Alone and Pensive, I Delight to Stray

Charlotte Smith's Nocturnal Sonnets in a Wider Literary Context

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ANNA CHRISTINA MARTINSSON

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!

Charlotte Smith: Sonnet IV, "To the Moon"

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Sammendrag

For my grandmother, who taught me to love reading,

My mother, who taught me to love the English language,

And Sue Martin, who taught me to love poetry.

For my father, who always believed in me,

For my partner, who makes me believe in myself,

And my supervisor, Juan Christian Pellicer, who made me believe I could finish my thesis.

Thank you.

CONTENTS

Abstract 8

INTRODUCTION 9

CHAPTER 1 14

Night and Nature 14

Sleep and Insomnia 20

The Nightingale and the Moon 25

Conclusion 30

CHAPTER 2 32

Nocturnal Settings 32

The Shoreline, Storms and Tides 34

The Graveyard 37

Introspection 38

Nocturnal Melancholy 41

Melancholy as Evening activity 42

Ambivalence towards Night and melancholy 44

Melancholy and despair 47

Conclusion 54

CHAPTER 3 56

Samuel Taylor Coleridge 56

Coleridge and the Sonnet 58

“The Eolian Harp” and Coleridge’s Two Nightingales 61

“Frost at Midnight” and “Dejection: an Ode” 65

William Wordsworth 70

Evening Walk 71

Lyrical Ballads 77

Sonnets 80

Conclusion 83

CONCLUSION 85

Works Cited 88

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to place the nocturnal settings of Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* in a wider literary context by comparing her poetry to nocturnal poetry written prior to, contemporary with and after her literary career. It uses close reading to compare Smith's poetry with nocturnal poems by other authors which have contributed to the genre of the English nocturnal in order to determine how Smith has contributed to the shaping of the genre. The first chapter focuses on Smith's predecessors such as Thomson, Milton, Young and Anne Finch, and how their poetry has influenced Smith's. The second chapter focuses on Smith's contemporaries such as Anna Seward and Helen Maria Williams, while the third chapter views Smith's nocturnal sonnets in the context of her influence on the later literary giants Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth.

INTRODUCTION

I first read *Elegiac Sonnets* during a course I took for my bachelor degree, in which we read a handful of Smith sonnets, among them Sonnet XLIV, "Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex". The attention to detail and specific setting of the sonnet caught my imagination. Although Smith herself lived at a time when speculation about the last ice age and the geological events it caused was still at a quite hypothetical state, I had the benefit of scientific discoveries made since then; I knew that the reason why the sea, "by its continual encroachments" (ES XLIV, Smith's footnote), swallows more of the land for every passing year is that during the last ice age, when the weight of the kilometers-thick ice cover depressed Scandinavia, the south of England tipped up on the other end of that geological see-saw. With the ice gone, my childhood home rises towards the sky at a creeping rate of a few centimeters per year, while Smith's beloved Sussex downs slowly tip back down towards the sea. So there we were, Charlotte and I, separated by around two hundred years and wildly different fates, but still connected by an earth moving event that happened ten thousand years ago. It was at that moment I first understood my teacher's words about the importance of the Sublime to the Romantic period.

This unexpected connection made me want to study Smith's sonnets more closely, and reading them I was struck with the frequency of the nocturnal setting in Smith's sonnets. The aim of this thesis is thus to explore Smith's relationship with the nocturnal poetry of the period she lived in. I've set out to study how her nocturnal poetry differs from that of her predecessors, how it compares to that of her contemporaries, and what kind of effect it had on those who come after.

My primary method for the thesis will be close reading; I will look at key texts from Smith and other poets in order to compare their use of theme, motifs, and language. As Bishop C. Hunt points out, "between 1780 and 1800 British poets wrote upwards of 2500 sonnets",[1] and, as sonnets were of course not the only poetic mode used during the period, my primary issue has thus been to limit my choice of authors and texts to a manageable number.

[1] Bishop C. Hunt, Jr., "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith: 1970", *Wordsworth Circle* 35:2 (2004), 82

Christopher Miller's *The Invention of Evening* has been a great aid in helping me find and identify relevant texts and poets for my comparisons. Although Miller separates evening poetry from nocturnal, I've found while studying these poets that the line between evening and night is, in poetry as in real life, fluid, and the book has led me to a wealth of poetry I would otherwise not have been aware of. In addition to Miller's book, my selection of texts for the first chapter has been greatly aided by Charles Peake's *Poetry of the Landscape and the Night.*

My choice of the two "major" romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge for my third chapter is due to a wish to link the study of female poets with the "canon" male Romantics. As Labbe points out in *Writing Romanticism*, "The two segments don't seem, very often, to overlap; that is, books about male authors may put forward theories useful to authors of books about female writers, but there is not a lot of traffic the other way."[2] Rather than focusing on what sets female poetry apart from male poetry, I wish to show, by focusing on the similarities rather than the differences, that whether male or female, the poets belong to the same poetic tradition. By showing the influence of the "minor" female poet, Smith, on the two "major" male poets, I wish to show that there is in fact a lot of overlap between the two spheres.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 will explore Smith's influences; in it, I will attempt to trace the line from the nocturnal poetry of Milton, Thomson and Young to Smith's poetry – studying choice texts through close reading to find patterns that resurface in Smith's poetry. Chapter 2 will look at Smith in the context of her contemporaries; how does her nocturnal poetry relate to that of her fellow poets Mark Akenside, Anna Seward, Mary Robinson, William Lisle Bowles, Helen Maria Williams and Anna Laetitia Barbauld? Finally, chapter 3 will look at the relation between Smith and the younger poets Coleridge and Wordsworth.

The rediscovery of Smith and her contemporaries has altered the view of the relation between Augustan and Romantic poetry. Rather than viewing Romantic poetry as a reaction to, and a dramatic break with Augustan tradition, we now see a gradual transition leading from the Augustan poets to the Romantics via poets like Smith, who, in the words of Paula

[2] Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1

Backscheider, "can use the language, allusions, and restraint of the great Augustan poets," as well as "write trembling and extravagant gothic descriptions."[3] Thus, when I set out, I was expecting to find that Smith's poetry represented a gradual transition from the Augustan nocturnal to the Romantic nocturnal, as her poetry in general represents a transition from the Augustan to the Romantic period. As for how and if her nocturnal poetry would differ from that of her contemporaries, I was less certain. To find out how Smith's nocturnal poetry fits in with the Augustan and the Romantic nocturnal involves defining the concept; does the Augustan nocturnal differ from the Romantic nocturnal, and if so, how? Are there any differences between the two that stand apart from the general differences between Augustan and Romantic poetry?

During the eighteenth century, the nocturnal "became particularly common, forming [an] important and recognizable [genre]",[4] writes Charles Peake in his foreword to *Poetry of the Landscape and the Night*. Both Peake and Christopher Miller point to Milton's "Il Penseroso" as the poem which kickstarted the genre, Peake characterizing it as the basis for the entire genre; a "familiar ground from which to base ventures into less explored territories".[5]

Like other poetic modes, the nocturnal underwent an evolution in its formal qualities between the Augustan and Romantic periods. Augustan nocturnals are typically longer poems written in heroic couplets or blank verse, aligning with the general poetic trend of the era. Charles Peake links the nocturnal to the landscape poem, but not all nocturnals can be comfortably classed as landscape poems. Although poems such as Anne Finch's "A Nocturnal Reverie" clearly have many things in common with the poetry Samuel Johnson describes as having as its subject "some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation",[6] Young's *Night Thoughts* is a more introspective type of nocturnal, where the grandeur of nature reveals itself not as it would to a physical onlooker, but as it appears to the mind's eye.

[3] Paula Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 366

[4] Charles Peake, "Introduction" in *Poetry of the Landscape and the Night: Two Eighteenth-century Traditions*, ed. Charles Peake (London: Edward Arnold ltd., 1967), 9

[5] Peake, "Introduction", 17

[6] Samuel Johnson, as quoted in Charles Peake, *Poetry of the Landscape and the Night*, 13.

The language of the Augustan nocturnal is related to that of the Augustan landscape poem; an initial focus on neoclassicism and metaphor gradually fives way to more vivid and direct nature descriptions – Thomson's *The Seasons* is particularly notable for its mixture of metaphor and nature description.

Stewart Curran describes Smith as "Influential among her contemporaries", claiming that "through the popularity of her verse over nearly a quarter century she established enduring patterns of thought and conventions of style that became norms for the period."[7] That this influence was recognized by her contemporaries is evidenced by the fact that in 1802, the *Critical Review* wrote that "the sonnet has been revived by Charlotte Smith",[8] thus attributing the entire sonnet revival of the 1780s and 90s to her influence. The revival of the sonnet was not just a question of taking up the form as it stood, but a retooling of its contents; where the sonnets of Shakespeare and Spenser are love poems, the sonnet of the late Eighteenth century was a poem of nature and melancholy. The nocturnal sonnet of the late eighteenth century is closely associated with the movement of Sensibility – it draws on a nocturnal landscape setting to create a mood of melancholic introspection.

The melancholy typically found in the poem of Sensibility is closely related to the kind of "divinest Melancholy" (Norton 1801, l. 12)[9] Milton hails in "Il Penseroso"; a Melancholy born from a mind primed to Sensibility and opened to deep emotional experiences – "melancholy, love-longing, regret, and nostalgia".[10] These painfully pleasurable emotions lent themselves well to the nocturnal setting, with its already-established implications of solitude and introspection. Like the Augustan nocturnal, the nocturnal poem of Sensibility uses classical allusions, typically to Diana and Philomel, to describe nature, but it uses direct nature description to a larger degree than the Augustan nocturnal.

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[7] Stuart Curran, "Introduction" in Charlotte Smith, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith,* ed. Stuart Curran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xix

[8] *Critical Review* 34 (January 1802), 303, as quoted in Paula Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry*, 316

[9] Milton quotes taken from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8:th edition, Vol 1. gen ed Stephen Greenblatt (London: W. W. Norton & Co, 2006)

[10] Christopher Miller, *The Invention of Evening: Perception and Time in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 39

Several of the nocturnals written by Coleridge are what M. H. Abrams calls the greater Romantic lyric – poems such as “The Nightingale”, “Frost at Midnight” and “Dejection: an Ode” are prime examples of the form. Abrams links the greater Romantic lyric to the sonnets of the sonnet revival; while he does not mention Smith specifically, I will argue that her influence on the genre is apparent not only indirectly as the innovator of the sonnet revival, but that many of Coleridge’s early poetical efforts bear traces of direct inspiration by Smith’s poetry, and that the greater Romantic lyric can be traced back to Smith’s influence as well as that of Bowles. Unlike the writers of nocturnal poems of the previous era, Coleridge does not appear to assign any particular emotional significance to night, imbuing his nocturnal poems with emotions ranging from the sheer joy of “The Nightingale” to the domestic musings of “Frost at Midnight” as well as the despondency of “Dejection: an Ode”. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge reject classical allusion in favor of a more everyday form of expression, Coleridge’s second poem to the nightingale implicitly rejecting the metaphor of the nightingale as Philomel by describing it as a male, joyful singer.

Wordsworth’s nocturnals display great formal variation; his early nocturnal poem, *An Evening Walk*, is written in heroic couplets reminiscent of the Augustan nocturnal, but he also uses the lyrical ballad and the sonnet as poetic vehicles for the nocturnal setting. His nocturnal poems are, like Coleridge’s, imbued with a range of emotions, however, Stuart Curran makes the claim that “even where (as with Wordsworth) the tonalities are reversed, the underlying dynamic of an isolated sensibility informs all the sonnets written in Smith’s wake.”[11] According to Jacqueline Labbe, the “wordsworthian sublime” mode, where the experience of nature is filtered through a carefully constructed “I” persona which “take[s] center stage and claim[s] full readerly attention”[12] has its origin in Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*.

[11] Stuart Curran, “Romantic Poetry: The I Altered”, in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)

[12] Jacqueline Labbe, “Revisiting the Egotistical Sublime: Smith, Wordsworth and the Romantic Dramatic Monologue” in *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers, 1790-1835,* ed. Beth Lau (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 18.

CHAPTER 1

The nocturnal tradition to which many of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* belong can be traced back to Milton's "Il Penseroso", after the publication of which "Philomel, Cynthia, the curfew, the midnight hour, cloisters, the abbey's high-arched roof, the 'dimm religious Light', the organ and choir, and 'the peacefull hermitage' all became familiar elements"[13] in a nocturnal tradition which grew in scope during the eighteenth century. However, as Peake points out, in many cases poetical tradition serves poets "like a musical theme on which to compose variations, or like familiar ground from which to base ventures into less-explored territories."[14] This chapter will attempt to delineate the tradition which Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* draws from and how she adheres to and diverges from this tradition.

The chapter is divided into three sections: Night and Nature, Sleep and Insomnia, and The Nightingale and The Moon, all of which are important imagery in the *Elegiac Sonnets*. The predecessors to Smith's poetry I will primarily study are Milton, Edward Young, Anne Finch, and James Thomson, but I will also look at other poets such as Gray, Collins, Joseph Warton, and Thomas Parnell.

