

Charlotte Smith and Early British Romanticism:
Her Writing, Her Critics, Her Influence

by

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Abstract

This dissertation advances the study of an author famous in her own time but only recently rediscovered by literary criticism. My three main objectives are to supply a thorough critical heritage of Charlotte Smith, to examine the processes involved in her gradual disappearance and her more sudden revival, and to secure her place in the literary history of early British Romanticism by showing in detail her influence on her younger contemporaries, primarily Jane Austen and William Wordsworth. In my introductory chapter I suggest some of the more problematic implications of Smith's reanonization and propose a method for examining her influence in the present critical moment, when influence (anxious or otherwise) is under pressure from the broader notion of intertextuality. Chapter two focuses on biographical matters, including the autobiographical tendency in Smith's writing and the disproportionate emphasis sometimes placed on her "life" at the expense of her "work." This chapter also surveys Smith's surprisingly extensive literary acquaintance. Chapter three is a critical history, beginning with Smith's earliest general evaluations as a writer and following her critical fortunes through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapter four examines the influence Smith exerted, through her fiction and her poetry, on the young Jane Austen. Chapter five is a deconstructive exercise analyzing Samuel Taylor Coleridge's admiration of William Lisle Bowles and the role this relationship has played in obscuring Charlotte Smith's significance for early Romanticism. My final three chapters explore various aspects of Smith's extensive and yet subdued influence on William Wordsworth. These three chapters are closely inter-related, but they are distinguished by differing thematic clusters as well as differing generic and chronological centres. By stressing concrete allusions on one hand and the complex background of national and sexual politics on the other, I hope to combine two methodologies — old-fashioned source-hunting and feminist New Historicism — to arrive at a single conclusion: Smith's work in poetry and in fiction played an important, if occluded, role in early British Romanticism.

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For one likes to feel oneself a deliverer advancing with lights across the waste of years to the rescue of some stranded ghost — a Mrs. Pilkington, a Rev. Henry Elman, a Mrs. Ann Gilbert — waiting, appealing, forgotten, in the growing gloom. Possibly they hear one coming. They shuffle, they preen, they bridle. Old secrets well up to their lips. The divine relief of communication will soon again be theirs.

Virginia Woolf, "The Lives of the Obscure."

No poetic reputation ever stays exactly in the same place: it is a stock market in constant fluctuation. There are the very great names which only fluctuate, so to speak, within a narrow range of points; whether Milton is up to 104 today, and down to 97 1/4 tomorrow, does not matter. There are other reputations like that of Donne, or Tennyson, which vary much more widely, so that one has to judge their value by an average taken over a longer time; there are others again which are very steady a long way below par, and remain good investments at that price

T. S. Eliot. "What is Minor Poetry?"

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.

Charlotte Smith. "To my lyre."

Chapter One: Introduction

Although the following dissertation introduces the poetry and fiction of Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) and presents a thorough critical heritage of the author, it is primarily an influence study. Charlotte Smith's career as poet and novelist, from 1784 to 1807 including posthumous publication, extends from what we call the pre-Romantic period or late Age of Sensibility into the early years of British Romanticism. I will argue that her work had a strong and formative influence on two authors who would become major literary figures: her younger contemporaries Jane Austen and William Wordsworth. The pre-eminence of both these authors is well-established. F. R. Leavis acknowledged Jane Austen as "the inaugurator of the great tradition of the English novel" (The Great Tradition 15). She is usually considered not so much a Romantic author as an exception to the rule among the Romantics. Even less is she considered an "early" Romantic, as her first work was published in 1811 and her rhetorical stance seems often to be in reaction to, or in moderation of, the poetry and fiction of high sensibility that we associate with early Romanticism. Nonetheless, Austen was only five years younger than Wordsworth, and she died before Keats. In the 1790's and early 1800's the young Jane Austen had not begun publishing, but she was writing her juvenilia and early drafts of her later novels. I will show that she was influenced in a significant way by Charlotte Smith during Smith's active years as a writer. Wordsworth is the foremost poet of the first generation British Romantic poets, and his career was longer than any of the big six. As Jerome McGann has said of Wordsworth, placing him at the centre of The Romantic Ideology, "... [his]

works — like his position in the Romantic Movement — are normative and, in every sense, exemplary” (82). The early part of Wordsworth’s career coincided with the height of Charlotte Smith’s fame and productivity. Examining Charlotte Smith’s influence on a major poet and a major novelist of the Romantic period will establish the broad, trans-generic nature of her influence. It will also emphasize the trans-generic aspect of early Romanticism, bringing the poetry and fiction of the period into closer relationship.

Ten years ago, the task of introducing a dissertation would probably have included declaring one’s theoretical allegiances. Today my readers might expect a declaration of anti-theoretical convictions. I hope to keep somewhere in between — not so much to have it both ways as from a conviction that theory and anti-theory are not easily distinguishable. Both are proven in the practice. I will say, by way of theoretical declaration, that if I quibble with particular feminist critics and new historicists in the course of this dissertation, it is to position myself among rather than against them. I feel an ideological allegiance with feminist theory and feminist practice in Romantic studies, as far as a male critic may, and I intend to keep before me the general guideline that the gender of the author, whether influenced or influencing, is as important an aspect of a text as its genre. In the late eighteenth century, which saw the rise to legitimacy of literature written by women and also such controversial works as Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1791), gender can even be said to determine some aspects of genre. Influence studies are necessarily gender studies of a sort, especially those that study specific author-to-author influences. Among writers who are contemporaries or friends, influence is shaped to some degree by the norms of gender distinction and gender

solidarity prevalent in the surrounding culture.

My attraction to new historicist readings is less ideological than methodological, if such a distinction can be made. New historicism preserves, with different emphases, the old historical method, with its respect for complexity, particularity, and the authority of documentary sources. I will be looking at some rather obscure texts in my chapter on the critical history, but my analyses will not be New Historical in the sense of bringing into play documents and discourses that are apparently far removed from the literary sphere. The works of Charlotte Smith will be my contemporary documents, and will be treated as a forgotten context for the works of Jane Austen and William Wordsworth. Smith's own concern for the events of contemporary history will provide — and require — the “historicizing” effect. Feminism and new historicism have maintained, respectively (sometimes reluctantly), the centrality of the subject as agent, whether writing or reading, and the centrality of the text, within a historical context. Articulated together they reveal new ways of valuing literary works and organizing literary history.

Although it is perhaps only visible to those studying early British Romanticism, the canon of the period is currently undergoing a process of revision. In recent years, a number of authors from the late eighteenth century — Fanny Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, Mary Robinson and Robert Bage, to name a few — have been the subject of renewed critical attention. In most cases, these authors are more highly esteemed now than at any time since their own. Among these authors, perhaps only Mary Wollstonecraft has been the subject of a more spirited revival than Charlotte Smith. Indeed, if we take into consideration the degree of obscurity from which

the author has re-emerged along with the current level of renown she enjoys, then the trajectory of Charlotte Smith's revival may have the steepest contour of them all.

A variety of factors combined to intensify this revival of scholarly interest in Charlotte Smith. Chronologically first is the increased attention given by mid- and late twentieth-century criticism to the novel of the eighteenth century and the phenomenon we know as the "rise" of the novel. Eventually, any novelist who actually contributed to the development of the genre — even if no longer read — would be studied by scholars. In particular, the criticism inspired by the sub-genre of the Gothic novel provided a preserve in which Charlotte Smith was sure to be mentioned. Although not the epitome of the Gothic novelist, her works have been discussed in most detailed studies of British Gothic fiction. The Gothic novel had not only a distinct rise and fall, but also a period of virtual dominance in the 1790's. By adapting the Gothic mode in her own way, Charlotte Smith became one of the most popular, as well as one of the most prolific novelists of her time, and not without serious praise from critics. Even if her fame was short-lived, and even if the persistence of the sub-genre of the Gothic novel itself has been intermittent, Smith's success as an original Gothic novelist earned her a place among the details of literary history.

A second contributing factor is the more recent but now well-established concern among Romantic scholars to consider the contemporary origins as well as the high-canonical affinities of the poetry of the period. This trend was inaugurated by Robert Mayo's 1954 article, "The Contemporaneity of Lyrical Ballads." Mayo states that

Something is known of the popularity of such writers as Helen Maria

Williams, Erasmus Darwin, W. L. Bowles, "Peter Pindar," Charlotte Smith, Henry James Pye, Mary Robinson, and Mrs. West; but except for Bowles they are usually dealt with summarily as a deservedly forgotten generation. (486)

Why William Lisle Bowles would be the exception in this list is something that I will consider in depth in chapter 5 of this study. Forty years after Mayo's article, Charlotte Smith is now routinely grouped with the contemporary poets of sensibility whose innovations, taken collectively, influenced the reading public and thus the first generation Romantics.

A third factor in Smith's revival is the enduring fascination of the French Revolution and its undeniable significance for Romanticism and British radical literature of the 1790's. M.H. Abrams has said of Romanticism that "... the characteristic poetry of the age took its shape from the form and pressure of revolution and reaction" ("English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" 91). Smith was one of those British authors who, along with Wollstonecraft, Wordsworth and Coleridge, explicitly defended the early phase of the Revolution. She was also one of the very few writers of the period to use the events of the Revolution in France as a background for fiction and poetry. Smith distinguishes herself even further by retaining in her writing, to the end of her career, the same liberal principles which first led her to sympathize with the Revolution. Readers of Charlotte Smith are not surprised to find that one of the first critical discussions of her fiction in the twentieth century appears in Allene Gregory's The French Revolution and the English Novel, published in 1914. Among critics interested in British radicalism during the French

Revolution and after, Charlotte Smith's name has an established and growing significance.¹ At the same time, the full significance of Smith's radical politics — especially as a factor in her influence — has not been measured. As we shall see, it is not so much the French Revolution as the British reaction which makes such measurement difficult. Chris Jones has recently observed in his book Radical Sensibility that “[t]he study of a movement whose works were vilified, if not burned, and dismissed from the canon of polite literature, and whose adherents disowned their former connections, presents many difficulties” (x). Charlotte Smith did not disown her radical connections, but this only made her influence more dangerous, and the acknowledgment of it more rare.

Perhaps the strongest force in Charlotte Smith's critical revival has been the work of late 20th-century feminist criticism, which has been directed at recovering for scholarship and for the general reader neglected writings by women and — equally importantly — adjusting the accepted notions of literary history and the literary canon. Feminist critics recognize an ally in Charlotte Smith because of her own style of feminism. Smith honoured the recently deceased Mary Wollstonecraft in the preface to The Young Philosopher in 1798 (v). More generally, she established a strident and embattled public persona through the middle part of her career, and advanced female agency and female rights in the examples of her strong and often outspoken fictional heroines. The affinity between Smith and Wollstonecraft was noted, and qualified, as early as 1941 by Florence

¹ Matthew Bray's recent article “Removing the Anglo-Saxon Yoke: The Francocentric Vision of Charlotte Smith's Later Works” (WWC [Summer 1993]: 155-58) discusses the persistence of Smith's radicalism in the form of an anti-English “Francophilia” in her later works, particularly in the historical sections of Beachy Head (1807).

May Anna Hilbish. Hilbish observes that Smith is the less radical of the two: "Mrs. Smith merely claims for women the respect due them as human beings and their right to be educated. Like the 'champion of woman's rights' she also attacked the intolerable marriage laws of her time but not marriage in theory" (520). Today a different and more generous estimate is made of Smith's sexual politics. In her recent essay "Charlotte Smith's Feminism," Pat Elliot argues that Smith "should be considered along with Wollstonecraft as an important precursor of socialist feminist criticism ..." (Spender, ed. Living By the Pen 91). The anachronism of the adjectives "socialist" and "feminist" reminds us that feminist radicalism was far more unprecedented in the late 18th century than Republicanism or even Revolution, as its very short career as an element of French reforms testifies. Thus if Smith had an influence as a feminist upon her contemporaries, it is unlikely to have been an overt or acknowledged influence.

It was not until 1969 that the first twentieth-century edition of a work by Charlotte Smith appeared, and it was a novel: The Old Manor House [1793], edited and introduced by Anne Henry Ehrenpreis and published by the Oxford University Press. In 1971, Oxford published Smith's first novel, Emmeline [1788], also edited by Ehrenpreis. These were the first republications of any of Smith's novels since the early years of the nineteenth century. Thus far, the major literary presses have gone no further with the fiction.² In recent decades, four other Charlotte Smith novels were reprinted in facsimile editions, suggesting an expanding scholarly interest. As part of a series called The Feminist Controversy in

² A new edition of Desmond, edited by Janet Todd and Antje Blank, was scheduled to appear in 1995 from Pickering and Chatto. To my knowledge it has not yet been released.

England 1788-1810, Garland Press reprinted Desmond [1792] in 1971 and The Young Philosopher [1798] in 1974, both introduced by Gina Luria. Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints published Montalbert [1795] in 1988 and Marchmont [1796] in 1989, both introduced by Mary Anne Schofield. Although these modern editions have made Smith's fiction somewhat more accessible, none of her novels is actually in print at the present, and none has appeared in paperback. Smith's letters, though not themselves published,³ have been the subject of a dissertation and two lengthy essays, by Turner, McKillop and Zimmerman respectively. These have contributed substantially to the biographical groundwork as well as the critical discourse. And in the past twenty years, with increasing frequency, numerous scholarly articles and chapters in books have dealt with some aspect of Smith's work. Although there continue to be exceptions, most recent histories of late 18th-century fiction, women's literature or Romantic poetry find some place for Charlotte Smith.⁴

Nonetheless, the number of book-length studies devoted to this author — published or not — remains small. Smith's poetry and fiction have only once been studied together and at length, in the doctoral dissertation of F. M. A. Hilbish, Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist, published in 1941. Hilbish's book is enormously thorough, and leaves little unsaid in the way of biographical facts or basic descriptive and critical commentary.

³ In The Feminist Companion to English Literature (Blain et al. 1990), the entry on Charlotte Smith notes a "forthcoming" edition of the letters by Judith Stanton (1996). The same book is mentioned as forthcoming in Curran's "Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" (1994). Unfortunately, it has not yet appeared.

⁴ An odd exception here is The Bloomsbury Women's Literature A-Z (Buck, ed. 1992), which has no entry for Charlotte Smith.

Although it is an indispensable source for students of Charlotte Smith and marks the beginning of the modern academic study of the author, it stands almost alone in the mid-twentieth century. Between 1941 and 1980 there were only a handful of dissertations. An important reference work is Rufus Paul Turner's unpublished dissertation of 1966, "Charlotte Smith (1749-1806): New Light on her Life and Literary Career," which provides virtually a second biography, at once more intimate and more objective than Hilbish's, though largely in agreement about the facts. Carroll Lee Fry's dissertation of 1970, Charlotte Smith, Popular Novelist, made a thorough critical study of her fiction, and was published in 1980 by the Arno Press in their Gothic Studies and Dissertations series. In 1976, Smith's sonnets received close structural and thematic analysis in Peggy Willard Gledhill's dissertation "The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith." Recent dissertations are more numerous, but none has made it to wider distribution. The fact that all full-length studies of Charlotte Smith have either begun or remained as dissertations is an indication that Charlotte Smith criticism is in an earnest, but preliminary stage. Certainly the finding and the reading of rare and often fragile texts is still required of those who would make a comprehensive study of her work. Even if her critical fortunes continue to rise at their present rate, it will probably be many years yet before the complete fiction joins the complete poetry in being available to the general reader.

A major asymmetry in Charlotte Smith criticism to date is that the study of her influence as a novelist has advanced further than the study of her influence as a poet. In her role as a predecessor of Jane Austen, Smith has been discussed by a number of historians of the novel and Jane Austen scholars. Thus my examination of Smith's

influence on Austen, while it includes a number of original observations, will also involve much in the way of organizing existing insights and drawing out their implications.

Relatively speaking, the influence of Smith's writing on the poetry of William Wordsworth has been a neglected topic, and it will accordingly be given a closer examination in this dissertation, comprising three separate chapters. I will, however, attempt to maintain a unified view of the author as poet and novelist, in part by examining her role as a "figure" in literary history, and in part by arguing that Austen was influenced to some degree by Smith's poetry, and that Wordsworth, conversely, was influenced to some degree by her fiction.

It has seldom been suggested, even in recent criticism, that Smith's success in both these genres might in itself be the key to understanding her particular genius. Leigh Hunt is among the few critics of any period to notice the complementary relationship. In his collection Men, Women and Books (1847), he introduces Charlotte Smith with the following critical commentary:

Some of her novels will last, and her sonnets with them, each perhaps aided by the other. There is nothing great in her; but she is natural and touching, and has hit, in the music of her sorrows, upon some of those chords which have been awakened equally, though not so well, in all human bosoms.

(139)

In the spirit of Leigh Hunt's statement I will try to treat Smith's poetry and her novels as equal and interdependent achievements. Such an approach resists the conventional notions that poetry is the most important genre in early Romanticism and that

developments in poetry and the novel during this time were largely separate histories with separate criteria and social spheres.

While it is often said that multi-generic or cross-generic writing was characteristic of the Romantic period,⁵ the multi-generic quality of the authors that we consider the major Romantics is more typically a matter of combining or mixing sub-genres — poetic experiments in ballad, elegiac, and epic forms; fusions of the Gothic novel, the novel of manners, and the novel of ideas. The rarity of the poet/novelist informs Jane Austen's surprise, and perhaps genuine distress, upon the publication of Scott's first novel, Waverley, in 1814. "Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones — It is not fair.— He has Fame and Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths ..." (Jane Austen's Letters 404). In a way, Charlotte Smith was to early Romanticism what Walter Scott was to later Romanticism: a writer who could comprehend the conventions of these two very different genres, and who could succeed at both. Indeed, in the early Romantic period the poet-novelist became, for the first time in English, a legitimate role for an author. Charlotte Smith helped establish the pattern.

The most important recent landmark in Charlotte Smith's re-canonization has been the appearance in 1993 of Stuart Curran's edition of The Poems of Charlotte Smith, in the series Women Writers in English, from the Oxford University Press. This is the first collected edition of Charlotte Smith's verse, and will no doubt be the standard edition for

⁵ For example, Gary Kelly in English Fiction of the Romantic Period: "Sharp generic distinctions were not part of Romantic literary culture; on the contrary, breaking the bounds of form was a recurrent rhetorical gesture" (42).

some time to come. Curran begins his introduction with a claim that could not have been made a scant ten years ago, and which even now may surprise some readers: “Charlotte Smith was the first poet in England whom in retrospect we would call Romantic” (xix). Another authoritative critic, Jonathan Wordsworth, makes a similar judgement in less categorical terms in his introduction to the facsimile reprint of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1992). In Smith’s poetry “... [t]he melancholy of Gray and Goldsmith has given way to a more personal mingling of mood and observation. The movement of the verse is the movement of early Romantic poetry ...” ([v]). For readers who are familiar with Charlotte Smith’s poetry, such statements are welcome, particularly as they serve to introduce Smith’s poetry itself to new readers. But the re-instatement of Charlotte Smith as a canonical author, certainly if she is to become known as the first Romantic poet rather than an interesting pre-Romantic poet, deserves a more circumspect analysis than is presently available in any single critical treatment of her work. Part of my intention in this dissertation is to provide this more circumspect analysis of the re-canonization of Charlotte Smith, a re-canonization which has been as disorganized as it has been energetic. The ironies of Smith’s re-canonization are only visible if we know the details of her critical history — the long, attenuated discourse that leads up to Curran’s announcement of Smith’s “retrospective” priority.

A number of questions prompted by Curran’s claim inform my investigation of Smith’s work and influence. Is it true, first of all, that Charlotte Smith is the first recognizably Romantic poet? If it can be demonstrated that Smith’s influence on the major early Romantics was substantial, this would certainly support the claim, for we

might expect the canonical Romantic writers to have recognized, and perhaps even to have acknowledged Charlotte Smith as one of their own. Or is it only “in retrospect” that Charlotte Smith becomes the first Romantic poet? Why, after all, has it taken 200 years for a critic to state her significance with such confidence, or for her poetry to appear in a complete edition? Finally, if Smith is the first Romantic poet, is there also an argument to be made for Charlotte Smith as the first “Romantic” novelist?⁶

Betty Rizzo, reviewing Curran’s edition of Smith’s Poems along with a number of other recent reprints from the early Romantic period, is impressed in particular with the contrast between the quality of Charlotte Smith’s poetry and the level of her canonical status. Rizzo’s blunt phrasing is salutary: “Smith should not have been written out of the history of poetry” (347). But Rizzo’s more general questions concerning the revival of forgotten authors should also be re-iterated:

Ought they to have been forgotten or was their obliteration a political act?

.... [I]f prejudice rather than the infallible taste of the best critics has

hitherto dictated the canon, what current prejudices may dictate the works

being reprinted? Is the reparative record once again being skewed?

(346)

⁶ The phrase “Romantic novel” has never connoted a single dominant type of fiction in the period of the Romantic poets. The difference between Scott and Austen, the major practitioners of the novel in this period, is very great. And neither wrote within the most popular novelistic convention of the time, the Gothic. Nonetheless, the Gothic trend in novels of the 1790’s, and a parallel trend of political and satirical novels, are generally viewed as Romanticism’s manifestations in the British novel, with Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein as the startling synthesis. Robert Kiely’s The Romantic Novel (1972) is the only book of criticism to take such a title, and starting with Walpole’s Castle of Otranto, it follows the Gothic tradition, but without mentioning Charlotte Smith

We need to be on guard not only for the oversights of the past, but for the over-determinations of the present as well.

As we might well expect, there are many broad similarities in theme and style between Smith's poetry and Wordsworth's, and between Smith's fiction and Jane Austen's. But these similarities are not all incidental to genre or to contemporaneity. In a number of important particulars, literary innovations that would come to be considered characteristic achievements of the two later authors are pre-figured, or to put it more pointedly, invented, in Charlotte Smith's work. Deducing influence and innovation from a study of similarities is a notoriously tricky task, and wherever possible I will build my argument upon concrete allusions and direct borrowings — acknowledged and unacknowledged. An early cautionary essay on this subject is R. E. Neil Dodge's "A Sermon on Source Hunting" (Modern Philology 9 [1911] 211-223). Dodge shows, through practical examples, that

before one ... infer[s] literary indebtedness one must be sure that the likeness [does] not lie in the mere fact of the two poets having chosen the same subject-matter: there must be special resemblances of imaginative handling or style or actual wording which [make] any other hypothesis improbable. (211)

An author's literary influence, unlike a novel or a poem or a corpus of literary texts, is ultimately shapeless. It is nonetheless possible to distinguish aspects of an influence that make sense, salient aspects such as the influences of particular texts on particular texts, or continuities of imagery and idea. Alongside biographical connections and continuities in

generic convention, I will examine — as they present themselves rather than systematically — continuities in the use of such images and figures as the gossip, the displaced woman, the happy child, the cycle of seasons and the sea, and such ideas as liberty, melancholy, and female choice in marriage.

A single author's influence on the development of a genre, or on literature as a whole, is difficult to estimate even in the case of major literary figures. Degrees of influence blend quickly from the direct to the indirect, and from thence to the diffuse or to the negligible. And yet surprising actions from a distance are always possible. For purposes of study, provisional limits are required. In this dissertation I have limited myself to a study of Charlotte Smith's influence on specific authors: Wordsworth and Austen first of all, and to a lesser extent Samuel Taylor Coleridge and W. L. Bowles. There are aspects of Smith's influence that I leave largely untouched, such as her influence on Walter Scott, or her influence on Keats or Dickens. Primarily these omissions are owing to a lack of time and space, which are limited even within the framework of a dissertation. But I also have considerations of emphasis and argument. By limiting myself to Smith's most immediate influences on the two or three most canonical of her younger contemporaries, I am taking the most readily demonstrable aspects of her influence and at the same time suggesting its scope and centrality. I have also limited my researches in another way, to the two genres for which Charlotte Smith first became famous: poetry and the novel. Her works for children were also numerous: Rural Walks (1795), Rambles Farther (1796), Minor Morals (1798), Conversations Introducing Poetry (1804), and the very rare A History of England (1806). The works for children usually mixed prose and

poetry, and they appeared with increasing frequency in the latter half of Smith's career. They were quite popular, and may have had a significant influence of their own, perhaps on a generation of readers younger than Jane Austen and William Wordsworth.

In bringing together a detailed critical heritage and an influence study I feel I am providing the two things most useful for the present state of Charlotte Smith studies. There has been no thorough study of Charlotte Smith's critical history, and no sustained study of her influence in poetry and prose. As Hilbish says, indicating the scope of a topic she treats only briefly: "To trace the influence of our author would be a study of itself" (274). Charlotte Smith's critical heritage can itself be considered a branch of her influence — her influence on criticism and the writing of literary history. In the critical heritage we also find the beginnings of the study of Smith's influence on Wordsworth and Austen — the specific antecedents for my own work in the later chapters of this study.

Despite her recent revival, readers still recognize Charlotte Smith as a minor author. Yet Smith's minority status in the canon is not a matter of quantity, or success in the marketplace. Her first work, Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays (1784) — titled Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems in later editions — was a critical and popular success, and was augmented with new poems in most of its nine editions during Smith's lifetime. By 1797, Elegiac Sonnets had grown to two volumes, many times the length of the slim original. The popularity of her novels, certainly the first five, rivalled that of Fanny Burney's, or Ann Radcliffe's. Her second novel, Ethelinde, has been called the best-seller in fiction for

the year 1790.⁷ She produced a novel or novel-length fiction almost every year for a decade. There are five works for children, and the complete poetry amounts to 300 pages in modern edition. There is also a play, with the appropriate title What Is She?, and a shipwreck narrative written for the relief of the victims.

The most recurrent and enduring critical qualification of Charlotte Smith's achievement, especially in poetry, is a monotony of theme and tone: her famous concentration on her own melancholy. Smith is firmly in the tradition of Sensibility, which as a rule valued highly the voice of sorrow, but she marks a late extreme in that tradition, and the nineteenth century deemed her to be a case of the banality of excess. The determination has stuck. With Smith's novels, the qualification is similar, perhaps more severe. They have been excluded from the first order in the genre because of their repeated variations on the same suffering characters, the same melancholy situations and the same distressful plots (distressful, of course, with the conventional exception of the happy resolution). Unlike her poems, many of Smith's novels also suffer from haste of composition, and are marred by problems of dramatic pace and structural unity. Some of her novels, for instance Emmeline (1788), Desmond (1792) and The Old Manor House (1793), are stylistically and structurally superior to others, especially the later novels, and have often been ranked highly, but the very unevenness of her success in fiction has tended to limit the general critical evaluation, and thus her canonical status.

⁷ See Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public, 332. Leavis lists the most popular works of fiction for most years over several centuries. Best-seller lists were not actually kept until the very late nineteenth century, but her research is considered definitive. Her "Outline of Popular Fiction" is reproduced as a catalogue of best-sellers in Nicholas Parsons's The Book of Literary Lists (99)



Acknowledging Charlotte Smith's minority status may seem to concede too much to a hierarchically structured canon. So might my general assumption that the degree of Smith's influence on "major" authors can be taken as an index of her own canonical status. Nonetheless, I intend this dissertation to work against the clear distinction of major and minor authors. The case of Charlotte Smith provides both example and argument. As an example, Charlotte Smith's critical fortunes illustrate the mutability of the canon. A major author in her own time, she became a very minor author, indeed a forgotten author, during the century following her death, and has since gradually risen to a canonical position somewhere in between: a growing eminence among the minor authors of early British Romanticism. As an argument, Charlotte Smith's writings reveal a career of innovation and controversy, and an embattled personal voice engaged in defending not only herself, but also her art. Indeed, the defense of Charlotte Smith began in her own writings and in her own voice, as we shall see in the following chapter. As my epigraph from her late poem "To My Lyre" suggests, Charlotte Smith — unlike almost all her female contemporaries — aspired to lasting fame explicitly, in the rhetoric of the enfranchised male poet. The very immodesty of this aspiration may have been a factor in ensuring that it would not be accommodated.

As a form of compensation, but with a methodological reason as well, I will be extending to Charlotte Smith some of the privileges normally reserved for major authors. This will mean taking a new attitude toward Smith's biography, her "life." I will assume — as we assume of major writers — that both her career and the shape of her works were intentional choices, the choices of an artist. This may seem obvious, but in Smith's case

her career has often been treated as merely a contingency of her financial need, and her art as merely the expression of her personal troubles. The biography of this author is an important aspect of her work, though, and I will examine several aspects of her life and her life-writing in chapter 2. Treating Smith as a major author is also one motive for supplying a full critical heritage in chapter 3. It also means treating Smith's works themselves as serious artistic wholes in my later chapters on specific influences.

T. S. Eliot provides a deceptively handy distinction in the essay "What is minor poetry?":

The difference between major and minor poets has nothing to do with whether they wrote long poems, or only short poems — though the very greatest poets, who are few in number, have all had something to say which could only be said in a long poem. The important difference is whether a knowledge of the whole, or at least a very large part, of the poet's work, makes one enjoy more, because it makes one understand better, any one of his poems.

(On Poets and Poetry 49-50)

By this test, Charlotte Smith might indeed qualify as a major writer. But the question of aesthetic value is not one that I will be pursuing in any explicit way in this dissertation. My comparison of Smith and Bowles in chapter 4 is to some degree evaluative, but I will be sampling Smith's work throughout this study with the examination of her influence foremost in mind, and the defense of her talents a secondary motive. I hope that whatever glimpses of Smith's writing I provide along the way have a favourable effect cumulatively,

but I also want to assemble the kind of evidence for her influence that would stand as credible whether one considers Charlotte Smith a great neglected writer, or just a curious minor one.

By treating Smith as a major author, I hope to avoid some of the pre-conceptions and pre-determinations associated with the study of minor authors. Once established, the label 'minor' limits not only canonical status, but also the scope of criticism. A study of the influence of a minor author traditionally assumes that any impact he or she might have had would have its real significance in the work of the later, more important author. A study of the influence of a major author, by contrast, reflects value back onto the work of that author. The influence of minor authors is attributed to the eccentricity or pre-maturity of particular aspects of their work, while the influence of major authors is attributed to the strength and the fullness of their own achievement. My intention is not to attempt to raise Charlotte Smith to majority status in the canon, but to show that more factors have been involved in determining her canonical position than aesthetic criteria and critical consensus. We will see that in Charlotte Smith's case, the status of minor author is a result not simply of inherent disqualifications in her work, but also of the personal, party and gender politics of criticism and literary history. Charlotte Smith's minority status, instead of ensuring her a modest place in literary memory, led to an almost total forgetting of her achievement. This forgetting, in turn, led to a significant misrepresentation of the transformations in literary practice that we call early Romanticism.

Influence study has not fared well of late, and this has largely been due to changes in the way we think about literary texts and the literary canon. With the recent wave of post-

structuralist critical theory, which has generally been averse to such ideas as originality and genius, influence has also fallen out of fashion.⁸ In 1966 Julia Kristeva introduced a term and concept that both embraced and outmoded influence: inter-textuality. In her emphasis on the textual and semiotic rather than genealogical or generic aspect of relations between written works, Kristeva has been persuasively seconded by such powerful authors as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, in their introductory essay to the anthology of essays entitled Influence and Intertextuality, suggest that

[t]he reasons that led critics to prefer the new term ranged from a perception of influence's weakness, to a suspicion that it carried unwanted implications, to a belief in its outright tendentiousness as a concept . . . It smacks of the system of earned rule that supplanted lineage, the capitalism of the bold, oblivious robber barons. (12)

Intertextuality is a translation of "intertextualité," first used by Julia Kristeva in Séméiotikè: recherches pour une sémanalyse (1966), where it begins as a translation itself. The word denotes, and slightly modifies, Mikhail Bakhtin's central theoretical concept, variously named "heteroglossia" or "dialogism" in English translations of his work.⁹ Kristeva, however, is more vigorously opposed to the traditional idea of influence than

⁸ Influence is also out of fashion in art history. Michael Baxandall introduces his Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures (1985) by complaining of "... a stumbling block or scandal — the notion of artistic 'influence', of one painter 'influencing' another — which I must spend a couple of pages trying to kick just enough out of my road to pass on ..." (58)

⁹ See Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle 60

Bakhtin was, and “intertextuality” soon needed to be replaced with something more exclusive. “The term intertextuality denotes ... transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources’, we prefer the term transposition ...” (The Kristeva Reader 111).

Clayton and Rothstein negotiate the struggle between influence and intertextuality by “... start[ing] with the generalization that influence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts” (4). By this definition, I will be concerned more with influence than with intertextuality in the following study. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that influence is a special subset of intertextuality. It is one of the more obvious types of internal dialogism in literature: the presence in a later text of the voice of an earlier writer. In order to help keep influence and intertextuality in a complementary relationship, I would also stress that even the most unlikely or apparently accidental transpositions between texts, impersonal as they might be, will involve the agency of a reader. In S/Z, Roland Barthes claims that “... by degrees, a text can come into contact with any other system: the intertext is subject to no law but the infinitude of its reprises ...” (211). But Barthes also saw that it was the reader who experiences the intertext and who negotiates these degrees of proximity.

The challenge of intertextuality has been daunting for influence studies, but may finally serve to clarify a rather blurry concept. The global reference of intertextuality reminds us that an influence is most accurately seen as a textual phenomenon among other textual phenomena, rather than a historical event or personal relationship, however much events and relationships may have shaped it originally. The concept of intertextuality also

admonishes students of influence to be conscious of the “laws” they are upholding by looking for influence in the intertext: laws of historical priority, generic continuity, and social proximity. Literary influences among contemporaries do exist as historical events and often as personal relationships, and the conventions of description associated with events and relationships can help us to understand — or at least find metaphors to describe — the dynamics of an influence. What I hope to reveal in my chapters on influence, however, is neither the truth about events that occurred two hundred years ago, nor, at the other extreme, the effects of an arbitrary conjunction of texts, but rather patterns in literary work that continue actively to shape literary history.

Influence studies have a particular relevance to the Romantic period, and were once a favourite critical mode for Romantic scholars. There is a strong argument that literary influence took on its modern cultural significance, and more importantly its psychological depth, during the Romantic Revolution. W. J. Bate and Harold Bloom have both observed a historical shift in the idea of literary influence during the eighteenth century, a shift from an imitative to a conflictual model. In his famous study of literary belatedness The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (1970), Bate “... argue[s] that the remorseless deepening of self-consciousness, before the rich and intimidating legacy of the past, has become the greatest single problem that modern art (art, that is to say, since the later seventeenth century) has had to face ...” (4). After British neo-classicism, which attached full honours to successful imitation of Latin and Greek masters, the latter half of the eighteenth century saw an increasing emphasis on spontaneity, non-classical models and formal experiment as sources of originality.

Harold Bloom locates the sudden rise of a belated or conflictual model of influence somewhat later than Bate, and supports his argument with etymology. Before the final decades of the eighteenth century, influence was not a term applied to literary relationships. It indicated simply that "... [a] power — divine and moral — later simply a secret power — exercised itself, in defiance of all that had seemed voluntary in one" (*Anxiety of Influence* 26). Johnson's *Dictionary* notes no literary connotation. But "... [f]or Coleridge, two generations later, the word has substantially our meaning in the context of literature" (27). In Bloom's view it is with the Romantic poets that the anxiety of influence comes into its own. "As poetry has become more subjective, the shadow cast by the precursors has become more dominant" (11). Bloom has shown that influence among authors is not only psychologically interesting — a sort of drama that we can imaginatively enact — it is also a principle of coherence for the canon itself, especially the canon of the Romantic literary tradition. One need only think of the complex layerings of influence created by the Romantics for the Romantics — the close and troubled relationship of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" and Shelley's "Adonais" to name the most obvious examples — to see that a new principle was at work in canon formation in these decades. In his later work, Bloom has acknowledged that the anxiety of influence exists before the Enlightenment as well as after, and it is probable that any tradition with enough duration will develop a "burden of the past." But other factors including the rise of the market system in literary publishing, the rise of the woman writer and reader, and the ideological pressures of the French Revolution and the British reaction, all served to heighten the anxiety of literary influence

in the pre-Romantic and early Romantic period.¹⁰

The work of Harold Bloom often runs against the grain of trends in critical theory, but he too has contributed to the decline in influence studies in the traditional sense. Bloom, not unlike Julia Kristeva, distinguishes his agonistic view of influence from the “banal” view, the view which will often be at play in this dissertation. “And what is Poetic Influence anyway? Can the study of it really be anything more than the wearisome industry of source-hunting, of allusion-counting, an industry that will soon touch apocalypse anyway when it passes from scholars to computers?” (Anxiety of Influence 31). Bloom, of course, is concerned more with relations of radical dissimilarity (except in status) among the works he compares, which are generally poetic works from the canon at its most select. His disdain for a more common-sense view of influence has remained disheartening to those of us who continue to pursue it, whether as historians of ideas or as students of individual authors:

By “poetic influence” I do not mean the transmission of ideas and images from earlier to later poets. This is indeed “something that happens,” and whether such transmission causes anxiety in the later poets is merely a matter of temperament and circumstances. These are fair material for source-hunters and biographers, and have little to do with my concern.

(Anxiety of Influence 71)

¹⁰ Louis A. Renza, in his highly Bloomian essay “Influence” in Lentricchia’s Critical Terms for Literary Study (1990), discusses several pre-Enlightenment instances of the anxiety of influence and at the same time raises the issue of Bloom’s “... failure to consider the possible political causes for the sudden breach of anxiety in Enlightenment and especially Romantic literary production” (197).

As a self-professed source-hunter (and to a lesser extent as a biographer) I feel I should defend the transmission of ideas and images as more than a matter of simple continuity, as something more than “banal.” Transmission, if it is also transformation, can be an index of constructive influence, complete with the anxieties of creation. Bloom allows that even unproblematic transmission can cause anxiety. His implication, though, is that only minor authors would be concerned with such minor influences as govern content, imagery, or ideology. He makes very clear that his “... concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death” (5). In recent works, Bloom has modified his theory, in particular by accommodating the novel to his canon, but he still maintains that “... only strength can attach itself to strength ...” (The Western Canon 41).

My concern, in contrast to Bloom, will be as much with the transmission and transformation of ideas and images as with irreconcilable strengths. Indeed, I will be studying the influence of an author whose obscurity perhaps proves that she was not “strong” enough to make a place for herself in the canon. As for source-hunting, it may indeed be helped by computer search programs, concordances and the like. But it is unlikely to “pass to computers.” Even if computers could find non-exact semantic similarities between texts — that is, anything subtler than a direct quote — they would still be quite unable to interpret their findings, or even eliminate meaningless correspondences. The study of influence will always require human readers, because literary influences are themselves an effect of reading, of one author reading another.

Literary works, creativity, personal relationships among living writers — these are

all very subtle and variable things, as are one's own relations to the corpus. We bring habits of thought to our work, in my case the tendency to narrate influence either as a matter of conceptual vectors (eg. Charlotte Smith pushed Wordsworth to the political left) or as a variants on the sentimental relationship (eg. Jane Austen felt pity for Charlotte Smith). If we are careful to avoid oversimplifying the shape or character of her influence, the example of Charlotte Smith may demonstrate that influence studies can still be valuable for literary criticism, and can help to adapt old ideas of tradition to new ideas of the canon.

I will on occasion take a rhetorical stand with respect to the rhetoric exercised by various of the writers that make up Charlotte Smith's critical heritage — her contemporaries first of all, but more recent writers as well — in particular where a writer seems to have deliberately forgotten Charlotte Smith, or remembered her in a way which make the least, rather than the most, of her achievement. In this I hope I am not falling prey to the biographical heresy of placing the author before the work, vindicating her by villainizing "others," and assuming a person long dead to be a text more readable than her writing. Often I will observe an underacknowledgement by a recipient of Charlotte Smith's influence, a silent resemblance that seems by its very silence to be a disowning. But perhaps it is we, as modern readers, who have been disowned, and the true measurement of Charlotte Smith's influence will involve rediscovering a code that was quite plain to at least some readers of poetry and fiction in the early Romantic period

Chapter Two

The Figure of the Author and Other Biographical Matters

1. The Figure of the Poet in Charlotte Smith's First Sonnet

In May of 1784, when Smith's Elegiac Sonnets were first published, William Wordsworth was fourteen and Jane Austen was nine; Byron, Keats and Shelley were not yet born. Samuel Johnson was still alive, though he was in his last year. From 1784 to the turn of the century Charlotte Smith was a major figure in the literature of sensibility, which had been on the rise since the mid-century. With the posthumous publication of his Prayers and Meditations in 1785, even the philosophical Dr. Johnson seemed to be following the fashion of sensibility. One of the best ways of demonstrating the intensity of Smith's style and at the same time demonstrating her consciousness of literary tradition and her ambition within it, is to consider the opening sonnet from her first book:

The partial Muse, has from my earliest hours
Smil'd on the rugged path I'm doom'd to tread,

And still with sportive hand has snatch'd wild flowers,
 To weave fantastic garlands for my head:
 But far, far happier is the lot of those
 Who never learn'd her dear delusive art;
 Which, while it decks the head with many a rose,
 Reserves the thorn, to fester in the heart.
 For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye
 Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove,
 Points every pang, and deepens every sigh
 Of mourning friendship, or unhappy love.
 Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favors cost,
If those paint sorrow best — who feel it most!

(Poems 1)

The glaring poeticisms and personifications mark the sonnet as late eighteenth-century sentimental verse. The self-absorbed and yet proudly expressive style of melancholy marks the sonnet as one of Charlotte Smith's.

This opening sonnet is not just a poem of sensibility, though: it is a signature piece. The poet evokes, describes, and attempts by sample demonstration to earn the “fantastic garlands” of a serious calling. Her melancholy excludes exultation or overt boasting, but Charlotte Smith nonetheless speaks as a fully self-determined artist, conscious that she is chosen as a poet, and conscious of the tradition into which she is entering. The poet alludes to no specific personal complaint or occasion of grief, but rather laments her own

heightened sensitivity to all suffering, the suffering of others as well as herself. Smith announces herself as a poet and as a woman of feeling by lamenting and yet accepting the burden of the poet. Women poets were part of the literary scene, but of those with established reputations in 1784 — Carter, Barbauld, More, Seward, Williams and Robinson to name the most prominent — none had appeared in print with such a flourish of self-conscious purpose as this. Indeed, such demonstrative confidence was rare even among male poets.

The last line of the sonnet, as Smith noted, is a variant on the end of Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard": "The well-sung woes will sooth my pensive ghost / He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most." This direct allusion to Pope is an ambitious gesture, more so if we consider the contrast between the two poetic contexts. In Pope's poem, the self-reference is indirect, even ironic. As the poet who "paints" the sorrows of Eloisa "best," Alexander Pope is 'he' who feels her sufferings most, but only through the dramatic persona of Eloisa. Charlotte Smith, however, has removed all indirection between the subject matter and the singer, and goes so far as to say that if Pope is right, then the vocation of poet is perhaps more a curse than a blessing. There is a more ambitious implication as well: since Pope is not Eloisa, he may not be able to express her sorrows as well as Charlotte Smith can express her own.

The presumption of a right to quote and thus to affiliate herself with past masters — or to distinguish herself from past masters, as in the case of Pope — is sustained throughout the ten sonnets in Smith's first edition. There are allusions to Horace, Shakespeare, Milton, Young, Gray and others. From Horace Smith borrows a line from

Pope's translation of the Odes — "For me the vernal garland blooms no more ..." (Poems 16) — a line which could stand as emblematic of Smith's melancholy disposition in the sonnets as a whole. One of the several allusions to Milton illustrates well the level of the author's ambition: in her sonnet 7 (Poems 17) there is a double echo of the last line of Milton's "First Sonnet." Smith's sonnet is addressed to the departing nightingale, but her allusion to Milton goes beyond the conventional addressee to the self-image of the sonneteer. "The pensive Muse shall own thee for her mate ..." says Charlotte Smith to her nightingale, "... [f]or still thy voice shall soft affections move, / And still be dear to sorrow and to love" (Poems 17] 7, 13-14). Like Milton, Smith places herself in poetic service, except that her two ideals are Sorrow and Love, while Milton's had been the Muse and Love. Writers of the Age of Sensibility were in general drawn more to the "Il Penseroso" model than to the "L'Allegro."

Smith's sonnet announces its own poetic voice in terms of election, eloquence, and even strength. At the same time, the primary emotion evoked is pity. This is not the pity a reader of Elizabethan sonnets might feel, pity for an amorous and unsuccessful suitor. Nor is it the pity a reader of Young's Night Thoughts or similar poetry might feel, sympathizing with the speaker's religious dread. Nor is it yet the pity a reader of fiction might feel for Clarissa, or for Parson Primrose and family, or for the various mendicants encountered by Mackenzie's Harley. Smith mentions unhappy love, and mourning, but only as possibilities among multiple, generalized sorrows. The most powerful pain in the sonnet, and the pain which structures the poem by connecting art to suffering, is "Pity" itself.

Sensibility, in its broadest positive connotation, meant sensitivity to the emotional aspect of the natural world, social relations, and the arts. It meant sensitivity to the sublime and to the beautiful, but just as importantly, to the pathetic.¹ Toward the end of the eighteenth century, pity had become perhaps the most frequently and strongly evoked emotion in British literature. Pity was not discovered as a virtue, nor as a literary pleasure, in the Age of Sensibility, but it did become a central theme, and took on a historically new shape as a literary passion, involving a new iconography and a new disposition among the genres. Arguably the novel led the way, with such diverse explorations of sympathetic feeling as Richardson's Clarissa (1748), Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield (1766), Frances Sheridan's Memoirs of Sidney Biddulph (1767) and Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling (1771). In poetry, the stoicism of the early Gray and the Johnson of The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) was superseded by the more affective styles of Goldsmith, the Warton circle, and female poets like Barbauld and More. Johnson, differing with Rousseau in 1763, had argued that pity was not a natural passion: "Pity is acquired and improved by the cultivation of reason" (Boswell London Journal 312). During the second half of the eighteenth-century, whether one cultivated it rationally as an acquirement or adopted a philosophy which might preserve it as a native instinct, pity became an art.

Eleanor Sickels observes in The Gloomy Egoist that "[i]t became a common-place of

¹ One of the most concise and yet thorough discussions of the concept of sensibility as it functioned in the late eighteenth century is in Synda McMillan Conger's introduction to Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics (1990).

preromantic and particularly of romantic verse that the lot of the poet was even more lamentable than that of the ordinary man" (303). This intuition is in Gray and Collins, and in Pope as well, to the extent that we see him in Abelard or Eloise. But Charlotte Smith was the first poet to make the claim explicitly, and certainly the first to make it part of her self-image from the beginning of her career. It is important to note that William Cowper's most intimate and melancholy poems, notably "On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture ..." and "The Castaway," were written and published years later than Smith's sonnets, even though Cowper's fame was established before hers. The suffering poet is a self-image that would appeal to the major Romantics. Sickels's choice of words is helpful here. The notion of the poet as especially prone to emotional suffering appears as a commonplace in pre-Romantic poetry, but becomes "particularly" commonplace in Romantic poetry. It is not too much to suggest that the difference between the two phases might have come when a certain mode available to poetry became the defining mode of a single poet.

A number of authors of the middle and later 18th century had already become famous as objects of pathos in Smith's time: Otway, Collins, Smart and — especially important for the early Romantics — Chatterton. All of these figures withdrew into madness or suicide (usually combined with poverty) and died young. With the partial exception of Smart, whose strange and pathetic late poetry was published only in the twentieth century, none of these poets made their own sorrows the primary subject of their

verse.² Posterity lamented their suffering, not they themselves. Charlotte Smith, by contrast, retained her sanity, if not always her composure, and lived a relatively long life in which to speak the role of pitiable poet. Her career as a writer lasted more than twenty years, and the tone of her self-reflection remained unremittingly melancholy, varied only by setting and its proportions of bitterness and resignation.

The pitiable speaker, of course, is as old as poetry, and as conventional, at least in the late 18th century, as melancholy itself. But at the beginning of the Romantic period, this figure underwent an important transformation. In the poetry of Young, Gray and Collins earlier in the century there were signs of a post-Augustan willingness to turn toward the author's own personal suffering as a suitable subject for poetry. But Gray's single elegiac sonnet "On the Death of Mr. Richard West," published posthumously in 1775, was emblematic of a certain decorum or discretion that prevailed. The intimately personal — even the transgressive — could be alluded to in moderation, but one did not dwell on it, or rush to publish one's private sorrows. Charlotte Smith brought together the established figure of the suffering poet and the new manner of the poetry of Sensibility. In doing so she established a new dynamic in which the reader is designed not only to feel pleasure in those staples of the era, the description of pitiable objects and the expression of emotional pain, but to feel pleasure in pitying the author herself, not as a character, or a speaker of a dramatic piece, but as a poet — and a female poet at that.

² Otway's bitter and scurrilous tirade "The Poet's Complaint of his Muse" (1680) is perhaps an exception to my rule that the lamented and suffering poets did not lament their own suffering. The tone of the work and its theatrical conventions are so different from a sonnet of sensibility that one can hardly acknowledge a line of generic similarity leading to Charlotte Smith.

The spectacle of the suffering woman was already a central icon of the Age of Sensibility. Janet Todd aptly describes the gender dynamics of sensibility as a configuration of sentimental types in The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800 (1989):

Although the sentimental representative could be a man or a woman and indeed the most famous examples in English are perhaps Sterne's Yorick and Mackenzie's Man of Feeling, the most sentimental situation is certainly the woman's and, even in the novels that convey the male sentimentalist, the pathetic scenes into which he enters and to which he responds usually display women in postures of distress: mad, ill, seduced, raped or dying.

(141)

All of these postures, in event or in potential, recur frequently in the work of Charlotte Smith, animating the plots of her fictions and the dramatic or auto-biographical settings of her poetry. And if we add a few less sensational afflictions to the list — poverty, maternal grief, legal oppression and political prejudice — then the sentimental situation of Charlotte Smith the author approaches even closer the stereotype of female distress. In her insightful essay "Charlotte Smith's Letters and the Practice of Self-Presentation" (1991), Sarah Zimmerman observes that

In all of her writings, Smith presents her case to the public By offering an account of indigence in the language of sensibility, Smith presented herself as a sympathetic figure to a public familiar with tales of women's suffering from the sentimental novels that followed the example of Samuel

Richardson's Clarissa (59-60)

Although she did not create the stereotype herself, Smith was the first to enact it as a literary persona.

Smith's literary work defined the high-water mark of a certain aesthetic, an aesthetic which aimed at evoking the sympathy of the reader for the sufferings of the author. In her novels, of course, this sympathy is directed toward the heroes or heroines. But Charlotte Smith's narrative style creates a near relationship between author and protagonist that approaches the identity of speaker and author we find in the poetry. She based her plots largely on her own experiences, even when she wrote novels with male protagonists or in settings she had not herself visited. Her heroes and heroines alike are writers of melancholy sonnets, sonnets which Smith wrote for the novels but included in editions of her own work. To further reinforce a connection between her fictional and autobiographical worlds, Smith introduced the figure of the working mother, with troubles very similar to her own, into several of her novels as a sympathetic secondary character. In The Banished Man (1794), Mrs. Denzil is actually a novelist, and we are shown hardships much like the real Mrs. Smith's. As Janet Todd observes in The Sign of Angellica, "[f]ew women wrote about female authors in their fiction An exception was the prolific and needy Charlotte Smith" (223).

Because the great majority of Smith's works are expressions of personal experience or contain major elements drawn from personal experience, the primary object of representation in her work is the subject of enunciation, the author herself. If the "primal scene" of the literature of Sensibility is the sensitive author sympathizing with the suffering

woman, then observer and observed are precariously close to collapsing in Charlotte Smith's writings — they are one and the same. Smith's work stands at what we might call the mirror phase of early Romanticism. The woman of sensibility, the woman of feeling, is also the object of feeling, and pity is almost inextricable from self-pity. At the same time, however, Charlotte Smith's work shows an unflagging concern for others — her children first of all, but also the poor and the politically oppressed or dispossessed. Her commitment to broader humanitarian issues is consistent with, perhaps even the result of, her reflections on her own legal and domestic troubles. Like Mrs. Montgomery, the suffering mother in *Ethelinde* (1789), Charlotte Smith cultivated the self-image of "... an heart which had acquired in the school of adversity fortitude to bear its own sorrows, with redoubled feeling for the calamities of others ..." (1:125). In an article written five years before the publication of his edition of Smith's *Poems*, Stuart Curran wrote that "Charlotte Smith made a virtual career out of self-pity" ("The 'I' Altered" 198). As a means of distinguishing Smith among her peers this statement is true enough, but it overlooks the social tendency of her work, and mistakes her most peculiar excess for her achievement as a whole. In his more recent statements on Smith, Curran has changed his emphasis, and readers of his work can benefit from the narrative of increasing appreciation contained there.³ If Charlotte Smith confuses herself with her own Muse, and writes with a fixation on sorrow and pity, we should remember that in the poetic achievement of

³ As if to quietly correct his "career of self-pity" comment, Curran observes in the article "Charlotte Smith and Early Romanticism" (1994) that reading all Smith's poetry rather than just a few sonnets "allows us to shift the reader's perspective from confronting the isolation of a solitary, wounded sensibility whose self-pity seems represented with excessive candour ... and to return the poems ... to a determined historical context" (72).

Romanticism as a whole, and in William Wordsworth's work in particular, these same confusions and fixations would become the substance of a new poetics. If self-pity finally ossified into stale convention, or overcame itself in nineteenth-century Romanticism, this does not mean that the first poets to explore its potentialities were part of the problem.

Northrop Frye, in his essay "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility" (1959), argued that a Longinian literature of process, as opposed to an Aristotelian literature of product, characterizes both the Age of Sensibility and Romanticism. Although he describes a spectrum of the more common objects of pity and fear in the two periods, he finds the common denominator in the subject of the emotions rather than the object:

Where there is a sense of literature as process, pity and fear become states of mind without objects, moods which are common to the work of art and the reader, and which bind them together psychologically instead of separating them aesthetically. (316)

At the transition between the two literary periods, we might interpolate that there was a moment when not only the reader and the work of art were bound together psychologically, but the author as well. Along with such diverse writers as Sterne and Boswell and Cowper, Charlotte Smith was among the first authors of the modern period to bring author, speaker, and subject into the same immediate sphere. Smith's early and intensive exploration of the poetics of self-pity formed an important part of the legacy of the Age of Sensibility, and enabled the major Romantics to work more subtle variations on the theme. By animating the established fictional character-type of the suffering woman, already so familiar in the novel, with the credibility of the poet and with what Sarah

Zimmerman calls the “rhetoric of actuality” (60), Smith radicalized a figure that was in danger of becoming a stereotype. Romanticism, in part due to her, could find in the female voice of sorrow and distress a rhetorically charged dramatic resource.

2. Not a Life Story

Charlotte Smith represented herself — in a para-legal as well as a mimetic sense — in almost all of her works. Although she wrote no literary criticism as such, she often spoke in propria persona as a writer, in her prefaces primarily, but also in her poetry and fiction. This self-presentation established a vivid and consistent “character” for the author during her career. Even after her death, when she had become a neglected writer, she was remembered as a literary “figure” largely on the strength of her self-representation. But the very strength of this self-representation, this auto-biographical aspect of Smith’s work, led later critics to presume too simple a connection between her life and her writing, as though Charlotte Smith’s importance for literature ended with her biological life-span.

Charlotte Smith’s life was as eventful and productive as it was difficult. She herself often deferred to biographical circumstance when explaining certain pre-occupations, or even short-comings in her work. In the preface to The Banished Man, for example, Smith says: “The insults I have endured, the inconveniencies I have been exposed to, are not to be described — but let it not be a matter of surprise or blame, if the impression made by them on my mind affects my writings” (vi). The author’s biography thus presents a

compelling narrative, a tangible object for research, and an obvious foundation for an analysis of her fiction and poetry. But I will deliberately resist a biographical approach to her work. To be more precise, I will try to be meticulous in my distinction between biographical facts which Smith herself made public, biographical facts that otherwise became public knowledge in her lifetime, and her biography as it has been constructed posthumously or in recent scholarly research. Most dissertations and most articles on Charlotte Smith begin with a sketch of the salient facts of her life.⁴ I have resisted the convention of beginning with a short biography in order that I might introduce my readers to Charlotte Smith as she was known through her works, at the time they appeared. To achieve a critical perspective on Smith's work, we must suspend our sentimental reactions to her sorrows, regardless of whether those reactions are sympathetic or dismissive. The difficulty her readers have, even now, in achieving this perspective is in large measure attributable to the original success of Smith's self-representation.

Smith's existing manuscript letters have been excerpted in several scholarly essays (McKillop [1952], Stanton [1987], Fergus and Thaddeus [1987], Zimmerman [1991] and one full-length dissertation (Turner [1966])). The letters are interesting, at least to those interested in Charlotte Smith, and seem to be consistent with her public statements. And

⁴ One of my favourite sketches of Smith's life, unusual for its brevity and lightness of tone, appears in Moira Fergusson's Subject to Others: British Woman Writers and Colonial Slavery (1992):

Without much say-so on her part, Charlotte Smith had been married to the son of a Caribbean merchant in 1764 or 1765 — she talks later of being sold to him — and had borne ten children by 1777. After his imprisonment for debt and subsequent flight to France, she left him in 1787 and there after wrote novels at a cracking pace to maintain her large family. (192)

they contain, as might be expected, many details more intimate or mundane in nature than those which she ventured to make public. Legal matters, financial matters, and the business of publishing are the primary concern, as the majority of the surviving letters are from correspondence with her publishers, but domestic details often slip in, especially in the letters to Sarah Farr Rose, a friend rather than a business associate. It seems that there are relatively few discussions of her writings, or other literary or intellectual matters.

What we do learn about, which we could not have gleaned from the published work, are the details of her relationships with her publishers, her private health problems, the health and careers of her children, and the intransigent viciousness of her husband.⁵ I will resist foregrounding material from Smith's letters in this dissertation, partly because I have not attempted the original research, but also with a positive method in mind. By excluding detailed discussions of the letters, and at the same time including her prefaces as part of her work, I hope to make clear the literary aspect of Charlotte Smith's self-presentation.

Eight years after her debut as a writer, Smith began to refer to her private troubles

⁵ Judith Phillips Stanton has examined the letters carefully, as she reveals in her article "Charlotte Smith's Literary Business: Income, Patronage, and Indigence." In the last paragraph she distills some of the more unhappy details about Smith's domestic sorrows:

... as a working writer, her lot was better than with her husband who cursed her books, slept with the kitchen help, and heaved quartern loaves of bread across the table, striking her breasts. (*Age of Johnson* 1 [1987] 396)

Turner supplies liberal samplings from the letters in his dissertation *Charlotte Smith: New Light on her Life and Literary Career*, including the author's revelation that her estranged husband's temper was "... so capricious and often so cruel than my life was not safe" (30). These are the sorts of autobiographical detail not supplied by the author herself in her writings, and consequently not discussed in the present study, however important they may be for other types of analysis.

and to their causes in her prefaces, without any fictional or poetic filter. The first of her revealing and argumentative prefaces appeared with the sixth edition of Elegiac Sonnets (1792). Here are the opening sentences:

When a sixth Edition of these little Poems was lately called for, it was proposed to me to add such Sonnets, or other pieces, as I might have written since the publication of the fifth[.] — Of these, however, I had only a few; and on shewing them to a friend, of whose judgement I had an high opinion, he remarked that some of them ... resembled in their subjects, and still more in the plaintive tone in which they are written, the greater part of those in the former Editions — and that, perhaps, some of a more lively cast might be better liked by the Public — “Toujours perdrix,” said my friend — “Toujours perdrix, you know, ‘ne vaux rien’” “Alas!” replied I, ‘Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?’ Or can the effect cease, while the cause remains? You know that when ... 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” (5)

Although the tone is conversational, Smith soon becomes energetically defensive. She is also adversarial in a personal way, illustrating her case with an anecdote in which the judgement of a “friend” comes in for sarcastic treatment.

A continuation of this citation from the 1792 preface illustrates the first instance of what would become a characteristic rhetorical turn for the author. Exorbitance was

already Smith's forté: her poetry explored a mysterious melancholy raised to the level of despair. The prefaces go further by introducing personal facts, and by making sudden shifts to a bitter and even angry tone. In the 1792 preface Smith makes public a controversy with lawyers that dates from, and in some respects caused, her first appearance as a professional author:

And I have unfortunately no reason yet, though nine years have since elapsed, to change my tone. The time is indeed arrived, when I have been promised by 'the Honourable Men' who, nine years ago, undertook to see that my family obtained the provision their grandfather designed for them,—that 'all should be well, all should be settled.' But still I am condemned to feel the 'hope delayed that maketh the heart sick.' Still to receive — not a repetition of promises indeed — but of scorn and insult when I apply to those gentlemen (Poe 18 5-6)

This was Charlotte Smith's first public declaration of her legal distress, but by no means her last. Her use of the forum of the author's preface for her impassioned self-defense only intensified in the years that followed. An argumentative justification like the one above can be found in all the prefaces to her novels after 1792,⁶ and most of the prefaces to later editions of Elegiac Sonnets.

Before the prefaces began to appear, Smith's readers would have had to interpret

⁶ There are prefaces to four of Smith's nine full-length novels: Desmond (1792), The Banished Man (1794), Marchmont (1796) and The Young Philosopher (1798). Her first three novels, and also The Old Manor House (1793) and Montalbert (1795), appeared without prefaces.

her highly generalized complaints in the sonnets, or the veiled self-portraits in the novels, in order to infer her personal legal distresses. But from this 1792 preface to about the turn of the century — her works for children excepted — virtually all of Smith's publications in poetry and fiction make reference to the injustice of her financial circumstances. In the 1797 preface to Volume Two of Elegiac Sonnets the rhetoric of her complaint against those who were delaying the execution of her father-in-law's estate came to a peak:

... any retribution in this world is impossible nor have I the poor
consolation of knowing that I leave in the callous hearts of these persons,
thorns to "goad and sting them," for they have conquered or outlived all
sensitivity of shame (Poems 9)

In this preface Smith promises to "dismiss these oppressors .. from the notice of any future readers," and even hints that she might be taking "... her last leave of the public" (9-10). But with her novel of the next year, her last novel,⁷ The Young Philosopher (1798), Smith was back. She restricts herself in this preface mainly to answering the literary censures of her critics, but she also alludes to her intimate knowledge of originals to match her unsavory lawyer characters, and her indignant tone is not substantially changed. Late in 1799, Smith's legal affairs appear to have finally settled in some degree, a moment marked by her last sonnet, number 92 (Poems 78). She continued to be a melancholy author, but she turned away from the sonnet and the novel both, writing only works for children and other kinds of poetry in the last six years of her life. Smith maintained her

⁷ Although The Young Philosopher (1798) was Smith's last full-length novel, it was not her last book of fiction. Letters of a Solitary Wanderer appeared in 1800, a collection of four narratives in five volumes.

penchant for melancholy, but she was largely silent on financial and legal matters in these years. In her late poetry there is good deal more composure, more natural description, especially botanical, and much less bitterness of tone.

The aggressive modulation from melancholy pathos to angry indignation makes Smith's prefaces virtually unique in the period, certainly among works by women. Angry indignation in particular was not the normative tone for a poet or novelist to strike while introducing her work to the late 18th-century reader. After a few early and uncomfortable dedications to such patrons and fellow poets as Hayley and Cowper, Smith dispensed with the humble decorum of the polite author and took up an adversarial rather than apologetic stance. Smith was conscious of the inappropriateness of her personal intrusions, as she indicates in the Preface to the second volume of Elegiac Sonnets (1797): "I am well aware that the present is not a time when the complaints of individuals against private wrongs are likely to be listened to; nor is this an opportunity fit to make those complaints ..." (Poems 8), but such apologies only serve to highlight her outbursts of indignation. Smith is never actually out of control in the prefaces, although she emphasizes the drama of her moods: after one particularly angry denunciation she exclaims, "It is passed! ..." (9). At the same time, the prefaces can be surprisingly witty. Smith concludes her preface to the sixth edition of Elegiac Sonnets (1792) with what appears to be a conventionally modest apology for deviating from gender norms in placing herself before the public: "I am well aware that for a woman — 'The Post of Honour is a Private Station.'" Curran's edition tells us in a valuable note (Poems 6) that this citation is from a speech by the protagonist of Addison's tragedy Cato, advising his son as to the wisest refuge of any citizen, male or

female, in times of strife and repression. What appears to be a relenting and a qualification is actually an incisive stroke of satire. Charlotte Smith's literary prefaces introduced more than the works in which they appeared. As Sarah Zimmerman points out "[t]he prefaces that open most of her works became, in effect, a serialized autobiographical narrative" (60). The prefaces do not provide the reader with all the details of Smith's life by any means, but they do provide a running commentary on the state of her legal battles, and a vivid portrait of the author.

For all her boldness in presenting herself to the public, Charlotte Smith respected some aspects of the difference between private and public discourse. In the 1792 preface to Elegiac Sonnets she goes on to say to her publisher-friend,

You know the circumstances under which I have now so long been labouring; and you have done me the honor to say, that few Women could so long have contended with them. With these, however, as they are some of them of a domestic and painful nature, I will not trouble the Public now (Poems 6)

This final emphasis is important. The author carefully draws the line between public and private affairs, but at the same time aggressively threatens to cross it:

Thus ended the short dialogue between my friend and me, and I repeat it as an apology for that apparent despondence, which, when it is observed for a long series of years, may look like affectation. I shall be sorry, if on some future occasion, I should feel myself compelled to detail its causes more at length (6)

While Smith never actually told the public the full story of her private distresses, this tone of barely withheld disclosure would recur and even intensify in later years.⁸

Charlotte Smith's decision to publish her Elegiac Sonnets, her first appearance as an author, was precipitated as much by financial need as by a desire for fame or a consciousness of poetic merit. This much she herself acknowledged in the later prefaces. We know that her financial need was a direct result of her unhappy marriage to Benjamin Smith and the protracted litigation over her children's inheritance, in and out of the courts. The machinations of lawyers and trustees and the pains of her poverty were revealed directly and insistently to the public in Smith's prefaces. But there were more intimate matters — the unhappiness of her marriage and in particular her husband's derelictions — which were revealed only indirectly. References to Smith's children, with a few exceptions, were also collective or indirect.⁹

⁸ This threat of exposing her enemies in print intensified in 1795, in the preface to The Banished Man.

I have "fallen among thieves," and I have occasionally made sketches of them — and I have made only sketches of them, because it is very probable that I may yet be under the necessity of giving the portraits at full length, and of writing under those portraits the names of the weasels, wolves, and vultures they are meant to describe — nay, even to detail at length the unexampled conduct of these persons . . . (Banished Man [Irish ed.]vii)

Despite such rhetorical brinkmanship, this naming of names and detailing of transgressions never actually occurred, at least not in Smith's published writings.

⁹ Curran suggests in "Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" (1994) that the sonnets "seldom ... relate to the actual terms of her existence" (72) and reiterates a point that he first makes in his preface to the poems, namely that "thirty-six of the sonnets, over a third, assume a speaking voice different from Smith's own" (72). This emphasis is part of Curran's general attempt to rescue Smith from the old criticism of her "egotism," but its force is weakened by the consideration that even when she assumes the voice of another for her sonnets, it is a sorrowful voice, a Werther or a Petrarch or one of her own

(continued ..)

By indirection, however, particularly the indirection of fiction, Charlotte Smith revealed much. Because of her established figure as the poet of the Elegiac Sonnets, readers of the novels probably expected a type of writing that drew upon the author's own experiences of sorrow and distress. Not surprisingly, disadvantaged circumstances similar to Smith's own are often represented in her novels, to some degree in the plights of her heroines, but more obviously in the digressive biographies of important secondary characters or secondary heroines — often the mother of the central character. In this fictional context, as Walter Scott observed, Smith's husband — though he is never so much as mentioned in her prefaces — could also be satirized:

... the introduction of one or two legal characters (men of business as they are called) into her popular novels, left them little to congratulate themselves on having to do with a lady whose pen wore so sharp a point. Even Mr. Smith's foibles did not escape. In spite of "awful rule and right supremacy" we recognize him (Miscellaneous Prose 4:96)

Some of Smith's well informed readers recognized him very early. Having read Smith's first novel, Emmeline (1788), Anna Seward complained to a correspondent in January of 1789:

Whatever may be Mr. Smith's faults, surely it was as wrong as indelicate to hold up the man, whose name she bears, the father of her children, to

⁹(...continued)

heroes or heroines. And the "terms of existence" are no more specific for these characters than they are for herself, so that the continuity of tone supports a continuity of persona — Smith's persona.

public contempt in a novel.

Then how sickening is the boundless vanity with which Mrs. Smith asserts that herself, under the name of Mrs. Stafford, is “a woman of first-rate talents, cultivated to the highest possible degree”

(Letters of Anna Seward 2:215)

As Mary Anne Schofield has argued: “Smith enters her fictional world unlike any of her predecessors” (Spender 182).

Charlotte Smith also enters her poetic world with a new type of immediacy. As early as 1793, she expressed not only her general sorrows but her personal legal distresses in the context of poetry, in her long poem The Emigrants:

How little dream'd I then the time would come,
 When the bright Sun of that delicious month
 Should, from disturb'd and artificial sleep,
 Awaken me to never-ending toil,
 To terror and to tears! — Attempting still,
 With feeble hands and cold desponding heart,
 To save my children from the o'erwhelming wrongs
 That have for ten long years been heap'd upon me! —
 The fearful spectres of chicane and fraud
 Have, Proteus like, still chang'd their hideous forms
 (As the Law lent its plausible disguise),
 Pursuing my faint steps

(Poems 160-61)

In order to understand these degrees of indirection and selection on Smith's part — her careful management of her self-presentation — we need to distinguish the autobiographical aspect of Smith's published works from her biography as it has been constructed by criticism and scholarship.

This is not always an easy task, and would have been a complex one even for her contemporary readers. Charlotte Smith's works were not the only source of public information about her private life. Gossip seemed to have kept up with and even outstripped her own disclosures.¹⁰ She also appeared in two reference texts of a type that was new to the late 18th century, the collection of "living" biographies: the Catalogue of Five Hundred Celebrated Authors of Great Britain, Now Living (1788) and the more detailed and selective Public Characters 1800-01 (1807, perhaps earlier). I will have more to say about these works in my next chapter.

As early as 1786 — newly famous as the author of the Elegiac Sonnets — Charlotte Smith found herself in the press in a much more peculiar way. In the Gentleman's Magazine for July of 1786 there appeared an obituary notice for one "Charlotte Smith, author of some beautiful sonnets, eldest daughter of Nicholas Turner Esq., of Bignor Park, and of Stoke, near Guildford ..." (52.2: 619). We have no record of Charlotte Smith's reaction to this obituary, but she had more than one reason to be disconcerted.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Carter also seemed to be in the know. In 1788, she said of Smith's first novel, "I heartily wish it was fashionable enough to be of any essential benefit to the author, who has been obliged to purchase her freedom from a vile husband" (Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, to Mrs. Montagu [1817] 3:295; qtd. Ehrenpreis, "Introduction" to Emmeline, vii-viii).

The obituary says very little about Smith herself, much less her supposed death, but it does go into some very unflattering detail concerning her father, her brother, and her husband.

The obituary narrates, in plain facts and slanderous characterization, the decline of her family fortunes:

Mr. Smith [Charlotte's husband] was too much a man of pleasure to attend to his business ... Mr. Turner [Charlotte's brother] followed his example, and after his father's death, spent more at Bignor, and in running backward and forward, in horse races & c. than in his business, so that it is no wonder if they failed. Mrs. Smith was of course involved in many difficulties. Mr. Turner the father [Charlotte's father] lived a profligate life, and dissipated almost the whole of his fortunes He was reckoned one of the most complete swearers in the country After the death of his first wife he married a lady of good fortune, which, however, she had the prudence to keep in her own hands, and survived him. By her he had no children. (619-20)

The obituary ends here, never returning to its ostensible subject. In the next issue, the Gentleman's Magazine printed a correction note for its error, but one senses that the original "obituary" article was intended for a special purpose in the first place, something to do with the public embarrassment of the men that are named. Whatever the explanation of the obituary, it illustrates the early entanglement of Smith's private and public life. Elegiac Sonnets made her a celebrity, and the scandalous lives of her relations probably increased public curiosity. One of her motivations for introducing autobiography into her

fiction and poetry may have been to exert some control over her public image.

Although she did not write an autobiography, or, so far as we know, keep a journal, “[a]n autobiographical thread can be traced throughout the works ...” (Zimmerman 58). In both her poetry, her fiction and her prefaces, the personal life of Charlotte Smith is revealed in its private aspect and as a creative motivation more explicitly than was usual for the time. In this as well as in her fondness for the melancholy mood, Charlotte Smith exceeded late eighteenth-century norms. For many of her contemporary readers and reviewers, knowledge of Charlotte Smith’s personal life helped to justify her melancholy and guarantee its sincerity. On the other hand, some readers found her recurrent strains of personal complaint improper, because they made public certain matters considered strictly private — namely legal and financial troubles — and intruded on the purity of genres popularly considered either abstract or escapist. Neither poetry nor the novel at the end of the eighteenth century permitted, at least in its conventional definitions, the airing of personal grievances in a way that actually indicted others.

Only by not naming names did Smith avoid making statements that would have been considered libellous. As Walter Scott suggested magisterially, several decades after Smith’s death:

This satire may not have been uniformly well merited; for ladies who see sharply and feel keenly are desirous sometimes to arrive at their point,

without passing through the forms which the law, rather than lawyers,
throws in the way. (Miscellaneous Prose 4:96)

It is a testimony to the state of popular literary taste in the 1780's and 90's, as much as to the sincerity of her complaints, that an exception was made for Charlotte Smith.

Whatever we may feel toward her personality as revealed in her works — with the prefaces considered as an integral part of those works — it is important to realize that Charlotte Smith's 'circumstances' are an inseparable part of her literary presence. Even if her introduction of autobiography into literary text was inadvertent, that is, motivated by personal exigencies rather than literary considerations, it was nonetheless one of her most significant innovations.

3. The Friends of Charlotte Smith

Charlotte Smith's influence on the writing of her contemporaries was enhanced by her considerable social life. She was not a socialite by any means, and indeed lived often in the relative isolation of genteel poverty, but there are a surprising number of direct social connections between her and other writers of her time, especially the rising generation of Romantic authors. There is biographical evidence that she met, spoke with, and in varying degrees befriended not only the elder writers Cowper and Hayley, but also Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge and Godwin. It is at least possible that she may have

met William Blake, Fanny Burney, and perhaps even Jane Austen. Smith's presence in cultural society reinforced the presence of her literary work while she lived. Some of her influence was direct and personal.

Wordsworth and Smith met on Wordsworth's initiative in late November of 1791. The meeting is described in a letter from Wordsworth to his brother Richard, written from Orléans shortly after Wordsworth's arrival. It was his second, his "revolutionary" visit to France. Wordsworth had been delayed at Brighton before his departure and he implies that the wait would have been unpleasant, "... if I had not bethought me of introducing myself to Mrs Charlotte Smith, she received me in the politest manner, and shewed me every possible civility. This with my best affection you will be so good as to mention to Captn. and Mrs. Wordsworth" (Letters 1:68-69). One civility shown by Smith was to supply Wordsworth with letters of introduction for his trip to France, one to Helen Maria Williams, and one, it has been suggested, to the Gironde leader in the Legislative Assembly, J. P. Brissot.¹² Wordsworth did not have a chance to use the letter introducing him to Williams, but he may well have been granted admission into the Assembly on the strength of the letter introducing him to Brissot (Gill Wordsworth 57).

Even before they met, though, they were connected by another matter. De Selincourt's long note to Wordsworth's brief description of his visit with Smith provides the basic facts concerning Charlotte Smith's circumstantial relationship to the Wordsworth

¹² See Gill, William Wordsworth: A Life (57) and J. Wordsworth's introduction to the recent reprint of Smith's Elegiac Sonnets (iii). It seems that there is no concrete evidence that Brissot was the addressee of a letter supplied by Charlotte Smith to Wordsworth, but the possibility is repeated with some authority.

family. John Robinson, member of parliament, and Anthony Parkin, lawyer, were friends and benefactors of the Wordsworths. They were also the principal trustees, for the better part of Smith's publishing career, of Richard Smith's will, which is to say they were two of the very "gentlemen" against whom Charlotte Smith would express such bitter complaints in her prefaces and elsewhere.

De Selincourt, in his note to Wordsworth's letter (1:68n2), tells us that John Robinson was actually Benjamin Smith's brother-in-law, and had been responsible for getting him out of debtor's prison in 1784 by agreeing to become his trustee. Anthony Parkin was a subscriber to the fifth edition of Elegiac Sonnets, and the employer of Wordsworth's brother Richard. In Bishop C. Hunt's article "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith" (Wordsworth Circle 1.3 [1970]) we are given the further detail that John Wordsworth's captaincy was with a merchant ship co-owned by Robinson (86). According to both De Selincourt and Hunt, one of Smith's sons brought suit against Robinson in 1793 on behalf of his mother presumably, for "... failure to administer their affairs satisfactorily" (Hunt 85). De Selincourt also tells us — observing that Smith's fiction included veiled attacks on lawyers of her actual acquaintance — that the satirical portrait of Sir Appulby Gorges in The Young Philosopher is based on John Robinson, whose native town was Appleby (Letters 1:68n2).

