], p. 2). 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* (London: For the Author, 1795). Unsurprisingly, all are illegitimate and irregular. See Judith Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle: The Silenced Partner* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chapter 9.

His comments reveal the wider echoes and significance of Smith's innovation and break with the literary past, which become aligned with a revolutionary impulse. In November 1792 – the same year in which her political novel *Desmond* was published – Smith would be one of the 'Women of Great Britain', toasted by the British Club, 'who have distinguished themselves by their writings in favor of the French Revolution'.⁸

Bowles occupies an interesting place in the sonnet revival for, while he was frequently aligned with Smith, he 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. In his initial *Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive. Written During a Tour* (1789), three sonnets 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). 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, wondering in the sestet, 'Is it that those, who circled on thy shore, | Companions of my youth, now meet not more?'⁹ 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).¹⁰ The poem celebrates the combined influence of place and the literary past that Warton inspired in his pupil and celebrates a specific literary genealogy that includes Shakespeare, Milton, Warton, and Bowles himself. Bowles also follows the Warton brothers canonically, publishing a ten-volume edition of Pope's works (1806) that included hostile comments on his poetry and life, thus embroiling himself in the so-called 'Pope Controversy'.¹¹

⁸ Quoted by Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (Basingstoke and New York: 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' (p. 15).

⁹ William Lisle Bowles, 'Sonnet VIII. To the River Itchin, Near Winton', *Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive. Written During a Tour* (London: R. Cruttwell, 1789), lines 9–10. A later poem by Bowles is 'On Leaving Winchester School. Written in the year 1782' (1796).

¹⁰ William Lisle 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), line 2.

¹¹ See Jacob Johan van Rennes, *Bowles, Byron and the Pope Controversy* (New York: Haskell House, 1966); James Chandler, 'The Pope Controversy: Romantic Politics and the English Canon', *Critical Enquiry*, 10 (1984), pp. 481–509; and Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope*, p. 61.

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

Bowles's sonnets were first published anonymously as *Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive*, presented as 'found' in a traveller's notebook. Three sonnets of the volume are addressed to rivers and four describe sea-scenes, imbued with a similar Smithian melancholy and congruence between mind and external nature.¹² 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 remaining sonnets, one takes a slight variation on the above, and four are irregular takes on the Italian sonnet form, suggestive of Warton. The very first of Bowles's *Fourteen Sonnets*, 'Written a Tinemouth, Northumberland, After a Tempestuous Voyage' 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. (pp. 1–2)

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. In many of his *Fourteen Sonnets*, Bowles's speaker follows 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' (line 4), and, in sonnet X 'On Dover Cliffs' is 'Sure many a lone wanderer has stood' atop the cliffs (line 4). In Smith's sonnets her speaker is often presented as a wanderer and, as she precedes Bowles in travelling along the riverbank and clifftop, appears to constitute Bowles's imagined figure, suggestive of the way Bowles follows Smith in a literary sense. Having made her mark on the sonnet form and establishing her trademark type of sonnet, *she* is now the figure poets encounter in this landscape.

¹² 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. 371–81.

Bowles's sonnets are marked by some notable differences, however. 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, pleased to look back in sonnet I 'o'er the dark wave rode the howling blast'. Many of his sonnets operate in a similar way, exploiting Smith's sublime sea aesthetic without fully realising it, holding back from an identification with it. In sonnet I '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 he 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.¹³ Although Bowles embraces the riverbank and spatial retreats of the Wartons, Smith's sublime seascapes are traversed with care. Bowles's sonnets also lack the integration between seascape and form that marks Smith's own sonnets. 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 Wansbeck, Tweed, and Itchin – a plurality suggestive of the different lines of influence at work in his sonnets, pulled between the Wartons' historic and Smith's 'modern' mode, river and seascape, Italian and English/irregular sonnet forms. It is Bowles's English sonnet and associated formal approach that prevails, however, and with which he was associated by readers. '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.'¹⁴ Bowles's second edition of sonnets, re-entitled *Sonnets, Written Chiefly on Picturesque Spots, During a Tour*, was also published in 1789, removing the 'elegiac' association with Smith and also including the sonnet discussed above, which appears to disassociate his speaker from Smith's. A new 'Advertisement' also answers the charges of imitation, for 'many of them [sonnets] were written prior to Mrs. SMYTH'S Publication', and Bowles is 'conscious of their great inferiority to those beautiful compositions, but such as they are, they were certainly written from his own feelings' (p. 8).

¹³ William Lisle Bowles, 'Sonnet XVII. In a Storm', *Sonnets, Written Chiefly on Picturesque Spots During a Tour, by the Reverend W. L. Bowles, A. B. Of Trinity College, Oxford. The Second Edition, corrected, with additions* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1789), line 1. See Raycroft, p. 507.

¹⁴ Anonymous, review of *Fourteen Sonnets. Elegiac and Descriptive*, *The General Magazine*, 3 (1789), p. 211 and Anonymous, 'ART. XXIII. Fourteen Sonnets, elegiac and descriptive', *The Analytical Review*, 3 (1789), p. 339.

As Daniel Robinson and Paula Feldman note, however, Bowles's sonnets bear 'too great a resemblance to Smith's in form, tone, and subject' to not have been influenced by them ('Introduction', p. 12).

Warton's influence and elements of his school also continued in several poems of the 1780s and 1790s, yet surrounded by a sense of loss in relation to it. A significant exception in the illegitimate sonnet tradition emergent in 1789 is Thomas Russell, whose *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems, by the Late Thomas Russell, Fellow of New College* was published in that year. Russell was a close friend of Bowles and, like him, was tutored by both Warton brothers at Winchester and Oxford. In contrast to Bowles's sonnets, however, his sonnets are more clearly Wartonian. Wordsworth would later adapt lines from a Russell sonnet to one of his own 'Iona. (Upon Landing.)' (1833). Russell wrote papers in *The Gentleman's Magazine* defending Thomas Warton's *The History of Poetry* while at Oxford, and sonnets of the volume celebrate Oxford as a Wartonian space of 'Gothic fanes, dim isles, and cloysters hoar, | And treasur'd rolls of Wisdom's ancient lore'.¹⁵ Sonnet I celebrates the impassioned and unimpeded 'strains' of the 'days of old' (lines 11–12) and sonnet II celebrates poets of the past. There is already a sense of loss imbued in Russell's sonnets, such as sonnet III, in which he catalogues aspects of Oxford missed by the speaker: 'thy moonlight walks' and 'high-embowering trees' (lines 9–10), 'But most those Friends, whose much-lov'd converse gave | Thy gentle charms a tenfold power to please' (lines 13–14), celebrating collegiately. Russell's next sonnet continues to lament the loss of this 'lov'd retreat' (line 1). Several sonnets are translations and Russell's own original sonnets abound with archaisms, and literary and classical allusion. All but three take the Italian form, although a contemporary review indicates the preference for the more 'simple' English form at this time: '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.'¹⁶ Russell's promising career was cut short by his premature death and his sonnets were posthumously published.

The sense of a lost tradition is communicated in an elegy by Bowles, 'Written at the Hot-wells, Bristol' (written 1789, published 1791), where Russell – seeking the curative benefits of the waters – had died. In the poem, Bowles eulogises Russell as a school friend, Oxford contemporary, and fellow poet. Thus, Bowles the illegitimate sonneteer eulogises the legitimate and academic Russell, and towards the end of the poem seems to eulogise the Wartonian sonnet school. Bristol Hotwells presents a fitting site, springs being among the special places of Warton's poems. The main Hotwell spring, which gushed out

¹⁵ Thomas Russell, 'Sonnet III', *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems, by the Late Thomas Russell, Fellow of New College* (Oxford: D. Prince, etc., 1789), lines 1–5.

¹⁶ Anonymous, *The Analytical Review*, 3 (1789), p. 337.

at the foot of St Vincent's rock, features in Warton's 'Birthday Ode for 1790'. In Bowles's 'Elegy' Russell appears as 'The lost companion of my youth's gay prime', heralding the influence of Thomas Warton, and the subsequent stanzas recall lines from his sonnets of 1777.¹⁷ The 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:

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! (lines 75–6)

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'.¹⁸ Writing in 1825, 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 [*sic*], 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 [...] should be mentioned with Russel, as closely resembling him in the cast of his poetry. ('ART. III', p. 89)

Indeed, Bowles may also be thinking of other Wartonian poets. Headley, 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), had died in 1788. His anthology *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry* (1787) had been inspired by Warton's *History*. He also published a sonnet: 'To Miss Aikin (now Mrs. Barbauld), written in a blank leaf of Sir William Davenant's Gondibert' was included in his *Poems and Other Pieces* (1786), and the sonnet celebrates the recovering of the literary past in a Wartonian manner, 'written in a blank

¹⁷ William Lisle Bowles, *Elegy Written at the Hot-Wells, Bristol. Addressed to the Revd. William Howley* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1791), line 64.

¹⁸ Fairer also notes these echoes in *Organising Poetry*, p. 112.

leaf' of an old text.¹⁹ The fate of Bampfylde may also be lamented. As Southey notes elsewhere, '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' ('ART. 1.', p. 289). Moreover, 1790 – the year before Bowles's Hotwells elegy was finally published – was the year of the death of Thomas Warton himself. The elegy ends: 'I yet survive, now musing other song | Than that which early sooth'd my thoughtless years' (lines 85–6). Of the Warton school, it is Bowles who survives in 1789, 'who yet lives', yet he is musing *other* song; the illegitimate sonnet mode of Smith that continues. The poem recalls Sacks's conception of the elegy and the theme of poetic inheritance – the 'consoling invigorating liquid' present in the Hotwell spring symbolic of the continuing force of the surviving poet. 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 Warton's 1777 sonnets.

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' (VII: p. 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
Charm'd the deep echos of the rifted shore.
But tepid waves, wild scenes, or summer air,

¹⁹ 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.

Restore thy palsied Fancy, woe-deprest?
 Check thee 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? (p. 73)

The sonnet is 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. Both Chatterton (1752–1770) and Yearsley (bap. 1753, d. 1806) came from Bristol, an increasingly significant literary site – as well as the South West more widely – at the time of Smith's sonnet. 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. In the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* there is a shift to an interest in figures of 'native Genius' (sonnet LXIV, line 7), called forth by their environment, lacking, like Smith, the formal education of Smith's Arun predecessors. 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. Contrary to Bowles's poem, the Clifton landscape here celebrates the absence of influence, schools, and poetic fostering; the poets who inhabit it are 'Heav'n-taught'. However, line four of the sonnet is taken from Hayley's 'Epistle to a Friend on the Death of John Thornton' (1780), which eulogises a close friend he made at Cambridge. Like Bowles's 'Elegy', Hayley's poem laments the premature death of a contemporary, while celebrating the college days they shared. Smith claims her own literary 'school', as such, through Hayley, while drawing attention to how her lack of 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 whom Smith boldly aligns herself. Another sonnet of the same 1797 edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797) is the specifically elegiac LXXXII 'To the Shade of Burns', written on Burns's death – at the age of thirty-seven – in 1796. Burns – often associated with Chatterton – is celebrated as the 'Bard sublime! | Who, amid Scotia's mountain solitude, | Great Nature taught to 'build the lofty rhyme' (lines 1–3); as in sonnet LXIV, place calls forth another native genius, a 'genuine Poet [...] of nature's own creation' (p. 84).²⁰ Smith draws correspondences between herself and Burns through the reference to Burns's 'low fortune' (line 7) within the

²⁰ Burns was, of course, widely celebrated as a native genius, a 'Heaven taught ploughman', and was often aligned with Chatterton (Henry Mackenzie, *Lounger*, 97 [9 December 1786], p. 388).

sonnet and in a note to the sonnet's title, which connects the two as 'object[s] of *subscription*' (p. 84).²¹ 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. The literary connotations of the spring here are somewhat different from in Warton's poems; Smith's Hotwell spring is a *fons et origo* symbol of originality. 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 activity, a mode Smith disestablishes her sonnet from as Mrs Denzil writes the sonnet on location in a simple pocket book. Notwithstanding, the octave of the sonnet reveals a disconnection from place. 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. The spring offers Smith neither relief nor the accordance with feeling and form she finds in the seascape, her preferred poetic space.