NIGHT AND NATURE

According to Miller, evening is "associated with typical spatial sites, including the bower, the hilltop, the field, the graveyard, and the shoreline".[15] Smith's Elegiac Sonnets make use of all of these places, borrowing from the typical imagery of evening poetry, but making it distinctly her own by associating these places with Sussex and her childhood home. Smith's bower is verdant not with topical flowers and amaranth, but with the floral species of her native home, listed by name and botanically classified in footnotes, her hilltops are the chalky cliffs overlooking the sea, or the hills and rolling fields of the Sussex downs, and her graveyard and her tidal-swept shoreline are the very real "church-yard at Middleton in Sussex" (ES XLIV, title)[16]. This focus on named places and geographical and scientific accuracy give

[13] Peake, "Introduction", 17

[14] Ibid.

[15] Christopher Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 7

[16] Smith quotes taken from Charlotte Smith, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith,* ed. Stuart Curran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)

her sonnets an air of authenticity that transfers to their emotional and thematic content: "These details give the emotions displayed in *Elegiac Sonnets* a place, a time and a context and they strengthen the perception that they are the real expression of the suffering of their author."[17]

This focus on immediacy and attention to botanical and geographical accuracy is a development which contrasts with the classical allusions and fantastic imagery of the neoclassical style. The neoclassical style drawing inspiration from Virgil and Theocritus was gradually replaced by the Romantic style of nature imagery incorporating descriptions of a more typically English landscape and images of birds and flowers found on the British Isles. Collins' *Ode to Evening* also shows clear classical influences in its descriptions of the sun retiring to "yon western tent" (PLN 123, l. 6)[18] and of "elves / Who slept in flowers the day / And many a nymph who wreaths her brows with sedge" (PLN 123, ll. 23-25), but this, as well, contains passages which show direct nature observation, as his observation of beetles buzzing at evening. Joseph Warton also populates his landscape with dryads, "Old Sylvan […] and the laughing Pan" (PLN 121, ll. 12), but his landscape also contains "clamorous rooks" and swallows. In Thomson's *The Seasons*, the use of description and classical imagery is inverted; the majority of the poem is taken up by direct description, and classical allusions are used sparingly, an inversion of the proportions in "Windsor Forest".

Night Thoughts is a largely introspective poem, and as such does not pay much attention to the natural world. To Young, "*Darkness* has more Divinity" not because of night's sublime qualities, but because of its lack of external stimuli: "It strikes Thought inward, it drives back the Soul / To settle on Herself" (NT, V, 128, 129-30)[19]. Night Thoughts belongs to a nocturnal tradition where the focus is not on the external world, but on the internal landscape; and the nocturnal setting serves as a signal that the daily bustle has ended and there is now room for uninterrupted thought, rather than as a setting worth describing on its own merits.

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[17] Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition: the Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 56

[18] Poems taken from Charles Peake (ed), *Poetry of the Landscape and the Night: Two Eighteenth-Century Traditions* (London: Edward Arnold ltd., 1967) will be referred to with the abbreviation PLN and page number.

[19] Young quotes taken from Edward Young, *Night Thoughts,* ed. Stephen Cornford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

Yet another clergyman focusing inwards is Thomas Parnell, whose “Night-Piece on Death” shows its focus on the world beyond already in its title. Parnell uses more external imagery, but its function is not to show the beauty of the world, but to serve as the setting for a philosophical discourse on death. Parnell’s poem, like Smith’s sonnets, seems to have a specific setting; he describes looking out his window and seeing the grounds fade into darkness on the right, and the churchyard bordered by water on his left. The nature imagery is classical, drawn from the imagery of “Il Penseroso”: the sky is “Azure”, speckled with innumerable “Orbs of gold”, and the moon glides through them “in silver pride”. (PLN 82, 9-12).

Christopher Miller and Dustin Griffin both describe “Il Penseroso” as the prototype for the evening poetry of the eighteenth century, but also mention *Paradise Lost* and its influence. Miller points out that *Paradise Lost* “offered a fund of temporal description, and later poets drew copiously from it.”[20] Despite its obvious exotic setting, the night scenes in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* seem more immediate and tangible than many of the later nocturnals inspired by Milton’s poetical works. The night scenes in *Paradise Lost* are, like all the scenes set in Eden, bursting with sensory description, which serves to make the setting tangible and realistic. Thus, Satan’s call to Eve is a source of real temptation in its description of what she misses by sleeping through the night:

> ‘Why sleep’st thou Eve? Now is the pleasant time,
> The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
> To the night-warbling bird, that now awake
> Tunes sweetest his love-labored song; now reigns
> Full-orbed the moon, and with more pleasing light
> Shadowy sets off the face of things,
> (Norton 1909, V.38-44)

It is no wonder that Eve would answer a call so detailed and sensually overt in its detailing of the pleasures of night, and indeed, poets such as Smith would later answer the call to wake and observe night. The continuation of these lines show an example of the kind of nocturnal communication with nature which would later become an important feature of Romantic poetry: “in vain / If none regard; heav’n wakes with all his eyes, / Whom to behold but thee, nature’s desire, / In whose sight all things joy” (Norton 1909, V.42-46) Nature joys in being seen by Eve, who takes joy from watching it, linking them together in a mutual sympathetic

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[20] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 16

reaction. Smith praises night for its ability to enable a similar sympathetic communion with nature and the heavens: “in thy quiet gloom the exhausted heart, / Is calm, tho’ wretched, hopeless, yet resign’d. / While to the winds and waves its sorrows given / May reach – tho’ lost on earth – the ear of Heaven!” (ES XXXIX, ll.11-14).

Anne Finch’s “Nocturnal Reverie” shares its botanical accuracy and tangibility of place with *Paradise Lost* and Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*. “Finch mimics the famous evening-to-dawn fantasy of scholarly devotion in John Milton’s “Il Penseroso” (1631), but she focuses more on sensory absorption of the nocturnal world than on the humoral disposition associated with it.”[21] The vivid descriptions of plants in “Nocturnal Reverie” – “Whence springs the woodbind, and the bramble-rose, / And where the sleepy cowslip sheltered grows, / Whilst now a paler hue the foxglove takes,” (Finch 84, ll. 13-15)[22] – are similar to passages of nature description in *Elegiac Sonnets* such as “Where the young leaves, unfolding, scarce conceal / Beneath their early shade, the half-form’d nest / Of finch or woodlark; and the primrose pale, / And lavish cowslip, wildly scatter’d round.” (ES VIII, ll. 3-6). The close nature observation in Finch’s poem anticipates Smith’s nature poetry. However, this sensory, proto-Romantic poem is an oddity in Finch’s literary production; her normal mode of writing is witty and arch, much closer to juvenalian satire than to a melancholy pre-Romantic mood. Even her poem addressing the nightingale is satirical, ending not with a reflection of on the pain of life, but with a dryly witty observation on how critics are most vicious towards those who reach heights they themselves cannot hope to attain.

Thomson’s nature imagery is strikingly similar to Smith’s. As Peake points out, compared to many of his predecessors, “the natural scene seems more immediately present before the poet’s and the reader’s eyes, and […] less dependent on classical colouring, overtones and allusions.”[23] In Thomson’s poem, summer evening falls, and “A fresher gale / Begins to wave the Wood, and stir the Stream” (Tho 136, ll. 1654-55)[24] and stirs up the thistle

[21] Christopher Miller, “Staying out Late: Anne Finch's Poetics of Evening”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* , 45:3 (2005),. 604

[22] Finch quotes taken from Anne Finch, *Poems: By Anne, Countess of Winchilsea 1661- 1720*, ed. John Middleton Murry (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928)

[23] Peake, “Introduction”, 13

[24] Thomson quotes are taken from James Thomson, *The Seasons,* ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981)

down to float across the fields, an observation which gives a sense of immediacy and presence – it seems based on first-hand impression rather than being a repeat of stock evening imagery. However, where Thomson attributes this botanical phenomenon to the providence of a kind and caring Nature, “thoughtful to feed / Her lowest sons” (Tho 136, ll.1661-62), underlining the religious theme of *The Seasons*, Smith is content with marveling at nature’s designs without attributing them to a higher power. In Sonnet LXXVII “To the Insect of the Gossamer”, Smith reveals her close observations of nature in one of her long footnotes detailing the inspiration for the poem; the observation of the gossamer, and the “minute species of spider” which travels along with it. In the sonnet, she asks “with what design / In Æther dost thy launch thy form minute[?]” (ES LXXVII, 4-5) attributing the intent of the action to the spider itself, and its potential fate at the bill of the swift is compared to the young poet’s vain hopes being dissolved by sorrow’s touch, rather than its success to nature’s providence.

Thomson and Smith also share an interest in ensuring that their nature imagery is presented with the utmost scientific accuracy; “New discoveries in science (particularly Newton’s discoveries in optics and cosmology) fostered the interest in natural phenomena”,[25] and poets such as Thomson, Smith and Darwin himself put these scientific discoveries to use in their poetical observations of nature. Thomson’s description of the autumn moon speaks of “her spotted Disk, / Where mountains rise, umbrageous Dales descend, / And Caverns deep, as optic tube descries, (Tho 190, ll. 1091-93) Personifying the moon as feminine, thus by implication linking it to its classical depiction as Cynthia, night’s apparent queen, does not prevent Thomson from launching into a scientific description of its features as viewed through a telescope; the moon is simultaneously an emblem of night’s beauty, anthropomorphized as feminine and linked to classical mythology, and a natural phenomenon worthy of studying. This mixture of the scientific and the poetic is anticipated by Milton in *Paradise Lost* when he describes the shield of Satan as similar to “the moon, whose orb / Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views […] to descry new lands, / Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe.” (Norton 1838, I.287.91). However, Milton’s description is used as a backdrop to the action of the poem, while Thomson uses natural description for its own sake. In the same manner, Smith’s anemones are simultaneously an emblem of spring and its equivalent state in the human mind, as well as neatly classified according to the Linnaean system as “Anemony

[25] Peake, “Introduction”, 10

Nemeroso. The wood anemony." (ES II, Smith's footnote), and her sonnet "On the Departure of the Nightingale" muses on "Whether on Spring thy wandering flights await, Or whether silent in our groves you dwell" (ES VII, ll. 5-6), showing her awareness of the scientific debate on whether the nightingale is a migratory or resident species. "Thomson's scientific interest and enthusiasm were part of his whole apprehension of the natural world, and thus, his information […] could be integrated into his poem."[26] In Thomson and Smith's poetry, scientific accuracy does not diminish the sense of nature's sublimity; it heightens it by drawing attention to the complexity and grandeur of nature's workings.

Night in *The Seasons*, like in *Elegiac Sonnets*, provides the setting for imagery depicting the terrible sublime; a blaze of meteors appears and is likened to "Armies in meet array, Throng'd with aërial Spears, and Steeds of Fire; […] a broad Slaughter o'er the Plains of Heaven" (Tho 192, ll. 1117-21). These natural phenomena are viewed by the superstitious as a sign of approaching disasters, yet "the Man of philosophic Eye" (Tho 192, l. 1133) is curious about their scientific cause. Smith uses similar imagery in Sonnet LXXX, in which she writes: "What time the martial star with lurid glare, / Portentous, gleams above the troubled deep; / Or the red comet shakes his blazing hair; / Or on the fire-ting'd waves the lightnings leap" (ES LXXX, ll. 9-12). However, unlike Thomson, she uses this imagery as symbolic of her own fate rather than as natural phenomena to be studied.

Another example of the terrible sublime imagery shared by Thomson and Smith is storm imagery, which in Smith's poetry is particularly tied to the nocturnal setting, but not linked to a particular time of day in Thomson's poetry.

> "The Cormorant on high
> Wheels from the Deep, and screams along the Land,
> Loud shrieks the soaring Hern, and with wild Wing,
> The circling Sea-Fowl cleave the flaky Clouds.
> Ocean, unequal press'd, with broken Tide
> And blind Commotion heaves; while from the Shore,
> Eat into Caverns by the restless Wave
> And Forest-rustling Mountain, comes a Voice"
> (Tho 208, ll. 144-151)

This imagery is quite similar to Smith's storm imagery in its setting by the shoreline – which Miller points out is one of the settings linked to evening – and its imagery of startled sea-birds

[26] Peake, "Introduction", 16

and tidal upset. The imagery used is similar to that of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*: "The screaming sea-bird quits the troubled sea" (ES XII, l. 6), "Press'd by the Moon […] The sea no more its swelling surge confines, / But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides" (ES XLIV, ll. 1-4), "Mined by corrosive tides, the hollow rock / Falls prone […] Loud thundering" (ES LXVI, ll. 5-8). Smith's interest in birds and their habits is also shared by Thomson, who throughout *The Seasons* describes specific species of bird and their habits.