A web of circumstances thus placed Smith and Wordsworth, by association at least, on opposite sides in a complex and protracted legal struggle. De Selincourt comments:

As the Wordsworths had various obligations to Robinson, and as R[ichard] W[ordsworth]'s employer, Anthony Parkin, was a co-trustee of Smith's

property, W.W. must have been a little surprised by her cordiality; but it is clear from this letter that she bore neither him nor Captain and Mrs. John Wordsworth a grudge (Letters 1:68n2)

Wordsworth's specific request that Captain and Mrs. Wordsworth be told he was well received by Smith suggests that he wanted to do what little he could to smooth relations.

At the same time, he may have had reason to minimize the details of his visit. Helen Maria Williams had established herself as a sympathizer of the French Revolution in her Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790 (1790) and Smith, as her friend, would have been implicated. Smith had not yet published the works in which she declared her own sympathies concerning the Revolution, but when Wordsworth visited her she was in the middle of her novel Desmond, soon to be her most controversial political statement. As Hunt suggests, "... the last thing which [Wordsworth's] family would have wished to hear about was a visit to some hot-bed of disreputable Jacobins" (86). Thus there were two strong motivations for Wordsworth to keep the details of his visit to himself. From what we do know, we may add one final speculation: since Wordsworth says he was delayed "from Tuesday till Saturday" in Brighton and that meeting Smith was the only thing that kept his wait from being "disagreeable," perhaps he spent more time with her than was required by a social call and a request for letters of introduction.

The extent of Coleridge's contact with our author is unclear. There are two references to Smith in the first volume of Griggs's edition of the Letters. On the 12th of February 1800, Coleridge adds as a postscript to a letter to Southey, "I pass this evening with Charlotte Smith at her house" (1:571). (Curiously enough, Coleridge's letter

contains a discussion of the profitability of writing fiction.) Coleridge does not later describe the meeting or otherwise confirm its occurrence, but this may be due to its not being their first encounter. The second reference in Coleridge's letters would seem to suggest that there was a developing relationship. In a letter to Godwin a few months later Coleridge says "To Mrs Smith I am about to write a letter, with a book," and asks ". be so kind as to inform me of her direction" (1.589). Again, we do not have this letter, assuming it was written, and it remains difficult to say with certainty how far the friendship went. What is unambiguous is that Coleridge wanted to make Smith's acquaintance

Southey was another literary friend of Charlotte Smith. In Curry's edition of the New Letters of Robert Southey (vol 1, to Charles Danvers, December 2, 1801), we find him anticipating a lengthy opportunity to visit her: "Miss Barker has been with us. She is coming to spend the winter with Charlotte Smith in London and I expect to be pleasantly intimate at that house" (258). A week later, Southey wrote to John Rickman " I am increasing my knowledge of the Living Remarkables, and added to the list — Charlotte Smith, a woman of genius, good sense, and pleasant manners" (269)

William Godwin's friendship with Charlotte Smith seems to have been longer and more intimate than those already mentioned. There is, at least, more textual evidence for this connection. Chris Jones has summarized their relationship in his recent book Radical Sensibility (1993)

Smith corresponded regularly with Godwin from 1797 and admitted reading Political Justice for the first time in 1798. Godwin and his family visited her at Tilford up to her final illness, when he sent Sir Anthony

Carlisle to see her. Carlisle's prognosis of recovery is annotated: 'Poor

Mrs Smith died in 3 days. These medical men often mistake.' (137)

Jones's description of the relationship is based on his reading of the Abinger Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library (Dep. b. 214/3).

Smith's contact with Blake was probably slight, and did not seem to be exactly a friendship. Alan Dugald McKillop suggests that in one of Smith's letters to Sarah Farr Rose (March 20, 1806, very near her death) there is "a tantalizing glimpse of William Blake" Smith speaks sarcastically of William Hayley's protegés, and mentions "... his strange tho[sic] benevolent fancy of writing such very sad doggrell, for the purpose of serving a Man, who might be anything than an engraver ..." (251). Smith is referring, as McKillop notes, to Hayley's verse in Designs to a Series of Ballads ... (1802), which was illustrated by Blake. The reference at first appears to insult Hayley and Blake at once, but there is perhaps also an acknowledgement on Smith's part that Blake's own poetry was something more than "doggrell." Smith's close association with Hayley, her first literary benefactor, predates Hayley's close association with Blake, but Smith continued to visit Hayley and she and Blake could have met. Sarah Farr Rose, one of Smith's most faithful correspondents, was the wife of Samuel Rose, who defended Blake when he was charged with sedition

There is evidence for a slight connection between Charlotte Smith and the family of Frances Burney In 1794, Charlotte Smith approached Dr Burney for advice on finding a priest willing to make her daughter Augusta's recent marriage to a French emigré "binding

according to the laws of France.”¹² The Burney and Austen families were connected through the Reverend Cooke, vicar in Burney’s parish, whose wife was a relation of Jane Austen’s mother. Biographers have searched far and wide for hard evidence of a meeting between Jane Austen and Fanny Burney, her favorite novelist, but to no avail. Park Honan in his 1987 biography of Austen has observed that “[o]vershadowed only by Miss Burney in Jane Austen’s opinion was Charlotte Smith” Noting the connections among the three families, Honan avers that “... if Jane Austen had wished to meet Miss Burney she might also have met Mrs Smith” (184). In 1794, when Smith introduced herself to Dr. Burney, Jane Austen was not yet twenty, and Charlotte Smith had gained a reputation as a radical: if modesty kept Austen from meeting Burney or Madame de Staël, prudence might have kept her from meeting Smith. Nonetheless, they moved in the same geographical circles in the south of England, between the Isle of Wight and Kent, Bath and London. Smith’s stay in Bath was in 1794, and the Austens resided there from 1801 to 1806. The famous Bath physician Dr Perry attended Smith’s daughter Augusta in 1795 and was the addressee of a sonnet of thanks from the author (Poems 57). “Mr Perry” also appears as a not-quite-fictional character in Emma, the obliging medical advisor to the valetudinarian Mr. Woodhouse.

These last three connections may seem dubious, but it is important to note that all of what we would like to call Charlotte Smith’s literary friendships are known to scholarship by virtue of slight information. Even in the case of her most famous literary association

¹² See Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (J. Hemlow et al., eds., 1973) 3:2-3, 7n.

with a Romantic period author — the acquaintance with Wordsworth — we could say that if it were not for the survival of Wordsworth's letter to his brother Richard of December 19, 1791 (Letters 1:67-71), we would have no record that he and Smith ever met, and no indication of what he meant when he said in his later years, "Charlotte Smith was a personal friend of mine."¹⁴ Thus it is eminently possible that Smith's acquaintance among the writers of her time was more extensive and intimate than we know.

¹⁴ See Reminiscences of Alexander Dyce (Richard J. Schrader, ed., 1972) 187. The entries are not dated, but this statement probably comes from the late 1820's or early 1830's.

Chapter Three

Charlotte Smith's Critical History

1. Introduction

The primary function of a critical history is to trace the development of an author's status and position in the literary canon. Charlotte Smith's critical heritage traces the development of the status and position of a minor author, and though it is less densely populated, it is as interesting a narrative as many of the more voluminous critical histories of major authors. Smith's critical history follows a pattern that seems simple — from popular fame to near invisibility to a recent revival. But there is more to the story than a long, slow cycle of over-estimation, under-estimation and achieved balance. Along with the general evaluation of her writing and the selection of her most important works, Charlotte Smith's critical history also contains the acknowledged measure of her influence. Very early on, for example, it became obvious to literary critics that Smith was influential as a writer of sonnets, and that she contributed significantly to the revival of that form at the end of the eighteenth century. This claim for a specific — though generically limited — influence has remained one of the constants of Charlotte Smith criticism. There are other constants, as well as recurrent contradictions, in the critical heritage, and they give it a structure and coherence of its own. Smith's critical history also contains clues to literary influences that have been obscured by time, and sometimes by the critics themselves.

Discussions of Smith's critical heritage have generally been very brief, and limited to either the criticism of her fiction or the criticism of her poetry, depending on the author's focus. My focus is on Charlotte Smith as a literary figure, and I will examine the criticism of both genres together, giving special attention to the relation between the two. Most critics have stressed the scarcity of critical writing on the works of Charlotte Smith. My emphasis will be on the continuity of the critical heritage, its variety, and its insights.

In the past few decades, and especially in the past five years, so much Charlotte Smith criticism has appeared in print that one can no longer argue that she is a neglected minor author. Rather than attempt another vindication of Charlotte Smith, I will treat the theme of vindication as part of her critical heritage. As we shall see, the vindication of the author has been a recurrent pre-occupation of Charlotte Smith's critics, for a variety of reasons, from the years immediately following her death to the present day.

This history will take us through two centuries of changing literary practices and critical priorities, and along the way the figure of Charlotte Smith will undergo a variety of transformations. If she was for some time forgotten, this does not mean there is a gap in the literary history, a discontinuity after which an objective 20th-century criticism re-discovered her and applied to her writings wholly new methodologies. There is a continuity for which the author herself is partly responsible. It is important to remember that the forgetting of Charlotte Smith was not simply a lapse of attention on the part of the literary establishment, or a result of the ill-will of detractors. Although we recognize it more readily in the discourses of the very famous or the very infamous, obscurity too is structured by the text of the author.

2. The Fame of Charlotte Smith

Charlotte Smith's critical heritage involves several phases: the critical reception of her individual works during her career, her general evaluation as an author (from about 1798 to 1840), a long period of increasing obscurity (1840-1914), a sporadic accumulation of basic scholarly work (1914-1976), and a recent energetic revival of interest (1976-1996). This last phase was discussed in my introductory chapter and will be revisited incidentally in the following chapters. The first phase, the reviews of individual works, presents a mixed picture for a variety of reasons. First, Smith's career was a relatively long one, and her works were numerous — especially the novels. Second, the quality of her work — again, especially the novels — was varied, even in the opinion of the author herself. Third, the criticism in the review journals of the 1790's was highly charged by adversarial rhetoric and political faction, and Charlotte Smith was among the more political poets and novelists of her time. I will begin my critical history not at the beginning of Charlotte Smith's career, but at the beginning of her canonization, with the earliest general estimates of her work, which began to appear only after she had established herself as a poet and novelist.

Most discussions of Charlotte Smith's significance in literary history begin with a mention of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's use of her sonnets and those of William Lisle Bowles as models of the contemporary style in the "Introduction" to his privately circulated anthology Sonnets from Various Authors (1796), which included two of Smith's sonnets. Coleridge says in his introduction that "Charlotte Smith and Bowles are

they who first made the Sonnet popular among the present English; I am justified therefore ... in deducing its laws from their compositions” (Poetical Works 2:1139). In Coleridge’s small anthology, Smith appeared in the company not only of Bowles, but of Coleridge, Southey, and Lamb as well. The little collection was never actually published, but Coleridge’s “Introduction” went on to appear as an appendix to his Poems of 1797, and in later editions as well.

After Coleridge became a major author, his citation of Smith’s sonnets would become a key anecdote supporting her status as a significant minor pre-Romantic poet. But by then the Biographia Literaria (1817) had appeared, in which Coleridge gives the credit solely to Bowles. I will have more to say about Coleridge’s “Introduction,” his Biographia Literaria, and his admiration for W. L. Bowles in my next chapter. I mention the anthology here as an instance of the acknowledgement by a younger contemporary of Smith’s contribution to re-popularizing an important literary form.

The notion that Charlotte Smith was a contemporary master of the sonnet had already been circulating for some years when Coleridge compiled his anthology: as early as 1786, a critic in the Gentleman’s Magazine wrote that “[a] very trifling compliment is paid Mrs. Smith, when it is observed how much her Sonnets exceed those of Shakespeare and Milton ...” (56:334). This surprising estimate did not please Anna Seward, a rival female sonneteer, who wrote of Smith’s sonnets in a letter of the same year: “All the lines that are not the lines of others are weak and unimpressive; and these hedge-flowers to be preferred, by a critical dictator, to the roses and amaranths of the first poets the world has produced!!! — It makes me sick ...” (Letters 1:163). In 1811, just five years after

Charlotte Smith's death and two years after her own, Seward's letters were published, giving her opinions a wider exposure. But the high estimation of Smith's sonnets in the Gentleman's Magazine was not an aberration.¹ In 1792, a critic for the Universal Magazine signing as "J.T." (possibly John Thelwall) published a carefully argued piece entitled "An Essay on the English Sonnet, illustrated by a Comparison between the Sonnets of Milton and those of Charlotte Smith." The claim is made that "[o]ver the epic field, Milton, of all the British bards, triumphs without a rival, Shakespeare in the dramatic, and in the sonnet, Charlotte Smith" (91:414). It appears that the young Coleridge was only re-iterating — and in a more restrained formulation — a fairly popular critical opinion.

For the earliest general evaluations of Charlotte Smith's work as a whole, we need to turn to some authors and anthologists who are now forgotten, but who belonged to the literary establishment of the 1790's in a way that the young Coleridge did not. In 1798, after most, but not all, of Charlotte Smith's major works had appeared, her achievement received one of its earliest general evaluations in David Rivers's Literary Memoirs of Living Authors of Great Britain, a dictionary of brief biographical notices and "occasional opinions upon ... literary character." Rivers's dictionary is organized as a work of reference, and the critical opinions it contains may be taken as representative. The entry for Charlotte Smith begins "Of Bignor Park, Sussex, a lady of very distinguished reputation as a Poet, and as a Novel-writer" (267), lists her works to date, and concludes

¹ See F.M.A. Hilbish (239 n11) for further explanation of the generally low estimate of the sonnets of Shakespeare and Milton in the late eighteenth century.

with this statement:

Considered as a novel-writer only, though her powers of pleasing are very great, Mrs. Smith has a few superiors among her countrywomen:

considered as a poet only, the number of these will be found exceedingly small: but, if considered, as to her union of both these characters, we know of no lady who has superior pretensions. (268)

Rivers allows Charlotte Smith a place among the best female authors of her time, and pre-eminence in her combination of skills as both poet and novelist. Although this judgement was to be re-iterated at various times in Smith's critical heritage, more often an emphasis would be laid on one or the other genre. A number of Charlotte Smith's female contemporaries, including Helen Maria Williams and Mary Robinson, published both poetry and novels, but Charlotte Smith seems to have been considered the most successful in handling the two genres. This was in part because her fictional output was considerably greater in quantity than that of Williams or Robinson.

Rivers's general evaluation of Charlotte Smith's achievement, for all its commendation, illustrates one of the important conventions of criticism at the end of the nineteenth century: the tacit division of literary accomplishment into separate male and female spheres. Rivers's evaluative rhetoric places Charlotte Smith with some precision among her female contemporaries, but because of the assumption that literature produced by men has its own standard of achievement, his rhetoric of praise is significantly qualified. One effect of this separation of literature into gendered spheres is to make it difficult to know how Charlotte Smith compared, in the opinion of contemporary critics, with the

male poets and novelists of her time. Marlon Ross has argued that in the Romantic period “[t]he male-female relation predicated by society and nature, as the poet understands such, is one of complementarity rather than contestation so that if women must be seen as competing at all for poetic mastery, they are seen as competing with other women in their own arena, not with men” (*Contours* 4). Complementarity places male and female authors in different evaluative fields, and pre-empts a whole range of relevant questions — for example, whether there was in the 1790’s any male author whose combined success as poet and novelist rivalled that of Charlotte Smith.

Nathan Drake, in his *Literary Hours, or Sketches Critical, Narrative, and Poetical* (1800) also placed Charlotte Smith evaluatively, but within a larger, and less gender-divided field, that of general literary history. Drake’s book is desultory in structure, but it attempts to be encyclopaedic in its discussion of the major genres and historical periods. In the essay on the sonnet, we find Charlotte Smith credited again as she was earlier by Coleridge and others: “... within the last forty years numerous cultivators of sonnet-writing have sprung up. Among those, we may mention with peculiar distinction Charlotte Smith and Mr. Bowles” (1:86). In another essay, “On the Poetry of the Ages of Elizabeth and the Charles’, and of the Present Reign,” the author makes an argument for the superiority of the poetry of his own period, which he calls ‘modern’, over the poetry of the earlier, ‘ancient’ period, across a broad range of poetic genres. Under the conveniently large category “Miscellaneous,” Drake cites Goldsmith, Beattie, Rogers, and Hayley as modern exemplars. He adds, along with the “*Poems of Burns*” and other works, “the *Sonnets* of Charlotte Smith and Bowles” (2:118-9). Older poets involved in

the comparison are Cowley, Raleigh, and Marlowe.

Noting that Cowley and Drummond were "... the favorites of their time" and are now "utterly neglected," Drake evokes "the mutability of popular applause" (117). His own list of "modern" poets reminds us now of the same mutability. We do not have to agree with Drake on "... the vast superiority of our miscellaneous poets over those of the Elizabethan period" in order to note that Charlotte Smith is listed here in support of an argument for the general strength of poetic production in the late eighteenth century, and that her work is being seriously compared to established canonical texts. Drake does not mention the novels, nor does he single out Smith for any particular excellence, but he does include her in a canon that has historical depth, and in which male and female authors appear together.

Rivers's and Drake's comments illustrate two major themes under which Smith's general achievement was first appreciated: the emergence of the female writer as poet and novelist, and the diversity and general excellence of 'modern' poetic literature. These two themes provided a context for the positive critical accommodation of Smith's work in her own time. But Charlotte Smith also had a more controversial fame, one which placed her work in a third late-eighteenth century context: revolutionary politics. In Thelwall's Peripatetic (1793), Charlotte Smith's experiments with the irregular sonnet appear as emblematic of larger political reforms and rebellions.² In a chapter entitled "The Sonnet," Peripatetic and Ambulator agree that the "illegitimate" form of Smith's sonnets is a "

² See J. Thompson, "John Thelwall and the Politics of Genre 1793/1793" The Wordsworth Circle 25.1 (1994): 21-25.

glorious crime — if such it be to burst the unnatural fetters of arbitrary authority, and the exert the free-born energies of the soul” (123) But conservatives found nothing to celebrate in Smith’s stylistic or political transgressions Later in the 1790’s, when the conservative reaction had set in, there appeared such texts as Reverend Richard Polwhele’s satirical poem The Unsex'd Females (1798), which used criticism and scandal-mongering to separate into two distinct groups the proper and the improper female writers Radicalism was seen at the time to be particularly attractive to women Polwhele frames as scandalous an observation made approvingly by the liberal poet George Dyer “The most sensible women . are more uniformly on the side of Liberty, than the other sex — witness a Macauley, a Barbauld, a Jebb, a Williams, a Smith” (16n, Dyers Poems 36-7)

Polwhele’s Unsex'd Females is dedicated to another conservative satirist, T.E. Mathias, “Author of The Pursuits of Literature,” which also was completed 1798 As Mathias declared in the preface to that satirical poem, “Government and Literature are now more than ever connected” (v) These anti-Jacobin satirists, backed by the Government, took their political agenda to the literary field, and did not scruple about tactics. In The Unsex'd Females Polwhele made use of the unfortunate facts of Wollstonecraft’s personal life — as they had been revealed by Godwin in his Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1797) — to attack the validity of her Revolutionary sympathies Similarly, Helen Maria Williams is treated as a traitor for moving to France and remaining there during the Revolution, and vilified as a woman of loose morals for her relationship with Stone Charlotte Smith has a unique role in Polwhele’s satirical review of female authors she is the only one among those placed in

Mary Wollstonecraft's camp who is not also accused of a personal moral lapse. This made her harder to vilify in the scandalous manner preferred by the anti-Jacobin propagandists, but it also creates the impression that she was less a target of their satire than Wollstonecraft or Williams. In fact, the conservative satirists simply had less scandal to exploit in her case.

Polwhele mentions Smith only briefly in the actual verse text of The Unsex'd Females. She is little more than listed among those who have come under the influence of "Gallic freaks" and "Gallic faith" (7): "And SMITH resign'd her power to please, / Poetic feeling and poetic ease ..." (17). But in the lengthy notes to this short poem, Polwhele provides a critical commentary on Smith which displays well the conservative position on her merits. As the verse implies, Smith is seen to have swerved from a previous respectability, and Polwhele's note spends more time appreciating her achievement than anatomizing her errors:

The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith have a pensiveness peculiarly their own: It is not the monotonous plaintiveness of Shenstone, the gloomy melancholy of Gray, or the meek subdued spirit of Collins. It is a strain of wild, yet softened sorrow, that breathes a romantic air, without losing, for a moment, its mellowness As a Novel-writer, her Ethelinde and Emmeline place her above all her contemporaries, except Mrs. D'Arblay and Mrs. Radcliffe. But why does she suffer her mind to be infected with the Gallic mania? I hope, ere this, she is completely recovered from a disorder, of which, indeed, I observed only a few slight symptoms. (18)

The proprietary medical tone of this diagnosis, which treats political activism in women as a disorder of sensibility, was common enough. Polwhele's suggestion that Smith might "recover" from her disorder indicates her unique position in his list of female writers: neither exemplary nor irretrievably lost.

Smith's critics from all periods have observed that after Desmond in 1792, she did not openly defend the French Revolution, and even made fictional and poetic heroes of ci-devant aristocrats. But she was never repentant, and felt her political opinions to be consistently liberal, as she explains in the Preface to The Banished Man (1794).

"When a man owns himself to have been in an error," says Pope, "he does but tell you that he is wiser than he was." Thus, if I had been convinced I was in an error in regard to what I formerly wrote on the politics of France, I should without hesitation avow it. I still think, however, that no native of England could help then rejoicing at the probability there was that the French nation would obtain, with very little bloodshed, that degree of freedom which we have been taught to value so highly. But I think also, that Englishmen must execrate the abuse of the name of Liberty which has followed (vii-viii)

As for her sympathy for Mary Wollstonecraft, Smith made it clear in the same year that Polwhele published The Unsex'd Females, 1798. In her preface to The Young Philosopher, Smith defends herself against a possible charge of plagiarizing Wollstonecraft.

... the incident of the confinement in a mad house ... was designed before I

saw the fragment of "The Wrongs of Woman," by a Writer whose talents I greatly honoured, and whose untimely death I deeply regret; from her I should not blush to borrow (v)

Some evidence that the admiration might have been mutual can be found in Wollstonecraft's selection of two Charlotte Smith sonnets, numbers 3 and 11, for her early pedagogical collection called The Female Reader, published in 1789 under the pseudonym "Mr. Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution." This selection was, interestingly, the earliest credited reprint of Charlotte Smith's poetry in an anthology.³ Though Polwhele is basing his judgement primarily on the political novels, he was right to consider Charlotte Smith a Wollstonecraftian writer. His inclusion of a largely favourable critical appreciation, however, shows that even ideological disapproval of Smith's work could not completely discount her achievement.

3. Living Biographies and Obituaries

Charlotte Smith's critical heritage, early and late, is deeply intertwined with her biography. Although she was never indicted with a moral fall by the critics or the press, her life was a famous one in its day, and scandalous enough. Rivers and Drake are among the very few critics from any period in the critical history who do not mention some of the

³ In December 1786, Wollstonecraft asked her publisher and friend Joseph Johnson to send her, along with other books, a copy of "Charlotte Smith's poems" (Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft 130).

salient facts of Charlotte Smith's non-literary life. Charlotte Smith's first detailed biography was a living biography, published in British Public Characters 1800-01 edited and in large part written by Richard Phillips. Although this book seems to have appeared first in 1807, after Smith's death, the biographical sketch itself shows numerous signs of referring to an author still living. Toward the end there is an asterisk note saying, "[s]ince this was written, Mrs. Smith has ceased to exist" (66).

Public Characters was not a literary journal but a directory of biographies of eminent living persons. It included a number of literary figures along with the nobility, medical men, politicians, and churchmen in each volume. The article on Charlotte Smith offers little that is obviously literary criticism, aside from an acknowledgement of her literary success. This biographical account is important in that it made public facts of Smith's private life that she had not herself revealed. The article speaks in detail of her family background, her education and her marriage, as well as her husband's financial troubles, her relations with publishers, and her long and complicated legal difficulties.

Public Characters also includes three citations from Smith's letters. We hear, in what appear to be the author's own words, that "[f]or more than a month I had shared the restraint of my husband, in a prison, amidst scenes of misery, of vice, and even of terror" (57). There is a glimpse of life in the King's Bench debtor's prison, where inmates had recently made attempts at "... blowing up the walls of the house" and where the author had spent her last night "... dressed, watching at the window, expecting every moment to witness contention and bloodshed, and perhaps be overwhelmed by the projected explosion" (57). She tells of her happy return to the countryside and her "transports" at

being reunited with her children.

Public Characters also includes, again from “a letter to a friend,” the following vivid memoir of Smith’s flight to France, accompanying her husband in his desperate attempt to avoid creditors:

My voyage was without incident; but of my subsequent journey, on a dark night of October, through the dismal hollows and almost impassible chasms of a Norman crossroad, I could give a most tremendous account. My children, fatigued almost to death, harassed by sea-sickness, and astonished at the strange noises of the French postillions, whose language they did not understand, crept close to me, while I carefully suppressed the doubts I entertained (59) whether it were possible for us to reach, without some fatal accident, the place of our destination. In the situation I then was, it was little short of a miracle that my constitution resisted, not merely the fatigues of the journey, with so many little beings clinging about me, (the youngest, whom I bore in my arms, scarce two years old) but the inconveniencies that awaited my arrival at our new abode, in which no accommodation was prepared for my weary charges. (59)

Phillips does not say to which of Smith’s “friends” the letter, or letters, are addressed. They do not turn up in the researches of McKillop, Turner or Zimmerman. And yet the voice seems continuous with Smith’s style, and the mysterious excerpts in Public Characters have been taken as authentic. The project of Public Characters was to provide living biographies, and Phillips would be unlikely to stray too far from verifiable facts

while his subjects were alive to respond.

As F.M.A. Hilbish has noted, all of Smith's early biographers borrow heavily from Public Characters. In 1807 Egerton Brydges quotes in full one passage "already given to the public" in his Censura Literaria (75). A shorter excerpt from the same passage — the release from debtor's prison — would appear in Anna Laetitia Barbauld's biographical sketch of Smith for the 1820 edition of The Old Manor House (iii). Even for Smith's sister, Mrs. Dorset — often called Smith's first biographer — Public Characters was "an apparently primary source" (Hilbish 11). But as Rufus Paul Turner pointed out, "[w]e have no evidence that [Charlotte Smith] ever read and checked the manuscript or proofs, nor do we know where Phillips obtained his information" (12). My intention here is not to question the reliability of Public Characters, or Smith's later biographers, but rather to point out that some of what we know about Charlotte Smith — even though we have it in her own words and with the authority of much repetition — comes to us through what may originally have been a breach of privacy.⁴ We recall Johnson's umbrage with Boswell

⁴ Rufus Paul Turner argues that Charlotte Smith was "... unenchanted with Phillips's work, regarding it as a vulturous enterprise," and he quotes from one of Smith's letters of 1804: "... rather try, if none of thy literary friends will die, that thou mayst tell how they lived & live thyself like a Chacal [jackal] on the carcass — for that seems most lucrative & most the rage — as witness Miss Seward, & all Mr. Phillips' late puttings forth" (qtd. Turner 12). McKillop suggests that these references "... are to Anna Seward's Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin (1804) and probably to Mrs. Barbauld's edition of Richardson's Correspondence, published by Richard Phillips" (McKillop 246). This makes sense, in that the two works are biographies of the deceased, but Smith refers to "all Mr. Phillips' late puttings forth," which in 1804 might have included an early edition of Public Characters 1800-01.

We might also question whether the Charlotte Smith excerpts are actually from letters. They have the sound of fragments from an autobiographical sketch rather than personal correspondence. The tone is slightly distanced and the narrative pace is swift and
(continued...)

for having included his letters without permission in the Account of Corsica (1768): "... who would write to men who publish letters of their friends without their leave?" (Boswell Life of Johnson 2:58) and his proviso: "... when I am dead do as you will" (2:60).

Charlotte Smith died in late October 1806, at the age of 57. The anonymous author of the obituary essay in The Annual Register (1806) suggests that "[f]rom her novels might be extracted a tolerable history of her own feelings, and of all she suffered from the harpies of the law ..." (563). The article laments — choosing a phrase with strong political connotations — that "[t]he republic of letters and the lovers of literature have sustained no inconsiderable loss in the death of Mrs. Charlotte Smith ... " (563). In the view of this critic, Smith's claim to canonical status lay in her poetry: "A fine imagination, an accomplished mind, and an early taste of infelicity, made her a poet; and her charming sonnets will live forever" (564). In this the author concurs with Nathan Drake's Literary Hours. The Annual Register also praised Smith's fiction: "Her novels are so numerous as to display a wonderful invention; for they are more diversified than could possibly be expected from the same pen She has contrived, in general, to make all her novels interesting, and has been studiously careful of her style" (563). The obituary claims that Smith had "great excellence" in characterization and that "... contrary to the usual practice of novelists, she neither heightens nor debases; she never descends to caricature, not even

⁴(...continued)

efficient. At the end of his biographical sketch of Charlotte Smith, Phillips adds in a note: "It is said, that memoirs of her literary life, drawn up by herself, together with a collection of her letters, will be published by one of the members of her family" (66). It seems at least possible that Phillips has borrowed from manuscripts of this very memoir, or perhaps from a proposal to publish, or a sample.

a lawyer" (563). With this last observation we begin to suspect that the author may not have read too widely in Charlotte Smith's fiction. Her portraits of lawyers, though by no means always comical, are almost always caricatures and debasements. The author of the Annual Register obituary apparently assumes that novels as a genre are of inferior literary value. As a writer of novels Charlotte Smith

... was so sensible of her merit ... and so desirous of her works ranking with the belle lettres of the age, that she could not endure the thought of their being considered simply as novels, but always expected them to be deemed worthy of a place in every elegant library. (563)

The Annual Register also contains some disparaging discussion of Charlotte Smith's political opinions:

Ensnared and entangled as she was in toils of the law, and suffering as she did under legal oppression, it is no wonder she should embrace those extravagant but fascinating sentiments of liberty which were promulgated in France, under pretense of founding a republic, and that she should regard with disgust that union of law and liberty which forms the beauty of the British Constitution. (564)

The author goes on to say that "[m]any of our female writers seem to have adopted the same wild notions ..." and laments, in rather unsettling imagery, that "... there seems to be a fatality attendant on real genius, that it shall always be surrounded by difficulties, and compelled, comparatively, to associate with owls and vultures, instead of eagles and nightingales ..." (564). Smith's politics and her poverty are linked in this metaphor as

equally unsavory. Even in her obituaries, Smith's sympathy with revolutionary politics — a transgression whose original scandal was now more than a decade past — stood as a serious objection to any claim made for her canonical status.

Not all of Charlotte Smith's obituaries expressed the conviction that she would have an enduring place in the canon. The European Magazine and London Review, for example, implied a disadvantage in Smith's having written out of financial need, and does not predict a lasting fame: "HER PEN was not only a mental but a pecuniary resource, which, if we consider its various and successful exertions, ought to have proved as PERMANENT as it was PROLIFIC" (qtd. Zimmerman 51). The variety and success of Charlotte Smith's works are granted, but their endurance is cast in doubt. This notice was published in November of 1806, the month after Charlotte Smith's death. The author's readiness to speak of Smith's fame in the past tense suggests that her impermanence was already evident, and also that obscurity is the predictable end of works written for immediate income.

Around this same time (1803-06) Hayley's four-volume Life and Letters of William Cowper appeared. Cowper, who died in 1800, was a friend and literary associate of Smith's, and his letters revealed, at the end of Smith's life, further details and bits of gossip from the years of her greatest productivity, the early 1790's. Though these brief references do not really constitute Charlotte Smith criticism, they nonetheless form part of her critical heritage, especially as they seem to have influenced the attitudes of later nineteenth-century critics and biographers. Cowper describes Smith, after meeting her in 1792, as " .. an amiable, agreeable woman, interesting both by her manners and her

misfortunes" (4:172). We also learn that Cowper initially found nothing objectionable in Smith's most controversial novel, Desmond (1792), with which he "... was so much pleased" that he "could not lay it down 'till supper." Cowper found in Desmond "... much ... of a political kind, and nothing to which I could not heartily subscribe" (4:190). He was less willing to declare his sympathy for the politics of The Emigrants, published later in 1792, even though it was a much less pro-Revolutionary work: "... whether my views of this matter coincide with ... Mrs. Smith's I doubt ..." (4:319). In another letter from 1793, Cowper speaks of "... a rumour ... which I have with ... confidence gainsaid, that Mrs. Smith wrote her Desmond bribed to it by the democratic party, by whom they say she is now actually supported" (4:341).

Cowper lost none of his admiration for Smith, and the publication of his letters helped to establish her position as the most pitiable figure of recent literary history. She seems to have been a virtual icon of distress for him:

The living, and they who live unhappy, they are indeed subjects of sorrow.
 And on this account poor Mrs. Smith has engrossed much of my thoughts
 and my compassion. I know not a more pitiable case. Chain'd to her desk
 like a slave to his oar, with no other means of subsistence for herself and
 her numerous children, with a broken constitution, unequal to the severe
 labour enjoin'd her by necessity, she is indeed to be pitied. It is easy to
 foresee that ... she will and must e'er long die a martyr to her exigencies.
 (4:281)

Ironically, Smith outlived Cowper by six years. But his image of Smith as a slave to her

imposed literary labours would be an enduring one, and we can see in the above passage a strange consequence of Smith's extreme of distress: the sympathy it caused in the more sensitive-minded could be so intense that her death — as some of her own sonnets suggested — could be presented as a kind of relief

In the spring of 1807 another obituary appeared in the Monthly Magazine. The article appears under "Memoirs of Eminent Persons" and is sympathetic with the author. Now that both of the principals were deceased, it was possible to say that "... in her behavior toward her husband, [Mrs Smith] tried to give him that consequence, which she was conscious he was little entitled to ..." (245). On a more literary note, after recalling that some of her novels "... brought on her much undeserved abuse," the author concludes with the generous and adversarial claim that "... the idle remarks of the stupid, the unfeeling, or the envious, either are, or will be forgotten, while the brilliancy of Mrs. Smith's genius will shine with undiminished lustre, as long as the English language exists" ([23 April, 1807] 248). Despite such predictions, Charlotte Smith's genius did not shine undiminished in the following decades.

4. Vindication and Decline

Charlotte Smith's lengthiest and most enthusiastic posthumous appreciation was written in 1807 by the novelist, poet, and literary memoirist Egerton Brydges. It provides a refreshing contrast to the ambiguities and obliquities of the shorter obituary reviews, and

warrants examination in some detail. In his periodically published Censura Literaria, Brydges provides, along with an obituary of Smith, a biographical sketch, a defense of her writing, and excerpts from her poetry. Brydges thought highly of Smith's fiction as well, recalling that her first novel, Emmeline (1788), " ... displayed such a simple energy of language, such an accurate and lively delineation of character, such a purity of sentiment, and such exquisite scenery ... as gave it a hold upon all readers of true taste, of a new and most captivating kind" (4:77). He provides an insight into the status of the novel as a genre in the late 1780's when he describes Emmeline's contemporary readers. "All that part of the public, who, though they were disgusted with the usual contents of a circulating library, yet had fancy and feeling enough to judge for themselves in spite of prejudice, received this enchanting fiction with a new kind of delight" (4:77). Brydges's praise is extended to Smith's subsequent novels: "... whatever wonder may be excited by this first effort, it will yet be increased when we recollect that for several successive years, she still produced others with equal felicity, with an imagination still unexhausted, and a command of language, and variety of character, which have not yet received their due commendation." Even in this claim for excellence, there is the suggestion of potential neglect. Brydges does not himself provide the "commendation" he says is "not yet received," and we sense that he does not expect to see it. At the end of his essay, Brydges moves to what seemed to be securer ground: "Of Mrs. Smith's poetry it is not easy to speak in terms too high Her name ... is sure to live among the most favoured of the Muse . ." (4:84).

Brydges's appreciation of Charlotte Smith's writings is inextricably involved in his

admiration of her character, and his sympathy for her misfortunes:

How a mind oppressed with sorrows and injuries of the deepest dye, and loaded with hourly anxieties of the most pressing sort, could be endowed with strength and elasticity to combine and throw forth such visions with a pen dipped in all the glowing hues of a most playful and creative fancy, fills me with astonishment and admiration! (4.77-8)

Brydges's Censura Literaria essay is a significant statement on Smith's work and reputation not only because of its earnestness and its rhetorical intensity, but also because of its defensive stance. In the various charges against Smith that Brydges attempts to answer, we can see the various critical attitudes that were hindering her canonization.

Although he had access to some published biographical material, namely Phillips's Public Characters, Brydges admits "I am totally unacquainted with the character of Mrs. Smith from any other source than her writings; but I consider those writings to furnish ample grounds for the delineation both of her intellectual and moral portrait" (4:79). Here again the autobiographical element of Smith's writing is acknowledged. The most important aspect of Smith's life for Brydges, and for other sympathetic critics, was that it was a life of protracted suffering and unjust hardship, facts which had already been made clear by the author herself in her poetry and novels. For Brydges, a defense of this author's work was much the same thing as a defense of her character.

The more general and insidious charges to which Brydges alludes are dismissed with a peremptory contempt.

Whenever ... I have heard dark hints of the harshness of her temper, or the

freedom of her principles, I have been not only skeptical, but indignant; and have attributed these foul aspersions to that narrow envy and never-ceasing malice, which constantly attend on Genius, when it carries itself high, and will not bend to the follies and servilities of the world I do not blame those imbecile and yielding spirits, which only smile or weep at the hand of the oppressor, and dare not lift a hand to defend themselves from insult or injustice, but I cannot admire them (4.80)

The high rhetoric of this passage is intensified by a rather startling metaphor, with quite different associations than the “owls and vultures” evoked by the author of the Annual Register.

.. when great talents and superior taste are under the inflictions of adverse fortune, they are considered by stupidity and hard-heartedness as the fair victims on which they may indulge their vengeance and hatred Then they conceive that the lion is chained down, disarmed of his claws, and they may commence their cowardly and cruel sports upon him with impunity! If he growls, or lifts a paw .. he commits an unpardonable offense ... (4:80)

Descending from these heights (or rising out of these depths), Brydges acknowledges that “the quickness of Mrs Smith’s penetration, and the boldness of her temper impelled her sometimes to speak unwelcome truths to some of the persons concerned in her affairs .. This might be imprudent in point of self-interest, but surely it neither detracted from her virtue, nor from her claims to respect and admiration” (4 80-1). Brydges seems to be reacting to gossip and prevailing opinions, which he calls “dark hints,” rather than any

specific texts.

Brydges emphasizes the virtues of Smith's fictional heroines, their "elevated simplicity and unaffected purity of heart," and then exclaims

Yet this is the writer, whose works have been deemed immoral! Immoral, by whom? By people who read with pleasure of fashionable intrigues

Who delight in the filthy amours of Tom Jones, and Peregrine Pickle! Who are enraptured with stories of ghosts, and robberies, and rapes and murders! (4:81)

This may be excessive, and probably unfair to the anonymous critics themselves, but it does indicate one reason Charlotte Smith's work may have been avoided by a certain type of reader. Brydges also dramatizes the uncertain moral status of fiction in the Romantic period.

Closely related to the charge of immorality is the charge that "... there is a deficiency of religion in her works." Brydges's reaction acknowledges the trend toward the morally didactic in novels written by women at the beginning of the nineteenth century: "Are novels then to be tried by the rules of a sermon? It seems to have been her plan to pourtray [sic] virtue attractive by its own loveliness; and to leave it to divines to set forth the more awful motives of the Revealed Word!" (4:82). But Brydges saves what he considers the two most genuine and most concealed charges for last:

... are these the real causes, why the admirable productions of this fair writer have been thus depreciated? I think not. In some the prejudice was founded on her political principles. She was an approver of the origin of

the French Revolution, and in Desmond spoke with too much bitterness of the privileged orders; and of the abuses of ancient institutions. Is there no freedom of opinion in this country? Is there no forgiveness for one, who was smarting under unjust oppression ...?" (4:83)

On this point Brydges exhibits his tolerance as well as his sensibility. He was not himself a sympathizer even with the early phase of the Revolution.⁵

If the prejudice against Smith's politics was strongest for some critics, others found that "... her touches of character were too nice ... they laid open the obliquities of the heart, or the head, with too keen a pen" (4:83). Brydges does not elaborate on this point, and it seems as if he might simply mean that Smith's minor character sketches, her satires on corrupt or coquettish types, were too close to home for some readers. But he moves quickly to the matter of Smith's realism — "... some taxed her ... with a departure from real life. The reverse seems to be true." Brydges is referring here to the psychological realism of Smith's novels, to her knowledge of the heads and hearts of her heroes and heroines as well as the follies of her minor characters. That this might result in a prejudice against her suggests the rarity and the unconventionality of certain kinds of realism when they appeared in the novel of the period. Egerton Brydges's vindication of Charlotte Smith was the only one of its kind in the years following her death, but was reprinted several times in later and retitled editions of Censura Literaria, the last of which was his

⁵ J.M.S. Tompkins, in her Popular Novel in England 1770-1800, describes Brydges as a "refined and stubborn Tory" (327) and notes that the hero of his novel Arthur Fitz-Albini (1798) "cleaves to all those loyalties which the philosophers assailed, to glory, rank, faith and spotless honour" (328). Had Brydges been of the same political camp as Smith, we might be more skeptical of his praise.

Imaginative Biography (1834).

After the obituary period, Smith's next group of critics were those who contributed to the literary selection of her works, that posthumous process whereby the major works of an author are singled out for republication or special critical attention. In 1810, the renowned poet, anthologist, and children's writer Anna Laetitia Barbauld edited an ambitious series called The British Novelists. She chose to include one novel by Charlotte Smith: The Old Manor House. In this series, Smith appears in the company of the familiar male novelists of the eighteenth century: Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, Sterne. Aphra Behn, Fanny Burney and Ann Radcliffe are among the female novelists included. Implicitly, The Old Manor House is judged to be among the best novels in the language. Barbauld includes as much biography as criticism in her introduction to Smith's novel, and makes an important general observation concerning the relation between her life and work. After referring to the aggravated inheritance litigations which "plunged them [Smith and her husband] into lawsuits for life," Barbauld concludes that "[t]he vexations attending these perplexities, together with the pecuniary embarrassments she was continually involved in, clouded the serenity of Mrs. Smith's mind, and gave to her writings that bitter and querulous tone of complaint which is discernible in so many of them" (ii). Barbauld leaves open the possibility that not all of Smith's works are equally marked by this tone of complaint, but her comment is a general qualification of Smith's literary achievement, and is meant to apply to her "writings" as a whole, both fiction and poetry.

The conventions of poetry allowed for the introduction of a certain degree of

personal complaint, but Barbauld suggests that in both genres Smith approached or exceeded the proper limits:

Poets are apt to complain, and often take a pleasure in it; yet they should remember that the pleasure of their readers is only derived from the elegance and harmony with which they do it. The reader is a selfish being, and seeks only his own gratification. But for the language of complaint in plain prose, or the exasperations of personal resentment, he has seldom much sympathy. It is certain, however, that the life of this lady was a very chequered one. (v)

The invocation of a selfish reader may be Barbauld's device for distancing herself from the critical judgement that she is relating, and from those readers who had no sympathy for Charlotte Smith's distresses. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that the major perceived limitation of Smith's writing was this propensity to include personal complaint, and by doing so to exceed the limit of the reader's sympathy.

Broad as it is, this is Barbauld's only major negative criticism of Smith's work. The poetry reveals "... a fine imagination, an ear and a taste for harmony, [and] an elegant and correct style ..." (ii). In both poetry and fiction Smith's "descriptive talent ... forms a striking aspect of her genius" (iv). The morality of her work is only mentioned in connection with her early translation of Prévost's *Manon l'Escaut*, "... a work of affecting pathos, though exceptionable with regard to its moral tendency" (iv). Smith's own novels, "... though not of the first order ... hold a respectable rank among that class of publications [T]hey show a knowledge of life, and of genteel life; and there is much beauty in the

descriptive scenery, which Smith was one of the first to introduce” (vi). Smith is carefully placed in the second order of novelists, despite her appearance in this selective series of reprints. Barbauld explains this critical judgement by referring to a generalized weakness in the novels: they possess the distinguishing characteristics of a “... knowledge of life, and a facility of expression, without having any very strong features, or particularly aiming to illustrate any moral truth” (vii). According to Barbauld, “[t]he two most finished novels of Mrs. Smith are Emmeline and Celestina” (vii). The only reason given for her selection of The Old Manor House for republication is that it “is said to be the most popular of the author’s productions” (vii). Why this would have been the most popular of Smith’s novels in the decades after her death is only hinted at. Barbauld mentions that the novel is set during the war with America, and that “... the author takes occasion, as also in many other of her publications, to show the strain of her politics” (vii). In “many other” of her publications, including Celestina, Smith’s occasion for political commentary was the French Revolution, a much more contentious issue than the earlier American revolution, especially as the war with Republican France was still on in 1810.

The next important text in the critical history was originally intended as an introduction to another reprint of The Old Manor House, in the discontinued series Ballantyne’s Novelists’ Library. The essay appeared first in the pirated Italian edition of Scott’s Lives of the Novelists (1825), but was soon reprinted along with other novel prefaces in his Miscellaneous Prose Works (1827). It is an unusual combination of a biography by one author, Charlotte Smith’s sister Mrs. Dorset, and a critical introduction by another, namely Scott. Mrs. Dorset’s memoir comprises the first and larger part of the

essay, and is considered one of the most authoritative biographies, even though the author often defers to earlier accounts, especially Phillip's Public Characters. There is a good deal of personal feeling in both Mrs. Dorset's and Walter Scott's contributions, and in tone the piece is more like Brydges's posthumous essay than Barbauld's introduction to The Old Man or House. Mrs. Dorset is telling the story of a member of her family, and she is understandably defensive and affectionate. She concentrates on Charlotte Smith's family life — her marriage, her children, her financial situation — rather than her literary life, referring to Brydges for the dates of her works and saying of the moral and political controversy over Desmond, "I leave its defense to an abler pen .." (Miscellaneous Prose 4:94-95). She does reveal, however, a popular prejudice when she admits that Smith's introduction of politics "... was sinning against good taste in a female writer ..." (4:95). Mrs. Dorset's consideration of the religious values in Charlotte Smith's work updates in a telling way the defense made by Brydges:

By some she has been censured, because there is no religion in her works, though I believe there is not a line that implies the want of it in herself, I am of opinion that Mrs. Smith would have considered it as a subject much too sacred to be ... brought forward in a work of fiction adapted for the hours of relaxation Nor was it then the fashion of the day, as it has become since. No one then took up a novel in the expectation of finding a sermon. "Religious Courtships" had not been revived, nor had Coelebs commenced his peregrinations in Search of a Wife. (4:95)

If the novel became, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a more sermonizing genre

under the influence of such texts as Hannah More's Coelebs in Search of a Wife (1809), then Mrs. Smith's novels would be prone to neglect in this same period.

Through her revelations about Smith's more private griefs — her unhappy marriage, her struggles to save her children from epidemic fevers, her own chronic illness, or the loss of several of her children during her lifetime — Mrs. Dorset increases the sadness of an already sad biography. She is also able to supply an account of Smith's early education, and the happy childhood that she so often contrasts to her adult life in her poetry.

Although Mrs. Dorset was Charlotte Smith's sister, she does not show complete approval for what was, after her political opinions, the most scandalous aspect of Smith's life, her separation from her husband. It was understood in Smith's lifetime, as is evidenced in her obituaries, that Benjamin Smith was not a good husband. Most writers assumed that Charlotte's reasons for leaving him were more than valid. But Mrs. Dorset's comments on the matter show how even a sympathetic sister could wish the separation had been handled differently:

Though the decisive step she had taken in quitting her husband's house, was perhaps, under the then existing circumstances, unavoidable, yet I have been told, that the manner was injudicious, and that she should have insisted on previous legal arrangements, and secured to herself the enjoyment of her own fortune. That she was liable to much censure, was a matter of course; but those who knew the dessous des cartes, could only regret that the measure had not been adopted years before. (4:94)

Mrs. Dorset's memoir gives the reader a measured glimpse of this "dessous des cartes"

when she quotes an unidentified letter of Smith's, perhaps to herself, in which she uses strong language indeed to describe her early married life.

. the more my mind expanded, the more I became sensible of personal slavery, the more I improved and cultivated my understanding, the further I was removed from those with whom I was condemned to pass my life, and the more clearly I saw by these newly acquired lights the horror of the abyss into which I had unconsciously plunged. (4 91)

This, along with the excerpts in Public Characters, would become one of the most often quoted statements by Charlotte Smith. It is an intimate confession, moving in its grim yet believable hyperbole. And yet it is not to be found in anything Charlotte Smith signed her name to, only in her sister's biographical sketch.⁶ The power of Smith's words is mitigated by Mrs. Dorset's cool summary of their import. The citation reveals the "indefinable restlessness and impatience, of which [Charlotte Smith] had long been conscious without comprehending .." The probable source of this ennui is "[t]he consciousness of her own superiority" (4 91). With the authority, and perhaps also the bias of a sister, Mrs. Dorset's interpretation leaves the high rhetoric of Charlotte Smith's complaint in doubt, and suggests that she was exaggerating her sorrows.

Mrs. Dorset's concluding defense of Smith's character, a rhetorical turn similar to that taken by Brydges, has a surprisingly unmelancholy emphasis

Those who have formed their ideas of her from her works, and even from

⁶ Again (see note above) we can observe a strongly narrative quality to the quote from Charlotte Smith. Mrs. Dorset calls it an excerpt from an unspecified letter, but I would suggest that this, too, may belong to a lost memoir.

what she says, in her moments of despondency, of herself, have naturally conclude d that she was of a melancholy disposition; but nothing could be more erroneous. Cheerfulness and gayety were the natural characteristics of her mind Even in the darkest periods of her life, she possessed the power of abstracting herself from her cares; and, giving play to the sportiveness of her imagination, could make even the difficulties she was labouring under subjects of merriment, placing both persons and things in such ridiculous points of view, and throwing out such sallies of pleasantry, that it was impossible not to be delighted with her wit (4:95)

Some of Charlotte Smith's poetry exhibits this gayety of character, for example the poem "Thirty-Eight" (Poems 92-4), which is modelled on Johnson's "To Mrs. Thrale, On Her Completing her Thirty-Fifth Year" (The Poems of Samuel Johnson 204-05), and in her satirical or comic portraits of secondary characters in her novels Mrs. Dorset speaks of Charlotte Smith's

... epigrammatic turn; she particularly exulted in little pieces of humourous poetry, in which she introduces so much fancy and elegance, that one cannot but regret, that, though some of them still exist, they are unintelligible except to the very few survivors who may yet recollect, with melancholy pleasure, the circumstances that gave rise to them. She was very successful in parodies, and did not even spare her own poetry. (4:95)

Given Mrs. Dorset insistence that the unpublished papers of her sister "were, without exception, committed to the flames" after she died, she must be referring here to poems

such as “Thirty-Eight.” And yet Smith’s comic and satirical poems, though rare, are hardly unintelligible. Mrs. Dorset’s comment remains a puzzle.⁷

With her memoir, Mrs. Dorset added a work to the complete poetry, Smith’s last and valedictory poem, the previously unpublished “To my lyre.” In Dorset’s opinion, “Mrs. Smith’s reputation rests less on her prose works, (which were frequently hastily written, in sickness and in sorrow,) than on her poetry” (4:95). Hasty writing, however, may not have been such a forced activity for Charlotte Smith, who spoke, according to her sister, with “... uncommon rapidity, as if her ideas flowed too fast for utterance” (4:95). Walter Scott was an admirer of novels, and at the beginning of the commentary appended to Mrs. Dorset’s memoir, takes “the liberty somewhat to differ from the obliging correspondent ... where she considers Mrs. Smith’s prose so much inferior to her poetry” (4:95). Scott acknowledges that

[t]he elegance, the polish, the taste, and the feeling of this highly gifted lady, may no doubt be traced in Mrs. Charlotte Smith’s poetry. But for her invention, that highest property of genius, her knowledge of the human bosom, her powers of natural description, her wit, and her satire, the reader must seek in her prose narratives. (4:96)

⁷ There is some bitter humour in the letters, and at one point in Turner’s study we are given a sample of epigrammatic wit that provides a clue to more. Turner cites a letter to Sarah Rose, July 30, 1804. After a description of legal delays relating to her sometime benefactor Lord Egremont, Smith concludes,

It is amazingly wearying. I shall leave it among my Aphorisms to my Grandchildren — Never to put their trust in a Lord. (qtd. Turner 74)

This might suggest that Aphorisms were actually being collected, perhaps as part of the memoir mentioned above.

Scott qualifies his description of Charlotte Smith's wit by saying that "Mrs. Smith's powers of satire were great, but they seldom exhibit a playful or light character ..." (4:96). The most unpleasant of her minor characters "... are drawn so as to be detested rather than laughed at," and at her foolish characters "... we smile in scorn, but without sympathy" (4:96). This may seem a rather limited estimate of a style which shows "great" powers of satire, but in order to put Scott's judgement in perspective, we need to note that by the time he wrote this essay, Jane Austen's works had appeared. Scott mentions Austen favourably at the end of his commentary, and might have had her playful and sympathetic satire in mind as he described Smith's less subtle tactics. Although Scott does not praise Smith for levity, he does mention one of the funniest details from The Old Manor House, in which he recognizes a satire on Mrs. Smith's husband: "... the whimsical projector, who hoped to make a fortune by manuring his estate with old wigs" (4:96).

Scott refers to The Old Manor House as Smith's "chef-d'oeuvre," and praises her fiction as a whole for its realism in natural description, characterization, and dialogue. He also remarks on the social range, or what we might call the variety of speech genres, in Smith's fiction: "She is uniformly happy in supplying them [her characters] with language fitted to their station in life; nor are there many dialogues to be found which are at once so entertaining, and approach so nearly to truth and reality" (4:97). He admits that "[t]he most deficient part of Mrs. Smith's novels, is unquestionably the plot ...," but he also points out, perhaps again with Jane Austen in mind, that a unified plot is "one of the rarest attainments of art" (4:97), and thus not always a feature of novels otherwise acclaimed as great works.

Scott eventually "... allude[s] to the general tone of melancholy which pervades her composition, and of which every one who has read the preceding Memoir can no longer be at a loss to assign the cause" (4:97). He acknowledges that "[t]he sky, though it uniformly lours upon us through Mrs. Smith's narrations, breaks forth on the conclusion, and cheers the scene when we are about to part from it . . .," but he suggests that readers with distresses of their own "... relish better those narratives which steal them from a sense of sorrow" (4:97). His comments are strongly influenced by the biography which precedes them, as is evident in his conclusion, which expounds upon a biographical rather than a literary consideration:

.. the works on which she was obliged, often reluctantly, to labour, were seldom undertaken from free choice If there is a mental drudgery which lowers the spirits and lacerates the nerves, like the toil of a slave, it is that which is exacted by literary composition when the heart is not in unison with the work upon which the head is employed. (4:97)

Scott's sympathy for the author's misfortunes sets up a debilitating division between the rational motivations and the emotional inclinations of her works, so that they become the result of "mental drudgery" — hardly suggestive of an appealing literary product. Scott confesses, in what for me is an ominous note, that "... we write without having Mrs. Smith's works before us" (4:95), not even The Old Manor House, the novel which his essay was originally intended to introduce. Mrs. Dorset's memoir, on the other hand, is directly before him, and his critical commentary illustrates quite clearly the discouraging and potentially distorting effect of Charlotte Smith's biography upon her critical

appreciation. The fact that Scott has none of Smith's novels before him may suggest that they were becoming rare texts.⁸ Barbauld's edition of The Old Manor House, printed in 1810 and 1820, was among the very few reprints of any of her novels in the nineteenth century.⁹

Because Scott does not have Smith's novels before him as he writes, he must rely on memory for his critical commentary. As a result, the novels themselves become associated with a past era, and Scott's focus often shifts to observations on changing literary taste, including his own personal literary taste, rather than an evaluation of Charlotte Smith's writing. By the time Scott wrote his essay, the Ballantyne's project of a series of novels had been abandoned, and he was free to discuss Smith's other works of fiction. Although he was no doubt the "abler pen" to whom Mrs. Dorset defers for judgement on the controversial politics and morality of Desmond, Scott avoids any mention of Smith's politics, or of that particular novel.¹⁰ But in his discussion, or recollection, of Emmeline, Smith's first novel, Scott does reveal an interesting historical

⁸ Scott owned a fairly large number of Smith's novels, and may simply have been separated from his library when he was writing this essay. A note in R.D. Mayo's dissertation "The Waverley Novels in their Relation to Gothic Fiction" (1938) lists Ethelinde, Celestina, Desmond, The Old Manor House, The Banished Man, Montalbert, and Marchmont as holdings of his library (155n23). Mayo's source is The Catalogue of the Library of Abbotsford (Edinburgh 1838).

⁹ Hilbish lists only one reprint of a Charlotte Smith novel other than The Old Manor House in this period: an 1814 edition of Ethelinde (582).

¹⁰ Around the time when Scott would have been polishing his critical preface for publication as part of the Miscellaneous Prose, we find a journal entry mentioning Desmond: "In the evening after dinner read Mrs. Charlotte Smith's Desmond, decidedly the worst of her compositions ..." (The Journal of Sir Walter Scott 115 [May 16, 1826]).

perspective on the question of the morality of her fiction:

One fault, we well remember, struck us, and other young readers such as we then were. There is (or at least there was, for it may have passed away since we experienced such sensations), a strain of chivalrous feeling in the mind of youth, which objects to all change and shadow of turning on the part of the hero and the heroine of the novel It may be said by some that this is a boarding school objection. All we can answer is that we felt it natural at the time when we read the book. (4:96)

Scott is referring to the fact that, in the novel, Emmeline breaks off her engagement to her first suitor in preference for a more virtuous man. Scott's attitude is ambivalent.

Although he re-iterates his youthful response, he also laments the increasingly strict moral expectations of readers and novelists alike in the decades following Smith's novels: "... prudence, as it is in a distinguished manner the virtue, so it is in some sense the vice of the present time ..." (4:96). His equivocations do not explicitly exonerate Smith for introducing "... change and the shadow of turning" in the behaviour of her protagonists, but he does place the critical disapproval of this aspect of her fiction in historical perspective, implicitly suggesting that her novels transgressed popular taste only, not the rules of morality.

This essay by Dorset and Scott is a double text in more than its authorship. The question of the relative merits of the poetry and fiction of Charlotte Smith is explicitly raised and then implicitly suspended between the differing opinions of the two writers. And two slightly different tones are present as well, the personal melancholy associated

with the poetry and emphasized by Dorset, and the satirical tendency of the fiction emphasized by Scott. Walter Scott is actually the first critic to argue for the superiority of Smith's novels over her poetry, but the weight of his opinion seems to have served to equalize the balance. The double essay became, as part of the collected works of a major nineteenth-century author, one of the most readily available pieces of Charlotte Smith criticism, more widely available, in fact, than her works themselves. The unresolved contradictions of this essay would animate later criticism, and ensure that Charlotte Smith was remembered as much for her fiction as for her poetry. At the same time the essay is a testimony to the fact that as early as the 1820's and 30's, Charlotte Smith was more remembered than read.

5. The Mid-century: Anthologies and Sketches

Charlotte Smith's poems continued to be more visible than her novels, partly because they could easily be excerpted and anthologized. In 1825, a large and scholarly anthology entitled Specimens of British Poetesses was published, containing a substantial selection of Smith's work: seven of her sonnets and five poems from her posthumously published Beachy Head (1807), including a lengthy excerpt from the title poem (lines 282-367). The anthology was selected and introduced by Alexander Dyce, with whom

Wordsworth corresponded.¹¹ In his brief Preface, the status of women's poetry within literary history is described in a way that is worth quoting, for it expresses well the paradoxical position of female poets and the peculiar dynamics of the separation of literary activity into gendered spheres. Dyce's preface opens with what sounds like an early version of male feminism:

Of the selections which have been made from the chaos of our past Poetry, the majority has been confined almost entirely to the writings of men; and from the great Collections of the English Poets, where so many worthless compositions find a place, the productions of women have been carefully excluded. (iii)

According to Dyce, the "small quantity" of female poetry, and its "concealment in obscure publications, have perhaps contributed to this neglect," but his second paragraph contains a more compelling reason, and reveals the thematic and biological division on which the separation of literary spheres is founded:

It is true that the grander inspirations of the Muse have not been often breathed into the softer frame. The magic tones which have added a new existence to the heart — the tremendous thoughts which have almost changed the character of nations, — these have not proceeded from woman; but her sensibility, her tenderness, her grace, have not been lost

¹¹ Wordsworth wrote to Alexander Dyce in 1830, requesting that "If a second edition of your 'Specimens' should be called for, you might add... a few more from Charlotte Smith, particularly

I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night."
(The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth 5:260).

nor misemployed: her genius has gradually risen with the opportunities which facilitated its ascent. (iv)

Dyce predicts that more impressive anthologies of "Poetesses" than his own will appear in "future centuries" because "... the mind, and, above all, the female mind, is making a rapid advance" (iv-v). But his championing of the advancement of women in literature does not lead him to suggest that these future anthologies will include poetry of "grander inspiration" or "tremendous thought."

Charlotte Smith's poetry is, to a large extent, accurately described by Dyce's general characterization of female genius. But among her poetic efforts were some sustained attempts at more "tremendous" themes. The long poem on political exile entitled The Emigrants (1791) would fit into this category, no matter how broadly defined, as would parts of Beachy Head (1807), which unites landscape and history. But Dyce does not mention The Emigrants, and his excerpt from Beachy Head is an extended description of a natural scene. It is an impressive segment, and one that clearly conveys an important aspect of Smith's poetic innovation, but it does not suggest the discursive range of the poem from which it is drawn.

The brief headnote to Dyce's selection presents what was likely a prevailing image of Charlotte Smith's life: her art is seen as an almost accidental result of her misfortunes, a means of making money. The dramatic descent from gentry to Grub Street appears all the more precipitous because of the attempted objectivity of the account:

The daughter of Nicholas Turner, Esq., who possessed estates in Surrey and Sussex, was married, when very young, to Mr. Smith, the son of a

West India merchant. The affairs of her husband having proved unprosperous, Mrs. Smith experienced much harsh treatment from his creditors, shared his imprisonment, and, after a series of misfortunes, died at Thetford. Her poems, novels, and other works, which were favourably received by the public, gained her a subsistence. (254)

The critical commentary Dyce provides is equally brief, and equally limiting in its implications. The sonnets, although seven are included in the anthology (#2, 4, 7, 27, 36, 49, 58), are ranked for the first time below the later poems, particularly those from Beachy Head. Their reputation is even treated with some condescension: "The 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" (254). Like Brydges, Dyce quotes generously (lines 282-367) from the late long poem Beachy Head and includes, for the first time in an anthology, the poem "St. Monica," from which Wordsworth was soon to borrow a poetic form and a theme as well. Dyce's selections reinforce his judgement that Smith's later poetry is superior in quality to the sonnets. Unfortunately, Dyce's skepticism toward the reputation of Smith's sonnets was more often echoed by later critics than his relatively high opinion of her late poems. In Dyce's headnote, Smith is recommended by only a very few characteristic strengths: her natural descriptions of "rural scenery" and her botanically accurate portrayal of flowers. The high praise of some of her contemporary critics has now been replaced by an attempt at a precise literary-historical placing, and by a very modest estimate of her significance.

In 1835 Wordsworth published Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems, which included

“Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees Heads, on the Coast of Cumberland.” In the note to this poem, published with the volume, Wordsworth acknowledges Charlotte Smith’s influence:

The form of stanza in this poem, and something of the style of versification, are adopted from the “St. Monica,” a poem of much beauty upon 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; for in point of time her earlier writings preceded, I believe, those of Cowper and Burns. (Poetical Works 4:403)

Although this note has led, until recently, a rather quiet existence, it does form part of Charlotte Smith’s critical heritage, and provides an early indication of an influence on Wordsworth. The note both remembers Charlotte Smith and re-inforces her obscurity. We will return to this note in my discussion of Smith’s “St. Monica” and its influence on “St. Bees ...” in chapter 6. For now I would simply point out the ambiguity of Wordsworth’s central statement that Charlotte Smith was “a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered.” What does Wordsworth mean by this, and what does he know that makes him so sure of his prediction? The statement may be an acknowledgement of the general failure of poets to give Smith her due. It may also be an acknowledgement of Wordsworth’s own failure to make his obligations known. After all, by 1835 he was himself fully ensconced in the

establishment of “English verse.”

Wordsworth’s statement that Smith wrote little and unambitiously is also curious, and only true on the quantitative side if we compare her output — and only in poetry — to Wordsworth’s own voluminous production. Smith’s ambition we have already noted. There is the possibility, with no collected works of Charlotte Smith available in 1833, that Wordsworth was not familiar with all her poetry. In Alexander Dyce’s Reminiscences Wordsworth is quoted as having said that “St. Monica” was a poem “... I had never read till I saw it in your Specimens of British Poetesses” (187). If this poem could inspire Wordsworth to metrical and thematic imitation more than twenty years after its first publication, the rest of Charlotte Smith’s poetic works may have come to his attention even later.

Charlotte Smith’s next appearance in nineteenth-century literary discourse was in Anne Katherine Elwood’s Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England, published in London in 1843. The essay on Smith is biographical rather than critical, and synthesizes the information already made available in Public Characters, Mrs. Dorset’s memoir and elsewhere. Ellwood does not venture any new critical judgements, and in general avoids close discussion of Smith’s works. She does, however, attempt to provide a complete list of Smith’s publications, the first such list to be published. Ellwood misses only Smith’s one drama What Is She?, and includes no works that have since proven to be spurious attributions. On the matter of Smith’s politics in Desmond, Ellwood is apologetic but not indignant:

Mrs. Smith was somewhat severely criticized ... by politicians adverse to

the French Revolution, for having therein somewhat advocated the cause; but when she was in France, she had seen the degradation of the people, and the oppression of the aristocracy, and possibly deemed any change must be for the better, unwitting of the ferocious scenes of licentiousness and anarchy that were afterwards to ensue. Politics are certainly out of their place in a novel (301)

Although it contains little original research or revision of critical judgements, Ellwood's biography helped to maintain Smith's visibility in the mid-century, and made her life story one among the many that were familiar to Victorian readers of literary biography.

Smith's academic minority in the nineteenth century was confirmed by her appearance in Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature, first published in 1844. The entry is brief, and the critical commentary is a concise synthesis of prevailing opinions, especially those of Dyce and Scott:

The poetry of Mrs. Smith is elegant and sentimental, and generally of a pathetic cast. She wrote as if 'melancholy had marked her for her own.'

The keen satire and observation evinced in her novels do not appear in her verse; but the same powers of description are displayed. Her sketches of English scenery are true and pleasing. (2:273)

The section quoted from Beachy Head, lines 297-350, is part of the longer excerpt given by Dyce. Chambers summarizes the pattern of Smith's novel-writing career that was narrated first by Mrs. Dorset. After three acclaimed and successful novels, Smith "imbibed the opinions of the French Revolution" and published Desmond: "This work

arrayed against her many of her friends and readers, but she regained the public favour by her tale, the Old Manor House, which is the best of her novels” (2 274)

One of the most unusual contributions to Charlotte Smith’s critical history was made by the poet and essayist Leigh Hunt, who discusses Smith in a much livelier fashion than the scholarly anthologist Dyce, and in a more critical, if more cavalier fashion than Ellwood or Chambers. Hunt was one of the major figures of Romantic biographical and auto-biographical writing, and helped to inaugurate a new, less adversarial style of literary criticism. This and his liberal politics seem to have interested him in Smith as a literary figure and as a personality. But we can also infer on Hunt’s part a serious and relatively high estimation of her writing. In his late collection of essays Men, Women and Books (1847), Charlotte Smith appears in three different contexts. Her first appearance is indirect, in a humourous essay entitled “A Novel Party,” a clever fantasia on the conceit that characters from fiction could actually meet and converse in the company of the reader.

But as we have no other certainty of the existence of the grossest bodies, than by their power to resist or act upon us . . . I beg leave to ask the candid reader, how he can prove to me that all the heroes and heroines that have made him hope, fear, admire, hate, love, shed tears, and laugh till his sides were ready to burst, in novels and poems, are not in possession of as perfect credentials of their existence as the fattest of us? (1 97)

Hunt relates how he transported himself, with the use of his “Wishing cap” (1 98), into a company of “. . . immortal though familiar creatures . . . the heroes and heroines of the

wonderful persons who have lived among us, the Novelists” (1:99).

The imaginary scene is described as a confusion of old and new fashions in dress. Hunt specifies that the get-together takes place on February 15, perhaps indicating carnival, and lists the company as follows:

Conceive how I felt, when I discovered that the gentleman and lady I was sitting next to, were Captain and Mrs. Booth; and that another couple on my left, very brilliant and decorous, were no less people than Sir Charles and my Lady Grandison! In the centre were Mr. and Mrs. Roderick Random; Lieutenant Thomas Bowling, of the Royal Navy; Mr. Morgan, a Welch gentleman; Mr. and Mrs. Peregrine Pickle; Mr. Fathom, a methodist — (a very ill looking fellow) — Sir George Paradyne, and Mr.

Hermesprong; Mr. Desmond, with his friend Waverley, (a relation of the more famous Waverley) and other persons too numerous to mention.

(1:99)

The company, not surprisingly, gravitates into groups with similar tastes and opinions, one of which consists of “the Hermesprongs, Desmonds, and others” (106), whose politics cause them to enter into a “controversy with the Grandisons.” Civility prevails, however:

The conclusion of the company seemed to be, that if the world were to be made different from what it is, the change would be effected rather by the philosophies of these gentlemen than the seraphics of the other party; but the general opinion was, that it would be altered by neither, and that in the mean time, “variety was charming;” a sentiment which the Vicar of

Wakefield took care to explain to his wife. (1:107)

By 1847 Revolutionary political opinions had become part of the characterization of the recent period of literary history, and could be contained within a larger, comic discourse. Hunt's conjuration of the hero of Smith's most controversial novel indicates not only that the controversy had become a thing of the past, but that Charlotte Smith was now being remembered, at least by some, for the same reason she was once avoided by others — her Revolutionary sympathies.

Hunt mentions that Waverley, the hero's friend in Desmond, is “.. a relation of the more famous Waverley.” He is pointing out the remarkable similarity in personality between the two Waverleys, Smith's and Sir Walter Scott's: both are young, virtuous adventurers distinguished by their romantic, geographic, and political indecisiveness. Hunt explains in another context, in volume two of Men, Women, and Books, that from Charlotte Smith's Desmond, “Sir Walter Scott borrowed the foundation of his character of Waverley, and the name besides” (2:135). Hunt also points out that in another of his novels, The Antiquary (1816), Scott borrows a scene from Charlotte Smith's fiction: “In a novel by the same lady, we forget which, is the first sketch of the sea-side incident in The Antiquary, where the hero saves the life of Miss Wardour” (2:135). Hunt seems to delight in the discovery of these influences, neither of which Scott acknowledged in his article on Charlotte Smith discussed above. In “A Novel Party,” the author relates to Smith's Waverley

... the sea-side adventure of [Scott's] Waverley's friend, the Antiquary, at which the other exclaimed, “Good God! how like an adventure which

happened to a friend of our acquaintance? only see what coincidences will take place!" He asked us if the Antiquary had never noticed the resemblance, and was surprised to hear that he had not (1:110)

Hunt is gently teasing his contemporary Sir Walter Scott. He does not say from which of Smith's novel Scott borrows the scene,¹² but he does make one of the earliest arguments for Charlotte Smith's unacknowledged influence on a more famous author.

An important note concerning Charlotte Smith appears in Hunt's discussion of Lady Henrietta O'Niell's poem "Ode to the Poppy" in the essay/ anthology of British female poets that forms part of the second volume of Men, Women, and Books. Smith and Henrietta O'Niell were friends. "Ode to the Poppy" first appeared, with credit, in Smith's Desmond, and was later often reprinted. Citing from O'Niell's poem, Hunt draws the conclusion that "... the flourishing lady of quality took opium; which, we suspect, was the case with her poorer friend" (2:136). This was the first time that this aspect of Charlotte Smith's life had been mentioned.¹³ F.M.A. Hilbish, almost a century later, would provide some supporting evidence for Hunt's inference: the character of Mrs. Elphinstone in Celestina (1791) — a poor, distressed mother with numerous children, and thus the

¹² The scene resembles one in Marchmont, although there are sea-side rescues in several of Smith's novels, including Montalbert and The Young Philosopher. Scott seems to be borrowing a device of Charlotte Smith's invention, rather than copying any individual scene.

¹³ De Quincey, another famous opium addict, mentions "looking into Charlotte Smith's metrical works -- particularly 'An Ode to the Poppy' . ." in his 1803 Diary (177). This is the full extent of his reference to Smith. His misattribution of O'Niell's poem is repeated by Hayter in her 1968 Opium and the Romantic Imagination (101) but corrected by Lindop in his 1981 The Opium Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey (107).

representative of the author in the novel — is described as “taking opiates incessantly” after the death of her husband, so that “[r]ecourse to opiates became gradually a habit ...” (2:157; qtd. Hilbish, 182). Turner in his dissertation finds convincing evidence in a letter from Smith to Sarah Rose in 1804: Smith refers to herself as “I who have lived on ‘Brandy, Aether, and Laudanum’ now for some years ...” (84).

Leigh Hunt seems to have been right about Smith’s addiction, but his inference is more than just an interesting fact. Hunt’s thoughts on the subject of Smith’s opium habit are pertinent, and he makes a critical as well as a biographical point:

We believe the world would be astonished, if they knew the names of all the people of genius, and of all the rich people, as well as poor, who have had recourse to the same consolatory drug. Thousands take it, of whose practise the world have no suspicion[sic]; and yet many of those persons, able to endure perhaps, on that very account, what requires all the patience of those who abstain from it, have quarrelled with such writers as the fair novelist, for trying to amend the evils which tempted them to its use.

(2:136)

Hunt’s logic here is odd, but again he shows his sympathy for Smith’s political agenda, or more precisely, for her sense that political reform would alleviate real human suffering, including her own. Very obliquely, Hunt supports Smith in her career-long claim that her legal distresses were the result of systematic injustice. More directly, he makes a general condemnation of readers and critics who would mollify their own complaints with a drug, and then disapprove of a writer who was not rendered acquiescent to injustice even

though she partook of the same consolation. This passage in Hunt connects Smith with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose opium habit was widely known and widely lamented by 1847.

Hunt's brief mention of Smith's opium habit appears in his "Specimens of British Poetesses," a title taken from Dyce. Hunt's opening comments to the essay also echo Dyce's introduction, but with perhaps more sarcasm in the tone:

About a hundred years ago, a collection of the poetry of our fair countrywomen was made under the title of "Poems by Eminent Ladies;" and twenty years ago, a second appeared, under the title at the head of this paper. These, we believe, are the only two publications of the kind ever known in England; a circumstance hardly to the credit of the public, when it is considered what stuff it has put up with in collections of "British Poets," and how far superior such verse-writers as Lady Winchelsea, Mrs. Barbauld, and Charlotte Smith were to the Sprats, and Halifaxes, and Stepneys, and Wattses that were re-edited by Chalmers, Anderson, and Dr. Johnson; to say nothing of the women of genius that have since appeared.

(2:110-111)

Hunt reprints sonnets 1, 4, and 27, and in summarizing criticism cites Dyce. Two lines from "Saint Monica" are quoted to show Smith's facility for "... agreeable miniature painting":

From the mapp'd lichen, to the plumed weed;

From thready mosses to the veined flow'r.

(2:141, emphases in Hunt)

Hunt's commentary closes on the matter of Smith's hardships, which are attributed to "... the failure of her husband's mercantile speculations, and the troubles they both incurred from the law" (2:141). As for the introduction of personal complaint into her fiction and her prefaces, Hunt is quite tolerant:

Lawyers cut a remarkable figure in her novels; and her complaints upon these her domestic grievances, overflow, in a singular, though not unpardonable or unmoving manner, in her prefaces. (2:141)

Although he does not make any further critical study of this point, Hunt is the first to consider Charlotte Smith's prefaces as an integral part of her work and her continued literary presence.

Hunt's attitude is something of the connoisseur's, and his essay is largely a selection from Dyce's anthology with his own thoughts intermixed — more a review essay than original criticism. He ends his discussion of Smith on a somewhat condescending note, praising the "... pretty feminine pathos, which the generous reader would be loth to call vanity" of Smith's choice of inscription under the title page portrait in Volume 2 of Elegiac Sonnets (1797). The lines are from Shakespeare:

Oh, Grief has chang'd me since you saw me last;
And heavy hours, with Time's deforming hand,
Have written strange defeatures on my face.