Other poets did continue the tradition of the Warton school. Following Russell, *Juvenile Poems* (1793) by Henry Kett 'of Trinity College, Oxford' includes twelve sonnets, one of which is addressed 'To the River Wye', and 'Verses on the Death of Mr. Headley' 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'.²² However, his sonnet VI – the only one to address a poet – is 'To Charlotte Smith', rather than Warton, a present-tense homage to the 'fair mourner' (line 1) over whom 'Fortune has spread the sickly tints of grief; | Whilst Poesy to give thee sweet relief' (lines 2–3). Thomas Park's *Sonnets and Other Small Poems* (1797) includes a sonnet 'To the River Witham' that explicitly draws on Warton's Loddon sonnet, acknowledged in a note by Park. 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!²³

²¹ 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.

²² Henry Kett, 'Verses on the Death of Mr. Headley', *Juvenile Poems* [...] (Oxford: J. Fletcher, 1793), lines 33–4.

²³ Thomas Park, 'To the River Witham', *Sonnets, and Other Small Poems* [...] (London: G. Sael, 1797), lines 12–4.

While it may appear to continue Warton's river sonnet mode, it is used in an elegiac way that nods to its demise. 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, and echoes Smith's earlier sonnets:

Too fond Enthusiast of the twilight bow'r!
Who lov'st with lonely Philomel to plain,
With her, in melting minstrelsy, to pour
At once the saddest and the sweetest strain: (lines 1–4)

The Bristol poet Gardner, about whom little is known, also published a revisitation river sonnet in his two-volume *Miscellanies, in Prose and Verse* (1798): 'Sonnet on revisiting the banks of the Avon near Bristol Hotwells'. However, in the sonnet, the revisitation 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'.²⁴ It is telling and significant that Smith was – over Bowles and others – asked to compose an epitaph following Warton's death. As her sister records, Smith 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' (p. 57). Despite her importance and influence in this 'society so fertile', and the implication in the offer that she is something of a successor to Warton, Smith's refusal is fitting considering her sonnet landscapes and mode, far removed from this poetic 'society'.

Thus, disestablishing Smith from the school of Warton, and acknowledging her 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. Smith is the poetic figure, and her seascape the poetic space – as seen in Bowles – that poets now have to negotiate. 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 in literary history, a new sonnet impulse. Simultaneously, however, 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.

²⁴ 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: lines 13–14. Nearly all of Gardner's twenty-three sonnets are English in form, and twelve have an alexandrine for the final line, recalling Smith.

Smith in Posterity: A Fragile Inheritance

Despite their importance in the sonnet's history, in later assessments both Smith and Warton were erased from sonnet history. As noted in the introduction, 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, most notably in his widely read *Biographia Literaria*, and it is this account that was upheld, notably by M. H. 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'.²⁵ However, as Brent Raycroft has shown, Abrams's comments on Bowles's sonnets apply equally to Smith's own. 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 missing from Abrams's genealogy, in which his earlier Loddon sonnet should occupy a central place – perhaps another legacy of Coleridge's essay, in which Coleridge differentiates Bowles from Warton's legitimate and antiquarian mode. In *Organising Poetry*, by contrast, the destination of Fairer's chapter on Warton's sonnet is Wordsworth's 'Greater Romantic Lyric' 'Tintern Abbey'.²⁶ Abrams's interest is in new beginnings and origins, whereas – as previously shown – the river trope that he identifies as being central to the genre, and which as Abrams himself argues develops out of the eighteenth-century topographical poem, is one of tradition and continuity rather than originating moments.

It is a fundamental aspect of Smith's sonnets that she too absents herself from literary tradition. She quotes two sonnets by Bowles in her prose works, the only sonnets she cites in their entirety aside from the sonnets by Drayton and Milton, attesting to her awareness of the close relationship between her sonnets and those of her successor. Somewhat playfully, Smith includes Bowles's sonnet '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 Bowles's sonnet, who 'passes weary on his way' along the Wansbeck (*Fourteen Sonnets*, line 10). In *Rural Walks*, as the group walks alongside a stream in the

²⁵ 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), p. 540.

²⁶ 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), pp. 313–15).

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: p. 73) to the cousin who has chosen Bowles's.²⁷ 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. In a section of the *Narrative* condemning the plundering that 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: p. 323)

The sonnet and Bowles's note to it follows. The reference to 'copying' is 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'. At the very least Smith strangely displaces herself here in 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. Moreover, throughout her sonnets – and this is something I return to in my final chapter – Smith writes from a position of marginality. While it may dramatise Smith's innovation, sonnet XLIV, for example, is also – like many of her sonnets – characterised by marginality and fragility. As the sonnet's note informs us, the speaker is located on the 'margin of the sea', a headland that is disintegrating as the poem is being written.

While the English sonnet form was by far the most popular sonnet mode in the late eighteenth century, and flooded the literary marketplace, there was also something of a backlash against it, which has impacted on Smith's subsequent status. A correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1786 complained that '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 [...] certainly the most difficult species of all poetic composition', which Anna Seward later repeats in the preface to her own sonnets.²⁸ Indeed, Smith and Seward were frequently juxtaposed in reviews and essays at this time. As *The British Critic* states, they 'may be considered as the leaders of two poetic parties, the one patronizing the irregular, the other the regular Sonnet', while *The Anti-Jacobin Review* seeks to 'discriminate the characters

²⁷ Playfully, considering Bowles's stance on Pope, *Windsor-Forest* is quoted from only a few pages later.

²⁸ White, 'Letter'.

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of the rival Sisters'.²⁹ Seward frequently disparaged Smith, and vehemently promoted the 'legitimate' form. Her volume of *Original Sonnets*, containing a hundred sonnets, presents something of a riposte to Smith's own. Thirteen of Seward's sonnets had 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 that preface Henry Francis Cary's *Sonnets and Odes* (1788).³⁰ 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.³¹

Fully conforming to the legitimate form itself, rhyming *abbaabbacdcdd*, the sonnet presents Seward's particular conception and history of the form. Indeed, her emphasis is on the strictness of its 'laws', a 'peculiar' and 'arduous model'. Seward offers a direct challenge to Smith's version of the sonnet, poems which 'it's [*sic*] appropriate name | Lawless assume'. 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' (II: p. 222–3). In the sestet of her sonnet to Cary, Seward delineates her history of the sonnet, from Petrarch to Milton, Italian to English:

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[,] (lines 10–13)

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 form.

²⁹ Anonymous, 'ART. XIV. Original Sonnets on various Subjects', *The British Critic*, 14 (1799), p. 166; Anonymous: 'ART. XXVI. Original Sonnets on various Subjects', *The Anti-Jacobin Review; Or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor*, 4 (1800), p. 327.

³⁰ Seward's first sonnet was published in 1784 in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Several further sonnets were published in periodicals and in Seward's *Llangollen Vale* (1796). Henry Francis Cary (1772–1844) was a young Lichfield poet whom Seward befriended and encouraged. His *Sonnets and Odes* (London: J. Robson, etc., 1788) included twenty-eight legitimate sonnets.

³¹ Anna Seward, 'To the author of the following poems. Sonnet', in Cary, *Sonnets and Odes*, lines 1–5.

Seward's sonnets remained far less popular and influential than Smith's, however. Coleridge included the sonnet in the introduction to his 1796 pamphlet, saying that Seward has 'perhaps succeeded the best in these laborious trifles [the legitimate sonnet], and who most dogmatically insists on what she calls the sonnet-claim, has written a very ingenious although unintentional burlesque on her own system' (p. 1140).

One of Seward's *Original Sonnets* is a translation from a section on the sonnet in Boileau's *Art poétique* (1674). Indeed, throughout much sonnet discourse, the legitimate sonnet form is aligned with a rule-bound and authority-based critical and poetic order. In *Art poétique*, translated by William Soames and revised by Dryden as *The Art of Poetry* (1683), Boileau presents Apollo as devising the sonnet form as a challenge to the 'Fops' and 'Scriblers' and their overly lengthy compositions:

For the short Sonnet order'd this strict bound:
Set Rules for the just Measure, and the Time.³²

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. 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 difficult and superior nature of the form. As Seward herself writes, 'it was the legitimate sonnet which Boileau meant, not that facile form of verse which Mrs Smith has taken' (*Letters*, II: p. 162). David Duff has argued that, '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'.³³ The 'Romantic' sonnet, is by its very nature, somewhat paradoxical, for in either its English or Italian form 'Romantic' principles of spontaneity and organicism are necessarily limited by the sonnet's formal parameters. As Duff also points out, in the period 'in many cases, generic and anti-generic tendencies – the urge to form and formlessness – coexist within the same text' (p. 19). The 'illegitimate' and irregular sonnet seems to embody some of these inconsistencies and contradictions: simultaneously highly formal and formless, generic and anti-generic. Smith's sonnets

³² Nicholas Boileau, *The Art of Poetry, Written in French by the Sieur de Boileau. In Four Canto's*, trans. Sir William Soames, rev. John Dryden (London: H. Hills, 1710), p. 14.

³³ David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 16.

also override and destabilise the contrast of neoclassical–Romantic through the tradition she invokes in her sonnets, positing herself as a successor to Waller and Pope. This is also true of Seward, who follows Milton in form while simultaneously drawing on Pope and Boileau, without the divisions made between the poetry of Spenser and Milton and the modern school of Dryden, Pope, and Boileau by commentators such as Warton and others; and, as articulated by Vicesimus Knox in 1782: ‘I think it is not difficult to perceive, that the admirers of English poetry are divided into two parties [...] On one side, are the lovers and imitators of Spenser and Milton; and on the other, those of Dryden, Boileau and Pope.’³⁴ Seward does, however, clearly disestablish herself from Smith and her feminised mode. Milton is her ‘model for sonnet-writing’ and, unlike Smith’s sonnets, his possess ‘Hardness’ (I: p. 223), ‘grave energies’, and ‘majestic plainness’ (II: p. 256); one sonnet is identified as having a ‘manly firmness’ (I: p. 191). What is surprising about Seward’s sonnets, however, considering her reputation for being contrary to Smith, is their similarity.³⁵ While the reviewer of Seward’s sonnets in *The Anti-Jacobin Review* juxtaposes sonnets by Smith and Seward to ‘discriminate the characters of the rival Sisters’, in doing so they draw attention to similarities by selecting sonnets that take the same subject. Sonnets by both are compared on female relationships, the seashore, and translations of Petrarch. Seward’s *Original Sonnets* also contains sonnets written in the character of Werther, and a river sonnet. Moreover, despite Seward’s frequently professed commitment to the legitimate sonnet, only thirty-eight of her hundred sonnets are actually fully Italian in form. Another review of Seward’s sonnets juxtaposes the sonnets of Smith and Seward in a formal context, highlighting Seward’s use of irregular forms and Smith’s (innovative) use of the Italian, narrowing the gap between them.³⁶

Like Seward, Mary Robinson also uses the Italian sonnet form to turn aside from the contemporary sonnet mode. In the preface of her sonnet sequence *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), she bemoans how ‘Every school-boy, every romantic

³⁴ Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2 vols. (London: Charles Dilly, 1782), II: p. 196.

³⁵ A recent study by Claudia Kairoff seeks to reposition Seward in a firmly eighteenth-century context, arguing that Seward’s frequent comparison with Smith and her ‘proto-Romantic qualities’ means Seward has been judged the lesser, and the less significant, poet. Kairoff presents Seward instead as a ‘child’ of Johnson and Darwin, and shows how her ‘her poetic style [...] fuses Milton’s practices with those of her Augustan precursors and more contemporaneous sentimental modes’ (Claudia Thomas Kairoff, *Anna Seward and the End of the Eighteenth Century* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012], p. 14). However, looking beyond the category of ‘Romantic’, and Seward’s attack of Smith in a wider context, reveals a different and more complex picture.