SLEEP AND INSOMNIA

Smith's sonnets also display another aspect of the nocturnal: insomnia. The nocturnal setting implies seclusion from the world; when the rest of the world ends its work and goes to sleep, the poet begins his or her work. Both Miller and Dustin Griffin believe "that the eighteenth-century ode to evening can be clearly traced to Milton as its progenitor",[27] Miller claiming that "Milton's Penseroso, who conceives of poetic apprenticeship as a kind of inspired insomnia while the rest of the world sleeps, is the archetypal figure for this kind of temporal reckoning".[28] "Il Penseroso" shows a prototype of the solitary Romantic genius who produces poetic work in the solitude of night and under the influence of the melancholic self-reflective disposition it invites to. Patricia Parker links Eve's moment of self-reflection in the pool with her later communication with the night sky and argues that "Eve's vision in the pool has its Romantic descendants in the twilight or suspended interval of self-reflection dwelt upon or within for its own sake".[29] Other poets such as Young also underline the poetical nature of the nocturnal setting by emphasizing the contrast between the bustle of day and the stillness of night. Young states his preference for night over day, using the opportunities for uninterrupted thought it provides as his primary argument:

> I am not pent in Darkness; rather say
> (If not too bold) in Darkness I'm embower'd.
> Delightful Gloom! the clust'ring Thoughts around
> Spontaneous rise, and blossom in the Shade;
> But droop by Day, and sicken in the *Sun*.
> NT, V.202-06

[27] Dustin Griffin, *Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 73

[28] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 4

[29] Patricia Parker, "Eve, Evening, and the Labor of Reading in *Paradise Lost*", *English Literary Renaissance*, 9:2 (1979), 340-341

Young further underlines the poetical nature of night by reassigning the stewardship of poetry to Cynthia rather than Apollo: “Ye train *Pierian*! to the Lunar Sphere, / In silent Hour, address your ardent Call / For aid Immortal; Less her Brother's Right.” (NT, III.37-39) The moon’s connection to the nocturnal makes it more suited to preside over poetry than the sun, which is connected to the bustling and busy daytime. *Night Thoughts* thus establishes night as the proper time for thought – the time for poets to take up their pen and engage in metaphysical speculation. Finch, as well, views night as the best time for introspection – “When a sedate content the spirit feels / And no fierce light disturbs, while it reveals; / But silent musings urge the mind to seek / Something, too high for syllables to speak” (Finch 85, ll. 37-40) – contrasting it with daytime, when “all’s confused again; / Our cares, our toils, our clamours are renewed, / Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued.” (Finch 85, ll. 47-48). Night is thus shown to be more suitable for philosophical and poetical pursuits than daytime.

In “Il Penseroso”, Milton invites poetical melancholy and insomnia: “But hail thou Goddess sage and holy, / Hail, divinest melancholy” (Norton 1801, 11-12). Smith displays a more complex attitude towards this nocturnal wandering. While Smith occasionally indulges in the type of pleasurable melancholy Milton describes in “Il Penseroso” – “O Melancholy! – such thy magic power, / That to the soul such dreams are often sweet, / And sooth the pensive visionary mind! (ES XXXII, ll. 12-14) – she is more often emphasizing the involuntary nature of her insomnia, attributing it to suffering rather than to poetic inspiration.

Young ascribes his insomnia to the losses he has suffered and how they have made him aware of the ephemeralness of human happiness, yet he also refers to it as a desirable state which allows uninterrupted meditation. As Patricia Parker points out, Young “hovers anxiously between the older imagery of religious *preparatio* – of life as the twilight vestibule before the final dawn – and the seductive twilight zone of *melancholia*”.[30] Despite a few sonnets looking forward to life after death, *Elegiac Sonnets* do not, as a whole, have the same religious intensity and focus on the life beyond, but they share a complex relationship with night with *Night Thoughts.* Smith depicts night as a comfort, but also a symbol of loss and sorrow – a duality which echoes *Night Thoughts’* tension between introspection for its own sake and as preparation for the afterlife. There is an obvious similarity between the opening lines of *Night Thoughts* and Smith’s Sonnet XI, “To Sleep”.

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[30] Parker, “Eve, Evening, and the Labor of Reading in *Paradise Lost”,* footnote to p. 340

Tir'd nature's sweet Restorer, balmy *Sleep!*
He, like the World, his ready visit pays
Where Fortune smiles; the wretched he forsakes;
Swift on his downy pinion flies from Woe,
And lights on Lids unsully'd with a Tear.
(NT I.1-5)

Come, balmy Sleep! tired Nature's soft resort!
On these sad temples all thy poppies shed;
And bid gay dreams, from Morpheus' airy court,
Float in light vision round my aching head!
[…]
And they, O gentle Sleep! still taste thy charms,
Who wake to labour, liberty, and love.
But still thy opiate aid dost thou deny
To calm the anxious breast; to close the streaming eye.
(*Elegiac Sonnets*, XI)

Smith paraphrases the opening line, "Tir'd nature's sweet Restorer, balmy Sleep!", and uses this as a springboard to write a sonnet on the same theme, which reaches a similar conclusion: sleep favors those who are already content, but denies its aid to those who are truly in need of respite. Smith, however, focuses more closely on the fortunate sleepers, and introduces the idea that worldly fortune is not necessarily a guarantee for happiness, but that it can indeed lead to more unhappiness than happiness - "the poor sea-boy, in his rudest hour, / Enjoys thee more than he who wears a crown" (ES XI, ll. 7-8). True fortune is thus "labour, liberty, and love" (ES XI, l. 12), as presented by the three figures of the peasant, the sea-boy, and the village-girl and her faithful shepherd. Smith presents dependence as the source of true unhappiness: "Dependence! Heavy, heavy are thy chains, / And happier those who from the dangerous sea, / Or the dark mine, procure with ceaseless pains / A hard-earned pittance – than who trust to thee! (ES LVII, ll. 1-4) Thus Smith presents freedom and self-reliance as essential for happiness, a theme which recurs throughout *Elegiac Sonnets*.

Both Young and Smith link insomnia and melancholia to an awareness of the world and a loss of innocence. Smith's Sonnet XXVII begins with the lines "Sighing I see yon little troop at play, /By Sorrow yet untouch'd, unhurt by Care; While free and sportive they enjoy to-day, / 'Content and careless of to-morrow's fare!'" (ES XXVII, ll. 1-4) and contrasts the children's happiness with her own reaction to seeing their carefree innocence: "Ah! – for their future fate how many fears / Oppress my heart – and fill mine eyes with tears!" (ES XXVII, ll. 13-14), a lament quite similar to Young's lines: "How sad a sight is human Happiness / To those whose Thought can piece beyond an Hour?" (NT I.306-07). This is also reminiscent of Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" – "Where once my careless childhood

strayed, / A stranger yet to pain!" (PLN 126, ll. 13-14) However, Young draws the conclusion that it is better to be aware of the futility of attempting to reach for happiness in this life, while Smith concurs with Gray's assessment that those who are able to enjoy these ephemeral moments of happiness are the lucky ones: Gray ends his ode with the lines "where ignorance is bliss, / 'Tis folly to be wise" (PLN 129, ll. 99-100), and Smith states in sonnet XXXI – "Ah! blest the hind – whom no sad thought bereaves / Of the gay season's pleasures! – All his hours / To wholesome labour given, or thoughtless mirth" (ES XXXI, 7-9).

Anne Finch's "Invocation to Sleep" similarly depicts sleep as reserved for the carefree and happy, first detailing her attempts at luring sleep to her, then at last accepting it as a temporary and flighty substitute for the permanent and certain final rest:

> For if thou wilt not hear my prayers
> Till I have vanquished all my cares,
> Thou'lt stay till kinder death supplies thy place,
> The surer friend, though with the harsher face.
> Finch 29, ll. 35-38

While the "Invocation to Sleep" asks for a cure for insomnia – "How shall I woo thee, gentle rest, / To a sad mind with cares oppressed?" (Finch 28 ll. 1-2), "Nocturnal Reverie" is similar to Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* in its focus on nocturnal wandering and observing nature; both "Nocturnal Reverie" and several of Smith's sonnets mask insomnia by focusing on the undisturbed nature observations it enables rather than the reasons for the poet's wakefulness, or praises insomnia for the opportunities for undisturbed meditation it provides, "treat[ing] that condition as a blessed state, even as a deliberate choice."[31] By focusing on external impressions and nature imagery, Finch and Smith are able to "[transform] a night of insomnia into a reverie of sensory pleasure"[32]

The image of the "monarch-Swain" asleep among his flocks shown in Thomson's *Summer* is similar to the images of pastoral mid-day rest Smith deploys as a contrast to her own insomnia. Smith's woodman, with "His careless head on bark and moss reclined, / Lull'd by the song of birds, the murmuring wind, / Has sunk to calm tho' momentary rest" (ES LIV ll. 6-8). Thomson's cowherd is similarly shown taking a peaceful mid-day rest: "Amid his Subjects safe, / Slumbers the monarch-Swain; his careless Arm / Thrown round his Head, on

[31] Miller, "Staying out late", 611

[32] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 32

downy Moss sustain'd" (Tho 84, ll. 493-95). Night and day are thus inverted; day becomes a time for carefree sleep and night for insomniac activity. As Miller points out, when a poet declares a preference for nighttime, "they define their habit, implicitly or explicitly, against daylight pleasures",[33] and, particularly in Smith's poetry, this distinction is so complete that the sonnets mentioning sleep are mostly set during daytime.

This contrast between the pastoral and the poetical is also present in Gray's "Elegy Wrote in a Country Church Yard":

> The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
> The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
> The plowman homeward winds his weary way,
> And leaves the world to darkness and to me."
> PLN 129, l. 1-4

The division between the pastoral scene of happiness and the poet's melancholy task allows the poet to "[articulate] the strangeness of his or her vocation in relation to other ways of being in the world: while other people's work is ending, the poet's has just begun."[34] The division between the pastoral, communal setting and the poet's lonely task also emphasizes the solitude inherent in the nocturnal setting. The world is left "to darkness and to me"; the poet alone remains outside – a literal outsider – while everyone else sleeps. Other poets underline this solitude as well. Milton dreams of a solitary retreat in "Il Penseroso": "some still removéd place will fit […] Far from all resort of mirth […] Or let my lamp at midnight hour / Be seen in some high lonely tower" (Norton 1803, ll. 79-86), while Eve in *Paradise Lost* finds night a solitary time: "I rose as at thy call, but found thee not; […] alone I passed through ways." (Norton 1909, V.48-50). Collins, as well, wanders alone, seeking out a hermitage in a mountainside hut which views villages only from afar.

Smith thus follows the established tradition of the nocturnal providing a scene for introspection by providing isolation from others, but also brings in the natural description and focus on external scenery characteristic of the evening-piece. Her invention is thus linking the internal more closely to the external, seeking out nocturnal scenes that provide a macrocosmos of the poetical persona's emotional state in order to paradoxically both alleviate and increase emotional pain by submerging it in sublime nature imagery that resonates with

[33] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 25

[34] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 4

her emotional state: "the wild gloomy scene has charms for me, / And suits the mournful temper of my soul" (ES XII, ll. 7-8).

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE MOON

Both the nightingale and moon symbolize a night "presided over by feminized spirits – Philomel, Cynthia, Melancholy".[35]

> And the mute silence hist along,
> 'Less Philomel will deign a song,
> In her sweetest, saddest plight,
> Smoothing the rugged brow of night, […]
> Sweet bird that shunst the noise of folly,
> Most musical, most melancholy!
> Thee chantress oft the woods among
> I woo to hear thy evensong;
> "Il Penseroso", ll. 55-64

"Il Penseroso" illustrates the poetical imagery linked to the nightingale; it is used as a symbol of musicality due to its song, which is described as more varied and artistic than other birdsong, while its nocturnal habits means it is the only bird who is heard singing after sunset – the time which, as has been shown, is particularly linked to poetical endeavors; indeed the nightingale is often depicted as having a connection to night and the muses which is more complete and natural than the poet's tenuous and sometimes difficult relation to the muses. It is a symbol of melancholy due to its connection with the myth of Philomel, and is indeed usually referred to as female if not outright named as Philomel. It is quite common for poets to describe seeking out the nightingale to listen to its song; another related and common trope is to invoke the nightingale for poetic aid, linking it further to the muses which are also invoked to aid the poet's task.

Thomson invokes the nightingale in *Spring* to "Lend me your Song, ye Nightingales! oh pour / The mazy-running Soul of Melody / into my varied Verse!" (Tho 30, ll. 576-78). Young, similarly, underlines the nightingale's closer connection to nature and the muses by confessing to an inability to fully emulate her song: "I strive, with wakeful Melody, to chear / The sullen Gloom, sweet *Philomel!* Like Thee, / And call the Stars to listen: Every star / Is deaf to mine, enamored of thy Lay." (NT I.440-42) This image of the nightingale's connection to the night is similar to imagery Smith uses in Sonnet III: "Poor melancholy bird

[35] Griffin, *Regaining Paradise,* 74

– that all night long / Tell'st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe […] Thus to the listening Night to sing thy fate" (ES III, ll. 1-8). The theme of the nightingale's musical superiority is also used in a satirical manner by Anne Finch in her poem "To the Nightingale", which shows how critics attempt to cloak their envy of the unattainable poetic qualities of the nightingale by criticizing it rather than admitting to feeling envy: "If a fluent vein be shown / That's transcendent to our own, / Criticize, reform or preach, / Or censure what we cannot reach." (Finch 87, ll. 32-35). In all of these cases, the nightingale is depicted as closely related to night and nature, and as a natural poet supreme to what mankind can hope to attain.