(Comedy of Errors 5.2.297; qtd. Hunt 2:141)

We should note that Charlotte Smith never complains of the effect of grief on her

appearance in her own writing. She strikes this “feminine” tone, shows this not-quite-
vanity, only in one instance, in the choice of the epigraph to her portrait. Though Hunt
does not obsessively discuss the appearance of the female poets, his literary praise is often
cast in sensual terms.¹⁴

The encouraging and lively mixture of male and female characters created by male
and female novelists in Hunt’s imaginary “Novel Party” is not transferred to his criticism
of poetry. Adopting Dyce’s selections and his defense of female genius, Hunt also adopts
the strict separation of literature into gendered spheres:

It is not pretended (with the exception of ... Sappho), that women have
ever written poetry equal to that of men, any more than they have been
their equals in painting and music. Content with conquering them in other
respects, with furnishing them the most charming of their inspirations ...
they have left to the more practical sex the glories of the pen and pencil.

(Men, Women and Books 2:111)

Leigh Hunt’s comments on Charlotte Smith, while they show a consciousness of her
strengths and idiosyncrasies, also install her firmly within the Victorian division of poetic
labour, in which women are more characteristically “... muses who set the poets writing,”
or if they did write, “... condescended ... to put on the earthly feminine likeness of some
favourite of the other sex.” According to this scheme, “[e]ven Miss Barrett ... is like an

¹⁴ For instance Hunt says of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire: “The writer seems
to breathe out her fervent words like a young Muse, her lips glowing with health and the
morning dew” (2:136). The longest chapter in Men, Women, and Books is a polite but
objectifying anatomy called “Criticism of Female Beauty.”

ultra-sensitive sister of Alfred Tennyson” (2:111). Hunt’s later anthology, The Book of the Sonnet Vol. 1 (1867), co-edited with S. Adams Lee, would include six of Smith’s sonnets (# 36, 2, 27, 4, 7, 62).¹⁵ According to the introduction, “[t]heir powers either of invention or expression are nothing, save in the ability to reject what is false and superfluous; yet that single merit is a thing so necessary to excellence, and so rare, that everybody likes the sonnets because nobody doubts their being in earnest ...” (85).

In 1848, two different anthologies of women’s poetry in English appeared, Frederic Rowton’s The Female Poets of Great Britain, published in London, and George W. Bethune’s The British Female Poets, published in Philadelphia. Rowton’s anthology was later reprinted in Philadelphia in 1853. Both include a selection of Charlotte Smith’s poetry, introduced by brief summaries of her life and work. In both introductions more attention is given to the life than to the work. None of the critical commentary in either of these anthologies is original. As Hilbish points out, Rowton “repeat[s] in substance Dyce’s praise” (Hilbish 253) of Charlotte Smith,¹⁶ and so does Bethune. Bethune’s tone is the more enthusiastic of the two, and he seems to have a higher opinion of Smith’s talents. Bethune calls Smith “... one of the more graceful ornaments of English literature towards the close of the last century” (The British Female Poets 88). Rowton’s headnote, though it is written in the concise, objective manner of Dyce’s headnote, begins by claiming that

¹⁵ Hunt and Lee take the liberty of adding titles to some of Smith’s sonnets.

¹⁶ Hilbish gives 1846 as the first publication date for Rowton’s anthology, under the title Cyclopaedia of Female Poets, but in Marilyn L. Williamson’s introduction to the facsimile republication of an early American edition of the Rowton anthology, this title is not listed as the first edition, but rather the 1848 Female Poets of Great Britain. I am using the republished version as my source.

Charlotte Smith, “[o]ne of the most admired of our female poets, is also a noble specimen of womanly excellence” (Female Poets of Great Britain 191). Where Dyce says that writing “... gained her a subsistence,” Rowton’s says Smith “... turned her literary talents to account” (191). Bethune sounds more indignant: “... she had for a long time supported him [her husband] and them [her children] by her literary productions” (88).

Bethune’s anthology, though sympathetic, is notably marred by inaccuracies. The Romance of Real Life (1786), a translation of short narratives from the French collection of legal cases called Les Causes Célèbres, is referred to as one of Smith’s novels. Bethune re-iterates the familiar formula that in Desmond Charlotte Smith “... so much favoured the principles of the French revolution as to lose much public credit, to regain which she portrayed substantial English life in her Old Manor House” (38). None of her novels after The Old Manor House is listed, and we are left with the impression of a repentant radical, content to pacify the public with a recantation and lapse into silence. A less damaging, but perhaps more puzzling inaccuracy, is Bethune’s inclusion of three poems which are nowhere else attributed to Charlotte Smith: “The Hot-house Rose,” “The Nautilus,” and “The Cricket” (94-98). The poems do not read like Smith’s work. “The Cricket,” indeed, turns out to be from Poems by William Cowper, Esq., published in 1782 (Cowper Poems 1:423). I have been unable to locate the other two, but they are almost certainly not Smith’s. Stuart Curran, in his edition of Smith’s Poems, neither includes nor mentions them.

Though brief, both biographical sketches mention Smith’s having accompanied her husband to prison. Bethune, perhaps from the remarks of the Monthly Magazine, adds

without euphemism that “[h]er self-sacrificing fidelity was not appreciated or returned, and in 17[8]7¹⁷ she was compelled to separate from Mr. Smith and devote herself to the support of her children ...” (88). Bethune estimates Smith’s poetry in an idiom which concisely defines the status of the minor author: “[s]ome of her sonnets are among the best of the second class in our language ...” (89). We also find the idiom of the forgotten author in his concluding remark:

We have given a longer sketch of this interesting lady than of some others, because her writings, though marked with elegance, judgement, and natural beauty, have fallen into such undeserved neglect, that they are rarely found except in libraries of collectors (89)

Anthologists naturally prefer their chosen authors to be “interesting,” and Smith’s life was an interesting one, but we can probably take this complaint to be based on a real obscurity. Bethune’s confusion of the Smith canon would support this conclusion

In Rowton’s anthology, we find no inaccurate attributions, but the biographical sketch is condensed to the point of inaccuracy. Giving only financial difficulty as a cause, he summarizes the same eventualities as Bethune, but with a confusing vagueness, similar to Mrs. Ellwood’s manner:

The domestic life of Mr. and Mrs. Smith becoming more and more unhappy, a separation at length took place; and Mrs. Smith retired to a

¹⁷ Since Smith’s separation was not a legal event, nor something she publicized, the date is not precise, but modern biographers agree that it was in 1787. Mrs. Dorset’s arithmetic would put the separation in 1788. Kavanaugh (191) says 1785. As Smith says in a letter (Oct. 9, 1793), her marriage articles made “. . . no provision for a separation ...” (qtd. Turner 33).

cottage near Chichester, where she applied herself assiduously and cheerfully to literary pursuits. (191)

Rowton is perhaps acknowledging here Mrs. Dorset's revelations about Smith's humourous character in conversation, but in close proximity to the statement that Smith's poems were "... somewhat sombre in their tone" the use of the word "cheerfully" creates the impression of affectation, or at least a happy ending, to Smith's sorrows. Rowton mentions only three, the first three, of Smith's novels, and makes no mention at all of her political opinions. His selection of the poetry consists of six sonnets (2, 28, 58, 5, 17, 36).

In her introduction to the modern facsimile edition of Rowton's anthology, Marilyn L. Williamson finds Rowton's prefatory essay to the volume particularly interesting, as it "... contains a concise statement of the prevailing sexual ideology of Victorian England, especially as it applied to poetry" (xix). It would be too easy to say that the Victorianization of Charlotte Smith caused her obliteration as a literary figure. But she was undeniably reduced in this period, despite the return of liberal politics in the mid-century. This is perhaps because the energy of her works was not compatible with Victorian gender norms. The segregation of male and female writers into separate spheres was established as early as Dyce's anthology in 1825. By the mid-century a rigid thematic division prevailed:

The reader will not fail to notice how rarely our Female Poets have addressed themselves to the mere understanding, and on the other hand how constantly they have sought to impress the feelings of the race; how little they have endeavoured to increase our wisdom, and how much they

have laboured to promote our virtue. It is for man to ameliorate our condition; it is for woman to amend our character. Man's Poetry teaches us Politics; Woman's, Morality. (Rowton xxxix)

This last equation is particularly damaging to any possibility of appreciating Charlotte Smith's poetry, it often dealt with political questions, and dealt with them precisely because the author felt that politics and morality were closely interrelated, and proper studies for both sexes. It is perhaps predictable that Rowton makes no mention of Smith's most political poem The Emigrants (1793), nor of her novel Desmond (1792), in the preface to which she makes the following argument

But women it is said have no business with politics — Why not? — Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them, in which they have father, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged? — Even in the commonest course of female education, they are expected to acquire some knowledge of history; and yet if they are to have no opinion of what is passing, it avails little that they should be informed of what has passed, in a world where they are subject to such mental degradation; where they are censured as affecting masculine knowledge if they happen to have any understanding; or despised as insignificant triflers if they have none.

(Desmond iii-iv)

Some of the prejudices against which Charlotte Smith wrote in the 1790's became, unfortunately, stronger and more legitimate during the next century

An article on Smith in the American Whig Review in 1849 provides a personal

perspective on the passing of a half-century:

Though the liquid smoothness of the versification, and the languid smoothness of the diction may not suit an ear accustomed to the vigour and variety of later poems, I can remember that they gratified me in my younger days, and they have still a kind of charm for me that I am almost ashamed to acknowledge. Perhaps early associations, a reference to the feminine qualities of the fair author's mind, and a sympathy for her distresses, made me willing to be pleased in defiance of an increased experience and a maturer judgement. (621)

Like Scott earlier, this author qualifies his appreciation of Smith's work by referring to his own youthful taste, and yet remains caught between a sentimental and a critical approach. The passage registers, along with some of the effects of the "masculinization" of poetic taste, the perceived marginality of Charlotte Smith's place in literary history. The author — who signs as G.F.D. — reminds his readers that Smith's poems "... have a feminine pathos, and a delicacy and tenderness of sentiment that ought to save them from oblivion" (621). The choice of the modal "ought" suggests that he feels they will not be saved. The article praises Smith's fiction as well, selectively but with greater confidence in its endurance: The Old Manor House is "... one of the best novels in any language ... on which Charlotte Smith can securely rest her fame" (629). The author evokes Smith's situation and her troubles by quoting her own voice, in prose as well as in poetic selections. There is an excerpt from Emmeline in which the character of Mrs. Stafford describes her poverty and her responsibilities as a mother, and also a passage from the

unidentified letter that first appeared in Public Characters, in which Smith tells of her imprisonment with her husband and her subsequent release. Like Bethune, another American critic, G.F.D. alludes to the delinquency of Mr. Smith, and as a concluding note, suggests that if he had been a good husband, “[o]ur loss might have been her gain” (630). The suggestion here is that Charlotte Smith would have written nothing, which would be “our loss,” if she had been a happier wife.

According to Hilbish, a final, eleventh edition of Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets appeared in 1851 (581). With somewhat greater authority, J. R. de J. Jackson places the eleventh and final edition in 1827 (Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography, 1770-1835 302). Whichever the case, this was to be the last publication of a volume of Smith’s poetry until 1992, more than a century later. After the mid-nineteenth century, Charlotte Smith existed within the canon largely in the form of short biographical entries and reprinted selections of her poems in anthologies. Poetic selections made as early as Dyce’s anthology were repeated mechanically, and almost as mechanically, literary historians would cite Walter Scott for a general estimation of her work. Charlotte Smith became a stable entity, a minor poet and minor novelist with an interesting because singularly unfortunate life. While Smith was in many ways responsible for this particular type of literary immortalization, her works were reduced to the status of evidence for her life. They were often remembered for a single characteristic — their portrayal of their melancholy author. From significant literary texts, they diminished first to the level of minor literature, and then further toward literary oblivion in a peculiar spiral of self-reference and isolation.

6. Obscurity

Biographical re-iterations of the sorrows of Charlotte Smith's life continued to be written throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is remarkable that a writer's biography could be of such enduring interest to the reading public while her writings themselves went largely unread. In 1855 an anthology of women's short biographies and selected writings called Woman's Record was published in New York by Sarah Josepha Hale, who also wrote songs and poetry for children. The biographical headnote for Charlotte Smith is largely derivative of other anthologies, and for critical commentary Hale quotes directly from Chambers and Scott. This anthology reprints some familiar selections and also "The Cricket," the Cowper poem that Bethune had earlier misattributed.

A similar anthology with a narrower scope, Literary Women of England, appeared in 1861 in London, written and compiled by Jane Williams. Eight pages are devoted to Smith's biography, "[o]ne of the most melancholy among female biographies ..." and five poems are reprinted: sonnets 7, 8, 35, 63, and "Flora's Horloge." Williams's biographical sketch is noteworthy for the tone taken with respect to Charlotte Smith's religious beliefs. Williams's attitude is one which we might dismiss as simply revealing her own orthodox enthusiasm, if it did not verge on inaccuracy:

Untaught in infancy to pray to Our Father who is in heaven, the sacred fire
of devotion was never enkindled upon the altar of her heart she rebelled

against troubles and trials as unjust inflictions, not discerning their probationary use, in the preparation of human character for an immortal and heavenly life (223-4)

Smith did rebel against troubles that were unjust, and truly could not see their “... probationary use.” But her religious sentiments, as Egerton Brydges had argued much earlier, were strong — even if they were not of the usual church-going sort. If Smith’s poetry had still been in print, or if the anthologist had researched her author more thoroughly, she might have found the following passage in The Emigrants (1793), where Smith defends herself against just this sort of complaint:

And if, where regulated sanctity
Pours her long orisons to Heaven, my voice
Was seldom heard ... yet my prayer was made
To him who hears even silence; not in domes
Of human architecture, fill'd with crowds,
But on these hills, where boundless, yet distinct,
Even as a map, beneath are spread the fields
His bounty cloaths ... ([Poems 162]387-394)

It is not my intention here to discuss Smith’s religious beliefs — though they did contrast significantly with Victorian piety. I quote Williams to illustrate how literary minority, especially as it becomes literary obscurity, can permit distortions and inaccuracies in criticism. Without her own works being available to justify her, Charlotte Smith — the literary figure of Charlotte Smith — became vulnerable to such mis-constructions and

even to scapegoating

The greatest irony of Charlotte Smith's critical history is that she would be remembered for having been forgotten. Although many late eighteenth-century authors went from renown to obscurity during the Victorian period, it is difficult to think of another whose life story remained so familiar a subject for literary history. This irony was expressed with eloquence in the lengthy treatment Charlotte Smith received from Julia Kavanaugh, in English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches (1863). The first paragraph of her biographical chapter on Smith is worth quoting at length, as it begs some of the questions which I hope my own critical history has already partly answered:

There are lives that read like one long sorrow, and that leave little save sadness and disappointment behind them when they close in death. Such a life was that of Charlotte Smith, full of cares while it lasted, and, once it was over, doomed to fade away from memory. She had great talent — she was one of the best novelists of the day, but the haste and facility with which she wrote, the gloom that overshadowed her life, robbed her of a durable literary fame. As a poetess she is forgotten; as a novelist she but helps to fill the vacant space between Miss Burney and Mrs. Radcliffe. To hold a place in that middle region is great good fortune for the living, but for the dead it is little, and if we attempt to give Charlotte Smith her meed of praise in these pages, it is not without the knowledge that she produced no strong impression, and will leave no lasting trace in the literature of her country. (188)

This is astute and revealing as well as sentimental. I would argue that the rhetorical gesture we see here, the gesture of obscurity apologized, is the trace of something like a collective bad conscience on the part of literary historians and critics. In Kavanaugh the paradox is tantalizingly near the surface. How, we might ask, can an author be both “doomed” and “robbed”? Like Scott, and the author of the article in the American Whig Review, Kavanaugh has greater expectations for the survival of Smith’s fiction than her poetry. But it is Smith’s life, her biography, by which she is most vividly remembered. The irony of being remembered for having been forgotten has an obverse — this life story which was all that kept Smith visible in the literary discourse would not have been public knowledge without her own literary works. It is a peculiar kind of critical blindness for Kavanaugh to say that she will leave no trace when her own substantial biographical and critical treatment of Smith is itself part of this persistent trace. Hilbish was to describe this phenomenon in Charlotte Smith criticism eloquently, from the vantage of the mid-twentieth century: “That she deserves greater recognition than she has received seems intimated by the urge critics have felt from her day to this to apologize for her decline and obscurity” (559).

Kavanaugh devotes two chapters of her book to Charlotte Smith: one to her biography, and one to the early novels. Although she discusses both Fanny Burney and Ann Radcliffe at greater length, the section on Smith seems to do more than “fill the vacant space” between them. Indeed, Kavanaugh is the most perceptive critic of the nineteenth century in her estimation of the features of this “middle region” that Charlotte Smith inhabits:

It is not moderation, but excess that strikes the public, and even posterity. Miss Burney verged on caricature, yet she holds a far higher place than Mrs. Smith; Mrs. Radcliffe was natural in nothing ... yet she can still charm the imagination and win forgiveness for her sins. It is Mrs. Smith's fault that she has none, and yet is not perfect. Her best stories are tinged with a mediocrity, which often looks like the effect of haste Even as it is, the place she holds in English literature is worthy of a record. She is a connecting link between opposite schools, and the most characteristic representative of the modern domestic novel. (195)

Thus the filling of a vacant space can also be seen as something much more significant: a “connecting link between opposite schools.”

Despite the appeal of the paradoxical formula that Smith's fault was to have no faults, Kavanaugh does go on to list both the strengths and the weaknesses of Charlotte Smith's fiction. One strength is her characterization, and not just of secondary characters such as Mrs. Rayland, whom Scott and Barbauld had earlier singled out. Kavanaugh's historical approach to the development of the female heroine is illuminating, and she makes an important critical observation:

... [A]mong the infinite variety of heroines to which feminine literature has given birth in England, Mrs. Smith's may claim to be the earliest and most successful in personations of the lady — not the elegant, well-bred, fashionable lady, but the lady of delicate feelings, accomplished mind, and good manners — the lady who will make a country gentleman's wife.

Emmeline and Ethelinda [sic] are far beyond anything similar in contemporary literature, French or English. They have been imitated until their successors have grown commonplace and tame, but the charm of the original models is still such as can be felt. (203-4)

I will have more to say about the effect of these “personations” on Jane Austen later. For now I would re-iterate that this modern woman whom Kavanagh finds in Smith’s fiction is in part a personality based on Charlotte Smith’s own self-image.

Kavanagh also gives a historical perspective to the more familiar claim that Smith had a talent for natural description:

This association between our secret feelings and the eternal, immutable nature which surrounds us, is one of the aspects of modern fiction, but it was long the attribute of poetry; and it was only towards the close of the eighteenth century that it passed into prose in the writings of Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint Pierre in France, and of Mrs Charlotte Smith and Mrs. Radcliffe in England. (231-32)

These literary-historical analyses, both of which have been borne out by 20th-century criticism, expose the largely rhetorical nature of Kavanagh’s earlier claim that Charlotte Smith “produced no strong impression” on the development of the novel.

Against Smith’s strengths as a writer, Kavanagh places the weaknesses that result from Smith’s “embittered temper” (228), a trait that she did not give to her generally flawless heroines: “[H]er heartless people are too open in their heartlessness ... and lay themselves out with too much complaisance to our contempt ...,” and her plots are often

“too harassing and painful” (228). Smith’s strengths ultimately do not compensate for “... the inevitable coldness, not to say bitterness, which is the tone of her writings” (233). Kavanaugh’s only allusion to Smith’s politics — she, like many others, does not mention Desmond or the later novels — is subsumed in a psychological and aesthetic observation: Charlotte Smith “... could not forget her sufferings and her wrongs; rebellion was rife in her, and revolt, though it may give momentary power, secures no lasting fame” (232-33). Charlotte Smith was not alone among early Romantics in suffering under this rubric in the Victorian era.

In her conclusion Kavanaugh returns to the paradoxical formula with which she began, the irony of Charlotte Smith’s unique minority. Her works “remain amongst the most remarkable but least read productions of the time to which she belonged, stamped with the melancholy fiat — above mediocrity, but below genius” (234). It is perhaps especially in the writing of a perceptive critic like Kavanaugh that we can detect something more than fiat at work in the determination of Charlotte Smith’s canonical status.

With the exception of an edition of The Old Manor House in 1878 (Hilbish 583), the novels of Charlotte Smith remained out of print for a century after Julia Kavanaugh’s attempt to describe their importance. Smith’s biography, on the other hand, seems to have been too much in print for the taste of some readers. In Allibone’s Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors (Philadelphia 1871) there is a distinct note of impatience:

Her life has been narrated at sufficient length by her sister, Mrs. Dorset ...

and Sir S.E. Brydges Mrs. Ellwood ... and Julia Kavanaugh ... have told us much more of this once famous lady than the modern reader cares to know. (2:2132)

But the modern, or Victorian, reader obviously did want to know the details of Charlotte Smith's life, as the number of essentially similar accounts testifies. S. Austen Allibone's impatience may be indicative of a new academic attitude toward the stubborn persistence of an author who is no longer read. He is the first academic to be sceptical of Walter Scott's praise for Charlotte Smith. Although he quotes a familiar passage to conclude his encyclopedia entry, Allibone prefaces it by saying that Scott's "... heart sometimes got the better of his head and softened the critic into the eulogist . ." (2:2132).

In 1881, Charlotte Smith's sonnets were given some exposure with the inclusion of two (#2, 36) in David M. Main's A Treasury of English Sonnets. Main begins his note on Smith with a critical estimation that marks a new low: "The unmitigable woe with which Mrs. Smith's poems are filled, together with their factitious and second-hand phraseology, renders them unpalatable to a generation so much healthier than that in which they were produced" But the weight of Smith's earlier critics is still felt, and Main reluctantly continues "... yet we must respect the opinion of so admirable a critic as Wordsworth ..." and quotes from the note to "St. Bees Heads ..." (358). Main also quotes Alexander Dyce's relative dismissal of the sonnets, in which they 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 ..." (359). By 1881 Dyce's estimation, originally a reaction to an overestimation of the sonnets, had

come to seem like high praise, one more odd critical opinion which the anthologist feels he can't ignore. At this point Smith's own critical heritage, though a tenuous one, was beginning to play a role in keeping her in print. Main concludes his note by printing another of Smith's sonnets, sonnet 82, "To the Shade of Burns" (Poems 71), not to enforce Wordsworth's and Dyce's praise, but as "... an example of a different order, if not in all respects the best, certainly the most masculine and interesting of her poems" (359). As if to provide a contrast to the praises he reluctantly inherits from Wordsworth and Dyce, Main suggests that Smith's most interesting sonnet is her most uncharacteristic one, and her most masculine. The implicit logic is sexually categorical: the feminine is not as healthy a poetics as the masculine, and politics is for men. The best Main can say for Smith's sonnets himself is that "... some of their old sweetness lingers, like the perfume of dried flowers ...".

Samuel Waddington, in his English Sonnets by Poets of the Past (1882), expresses a similar surprise at Smith's former fame:

In what high estimation this lady's work was still held nearly thirty years after her death, may be gathered from the fact that the late Rev. Alexander Dyce included no fewer than nine of her sonnets in his Selection, whereas he only gives one by Keats, and entirely omits those of Shelley and Byron.

(229)

Waddington's observation indicates not only how far Smith's reputation has declined, but also which sonnet-writers were beginning to eclipse her in the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

In her recent general Foreword to the series *Women Writers in English 1350-1850*, a series that was inaugurated with Curran's edition of Charlotte Smith's *Poems*, Suzanne Woods observes that "[m]ost of the writers represented in the series were well known and highly regarded until the professionalization of English studies in the later nineteenth century coincided with their excision from canonical status and from the majority of literary histories" (*Poems* xiii). The case of Charlotte Smith is complicated by the fact that her fame had declined beyond minor status to obscurity well before the end of the nineteenth century. Unlike female authors whose reputations were well-maintained — Fanny Burney, Hannah More, Anna Seward, and Felicia Hemans to name a few — Charlotte Smith did not need to be "excised" from the late Victorian canon. She was already carefully placed on its periphery.

Before the end of the century there was one last book in the genre of the biographical anthology of female poets: Eric S. Robertson's *English Poetesses* (1883). The gender ideology of the Victorian period is still in place, although it is showing some signs of stress:

While we find nothing in any common definitions of poetry that suggests distinction between the poetical capabilities of the sexes, and while we see that all kinds of experience — and therefore woman's as well as man's — can be touched by imagination into poetry, a further psychological analysis seems to be necessary. This analysis appears to reveal a sexual distinction lying in the very soul (xiii)

Robertson is even more skeptical than Allibone of Walter Scott's judgements concerning

Charlotte Smith — “... for whom [Scott] seems to have had quite a sentimental attachment, in a literary way” (64).

Robertson’s biographical sketch, although it gets the basic facts correct, is distorted and ungenerous: as a child Charlotte Smith “... appeared to spend nearly all her time in fashionable dissipation;” at twelve “[s]o much was made of her that her father had to deliver her up to society as a plaything. Her good looks and her spirit made her friends everywhere ..” At sixteen “... a marriage of convenience was proposed to her, and accepted” (65). Desmond is described rather exorbitantly as “... a tale of violently democratic tendencies” (68). We are given again the passage in Smith’s words from her own letters, the quote first published in Dorset’s memoir, in which she speaks of “personal slavery” and “the horror of the abyss into which I had unconsciously plunged.” Here it is introduced in such a way as to make it seem a melodramatic and unjustified complaint: “... indulged with a cottage in the village of Southgate ... she first procured the opportunity to reflect at leisure on the incongruity of her surroundings in life with her own upbringing and her tastes” (66). Robertson does acknowledge that Smith’s husband was “[i]ndolent, incapable, and pleasure-loving ...” and that “[t]o his wife ... he proved a life-long experience in sorrow ...,” but he makes no mention of the protracted legal difficulties which were so prominent a source of Charlotte Smith’s indignant tone. It is unfortunate that the last biographical sketch of the century should have been unsympathetic, but it perhaps attests to the generality of the opinion, at least in some circles, that Smith’s biography had been repeated too often, and taken too seriously.

The Dictionary of National Biography, with its broad, non-literary purview, contains

a substantial entry for Charlotte Smith in 1898. It is different from all the earlier biographies in its improved objectivity, evenness of tone and condensed thoroughness. The facts of Smith's family and her married life are balanced with plain accounts of her literary business and legal difficulties. One factor contributing to the evenness of tone in the short biography is the absence of any of the familiar citations from Charlotte Smith's prefaces or letters, which had previously been a feature of almost all accounts of her life. The only quote from Smith herself in the DNB is a anecdote culled from J. B. Nichols's Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century (1858). It concerns Smith's response to the suggestion that her husband's "enthusiasm" might be turned toward religion: "Oh!" replied Charlotte, "for heaven's sake do not put it into his head to take to religion, for if he does he will instantly begin by building a cathedral" (28). The anecdote is amusing, but unreliable. In conjunction with such formulas as "Mrs. Smith's cheerful temperament enabled her to abstract herself from her cares," borrowed from Mrs. Dorset, this choice of Smith's reported words minimizes her married unhappiness and the intensity of distress that marked her writing as well as her life. Critical judgements are at a minimum in the DNB entry, and they are borrowed, with references, from earlier critics, beginning with a variant on Hunt's phrase: "there is nothing great in Mrs. Smith's poems" (53.29). The ostensibly complete list of works includes all the novels, but omits Smith's long poem The Emigrants (1793).

In the eight-volume Moulton's Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors, published in 1902, many of the critical citations we have already seen are reprinted. Charles Wells Moulton's method was to assemble, for each author, a

bibliography of their work and a selection of important or representative citations from earlier critics, without further commentary. First and earliest among the citations, and the only one under the heading “Personal,” is the passage from Scott in which he “regret[s] that the tone of melancholy which pervades Mrs. Smith’s compositions was derived too surely from the circumstances and feelings of the amiable authoress” and goes on to refer to her writing for money as “mental drudgery.” Under the heading “Sonnets” we find quotations from Brydges, Main and others, and under “General” (there is no “Novels” heading) quotations from Wordsworth — the “St. Bees” note — Hunt, Bethune, Jane Williams, and the Dictionary of National Biography. The comments, drawn from such a long span of time, and each in their own way both celebrating Smith and lamenting either her faults or her obscurity, have a confusing effect when brought into close quarters.

Where the Dictionary of National Biography under-emphasizes the more sensational aspect of Smith’s life, a very different tone is taken by the Viscount St. Cyres a few years later, in an article for the Cornhill Magazine for 1903 entitled “The Sorrows of Mrs. Charlotte Smith” (15:683-696). The essay is written in a knowing, sarcastic tone, and persistently confuses the factual with the fictional. St. Cyres begins by pointing to some slight resemblance between Smith and one of Thackeray’s characters, Lady Fanny Flummery.¹⁸ A detail from Emmeline, in which Scott had seen an autobiographical comment, is here treated as autobiographical fact:

Benjamin Smith’s experiments, however, were more ingenious than

¹⁸ Lady Fanny Flummery does not resemble Charlotte Smith in anything but her prolific output. She is the subject of the chapter “A Fashionable Authoress” in Thackeray’s Character Sketches, first published in 1841.

successful; according to his wife — by no means a sympathetic critic — his favourite hobby was the manufacture of manure out of old discarded wigs. Things soon ran their course — debt, the King's Bench prison, flight to France. (685)

St. Cyres's lack of sympathy for the author is clearly shown in such unfounded commentary as the following, concerning Smith's childhood:

I fear that she was also rather hard to manage: some scathing lines about "The rustic nymph, whom rigid aunt's restrain / Condemned to dress, and practise airs in vain" point to not inconsiderable disturbances in the Bignor household. It was probably for the sake of peace that Mr. Turner married her off, at the early age of fifteen (684)

Is it possible that Charlotte Smith's stubbornness as a figure of literary history, her refusal to disappear along with her books, lies behind this difficulty of control that St. Cyres ascribes to her?

Mrs. Ellwood, according to St. Cyres, "ventures to suggest a gentle doubt as to whether her heroine was ever quite so heart-broken as the tone of her writings would imply" (696). St. Cyres lists, as one of the reasons Charlotte Smith should have been happy and not melancholy is that "[s]he lived to hear her novels praised by Sir Walter Scott" (696), something for which there is no evidence. It is as if St. Cyres resents, and by resenting acknowledges, the power of endurance that he would deny her.

Absurdities and contradictions crowd the article: on the one hand, "[f]inding realities uninteresting, she was too apt to treat them as of no account, and drift off to a cloudland

of chronic hyperbole where emphasis was the only law (688).” On the other hand “[i]t is one of the few real merits of Charlotte Smith that she forswore these abstract unrealities and honestly tried to reproduce what her own eyes had shown her” (693). On one hand, “[s]he was so keenly gripped by her emotions that she cared little whether they were original or no” (687); on the other, “quite an appreciable proportion of her tears was due to purely literary requirements” (687). St. Cyres concludes that the popularity of this “Laureate of the Lachrymose” (688) was primarily a fashion: “No other grief that ever sighed has worn so much crape and bombazine” (689).

The cavalier, almost fantastical, quality of this essay is not unlike Hunt’s “A Novel Party,” and despite St. Cyres more sceptical attitude, the style permits him to make some interesting and rather new critical comments. Quoting Smith’s defense of the “illegitimate” sonnet, St. Cyres exclaims ironically: “Could Romantic lawlessness go farther?” (687). This might prompt us now to the more measured question of whether Smith’s sonnets were indeed a significant moment in the Romantic revolution in literature. On her politics, St. Cyres draws an appropriate parallel: “I am afraid that Mrs. Smith was no sounder than her brother-poet, William Wordsworth, on the subject of the French Revolution” (691), and makes the provocative observation that “[i]t is a wonder Mrs. Smith was not prosecuted for sedition” having published, as St. Cyres puts it, “within a short time of the execution of Louis XVI,” such lines as

In Earth’s cold bosom, equalled with the great,
Death vindicates the insulted Rights of Man

(Poems 97; qtd. St. Cyres 691)

In 1792, when the poem containing these lines was written and first published, it was an offense against the King of England to publish or refer to Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, and the author himself had fled the country on sedition-related charges. Smith continued to include the poem in her Elegiac Sonnets after January of 1793 and the execution of Louis XVI of France, which would have increased its offensiveness to some readers. From a distance of more than a century, an Edwardian aristocrat could still recognize the radical aspect and potential of Smith's work.

The Viscount St. Cyres's amused and amusing over-statements and conflation are productive of some important observations, particularly with respect to Smith's possible influences on later writers. The legal difficulties resulting from the contested will of Charlotte Smith's father-in-law are compared by St. Cyres to a later fictional treatment in Dickens's Bleak House: "The Jarndyce case itself was not a greater godsend to the Chancery Bar" (684). St. Cyres also playfully speculates that Smith's Elegiac Sonnets may have been read by the fictional characters in Jane Austen's work:

... it is quite likely that the 'Elegiac Sonnets' formed part of the literature of Marianne: our heroine was certainly one of the writers whom 'Sense and Sensibility' was meant to satirise. (689)

This article is a peculiar, but in a way appropriate beginning for 20th-century criticism of Charlotte Smith. Her cultural significance is back-handedly acknowledged, and yet the facts of her life and achievement are obscured by St. Cyres's ironic and apocryphal embellishments. Charlotte Smith is evoked less as an author than as a curiosity of literary history. Predictably, the more insightful critical observations made in his essay were not

soon pursued by more academic critics.

Eventually, Charlotte Smith began to be dropped altogether by literary histories and literary encyclopedias. In W. Davenport Adams's Dictionary of English Literature (1878), she is listed as a "novelist" only, although credited with the title Elegiac Sonnets. Charlotte Smith does not appear at all in A Dictionary of English Authors (1897) by R. Farquharson Sharp, although as "Keeper of the Books" for the British Museum he would certainly have had access to her works. She is also omitted from Edmund Gosse's large study English Literature: An Illustrated Record (1903). Julian W. Abernethy's English Literature (New York: 1916), although written with the aim of "... pointing out those works that should be known and those that may be neglected ..." (iii), also neglects her writings. Probably the most pointed omission was committed when R. B. Johnson left Smith out of his 1919 study The Woman Novelists.¹⁹

George Saintsbury, a major critic of the early twentieth century and an expert on late eighteenth-century literature, had various opportunities to discuss Charlotte Smith. In The English Novel (1913) she receives a slight mention, one which acknowledges a disproportion between her biographical and literary fame: Charlotte Smith is "... something of a person in herself, but less of a figure in history, because she neither innovates nor does old things consummately" (174). How a dead author could continue to be a person in herself without being a figure in history is unexplained.

¹⁹ As late as 1974, H.M. Jones ignores Charlotte Smith in his massive study Revolution and Romanticism. In his "Sensibility" chapter, Jones "... omit[s] Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Opie and other virtuous members of a mob of scribbling women ..." (110). Charlotte Smith does not appear even in the index.

Saintsbury also made substantial contributions to the Cambridge History of English Literature (1907-27), perhaps the most authoritative early 20th-century text of its kind. In his essay "Southey. Lesser Poets of the Later Eighteenth Century," he makes no mention of Charlotte Smith, which would suggest that her status, even among "lesser" poets, had now become negligible. It was these lesser poets who revived the sonnet, according to Saintsbury, but he names only two innovators:

Although Bowles was not the first to revive the sonnet, he was the first, except perhaps, Bampfylde, to perceive its double fitness for introspection and for outlook; to combine description with sentiment in the new poetical way. (11:178)

For students of Charlotte Smith there is an irony in Saintsbury's statement that "[i]t would be ungenerous and uncritical not to add that [the lesser sonnet-writers of the late eighteenth century] did much to start the movement that eclipsed them ..." (178). Here Charlotte Smith has been eclipsed not only by the major Romantic poets, but by Bowles and Bampfylde as well.

The only direct reference to Charlotte Smith's poetry in the Cambridge History is in Saintsbury's essay "The Prosody of the Nineteenth Century," where she appears in an odd footnote to a list of practitioners of the metre of the "Lays," the "three-foot anapaest":

An intermediate between Cowper and Byron, very likely to have been known to the latter, has been recently noted by W.P. Ker in that curious person Charlotte Smith, who gave Scott the name 'Waverley.' (13:239)

The obliqueness of this reference is extreme. There are only two Charlotte Smith poems

in anapests, “The Female Exile” (Poems 97-98) and “An Evening Walk by the Sea-side” (Poems 196-98), and these are descriptive rather than ballad-like. Saintsbury’s note alludes to Leigh Hunt’s observation concerning *Waverley*, and makes an incomplete reference to Ker, but it doesn’t tell us much about Charlotte Smith. The note also depends upon, without mentioning, the fact that Smith was both poet and novelist. Another highly marginal appearance by Charlotte Smith can be found in Legouis and Cazamian’s A History of English Literature (1927), where again she is mentioned in a footnote only, this time as “[a]n intermediary writer between Clara Reeve and Mrs. Radcliffe ...” (967n). It seems that in the history of fiction as well as the history of poetry, Charlotte Smith had an irreducible importance as a connecting link, an importance which could be attenuated to the fragility of a footnote, but which could not be totally ignored.

As W. L. Renwick admits in English Literature 1789-1815 (1963), Charlotte Smith “... displayed an emotional force that cannot quite die with fashion” (102). In a 1976 dissertation “The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith” Peggy Willard Gledhill observes that “[a]lthough few people today have heard of Charlotte Smith, she has never dropped completely from sight” (192). Gledhill finds that “[i]n six randomly selected anthologies of the English sonnet appearing between 1880 and 1965, Smith is represented in all but one ...” (193). Charlotte Smith can also be found in every edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica from the early nineteenth century to the present, at first briefly mentioned under “Romance,” and later in an entry of her own. The original article on “Romance” was written for the encyclopedia by an author who, as we have already seen, knew Smith’s work intimately enough to have been influenced by it: Sir Walter Scott.

7. A Revival

The twentieth-century critical revival of Charlotte Smith was slow to begin, and it began as a revival of interest in the novels rather than the poetry. Allene Gregory's discussion of Smith's political fiction in The French Revolution and the English Novel (1915) is perhaps the first academic treatment of her in the 20th century. The first 20th-century essay devoted entirely to Smith's writing was James R. Foster's "Charlotte Smith, Pre-Romantic Novelist," which appeared fourteen years later in the 1928 PMLA (43:463-75). Foster's opening sentence vividly announces, even seems to denounce, her obscurity. "Time and the critics have dealt scurvily with Charlotte Smith, since she has been completely forgotten, being neither as bad as the Minerva Press nor as striking as Ann Radcliffe" (43:463). Although Foster does not deal "scurvily" with Charlotte Smith himself, and indeed compares her fiction in many respects favourably to that of Ann Radcliffe, nonetheless he concludes by saying that his "purpose ... is not the rehabilitation of Charlotte Smith, for her works are dead, and justly so" (475).

In 1932 J.M.S. Tompkins discussed Smith in a more optimistic way in The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800. Although hers is not a sustained study of Charlotte Smith, Tompkins "stresses," in the words of a later critic, "the formative influence she exerted on almost every phase of the fiction of her day." (Fry Charlotte Smith: Popular Novelist 26). With the publication of F. M. A. Hilbish's Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist in 1941, the twentieth century revival of academic interest began in earnest. This most recent phase of

Charlotte Smith's critical heritage, which was outlined in my first chapter, has not returned her to anything like the status she enjoyed in her lifetime, but it has brought her decisively and perhaps permanently out of the realm of obscurity.²⁰

Throughout this critical summary of Charlotte Smith's critical fortunes, it has not been my intention to arraign the critics, anthologists and literary historians for forgetting her, or for the distortions that were introduced into the critical discourse concerning her. One of the simple truths of obscurity is that it often involves an inaccurate impression of the author on the part of criticism. The minor author who becomes even more minor does not simply sink on a scale of value: he or she becomes almost literally smaller, more indistinct, and thus more easily misconstrued. Neither has it been my intention to raise the spectre of the even-more-minor-writer and by doing so to place Charlotte Smith above her fellows and sisters among the neglected. Many of the writers whose names have appeared in this tour through one author's obscurity — John Bampfylde, John Thelwall, Egerton Brydges, A. L. Barbauld, Mary Robinson and many others — deserve as much critical attention as Charlotte Smith.

As it turns out, Charlotte Smith has survived relatively well in the long term. Nonetheless, an understanding of the vicissitudes of her critical history is indispensable to an understanding of her literary achievement, which has been from the beginning a matter

²⁰ Inaccuracies persist, however. The Oxford Companion to English Literature, which only added an entry on Smith in the fifth edition (Margaret Drabble, ed. 1985), contains the misleading sentence "Her novels appeared between 1788 and 1793" (913). This overlooks four later novels. The Everyman anthology Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832 (Jennifer Breen, ed. 1994) has Elegiac Sonnets appearing first in 1787 rather than 1784 (165), and dates Smith's sonnet # 7 "On the Departure of the Nightingale" to 1807, when it actually appeared in the first edition of 1784.

of survival as well as success. Many of the aspects of Smith's work which caused her to be forgotten in the nineteenth century — her intense melancholy, her feminist ethic, her liberal politics, her aggressive authorial voice, her popularity itself — are proving in the twentieth century to be central to her significance.

Chapter Four

Charlotte Smith and Jane Austen

1. Introduction

As a novelist, Charlotte Smith has been estimated in a variety of ways in the twentieth century, usually modestly, but often with a certain categorical precision. For B. G. MacCarthy in 1947 she was "... one of the most interesting writers of her time" (The Later Women Novelists 1744-1818 162). Walter Allen in 1954 rated her relative to her nearest sister in the canon: "If Fanny Burney has been over-rated, Mrs. Charlotte Smith has been persistently underrated" (The English Novel 98). For Lionel Stevenson in 1960 she was "... the most respectable novelist of the [1790's], in spite of her badly constructed plots and the distortions resulting from her personal animosities ..." (The English Novel: A Panorama 173-74). For Carroll Lee Fry in 1980 she was, with no qualification, "... the best novelist of the period between the death of Smollett [1771] and the publication of Waverley [1814]" (204). Fry's claim is appealing in part because of its precise formulation, and in part because his Charlotte Smith: Popular Novelist, like the present study, is a dissertation. Harrison Steeves, on the other hand, in a book with a broader mandate, Before Jane Austen: The Shaping of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century (1965), judges that "... in every aspect of [Smith's] performance there was a

novelist or two who could do better” (317). We have seen an equally wide variety of estimates of Smith’s fiction in the preceding chapter.

An author’s influence is often an index of the quality of his or her work, but there is no necessary relationship. Walpole with his Castle of Otranto or Macpherson with his “Ossian” tales, for instance, were highly influential, but they are seldom referred to as fully canonical, major authors. Charlotte Smith in some ways belongs among these eccentrics of eighteenth-century English literature. Within her own canon, we can isolate individual novels for their superiority to others. Emmeline (1788), Desmond (1792), and The Old Manor House (1793) have frequently been singled out for quite high praise. None of her works of fiction is without pleasant surprises, and none falls below a basic standard of competence. But there is a drastically mixed and uneven quality to Smith’s fiction that is present in every novel, with the possible exception, in my opinion, of Desmond. As B. G. MacCarthy says in The Later Women Novelists 1744-1818 (1947), “[i]n her effort to unite the Gothic, domestic and tendenz genres she attempted the impossible, yet, as a reflection of the chief trends in the second half of the eighteenth century, her novels repay careful examination” (162). It is perhaps an indication of the ferment of invention in fiction during the 1790’s that Charlotte Smith could be called the “best representative of her period” (Stevenson 162) when she is also one of the most unusual writers of the time. One way of reconciling this contradiction (and evading the question of intrinsic literary quality at the same time) is to say that if Smith is not the best novelist of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, she is the most innovative. And here I mean innovative in the sense of adding to the resources of the novel, which is much the same as saying influential.

We can suggest the pervasiveness of Smith's influence on the conventions of the novel at their most general by surveying the list of her "Innovations" as presented in detail by F.M.A. Hilbish in Charlotte Smith: Poet and Novelist 1749-1806 (527-559). The first innovation to her credit, and the one that receives the most unanimous agreement among historians of the novel, is her use of detailed scenic descriptions and her integration of these descriptions into plot and characterization. Hilbish is not alone in finding Smith's English scenery vivid, realistic, and unprecedented. Her Scottish scenes and her descriptions of other locales she did not know first-hand could be equally successful.¹ As Jane Austen is not known for her scene painting, this will not be an area of Smith's influence that I will be discussing in detail. Smith's second major innovation has to do with her realistic characterization, her success in creating minor as well as major characters, especially female protagonists. We will have more to say on the novelty of Smith's heroines shortly. Smith was also a pioneer among female novelists in creating male heroes. Hilbish credits her with the experiment of writing one of the first "volumes" of fiction without a love interest at all. Volume One of The Banished Man (1794), Smith's third novel with a male protagonist at the centre of the plot, contains no female character for the hero's attachment. In her Shandean device of the "Avis au Lecteur," the

¹ When portraying natural scenes from more distant locales, however, Smith was often at a loss, or subject to error. She transposes the Carolina of Bartram's Travels onto Quebec in The Old Manor House (iv), and offers no description at all of the historic cities of Coblenz and Dresden in The Banished Man. She sometimes seems to be attempting a kind of short-hand in order to get round the obligation of describing her character's surroundings, as in Marchmont, when the hero writes "I will check the disposition I even now feel to describe the valley of Munster — to tell you how, in passing it, I sometimes forgot the rigors of winter, even all I had suffered, and all I dreaded, and was lost in admiring the wildness and singularity of the scene" (3:94).

narrator of The Banished Man draws the reader's attention to the absence of a heroine for the hero to fall in love with, and capitulates to convention by introducing one. Smith's novelette The Wanderings of Warwick (1793) self-consciously begins rather than ends with a marriage.²

Another claim made by Hilbish is Smith's importance in extending "... the scope of the novel to include historical bases," a claim anticipated by Gregory in 1914 and confirmed by Margaret Doody in her 1975 paper "English Women Novelists and the French Revolution": "The pioneer — the first novelist to use the French Revolution for theme and setting — was a woman, Mrs. Charlotte Smith" (Doody 178). Something that neither Hilbish, Gregory nor Doody stresses, but which makes the innovation all the more unusual, is that Smith's construction on "historical bases" never takes her further than two decades into the past. There are other contenders for writer of the first historical novel in English, but Charlotte Smith seems to have been the first novelist of present history. The main action of all her full-length novels takes place in the present day, except for The Old Manor House, which is set in the relatively recent past of the 1770's.³ Smith's Desmond is the first English novel about the French revolution, and actually appeared in the midst of the revolutionary years. The letters that comprise the novel are set between June 9, 1790,

² Hilbish suggests two other firsts: "... the new device in fiction of a town surprised and carried by storm" in the Letters of a Solitary Wanderer ([1799] 3:246-53), and "the first 'atrocious' story of record," from The Young Philosopher ([1798] 2:118-20), a doubly-framed but amply shocking anecdote of torture in the American War of Independence (Hilbish 547-48).

³ Smith's first novel, Emmeline, is somewhat vague in its date, but Ehrenpreis concludes it is set in 1781-85, just four years before its publication.

and February 6, 1792, the author's preface is dated June, 1792. The characters mention King Louis's flight from Paris, his return, and the signing of the constitution. Set within twelve months of its own publication, this novel would have seemed to readers of the time anything but antiquated in subject matter ⁴

Charlotte Smith stuck with her "historical bases" in fiction, and continued to write novels that referred to contemporary history despite negative criticism of her politics. In her novel of 1794, The Banished Man — which contains what Doody believes to be " .. the first 'guillotine scene' in English fiction" (183) — the hero is "banished" from France by the events of the Revolution. The narrative makes reference to the recent executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, and marks the same turn in Smith's attitude that appears in her poetry in The Emigrants (1793), namely her dismay at the betrayal of the revolution's early ideals. Although the hero of The Banished Man is a ci-devant aristocrat who disapproves of the Revolution, his English friend the younger Ellesmere still believes that " .. the first design, aiming only at the correction of .. faults, at a limited monarchy and a mixed government, was the most sublime and worthy of a great people .." (2.321) Montalbert (1795), like the earlier Old Manor House (1793), does not concern itself with

⁴ Maurice Lévy, in Le Roman "Gothique" Anglais 1764-1824 (1968) points out the surprising rarity of such historical immediacy in the English novel of the 1790's and early 1800's. He quotes the Critical Review as saying in 1796 that "The French Revolution has not only afforded an ample field for the historian, the politician, and the moralist, but has supplied abundance of matter to the novel-weavers of the present times" (26-471; qtd Lévy 609) but then has difficulty finding any examples, save in the most tabloid novels. Charlotte Smith is the notable exception. In Radcliffe's works and in other famous Gothic novels " .. tout ou partie de l'action se déroule dans la France de l'Ancien Régime, et les noms des personnages qui comptent aux yeux des auteurs s'orientent tous de particules. Tout se passe comme si, pour eux, la Révolution française n'avait pas eu lieu .." (611)

contemporary historical events, but in Marchmont (1796) Charlotte Smith again has her protagonist travel to Revolutionary France, although this time he sees only "... the wild assemblage of idiotism and phrensy" (3:185) that is the Reign of Terror. The political and historical aspect of Smith's fiction seems to have had a distinct influence on Charles Dickens's Tale of Two Cities.⁵ As one of the most sentimental and reformist novelists of the nineteenth century, Dickens probably found more than we yet realize in the fiction of Charlotte Smith.⁶

Although her main characters all speak the polished English of the educated class, Smith attempted with some success in minor characters to render a wide range of British local and class dialects, as well as European accents and second-language idiosyncrasies. She also had an ear for the slang of the old debauch, the young coquette, and other English bourgeois types. Burney had earlier ridiculed the slang of fashion in Evelina and

⁵ Hilbish was the first to notice that Smith's Desmond includes an anecdote which re-appears in Dickens's novel of the French Revolution. In Desmond we are told of ...the furious manner in which the carriages of the noblesse were driven through the streets, where there are no accommodations for the foot passenger — and where the proud and unfeeling possessors of those splendid equipages (the disappearance of which has been so much lamented in England) have been known to feel their rapid wheels crushing a fellow creature, with emotions so far from humanity, as to have said, "tant mieux, il y à toujours assez de ces gueux (1:108)

This seems to have been the source for Dickens's very similar scene in book 2, chapter 7 of A Tale of Two Cities. Hilbish points out some other similarities as well (558-59).

⁶ See "Charlotte to Charles: The Old Manor House as a Source for Great Expectations," Dickens Quarterly 8.3 (Sept. 1991): 112-120. St. Cyres was the first to note the similarity between Smith's legal distresses and the Jarndyce vs Jarndyce case in Bleak House, a similarity which has several times been noted but not yet examined in detail.

Cecilia, and Jane Austen, too, would occasionally drop a contemporary bit of slang or a fashionable French borrowing. Although it does not present a strong line of influence, this is the only matter discussed under Smith's influence in Bradbrook's Jane Austen and her Predecessors (1966). "Occasionally, Jane Austen may be indebted to Charlotte Smith for an odd phrase, or she may mock a certain cliché or vulgarism used by the less critical novelist" (103). The idiomatic expression from Smith's Ethelinde — "If Lord Danesforte is not the thing, who is?" (2:193) — crops up in Emma when Mr. Woodhouse decides that Frank Churchill is "not quite the thing" (Bradbrook 103). Other examples include "setting one's cap" at a marriage with a particular man (Old Manor House and Sense and Sensibility) and in the same Smith novel:

... the heroine Isabella calls a General 'her old beau' [1.183], the very same familiar phrase used by the vulgar Mrs Elton to describe Mr Woodhouse [in Emma] (Bradbrook 104)

It should be pointed out here that Monimia, and not Isabella, is the heroine of Smith's The Old Manor House. Indeed, Isabella is not unlike a younger Mrs Elton. Thus both authors, and not just Austen, are satirizing idle or irresponsible chatter.⁷ Writers like

⁷ Anna Seward, as Ehrenpreis points out in a note to Emmeline, objected strongly to the vulgarisms in Smith's fiction:

When Emeline [sic] first says of the fainting Adelaide [sic], 'she is coming to', I concluded the press had accidentally omitted to add 'herself'; but in a page later, the same kitchen-phrase is repeated by Emeline [actually by Barret], 'yes, she is certainly coming to' (Letters of Anna Seward 2:216; qtd. Ehrenpreis, 531n; insertions Ehrenpreis)

In this and many other cases, Smith's use of kitchen-phrases has anticipated the idiom of our times.

Walter Scott, and perhaps Dickens, too, would have found an important groundwork of style in Smith's range of represented speech, a range that was both sociological, from the fashionable to the rustic, and tonal, from satirical to realistic.⁸ Stuart Curran, speaking of Smith's "breadth of class ideolects and professional voices" and her concentration on "class, gender, economic, and power relations," names Scott as "her actual successor as Romantic novelist" ("Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" 71). The influence on Scott is not one that I follow in any detail in this dissertation, although it seems to be significant, as Leigh Hunt intimated in the 1840's. This exclusion is partly owing to considerations of time and space, partly to my deliberate focus on early Romanticism. I also hope to follow a different line in the development of fiction, one that connects Smith to her less "Romantic" but ultimately more central successor, Jane Austen.

In the diverse innovations of Charlotte Smith's novels we can see many of the features that would become characteristic of the nineteenth-century novel: the attempt to capture the heteroglossia of social life in a realistic way, the depiction of mixed characters (even mixed heroes and heroines), and the fusion of suspense and mystery with a reformist agenda. But there were other transitional novelists of the same period of which we could

⁸ Closely related to Smith's sensitivity to dialect is her realistic touch when including children in her stories. Children do not have roles in her novels as individuals or agents, but they often form part of domestic scenes, generally a circle of love surrounding a distressed but caring mother. Hilbish selects, among other passages, the following brief exchange from Emmeline:

"Whose sweet little boy are you, my love?" said she

The child looked at her with surprise

"I am my mama's boy," said he, "and so is Henry," pointing toward another who now approached, and who seemed hardly a year younger

(Emmeline 42, Hilbish 555)

Smith's knowledge of children shows most fully in her works written for young readers

say the same thing. Burney, Godwin, Wollstonecraft and others participated in the broader development of psychologically complex and socially engaged fiction. More specific lines of influence, however, can be drawn from Charlotte Smith alone to Jane Austen in particular.

2. A Novelist by Necessity

The aspect of Charlotte Smith's fiction that most obviously resembles the work of Jane Austen — and which has prompted the most commentary with respect to her influence — is her innovation in what has been called the novel of domestic sensibility, or as Julia Kavanaugh described it in the mid-nineteenth century, “the modern domestic novel” (195). The aspect of Smith's work which is most often used as a contrast with the fiction of Jane Austen is her innovation in the Gothic tradition. Here, too, an influence has been observed by critics of the novel, although it is what we might call a negative influence: Smith's fiction seems to have been among the targets of Jane Austen's anti-Gothic satire. Both of these lines of influence will be discussed shortly. First, however, I would like to suggest an influence where we might least expect one, where Smith and Austen seem to differ the most irreconcilably — in their attitude toward the art of fiction.

One of Charlotte Smith's most explicit and extended statements on the writing of fiction is the following from the Preface to Marchmont (1796), her eighth full-length novel:

In the composition of what are called novels I have been engaged (from necessity, and by no means from choice) for eight years, and my thirty-second volume is now before the Public. To the pecuniary advantage I have derived from them I owe my family's subsistence and my own, while labouring under the heaviest (and now the most irremediable) oppression that was perhaps ever practised or suffered in a country boasting of its laws. (vi-vii)

The word "irremediable" anticipates an upcoming reference to the loss of her daughter Augusta, who died in childbirth in 1794. The earlier parenthesis, "from necessity, and by no means from choice" is one of Smith's most blunt acknowledgments of her lack of affection for writing novels. This interjection might have troubled some readers with an emotion other than pity, as it seems contrary to the best interests of an author who hopes her book will sell.⁹

Smith's first Preface to a novel, for Desmond in 1792, reveals that "... circumstances have compelled me to write" (v) and outlined these circumstances with a quote from Hamlet. Owing directly to "The proud man's contumely, th' oppressor's

⁹ Smith's letters reveal from very early on in her novel-writing career an attitude at best practical but sometimes verging on resentful:

"I am compelled to live only to write, and to write only to live ..." (Letter to Mr. Shirly, August 22, 1789 [qtd. Turner 161]); "I love Novels no more than a Grocer does figs ..." (Letter to Joseph Cooper Walker, October 9, 1793 [qtd. Turner 163]); "It is on the Poetry I have written that I trust for the little reputation I may hereafter have, & I know that it is not the least likely among the works of modern Poets to reach another period if any judgement can be formed from the success it has had in this" (Letter to Cadell and Davies, August 18, 1805 [qtd. Turner 165]).

wrong; / The law's delay, the insolence of office' ... I am become an Author by profession ...” (v). In the Preface to The Banished Man (1794) Smith apologizes for “the defects of so trifling a composition as a novel” by quoting Dr. Johnson: “... it has been composed ‘amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow’ — at a time when long anxiety has ruined my health, and long oppression broken my spirit ...” (The Banished Man i). But nowhere does she reveal her bitterness about this unchosen profession as baldly as in the preface to Marchmont.

James R. Foster, contemplating the persistent high melancholy of Smith's poetry, reminds us, or perhaps pleads, “Certainly some of this is pose” (466). Readers of her fiction may also hope that some of the novelist's modesty, almost a disdain for her own productions, is pose as well. To counterbalance what appears to be her lack of commitment to the art of fiction, we could cite from Smith's letters the following, written near the end of her life and several years after she had quit writing novels: “... I will not affect to say I am not conscious of being some degrees above most of the Lady-writers of the day” (Letter to Cadell and Davies, September 2, 1805; qtd Turner 164). There is also the ambivalent reputation of the novel itself to be considered, especially the reputation of novels by women. Thus, when Smith calls her work “trifling” in the quote above, she may be employing false modesty in order to draw our attention away from the ambitiousness of her comparison of her own work under duress with that of Samuel Johnson.

Within Smith's fiction there are also many favourable references to exemplary novels and novelists — Frances Sheridan's Memoirs of Mrs. Sidney Bidulph, Sterne's Tristram Shandy, Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther, and Burney's Cecilia to name a few. Smith

also defends the novel reader. Troubled to hear that her younger sister's reading is "under proscription" (2:164), Geraldine Verney argues in Desmond against the commonplace that novels could be dangerous:

And since circumstances, more inimical to innocence, are every day related, without any disguise, or with very little, in the public prints; since in reading the world, a girl must see a thousand very ugly blots, which frequently pass without any censure at all — I own, I cannot imagine, that novel reading, can, as has been alleged, corrupt the imagination, or enervate the heart (2:166)

Charlotte Smith may have admitted, even to her own readers, that she did not much enjoy writing novels, but she seems to have understood what it meant to enjoy reading them.

There is no denying that Charlotte Smith came to novel-writing with mixed feelings, or that her favoured genre was poetry. In her fiction, especially in the later novels, she often let the process of writing show through the illusion of the fiction itself. As Hilbish says, "... a spirit of adventure was within her .." (546) However sensitive Smith needed to be to the market for novels, she also made the genre her own by turning impatience with convention, and even creative exhaustion, into literary experiment. This is nowhere more apparent than in her sixth novel, The Banished Man (1794), with its self-reflexive comic interlude, "Avis au Lecteur," ten roman-numeral pages inserted at 1:134 in the two-volume Irish edition (Dublin: Jackson, 1794) and at the beginning of volume two in the London edition. The Banished Man also has some of Smith's most vivid descriptions of

the daily tribulations of the impoverished writer, in the figure of Mrs. Denzil.¹⁰ At one point she seems to be writing the very novel in which she appears

After a conference with Mr. Tough [the debt collector], she must write a tender dialogue between some damsel, whose perfections are even greater than those

“Which youthful poets fancy when they love,”

and her hero, who, to the bravery and talents of Caesar, adds the gentleness of Sir Charles Grandison, and the wit of Lovelace (1 267-68)

This novelist, who happens to be the heroine’s mother, at one point (at least in the Irish edition) reveals her full name: “Charlotte” Denzil (1 274).

Conscious of, and often disdainful of, the conventions she was expected to fulfill as a novelist, Charlotte Smith nonetheless attempted to write fiction that lived up to her own standards as a reader and as a writer. The character Geraldine offers a burlesque of inflated style in the pages that follow her defense of the novel reader in Desmond (2:167-

¹⁰ In the “Avis au Lecteur” section of The Banished Man the author engages in a conversation with a reader on the progress of the novel. She admits to being exhausted in the creation of castles:

I find that Mowbray Castle, Grasmere Abbey, the castle of Rock March, the castle of Hauteville, and Rayland Hall, have taken so many of my materials to construct, that I have hardly a watch tower, a Gothic arch, a cedar parlour, or a long gallery, an illuminated window, or a ruined chapel, left to help myself. . . (i [Irish edition])

In the day in the life of Mrs. Denzil (1 267-274 [Irish edition]) we get an excerpt of a letter from her publisher:

Am much surprised at your not sending up, as promised, the end of the third volume of the new novel purchased by me. Must insist on having a hundred pages at least by Saturday night. (1 270-71 [Irish edition])

Katharine Rogers has reprinted this “day in the life” section of The Banished Man in her short anthology Before Their Time: Six Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century (1979)

68), and we may infer that Smith tried to keep her own style above parody. But with contracts that paid her by the volume, sometimes in advance, she was often writing in haste, and the result frequently was unevenness of tone and problems with plotting and pace. Although Smith's style at its best is rhythmic and clear, there are gaffes, large and small, in all of her novels, which only the luxury of revision could have helped. The reader of Emmeline, for instance, must endure the following short paragraph, which opens with a dangling modifier:

Uncertain what to do, another day passed; and on the following morning, while she waited for Lady Westhaven, she was addressed by Godolphin, who calmly and gravely enquired if she would honour him with any commands for England. (406)

In the preface to Marchmont, Smith apologizes for shortcomings in her previous novel Montalbert (1795), which had no Preface, and which she seems to consider more than usually disadvantaged by her sorrows. She also explains that in the composition of Marchmont she was without her personal library, so that

... the mottoes and quotations I have used, have been either copied from memory or a common-place book; and as neither the one nor the other always furnished me with the name of the poet or essayist whose words I borrowed, I have omitted the names of all. (xi)

Charlotte Smith's oppressions, though long-ended, will have an after-life of sorts in the pains required of her future editors.

Anne Henry Ehrenpreis, introducing The Old Manor House in 1969, admits even of

Smith's most highly praised novel that the first volume is superior to the rest. Much of this book was written in a period of relative happiness and comfort, in the summer of 1792 when Smith was a guest of William Hayley's and in the company of other writers and artists. The most successful scenes in the book make Ehrenpreis "... devoutly wish that Mrs. Smith had the leisure to write more often with a comparable degree of care" (xvii). The Old Manor House, she points out, was carefully revised for typos in the second edition. But none of Smith's novels seems to have been actually re-written, and almost all of them have discontinuities in plot and speaker which cause them to resemble, when the reader is stalled between volumes, bad eighteenth-century picaresques as much as unified nineteenth-century novels.

In this respect at least, Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith could not have been further apart. Austen's novels show the polish that could be achieved by careful revision and redrafting; her control of narrative voice and of the progress of a unified plot is firm and calculated. But duress and finesse can sometimes have similar expressions. Among the many experiments in The Banished Man is the following authorial aside:

One great objection to novels is the frequent recurrences of love scenes; which readers of so many descriptions turn from as unnatural, or pass over as fulsome; while, to those who alone perhaps read them with avidity, they are said to be of dangerous tendency. The conversations then which decided that D'Alonville was an accepted lover, by the woman he adored, and the parting of persons thus mutually attached, when one was going to a country from whence there were so many chances that he might never

return, shall be passed over (2:32 [Irish edition])

This strange and ironic intrusion on the part of the author, a paradoxically inclusive omission, reminds us of Jane Austen's famous reserve in the moments when her main characters profess their love. In the proposal scene between Emma and Knightly, for instance, Knightly says, "I cannot make speeches, Emma ...," and proceeds to speak nonetheless. Then for Emma's part: "— What did she say? — Just what she ought, of course ..." (*Emma* 430-431), with no indication of her exact words. There is something of this same tone of polite reserve combined with authorial importunity at the end of

Mansfield Park:

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. — I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (470)

Both authors seemed to have been uncomfortable with the voyeurism implicit in romantic fiction, or rather with voyeurism as an end of romantic fiction, and would rather give their characters privacy than attempt to write the ideal and believable love conversation.

Though Charlotte Smith's compositional haste is often transparent, and sometimes debilitating, some of her wittier time-saving devices seemed to have appealed to the impatience of Jane Austen — an impatience with novelistic cant that both authors shared.

3. Smith and Radcliffe

When James R. Foster published “Charlotte Smith: Pre-Romantic Novelist” in 1928, he was contributing not so much to Charlotte Smith’s revival as to the revival of an only slightly less obscure author. The previous year, Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian in A History of English Literature (1927) — under “Pre-Romanticism” and the sub-head “The Pre-Romantic Novel” — opened their discussion of Ann Radcliffe with the following words: “The spell of Romanticism in all its potency was first brought home to English readers by a writer of original gifts, whose name to-day, however, is as good as forgotten” (967). In the footnote to this passage Smith is mentioned, but only as a minor precursor to Radcliffe, leading back to the fiction of Clara Reeve. By such constructions as these, Charlotte Smith was distanced from the Gothic influence on the Romantic poets. As the twentieth century progressed, Ann Radcliffe would rise from obscurity to be remembered as the foremost Gothic novelist and the most influential novelist of the pre-Romantic period. We shall see later how a similar genealogy in the critical discourse on pre-Romantic poetry distanced Charlotte Smith from the Romantics in a similar fashion, with William Lisle Bowles in the role of mediator rather than Radcliffe.

A few twentieth-century critics realized that Charlotte Smith deserved more credit for invention in the realm of the Gothic than had been suspected. Gothic elements are present in all of Smith’s novels, but are strongest in Emmeline (whose subtitle is “The Orphan of the Castle”), Celestina, The Old Manor House, and Montalbert. Even Foster in

1928, though he could say Smith's novels were "dead, and justly so," was aware that she had been a major literary presence before Radcliffe's peak of fame: "The relative position these two novelists held in the years before the publication of Udolpho has been exactly reversed" (463). Although he does not quarrel with this evaluative shift, Foster finds that in Emmeline "... the method and plan is that employed in the later novels of Mrs. Smith and the most successful ones of Ann Radcliffe" (470). The method and plan are the familiar essentials of the Gothic novel: sentiment and suspense and the isolated young heroine of uncertain parentage, trapped or unwelcome in a large and mysterious home. By citing the reviews, Foster demonstrates that Celestina, Smith's third novel, appeared early in 1791, while Radcliffe's Romance of the Forest, her first full-length work, appeared later in the same year. He argues that Celestina was "... in point of influence, perhaps the most important of Smith's tales" (473). In the final volume of Celestina, Smith breaks into the "European" Gothic that we usually think of as Radcliffe's invention: there are scenic descriptions of the Pyrenees, an ancient French castle, and a framed tale of parental tyranny, monasteries and imprisonments that explains the mysterious origins of the heroine. Foster admits that Smith's descriptive powers constitute her greatest influence: "With Mrs. Smith the pictorial, whether macabre, exotic or pastoral, became an important element in the novel. Her influence was immediate, and is most noteworthy in the work of Ann Radcliffe" (474).

Smith and Radcliffe were contemporaries, and rivals in the same marketplace. They would likely have read each other's work, and, as Foster points out, "borrowing can work two ways ..." (473). Montalbert (1794), he argues, "took from Udolpho and gave to The



Italian" (473). Nonetheless, there is truth to the observation made by J.M.S. Tompkins, in The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800, that it is "Charlotte Smith ... who first begins to explore in fiction the possibilities of the Gothic castle, and her Emmeline (1788) is the first heroine whose beauty is seen glowing against that grim background, or who is hunted along the passages at night" (266). Ehrenpreis would later correct Tompkins and point out that Isabella from Walpole's Castle of Otranto (1764) is the precedent ("Introduction" Emmeline xi). But if we add the qualification that the Gothic horrors must be contained within a non-supernatural narrative, that the novel must be in the realistic tradition, then Smith's Emmeline retains its distinction.

Devendra Varma in The Gothic Flame (1957) quotes Foster at length, accepting his argument that Smith was highly influential for Ann Radcliffe. Varma's citation from Foster is worth repeating for its assembly of specifics:

Montoni's marriage with Emily's aunt [in The Italian] is not unlike Roker's marriage of Leonard [Aunt Lennard in The Old Manor House], the ghosts of Bangy castle [in The Mysteries of Udolpho] prove to be the smugglers of the Old Manor House, while the recovery of Ludovico reminds one of the banditti scene in Desmond. (Foster 475; qtd. Varma 122, inserts Varma)

In his 1980 dissertation Charlotte Smith: Popular Novelist, Carroll Lee Fry also confirms Foster's estimate of Smith's influence and quotes Varma's critical observation that in Radcliffe, as opposed to Smith, "[a]tmosphere and scenery provide the whole focus of interest ... while the characters, like the figures in a landscape, are subordinated ..." (The

Gothic Flame 113). Fry illustrates the point with a scene from Radcliffe's The Italian (1797) in which the appearance of a sublime vista interrupts what should be a hurried flight from potentially murderous pursuers. "Charlotte Smith," he observes, "is never guilty of this sort of liberty with probability" (105-06).¹¹

The observation that Smith was the innovator of the integrated picturesque in narrative fiction was made as long ago as 1806 by Egerton Brydges: "In Mrs. Radcliffe's works ... the narrative is often of little use but to introduce the description to which it is subservient; in Mrs. Smith's the description is ... never forced into service" (Censura Literaria 4:81). My intention here, however, is not to compare and contrast Smith and Radcliffe as novelists, nor to investigate further their complex reciprocal influence. I do want to stress the way in which Smith's novels in the twentieth century have had to struggle against received opinion just to make a space for themselves in the canon. Smith's occlusion by Ann Radcliffe is just one aspect of the general obstruction of her critical visibility, a legacy of the conservative backlash of the 1790's and of Romantic literary history. The spell of the latter has lasted well into the twentieth century.

In 1941 it was conventional wisdom that Radcliffe was the progenitor of atmospheric description in the novel and Smith the imitator. F.M.A. Hilbish reluctantly observes: "Scott is perhaps to blame" (529). In his essay on Radcliffe in Lives of the Novelists (1827) Scott states categorically (with only the slightest sign of flinching) that The Sicilian Romance, published in 1790, qualified Ann Radcliffe for

¹¹ The fact that improbabilities in Radcliffe strike us as improbable confirms that she is in the realistic tradition as much as Smith is.

the praise ... of having been the first to introduce into her prose fictions a beautiful and fanciful tone of natural description and impressive narrative, which had hitherto been exclusively applied to poetry Mrs. Radcliffe has a title to be considered as the first poetess of romantic fiction, that is, if actual rhythm shall not be deemed essential to poetry”

(qtd. Hilbish 529)

In all that Walter Scott wrote elsewhere in praise of Charlotte Smith, she never came in for such “titles” as these. Scott, naturally enough, is writing literary history in such a way that his own fiction stands in the central line, and his novels do resemble Radcliffe’s more than Smith’s, most obviously in their archaic “romance” quality. But as Scott himself had some debts to Smith, and had all her early novels in his library, we find that, to use Hilbish’s polite euphemism, “we cannot entirely excuse him ...” (529). There is no denying that Ann Radcliffe was an influential author, both for the Romantic poets and for Jane Austen. As we shall see, however, Charlotte Smith influenced Jane Austen not only through Radcliffe, but also directly, without the mediation of her more famous contemporary.

4. From Ethelinde to Northanger Abbey.

A Palimpsest

The first critic to argue for a specific influence of Charlotte Smith on Jane Austen was Mary Lascelles in Jane Austen and her Art (1939). As the instance involves parody rather than imitation it does not at first suggest admiration on Austen's part. Lascelles notices that the portrait given of Catherine Morland in Northanger Abbey (1818) seems to depart, point by point, from the description of Emmeline in Smith's first novel. Emmeline, she notes,

... besides forming correct tastes in a ruined library, had 'of every useful and ornamental employment ... long since made herself mistress without any instruction' But Catherine, alas, 'never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid.' And whereas Emmeline 'had learned to play on the harp, by being present when Mrs. Ashwood received lessons on that instrument,' she . . . 'had advanced no farther than to be able to listen to other people's performance with very little fatigue.' This was not all — 'her greatest deficiency was the pencil'; here she fell miserably short of Emmeline, who 'endeavoured to cultivate a genius for drawing, which she had inherited from her father' . . . (Lascelles 60)

Thirty years later, Anne Henry Ehrenpreis would agree with Lascelles's analysis, but would also take a significant further step. Ehrenpreis published three brief but very

concentrated essays on Charlotte Smith: the introductions to the first and thus far the only two Smith novels to appear in the Oxford novels series (The Old Manor House in 1969, and Emmeline in 1971) and the essay “Northanger Abbey: Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith” (1970).

In her introduction to Emmeline, Ehrenpreis notes that Austen’s juvenilia includes several references to Charlotte Smith’s first novel. The first reference is in the brief “History of England,” written in 1791. The spoof actually includes two references to the hero of Emmeline, Delamere (Minor Works 144,147). In both cases his name comes up as an appropriate compeer for one of Austen’s favorite figures from British history, Lord Essex, Queen Elizabeth’s ill-fated courtier. Delamare, the passionate and impulsive hero of the first half of Emmeline, is rejected by the heroine as Elizabeth rejected Essex. The other reference to Smith’s novel is part of a much fuller allusion. In the sketch entitled “Catherine, or The Bower” (Minor Works 192-242), there is a scene between the heroine and her flighty new friend Camilla Stanley. “Eager to know that their sentiments as to Books were similar,” Catherine asks:

“You have read Mrs. Smith’s Novels, I suppose?” ... “Oh! Yes, replied the other, and I am quite delighted with them — They are the sweetest things in the world —” “And which do you prefer of them?” “Oh! dear, I think there is no comparison between them — Emmeline is so much better than any of the others —” “Many people think so, I know; but there does not appear so great a disproportion in their Merits to me; do you think it is better written?” “Oh! I do not know anything about that — but it is better

in everything — Besides, Ethelinde is so long —” “But did you not find the story of Ethelinde very interesting? And the descriptions of Grasmere, are not the[y] beautiful?” (Minor Works 199)

The conversation ends here, as the mention of Grasmere sets Camilla off on the tangent of her future plans to travel in the Lake District.

In her short article “Northanger Abbey: Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith” (1970), Ehrenpreis develops a fascinating argument based on the acknowledged relationship between two related scenes in Jane Austen’s writing. One scene is this discussion from “Catherine, or The Bower” and the other is from Northanger Abbey, where another Catherine, Catherine Morland, discusses novels with another flighty friend, Isabella Thorpe. Alan D. McKillop and Cecil S. Emden had already pointed out that Austen’s later scene is modelled on the earlier one from her juvenilia. What Ehrenpreis discovers is that there is an even earlier precedent, and that it appears in the novel to which Austen draws our attention in “Catherine, or The Bower”: Smith’s Ethelinde. The critic is “startled to come across” the following scene, between Ethelinde and Miss Clarinthia Ludford:

Ethelinde now found she was expected to speak, and therefore said —
 “What, then do you principally read, Madam? ... You read history, perhaps?”

“Oh yes, a great deal of history. One must, you know, be acquainted with those things, or else one appears ignorant. But after all 'tis fatiguing enough. To tell you the truth, my great delight is in novels.”

“Novels,” said Ethelinde, “are certainly very entertaining.”

“Oh yes, delightful! and the only fault I find with some of the latest is that they are too probable, and I fancy myself reading what is true. Now the thing I like is to be carried out of myself by a fiction quite out of common life, and to get among scenes and people of another world.”

“In that I should think you might easily be gratified.”

(Ethelinde 2:165-68)

As Ehrenpreis observes, the parallels between this scene and the two scenes in Austen’s work are striking. She concludes that in “Catherine, or the Bower,” “... seventeen-year old Jane Austen was not merely indulging her irrepressible itch to parody” but also “... share[d] the sensible Catherine’s relatively favourable judgement of Ethelinde” (345-46). Ehrenpreis notes various similarities between Ethelinde, “Catherine, or the Bower,” and Northanger Abbey, including the continuity between the friends in each context, Clarintha, Camilla, and Isabella Thorpe, each of whom has a brother who becomes infatuated with the respective heroine. “Charlotte Smith,” Ehrenpreis argues, quietly differing from Mary Lascelles, “was quite a good enough writer to serve as more than a figure for ridicule.” She is also, Ehrenpreis notes, “... the only contemporary novelist mentioned by name in the juvenilia” (346).