³⁶ Anonymous, review of *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects*, *The New London Review*, 2 (1799), pp. 59–72.

scribbler, thinks a sonnet a task of little difficulty', and how 'sonnets are so common, for every rhapsody of rhyme, from six lines to sixty comes under that domination, that the eye frequently turns from this species of sonnet with disgust.'³⁷ She thus appropriates the 'legitimate sonnet' and places herself as a successor in the sonnet to Petrarch and Milton and in subject to Ovid and Pope (p. 320). Again, literary tradition can move through Milton and Pope and into the hands of the woman poet, as Robinson reappropriates the female voice of Sappho as she draws on Pope's 1712 translation of *Heroides*. Contrary to Seward, however, Robinson does not vilify Smith and indeed quotes from and celebrates her among other contemporary women writers in her preface. Thus, the approach of both Seward and Robinson to tradition and form differs from that of Smith in *Elegiac Sonnets*, for she presents her sonnets as tentative 'essays' and perhaps not even sonnets at all, invoking a powerful lineage of canonical poets only to formulate her own poems' illegitimate effusions, matched by their subject matter. Seward and Robinson more assertively place themselves in a literary tradition, using what they present as the elite, 'legitimate', Miltonic sonnet form.

The sonnets of Seward and Robinson still both bear the influence of Smith, especially those sonnets that take a coastal setting. Seward's sonnet XCV is set 'On the damp margin of the sea-beat shore' and 'with solemn roar | Vast billows into caverns surging pour' (*Original Sonnets*, lines 1 and 4–5); replete with seabirds, it recalls Smith's sonnet XII. In contrast to Smith's often fragile seascapes, in Seward's, the 'craggy mounds' are 'Staying the furious main' (lines 11 and 12). While Smith's similar sonnet XII is characterised by fracture, both in landscape and sonnet form, physically broken up on the page, Seward's 'damp margin' and her sonnet form are more cohesive, befitting the rigidity of form she advocates. Moreover, although Seward's speaker experiences 'delight', there is no distinction between the pleasure imparted by the sea scene and the 'green vales' of the final line; and, although she may find pleasure in the seascape, it does not suit or symbolise her state of mind or soul. Seward locates her speaker 'Beneath a rock' (line 13), whereas Smith's speaker can be found on a 'rude fragment of the rocky shore': Seward places herself in Smith's poetic space, yet takes a different position within it. Several of Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* sonnets are coastal in their island setting. A shift takes place across the sequence from the 'margin of the trembling shore' to the headland, as Sappho 'resolves to take the leap of Leucata' in sonnet XLI, which most strongly recalls Smith: 'Where the blast yells, the liquid columns pour, | And madd'ning billows combat with the skies!', offering 'dreadful solace to the stormy mind' (I: lines 3–4 and 9). The fixed Leucadian landscape of Robinson's Petrarchan

³⁷ Mary Robinson, preface to *Sappho and Phaon*, in *The Works of Mary Robinson*, gen. ed. William D. Brewer, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009–2010), I: p. 322.

sonnet is again in contrast with Smith's crumbling headland, consumed by the waves.³⁸ Helen Maria Williams also published sonnets bearing considerable resemblance to Smith's, taking the Italian form, yet she did not distance herself from the 'illegitimate' mode in the way of Seward and Robinson, as Smith's influence manifests more positively. Her sonnet 'To the Curlew' (1795), set on the seashore, in particular bears resemblance to Smith's sonnet, as, 'Sooth'd by the murmurs on the sea-beat shore', the curlew, with his 'melancholy wail', is a 'congenial bird' to the speaker.³⁹

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). 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 feminisation of the sonnet, not only by women writers but by Bowles and others (Phelan, p. 9). The way in which he claims a place as Gray's inheritor and disruptor in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* also in a sense cuts out what has been published in the period between Gray's sonnet and *Lyrical Ballads*. Dorothy Wordsworth records how her brother was also 'turning over the leaves of Charlotte Smith's sonnets' in 1802, and Daniel Robinson has argued that Wordsworth's adoption of explicitly Miltonic sonnet practices is 'a deliberate erasure of the sonnet of Sensibility', and of Smith's influence in particular ('Form and Function', p. 449).⁴⁰ Wordsworth had owned a copy of *Elegiac Sonnets* as early as 1789, when he was a student at Cambridge, adding his name to the subscription list. It seems significant that his own sea sonnet, 'Composed by the sea-side, near Calais, August 1802', published in the 1807 volume, appears in the second sequence entitled 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty'. Appearing alongside other political, non-Smithian sonnets such as 'London 1802', which calls on Milton, it is clearly separated from Smith's mode, while recalling it in setting. Wordsworth's 'Prefatory Sonnet' also seems to counter Smith in its reference to the 'Sonnet's scanty plot of ground', where those 'Who have felt the weight of too much liberty, | Should find brief

³⁸ Stephen Behrendt has highlighted how the sonnets of Smith, Robinson and Seward meet through the sea setting (see *Romantic Writing Community*, p. 125).

³⁹ Helen Maria Williams, *Poems by Helen Maria Williams*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell, 1786), I: lines 1, 3 and 5.

⁴⁰ Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. 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), pp. 96–115; and Robinson, 'Form and Function'.

solace there, as I have found'.⁴¹ As this chapter has shown, Smith's innovation widens the sonnet's scope and transcends its boundaries. Wordsworth reduces the sonnet back in size under a weight of liberty the oppressed Smith herself could never express; as the speaker of sonnet III declares to the nightingale, 'that such my lot might be, | To sigh, and sing at liberty – like thee!'. It is other non-sonnet poems of Wordsworth that bear a stronger resemblance to Smith's lyrical, naturalised mode and treatment of the natural world, and his early 'An Evening Walk' (1793) includes a quotation from Smith's sonnet V. Wordsworth's first published poem was, however, an illegitimate, elegiac sonnet 'On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress' (1787), published as Axiologus in *The European Magazine*. He disowned the poem, and the sonnet Wordsworth does include in his 1807 *Poems* as 'Written in very early youth', in contrast, is a 'legitimate' sonnet.

A complex picture emerges, then, as Wordsworth writes in the 'legitimate', masculine form in an evasion of eighteenth-century sonnet tradition, which mimes that of women writers Robinson and Seward. While the way in which they claimed Milton and the legitimate sonnet did not have much influence on understandings of literary tradition – in large part because of their status as women writers – Warton's and Wordsworth's positioning of themselves in relation to Milton did. In drawing on Milton, Wordsworth does not seek to reach back and return to the past, yet he does follow Warton in eliding the influence of Pope (as well as the feminised sonnet tradition) in his poems, as Griffin's study has shown. Wordsworth is clearly not claiming the sonnet as a strict, 'neo-classical' form in the way that Seward does and thus he presents his sonnets as modern 'Romantic', legitimate – or, rather, Miltonic – sonnets. While Wordsworth's later note bemoans that Smith's influence on 'English verse' will not be adequately acknowledged, he was also somewhat complicit in obscuring it.

It seems significant that in his copy of *Elegiac Sonnets* the only poem which Wordsworth marks in any notable way is sonnet XLIV. Christopher Nagle suggests that Wordsworth's 1833 note is a final late acknowledgement of Smith's importance to his poetic development embedded in this earlier 'editing' of Smith's sonnet.⁴² In his copy, Wordsworth rewrites the final line of Smith's sonnet, amending the couplet from 'While I am doom'd – by life's long storm opprest, | To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest' to 'While I am doom'd – by life's long storm opprest, | To envy their insensible unrest'. Nagle

⁴¹ William Wordsworth, 'Prefatory Sonnet', in *Poems, In Two Volumes, by William Wordsworth, Author of The Lyrical Ballads*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1807), I: lines 11 and 13–14.

⁴² Christopher C. Nagle, *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 51.

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suggests that Wordsworth thus alters the relationship between the poetic self and the natural scene; through losing the distance embedded in the original 'gaze', the 'I' becomes more fully absorbed in the scene, 'so much a hallmark of his mature poetry' (p. 53). Like his later acknowledgement, Wordsworth here displays his poetic debt to Smith, while in a sense obscuring her. In editing, 'improving' her lines, asserting his superiority, Wordsworth displaces Smith, curiously mirrored by the way in which he removes the speaking 'I' from the scene of the sonnet.

Robinson has convincingly argued that it is in his later sonnet sequence *The River Duddon* (1820) that Wordsworth balances his debt to Smith, negotiated largely through his appropriation of the river trope. Robinson has identified a reference to Smith's sonnet XLIV in a sonnet of the sequence that is centred upon a 'wave-washed churchyard':

How sweet were leisure! could it yield no more
Than mid that wave-washed Church-yard to recline,
From pastoral graves extracting thoughts divine;
Or there to pace, and mark the summits hoar
Of distant moon-lit mountains faintly shine,
Sooth'd by the unseen River's gentle roar.⁴³

While presenting a similarly moonlit scene, the 'pastoral' churchyard of Wordsworth's sonnet is 'washed' by the river rather than the sea and the soothing, 'gentle roar' of the river suggestively echoes yet iterates its dissimilarity from the raving and warring 'winds and waters' of Smith's sonnet. Wordsworth modifies Smith's scene: the relationship between speaker and place and what the speaker 'extracts' from it are somewhat different. To Robinson, Wordsworth claims poetic immortality for himself and his sonnet sequence through the transcendent permanence of both the river and the sonnet tradition. Thus, the river becomes a complex trope through which Wordsworth finally acknowledges 'how profoundly' he felt Smith's influence; yet through it Wordsworth also disestablishes himself from the ephemeral and transient mode of Smith and other eighteenth-century predecessors. In his own churchyard sonnet Wordsworth's poet gleans 'thoughts divine', and is successful in securing the poetic fame and longevity Smith is denied and appears to resist in her sonnets through their fading, fragile subject matter. Marlon Ross has established how canonical male Romantic poets were driven by the anxiety created by the popularity of women writers in the late eighteenth century, and their poems were informed

⁴³ William Wordsworth, XXX, *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia: And Other Poems. To Which Is Annexed. A Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes, in the North of England* (London: Longman, 1820), lines 9–14.

by a model of separation from and repression of the feminine.⁴⁴ This in many ways illuminates Smith's position, and the backlash against her sonnet form, which had become aligned with a more female mode (male poets such as Bowles and the legitimate sonnets of women writers notwithstanding). While Wordsworth branded his sonnets as Miltonic, Coleridge's relationship with the sonnet was more vexed, seemingly because of the shifting fortunes and status of the form. He switched between labelling his poems in the form as 'sonnets', 'effusions', and sonnets 'in the manner' of Bowles, and parodied the contemporary sonnet in 1797 under the pseudonym 'Nehemiah Higginbottom' before abandoning it all together.⁴⁵

Smith's colourful literary fate outside of the works of her poetic inheritors has been tracked by Louise Duckling, who shows how Smith's contemporary success 'failed to secure her a position within the newly-emerging national canon'.⁴⁶ However, despite Smith's subsequent effacement from literary history, Duckling argues that Smith was not 'entirely forgotten: her contribution was assessed in a variety of nineteenth-century anthologies, dictionaries and celebrations of 'lost' female talent' (p. 203) in which her contribution was downgraded to that of a popular female poet. Indeed, in posthumous assessments, Smith is frequently marginalised or referred to in something of an 'elegiac' way. In Alexander Dyce's *Specimens of British Poetesses* (1825) – a response to the exclusion of women from great 'Collections of the English Poets' – Smith seems poised between preservation and disappearance.⁴⁷ Dyce writes that 'Her Sonnets, once very popular, are not framed on the Italian model, and exhibit little of concentrated thought; but they are "most musical, most melancholy", and abound with touches of tenderness, grace and beauty' (p. 254). Dyce is obliged to temper his praise of Smith with a nod to the inferiority, and perhaps ephemerality, of the English sonnet form. The alignment of her sonnets with Milton's nightingale imbues Smith with a canonical voice, while simultaneously denying it to her through the identification with the bird – usually female, hidden, and dispossessed – and she was of course but 'once very popular' (p. 254). Dyce also included a sonnet by Smith in his 1833 collection *Specimens of English Sonnets*. In another of the 'reclamation efforts' that Duckling identifies, George Bethune's *The British Female Poets* (1848),

⁴⁴ See Marlon Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴⁵ On Coleridge's relationship with the sonnet, see Daniel Robinson, "'Work Without Hope": Anxiety and Embarrassment in Coleridge's Sonnets', *Studies in Romanticism*, 39 (2000), pp. 81–110.