Smith makes use of the established symbolism of the nightingale, its connection to the melancholy and the poetic, to the nocturnal and the feminine – using these aspects of the nightingale to draw a parallel between herself and the nightingale. Miller writes about Collins similar identification with the natural creatures of "Ode to Evening", but his identification is not as complete as Smith's with the nightingale: "In these bestial alter egos, Collins prefigures the rapport between poet and nature that his Romantic successors would more fully elaborate."[36]

Smith draws the parallel between herself and the nightingale in several ways. Sonnet I alludes to the myth of the nightingale singing with its breast pierced by a thorn by describing how the muse "Reserves the thorn to fester in the heart" (ES I, l. 8), a myth also alluded to by Finch in her poem "To the Nightingale: "And still the unhappy poet's breast, / Like thine, when best he sings, is placed against a thorn." (Finch 86, ll. 12-13). Finch, like Smith later, links nightingale and poet, melancholy and poetical production – Finch's poem "To Melancholy" shows her attempts to keep melancholy at bay by invoking the powers of poetry: "These failing, I invoked a Muse, / And poetry would often use / To guard me from the tyrant power" (Finch 30, ll. 29-31), a statement similar to Smith's assertion that "Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought". (ES, p. 3)

Smith's Sonnet III links Smith to the nightingale by her self-identification as its own poet, by showing its situation to be similar to the unspecified melancholy which haunts Smith's own poetical persona, and by its similarity to Sonnet I, which is explicitly stated to be about Smith's poetic endeavors. Smith's speculation in the nightingale's reasons for singing –

[36] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 33

"From what sad cause can such sweet sorrow flow, / And whence this mournful melody of song?" (ES III, ll. 3-4) – also invites the reader to speculate in Smith's reasons for writing. The lines "hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong, / Or died'st thou – martyr of disastrous love?" coyly hint at Smith's own woes by echoing Sonnet I's statement that the muse worsens the pain "Of mourning Friendship, or unhappy love" (ES I, l. 12). Her nightingale's sorrow and her refusal to reveal a definite cause is reminiscent of her hints to the cause of her own sorrow, thus remaining a blank page for her readers to project their own emotions on. In this way, Smith's statement from the preface to the first edition that melancholy can be lessened by expressing the emotions it causes in verse, is linked to the nightingale's pouring her feelings out to the moon and the listening night.

Smith's success in identifying herself with the nightingale is evidenced by the strong connection between *Elegiac Sonnets,* Smith herself, and the nightingale formed by readers and critics, despite the fact that the nightingale is only mentioned in a handful of the *Elegiac Sonnets*. Smith's anecdote in the preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* is an example of this identification of *Elegiac Sonnets* with nightingale imagery. She informs the reader that her friend reacted to the inclusion of "The Return of the Nightingale" in the sixth edition with the comment "tojours Rossignols, tojours des chansons tristes". (ES, p. 5). Given that this sonnet is the sixth published which mentions the nightingale, out of a collection which would grow to comprise two volumes with a total of ninety-two sonnets and 25 other poems, this shows how closely Smith and her poetry are conflated with the nightingale imagery, despite the relatively small number of them that actually contain such imagery.

Smith's readers seem to react towards her with the same kind of sympathetic protective response she herself extends to the nightingale, as shown by reader responses such as the sonnet by an anonymous author published in the *European Magazine* in 1786. The sonnet first asserts its author's belief in the sincerity of Smith's suffering – her poems "spring from REAL woe", and wishes her a happier future, yet ends with the caveat – "Tho' ah! So sweet, so pensive sweet, thy grief, / Compassion's self might almost grudge relief."[37] This and other similar reader responses show a similarity to Smith's Sonnet VII, which shows how the nightingale is sheltered and protected by pastoral figures which display a sensibility to the

[37] Anonymous author, "Sonnet to Mrs Smith", quoted in Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 57

suffering of the bird which sets them apart from the "eyes profane" that would view it without the sympathy required to understand its suffering.

> With cautious step the love-lorn youth shall glide
> Thro' the lone brake that shades thy mossy nest;
> And shepherd girls from eyes profane shall hide
> The gentle bird, who sings of pity best:
> For still thy voice shall soft affections move,
> And still be dear to Sorrow, and to Love!
> *Elegiac Sonnets* VII, ll. 9-14

As with large parts of the night imagery, much of the moon imagery used in eighteenth century poetry can be traced back to Milton, "Il Penseroso" and *Paradise Lost*. The moon is shown "Rising in clouded majesty, […] / Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light, / And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw." (Norton 1900, IV.606-09), or as in "Il Penseroso" riding across the sky, "And oft as if her head she bowed, / Stooping through a fleecy cloud" (Norton 1802, ll. 71-72). Milton's influence on this area is undeniable – Dustin Griffin even claims that it is due to Milton's influence that "the moon became a standard part of the eighteenth-century evening poem".[38] Gay's mock-heroic *Trivia* captures the spirit of the times when he urges Trivia, "Celestial Queen, put on thy Robes of Light / Now Cynthia nam'd, fair Regent of the Night" (PLN 64, ll. 3.3-4). Even Thomson, whose nature imagery is often notable for its originality nods towards "Il Penseroso"'s classic image of the moon riding the sky and stooping through the clouds; the lines "Now thro' the passing Cloud she seems to stoop, / Now up the pure Cerulean rides sublime" (Tho 190, ll. 1096-97) are undeniably similar to "the wandering moon, / Riding near her highest noon […] Stooping through a fleecy cloud" (Norton 1802, ll. 67-72) of "Il Penseroso". Thomson, however, combines this allusion with his own moon imagery more closely drawn from nature, reminiscent of the way Smith uses an abundant amount of quotes and allusions from other poetry to complement her own imagery in *Elegiac Sonnets*. This use of allusion serves to link the poems to an existing tradition, while still leaving room for new and inventive imagery to be used.

Like the nightingale, the moon is a symbol of femininity; it is alluded to or outright referred to as Cynthia or Diana, and given feminine epithets as Queen of the Night. The moon comes up in conjunction with the feminine and melancholy. Smith also imagines the moon as feminine, but imbues it with an air of authority which contrasts with earlier descriptions such

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[38] Griffin, *Regaining Paradise,* 77

as Young’s image of a “*Lunar* theme, / Soft, modest, melancholy, female, fair” (NT III.56-57), by casting the moon as the “mute arbitress of tides” (ES XLIV, l. 1) who controls the violent night-floods without herself being affected by the tumult below.

Smith’s usage of the moon as a symbol differs from that of Young, who addresses the moon as a symbol of the rapid changes undergone by both the moon and the sublunary world below: “O *Cynthia!* Why so pale? Dost thou lament / Thy wretched Neighbour? Grieve, to see thy Wheel / Of ceaseless change outwhirl'd in human Life?” (NT I.214-16). Contrasting with this, Smith’s moon symbolizes stability and eternity: “oft I think – fair planet of the night, / That in thy orb the wretched may have rest;” (ES IV, ll. 7-8). She imagines the moon as a symbol of heavenly peace and serenity which not only symbolizes heaven – it is the place where sufferers go after death – but, like the thought of heaven, is also able to give comfort to the living through the soothing influences of its “mild and placid light” (ES IV, l. 5).

Sonnet LIX further underlines the moon’s position of authority by describing a fierce thunderstorm which despite its intensity cannot affect the moon: “While in serenest azure, beaming high, / Night’s regent [….] Gilds the dark shadows that beneath her lie, / Unvex’d by all their conflicts fierce and loud” (ES LIX, ll. 5-8). Smith continues the sonnet by comparing the moon to a spirit “conscious of superior worth[, who] 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.” (ES LIX, l. 1-14) The constancy of close friendship is also likened to the moon: “Like the fair moon, thy mild and genuine ray / Thro’ life’s long evening shall unclouded last” (ES XXVIII, ll. 5-6) The moon symbolism Smith uses is thus not based on changeability, but on the moon’s situation above earthly, sublunar concerns, its ability to bring light to the nocturnal settings which Smith inhabits, thus becoming a symbol of comfort and hope, and its symbolism as a feminine version of a higher power.

Although Smith converts the moon from a symbol of instability to a symbol of stability and constancy, it is still used in conjunction with other imagery to represent the instability of the sub-lunar world; when the moon is present, it “Sheds a soft calm upon my troubled breast” (ES IV, l. 6), while times when it the moon is occluded by clouds or absent altogether are used to represent feelings of hopelessness and despair. Sonnet LXXX “To the Invisible Moon” focuses on the moon’s absence. The sonnet states that “Mild Sorrow, such as Hope has not forsook, / May love to muse beneath thy silent reign” (ES LXXX, ll. 5-6) The moon is thus connected with hope, and again shown as a figure of authority which reigns over

the sky and brings order when present; its absence, however, paves the way for destructive sublime imagery such as “the martial star”, blazing comets or a lightning storm over a sea lit by Saint Elmo’s fire, “While [the moon’s] fair beams illume another sky, and shine for beings less accurst than I” (ES LXXX, ll. 13-14).

Thus Smith’s moon imagery, despite occasionally using classical allusions such as “Queen of the Silver Bow”, mainly relies on natural immediate imagery and scientific observation in the vein of Thomson rather than the classical imagery used by Milton. Smith also places the moon in a position of authority which is hinted at by previous epithets such as “Night’s Regent”, but makes it more explicit.

CONCLUSION

Smith’s poetry shows inspiration from her predecessors not only in the form of her frequent allusions, but also in the mixture of naturalistic imagery and classical allusion which is quite reminiscent of Thomson’s *The Seasons*. Where Smith breaks from the mold is in her combination of the nocturnal and the evening-piece. Griffin differentiates between the evening-piece and the nocturnal thusly: “While the night-piece is typically rapturous, bold, and pre-occupied with death and immortality, the evening poem is mild, temperate, pre-occupied with the ‘pensive pleasures’ of the mortal imagination.”[39] Miller further elaborates on the typical settings of the evening poem, “the bower, the hilltop, the field, the graveyard, and the shoreline”[40]; all used by Smith, but often in combination with sublime and violent imagery such as storms and tides, rather than associated with stillness and temperateness. Miller further elaborates that “A night-poem […] is set in the dark middle of things, a moment in which time seems to stand still; in contrast [the evening poem] is set at the cusp between day and night, and the lapse of time is registered in significant ways.”[41] Smith thus uses elements from both the nocturnal and the evening poem to make her own brand of poetry which is combines the typical settings and focus on external scenery of the evening poem with the “rapturous” sublime imagery and the introspectiveness of the nocturnal. Similarly, Smith reinvents the symbols of the nightingale and the moon, expanding on the traditional

[39] Griffin, *Regaining Paradise*, 77

[40] Miller, *The Invention of Evening,* 7

[41] Miller, *The Invention of Evening,* 6

symbolism and making them take on meanings which are particular to her work. The nightingale becomes a symbol for the poet herself, while the moon is made into a symbol of female authority.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter will deal with Smith's relation to her contemporaries. I will attempt to delineate the trends in nocturnal poetry in the era of Sensibility, and how *Elegiac Sonnets* relates to these trends – to which degree it follows established and growing conventions, and to which degree it departs from the conventions and helps to shape them. The chapter will look at nocturnal poetry by Mark Akenside, Anna Letitia Barbauld, William Lisle Bowles, Mary Robinson, Anna Seward and Helen Maria Williams. The chapter will be divided into three sections, dealing with nocturnal settings, introspection and melancholy.

NOCTURNAL SETTINGS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Christopher Miller refers to evening in eighteenth-century poetry as a chronotope, associating it with specific spatial settings such as "the bower, the hilltop, the field, the graveyard, and the shoreline".[42] Of these settings, the graveyard and the shoreline are particularly associated with the nocturnal. Smith, indeed, combines both of these settings to great effect in her Sonnet XLIV, "Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex". Miller also refers to the poets of sensibility's "set of shared aesthetic preferences, including evening walks, nightingales, sunsets, churchyards, breezes, shadows."[43] In the nocturnal, the beautiful scenery of evening poetry is often replaced by more violently sublime imagery. Thus, where the evening has breezes, gently lapping waves, and slowly spreading shadows, exemplifying the beautiful, the nocturnal exemplifies the sublime with imagery such as violent storms, and in the seashore setting, tides; grand natural phenomena which produce a sense of terror and exaltation in the onlooker[44], amplified by the darkness, which Burke claims to be sublime and terrible in and of itself.[45]

The sublime nature scenes of the nocturnal, and the sensory deprivation afforded by darkness serve as a starting point for introspection, which is woven into the context of the poem either by using these sublime nature observations as a metaphor for violent emotion, or

[42] Miller, *The Invention of Evening,* 7

[43] Miller, *The Invention of Evening,* 39

[44] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 124

[45] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 131

by emphasizing the uncanny aspects of night – the sense of isolation and the surreal effect this isolation produces, even when the nocturnal poem is set in a busy town – or perhaps even more so, due to the contrast between the bustling scenes of day and the quiet stillness of night. Smith describes a winter night in Weymouth: "black and gloomy, like my cheerless breast, / Frowns the dark pier and lonely sea-view round. / Yet a few months – and on the peopled strand / Pleasure shall all her varied forms display". (ES LXXI, ll.5-8). The contrast between day and night is heightened by the added contrast between the winter and summer months in the resort town.