The value of Ehrenpreis’s short essay is that it explodes the notion, voiced as recently as 1966 by Bradbrook, that “Charlotte Smith’s fiction was only of negative use to Jane Austen” (105). Most importantly Ehrenpreis stresses a “deeper parallel.” A scene of “heavy-handed satire” in Ethelinde “contains the germ of something Jane Austen

developed with light-fingered delicacy the author's smiling implication that the novel we are reading is superior to those it burlesques ..." (347). No doubt the scene in Austen's Northanger Abbey is subtler than either Austen's own first draft or the original scene in Charlotte Smith. But we may expect increasing subtlety as a device is developed through various versions by more than one author. The scene in Smith's Ethelinde does not appear heavy-handed until we set it beside Austen's Northanger Abbey. Indeed, the "smiling implication that the novel we are reading is superior to those it burlesques" is fully present in Charlotte Smith's novel. And we might also point out that one of the features that makes Austen's satirical scene in Northanger Abbey more subtle as criticism is that her Catherine Morland is more enthusiastic about "horrid novels" than either the earlier Catherine or Smith's Ethelinde. That is, in order to show her own literary taste, the author of Northanger Abbey must make her heroine a less discerning reader than herself. Charlotte Smith does not make this trade-off.

The novel that the young women discuss in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey is neither Emmeline nor Ethelinde, but Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). Ehrenpreis considers that it was primarily changing literary fashion that led to the substitution of Radcliffe for Smith between the earlier and later versions of the scene. In August 1792, when "Catherine, or The Bower" was written, Charlotte Smith was at the height of her celebrity as a novelist. By 1798-99, when Northanger Abbey was composed,¹² Ann Radcliffe had taken Smith's place as "the new phenomenon of the world

¹² C. S. Emden has suggested that there was an early draft of Northanger Abbey written around 1794. See "Northanger Abbey Re-Dated?" Notes and Queries 195 (1950), and "The Composition of Northanger Abbey" RES 19 (1968).

of romance.” Thus Jane Austen’s “new Catherine discusses black veils instead of Grasmere scenery” (Ehrenpreis 347). As Ehrenpreis puts it — with an allusion to Austen’s defense of her sister novelists in Northanger Abbey — the result of the alteration is that “behind that famous conversation lies much more of one forgotten member of the ‘injured body’ of contemporary novelists than has been suspected” (347).

Austen’s choice of Radcliffe’s Udolpho as the prime target of her satire in Northanger Abbey is not just a matter of timing, not just that she happened to be the most popular novelist of the year. Austen must also have been motivated by Radcliffe’s Gothic extremes. Catherine Morland’s unrealistic fears of murder while at the abbey need to be based on a type of fiction that, in the words of Smith’s Clarinthia Ludford, takes one “... quite out of common life.” But it would trivialize the whole project — and Austen has a serious intent even in Northanger Abbey — if the novel satirized was a mediocre novel. Radcliffe is more suitable to the later version of the scene not just because she was the new epitome of popularity, but also for the dual reason that her novels were more open to parody than Charlotte Smith’s, and at the same time just as respectable as contemporary fiction, if not more so.

There may be yet another reason for Austen’s revision of the scene from “Catherine, or the Bower.” The famous defense of novels and novelists, which appears in the chapter before the conversation between Catherine and Isabella in Northanger Abbey, provides a hint. At this point in her story Austen has not yet distinguished between Isabella’s “horrid” novels and novels such as Sir Charles Grandison, which Isabella also (with a different meaning) refers to as “horrid.” The defense is meant to cover novels in general:

Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure ... Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried

(Northanger Abbey 21)

We may note first that Austen's tone here takes on something of Charlotte Smith's characteristic vitriol — a rare tone for her — especially when she goes on to complain that “... the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens” (22). Her defense of abused novelists also begs the important question of whether Ann Radcliffe in 1798-99 was typical in this respect — whether or not she was routinely abused by reviewers. Austen's caricature of the disapproval of reviewers who “talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans” applies best, of course, to the “horrid” novels that Isabella lists by title only, and which have since disappeared.¹³ Ann Radcliffe, though, was quite well received by the reviewers. It was Charlotte Smith who was routinely the target of censorious remarks in the press, especially by the late 1790's.

Smith was never condemned outright for literary inadequacies, or for writing

¹³ The Oxford edition of Northanger Abbey credits M. Sadleir with identifying the authors of these titles (382 n 24).

“horrid” novels, but she was consistently faulted by liberal and conservative critics alike for the “asperity” of her fiction and its blatantly “personal” aspect. And there was another kind of journalism afoot, works such as The Pursuit of Literature: A Satirical Poem by T. E. Mathias, which had gone through six editions by 1798. In its “First Dialogue” the author asks: “Or must I tempt some Novel’s theme, / Bid the bright eye o’er Celestina stream ...” (20) The note to this line explains that “Celestina” is

Put for almost any modern novel. Mrs. Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Mary Robinson, Mrs. c. & c. though all of them are ingenious ladies, yet they are too frequently whining or frisking in novels, till our girls heads turn wild with impossible adventures, and now and then are tainted with democracy. — Not so the mighty magician of The Mysteries of Udolpho.¹⁴ (20n)

Granted, this is conservative criticism, of a piece with the Anti-Jacobin, but the late 1790’s was a conservative time. Jane Austen herself has convinced many of her readers that she was a staunch conservative. Without resolving the question of Austen’s politics, or pre-judging Ann Radcliffe’s, we may nonetheless conjecture that there may have been a political reason for choosing Udolpho — it was a safer choice than a Charlotte Smith novel. If this is the case, then the apology implicit in Austen’s defense of an “injured body” may actually be directed more toward a novelist whose works are not named than

¹⁴ In a letter to a publisher Charlotte Smith lets drop that “Mrs Ratcliffe [sic] is restrained by the authority of her husband from calling any more ‘spirits from the vasty deep’ of her imagination” (Letter to Joseph Cooper Walker, circa 1801 qtd Turner 164.) The wording here, the implied comparison to Glendower in Shakespeare’s Henry IV, may have been provoked by this epithet of “mighty magician” in The Pursuit of Literature.

toward the author of Udolpho.

At the end of her article “Northanger Abbey: Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith”

Anne Henry Ehrenpreis quotes Mary Lascelles:

There are implicit allusions of many kinds — lying as it were, at various depths — in Jane Austen’s writings; ... it seems likely that there may be many more still lying perdu — not noticeable because they sprang from an impulse of expression rather than communication, were nothing but the spontaneous record of her response — whether assent or protest — to what she read (Lascelles 45-46; qtd. Ehrenpreis 348).

What Jane Austen said or didn’t say about the authors she approved or disapproved of may not have been so “impulsive” or “expressive” a matter as Lascelles and Ehrenpreis assume.

Q.D. Leavis, describing the way in which drafts of fictions from as early as “Catherine, or The Bower” were rewritten to become the mature novels, calls Austen’s final works “palimpsests.”¹⁵ Even the juvenilia have some of the qualities of the palimpsest, and in particular one erasure in the manuscript may be pertinent here. Just before the scene between Catherine and Camilla in which Charlotte Smith’s novels are discussed, the motivations of Jane Austen’s young heroine are presented:

... but though she was well read in Modern history herself, she chose rather to speak first of Books of a lighter kind, of Books universally read and

¹⁵ See Q.D. Leavis, “A Critical Theory of Jane Austen’s Writings,” Scrutiny 10:1, 61-87.

admired, [and that have given rise perhaps to more frequent Arguments than any other of the same sort]. (199)

The square brackets appear in Chapman's standard edition, and indicate text which has been "erased."

Why this clause was erased, and by whom, we do not know. One explanation is that the words were erased because they are not borne out by what follows. Emmeline and Ethelinde, the two Smith novels mentioned in the ensuing dialogue, did give rise to some argument, but nothing unprecedented. The young Mary Wollstonecraft, reviewing for the Analytical, objected to the secondary love affair in Emmeline as endorsing lapses of chastity (1:333) Ethelinde took a slight risk by portraying the suppressed desire of a married man for the heroine. But Catherine and Camilla do not discuss these or any other controversies. A different explanation of the erased text emerges if we take a second look at the date of composition of Austen's "Catherine, or The Bower": August of 1792. By that time two more of "Mrs Smith's novels" had appeared, Celestina in 1791 and Desmond in June of 1792. Celestina mentioned the French Revolution approvingly in its final volume. Desmond concerned itself intimately with the events and ideas surrounding the Revolution, and in doing so provoked a good deal of "Argument." The reviews of Desmond began to appear in July,¹⁶ predictably split along political lines. Conservative reviewers were later than liberal reviewers in noticing the novel, and at first there was as

¹⁶ See Hilbish, p. 147, for reviews of Desmond with dates. As Hilbish notes, Desmond "left extant more critical comments than any other novel by Mrs. Smith" (146).

much resistance to the love interest as to the politics.¹⁷

Even though Austen's Catherine does not mention these most recent Charlotte Smith novels, she does say of Smith's novels collectively that "... there does not appear so great a disproportion in their Merits to me ..." (199), implying she found not only Ethelinde, but also Celestina, and perhaps even Desmond, as satisfying as Emmeline. Jane Austen may not have read Desmond by August of 1792, just two months after its publication, but she would surely have heard of its scandal. As Mrs Dorset says in her memoir of her sister, Desmond "... brought a host of literary ladies in array against her, armed with all the malignity which envy could inspire!" (Scott Miscellaneous Prose 4:94). Perhaps it was Austen's sister, Cassandra, who thought that there was no need for posterity to know that Jane read novels that "had given rise to more Argument than any other of the same sort." Perhaps Jane Austen thought better of foreshadowing a conversation she would not, in the event, have the temerity to write. Perhaps if Camilla Stanley had not changed the subject, Austen's first Catherine would have gotten round to discussing "Modern history" after all.

¹⁷ See Bowstead 239-40 for more on reviews of Desmond. See also Rigby, "Radical Spectators of the Revolution: the Case of the Analytical Review" where it is shown that the literary reviews were generally liberal in their politics, so much so that the reactionary Anti-Jacobin Review could attack the Monthly Review, the Critical Review and The Annual Register as being, along with the more obviously radical Analytical Review, part of a "Grand Conspiracy against Social Order" (65n17). This is one reason why it is difficult to find serious literary reviews that strongly attack the politics of Smith's work.

5. Heroines

Walter Scott and Egerton Brydges expressed their admiration for Charlotte Smith's heroines in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but it was Julia Kavanagh in 1863 who began the feminist tradition of crediting Charlotte Smith with a major development in the portrayal of the rational and independent woman. In Charlotte Smith's fiction Kavanagh finds the "perfect prototype of the lady in the modern novels of today" (201). In a new key and with greater scholarly precision, modern feminist critics have begun an analysis of female agency, voice, and creativity in her work. In the late twentieth century, Smith's heroines seem perhaps too perfect, but we are still in reaction to the very long reign of an ideal of womanhood bequeathed to the nineteenth century by such authors as Burney, Smith, and Jane Austen and then standardized and elaborated by the Victorians. Smith's contribution to the domestic tradition was strongest in her earlier works of fiction, Emmeline (1788), Ethelinde (1789), and Celestina (1791). But even in the later novels, which have more mobile male figures as their central characters, the domestic remains a strong element, both for the hero and for the heroine. The exploration of female agency continues in the novels with male heroes, many of which were eponymous. In her depiction of Monimia in The Old Manor House, Rosalie Lessington in Montalbert, and Althea D'Acres in Marchmont Smith maintained her focus on female character. When we have read a number of Charlotte Smith's novels, we find that her heroines, or at least their circumstances, are more various than we might expect. Monimia of The Old Manor House, Smith's most widely available novel, is not only the youngest but also the meekest

of her heroines. This may be among the reasons the novel has so often been singled out as Smith's least objectionable fiction, even her best.

In 1932, J.M.S. Tompkins would find Kavanaugh's 1863 essay on Smith relevant to her study of The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800. She paraphrases Kavanaugh as follows:

... in Charlotte Smith's books the new heroine is fully evolved, a quiet, steadfast, sensitive girl, whose virtue is modesty and her strength endurance, whose character is ripened by adversity and love, and who solaces her worst hours with the contemplation of nature and the English poets. (143)

Tompkins feels that Kavanaugh "overstates her case and post-dates the appearance of the new heroine by at least twenty years, but there is truth in what she says ..." (143).

Tompkins's qualification is based on a very wide reading of the novels of the period and a scholar's exactitude about the appearance of every individual element of the new heroine in earlier works, often works which are otherwise undistinguished. The new character nonetheless becomes available as a type because of Smith's consistency in giving each of her heroines the same new constellation of virtues. As Kavanaugh says "Emmeline and Ethelinda are far beyond anything similar in contemporary literature, French or English. They have been imitated until their successors have grown commonplace and tame ..." (203-04).

Although Smith's heroines are often forced into passivity by convention, parental authority or imprisonment, they have not only individual will but some room to exercise it.

They are distinguishable from the generation of heroines who came before them by their combination of previously unreconciled qualities and their accession to new freedoms. Fictional heroines in the latter half of the eighteenth century were largely circumscribed by the two basic types made popular by Richardson. Between the two poles of Pamela's stubborn pursuit of respectability and Clarissa's stubborn reliance on virtue, there was no successful middle ground until Smith's virtuous and rational heroines appeared. They combined Clarissa's unimpeachable motives with Pamela's knowledge of character and the world, Clarissa's innocence with Pamela's wisdom. Along with "the dignity of conscious worth" — a formulation used repeatedly by Smith to describe the source of their fortitude — Smith's heroines have unusual intellectual strength in confrontations with authority and a physical boldness which allows them to strike out alone when necessary. We might say the same of Fanny Burney's heroines, but they are not singled out from their world by extreme psychological hardships, nor are they physically highlighted by solitude, imprisonment or flight, as is usually the fate of Smith's heroines. Burney's rational and virtuous protagonists are an integral part of their social milieu; but if they were not at the centre of their respective narratives, they would hardly stand out. Smith's heroines appear in a more "interesting" light because of their melancholy, their isolation and the intensity of their distress. Her heroines have the added advantage of belonging to a somewhat lower economic class than Burney's high-life heiresses, closer to the class of Austen's rural ladies and gentlemen.

Unlike Jane Austen's heroines, the individuality of Smith's heroines is not primarily psychological or temperamental; not, that is, a matter of varying proportions of sense and

sensibility. Smith's heroines are made prematurely and almost uniformly wise by misfortune, and they derive what uniqueness they have from the uniqueness of their misfortunes. As Smith explains in an authorial aside in Marchmont:

It has been said that Shakespeare, the great delineator of human character, has failed in distinguishing his principal women -- and that such as are meant to be amiable are all equally gentle and good. How difficult then is it for a novelist to give to one of his heroines any very marked feature which shall not disfigure her! Too much reason and self-command destroy the interest we take in her distresses. . . Other virtues than gentleness, pity, filial obedience, or faithful attachment, hardly belong to the sex, and are certainly called forth only by unusual occurrences. Such was undoubtedly the lot of Althea, and they formed her character. . . (1:128)

And here Smith's innovative streak helps her out even where psychological invention seems to fail and convention stifle her. As Tompkins puts it, "Mrs. Charlotte Smith is a very pretty hand at distressing her heroines; moreover, her methods are delicate and probable ..." (104).

J. R. Foster noted a Charlotte Smith "first" in the distresses of the heroine of The Old Manor House (1791), a first which he presents as emblematic of Smith's realism, and which has rather obvious social significance:

The Old Manor House (1793), while not without romantic elements, is the best expression of this more matter-of-fact vein. The heroine is an orphan — a genuine orphan who neither turns out to be of noble extraction nor an

heiress (467)

Realism at the intersection between plot and characterization (and, I think, another Charlotte Smith first) can also be seen in the trials of Geraldine Verney in Desmond, a heroine who at the same time is a nursing mother — something controversial enough among women of the upper classes at the time. Geraldine's fear for her babe-in-arms is not made into melodrama, but serves to emphasize her selflessness, and thus gives her definition as the most maternal of Smith's heroines.

Smith's heroines all have the same basic personality, but they are individualized by the circumstances into which they are thrown — by their plots. Emmeline, Smith's first heroine, is remarkable for her stubbornness in resisting suitors and her ability to reason with herself, with Delamere and other authority figures. In strength of will and expressive intelligence she established the pattern for the heroines of all subsequent Charlotte Smith novels. Her stubbornness is especially stressed, however, by the fact that no better suitor than Delamere is offered for Emmeline or the reader to hold out for until late in the novel, and the first hero has much to recommend him. To make the pressure on Emmeline and the reader even greater — the pressure to support a compromise with the heart — there are several far worse suitors for Emmeline to reject in the meantime.

Geraldine Verney, on the other hand, heroine of Desmond and possessed of almost identical virtues as Emmeline or Ethelinde or Celestina, is a married woman, and married to a scoundrel. Because she no longer has even the limited freedom of the unattached young woman, she appears to be less aggressive, and more internally divided than other Smith heroines. Geraldine must accommodate her sense of right with her duty as a wife,

and the conflict is crueller — psychologically if not morally more difficult — than the dilemmas of the unmarried heroines (or the secretly married heroine of Montalbert). Verney, as Geraldine's husband, has far greater claims on Geraldine in the eyes of "the world" than Delamare has on Emmeline, for in Emmeline's case the heroine and the reader know that the "engagement" is a mere misrepresentation on Delamere's part.

Charlotte Smith worked some strikingly varied effects on her readers by putting what is essentially the same heroine through such different tests. Huang Mei, in her 1980 article "Emmeline and the 'Designing' Woman" relates Smith's heroines to Wollstonecraft's championing of reason as a virtue equally accessible to women and men (56). "Emmeline, the exalted heroine of this novel, is a disturbingly alert businesswoman in the transaction of love and marriage ..." (56). Her "cool-mindedness and circumspection ... [are] almost astonishing" (57). Mei implies that the reader, as well as the thwarted lover Delamere and his powerful friends and relations, would have found Emmeline willful and even cruel in her rejection of such a romantic and passionate hero. And indeed this is the reaction remembered by Walter Scott, looking back at his youthful enthusiasm for the novel, and parodied by the young Jane Austen when she calls Delamere in her juvenilia one of the "first of Men" (along with Essex and Gilpin).

Diana Bowstead, in her 1986 article "Charlotte Smith's Desmond: The Epistolary Novel as Ideological Argument" discusses another of Smith's thematic variations on the virtuous heroine. Bowstead argues that as readers we are meant to feel the folly of Geraldine Verney's obedience to her vicious husband. As a result "... her rectitude seems hollow and unwholesome" (260). This experiment with conventional expectations may

have been more successfully managed than the double-hero device of Emmeline, but in both cases the experiment in characterization works in accordance with the larger themes of the novels — personal and political liberty, or freedom of conscience. If Smith made Emmeline a little too stiff in her first novel, it was not in order to suggest that her virtue was misplaced. Emmeline's reward of an even more admirable, though less flamboyant man in *Godolphin* is surely intended to signal the author's approval of her heroine's stubbornness. The fact that so many readers resisted Emmeline's resistance, and hoped the imprudent man would be accepted or reformed or that the young woman would honour the world's assumptions, shows just how pertinent Smith's experiments with her readers' expectations really were, and just how experimental, in the sense of risking offence.

Jane Austen never tested her heroines with the extremes of privation and anxiety made normative by Richardson and elaborately complicated by Charlotte Smith. This is not just because Jane Austen was a more realistic novelist, but also because her personal knowledge of a woman's fate was different, more hopeful. The distance from Richardson was historical and sexual; the distance from Charlotte Smith was a matter of circumstance. Unmarried herself, but domestically secure, Austen had good reason to appear more optimistic about the protection — and freedom — that society, family, and even matrimony, could afford to women.

As J.M.S. Tompkins has observed of women's place and women's fiction in the late eighteenth century:

Safety lay in one thing and one only, a strict adherence to established moral

values. Even the liberal spirit of Mrs. Charlotte Smith will be found faithful in the main to this allegiance, for her liberality expresses itself not in tampering with standards but in a greater tenderness to frailty, a less rigid distribution of justice. (149)

It is significant that if any author of the period were to prove an exception in Tompkins's opinion, it might have been Charlotte Smith. The morality of her fiction was often at the limit of acceptability, and perhaps even helped to alter what was acceptable in a novel. But it is not in Smith's tolerance of moral lapses that we will find any strong influence on Jane Austen. Although she doesn't demand perfection of her heroines and heroes, Austen adhered at least as strictly as most female novelists to established moral values. Some of this difference is attributable to circumstance. Jane Austen, no less than Charlotte Smith, generally wrote about distresses that she knew first hand, and her life, as well as her art, was less fraught with transgression.

As creators of heroines that continue to engage modern readers, there seems to be a rather large qualitative difference between Charlotte Smith and Jane Austen. But it is important to acknowledge that it is a difference of degree only. By finding greater variety among female central characters, and at the same time subjecting them to less extreme distresses, Jane Austen re-invented the domestic novel and established a new standard of subtlety far above her immediate predecessors. But she did not reinvent the heroine entire. Indeed, some readers seem to have felt that on the criterion of characterization, the two authors were very close. Ehrenpreis notes a contemporary reader's reaction to Emmeline from The Life and Letters of Anna Isabella, Lady Noel Byron (1929). After

reading Pride and Prejudice, published anonymously in 1813, Annabella Millbanke characterized the new novel by saying: “It is written by a sister of Charlotte Smith’s and contains more strength of character than other productions of this kind” (55; qtd. Ehrenpreis, “Introduction” to Emmeline, xiii n2).

In Jane Austen’s first published novel, Sense and Sensibility (1811), there are two basic types of female protagonist rather than one, embodied by the sisters Elinor and Marianne and abstracted in the novel’s title. These are two new types, quite different from Pamela and Clarissa. As early as her next novel, Pride and Prejudice (1813), Austen had developed her own synthesis in the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Only Fanny Price, Austen’s most dependent heroine, is what we might call a traditional heroine of sensibility. Indeed, it is Fanny Price who most resembles the model of sensibility at the centre of Charlotte Smith’s novels.

Charlotte Smith was capable, however, of creating a female character as witty as she was good, one who might justifiably be called a precursor of Elizabeth Bennett and Emma Woodhouse. Fanny Waverley in Desmond (1793) predates not only Austen’s outspoken heroines but also the parodic extreme of Bage’s Maria Fluart, the heroine’s gun-slinging, cross-dressing friend in Hermesprong (1796). Here is a sample of Fanny’s Waverley’s usual tone and temper, believably comical without being self-satire, from a letter to her sister:

In hopes of hearing something of [Desmond], I have endured the misery of long conversations with that odd old animal his uncle Major Danby — The formal twaddler loves to tell long stories, and can seldom get any body to

hear them, unless he can seize upon some stranger who does not know him, and these becoming every day more rare, he has taken quite a fancy to me The gossiping people here (of which heaven knows there are plenty) have already observed our tête-a-tête, and begin to whisper to each other that Miss Waverley has hook'd the rich old Major — I like of all things that they should believe it, and am in hopes of being in the London papers very soon, among the treaties of marriage (2:71)

Fanny is scolded for her raillery by her sister Geraldine, the heroine proper and a more “proper” heroine. Geraldine invokes her “eldership” in offering advice:

... I beseech you check your vivacity when you meet Mr. Danby
[N]othing [is] so injurious to that delicate sensibility which you really possess, as indulging this petulance ... which you now give way to only, perhaps, in writing or in speaking to me (2:85)

Fanny later responds:

... I am often rather reprov'd than thanked, for endeavouring to amuse you with the events, real or imaginary, which occupy us here, and give us the requisite supplies of conversation for the tea and card parties; but indeed my Geraldine, if you deprive me, by your rigid aversion to what you call detraction, of such a resource, I know not what there will remain for me to write about (Desmond 2:145)

As Geraldine's proviso suggests, it is only within the epistolary form that Fanny Waverley can thrive in all her impertinence. There is no such character, at least not in such

prominence, in any other Charlotte Smith novel. And Desmond was Smith's only attempt at a novel in letters.

The author of Desmond does not outwardly endorse either Fanny or Geraldine on the question of Fanny's manners, but it is arguable that Fanny represents more closely the author's attitude than does Geraldine. It is Fanny who urges her sister to disobey her husband's outrageous summons — "... your delicate sense of duty (duty to such a man!) makes you acquiesce in silent patience ..." (2.70). Fanny is rewarded with a good marriage at the end of the novel, to Montfleuri, Desmond's friend. Although she is not at the centre of the novel, her vivacity and her closely related fault of "detraction" remind us not only of Elizabeth Bennet, but also of Austen's Emma, who in spite of her "fault" enjoyed all her creator's affection. Austen's strategy of writing a novel with two heroines, used with such effectiveness in Sense and Sensibility, may well have been based on the structure of Desmond. There may also be some significance, an ironic allusion perhaps, in the fact that Austen's most unusually timid heroine, Fanny Price, has the same name as Smith's most outspoken female protagonist, Fanny Waverley.

One of Smith's most important experiments in male characterization took place in her first novel. Through a long and dramatic examination of the character of Delamere in Emmeline, she critiques the passionate and reckless hero, but without, as Richardson had done with Lovelace, making him a villain. Half-way through her novel Smith supplants the dashing Delamere with the reserved and sympathetic hero of sensibility — Godolphin. Syнды McMillen Conger has argued in "The Sorrows of Young Charlotte: Werther's English Sisters 1785-1805" (1986) that Smith's Emmeline

... alerts its women readers, first of all, to the dangers of sensibility for them, to the sexual dimension of the problems it poses ...

Smith's clearly experimental attitude in *Emmeline* allows her to refashion a positive sensibility that can be shared equally by men and women ... (49)

In her characteristic pattern of contrasting her male characters as well as her female characters along a sense and sensibility scale, Jane Austen can be included among the beneficiaries of a pattern established by Charlotte Smith in *Emmeline*. Jane Austen never got into trouble with critics or readers for the freedom she allowed her heroines or her heroes, as Charlotte Smith did, but she did give them, recurrently, the choice between a more "romantic" but less agreeable lover, and a more reserved but more honourable and sympathetic one.

6. Plots and Characters

With certain qualifications we could say that Smith's success as a novelist must derive in some degree from her plots and minor characters, and not rest entirely upon a combination of attractive heroines, descriptive passages, and topical politics. Smith has often been faulted for poorly structured narratives, but what critics usually mean by this is that each novel contains one or two, if not four or five, truly awkward or arbitrary turns. The most contrived and overused of Smith's typical plot devices include the coincidental meeting (in transit or in a foreign land), the secret parentage revealed, the appearance out

of nowhere of the rich and philanthropic relative, and — her favourite — the suspension of the main action while the protagonist listens to a monologic narrative that takes several days to relate and comprises an entire volume.¹⁸

Some critics have faulted Smith for flatness and sameness among her characters, including her heroes and heroines. At the same time, it has long been a commonplace that she could create minor and secondary characters with great facility and novelty. Scott mentions not only Mrs. Rayland, but also Delamere from Emmeline, and from Ethelinde the villain Lady Newenden, “who becomes vicious out of mere ennui,” as well as “the female horse jockey and the brutal buck” (Miscellaneous Prose 4:90). These latter characters are some of Smith’s more memorable villains. J.M.S. Tompkins found something new in the portraits of Lady Ellesmere and Miss Jamima Milsington in The Banished Man, both of whom show Smith’s ability to create mixed minor characters with signal flaws and yet a certain integrity as well. Lady Ellesmere is narrow-minded and without imagination, but she is also without personal malice, and is the object of fond rather than biting humour. Miss Jamima Milsington, a spinster who falls in love with the hero, is similarly valued rather than villainized. In such characters, who bear a general resemblance to the valetudinarians and spinsters in Jane Austen, Smith shows “impartial judgement,” transforming such “legendary figures [as] the amorous old maid” into “humane and credible” portraits (Tompkins 136-37). The impression made upon her

¹⁸ This plot device has its own virtues, of course, in creating doubled or parallel narratives. Mary Anne Schofield, in her introductions to Montalbert and Marchmont emphasizes the thematic significance of the generational mother-daughter structure established by the telling of these framed narratives.

readers by secondary characters is just one indication of a general critical truth about Charlotte Smith's work. her creativity is most evident in the detail of her fiction, in the "grain" of it rather than the overall shape of individual novels. Her particular creativity can be found in her atmospheric description, but also in the motivations (if not *always* the manifestations) of her characters, and in parts (if not *always* the wholes) of her plots.

Walter Scott, while acknowledging the "deficiency" of Smith's plots, also reminded his readers that in many novels "of the first eminence . . . no effort whatever is made to attain the praise belonging to a unified narrative..." (97). He is eloquent if exorbitant on the matter of Smith's plots falling victim to compositional haste

she was too often summoned to her literary labours by the inexorable voice of necessity, which obliged her to write for the daily supply of the press Hence the hurry and want of connexion which may be observed in some of her stories, and hence, too, instances, in which we can see that the character of the tale has changed while it was yet in the author's imagination, and has in the end become different from what she herself proposed. (97)

Only Montalbert and The Banished Man have such awkward plots as this suggests, though all the novels give the impression of having been to some degree improvised in the process of composition. Many of Smith's novels nonetheless have reasonably efficient, eventful, and even credible plots. Desmond is perhaps the best example of unity, novelty, and pace in plotting, but Emmeline, Ethelinde, and The Young Philosopher also have strengths in this respect. Scott makes a rather drastic qualification on the matter of character as well

“The characters of Mrs Smith are conceived with truth and force, though we do not recollect any one which bears the stamp of actual novelty ...” (97). This is after calling Mrs. Rayland of The Old Manor House “without a rival” and “a Queen Elizabeth in private life ...” (96). Scott makes no mention at all of one particular Charlotte Smith character who seems to have impressed him sufficiently enough, and who still had some novelty for readers when he appeared in the role of hero in Scott’s first novel: the wavering Waverley from Desmond.

In the novel of domestic sensibility from Richardson onward there is a strong family resemblance, involving a growing tendency toward sustained character portrayal and unified plot, and a growing realism. If we consider primarily the women’s tradition, which was from the first equally strong if not stronger than the men’s tradition in the domestic novel, there are even more recurrent features: the narrative focus on courtship, the unmarried woman as protagonist, the educational concern with the formation and celebration of female virtues, and the happy ending. Parental tyranny is a common plot element, as is the threat of a loss of family income or personal inheritance. Even the Gothic, for all its escapism, reveals itself in the end as a disguise for such mundane and important concerns as parenthood and property. Common characterological devices included the framing of the perfect heroine between characters too coquettish or too insensible, and the perfect hero between characters too rakish or too dull. Plots almost invariably revolved around gendered desire and the challenges that the world and the author might throw in the way of heterosexual love. A side-effect of the strongly conventional nature of the genre is that once one has set out to look for Charlotte Smith’s

influence on Jane Austen, it becomes difficult to distinguish accidents of the genre from useful signs of a specific influence. Once one begins to see similarities and recurrences, the influence expands in a profusion of detail, and threatens to collapse of its own weight into mere generic continuity, a continuity of conventions. We need to be careful in distinguishing specific allusions from general conventions, especially in the domestic novel. Domestic situations are by their nature familiar situations, recurrent ones. And novelists — even of the “garrulous narrator” sort — do not often quote each other within the text of their novels. A device such as the reading of novels within novels, while it appealed to Smith, who has Delamere read Werther and Fitz-Edward read Cecilia in Emmeline (170,190), seems to have been abandoned by Austen after her definitive treatment of novel-reading in Northanger Abbey. Thus we have no explicit acknowledgement of Charlotte Smith’s influence on Jane Austen outside the two direct allusions in the juvenilia. But there are other ways than direct naming for an author to make reference to a fellow or sister novelist.

Despite the difference between a Jane Austen heroine and a Charlotte Smith heroine, there are patterns of central and secondary characters, patterns among lovers and love affairs, parents and siblings, which we can find in Smith’s and again in Austen’s novels. In addition there are concrete minor details that are echoed — situations and speeches and words, some of which we have already noted. W. H. Magee, in what is only the second journal article in this century to deal specifically with Charlotte Smith’s influence on Jane Austen, presents a wide array of evidence of this sort. “The Happy Marriage: The Influence of Charlotte Smith on Jane Austen” (1975) also brings a thematic focus to the

influence. Charlotte Smith's fiction was important to Austen because it "... pointed the way to making courtship a profound rather than an automatic view of life ..." (129). The article is provocative, and rich in new observations, but the vagueness of the thematic framework seems to have led Magee to overstate his case. His most general claim is that "... a study of parallels in character, incident, and theme shows that Jane Austen followed the example of her prolific predecessor closely" (124). After a discussion of the references to Smith in Austen's juvenilia, Magee suggests, evidencing such characters as Mrs. Ashwood from Emmeline — who "had learned all the cant of sentiment from novels" (Emmeline 229) — that Smith was "a likely source" for Austen's theme of fiction interfering with life, a theme prominent in Northanger Abbey, but also significant in Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion. Smith is obviously in the tradition of such satire, and Ehrenpreis discusses the specifics of an influence related to this theme in her article on the juvenilia discussed above. But the theme itself goes back at least as far as Charlotte Lennox's Female Quixote (1751), if not to Cervantes.¹⁹

The first point Magee makes on the mature works, focussing on plot, is intriguing.

¹⁹ Many of Magee's observations are based on generic similarity rather than any discernable influence. He suggests a kinship between Desmond, who longs for an impossible "domestic comfort" with a married woman, and Edward Ferrars of Sense and Sensibility, in whom Jane Austen "developed the same longing ..." (123). Edward is also compared to D'Alonville of The Banished Man, on the evidence that they are rewarded by being united with their lovers at the end. Magee's choice of words often acknowledges the tenuousness of his observations "... there seems to be a touch of Ethelinde's father in Darcy ..." (127). Similarly forced is the suggestion that Althea Dacres of Montalbert — who as Magee acknowledges is kidnapped, imprisoned and shaken by earthquakes — resembles Fanny Price because of their mutual "... devotion to an absent brother" (124). Nor should we be surprised if Northanger Abbey contains a "foolish coquette" of the same sort as appears in The Young Philosopher: the character was ubiquitous.

The “feminine heroisni” of Emmeline — winning the love of the distant Godolphin by befriending his disgraced sister — “is not far removed from the loyalties of Pride and Prejudice, in which Elizabeth attracts Darcy by her active sisterly love for Jane, and later her eager friendship for his nearly seduced sister Georgiana” (123). But his next point mistakes a convention for an invention: “Ethelinde ... anticipates the physical weakness and violent emotions of Fanny Price of Mansfield Park” (123). Physical weakness was not peculiar to any particular heroine. Nor were faithfulness or unwanted suitors:

Ethelinde declines the love of the unhappily married Sir Edward Newenden ... and marries instead her ardent young hero Montgomery. It is as if the idolized flirt Henry Crawford echoes the even less discreet Sir Edward as a trial for a heroine who is anxiously determined to be faithful to a first love (123)

In the same paragraph, however, Magee spots something more particular and more convincing: the use of the name Willoughby for the lover in Celestina and in Sense and Sensibility. In Smith’s novel he only seems to desert the heroine; in Austen’s novel he really does withdraw. Marianne’s romantic expectations that “Willoughby” will return to her might have been raised in part by her “reading,” that is, by Smith’s earlier Willoughby. For every vague or debatable suggestion, Magee’s article contains at least one which shows close and sensitive reading and an eye for pattern.

Both Smith and Austen invested much work in their secondary love plots and in exploring the difficult ethical terrain between heroism and folly in the domestic sphere. The schematics of relationships in modern novels are usually complex, and the comparison

of two authors concerned with courtship and marriage is bound to be a matter of recurring patterns, as well as judgement calls as to what constitutes a variation on a tradition and what constitutes an indicator of influence. The most convincing signs of influence, of course, are those that contain their own acknowledgement. This can be a direct acknowledgement (naming the author or her work or making a direct quotation) or it can be an indirect acknowledgement, coded in patterns of language and detail. Magee, for instance, discovers a vivid reprise of a scene from Smith's Celestina in Sense and Sensibility:

.. Marianne "fondly" fancies she can see Willoughby's stately home, which is "not thirty" miles from the house she is visiting, though without the aid of the telescope which Celestina suddenly brings out of her pocket to help her see "a clump of firs" in her Willoughby's estate in the far distance" (125 [Sense and Sensibility 302-3, Celestina 1:207]).

Magee notes a more impressive and thematically significant echo from Smith's Montalbert in Jane Austen's Persuasion:

... [W]hen [Harville] argues with Ann about the durability of passion as Frederick Wentworth is writing his climactic letter of proposal, he sounds like Walsingham in Montalbert. When the melancholy Walsingham asks, "You don't believe the passion can exist when the object is no more?" and is answered [by de Montagny] "I believe it is transferable my friend," he sounds like Anne telling the Captain "I believe you [men] equal to every important exertion and to every domestic forbearance, so long as — if I

may be allowed the expression, so long as you have an object. I mean, while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone”

(Montalbert 3:74, Persuasion 235; Magee 127-28)

The theme of the transferability of love is also prominent in Austen’s Sense and Sensibility. With this example Magee vindicates to some extent his theme. It seems that Austen did draw ideas as well as details and situations from the work of her elder contemporary.

For all his convincing evidence of Austen’s use of Smith’s novels as a source of characters, situations and themes, Magee concludes on a note that is surprisingly dismissive:

... [Smith] offered Jane Austen no useful example in displaying everyday life, dramatizing inner conflict, or even developing the emotions of her heroines of sensibility Jane Austen must have been a patient and tolerant reader to maintain her interest in such predecessors so late in her career. (128)

We can detect, perhaps, the impatience of the critic who has made a search for sources either too hastily, or too thoroughly under the impression that the influencing novelist is not in the same league as the influenced novelist. From the evidence that Magee himself musters, we could just as easily argue that Jane Austen read Charlotte Smith’s novels with eagerness and admiration. Magee opens his article with what by the close seems to have been an over-estimation: “Charlotte Smith influenced [Austen] the most frequently and

profoundly of any of her predecessors" (120). Once again the rhetoric of the major/minor distinction obtrudes on useful criticism, in the form of a redundancy of stress on the superiority of the canonical author. The minor author is treated on one hand as influential and on the other hand as a contrast with the more original — and thus paradoxically less influenced — major author.

Eleanor Ty has also observed repeated patterns of character and repeated details of plot in her short article "Ridding Unwanted Suitors: Jane Austen's Mansfield Park and Charlotte Smith's Emmeline" (1986). Taking just two novels, and focussing on a discrete element of plot rather than the thematic resolution of the plot, she manages to show an influence while avoiding the pitfall of finding too many mere resemblances. Ty focusses on the "scandals" that facilitate the success of the true hero in each novel by getting rid of one or more false heroes. Frank Crawford's affair with the newly married Maria Rushworth in Mansfield Park precipitates his exit from the plot of Austen's novel. In Smith's Emmeline the Chevalier Bellozane has an affair with Delamere's married sister and this precipitates a duel, which sends the Chevalier back to France and Delamere to his death. The resemblance between these two plot devices is enhanced by the telling detail that "in both cases, the scandals are publicized in the fashionable papers" (327), and announced to the protagonists by inveterate newspaper-readers, namely Fanny's father and Delamere's mother.

The theme of Ty's article, the convenient disposal of unwanted suitors as a challenge to the plot-making skills of the novelist, reminds us that there was more to Smith's and Austen's view of marriage than their psychological seriousness and their

emphasis on domestic happiness. Neither novel¹² gives us much of the married life of her heroines, but rather follows the intricate trials of courtship. Rejecting the wrong man is often more important than — or at least a prerequisite to — recognizing the right one. Charlotte Smith may have provided Austen with a model for the rhetoric of refusal as well as such plot devices as the scandal that excises a false suitor. Although none of Austen's heroines is subjected to the intensity of psychological harassment, financial insecurity, and physical danger that commonly distresses Smith's heroines, Austen would have found something to admire in the self-confident eloquence of such speeches as the following, from *Emmeline*. The heroine is responding to a peremptory marriage proposal given third hand, from her guardian uncle's officious lawyer:

My Lord Montreville, Sir, would have been kinder, had he delivered himself of his wishes and commands. Such, however, as I now receive them, they require no deliberation. I will not marry Mr. Rochely, tho' instead of the fortune you describe, he could offer me the world. — Lord Montreville may abandon me, but he shall not make me wretched. Tell him therefore, Sir, (her spirit rose as she spoke) that the daughter of his brother .. disclaims the mercenary views of becoming, from pecuniary motives, the wife of a man whom she cannot either love or esteem I beg that you, Sir, who seem to have delivered Lord Montreville's message, with such scrupulous exactness, will take the trouble to be as precise in my answer; and that his Lordship will consider it as final ... (109)

Such bold rejection speeches can be found in all of Smith's novels. However much they

owe to Clarissa's moral firmness, the idiom also suggests Jane Austen's equally strong, though less distressed heroines, especially in such formulas as "love or esteem," a pair of positives that Austen kept in close proximity.

7. Jane Austen's "Mrs Smith"

Smith's influence on Austen is examined through another pairing of novels in Stephen Derry's 1990 article "The Ellesmeres and the Elliots Charlotte Smith's Influence on Persuasion." Derry finds parallels of various kinds between the plots of The Banished Man and Persuasion, noting the genealogical obsession of the two patriarchs, the previous disappointments in love or marriage of both Smith's Elizabeth and Austen's Elizabeth and Anne, and Anne's resemblance in name and "virtuous character" (69) to Angelina Denzil, heroine of Smith's novel. There are character echoes on the male side as well: Sir Maynard of The Banished Man has an eldest son who is unpleasant and unscrupulous, and lives the London high-life, as does Sir Walter's heir and namesake cousin Walter Eliot, the milder villain of Austen's Persuasion. Austen's hero, Captain Wentworth, "faces class prejudice as D'Alonville faces national prejudice..." (Derry 69). Smith's hero also encounters class prejudice where Wentworth is a "nobody" to the snobs in Austen's novel, Angelina Denzil (D'Alonville's love), and her sisters are "nobodies" in Smith's novel (Persuasion 33; Banished Man 2:3 [Irish ed.]; qtd. Derry 70).

Charlotte Smith not only put herself into her novels as a character and made her

heroes and heroines amateur poets and professional essayists, she also satirized other writers in such satirical portraits as Mrs. Manby in The Old Manor House.²⁰ No writers appear in Jane Austen's novels, but as Stephen Derry points out, in his most surprising and provocative suggestion, there is a "Mrs. Smith" in Persuasion, and Jane Austen "may ... have intended to recall Charlotte Smith in Anne's friend ..." (70). His argument is as follows:

The novelist was dead when Persuasion was written, but the circumstances of her life were probably known to Jane Austen. Both Mrs. Smiths were women of ability damaged by the ill-judgement of their husbands; though both live in poverty, each has a claim on a greater income — Jane Austen's character from property in the West Indies, Charlotte Smith from a family trust, which was caught up in a lawsuit (70)

Derry supplies some supporting evidence derived from his comparison of Persuasion with The Banished Man: Smith's novel includes her most exact self-portrait, the heroine's mother Mrs. Denzil, and was written when Smith was in Bath, which is in part the setting of Austen's Persuasion. Derry's observation, however, is not fully developed. It serves as an intriguing, but self-consciously debatable closing point for his article.

There is other corroborating evidence we can add to this argument, and there are important implications to explore. First of all, Jane Austen would almost certainly have

²⁰ For more on Mrs. Manby as a satirical portrait, see Ehrenpreis's long note in The Old Manor House (542-43, n507). She argues that the butt of the satire must be Hannah Cowley, although it has been assumed in the twentieth century to be variously Hannah More and Elizabeth Inchbald.

known the biographical facts of Charlotte Smith's life. Public Characters was a common reference text, a Who's Who of the day, and Smith's obituaries had been quite detailed. There were also her books themselves, with their personal prefaces and transparently autobiographical elements. There was also gossip. In fact, the description of Mrs. Smith's character and circumstances in Persuasion corresponds exactly to the portrait which emerges from a careful reading of the biographical material on Charlotte Smith, including works which Jane Austen did not live to see published, such as Mrs. Dorset's intimate memoir. Granted, the two figures have some differing circumstances — Austen's Mrs. Smith is neither a novelist nor a mother — but the personality and the situation seems to be one and the same:

Her accommodations were limited to a noisy parlour, and a dark bed-room behind, with no possibility of moving from one to the other without assistance, which there was only one servant in the house to afford, and she never quitted the house but to be conveyed into the warm bath. — Yet, in spite of all this, Anne had reason to believe that she had moments only of languor and depression, to hours of occupation and enjoyment. How could it be? — She watched — observed — and finally determined that this was not a case of fortitude or of resignation alone. — A submissive spirit might be patient, a strong understanding would supply resolution, but here was something more: here was that elasticity of mind, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was from Nature alone

.... (166-67)

This description is very similar to Dorset's or Hilbish's picture of Charlotte Smith's character, health and domestic circumstances.

There are also allusions to Charlotte Smith's writings in this passage, allusions which suggest that Austen's Mrs Smith had a writer's temperament. We recall the idiom of being "carried out of oneself" from Clarintha Ludford's description of the pleasure of fiction in Ethelinde, fiction which she herself aspired to write. Charlotte Smith the poet, in her elder years, called her youthful self "elastic as the mountain air ..." in Beachy Head (Poems 228, l.284). A paragraph later in Austen's text we learn that Mrs Smith's "employment" is the making of "thread-cases, pin-cushions and card-racks" (167), but even here we are reminded of the labours of the Marchmont sisters in Marchmont, who also sell hand-sewn merchandise after descending from affluence. Their brother, the hero, lives with them and writes his travels for the press.

In 1827 Mrs. Dorset would emphasize the general sociability of Charlotte Smith in affluence and poverty, health and illness.²¹ Anne Elliot observes of Mrs Smith that "[neither] the dissipations of the past — and she had lived very much in the world, nor the restrictions of the present; neither sickness nor sorrow seemed to have closed her heart or ruined her spirits" (166). Smith's letters, as excerpted by Dorset, McKillop, Turner and others, confirm her character as both deeply embittered and at the same time capable of

²¹ Southey also noted Smith's pleasant personality in the face of suffering, after visiting her late in 1801: "I like her manners. By having a large family, she is more humanized, more akin to common feelings, than most literary women I see in her none of the nasty little envies and jealousies common enough among the cattle" (qtd. McKillop 252).

levity and good-humour. They also reveal that Charlotte Smith's physical troubles were very like those of Austen's Mrs. Smith. When she was living at Bath in 1794, Charlotte Smith was "... a martyr to Rheumatism, the gout, or something ... entirely crippled, so as not to be able to walk across the room ..." (qtd. Turner 78). And their financial troubles were also the same. Stephen Derry speaks too quickly when he concedes that Charlotte Smith's financial insecurity was the result of a contested will, while Austen's Mrs Smith owed her insecurity to a contested West Indies property. In Smith's letters we find that one of the major provisions of the contested will, one that actually promised at times to materialize, was an interest in the West Indies. She, too, waited on "money ... coming [to her children] from their Grandfather's property, which is in the Island of Barbadoes ..." (qtd. Turner 36).

Against this whole construction one might argue that Harriet Smith in Emma does not resemble Charlotte Smith, and that Jane Austen used this very common name, in both cases, simply to suggest social obscurity. Certainly this is Sir Walter's reaction when he hears Anne has visited her old friend: "... low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you . . . — a mere Mrs. Smith, an every day Mrs Smith, of all people and all names in the world ..." (Persuasion 169-70). To meet the objection that the name is an arbitrary choice we could point out that in Persuasion Jane Austen seems to be at pains not to give any first name to her Mrs. Smith, despite the fact that it would have been easy to choose one, especially if an allusion to the novelist were not intended. Mrs. Smith's only other appellation is Miss Hamilton, her maiden name. And yet she appears in the role of friend and confidante to the heroine. In Smith's letters there is a strange but

relevant detail on the matter of names. Unlike Austen's poor widow, Charlotte Smith had an estranged husband living almost until her own death; because his debts were her debts, and her money his money, she often complained of a lack of anonymity. "She frequently asked her correspondents to omit her Christian name, addressing the letters they sent her only 'Mrs. Smith'" (Turner 167).

The widowing of Jane Austen's Mrs Smith at a much earlier age than Charlotte Smith seems at first to distinguish her from the novelist, but Anne is sensitive enough to observe the unhappy truth. Mrs Smith laments: "There is so little real friendship in the world" Without having to be told,

Anne saw the misery of such feelings. The husband had not been what he ought, and the wife had been led among that part of mankind which made her think worse of the world than she hoped it deserved (168-69)

Like Charlotte Smith, Mrs Smith does not explicitly condemn her husband. Like Charlotte Smith's readers, Anne infers the judgement clearly enough. And the language used sounds like Brydges or other defenders of Charlotte Smith in the early nineteenth century: the defense of a character embittered by suffering.

In later conferences with Mrs Smith, Anne learns the disenchanting truth about another man, her cousin Walter Elliot, in this case in explicit detail. Here we have a contested will, an ill-chosen executor, and the unrestrained parallelisms of Charlotte Smith's characteristic complaint:

... but Mr Elliot would not act, and the difficulties and distresses which this refusal had heaped on her, in addition to the inevitable sufferings of her

situation, had been such as could not be related without anguish of spirit, or listened to without corresponding indignation [Anne] had a great deal to listen to; all the particulars of past sad scenes, all the minutiae of distress upon distress (215)

These minutiae justify an earlier outburst in which Mrs Smith characterizes Walter Elliot as "... a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself Oh! he is black at heart, hollow and black!" She apologizes to Anne for her passion: "My expressions startle you. You must allow for an injured, angry woman ..." (206). This was the same allowance Charlotte Smith asked of her readers and critics, and this is the same word used by Jane Austen to describe the "body" of her sister novelists in general.

Anne's relative naïveté concerning the world is balanced by Mrs Smith's cautions, and the plot of Persuasion is set on course toward a happy resolution by the information Anne receives. Mrs Smith is thus crucial to the structure of novel, and not merely in a static way, as exemplar of fortitude, or foil for Anne's loyalty, or as an object lesson in marital unhappiness. Mrs Smith performs an active role, a role of disclosure and even guidance. It is a role we find in most of Jane Austen's plots, the role of the gossip. She can appear as an individual, but everyone gossips in Jane Austen. Among the characters as a group, gossip in the sense of social discourse is very much the medium of the action. Disclosures comprise the bulk of "events" in a Jane Austen novel, rather than physical actions or accidents, and the represented or misrepresented word of others is always a powerful force.

In Charlotte Smith's fiction as well, we find a gossip busy at the centre of almost

every plot. Sometimes she is a malicious character, like Aunt Crewkherne in Desmond, sometimes a talkative and kind-hearted hanger-on, like Miss Milsington in The Banished Man. Similarly, Jane Austen has her Mrs Jennings and her Miss Bates. Magee has pointed out the similarity between Smith's Mrs Lennard from The Old Manor House and Jane Austen's Mrs Norris from Mansfield Park, two memorable gossips. The engagement of Smith's Emmeline to Delamere is like Fanny's engagement to Henry Crawford, or Emma's to Frank Churchill: all are constructs of rumour and gossip. The topic of gossip as an aspect of narration has been discussed eloquently by Patricia Meyer Spacks in Gossip (1985), where she shows the development of the technique from Fanny Burney to Jane Austen. In the novel of manners or domestic sensibility "... gossip impels plot" (7). Speaking of Emma in particular, Spacks says:

As subtext for the major line of narrative, [gossip] supports the imaginative and the improvisational, valuing the private, implying the saving energies of female curiosity and female volubility It exemplifies the subversive resources of the novel as genre. (170)

The same might be said of Charlotte Smith's use of gossip in her fiction. Spacks does not mention Smith in her discussion, but she does note the exemplary instance of gossiping in the scene between Anne and Mrs Smith in Persuasion, where gossip appears as "healing talk" (57). A discussion of Charlotte Smith would have provided Spacks with a smoother transition between the rudimentary use of gossip in Burney's Evelina and the elaborate and self-conscious constructions in Austen's Emma.

Arguably, Jane Austen learned as much about the gossip and her ambivalent power

in society from Charlotte Smith as she did from Fanny Burney. She would have observed how gossip and gossips can be employed in a novelistic plot, but just as importantly she would have learned of the darker side of the fashionable world through the scandalous content of the gossip in Charlotte Smith's novels — the author's own life-story included. In particular she would have learned of the deceptive charms of men of pleasure, from Delamere in Emmeline to the elder brother in The Young Philosopher. We could even argue that what Anne Elliot the heroine learns from her Mrs Smith is emblematic of what Jane Austen the novelist learned from the Charlotte Smith the novelist. To pay tribute to her sister novelist in the figure of a kind but worldly-wise gossip, a gossip who averts an otherwise dangerous outcome for Jane Austen's most auto-biographical heroine, is a complex critical statement as well as a reciprocal kindness.

In Jane Austen's novels, more surely than in Charlotte Smith's novels, structure is a reflection of theme. In revealing the truth about Walter Elliot, Mrs Smith places herself at the centre of the plot of Persuasion, opposite the influence of the novel's original persuader, Lady Russell. As Lady Russell opens, so Mrs Smith closes the uncertainty which drives the narrative. Realizing how near she was to welcoming the advances of Walter Elliot, Anne is amazed by a salient irony: "It was just possible she would have been persuaded by Lady Russell!" Persuasion, after all, is another word for influence, and Mrs Smith's influence proves decisive. "Call it gossip if you will ..." says Mrs Smith to Anne, "... something that makes one know one's species better" (168).

Stephen Derry concludes his short article on a familiar biographical turn, evoking the famous sorrows of Charlotte Smith: "A happier ending was available for Mrs. Smith of

Persuasion than was ever the case for Mrs. Smith in real life” (70). If Derry’s interpretation of this fictional character is correct, if the evidence I have added makes it even more likely that Jane Austen was consciously referring to Charlotte Smith in the figure of her own Mrs Smith, then perhaps we should resist the temptation to contrast real with fictional sorrow, or real with fictional happiness. Jane Austen may have known more about the latter years of Charlotte Smith’s life than today’s scholars, and she may have been accurate as well as allusive in her portrait of the not-entirely-friendless Mrs Smith. Anne Elliot notes that it had been “twelve years” since she and Mrs Smith had last seen each other, and “twelve years had transformed the fine-looking, well-grown Miss Hamilton, in all the glow of health and confidence of superiority, into a poor, infirm, helpless widow, receiving the visits of her former protégée as a favour ...” (166). These “twelve years” may also refer to a somewhat different lapse of time, the twelve years between Austen’s completion of Persuasion — within months of her death in 1817 — and the last time she could have seen, received news from, or heard fresh gossip about Charlotte Smith — in the months before her death in 1806, when she was, finally, a widow.

8. Jane Austen’s Later Works and Charlotte Smith’s Poetry

We have demonstrated a variety of ways in which Charlotte Smith’s fiction may have influenced the fiction of Jane Austen, and we have searched for an acknowledgement of this influence on the part of the younger novelist. Both aspects of this exploration

could be extended to greater lengths, for as we have already seen, there are a multiplicity of resemblances between the works of the two novelists, and enough of a different sort of evidence to suggest a substantial influence. Austen's coded acknowledgements suggest there were reasons she did not want to be known as a follower of Charlotte Smith's novelistic practice. And indeed, Austen is positively influenced by only one major aspect of Charlotte Smith's fiction, though it is a central one: her innovative treatment of female agency within the novel of domestic sensibility. If Austen approved of Smith's political opinions, or admired her atmospheric scene-painting, she did not emulate her in either respect.

Charlotte Smith's poetry, however, seems to have impressed Jane Austen to some degree. She never mentions it explicitly, but Ehrenpreis has spotted a possible allusion to the sonnets in Persuasion. In her introduction to Emmeline, Ehrenpreis adds in a note:

I suspect there may be another glance at Charlotte Smith in Persuasion ... where Anne Elliot seeks to recall "some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope, and spring, all gone together." (xiii n1)

If we examine the scene from Persuasion more closely, we notice that the "tender sonnet" Anne tries to remember is singled out by dramatic circumstances after a more generalized survey of autumnal poetry. In the company of Wentworth, Louisa, and others, but walking where "the narrow paths across the field made many separations necessary ..."

Anne's pleasure

... must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles

of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness (107)

After overhearing a round of complimentary flirtation between Wentworth and Louisa, “Anne could not fall immediately into quotation again. The sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by — unless some tender sonnet ...” etc. (107). The distinction is slight, but worth noting: from a thousand poetic descriptions of autumn, only the tender sonnet on “youth and hope and spring, all gone together” continues to console her in the face of her increasing discomfort and dismay.

Ehrenpreis reminds the reader of Smith’s fame as a melancholy sonneteer, and quotes, as an example of the sort of sentiment Anne might have quoted to herself, the closing couplet of Smith’s sonnet 2 “Written at the Close of Spring”: “Another May new buds and flow’rs shall bring; / Ah! Why has Happiness — no second Spring?” (xiii n1). Her suggestion that Charlotte Smith’s poetry would be the most likely source for an image of “youth, and hope, and spring, all gone together ...” is a credible one, especially as the text offers no better candidate. There is nothing closer to such an image in the works of poetry explicitly mentioned later in the novel, poems read by Captain Benwick and familiar to Anne: Scott’s Marmion and the Lady of the Lake and Byron’s the Giaour and The Bride of Abydos (Persuasion 121).

In this latter scene, when titles and authors are given, Anne makes a critical observation to Benwick, “venturing to hope he did not always read only poetry ...”:

[I]t was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and ... the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly. (Persuasion 121-22)

The fact that Austen presents this judgement in free indirect speech suggests she might share it herself. When Benwick recites with "... tremulous feeling, .. various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness ...," the reader may be intended to recall Anne's earlier indulgence in poetic melancholy of an only slightly different kind. Both characters allow poetry to heighten feelings not otherwise desirable, and both may be led to exaggerate their own forlorn fates as a result. But there is a difference in the degree of psychological danger involved in each case. Jane Austen seems to be more tolerant of Anne's poetic extremes than Benwick's, even though she implies there is something conventional about hers, and names fashionable titles for his. Anne's cautions probably extend to "tender sonnets" as well as Scott and Byron, and it is worth noting that she does not recommend to Benwick a different type of poetry, but "a larger allowance of prose," including "our best moralists," and "memoirs of characters of worth and suffering" (122).

I believe there is another allusion to Charlotte Smith's poetry in Jane Austen's final, incomplete work, the fragment called Sanditon. The rakish Sir Edward Denham attempts to impress the heroine, Charlotte Heywood, by expounding "... in a tone of great Taste and Feeling ... of the Sea and the Sea shore":

The terrific Grandeur of the Ocean in a Storm, its glassy surface in a calm, its Gulls and its Samphire, and the deep fathoms of its Abysses, its quick vicissitudes, its Direful deceptions, its Mariners tempting it in Sunshine and overwhelmed by the sudden Tempest, All were eagerly and fluently touched; — rather commonplace perhaps — but doing very well from the Lips of a handsome Sir Edward, — and she could not but think him a Man of Feeling — till he began to stagger her by the number of Quotations, and the bewilderment of some of his sentences. — “Do you remember,” said he “Scott’s beautiful Lines on the Sea? — Oh! what a description they convey! — They are never out of my thoughts when I walk here”

(Minor Works 396)

Charlotte interrupts Sir Edward to ask “What description do you mean? ... I can remember none at this moment, of the Sea, in either of Scott’s Poems” This “either” most likely refers to Scott’s Marmion (1808) and The Lady of the Lake (1810), both of which Denham quotes briefly. But he doesn't quote descriptions of the sea, and in response to Charlotte’s question and qualification he can only respond, “do not you indeed? — Nor can I exactly recall the beginning at this moment — But — you cannot have forgotten his description of Woman. — ‘Oh! Woman in our Hours of Ease —’

Delicious! Delicious! ...” (Minor Works 397).²² Sir Edward betrays his ignorance of poetry and his sexist priorities in the same moment. He quotes Scott and Burns correctly, but Charlotte is right to bring him to task for his praise of Scott’s poetic descriptions of the sea. There are few such descriptions anywhere in Scott’s poetry, and none in the two poems alluded to in this scene. What, then, is Sir Edward referring to when he misremembers “Scott’s .. Lines on the Sea”?

Perhaps it is the poetry of a woman, Charlotte Smith, who not once but often describes the sea in both poetry and prose. Here, for example, is the second stanza from her “Studies by the Sea”

He who with more enquiring eyes
Doth this extensive scene survey,
Beholds innumerable changes rise,
As various winds its surface sway,
Now o'er its heaving bosom play

²² In Mansfield Park there is another possible instance in which an explicit reference made to Walter Scott hides an indirect allusion to Charlotte Smith. Upon entering the chapel in their tour of the Rushworth “Great House,” Fanny Price is disappointed to find “No banners . . . to be ‘blown by the night wind of heaven.’ No signs that a ‘Scottish monarch sleeps below’” (77). Fanny’s quotations are from Scott’s Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805). The scene in which she appears, however, is more reminiscent of a scene from Smith’s The Old Manor House (1793). The hero Orlando comforts the fearful Monimia as they enter another disused manorial chapel, this one supposedly haunted (49). Later, in the same chapel, we find “helmets and gauntlets . . . suspended from the pillars” (96). Orlando, after hearing Monimia’s tale of strange sounds in the chapel, says that he does believe in one type of spectre, that which appears . . . to the conscience of the guilty; but even that is not always ready to raise hideous shadows to persecute the sanguinary monsters who are stained with crimes, for if it were, Monimia, I am afraid not one of our kings could have slept in their beds . . . (49)

Small sparkling waves of silver gleam,
 And as they lightly glide away,
 Illume with fluctuating beam
 The deepening surge; green as the dewy corn
 That undulates in April's breezy morn.

(Poems 289)

The next stanza describes other colours in the same scene, and another mood of the sea at another time. The shift is made by a glance outward to the horizon, and the weather appears to change in a movement of the eye:

The far off waters then assume
 A glowing amethystine shade,
 That changing like the Paon's plume,
 Seems in celestial blue to fade;
 Or paler colder hues of lead,
 As lurid vapours float on high,
 Along the ruffling billows spread,
 While darkly lours the threatening sky;
 And the small scatter'd barks with outspread shrouds
 Catch the long gleams, that fall between the clouds.

(Poems 290)

This poem is Smith's most sustained ocean study, and it is written, as the first stanza explains, to counter the view that the Ocean is unchanging save for tides and the extremes

of balminess and tempest. The poem seems conscious of having no precedent, nor have I found one.

Many of Charlotte Smith's poems include descriptions of the ocean and the sea-shore. Typical sonnet titles include "Written in a tempestuous night, on the coast of Sussex" (sonnet 66, Poems 58), "Written near a port on a dark evening" (sonnet 86, Poems 74) and "The sea view" (sonnet 83, Poems 72). Her first long poem The Emigrants (1793) is set on the coast, and her later poetry is particularly rich in sea-side descriptions. Conversations Introducing Poetry (1804), where "Studies by the Sea" first appeared, also included "An evening walk by the sea-side," another poem wholly devoted to describing the ocean, this time in light anapaests. "Tis pleasant," says the poet "to wander along the sand":

While fast run before us the sandling and plover,
Intent on the crabs and the sand-eels to feed,
And here on a rock which the tide will soon cover,
We'll find us a seat that is tapestried with weed.

(Poems 196]5-9)

Smith's blank verse poem Beachy Head, published posthumously in 1807, not only includes extensive descriptions of the sea, coastal geography and vegetation, but concludes with a character and events not unlike the oceanic narrative suggested by Sir Edward's phrase "... its Direful deceptions, its Mariners tempting it in Sunshine and overwhelmed by the sudden Tempest" Smith's unnamed hermit figure

... learn'd to augur from the clouds of heaven,

And from the changing colours of the sea,
 And sullen murmurs of the hollow cliffs,
 Or the dark porpoises ...

...

When tempests were approaching: then at night

He listen'd to the wind; and as it drove
 The billows with o'erwhelming vehemence

...

He waded thro' the waves, with plank or pole

Towards where the mariner in conflict dread

Was buffeting for life the roaring surge

([Poems 246]692-704)

Smith's ocean scenes rival her own botanically accurate plant descriptions for vividness, and the two are often combined when she describes coastal or underwater vegetation.

Stuart Curran has remarked on Smith's "ability to represent nature's alterity as an intricately detailed ecosystem that across time and space transcends human control ..."
 ("Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" 76). After wild flowers, the sea was perhaps her favourite natural subject. Although none of the major Romantic poets devoted more than a few poems to such description, they were generally successful when they did. As a result, the beauty, violence and "alterity" of the ocean became a strong theme in Romantic poetry. Charlotte Smith was one of the first poets in the English language to describe the sea in convincing detail, or indeed to make ocean description the subject of individual poems.

However ambivalent Jane Austen was about life in Bath, she would surely have known of Smith's poetry, being a reader of her novels. In the same scene from Sanditon she has Sir Edward drop the names of Montgomery, Wordsworth, and Campbell (Minor Works 397), as if to say, "not these" with respect to the unattributed "Lines on the Sea." Perhaps Austen thought that Sir Edward's unintentional misreference in his literary boasting — especially in conversation with a "Charlotte" Heywood — was obvious enough to suggest Charlotte Smith.

Many of the allusions to Charlotte Smith discussed in this chapter — and many which will follow in later chapters — lack a decisive confirmation, and without such confirmation they may seem suspended, debatable. I can only hope that they support each other, and find a strength in numbers, and also that Smith's influence on one author may work to support the possibility of her influence on another. Jane Austen and William Wordsworth each read some of Charlotte Smith's works. This much we know for certain. They also read each other's works, and although Austen wrote scant poetry and Wordsworth no novels, they were participants in a literary milieu which saw the beginnings of communication between these two genres. The influence of the first romantic poet-novelist may have similar features for each of these major writers. The most striking common feature is the obliqueness of their respective acknowledgements of her influence.

Chapter Five

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, W.L. Bowles, and Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets

1. Charlotte Smith and the Illegitimate Sonnet

Between their first publication in 1784 and the author's death in 1806, Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets were among the most popular and widely admired of English sonnets. The Critical Review reiterated a prevailing opinion in 1802 when it stated that "The sonnet has been revived by Charlotte Smith: her sonnets are assuredly the most popular in the language, and deservedly so ..." (34:393). The gradual decline in the reputation of Smith's sonnets over the next century is a result of several inter-related factors. There was a shift in taste away from the particular type of melancholy sentimentality that Smith represented, and away from the eighteenth-century diction whose remnants are still present in her work. There was also a shift in the canon of English poetry, a revalorization of the Elizabethan and seventeenth-century poets, Shakespeare and Milton in particular — their sonnets included.

The most powerful factor in the declining reputation of Smith's sonnets — and one which shaped these other changes in taste, poetic diction, and the canon — was the appearance of the poetry of the major Romantics. Coleridge published his early sonnets in Poems on Various Subjects (1796) and Poems (1797), both of which volumes also

contained sonnets by his friends, among them Lamb and Lloyd Southey's sonnets, including those against the slave trade, appeared first in 1795, in the volume Poems by R. Lovell and R. Southey, and more were published in his 1797 Poems. Leigh Hunt began to publish sonnets shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century, in his Juvenilia of 1802. The first large groups of Wordsworth's many sonnets appeared in his Poems in Two Volumes (1807),¹ and more were published in 1815, 1820 and 1827. Byron, Keats, and Shelley also published sonnets in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. As the century progressed, the ascendancy of the major Romantic poets — most of whom produced a number of individual sonnets that gained wide renown — eclipsed the fame of Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets, and helped to obscure their role in the development of the Romantic lyric. Moreover, the sonnet itself was somewhat eclipsed within the poetic practice of the Romantics. Despite the strong tradition of Romantic sonnets, British Romantic poetry is usually considered to have found its most characteristic expressions in other forms: the ballad, the ode, and blank verse.

The decline of Smith's sonnets was hastened by more than the sheer poetic success of the major Romantics. One important factor arises from Romantic criticism rather than poetic practice: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's explicit admiration and acknowledged debt to the sonnets of William Lisle Bowles. Indeed, the Coleridge-Bowles connection is significant enough to require examination in some detail. Coleridge's emphasis on the

¹ The sonnets published in 1807 were not, strictly speaking, Wordsworth's first sonnets. His first publication was a "Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress," (European Magazine 40 [March 1787]:202), which I will discuss in chapter 7. There were a few other sonnets in the juvenilia. Thus, unlike Coleridge, Wordsworth had published sonnets before Bowles's Fourteen Sonnets appeared in 1789.

sonnets of Bowles in his account of his own early poetic development in the Biographia Literaria (1817) has been instrumental in obscuring Charlotte Smith's contribution to the development of the sonnet, and continues to stand as a textual structure that blocks the reader's access to her work. The complicated critical heritage surrounding the Coleridge-Bowles connection needs to be disentangled in order to discover Charlotte Smith's actual influence on the early Romantic sonnet. Bringing Bowles into my discussion will also provide me with appropriate comparison texts for a closer examination of Smith's sonnets — the sonnets of another minor pre-Romantic poet.

As we have seen earlier, Coleridge gave what looks like equal credit to Smith and Bowles for reviving the sonnet in the late-eighteenth century when he penned his "Introduction" to Sonnets from Various Authors, which was printed as an appendix to his first book of poetry, Poems on Various Subjects (1797): "Charlotte Smith and Bowles are they who first made the sonnet popular among the present English ..." (Poetical Works 2:1139). The sequence of names here is important: Smith's first edition of sonnets preceded Bowles's by five years. In the late 1780's, as the researches of Hilbish (264-69) and Curran have shown, Charlotte Smith was being widely imitated, both in earnest and in parody.² W. L. Bowles found it necessary to deny Smith's influence on his sonnets in the "Advertisement" to his second edition:

It having been said that these Pieces were written in Imitation of the little
Poems of Mrs Smyth [sic], the Author hopes he may be excused adding

² In a paper delivered at Dalhousie University in 1995, "Inscribing the Self," Stuart Curran presented a number of poems written in imitation of, or addressed to Charlotte Smith.

that many of them were written prior to Mrs Smyth's Publication. He is conscious of their great Inferiority to those beautiful and elegant compositions; but, such as they are, they were certainly written from his own feelings. [i]

Smith and Bowles both subscribed to the literary value of "feeling," and felt that sincerity and particularity combined to guarantee, if not excellence, then a type of self-generated originality. But Bowles argues his defense both ways, and also makes a gesture toward linear priority. Hilbish, pointing out that by the time Bowles's Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive (1789) was published "Mrs. Smith's Elegiac Sonnets had gone through five editions in as many years" argues that Bowles "... obviously took from Mrs. Smith many of the attributes of her sonnets" (270). But what may have been obvious to contemporary reviewers, and what may become obvious to research, was not obvious to literary criticism in the long intervening period between the early nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth..

In the 1780's, Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets became the first successful volume of what were called irregular or "illegitimate" sonnets. At the time there was an academic debate over whether to model the English sonnet on the Petrarchan and Miltonic model, with fewer rhymes, no end couplet, and an octet/sestet structure, or the less strict English Renaissance sonnet model of Surrey, Shakespeare and Spencer, four quatrains and a couplet.³ In 1784, before the sonnet revival had begun in earnest, Charlotte Smith took

³ For a detailed history of the sonnet in the latter half of the eighteenth century, including the phases of the debate over sonnet form, see Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry 486-528.

her position modestly but firmly on the side of the less approved form, the irregular or Shakespearean sonnet. The preface to the first edition of Elegiac Sonnets opens with an acknowledgement of the prevailing wisdom and a subtly aggressive apology:

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 (Poems 3)

First among the judges alluded to here is most likely Samuel Johnson, who defined the sonnet in his Dictionary as "... not very suitable to the English Language ..." (qtd. Hilbish 238n5).

In the 1789 "Advertisement" to the anonymous first edition of Fourteen Sonnets, Bowles's "Editor" does not mention the controversy except to casually circumvent it: "The following Sonnets, (or whatever they may be called) were found in a Traveller's Memorandum-Book ..." ([vi]). Bowles's Fourteen Sonnets contained a mixture of sonnet types, and although most end with a Shakespearean-style couplet, most also use the Petrarchan quatrain (abba). Nonetheless, Bowles's very mixture of types placed his sonnets among the irregulars. Smith's third and fourth editions include Petrarchan sonnets as well, freely translated "with what success I know not..." (Poems 4) from the Italian. But as she says in her preface to these editions, " I am persuaded that, to the generality of my readers, those which are less regular will be more pleasing" (Poems 4). In 1796, Coleridge, too, was confident that the irregular sonnet writers were winning the contest

for popular taste. He deduced the “laws” of the contemporary sonnet from what Smith had earlier called the “illegitimate” sonnet — laws of lawlessness, specifying in theory no more than Charlotte Smith herself specified in practice.

a small poem, in which some lonely feeling is developed. It is confined to fourteen lines, because as some particular number is necessary, and that particular number must be a small one, it may as well be fourteen as any other. . . . Respecting the metre of a Sonnet, the Writer should consult his own convenience. ” (2:1139)

Coleridge reprinted this “Introduction” as a headnote to his sonnets in the second (1797) and third (1803) edition of his Poems. Despite Coleridge’s confidence in the irregular sonnet, the debate would ultimately go to the Petrarchan or Miltonic model. In 1805, critics such as William Herbert remained staunch about the exclusive criteria of the sonnet. Variants introduced by “[s]ome of our old sonneteers . . . [e]ncouraged some of our later writers [to] present the public (under the name of a sonnet) with three elegiac stanzas, concluded by a solitary couplet . . .” (Edinburgh Review 6:297). This was Charlotte Smith’s characteristic mode. Capel Lofft’s five-volume compendium of 1814 entitled Laura, or an Anthology of Sonnets (on the Petrarchan Model) and Elegiac Quatorzains English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Greek, original and translated placed Charlotte Smith’s sonnets among the “Elegiac Quatorzains.”

Although the Shakespearean model was in practice almost as “regular” as the

Petrarchan,⁴ those who admired and imitated it were also drawn to experimentation in the sonnet. Thomas Gray produced but one sonnet, published posthumously in 1775, a singularity which was in itself an experiment. The sonnet “On the Death of Richard West” had a rhyme scheme quite unlike either the Shakespearean or the Petrarchan — abababab cdcdcd, with some half-rhymes. Gray set a precedent for experimentation in the form by combining a Shakespearean quatrain with an octet/sestet division and a Petrarchan four-rhyme limit. Gray’s formal model did not establish a new orthodoxy in later sonneteers, but the elegiac theme of his sonnet proved to be highly influential. Although Charlotte Smith does not draw the connection explicitly, her sonnets were “Elegiac” sonnets in a double sense — in their choice of subject and tone, and in their choice of quatrain. The elegiac quatrain (abab) was named in the eighteenth century after its use as the stanza of another Gray poem, the enormously popular “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.” None of Smith’s experiments in sonnet structure matched Gray’s exactly, but her focus on private grief was very much in the spirit of his singular sonnet and his elegiac stanza. We have seen in the critical heritage how she was sometimes likened to the figure in Gray’s elegy whom melancholy has “marked” as her own. Appropriately, Charlotte Smith was one of the first poets to join the critics in expressing publicly her admiration for Gray’s lone sonnet. Nine years after its posthumous publication in 1775, she borrowed a phrase from it in her “Elegy,” a poem written in seventeen of Gray’s elegiac stanzas: “And fruitless call on him — ‘who cannot hear’” (Poems 81). Her note provides her readers

⁴ As Hilbish points out, the sonnet type that would later be called Shakespearean was developed by Surrey some time before Shakespeare, and was itself an adaptation of Petrarch (Hilbish 246).

with the original line from “... Gray’s exquisite sonnet; in reading which it is impossible not to regret that he wrote only one” (81n).

F.M.A. Hilbish has sorted Smith’s sonnets by rhyme scheme (247n39) and finds 44 of 92 to be Shakespearean (abab cdcd efef gg), 46 irregular or mixed, and only one strictly Petrarchan. Hilbish also points out that the Italian sonnet was never so regular as English critics imagined, even in the practice of Petrarch (247n41). Not including her translations from Petrarch, more than twenty of Smith’s sonnets end with two tercets rather than a couplet, and 18 begin with an “abba” quatrain, both of which were features of the Italian model. The debate over sonnet form seems to have been a question of how regular the form should be, as much as it was a question of which specific form it should take. After the turn of the century, those who preferred the more rigorous Petrarchan form or its Miltonic variants — Anna Seward for example, whom Coleridge tried to belittle in his “Introduction” — seemed to have prevailed. The best evidence of this is in the practice of the major Romantic poets. Although the sonnets of Shakespeare were respected by Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron, their actual practice in sonnet writing was generally in the Petrarchan-Miltonic rhyme scheme. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s practice in the sonnet was more mixed, with a higher proportion in the Shakespearean mode, but he was not to become a major Romantic sonnet writer. As David Erdman has pointed out, Coleridge was “guilty of” only three original sonnets after his early experiments in the form (“Coleridge as Nehemiah Higginbottom” 571).