⁴⁶ Louise Duckling, "'Tell My Name to Distant Ages": The Literary Fate of Charlotte Smith', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), p. 203.

⁴⁷ Alexander Dyce, *Specimens of British Poetesses* (London: Rodd and Prowett, 1825), p. iii.

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Bethune observes how Smith's sonnets have, elegiacally, 'fallen into such undeserved neglect, that they are rarely found except in libraries of collectors'.⁴⁸

Smith's changing literary fortunes can be traced in the afterlives of sonnet XLIV. The church found a place on the tourist map of the eighteenth-century picturesque traveller as a result of its perilous location. As Smith records in her note to the poem, by 1789 the wall around the churchyard had already been swept away and graves disinterred by the tide. The churchyard of the medieval St Nicholas' church in Middleton gradually succumbed entirely to the tide in the years following Smith's sonnet. In 1838 a very high tide destroyed much of the remaining building, and it had completely disappeared by c. 1849, when a newly built church was consecrated (safely further in land). Much of the material on Middleton church appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. The May edition of 1796 printed the first engraving of the church, together with a letter describing its location; the church stands on a 'low earthy clift against the sea', the correspondent writes, 'which on this coast gains on the land in a rapid manner: it has devoured the church-yard, with great part of the chancel, and threatens the whole fabrick, which, from the ruinous and desolate situation it is in, appears to be irreparably hastening to its [...] total dissolution'.⁴⁹ A respondent to the engraving in the next volume of the magazine, in 1796, is the first commentator to make the connection with Smith's sonnet: 'This ruined church, and sea-washed cemetery, have been retrieved from obscure oblivion by the poetical painting of Charlotte Smith.'⁵⁰ Smith's sonnet becomes bound up with retrieving and somehow preserving the site of her sonnet, even as it describes and heralds its destruction. In the next response to the church, again in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1797), the correspondent writes: 'the inclosed poor remains of Middleton church struck me as worthy of preservation in your Magazine' before it becomes swallowed 'by the devouring ocean'.⁵¹ Although 'small and insignificant as the church appears', the correspondent continued, 'as the site of it has been immortalized by the elegant pen of that poetess of the county, 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' (p. 729). While the site itself seems to suggest impermanence and precariousness, poetry and art are invested with longevity, somewhat at odds with the impulse of Smith's sonnet, which rejects the immortality imbued in the sonnet form by her predecessors. In

⁴⁸ G. W. Bethune, *The British Female Poets* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1848), p. 89.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, letter, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 66 (May 1796), p. 369.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, 'Leviter Eruditus', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 66 (June 1796), p. 489.

⁵¹ Anonymous, letter, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 67 (March 1797), p. 729.

1805, the next *The Gentleman's Magazine* commentator similarly records that, while the church 'has no claim to celebrity from its architectural properties',

its singular situation has, however, attracted the attention of Mrs. Charlotte Smith, who has honoured it as the scene of one of her beautiful elegies. [...] It affords a flagrant example of the depredations made in that part of our Southern coast by the daily encroachments of the sea; [...] [the church] is at present situate so near the verge as scarcely to admit the safe passage of an individual. [...] Its insertion in your Magazine will perpetuate the representation of an original, which a few months may be reduced to ruins.⁵²

The artist continues the theme of preserving the site through art by joining Smith and others who 'perpetuate the representation of an original' destined for ruin, here poised between celebrity and 'elegy'. Significantly, while they may purport to depict the same scene in a 'sister-art', the illustrations of the church and churchyard by all three artists in *The Gentleman's Magazine* depart from the scene presented by Smith's sonnet and its emphasis. The peaceful scenes that focus on the church contrast with Smith's moonlit sublime and Gothic seascape. While Smith's sonnet may have been written in the churchyard, the church itself is not mentioned in the sonnet: the speaker's gaze is fixed firmly outward to the sea and on the elements. The sonnet's note does look inland, yet only to mention in passing the 'small church', the 'half-ruined and humble edifice'. The engraving accompanying Smith's own 'Elegy' also privileges the church, although a female figure dominates, and, through her, the illustration points to what is off the page, directed away from the church and towards what the poem is interested in: the tempestuous sea described by the 'I' in the poem she represents. The illustrations and accompanying letters in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, fully concerned with the church, thus curiously misread Smith's sonnet in implying that it features and preserves it. As a result, Smith becomes associated with the church – obscure and neglected, precariously poised – rather than the forces of the seascape that suggest her own poetic power and influence, and, as the church becomes increasingly close to 'oblivion' and disappearance, Smith's literary prominence and reputation appear to be exposed to a similar fate. As noted, following her popularity and literary celebrity in the 1780s and 1790s, Smith's eminence had begun to wane as she neared the end of her life, concomitant with the erosion of the ground from which she had written her best-known sonnet. In 1802 Smith wrote that 'I [...] see that the ci devant celebrated Charlotte Smith may sink [...] quietly into the gulph of oblivion' (*Letters*, p. 451), anticipating the observation in 1805 that Smith's

⁵² B. I. G., letter, *The Gentleman's Magazine* (5 September 1805), p. 801.

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Sonnet XLIV has brought ‘celebrity’ in an elegy to a church that will soon ‘be reduced to ruins’. The misreading of Smith’s sonnet also shows the way in which her literary status is ‘downgraded’ to that of popular poetess, a gentle and genteel woman writer. The reference in 1797 to the ‘beautiful sonnet’ by the ‘elegant pen of that poetess of the county Mrs. Smith’ and in 1805 to the ‘beautiful elegies of Mrs. Charlotte Smith’ contrast with Thelwall’s celebration of the sonnet’s ‘vivid painting, numerous harmony, sublimity of thought and expression’, Smith’s innovation and daring as a poet, and her place in a literary canon alongside Shakespeare and Milton.

The next account in which Smith is connected with the site is in *The Origin and Description of Bognor or Hothampton* – as the discourse shifts from periodicals to guidebooks – published in 1807, the year of Smith’s death. Its author, J. B. Davis, is much concerned with the encroaching sea and ‘assaults’ of Neptune; the ‘merciless deity has swallowed up fields and edifices’ and now ‘has invaded the habitations of the dead’.⁵³ Davis writes:

Middleton Church has obtained some celebrity from having furnished the scene of one of the poetical compositions of the late ingenious and unfortunate Mrs. Charlotte Smith. The reader will not perhaps be displeased if I conclude my observations on this relic, which will soon lose every vestige of existence, with the lines which the ruinous aspect of it inspired. (p. 100)

The relationship between Smith’s representation of the site and the original has shifted in a posthumous context and Davis’s description reflects how – as Duckling has shown – Smith was eulogised in light of her troubled life story, depicted as an unfortunate figure of sensibility. Smith herself in some ways anticipated this reception in her poem ‘To My Lyre’, written shortly before her death, in which she imagines her posthumous fate:

And as the time ere long must come
When I lie silent in the tomb,
Thou wilt preserve these mournful pages;
For gentle minds will love my verse,
And Pity shall my strains rehearse,
And tell my name to distant ages. (lines 33–8)

The stanza shows the way in which celebrity and elegy are inextricably linked in Smith’s poems and how her longevity relies upon the very qualities that

⁵³ J. B. Davis, *The Origin and Description of Bognor or Hothampton* (London: Samuel Tipper, 1807), pp. 75 and 100.

threaten to efface it: her mournful, elegiac sonnets invoking oblivion and forgetfulness – for example – rely on pity, which in this poem will ‘tell my name to distant ages’. Davis’s reference to the church’s ‘celebrity’ again suggests Smith’s literary fame and reputation, yet she is now presented in an elegiac way: ‘late’ and ‘unfortunate’. While similarly pointing to the precariousness of the church’s position, soon to ‘lose every vestige of existence’, Davis does not invoke the immortalising or perpetuating qualities earlier commentators attached to Smith’s sonnet, which is here rooted in and tied to the ‘ruinous aspect’ of the church. The church of Smith’s scene is described as a ‘relic’, with a suggestion not only of Smith’s sonnet but now, posthumously, of Smith herself. Following Davis’s Bognor guide, several years elapse before Middleton is again mentioned in connection with Smith’s sonnet, and the revival of interest in the church at this time coincides with the nineteenth-century publications in which Smith is ‘recovered’ – by Dyce in 1825 and 1833 and Bethune in 1848. Both discourses show how Smith was not entirely forgotten in the nineteenth century, yet was perilously close to slipping from view. In 1828 Richard Dally’s *The Bognor, Arundel and Littlehampton Guide* includes an illustration of the church, a ‘sketch of the remains of Middleton Church, Sussex. Taken from the North East, July 30, 1826’. The church again dominates the scene, and still appears to be intact, somewhat at odds with the title and description. Dally observes how the tide ‘has not spared the sacred depositories of the dead, “whose bones have whitened in the frequent wave”’, slightly misquoting Smith’s sonnet, which is still the textual lens through which he views the landscape.⁵⁴ Indeed, Dally refers to the ‘celebrated Charlotte Smith’ (p. 70), who visited this strand at the time of composing the following sonnet, her ‘genius’ catching the images before it and portraying them ‘on its literary canvas’ (p. 70). In 1835 John Constable visited the site and produced a watercolour sketch of the churchyard from the south-west with the note: ‘Middleton Church Coast of Sussex – in part washed away by the Sea see Charlotte Smith’s Sonnet 10 July’.⁵⁵ Of all the Middleton artists, Constable most starkly depicts the marginality of the church, the extent to which it has been undermined and is perilously close to falling into the sea, which it did only three years later. The note to ‘see’ Charlotte Smith’s sonnet finally brings poem and illustration into dialogue: while Smith’s sonnet describes the sea’s process of washing away the coast, Constable’s sketch depicts the results. A second sketch by Constable shows a skeleton partly exhumed from the chalky bank, the first visual representation of the human remains in which Smith’s sonnet takes particular interest. Constable owned a copy of the fifth

⁵⁴ Richard Dally, *The Bognor, Arundel and Littlehampton Guide Comprising a History of Those Places, and of the Castle of Arundel* (Chichester: William Mason, 1828), pp. 67–8.