Mary Robinson's "Ode to Melancholy" shows how intertwined the tropes of night and melancholy are, describing melancholy's favored haunts as primarily nocturnal, she lists the graveyard, the shoreline and the field, also mentioning the moon and the nightingale as belonging to the setting: Melancholy is best found in "some Church-yard's gloom", "where the Virgin Orb of Night, / Silvers o'er the forest wide, / Or across the silent tide", where "Sounds of mournful melody / Caught from the Nightingale's enamour'd Tale, / Steal on faint Echo's ear" or in "enchanted spangled meads", (MR I:21-22, ll. 16, 20-22, 25-27, 29).[46] Helen Maria Williams further underlines this link between the sublime nature scene and poetry: "Wild poesy in haunts sublime, / Delights her lofty note to pour; / She loves the hanging rock to climb, / And hear the sweeping torrent roar" (HMW, I:147, ll. 147-48)[47] Similarly, Anna Seward states that "Romantic Nature to th' enthusiast Child / Grew dearer far than when serene she smil'd / In uncontrasted loveliness array'd." (AS, VII, ll. 6-8)[48] Both these poets show awareness of the connection between Sensibility and the sublime, and how melancholy and pleasurable pain is linked to these concepts. Smith is on the forefront of the trend of the melancholic nocturnal with her *Elegiac Sonnets*, but as the chapter will show, while these poets all use the imagery of nocturnal melancholy, their approach to this melancholy varies greatly, and the performance of pain becomes a performance of "the tear 'tis luxury to shed." (HMW, II:28, ll. 14)

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[46] Mary Robinson quotes taken from Mary Robinson, *Poems by Mrs. M Robinson*, two volumes, (London: J. Bell, 1791) (ECCO), volume number indicated in in-text citations.

[47] Helen Maria Williams quotes taken from Helen Maria Williams, *Poems: in Two Volumes,* 2:nd ed. (London: T Cadell, 1791) (ECCO), volume number indicated in in-text citations.

[48] Anna Seward quotes taken from Anna Seward, *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects, and Odes Paraphrased from Horace,* 2:nd ed. (London: G. Sael, 1799) (ECCO)

Anna Seward's Sonnet 95 depicts the shoreline nocturnal in a manner which is very reminiscent of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Paula Backscheider comments on its similarity to Smith's sonnets, pointing out that: "Perhaps it is no coincidence that one of Seward's sonnets written at the height of Smith's fame is studiedly 'nervous' and 'sublime' and makes use of some of Smith's most characteristic imagery."[49] I have quoted it in its entirety, side by side with Smith's Sonnet XII, in order to show the similarities and dissimilarities between the two poets' approaches to the nocturnal shoreline setting.

On the damp margin of the sea-beat shore
Lonely at eve to wander; – or reclin'd
Beneath a rock, what time the rifling wind
Mourns o'er the waters, and, with solemn roar,
Vast billows into caverns surging pour,
And back recede alternate; while combin'd
Loud shriek the sea-fowls, harbingers assign'd,
Clamorous and fearful, of the stormy hour;
To listen with deep thought those awful sounds;
Gaze on the boiling, the tumultuous waste,
Or promontory rude, or craggy mounds
Staying the furious main, delight has cast
O'er my rapt spirit, and my thrilling heart,
Dear as the softer joys green vales impart.
Seward, Sonnet XCV

On some rude fragment of the rocky shore,
Where on the fractured cliff the billows break,
Musing, my solitary seat I take,
And listen to the deep and solemn roar.
O'er the dark waves the winds tempestuous howl;
The screaming sea-bird quits the troubled sea:
But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me,
And suits the mournful temper of my soul.
Already shipwreck'd by the storms of Fate,
Like the poor mariner, methinks, I stand,
Cast on a rock; who sees the distant land
From whence no succour comes – or comes too late.
Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries,
'Till in the rising tide the exhausted sufferer dies.
Smith, Sonnet XII

The imagery used in the first two quatrains of both sonnets is undeniably similar; both Seward and Smith describe themselves alone, seated in "deep thought", or, with a play on words, "musing" – both thinking and being influenced by the muse to write poetry. The winds blow over the water – Seward uses the word "mourn", while Smith reserves the adjective "mournful" for herself and refers to the winds as tempestuous. The storm makes the sound of the waves into a "solemn roar", and the sea-birds flee the scene, fearful of the stormy hour. Both Seward and Smith point out how they have, in contrast to the fleeing birds, voluntarily sought out the scene.

[49] Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry,* 339

However, the sonnets diverge after the first two stanzas. Seward's sestet shows her to be delighted and elated by the sublime scene, enjoying the scenery as if she is reading the setting as a gothic novel, clearly stating that the enjoyment a sublimely violent nature scene of this type causes is "as dear" as the joy afforded by viewing the Beautiful in the shape of "green vales". Smith, however, seeks out the scene not because it offers her "delight", but because it "suits the mournful temper of [her] soul" (ES XII, l. 8). Smith's last quatrain and rhyming couplet function as a sestet in that the volta starts with the last quatrain, and uses the view of the ocean to paint a picture of herself as a shipwrecked mariner, who, while in sight of dry land, has no hope of rescue. This subtle allusion to her financial troubles – the money of her father-in-law is in her sight, yet bound up in legal issues and seems unlikely to reach her until it is too late – is typical of Smith's poetry. While the allusion adds another dimension to the poem for those aware of Smith's financial troubles, the depiction of suffering is also general enough to serve as metaphor for any type of suffering – thus turning the personal into the universal. Rather than enjoying the sublime scene as a gothic novel directly, Smith thus places herself in the character of the novel's heroine, leaving the enjoyment of her suffering and how it is echoed by nature to the reader.

The formal aspects of the sonnets differ as well. While Seward makes a point of her adherence to the Petrarchan sonnet, Smith sacrifices strict formality for greater freedom of expression, using a hybrid of two forms; the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet where the last quatrain and couplet function as the sestet of a Petrarchan sonnet. Smith's sonnet is also far more grammatically simple and straightforward than Seward's: each quatrain is a complete sentence, and there is no enjambment. Seward's sonnet, perhaps due to its adherence to the stricter rhyme scheme, is less straightforward, consisting of a single sentence with a complex set of subclauses. Thus, while the imagery used by both poets is strikingly similar, the sonnets differ thematically in their attitude towards the nocturnal scene, as well as in which sonnet forms the poet uses.

Several other sonnets by Seward use imagery that is very similar to that used by Smith in her sonnets. In her sonnets LXXXVIII-XC, Seward places herself in the character of Werther, ventriloquizing him in the same manner as Smith does in her sonnets XXI-XXV of the *Elegiac Sonnets*. The imagery Seward uses in her Werther sonnets is also strikingly similar to the nocturnal imagery of *Elegiac Sonnets*: "Amid the cloudy lour / Gleams the cold Moon; – and shows the ruthless power / Of yon swoln Floods, that white with turbid foam /

Roll o'er the fields" (AS LXXXVIII, ll. 4-7). The imagery is similar to the imagery Smith uses in Sonnet XLIV – "Press'd by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides, […] The sea no more its swelling surge confines, / But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides." (ES XLIV, ll. 1-4). Both poets draw attention to the moon and the tidal forces, and how they are causing the ocean to encroach on what should be stable land, thus blending two of the typical nocturnal settings – the shoreline and the field, in Seward's case, and the shoreline and graveyard, in Smith's. Both poets further underline this upset of the natural order of things, Seward describing the scene as "A vale no more, / A troubled Sea, toss'd by the furious wind! – / Alas! the wild and angry waves efface / Pathway, and hedge, and bank, and stile! – I find / But one wide waste of waters!" (AS LXXXVIII, ll. 8-12), while Smith describes how "The wild blast, rising from the Western cave, / Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed; / Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead, / And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!" (ES XLIV, ll. 5-8)

Unlike the previous sonnet by Seward, where watching the melancholy sublime scene is depicted as a source of enjoyment, the conclusion here, where Seward is ventriloquizing Werther, is similar to Smith's favored method of turning the external scene into a metaphor for her internal turmoil, the sonnet ending with the lines "In controul / Thus dire, to tides of Misery and Disgrace / Love opes the flood-gates of my struggling Soul." (AS LXXXVIII ll. 12-14) Like Seward, Smith ends her sonnet by comparing herself with the objects she is gazing on, in this case not to nature, but to the dead bones the waves have moved from the graveyard into the surf: "*They* hear the warring elements no more: / While I am doom'd – by life's long storm opprest, / To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest." (ES XLIV, ll. 12-14) Thus both poets use the external scene as a metaphor for the internal emotional landscape; however, while Smith invites the reader to view the speaker as an idealized version of herself, Seward places the character of Werther as a barrier between herself and the reader, thus enabling herself to use the language of despair while retaining her own image as a gentlewoman, with the restraint that that entails.

Helen Maria Williams uses storm imagery as well, displaying a sentiment similar to Seward rather than Smith: "Now, when the wintry tempests roll, / Unfold their dark and desolating form, / Rush in the savage madness of the storm, / And spread those horrors that exalt my soul." (HMW I:149, ll. 165-68). In this quote, Williams makes it clear that the violent imagery of storms does not just produce melancholy, but even a type of horror which

produces an effect of exaltation; a description consistent with Burke's theories regarding the terrible sublime. Smith, however, seems to derive whatever pleasure she finds in scenes of the terrible sublime from a sense of kinship with the tormented nature.

THE GRAVEYARD

One of Smith's Werther sonnets show Werther wishing to be buried underneath a lime tree, where "Sometimes, when the sun with parting rays / Gilds the long grass that hides my silent bed, / The tears shall tremble in my Charlotte's eyes;" (ES XXIV, ll. 9-11) Smith plays with the fact that her own first name is the same as Werther's beloved, thus allowing her to appear in the sonnet – the Charlotte of the sonnet becomes both Werther's Lotte, and Charlotte, the reader who cries over his fate. The image of the lover's grave, over which the surviving lover sheds tears, is not taken from earlier graveyard poetry such as Gray's *Elegy*, but likely, as Smith's sonnet implies, originates in Werther's fantasies of his own lonely grave.

In her "An Address to Poetry", Helen Maria Williams attributes the graveyard poem to Gray: "Then with the mournful bard I go, / Whom 'melancholy mark'd her own,' / While tolls the curfew, solemn, slow / And wander amid graves *unknown*" (HMW I:151, ll. 185-88, italics mine). The poem underlines the fact that Gray's graveyard poem is a memento mori, a reminder of the mortality of all mankind, rather than a poem mourning a specific loss; in fact Williams poem seems to imply that the poet in the graveyard poem is concerned with her own mortality; it is "When disappointment's sick'ning pain, / With chilling sadness numbs my breast […] And bids its fruitless struggles rest" (HMW I:150, ll. 177-180) that Williams wishes to join Gray in his evening meditations on the dead.

The image of the lover's grave is also found in Mary Robinson's "To Melancholy": "Oft, beneath the witching Yew, / The trembling MAID, steals forth unseen; / With true-love wreaths, of deathless green, / Her Lover's grave to strew" (MR I:22, ll. 43-46), and in Smith's Sonnet XLIX, "Supposed to have been written in a church-yard, over the grave of a young woman of nineteen", taken from her novel *Celestina*: "lingering here, to Love and Sorrow true, / The youth who once thy simple heart possesst / Shall mingle tears with April's early dew" (ES XLIX, ll. 10-12). There is thus an air of performativity surrounding this type of graveyard poem; Robinson's poem is written in the highly theatrical Della Cruscan style, while both of Smith's sonnets feature a narrator clearly separate from Smith's own persona. The "Supposed to be written" in the title of the Werther sonnets and the sonnet from *Celestina*

lends them an air of the imaginary which contrasts sharply with Smith's typical claims of genuineness and accuracy. Smith, however, also uses the image of weeping over a loved one's grave in her most personal sonnets, the ones dealing with the loss of her daughter Anna Augusta; "she on whose untimely grave / Flow my unceasing tears" (ES LXXVIII, ll. 11-12), thus blurring the line between the personal and the theatrical.

Smith's graveyard sonnet, XLIV, "Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex", breaks with tradition; it is not quietly introspective, but sublime and grandiose. Smith adds an air of realism to the setting by using one of her characteristically informative endnotes to clarify that this is a real scene, describing how the rising sea levels has swept away the wall surrounding the graveyard and broken up the graves, causing human remains to be washed into the sea. The scene is thus dramatic and grandiose, as typical of the shoreline nocturnal rather than the graveyard poem, yet the "gloomy rest" (ES XLIV, l. 14) of the dead is alluded to; "But vain to them the winds and waters rave; / *They* hear the warring elements no more (ES XLIV, ll. 11-12). The dead are thus at peace, while the living suffer; in fact, Smith makes it clear that she looks "with envy on their gloomy rest" (ES XLIV, l. 14). Thus, Smith merges the graveyard poem and the shoreline nocturnal to create a sonnet depicting the terrible sublime typical of the shoreline nocturnal while incorporating the imagery and meditations on the peace of the grave typical of the graveyard poem.

INTROSPECTION

Introspection is an integral part of nocturnal poetry. The nocturnal setting functions as a connection to the uncanny, providing either a vista which can be used as a macrocosm for the internal landscape, or a silent scene devoid of external distractions, which serves to turn the soul inwards. These two modes can be traced to Milton's "Il Penseroso", the model for nocturnal exploration, and Young's *Night Thoughts,* the model for nocturnal introspection. Smith vastly prefers the exploration model, but she also has a handful of sonnets which use the introspective model, in which she muses over death and insomnia, the two favored themes of Young.