Regularity in the sonnet was not a major concern for the Romantics, and the debate eventually lost its urgency. When Wordsworth published his sonnet “Nuns fret not at their

convent's narrow room" (Poems in Two Volumes 133) in 1807, it was the "Sonnet's scanty plot of ground" (11) for which he was apologizing, as much as its regimen of rules, and when he asks his reader to "Scorn not the sonnet ..." in 1827, he praises the sonnets of regular and irregular sonneteers alike, Shakespeare and Spenser as well as Petrarch and Milton. At this level of name-dropping, neither Smith nor Bowles is mentioned.

By the mid-nineteenth century there was increasing tolerance for irregular sonnets, but as the following citation from 1841 illustrates, some critics could still use the distinction as a way of expressing other types of value judgement:

Undeviating obedience to such rules, though a very important requisite, is not the only test and criterion of the sonnet. If it were, the productions of Shakespeare, and Bowles, and Coleridge, would be supplanted by the polished triflings of Hayley, the laborious commonplaces of Capel-Lofft, and the mawkish effusions of Mrs. Mary Robinson and Charlotte Smith.

(Housman A Collection of English Sonnets xi)

This author does not seem to know that Charlotte Smith was actually as irregular a sonnet-writer, in formal terms, as Shakespeare or Coleridge, and more so than Bowles. As we shall see, the real agenda of sonnet criticism had as much to do with the status of "mawkish effusions" as it did with the "rules."

The importance of the sonnet in the development of early Romanticism is not just a matter of competing rhyme schemes. Nor is the importance of Coleridge's apprenticeship in this form a peripheral matter simply because he wrote very few sonnets after 1797. Literary historians from Havens to Curran have agreed that the sonnet was the first poetic

genre to be lyricized in the way we call Romantic, and the history of this small genre in the 1780's and 90's is a crucial chapter in the emergence of British Romanticism. In these decades the sonnet was not only popular, but in flux, providing a forum for the experimentations in tone and technique which the major Romantics would extend to other poetic forms. The first publications of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, we might note, were all sonnets.

2. From Bowles to Coleridge to Wordsworth: A Construction

For reasons of personal taste Coleridge preferred the sonnets of Bowles above those of all other contemporaries in his early years. In the "Introduction" to Sonnets from Various Authors, he was categorical: Bowles's sonnets possess a "marked superiority over all other sonnets." His reasons? "[T]hey domesticate with the heart and become part of our identity" (Poetical Works 2:1139). When Coleridge first published his Poems on Various Subjects in 1796, the first of the sonnets — or "Effusions" as they are called in the first edition — was a sonnet to Bowles:

My heart has thank'd thee, Bowles! for those soft strains,
 That on the still air floating, tremblingly
 Wak'd in me Fancy, Love, and Sympathy ...

....
 And, when the darker day of life began,
 And I did roam, a thought-bewilder'd man!
 Thy kindred Lays an healing solace lent ...

(Poetical Works 1:84)

The closing couplet recalls nothing less than the Creation, as Bowles's soothing influence on Coleridge is likened to "that great Spirit, who with plastic sweep / Mov'd on the darkness of the unformed deep." In the Preface to the volume Coleridge says that he decided to call the sonnets "Effusions" because "... the title 'Sonnet' might have reminded my reader of the Poems of the Rev. W.L. Bowles — a comparison with whom would have sunk me below ... mediocrity ..." (2:1137). The book is not officially dedicated to Bowles,⁵ but the preface and the sonnet to Bowles certainly express a strong, if perfunctory, indebtedness on Coleridge's part. No other living poet is given such praise or thanks in Coleridge's early poetry. In the second edition of Poems on Various Subjects, published in 1797, Coleridge dares the comparison he pretends to avoid in his earlier preface: the sonnet to Bowles continues to appear first and the section is now entitled "Sonnets, / Attempted in the Manner / Of the Rev. W.L. Bowles" (2:1146).

Coleridge's admiration of Bowles — "the bard of my idolatry," as he describes him in a letter to Thelwall in 1796 (Letters 1:259) — seems to have been partly an affectation from the beginning, genuine enough, but strategically exaggerated. In a letter to Southey

⁵ Coleridge's first book of poetry appeared without a dedication, but E.H. Coleridge notes a draft of the preface in which the volume is dedicated to Earl Stanhope (Poetical Works 2:1137).

in 1794, Coleridge was already treating his penchant for Bowles with some levity, quoting himself as having said, in reaction to Holcroft's low opinion of Bowles, "Come — come — Mr Holcroft — as much unintelligible Metaphysics and as much bad Criticism as you please — but no Blasphemy against the divinity of a Bowles! " (Letters 1 139) Earlier in 1794, Coleridge had admitted that was "shocked" at the revisions Bowles was making to his poetry in a new edition "Every Omission and every alteration disgusts Taste & mangles Sensibility .." (Letters 1.94) A letter to Sotheby in September of 1802 describes what amounts to a complete reversal of his earlier claims for Bowles's poetic achievement. Noting the inferiority of his recent blank verse poems, Coleridge complains of Bowles's "... perpetual trick of moralizing every thing " (Letters 2 864) The comment turns immediately to a more general critique

... never to see or describe any interesting appearance in nature, without connecting it by dim analogies with the moral world, proves faintness of Impression ... A Poet's Heart and Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature — & not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them The truth is — Bowles has indeed the sensibility of a poet, but he has not the Passion of a great Poet." (Letters 2 864-5)

Although Coleridge outgrew his youthful devotion to Bowles's poetry, the developmental significance of the lesson learned from his early model is emphasized again in 1817, in his discussion of Bowles's influence in the first chapter of the Biographia Literaria In this later context, Charlotte Smith's name is not mentioned, but this is at least partly because

Coleridge is concerned with his own poetic taste rather than literary history. Coleridge's tribute to Bowles in the Biographia Literaria was, and continues to be, a far more widely read and widely influential text than the obscure "Introduction" to the sonnets, which after 1803 was out of print until E.H. Coleridge's 1912 scholarly edition of the complete poetical works. Coleridge's acknowledgement of Bowles in the Biographia Literaria, for all its eccentricity, has become emblematic of the significance for early Romanticism of what was, in reality, a whole school of contemporary sonnet writing, with Charlotte Smith, arguably, at its head.

The distorting effect of Coleridge's critical comments concerning Bowles can be seen most clearly in the literary criticism and literary history written between 1880 and 1920. This was the period of Charlotte Smith's greatest obscurity, and also the period in which British Romanticism began to be formulated as a coherent period by the academic discourse. Though both Smith and Bowles were remembered as minor sonneteers of the late nineteenth century, they receive very different treatment. In Main's Treasury of English Sonnets (1881) the "unmitigable woe" and "factitious and second-hand phraseology" of Charlotte Smith's sonnets are said to make them "... unpalatable to a generation so much healthier than that in which they were produced ..." (358). Bowles sonnets, on the other hand, "... are still prized in some measure for their own charms as plaintive and graceful effusions, but they possess an interest greatly exceeding their intrinsic value, in virtue of the important influence they chanced to exercise on the poetical taste of his youthful contemporary, S.T. Coleridge ..." (362). Bowles, though relegated to minor status, retains a privileged position among minor authors because of his influence.

A Brief Handbook of English Authors, published in 1889, succinctly illustrates the occlusion of Charlotte Smith by the “figure” of W. L. Bowles. The entry for Smith is “Poet and Novelist. Elegiac Sonnets are her principal poems, and *The Old Manor House* is her best novel (129)”; the entry for Bowles is “Poet. Author *Fourteen Sonnets*, *Village Verse Book*, etc. A graceful writer, to whom Wordsworth and Coleridge attributed their own poetic inspiration” (14). This, I think, is the earliest categorical statement of a stubborn misconception that only became more “factual” as it became less overstated in early twentieth-century criticism. The close and developmental relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth seems to be the rationale, with Bowles’s influence presumably reaching Wordsworth through Coleridge.⁶

The most exorbitant study of Bowles’s relation to the other Romantics is T. E. Casson’s long essay “William Lisle Bowles” in *Eighteenth Century Literature: An Oxford Miscellany* (1909). The essay is the last in the volume, and opens with the question of the origins of British Romanticism:

In the transition from the poetry of the eighteenth century to the poetry of the Romantic Movement, no critic has been able to put down his finger and say, ‘Here the old ended, the new began’....

But no critic could deny the importance of the Lyrical Ballads, as

⁶ C.H. Herford, in his *The Age of Wordsworth* (1897), makes no mention of Charlotte Smith, but says that Bowles “... will always be remembered as having fascinated both poets ...” (183). In his later, more mediocre work, Bowles was “... lift[ing] up his little light in the midst of the glory he had helped to kindle ...” (183). The Harvard Classics series of 1910 includes no poetry from Charlotte Smith, but Bowles’s sonnet “Dover Cliffs” (sonnet 10 of his original 14) is printed immediately after the long selection of Wordsworth’s poetry (41:697), like a footnote to a source.

the unmistakable manifesto of the later poetry. If, then, by his art a poet can be shown to have affected the two authors of that book, he may be reasonably regarded as having borne a share in the creation of the new forms. (151)

Casson reminds us that Bowles also started a literary controversy with his 1806 edition of Pope. His defense of a poetics of Nature over Pope's poetics of Art raised the indignation of many critics, including Byron. If anything, the debate is an instance of Wordsworth's effect on Bowles, but Casson manages to confound causality and credit Bowles with a second achievement:

And if, in addition he assailed the criterions of the earlier faith in such a way as to provoke the bitter retaliation of its defenders, he may be said to have contributed, not only to the inception of another practice, but also to the erection of a new theory. Such a poet, and such a critic, was Bowles (151)

Casson mentions Charlotte Smith only once, and only because he needs to quote Coleridge's "Introduction" to the sonnets, where the laws of the irregular sonnet are deduced from the practice of Smith and Bowles. He follows the citation with, "...legislation by such deductions would not satisfy the rigid historical critic..." (160), implying that Coleridge was right about Bowles, but wrong about Charlotte Smith.

As evidence that "Bowles was a definitively formative influence on Wordsworth ..." (167) Casson cites the following from his Monody at Matlock (1791):

Nor may I, sweet dream!

From thy wild banks and still retreats depart
 (Where now I meditate my casual theme)
 With out some mild improvement on my heart
 Poured sad, yet pleasing! so may I forget
 The crosses and the cares that sometimes fret
 Life's smoothest channel.

This, supposedly, is "... the very sentiment of the Lines at Tintern Abbey" (165).

Frederick E. Pierce, in his Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation (1918) creates some confusion of his own when he fails to be able to distinguish Charlotte Smith from Bowles, even as he raises Bowles above her. It was Bowles who "... exercised a marked influence on the young authors afterwards known as 'the Lake Poets' ..." (20), and predictably "[h]is effusions are much better than those of Charlotte Smith ...," but Peirce also "... questions whether the general public realized" this, and concedes that readers "found in both the same wind sighing through withered leaves, the same mellow pentameter sighing through withered hopes ..." (20).⁷

There is no evidence that Wordsworth ever attributed to Bowles a significant poetic influence on his own work, nor has an argument for such an influence ever been

⁷ I cannot resist citing one of the unkindest comments in the critical heritage, from Pierce's Current and Eddies: Mrs. Smith "... brought into the world twelve children and a somewhat larger number of novels, both types of offspring being now equally dead ..." (20). At most, Smith's novels number ten.

convincingly made in detail.⁸ The closest Wordsworth came to acknowledging an influence from Bowles was when he said to Samuel Rogers: “When Bowles’s Sonnets first appeared, — a thin 4to [quarto] pamphlet, entitled Fourteen Sonnets, — I bought them in a walk through London with my dear brother, who was afterwards drowned at sea. I read them as we went along; and to the great annoyance of my brother, I stopped in a niche of London Bridge to finish the pamphlet ...” (Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers 261n).

Rogers’s recollection has been often cited as strong supporting evidence of Bowles’s influence on the young Wordsworth. But as Jonathan Wordsworth observes in his introduction to the recent reprint of Bowles’s Fourteen Sonnets, “[t]he occasion seems to have been remembered more for John [Wordsworth’s brother] ... than for the poetry” (ii). Though Jonathan Wordsworth is to this extent sceptical of the significance of the anecdote, he does cite it, and, as many other critics have done, without its concluding sentence, which evidences no particular admiration on William Wordsworth’s part: “Bowles’ short pieces are his best: his long poems are rather flaccid ...” (Rogers 261n). In 1833, even more decisively, Wordsworth used the contrast between himself and Bowles to

⁸ Duncan Wu notes Bowles’s influence on two unpublished early sonnets by Wordsworth in “Wordsworth’s Reading of Bowles” (Notes and Queries 36:2 [June 1989] 166-67), but his main point is to identify the edition mentioned by Wordsworth in the Rogers’s anecdote as the second edition of Bowles’s sonnets rather than the first. Paul Bauschatz, in his article “Coleridge, Wordsworth and Bowles” (Style 27:1 [Spring 1993] 17-40) shows some of the similarities between Bowles’s style and that of the early Wordsworth, and argues that an “implicit susceptibility to Bowles’s voice” (34) can be traced in a variety of Wordsworth’s early poems. His argument focusses more on sound than sense, however, and he acknowledges that some of the best examples of Wordsworth showing Bowles’s characteristic style (such as those mentioned in Wu’s article) may well have been composed before Bowles’s poetry had been published.

soften his appraisal of the poetry of a friend, the publisher Edward Moxon: “In the cadence and execution of your Sonnets, I seem to find more of the manner of Bowles’ than my own, and this you must not think a disparagement, as Bowles in his sonnets has been very successful ...” (Letters 5:616). Nonetheless, the assumption that an important influence was exerted on Wordsworth by W. L. Bowles became a commonplace in the Romantic critical discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Only in recent years has the misconception been quietly corrected: in his introduction to the Woodstock reprint of Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets, Jonathan Wordsworth notes that “... in her temperament she is as clearly Wordsworth’s predecessor as Bowles is Coleridge’s” ([iv]). I will examine this relationship between Smith and Wordsworth in my later chapters.

3. Smith and Bowles: A Comparison

Faced with the problem of accounting for the promotion of Bowles over Smith as the pre-eminent pre-Romantic sonneteer, F.M.A. Hilbish was puzzled but resigned in her 1941 dissertation: “In contemporary praise Mrs. Smith’s name was linked frequently with that of Bowles as his superior; now the relationship is reversed” (269). Poetic quality admits of as many degrees among minor authors as it does among major authors, and an argument could be made that Smith’s sonnets were better poems than Bowles’s sonnets. Indeed, Hilbish goes some distance toward making such an argument (269-73). But as Hilbish recognized, it is also important to emphasize that Smith and Bowles are similar

poets, roughly equal in talent. As Bowles sensed in his defensive advertisement to the second edition, it is their resemblance which establishes so decisively Smith's priority and originality. It is perhaps a contradiction of my stated intentions to be raising Charlotte Smith at the expense of another minor poet, especially William Lisle Bowles, who has so often been used to provide a qualitative contrast with the major Romantics. But Bowles's privileged role in the received history of the origins of Romanticism makes the comparison inevitable.

In his chapter "The Sonnet" in Poetic Form and British Romanticism (1986), Stuart Curran gives the appearance of righting the balance of critical judgement between Smith and Bowles. According to Curran, the "re-birth" of the sonnet "co-incides with the rise of a definable women's literary movement and with the beginnings of Romanticism. The palm in both cases should go to Charlotte Turner Smith ..." (30). Curran grants that Smith "... established the mode of the new sonnet in pensive contemplation, mostly sorrowful, at times lachrymose ..." (30), and that her "... singular achievement is to free established poetic discourse from its reliance on polished couplets, formal diction, and public utterance, and through centering on internal states of mind to realize an expressive and conversational intensity" (31). Despite the generosity of these claims — as large as any I will claim in the present study — Curran does not go on to demonstrate his point. No Charlotte Smith sonnet is cited. Instead, Curran prints a Bowles sonnet, and follows the pattern of critics before him by giving Bowles closer attention, despite his own qualifications with regard to Bowles's talent:

For all their effect on Coleridge, an effect that even he had difficulty

explaining in his celebration of Bowles in the Biographia Literaria, these sonnets are not sophisticated in subject or form. They are largely written to formula — five of the twenty-one [in the 1805 edition] are addressed to rivers, another four juxtapose cliffs and the ocean pounding their base —and the sentiments are generally predictable If he did not invent those formulae, he certainly codified them for a generation” (32)

The same general qualification — a lack of sophistication — could perhaps be made of Charlotte Smith’s sonnets, but as the poet who did invent these “formulae,” she would at least escape the charge of unoriginality.

Bowles’s sonnets, like Smith’s, were very popular: nine editions of his 1789 volume — gradually augmented, also like Smith’s — had been printed by 1805. For a time, their mutual popularity seems actually to have worked against the literary reputations of both poets, as they were held responsible for the sustained vogue of melancholy sonnets in the late eighteenth century. By 1793, the Monthly Review was complaining that the sonnet had been “... so much cultivated of late years ... especially since Mr. Bowles and Mrs. Smith have gratified the public ear ... that, to say the truth, we begin to be almost satiated with sonnets” (10:114). Already we see a tendency to use the similarity of the two poets as a way of putting Bowles’s contribution first. Charles Lamb responded with even greater dislike to the fashionable melancholy sonnet when he made the following observation in a letter to Robert Lloyd in November 1798:

You may extract honey from everything; do not go a gathering after gall
— the bees are wiser in their generation than the race of sonnet writers &

complainers, Bowless & Charlotte Smiths, & all that tribe, who can see no joys but what are past, and fill peoples' heads with notions of the Unsatisfying nature of Earthly comforts" (Letters 1:144)

Like Lamb, Coleridge would protest in his own way the fashion of high melancholy in the sonnet.

Unlike Lamb and the Monthly Review, Coleridge does list the names of these two sonnet writers in their right chronological order in his "Introduction" to Sonnets from Various Authors. If we keep this sequence in mind, it becomes clear that the first important influence of Charlotte Smith's sonnets was on the sonnets of William Lisle Bowles. Hilbish calls this Smith's "most far-reaching influence," as it was Bowles "who in turn individually animated Coleridge, Southey, and many other poets ..." (269). The possibility that Bowles did little more than mediate and even moderate a stronger influence being exerted by Charlotte Smith is one that I would like to pursue.

The opening topic of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria is the effect of living authors on a young writer. From the outset, Coleridge describes his topic in a way that effectively and quietly excludes Charlotte Smith "... the writings of a contemporary ... surrounded by the same circumstances, and disciplined by the same manners, possess a reality for him, and inspire an actual friendship as of a man for a man" (161).⁹ Bowles's appeal for the

⁹ Coleridge gave an erroneous impression to at least one correspondent by speaking about Bowles in these familiar terms. In a letter to Thelwall (19 November 1796), he calls Bowles "the Bard of my Idolatry." But shortly afterwards he is correcting Thelwall: "You imagine that I know Bowles personally — I never saw him but once; & when I was a boy, & in Salisbury market-place" (31 December 1796). By 1797, however, Bowles and Coleridge had met. See Coleridge's letters to Bowles in Griggs, Volume 1.

young Coleridge is described in the Biographia Literaria as primarily a stylistic one, but an appeal with a profound psychological importance. Coleridge portrays his youthful self as “bewildered ... in metaphysics, and in theological controversy (1:15),” a state from which he was “... auspiciously withdrawn ... by the genial influence of a style of poetry, so tender, and yet so manly, so natural and real, and yet so dignified, and harmonious, as the sonnets, etc. of Mr Bowles!” (1:17). Only one of these epithets would not have been equally appropriate in characterizing Charlotte Smith’s poetry: “manly”. The psychological significance that Coleridge attached to the poetry of his contemporaries, its moral function as a model, seems to have required that his “idol” be a male poet.

Bowles and Smith wrote sonnets concerned primarily with their own moods of melancholy, sorrow, and pity. Both recurrently drew connections between their feelings and the natural landscape. But there are important differences in their styles and in their emotional tone. In her list of the distinguishing qualities of the two poets, Hilbish uses a phrase that echoes Coleridge’s gendered idiom:

Compared with Mrs. Smith, [Bowles’s] sonnets lack the descriptive power, the dramatic portrayals, the passionate intensity, the querulous plaintiveness so often hers. His are more reflective, more objective, slightly masculine, less rhythmic, unmelodious though harmonious. (270)

If the distinction between these two poets can be measured in that aspect of Bowles’s sonnets that led Coleridge to call them “manly,” this distinction would seem to be closely related to Bowles greater objectivity and reflectiveness, a certain disengagement on the part of the poetic voice. Coleridge first uses this idiom of gender distinction in his 1797

version of the sonnet “To the Rev. W.L. Bowles.” Coleridge thanks Bowles for “... those soft strains, / Whose sadness soothes me ...” and explains that when

... the mightier throes of mind began,
 And drove me forth, a thought-bewildered man,
 Their mild and manliest melancholy lent
 A mingled charm, as the pang consigned
 To slumber (Poetical Works 1:12)

If, as an example of Bowles’s mild and manly melancholy, we take the sonnet that Coleridge placed first in his privately circulated anthology¹⁰ and compare it with a sonnet by Smith that he also selected for this volume, we can see the difference between their two poetic voices more clearly.

The Bowles sonnet is one of the ones added to his original fourteen between 1789 and 1796, entitled “At Oxford, 1786” in the 1855 edition:

Bereave me not of [these delightful Dreams],¹¹
 Which won my heart, or when the gay career
 Of life begun, or when at times a tear
 Sat sad on memory’s cheek — though loftier themes

¹⁰ The sonnets that Coleridge selected for this short anthology are listed by first line in the bibliography of the Poetical Works (2:1141), and reprinted in facsimile in Paul M. Zall’s Coleridge’s “Sonnets from Various Authors” (1968).

¹¹ The first line here is restored to the form it had when Coleridge selected the poem. Bowles, who tinkered often with his already published works, would later change the opening line to “Bereave me not of Fancy’s shadowy dreams,” which is how it appears in his Poetical Works (1855).

Await the wakened mind to the high prize
 Of wisdom, hardly earned with toil and pain,
 Aspiring patient; yet on life's wide plain
 Left fatherless, where many a wanderer sighs
 Hourly, and oft our road is lone and long,
 'Twere not a crime should we a while delay
 Amid the sunny field; and happier they
 Who, as they journey, woo the charm of song,
 To cheer their way; — till they forget to weep,
 And the tired sense is hushed, and sinks to sleep.

(Bowles Poetical Works 1:23)

Coleridge also included in his anthology Charlotte Smith's sonnet 39, "To Night,"

I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night
 When the faint moon, yet lingering in her wane,
 And veil'd in clouds, with pale uncertain light
 Hangs o'er the waters of the restless main.
 In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind
 Will to the deaf cold elements complain,
 And tell the embosom'd grief, however vain,
 To sullen surges and the viewless wind.
 Tho' no repose on thy dark breast I find,
 I still enjoy thee — cheerless as thou art;

For in thy quiet gloom the exhausted heart
 Is calm, tho' wretched; hopeless, yet resigned.
 While to the winds and waves its sorrows given,
 May reach — tho' lost on earth — the ear of Heaven!

(Smith Poems 39)

Smith's greater intensity and more vivid dramatic portrayal of the speaking voice may already be apparent. This particular sonnet was not only selected by Coleridge for his collection, but also singled out much later by Wordsworth, recommending additions to Dyce's Specimens of British Poetesses in 1830 (Letters 5:260).

Another logical candidate among Smith's sonnets for a direct comparison with Bowles's sonnet "At Oxford, 1786" is her sonnet 47, which is on the same topic, addressed: "To Fancy":

Thee, Queen of Shadows! — shall I still invoke,
 Still love the scene thy sportive pencil drew,
 When on mine eyes the early radiance broke
 Which shew'd the beauteous rather than the true!
 Alas! long since those glowing tints are dead,
 And now 'tis thine in darkest hues to dress
 The spot where pale Experience hangs her head
 O'er the sad grave of murder'd Happiness!
 Thro' thy false medium then, then, no longer view'd,
 May fancied pain and fancied pleasure fly,

And I, as from me all thy dreams depart,
 Be to my wayward destiny subdued:
 Nor seek perfection with a poet's eye,
 Nor suffer anguish with a poet's heart!

(Poems 44)

To some readers these two sonnets, and Bowles's as well, may seem mediocre examples of the form. Smith's sonnets always run the risk of appearing bleak, hyperbolic or affected. Bowles's mediocrity is of a different sort, and has its origins in a different poetic risk, his use of understatement rather than overstatement.

Bowles's "At Oxford, 1786" and Smith's "To Fancy" treat the same subject in the same form, but show a distinct contrast at the level of ideas and structure. Though both sonnets are melancholy, Bowles's is less intensely focussed on the unmitigable woe of the speaker, less austere in its sentiment, and essentially optimistic in tone. The psychological process praised by the speaker — indulging Fancy's dreams — is legitimized by generalization to a "happier they" who also sing in the face of adversity. Bowles's voice is calmly reflective while Smith's is impassioned and direct, and this leads to a difference in the rhetorical structures of their sonnets. Smith's agonized stoicism verges on a structural paradox, in that the poem produced by the rejection of fancy's intensification of feelings is at the same time a creative indulgence in poetic language and the intensification of feeling. The paradox of Bowles's optimistic stance is that his poem, while attempting a defense of Fancy, verges on becoming an example of the "charm of song" that lulls a "happier they" — not quite the poet or the reader — to sleep. In this sense his poem is indeed soothing,

if not soporific. But Bowles's lack of emotional focus permits him a greater discursive range, and he has time to note that "loftier themes await the awakened mind," an appeal to readers who, like Coleridge, aspired to the "high prize of wisdom" as well as fancy's consolations.

No such reflective distance between speaker and subject exists in Smith's sonnets. The rhetorical structure of the sonnet "To Fancy" lies in the dramatization of the poet's own psychological state only. The "gay" and "sad" options that Bowles lists in his opening lines are for Smith irreversible phases of her existence, and their narration occupies the poem. There is no room for Bowles's meditative "delay," and if the aid of fancy is "still invoke[d]" by the poet, she is invoked in the service of an analysis that is almost ruthlessly rational. If there is a distinguishing manly quality to Bowles's sonnet, it is not a Johnsonian sternness, but rather a lightness of tone, a melancholy which discusses consolation more than it appears to need consolation. Bowles's melancholy contained its own consolation; Charlotte Smith's did not. This may have been first among the various reasons for young Coleridge being more inspired by the sonnets of Bowles.

Coleridge saw that Smith and Bowles together had re-defined the contemporary sonnet, and that their style had raised for it a new ideal. This new ideal was not just a matter of melancholy tone: "[T]hose Sonnets appear to me the most exquisite," he says, "in which moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings, are deduced from, and associated with, the scenery of Nature" (*Poetical Works* 2:1139). Of the three Bowles sonnets that Coleridge included in his early anthology — the one above, plus "Music" (*Poetical Works* 1.22) and "At Dover, 1786" — only the latter demonstrates the use of natural description

in connection with moral sentiments:

At Dover, 1786

Thou, whose stern spirit loves the storm,
 That, borne on Terror's desolating wings,
 Shakes the high forest, or remorseless flings
 The shivering surge; when rising griefs deform
 Thy peaceful breast, hie to yon steep, and think, —
 When thou dost mark the melancholy tide
 Beneath thee, and the storm careering wide, —
 Tossed on the surge of life how many sink!
 And if thy cheek with one kind tear be wet,
 And if thy heart be smitten, when the cry
 Of danger and of death is heard more nigh,
 Oh, learn thy private sorrows to forget;
 Intent, when hardest beats the storm, to save
 One who, like thee, has suffered from the wave.

(Poetical Works 1:24)

This is the Bowles sonnet that Curran prints and praises in his chapter on the sonnet in Poetic Form and British Romanticism (33). Having conceded that Bowles's sonnets "... are not sophisticated in subject or form ..." (31), he still finds in this example "... a truly remarkable rhetorical structure, one that continually folds in on itself and exhausts its alternatives in lightning shifts of perspective, denying the resolution it seems so forcefully

to posit” (33). Curran is no deconstructionist, and I can only conclude that this ambivalent flourish is a kind of damnation by faintly trendy praise. Curran’s strategy suggests the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of being loyal to both the bias of Coleridge and to the fact of Charlotte Smith’s originality. Poetic Form and British Romanticism (1986) was Curran’s first statement on Charlotte Smith. In more recent critical essays he has become one of Smith’s most insightful and eloquent promoters.

The appropriate comparison for Bowles’s sonnet “Thou, whose stern spirit loves the storm ...” is Smith’s sonnet 66, “Written in a tempestuous night, on the coast of Sussex,” a sonnet which will illustrate more than her descriptive powers:

The night-flood rakes upon the stony shore;
 Along the rugged cliffs and chalky caves
 Mourns the hoarse Ocean, seeming to deplore
 All that are buried in his restless waves[.]—
 Mined by corrosive tides, the hollow rock
 Falls prone, and rushing from its turfy height,
 Shakes the broad beach with long-resounding shock,
 Loud thundering on the ear of sullen Night;
 Above the desolate and stormy deep,
 Gleams the wan Moon, by floating mists opprest;
 Yet here while youth, and health, and labour sleep,
 Alone I wander[.] — Calm untroubled rest,
 “Nature’s soft nurse,” deserts the sigh-swoln breast,

And shuns the eyes, that only wake to weep!

(Poems 58)

Again we can see a marked difference, not only in the amount and vividness of natural description, but also in the degree of immediacy and intensity. Though it was published somewhat earlier than Smith's sonnet 66, Bowles's "At Dover, 1786" can be read as a response to Smith's already established type of melancholy, a melancholy not only inconsolable, but, as the Bowles sonnet suggests, liable to an excess of self-regard. The speaker of Smith's poem, or someone like her in mood, is in effect the addressee, the "Thou," of Bowles's sonnet. This overly-melancholy addressee is advised to forget "private sorrows" and attend to the saving of others equally unfortunate.

The two sonnets contain many of the same elements, but in Bowles's there is again a greater reflective distance from the melancholy being described. Where extremes of suffering are introduced, they are framed at an even further distance. Bowles's emphasis is on a stormy nocturnal vigilance, but one which places the poet in the position of the benefactor rather than the sufferer. And the vigilance is a metaphor for an abstract ethical stance, not a fully realized scene. Smith's sonnet, if more self-indulgent, is correspondingly more intimate, and the nocturnal wakefulness she describes is a literal wakefulness, an attack of melancholy insomnia dramatized by a late-night visit to the seaside cliffs. Smith's sonnet is one of those which first appeared in a fictional context — written by a male protagonist in her novel Montalbert (1795). Nonetheless, the speaker's visit to the stormy sea-shore is described as actual experience, in the first person and the present tense. In Bowles's sonnet the vigil at the shore is hypothetical, inspired by —

rather than inspiring — a moral sentiment.

The difference in the vividness of the two descriptions of a storm corresponds to this difference in point of view. The difference in the attitudes toward the extremes of melancholy in these sonnets could also be said to correspond to the phases of Coleridge's early mental life: Bowles's milder melancholy appears as a reaction to — almost a conversation with — the inconsolable melancholy of Smith. Coleridge perhaps admired this Bowles sonnet because he felt himself, in certain moods, to be among its implied readers, felt an affinity, that is, with the "Thou" that the sonnet addresses.

These direct comparisons show favourably, I think, Smith's characteristic intensity of feeling, and her felicity of phrase, especially in natural description. And they may begin to explain what Coleridge meant by "manly" in his praise of Bowles. Bowles's sonnets are not more forceful than Smith's; they are, indeed, more moderated, more restrained. Bowles's sonnets are more intellectual only in the sense that they grant consolatory power to reflective and discursive distance; Smith's sonnets are otherwise intellectually equal to Bowles's — if not superior — especially in combining complexity and clarity. If Bowles's sonnets seemed more "manly" than Smith's, it was not because of a single-minded engagement with the author's feelings and sensations, for this characterized the sonnets of both authors. The gender distinction, or as we might more accurately describe it, the 'gendered' distinction, seems to be one of style, with Smith's style being more expressive,, and Bowles's more reflective.

Bowles's manliness, then, lies in his very mildness, his negotiation of a successful consolatory turn. From Coleridge's point of view, this may have looked like greater

strength in the face of adversity, despite the quantitative difference in the respective adversities besetting the two poets. Whatever the case, the gender difference amounted to a perceived qualitative difference, and conformed to the gender stereotypes of the time, stereotypes that Coleridge endorsed. Consider, for instance, his epigram “On the Curious Circumstance that in the German Language the Sun is Feminine, and the Moon Masculine” (1802). The conclusion and punch line of the poem rework a German epigram explaining the gender designation (their wives are “common” as the sun and their husbands “horned” as the moon), but Coleridge’s original opening lines show how the commonplace gender distinction of sun/moon could be understood in terms of contemporary poetry:

Our English poets, bad and good, agree
 To make the Sun a male, the Moon a she
 He drives his dazzling diligence on high,
 In verse, as constantly as in the sky,
 And cheap as blackberries our sonnets shew
 The Moon, Heaven’s huntress, with her silver bow,
 ... (Poetical Works 2:968)

The designation of sonnets as the “feminine” genre, and sonnets to the Moon as the favorite theme of female sonneteers, are each insights with a certain amount of truth. But the paradigm forces female poets into a scheme whereby they are the “bad” English poets, writing in a cheapened genre, and limited by their gendered imaginations to variations on a single theme.

4. Degrees of Melancholy

Even if we had only the few sonnets discussed in the previous section to judge from, we might conclude that Charlotte Smith's personal griefs were deeper and more protracted than W.L. Bowles's. But Smith's contemporary readers also had Smith's own complaints in her prefaces and notes to reinforce the conclusion. In the preface to her sixth edition, 1792, Smith claims for her sonnets that "... unaffected sorrow drew them forth; I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy ..." (Poems 5), and provides a description of her legal troubles, quoted at some length in chapter 2. Bowles would also stress, in his later prefaces, that his sorrows were personal ones. In the "Preface" to the 1805 edition, he explained that the tour was taken to relieve "... depression of spirits" (Poetical Works 1:1). This depression of spirits, he explained, was the result of disappointed love — an engagement terminated by parental disapproval.¹² None of the sonnets in Bowles's first edition address this matter directly, and none are addressed to a lost lover, although parting friends and separation play a part in some of his meditations. In a graceful touch, intended to provide a key, perhaps, to the speaker's melancholy, the last couplet of the last sonnet in the first edition contains the only reference to "her," but even this is elided with a personification: "If haply, 'mid the woods and vales so fair, /

¹² In Bowles's 1837 edition of his sonnets, he provides further biographical information, and explains that later sonnets were inspired by a tour taken to relieve his grief at the failure of another engagement, with a woman who died soon afterwards. See Havens, 512n1, and Ralston, 118-9.

Stranger to Peace! I yet may meet her there.” Charlotte Smith, too, avoids detailing the specific objects of her grief, but her sonnets do speak of sorrows more numerous and persistent than the memory of a lost love.

Bowles’s sorrows, though vague and mild, conform to the thematic tradition of the Petrarchan sonnet, even if his reluctance to be explicit about love belongs to the manner of the late eighteenth century. Smith’s sorrows, on the other hand, are almost never amatory. Among her misfortunes, as her contemporary readers would have known (especially those whose social lives actually intersected with hers) were poverty, an unhappy marriage, legal suits in which her efforts were largely fruitless, alienation from friends for social and political reasons, and the loss of several of her children during her lifetime. In the sonnets themselves, only the last of these sorrows appears as an explicit topic, and even here the full details must be supplied by the critical apparatus. Curran notes in the Poems of Charlotte Smith that sonnets 65, 74, 78, 89, 90, and 91 refer to the death of her eldest daughter Anna Augusta, in childbirth. To the first sonnet on this subject, addressed to Dr. Parry of Bath, Smith provided an explanatory footnote:

To the excellent friend and Physician to whom these lines are addressed, I was obliged for the kindest attentions, and for the recovery from one dangerous illness of that beloved child whom a few months afterwards his skill and most unremitting and disinterested exertions could not save!

(Poems 57n)

This is at once personal and unspecific, almost a cryptic reference: the reader can infer from the text itself little more than the loss of a child. The specific details have been

established for modern criticism by the researches of F.M.A. Hilbish (178-180) and Rufus Paul Turner (38-9). Turner uses Smith's letters to confirm the conclusions of Hilbish, and Hilbish herself relies on Smith's own words from a letter published in Public Characters in which Smith laments "the loss of my child, which fell like the hand of Death upon me ..." (Public Characters 64). Mrs. Dorset, Smith's sister, provides the same quotation in her memoir. My point here is that the sonnets of Charlotte Smith were not themselves the source of all biographical information concerning their subjects. Charlotte Smith maintained a certain reserve about some personal facts, at least within the bounds of this poetic genre.

More typically, Smith's sonnets contain recurrent phrases and rhetorical turns that emphasize multiple and thus non-specific misfortunes. Many of Smith's sonnets deal directly with the almost insupportable nature of these misfortunes, dramatized by the difficulty — or failure — of consolation, as in the sonnet "To Fancy" above. Smith develops an idiom of her own for the painful, combined and unjust nature of the poet's suffering, an idiom in which, for the reader at least, hyperbole and sincerity are precariously blended. In Smith's second sonnet, she speaks of the destructive effects of "tyrant Passion and corrosive Care" (Poems 14); in sonnet 4 she numbers herself among the "sad children of Despair and Woe" (Poems 15); "... pain and sorrow strike — how many ways" in sonnet 10 (19); sonnet 34 is "[d]ark with new clouds of evil yet to come" (37); in sonnet 55, " — such evils in my lot combine, / As shut my languid sense — " (Poems 50); in sonnet 84, the speaker is "[c]rush'd to the earth, by bitterest anguish prest ..." (Poems 73). Only the very last of her sonnets, sonnet 92, published in 1800, contains

a reference to an improvement in the poet's circumstances, and the allusion is bitterly undercut: "... too late / The poor Slave shakes the unworthy bonds away which crush'd her" (Poems 78). Frequently, death is invoked as the only release. Sonnet 5 concludes with the line "There's no oblivion — but in death alone" (Poems 16); the speaker never quite contemplates suicide in Smith's sonnets, but those in the voice of Goethe's Werther (Poems 26-29) outnumber those translated from Petrarch (Poems 21-23).

Despite the combined and usually generalized nature of Smith's woes — "... pangs of sorrow past, or coming dread" (Poems 34) — she sometimes alludes to more specific troubles. There is a social complaint that appears as early as her first edition: sonnet 9 lists among her misfortunes the fact that "Friends, on whose faith the trusting heart rely'd, / Unkindly shun th'imploring eye of woe ..." (Poems 18); and again in sonnet 52, "By Friendship's cheering radiance now unblest, / Along Life's rudest path I seem to go ..." (Poems 48). In one instance there is a fairly explicit allusion to the legal troubles that endangered her children's welfare. In sonnet 27, the poet fears that they will "... rue the hour that gave them birth, / And threw them on a world so full of pain, / Where prosperous folly treads on patient worth, / And to deaf Pride, Misfortune pleads in vain!" (Poems 31). There are other striking references to injustice: "Happiness," in the sonnet "To Fancy" above, is "murder'd"; in sonnet 79 the poet is "[o]f Folly weary, shrinking from the view / Of Violence and Fraud ..." (Poems 68). No such rhetoric of moral indignation is to be found in Bowles.

Even in the more abstractly structured sonnets of these two poets, we can detect differences in their emotional engagement, differences we cannot help but attribute to

different biographical circumstances. Although they were both born into middle class families, and although Bowles may, like Smith, have published his first volume out of financial need (Ralston 118), their knowledge of poverty was very different. The following two sonnets, by Bowles and Smith respectively, are addressed to similar abstractions, but illustrate a difference in the economic situations as well the emotional states of the two poets:

O Poverty! though from thy haggard eye,
 Thy cheerless mein, of every charm bereft,
 Thy brow, that hope's last traces long have left,
 Vain Fortune's feeble sons with terror fly;
 Thy rugged paths with pleasure I attend; —
 For Fancy, that with fairest dreams can bless;
 And Patience, in the Pall of Wretchedness,
 Sad-smiling, as the ruthless storms descend,
 And Piety, forgiving every wrong,
 And meek Content, whose griefs no more rebel;
 And Genius, warbling sweet her saddest song;
 And Pity, list'ning to the poor man's knell,
 Long banish'd from the world's insulting throng;
 With Thee, and loveliest Melancholy, dwell.

(Fourteen Sonnets 10)

Charlotte Smith has no sonnet to Poverty, but she does have one on a similar theme:

To dependance [sonnet 57]

Dependence! heavy, heavy are thy chains,
 And happier they who from the dangerous sea,
 Or the dark mine, procure with ceaseless pains
 An hard-earned pittance — than who trust to thee!
 More blest the hind, who from his bed of flock
 Starts — when the birds of morn their summons give,
 And waken'd by the lark — “the shepherd’s clock,”
 Lives but to labour — labouring but to live.
 More noble than the sycophant, whose art
 Must heap with taudry flowers thy hated shrine;
 I envy not the meed thou canst impart
 To crown his service — while, tho' Pride combine
 With Fraud to crush me — my unfetter'd heart
 Still to the Mountain Nymph may offer mine.

(Poems 51)

Smith’s note for “Mountain Nymph” is “The mountain goddess, Liberty [from] Milton.” Behind both poems lies the familiar moral paradigm of happy rural poverty in contrast to corrupt and fashionable wealth, and both poets distinguish themselves from the labouring poor and the idle rich alike. But Smith’s analysis of dependance, even though it employs personification, is far more complex and realistic than Bowles list of the personified abstractions that “dwell” with poverty, and among which, significantly, “Liberty” is not

included.

As a woman who grew up in expectation of an independence from inherited property and was instead forced to write for, in her own words, “a subsistence” (The Banished Man [Irish ed.] vii), Charlotte Smith regarded financial dependence on others as a severe humiliation, especially as such dependence only exposed her to “Pride” and “Fraud”. It was a humiliation that she could, with effort, defer by writing for an income. As a clergyman’s son in expectation of a curacy, the young Bowles could embrace an idealized poverty. But we should note that the speaker in Bowles’s sonnet does not actually dwell with poverty, even though “Genius” apparently does. “Thy rugged paths with pleasure I attend ...” is ambiguous, but “... listening to the poor man’s knell” establishes firmly the poet’s point of view, his pastoral, in both senses of the word, relationship to poverty. The “rugged paths” that Bowles merely “attends” are perhaps an echo of a more immediate use of the phrase in the second line of Smith’s first sonnet, cited in full in my introduction: “... the rugged path I’m doomed to tread ...” (Poems 13).

Describing the effect of her life on her sonnets, Stuart Curran emphasizes what Charlotte Smith did not introduce: “Charlotte Smith had good reason to express an indiscriminating sorrow (and good reason as well to suppress the discriminating facts): a wastrel husband whom she left in debtor’s prison ... a large brood of children ... the vicissitudes of earning a living” (Poetic Form and British Romanticism 31). As I observed in chapter 2, however, it is only the more intimate and unpleasant facts of her marriage that Smith “suppresses” completely. Her other troubles, if not described in detail, are described enough for us to sense their complexity. Legal oppressions, social

ostracism, her struggle to support her numerous children, are all discernable complaints. In the sonnets on the death of her daughter, Smith is quite direct about the object of her grief. If she avoided the sordidness of “discriminating” facts, we should not necessarily conclude that it was out of shame, or deference to social decorum. Her sense of poetic decorum must also have been a factor, however much she may seem to transgress it.

If Coleridge had a greater sympathy for the melancholy of Bowles, perhaps it was because most of Charlotte Smith’s misfortunes could not have afflicted a male writer of her time, especially a young male poet. Even Smith’s poverty was a result of her dependance and her legal non-entity as a married woman with a debt-ridden husband. Smith’s stark personifications of social evils, her lists of personal adversities, and the seldom varied tendency of the sonnets to develop toward a greater sense of despair or to resolve on the note of death’s release — all this combined to make her sonnets psychologically challenging, almost alarming. The extremity of Charlotte Smith’s plight, or more precisely the extremity of her language of complaint, makes demands on the reader to sympathize with a woman in a position of almost complete powerlessness. The contemporary reader would have been forced either to reject the sonnets outright as overwrought and insincere, or to sympathize wholly with the author. The only middle ground, at least for Coleridge, was to prefer the sonnets of a poet who was heavily influenced by Charlotte Smith, a poet whose sonnets had most of the virtues of hers, but whose melancholy had something more of the consolable in it, more of nostalgia and less of despair.

5. The Greater and Lesser Romantic Lyric

In her dissertation of 1976, "The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith," Peggy Willard Gledhill observes that "[i]nasmuch as Coleridge forgot about Charlotte Smith, it is not surprising that many later critics have too" (95). Although Gledhill's dissertation is concerned primarily with the structural principles of Smith's sonnets, she is provoked, while discussing sonnet 32, "Written on the banks of the Arun, October 1787," to take M.H. Abrams to task for not exploring the origins of what he calls "the Greater Romantic Lyric" further than the general influence of Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747) and Coleridge's immediate indebtedness to Bowles. In Abrams's essay "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" (Hilles and Bloom, eds. From Sensibility to Romanticism [1965]: 527-60), no mention is made of Charlotte Smith, and, as Gledhill laments, the credit for "lyricizing" the local poem goes to Bowles. Abrams includes the text of "To the River Ichn, Near Winton" to "represent Bowles' procedure ..." (541). As Gledhill observes, though without making a detailed argument, "everything he says about it ... could equally well apply to Smith's sonnet 32 ..." (94). Gledhill's claim could easily be expanded and defended. Charlotte Smith wrote a number of sonnets inspired by the River Arun (5, 26, 30, 32, 33, 45), and several of them exhibit the qualities of the lyric local poem — if not the Greater Romantic Lyric — at least as well as Bowles's sonnet.

Abrams suggests in a note to his essay (558 n16) that "As late as 1806-20, in The River Duddon, Wordsworth adopted Bowles's design of a tour presented as a sequence of

local-meditative sonnets.” Smith’s sonnets to the Arun, though they do not comprise a volume or a “tour,” are the first group of English sonnets inspired by a minor river. The first river sonnet in this fashion was probably Thomas Warton Jr.’s “To the River Lodon” (1877), which in turn reworks the theme of a return to childhood haunts made popular by Gray’s “Eton College” ode, where the Thames figures is an addressee.

As a final illustration of the similar and yet contrasting styles of Charlotte Smith and W. L. Bowles, and as a final illustration of Smith’s originality, I will present her sonnet 5, and Bowles’s “To the River Itchin.” I choose Smith’s Sonnet 5 rather than her Sonnet 32, which prompted Gledhill’s critical commentary, because it possesses, in addition to the lyric and loco-descriptive features of sonnet 32, the special psychological feature that Abrams calls “... a recollection of an earlier visit to the same location” (541). Another reason for choosing it is that it was printed earlier than Smith’s sonnet 32, and earlier than Bowles’s sonnet. In the sestet of Smith’s “To the South Downs,” we find her earliest apostrophe to the river Arun:

Ah! hills belov'd! — where once a happy child,
 Your beechen shades, “your turf, your flowers among,”¹³
 I wove your bluebells into garlands wild,
 And woke your echoes with my artless song.
 Ah! hills belov'd — your turf, your flowers remain;
 But can they peace to this sad bosom restore;

¹³ Smith’s note refers for this citation to Gray’s “Ode on A Distant Prospect ...” line 8: “Whose turf, whose shades, whose flowers among.”

For one poor moment soothe 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!

(Poems 15-16)

Bowles's sonnet "To the River Itchin" was the 8th in his first edition:

Itchin, when I behold thy banks again,
 Thy crumbling margin, and thy silver breast,
 On which the self-same tints still seem to rest,
 Why feels my heart the shiv'ring sense of pain?
 Is it — that many a summer's day has past
 Since in life's morn, I carol'd on thy side?
 Is it — that oft, since then, my heart has sighed,
 As Youth, and Hope's delusive dreams, flew fast?
 Is it — that those, who circled on thy shore,
 Companions of my youth, now meet no more?
 Whate'er the cause, upon thy banks I bend
 Sorrowing, yet feel such solace at my heart,

As at the meeting of some long-lost friend,
 From whom, in happier hours, we wept to part.

(Fourteen Sonnets 9)

M.H. Abrams, after providing the text of “To the River Itchin” in his essay, is mildly deprecating: “Why Coleridge should have been moved to idolatry by so slender, if genuine, a talent as that of Bowles has been an enigma of literary history” (“Structure and Style ...” 541). He provides an answer to this enigma by locating the origins of the lyricized loco-descriptive poem in Bowles’s early sonnets. Peggy Gledhill cannot resist renewing the enigma with an insightful quip—one that I cannot resist repeating: “What seems equally enigmatic to me is the notion that Coleridge found ‘Itchin’ more poetic than ‘Arun’” (94). And yet there is no doubt that he did.

M. H. Abrams states that “‘To the River Itchin, Near Winton’ ... so impressed Coleridge that he emulated it in his sonnet ‘To the River Otter’” (541). Even though this statement is probably correct, it needs to be pointed out that it is actually just informed speculation. There is no record of Coleridge mentioning this particular Bowles sonnet. It was not one of the ones he included in his 1796 anthology or later defended against Bowles’s revisions (Letters 1:318). Abrams, without citing him, seems to be taking his cue from W.K. Wimsatt’s 1954 essay “The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery,” in The Verbal Icon. As a “central exhibit” of his essay, Wimsatt uses the same comparison as Abrams, the similarity and contrast between Bowles’s sonnet “To the River Itchin” and Coleridge’s sonnet “To the River Otter.” The latter, Wimsatt says, was “written in confessed imitation of Bowles” (105). This confessed imitation is evidenced in Wimsatt’s

footnote by nothing more than the half-title from the 1797 Poems on Various Subjects (Verbal Icon 285 n3). This half-title — “Sonnets Attempted in the Manner of Rev. W.L.Bowles” — is more dedicatory than descriptive, and the sonnets printed under it are, most of them, quite unlike Bowles’s sonnets. A selection of these sonnets would later be more accurately titled by Coleridge as “Sonnets to Eminent Characters.” “To the River Otter” is indeed the most “Bowlesian” of these sonnets, and it did appear as part of Coleridge’s own contribution to Sonnets From Various Authors. My point, though, is that there was no “confessed imitation” of Bowles. The causal or genealogical connection has been inaccurately treated as authorized fact, when it is really a critical construct.

5. The Higginbottom Parodies

I hope it has become clear through the direct comparisons made in this chapter that Coleridge’s preference for Bowles’s sonnets over Smith’s cannot be attributed to any significant or obvious superiority in poetic skill or originality on Bowles’s part. Abrams himself provides a second reason for Coleridge’s youthful admiration of Bowles, one that does not depend on his having lyricized the local poem, and which is more in accord with the explanation I have been making: it was Bowles’s tone, the relative lightness of his melancholy, that appealed to Coleridge. Abrams quotes from Coleridge’s letter to Southey (11 December 94): “... my Poetry is crowded and sweats beneath a heavy burthen of Ideas and Imagery! It has seldom Ease.” “This ‘Ease’” says Abrams, “Coleridge had

early discovered in Bowles” (“Structure and Style ...” 543). With this I must agree. Even those, like Hilbish, Gledhill and myself, who find in Smith’s sonnets a superior harmony and subtlety of verse style, would not call her sonnets ‘easy’, at least not in the complimentary sense. To explain the importance of this ‘ease’, Abrams returns to the Biographia Literaria, and Coleridge’s claim that “... of the then living poets Bowles and Cowper were, to the best of my knowledge, the first who combined natural thoughts with natural diction; the first who reconciled the heart with the head” (Biographia Literaria 1:24).

The canonical influence of the Biographia Literaria, and of critical readings such as Abrams’s, has elevated this statement to the level of literary history. But we should remind ourselves that Coleridge is speaking primarily of his own development as a poet — he even lists the two authors in the order he read them, as he explains in a footnote (1:24). Like the other major Romantic poets, Coleridge tended to equate his own poetic development with literary history itself. His modest qualification, “to the best of my knowledge,” acknowledges both the subjectiveness of his judgement and its aspiration to fact. Bowles and Cowper reconciled the heart and the head “first” not so much for poetry in general as for Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Indeed, if Coleridge’s claim were actually valid in any general sense, both Cowper and Bowles would certainly be independently famous for their achievement.

Coleridge is, in fact, aware of the incongruity of the major claim he makes for this minor poet. He begins his discussion with a theoretical proviso that, for all its brilliance, only obscures the matter: “... it is peculiar to original genius to become less and less

striking, in proportion to its success in improving the taste and judgement of its contemporaries” (1:24). By the light of this principle, one could claim that Coleridge’s very omission of Charlotte Smith’s name in the Biographia Literaria is evidence that she was more original and more influential than Bowles and Cowper combined.

I do not want to begin a discussion of the Romantic reconciliation of heart and head, or to pursue the vexed question of naturalness in poetry. I have returned once again to the Biographia Literaria, a text which makes no mention of Charlotte Smith, in order to pursue a particular point: her absence from some of the central discourses of Romantic criticism is a significant absence, and often the gestures which exclude her constitute a negative presence on her part. In the Biographia Literaria we are advised that in order to understand the effect of Bowles’s poetry on the author in his youth “... the reader must make himself acquainted with the general style of composition that was at that time deemed poetry ...” (1:24). This acquaintance would of necessity include a familiarity with the sonnets of Charlotte Smith. Readers who were, or who are, acquainted with late-eighteenth poetic taste, will perhaps think of Charlotte Smith when faced with the following parodic sonnet by Coleridge, which he prints in a footnote to chapter one:

Pensive at eve, on the hard world I mused,
 And my poor heart was sad; so at the Moon
 I gazed, and sighed, and sighed, for ah how soon
 Eve saddens into night! mine eyes perused
 With tearful vacancy the dampy grass
 That wept and glitter'd in the paly ray:

And I did pause me, on my lonely way
 And mused me, on the wretched ones that pass
 O'er the bleak heath of sorrow. But alas!
 Most of myself I thought! When it befel,
 That the soothe spirit of the breezy wood
 Breath'd in mine ear: 'All this is very well,
 But much of ONE thing, is for NO thing good.'
 Oh my poor heart's INEXPLICABLE SWELL!
 (1:27n)

Coleridge explains that this sonnet, along with the two others reprinted in his long footnote, appeared first in 1797 in the Monthly Magazine, under the pseudonym Nehemiah Higginbottom. He wrote the parodic sonnets to expose "... the three sins of poetry, one or the other of which is the most likely to beset a young writer" (1:26). This first one was designed to "... excite a good-natured laugh at the spirit of doleful egotism, and at the recurrence of favourite phrases ..." (1:27). Charlotte Smith herself quoted a similar phrase — "querulous egotism" — as the typical critical complaint against her style in the Preface to the second volume of Elegiac Sonnets, which was also published in 1797 (Poems 10). If words like "dampy" and "paly" do not invoke Smith's idiom of favourite phrases, such words as "pensive," the repeated word "sighed," and the phrases "Eve saddens into night," "my lonely way" and "the wretched ones" certainly do. These are not exact citations from Smith, but the "doleful egotism" that the sonnet parodies is very much her characteristic tone. The appropriate comparison here would be with Smith's sonnet 4,

“To the Moon:”

Queen of the silver bow! by thy 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.
 And while I gaze, thy mild and placid light
 Sheds a soft calm upon my troubled breast;
 And oft I think — fair planet of the night,
 That in thy orb, the wretched may have rest:
 The sufferers of the earth perhaps may go,
 Released by death — to thy benignant sphere;
 And the sad children of Despair and Woe
 Forget, in thee, their cup of sorrow here.
 Oh! that I soon may reach thy world serene,
 Poor wearied pilgrim — in this toiling scene.

(Poems 15)

The similarity between this sonnet and the first of the Higginbottom parodies is striking, in rhetorical structure as well as tone. That Charlotte Smith was the epitome of the sonneteer of “doleful egotism” may indeed have been so obvious to Coleridge, and more importantly to his magazine readership, that it required no mention. The in-joke target of

this sonnet appears to have been primarily Charles Lloyd.¹⁴ But the general reader of the Monthly Magazine may not have been able to make this determination, nor the contributor to rely on it. Lloyd was not a well known poet. As magazine satire, and as personal satire of friends as well, the sonnets would have worked best if the in-joke were disguised beneath a more widely recognizable reference.

In his short but definitive article, "Coleridge as Nehemiah Higginbottom" (1958), David Erdman traces resemblances between the diction of the three parodies and the sonnet styles of Lloyd, Lamb and Southey. But he concludes that the first object of parody in all three sonnets is the early style of Coleridge himself. The parodies are ... a mockery not primarily of anybody's sonnets, but of the intensely melancholy and nearly suicidal brooding recurrent in several of his own early poems, especially his Chatterton (575)

Now that we have seen a number of Charlotte Smith's sonnets, it will seem odd that Erdman does not pursue the question of whether or not there was a contemporary precedent for this "nearly suicidal brooding" in sonnet form.¹⁵ Charlotte Smith is mentioned by Erdman only in Coleridge's own formula: as being, with Bowles, one of the two poets who established the sonnet as a "... small poem, in which some lonely feeling is

¹⁴ The first sonnet is the most crammed with borrowed phrases, most of them italicized. Coleridge says in a letter to Cottle that these and other "instances" of cliché "... are almost all taken from mine and Lloyd's poems ..." (Letters 1.257).

¹⁵ One of the most thorough treatments of Coleridge's early fascination with Chatterton and the late-eighteenth century vogue of the young genius-suicide is in George Dekker's Coleridge and the Literature of Sensibility (1978), in particular his chapter entitled "Blue Coat Boys." Charlotte Smith is not discussed.

developed” (Poetical Works 2:1139).

No doubt Coleridge was parodying himself to some extent, learning his craft in public by playing poet and anonymous critical wit at the same time. Lamb, Lloyd and Southey all seem to have taken offense at the parodies when they appeared in the Monthly Magazine (Erdman 575), and many individual turns of phrase do have direct targets in the sonnets of these friends of Coleridge.¹⁶ And yet the arrangement of the three Higginbottom sonnets, and the fairly obvious tonal differences between them, have not yet been considered in the light of Coleridge’s own early definition of the contemporary sonnet as the creation of Smith and Bowles. If he was indeed “justified ... in deducing its laws from their compositions,” perhaps these early parodies were also shaped by their styles of sonnet writing.

We find that the second of the Higginbottom sonnets, directed toward what Coleridge calls “... low, creeping language and thoughts, under the pretense of simplicity” (1:27) has a tone contrasting the first, a mildness that remind us of Bowles:

Oh I do love thee meek SIMPLICITY!
 For of thy lays the lulling simpleness
 Goes to my heart, and soothes each small distress,
 Distress tho' small, yet haply great to me,
 Tis true on Lady Fortune’s gentlest pad

¹⁶ A specific borrowing in the first Higginbottom sonnet that Erdman does not mention is the phrase “paused me” — “And I did pause me on my lonely way.” Southey’s sonnet 10 from his 1797 collection Poems contains the phrase “... I the while / Pause me in sadness ...” (Southey Poems 1797 [Woodstock 1989] 116).

I amble on; and yet I know not why
So sad I am, but should a friend and I
 Frown, pout and part, then I am very sad.
 (Biographia Literaria 1:27n)

Individual lines, as in the first Higginbottom sonnet, may point to colleagues of Coleridge, but the rhetorical structure of the sentiment — the uncertainty of the melancholy and easiness of the consolation — is much like Bowles. According to Erdman, this sonnet “... is usually taken as a parody of Lamb, though Southey ‘recognized’ it as an attack upon his own style” (575). It may be all these things, but one could certainly argue that W. L. Bowles is being satirized too. We recall the sonnet “To the River Itchin,” printed above: “Why feels my heart the shiv’ring sense of pain? Whate’er the cause, upon thy banks I bend some long lost friend, / From whom, in happier hours, we wept to part.” There is also a trace of the passage from the Monody on Matlock quoted above, in section 2 of this chapter: “... [t]he crosses and the cares that sometimes fret / Life’s smoothest channel”

There were enough well-aimed barbs at contemporary sonneteers in each of the Higginbottom sonnets to have offended any number of “contemporary writers.”¹⁷ But according to Coleridge, only one of the three sonnets, the third, was a self-parody. It ridicules “... the indiscriminate use of elaborate and swelling language” (169), and is distinctly different in subject from the first two, concerning itself somewhat scurrilously

¹⁷ The Princeton Biographia Literaria has a detailed note on the reactions of Coleridge’s friends to his parodies (1:278n2). The editors conclude that the three sonnets parody Lloyd, Southey, and Coleridge, respectively. Paul M. Zall suggests that this third sonnet also satirizes the style of the early Wordsworth.

with the description of a ruined “knight” called “Jack ” Next to this sonnet, the first two parodies can look very similar to each other. But they do have differences, and their differences illustrate symmetrical “sins” of poetry: high egotism and low simplicity, the over-determination and under-determination of melancholy. In this stylistic symmetry the first two Higginbottom parodies of 1797 remind us of no pair of “contemporary” sonneteers more than Charlotte Smith and W. L. Bowles, whose names Coleridge had placed side by side just a year earlier in his “Introduction” to Sonnets From Various Authors ¹⁸

By directly comparing the sonnets of Smith and Bowles in this chapter, I hope I have been able to demonstrate that Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets not only fulfill the definition of the lyricized local poem as M.H. Abrams formulates it, but did so earlier than Bowles’s sonnets. My purpose in exploring the critical history of the connections between Charlotte Smith, W.L. Bowles and Samuel Taylor Coleridge has not been to show that Smith had a major influence on Coleridge, but rather to clear the path for a discussion of Charlotte Smith’s direct influence on William Wordsworth. Smith influenced Bowles, and Bowles in turn influenced Coleridge. But if Smith’s influence on Wordsworth needed to travel through Bowles and Coleridge to get to him, then it would be tenuous indeed.

Donald H. Reiman has observed in “Coleridge and the Art of Equivocation” that in

¹⁸ A year earlier than Coleridge’s anthology of sonnets, Charlotte Smith had herself placed Bowles’s sonnets next to her own, in her first book for children Rural Walks (1795). F.M.A. Hilbish excerpts a scene from this text in which two female students recite sonnets they have memorized. Caroline’s sonnet is one of Bowles’s, a revised version, “lately published” of his sonnet 4, “To the River Wenbeck.” Elizabeth, “avowing her inferiority both in choice and manner” recites Smith’s own sonnet 4 “To the Moon” (Hilbish 271).

the Biographia Literaria the author places his recounting of "... youthful enthusiasms for Bowles's sonnets between his declaration of the effect of Wordsworth's poetry on him and the full critique of Wordsworth's poems" This strategic move "... not only frees Coleridge from the status of a blind worshipper of Wordsworth's genius, but partially negates the positive force of the declaration itself" (346-47). Raimonda Modiano, in her essay "Coleridge and Wordsworth: The Ethics of Gift Exchange and Literary Ownership" (1989) has expanded upon the implications of Reiman's analysis:

Coleridge presents himself as a staunch Wordsworthian in artistic preferences but prior to and without any direct influence from Wordsworth. Moreover, while casting himself in the role of a Wordsworthian naturalist ... Coleridge surreptitiously introduces a counter-model of natural style to the one adopted by Wordsworth, showing that Bowles achieved the combination of "natural thoughts with natural diction" by means of a "sustained and elevated style," and not by recourse to "the language of real men" or the choice of subjects from rural life. (113)

We do not need to decide where Charlotte Smith would stand in the aesthetic debate between Wordsworth and Coleridge to see that she was obscured by their alternately collaborative and adversarial attempts to write their own literary history. Coleridge's desire to be Wordsworth's predecessor, rather than, in Bloomian terms, his ephebe, has created a blur of substitutions in which more modest influences are no longer discernable.

Smith's melancholy sonnets may be the model for one of Coleridge's Higginbottom parodies, but her poetic style does not seem to have moved him to direct borrowing or

serious imitation. His melancholy sonnets were actually very few, and the most descriptive of them, the sonnet "To the River Otter," is in the idiom of Bowles and not Smith. Coleridge did, of course, write poems that renovated the tradition of eighteenth-century melancholy, his "Dejection, An Ode" (1802) being the most obvious example. And in this ode, when he needed to describe his dejection in the fullness of its power, his imagery, as well as his tone, approached her signature style. In particular the first half of the sixth strophe reminds us of Smith's extreme of woe, and her manner of expressing it:

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
 This joy within me dallied with distress,
 And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
 Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness
 For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
 And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
 But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
 Nor care I 'hat they rob me of my mirth (76-82)

There are already borrowings from Wordsworth's Immortality ode here, and it has long been known that the two poems were written in stages, as Coleridge and Wordsworth responded to each other's early drafts. But in such phrasings as "though my path was rough," and the line "But now afflictions bow me to earth" we recognize yet another idiom. We are reminded of the "rugged path" in Smith's first sonnet, and from her sonnet 84 the description of the speaker "Crush'd to the earth, by bitterest anguish prest" ([Poems 73]9). And when Coleridge speaks of the suspension of his "shaping spirit of Imagination

..." we could point to Smith's sonnet 48: "Imagination now has lost her powers / To dress Affliction in a robe of flowers / ... no more the bowers of Fancy bloom ..." (Poems 45).

"Dejection: An Ode" was an exception for Coleridge, or rather the culmination of a strain in his work epitomized by his early "Monody on the Death of Chatterton" (1794). He continued to struggle with melancholy in his verse after bidding it hence in "Dejection," but he would not return to Charlotte Smith's explicit and intense idiom of personal lament.

Although Coleridge may have exaggerated W. L. Bowles's influence on his early work, it was no doubt a larger influence than Smith's. The argument which he was instrumental in developing, however — that the origin of the lyricized local poem lay in Bowles's sonnets — is valid only if we take Coleridge's poetry as paradigmatic, and his account of his own poetic development in the Biographia Literaria at face value. If we take Wordsworth's lyricized local poems as paradigmatic, and Wordsworth's poetic development as our narrative of early Romanticism, then a different argument needs to be made.

Chapter Six

Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth:

The Overcoming of Melancholy

1. Introduction

My research into the influence of Charlotte Smith on William Wordsworth has uncovered a field of allusions large enough and complex enough that I will need to divide my discussion into three chapters for convenience of presentation and argument. The divisions are partly thematic, partly generic, and partly chronological. As we shall see, Smith's influence on Wordsworth was as pervasive as it was subdued, and no clear distinction into discrete parts is possible along any one of these three lines. In the poetry of both authors, for example, themes of nature and memory blend almost imperceptibly into themes of social displacement and politics. Nor is there an easy generic distinction to be made between Smith's influence on Wordsworth's sonnets and her influence on his blank verse. This is in part because of the ubiquity of certain thematic concerns across both genres for both writers, and in part because Wordsworth seems to have been more careful to avoid modelling his sonnets on Charlotte Smith's famous precedents than he was to avoid the influence of her sonnets on other genres of his writing, including his longer poems.

The most logical division of Smith's influence on Wordsworth would be

chronological, giving us three phases: early, middle, and late, based on the three most obviously documented connections between the two authors. First, there would be an early influence centred around Wordsworth's visit with Smith in 1791, the only known personal meeting between the two poets. Next, a more methodical phase of influence might be located in 1801-02, when Dorothy's journals (163-64) suggest that Wordsworth returned to Smith's poems before beginning his substantial production of sonnets and elegies for Poems in Two Volumes (1807). And thirdly, we would have a late influence centred around "St. Bees ..." and its note in 1835, a poem which Wordsworth deliberately and expressly modelled on a late work by Charlotte Smith. These chronological phases are to some extent the framework of the following three chapters, with most of the allusions to Smith in Wordsworth's early work being discussed in the present chapter, and most of the later allusions to Smith being discussed in my last chapter. But the division is also thematic: the present chapter deals primarily with themes of nature, melancholy, and the specific intersection of the two, nature's consolatory power. Chapter seven deals with a complex cluster of themes and formal characteristics, bringing together the overt politics of the French revolution and English radicalism, and the implicit politics of genre and gender. Chapter eight concentrates on the influence of Charlotte Smith's writing on Wordsworth's Prelude, both the influence of her own blank verse and, more surprisingly, the influence of her fiction. This last chapter also considers Wordsworth's reciprocal influence on Smith's poetry, and finally the connections between Smith's "St. Monica" and Wordsworth's late poem "St. Bees"

We find allusions to Smith's work at every stage of Wordsworth's writing, and often

fewer where we would expect them most. Given Wordsworth's tendency — especially in his most ambitious work, the Prelude — to return to earlier moments in his life, biographical linearity is an unreliable framework. And since Charlotte Smith was closely connected to that phase of Wordsworth's life which required the most concealment and covert action — his association with France, the Revolution and Annette Vallon in 1791 — we are perhaps well advised not to give too much weight to the authoritative record. The anecdotes which comprise this record and which seem to supply a narrative of a literary relationship are partly accidental, as in the case of the survival of the letter to Richard Wordsworth, or Dorothy happening to mention Wordsworth's reading in 1802, and partly selective, as in Wordsworth's own summary of his debts in the note to "St. Bees" The intertext of literary allusions, as distinct from the documentary biographical connections, provides a somewhat different narrative of relationship, one that is more mysterious, perhaps, but at the same time fuller and more detailed.

The most thorough treatment to date of Charlotte Smith's influence on William Wordsworth is the essay "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith" by Bishop C. Hunt, published in The Wordsworth Circle (1.3) in 1970. Bishop C. Hunt was the first critic — significantly he has thus far been the only critic — to write at length on the subject of Smith's poetic influence on Wordsworth. The remarkable lack of attention given to Hunt's essay in Wordsworth criticism since 1970 may be another indication of a persistent blind-spot in the critical community with respect to Smith's influence. With the exception of R.M. Ralston in her unpublished dissertation, Hunt's essay is cited by almost none of Wordsworth's critics. We might, for instance, expect that Edwin Stein would note Hunt's

essay in his 1988 study, Wordsworth's Art of Allusion. Stein examines 260 Wordsworth poems and uncovers allusions to "roughly 150 writers" (9), but there is no mention of Charlotte Smith. It is possible, of course, that for many critics Hunt's argument simply does not succeed; this may well be one reason he is not noticed, nor his research pursued further. Hunt does take the unfortunate risk of mixing strong points with rather weak ones, thus compromising his best evidence. I, too, am perhaps guilty of this error at various points in the present study, but I will try to keep to a minimum the listing of verbal similarities between Smith's poetry and Wordsworth's, and to explore more fully the thematic connotations of the allusions that I do present. I will be returning to Hunt's essay at various points in the following three chapters.

Hunt's primary research is authoritative, as he has examined the marginalia in Wordsworth's copy of Smith's Elegiac Sonnets (5th ed. 1789), and other materials in the Dove Cottage Library. Two additional sonnets are copied into the rear fly-leaf of the book in Wordsworth's own hand (Hunt 101 n1), sonnets that were written for Smith's novel Celestina (1791) and that would also appear in later editions of Elegiac Sonnets as numbers 49 and 51 (Poems 45-47). Hunt points out that the versions transcribed into Wordsworth's copy of Smith's book do not correspond exactly to either the versions of the poems from Smith's novel or the versions printed in her sixth edition. This suggests to Hunt that they were seen by Wordsworth when he visited Smith late in 1791, while the sonnets were undergoing revision by the author (Hunt 86), which raises the intriguing possibility that the two writers discussed their recent work while they were together. In addition to pencilling his own name into the list of subscribers, Wordsworth took the

liberty of emending in his copy the closing line of Smith's sonnet 44 (Poems 42). Sonnet 44 is one of Smith's more frequently anthologized sonnets, in which she describes a sea-side locale where the bones of the dead are being undermined from their graves by the action of the tide. Below Smith's conclusion, "To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest" Wordsworth inserts an alternative: "To envy their insensible unrest" (Hunt 101n1). Hunt ventures the suggestion that on this visit "Wordsworth may have seen a number of Charlotte Smith's poems which, though written early, she did not publish until later" (86). Wordsworth's variant transcriptions of Smith's sonnets 49 and 51 may also have been his own emendations of the poems. What the marginalia in Wordsworth's copy of Elegiac Sonnets establish unambiguously is that he had a strong interest in Smith's poetry at an early age, an interest that extended to the very particulars of phrasing.

While Hunt deserves much credit for laying a strong foundation in textual criticism, he also demonstrates some of the biases of the critical community as a whole, biases built up over the long period of Smith's obscurity and the long dominance of a history of Romanticism which neglects her. It seems at first that Hunt is willing to grant Charlotte Smith a rather significant place in literary history. He claims that her

... combination of natural description, discursive statement, and an underlying personal and emotional involvement on the part of the poet — is essentially the pattern perfected by Wordsworth and followed by the entire Wordsworthian tradition in the nineteenth century, from Arnold to Hardy and beyond. (90)

But he is quick to limit his claim:

I am not for a moment suggesting that Charlotte Smith invented such poetry. The attitude toward landscape which it involves, and also the attitude of skepticism, the implied stance of questioning, go back at least as far as Virgil. But one wishes to understand why a great poet becomes interested in a very minor one. (90)

It will be clear by now that I am suggesting Charlotte Smith did indeed invent such poetry, if anyone can meaningfully be said to have done so. That is, she invented the modern synthesis that would permit a return to "sceptical" landscape poetry to seem new, to seem something more than Virgilian, as it seems when we read Wordsworth.

Perhaps Wordsworth's interest in Smith's poetry would not be so surprising if we were not previously convinced that she was, in Hunt's words, "a very minor" poet. Regardless of her present status, or her status in 1970, Charlotte Smith was certainly not seen as a "very minor" poet when Wordsworth was writing his early works. Indeed, in the late 1780's and early 1790's, it was Wordsworth who was the relative unknown. His visit to Smith in 1791, despite his early sense of poetic strength and her chronic poverty, would have been like an apprentice visiting an established professional.

2. "A Happy Child"

Charlotte Smith had a strong individual influence on Wordsworth's early work, an influence that would begin with, and last well beyond, the period of his juvenilia. The best, the most concrete evidence of this influence is a small but telling group of direct allusions. These direct allusions — at least one of which seems to be a conscious borrowing — are evidence of influence in themselves, but they also direct us toward larger thematic similarities between the poetic works of these authors, and thus toward a broader influence. While the various thematic threads of Smith's influence on Wordsworth are complexly woven, I will try to examine first those allusions which draw our attention to themes of nature, natural description, and poetic melancholy.

Several allusions to Charlotte Smith have been noted in one of Wordsworth's earliest texts, the lines known as "The Vale of Esthwaite" (Poetical Works 1:270-283), written in 1788 but never published, although some passages were adapted for An Evening Walk (Reed Chronology: Early Years 21). In The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry 1785-1798 (1973), Paul Sheats noted an echo of one of Smith's poems in Wordsworth's descriptive language:

In the murmurs of an impending storm Charlotte Smith had heard the "Spirits of the Tempest"; in a "dying storm" Wordsworth hears the "Spirit of the surge" singing the "tempest's dirge" (26-27)

Sheats's emphasis is on the early poetry of Wordsworth, and his tone here suggests that the echo of Charlotte Smith in "The Vale of Esthwaite" is a sign of conventionality in the

young Wordsworth's style, even cliché. In his larger argument, Smith's influence stands for the influence of the poetry of sensibility in general. With a somewhat different agenda, Duncan Wu also goes to "The Vale of Esthwaite" for an example of Smith's influence. The observation is made in the entry on Smith in Wu's Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799 (1993). Although he is attempting to provide evidence for what I believe to be a valid proposition — that Wordsworth was early acquainted with Smith's poetry — Wu perhaps mistakes an idiom of the poetry of sensibility for an instance of influence. "My breaking heart could bear no more" from "The Vale of Esthwaite" "... derived ultimately," according to Wu, from "And teach a breaking heart to throb no more ...," a line from Smith's sonnet 5, "To the South Downs" ([1784] Poems 16). By noting that Helen Maria Williams had "adapted it first" in Peru (1784) and in An American Tale (1786), Wu introduces evidence that undermines his assertion of a direct influence (127). It is revealing and perhaps predictable that critics are eager to see Smith's influence in Wordsworth's earliest and most unoriginal works. We could debate further whether these points of similarity constitute allusions or shared clichés, but I would at least note that they involve two themes which soon became areas where Wordsworth did feel, and register, Smith's influence: the sublime of nature and the extremes of sorrow.

To these two themes we need only add the innocence/experience paradigm to arrive at the rudiments of a recognizable Romanticism. These elements are all combined in the sonnet which we have just mentioned, Smith's fifth sonnet, "To the South Downs," which would have a significant — and this time clearly designated — influence on Wordsworth poetry after the juvenilia. Smith's sonnet 5 is one of her most popular, no doubt because

it is also one of her most Romantic. I reproduced it in the previous chapter as an illustration of Smith's handling of landscape and sentiment in the form of a return to a river setting familiar from childhood. The poem is constructed so as to convey a double perspective, contrasting the poet's mature or present relationship to external nature with her remembered, but irretrievable, childhood relationship to the same scene. Here again is the first quatrain:

Ah! hills belov'd — where once a happy child,
 Your beechen shades, “your turf, your flowers among,”¹
 I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild,
 And woke your echoes with my artless song.