⁵⁵ Quoted by A. G. Reynolds, *The Later Paintings and Drawings of John Constable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), II: p. 1010.

edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* and had also visited Sussex in 1834. It was perhaps the connection with Smith that prompted him to make two sketches of Bignor Park at this time (although the original house of Smith's lifetime had been rebuilt). There is also a contemporaneous quotation made in Constable's hand of Smith's Sonnet XLV 'On Leaving a Part of Sussex' in the family collection.⁵⁶ Made only two years after Wordsworth's influential statement on Smith, Constable's 1835 sketch and note typify the way in which, while Smith was widely read and known in these decades, her influence was recorded in ways that have remained largely hidden and only partially or tenuously captured. Few further references to Middleton church in connection with Smith are made. In 1838, the year in which the church fell into the sea, *The Bognor Guide*, published by John Phillips, includes Smith's sonnet and Dally's commentary, although it omits the picture. Mark Lower's *A Compendious History of Sussex* (1870) notes that the church 'has entirely disappeared' and also observes that 'Charlotte Smith's Sonnet has often been quoted' in connection with the site, although the sonnet itself is not included and has similarly dropped out of view.⁵⁷ Again, Smith's fame is tentatively captured, despite her being still well known among a local Sussex audience as a regional poet. Indeed, in 1897 Smith's sonnet does appear in a section on Middleton in William Axon's *Bygone Sussex*, which observes in the preface that 'some of the thousands of visitors who throng the Sussex coast [...] may find in these pages suggestions of historic memories that may add to the interest of their stay'.⁵⁸ Both Smith and Middleton church are, by this time, 'bygone', 'historic memories'. In the decades following, Smith most noticeably sinks 'into the gulph of oblivion', especially outside of her Sussex environs. As Duckling notes, Smith had lost intellectual ground by the end of the nineteenth century, and the early twentieth century, while seeing an interest in her novels, was a period 'not yet ready to truly appreciate Charlotte Smith' (p. 216). This was reversed in the 1980s and 1990s, when Smith – along with several other women writers – was reinstated in the literary landscape of the late eighteenth century by critics. It is entirely fitting that Smith's Sonnet XLIV takes a prominent place in Curran's important essay of 1988 to this effect, 'Romantic Poetry: The I Altered', in which the sonnet is shown to fuel the sonnet revival and to present a vision informing 'all the sonnets written in Smith's wake' (p. 200).

⁵⁶ There was also a personal connection: the father of Constable's wife (whom he married in 1816 after a seven-year courtship) was Charles Bicknell, Smith's lawyer throughout the complex legal processes regarding the inheritance of her father-in-law.

⁵⁷ Mark Lower, *A Compendious History of Sussex* (Lewes: Geo. P. Bacon; London: John Russell Smith; Brighton: W. J. Smith, 1870), II: p. 50.

⁵⁸ William Edward Armytage Axon, *Bygone Sussex* (London: William Andrews, 1897), n. pag.

Smith's is a fragile inheritance, then, which of all her sonnets is most apparent in the final sonnet of *Elegiac Sonnets*. 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 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, the genteel life promised in youth and its subsequent denial. Throughout *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith is continually shut out and excluded from happiness, place, literary tradition: an exile and wanderer, dispossessed and disinherited. Drawing on the long-standing associations between elegy and inheritance, perhaps, 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 by Smith from 1805, as the house was on the point of being sold, articulates the significance of Bignor Park to her:

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. (p. 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'. The letter reveals how the experience of revisitation can differ according to sex. 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, because of the inability of her brother to pay Catherine Dorset her annuity from their father's fortune. Patrilineage has been disrupted, but only temporarily, passing through Dorset

Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet

to her husband, who was then forced to sell the house for financial reasons.⁵⁹ 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. (lines 1–4)

Houses are invested with much importance in Smith’s novels. Property and its ownership are central to the plots of *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 also 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’ (p. 332). She has been advised to go to the seaside, but owing to financial difficulties and a belief that the legal issues that ‘have so long perplex’d & impoverished my family and myself’ are on – so she dares to hope – ‘the eve of being concluded’, she writes from Bignor Park:

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. (p. 332)

Thus, Smith anticipates the final resolution of her children’s inheritance, back at her childhood home.⁶⁰ She is but ‘lending’ the house from her sister,

⁵⁹ Bignor Park was bought by Cornish tin miner John Hawkins, who knocked down the original 1584 house and built the present house in 1826–9. The new house was the subject of a sketch by Constable in 1834, who also sketched the view from the house.

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, Smith’s optimism was misplaced: the new trustees, Lord Egremont and Smith’s brother, who took over from Robinson, presented yet new difficulties.

though – a temporary, tenuous inhabitation – and no longer able to wander freely, being 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 apparent in the sonnet:

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
Nor hope nor joy illumines – Nor for me
Return those rosy hours which here I used to see! (p. 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, that 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'.

Bignor Park, then, bookends Smith's sonnet career. It is 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' – that Smith is able to claim

in some sense or possess. However, despite the sonnet's elegiac mode and sense of dispossession, it showcases Smith's innovation: the infusion of form with content; self with place; past and present, in its revisitation mode. Curiously, the two have become fused: Smith's 'elegiac', outsider 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 revisitation or echo serves to highlight the difference from Smith's earlier sonnet approach. Although not a sea sonnet, the sonnet undoes or destabilises the form in a similar way to sonnet LXXXVI, which is here used both to inscribe and undercut the alienation of sonnet V. While in the first edition the 'little Poems which are here called Sonnets, have [...] no very just claim to that title', by 1800 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). 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. In 1791 she described herself as 'fete'[d] eternally by the most eminent literary Men' (*Letters*, p. 40); yet, by 1802, she believed that she would fall 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 [*sic*] matron & had suckled fools & chronicled small beer without having done much else.' 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 is sold and her access to this 'paternal' space is lost. This was thus the final sonnet of *Elegiac Sonnets*: the volume was not expanded after 1800, and it was in 1806 that Smith wrote that 'I am tired of Sonnets' and refers to her own as 'almost all illegitimate' (*Letters*, p. 731). Smith's 'illegitimacy' refers of course to her English and irregular sonnet forms, a dispossessing reference, which nonetheless acknowledges Smith's formal experimentation and her influence. The term is also a relevant and fascinating one in relation to literary – and property – inheritance. Smith's position as a woman poet, with a major role in sonnet and literary history, is 'illegitimate' and untenable; not in accordance with or authorised by the customs of inheritance.

As detailed earlier in this chapter, Smith's break with tradition was aligned with a revolutionary impulse; in contrast, opposition to the French Revolution

drew on a strong sense of (patrilineal) tradition and inheritance, as Edmund 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 house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises and liberties, from a long line of ancestors.⁶¹

Smith's sonnets bring challenges to 'forefathers' and modes of literary inheritance through her formal experiments. Pertinently, Thelwall ends his politically tinged 1792 essay with a (perhaps extravagant) exclamation that 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' (p. 414) – a revolutionary premise indeed. It was an untenable position for a woman writer, and did not hold. The illegitimacy of Smith's sonnets is peculiarly inscribed in the 'elegiac sonnets' by 'Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park', which this final sonnet of the volume – after years of personal and financial dispossession – back at Bignor Park, throws into relief. It is a 'paternal' scene indeed. Yet, while Smith's sonnets end with this scene, an alternative, more female realm also emerges in the final editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, which will be considered in the final chapter.

⁶¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 33.

Botany to Beachy Head

In this chapter I show that in the final edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797 and 1800) several sonnets display an involvement with nature in rather a different mode from the vast seascape, steeped, in contrast, in the close-up observation of the botanist or naturalist. Rather than a specific landscape, at the crux of Smith's late poems is a certain mode of engaging with the natural world, through which she conceives a different model of literary inheritance. 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). In 1797 Smith proposed the composition of a botanical guide, to be illustrated by her sister, to her publishers, although this never materialised. 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 [...] I must henceforth [...] botanize on annuals in garden pots out at a window' (*Letters*, p. 283). She goes on to describe botany as a 'delightful and soothing study' (p. 283), which seems to be its principal attraction for Smith, especially following the death of her daughter Anna Augusta in 1795. 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, and became an acceptable, genteel way for women to acquire knowledge on a scientific subject.¹ Smith's poem 'Flora' in particular – first

¹ See Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany*

published in *Conversations* and then *Beachy Head* – assumes a significant place in the body of botanical poetry (with scientific notes) by women writers of the time. The science had been popularised by the work of the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné, or Linnaeus (1707–1778), whose *Systema Naturae* (1735) supplied simplified binomial names for plants and founded the influential ‘sexual system’ of classification. The system was versified by Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) in his 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 to which Linnaean taxonomy exposed female readers 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. Here, I explore for the first time the relationship between Smith’s botany and natural history and the way she understands her place in literary tradition. I show how, as in her seascape sonnets, Smith is interested in ‘form’, and how natural and sonnet forms can coalesce. 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.² Dispensing with the male prospect view and the sublime 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 (p. 203). Thus, ‘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 empowers the woman poet (pp. 203–4). 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. The literary texts on which Smith draws in her late sonnets are predominantly works of natural history and science by – in addition to Darwin – Martin Lister; Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon; Gilbert White; and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. I show that having moved from the male-dominated woodland and riverbank to the more female, autonomous seascape, and finally to the feminised, learned world of botany, Smith reworks her place in male literary tradition. Smith’s

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).

² Judith Pascoe, ‘Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith’, in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776–1837*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), pp. 202 and 203.

sonnets continue to be experimental, and are often split between a position of inheritance and the obscuration of it, as in 'Written at Bignor Park'. Her botanical sonnets present a more emboldened vision, yet one which is simultaneously subsumed. After the 1800 edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* Smith published no further poems in the form. However, other late poems illuminate Smith's sonnets, and I show that 'Flora' (published in *Conversations* in 1804 and then posthumously in *Beachy Head*), has a particularly close relationship with them. My final section looks to other poems in the *Beachy Head* volume, which were only published posthumously: while the volume does not contain sonnets, it looks back to and echoes images from Smith's sonnet oeuvre. I show how, in 'Beachy Head' and 'Saint Monica', Smith write her place in posterity as a *sonneteer*, and these posthumously published poems constitute a fitting final retrospective lens through which to consider *Elegiac Sonnets* and Smith's place in literary history.

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:

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. (p. 82)

Sonnet LXXIX grounds Smith's engagement with botany explicitly in the context of her suffering, and in the sonnet's massive note, the largest in *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith places herself in the company of Milton and Rousseau as writers who also turned to botany for respite. She quotes from the end of Milton's 'Il Penseroso', in which the melancholy poet imagines a solitary, peaceful existence engaged in the study of nature in later life, and for whom the ability to 'spell of every herb that sips the dew', Smith writes, 'seems to be a resource for

the sick at heart' (p. 82). 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) more widely in her work and draws on the persona of the solitary, botanising wanderer of *Rêveries* in her late works.

Smith's wild seascapes may correspond with her suffering 'soul', yet they offer no relief: 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 to withstand adversity; here the 'sweet nymph' soothes. As in her seascape sonnets, Smith's botanical sonnets are 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. Formal and thematic space again converge, yet whereas Smith's seascape sonnets opened up the form, the sonnet is here reduced back in size, in a more fitting spatial correspondence.

In 'To the Goddess of Botany' an initial correspondence can be identified in the 'variety' Smith's sonnet celebrates. In a key passage in *Minor Morals*, Mrs Belmour – again the Smithian character – celebrates how

plants and flowers [...] offer themselves in millions of different forms, all equally beautiful and curious, in the woods, under the shelter of hedge 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: p. 221)

Attention is drawn not only to how plants and flowers take 'millions of different forms' but also to how they can be found in myriad locations. 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' (p. 269). Indeed, the sonnets and other poems of the volume 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. Elizabeth Dolan has shown how Smith's *Conversations*, as much a textbook on poetry as on nature, 'posits an analogy between the structure of poems and the structure of plants' (*Seeing Suffering*, p. 118), as the autobiographical Mrs Talbot teaches how to distinguish between species of plants and various poetic forms.