Smith's Sonnet LXXIV, "The winter night", has her begin with a quotation from Macbeth: "'Sleep, that knits up the raveled sleeve of care', / Forsakes me" (ES LXXIV, ll. 1-2). The night seems to bid her prepare for death as she muses on her lost daughter. The introspective mode used here is modeled on Young's *Night Thoughts*, distilling Young's

poem down to fourteen lines, beginning, like Young, with discussing her insomnia, then moving on to the soul preparing for death – "bidding me prepare / For the last sleep of death" – the uncanniness and isolation of night – "Murmuring I hear / The hollow wind around the ancient towers / While night and silence reign" – the loss of earthly joys – "Ah! When this suffering being I resign" – and the loss of a loved one – "her, whose loss in anguish I deplore" (ES LXXIV, ll. 4-5, 5-7, 11, 13).

William Lisle Bowles engages in nocturnal introspection in his "Elegiac Stanzas": "Though the long night is dark and damp around, / And no still star hangs out its friendly flame; […] I catch consoling phantasies that spring / From the thick gloom, and as the night-airs beat, / They touch my heart, like the wild wires that ring / In mournful modulations, strange and sweet." (WLB 129, 5-6, 9-12)[50]. Like Young, Bowles' nocturnal meditations are on lost friends – "Was it the voice of thee, my bury'd friend? / Was it the whisper'd vow of faithful love?" (WLB 130, ll. 13-14) – and the soul preparing for the inevitability of death.

Mark Akenside shows in two quotes from "Pleasures of Imagination" why introspection is more suited as a nocturnal activity than a daytime endeavor, by showing that daytime allows the eye to focus on nature and the world surrounding us: "Who but rather turns / To heaven's broad fire his unconstrained view, / Than to the glimmering of a waxen flame?" (MA 18, ll. 175-77)[51] It is only at night, when "the darkening of sight is compensated by the revived powers of the mind's eye",[52] that it is a positive, rather than a negative, thing that "the pensive sage, / Heedless of sleep, or midnight's harmful damp, / Hangs o'er the sickly taper" (MA 21, ll. 247-49). Akenside again uses nocturnal introspection in "On the Winter Solstice", writing "How pleasing wears the wintry night, / Spent with the old illustrious dead! While, by the taper's trembling light …" (MA 233, ll. 71-73). Anna Seward also engages in introspection in Sonnet XXXIX, "Winter Evening", where she writes that "in the deep and silent lour / High themes the rapt concent'ring Thoughts explore, / Freed from external Pleasure's glittering chain." (AS XXXIX, ll. 6-8) The fact that both of them write specifically about winter night is worth noting; night and winter are connected metaphorically,

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[50] William Lisle Bowles quotes taken from William Lisle Bowles, *Sonnets, and other poems, by the Reverend W. L. Bowles, A. M. Of Trinity College, Oxford*. 7:th ed. (Bath: T. Cadell et al., 1800) (ECCO)

[51] Mark Akenside quotes taken from Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination, and Other Poems, of Mark Akenside, M.D.*, (London: J. Dodsley, 1788) (ECCO)

[52] Miller, *The Invention of Evening,* 41

as well as in more mundane manner – the winter nights are longer and colder than summer nights, and the chill serves as an even stronger incentive for staying indoors rather than walking out to observe nature.

Helen Maria Williams writes in her “Paraphrases from Scripture” that evening leads the mind to God through its muted shades and fading light, which inspires introspection in a way the distractions of day are less suited to.

> Or when, in paler tints array’d,
> The evening slowly spreads her shade;
> That soothing shade, that grateful gloom,
> Can, more than day’s enliv’ning bloom,
> Still every fond and vain desire,
> And calmer, purer thoughts inspire;
> From earth the pensive spirit free,
> And lead the soften’d heart to Thee.
> (HMW, I:178, ll. 9-16)

Williams is not alone in associating evening with religious thought. Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s “A Summer Night’s Meditation” has a setting of nocturnal introspection, which leads to a meditation on the vastness of the universe and an internal exploration. The poem’s epigraph, taken from Young’s *Night Thoughts*, shows the genre’s debt to Young. The poem begins with a description of the sunset. Barbauld uses classical idiom and metaphors to a larger extent than Smith; her description of the moon uses the lines “Dian’s bright crescent, like a silver bow / New strung in heaven, lifts high its beamy horns / Impatient for the night (ALB 137-38, ll. 7-9)[53]. This is a direct continuation of the Augustan poetical tradition; in the vein of Milton and Young, Barbauld fills her poem with metaphor and classical references, while Smith, although she too makes use of metaphor and personification uses imagery closer to nature and a more direct and literal description, as has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

Barbauld turns from her contemplation of the nature scenery towards introspection and religious meditation: “At this still hour the self-collected soul / Turns inward” (ALB 140, ll. 54-55). In darkness, the inner eye proves more acute than the physical eye; Barbauld’s inward journey carries her “From the green borders of the peopled earth” (ALB 141, ll. 74), and past the confines of the solar system to “The desarts of creation, wide and wild; / Where embryo

[53] Barbauld quotes taken from Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Poems, a new edition, corrected* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792) (ECCO), unless otherwise stated.

systems and unkindled suns / Sleep in the womb of chaos" (ALB 142-43, ll. 96-97). Barbauld's introspection is thus no less sublime than the exploratory nocturnal's depictions of storms and tides. By the end of the poem, Barbauld returns to the scene she left in favor of introspection: "my soul, unused to stretch her powers / In flight so daring, drops her weary wing, / And seeks again the known accustomed spot," (ALB 143-44, ll. 112-14). The poem thus foreshadows what M. H. Abrams calls the greater Romantic lyric, which Christopher Miller summarizes as a poem "in which a solitary speaker stations himself in a particular place, figuratively departs in a reverie of recollection or anticipation, and finally 'returns' with a new sense of his situation."[54] While Barbauld's poetry and differs considerably from Smith's in its content and style, both poets foreshadow the greater Romantic lyric.

While Smith is less overtly religious than Williams and Barbauld, she too comments on night's powers of leading the mind closer to God; in Sonnet XXXIX "To Night", she states that night has a soothing effect on the suffering heart, and that its sorrows, shared with the winds and waves, "May reach – tho' lost on earth – the ear of Heaven! (ES XXXIX, l. 14), while in IV "To the moon" she views the moon as a heaven where "the wretched may have rest" (ES IV, l. 8), and wishes that she "soon may reach thy world serene" (ES IV, l. 13). However, Smith is occupied with the self rather than the spiritual; her poetry is a forerunner of the wordsworthian sublime where the experience of nature is filtered through a carefully constructed "I" persona: "writing wherein the 'nature' and 'identity' of the poet, far from being 'annihilated', take center stage and claim full readerly attention".[55]

NOCTURNAL MELANCHOLY

Milton's "Il Penseroso" is the model for Melancholy as a nocturnal "activity", but for Smith's contemporaries, this Melancholy can be split into two types: pleasurable and painful. Sympathy is a key concept to this division; its presence often separates pleasurable Melancholy from painful. Pleasurable Melancholy is caused by sympathizing with others; whether the pain is caused by pity for a miserable subject, or an already present pain is alleviated by finding sympathy with others in a situation similar to the subject's own.

[54] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 48

[55] Labbe, "Revisiting the Egotistical Sublime", 18.

The nocturnal poetry of Charlotte Smith and others shows this sympathy extended to aspects of nature as well, primarily emotions of sympathy are extended towards or attributed to the nightingale and the moon. The poem's speaker often seeks out an external nature scene that resonates with the emotional state of the speaker. In keeping with the idea of evening as representative of the Beautiful and night as representative of the Sublime; the softened, pleasurable melancholy is a typical feature of the evening poem while painful melancholy is more characteristic of the nocturnal.

MELANCHOLY AS EVENING ACTIVITY

Helen Maria Williams makes clear in her "Sonnet to Twilight" that pleasurable melancholy is an "activity" associated with evening; she states that "Yet dearer to my soul the shadowy hour, / At which her blossoms close, her music dies – / For then, while languid nature droops her head, / She wakes the tear 'tis luxury to shed." (HMW II:28, 11-14). Williams further underlines the Melancholy's association with the nocturnal and its pleasurable state in "An Address to Poetry": "Come, lonely bard 'of other years!' / While dim the half-seen moon of varying skies, / While sad the wind along the grey moss sighs, / And give my pensive heart 'the joy of tears!'" (HMW I:146, ll. 133-36). She also asserts the superiority of the poetry of Melancholy over other contemporary styles of poetry, primarily the Della Cruscan: "The various tropes that splendor dart / Around the modern poet's line, / Where, borrow'd from the sphere of art, / Unnumber'd gay allusions shine / Have not a charm my heart to please …" (HMW I:147, ll.137-41) Melancholy is thus not only described as pleasurable; Williams also asserts that the pleasure it brings is superior to that of pure gaiety.

This pleasurable Melancholy is also featured in Anna Seward's previously mentioned Sonnet XCV: "On the damp margin of the sea-beat shore / Lonely at eve to wander […] delight has cast / O'er my rapt spirit, and my thrilling heart/ Dear as the softer joys green vales impart." (AS XCV, ll. 1-2, 13-14) Neither Williams nor Seward explain the reasons for their preferences; the reader is expected to know the language of Melancholy and the Sublime well enough to understand instinctively why Williams and Seward find the evening setting, the damp sea-shore and the shedding of tears, as pleasurable, or even more so, as the enjoyment of nature by daylight, thus proving the reader's belonging to the exclusive club of Sensibility.

William Lisle Bowles describes evening in terms that makes it appear as a place rather than a time, where those "by melancholy led, / From the broad blaze of day, where pleasure flaunts, / Retiring wander 'mid thy lonely haunts" (WLB V, ll. 5-7) Evening thus becomes a place where you can linger indeterminately, rather than a time which will pass by. Similarly, Akenside's Ode III, "To a Friend, Unsuccessful in Love" shows evening as belonging to the Melancholic: "When Hesper gilds the shaded sky, / Oft as you seek the well-known grove, / Methinks I see you cast your eye / Back to the morning scenes of love" (MA 236, ll. 31-34). The implication is not that happiness arises every morning and dies every afternoon, but rather that in the perception of the Melancholic, evening is a constant state, while happiness perceives only the delights of day. Smith adheres to this division between day and happiness, and night and melancholy, describing childhood scenes as set in the mornings "When Life's gay dawn was opening to my view" (ES X, l. 4), while her nocturnal sonnets follow the Melancholic model.

Smith's Sonnet XXXII is a sonnet of pleasurable Melancholy, a rarity for her, set on the banks of river Arun "When latest Autumn spreads her evening veil" (ES XXXII, l. 1). Smith thus uses the evening setting rather than the nocturnal for pleasurable Melancholy. In the sonnet, Smith observes her surroundings, imagining that "Here, by his native stream, at such an hour / Pity's own Otway I methinks could meet" (ES XXXII, ll. 9-10). The sonnet ends "O Melancholy! Such thy magic power, / That to the soul such dreams are often sweet, / And soothe the pensive visionary mind!" (ES XXXII, ll. 12-14). Smith thus depicts melancholy as a force which changes painful thoughts into a source of pleasure; the transforming element is sympathy, and it is thus the sympathetic connection caused by the presence of "pity's own Otway" that turns the musings of the poem's subject into a pleasurable experience.

This type of self-indulgent melancholy, reveling in sad thoughts for the pleasure it brings, is a typical evening activity. On the threshold between day and night, the gaiety of the day and the more deeply reflective melancholy or even despair of the nocturnal meet to produce a pleasurable, somewhat theatrical melancholy which, "like twilight itself, is avidly sought; and sadness becomes an exquisite pleasure."[56]

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[56] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 40

Jean-Paul Forster claims in his essay "Lighting at Night and Darkness at Noon" that the traditional perception of night is negative, and the Age of Enlightenment is remarkable for its variants; "the image of the night of ignorance, unreason, and superstition which the century's love of rhetorical contrasts opposed to the light of reason, the redefinition of night as sublime, and the sensationalism of the Gothic night."[57] These variants are both found within the poetry of the time, coexisting as separate metaphors.

Smith's contemporaries thus show an ambivalent attitude towards night and melancholy, both denouncing and inviting it; sometimes displaying this ambivalence within a single poem. Although Mary Robinson begins her "Ode to Melancholy" by denouncing melancholy, she displays an ambivalence towards it and its alternative, the "light-heeled mirth" which "despotic reigns" (MR I:21, l. 4) in her bower. This description of mirth as "despotic" and "Slightly bound in feath'ry chains" (MR I:21, l. 5) lends a subtle undercurrent of dissatisfaction to Robinson's insistence she would rather live a carefree life than indulge in Melancholy.