.... (Poems 15)

Jonathan Wordsworth quotes from Smith's sonnet 5 and others in his introduction to the recent Woodstock reprint of the fifth edition of Elegiac Sonnets (1992), acknowledging that Wordsworth must have recognized in Smith “... a new voice in English poetry,” especially since he bought the 5th edition himself in 1789, and seems to have carried it about with him (v). He illustrates Smith's direct influence, however, with a small detail from another poem: Wordsworth's use of the newly-coined word “pillowy,” from Smith's

¹ Smith's note here attributes her allusion to Thomas Gray's “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College,” line 8: “Whose turf, whose shades, whose flowers among,” (8). Gray's Eton College ode is perhaps the first English poem to express melancholy emotional effects by means of a temporally multiple perspective on a single scene — complete with an apostrophe to the river Thames. In Smith's sonnet the prospect is less institutional, and does not lead to extended social and philosophical generalization, but rather to something more personal. As if to indicate Gray's influence, however, Smith adapts this phrase from his ode. Significantly, she chooses one of that poem's relatively few notes of natural description.

sonnet 42, in the 1805 Prelude (3:520) Ironically, Jonathan Wordsworth could have pointed to much better evidence in the first line of Smith's sonnet 5, in the very section he quotes. As early as 1954, in Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation (73-4) F.W. Bateson had observed that the phrase 'a happy child' from the first line of Smith's sonnet 5 was borrowed by Wordsworth — with inverted commas but without explicit acknowledgement — in An Evening Walk (1793)

Fair scenes! with other eyes, than once I gaze,
The ever-varying charm your round displays,
Than when, erewhile, I taught 'a happy child,'
The echoes of your rocks my carols wild ..

([An Evening Walk 30]17-20)

Bateson is confident in his identification of the allusion, “[a]lthough none of Wordsworth's editors seems to have identified it . . .” (73). Indeed, Bateson's observation seems to have gone largely unnoticed, as Paul Kelley's short article in Notes and Queries (29:227-3) makes exactly the same identification of Wordsworth's allusion in 1982, as if for the first time.

Kelley's note is not simply redundant, though, for he goes on to point out that the two passages cited above contain another very close similarity — their description of youthful singing in the outdoors. In Smith it is a “waking” of echoes, and in Wordsworth, a more personified — and more presumptuous — “teaching” of songs to the echoing rocks (220) The phrase 'a happy child' thus connects two passages of remarkable similarity That Jonathan Wordsworth does not mention the allusion while discussing

Smith's sonnet 5 is first of all an indication of the dispersed and piece-meal state of Charlotte Smith criticism. It is perhaps also an indication of the stubbornness of some Romantic critics, or perhaps somehow of the discourse itself, to recognize the possibility of a formative and not just an atmospheric influence in the work of Charlotte. In Stephen Gill's 1984 selection of Wordsworth's poetry in The Oxford Authors series, credit for 'a happy child' is duly given to Smith's sonnet 5 (684n1). But it is important to note that if it were not for Gill's preference for early versions of Wordsworth's poems, rather than the author's final revisions, the inverted commas which highlight this small phrase would not appear. As Bateson notes, Wordsworth himself dropped the inverted commas around the phrase in the 1820 reprint of An Evening Walk (73), effectively obliterating his acknowledgement of her influence on the poem, if not the allusion itself. Those who would ignore it have William Wordsworth's authority in doing so.

The small phrase 'a happy child' is not in itself poetic in a stylistic sense, and we may assume that Wordsworth does not borrow it for technical or musical reasons. The phrase does, however, serve as an emblem of the larger theme of Smith's sonnet: the emotional contrast between the poet's mature and childhood attitudes to external nature. This is exactly the theme of the second verse paragraph of An Evening Walk, which is also the earliest published instance of Wordsworth's use of the rhetoric of lost childhood happiness. Presented in inverted commas by Wordsworth, 'a happy child' indicates that something more than a three-word phrase is being borrowed. Paul Sheats, in The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry 1785-1798, generalizes as follows: "Virtually all the poets the young Wordsworth imitated make [the] assumption ... that the power of 'fancy' is

dominant in youth, and that maturation involves a transition to a mature reason” He also notes that an orthodox optimism in the face of this transition, such as we find in Pope, is superseded in the “poets of sensibility” by “passionate complaint” (33). Charlotte Smith’s poems epitomized this development, and the inverted commas in An Evening Walk show that for at least a short period early in his publishing career, Wordsworth felt the need to acknowledge her precedence.

3. Night Pieces

Wordsworth’s early poem, An Evening Walk, in which Bateson found the ‘happy child’ allusion, contains another indication of Smith’s influence. Bishop C. Hunt singles out the phrase “deep-embattled cloud” from Smith’s sonnet 54, “Written September 1791, during a remarkable thunderstorm ...”:

What awful pageants crowd the evening sky!
 The low horizon gathering vapours shroud;
 Sudden, from many a deep-embattled cloud
 Terrific thunders burst, and lightnings fly —
 While in serenest azure, beaming high,
 Night’s regent, of her calm pavilion proud,
 Gilds the dark shadows that beneath her lie,
 Unvex’d by all their conflicts fierce and loud.

— So, in unsullied dignity elate,
 A spirit conscious of superior worth,
 In placid elevation firmly great,
 Scorns the vain cares that give Contention birth;
 And blest with peace above the shocks of Fate,
 Smiles at the tumult of the troubled earth.

(Poems 52)

The relevant passage from An Evening Walk appears at the beginning of its fifth verse paragraph:

When, in the south, the wan noon brooding still,
 Breathed a pale steam around the glaring hill,
 And shades of deep embattled clouds were seen
 Spotting the northern cliffs with lights between
 (53-6)

Smith's sonnet was not published in the fifth edition of Elegiac Sonnets, but its composition date places it among those works which would have been recently written when Wordsworth visited Smith in November of 1791, and he may have seen it then, or in the sixth edition (1792).

This phrase probably was borrowed for its inherent poetic felicity, as Hunt implies, but what Hunt does not elaborate on is its thematic significance. "Deep-embattled clouds" also points, as 'a happy child' did, to larger thematic concerns. In the context of An Evening Walk the adjective "deep-embattled" loses most of the thematic resonance of

warfare that it has in Smith's sonnet, but nonetheless it suits well a poem replete with conflicting imagery, and published just after war broke out between France and England. We will examine in the following chapter other images that do engage the war, in other poems written about the same time as An Evening Walk, including its companion piece, Descriptive Sketches. At the very least the borrowing of "deep embattled" by Wordsworth draws our attention to the attempt by both poets to describe, in a kind of detail uncommon in English poetry before them, specific atmospheric phenomena, especially the visual sublime of sky-scape at twilight or at night. It is interesting to note here that in his 1830 recommendations to Dyce for new sonnets to be added to Specimens of English Poetesses, all three of the sonnets Wordsworth names are on the subject of the evening or night sky: "... from Helen Maria Williams the 'Sonnet to the Moon,' and that to 'Twilight,' and a few more from Charlotte Smith, particularly 'I love thee, mournful, sober suited night' ..." (Letters 5:260).

Atmospheric spectacles of wind and weather, usually of a less violent, though no less expressive kind than we find in Smith's sonnet 54, were one of Wordsworth's most characteristic settings for the onset of sublime feeling. In his attraction to night-time sky-scapes and figurations of the moon Wordsworth shows his affinity for what Coleridge, in the epigram discussed in chapter 5, stereotypes as a feminine poetic subject. Among Wordsworth's many sonnets concerned with night or sunset or the moon and stars, at least three are inspired by particular sky-scapes: "Dark and more dark the shades of evening fell ..." (1807) and its companion sonnet "Those words were uttered as in pensive mood ..." (1807); and "I watch and long have watched, with calm regret ..." (1819).

Smith's sonnet 54 bears a closer similarity, however, to the early blank verse fragment "A Night Piece" (1798) and its later development as the Snowdon passage in the last book of the 1805 Prelude (13:1-65), where Wordsworth depicts high contrasts in a single sky-scape — between dark and light, obscurity and clarity, closeness and depth.

Smith's sonnet 54 illustrates well the peculiar fusion of reader, poetic subject and poet that I have earlier suggested was a characteristic of Smith's verse, and one of her more Romantic innovations. On the surface, we are given a description of a night sky, and a moral is drawn on the moon's superiority to earthly strife. In this the poem fulfills — as it helped to define — one of Coleridge's criteria of excellence in his "Introduction" to the sonnets: "... 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" (Poetical Works 2:1139). But Smith's poem does not moralize on Nature in the manner of Thompson, Gray, or Warton. The vagueness of Coleridge's early definition of a sonnet's content — "... in which some lonely feeling is developed ..." — shows that he, too, was aware of the potential as well as the traditional moral aspect of the sonnet of natural description.²

² Bishop C. Hunt claims, using Wordsworth's phrase, that Smith's sonnet is the type of poem which draws "apt illustrations of the moral world" (Prelude [1850]14:319) from the scenery of Nature. Hunt's argument flounders somewhat on this point, for there was an eighteenth-century as well as a "Wordsworthian" method of moralizing on Nature. Although the originality of Smith's sonnet is revealed in its proximity to the Wordsworthian method, this method is not well described by the phrase Hunt chooses from The Prelude. We recall Coleridge's aversion to Bowles's "... perpetual trick of moralizing every thing..." (Letters 2:864), and we should also note that conveying Nature's "apt illustrations of the moral world" is actually not a desideratum for poetry in the Prelude. That power is Nature's "secondary grace ... the charm more superficial that
(continued...)

Despite the turn to abstraction in the sestet of Smith's sonnet 54, and despite its apparent construction as a deduction or analogy — "So, in unsullied dignity elate ..." — it should be emphasized that no unambiguous moral is drawn by the author. The coherence of contrasts that makes the natural scene so striking to the observer/poet in the octet is internalized rather than moralized. At first it seems that the speaker identifies with the "superior" position of the moon, and observes the scene with something like the moon's aloofness. But by the end of the sonnet the identification of the poet with the moon is no longer possible. The moon's perspective requires not only "conscious[ness] of superior worth," something of which the poet or reader might be capable, but also "placid elevation firmly great," a stance more obviously beyond the human. The transcendence of conflict in the sonnet is fleeting. While contemplation of the moon leads the speaker away from conflict, the moon's light enables her to depict the conflict in the first (and second) place: it is the moon that contemplates the storm, and "[g]ilds the dark shadows that beneath her lie."

In the poem's concluding image the moon "[s]miles at the tumult of the troubled earth," thus returning both reader and speaker to the world of conflict, a world upon which we would not exactly "smile." The poet, while central to the poem as the observing subject, is thus identified not simply with the storm or with the moon, but with the observed scene in its totality, suspended in perception. The poet is moralizing in rather

²(...continued)

attends her works" (*Prelude* [1850]14:315-17). Apt moral illustration is in fact listed at the end of book fourteen as one of the things to which the author has not given extensive consideration.

than upon Nature. Similarly, Wordsworth's early "A Night Piece" locates the poet outdoors at night, where, emerging from cloud, the moon's "... pleasant instantaneous light / Startles the musing man ..." (6-7) into a contemplation of the partly clear sky, after which "... the mind / Not undisturbed by the deep joy it feels, / ... / Is left to muse upon the solemn scene" (20-23). This same poetic structure, built on the movement of perception rather than static description or linear narration, is discussed by Mary Jacobus in the final essay of Romanticism, Reading and Sexual Difference. In the Snowdon passage of Wordsworth's Prelude, "[w]hat the moon saw is what Wordsworth sees ... [the moon] serves to double the seeing eye of the poet ..." (273). Though on a less ambitious scale in the sense that the effect is not as sustained, Smith's sonnet 54 also develops this sublime of Nature experienced rather than contemplated, and this same spectral augmentation of seeming to see Nature from Nature's point of view. Smith's sonnet conforms to Coleridge's more demanding and "Romantic" stricture, the one he used to criticize Bowles: "A Poet's Heart and Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature — & not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them ... (Letters 2.864-5).

Charlotte Smith did write sonnets that moralized on observations of nature in the traditional way. One of these is her sonnet 58, "The Glow Worm" (Poems 51-52), which Bishop C. Hunt says "would have delighted Wordsworth" (90). Hunt's argument focusses not on the moral of the poem but on Smith's use of the glow worm, which, he reminds us, would become a favorite subject of the Romantic poets in their nocturnal poems. While this is true, there are also numerous poems on the glow worm earlier in the

eighteenth century — Smith herself refers to two different literary sources in her note to the sonnet (Poems 51). The poem tells of a child who excitedly collects the glow worm at evening and then finds it dead — “rayless as the dust” (13) — the following day. The final line: “ — So turn the world’s bright joys to cold and blank disgust” is an extremely blunt, but also very traditional, moral turn. Smith’s sonnet is innovative neither in its choice of the glow-worm as a poetic subject, nor in the manner of its moralizing. Nor does it conform to Hunt’s own description of the novelty of many other of Smith’s sonnets:

The phenomena of the natural world, and the emotions which they excite, are treated in the Elegiac Sonnets as determinate historical events in the personal life of the writer. (88)

If Smith’s sonnet 58 has a Romantic aspect, it is the use of the unusual subject of the child, “[t]he happy child to whom the world is new ...” (2), and the concern for the disillusioning experiences a single night can bring to the “inexperienced” (5).

5. “Salisbury Plain”

An Evening Walk has already revealed two allusions to Charlotte Smith’s poetry. “Salisbury Plain,” whose composition has been dated 1793-4, contains at least two more concrete allusions to Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets, neither of which has previously been noted by critics. Bishop C. Hunt does not consider Wordsworth’s “Salisbury Plain” in his article, and indeed the poem has only been available in a continuous, reconstructed form

since 1975, when it was published, along with its later expanded versions “Adventures on Salisbury Plain” and Guilt and Sorrow, in Stephen Gill’s The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth. Previously, it was placed in the apparatus criticus of De Selincourt’s Poetical Works as a long note to Guilt and Sorrow, the final version of the poem, not published by Wordsworth until as late as 1842. “Salisbury Plain” has received considerable attention in recent decades as one of Wordsworth’s most explicitly political early works, and the first treatment by him of experiences which would be recast later in The Prelude and elsewhere. It was also the first long poem that Coleridge heard Wordsworth read, and thus marked the beginning of their poetic and critical relationship.³

In stanza 40 of “Salisbury Plain,” the female speaker (whom Wordsworth would later call The Female Vagrant) recalls a time of tranquillity, becalmed on a ship at sea. The last two lines of the stanza are:

The Spirit of God diffused through balmy air
 Quiet that might have healed, if aught could heal, Despair.

These are strikingly similar to the last two lines of Smith’s sonnet 8, “To spring”.

Thy sounds of harmony, thy balmy air,
 Have power to cure all sadness — but despair.

Charlotte Smith’s note to the last line acknowledges its source in Milton’s Paradise Lost: “To the heart inspires / Vernal delight and joy, able to drive / All sadness but despair.” Paradise Lost, Fourth Book” (Poems 18). Curiously enough, in their original context

³ See Gill ed., The Salisbury Plain Poems (3) and Woof “Wordsworth and Coleridge: Some Early Matters” in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies (Jonathan Wordsworth, ed. 1970).

these lines (Paradise Lost 4:154-56) are part of a description of the powers possessed by the odour of Eden as Satan first approaches — an index of the intensity of feeling the latter authors were attempting to convey.

If it were not for the preceding lines in these two citations, we might conclude that each poet is independently alluding to the same passage in Milton. But the fact that Smith and Wordsworth both use the same phrase in the rhyming line — “balmy air” — makes it apparent that, however well Wordsworth knew his Milton, his allusion is primarily to Charlotte Smith. The new context for Milton’s words is much the same in each case. Smith and Wordsworth both transpose the idea to the earthly sphere and claim for individual mortals an all-but-Satanic susceptibility to despair. Smith retains the seasonal reference of the lines; Wordsworth uses them to describe a moment of oceanic peace. But in both cases the question of whose despair might not be cured is less rhetorical than it is in Milton — it is the speaker who despairs, Charlotte Smith the sonneteer, the Female Vagrant as she narrates her tale.

Although several of the most striking allusions to Smith’s poetry in the early work of William Wordsworth point to common sources in earlier poets, Smith’s modifications of context or wording are in each case significant. A similar genealogy can be traced for another idiom of extreme melancholy, the phrase “no second spring” from stanza 25 of “Salisbury Plain.” An allusion to an earlier poet is first made by Smith and then adopted and altered further by Wordsworth. In Thomas Gray’s “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College,” the speaker feels the “gales ...

A momentary bliss bestow,

As waving fresh their gladsome wing,
 My weary soul they seem to soothe,
 And, redolent of joy and youth,
 To breathe a second spring

....

(16-20)

Charlotte Smith's sonnet 2 concludes with the following couplet:

Another May new buds and flowers shall bring;
 Ah! why has happiness — no second Spring?

(Poems 14)

And in "Salisbury Plain" we find the phrase again:

New suns roll on and scatter as they shine
 No second spring, but pain, till death release thee, thine.

(224-25)

In this case, all three occurrences might be considered independent, if it were not for the close similarity of thematic context. Unlike the phrase 'a happy child,' we have no inverted commas from the author to give us assurance of conscious allusion. Nor does Charlotte Smith provide a note directing us to Gray's "Ode." But once again we can see that Wordsworth's use of the phrase is much more like Smith's than Gray's. He frames it in Smith's blunt negative, rather than the ironical positive of Gray's syntax. Like Smith, Wordsworth begins by evoking future springs, which Gray does not. And though the lines are not part of the Female Vagrant's speech, Wordsworth's narrator/poet is describing her

emotional state and not his own. The theme of unregenerate sorrow, no less than the figure of the suffering woman, recur with some frequency in Wordsworth's later work, in such poems as "The Mad Mother," "The Thorn" and "The Ruined Cottage," to name but a few well-known instances. In the next chapter we will pursue further the issues of gender suggested by this allusion, in particular the gender of the figure of pity in relation to the gender of the poet.

The phrase "no second spring" is very short, but it has significant thematic resonance. "No second spring" could indeed stand as a motto for Smith's Elegiac Sonnets as a whole, as it encapsulates one of her book's central tropes. In "Salisbury Plain" the poet/narrator's relationship to the female vagrant involves a recognition of the depth of her despair: her sense of loss, and of lost hope, is given expression by the same phrase. As with the allusion to Paradise Lost, we cannot say Charlotte Smith was Wordsworth's only source, but we can be reasonably certain that "second spring" did not pass directly from Gray's "Ode" to the "no second spring" of Wordsworth's "Salisbury Plain."⁴ Although he would publish the woman's tale from "Salisbury Plain" as "The Female Vagrant" in Lyrical Ballads (1798), the echo of Charlotte Smith occurs just outside the excerpted

⁴ Anna Seward, who criticized Smith's poetry for its unoriginality, saw a source for "no second spring" in Beattie's Hermit's Complaint, but the verbal resemblance is slight:

Nor yet from the ravage of winter I mourn,
Kind nature the embryo blossoms will save:
But when shall kind spring visit the mouldering urn;
O! when will she dawn on the night of the grave.

(Letters of Anna Seward 2:162-64)

The thematic resemblance is slight as well, if we keep in mind that Gray, Smith and Wordsworth are speaking of past and present seasons in the course of a life still being lived.

section, in the narrator's introduction. Wordsworth would find use, however, for the phrase "second spring," divested of both Charlotte Smith's negative and the irony of Gray, in his later poetry.⁵

There is yet another allusion to Smith's Elegiac Sonnets in "Salisbury Plain," an allusion of a less exact kind, perhaps, but one which introduces the political dimension of Smith's influence on Wordsworth. The final stanzas of "Plain" are the most fragmentary in the manuscript, but the poem does come to a conclusion, and ends with the intellectual battle-cry in stanza 61:

Heroes of Truth pursue your march, uprear
 Th'Oppressor's dungeon from its deepest base;
 High o'er the towers of Pride undaunted rear
 Resistless in your might the herculean mace
 Of Reason; let foul Error's monster race
 Dragged from their dens start at the light with pain
 And die; pursue your toils, till not a trace
 Be left on earth of Superstition's reign,
 Save that eternal pile which frowns on Sarum's plain.

One of the non-sonnets in the fifth edition of Elegiac Sonnets — the edition Wordsworth

⁵ Cooper's Concordance (1965) does not index "Salisbury Plain" and other manuscript texts, but does list two occurrences of "second spring," one in the Prelude (11:6) and one in the final manifestation of what began as "Salisbury Plain," Guilt and Sorrow (455). In the latter instance "second spring" appears in the same dramatic context as "no second spring" had appeared in "Salisbury Plain": in the interlocutor's reaction to the figure of the female vagrant.

owned — was Smith's "Elegy," in which a female speaker laments the death of her lover beside the grave of the young man's father. The father, before he himself died, compelled his son to service as a pilot, in which he was drowned.⁶ In grief and anger, the speaker implores the threatening storm to undermine the cliff in which the father is interred, and destroy both herself and the offending monument. In the final stanza:

The Ocean hears — The embodied waters come —
 Rise o'er the land, and with resistless sweep
 Tear from its base the proud aggressor's tomb,
 And bear the injured to eternal sleep.

The resemblance of phrasing is provocative and the difference in thematic context is not as great as it seems. The aggressor in Smith's poem is a specific patriarch, and the oppressor in Wordsworth's poem is an entire political establishment based on pride and superstition. Today, we readily acknowledge that domestic and political tyranny are closely related, and in the late eighteenth century such an analysis was beginning in the work of Godwin and Wollstonecraft. Wordsworth borrows in this instance no more than — but no less than — Smith's vocabulary of radical and righteous triumph.

Wordsworth's invocation of Reason as the weapon of conquering Truth at the end of "Salisbury Plain" is uncharacteristic of him, and registers the rhetorical strain of that

⁶ Strieder explains this narrative background to the poem in a note (*Poems* 80). She also mentions that the setting of the poem is the same as her sonnet 44 (*Poems* 42). Although Hunt does not discuss this connection between "Elegy" and "Salisbury Plain," he does suggest a relationship between Smith's poem, Wordsworth's "Address to the Ocean" and the episode of the drowned man in Book Four of *The Prelude*. All three include the image of a drowned man's body rising lifeless from the water.

section of the poem. A more typical engagement with reason occurs earlier in “Salisbury Plain,” when the poet asks in stanza 48:

Though Treachery her sword no longer dyes
 In the cold blood of Truce, still, reason’s ray,
 What does it more than while the tempests rise,
 With starless glooms and sounds of loud dismay,
 Reveal with still-born glimpse the terrors of our way?
 (428-32)

Charlotte Smith shared this new skepticism toward reason, as we see in her sonnet 86, from 1798.

....
 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.
 (Poems 74)

Wordsworth’s unpublished “Salisbury Plain” is actually years earlier than this late sonnet by Charlotte Smith. But it is also possible Wordsworth was influenced by the concluding couplet of Smith’s early sonnet 23, one of those which she wrote in the voice of Goethe’s Werther. This sonnet appears in the fifth edition of Elegiac Sonnets (1789):

So o'er my soul short rays of reason fly,
 Ther fade: — and leave me to despair and die!

(Poems 28)

Another sonnet in the fifth edition was Smith's sonnet 40, written for the novel Emmeline (1788), which contains the following lines:

... o'er the world of waters, blue and wide,
 The sighing summer-wind forgets to blow.
 As sinks the day-star in the rosy West,
 Alas! can tranquil nature give me rest,
 Or scenes of beauty soothe me to repose?
 Can the soft lustre of the sleeping main,
 Yon radiant heaven, or all creation's charms,
 "Erase the written troubles of the brain,"
 Which Memory tortures, and which Guilt alarms?

(Poems 39-40)

The speaker in this sonnet in Emmeline is not the heroine herself, but Adelina Trelawny, friend of the heroine and the mother of an illegitimate child. She has been separated from her lover and from society for her indiscretion.

Bishop C. Hunt cites this sonnet as an example of Smith's concern for the Wordsworthian theme of memory, and as an example of her descriptive powers. "For all its flaws, such poetry is the forerunner of Wordsworth's finest meditative lyrics such as the sonnet 'It is a beauteous evening, calm and free ...'" (92). The sonnet has other

virtues as well, including the apt pun on “reflection” in line six, which triggers an unusually early rhetorical turn. Its descriptive aspect reminds us not so much of “It is a beauteous evening ...” as “Salisbury Plain” once again, specifically stanza 40, which concludes with the line already discussed, “Quiet that might have healed, if aught could heal, Despair.”

The stanza begins, in the voice of the Female Vagrant:

Peaceful as this immeasurable plain
 By these extended beams of dawn impressed,
 In the calm sunshine slept the glittering main.
 The very ocean has its hour of rest
 Ungranted to the human mourner’s breast

(352-56)

Although this passage is in the narrative past tense rather than the lyric present of the sonnet, the description, as well as the sentiments of the speaker, are similar to Smith’s sonnet 40. In both poems the tranquillity of the calm ocean is vividly portrayed, only to be rejected as consolation by a woman stricken with grief and remorse.

4. The Emigrants and “Tintern Abbey”

A specific line of influence from Smith to Wordsworth in blank verse was first suggested by Bishop C. Hunt, who described in 1970 a “.. significant and hitherto unnoticed relationship between ‘Tintern Abbey’ and The Emigrants” (93) Each, he notes, is “... topographical poetry, set in the form of a quasi-dramatic monologue” (93). The

Emigrants is quoted at length to show that Smith's

tone of wistful introspection, of hesitant, somewhat detached, yet lofty moralizing on the human condition, approximates the effect of Wordsworth's blank verse. In particular, there is the same alternation between commitment and detachment, between engagement and disengagement with the world, which is found in Wordsworth, where the poetry reproduces the movement of the thinking mind. (94-95)

Although I fully agree with Hunt here, I would also observe in his phrasing the rhetoric of the minor/major distinction at work. Hunt refers to a tone and rhythm that we can hear in both poets, and he is eloquent in his description, but the wistful and the hesitant are placed as far as possible from "the movement of the thinking mind." The priority of the influencing minor author is minimized by the contrast between the inchoate and the fully developed. Hunt argues that "Tintern Abbey" is "indebted" to The Emigrants — a choice of words that might seem to direct us to the creditor — but when he notes that "[t]his can be shown by quoting at length ...", it is "— a fact which in itself makes an interesting commentary on the way Wordsworth's imagination worked" (95). I would rather conclude from the dispersed and "gestalt" nature of Smith's influence that it was a pervasive and strong one, and that it was so because Smith's imagination worked in a way that gave Wordsworth clues as to how he might proceed poetically.

The most telling textual comparison that Hunt makes is between passages selected from the beginning of book two of The Emigrants and from the first sections of "Tintern Abbey." The selection from Smith's poem is here abbreviated somewhat:

Long wintry months are past; the Moon that now
 Lights her pale crescent even at noon, has made
 Four times her revolution; since with step,
 Mournful and slow, along the wave-worn cliff,
 Pensive I took my solitary way,
 Lost in despondence, while contemplating
 Not my own wayward destiny alone

....

Fain would I snatch an interval from Care,
 That weighs my wearied spirit down to earth;
 Courting, once more, the influence of Hope
 (For "Hope" still waits upon the flowery prime)

....

Ah! 'twill not be: — So many years have pass'd,
 Since on my native hills, I learn'd to gaze
 On these delightful landscapes; and those years
 Have taught me so much sorrow, that my soul
 Feels not the joy reviving Nature brings;
 But in dark retrospect, dejected dwells
 On human follies, and on human woes

(2:1-7, 19-22, 36-42)

And from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey":

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
 Of five long winters! and again I hear
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
 With a sweet inland murmur. — Once again
 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
 Which on a wild secluded scene impress
 Thoughts of a more deep seclusion; and connect
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

....

... that blessed mood,

In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world
 Is lightened

... — That time is past,

And all its aching joys are now no more,
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
 Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes

The still, sad music of humanity

(1-8, 38-42, 84-92)

The similarities of phrasing in these selected passages are numerous, and they speak to the thematic centre of the two poems — the “loss” experienced in the transition to adulthood, and the relations between melancholy introspection, natural scenery, and social feeling

The comparison Hunt makes, or rather begins, between The Emigrants and “Tintern Abbey” is one of the more immediately convincing of all textual comparisons between individual poems by these two poets. Unlike the allusions in Wordsworth’s juvenilia or the similarity between Smith’s “St Monica” and Wordsworth’s “St Bees”, this comparison brings together major poems by each author, in Wordsworth’s case one of his most famous works and in Smith’s case her first attempt at a long blank verse poem. While Wordsworth certainly read Elegiac Sonnets, there is no external evidence that he ever read The Emigrants, even though Hunt’s observations make him “virtually certain” that Wordsworth did so, and “with care” (94). This much at least of Hunt’s argument has stood the test of time, as Duncan Wu has recently listed Smith’s The Emigrants in Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799 (1993) solely on the weight of Hunt’s essay.

Hunt notes a variety of verbal echoes of The Emigrants in “Tintern Abbey,” the fruits of what he calls his method of “old-fashioned ‘parallel hunting’” (94). Among the items on Hunt’s list, several are left unexplained and undefended. One of these is the similarity between Smith’s reference, in the opening lines of book two, to “the Moon that now / lights her pale crescent even at noon” and Wordsworth’s lines in “Tintern Abbey” “Therefore let the moon / Shine on thee in thy solitary walk” (135-6). In order

for this rather slight echo to appear in its full significance, we need to recall the peculiar structure of “Tintern Abbey.” We need to recall, specifically, that Wordsworth is both alone and not alone in the poem, and that while on one hand the speaker seems to be rapt in self-examination as though solitary, he also says that “thou art with me, here, upon the banks / Of this fair river ...” (115-16). A subtle and appropriate image for this dual solitude and co-presence would be the crescent moon visible in the day. “Tintern Abbey” is set, unambiguously, during daylight, with a long and clear vista of “the wild, green landscape” (15). Thus, in Wordsworth’s apostrophe to Dorothy, who both listens and is absent, he “lets” the moon shine in the present and also imagines it shining at another time. It is possible that the germ of this dual perspective came from Smith’s image of the daytime moon. It may not be entirely irrelevant here to recall that one of Wordsworth’s poetic names for his sister was “Emmeline,” as in the poem “To a Butterfly” (Poetical Works 1:226-27), a name which would have suggested Charlotte Smith’s Emmeline, the eponymous heroine of her first novel.

An important similarity between The Emigrants and “Tintern Abbey” not discussed by Hunt is the apostrophe to a listener at the end of each poem, an apostrophe that combines the self-elegiac with an avowal of natural religion. Smith addresses her “friends” (2:371), anticipating a time when “... no memorial shall remain of me / Save in your bosoms” (2:376-77), and asks that

... if the little praise that may await

The Mother’s efforts, should provoke the spleen

Of Priest or Levite; and they arraign

The dust that cannot hear them; be it yours
 To vindicate my humble fame; to say,
 That, not in selfish sufferings absorb'd,
 "I gave to misery all I had, my tears."
 And if, where regulate sanctity
 Pours her long orison to Heaven, my voice
 Was seldom heard, that yet my prayer was made
 To him who hears even silence, not in domes
 Of human architecture, fill'd with crowds,
 But on these hills (2:380-92)

Although Wordsworth's apostrophe to Dorothy at the end of "Tintern Abbey" does not have this tone of self-defense, it does contain many of the same elements in a milder form:

... Nor, perchance,
 If I should be, where I no more can hear
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eye these gleams
 Of past existence, wilt thou then forget
 That on the banks of this delightful stream
 We stood together; and that I, so long
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came,
 Unwearied in that service: rather say
 With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal
 Of holier love (147-56)

Both poets are in some small degree echoing the poet's epitaph from Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," which Smith quotes, but the idiom of self-presentation is much more direct than in Gray, and the religious sentiments belong to the natural supernaturalism (in Abrams's phrase) of the Romantic period. This comparison reveals not only a similarity of tone and feeling, but also a similarity at the level of structure and ideas.

6. The Sorrows of the Poet: A Thematic Turn

The thematic cluster of hope and despair, with its central metaphors of youth and maturity, dawn and dusk, spring and autumn, is in many ways a conventional area of poetic sentiment with no real historical beginning. But there is a Romantic mode of negotiating these themes, and we can see a specific line of influence between Smith and Wordsworth in this area, a line which appears first to be largely a matter of diction, or imagery, but which ultimately has more to do with ideas, in particular the idea of the consolatory function of poetry. Bringing together Smith's sonnet 47 "To Fancy" (Poems 44) and her sonnet 48, "To Mrs. ****" (Poems 45), Bishop C. Hunt observes that Smith's "... use of the imagery of light and vision and flowers sets a poetic precedent for the much greater originality of Wordsworth and Coleridge" (91). The relevant passages from Smith's two sonnets are, from sonnet 47,

Thee, Queen of Shadows! — shall I still invoke,

Still love the scene thy sportive pencil drew,
 When on mine eyes the early radiance broke
 Which shew'd the beauteous rather than the true!
 Alas! long since those glowing tints are dead ...

(1-5)

and from sonnet 48, a passage we have already set beside Coleridge's "Dejection":

Imagination now has lost her powers,
 Nor will her fairy loom again essay
 To dress Affliction in a robe of flowers

(5-7)

In both imagery and idea Hunt finds a similarity between these sonnets and Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807). From Wordsworth's Intimations Ode he cites the lines:

What though the radiance which was once so bright
 Be now for ever taken from my sight,
 Though nothing can bring back the hour
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower

(178-81)

A recognition of similar patterns of imagery here depends very much on the thematic similarity of the passages, rather than the verbal or melodic echo, which is only slight.

According to Bishop C. Hunt "[t]he central theme of the Elegiac Sonnets is the gradual loss of what Coleridge calls 'the shaping spirit of Imagination' ('Dejection: An

Turn wheresoe'er I may,

By night or day,

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

(1-9)

Wordsworth — like Coleridge and perhaps more successfully — devotes much of his poem to an overcoming or recuperation of the apparent loss of “Imagination.” The grammar of the verse sentence beginning “What though the radiance ... / Be ... taken from my sight ...” is completed by the answering clause, “We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind” (182-83). At this point Wordsworth swerves from the tradition of melancholy he found in Smith’s poetry. Always conscious of the intransigence of her sorrows, and committed to a certain grim sincerity about this intransigence, Charlotte Smith never made a poetic resolution to “grieve not.”

There is no doubt that William Wordsworth was a poet of greater powers than Charlotte Smith. One aspect of his demonstration of these powers was to overcome the type of melancholy that her sonnets had so fully indulged. This turn can be traced in Wordsworth’s use, discussed above, of “no second spring” in “Salisbury Plain” and his transformation of the phrase to a positive “second spring” in later works. This difference between Smith and Wordsworth on the theme of melancholy is due in some measure to a difference of circumstance. Wordsworth had not only the literary powers but also the relative good fortune — of which his talent formed a part — to be able to find consolation in poetry for the loss of childhood’s bright and optimistic Imagination. If we consider the poet of the Intimations ode as conscious not only of his own previous states of mind, but

also of the state of poetry as he found it in his youth, then we can find literary criticism as well as personal memoir in Wordsworth's poem. When Wordsworth declares "No more shall grief of mine the season wrong ..." (26) or exclaims "Oh evil day! if I were sullen / While the Earth herself is adorning, / This sweet May-morning ..." (42-4), he may simply be referring to unseasonal despondencies of his own. But the reader, especially in 1807 when the *Intimations* ode was first published, might also be reminded of precedents in other poets, particularly Charlotte Smith, whose sonnets often exploited precisely this paradox of autumnal moods brought on by vernal scenes. Again and again in her poetry, springs fails to comfort the poet. In a note to "April" (*Poems* 119-21), one of the many poems which dwells upon this theme, Smith states plainly what her readers would already know: "The return of the Spring, which awakens many to new sentiments of pleasure, now serves only to remind me of past misery." She gives several poetic precedents for this sentiment, but they are from Petrarch and Guarini. Despite the famous melancholy of the English, precedents in the poetry of her own language would be harder to find.

Wordsworth had experienced early and significant losses when he began his career as a poet, and periods of domestic and financial insecurity, but he was not an unhappy or unfortunate young man in his own eyes, and never expressed anything like self-pity in his poetry. It is interesting to note that Wordsworth would later describe, in the 1805 *Prelude*, his general state of mind in his youth: "My seventeenth year was come / / ... I at this time / Saw blessings spread around me like a sea" (2:405-415). His concern with the themes of grief and sorrow was strong, but, this concern is characteristically expressed through sympathy for others rather than overt personal lamentation. In his first published

poem, the “Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams weep at a Tale of Distress,” which we will discuss at greater length in the following chapter, the poet’s sorrow is felt at a double remove from suffering itself, evoked not by the sad “wanderer” directly, but by the sympathetic tears of the auditor of his tale, the woman of sensibility. This pattern would be recurrent in his mature verse. When he came to write The Excursion, this inability to express his own sorrow directly was beginning to be framed as a psychological problem, at least from the point of view of the eccentric “Solitary” of book three:

... but thee,

O fostering Nature! I rejected — smiled

At others’ tears in pity; and in scorn

At those, which thy soft influence sometimes drew

From my unguarded heart (3:809-812)

When the Intimations ode appeared, Wordsworth himself had not previously published poems in which his grief had “wronged” the season; nor would he ever.

Charlotte Smith, in marked contrast to Wordsworth, seldom failed to stress her own misfortune in her poetry, and despair often interferes with the appreciation of natural beauty. One of the best examples of her use of the pattern of unseasonal sorrow is her sonnet 8, “To spring:”

Again the wood, and long-withdrawing vale,

In many a tint of tender green are drest,

Where the young leaves, unfolding, scarce conceal

Beneath their early shade, the half-form! ! aesi

Of finch or woodlark; and the primrose pale,
 And lavish cowslip, wildly scatter'd round,
 Give their sweet spirits to the sighing gale
 Ah! season of delight! — could aught be found
 To soothe awhile the tortured bosom's pain,
 Of Sorrow's rankling shaft to the cure wound,
 And bring life's first delusions once again,
 'Twere surely met in thee! — thy prospect fair,
 Thy sounds of harmony, thy balmy air,
 Have power to cure all sadness — but despair. (Poems 17)

This is the type of sentiment which Wordsworth's "Ode" evokes, re-interprets and overcomes as he enacts his promise, "No more shall grief of mine the seasons wrong." It is also, as we saw above, the sentiment he ascribes to the inconsolable Female Vagrant of "Salisbury Plain "

Wordsworth struggles with nostalgia and melancholy in "Tintern Abbey," but in the *Intimations* ode, completed nearly a decade later, he more decisively overcomes the emblematic tear of sensibility⁷ by delving beneath it, at once rejecting and intensifying its symbolic value:

⁷ Wordsworth and the image of the tear would be a study in itself, but we might also note the refrain of the untitled manuscript elegy that begins:

Remembering how thou didst beguile
 With thy wild ways our eyes and ears
 I feel more sorrow in a smile
 Than in a waggon load of tears.
 (Gill, ed. Wordsworth 144)

To me the meanest flower that blows can give

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. (205-06)

The overcoming of melancholy is a strong and recurrent theme in Wordsworth's poetry, and the *Intimations* ode is perhaps his most definitive statement on the topic. It is significant, however, that a number of his mature sonnets also enact this overcoming.

Wordsworth stayed well clear of the sonnet controversy as it played out in the 1790's. After the juvenilia, where we find no more than three or four original sonnets and some translations of Petrarch, Wordsworth did not write or publish sonnets in any concerted way until after the turn of the century. If we search his complete sonnets for something that looks like an imitation of Smith's characteristically melancholy manner, we find only one good candidate, one of the sky-scapes mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, published as late as 1819:

I watch and long have watched, with calm regret

Yon slowly sinking star — immortal Sire

(So might he seem) of all the glittering quire!

Blue ether still surrounds him — yet — and yet;

But now the horizon's rocky parapet

Is reached, where, forfeiting his bright attire,

He burns — transmuted to a dusky fire —

Then pays submissively the appointed debt

To the flying moments, and is seen no more.

Angels and gods! We struggle with our fate,

While health, power, glory, from their height decline,
 Depressed; and then extinguished: and our stars
 In this, how different, lost Star, from thine,
 That no tomorrow shall our beams restore!

(Poetical Works 3:22-23).

Here we have a rare glimpse of the sentiments that once led Coleridge to call Wordsworth a 'Semi-Atheist' (Letters 1:216). Charlotte Smith never went so far as to imply a lack of faith in the afterlife, but her affirmations of it are often weakened by despair, and her closing couplets often have the deflating bathetic quality of the closing couplet in this Wordsworth poem. The bleakness of this poem is unique among Wordsworth's sonnets and exceedingly rare in his work as a whole.

Wordsworth wrote many sonnet elegies, which are melancholy sonnets in a sense, and several of his political sonnets express anxiety and dismay, but there are surprisingly few sonnets of personal melancholy, and surprisingly many which stress its opposite. Milton, the official hero of Wordsworth's sonnets, is celebrated in "London 1802" for his "cheerful godliness" (Poems in Two Volumes 148). In a sonnet published in 1815, "From the dark chambers of dejection freed ..." (Poetical Works 3:22), Wordsworth would make the categorical claim that "A cheerful life is what the Muses love, / A soaring spirit is their prime delight." One of the "River Duddon" sonnets begins "Sad thoughts avaunt ..." (Poetical Works 3:255-56). The whole formula of the nostalgic visit to a river landscape is self-consciously overcome in the sonnet "'Beloved Vale!' I said, 'When I shall con ..'" (Poems in Two Volumes 127), which appeared in the same volume as the Intimations ode.

The poet tells of his surprise at finding the stereotypical experience of sadness unfulfilled:

.... I look'd round, I shed no tears;
 Deep thought, or awful vision, I had none

 A Juggler's Balls old Time about him toss'd;
 I looked, I stared, I smiled, I laugh'd; and all
 The weight of sadness was in wonder lost.
 (7-8, 12-14)

With this fresh treatment Wordsworth distinguishes himself from the whole tradition of earlier writers of the melancholy sonnet, including Warton, Smith, Bowles and Coleridge. Because Wordsworth seems to have made a conscious and sustained effort to rescue the sonnet from its recent melancholy conventions, Charlotte Smith's influence is perhaps least apparent in his sonnets, if we are looking for positive imitation.

There are moments in Wordsworth's sonnets, though, where a negative, or dialectical relationship between himself and the melancholy tradition provides glimpses of Charlotte Smith in particular. In his relatively late sonnet called "Retirement," for example, published in 1827, Wordsworth refers to truths "which they alone shall comprehend / Who shun the mischief which they cannot heal" (*Poetical Works* 3:23-24). We saw in Charlotte Smith's very first sonnet a similar dynamic, from a different perspective but in the same verbal structure. The poet complains of the duties imposed by the muse: "For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye / Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove" (*Poems* 13). Whether this resemblance qualifies as an allusion on Wordsworth's

part is doubtful. It is indeed a resemblance that draws our attention to the difference between the authors, not their similarity. The incurable ills that Smith's muse will not let her ignore may well be of a different sort than the mischiefs that the middle-aged Wordsworth is able to shun. The more important difference is that Wordsworth succeeds in finding — poetically and not just biographically — the peace of mind in rural retirement that Smith's sonnets recurrently fail to find. Wordsworth would have been most conscious of Smith's influence when he was writing in the form most closely associated with her. Thus if we find few direct echoes of Smith's sonnets in Wordsworth's sonnets, it may be the sign of Wordsworth's desire to distinguish himself from one of his most important models.

Wordsworth's use of direct allusion in poetry was sparing, even with canonical authors.⁸ Allusions based on slight verbal echoes found in similar thematic or rhetorical contexts make for slighter evidence than exact borrowings. Much depends on the reader's ear. And much depends on our sense of how Wordsworth's poetic ear retained and revised his sources. Bishop C. Hunt, defending some of the more debatable allusions

⁸ Charlotte Smith was more a poet of the eighteenth century in this respect, at least in her earlier sonnets. In the first and second editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, there were many borrowings from earlier poets, some altered to suit her purposes, and most presented without quotation marks or notes. Adverse commentary from reviewers caused Smith to provide references in the third and later editions (Hilbish 242-45). Thus revised, Smith's direct quotations were accepted as appropriate poetic practice. As *The Universal Magazine* observed in 1792, in its review of her sixth edition, her use of quotations from earlier poets "shows her liberality, taste, and judgement [H]er claim to imagination is sufficiently established by what she has added of equal merit of her own" (qtd. Hilbish 245).

presented in his essay,⁹ explains that Wordsworth possessed “an eclectic and retentive verbal memory,” and that

... his imagination absorbed words, phrases, and patterns of phrase drawn from a considerable body of verse, to reproduce them in smaller compass, and in entirely new arrangement, in his own work. The process must have been largely unconscious. (96)

Indeed, the only allusion to Charlotte Smith that we can confidently suggest was fully conscious on Wordsworth’s part is ‘a happy child’ from An Evening Walk, which he marked as a quotation. If we follow through on the thematic implications of the allusions that we find, however, we see patterns too striking to be accounted for by unconscious circulations of idiom. Often Wordsworth’s “arrangement” of older materials is not “entirely” new.

⁹ Hunt suggests that the first line from Smith’s sonnet 39, “I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night!” had some role in Wordsworth choice of words in the lines “The clouds that gather round the setting sun / Do take a sober colouring from an eye / That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality ...” (Intimations Ode 199-201). He also suggests that “viewless wind” from the same sonnet might turn up in The Prelude: “visionary power / Attends the motions of the viewless winds ...” (5:595-96). But as Hunt observes, “viewless” was a common poeticism in the eighteenth century, and in a footnote he acknowledges a more original source in Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure (3.1.124): “...imprison'd in the viewless winds” (Hunt 88).

7. Elegies for Poets

Many, indeed most of Charlotte Smith's sonnets are elegaic in the sense that they lament her own unhappiness. She also wrote elegaic sonnets expressing a specific personal grief. In the spring of 1795, Smith's daughter Augusta died in childbirth. Six of Smith's sonnets and several other elegaic poems refer to this loss (Poems 57n). Wordsworth lost his brother John in 1805 and his infant daughter Catharine in 1812, and a number of poems were inspired by these griefs. Earlier in his career, Wordsworth experimented in the elegaic mood without seeming to have a specific biographical occasion, composing a number of poems, usually called the "Lucy" poems, whose subject is not an actual death but the imagined death of a female figure who combines aspects of sister, child, and lover. Thus, Smith and Wordsworth both participated in the tradition of the personal elegy,¹⁰ an ancient tradition given a late-eighteenth century manner with the

¹⁰One of Wordsworth's most famous elegies is the much-celebrated short lyric "A Slumber did my spirit seal" (1800). It is possible that the second and concluding stanza, No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees!

may have been influenced by the tone and metaphor of the concluding lines of Smith's sonnet 78, published in the second volume of Elegaic Sonnets in 1797:

...
Ah, ye soft, transient children of the ground,
More fair was she on whose untimely grave
Flow my unceasing tears! Their varied round
The Seasons go; while I through all repine:
For fix't regret, and hopeless grief are mine.
(Poems 67)

There is a similarity here in both sound and sentiment, as well as in the temporal shift from
(continued...)

publication of Gray's restrained but intimate "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West" in 1775. We can find a more direct connection between the elegiac poetry of Smith and Wordsworth if we concentrate on a specific type of elegy peculiar to the times, a type less personal and yet more intimately connected to the poet's self image: the elegy for the dead, unhappy, and often unsung fellow poet.

One of Charlotte Smith's more ambitious and complex sonnets is her number 26, "To the River Arun":

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 soothed his pensive ear,
 And still the poet — consecrates the stream.
 Beneath the oak and birch that fringe thy side,
 The first born violets of the year shall spring,
 And in thy hazels, bending o'er the tide,
 The earliest Nightingale delight to sing:

¹⁰(...continued)

a past to a present state of mind. Smith's poem employs once again the device of the author's inability to respond in sympathy with the seasonal revival of the natural world, but the snowdrop itself is unseasonal, and brings the full "round" of the year into play.

While kindred spirits, pitying, shall relate

Thy Otways sorrows, and lament his fate!

(Poems 30)

This sonnet is cited by Bishop C. Hunt as evidence of Smith's concern for "... the interaction of a special sensibility (The Poet's) with a special set of circumstances (the observed phenomena of Nature, together with the poet's perceptions of his own observations)" (89). While the sonnet contains much natural description, Hunt emphasizes its simultaneously "internal" quality: "... the central 'meaning' which the poet wishes to convey cannot be stated openly; namely the parallel between Otway's immortality and her own" (90).

It is important to add that it is not Charlotte Smith's modesty as a poet which makes her state her meaning indirectly, far from it. The poet seems certain that she is among the "kindred spirits" who lament Otway's fate, but this kindred quality is not the result of an equality of canonical fame established in some public forum. The connection depends rather on a subtle, almost supernatural co-presence of Muse, Poet — or Poets — and Nature. Hunt avers that "Charlotte Smith is speaking ... of something quite outside the normal, rational categories of human experience" (89). But the sonnet is not intended primarily as a ghost story, nor is the survival of a poet's spirit such an uncanny notion. The affinity between the two poets is indeed "outside": both out-of-doors and outside the normal canon-producing institutions, but it is not outside experience. Nature, and not culture, is given precedence here, in an intimate canon of melancholy, a canon organized around place and mood, not an external formal standard. Thus the fact that neither Otway

nor Smith have been ranked highly in the public canon does not detract from the sonnet's pretension, but rather confirms it. The sympathy felt between Smith and Otway is a community of critical neglect as well as biographical misfortune. And yet as poets, they have still the power to "consecrate" a particular locale.

In support of his suggestion that the "method" of this sonnet was influential for Wordsworth, Hunt draws a connection between its phrasing and a passage from Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas" (1805). Wordsworth "appears to have turned the eighth line ... 'And still the poet — consecrates the stream,' into one of his loveliest images: 'The light that never was on sea or land, / The consecration and the Poet's dream'" (90). What Hunt does not emphasize is the confidence of poetic power that the word conveys, a confidence which, in a female poet of the 1780's, is far more striking than in the Wordsworth of 1805, when his "Elegiac Stanzas" was written.

Another of Smith's elegies for a dead poet is her sonnet 45, "On leaving a part of Sussex,":

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 woodlands recline,
 Or on thy 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!

(Poems 42-3)

Hunt argues that if readers can “overlook the Gothic element” in this sonnet and concentrate on certain elements of phrasing, they will “surely be reminded of the vocabulary of meditation in Wordsworth’s longer poems” (93). As he suggests, “vows ... paid to Nature’s shrine” and “the word ‘visionary’ coupled with ‘power’” do indeed sound like Wordsworth’s idiom. In addition to being an elegy for a fellow poet, this sonnet illustrates a number of themes we tend to think of as Wordsworthian, themes we have already noted in Smith’s work: the inspiring presence of river landscape, the persistence of childhood memories, and the complex interaction of the two — the double perspective of the observing and remembering poet.

Hunt does not re-iterate these thematic similarities, perhaps because he expects his reader will recognize them. I am being explicit because Hunt’s emphasis on verbal echoes alone does not do justice to the depth of Smith’s influence. As Hunt implies, Smith’s sonnet 45 anticipates the diction of Wordsworth’s longer blank-verse poems such as “Tintern Abbey.” But it is the perspective of the poet, and not just the choice of words, which makes the similarity so striking. In “Tintern Abbey” Wordsworth employs not just

a double perspective on the scene he contemplates, but a multiple perspective, in which at least three psychological and developmental phases are suggested. In a more condensed form, Smith's sonnet also conveys a multiple perspective, from the earliest phase of "thoughtless joy," through intermediate visits — the "lorn stream has heard me since deplore / Too many sorrows" — to the present, maturer viewpoint, which in her case is an anticipation of a final resignation or departure.

There is a remarkable aspect of this poem which goes unmentioned by Hunt, probably because it is not obviously related to his argument for an influence on Wordsworth. Sonnet 45, after all, is about the poet William Collins, and is another example of Smith's self-proclaimed affinity with other unfortunate poets of the past. In the very "Gothic element" that Hunt asks the reader to ignore is an impressively condensed and complex reference to Collins's odes, which had a distinctively Gothic quality themselves. Without seeming too contrived, Smith manages to conjure something of Collins's style and also makes reference to at least four of his poems: the odes to Fancy, Evening, Pity and Fear respectively. And in the use of the phrase "lorn stream" in addressing the River Arun, Smith is alluding to Collins's "Ode on the Death of Mr. Thompson," which uses the same phrase in line 29, in reference to the Thames. Smith is thus conscious of the tradition of local elegy in which she is writing, a tradition to which Wordsworth would make his own contribution in 1798, with his "Remembrance of Collins." Wordsworth's "Remembrance of Collins" bears no particular resemblance in phrasing to Smith's sonnet 45, but it does contain a rhetorical wish that appears rather ironic in the present context: "And pray that never child of song / May know that Poet's

sorrows more" (19-20).

Another poet celebrated by both Smith and Wordsworth for his misfortunes and his genius was Robert Burns. By the late 1780's Burns had become famous among the reading public as an untaught and original poet who endured a life of rural manual labour in the harsh Scottish climate.¹¹ By the time of his relatively early death in 1796, Burns was also known for his democratic sympathies, expressed in his Scottish nationalism and in his approval of the French Revolution. This element of his reputation has been added to the image of the untaught genius when Charlotte Smith valorized the poet in her sonnet "To the Shade of Burns":

Mute is thy wild harp, now, O Bard sublime!
 Who, amid Scotia's mountain solitude,
 Great Nature taught to "build the lofty rhyme,"
 And even beneath the daily pressure, rude,
 Of labouring Poverty, thy generous blood,
 Fired with the love of freedom — Not subdued
 Wert thou by thy low fortune (Poems 71)

In her note to the poem, Smith draws a direct parallel between herself and Burns: both were poets whose earnings went to the support of their needy families. By the turn of the century, biographies of Burns had confirmed rumours of his illegitimate children,

¹¹ In 1791, Helen Maria Williams published her "Sonnet on Reading the Poem upon the Mountain Daisy, by Mr. Burns," in which "... like that lovely flower the poet rose / 'Mid penury's bare soil and bitter gale" and "... through the cloud of adverse fortune burst / Indignant ..." (Lonsdale Eighteenth Century Women Poets 414).

libertarian politics, and fondness for drink. This is the Robert Burns that Wordsworth has in mind in his admonitory "Address to the Sons of Burns" (1807).¹²

Burns also appears in "Resolution and Independence" (1807) as an exemplar, along with Chatterton, of the dangers of the poet's vocation:

I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
 The sleepless Soul that perished in its pride;
 Of Him who walked in glory and in joy
 Behind the plough, upon the mountain-side:
 By our own spirits are we deified;
 We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
 But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.

(43-49)

Wordsworth aligns himself with Chatterton and Burns explicitly, but only in a temporary and tentative way, for "Resolution and Independence" is another of the poems in which he attempts to overcome melancholy, in this case by overcoming the pattern of the unhappy and doomed poet. There is no direct allusion to Charlotte Smith in Wordsworth's poem, but she was another poet who began as 'a happy child' and grew into despondency. She was also one of the few who had written about the process before Wordsworth. In addition to writing elegiac sonnets for Otway, Collins and Burns, Smith also paid poetic tribute to Chatterton in her sonnet "Written at Bristol in the summer of 1794," where the

¹² This poem first appeared in 1807, and in revised form was the third of a group of three poems inspired by Wordsworth's visit to the grave of Burns, published together in Memorials of a Tour in Scotland 1803 (1827).

“native Genius” of the place is associated with both “Heav'n-taught skill” and “palsied Fancy, woe-deprest ...” (Poems 56).

8. Two Romantic Sonnets

From the recurrence of certain themes and rhetorical turns in Wordsworth's allusions to Charlotte Smith, especially as I have arranged them in this chapter, we may be tempted to conclude that for Wordsworth the overcoming of melancholy meant, in terms of poetic practice, the overcoming of Charlotte Smith. Yet we should be careful of oversimplifying: Wordsworth's overcoming of melancholy is never entirely complete, just as Charlotte Smith's immersion in despair was never entirely complete. Thus his relation to her, or rather the relation of his poetry to hers, is not just a matter of passing beyond. At their best they still resemble one another.

Many of Charlotte Smith's sonnets describe the attempt by Fancy or Imagination to overcome or mitigate sorrow, but in only one of ninety-two sonnets does this impulse realize itself without being sharply undercut in the sestet or concluding couplet — her sonnet 79, “To the goddess of botany,” which appeared in the 1797 edition of Elegiac Sonnets:

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.

(Poems 68-69)

Smith is influenced here, as she explains in her long note, by similar sentiments — the desire for a withdrawal from society and toward Nature — expressed in Milton's II Pensive, Shakespeare's Cymbeline, and most immediately in Rousseau. What makes the sonnet remarkable, and Romantic in the Wordsworthian mode, is the method in which the sentiment is developed. The desire to escape social evils becomes realized in the imagination, culminating in a liberating list of animated plant-life that leads us quite out of the world of Violence and Fraud and into another, normally inaccessible world beneath the sea. Verbs of rest evolve into verbs of motion, and the speaker is linked both grammatically and imaginatively to the natural world, as the antecedent for “lurk,” “mantle,” “float” and “stream” can be taken as either “varieties” of plant life, or the

retiring subject who “might rest” and “learn” those varieties: the poet or reader.

Although one could not point to any specific verbal echoes, there is, I would argue, a striking thematic and even structural similarity between this sonnet and Wordsworth’s “The world is too much with us ...” (Poems in Two Volumes 150), which was composed between 1802 and 1804, or some five years after Smith’s sonnet. Although without the capitalized abstractions, Wordsworth’s sonnet begins in a world that is wasted by “getting and spending” and proceeds by degrees to a virtual fulfillment of the desire to escape that world, an escape that culminates in a vision of the mythical undersea world become visible to the imagination. Wordsworth’s poem is perhaps more ironic than Smith’s, in that his inclusion of classical sea-gods makes the vision at the end deliberately anachronistic — it is a vision that loses in viability what it gains in vividness. But Smith’s sonnet, too, is ironic — her goddess of botany is just as much an imaginary addressee as Wordsworth’s Proteus and Triton are imaginary sights. Neither poet claims to have overcome in any permanent way the limitations of historical or personal context, and both escapes, though fully imagined, are suspended in the hypothetical or subjunctive grammar of Romantic irony.

Chapter Seven

Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth:

Gender, Genre, and Politics

1. Wordsworth's First Sonnet

In The Gloomy Egoist (1932), Eleanor Sickels speaks of a process that she calls “the feminization of lyric love melancholy” (207) in the Age of Sensibility. Similarly, R.M. Ralston has described the sonnet of sensibility as practised by Smith, Williams and, though rarely, the young Wordsworth in the 1780's as a “feminized” genre. What these critics mean is simply that in the latter half of the eighteenth century, male sonnet writers began to show “new interest in women’s mental as well as physical endowments,” and this in large part because female poets had begun to “use ... the sonnet to voice their own perspectives and concerns” (Ralston 103). This is but a specific manifestation of a much larger phenomenon. As Sickels observes, it is “common knowledge that the triumph of Sensibility in the eighteenth century was intimately associated with the rise of women in social and literary importance” (202-3). The subject of Sickels’s The Gloomy Egoist is the poetry of melancholy “... from Gray to Keats,” but along the way she finds herself considering many female writers. Although poets like Young and Gray in the mid-century had established a tradition of rational, intellectual melancholy, women inevitably — at the time it would seem “naturally” — dominated in their own precinct. As Sickels explains:

... if a reasoned philosophical melancholy was forbidden by society to women, “sweet sensibility” came to be more and more a prime ingredient of the feminine ideal sensibility leads directly to another kind of melancholy — a melancholy having very little to do with reason or philosophy, but everything to do with romantic love, family affection, benevolence, and religion. Now since all these things were popularly supposed to be the special realm of womanhood, it was inevitable that the great body of literate women ... should with remarkable unanimity move in the central current of sentimental melancholy. (204-05)

To write in the tradition of sentimental melancholy was thus to write in a tradition that celebrated, and often emulated, a particular set of “feminine” virtues: spontaneous sympathy, domestic and social love.

In 1787, just three years after the first edition of Elegiac Sonnets, William Wordsworth’s first published poem appeared in The European Magazine. The title was “Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress”:

She wept. — Life’s purple tide began to flow
 In languid streams through every thrilling vein;
 Dim were my swimming eyes — my pulse beat slow,
 And my full heart was swell'd to dear delicious pain.
 Life left my loaded heart, and closing eye;
 A sigh recall'd the wanderer to my breast;
 Dear was the pause of life, and dear the sigh

That call'd the wanderer home, and home to rest.
 That tear proclaims — in thee each virtue dwells,
 And bright will shine in misery's midnight hour;
 As the soft star of dewy evening tells
 What radiant fires were drown'd by day's malignant pow'r,
 That only wait the darkness of the night
 To cheer the wand'ring wretch with hospitable light.

(Poetical Works 1:269)

Wordsworth published the poem pseudonymously, signing it “Axiologus” (a Latin construction for “Words-worth”) but he never reprinted it. Written when he was seventeen, this sonnet provides a glimpse into the early phase of one of Wordsworth’s recurrent poetic pre-occupations: the figure of the sorrowful woman.

John Jones in The Egotistical Sublime makes the following comment about this sonnet:

Wordsworth has abandoned the sense of Pope for the sensibility of Miss Williams, a specialist in the poetry of feeling which enjoyed a great vogue at this time and infested the magazines with just such rubbish as Wordsworth’s sonnet. (15)

This early sonnet may indeed be inferior to Wordsworth’s later work, and much of the poetry of sensibility published in the 1780's was trite and over-wrought. But we can see in Jones’s evaluative sentence an odd contradiction. Wordsworth’s choice of the poetry of sensibility over the poetry of common sense and reason was surely an important choice,

one which gave a direction to all his important early work. To label as rubbish the tradition that provided him with an alternative to the poetry of rationality is to be less than historical, and blinds us to an important source of Wordsworth's style and thematic preoccupations.

That this sonnet should be Wordsworth's first publication tells us much about the state of the public taste in poetry in the 1780's. On one level, it does not matter whether Wordsworth's poem was undertaken as an imitation, or even if it is sincere — he is writing in a popular style and genre. James Averill points out in his discussion of this sonnet that “[t]he short poem of recognition to a fellow poet was a minor genre popular in the late eighteenth century” Averill also notes that in 1786, the year before its publication of Wordsworth's poem, The European Review included six of these short verses. No less than three of them were sonnets to Charlotte Smith (Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering 33). Such poems were part of the Della Cruscan mode, a phase in the literature of sensibility which emphasized the social correspondence between poets, their friendship and mutual admiration. Wordsworth had not actually met Helen Maria Williams when he wrote his sonnet, but many of the Della Cruscans had not met in person either. Reviving the spirit of courtly love in a new key, the Della Cruscans engaged in public salutations and flirtations, usually under fanciful pseudonyms like Wordsworth's Axiologus. In various anthologies and in the magazines, short poems in the Della Cruscan mode, often songs and sonnets, were highly popular from 1784 to about 1790.

Not all the Della Cruscans were women — Robert Merry, or “Della Crusca” himself,

was one of the more prolific of the group — but women dominated the vogue, notably Hannah Cowley, Mary Robinson, and Helen Maria Williams herself.¹ The Della Cruscan fashion had its origins in the expatriate salon of Hester Thrale Piozzi in Italy, a somewhat controversial woman of letters who had shocked Johnson and mid-century manners by abandoning comfortable widowhood in England for a second marriage to an Italian music master, a marriage for love. The diction of the Della Cruscans was self-consciously ornate, and the emotions expressed were at once polite and intense. The poetry was less sexual than the tradition of English love poetry, and had little of the elegiac quality of Petrarch. Ostensibly, the poetic correspondence between these poets was amatory, but it was really a poetry of mutual admiration, with the emphasis on the mild sorrows of sympathy and separation. The love between the Della Cruscans, and the love expressed in Wordsworth's juvenile sonnet, was literary friendship raised to new heights by the admiration of sensibility. Because of its stylistic excesses and its artificiality, the Della Cruscan vogue was not well received critically. But it did introduce, for the first time outside actual court poetry, a collective poetic practise based on a formalized but real dialogue between male and female poets.

Charlotte Smith's sonnets are not generally classed by literary historians as Della Cruscan, but her literary practice was immediately adjacent to theirs in style.² Elegiac

¹ For more on the Della Cruscans see W. N. Hargreaves-Mandsley, The English Della Cruscans and Their Times, 1783-1828 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967). See also Sickels 208-213 and Ralston 157n43.

² See Havens 515-519, where he speaks of the "Hayley-Della Cruscan school" interchangeably with the "Hayley-Smith-Williams" school. This type is contrasted with the Miltonic type, and Bowles effects a synthesis.

Sonnets actually appeared just before the first Della Cruscan anthology, the privately circulated Florence Miscellany of 1785. Charlotte Smith did not contribute to the anthologies and magazine correspondences that defined the Della Cruscan circle in England, having already chosen a distinctly more solitary stance. She did write several sonnets of gratitude to friends, and a few encomiastic poems to fellow poets, but her characteristic tone was that of intense private melancholy rather than fond sociability, and she did not publish under pseudonyms. Her style could be as hyperbolic as the Della Cruscans, but the perceived sincerity of her verse gave it an advantage and a distinction.³ We can see a very general similarity in diction between Smith's sonnets and Wordsworth's first published poem, but I have reproduced it here primarily to illustrate the degree to which the young Wordsworth participated in the poetic fashions of his day.

Wordsworth's admiration for Helen Maria Williams was genuine, even though he would not reprint the sonnet in his lifetime. Williams did not become for Wordsworth what Bowles became for Coleridge, but he does seem to have appreciated, and to some degree remembered her work. In Wordsworth's letter to Dyce quoted in chapter three above, Helen Maria Williams is mentioned along with Charlotte Smith in a recommendation for additions to Dyce's anthology of women poets (Letters 5:260). Smith and Williams were also friends and associates. When Wordsworth visited Charlotte Smith in 1791, he was given — we assume he asked for — a letter of introduction to Williams in Paris, a letter he was unable to use and which does not seem to have survived.

³ Lonsdale, in the headnote to Smith in his Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, notes that one reviewer, worried by the poet's melancholy, hoped that "the misfortunes she so often hints at, are all imaginary" (366).

Wordsworth had an early and lasting appreciation of the poetry of feeling written by his female contemporaries, these two women in particular. And yet in his sonnet of admiration to Williams he does not actually mention her poetry. Instead, he concentrates on a particular bodily presentation of the woman of sensibility: the physical sign of her tears of pity, and the effect of these tears on the emotions and thoughts of the speaker. Despite its “purple” diction, Wordsworth’s poem does possess a certain complexity. The sonnet elaborates one of the central images of the Age of Sensibility, the woman weeping out of pity, and creates from a static tableau a layered narrative of sympathy: a tale of distress causes tears to flow from the woman of feeling, which tears in turn move the poet, the man of feeling, to tears himself. The poem reaches for and attempts to enact that oxymoronic cliché of the Age of Sensibility — “dear delicious pain.” This pain, which is close to being a deathly swoon (“life left my loaded heart, and closing eye”) recalls to the poet the suffering of the “wanderer,” whose narrated misfortune had caused the first tear. This completed circle of affection is offered as proof of the manifold virtues of the woman of feeling at its centre. She mediates the moving narrative (which we never actually hear) and by the end of the poem has been brought close to the speaker and the reader, finally being addressed as “thee” rather than “she.” In his early adulthood, Wordsworth attempted to approach this figure of the woman of sensibility both rhetorically in his poetry and actually in his life. His efforts to visit Helen Maria Williams on his second trip to France, and his actual visit to Charlotte Smith shortly before, both evidence a desire on



his part for a more direct knowledge of this new type of writing woman.⁴

The attempt by Coleridge to masculinize Bowles, which we noted in the previous chapter, is one indication that femininity was seen by some male poets as a limitation of the poetry of sensibility, a hazard. Although Wordsworth was eventually described by Coleridge as having “[o]f all the men I ever knew ... the least femineity in his mind” (Table Talk 2:391), his poetry would explore, almost obsessively, the meaning of sympathy and of social and domestic love. This exploration was no doubt influenced by the strong feminine bias of the poetry of sensibility, the dominant mode of new poetry during his youth. The rhetorical gesture we see in his first published poem, in which the female poet of sensibility is elevated to an icon of sympathy, while at the same time her role as writer is occluded, may indicate Wordsworth’s more subtle and aggressive reaction to the same feminization of melancholy that prompted Coleridge’s gestures of defense.

2. A Theory of Influence

As Wordsworth’s talent matured, his own originality came to dominate, and echoes of his contemporaries, even Coleridge, become exceedingly rare. Charlotte Smith herself made fewer borrowings from other poets in her later sonnets and other poems, and perhaps all original poets find less use for the phrasing and diction of others as they

⁴ Another work in Wordsworth’s juvenilia that indicates a Della Cruscan apprenticeship is “To Lesbia” (306), adapted from Catullus. Sappho was a classical model for the Della Cruscans.

establish their own particular style. Nor should we be particularly surprised that Wordsworth associates himself, in his mature sonnets and in the blank verse, with an undeniably great poet of the past rather than with Charlotte Smith or Helen Maria Williams, contemporaries of his youth. The influence of Milton's sonnets on Wordsworth's sonnets, and the influence of Paradise Lost on the Prelude, are serious and complex inheritances. In the sonnets themselves Wordsworth addresses Milton in full consciousness of influence.

In her dissertation "Wordsworth and the Feminized Sonnet," R. M. Ralston expands upon an insight first expressed by Bishop C. Hunt, whom she quotes early on in her argument:

Wordsworth is sometimes thought to have begun writing sonnets on his own because he happened to read Milton's one day in 1802. Clearly such a view is an oversimplification. Milton's sonnets of course were important to Wordsworth, but he owes a considerable debt to the minor sonneteers (Hunt 87)

This oversimplification was not initiated by critics, but by Wordsworth himself. When Wordsworth collected his sonnets into one volume in 1838, he stated in the "Advertisement" that his "... admiration of some of the sonnets of Milton first tempted me write in that form" (qtd. Ralston 1). None of Wordsworth's few early sonnets — those which show the influence of the female poets of sensibility most clearly — were reprinted in this collection, and thus Wordsworth's avowal of Miltonic inspiration is appropriate to the general tenor of the sonnets of his mature period. Although Milton wrote relatively

few sonnets — twenty-three in all — they embraced enough variety of theme, for all their Petrarchan regularity of form, to serve as a flexible model, ranging from the political to the elegiac. What they do not include is a model for the sonnet of “feminine” sensibility.

Ralston cites the Fenwick notes, dictated in 1843, for further evidence of Wordsworth’s oversimplification of the influence of his forbear

.. one afternoon in 1801, my Sister read to me the sonnets of Milton. I had long been well acquainted with them, but I was particularly struck on that occasion by the dignified simplicity and majestic harmony that runs through most of them. I took fire, if I may be allowed to say so, and produced three sonnets the same afternoon, the first I ever wrote except an irregular one at school. The only one I distinctly remember is “I grieved for Buonaparte.” (Poetical Works 3:417)

Contrary to what he says here, Wordsworth did write sonnets before 1801, though there are less than ten and most of them are from the juvenilia, that is, from before 1790. From 1801 to the end of his career, on the other hand, Wordsworth’s sonnets number in the hundreds. Nonetheless, the early precedents are enough to prompt Ralston to call his statement “inaccurate and misleading” (1). Strictly speaking, it is, although we should perhaps make allowances for the lapse of time, as well as the poet’s desire to forget some of his very early works. Wordsworth also seems to be employing a technical distinction with the word “irregular,” discounting his earlier sonnets because of their formal irregularity. His mature sonnets would be almost exclusively in the “regular” rhyme scheme, Petrarchan or Miltonic, while irregular sonnets, as we saw in chapter 5, were

characteristically sonnets of high sensibility such as Charlotte Smith's.

According to the Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, recorded at the time rather than in retrospect, Wordsworth's moment of Miltonic inspiration in sonnet-writing came in 1802 rather than 1801. Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry for May 21st, 1802 contains the following: "Wm wrote two sonnets on Buonaparte after I had read Milton's sonnets to him" (Journals 127).⁵ This journal entry describes what could only be called a moment of distinctly Miltonic inspiration, and it also directs us to a particular sonnet that Wordsworth would later recall composing under Milton's strong influence. One of Ralston's most convincing points is that "I grieved for Buonaparte," for all its political emphasis, develops the idea that "Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood ..." were lacking in the character of Napoleon — not a diagnosis we could easily ascribe to a fresh reading of Milton (Ralston 180).

There is another entry from Dorothy's journals (noted by Hunt and Ralston alike) supporting a serious qualification of Wordsworth's claim that Milton was his sole inspiration for the prolific output of sonnets between 1802 and 1807:

24 December 1802, Christmas Eve. William is now sitting by me at ½ past

10 o'clock. I have been beside him ever since tea running the heel of a

stocking, repeating some of his sonnets to him, listening to his own

repeating, reading some of Milton's and the Allegro and Penseroso

[B]eloved William is turning over the leaves of Charlotte Smith's sonnets

⁵ The sonnet "I grieved for Buonaparte ..." is one of these two sonnets mentioned by Dorothy. It was published in 1802 with the title "1801," which may have been a kind of back-dating by the author to the time of inspiration rather than composition.

(Journals 163-64)

It would be fascinating to know what Wordsworth thought of these sonnets in 1802, some ten years after taking them with him to visit their author. Unfortunately we have no record of his opinion after this re-reading — only this brief mention by his sister. And Dorothy does not mention what poems, if any, he was inspired to write at this time.

As Ralston says, “Wordsworth’s acknowledgements of his debts to the writers of the feminized sonnet were faint, patronizing, and long after the fact” (Ralston 19). It is true that Wordsworth did not credit the female sonneteers with a formative influence on the sonnets of his mature period, and expressly took Milton’s sonnets as his general — and by implication sole — inspiration. But it is also true that what we might call Wordsworth’s major sonnets are more original than his earlier works, more entirely his own. And in many ways they are less feminine — or to be precise, more Miltonic — in style and subject. Most of Wordsworth’s best-known sonnets come from the large group he called simply “Miscellaneous Sonnets,” and though nearly half of this group are what we might call sonnets dealing with nature, the majority of Wordsworth’s sonnets — about two-thirds of his more than three hundred — could be broadly categorized as either political or historical. Certainly by the end of his career, sonnets on such topics as ecclesiastical history or the death penalty outnumber sonnets on rivers, landscapes, or departed loved ones.

Ralston’s argument hinges upon Wordsworth’s denial of the influence of the “feminized” sonnet. But this denial is both easily proven and impossible to prove, in that any turn toward the “masculine” subjects of history or politics, or any hierarchical placing

of masculine abstractions above female abstractions, could be seen as evidence of such a denial. One could as easily argue that the sonnets that make these masculine gestures, as they become more common in Wordsworth's mature poetry, simply show that a feminine influence is being outgrown. Ralston claims that ". . . while Wordsworth attempted to repress or cast off his indebtedness to the eighteenth-century sonnet writers in his later sonnets, this influence continues vitally to affect the sonnets of his most prolific period of sonnet writing from 1802 to 1807" (Ralston 5). But when she comes to explore this influence in detail, there is little evidence to be found of a positive nature, and her argument proceeds by considering the absence rather than the presence of a "feminized" style of sonnet-writing in the mature Wordsworth. Ralston notes a few slight instances of specific influence by individual authors, for example the thematic similarity between Smith's sonnets 26 and 32, which remember Otway, and Wordsworth's "Remembrance of Collins" (Ralston 176). As Ralston notes, however, this poem was not a sonnet. The problem here lies not in Ralston's agenda of emphasizing Wordsworth's failure to give credit, but rather in the overly general characterization of a "feminine" style in the first place, coupled with a narrow focus on a single poetic sub-genre. The constructive result of such a method is that the themes of gender in Wordsworth's sonnets are revealed in complex association with his style. But what also occurs in such an argument is that the distinctive qualities of individual female sonneteers are blurred, and the curious play of genre that is a part of Smith's influence on Wordsworth becomes invisible. The rhetorical force of Ralston's argument is further undermined by the fact that the sonnets of W. L. Bowles appear to be as influential for Wordsworth as those of the female poets. As we

have seen, Bowles's influence served to obscure the feminized sonnet as a creation of female poets, and was felt or at least described by Coleridge as a masculine rather than a feminine influence.