The last four lines of sonnet LXXIX, offering a series of alternative locations for the 'veined leaf', again emphasise diversity, reminiscent of the passage quoted above, which similarly celebrates the 'different forms' of plants located in woods, on the riverbank, and on sea cliffs. The sonnet 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. The way it is able to move between different forms reflects the way in which 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 final line of the sonnet also offers a different mode of congruence between form and content: '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' have interesting implications in terms of Smith's conception of the sonnet. Like the natural spring rising from the earth, the streaming leaf suggests originality and spontaneity. In *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 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: in contrast to the 'mechanic form', characterised by 'when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, [...] The organic form [...] is innate; it develops itself from within.'³ The leaf analogy is 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

³ Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, p. 12; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor, 2 vols. (London: Constable and Co., 1930), I: p. 224.

all' (letter to John Taylor, *Oxford Authors*, p. 380). However, there is also an emphasis on botanical study and learning in Smith's sonnets, and she has 'studiously varied the measures' of her poems, in addition to their botanical content. Smith's sonnets deny or refuse any hierarchisation of poetic approaches. Indeed, contrary to sonnet LXXIX, Smith's sonnets that display an interest in botanical drawing imply a less naturalised approach to form, and emphasise imitation. In these sonnets, the pictorial context surrounding her land and seascape sonnets is exchanged for a different mode of *ut pictura poesis*. Florence Hilbish's 1941 dissertation on Smith reproduces a watercolour painting of some flowers by Smith from her childhood. 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' among the flowers.⁴ Mrs Belmour's celebration of myriad plant forms in *Minor Morals* comes about as part of a discussion about botanical drawing, an activity she promotes among her wards, 'gathering these beautiful productions of nature, flowers, and dissecting them with a view to imitate them, either with the pencil or the scissars [*sic*]' (p. 221).⁵ 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' (line 8) and sonnet XXXVII 'Sent to the Honorable Mrs. O'Neill, with painted Flowers' to the 'mimic pencil' (line 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[.] (lines 1–7)

Like 'To the Goddess of Botany', sonnet XCI takes a close-up view of plants and flowers, befitting the size of the sonnet, as the lines that make up the sea scene are replaced with the 'veins' of the iris, the shape of the sonnet more akin to a 'scallop'd lea[f]', rather than the formation of the seascape. Unlike sonnet LXXIX, however, with its suggestion of spontaneity, sonnet XCI emphasises the mimicry and copying of forms through drawing: these are 'mimic flowers',

⁴ Florence May Anna Hilbish, *Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist (1749–1806)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1941), pp. 14 and 15. I have been unable to trace the current whereabouts of the watercolour.

⁵ The reference to scissors, 'assisted by wire, paper and silk, which may be called the sculpture of flowers' (p. 221), recalls the 'paper mosaics' of Mary Delany (1700–1780), who recreated flowers by assembling hundreds of finely cut pieces of coloured paper.

the leaves and stems a 'copy'. Typically, formally, the sonnet is not quite a copy, rhyming *ababcdcdeffegg*; the irregular or legitimate sonnet is ambivalently poised between a 'mechanic' and 'organic' approach.⁶

Sonnets XCI and LXV also have other 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' (line 4). References to 'evanescent forms', the 'light', and 'slight' all evoke a sense of Smith's use of the sonnet, imbued with transience and insubstantiality. The sonnet is one of five in the second volume that lament the death of Smith's daughter Anna Augusta, who had died in 1795 at the age of twenty-one. This context frames the volume, and Smith finds some reprieve from her grief in botany, celebrated for its therapeutic qualities.⁷ Notwithstanding, in sonnet LXV:

as the lovely family of flowers
Shrink from the bleakness of the Northern blast
So fail from present care and sorrows past
The slight botanic pencil's mimic powers. (lines 5–8)

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' (lines 9–11), with the suggestion of plant-life in 'blight' (also present in sonnet LXV). The sonnet is defined by a discrepancy between Smith's ability to 'compose', 'catch', 'copy', and 'arrest' the plants through drawing, however tentatively, 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. In addition to the 'angel form' of Laura in her translations from Petrarch, the only references Smith makes to 'form' are in the Anna Augusta sonnet LXXXIX, 'for never more the form | I loved' (line 11) and the graveside sonnet XLIX, originating in *Celestina*, which also refers to the 'form' (line 14) of the deceased young woman. The second volume of Smith's sonnets takes an epigraph from Petrarch's *The Rime Sparse*, from the *in morte* canzone 268 in which Petrarch implores his 'song' to find an audience among the grieving rather than cheerful, as Smith, like Petrarch, mourns the loss of a young female 'form'.

⁶ Labbe has explored *ut pictura poesis* in this sonnet: see 'Every Poet Her Own Drawing Master: Charlotte Smith, Anna Seward and *Ut Pictura Poesis*', in *Early Romantics*, in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 200–15.

⁷ See Dolan, *Seeing Suffering*.

Smith's elegiac Anna Augusta sonnets appear to be in dialogue with the sonnets of Sir Brooke Boothby (1744–1824), a baronet, poet, amateur botanist, and member of the literary 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 eighteenth-century sonnet published after 1784 that Smith refers to 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, connecting through sonnet, botany, and parental grief.⁸ In sonnet XC 'To Oblivion' she clearly identifies with Boothby and his 'misery living, hope and pleasure dead' (line 12) – the quotation she appropriates. The influence of Petrarch colours Boothby's volume: all but three sonnets are Italian in form, while five are translations from Petrarch. A portrait of Penelope Boothby 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 impoverished, isolated Smith – writing in circumstances entirely different from those of Boothby, the wealthy and well-connected baronet – bemoans that 'save the portrait on my bleeding breast, | I have no semblance of that form adored' in sonnet XCI (lines 8–9), 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. Her earlier sonnets having challenged the ability of the sonnet form to immortalise, as Smith herself finds herself elegising a female subject, her sonnet is 'heartless, helpless, hopeless' (line 11).

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, which Smith names as 'one of my favourite books' (*Letters*, p. 332). Darwin – a physician, natural philosopher, and poet – was based for most of his life in Lichfield. The second of the two poems, '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

⁸ Sir Brooke Boothby, *Sorrows. Sacred to the Memory of Penelope* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1796).

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' (p. 81), and it is from this poem that she quotes in footnotes to sonnets in the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*.

'The Economy of Vegetation' opens with an explicit invocation to the goddess of botany by the genius of the place: 'Hither, emerging from yon orient skies, | Botanic Goddess!' 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.⁹ Smith's sonnet LXXIX may draw on a section in 'The Loves of Plants' that invokes the '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[.] (canto I: lines 31–5)

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 characterises botany as a female enterprise and offers a voice for the woman writer in his presentation of the goddess of botany as a – highly knowledgeable and empowered – woman poet, which Smith thus reappropriates. The 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 sonnet LXXIX. Those that 'mantle the cliffs' 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. (lines 171–3)

⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation*, in *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), canto I: lines 43–4 and 59–60; canto II: line 78.

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' (lines 179–81). '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' (lines 1–2) – and can be read as a reworking of that sonnet. This contrasts with the earlier couplet poem 'The Origin of Flattery', which bears little resemblance to Smith's sonnets or other poems, and indeed was removed from editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* owing to the departure in tone.

Through the botanical goddess, then, different poetic forms coalesce. 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 instead was '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'.¹⁰ She quotes from Hayley: 'desiring much the letter'd world might own | The countless forms of beauty only one'; Darwin's exclusivity of poetic form is at odds with the 'countless forms of beauty' in the natural world his poems celebrate, and in contrast with the variety of forms, poetic and botanical, Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* appropriates.¹¹ Like Seward, more recent critics have aligned Darwin with Pope and the 'Augustan' age. Desmond King-Hele, for examples, argues that the poetic project of Wordsworth and thus 'Romanticism', was based on a repulsion from Darwin's Popean versification.¹² Again, Smith overrides such disjunctions; like her appropriation of Pope to her sonnets, she draws on Darwin as couplets evolve in to the sonnet form, and 'Flora' – a rewriting of sonnet LXXIX – 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,

¹⁰ Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence at Lichfield, with Anecdotes of His Friends and Criticisms of His Writings* (London: J. Johnson, 1804), pp. 386–7.

¹¹ The lines seem to be slightly misquoted and appear to come from Hayley's *An Essay on Epic Poetry*: 'Beauty's countless forms are only one' (I: line 394).

¹² Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 68. Smith does not feature in King-Hele's book. 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), p. v; Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 55.

dew, springs, rills, rivers, and the sea to how a leaf bud can change into a flower bud. Like natural forms, literary forms transform, as heroic couplets morph into sonnets. It seems significant, then, that Darwin's 'economy', and indeed the whole natural world, is overseen and directed by a female entity. The goddess of botany governs the connections between all living things in their various forms and Smith's *Flora* takes a similar role in the poem. This can be related to the literary economy Smith oversees, which departs from the anxieties and deliberate elisions that characterise some of the relationships between her male contemporaries. In her sonnets Smith naturalises genealogical links, revealing lines of influence – the poetic river genealogy, for example – that are elsewhere suppressed. Fairer argues that there is an 'organic' relationship between texts among poets of the Warton school, yet while this may fit for the relationship between Warton and the chosen poets of his native tradition, for example, his poetic relationship with Pope is notably 'unorganic', which Smith brings to light in her own verse.¹³

Moreover, Smith's later works are also able to locate her own poems within this 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 her own work 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 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 a literary economy in a different way. 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 (sonnet XLVI 'Written at Penshurst'), while the preceding epigraphs in the volume are taken from Smith's usual range of sources, including Oliver Goldsmith, Pope, Shakespeare, and Thomson. '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 that feature the bird, where it encodes a deferential aspect. Despite her modesty and continued avowals of her poems' inferiority, Smith's acknowledgment of what comes after her

¹³ Fairer's *Organising Poetry* is informed by a very different version of the term 'organic' from that espoused by Young, Schlegel, and Coleridge: it 'carries a sense and set of associations at odds with those traditionally exploited in criticism of Coleridge and his 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' (p. 2), focused on process, inheritance, and continuity rather than new beginnings.

own sonnets – Coleridge and Bowles, for example – suggests a more assertive awareness of her own influence and place within a literary economy.

Thus, her later poems rework previous presentations of the river and sea. In ‘Flora’, the speaker of the poem wishes to ‘trace her power along the mountain stream’ (p. 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[.] (lines 141–4)

The landscape is feminised from the start. Eventually, the naiad leads the goddess ‘Down to the Sea; where even the briny sands | Their product offer to her flowing hands’ (lines 165–6). Like sonnet LXXIX and the passage from *Minor Morals*, botanical engagement is steeped in movements between river and sea. In sonnet LXXIX the leaf appears ‘in mead or woodland’, on ‘dimpling rivers’, and streams ‘beneath the ocean waves’, and in *Minor Morals* forms are ‘washed by the spray of the sea’ while ‘Others float on the surface of the river’. 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, subordinate to the river’s male literary tradition, is reworked in the fully feminised ‘Flora’. As well as Smith’s earlier river poems, ‘Flora’ also departs from previous presentations of the female seascape, which, although liberating, is also a barren, desolate space. Empowering in a different way, ‘Flora’ reconnects source, river, and sea: a fecund, feminised, and naturalised connectivity.

Smith’s ‘Flora’ also invokes a feminised landscape in a different way in naming the speaker’s childhood river as the River Wey, rather than the Arun, the only time in which she does so. Fancy is implored:

To lend thy magic pencil, and to bring
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 (lines 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, that 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 Stoke – which was her final residence before her death. The two branches of the Wey flow through Tilford before converging nearby. This childhood landscape was a more maternal space to Smith: her mother Anna, who died when Smith was three (probably in childbirth with Smith's sister, Catherine), was buried at Stoke and Smith desired to be – and was – buried there 'with my Mother' (*Letters*, p. 471). A contrast is suggested 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. Botany is central in the mother–daughter relationship between Mrs Glenmorris and her daughter in *The Young Philosopher*, for example, and in *Minor Morals*, the suggestion of Mrs Belmour that Mary should study botanical drawing is contrasted with the intention of her father:

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 (XII: p. 221)

Smith's own life appears to be echoed here, in its recollection of her tutelage in landscape art by George Smith. After her mother's death, Smith and her sister were in-part raised by her maternal aunt Lucy Towers, who is also suggested in the Mrs Belmour character. In 'Flora', Smith's maternal Wey is presented in a much less complicated way than the Arun, and although 'native Wey' may recall Warton its banks are notably free of literary precursors.¹⁴ Smith does not necessarily revisit the river, yet seeks to recall 'life's happier Spring' through the 'lovely forms' of plants and flowers she knew on the riverbanks as a child.