The poem acknowledges melancholy's appeal, describing how its "touch magnetic leads / O'er enchanted spangled meads" (MR I:22, ll. 29-30) and lingering over descriptions of moonlight, nightingales, gothic haunts and sighing maidens before asking itself "Why does thy hollow voice, forlorn, / So fascinate the sons of Earth; / That once encircled in thy icy arms / They court thy torpid touch, and doat upon thy charms?" (MR I:23, ll.53-56). With the tempting display of Melancholy's offerings and the subtly veiled dissatisfaction with the enforced mirth at the beginning of the poem, it seems Robinson has already answered her own question. Thus, the superficially simple poem denouncing melancholy and advocating mirth shows a much more complex attitude towards the subject through subtle undertones. The conflict remains unresolved in the "Ode to Melancholy", but later poems by Robinson – "Ode to the Nightingale", "Ode to the Moon", and others – more clearly embrace melancholy as a poetical mode.

[57] Jean-Paul Forster, "Lighting at Night and Darkness at Noon" in *The Enlightenment by Night: Essay on After-Dark Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, eds. Serge Soupel, Kevin L. Cope and Alexander Pettit (Brooklyn, NY: AMS Press, 2010), p 107

It is perhaps not surprising, that Robinson, both a Della Cruscan and an ardent admirer of Charlotte Smith's poetry, would display such an ambivalent attitude – while the more sober and serious style of the poetry of melancholy goes against the almost frantically theatrical style of Della Cruscan poetry, Robinson recognizes the power of melancholy as a poetical device.

Mark Akenside shows a similarly ambivalent attitude towards the nocturnal setting itself, using night to represent the night of superstition as well as depicting it as a time for introspection; "Pleasures of Imagination" clearly illustrates the duality in the attitudes towards night:

> Though the poisonous charms
> Of baleful superstition guide the feet […]
> And leave the wretched pilgrim all forlorn
> To muse at last, amid the ghostly gloom
> Of graves, and hoary vaults, and cloister'd cells;
> To walk with spectres through the midnight shade,
> And to the screaming owl's accursed song
> Attune the dreadful workings of his heart;
> Yet be not ye dismay'd. A gentler star
> Your lovely search illumines.
> (MA 27, ll. 391-402)

Akenside is thus dismissing the Gothic night and the mode of nocturnal melancholy as "the poisonous charms / Of baleful superstition", but the lines "A gentler star / Your lovely search illumes" show that Akenside is not completely denouncing the nocturnal mode; several other of Akenside's poems show night as a suitable setting for introspection.

Helen Maria Williams, on the other hand, wholeheartedly embraces Sensibility and Melancholy. She begins her poem "To Sensibility" with the lines "In Sensibility's lov'd praise / I tune my trembling reed: / And seek to deck her shrine with bays, / On which my heart must bleed!" (HMW I:61, ll. 1-4). These lines are reminiscent of Smith's Sonnet I, "To the muse", in which Smith states that "while [poetry] decks the head with many a rose, / [it] Reserves the thorn to fester in the heart." (ES I, ll. 7-8). Williams' poem is, despite its insistence that Sensibility heightens pain, positive towards Sensibility, stating that while the sensitive soul is more sensitive to pain, it is also more strongly affected by the finer feelings. Thus, "tho' her soul must griefs sustain / Which she alone can know; / And feel that keener sense of pain / Which sharpens every woe" (HMW I:64, ll. 37-40), it is vastly preferable to

the alternative, as its loss would also mean giving up “friendship, sympathy and love, / And every finer thought.” (HMW I:68, ll. 83-84)

Smith’s sonnet also states that having a poetic soul means being more sensitive to pain, but unlike Williams, she draws the conclusion that it is far better not to be affected with this extraordinary sensibility; “far, far happier is the lot of those, / Who ever learn’d her dear delusive art” (ES I, ll. 5-6). Williams’ poem thus neatly illustrates the “cult of Sensibility” with its insistence on the desirability of Sensibility and its phrases such as “The sacred power to weep” (HMW I:66, l. 64), while Smith’s sonnet rather describes poetical affinity and the sensibility it causes as an involuntary state which is riddled with drawbacks.

In “Sonnet, to Expression”, Williams invokes Expression in a way reminiscent of poetical invocations to the muse: “the poet’s lyre, / The painter’s pencil catch thy sacred fire,” (HMW I:57, ll. 2-3). Williams continues, however, by averring that not all scenes of distress excite sympathy and agreeable melancholy:

> But from this frighted glance thy form avert
> When horrors check thy tear, thy struggling sigh,
> When frenzy rolls in thy impassion’d eye
> Or guilt fits heavy on thy lab’ring heart.–
> Nor ever let my shudd’ring fancy hear
> The wafting groan, or view the pallid look
> Of him the muses lov’d – when hope forsook
> His spirit, vainly to the muses dear!
> For, charm’d with heav’nly song, this bleeding breast
> Mourns the blest power of verse could give despair no rest.
> (HMW I:57-58, ll. 5-14)

Although Williams is asserting that her “bleeding breast” mourns for Chatterton, she shies away from the less agreeable realities of suffering. As Anna Laetitia Barbauld writes, “it is far from true that we are agreeably affected by every thing that excites our sympathy”.[58] In order for a scene of distress to cause melancholic pleasure, “the misfortunes which excite pity must not be too horrid and overwhelming”,[59] and thus, if the object is to excite pity rather than disgust, the disagreeable realities “incident to that state must be kept out of sight”.[60] Smith parodies the type of Sensibility Williams and Barbauld describe in her play *What is She?*, in

[58] Barbauld, Anna Lætitia, “An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations” in John Aikin and Anna Lætitia Barbauld, *Miscellaneous pieces, in prose* (London: J. Johnson, 1792) (ECCO), 192

[59] Barbauld, “An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations”, 196

[60] Barbauld, “An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations”, 203

which Sir Caustic, upon hearing his niece described as a woman of Sensibility, draws the following conclusion:

> I suppose she sighs over the distresses of a novel - wipes her eyes while a ghost in an opera comes out of his tomb to accompany the orchestra; but is shock'd too much at real misery to suffer its approach, and avoids sickness and poverty as though she herself were not human.[61]

Smith also criticizes excessive Sensibility in Sonnet LXXIII, "To a querulous acquaintance", in which she claims that to her acquaintance, life "prepares a downy bed / With roses scatter'd, and to thorns unknown, / Wilt thou yet murmur at a mis-placed leaf?" (ES LXXIII, ll. 3-5) Smith exhorts her acquaintance to "Think, ere thy irritable nerves repine, / How many, born with feelings keen as thine, / Taste all the sad vicissitudes of grief." (ES LXXIII, ll. 6-8) This sonnet both serves as a distancing from excessive and misplaced sensibility, a subject much criticized and parodied at the time, and as an assertion of Smith's own right to continue writing poems of Sensibility; the asserted authenticity of her grief also asserts her right to Melancholy.

MELANCHOLY AND DESPAIR

The idiom of Sensibility includes a wide range of sorrowful emotions, from pleasant melancholia, "the tear 'tis luxury to shed" (HMW II:28, l. 14) to outright despair. Poems of Melancholy frequently make use of the pathetic fallacy to heighten the emotional impact of the poem; the external scene – typically a nocturnal nature scene – matches the emotional state of the speaker, thus both strengthening and submerging the speaker's emotions. The descriptions of the effect of this resonance with the speaker's emotional state are reminiscent of Adam Smith's theory of how sympathy serves to alleviate sorrowful emotion; the sympathetic connection between the speaker and landscape itself serves to alleviate sorrow. The sublime and terrible scenes of night are thus used as an external representation of the internal upheaval of the poems' subjects, and the effect this twinning of the natural and emotional landscape produce on the reader is to invoke simultaneously the enjoyment of both sympathy and the sublime. Such parallels between external nature and the internal landscape are characteristic of *Elegiac Sonnets,* Smith stating the connection clearly in Sonnet XII: "But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me, And suits the mournful temper of my soul" (ES XII,

[61] Charlotte Smith (published anonymously), *What is she? A comedy, in five acts, as performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden,* (London: T. N. Longman and O Rees, 1799) (ECCO), 45

ll. 7-8) and Sonnet LXVII: "to *my* heart congenial is the gloom / Which hides me from a world I wish to shun" (ES LXVII, ll. 9-10).

In "Euphelia, an Elegy", Helen Maria Williams abandons pleasurable melancholy to tell a Gothic tale of death and despair. The titular Euphelia, driven out into the night by the belief that her lover is dead, states:

> To me congenial is the gloom of night,
> The savage howlings that infest the air; […]
> deep despair has arm'd my timid soul,
> And agony has numb'd the throb of fear;
> Taught a weak heart its terrors to controul,
> And more to court than shun the danger near.
> (HMW I:159, ll. 17-18, 25-28)

The turmoil and upheaval of the nocturnal scene is "congenial" to the emotional turmoil felt by the suffering Euphelia, and she is therefore seeking out a scene her "timid soul" would otherwise shy away from. Similarly, Anna Seward's Sonnet LXXXVIII, which uses Goethe's Werther as its despairing main character, begins with the lines: "Up this bleak Hill, in wintry Night's dread hour, / With mind congenial to the scene I come" (AS LXXXVIII, ll. 1-2).

Mark Akenside's "Pleasures of the Imagination" denounces this type of sympathetic connection with nature: "And to the screaming owl's accursed song / Attune the dreadful workings of his heart;" (MA 27, ll. 399-400) Akenside depicts the practice as the sufferer of melancholy attuning his heart to the scene, rather than seeking out a scene that resonates with his own feelings.

In "On the Death of Henry Headley, of Trinity College, Oxford", William Lisle Bowles writes of his subject: "Far from the murmuring crowd, unseen, he sought / Each charm congenial to his sadden'd thought." (WLB 50, ll. 19-20). The lines echo Gray's *Elegy*, and again, the word used to describe the affinity between the subject and scene is "congenial". Bowles continues: "The murm'ring waterfall, the winter's wind / His temper's trembling texture seemed to suit, / Like airs of sadness the responsive lute." (WLB 50, ll. 28-30) Williams uses a similar phrasing in her poem "An Address to Poetry": "And long with melting music fill the string / That suits the present temper of my soul. / Oh! ever gild my path of woe, / And I the ills of life can bear;" (HMW 136-137, ll. 15-18). The implication is that the concord between the scene and the emotions of the poet is what gives rise to the

poetic impulse, and that the expression of emotion serves to alleviate sadness; in Smith's own words, "Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought." (ES, p. 3) Bowles expresses a similar sentiment in the preface to his poems; his poems "were therefore, in general, suggested by the scenes before [the author] – and wherever such scenes appeared to harmonize with his disposition at the moment, the sentiments were involuntarily prompted." (WLB, p. v-vi)

While Williams and Seward both use external characters, Euphelia and Werther, to tell their tales of despair, Smith consistently places herself in the role of sufferer: "[Smith's] identification with the woeful object of feeling is never broken; rather, when as literary subject she contemplates the object of sensibility, she reveals through that contemplation that the pitiable object serves to reflect her own position as the primary object as well as the subject of sensibility."[62] Smith underlines the genuineness of her emotions in the prefaces to *Elegiac Sonnets*; William Lisle Bowles, as well, writes in the preface to his collected poems:

> [this preface] may serve in some measure to obviate the common remark on melancholy poetry, that it has been very often gravely composed, when possibly the heart of the writer has had very little share in the distress he wishes to describe. But there is a great difference between *natural* and *fabricated* feelings, even in poetry: – To which of these two characters the poems before the reader belong, the author leaves those, who have felt sensations of sorrow, to judge.
> (WLB, p. vi-vii)

Bowles thus implies that genuine sorrow lends an air of authenticity to the poems which will be obvious to a discerning reader. Smith similarly defends the melancholy tone of her poems in the preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, stating that

> when in the Beech Woods of Hampshire, I first struck the chords of the melancholy lyre, its notes were never intended for the public ear! It was unaffected sorrows drew them forth: I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy – And I have unfortunately no reason yet, though nine years have since elapsed, to *change my tone.*
> (ES, p. 5)

Smith is thus defending herself against possible accusations of insincerity – indeed she observes in the preface that she is recounting the conversation " as an apology for that apparent despondence, which, when it is observed for a long series of years, may look like affectation" (ES, p. 6) – but also against the idea that excessive melancholy will tire her

[62] Pratt, Kathryn, "Charlotte Smith's Melancholia on the Page and Stage", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 41:3 (2001), 568

readers; her preface uses the premise of a friend's suggestion that she attempt "a more cheerful style of composition" (ES, p. 5), but the sentiment was also expressed by among others the critic Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who wrote in her essay "An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations" that "scenes of distress should not be too long continued",[63] or they will fail in their purpose of exciting interest and pity and rather harden the reader's emotions against further scenes of suffering.

Smith is thus performing a delicate balancing act; convincing the reader of her sincerity of emotion while avoiding alienating her readers with a surfeit of nightingales – and in addition avoiding providing too much autobiographical information which could be seen as socially inappropriate or alienate the reader's sympathies. Adam Smith states that anger is an always disagreeable passion which "never excites, never prepares, and often disturbs our sympathy".[64] However, while the prefaces to later editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* may be considered as Smith airing her dirty laundry in public, the only specific grief which is overtly referred to in sonnets themselves is the socially appropriate mourning over her lost daughter. Avoiding stating her grievances clearly within the sonnets themselves is a way around that issue – the reader is provided with a blank canvas on which he or she can project her own "most complete image of sorrow and distress";[65] like Smith's speculation in the nightingale's cause for grief, the sonnets leave the sorrows of Smith's poetical persona vague, and the reader free to speculate if she has "felt from friends some cruel wrong, / Or [is a] martyr of disastrous love" (ES III, 11-12), or if she has other reasons altogether for her grief.