The problem of the over-generalization of gender is not limited to enthusiastic dissertations written by women. A prominent male critic venturing into feminist analysis is just as likely to make the mistake of obscuring the woman artist under the category of women's writing. Here, for example, is a passage from David Simpson's "Figuring Class, Sex, and Gender: What Is the Subject of Wordsworth's 'Gypsies'?" (1989):

If Curran is correct to find in the works of Charlotte Smith the exemplary precursor of poetic mannerisms that "in a few years were to become identifiably Wordsworth's," ["I Altered" 202] then we must suspect the pressure of an identification that was not at all limited to the poet's confessed youthful admiration for the works of Helen Maria Williams ... but which must have persisted at least through his early and middle career: the pressure of the female precursor. (162)

Simpson, of course, has not chosen Charlotte Smith's influence as his topic, but an individual Wordsworth poem. By proposing we read with "... the pressure of the female precursor" in mind, however, he has pre-empted the possibility we might read with Charlotte Smith's influence in mind. This is not to say that Simpson overlooks any obvious influence of Charlotte Smith on Wordsworth's "Gypsies," but after invoking her name he does allow his gender analysis to rest on such familiar imagistic paradigms as male/female, active/passive, sun/moon, and individual/community. This effectively

obviates the need to look carefully for concrete precedents among Wordsworth's female precursors, and comes near to casting the female poets in same prejudicial light as the gypsies themselves.

Simpson might have noted the similarity, or rather the telling contrast, between Wordsworth's "Gypsies" and his sequel to the Female Vagrant's tale that unfolds in his "Adventures on Salisbury Plain" and later in Guilt and Sorrow. In these poems, the central female figure, rejected by mainstream society, lives happily among a band of "rough potters" specializing in "midnight theft" (Guilt and Sorrow 406, 416). She enjoys the communal aspect of their economy, although the lifestyle of a thief "ill ... suit[s]" her (415). A very sunny moon, with the same speed but not the same admonitory gaze as in "Gypsies," presides over the action: "... jocund June / Rolled fast along the sky his warm and genial moon" (413-14). Given the connections between Wordsworth's "Salisbury Plain" and Charlotte Smith's poetry, some of which were introduced in chapter 6, and the further similarity between his "Female Vagrant" and Smith's "Female Exile," which we will discuss later in this chapter, it may be that there is a specific, though subtle and subtilized pressure being exerted on Wordsworth's "Gypsies" by a specific female precursor. I have found no mention of Gypsies in Smith's work, but she does refer to herself as having "fallen among thieves" — an allusion to the tale of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30) — in her Preface to The Banished Man ([Irish ed.]vii).

The literary fact of the female precursor is more than a new background to Romanticism proper. The influence of individual authors such as Charlotte Smith, when fully elaborated, can be seen as fields of study in themselves, and not as metonymic

counters for a larger, ostensibly homogeneous influence of women writers. Simpson employs the same collapsed series that Wordsworth himself used when he suggested the addition of more sonnets by Williams and Smith to Dyce's anthology of female "poetesses." The mere addition of female poets to each other does not establish a general influence of women's writing. To suppose it does obscures not only what Smith and Williams have in common — their political sentiments in the early years of the French Revolution, for example — but also the differing influences of each writer. What such addition and generalization does efficiently establish is a major/minor distinction once again, in which Wordsworth's achievement is greater than a sum of previous parts: women's poetry.

3. Political Sonnets

Identifying a particular style — perceptibly gendered or otherwise — with a particular group of authors can lead to other, more unreliable generalizations. This occurs when Ralston claims that "[n]either Bowles nor the women sonnet writers who influenced Wordsworth most strongly wrote any explicitly political sonnets, although their poems display an implicit radical sympathy for the French Revolution" (179). Notwithstanding the strong qualification she offers, Ralston's claim seriously misrepresents Charlotte Smith. One of the distinguishing aspects of her sonnets among those of her female contemporaries is their Miltonic interest in political and public themes.

The political is not a dominant strain in Smith's sonnets, as it would be in her blank verse. In the sonnets, melancholy personal feelings come first, but Smith was not strict in excluding politics from the sonnet form. Some melancholy personal feelings, after all, are profoundly political. In a sonnet that first appeared in Smith's novel Marchmont (1796) political concerns are the explicit theme. Sonnet 76 is entitled "To a young man entering the world," and the parental poet admonishes in the concluding sestet:

....

Not, where mistaken Glory, in the field
 Rears her red banner, be thou ever found;
 But, against proud Oppression raise the shield
 Of Patriot daring—So shalt thou renown'd
 For the best virtues live; or that denied
 May'st die, as Hampden or as Sydney died!

(Poems 65)

Algernon Sidney and John Hampden were executed for opposition to Charles II and became martyrs for the cause of constitutional liberty. The poem as a whole exhorts the "young man" to resist the temptations of the "active life," where "... titles, wealth and power / May all be purchased ..." (3-4). Within this broad warning against ambition is the specific implication that title, like wealth and power, is a quantity and not a quality, to be had at a financial but also an ethical cost. The sonnet is driven by the political sentiment ascribed to the young man: a "... high disdain / Of Tyrants ..." (7-8). This sonnet is no less political than Wordsworth's "Great men have been among us ..." (Poems in Two Volumes

166), which invokes at least one of the same political heroes, “[t]he later Sidney ...” (3). Smith’s anti-monarchical fervour differs from Wordsworth’s anti-French fervour, but both are appealing to the same liberal or parliamentary political heritage. However much the politics of Charlotte Smith in the mid-1790’s differed from Wordsworth’s ten years later, they both include themselves among the friends of Milton the Republican.⁶

In his copy of the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789), Wordsworth would have read the sonnet “Written at Penshurst, in autumn 1788,” in which the poet is inspired by the sight of the ruins of the same Algernon Sidney’s country residence. On “fading canvas” within the manor, the visitor may “love to learn / Sydney’s keen look, and Sacharissa’s grace / ...” (*Poems* 44). The relative rarity in Smith’s sonnets of any explicit reference to political history makes this expression and reiteration of party affiliation all the more striking. Rather than celebrate a monarch or monarchist, or a hero of ancient national mythology, Smith chooses a parliamentary leader, a champion of the Whigs, and a woman who was another sort of heroine, the addressee (under the name “Sacharissa”) of Edmund Waller’s verse (*Poems* 44n).

Although Wordsworth wrote many sonnets that we could call political, he is also renowned for his ability to displace the political aspect of certain topics and understate the

⁶ These parliamentary heroes also appear in Keats’ “Lines Written on 29 May, The Anniversary of the Restoration of Charles II,” a short poem not published in Keats’ lifetime:

...
 Ah! when I hear each traitorous lying bell,
 ’Tis gallant Sidney’s, Russell’s, Vane’s sad knell,
 That pains my wounded ear.
 (*Poetical Works* 540)

politics of the historical moment in which he wrote. In recent criticism, our very definitions of Romanticism have taken their cue from the anti-historical tendency in some of Wordsworth's major lyrics. Jerome McGann has observed of "Romantic poems" in general, "that the works tend to develop different sorts of artistic means with which to occlude and disguise their own involvement in a certain nexus of historical relations" (The Romantic Ideology 82). Marjorie Levinson, analysing "Tintern Abbey," argues that "... the primary poetic action is the suppression of the social" and that this "suppression of a historical consciousness is precisely what makes it so Romantic a poem" (Wordsworth's Great Period Poems 37, 45). These generalizations work best, of course, for Wordsworth's early poetry, when he held strong radical opinions, and for the poetry of the late 1790's, when his attitude toward contemporary history was in flux but had not entirely lost its radical cast.⁷ By the time Wordsworth returned to the sonnet around the turn of the century, the Revolution had been commandeered by Napoleon, and the poet was coming to terms with a new-found, old-fashioned patriotism. Thus, the politics of Wordsworth's sonnets is largely the conservative politics of his middle years.

Charlotte Smith, by contrast, made little attempt to disguise her radicalism, and was not one to wait until a controversy died down before commenting on political matters. Thus, despite the much larger proportion of political sonnets in Wordsworth's total production, it is possible to find a comparison in which two sonnets that are quite similar

⁷ Even Nicholas Roe, a critic who resists the tendency of the New Historicists to emphasize the displacement of history in Wordsworth's poetry, admits that in the 1790's and in The Prelude Wordsworth's life and poetry are marked by "secrecy," and that certain facts have been "deliberately obscured" (The Politics of Nature 101).

some respects highlight Charlotte Smith's greater willingness to introduce political concerns. Smith's sonnet 69 appeared in the second volume of Elegiac Sonnets (1797):

Clouds, gold and purple, o'er the westering ray
 Threw a bright veil, and catching lights between,
 Fell on the glancing sail, that we had seen
 With soft, but adverse winds, throughout the day
 Contending vainly: as the vessel nears,
 Encreasing numbers hail it from the shore;
 Lo! on the deck a pallid form appears,
 Half wondering to behold himself once more
 Approach his home — And now he can discern
 His cottage thatch amid surrounding trees;
 Yet, trembling, dreads lest sorrow or disease
 Await him there, embittering his return:
 But all he loves are safe; with heart elate,
 Tho' poor and plunder'd, he absolves his fate!

(Poems 60)

In both its initial scene and in its method of development — that of an observed and subtly narrated approach across the water — this sonnet bears no small resemblance to Wordsworth's sonnet 8 from the "Miscellaneous Sonnets" published in 1807:

With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh,
 Like stars in heaven, and joyously it showed;

Some lying fast at anchor in the road,
 Some veering up and down, one knew not why.
 A goodly Vessel did I then espy
 Come like a Giant from a haven broad;
 And lustily along the Bay she strode,
 Her tackling rich, and of apparel high.
 This Ship was nought to me, nor I to her,
 Yet I pursued her with a Lover's look;
 This Ship to all the rest did I prefer:
 When will she turn, and whither? She will brook
 No tarrying; where she comes the winds must stir:
 On went she, and due north her journey took.

(Poems in Two Volumes 142)

Whereas Smith sets her scene in order to introduce the ransomed prisoner of war, Wordsworth chooses to narrate his observations of a ship which means “nought” to him. The question of the ship’s destination is emphasized but unanswered; the question of whether it is a merchant or a war ship is never raised. One would want to set these two sonnets side by side for their structural similarities alone — it is a happy coincidence for my present argument that they show Charlotte Smith in a political mood and Wordsworth in an aesthetic mood. Wordsworth was fully capable, as in the sonnet “Composed by the Sea-Side, near Calais,” of seeing and addressing the political ramifications of distant prospects viewed from the seashore. But just as Charlotte Smith’s sonnets were not

exclusively expressive of personal melancholy, so Wordsworth's sonnets were not always political.

The political content of the three Smith sonnets I have mentioned thus far is perhaps not enough to register strongly on a reader of her sonnets as a whole. Peggy Willard Gledhill, classifying the sonnets of Charlotte Smith by their structural patterns, finds one unclassifiable sonnet that she calls political. "Sonnet 83 is clearly an anti-war poem, and as such is unique in her collection" (Gledhill 154). If we include as political the three sonnets mentioned above, however, we find that there is actually a characteristic structure in this small group. With the exception of the sonnet 76, "To a young man entering the world," they introduce politics as a visible aspect of what first appears as a "natural" scene. In sonnet 46, the outward prospect of ruined Penhurst shifts in perspective to the portraiture within. In sonnet 69 a distant ship lost in the beauty of sunset approaches only to reveal the ransomed seaman and his growing anxiety. In sonnet 83, the scene is again a sea-scape:

The upland Shepherd, as reclined he lies
 On the soft turf that clothes the mountain brow,
 Marks the bright Sea-line mingling with the skies;
 Or from his course celestial, sinking slow,
 The Summer sun in purple radiance low,
 Blaze on the western waters; the wide scene
 Magnificent, and tranquil, seems to spread
 Even o'er the Rustic's breast a joy serene,

When, like dark plague-spots by the Demons shed,
 Charged deep with death, upon the waves, far seen,
 Move the war-freighted ships; and fierce and red,
 Flash their destructive fire — The mangled dead
 And dying victims then pollute the flood.
 Ah! thus man spoils Heaven's glorious works with blood!

(Poems 72)

The moral here is as strong as the scene is graphic, and the sonnet is admittedly, perhaps deliberately, heavy-handed. It achieves a dizzying condensation of time and visual distance, such that the “mangled dead” seem to burst rather than float towards us out of the distance.

Although Wordsworth's “Composed by the Sea-Side Near Calais” (Poems in Two Volumes 155) is, if reluctantly, a poem in support of the war with France, it employs something of the same method, visually drawing the political out of an observed natural scene. The evening star “on the horizon's brink” (2) becomes an emblem of England, but England is also concretely visible in the extreme distance, “There! that dusky spot ...”(9). At the end are we brought into the speaker's proximity on shore, and reminded that Wordsworth's is an Englishman in hostile France. There is a similar pattern in Wordsworth's equally famous sonnet, “September, 1802” (Poems in Two Volumes 145) wherein the perspective is reversed, and from England Wordsworth contemplates France across the channel.

These resemblances are slight, but we should remember that even with Milton as a

model, Wordsworth had relatively few examples of the political sonnet to look back upon. Of Milton's 23 sonnets, no more than half are political and none combine politics and natural description. Coleridge developed one sort of Miltonic political sonnet in his heroic character sketches, the early sonnet "effusions" to individual figures, and Wordsworth adapted this form as well, in his sonnet critiques of Buonaparte and elsewhere. Southey's political sonnets of the mid-1790's are also effusive or hortatory in a political vein: some draw vivid figures of social victims — notably the African slave — but they do not place the author within a politicized natural landscape. Wordsworth's more "scenic" political sonnets do not have a precedent in Milton or in these contemporaries, but they do have a precedent in the rare but innovative political sonnets of Charlotte Smith. This is one influence that Bishop C. Hunt misses entirely in his discussion. Indeed, it is in Wordsworth's political sonnets that Hunt locates his "true originality." After demonstrating Smith's role in the development of the "poetry of travel or tourism" and noting the effect of this general trend on Wordsworth's descriptive sonnets, he distinguishes Wordsworth by stressing his ability to fuse "the short, meditative lyric about 'lonely feelings' and 'the scenery of nature,' with the 'public' voice of Milton's political and patriotic sonnets" (88-89). This combination — this innovation — was actually attempted first by Charlotte Smith

4. The Sonnet and Blank Verse

Given its lineage, it is surprising that the sonnet ever took a political turn. In The Birth of the Modern Mind: Self, Consciousness, and the Invention of the Sonnet (1989), Paul Oppenheimer makes the large and, at first, surprising argument that “[m]odern thought and literature begin with the sonnet” (3). According to this argument, the Italian sonnet, as composed by Giacomo Lentino in the 11th century, “... is the first lyric form since the fall of the Roman Empire intended not for music or performance but for silent reading” (3).⁸ As such, it has been a profoundly influential genre. Clifford Siskin has developed a similar argument for the sonnet’s central role in a later period, in the lyric turn that defines Romanticism:

... Romanticism is an age of lyric in that the hierarchy of genres was ... lyricised; that is, what we have come to identify historically as lyric features and their effects, such as the turn to the reader and spontaneity, were incorporated with increasing frequency in increasing numbers of forms.

(Historicity 11)

Siskin goes on to argue that “... if we are looking for a formal model for Romanticism, along the line of the couplet for the early eighteenth century, we need to turn ... to the

⁸ Oppenheimer goes to Keats for an affirmation of “silent” poetry — “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter ...” Unfortunately for his argument, these lines are from the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and not a sonnet.

sonnet" (29).⁹

If we consider the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century landmarks in another poetic genre, the blank verse poem — a genre that does have classical precedents — we see that it, too, takes a lyric turn away from the public voice toward the private voice, away from mythic narrative and didacticism and toward descriptive and subjective discourse. In the long blank verse poem the lyric turn is registered in a shift of speaker as well as subject matter, from the epic narrator and religious narrative we find in Paradise Lost, to the philosopher, churchman or literary critic in the eighteenth century with his moral and aesthetic topics, and thence to the private individual, and the desultory seriousness of Cowper. Wordsworth's short blank verse poem "Tintern Abbey" and the 1799 Prelude show that this shift has gone even further: not only is the speaker the poet as a private individual, but the chosen theme of the poem is the growth, or autobiography, of the poet's mind. In this respect, the sonnet and the long blank verse poem are not as different as they outwardly seem. While the sonnet is formally the shortest and most restrictive poetic genre of the period and the blank verse poem is formally the longest and least restrictive, they are among the genres in which the lyric turn of early Romanticism is most dramatically displayed. The sonnet was more confessional, and the blank verse poem more philosophical, but by the end of the eighteenth century both had become conventionally associated with a meditative individual voice. Indeed, we might suggest that the political turn in sonnet-writing from Milton onward, though less pronounced or

⁹ Siskin credits the germ of this idea to John Louis Rowlett, "The Generic Wordsworth" (Diss. U of Virginia 1987).

continuous than the lyric turn in blank verse, was but its complementary effect, a sort of cross-pollinating of the genres.

It is also significant that both blank verse and the sonnet are constructed of iambic pentameters. We recall that Coleridge in his "Introduction" to the sonnets suggests that no rhyme scheme at all might be just as legitimate as the four-only rhyme of the Petrarchan model. Coleridge may well have been thinking of the scene in Thelwall's The Peripatetic (1793) in which the narrator and his friend discuss Charlotte Smith's sonnets, and Ambulator suggests that, to his taste, there is ". . . no choice for the sonnet writer, but between blank verse and the elegiac stanza" (125). The sonnet provided by the Peripatetic himself is without rhyme (122). William Wordsworth, according to Henry Crabb Robinson, once quoted fourteen lines from Paradise Lost "... which he says are a perfect sonnet without rhyme" (Morley, ed. Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers [London: Dent, 1938] 2:484)¹⁰ And Keats has a very musical sonnet in blank verse "O thou whose face hath felt the Winter's wind" (The Complete Poems 228).

Charlotte Smith has no unrhymed sonnets, but she did write two long poems in blank verse. The Emigrants, about 800 lines in length, appeared as a slim book in 1793. Beachy Head, also about 800 lines long, was the main text in the posthumous volume Beachy Head and Other Poems, published in 1807. Many of the thematic concerns that we find in Smith's Elegiac Sonnets — personal sorrow, pity for others, and the ambivalent consolation of natural scenery — also animate her work in blank verse. But the blank

¹⁰ Clifford Siskin has pointed out that the 1850 Prelude is somewhat like a giant sonnet, with fourteen books rather than fourteen lines (Historicity 122).

verse poems engage in political and historical discourse to a much greater degree than the shorter works. The Emigrants concerns itself with contemporary politics and the social displacements caused by the French Revolution. The politics of Beachy Head are more historical, as the poem ventures back many centuries to touch upon the geological and cultural origins of Britain. Both poems are in the same style, a conversational blank verse that moves from the descriptive to the meditative, from the meditative to the hortatory, all within the framework of the speaker's monologue in an outdoor setting.

Smith's blank verse poems, in particular the earlier Emigrants, were not nearly so well received as her sonnets, and for two related reasons. First, it was in her blank verse — and her fiction — that Smith fully engaged the political context of her time, taking a position contrary to the conservative government line. Secondly, she introduced into her blank verse much of the personal complaint with which the sonnets are infused, thus exceeding the norms of the genre, even as it had been modernized by Cowper's The Task. Even though the more literary of the review magazines in the early 1790's tended to be liberal publications, one senses that their objections to the personal aspect of Smith's poem were strengthened by the perceived incompatibility of private and political matters. The European Magazine felt that blank verse was not the "proper measure in which to complain ..." (24:41; qtd. Hilbish 152). The Critical Review was also of the opinion that "... the plaintive strain, though interesting when lightly touched, is too monotonous to be long dwelt upon ..." (9:299), and describes The Emigrants as "... self-condolence, expressed in elegant political language ..." (9:301). On this point the Critical Review attempts to be scathing:

Herself, and not the French emigrant, fills the foreground; begins and ends the piece; and the pity we should naturally feel for those overwhelming and uncommon distresses she describes, is lessened by their being brought into parallel with the inconveniencies of a narrow income or a protracted lawsuit. (9:299)

Hilbish points out that this is an exaggeration of the proportions of The Emigrants, and a misrepresentation of its structure (153). But the Critical Review rightly discerned Smith's intention of placing her own distress "parallel" to those of the emigrés.

Such commentary as this suggests why the author of a blank verse poem begun in the same decade as The Emigrants might have qualms about introducing too many personal details. Wordsworth would write to Beaumont in 1805 that his "Poem on my own life" was approaching 9,000 lines in length, and he expresses his anxiety as to both size and substance: "... an alarming length! and a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself" (Letters 1 586). Nine thousand lines is a lot more than 800, but Wordsworth's focus on himself was not entirely unprecedented, nor is his anxiety about how such a work might be received entirely uninformed. The long, blank verse poem did have conventions in the 1780's and 90's, even though there was a relative freedom of structure and subject. Not going too far in the direction of personal detail was one of these conventions. In the words of the Critical Review, from its review of Smith's The Emigrants, "[b]lank verse requires a fuller cadence and a larger sweep of harmony, than the confined and elegant sonnet" (9:302).

Although by no means a requirement of the genre, there was also an established

tradition of liberal sentiment in eighteenth-century blank verse, a tradition of liberal politics. Thompson's Winter (1726) contained a passionate appeal for prison and legal reform:

... in this rank age,

Much is the patriot's weeding hand requir'd.

The toils of law (what dark insidious men

Have cumbrous added to perplex the truth,

And lengthen simple justice into trade),

How glorious were the day that saw these broke,

And every man within the reach of right!

(312-18)

Joseph Warton in The Enthusiast (1744) idealized the freedom and social justice of the New (English-speaking) World:

Oh who will bear me then to western climes

(Since Virtue leaves our wretched land), to fields

Yet unpolluted with Iberian swords

(233-35)

In Fanny Burney's novel Cecilia (1782) the genre is used as a kind of short-hand, as the eccentric outsider Mr. Albany, whose unsolicited diatribes against wealth ultimately become a normative influence, "runs into blank verse perpetually" (291), even though he does not actually utter poetry. Cowper's The Task (1784) marks a pre-Revolutionary extreme of political moralizing in blank verse, particularly book five, with its long

discussion of political liberty. Hoping prophetically for the destruction of the Bastille, he could claim that

There's not an English heart that would not leap

To hear that ye were fall'n at last ...

...

For he that values liberty confines

His zeal for her predominance within

No narrow bounds; her cause engages him

Wherever pleaded (5:389-97)

Much the way the sonnet took on the stereotype of melancholy, blank verse in the late eighteenth century had become firmly associated with social and moral seriousness, and even with social reform.

Charlotte Smith dedicated The Emigrants to Cowper and acknowledged the influence of The Task (1785). In her dedication she would also notice the prophetic quality of the lines quoted above: "The exquisite Poem ... was published some years before the demolition of regal despotism in France, which, in the fifth book, it seems to foretell ..." (Poems 134). Smith modestly claims that her own poem is "far from aspiring to be considered as an imitation" of Cowper's "inimitable" work (Poems 132). Indeed, The Emigrants is much shorter than The Task and outwardly less ambitious. Despite her modesty, though, Smith manages to allude to several other blank verse precedents in her dedication, bravely inviting comparison and suggesting that Cowper may not have been her only inspiration. She admits to being "... perfectly sensible, that it belongs not to a

feeble and feminine hand to draw the Bow of Ulysses" (Poems 132), an allusion to Homer's Odyssey. To describe the effect of The Task on her imagination, she quotes Milton's Paradise Lost: "The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear / So charming left his voice, that he awhile / Thought him still speaking" (Poems 132; Paradise Lost 8:1-3). Both allusions serve as high praise for Cowper's poem, but they also draw Smith's poem into a larger tradition. Book two begins with an epigraph drawn from Virgil (Poems 149).

Of all Smith's individual poems, The Emigrants is now receiving the most vertiginous reevaluation. From his recent introduction to Smith's Poems (1993), which contains the first republication of The Emigrants in two hundred years, here is Stuart Curran's estimation:

In terms of its sheer craft, The Emigrants is the finest piece of extended blank verse in English between Cowper's The Task (1785) and Wordsworth's unpublished initial version of The Prelude (1799), which like her poem he projected in two books. Its reappearance after two centuries, however, provides more than a missing link; for in its interweaving of the public and private, the political and the personal, its meditative absorption of and sometimes by its surroundings, and its sense of a universal existential crisis, The Emigrants establishes a weighty touchstone against which to measure the major poetic voices of the 1790's (Poems xxiv)

Curran makes one of these measurements in a note to Smith's dedication. After identifying Cowper's The Task as "a major influence on a characteristic mode of Romantic poetry, usually exemplified by Wordsworth's epic of self-development, The Prelude,"

Curran immediately goes on to say that “[t]he first work to establish this vein of self-conscious filtering of reality in a conversational style is Smith’s Emigrants” (Poems 132n). In the following chapter I will take a closer look at the relationship between The Emigrants and The Prelude. For the present, I would simply note that Curran’s editorial commentary on The Emigrants reflects the ironic critical situation created by the re-canonization of Charlotte Smith. Her single most substantial poetic work can be presented now only in a dual and ambivalent role: as a touchstone and at the same time as a missing link — a major work, and a footnote.

With so little critical work to draw upon when introducing the republication of The Emigrants, Stuart Curran is in the peculiar position of having to anticipate future work: “A later critical perspective might wish in The Emigrants to accentuate the link between the law and arbitrary state power as instruments of an interiorized exile and to engage the complex political indictment that results ...” (xxv). Although I will not be providing this particular perspective on the poem in the present discussion, I will suggest that any approach to the “complex political indictment” we find in Charlotte Smith’s The Emigrants also needs to consider the equally complex political indictment that is implicit in the poem’s critical history. The Emigrants is a special case of obscurity even within Charlotte Smith’s canon. Unlike her first book of poetry, which went into rapid and sustained reprints, The Emigrants, taking up new themes in a new genre, was not called for again by the printers. As a rare text, the poem was often — and early — dropped from lists of Smith’s works. More importantly, perhaps, it was never acknowledged as a touchstone or a link by any of the poets of the day, including William Wordsworth.

5. The Politics of The Emigrants

In The Emigrants, Charlotte Smith meditates upon sights, figures and narratives that are at once personal and political. The two books of the poem are structured around two separate encounters with a group of French emigrés stranded on the English coast. These encounters bridge the private and public worlds, as a sea-side promenade becomes a witnessing of international displacements. As in many of Smith's sonnets, the scene is the south coast of England. But in this text the scenic coastal towns are havens — and not necessarily friendly havens — for those fleeing political upheaval in France. Smith locates herself within a natural scene that has been transformed into a social scene by the revolution and war. Each book of the poem moves, if not seamlessly then at least purposefully, from natural description and personal melancholy to reported narrative, political reflection and prayerful exhortation.

In the first fifty lines of book one, before the emigrés are mentioned or introduced, the author establishes that she herself is the victim of injustice. After an opening description of an autumn sunrise by the sea, “that with reluctance gives / To this cold northern Isle, its shortened day,” Smith laments generally, “Alas! how few the morning wakes to joy ...” and invokes a list of the complaints of life: “... doubts, diseases, abject dread of Death, / And faithless friends, and fame and fortune lost ...” (1.12-16). But soon a focus is established on social evils rather than mortal accidents, with the formula that despite God's benevolent intentions “Man, misguided Man / Mars the fair work that he

was bid enjoy, / And makes himself the evil he deplores ..." (32-34). In the next line the author turns to her own circumstances

How often, when my weary soul recoils
 From proud oppression, and from legal crimes
 (For such are in this Land, where the vain boast
 Of equal Law is mockery, while the cost
 Of seeking for redress is sure to plunge
 Th'already injur'd to more certain ruin
 And the wretch starves, before his Counsel pleads)
 How often do I half abjure Society,
 And sigh for some lone Cottage .. (1:35-42)

Here we have a clear intersection of Romantic themes: political indignation and the resultant, but ambivalent, desire for rural retirement

Self-absorption reaches a peak in the early lines of The Emigrants as the speaker compares herself to Sisyphus, "... the wretch, / Who ceaseless, up the steep acclivity, / Was doom'd to heave the still rebounding rock ..." (68-70) But then she undercuts her own position with a reflexive rhetorical turn that introduces the emigrés:

Ah! Mourner — cease these wailings; cease and learn,
 That not the Cot sequester'd ..
 ..
 Or more substantial farm
 . nor the statelier dome

...

... not these

Or any of the buildings new and trim

With windows circling towards the restless Sea

...

Can shut out for an hour the spectre Care.

(1:74-90)

The group of emigrés appears “... in witness of this mournful truth” (94). Thus there is a general moral framework for these figures, as well as the personal framework of the speaker’s melancholy seaside walk. But it is the political framework which receives the most surprising treatment.

The Emigrants appeared shortly after Smith’s most controversial novel, Desmond (1792), and belongs to what Hilbish has called her “French period” (151). It is an overtly political work, but in a different key than Desmond, which had been largely optimistic in its balance of enthusiasm for the revolution and skepticism about politics. Between the composition of Desmond in late 1791 and early 1792 and the composition of The Emigrants one year later, affairs in France had taken a violent turn and hopes for peace within — or with — France were fast disappearing. In Desmond the characters observed and debated the early phase of the Revolution and its more abstract principles, and the author was sympathetic with what appeared to be the liberation of France from the tyranny of ancient aristocratic privilege. In The Emigrants, some of those very aristocrats become objects of sympathy, and the author’s politics manifest themselves primarily in

resistance to the war between England and France and the Francophobia that it exploited — a resistance which places the victims of the Revolution and of the Revolutionary wars on an equal footing

Book one of The Emigrants is set during “a morning in November, 1792” (Poems 135). Readers would have been reminded of very recent political events. France had been at war with Austria and Prussia since April, and more recently the King had been deposed, the Republic declared, and blood spilled senselessly and chaotically in the September massacres. Although Robespierre’s time in power was a year away, The Terror had, in many respects, already begun. There had been a second revolution in French politics, one in which violence was playing a much greater part. Book two of The Emigrants is set just four months later, on “an afternoon in April, 1793” (Poems 149). These intervening months were crucial ones in French and British history, and this change in the larger context is darkly implicit in the speaker’s developing rhetoric. During the winter of 1792-93, King Louis had been executed and England had joined in the continental wars against Revolutionary France. What had seemed a dismal prospect for lovers of peace and liberty in the fall, seemed an even worse prospect in the spring. Although much of this is left implicit, the poem’s openness to this historical moment, combined with the author’s own personal melancholy, creates what Stuart Curran calls a “sense of a universal existential crisis” (xxiv). The anachronism of the word “existential,” which nonetheless is fitting, is an index of the true novelty of Smith’s tone and topic.

F.M.A. Hilbish argues that “Mrs. Smith did not enter into political discussions in this poem” but rather “attempted to break down political and national prejudices” (282). In

war-time, however, such an attempt would be nothing if not political, and could easily have been taken as contrary to the national interest. Smith's choice of the French emigrés as her chief subject allows her to have her politics both ways, or at least try. The advantage of Smith's choice of subject is that it gives the appearance of placing the author on the side of the deposed aristocrats and clergy. Smith exploits this advantage by parleying her pity for the emigrés into a new affirmation of democratic and pacifist values, all without giving voice to the revolutionary party. None of the emigrants, of course, is a Republican. On one hand, The Emigrants can strike a revolutionary pose, and on the other it can lament the recent events in France. Similarly, the poem praises constitutional British freedoms at the same time as it attacks British privilege, law, and national prejudice.

Toward the climax of book one, Smith rhetorically invites England's own oppressed to take a lesson from the exiles:

Poor vagrant wretches! outcasts of the world!
 Whom no abode receives, no parish owns;
 Roving, like Nature's commoners, the land
 That boasts such general plenty: if the sight
 Of wide-extended misery softens yours
 Awhile, suspend your murmurs! — here behold
 The strange vicissitudes of fate — ...
 The exil'd Nobles, from their country driven

(303-310)

Then Smith calls forward another group to see what she sees, and learn a different lesson:

Ye venal, worthless hirelings of a Court!
 Ye pampered Parasites! whom Britons pay
 For forging fetters for them; rather here
 Study a lesson that concerns ye much;
 And, trembling, learn, that if oppress'd too long
 The raging multitude, to madness stung,
 Will turn on their oppressors; and, no more
 By sounding titles and parading forms
 Bound like tame victims, will redress themselves!
 Then swept away by resistless torrent,
 Not only all your pomp may disappear,
 But, in the tempest lost, fair Order sink
 Her decent head, and lawless Anarchy
 O'erturn celestial Freedom's radiant throne; —
 As now in Gallia; where Confusion, born
 Of party rage and selfish love of rule,
 Sully the noblest cause that ever warm'd
 The heart of Patriot Virtue

(329-346)

Conscious of the radicalism of this tirade, Smith provides a sarcastic rather than apologetic note to the last line: “This sentiment will probably renew against me the

indignation of those, who have an interest in asserting that no such virtue any where exists.” She is alluding here to negative critical and popular responses to the politics in Desmond, and implying that such a response is narrowly nationalistic and deeply cynical. The Emigrants reframes Smith’s political sentiments to accord with recent developments, namely the veering of the Revolution from its original principles. Nonetheless, Patriot Virtue remains an international love of Liberty, rather than an exclusive national love of the British status quo.

Carefully avoiding what might be construed as traitorous sentiments, Smith is able to hope for British moral victory and at the same time morally condemn the war between Britain and France:

English hearts,

Of just compassion ever own the sway,

As truly as our element, the deep,

Obeys the mild dominion of the Moon —

..

Thus may'st thou, Britain, triumph! —

.

..

— May thine

Be still such bloodless laurels!

(l. 360-369)

To conclude book one of her poem, Smith alludes to the British commander of Gibraltar, who in the recent war with Spain was

Illustrious rather from the crowds he sav'd
 From flood and fire, than from the ranks who fell
 Beneath his valour! — Actions such as these,
 Like incense rising to the Throne of Heaven,
 Far better justify the pride, that swells
 In British bosoms, than the deafening roar
 Of Victory from a thousand brazen throats,
 That tell with what success wide-wasting War
 Has by our brave Compatriots thinned the world.

(1:376-382)

The apocalyptic note of this conclusion again predicts victory and condemns war. The bitter irony that destabilizes “success” and “brave Compatriots” is contained — barely — by the author’s faith in non-military British strengths, a love of liberty and a concern for the welfare of others.

Smith introduces the political agenda of her poem plainly enough in her dedication. She begins on a neutral or reconciliatory note, and justifies her choice of the emigrés as “interesting objects” of poetic “delineation” by hoping that “this painful exile” — and, by modest implication, her portrayal of it — “may finally lead to the extirpation of the reciprocal hatred so unworthy of great and enlightened nations ...” (*Poems* 132-133). Her own perspective comes to the fore when she deduces the harmful effects of a “national aversion [that] has acquired new force by the dreadful scenes which have been acted in France during the last summer ..” The “worst effect” of this prejudice is that “... by

confounding the original cause with the wretched catastrophes that have followed its ill-management ... the very name of Liberty has not only lost the charm it used to have in British ears, but many, who have written, or spoken, in its defense, have been stigmatized as promoters of Anarchy, and enemies to the prosperity of their country” (Poems 133-34). Smith includes herself in this group of stigmatized — and heroized — writers. This is but one of the ways in which she aligns herself with the emigrants she describes, and attempts in her own way to confound the distinction between British and French oppressions. And yet The Emigrants was by no means a safe text, nor were the author’s broad sympathies enough to disguise her libertarian politics. By lamenting the chaotic massacres of the “summer” of 1792, for instance, without giving even greater weight to the regicide of the following winter, Smith may well have allowed her priorities to remain eminently readable despite her diplomatic devices.

The stigmatization of radicalism under the politics of a war-time conservatism in public opinion extended into literature, and even into literary tradition. Smith’s consciousness of this literary “chill” is revealed in her sarcastic note to a rhetorical question in book one, concerning a ci-devant aristocrat among the emigrés:

... could he learn,

That worth alone is true Nobility?
 And that the peasant who, “amid the sons
 Of Reason, Valour, Liberty, and Virtue,
 Displays distinguish'd merit, is a Noble
 Of Nature’s own creation!” — If even here,

If in this land of highly vaunted Freedom,
 Even Britons controvert the unwelcome truth,
 Can it be relish'd by the sons of France?
 (1:239-244)

Smith takes the opportunity to comment on the state of public and critical opinion in her note to the quotation within this passage: “These lines are Thomson’s, and are among those sentiments which are now called (when used by living writers), not common-place declamation, but sentiments of dangerous tendency” (Poems 144).

In Cowper’s letter to Hayley, April 1, 1793, concerning the about-to-be-published manuscript of The Emigrants, we have a good index of the delicacy of the political climate at the time. Cowper could see that siding with the emigrés would be no guarantee of political acceptability:

Were the poem my own, I should in the course of it take occasion of
 seasonable and righteous invective against the National Convention In
 short I think that the Exiles themselves cannot be treated with too much
 tenderness (and the more of this appears the more popular will the poem
 be) nor the tyrants in Paris with too much severity. But whether my views
 of this matter coincide with yours and Mrs. Smith’s, I doubt, and in this
 uncertainty I find a check that hinders me when I would suggest any thing
 on the subject (Cowper Letters and Prose 4:319)

The war with France began a long “season” of such “checks,” self-imposed and otherwise,

on individual and collective freedom of speech.¹¹

Charlotte Smith was predisposed by personal experience toward a sympathy for the powerless and a contempt for the powerful, but she was also predisposed, by the same long frustrations with the legal system and her husband's derelictions, toward a certain bitter pessimism. Hers was perhaps the ideal position from which to develop an early approbation of the aims of the French Revolution and an equally early disaffection with its wayward and violent course. Thus, *The Emigrants* is the first treatment of the French Revolution by an English poet in blank verse, and one of the earliest texts of any kind to lament the effects of the Revolution while upholding its original principles. As early as 1793, before Coleridge's "Religious Musings" (1794) or "France: An Ode" (1799) and well before Wordsworth's "The French Revolution" (1809), Charlotte Smith was able to make a coherent poetic construct out of a combination of private meditation and international politics. Some political questions, both immediate and theoretical, are kept in abeyance in Charlotte Smith's poem, but the French Revolution, in its chaotic rather than idyllic aspect, is kept directly before us in the figures of the emigrants and in the political tenor of the author's meditations.

In all references to the "distracted Country" of the emigrés, we find a crucial qualification: in France the "... name of Freedom [is] misapplied, and much abused by lawless anarchy" (1: 98-100); "... celestial Freedom's radiant throne" has been

¹¹ For a thorough discussion of the repressive legislation enacted in the 1790's to counter radicalism in England, see Clive Emsley's articles, "Repression, 'terror' and the rule of law in England during the decade of the French Revolution" (*English Historical Review* 100: 801-25) and "An aspect of Pitt's 'Terror': prosecutions for sedition during the 1790's" (*Social History* 6:155-84).

“o'erturn[ed]” (1:342). This is not to say that Charlotte Smith lost her hope in the French Revolution any earlier or later than Coleridge or Wordsworth. Such comparisons would be difficult to make, and would not necessarily point to a literary priority. What is unarguable is that in The Emigrants Charlotte Smith expressed her disaffection with both old and new regimes and, most importantly, reconciled her disappointment with her political ideals, well before either of her younger contemporaries.

6. Smith and Wordsworth as Radical Writers

One of the most obvious differences between Wordsworth's poetry in the early 1790's — the long poems included — and The Emigrants is the higher degree of political explicitness and moral indignation in Smith's poem. But this should not be read as a sign that Charlotte Smith held more radical opinions than William Wordsworth. Wordsworth's circumstances were very different from Smith's in the early 1790's, and though not so unhappy, he was perhaps more vulnerable to political scandal than she was. In some ways, the young Wordsworth had more to lose. Charlotte Smith had established herself, as early as 1792 with Desmond, as a politically opinionated author with democratic sentiments. Her financial situation had been liminal for many years. Her legal coverture as a married woman combined with her separation from her fugitive husband gave her a certain independence of mind, if not of means. Contrary to what gender norms might lead us to expect, Charlotte Smith may well have had a greater freedom to express her political

opinions in the turbulent 1790's than many of her female contemporaries, greater even than some of her male contemporaries. Certainly Wordsworth's more rigorous self-censorship makes the influence of the radical side of Smith's work upon his own poetry difficult to discern clearly. It is possible, even probable, that certain aspects of Smith's influence on the young Wordsworth remained unacknowledged for political reasons, that is, in order to avoid being associated with the kind of radicalism that was stigmatized in the increasingly conservative 1790's.

Wordsworth's greater caution during these years may, in fact, be an index of a greater radicalism. In the unpublished "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" (1793) he explicitly refers to himself as a Republican and justifies at length the execution of King Louis (Owen and Smyser, eds. Prose Works 1:29-49). Charlotte Smith neither called herself a Republican nor made such a justification; rather she expressed her hope in The Emigrants that France would adopt a constitutional monarchy like England's (1.105-112). Smith's reputation as more radical than Wordsworth depends on the relative publicity of their opinions rather than on their actual sentiments in the early 1790's, and upon our sense of the constancy of Smith's opinions in comparison with the eventual conservative turn taken by Wordsworth. If the young Wordsworth had published "Salisbury Plain" and his "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff," he may well have established a reputation for himself not unlike that of Charlotte Smith. Indeed, Wordsworth's tone in that early and self-suppressed letter often sounds like Charlotte Smith's, the Charlotte Smith of the prefaces and of the footnotes to The Emigrants:

The friends of liberty congratulate themselves upon the odium under which

they are at present labouring; as the causes which have produced it have obliged so many of her false adherents to disclaim with officious earnestness any desire to promote her interest (Selected Prose 160)

But the letter was never published, and Wordsworth, despite being spied upon by his own government, never suffered from this odium, and thus could never congratulate himself on enduring it. By the same token, he never really had anything to recant. Stephen Gill, in his Wordsworth: A Life, aptly distinguishes Wordsworth from some of his closest contemporaries:

Unlike Coleridge and Southey, unlike Horne Tooke and Thelwall and many other writers and orators, the radical Wordsworth — whose seriousness and sincerity is not in question — never acquired a public identity. (73)

Unlike Charlotte Smith as well, we could add.

The courage of her convictions was something that Charlotte Smith never seemed to lack. One of the poems collected in the second volume Elegiac Sonnets (1797), but printed at least twice before, in 1792 in the European Magazine (22:382) and in 1794 in the Scottish Register (3:302), was a short piece with a long title: “The Dead Beggar, An elegy, addressed to a lady, who was affected at seeing the funeral of a nameless pauper, buried at the expense of the parish, in the church-yard at Brighthelmstone, in November 1792.” The date places the poem in the same moment as book one of The Emigrants. Hunt points out the title’s resemblance to “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” but the poem’s importance lies elsewhere than in a similarity to this poem, or any of Wordsworth’s beggar poems. In 1792, shortly after his conviction in absentia, Smith dares to allude to the

banned writing of Thomas Paine: "Death vindicates the insulted rights of Man" (Poems 97) and dared in 1797 not only to reprint "The Dead Beggar," but to draw attention to the allusion in her note:¹²

I have been told that I have incurred blame for having used in this short composition, terms that have become obnoxious to certain persons. Such remarks are hardly worth notice; and it is very little my ambition to obtain the suffrage of those who suffer party prejudice to influence their taste; or of those who desire that because they have themselves done it, every one else should be willing to sell their best birth-rights, the liberty of thought, and of expressing thought, for the promise of a mess of pottage.

(Poems 97)

I include this quotation not to portray the young Wordsworth as one of the sell-outs so bitterly characterized by Smith, but rather to show the directness and the passion with which she expressed her political views in the 1790's.

Bishop C. Hunt, pointing to a similarity in titles and subjects among Smith's and Wordsworth's shorter poems — including a number of outcasts and unfortunates — suggests that she was one of his models, in a general sense, for the poetic expression of anti-militarism and other kinds of social criticism. "These poems are not necessarily

¹² F.M.A. Hilbish was the first to point out the earliness of Smith's "The Dead Beggar." Although she does not mention the allusion to Paine, she does direct the reader to Smith's note and recognizes that Smith, "before Wordsworth ... bore the censure of those who objected to her interest in the lowly" (275). Mayo (500) lists Smith's "The Dead Beggar" as exemplary of a fashion of outcast and beggar poems that preceded Lyrical Ballads.

Wordsworth's 'sources'" says Hunt, "... but Charlotte Smith's example must have encouraged him to take up the burning social issues of the day" (100). If, as Hunt suggests, the example of Charlotte Smith encouraged Wordsworth to take up the burning social issues of the day, we must make an important qualification — he did not take up those issues nearly as openly as she did, and thus may have been resisting, as well as feeling, her influence. Her example, indeed, may have been influential in his keeping his more extreme political opinions unpublished.

It is important to acknowledge the different political stances taken by Smith and Wordsworth in order to bring certain similarities into focus, similarities which show not just an implicit political affinity between them, or an early use of Wordsworthian topics on Smith's part, but an actual poetic influence. Despite their differing strategies for dealing with the political chill of the mid-1790's, it is important also to establish the extent of political agreement that existed between Smith and Wordsworth. They were both democratic radicals, sympathizers with the principles — and to different degrees the progress — of the French Revolution. They were poets, of course, and not politicians, but they were radicals nonetheless. One of the best illustrations of this affinity is the similarity in political rhetoric to be found in The Emigrants and Descriptive Sketches, both poems of 1793.

If we allow for the contrast between Wordsworth's ambiguously expressed Republicanism, and Smith's directly expressed but more moderate position, then the concluding passages of The Emigrants and Descriptive Sketches can be recognized in all their similarity:

May lovely Freedom, in her genuine charms,
 Aided by stern but equal Justice, drive
 From the ensanguined earth the hell-born fiends
 Of Pride, Oppression, Avarice, and Revenge,
 That ruin what thy mercy made so fair!
 Then shall these ill-starr'd wanderers, whose sad fate
 These desultory lines lament, regain
 Their native country

(2:431-438)

The end of Descriptive Sketches rises to similar rhetorical heights in a similar idiom:

Oh give, great God, to Freedom's waves to ride
 Sublime o'er Conquest, Avarice, and Pride,
 To break, the vales where Death with Famine scow'rs,
 And dark Oppression builds her thick-ribb'd tow'rs

(792-795)

The political affinity between these two poems is also registered by their allusions to the same famous passage from Henry V:

 There, taunting in the van
 Of vengeance-breathing armies, Insult stalks;
 And, in the ranks, "Famine, and Sword, and Fire,
 Crouch for employment." . . . (The Emigrants 2:76-79)

and from Wordsworth

... Discord stalks dilating, every hour,

And crouching fearful at the feet of Pow'r,

Like Lightnings eager for th'almighty word,

Look up for sign of havoc, Fire and Sword

(Descriptive Sketches 800-03)

A phrase whose original Shakespearean context was the horror of war between Britain and France is used by both authors to lament the horrors of the current strife. This bit of Shakespeare, though, was much quoted in the 1790's, and by all political parties.

Drawing Smith and Wordsworth into closer proximity is their shared hope in progress despite the violence of the immediate prospect. In both poems there is a discernable implication, clearer in Smith's poem than in Descriptive Sketches perhaps, that a process was begun in the Revolution which must be carried through, and that the present violence might still be justifiable. Charlotte Smith hopes in the final lines of The Emigrants that "the fierce feuds,

That long have torn their desolated land,

May (even as storms, that agitate the air,

Drive noxious vapours from the blighted earth)

Serve, all tremendous as they are, to fix

The reign of Reason, Liberty, and Peace

(2 439-44)

This is not Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, but it is close enough to be unambiguous

The revolution must be “fixed” or made permanent, not undone. Wordsworth also sees a purpose to the present conflict, purpose enough to almost welcome it:

Yet, yet, rejoice, tho' Pride's perverted ire
 Rouze Hell's own aid, and wrap thy hills in fire.
 Lo! from th'innocuous flames, a lovely birth!
 With its own Virtues springs another earth
 (780-83)

This outburst, however, is but an isolated moment within the poem as a whole, a moment of rhetoric more incendiary than the concluding lines to The Emigrants, perhaps, but framed by the touristic and philosophical resignation of Wordsworth's Descriptive

Sketches:

To-night, my friend, within this humble cot
 Be the dead weight of mortal ills forgot.
 Renewing, when the rosy summits glow
 At morn, our various journey, sad and slow.
 (810-13)

Wordsworth, like Smith, has it both ways politically, but his strategy is one of contradiction and ambiguity rather than Smith's careful balancing of benevolism, pessimism, and personal complaint. Some of Wordsworth's contemporaries — whether sympathetic to radical ideals or not — might have read a good deal into the subtle code of Descriptive Sketches, where Switzerland and the Savoy sometimes seem to stand for France in miniature, and sometimes seem to be the first line of resistance to an

expansionist Revolution. Certainly critics now, in retrospect, read various sections of the poem as descriptive of French politics at the time of Wordsworth's second visit to France, rather than his first, and the poem as a whole is generally understood to be Wordsworth's most political (published) early work. Yet there remains in the poem an apparently deliberate blurring of the precise application of its most radical statements within a profusion of political and cultural contexts. The first ambiguity in the politics of Descriptive Sketches is the year of the speaker's visit, the time-frame of the poem. The footnotes to the first edition place the composition of the sketches "before the emancipation of the Savoy" (706n) and "before France became the seat of War" (746n). This seems to be precise, but the reader might well have asked "Which liberation of Savoy?" or "Whose war with France?" especially as another note speaks in the past tense of the "exorbitant" taxes on river transport and their effect on "the poorer people" (772n). Wordsworth apparently did not want to appear to be supporting France — at war with England by the time the poem appeared — and yet still wanted to champion liberty and the goals of the Revolution, and to be recognized as doing so by sympathetic readers.

Alan Liu has written at length about the ambiguous representation of contemporary history in Wordsworth's poetry. In a note to his discussion of Descriptive Sketches in Wordsworth: The Sense of History, Liu suggests that "[i]t is possible that Wordsworth's typification of the Swiss mountaineers owes much to Charlotte Smith's 'The Peasant of the Alps'" (571n12). Like many critics making such attributions, Liu does not expand upon his suggestion, but it proves to be a valid one, and for a variety of reasons. Printed in the novel Celestina in 1791, "The Peasant of the Alps" would have been among Smith's

most recent poetry when Wordsworth visited her in November of that year. Thus he may have read it along with the two sonnets from Celestina that he transcribed into his copy of Elegiac Sonnets. The narrative of Smith's poem — the death of a Swiss mountaineer's family in a winter avalanche, and his ensuing suicide — is rather different from the passage in Descriptive Sketches, w'ch describes the death of Swiss mountaineer by burial in snow, and his family's "cruel hope" that he will return (375-412). Indeed, Smith's narrative is a reversal of the events in Wordsworth's poem, which seem to be modelled closely on a famous scene in Thomson's "Winter" ([1746] 276-321).

Liu is probably referring to a different sort of "typification," one which involves the social context for this tragic episode — the Swiss mountaineer's "Manner of Life," to use a phrase from the "Argument" of Descriptive Sketches. We might point to this stanza from Smith's poem:

His garden's simple produce stored,
 Prepared for him by hands adored,
 Is all the little luxury he knows
 And by the same dear hands are softly spread,
 The chamois' velvet spoil that forms the bed,
 Where in her arms he finds repose ...

(Poems 91]25-31)

and set it beside Wordsworth's lines:

For him sod-seats the cottage-door adorn,
 And peeps the far-off spire, his evening bourn!

Dear is the forest frowning o'er his head,
 And dear the green-sward to his velvet tread;
 Moves there a cloud o'er mid-day's flaming eye?
 Upward he looks — and calls it luxury

(21-26)

If "The Peasant of the Alps" was indeed seen by Wordsworth when he visited the author on his way to France, its impression on his memory may have been heightened by the fact that this reading experience was more recent than his actual visit to the Alps on his earlier walking tour of 1790.

By making oblique reference to a Charlotte Smith poem, even a relatively apolitical Charlotte Smith poem, Wordsworth gives us a clue to his true political affiliations. Wordsworth's note to the passage that includes the death of the Swiss mountaineer makes no reference to Smith: "For most of the images in the next sixteen verses I am indebted to M. Raymond's interesting observations annexed to his translation of Coxe's *Tour in Switzerland*" (372n). "Most" of the images, but not all.

If Wordsworth had given Charlotte Smith some of the credit for his Swiss mountaineer, rather than mentioning only the conservative author Coxe, his readers might have seen more clearly — in wisdom or in prejudice — the import of such lines as

He marches with his flute, his book, and sword,
 Well taught by that to feel his rights, prepared
 With this "the blessings he enjoys to guard"

(534-35)

Conservative readers might assume this book to be the Bible, and might also assume this “golden-age” (475n) Swiss to be the sort who would resist the expansion of Revolutionary France.¹³ Radical readers, and perhaps some reactionary readers, might assume a more contemporary pamphlet to be the source of the citizen’s knowledge of his rights.¹⁴ The same ambiguity dwells in the unattributed quotation: it can be traced to Smollett’s “Ode to Leven Water,” a pastoral and patriotic poem anthologized when Wordsworth was a school-boy. This is the source suggested by the Cornell Wordsworth (Descriptive Sketches 90). But, as F. M. Todd has argued, the quotation could also refer to Smith’s Desmond (1792), where Smollett’s lines are cited by the character Geraldine (3:124) in reference to the newly acquired blessings of the citizens of Revolutionary France.¹⁵

¹³ A pro-Government anti-Jacobin satirical work called Pursuits of Literature in its “Fourth Dialogue” (1797) complained that:

Our peasantry now read the Rights of Man on mountains, and moors, and by the wayside, and shepherds make the analogy between their occupation and that of their government. Happy indeed, had they been taught to make no other comparison. Our unsex'd female writers now instruct, or confuse us and themselves in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy.... (194)

¹⁴ In the “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” Wordsworth calls upon a similar image of the Swiss citizen in order to counter traditional views of rank and education:

If your lordship has travelled in the democratic cantons of Switzerland you must have seen the herdsman with the staff in one hand and the book in the other. In the constituent assembly of France was found a peasant whose sagacity was as distinguished as his integrity (Prose Works 1:39)

¹⁵ F.M. Todd argues in Politics and the Poet (38n) that the quotation refers to Smith’s citation of Smollett in Desmond (3:124) and Hunt re-iterates Todd’s attribution (99). Duncan Wu does not list Desmond in Wordsworth’s Reading, but he does list “Ode to Leven Water” on the authority of the Cornell Descriptive Sketches (Birdsall ed.). Wu notes that the Smollett poem was in Knox’s Elegant Extracts, which Wordsworth may have known at Hawkshead (90).

7. Female Exiles and Female Vagrants

At the imagistic and thematic centre of Wordsworth's other long poem of 1793, An Evening Walk, is a suffering woman, the "wretch" brought to mind for the poet by the swan and her brood: "I see her now, denied to lay her head ..." (257). This figure of the suffering mother is the most fully developed image in An Evening Walk, even though she is not before the eye of the ostensibly "walking" poet. From her appearance to her demise she is the subject of about 60 lines, and the tableau of her and her children's death, "No tears can chill them, and no bosom warms, / Thy breast their death-bed coffined in thine arms ..." — luridly illumined by a flash of lightning — is one of the most startling images in the poem. Contemporary readers of poetry would have recognized the scene as being in a line of similar scenes going back to Thomson's snow covered mountaineer in The Seasons. Jonathan Wordsworth has noted several female figures of pity who may be precedents for this scene, in the poetry of John Langhorne, Erasmus Darwin,¹⁶ and an anonymous passage from Knox's Elegant Extracts of Poetry (Music of Humanity 51-55). Scenes of pathetic/heroic death were indeed commonplace in the poetry of sensibility, and Jonathan Wordsworth is at pains to distinguish Wordsworth's contribution from "... the grotesque lower reaches of the tradition in which he was working." (53). In a note to his expanded 1794 version, Wordsworth himself attributed his scene to an actual story of "...

¹⁶ One of the more surprising precedents suggested by J. Wordsworth for the freezing female vagrant in An Evening Walk is a scene from Darwin's "Loves of the Plants" in which "Tremella," a mushroom personified as a woman, succumbs to the elements in high sentimental detail (Music of Humanity 52n).

a poor woman who was found dead on Stanemore two winters ago with her children ...” (An Evening Walk 148n), but Jonathan Wordsworth points out that no documentary evidence of this local incident has been found (Music of Humanity 52n2).

A possible source for Wordsworth’s note, if not the figure of the female vagrant herself, is a passage in Smith’s Desmond (1792), where the hero laments polemically the contrasts presented in the newspapers of the day:

Today, we see displayed in tinsel panegyric, the superb trappings, the gorgeous ornaments, jewels of immense value, with which the illustrious personages of our land amaze and delight us — Tomorrow we read of a poor man, an ancient woman, a deserted child, who were found dead in such or such alleys or street ‘supposed to have perished through want, and the inclemency of the weather ...’ and is it possible to help proclaiming, ‘Take physic pomp’ ? (2:125-26)

Indeed, we find a very similar phrasing — “perished by the inclemency of the weather” — in one of the items found by Averill in his search for the documentary source of Wordsworth’s note (An Evening Walk 148n). The phrase was no doubt a standard journalistic euphemism, but the context in Desmond provides a precedent for the politicizing of such a euphemism.

Smith’s The Emigrants appeared in May of 1793, just four months after Wordsworth’s Descriptive Sketches and An Evening Walk. In the second book of Smith’s poem we find a number of startling tales of horror and distress, narratives the speaker has gleaned from the emigrés themselves. One of these brief tales bears a general

resemblance to the vignette in Wordsworth's poem. We are not told which tale in book two belongs to which emigrant in book one of Smith's poem, but this story is placed in parallel with the only female portrait in book one, the ci-devant aristocrat with her children. The vignette in book two tells of a woman who was not lucky enough to emigrate:

A wretched Woman, pale and breathless, flies!

And, gazing round her listens to the sound

Of hostile footsteps ...

....

... half repentant now

Her headlong haste, she wishes she had staid

To die with those affrighted Fancy paints

The lawless soldiers victims ...

....

... yet, in Death itself,

True to maternal tenderness, she tries

To save the unconscious infant from the storm

In which she perishes ...

...

— But alas!

The Mother and the Infant perish both!

(2:258-260, 269-272, 281-284, 291-92)

An Evening Walk probably could not have been influenced by Smith's The Emigrants, nor

does Smith's poem show any particular signs of influence from Wordsworth's early poem. But in 1793, Smith and Wordsworth both use this pathetic figure as a central motif: the dutiful mother, abandoned to the elements, dying in a vain attempt to protect her children. Although less directly victimized than Smith's fleeing refugee caught in a storm, such figures in Wordsworth's poetry are usually also war's victims, widowed or abandoned by distant military conflicts. In Wordsworth's An Evening Walk the woman is a vision without a context, but she would return in more articulated — and in some cases more articulate — guises in his later poetry. Jonathan Wordsworth argues that all the manifestations of Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" and elsewhere belong to this general figure of pity, and develop from the unnamed woman in An Evening Walk (Music of Humanity 50-55).

Wordsworth's "Salisbury Plain" was written in late 1793 and early 1794, and was thus his first long poem written after the publication of Smith's The Emigrants. "Salisbury Plain" is a more dramatic and narrative work than his two earlier long poems, composed in Spenserian stanzas rather than rhyming couplets. It was not published by Wordsworth, but rather rewritten several times to become, eventually, the much-altered Guilt and Sorrow of 1842. In Descriptive Sketches politics and pity were arbitrarily fused in the heroic/pathetic figure of the Swiss mountaineer. In An Evening Walk the heroic figure of pity is a woman, but she is an isolated vignette with little or no political context. In "Salisbury Plain" the female figure of pity becomes central to the structure and the meaning of the poem, and expresses her own political context and commentary.

The figure of pity in "Salisbury Plain" is not just an object of aesthetic

contemplation, but a woman who narrates her own tale of sorrows. Pity is not expressed in the poem by benevolent actions of direct charity, but rather by an attitude of sympathy on the part of the woman's interlocutor — by the traveller's willingness to hear, and the poet's willingness to represent her tale. In "Salisbury Plain" pity is transformed, without much philosophical mediation, into revolutionary rhetoric. The woman's tale inspires the traveller-figure to gestures of consolation. In the narrator, though, it provokes the political exhortations of the poem's concluding stanzas. Before the concluding exhortation, the female vagrant and the traveller depart together toward an ambiguous future, suggesting not so much an improvement of their lot, as an attempted merging of their destinies. The high revolutionary rhetoric at the end of "Salisbury Plain" is left to the narrator of the whole, and while it evokes a world transformed by indignant reason, it requires a splitting of the poet into two figures. Like the female vagrant whom he meets, the traveller "... had withered young in sorrow's deadly blight ..." (45). The speaker of the whole, on the other hand, is almost "the sage" of line 510, and must bid adieu to the sad pair before rising to panegyric against tyranny and injustice.

In Charlotte Smith's The Emigrants there is no ambiguity about who speaks — even during the reporting of pathetic or horrific tales in book two — because there is no difficulty in establishing a continuous spectrum between the author's suffering and the suffering of the emigrants themselves. In "Salisbury Plain" as well as in The Emigrants, there is an emphasis on the speaker's inability to take action to alleviate suffering — but in Smith's case this is because she shares the emigrants' state of despondence and powerlessness: "They, like me, / From fairer hopes and happier prospects driven, / Shrink

from the future, and regret the past ... (2:14-16). In Wordsworth's case the paralysis arises from the distance, both narrative and social, between the male poet and the female vagrant.

The eponymous but individually anonymous emigrants in Smith's poem are each given approximately equal weight as members of a group, with different degrees of sympathy from the author, depending on their differing culpability in the ancien régime and their motives for emigration. Nonetheless, the one female in the group would later be given special emphasis by the author: her tale was rewritten as a separate short poem in rhyming stanzas entitled "The Female Exile," and included in later editions of Elegiac Sonnets. This marks it as an important part of the original poem. It also suggests that the process of excerpting may have been made for political reasons, since the whole of The Emigrants was never reprinted. It is significant, I believe, that a very similar pattern of selection, re-writing and re-publication occurs in the case of "Salisbury Plain." Why Wordsworth chose to withhold the whole poem from publication is not clear. Perhaps he thought it was unfinished, or unsuccessful. Perhaps, too, he felt that the concluding stanzas would give the wrong impression in an age of political reaction — "Heroes of truth, pursue your march, uptear / The Oppressor's dungeon from its deepest base ..." (541-42). Whatever the case, Wordsworth did manage to salvage some of the very best poetry from "Salisbury Plain" when he republished, with some addition and alteration, the woman's tale as "The Female Vagrant" in Lyrical Ballads (1798), shorn of its narrative frame. Just the year before, in the second edition of Elegiac Sonnets Volume Two (1797), Charlotte Smith had published "The Female Exile," the poem derived from her portrait of

the French lady and her children in The Emigrants.

in both re-written short poems the earlier context of the French Revolution and its wars is mute! Smith does not mention the woman's nationality, only her exile, but she does insist upon the date and place in her sub-title, the same date and place that situated book one of The Emigrants "... Brighthelmstone in November 1792" (Poems 97).

Wordsworth, too, preserves some of the political power of his original, in the bitter pacifism of the indignant woman's tirade:

Or in the streets and walks where proud men are,
Better our dying bodies to obtrude,
Than dog-like, wading at the heels of war,
Protract a curst existence"

(23-25)

But in his rewriting of the woman's tale into a whole rather than a part, Wordsworth has shifted the emphasis from the imminent political moment of the narrative frame in the 1794 "Salisbury Plain" — that is, the early French revolutionary wars — to a retrospect on the war in "the western world," the colonial war with America, which in 1798 was a much less controversial subject. It is also interesting to note that in his rewrite of the female vagrant's tale Wordsworth revises (within stanzas otherwise left largely untouched) the two instances where "Salisbury Plain" borrowed from Charlotte Smith's sonnets, allusions we discussed in chapter 6. "Quiet that might have healed, if aught could heal, Despair," (360) becomes "Until it seemed to bring a joy to my despair" (144) and "balmy air" is moved to line 161. And the section excerpted for "The Female Vagrant" begins

immediately after the line in “Salisbury Plain” where Wordsworth uses “no second spring” (225). Thus, Wordsworth’s rewriting of the poem involved removing the concrete textual allusions to Smith’s poetry that were scattered throughout “Salisbury Plain.” At the same time, though, the process of revision and republication behind “The Female Vagrant” is the same as that behind Smith’s “The Female Exile,” a parallel which, along with the similar titles, preserves and obliquely acknowledges something of the original influence. The similarity of the central figures of pity, the two distressed and displaced women, is only emphasized by their isolation in shorter poems.

This figure of the suffering and displaced woman was not new to poetry in 1793, nor am I suggesting that Wordsworth borrows his female vagrant in “Salisbury Plain” and Lyrical Ballads entirely from Smith. In the Fenwick note to “The Female Vagrant” Wordsworth claims “[t]he chief incidents” and the “description of her feelings on the Atlantic, are taken from life” (Grosart, ed. Prose Works 3:10). In detail, the “The Female Exile” and “The Female Vagrant” are quite different poems. Smith’s poem, in its original form as part of The Emigrants and as a separate poem, emphasizes the pictorial aspect of the figure and includes dependent children oblivious to their mother’s sorrow. Wordsworth’s poem, in both its versions, emphasizes the far-ranging narrative of a solitary woman. Nonetheless, Wordsworth may have been inspired to rewrite his female vagrant’s tale for publication in Lyrical Ballads after having seen Smith work a similar excerption and transformation on her portrait of the female emigré.

Carl Woodring, in Politics in English Romantic Poetry (1970), has offered a general interpretation of this gendered figure of suffering in Wordsworth’s poetry.

Vignettes of the suffering woman, which have been to some critics a signal of Wordsworth's guilt because he begot a child in France without marrying the mother, Annette Vallon, were a different sort of signal in the years of debate over Burke's Reflections. Experience with other poems of the partisan Opposition would have led a reader of An Evening Walk to count Wordsworth's vignette of the burdened mother, struggling toward an inconvenient cottage, as ill-will toward the King. (86)

Even though it is true that, as Woodring puts it, "England's war against the Revolution changed an age of sentiment to an age of politics" (87), his claim that contemporary readers would see sedition in such figures of sentiment as the burdened mother is dubious. It is a possible reading, of course, but Burke himself had used the figure of Marie Antoinette — a distressed mother of royal proportions — as a figure of pity in the service of political conservatism as early as 1790, in his Reflections on the Revolution in France. The ubiquity of this figure in the literature of the time is perhaps owing more to its political ambivalence than its political signification; the suffering woman could be used as an emblem for any party.

In context, of course, this figure could be very powerful rhetorically. In Smith's The Emigrants she is a ci-devant aristocrat, but the loss of her peace of mind and domestic security are her sorrows, not the loss of her title or its privileges. The sufferings of the French Royal family are also mentioned in book two of The Emigrants, in particular the execution of Louis XVI, which occurs between books one and two, and probably occurred during the composition of the poem. "[T]he Fiend of Discord..." holds up

“...[t]he headless corse of one whose only crime / Was being born a monarch...” (2:51-55). With similar cool compassion Smith considers the uncertain future of the child-prince, and then carefully places the sorrows of Marie Antoinette:

Ah! much I mourn thy sorrows, hapless Queen!
 And deem thy expiation made to Heaven
 For every fault, to which Prosperity
 Betray'd thee, when it plac'd thee on a throne
 Where boundless power was thine (1:154-158)

The imprisoned Queen is a victim like many others. She is emphatically not the heroine of the poem, nor even the most blameless of the victims. The most pathetic tale of a female victim in Smith's poem is the one discussed above, the death of a nameless woman undistinguished by rank, a casualty of war. A further clue to Smith's position with respect to the emotional appeal of Marie Antoinette is perhaps to be found in her dedication to the poem, where she calls Fox, who opposed the war with France, "... the greatest Orator of our Time" (*Poems* 134), rather than Edmund Burke, who supported the military option and evoked Marie Antoinette as an icon of insulted femininity.¹⁷ Marie Antoinette's execution in October of 1793, soon after the publication of *The Emigrants*, would not have helped the poem's popularity.

For Stuart Curran the importance of *The Emigrants* is not its specific resemblance to

¹⁷ The suspicious and meddling Mrs. Crewkerne, one of the politically reactionary villains of Smith's novel *The Young Philosopher* (1798), is a devotee of Burke, and she reiterates a commonplace of the day when she calls him "the first orator of the age ..." (1:181).

any individual Wordsworth poem, but its exemplary quality as an illustration of Smith's general priority:

A cursory glance ... will suggest how charged is Smith's poem with features that in a few years were to become identifiably Wordsworth's: in style, the long, sinuous verse paragraphs, the weighted monosyllables, the quick evocation of natural detail; in matter, the absorbing and self-mythicizing voice and the creatures of its contemplation — the aged, the idiots, the female vagrants, the exiled and the alienated. (“The I Altered” 202)

The similarity of Smith's blank verse to Wordsworth's blank verse on a purely stylistic level is perhaps best illustrated by the cumulative effect of citations made for other purposes, as in the present analysis. But we can make a more calculated contribution here to an examination of such thematic resemblances as the self-mythicizing voice and the turn to marginal figures as poetic subjects.

These two features are interrelated in a complex and unique way in Charlotte Smith's blank verse: she did not simply infuse the high seriousness of the form with personal confession and at the same time depict suffering and outcast social figures. Rather she portrayed herself as suffering and outcast, and contemplated the sufferings of others in that light. This particular economy of devices — which appears in Smith's sonnets as well — could not be inherited by Wordsworth as a functioning whole, although he does borrow its basic elements. Self-mythologizing and the emphasis on figures of pity would be re-assembled by the younger poet in his own fashion. The most important

difference is that there is a greater distance between Wordsworth the poet and the figures of pity that appear in his poetry. This increased distance between the speaker and the object of pity in Wordsworth is a result of both the poet's greater sense of elevated and elevating mission and his different — that is, happier — personal circumstances.

Furthermore, the conventions of sensibility had established the epitome of the figure of pity in the suffering woman, and thus a third factor separates the subject of pity from the object of pity in Wordsworth's poetry: gender.

The strategies devised by Wordsworth to reconcile, or at least dramatize, this irreconcilable gap between the sympathetic poet and the sorrowing woman often involve the transposition of the difference onto a scheme for two men, two men of feeling distanced from a third female figure either by narrative or by emblematic framing. In The Excursion we have the author and the Wanderer, with the tale of Margaret exchanged between them. In the Prelude we have Wordsworth and Beaupuy and the emblematic tableau of the "hunger-bitten girl" (9:512) with her heifer by the roadside. The important relationship is between Wordsworth and Beaupuy, who interprets the pathetic figure for the poet: "Tis against that / Which we are fighting" (9:519-20). Such triangulations support, but sometimes also vitiate, the dramatic tensions of the situations described. The ironies and limits of this structure are forced into high relief at the conclusion of Guilt and Sorrow (1842), the final version of a poem that began as "Salisbury Plain" and produced "The Female Vagrant." We can quote a passage that still bears a trace of Smith's influence, as the sailor tries to respond to the woman of sorrows:

Of social Order's care for wretchedness,

Of Time's sure help to calm and reconcile,
 Joy's second spring and Hope's long treasured smile,
 'Twas not for him to speak — a man so tried.
 (453-56)

Smith's "no second spring" is rewritten in the positive, but the words cannot be spoken by the author directly to the female vagrant: the guilt of the young sailor blocks the way.

8. "What man has made of man ..."

Although the voice of the poet in The Emigrants is consistent with the voice of the poet in Smith's sonnets, The Emigrants aspires to a higher level of discursive complexity — the speaker has room to expand on such themes as happiness and the human condition, and to venture further into political context and political rhetoric. At one of the more elevated moments of political rhetoric in The Emigrants, we find a line which would provide Wordsworth with one of his most visible and emblematic allusions to Smith's poem. Ironically, it is an allusion which obscures the gender dynamics of her influence under a political generalization, or rather a universalization of the human condition. Wordsworth's famous short poem "Lines Written in Early Spring" (1798) has a well-known refrain:

And much it grieved my heart to think
 What man has made of man.
 ([Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems 1797-1800 76]7-8)

This refrain appears to derive from a repeated phrase in book two of The Emigrants:

“Woes such as these does Man inflict on Man ...” (2:319), and a more compact version:

— Ah, while I adore

That goodness, which design'd to all that lives

Some taste of happiness, my soul is pain'd

By the variety of woes that Man

For Man creates —

(2:410-414)

Similar phrases can probably be found in texts from other authors and other periods — the corruption of man by society is not a new idea — and Wordsworth “makes” his own advancement on Smith’s concise formula rather than quoting her verbatim.

The similarity in phrasing becomes more obviously a sign of influence, however, if we note that in both Smith and Wordsworth a similar philosophical point is at stake. The “plan” of Wordsworth’s “creed” is that “... every flower / Enjoys the air it breathes ...” (11-12). The poet exclaims, “... I must think, do all I can, / That there was pleasure there” (19-20). This is the same universal benevolism that was expressed in Smith’s poem: “... to all that lives some taste of happiness.” The idea — relatively new in British thought — had by the 1790’s become highly charged politically. Deistic benevolism goes back to Shaftesbury, but during the eighteenth century it had developed from a somewhat naïve social optimism toward a political radicalism based on universal human rights. Faith in the political applicability of universal benevolence — what Chris Jones calls, in his book of the same name, “radical sensibility” — is difficult to sustain in the face of anti-Revolutionary

war and its ravages. But it is nonetheless central to the progressive political stance of the speaker in The Emigrants, and adds poignance to the incipient despair which threatens the speaker's social hope at the end of book one and the opening of book two. The contrasting lightness of Wordsworth's "Lines ..." should not distract us from the underlying ideological similarity of the two poems.

In Wordsworth's "Lines Written in Early Spring" the possibility of personal suffering is evoked in a formulaic fashion, side-stepping the question of the speaker's actual experience: "... that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts / Bring sad thoughts to the mind" (3-4). We are reminded here of the "dear delicious pain" that punctuated Wordsworth's first sonnet. The question with which the poem ends — "Have I not reason to lament / What Man has made of Man?" — is perhaps an ironic acknowledgement of the author's relative happiness, as well as a redirection of the rhetorical question toward the reader.

In Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790's (1993), Chris Jones discusses this allusion as a sign of the similar political philosophies of Smith and Wordsworth. "Wordsworth," he says, after quoting Smith's lines from The Emigrants, "was later to lament what man has made of man in similar vein ..." (202). Jones's emphasis is on shared ideas, not influence, although to my knowledge he is the first critic to note the allusion to Smith in Wordsworth's poem. In Jones's reading, the universal benevolism implicit in the similar phrases aligns both of these writers with the tenets of Godwin's Political Justice. Godwin's book appeared in 1793, as did Smith's The Emigrants and also Wordsworth's Descriptive Sketches and An Evening Walk. But as Jones notes, Smith did not read Godwin's Political Justice till 1798 (137), and as The

Emigrants presents a political position that is actually clearer and more explicit than that expressed in An Evening Walk or Descriptive Sketches, we might say that the allusion brings the two poets into closer proximity with each other than with Godwin. Certainly it would be fair to say that Wordsworth in "Lines written in Early Spring" is drawing upon both Smith and Godwin to compose his sad thoughts and pleasant thoughts into a viable "creed," or at least into a single pointed question.

"Lines Written in Early Spring" draws together two different strains of Smith's influence on William Wordsworth, strains that I have kept further apart for analytical convenience than they actually present themselves in the poetry: the theme of unseasonal sorrow in spring, and the theme of political justice. In his foundational essay "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" M. H. Abrams observes that in the writing of the Romantics "... certain terms, images, and quasi-mythical agents tend to recur and to assume a specialized reference to revolutionary events and expectations" ("Spirit" 107). It was not just Wordsworth, but Charlotte Smith before him, who helped to establish "... the awakening earth in springtime ..." as one of these images.

Chapter Eight

Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth:

Blank Verse, Fiction, and Later Influences

1. The Emigrants and The Prelude

Not until the short blank verse poem “The French Revolution, as it Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement” — printed in 1809 in Coleridge’s “The Friend” — did Wordsworth acknowledge, however obliquely, his own early enthusiasm for the events of the French Revolution. Despite the moving political rhetoric of the poem, there is a determined distance — registered in the awkward title of the piece — between the author and the Revolution, as though it were a study of the feelings of a group to which Wordsworth himself might never have belonged. Significantly, this poem was the first published fragment of what would eventually be known as The Prelude. Like the much longer poem of which it is a part, “The French Revolution as it Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement” looks back upon the Revolution as a moment in the past, distanced even in 1809 (or 1804 or earlier, when the lines were written) by a significant span in historical time and by what Wordsworth portrays as an even greater advance in personal development. The Prelude in its entirety reveals a more complex attitude on Wordsworth’s part toward the events and times of the French Revolution, but that larger

context would not be supplied for more than forty years, and even in the 1850 Prelude the author's intimacy with the Revolution would not be fully revealed. Only in 1876, with the first publication of his essay "A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff ...," did the radicalism of Wordsworth's early political opinions finally come to light.¹

The Prelude was first drafted by 1799, and first conceived in a two-book format. The thirteen-book version was complete by 1805, seven years after Lyrical Ballads, yet well before the end of the long war with Republican France. Revision, the never-completed larger project of The Recluse, and a complex of other hesitations kept The Prelude from publication until just after Wordsworth's death. Among these other hesitations we would have to include uncertainty as to how the politics of the poem would be received. Wordsworth did not radically change his major long poem between 1805 and 1850, although the changes that were made have often been seen as highly significant. But the political and historical content of the poem looked very different in 1850, simply because of the passage of time. The forced distance of an extract like "The French Revolution, as it Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement" — one of the pieces of The Prelude that remains unchanged through the various revisions — would become more

¹ Grosart's comments on the first publication of Wordsworth's "Letter ..." in the preface to Volume 1 of the Prose Works (1876) suggests the magnitude of the disclosure: Every reader of 'The Recluse' and 'The Excursion' and the 'Lines on the French Revolution, as it appeared to its Enthusiasts at its Commencement' — to specify only these — is aware that, in common with Southey and the greater Coleridge, Wordsworth was in sympathy with the uprising of France against its tyrants. But it is only now that we are admitted to a full discovery of his youthful convictions and emotion by the publication of this manuscript (1:x)

and more appropriate with the passage of time.² The poem as a whole has the peculiar quality of being both an early work and a final statement

In addition to being about the same size and shape, the 1799 Prelude and The Emigrants have one major thematic resemblance: the presentation of the author as an adult remembering childhood. In book two, after the section earlier compared with “Tintern Abbey,” Smith evokes a past self:

Memory come!