Turning again to 'To the Goddess of Botany', the 'streaming leaf' in that sonnet suggests an element of literary continuation or influence not present

¹⁴ 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' (*Major Works*, line 342); it is not involved in the literary aspect of rivers Pope heralds, which Smith draws on in her Arun sonnets.

in Smith's desolate seascapes. In an interesting essay on sonnet LXXIX 'To the Goddess of Botany', Judith Hawley contrasts this sonnet with Smith's signature sonnets, which 'situate the speaker on the sea shore on a perilous rocky cliff, contemplating the destructive forces of the sea.'¹⁵ She draws on Peter Sacks's conception of the elegy, and the significance of life-giving springs and continuing rivers – as opposed to the desolate sea – within the genre. She writes that at the end of sonnet LXXIX, 'the subject of the elegy which is, I would argue, Smith's own life, both streams with natural renewal and drowns' (p. 193). 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 at the end of this sonnet in the form of the streaming leaf that is absent in Smith's seascape sonnets. Many of Smith's late poems enact a similar simultaneous loss and continuation. The quotation from elegy 'Lycidas' – the poem that provides the material for Sacks's reading – in sonnet LXXIX is rather apt in this context. In Milton's poem, Lycidas moves from death, 'under the whelming tide' (*Shorter Poems*, line 157), like Smith's leaf, to renewal; Lycidas is 'sunk low, but mounted high' (line 172). Both poems are able to occupy two places or states at once. As noted, Smith's wild seascapes correspond with her suffering 'soul' and form, yet there is nowhere to go, as such, aside from imploring fortitude (sonnet XXXV); botany's 'silent shades of soothing hue' offer not only alleviation but also renewal.

Gossamer

Smith's interest in the intertwining of natural history, form, and literary tradition is evident in two sonnets of the 1797 second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* that both take the same subject, LXIII 'The Gossamer' and LXXVII 'To the Insect of the Gossamer'. 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 (p. 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

¹⁵ Judith Hawley, 'Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*: Losses and Gains', in *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730–1820*, ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 193.

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! (pp. 72–3)

The delicate structure of the gossamer presents a fitting subject for Smith's sonnet form, an alternative to the crumbling cliffs of her seascape poems. Like many other 'elegiac' sonnets, sonnet LXIII is concerned in a different way with transience, insubstantiality, loss, and disintegration. The sonnet presents an aerial world 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. (*Major Works*,
canto II: lines 65–6)

Smith's emphasis in sonnet LXIII is on minuteness and intricacy; this is form on a very small, fragile scale. The allusions to weaving 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. (lines 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 impermanence, 'fragile as the fleeting dews of morn'. As seen, the 'illegitimate' sonnet form was associated by critics with insubstantiality, a 'facile form' as Seward describes it.

Webs and weaving spiders have long-standing associations with creativity, particularly female creativity – and indeed its suppression – through the Arachne myth. 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 describes how 'Our greater Milton, hath by many a lay, | Wov'n on this arduous model', suggesting the woven textile-text metaphor. Seward's 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 sonnet here is regularly Shakespearean, in many of Smith's irregular sonnets the form appears 'lightly spread', 'Waving in every sighing air that stirs'. As in her botany sonnets discussed above, Smith's attitude to form appears unfixed: in sonnet LXIII the threads are all at once carefully 'entwined', produced by a more mechanical 'loom', and likened to the production of weeping sylphs in flight.

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. (pp. 80–1)

The 'line of | Gossamer' of the sonnet's opening suggests the verse 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 – aside from the clear octave–sestet divide – mainly transcends line-endings and structural divides, with other breaks and pauses within the lines. Again, this gives the effect of occupying different formal spaces simultaneously, which the sonnet floats between in an unfixed, shifting, gossamer-like way. The alexandrine, cut off syntactically from the rest of the sonnet, gives the impression of the dissolution it describes.

The sonnet presents another 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 ‘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 of the couplet, again recalling Pope in both subject and form. Smith’s focus in this sonnet is specifically on the ‘insect’ – as the spider was still known in 1797 – of the gossamer, and in the sestet the correlation between poet and spider is made explicit. Smith also quotes from the naturalist Martin Lister in her note, the second longest of *Elegiac Sonnets*, which bears interestingly on the poet–spider analogy in relation to form. 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, [...] 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 strictly be said, they being carried into the air by external force; but they can, in case the wind suffer them, steer their course [...] 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[?]. (p. 80)

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’. Typically of Smith, however, this flight or transcendence is temporary and limited, dependent on external forces that also bring about its end. Smith quotes Lister from French naturalist Buffon’s *Natural History of Birds, Fish, Insects and Reptiles* (1793), and other attributes of the gossamer spider detailed in the same section further illuminate Smith’s ‘poet’. Lister relates how gossamer shoots out from a small hole in the stomach of the spider:¹⁶

¹⁶ As Jacqueline Labbe points out, Smith mistakenly references this to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, rather than Buffon’s *Natural History*, in the note to her sonnet (Smith, *Works*, XLIV: p. 231).

[I]t 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.¹⁷

This recalls the liquidity of the streaming leaf of ‘To the Goddess of Botany’, again suggesting spontaneity. Lister and Buffon both emphasise the innate ability of spiders to spin thread, an in-born faculty rather than a learned art. As well as flight, strongly redolent of the sublime, which is associated with flight, elevation, and transport from Longinus onwards, the appellation of the insect as an ‘aeronaut’ also suggests invention; the term was coined only in 1784 in response to the invention of the hot-air balloon in France the year before. The *OED* gives Smith’s usage as its first application to ballooning spiders. A non-spider-related precedent can also be found in Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* 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’ (p. 249) – befitting the revolutionary impulse with which Smith’s use of form had been aligned. Smith refers to the ‘poet’ in earlier Arun sonnets XXXIII, XXVI, and XXX, sonnet XIX addressed to Hayley, and nightingale sonnet VII; here she seems to be conjuring a different poet, ‘young and visionary’. Critics have suggested a similarity between Smith’s poet and that of Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’ (1816).¹⁸ Mary Robinson – who had read the poem in manuscript – presents Coleridge in the terms of his poem in her ode ‘To the Poet Coleridge’ (1801): ‘rapt in the visionary theme! | spirit divine!’ (*Works*, II: lines 1–2). Smith would thus appear to present something of a ‘Romantic’ poet in her sonnet: male, visionary, and young, and able to transcend ‘Life’s dull realities’ in a way that the female Smith, burdened and nearing the end of her career, is not. Yet her sonnet also looks back, here – in the note – to Shakespeare and Darwin, and through him to Pope and the world of the couplet. Thus, the sonnet is poised between two formal approaches, and facilitates the shift from one to the other through a

¹⁷ Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History of Birds, Fish, Insects and Reptiles*, 5 vols. (London: J. S. Barr, 1793), V: p. 155.

¹⁸ Jennifer Keith 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’ (‘Kubla Khan’, lines 51–4; Jennifer Keith, ‘“Pre-Romanticism” and the Ends of Eighteenth-Century Poetry’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. John Sitter [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], p. 184). Labbe’s note to the sonnet in Smith’s *Works* also directs the reader to these lines (p. 231).

lineage that travels from Shakespeare, through to Pope, Darwin, Smith, and on to the young male 'Romantic' poet. The way the gossamer insect is looking backwards while moving forward – 'like a sculler on the Thames' – also gives the impression of moving in two different directions at once.

Lister and Buffon both gender the gossamer spider as female, yet in her sonnet Smith's poet is male, creating a 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.¹⁹ Again, Smith writes herself out of the poem as 'poet'. In her Arun sonnets, unable to fit into literary tradition, Smith looks ahead to a future poet, yet here the future poet follows or is impelled by something the female poet has created: there is a sense of the male following the female. As shown in my reading of the Bignor Park sonnet, the innovation of the late poems also undercuts their elegiac aspect. Again, Smith's sonnet seems to split, occupying two different positions. Indeed, the whole sonnet is pulled between opposing states: male and female, transcendence and reality, flight and limitation, sky and earth, form and formlessness. These tensions enhance the instability of the gossamer-sonnet, which ends by falling apart, as Smith's authorial subject finds no suitable model and disappears. Smith's sonnet speaks to the contradictions, inconsistencies, and suppressions of influence inherent in the discourse surrounding the eighteenth-century and 'Romantic' sonnet, across issues of gender, form, and tradition. 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 and forms, and enacts a process whereby the poetic 'I' is lost.²⁰

Beachy Head

Towards the end of her life, then, Smith reconceives her 'place' in literary history. Jennifer Keith argues that the 'precariousness of the poet represented in many late eighteenth-century works', such as Smith's gossamer sonnets, 'unfortunately mirrors their disappearance from literary history' (p. 284). Smith's fading, disintegrating sonnet subjects look forward to the way in which she fades from literary canons following her popularity, as discussed in relation to sonnet XLIV. Smith's late sonnets also increasingly invoke states of 'Forgetfulness!' for their anguished speaker, and 'Oblivion! Take me to thy

¹⁹ Also, in Darwin's poem the (female) goddess of botany directs (female) sylphs to produce gossamer clouds.

²⁰ As Judith Hawley points out of sonnet LXXIX, the subject of the sonnet's final lines is ambiguous: 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' ('Losses and Gains', p. 193).

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quiet reign' (Sonnet XC, lines 1 and 6), which become intertwined with the fate of the sonnets themselves. Rather than 'mirroring', however, I suggest Smith's poems and outlook anticipate her place in literary history, showing an awareness of the processes underpinning it. While Smith's early sonnets absent herself from male literary tradition, her late works reconfigure this position, showing how her experiences as a woman poet are mimed by the processes of reception, as she is inherited by male poets. She cites Bowles's sonnets, for example, influenced by her own, yet her avowed inferiority as she does so looks forward to how Coleridge and Abrams write her out of sonnet history.

After the 1800 edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith published no further poems in the form. Her final volume of poems, *Beachy Head*, does not contain sonnets, yet it looks back to and contains echoes from Smith's sonnet oeuvre. Smith herself invested the volume with considerable importance. As she wrote to Cadell and Davies:

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*, pp. 705–6)

As well as this work, Cadell and Davies declined Smith's proposal for a three-volume collection of her poems, and retained the copyright of her sonnets. Smith thus had to rely on the *Beachy Head* collection, which was eventually published by J. Johnson, for her reputation. Smith did not live to see its publication; she died in October 1806, and *Beachy Head* was published the following year. As the letter cited above implies, the volume was perceived by Smith to be bound up with her poetic legacy. Reviews of *Beachy Head* are elegiac, obituary-like: '[i]t 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*, and reviews commemorate Smith as *sonneteer*, specifically, despite the lack of sonnets in *Beachy Head*.²¹ Smith's final collection thus constitutes something of a

²¹ Anonymous, 'ART. V. Beachy Head: with other Poems', *The Annual Review*, 6 (1807), p. 536. In *The British Critic* it is noted that 'Most sincerely do we lament the death of Mrs. Charlotte Smith [...] a genuine child of genius [...] Her Sonnets in particular will remain models of that species of composition', and *The Universal Magazine*, while 'Not a Sonnet have we been able to discover, throughout the miscellaneous poetry. [...] We have always esteemed her as holding a very high rank among those who have in his country cultivated the composition of sonnets' (Anonymous, review of *Beachy Head*, *The Universal Magazine*, 7 [1807], p. 231; Anonymous, review of *Beachy Head*, *The British Critic*, 30 [1807], p. 170).

memorial of Smith's sonnet career. I consider two poems from the volume, the unfinished title-poem 'Beachy Head', which I argue constitutes an elegy of sorts for Smith's sonnets, and the finished 'Saint Monica', in which, I argue, Smith offers a final configuration of the place of her sonnets in literary history. Both of these poems in a sense rewrite sonnet XLIV, 'Sonnet Written in the Churchyard at Middleton in Sussex', Smith's most famous and influential sonnet.

'Beachy Head' 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 seascape with which it is concerned. The poem opens 'On thy stupendous summit, rock sublime!' (line 1), and roves through a range of aspects 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 they have become embedded within the headland itself, such as the 'strange and foreign forms | Of sea-shells' (lines 373–4) and 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[,] (lines 401–5)

These coalesce with the 'enormous bones' of elephants (line 417) and the more recent bones of sailors drowned at sea, buried in the cliff-face by Hermit Darby, whose own bones eventually join them. The poem eulogises the various lifeforms that have roamed and inhabited Beachy Head, and the histories that have been played out upon it, speaking to how they can be 'traced' in the landscape. And, as Smith roams across and encounters these remains, she leaves her own traces upon Beachy Head; the headland becomes studded with echoes and images, fragments of her own sonnets.²² 'Ah! hills below'd! – where once a happy child' of sonnet V becomes 'Ah! hills so early loved!' (line 368) and sonnet XLV, 'My early vows were paid to Nature's shrine', is reworked as

²² See John M. Anderson, "'Beachy Head': The Romantic Fragment Poem As Mosaic', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000), pp. 119–46. Anderson traces one single image from 'Beachy Head', the 'moonbright line', across a range of Smith's poems. He 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' (p. 146). To Kari Lokke, 'through the device of self-quotation and reference to her entire poetic works 'Smith creates in 'Beachy Head', a 'complex tribute to herself' (Lokke, 'The Figure of the Hermit in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism* [London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008], p. 48).

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'An early worshipper at Nature's shrine' (line 346). The 'upland shepherd' of sonnet LXXXIII makes an appearance (line 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 (line 12). The 'wandering fairy fires, that oft on land | Misdread the Pilgrim' of sonnet LXXXVI also reappear as the 'false fire, from marsh effluvia born | [which] Misdreads the wanderer' (lines 256–7). The poem also reconciles the prospect and close-up view of the natural world Smith takes in her sonnets, holding them in dialogue. The speaker is able to 'behold | Those widely spreading views' (lines 369–70), 'And still, observing objects more minute' (lines 372).

The poem ends with Smith's poetic signature, a reworking of sonnets LXVI and XLIV, as well as its corresponding 'Elegy', as the headland crumbles into the sea:

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. (lines 716–20)

At the end of the 'Beachy Head' the attention of the poem turns to the hermit who lives within the headland itself. At the end of the poem, he becomes indistinguishable from Smith, and the poem indistinguishable from the headland. For, following the 'equinoctial' storm:

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
Receiv'd the rites of burial. Those who read
Chisel'd within the rock, these mournful lines,
Memorials of his sufferings[.] (lines 721–8)

The poem 'Beachy Head' (along with its sonnet references) appears to be 'chisel'd within the rock' of Beachy Head itself. The poem ends with the hermit's death, reflecting the posthumous publication of 'Beachy Head' and confirming its elegiac aspect. Curiously, at the end of the poem, Smith's sonnet memorial embedded in the majestic headland is mined by the very forces which once heralded her literary force. In the final years of her life, Smith was aware

that she would 'sink quietly into the gulph of oblivion', and she writes her fragile inheritance into Beachy Head/'Beachy Head'.

Significantly, Beachy Head is open to interpretation, which is nowhere more apparent than in the much-discussed section of 'Beachy Head' on fossils. As Smith's note to the poem records: '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' (p. 165). She ponders different explanations for the fossils' destination, as she 'Wondering remark[s] the strange and foreign forms | Of sea-shells; with the pale calcareous soil | Mingled':

Tho' surely the blue Ocean (from the heights
Where the downs westward trend, but dimly seen)
Here never roll'd its surge. Does Nature then
Mimic, in wanton mood, fantastic shapes
Of bivalves, and inwreathed volutes, that cling
To the dark sea-rock of the wat'ry world?
Or did this range of chalky mountains, once
Form a vast bason, where the Ocean waves
Swell'd fathomless? (lines 376–84)

At the time of 'Beachy Head', geology was emerging and developing rapidly as a scientific discipline, and the Geological Society of London was founded in 1807, the same year in which the poem was published. Fossil discoveries drove developments in geology and changed understandings of time and histories. As Anne D. Wallace has shown, theories for explaining fossils, encompassing 'scripturalism and materialism, neptunism and vulcanism, and catrastrophism and graduationsm appear in many permutations in the ongoing debates among natural philosophers', including Jean Andre de Luc, Georges Cuvier, and Jean Baptiste Lamarck.²³ Explanations varied, from falling sea levels to biblical deluges, and hills emerging from the sea. As Smith turns her attention to these 'strange and foreign forms' she runs through the possibilities by turns, and as she does so the poem's sense of time expands and contracts. The poem remains ambivalent, for Smith deems accounts of fossils to be 'but conjecture, | Food for vague theories, or vain dispute' (lines 393–4), and faith is put instead in the peasant who 'goes | unheeding such inquiry; with no care | But that the kindly change of sun and shower' (lines 395–7). Notwithstanding the epistemological uncertainty of Smith's poem and of geological discourse surrounding fossils more widely, the appearances

²³ Anne D. Wallace, 'Picturesque Fossils, Sublime Geology? The Crisis of Authority in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*', *European Romantic Review*, 13 (2002), p. 86.

of fossils in the poem decidedly ‘deepen’ its sense of time, and, as Wallace writes, the ‘depth of chronological record’ fossils encode, the ‘history of earth, the histories of its species, human histories, [are] all brought into question’ (p. 87). Smith’s meditation on fossils opens up different ways of reading and understanding history through place, drawing attention to the indeterminacy of historiography. Her poem encourages us to read remains, legacies, and histories openly, and to be aware of how they are subject to change. As such, readers encountering Smith’s sonnets should be aware that literary history and a writer’s place within it are not fixed, as Smith’s own critical fortunes have shown. Taking its cue from Smith, this book has looked beyond received literary histories, from Warton’s positioning to more recent accounts of the Romantic sonnet revival.

While Smith may teach us to be open as readers of history in ‘Beachy Head’, she herself most conspicuously writes her own place within it in her poem ‘Saint Monica’. As Kari Lokke has written, the poem ‘reveals Smith’s conceptualization of British literary history and her place, as a woman poet, in that history’.²⁴ It can also in a sense be read as her own posthumous contribution to the discourse surrounding her sonnet XLIV and in some ways seems to answer the commentators on Middleton church discussed in chapter four. Suggestively, Wordsworth’s famous observation on Smith is made in the context of ‘Saint Monica’. To quote the note more fully:

The form of stanza in this Poem [‘Stanzas suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees’ Head, on the coast of Cumberland’], 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. (*Poetical Works*, p. 403)

Wordsworth’s own poem follows Smith’s formally. Although he does not allude to the sonnet here, Wordsworth’s comments in the note are particularly pertinent to Smith’s influence on the sonnet – and 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 is dramatised in Smith’s own poem, which evokes both her influence and its obscuration, which she can now observe; a backlash against the ‘illegitimate’ sonnet and

²⁴ Kari Lokke, ‘Charlotte Smith and Literary History: “Dark Forgetfulness” and the “Intercession of Saint Monica”’, *Women’s Studies*, 27 (1998), pp. 261–2.

return to the Miltonic form, which obscured the way Smith had ‘modernised’ the sonnet in language and mode.

‘Saint Monica’ takes a ruined abbey as its subject:²⁵

AMONG deep woods is the dismantled scite
Of an old Abbey, where the chaunted rite,
By twice ten brethren of the monkish cowl,
Was duly sung. (lines 1–4)

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 I have argued, Smith resists Warton’s approach to these special places that offer a link with the past, which ‘Saint Monica’ makes explicit. 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 (lines 28–9 and 32). Indeed, Smith seems to empty the site of a Wartonian poet: ‘The antiquary comes not to explore, | As once, the unrafter’d roof and pathless floor’ (line 64). Yet a figure does visit, ‘a pensive stranger’ (line 75) who does not seek items of antiquarian interest but meditates on the nature that has claimed and transformed the graves:

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
Dresses the ruins of Saint Monica. (lines 85–93; original emphasis)

The actions of the pensive stranger directly contrast with those of Warton, whose poet goes into the ‘inmost cell’ ‘to pluck the grey moss from the mantled stone’ (lines 74–5). Rather than ‘plucking’ the vegetation from the monuments it has claimed, uncovering the past, Smith invokes its motions. She seems to replace the antiquarian poet with a different one, and the poem acts as a sort of fulcrum between their approach and her own, yet realised through a male figure. The way the nettles, brambles, mosses, weeds, and

²⁵ Smith is not explicit as to the location of the abbey: it is probably St Monica’s Priory, Spetisbury, Dorset.

flowers claim the graves mimes Smith's own rejuvenating influence on the sonnet form, replacing the antiquarian mode of Warton, Gray, and Edwards. Significantly, although the poet-figure who populates the scene is male, the nature that has transformed the site is female. 'Saint Monica' reworks Sonnet XLIV yet in a more positive, fertile, sustainable way. Lokke argues that 'Saint Monica' is a 'Romantic re-writing of eighteenth-century graveyard poetry', looking back to Gray's 'Elegy' and forward to Smith's 'Romantic sons', to whom she bequeaths her poetic landscape and mode, asserting her importance as a link between them (pp. 363 and 268). My chapter three showed how Smith's sonnet XLIV 'rewrites' not only the graveyard poem but also the eighteenth-century sonnet; in 'Saint Monica', her role in literary history is reconfigured as a less disruptive – and ultimately more powerful – force. While we do not know if Smith was aware of the periodical illustrations of and commentary on Middleton churchyard, she also seems here to reassert her relation to the decaying building in 'Saint Monica'. As shown, commentators – misreading her sonnet – associated Smith with the church, and in this poem Smith perhaps corrects them, again aligning herself not with the abbey and its environs but with the vegetation that overtakes it, an alternative manifestation of the eroding waves (which previously suggested her literary force). In 'Saint Monica', Smith's poetic scene is once again governed, posthumously, by a female power, rather than the male Neptune (as claimed by writers such as J. B. Davis), as the disempowered 'mute arbitress of tides' of sonnet XLIV becomes the similarly female and 'silent' yet now 'ever active' botanical powers of the later poem.

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 more accurately inscribes her literary position. To return to Wordsworth's note on the poem, Smith's influence is unlikely to 'be either acknowledged or remembered' adequately, and indeed Smith was obscured by the male poets to whom she 'bequeathed' her poetic mode. Invested in the vegetative life, Smith's poetic presence takes the unusual form of a present-absent influence, which is at once dispossessing and empowering. This echoes Smith's 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'. 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'. 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' (p. 188). Hawley 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' (p. 188). 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. And as the poem ends:

And while to dark Forgetfulness they go,
Man, and the works of man; immortal Youth,
Unfading Beauty, and eternal Truth,
Your Heaven-indited volume will display,
While Art's elaborate monuments decay,
Even as these shatter'd aisles, deserted Monica! (lines 94–9)

Smith once more invokes the temporal and fleeting, linking literary works and reputation, buildings, and monuments in 'dark Forgetfulness'; yet there is an alternative force at work here, unfading and eternal: the 'Heaven-indited volume' of 'Nature'. Having established the association between herself and the vegetative life earlier in the poem, Smith simultaneously effaces and empowers herself canonically. By absenting her poetic self from the scene, replaced by the italicised *He*, she both mimes the way she has been – and anticipates the way she will continue to be – displaced and misread in posterity. Investing instead in the female absent-presence of the vegetation, she paradoxically transcends both 'Man, and the works of man', aligning herself instead with Nature's volume and 'indicting' her own, unfading, place in literary history.

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