And from distracting cares, that now deprive
Such scenes of all their beauty, kindly bear
My fancy to those hours of simple joy,
When, on the banks of Arun, which I see
Make its irriguous course thro' yonder meads,
I play'd; unconscious then of future ill!
There (where, from hollows fring'd with yellow broom,
The birch with silver rind, and fairy leaf,
Aslant the slow steam trembles) I have stood,
And meditated how to venture best
Into the shallow current, to procure

² Wordsworth seems always to have thought of “The French Revolution ...” as an extract from a larger work rather than a poem in its own right, and we may perhaps detect mild irritation in his later, brief note to the poem: “It was first published by Coleridge in his Friend, which is the reason of its having had a place in every edition of my poems since” (Grosart 3:45). It seems as if the text were not designed for 1809, and that Wordsworth reprinted it only to avoid the inconsistency of suppression.

The willow herb of glowing purple spikes,
 Or flags, whose sword-like leaves conceal'd the tide
 (2:328-41)

This complex reflection, in which memory is infused with perception and nature mediates between past and present, is strikingly similar to the very first cluster of memories evoked in the 1799 Prelude:

Beloved Derwent, fairest of all streams,
 Was it for this that I, a four years' child
 A naked boy, among thy silent pools
 Made one long bathing of a summer day,
 Basking in the sun, or plunged into thy streams,
 Alternate, all a summer's day, or coursed
 Over sandy fields, and dashed the flowers
 Of yellow grunsel (1:15-23)

The emotional context is different, but it is a difference we have seen before. Where Smith's emphasis is on contrast — the misery of her adult life against her happy childhood — Wordsworth's emphasis is on the continuity of joy. Still, the dynamic of a consolatory return to a place and time of happiness, complete with flowers, is the same. Even though it arises from more pronounced sorrows, Charlotte Smith's appeal to memory as consolation accords well with Wordsworth's definition of "spots of time":

There are in our existence spots of time
 Which with distinct preeminence retain

A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
 By trivial occupations and the round
 Of ordinary intercourse, our minds —
 Especially the imaginative power —
 Are nourished and invisibly repaired

([1799]1:288-94)

The infant self that Charlotte Smith remembers is less wild than the infant self that Wordsworth remembers: she contemplates how best to venture, rather than simply venturing, into the stream. Young Charlotte would “procure” flowers; young William “dashes” them.³ But these two children have very much the same role — to give temporal and psychological depth the speaker, the landscape, and the poem.

Another possible sign of The Emigrants’ influence in the early Prelude involves the unanswered question as refrain. The second instance of the refrain in Wordsworth’s poem appears in the quote above. “Was it for this ...” the speaker of the poem asks, several times, but without getting an answer and without ever supplying a clear antecedent for “this.” It is an evocative formula that starts and restarts the poet’s chain of youthful associations in the first book of the poem. The feature is particularly strong in Wordsworth’s 1799 Prelude, but it is present as a repeated marker in all versions. This simple but crucial phrase has been the object of considerable critical attention. Jonathan Wordsworth, in the mid-seventies, solicited the help of the readers of TLS in finding

³ In the 1805 version Wordsworth emends this to “... leaping through groves / Of yellow grunsel ...” (1:297-98).

precedents for it in earlier British and Classical poetry. Correspondents pointed to similar devices in Milton, Ariosto, and Virgil, but none of these has been accepted as a definitive precedent, and it is apparent that we are dealing with a tradition of related devices.⁴ There is yet another candidate in Charlotte Smith's The Emigrants. Once again we find it early in the second book:

What is the promise of the infant year,
To those, who shrink from horrors such as War
Spreads o'er the affrighted world? (2:43-46)

The author reprises her question some twenty lines later, at the beginning of the next verse paragraph:

What is the promise of the infant year
To those, who ...
...
Survey, in neighbouring countries, scenes that make
The sick heart shudder; and the Man, who thinks,

⁴ For precedents to the phrase "Was it for this..." the Norton Prelude directs the reader to the TLS correspondence, April to September 1975 (1n). None of the precedents supplied by readers comes any closer, syntactically, than the one of which Jonathan Wordsworth was already aware, the lines from Pope's "Rape of the Lock"

Was it for this you took such constant Care
The Bodkin, Comb, and Essence to prepare;
For this your Locks in Paper-Durance bound,
For this with tort'ring Irons wreath'd around?
For this (97-101)

But it was the sense that there might be more to the allusion than this that sent Jonathan Wordsworth on his search in the first place (see TLS April 18, 1975, p.428). At first this source in Pope seems to have a completely different context, but we should recall the mock-epic card scene in the 1799 Prelude, which is modelled on Pope's poem.

Blush for his species? (2:63-68)

Although there is no verbal resemblance between the two questions, they have in common more than their function as reiterated prompts. First of all, Smith and Wordsworth both leave their questions unanswered. Furthermore, both questions suggest a general evaluation of present circumstances, in Smith's poem the promise of the spring of 1793, in which book two is set, and in Wordsworth's poem — though it remains deliberately enigmatic — the promise of the poem itself, or perhaps the necessity of the poem itself, as a digression from the larger task of The Recluse. In both questions, favourable and adverse conditions seem to weigh in the balance.

Conspicuously absent from the 1799 draft of The Prelude are the political reflections that would come to be central in 1805. But there is one group of lines in the poem that alludes broadly to present political circumstances:

The gift is yours [ie. Nature's]; if in these times of fear,
 This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,
 If, mid indifference and apathy
 And wicked exultation, when good men
 On every side fall off we know not how —
 Yet mingled, not unwillingly with sneers
 On visionary minds — if, in his time
 Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
 Despair not of our Nature ...
 (2:478-88)

The 1799 Prelude acknowledges, albeit without explanatory context, a later and more intense phase of the same political reaction that Smith observed as early as the preface to The Emigrants: "... the very name of Liberty has not only lost the charm it used to have in British ears, but many ... have been stigmatized ..." (Poems 134). Wordsworth's tone and diction in this brief, indignant section of the 1799 Prelude resemble those of Charlotte Smith's 1797 preface to Volume two of Elegiac Sonnets:

... I also know, that as party can raise prejudices against the colour of a ribband, or the cut of a cape, it generates still stronger antipathies, even in regard to things almost equally trifling. And there are who can never forgive an author that has, in the story of a Novel, or the composition of a Sonnet, ventured to hint at any opinions different from those which these liberal-minded personages are determined to find the best (Poems 10)

As for mysterious fallings off of erstwhile supporters, Smith goes on:

To the favor they then conferred I am not insensible ... and have never suffered them to be put under the painful necessity of avowing their dereliction in 1797, of the writer whom they affected so warmly to patronize in 1787. Ten years do indeed operate most wonderful changes in this state of existence. (Poems 11)

Wordsworth makes clear in the 1799 Prelude that he, too, could see this change in the cultural climate.

In the 1805 and 1850 Prelude, Wordsworth's experiences in Revolutionary France take up two whole books and more. Because these experiences set the stage for the

impairing of the poet's imagination, they take on an even more central importance, as the repair of that damage is the governing narrative of the later books of the poem. Critics as various as Woodring, Harper, F. M. Todd, and more recently McGann, Jacobus, Liu, Levinson and others, have observed the complexity and the evasiveness with which the poet's reactions to the French Revolution are portrayed in the Prelude. Much work has been done on the devices of structure and rhetoric by which Wordsworth both recreates his original passions and places them within a period of youth and error. Scholars are in general agreement that Wordsworth began writing the material which would become The Prelude in 1798, on his trip to Goslar in Germany, little more than five years after his most intense period of radicalism. But these origins and proximities are not facts presented in the text. The period of the origin of the poem as a moment within the poem itself — as a moment in the autobiography of the poet — is one of the most curious aspects, one of the most evasive centres, of the Prelude.

Wordsworth speaks at various times in all versions of the poem as though it began as an intuition in early childhood. This notion gives structure to the earliest Prelude of 1799, which has not yet taken on the shape of autobiography. But the 1805 Prelude and the 1850 Prelude are dominated by a crisis of young adulthood. As the poet says to his interlocutor Coleridge toward the end of book ten:

Thus, O friend,
 Through times of honour, and through times of shame,
 Have I descended, tracing faithfully
 The workings of a youthful mind, beneath

The breath of great events (10:941-944)

The spiritual and intellectual crisis that Wordsworth went through between 1793 and approximately 1796-98 was a crisis both personal and at the same time linked to contemporary political events. Indeed, the end of the year 1792 is actually the last period of Wordsworth's life to be rendered in any detail in The Prelude. As the author says very near the end of book thirteen:

Since I withdrew unwillingly from France,

The story hath demanded less regard

To time and place (13:334-36)

Wordsworth places the beginning of his crisis at the moment when England declares war on France — February 11, 1793, just weeks after his unwilling withdrawal. In addition to the political, financial and personal aspects of Wordsworth's crisis during the following months and years, there was a readerly aspect as well. Our understanding of this readerly aspect has generally been limited to an acknowledgement of William Godwin's influence, in particular the influence, for better or worse, of Political Justice, published in the winter of 1793. I would argue that Charlotte Smith's The Emigrants, published in the spring of 1793 and structured around the preceding winter of political despair, also had its role in Wordsworth's crisis of moral philosophy, and thus on the Prelude.

The temporally disjunct structure of The Emigrants, a two-book structure spanning, and broken by, a disruptive season of historical and biographical time, may well have been an important formal precedent for Wordsworth's Prelude. Wordsworth does not date and place the two books of the 1799 Prelude in the way Charlotte Smith does, but the thirteen-

book 1805 Prelude does visit and revisit the early years of the Revolution, and does attempt to capture the effect of a “present” past combined with a fully conscious nostalgia. The Emigrants and the 1805 Prelude are built around a the same historical and personal hiatus: the suspension of faith in revolutionary history during the early 1790's. Revolutionary hope is transformed differently by each poet: for Smith it becomes a weary bitterness which gathers itself into desperate prayer, for Wordsworth a confirmation of his personal artistic mission and a more privately directed prayer for its success. Regardless of these different tonal qualities, both poems locate us, as readers, at once before and after a crucial point where history and biography intersect. In both poems this turning point falls in the same eventful season of private and world history: the winter of 1792-93.

In neither The Emigrants nor the Prelude is the personal crisis simply one of disillusionment in the Revolution or in its original principles. In both there is a dual focus: escalating urgency and escalating doubt, an articulation of radical principles and a testing of radical hope against historical reality. In The Emigrants history is very much present history, captured in the structure of the text: two dated sections separated by five months. With some qualifications, the same may be said of Wordsworth's Prelude. Although the Prelude was presented in 1850 as an autobiographical poem, its point of view is not simply that of an elderly Wordsworth. Already in 1799 the poem is written in retrospect, and from a number of different viewpoints, some of them relatively early in the poet's life. A variety of present moments and moods are recreated, and the vividness of these memories recurrently obliterates the ostensible “present” moment of the poem as utterance — the reading of the text to Coleridge. The persistent memories that take us away from this

moment in The Prelude are not only memories from childhood, but also spots of time from Wordsworth's crisis period of 1792-96.

The affinities of image and rhetoric in the poems of 1793 have already illustrated the degree to which Smith and Wordsworth were citizens of like mind on many political questions, despite differences in age, sex and destiny. Their friendship, which seems to have begun in 1791, may have involved a continued personal acquaintance, or it may have been no more than mutual good-will maintained without close personal contact. What we can safely acknowledge, though, without knowing the answers to these biographical questions, is the similarity of their explorations of a special poetic language: a blank verse style adequate to the personal and political crises of the Revolutionary period.

It is reasonable to assume that in 1793 Wordsworth would have been drawn to The Emigrants. It was a poem by an author he admired, it was published shortly after his return from a year-long visit to Revolutionary France, and it had as its subject the ramifications of events he had just witnessed.⁵ Charlotte Smith, we recall, was one of the last people Wordsworth spoke with before he left for France. He would surely have been curious about the work produced by his fellow poet in the interim. If Wordsworth read The Emigrants he would have been especially engaged by the fact that the hiatus between books one and two in the temporal structure of the poem — the interval between November 1792 and April 1793 — was also the time of his recent winter of crisis: his

⁵ Wordsworth's little-read poem "The Emigrant Mother," published first in 1820, though it bears no stylistic resemblance to Smith's The Emigrants, shows his interest in the figure of the exiled Frenchwoman, in this case a woman who has left behind her child in France. In his note to the poem Wordsworth mentions that he saw French emigrants "during the time of the French Revolution" (Reed Chronology: Early Years 124).

departure from Revolutionary France and his separation from Annette Vallon, soon to bear his child. These circumstances must surely have animated the female figures of pity in Smith's poem — the exiled mother of book one, and even more so the mother and child as casualties of the continental war in book two — with strong personal resonance for Wordsworth.

Considering what we have seen of the thematics of spring in their sonnets and shorter poems — the challenge spring presented to Smith's weary spirit and Wordsworth's greater capacity to respond to it — we may now observe, in what seems a conventional passage from book 11 of The Prelude a possible allusion to Smith's The Emigrants:

The morning shines

Nor heedeth man's perverseness; spring returns —

I saw the spring return, when I was dead

To deeper hope, yet had I joy for her,

And welcomed her benevolence, rejoiced

In common with the children of her love,

Plants, insects, beasts in field, and birds in bower

(11:22-28)

Even though Charlotte Smith in The Emigrants “[f]eels not the joy reviving Nature brings” we can recognize this passage as a variation on the same dynamic. Before Wordsworth and with different results, Charlotte Smith, too, had measured Nature's consolation against History's disappointment.

A similarity through contrast can also be seen in Wordsworth's treatment of a political theme central to Smith's poem: the transferral of hope for a successful revolution in France to hope for successful reform in England. For Charlotte Smith in 1793 it was a logical extension. For Wordsworth, remembering the same period from the vantage of some years distance, the hope for British reform seems to have been an aspect of his own crisis, even an index of error:

I knew that wound external could not take
 Life from the young Republic, that new foes
 Would only follow in the path of shame
 Their brethren, and her triumphs be in the end
 Great, universal, irresistible.
 This faith, which was an object in my mind
 Of passionate intuition, had effect
 Not small in dazzling me; for thus, through zeal
 Such victory I confounded in my thoughts
 With one far higher and more difficult:
 Triumphs of unambitious peace at home,
 And noiseless fortitude (10:581-92)

Here we have a sentiment very similar to Smith's hope for peace at the end of book one of The Emigrants. But Smith's poem is set (and was probably in part composed) before war with England had been declared, though published after. We have quoted Smith's lines earlier: "Thus may'st thou, Britain, triumph! / / ... — May thine / Be still such bloodless

laurels!” (1:365, 368-69). Wordsworth, however, sees the transferral of reformist hopes from France to England as a symptom of his youthful confusion. British virtue will triumph, but it should be a triumph of noiseless endurance of the status quo, rather than an imitation, by “confounding,” of a dazzling change in another nation.

For another echo we need to recall that Smith’s poem was written and published before the Reign of Terror in the summer of 1793, and that Wordsworth’s poem was composed afterward. Wordsworth’s describes that summer of indiscriminate executions, as one in which “... blasts / From hell came sanctified like airs from heaven ...” (10:313-14), and in which “[t]he sternness of the just” (10:315) was mixed with all variety of motives, including “the blind rage / Of insolent tempers ...” (10:321-22). These lines may ironically echo hopes expressed by Charlotte Smith at the end of The Emigrants, quoted above in comparison with Descriptive Sketches:

May lovely Freedom, in her genuine charms,
 Aided by stern but equal Justice, drive
 From the ensanguin'd earth the hell-born fiends
 Of Pride, Oppression, Avarice, and Revenge
 (2:431-34)

With so few examples before him of a blank verse style that treated present-day politics during the throes of the French Revolution, it is perhaps to be expected that Wordsworth would find himself rewording and rephrasing Smith’s The Emigrants as he looked back

upon that period.⁶

“Home at Grasmere,” a poem unpublished in Wordsworth’s life, was never included in The Prelude, but it did form part of the extensive writing toward The Recluse, of which The Prelude itself was conceived as a part. Dating of the poem has proven to be a complex matter, but the first section was probably composed in 1800, during Wordsworth’s first spring at Dove Cottage (Darlington, ed. Home at Grasmere [1977] 13). In many ways the opening part of the poem marks the beginning of Wordsworth’s domestic security and the final resolution of his political and moral crisis. It also contains an allusion to Smith’s The Emigrants, an allusion that reminds us there was more to be found in that poem than sorrow, strife and politics. In book two of Smith’s The Emigrants, the speaker turns from the contemplation of war to the limited security of the scene before her:

But, tho' the landscape be too oft deform'd

By figures such as these, yet Peace is here,

...

⁶ Late in his life Wordsworth would associate Smith with the Revolution. Harper in William Wordsworth relates an anecdote from Mrs. John Day’s “Memories of William Wordsworth ...” in which Wordsworth and the memoirist’s mother indulge in ... reminiscences of the olden time — the early days of the French Revolution. He spoke of Helen Maria Williams and Mrs. Charlotte Smith, on which my Mother took up an old favourite sonnet of hers, “Queen of the silver bow! by thy pale beam” and she and Mr. Wordsworth repeated it together” (150)

The dinner party was in January of 1843. We can see two Charlotte Smith’s in this anecdote, the French Revolutionist and the sentimental sonneteer. The closing emphasis is on the latter, but we should note that associating Smith and Williams with the period of the Revolution is Wordsworth’s contribution. Reciting sonnet # 4 — not one of Smith’s political works — is the hostess’s idea.

For, by the rude sea guarded, we are safe,
 And feel not evils such as with deep sighs
 The Emigrants deplore (2:204-210)

In “Home at Grasmere” the speaker is also taking stock of a new-found domestic security and turning away from more violent thoughts:

.. shame to thee, sage Man,
 Thy prudence, thy experience, thy desires,
 Thy apprehensions — blush thou for them all.
 But I am safe, yes, one at least is safe;
 What once was deemed so difficult, is now
 Smooth, easy, without obstacle ([Home at Grasmere 40]MS B 71-76)

Smith’s consolatory address to the reader contrasts with Wordsworth’s more strained and internalized dialogue. But there is nonetheless a similarity in tone to support the identity of phrasing. In both passages, imagined anxieties are kept in abeyance by geographical reality, by the speaker’s British surroundings and the security of land.

Towards the end of the 1805 Prelude, Wordsworth describes a moment from the midst of his crisis years, the partly accidental walking tour on the plain of Sarum, a visit which inspired the poem “Salisbury Plain.” Earlier in the same summer, Smith’s The Emigrants had appeared. Wordsworth’s visionary experience on Salisbury Plain is distinguished in The Prelude as a time when “[o]nce above all” (12:313) the poet seemed “raised” (314) to the sense that a work of his might have “a power like one of Nature’s” (312). It is, significantly, the final spot of time before the ascent of Mount Snowdon in

book thirteen. In the same book Wordsworth also relates Coleridge's reaction later in the 1790's to "some imperfect verse / Which in that lonesome journey was composed ..."
(12:356-59), a reference to the "Salisbury Plain" manuscript. This conflation of events — the visit to Stonehenge, the writing of "Salisbury Plain," the reading of that text to Coleridge — blurs the compositional beginning of the Prelude, which itself is structurally marked as being a poem read to Coleridge. This yoking together of moments that span a number of years has the effect of pushing back the apparent starting date of work towards the poem to some years earlier than 1798, the date of the earliest manuscripts.

The 1805 Prelude is curiously marked by echoes of the longer poems that Wordsworth wrote or published in the period of his intellectual crisis, namely Descriptive Sketches, An Evening Walk and "Salisbury Plain." If we examine the 1805 Prelude through these echoes of Wordsworth's earlier poems, the latent presence of Smith's poetry can sometimes be discerned. For example, in book 11, Wordsworth's describes the inefficacy of the promise of traditional domestic pleasures in repairing his imagination:

... What availed,

When spells forbade the voyager to land,

The fragrance which did ever and anon

Give notice of the shore, from arbours breathed

Of blessèd sentiments and fearless love?

What did such sweet remembrances avail—

Perfidious then, as seemed—what served they then?

My business was upon the barren seas,

My errand was to sail to other coasts.
 Shall I avow that I had hoped to see
 (I mean that future times would surely see)
 The man to come parted as by a gulph
 From him who had been? (11:48-60)

There are numerous echoes from “Salisbury Plain” in this passage, in particular from stanza 40, which contains the double allusion to Milton and to Smith’s sonnet # 8 discussed above in chapter 6. As the Norton Prelude points out (418n8), Wordsworth is alluding in lines 55-56 to the description of the odours encountered by Satan as he approaches Eden (Paradise Lost 4:156-65). These are the same images of unregenerate despair to which both Wordsworth in 1793-94 and Charlotte Smith in 1784 had previously alluded. Furthermore, the phrase “parted as by a gulph” (11:59) echoes “some mighty gulf of separation” in “Salisbury Plain” (370) and suggests a line of affinity between the disjunctions in the female vagrant’s narrative, the disjunctions in human development anticipated by the young, misguided Wordsworth, and the disjunctions between the poet’s younger and older selves

Wordsworth paraphrases Coleridge as having said of “Salisbury Plain” that the author had “exercised ... / ... [a] higher power” on “the vulgar forms of present things / And actual world ...” and had “caught from them a tone, / An image, and a character, by books / Not hitherto reflected ...” (Prelude 12:363-65). Coleridge’s version of this reading experience confirms Wordsworth’s account in even more enthusiastic language (Biographia Literaria 1:82-85). No doubt there is something unique and powerful about

“Salisbury Plain.” And Charlotte Smith’s The Emigrants is certainly no match for the ambitions of The Prelude. My intention has not been to subtract from the significance of Wordsworth’s “imperfect verse” or his imperfect Prelude, only to explore their original literary context more fully. I have been searching, sometimes straining, for signs of The Emigrants in these works because some undeniable signs are there, and one wants to see others. The latency, the obscurity of these signs of influence is in part owing to the original visibility — the brief infamy we should perhaps say — of Smith’s poem at the time when Wordsworth’s “Salisbury Plain” was first composed, and when The Prelude was, arguably, first conceived.

While we may grant that Coleridge discovered in Wordsworth’s “Salisbury Plain” something unprecedented, we must also remember that his intuition was not critically tested in the literary marketplace. Coleridge wrote to Wordsworth in 1799, “I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind ...” (Griggs Letters 1:527). He may or may not have been aware of The Emigrants when he wrote this. Smith’s poem was written before — just before — the “complete failure” of the revolution, but in 1793 it had already given form to a poetic consolation similar in its essentials to the consolation that Wordsworth would describe in The Prelude, which the general public did not see until more than half a century later. Coleridge says in his letter that such a poem would “do great good” Whatever good The Prelude has done since its publication in 1850, whatever good such excerpts as “The French Revolution ...” may have done since 1809, readers who were disillusioned by the

failure of the revolution had little else to turn to in 1793, or 1799, than Smith's The Emigrants, and may indeed have found there some of the support and inspiration they needed.

2. Charlotte Smith's Fiction and Wordsworth's Blank Verse

We are not used to thinking of poetry as being open to influence from the novel, especially in the late eighteenth century, when the novel as a genre remained on a kind of critical probation, and when the poet/novelist, or at least the critically successful poet/novelist, was still a rare phenomenon. In the case of Wordsworth, who shows little sign of having been a reader of novels — and less of being a writer of novels — we are even less likely to look for signs of influence from fiction. Wordsworth's The Prelude is autobiographical in its general design, and while this marks it as non-fiction, we should also remember that autobiography — in Wordsworth's time as in our own — is conventionally treated in prose and not verse. Nor is The Prelude entirely a narrative of true facts and personal reminiscences. In its 1805 manifestation, The Prelude contained the long and outwardly “fictional” episode known as “Vaudracour and Julia” ([1805]9:556-935) a verse narrative with many of the plot elements of a novel. Even in the style of Wordsworth's blank verse we can sometimes hear the proximity of fictional prose, as in the opening lines of book 3: “It was a dreary morning when the chaise / Rolled over the flat plains of Huntingdon ...” ([1805]3:1-2).

Duncan Wu does not list any of Charlotte Smith's novels in Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799, but this does not mean Wordsworth did not read them, either before 1799 or after. Although Wordsworth never mentions actually reading Smith's novels, there is at least one anecdote that would suggest he had some familiarity with her fiction. Bishop C. Hunt, in his brief attempt to suggest an influence exerted by Smith's fiction on Wordsworth's poetry, draws our attention to a reported statement from 1820, recorded by Thomas Moore and quoted in Peacock's The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth:

He said that great fertility was the characteristic of all novelists and story tellers. Richardson could have gone on forever Instanced Charlotte Smith, Madame Cottin, etc., etc. (Hunt 100; Peacock 339)

But this only proves that Wordsworth knew Smith was a prolific novelist: not necessarily that he read her novels.

Hunt also makes the educated guess that “[a]t some point Wordsworth no doubt saw or heard about Charlotte Smith's second novel, Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake (1789), ... which received high praise for its description of the scenery of the Lakes” (Hunt 100). Unsupported by evidence this point seems to rely rather much on coincidence. De Selincourt in his introduction to Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes observes that “...at the time of the poet's birth [the Lake District] was already becoming a popular resort, and in the last quarter of the eighteenth century no part of England was more often the subject of description and illustration” (ix). Hunt's intuition can be supported, however, by a passage from an unpublished “Tour of the Lake Country,” printed as an appendix to the Owen and Smyser Prose Works of William Wordsworth:

... this humbler edifice ... is the most interesting piece of architecture these Lakes have to boast of — Grasmere Abbey having no existence but in the pages of Romance, though the wreck of a sheep-fold has been more than once archly pointed out as its last remains by a Peasant in answer to questions eagerly put to him by Votaries whose heads were full of Sir Ed. Newenden & the Recluse of the Lakes ... I will avail myself of this opportunity to prevent further search after the Dwelling of Miss Evelyn & her ancient Uncle, to assure such female readers as may have given too eager faith in the narratives of the Minerva Press that no such interesting Residence exists. (Prose Works 2:308)

Wordsworth again shows that he was aware of Smith's fiction, although he gets the name of her heroine wrong and is rather condescending toward her readers, assuming that the most naïve of them would be uniformly female. Charlotte Smith did not call her fictions Romances, but rather "Novels," and though she was in all likelihood abridged by the Minerva Press to provide cheap, circulating-library editions of her works, she did not write for the Minerva Press.⁷ We may even read a kind of jealousy in Wordsworth's attempt at humour here, a resentment that a writer of women's fiction had already marked with her Imagination territories for which he himself developed a proprietary fondness.

Hunt's only internal evidence of an influence exerted by Smith's fiction on Wordsworth's poetry is the item mentioned above: Wordsworth's use in Descriptive

⁷ Smith once complained in a letter to Joseph Cooper Walker that she was so isolated she could "... get near nothing but wretched circulating libraries where nothing circulates but the most wretched novels ..." (May 29, 1796; qtd. Turner 253).

Sketches of the same quotation from Smollett's "Ode to Leven Water" that Charlotte Smith uses in Desmond. But this is weak evidence in that it is not necessarily a reference to Smith's novel. Indeed, given the importance of low tide at Leven Water to Wordsworth's reminiscences of horseback riding on its "level sand" in the Prelude (10:515-566), the reference is most probably to Smollett rather than Smith, although a multiple reference cannot be excluded.

As with The Emigrants, however, it is possible to make a strong circumstantial argument for Wordsworth's having read, rather than simply heard of, at least two of Smith's novels, on the basis of their relevance to his own political interests and experiences. Just as it is hard to imagine that the melancholy poetry of the early Romantics was entirely unaffected by the most melancholy poet of their time, so it is hard to imagine the young Wordsworth uninterested in one of the most political novelists of his time. Although there is a political aspect to all of Smith's fiction after 1791, Desmond (1792) and The Young Philosopher (1798) are the two novels in which she deals most directly with the events and controversies surrounding the French Revolution. Desmond was published in June of 1792, in the middle of Wordsworth's year-long visit to France. It was most likely a work in progress when he visited Charlotte Smith before crossing the channel. As it turns out, the plot of Smith's novel has numerous parallels to Wordsworth's own adventures: the eponymous hero travels to Revolutionary France in the summer of 1791, partially as an escort to his young friend Waverley, and partly to absent himself from the temptations of his love for a married woman, Geraldine Verney. While in France, Desmond engages in extensive discussions of politics with a ci-devant

aristocrat named Montfleuri and other characters, confirming and strengthening his democratic sentiments.

The secret that the novel does not disclose until its final volume is that while on the continent, Desmond also has a brief liaison with an unhappily married French woman from an aristocratic family: Josephine Boisbelle, sister of Desmond's friend Montfleuri. She becomes pregnant, and much covert travel and mysterious epistolary silence on Desmond's part is required to ensure that the child is provided for and the mother uncompromised. There is a secret channel-crossing and some very broad-minded accommodations on the parts of various characters, especially the French. Ultimately the child, a girl, comes under the guardianship of her English father. In the end, after Geraldine's abusive husband dies, she and her children, and Desmond and the infant, look forward to forming a new family.

This is not, of course, exactly what happened to Wordsworth during those years, but the number of points of similarity is remarkable. There were very few novels of the time which expressed such liberal attitudes, not only toward the French Revolution, but also toward extramarital sexual relations and illegitimate children. The similarity between the plot of Desmond and Wordsworth's relationship to Annette Vallon is at one level purely co-incidental. After all, Wordsworth does not give us this story in his own words, and as biographical fact it is not a text to be studied in the same way as the autobiographical Prelude. The similarity in these two "plots" does not point to a literary influence as such, but it reminds us that Charlotte Smith did know Wordsworth personally, as well as other young people, including her children and their spouses, who crossed into and out of

Revolutionary France in the early 1790's. If Wordsworth did read Desmond after returning from France, like The Emigrants it would certainly have struck a strong personal chord.⁸ Wordsworth, too, must have dissembled in the manner of Desmond, disguising a very similar truth: "... some business, from which I cannot disengage myself, will absolutely require my presence in France early in July ..." (2:15), or "... I had other motives for my journey thither, than it is in my power to communicate ..." (2:29).

Smith's novel of 1798, her last full-length prose fiction, was The Young Philosopher. Wordsworth would have heard of the novel, if for no other reason than that

⁸ Desmond might have struck another chord with Wordsworth when he read the following, an atmospheric recollection of childhood that anticipates something of his own later description of childhood fears in the Prelude. Desmond speaks of his fondness for "the cathedral-like solemnity of long lines of tall trees." As he says, "I know this betrays a very Gothic and exploded taste, but such is the force of early impressions ...":

.... I account for my predilection, by the kind of pensive and melancholy pleasure I used to feel, when in my childhood and early youth, I walked alone, in a long avenue of arbutus, which led from a very wild and woody part of the weald of Kent, to an old house my father, at that period of my life, inhabited. I remember the cry of the wood-peckers and the yaffils, as we call them in that country, going to roost in a pale autumnal evening, answered by the owls, which in great numbers inhabit the deep forest-like glens that lay behind the avenue. I see the moon slowly rising over the dark mass of wood, and the opposite hills, tinged with purple from the last reflection of the sun, which was sunk behind them. — I recall the sensations I felt, when, as the silver leaves of the aspens trembled in the lowest breeze, or slowly fell to the ground before me, I became half-frightened at the increasing obscurity of the objects around me, and have almost persuaded myself that the gray trunks of these old trees, and the low murmur of the wind among the branches, were the dim forms, and hollow sighs of some supernatural beings; and at length, afraid of looking behind me, I have hurried breathless into the house. (Desmond 1:172-74)

B. G. MacCarthy singled this passage out in 1947 for its "sense of the strangeness of human existence" (The Later Women Novelists 156). She does not mention the strikingly Wordsworthian quality of the anecdote, both in its content and its structure as recollection.

one of the prime antagonists, the officious lawyer Appulby Gorges, is a satirical portrait of his own elder cousin, John Robinson (Letters 1:68n). Although it is not set in Revolutionary France, the novel's hero is another young man with democratic sympathies much like those of Desmond. George Delmont's best friend and mentor, Armitage, is a figure much like Bethel, Desmond's correspondent, but in The Young Philosopher it is the elder man who has the more radical opinions. Mr. Armitage, we are told, has "... acquired a reputation as a free-thinker ..." (1:172). He is an author who has, from the point of view of the malicious Aunt Crewkherne, "... aided and abetted, as far as in him lay, the atrocious French Revolution ..." (1:175). The more sympathetic narrator explains that Armitage

... had been present at Paris at the taking of the Bastille ... and, on his return, ventured to write a pamphlet, in which, while he exhorted the French people not to suffer themselves to be led by the first effervescence of liberty, into such licentiousness as would risk the loss of it, he hazarded a few opinions on the rights of nations, and the purposes of government, which though they had been written and spoken, and printed a thousand times under different forms, and were besides modified by the nicest attention to the existing circumstances of his own country, and softened by a mildness and amenity of language, which was thought very considerably to weaken their effect, yet these high crimes and misdemeanors had estranged from him two or three old friends who held places, and several others who expected them. (1:175-76)

Here we recognize the novelist herself, although the speaker is ostensibly male. One of the charges against Desmond was that it had too much of the Revolutionary political pamphlet in it. And the novel caused the same sort of social repercussions for its author as Armitage's writings have done for himself.

While Desmond is set in the early years of the Revolution, The Young Philosopher is set during the conservative reaction in the later 1790's. The fury of political arguments, and parodies of political arguments, that animates Desmond is superseded in The Young Philosopher by a plot based on the social chill that followed the failure of the Revolution. And yet the political ideals held by the protagonists and the "authors" of The Young Philosopher — both Mr. Armitage and Charlotte Smith — remain the same as those expressed earlier in the same decade.⁹

Armitage's pamphlet on government, democracy, and revolution, although we do not have the text of it in The Young Philosopher, would belong generically among the controversial "master pamphlets of the day" with which Wordsworth confesses some familiarity in the Prelude (8:97). Editors usually gloss Wordsworth's phrase with a reference to Paine's The Rights of Man and Mackenzie's Vindiciae Gallicae, two rebuttals of Burke's writings against the Revolution, and there is no doubt the gloss is correct. But Armitage's fictional pamphlet is also an answer to "the admirable Mr. B---- ..." (1:181), and his social vulnerability is modelled on the fates of such pamphleteers. Wordsworth's

⁹ The Universal Magazine, in its obituary review of Smith's works, noted that The Young Philosopher was "... like Desmond ... written with a democratic pen, and lashed with pointed severity, the profession of the law, in a manner that shewed more ill-nature than good-sense" (7[March 1807]:260; qtd. Hilbish 196).

own pamphlet on the Revolution, the “Letter to Bishop Llandaff ...” was never published, but he might still have seen something of himself in Smith’s Mr. Armitage. Such a connection would help to explain a mysterious proper name that appears in one version of another unpublished work, “The Ruined Cottage,” MS D, a manuscript which has been dated 1799 (The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar 22-23). In this version only, the figure who appears between the poet and the tale of Margaret is given a name: the “venerable Armytage” (45). He is a pedlar not an essayist, but a wise man nonetheless, and he belongs in a line of speakers that would lead to the Wanderer in Wordsworth’s The Excursion. As Charlotte Smith’s Mr. Armitage is privy to the sorrows of his female friends in The Young Philosopher, so the “venerable Armytage” has authoritative knowledge of the sorrows of Margaret in “The Ruined Cottage.”

Nicholas Roe has said of The Prelude that “[t]he poem lives most completely in its lacunae, inconsistencies, and ambiguities: the disputed territory where history and imagination intersect” (The Politics of Nature 116). The boundary between history and imagination in The Prelude is sometimes made visible as a boundary between poetry and prose. One of these lacunae is mapped out by the author himself:

To a strain

More animated I might here give way,
 And tell, since juvenile errors are my theme,
 What in those days through Britain was performed
 To turn all judgements out of their right course;
 But this is a passion too near ourselves,

Reality too close and too intense,
 And mingled up with something in my mind,
 Of scorn and condemnation personal
 That would profane the sanctity of verse

(10:636-56)

Wordsworth chooses to exclude a great deal in this gesture, and perhaps protests too much. The reasons he gives for this enigmatic but sweeping exclusion of admittedly relevant matters are redundant: certain subjects treated candidly would be at once too animated, too personal, too mean-spirited, and not fit for verse. The passage seems intended to cover such “bitter truths” as Wordsworth’s own brief persecution by the government, the distortions of the press, and the repressive war-time laws which effectively turned Britain into (as Terry Eagleton has called it) “a police state” (Literary Theory 19). But Wordsworth does manage to slip in some of what he claims to be excluding:

Our shepherds (this say merely) at that time
 Thirsted to make the guardian crook of law
 A tool of murder ...

 Giants in their impiety alone,
 But in their weapons and their warfare base
 As vermin working out of reach, they leagued
 Their strength perfidiously to undermine

Justice, and make an end of liberty.

(10:651-656)

Wordsworth excludes and yet indulges a scornful style that by his own judgement is not fit for verse. Much like the passage discussed above from the 1799 Prelude, where Wordsworth lamented "... this time of dereliction and dismay ..." ([1799]2:478-88; [1805]2:448-58), the tone of this not-quite-excluded strain in the Prelude is reminiscent of Smith's recurrent complaints, not only in verse, but in her prefaces and in her fiction.¹⁰

By reminding us of prose (which lies beyond "the sanctity of verse") and of the proximity of prose narrative to Wordsworth's verse autobiography, these lines also recall the separation of the "Vaudracour and Julia" episode from the 1850 Prelude. This tale, too, verges on prose, the prose of romance fiction. Critics are in agreement that the main story-line of the "Vaudracour and Julia" episode was drawn from Helen Maria Williams's prose account of the du Fossé family in Letters Written in France (1790). This argument was first presented in detail by F. M. Todd in 1957. Despite Wordsworth's insistence in his note to the poem that "[t]he facts are true ..." (Grosart ed. Prose Works 3:26), "Vaudracour and Julia" appears to be a synthesis of factual and fictional elements. It is the closest Wordsworth ever comes to telling the story of his liaison with Annette Vallon. Thus, the name "Vaudracour" stands in some respects for Wordsworth's own name in the 1805 Prelude.

¹⁰ Smith was not the only author to express openly the indignation that Wordsworth tries to exclude in these lines. In the Preface to The Peripatetic (1793), published almost simultaneously with Smith's The Emigrants, John Thelwall complains in similar terms of the persecutions he has endured for his principles.

In a short TLS note (21 Feb., 1958) Chester L. Shaver reveals that there were several officers with the name “Vaudracourt” stationed at Blois in 1792, one before and one during Wordsworth’s own stay in that town, and that the latter Vaudracourt was an officer in Beaupuy’s battalion. Another article by Shaver suggests that Wordsworth might be the unnamed friend in an anecdote from Joshua Wilkinson’s journal of his travels in Revolutionary France, The Wanderer (1795). Wilkinson’s anecdote briefly mentions a tale that he himself refrains from including in full, in deference to the friend from whom he heard it, who intends to write it up himself. Shaver argues that this anecdote may provide a glimpse of Wordsworth preparing to frame as a prose narrative the “woeful tale of the loves of a chevalier near Blois, and a young bourgeoisie, his consequent imprisonment and insanity ...” (“Wordsworth’s Vaudracour and Wilkinson’s The Wanderer” 55). If this “woeful tale” eventually became the Vaudracour and Julia episode in book 9 of the 1805 Prelude, the anecdote would show that Wordsworth conceived at least some aspects of his major autobiographical work in terms of sentimental prose narrative rather than epic verse, and well before the earliest extant manuscripts of Prelude material. Despite Shaver’s evidence pointing to a real chevalier named “Vaudracourt,” Wordsworth may have found the name in its exact spelling in another book from the mid-1790’s, one of Charlotte Smith’s prose fictions. A Gothic “castle of Vaudracour” appears in The Banished Man (2:62 [Irish ed.]), Smith’s novel of 1794, and the first in which she registers the failure of the Revolution and the villainy of the new French Republic. The castle itself does not figure largely in the novel, but it is the scene of the hero’s capture by agents of the French government.

Since criticism became cognizant of the more intimate details of Wordsworth's early life, with the publication of G. M. Harper's biography in 1916 and Emile Legouis's Wordsworth and Annette Vallon in 1922, there has been a broader interpretation of what is absent from the Prelude, so that we now tend to locate in the same liminal zone of subtext both Wordsworth's more radical political opinions in the early 1790's and his paternity of a French woman's child. Paulson has framed this collocation as a large and simple metaphor: "The act of loving with this slightly alien woman is the act of revolution" (Representations of Revolution 1789-1820 [1983] 269). Mary Jacobus, quoting Paulson in her Romanticism, Reading, and Sexual Difference (1989) elaborates and transposes as follows: "I want to suggest that the metonymic swerve of passion from fallen Bastille to fallen woman, from history to romance, puts a woman's face on the Revolution and, in doing so, makes a man of Wordsworth" (194). We might also say that Wordsworth's concentration on French politics, whether candid or not, to some degree obscures or crowds out matters that are even more intimate: the "domestic" politics of family. In this Wordsworth is again like Smith's Desmond, whose late letters to Bethel strike the mentor as evasive: "Desmond ... [who] generally spoke of Mrs. Verney ... now seems to force himself upon political matters ..." (3:200). Wordsworth's relations with Charlotte Smith and her writings may perhaps be considered as of the same kind, at least as far as their representation in The Prelude is concerned, as his other scandalous relations in the early 1790's, whether with Annette Vallon, the National Assembly, or William Godwin.

Like her controversial Desmond, Smith's The Young Philosopher (1798) is also about an international love affair, this time between the hero and a young American

woman. There is no illegitimate child in the main plot, but the action does focus on a love affair made vulnerable by political prejudice and gossip. The crisis of volume one, which precipitates the entire main plot, involves a discovery: a pastoral scene of innocent love takes on a socially and politically scandalous significance when Aunt Crewkherne's carriage driver "misse[s] the gate" (1:182) and the notorious gossip interlopes on the grounds of Armitage's country house. Delmont and Medora (the adult daughter of Armitage's visiting American friend, the democratic-minded Glenmorris) are relaxing together, enjoying an innocent but sensuous activity which readers of Wordsworth's blank verse will recognize. The scene begins from Aunt Crewkherne's point of view:

.. she saw before her a young woman certainly not a peasant; her straw hat, filled with nuts, lay on the ground beside her, and her gown was held out to receive more, which were showering from the hazel trees above her, among the boughs of which appeared George Delmont, who, little guessing who was the spectatress of his activity, was making his way through the branches, now shaking their fruits from them, and now crushing down some of the most flexible, that his fair companion might herself gather the nuts. (1:184)

It is a very physical description, and provides a vivid setting for the confrontation between Delmont and his Aunt. Mrs. Crewkherne, of course, assumes the worst, and proclaims that Armitage, by tolerating this unsupervised intimacy, is "lending ... assistance to seduce young men of family from the paths of honour and right ..." (1:187). Desmond, a man of principle, decides that

[n]othing remained but to avow openly an acquaintance, which he had no other reason for concealing, than his knowledge of that invidious suspicion with which his aunt regarded every one in obscurity, or not immediately recommended to her by rank, fortune, or connections. (1:186)

The young William Wordsworth, no doubt, had more to lose from having his own politically incorrect romance discovered, and more to hide from gossips and spies.

I would argue that this scene, brief and fictional though it is, may have contributed to the genesis of “Nutting,” a poem intended at one point to be part of the Prelude, but published as an independent poem in 1800, much as “Vaudracour and Julia” was published on its own in 1820. “Nutting” (Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems 1797-1800 218-220) is a famous enigma in the Wordsworth canon, and a much discussed work. If it was influenced by this scene from Smith’s The Young Philosopher, the enigmatic quality of the poem may be somewhat resolved. An allusion to Smith’s innocent lovers brings to the hazelnut bower an erotic charge that only heightens the transgressive quality of the speaker’s solitude in Wordsworth’s poem. The symbolism of the harvest itself — its necessary violence, its joy mixed with shame — takes on an adult sexual dimension, as well as a political dimension and a new literariness as well. Wordsworth’s solitude in the hazelnut grove, the guiltiness of his harvest, is no doubt a metaphorical representation of sexual enjoyment as a private loss. But we can now more clearly see it as a metaphor for forbidden adult love as well as masturbatory sexuality, and perhaps also as a metaphor for unacknowledged literary borrowing.

Considered as a fragment of the early Prelude, and in the light of its internal clue “...

unless I now / Confound my present feeling with the past" (46-47) "Nutting" is a spot of time which seems to have its origin in both adulthood and childhood. The present moment of the poem, the "now" of these lines, is late 1798, the time of the poem's composition (Reed Chronology, Early Years 331). Smith's The Young Philosopher had appeared earlier in the same year. In the Fenwick note, Wordsworth says that "Nutting" was "... intended as part of a poem on my own life, but struck out as not being wanted there ..." (Grosart ed. Prose Works 3:39). Perhaps it was not wanted there, in the autobiographical Prelude, because it is a fiction rather than a memory from life — a fiction drawn from fiction, but resonant with the transgressions of childhood, adulthood, and authorship.

In a recent rereading of "Nutting" in his book Critical Genealogies, Jonathan Arac places his emphasis on the fictional rather than the autobiographical aspect of the poem. From the vagueness of Wordsworth's note — "... these verses arose out of the remembrance of feelings I had often had when a boy, and particularly in the extensive woods that still stretch from the side of Esthwaite" (Grosart 3:39) — Arac concludes that "[t]here is no particular 'mutilated bower'; the woods 'still stretch'; there was no event that corresponds to the feelings ..." (Arac 44). Even though he appeals to the "authorial" Fenwick notes, Arac tries to leave the matter of biographical fact behind:

Readers' sense of an epochal moment in the dragging down of the boughs comes wholly through the poem's fabrication, which has stretched out sequentially the feelings of the "impassioned nutter" Wordsworth recalled, or of the recollecting poet, or perhaps some third thing that emerges between them. (44)

My reading of the poem as influenced by a scene from a novel by Charlotte Smith would support Arac's conclusion as to the fictionality of the event described. At the same time, such a reading undermines even further the reliability of Wordsworth's note as an explanation of the poem's origins.

This "third thing" in Arac's post-Freudian reading turns out to be the phallic-mother, and "Nutting" becomes once again an allegory and "screen memory," not for rape or masturbation this time, but the impossible (and thus fictional) act of "castrating the mother" (45). But if we take the fictional or non-literal aspect of "Nutting" simply as a cue to read the poem as psychological fantasy, even with the new analytic twist added by Arac, then we miss the possibility that its fictionality is a literary fictionality, an allusion to fictional literature. A psychological reading remains possible, of course, but the third thing between the child and man may be the text of a novel, rather than an impossible phallic mother, or more appropriately yet, the third thing between child and man may be a woman novelist, author of the fictional heroism of George Delmont, who, unlike the young Wordsworth, remains with his scandalized lover. For a man whose origin as a poet was as important as his origin as a person, a powerful creator of fictions and contemporary heroes might be an apt figure for the mother who must (and yet cannot) be mutilated. If a trauma is required to explain such an elaborate evasion, might it not be Wordsworth's readerly shock at finding his private self represented in the writing of a woman, not only in The Young Philosopher, but earlier and more exactly in Desmond?

To enforce the argument that "Nutting" is about literary experience as much as lived experience, we could note its peculiar similarity to a sonnet on a highly literary topic

published in 1820, "To the Lady Mary Lowther". The sonnet begins:

Lady! I rifled a Parnassian Cave
 (But seldom trod) of mildly gleaming ore,
 And culled, from sundry beds, a lucid store ..

(Poetical Works 3:264)

Wordsworth wrote this sonnet to introduce to his friend a selection of the poetry of Anne Finch (1661-1720) and other early women poets. Wordsworth the spelunker of the Restoration is much less troubled by his trespass than the impassioned young nutter of 1798, but the metaphorical construct of the feminine sanctum rudely invaded remains very much the same.

As much as our consciousness of Charlotte Smith's particular influence takes away from our estimate of Wordsworth's originality, it adds to our understanding of his work. David Simpson has argued that if we consider the "pressure of the female precursor" when we are reading Wordsworth's writing, then the "hysteria that seems to mark so many of the sexualized moments of that writing will not seem so surprising" ("Figuring" 162). Some readers may resist a Wordsworth who is at once less original and less enigmatic. But we should be relieved to have him less "hysterical" and more strategic, regardless of whether we object to his strategies. Stealing well, as Emerson and Eliot knew, is the art of literary borrowing. "Nutting" may be Wordsworth's most subtle theft as well as his most oblique tribute to Charlotte Smith. Unlike his most explicit acknowledgement of her influence, the late poem "St Bees .." and its authorial note, Wordsworth's "Nutting" was published when Charlotte Smith might still have read it. What she would have thought of

the allusion to The Young Philosopher in this poem, indeed, whether she recognized any of Wordsworth's many allusions to her poetry and fiction during her lifetime, is beyond the scope of the present research. Whether Wordsworth himself was aware of all his allusions to Charlotte Smith is another question that may be unanswerable. But if the literary text can stand without its author, we may hope that the intertext of a literary influence can stand on its own as well, without the confirmation of conscious intent.

3. Reciprocal Influences

After the Lyrical Ballads were published in 1798, and certainly after 1800, with the publication of Wordsworth's two-volume version, it becomes harder to speak of influence travelling simply from Smith to Wordsworth. Both were now established, working poets, and influence could easily have gone the other way. And in some of Smith's later poetry a reciprocal influence does seem to be at work, with the elder poet showing signs of being influenced by the younger. Bishop C. Hunt points to one such sign when he suggests that Smith's "... moralizing Botanist" from "A Walk in the Shrubbery" (Poems 303) — one of the "Other Poems" published with Beachy Head in 1807 — is influenced by Wordsworth's "A Poet's Epitaph," published in the 1800 Lyrical Ballads (Hunt 101). This allusion depends upon our recognizing in Smith's "moralizing Botanist," who is a positive figure in her poem, the fusion of two of Wordsworth negative stereotypes, the Philosopher who would "botanize / Upon his mother's grave ..." (19-20), and his "Moralist" who has

“neither eyes nor ears” (25,27). Both poems are in the same verse form, tetrameter quatrains in a ballad rhyme, and although Smith is more concerned to delineate plant types than human types, she does contrast her “Botanist” to the more artificial “Florist.” She might also have been attracted by the unusual note — unusual for Wordsworth, that is — of hostility toward lawyers in “A Poet’s Epitaph:” “... The hardness of thy coward eye, / The falsehood of thy sallow face” (7-8).

After the turn of the century, Smith published her poetry mostly in the context of her children’s books, but she still had one more major work to release. The blank verse poem Beachy Head was unfinished at the time of her death late in 1806, but was published posthumously in the early months of 1807, along with other late poems. In more than one passage Beachy Head seems to echo Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey.” It is ironic that in the most obvious instance, the echo is on a theme for which Wordsworth’s poem itself owes something to Smith’s earlier work. Here, from Beachy Head, is Smith’s reprise of one of her favourite themes, modified by Wordsworth’s own contribution:

I once was happy, when while yet a child,

I learned to love these upland solitudes,

And, when elastic as the mountain air,

To my light spirit, care was yet unknown

And evil unforeseen ...

...

... — Haunts of my youth!

Scenes of fond day dreams, I behold ye yet!

(283-86, 297-98)

This sounds like Wordsworth remembering his own younger self, "... when like a roe / I bounded o'er the mountains ..." (68-69), and recognizing the view before him: " — Once again / Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs ..." (4-5). Also reminiscent of "Tintern Abbey" is Smith's phrasing in the following lines, although again the sentiment can be found in her own earlier work:

An early worshipper at Nature's shrine,

I lov'd her rudest scenes

(346-47)

Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" describes himself as "... so long / A worshipper of Nature ..." (152-53).

There are moments in Beachy Head which would even suggest that Charlotte Smith was influenced by Wordsworth's Prelude, although it was not published in her lifetime. This may seem far-fetched — it would mean that Smith and Wordsworth were much closer after 1791 than any scholar, or any evidence, has yet suggested. Nonetheless, the following citations from 1807 resonate with the tones and imagery of Wordsworth's manuscript poem. The resemblance of one of these passages to Wordsworth's bird-snaring anecdote in The Prelude ([1799] 1:33-45; [1805] 1:316-28) can be explained in part by the availability of similar details in White's Natural History of Selbourne (1789) and Pennant's Tour of Scotland in 1772 (1774).

... [the shepherd's] boy visits every wire trap

That scars the turf, and from the pit-falls takes

The timid migrants, who from distant wilds,
 Warrens, and stone quarries, are destined thus
 To lose their short existence ...

(Poems 237 461-65)

Another instance in which Smith describes a young boy's play could only be called uncanny:

The boy

That on the river's margin gaily plays,
 Has heard that death is there — He knows not Death,
 And therefore fears it not; and venturing in
 He gains a bullrush, or a minnow — then,
 At certain peril, for a worthless prize,
 A crow's, or raven's nest, he climbs the boll
 Of some tall pine; and of his prowess proud,
 Is for a moment happy. Are your cares,
 Ye who despise him, never worse applied ?

(260-68)

Both the aerial excursions and the conceit of death concealed by the river-side have corresponding manifestations in the Prelude. In book one of the 1799 Prelude, Wordsworth measures in a similar fashion the ethical value of his youthful adventure of robbing ravens' nests:

... Though mean

And though ignoble were my views, the end
 Was not ignoble. Oh, when I have hung
 Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
 Or half-inch fissures ill-sustained

(1:55-60; [1805]i:339-344)

And in book 5 of the 1805 Prelude the poet remembers himself as an innocent child in a river landscape that was "... like a dream of novelty / To my half-infant thoughts ..."
 (5:453-54), watching the water in vain for the emergence of a bather who the next day is brought out a "... dead man, mid that beauteous scene ..." (470).

4. "St. Monica" and "St. Bees"

The only time that Wordsworth explicitly acknowledged, in his own writings, the influence of an individual Charlotte Smith poem was in the case of his late itinerary poem published in 1835: "Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees Heads, on the Coast of Cumberland" (Poetical Works 4:25-30). In the note to this poem, published with the volume, Wordsworth explains that

The form of stanza in this poem, and something in the style of versification,
 are adopted from the "St. Monica," a poem of much beauty upon a
 monastic subject, by Charlotte Smith (Poetical Works 4:403)

This is the note in which Wordsworth hints at a broader influence by noting Smith's "true feeling for rural nature" and then suggesting enigmatically that she was "... a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or

remembered.” While we may be tempted to read much into Wordsworth’s commentary, it remains that this, his fullest acknowledgement of Smith’s influence, appears in a note to one of his least canonized poems, and refers us to a Charlotte Smith poem which is formally quite uncharacteristic of her own work. Bishop C. Hunt calls “St. Monica” “... a surprisingly good poem by Charlotte Smith” (101), but it is not her only good poem, nor her most original. And certainly Wordsworth’s poem is not one of his more renowned. As Peter J. Manning observes in a recent reading of “St. Bees ...”: “Mary Moorman’s verdict that ‘Poetically, it may be said to have as little merit as any poem he ever wrote’ is more than it receives elsewhere” (“Wordsworth at St. Bees: Scandals, Sisterhoods, and Wordsworth’s Later Poetry” 33). All that Moorman says of Wordsworth’s choice of the verse form of Charlotte Smith’s poem is that it was “... not a happy one” (2:481). The question of how successful a poem “St. Monica” is, or why Wordsworth borrowed from it, has been rendered irrelevant by the fact — or rather, the received opinion — that “St. Bees ...” is one of Wordsworth’s least distinguished works.

Smith’s “Saint Monica” consists of eleven stanzas of nine lines each, rhyming aa bb cc dd e, with the final three rhymes and the concluding phrase “Saint Monica” repeated in each stanza. Wordsworth’s poem is in eighteen of the same stanzas, although the refrain of rhymes in the last three lines is strengthened into a triplet, rhyming with the concluding phrase “St. Bees.” But Wordsworth borrows more from Smith’s poem than a rhyme scheme and “something in the style of versification.” Consider the following two stanzas, the first from Smith’s poem and the second from Wordsworth’s:

Beneath the falling archway overgrown

With briars, a bench remains, a single stone,
 Where sat the indigent, to wait the dole
 Given at the buttery; that the baron's soul
 The poor might intercede for; there would rest,
 Known by his hat of straw with cockles drest,
 And staff and humble weed of watched gray,
 The wandering pilgrim; who came there to pray
 The intercession of Saint Monica.

([Poems 299]10-18)

There are the naked clothed, the hungry fed;
 And Charity extendeth to the dead
 Her intercessions made for the soul's rest
 Of tardy penitents; or for the best
 Among the good (when love might else have slept,
 Sickened, or died) in pious memory kept.
 Thanks to the austere and simple Devotees,
 Who, to that service bound by venial fees,
 Kept watch before the altars of St. Bees.

([Poetical Works 4:27]64-72)

Wordsworth in a later stanza echoes Smith's description of the travelling mendicant: "...
 nor do they grudge the boon / Which staff and cockle hat and sandal shoon / Claim for the
 pilgrim ..." (93-5).

Smith's poem, like Wordsworth's, recalls both the social and historical context of the ruined abbey: "Stern Reformation and the lapse of years / Have reft the windows" (19-20). Wordsworth's "ancient House" was "laid low / In Reformation's sweeping overthrow" (147-48). Beside Wordsworth's "venial fees" we could place Smith's "yearly stipend paid" (7). Both poems also invoke the festive moments that once animated the monasteries. In Smith's poem

No record tell[s] of the wassail ale,
 What time the welcome summons to regale,
 Given by the matin peal on holiday,
 The villagers rejoicing to obey,
 Feasted, in honour of St Monica
 (70-74)

In Wordsworth's poem

. . . though chiding sharp
 May sometimes greet the strolling minstrel's harp,
 It is not then when, swept with sportive ease,
 It charms a feast-day throng of all degrees,
 Brightening the archway of revered St Bees
 (95-99)

Both poets go beyond the descriptive to develop an apology for the pre-Reformation social order. The thematic similarities between the two poems are as remarkable as the formal similarities, and it is equally remarkable that Wordsworth's note does not

acknowledge them, beyond the suggestion that Smith's poem was also on "a monastic subject" (Poetical Works 4:403).

Peter J. Manning's "Wordsworth at St. Bees: Scandals, Sisterhoods, and Wordsworth's Later Poetry" (1985) takes a New Historicist approach to "St. Bees ...", providing a thorough examination of the poem's historical context: the debate over High Church revival and the complex legal entanglement of the St. Bees property itself. But the literary context — Charlotte Smith's "St. Monica" — is touched upon only in a footnote, which is less acknowledgement than even Wordsworth gives her poem. By the synchronous standard of New Historicism, Smith's poem of 1807 does not belong to the contextual moment of Wordsworth's 1835 "St. Bees ..."; the specific scandal uncovered by Manning's research only came to a head in the 1820's, and the Oxford movement to which he also connects the poem did not begin until the thirties. Manning's explanation of the larger political context, however, takes him back centuries, and he does mention one literary precedent from the 1790's in Rev. Fosbrooke's poem, "The Economy of Monastic Life" (Manning 35). Manning's exclusion of Wordsworth's much closer poetic precursor shows that despite his own admonitions against "... a view of literary production ... bound by a nineteenth-century fascination with the single author ..." (51), he is himself bound by such a view. Smith's "St. Monica" is a valuable text to read alongside Wordsworth's poem, both for those in search of the influence of her poetry on his (or vice versa), and also for those following the topic of monastic "revival" in British Romanticism.

Smith's poem ends in praise of Nature "... ever lovely, ever new" (94), while Wordsworth's ends with an admonition to Reason not to forget in her "triumphs" the "...

bold credulities / That furthered the first teachings of St. Bees” (160-162). Charlotte Smith concentrates on the ruined aspect of Saint Monica, and in the person of the “pensive stranger” (77) observes in detail “[t]he silent, slow, but ever active power / Of Vegetative Life, that o'er Decay / Weaves her green mantle . . .” (90-92). The Wordsworth of 1835, somewhat uncharacteristically, does not give us a close-up of social decay and vegetable regeneration, but anticipates a revival in the form of “... the new-born College of St Bees” (153). In some respects, the ideas and expressions of Smith’s poem are more Wordsworthian than Wordsworth’s own poem, which suggests another instance, perhaps, of a reciprocal influence. We might even wonder if Wordsworth was drawn to “St Monica” and chose to imitate its form precisely because of this aspect of the poem. By directing his readers to a late Charlotte Smith poem, and one which shows the influence of his own “Micheal” and other “great decade” poems, Wordsworth installs his own poetry before that of his model, and becomes by sleight of hand the precursor as well as the imitator.

If the poem “St. Bees ...” places Smith in parentheses, the note to the poem employs a more straightforward distancing strategy. Wordsworth seems to be making an effort to correct the historical record when he remembers that Charlotte Smith’s “... true feeling for rural nature” was manifest in poems that “preceded, I believe, those of Cowper and Burns” (*Poetical Works* 4:403). But by evoking the names of other long-deceased poets of an earlier generation, Wordsworth preempts the question of Smith’s contemporaneity with himself, and her influence not only on his own technique of natural description but on a wide variety of his other poetic practices and pre-occupations. His admission elsewhere

to Dyce that he "... had never read ["St. Monica"] until [he] saw it in your Specimens of British Poetesses" (Reminiscences 187), a book that did not appear until 1825, might even make the connection between the two poems appear to be an isolated accident from late in Wordsworth's life, another rifling of "mildly gleaming ore" from literary antiquity.

Wordsworth's statement that Charlotte Smith was "... a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered ..." (Poetical Works 4:403) begins to appear as a ponderous and evasive formula, an understatement, even a red herring. Certainly it is not the genteel and enigmatic compliment it seems when one first encounters it. "St. Bees ..." and Wordsworth's commentary were written almost thirty years after Smith's death and the posthumous appearance of her "St. Monica" in 1807. In making his acknowledgements to Charlotte Smith at this late date — rather than, say, in a note to a 'a happy child' in An Evening Walk in 1793 — Wordsworth confirms and contributes to, even as he laments, her diminishment. He is, in effect, making sure that the obligations owed by English poetry to Charlotte Smith are never fully acknowledged or remembered.¹¹ In 1835, readers might have said of Charlotte Smith that, like Saint Bega herself, who in Wordsworth's manuscript draft of his poem gives her "softened name" to Saint Bees: "She too hath been obscured ..." ([Poetical Works 4:25] 46-48n).

¹¹ Grosart's brief commentary on Wordsworth's "St. Bees ..." note illustrates the sentimental but complaisant view of her obscurity that prevailed in 1876, when his edition of the prose appeared: "It seems a pity that the Poems of this genuine Singer should have gone out of sight" (4:507).

Conclusion

Charlotte Smith is on the cusp of a number of significant transitions. In literary history, she stands on the border between the Age of Sensibility and the Romantic period. Canonically, she has crossed and recrossed the border between renown and oblivion. Generically, she bridges the gap between poetry and the novel. As a woman writing during the most radical phase of Enlightenment feminism, Smith was on the front lines of a contest between masculine and feminine writing, between the largely masculine critical discourse and the emerging voices of female authors. And as a writer engaged in national as well as sexual politics in the 1790's, she was involved in the war of ideas between the conservative and reformist traditions in England during the aftermath of the French Revolution. In all of these struggles, across each of these borders, a major/minor hierarchy is — or rather was — at work.

At the end of the eighteenth century, poetry was still considered a “higher” genre than the novel, challenged by prose, perhaps, but more by critical prose than by fictional prose. A closely related tradition placed men’s writing above women’s writing, again in spite of challenges, in this case advances by some female authors toward a parity of respectable esteem. These two embattled but stubborn hierarchies combined to confirm — although not, of course, to determine — the portrayal of the Romantic period as superior in literary achievement to the Age of Sensibility that came before it. There was a major/minor differential among the political camps as well. The British reaction to the French Revolution was positive for only a very brief period, and was never unanimously

so. The broadly felt negative reaction to events in France in 1793 and 1794 marked the beginning of a conservative backlash that lasted, like the Revolutionary Wars, for decades. Conservative policies and propaganda imposed a stigma on the ideals of democratic radicalism and cast a chill on literary discourse, making a spy of Coleridge and a traitor of Blake, imposing self-censorship on Wordsworth and Keats, and contributing to the emigrations of Shelley and Byron. This conservative chill made Charlotte Smith's supporters either fall silent or resort to codes and indirections to express their sympathy and their respect. When the original conditions have passed away, it becomes difficult to hear such silences or understand such codes. Nor does it take long for a hidden relationship to be institutionalized as an absence of relation.

Two intervening centuries have seen significant changes in the way we value not only the novel and women's writing, but also the literature of Sensibility, political radicalism, and the contributions of minor writers. Nonetheless, the biases which shaped Charlotte Smith's place in literary history and contributed to her long obscurity should not be forgotten, for they shaped her own work in her own lifetime, as well as the way her work was received and acknowledged by her contemporaries.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the evidence presented in the previous chapters is that by any sort of measurement Charlotte Smith was a far more influential author than has previously been understood. I am by no means the first to make such a statement, but I hope I have provided a more convincing argument in its support. In the writings of Jane Austen and William Wordsworth there are more direct allusions to Charlotte Smith than we might expect, more thematically significant

borrowings of larger structures and devices than we might expect, and more complex relations of alliance and distinction at play. I have not by any means exhausted the topic of Smith's influence on Jane Austen or her influence on William Wordsworth, but I have outlined the main features of these two influences and suggested some of the ways in which they resemble each other. In both cases, Smith's influence inspired a reaction or a crucial swerve: Wordsworth alluded to her most frequently as he was overcoming the extremes of the melancholy tradition; Austen as she was overcoming the extremes of the Gothic.

Two things need to be emphasized: first, that both authors retained as much as they rejected, and secondly, that this swerving — this clinamen, in Bloomian terminology — only heightened the effect of a general tendency on the part of the critical establishment to minimize Smith's importance. Each of these authors made a relatively explicit late acknowledgement of Charlotte Smith: Wordsworth in his 1835 "St. Bees ..." and Austen in the figure of Mrs. Smith in her last novel, Persuasion. But these gestures were not noticed by criticism or by literary historians. Indeed, Charlotte Smith's obscurity lasted so long that she now has a kind of leverage on literary history, a purchase or torsion which — if she succeeds in holding the attention of today's critical establishment — may change the accepted narrative of early Romanticism. As Eliot said in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," immediately after his famous description of the relation between new writing and an ideal but flexible canon: "Whoever has approved this idea of order ... will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Selected Essays 15).



An understanding of Smith's influence contributes to several emergent truths about early British Romanticism. First, the influence of women's writing is roundly confirmed, both generally as one of the defining features of the literature of Sensibility, and specifically in the influence of a single author. Smith's influence gives much-needed detail to the generally acknowledged but not yet fully articulated importance of women's writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Coleridge's search for a more manly melancholy attests to Smith's presence as a female author no less than Wordsworth's complex transformation of her central tropes. An understanding of Smith's influence also confirms our growing sense of the complexity of genre dynamics in early Romanticism. Along with the more predictable lines of influence, we have seen Jane Austen influenced by Smith's poetry, and Wordsworth by her fiction. Smith's influence also complements recent research, New Historicist and otherwise, into the concealed cultural distortions that resulted from the repressive political climate of the post-Revolutionary period.

The concurrence of factors that obscured Smith's formative role in the development of Romantic poetry amounted to a structural predisposition of the critical discourse itself, a predisposition to ignore an influence exerted at such a time by such a writer: feminine and yet not modest, radical and yet not seditious, popular and yet not negligible. Wordsworth's failure to acknowledge Smith's influence fully is perhaps the cornerstone of this predisposition, but that failure itself has a complex history, and might not properly be termed a failure at all. It involves not just ingratitude or sexism on Wordsworth's part — though these played a role — but also prudence, fear, an ambitious exclusiveness of literary reference, and the sometimes necessary alienations between youth and adulthood.

The coherence of many of the allusions that do exist, their tendency to highlight certain themes, may indeed be Wordsworth's way of giving credit where it is due, in a code designed for the contemporary ear rather than for posterity, and perhaps only for his own circle. The example of Charlotte Smith provides a challenge to the notion that the anxiety of influence as it manifests in British Romanticism was always a matter of the living wrestling with the dead, or of male poets wrestling with their male equals. In the novel, where the influence of women writers has been acknowledged for much longer, and where influence is less often associated with anxiety, the details of Smith's individual influence on Jane Austen are perhaps less surprising. But they do help us to see the female novelists as a coherent school and a self-consciously developing tradition, despite the silences imposed on the authors by domestic ideology and political controversy.

Placing Smith at the beginning of Romanticism rather than at the end of Sensibility may be an arbitrary re-drawing of an imaginary line, but it has the advantage of inaugurating Romanticism with a figure who was both poet and novelist. The Romantic revolution had a lyric and a narrative dimension, and Charlotte Smith's influence was felt most strongly in the two sub-genres that were arguably the most important in the shift from pre-Romantic to Romantic writing: the elegy in poetry and the Gothic in fiction. In 1833, fifty years after Smith's Elegiac Sonnets first appeared, Samuel Taylor Coleridge offered the following definition in Table Talk (1833):

Elegy is the form of poetry natural to the reflective mind. It may treat of any subject, but it must treat of no subject for itself; but always and exclusively with reference to the poet himself. (2:266)

Although Coleridge is attempting to provide a timeless definition by calling the elegy the “exact opposite of the Homeric epic,” his definition is a critical response to recent developments in poetry and criticism, developments which he himself helped promote as early as his anthology of sonnets in 1796. Coleridge’s definition of the elegy is derived in large measure from Schiller’s Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795), in which the sentimental elegy is clearly distinguished as a “modern” form. In 1784, well before Schiller or Coleridge, Charlotte Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems was the first book of English poetry to adopt this broader definition. The title of her book gave a name to what would soon become the dominant formal manifestation of the new elegy: the elegiac sonnet.

If the elegiac mode can be said to characterize many of the more important experiments in early Romantic poetry, the Gothic mode can be said to characterize the most innovative fiction of the same period. In Smith’s novels, the Gothic mode inaugurated by Horace Walpole begins to combine its original indulgence in superstition and the supernatural with a rationalist and even satiric impulse, an impulse toward a realistic depiction of domestic relations. There are too many mundane dangers facing Smith’s heroines and heroes from such quarters as scheming relations, the toils of the law, physical force, “inanition” and poverty for there to be any need of the supernatural in her Gothic. Fanny Burney and Ann Radcliffe have often been said to represent the two extremes of the domestic and the Gothic in the fiction of the 1790’s. Between them there was not a void, but the fiction of Charlotte Smith, who took a middle path and helped to define the central line of development in fiction, a base upon which Jane Austen could

achieve the first modern novels.

Smith's most obviously "Romantic" innovations in fiction were her introduction of close natural description — especially of landscape, plant life and the seashore — and her boldly sympathetic treatment of the highly controversial French Revolution. Linking these two innovations, however, is an ethos of personal liberation and rational struggle against social injustice. Smith's agenda of reform — which her very haste of composition seemed to strengthen — required a greater realism in her fiction. This was not so much a higher degree of realism as a more intimate kind of realism, a closer look at the psychological motives and the material means of her characters. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis is quite right to observe in her introduction to The Old Manor House, that "[t]hose literary historians who try to 'place' Charlotte Smith as a Gothic novelist do so only by ignoring three-quarters of her work" (xi). But if the Gothic vogue itself were accorded greater respect as a moment in the history of fiction, such an apologetic measurement would not be necessary. The epithet Gothic needs to be part of any full description of Charlotte Smith's novels, not only because of her innovations in atmosphere and suspense, but also because of her unflagging interest in the perilous relationship between youth, especially female youth, and landed property, haunted by mysterious but earthly powers.

The elegiac trend in poetry and the Gothic trend in the novel at the end of the eighteenth century are both attributable to the general prevalence of Sensibility as a social and literary value. In the elegiac, sensibility focusses on sorrow and loss; in the Gothic, on distress and desire. To put this more provocatively, we might say that the elegy evokes pity, and the Gothic, fear. Between them, these two sub-genres embrace the elements

once found blended together in tragic drama. English literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was productive of stage tragedies in quantity, but the age produced more memorable and more eloquent tragedies in the lives of its poets, productions which occurred off-stage, but not outside literature. We could say that the trend began with Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," peaked with the Chatterton vogue in which Coleridge, Smith, and Wordsworth all partook to some degree, and began to decline, though it by no means ended, with Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" and "Resolution and Independence." Charlotte Smith wrote no tragedies herself, but there is a distinctly tragic aspect to her work, and to her role in our literary culture. This is not simply the "tragedy" of her personal misfortunes, nor even the scandal of her literary obscurity, but rather the complex mutual reinforcement between the two.

There is yet another genre to consider in this conclusion, if it can be called a genre: autobiography. Charlotte Smith's autobiographical representation of herself in her work was more than an accidental predilection. It was a profoundly original exploration. In Felicity Nussbaum's 1987 essay, "Heteroclitics: The Gender of Character in the Scandalous Memoirs" we find an observation that is pertinent here:

The first significant public form of self-writing that women take up (other than spiritual autobiography), the scandalous memoir, is the narrative of an experience from which men are excluded. These works revived the Greek (male) form of public self-defense in the agora, but their content was a uniquely female situation [T]he memoirs mark the point at which women become the producers rather than the consumers of discourse and

of the ideology of character . . . (The New Eighteenth Century 150-51)

Charlotte Smith combined the disruptive energy of the scandalous memoir — established earlier in the century by such writers as Constantia Phillips and Charlotte Charke — with the moral authority of the wronged wife and dutiful mother, and the aesthetic distance of accepted literary forms. As a result, lyrical melancholy and indignant protest could speak with a single, female voice. Smith's "figure" as an author, oppressed but outspoken, harassed but proud, and above all politicized by her suffering, would not be emulated exactly by any of her successors, but it demanded a reaction, and was as influential for her contemporaries as any of her particular innovations. The autobiographical tendencies in the writings of William Wordsworth and Jane Austen, although they seem to be developments in separate traditions, namely the verse epic and the prose romance, and although they reveal two very different "characters," can both be traced in part to this same author.

Charlotte Smith's commitment to moral individualism and to social reform align her with the revolutionary aspect of Romanticism. Her return to "vegetable" nature and landscape, and her reflections on the states of mind inspired by such a return align her with Romanticism's environmental or ecological concerns. Her exploration of the dynamics of memory and the suffering subject align her with Romantic psychology. At the risk of over-simplifying what Romanticism was, we could say that one of the major achievements of the period was to bring the political, the pastoral and the personal into an aesthetic synthesis, or at least show the necessity of such an attempt. Charlotte Smith may not have achieved this synthesis or shown this necessity as confidently as the major Romantic

— authors, but she was among the first to attempt it. Her excesses and her successes alike opened new possibilities for the generation of writers that followed her.

Although I hope to be part of the movement in scholarship that brings Charlotte Smith's writings back into circulation among students of Romantic literature, it should be emphasized that her influence does not wait upon myself or any other critic in order to be felt — it has already been exerted. What we have been examining in this dissertation are some of the more visible traces of her influence within the larger text of canonical literature. But this is not an elegiac note. Smith's writing helped to shape some of the most important works of the Romantic period, and thus her influence has been felt indirectly even by readers who have never heard of her, many of whom are not likely to be reached soon by the news of her academic revival. The present study, if it has been successful, has given new definition to one small but previously obscure area within the complex of old and new genres, male and female voices, and unprecedented political forces that we call early British Romanticism. The real gain for academics, though, is not a clearer perception of Charlotte Smith's place in an ideal order, but a recognition, by means of a specific case, of the non-ideal nature of literary canons: the gap between the elusive agency of literary works and the imposing narratives of literary history.

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