That Smith, despite her detractors, is successful at this balancing act is evidenced by the success of the nine editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* published during her lifetime and the many positive reviews and responses from readers it received. In 1787, Sir William Jones wrote to a friend who had given him a copy of *Elegiac Sonnets* – "I thank you heartily, my dear Sir, for the tender strains of the unfortunate Charlotte, which have given us pleasure and pain; the sonnets which relate to herself are incomparably the best."[66] He describes the works as

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[63] Barbauld, "An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations", 208

[64] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45

[65] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* 15

[66] William Jones to J. Shore, August 16, 1787 in *The Works of Sir William Jones* (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1976-80) 2:119, as quoted in Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 23

"tender", echoing Smith's own description of sympathizing with the nightingale's sorrow. His use of Smith's first name, Charlotte, rather than the formal Mrs. Smith shows how the sonnets have created a sensation of emotional intimacy between the poet and the reader, while his statement that the sonnets which relate to herself are the best shows his appreciation of that feeling of intimacy. While modern critics have underlined the performative aspect of Smith's apparent sincerity, as Claire Knowles argues in the second chapter of *Sensibility and Female Poetic tradition*, the appearance of sincerity is an important part of Smith's autobiographical persona.[67] As Adam Smith argues, "the pleasure which we find in the conversation of one whom in all the passions of his heart we can entirely sympathize with, seems to do more than compensate the painfulness of that sorrow with which the view of his situation affects us".[68] Thus, while sympathy may not always be an apparent theme of Smith's sonnets, the implicit connection between Smith – or the poetic persona of Charlotte Smith – and the reader is always present.

In nocturnal poetry, the moon often fulfills the poets desire for a sympathetic audience. Smith's Sonnet IV depicts this connection between the moon and the poetic persona: "And while I gaze, thy mild and placid light, sheds a soft calm upon my troubled breast" (ES IV, ll. 5-6) There is thus a sympathetic communication between Smith and the moon; while Smith gazes at the moon, the moon sends its light down to her. When the moon is "in her wane, / And veil'd in clouds" (ES XXXIX, ll. 2-3, the sympathetic connection with nature also wanes: "In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind / Will to the deaf cold elements complain, / And tell the embosomed grief, however vain, / To sullen surges and the viewless wind." (ES XXXIX, ll. 5-8) Nature here is no longer a sympathetic listener – it is deaf, cold and sullen. Smith also shows the connection between sympathy and the moon from a different angle; In her Sonnet XXVIII, "To friendship", she compares friendship's positive influence to moonlight: "Like the fair moon, thy mild and genuine ray / Thro' Life's long evening shall unclouded last" (XXVIII, ll. 5-6).

Helen Maria Williams delineates the limits of the moon's capacity for comfort in "Queen Mary's Complaint": "Pale moon! thy mild benignant light / May glad some other captive's sight; […] But, oh, pale moon! what ray of thine / Can sooth a misery like mine!"

[67] Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith*

[68] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 19

(HMW II:31, ll. 1-6). While the moon is assumed to have a soothing influence on others, the speaker's state of grief is so deep sympathy can no longer offer her comfort. Williams' lines are reminiscent of Smith's Sonnet LXXX, "To the invisible moon", which states that while "Mild Sorrow, such as Hope has not forsook, / May love to muse beneath thy silent reign" (ES LXXX, ll. 5-6), the speaker, herself beyond all hope, prefers the terrible sublime nocturnal scene, away from the influence of the moon. Williams also uses the moon as a source of sympathy in her "Sonnet to the Moon" from her novel *Julia:*

> That gloom, those pensive rays, alike I love,
> Whose sadness seems in sympathy with mine!
> But most for this, pale orb! thy light is dear,
> For this, benignant orb! I hail thee most,
> That while I pour the unavailing tear,
> And mourn that hope to me, in youth is lost!
> Thy light can visionary thoughts impart,
> And lead the Muse to sooth a suff'ring heart. [69]

Paula Backscheider draws attention to how the sonnet "moves from a specific scene to the congenial feeling to the possibility of the leap to some visionary comfort or understanding" and points out that this "replicat[es] the movement of many of Smith's sonnets".[70] Not only is the moon sympathetic, it is also capable of offering comfort to "sooth a suff'ring heart". This sonnet is not only thematically similar to Smith's moon sonnets; there is also a similarity between the language and imagery used in Williams' sonnet and those of Smith. Smith refers to the moon as a "benignant sphere" (ES IV, l. 10), drawing from the same stock of descriptive words – the moon's "pale beam", the "pensive" wanderer (ES IV, ll. 1, 2) It is also notable that Williams follows Smith's practice of embedding her poetry into her novel.

Mary Robinson's "Ode to the Moon" refers to the moon as "Blest Contemplation's placid friend" (MR I:47, l. 2),imploring it to "let thy transitory beam, / Soothe my sad mind, with Fancy's aëry dream" (MR I:48, ll. 21-22). In "Second Ode to the Nightingale", she describes a sympathetic connection between the moon and the rest of nature:

> While sad I watch night's pensive queen,
> Just emblem of MY weary woes:
> For ah! where'er the virgin goes,
> Each flow'ret greets her with a tear

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[69] Helen Maria Williams, *Julia,* vol. 2 (Dublin: Chamberlaine and Rice, 1790), 244 (ECCO)

[70] Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry*, 351

To sympathetic sorrow dear"
(MR I:34, ll. 44-48)

Robinson thus depicts sympathy not just between the poetic persona and nature, but within nature itself, as Smith does in her Sonnet III, "To the nightingale", in which the nightingale "Tell'st to the moon thy tale of tender woe" (ES III, l. 2) and leaves her nest "to the listening night to sing thy fate" (ES III, l. 8). Both these poems thus depict sympathy as not only limited to humanity, but also existent within nature, while also identifying with part of that nature, so that the sympathy implicitly becomes directed towards the poet; Robinson explicitly likens herself to the moon, while Smith more subtly identifies herself with the nightingale.

The nightingale of the nocturnal poem of Sensibility commonly represents a fellow sufferer; one whose grief is equal to or stronger than that of the poem's subject, thus allowing a sympathetic connection that allows the subject's grief to be alleviated. Mark Akenside invokes sympathy for the nightingale as a means of alleviating sorrow in the conclusion of "To the Evening Star":

O sacred bird, let me at eve,
Thus wandering all alone,
Thy tender council oft receive,
Bear witness to thy pensive airs,
And pity Nature's common cares
Till I forget my own.
(MA 289, ll. 73-78)

Thus the poet's own sorrows can be subsumed into "nature's common cares" and forgotten. Mary Robinson writes in "The Adieu to Love":

To tell the hopeless Lover's ear,
That Sympathy's fond Bird is near
Whose note shall soothe his aching heart,
Whose grief shall emulate his smart;
And by its sadly proud excess,
Make every pang he suffers less;
For oft in passion's direst woes,
The weariest wretch can yield repose;
While from the voice of kindred grief,
We gain a sad, but kind relief.
(MR I:115, ll. 73-82)

Sympathy thus transforms sadness into melancholy; by submerging his own woes in the nightingale's "sadly proud excess" of emotion, the "hopeless lover" is able to gain relief from

his own suffering. Robinson also addresses the nightingale in “Ode to the Nightingale”: “Oh, think not thy heart-piercing moan / Evap’rates on the breezy air, / Or that the plaintive song of Care / Steals from THY Widow’d Breast alone” (MR I:29-30, ll. 15-18), thus showing her awareness of and sympathy for the nightingale’s plight. She then implores the nightingale to “come, Sweet BIRD, and with thy strain, / Steal from my breast the thorn of pain; […] When HAPPY Mortals seek repose, / By Night’s pale lamp we’ll chaunt our woes” (MR I:31, ll. 61-66), thus asking the nightingale to return the sympathy that will diminish her own pain. However, Robinson ends the poem on a note typical for Smith’s later sonnets with the lines “Sweet BIRD, not e’en THY melting Strains / Can calm the Heart, where TYRANT SORROW REIGNS.” (MR 32, ll. 77-78). Compare this to Smith’s Sonnet LV, “On the return of the nightingale”, in which she writes “With transport, once, sweet bird, I hail’d thy lay […] But now!– such evils in my lot combine, / As shut my languid sense – to Hope’s dear voice and thine!” (ES LV, ll. 9, 12-14) Both Robinson and Smith are thus, like Williams in “Queen Mary’s Complaint” acknowledging the limits of sympathy’s capacity to soothe grief.

CONCLUSION

Smith and her contemporaries share a library of common nocturnal imagery and settings – the shoreline, the graveyard, tides, storms, the moon and the nightingale are all stock features in the poetry of the time, and the difference between the poets lies less in whether they make use of these features and more in *how* the features are used. The shoreline poem is linked to the terrible sublime, the graveyard poem is typically introspective; it is only Smith, already espousing one type of hybridity in the Elegiac Sonnet, who hybridizes these two settings into a single sonnet containing both the terrible sublime of the shoreline poem and the memento mori of the graveyard poem. Thus, Smith’s poetry is set apart not by the imagery and settings it uses, but through its inventive adaptation of the stock phrases and settings.

Sympathy and fellow-feeling are required to turn grief into melancholy, and the poets show awareness and approval of this quality, both in themselves and in others. In her “Sonnet to Mrs. Bates” Helen Maria Williams, after listing the appealing qualities of her subject, then goes on to state that it is “yet more happy! […] That, tun’d to sympathy, thy faithful tear / In mild accordance falls for others woes” (HMW I:54, ll. 9-12). Thus, while Mrs. Bates is claimed to have an abundance of good qualities, Sensibility trumps all of them.

The sonnets in which Smith claims to, directly or indirectly by phrases such as "sweet sorrow", engage in melancholy rather than suffering, all involve a sympathetic connection with another – with the nightingale, the moon or a friend. Smith thus adheres to the idea that sympathy is required in order to modulate sorrow, turning it into melancholy rather than grief. However, Smith's attitude towards Sensibility is complex; while she welcomes sensibility, as "some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought" (ES 3), she also implies in her verse that the suffering of sensibility is a price to pay for the gift of poetry: "Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favours cost, / *If those paint sorrow best – who feel it most!*" (ES I, ll. 13-14), and she criticizes excessive and feigned sensibility both explicitly and implicitly. The implication of this is that genuine Sensibility is linked to poetic ability and to authentic suffering, and thus available only to a select few. Smith sets herself apart from her contemporaries by establishing and maintaining an image of herself as the possessor of a genuine Sensibility; the delicate balance act she performs in sharing and withholding information regarding her griefs and grievances to uphold this image of genuine Sensibility indicate her awareness of the importance both of her image as the poetic genius singing, like the nightingale, with her breast pressed to a thorn, and adhering to her social status as a gentlewoman.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter will deal with Smith's influence on later poets. For this chapter I have chosen to focus more closely on Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. I have selected these two poets for several reasons, one of these reasons being their own acknowledgement of their debts to her: Wordsworth famously acknowledges Smith as a poet "to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered",[71] and Coleridge claims Smith as one of the models for the English sonnet.

In addition, Wordsworth and Coleridge are part of the established literary canon of "Romantic geniuses". Although modern literature theory has a much broader focus, studying other, often female, poets, that have previously been overlooked, there is still a division between studies of the "major Romantic poets" and newer research, where, as Jacqueline Labbe puts it, "The two segments don't seem, very often, to overlap; that is, books about male authors may put forward theories useful to authors of books about female writers, but there is not a lot of traffic the other way."[72] Like Labbe, I wish to show that Smith is part of the same continuum of poetic development as the "canon" Romantics, and thus I have chosen Wordsworth and Coleridge as my examples of Smith's influence on later poets.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Coleridge famously claims Smith and William Lisle Bowles as his models for the English sonnet in the preface to his collection "Sonnets from Various Authors", drawing from them the conclusion that "the sonnet is a small poem, in which some lonely feeling is developed" and that "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." (Col 1205-06)[73] This description is echoed by M. H. Abrams' description of the greater Romantic lyric, in which "The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory,

[71] William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, Vol 7, ed. William Knight (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1885) 342 (footnote)

[72] Jacqueline Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 1

[73] Coleridge quotes, unless otherwise stated, are taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* gen ed. Kathleen Coburn, vol. 16.I, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene."[74] Abrams does indeed cite Bowles's sonnets as the immediate inspiration for Coleridge, who he sees as the primary developer of the greater Romantic lyric, pointing out that, like the greater Romantic lyric,

> Bowles's sonnets present a determinate speaker, whom we are invited to identify with the author himself, whose responses to the local scene are a spontaneous overflow of feeling and displace the landscape as the center of poetic interest […], instead of being a series of impersonal *sententiae* linked to details of the setting by analogy, are mediated by the particular temperament and circumstances of the perceiving mind, and tend to compose a single curve of feelingful meditation."[75]

As Brent Raycroft points out, this description fits Smith's sonnets just as well as it does those of Bowles. Raycroft comments that "Charlotte Smith wrote a number of sonnets inspired by the river Arun […], 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",[76] while Daniel Robinson claims that "No poet was more indebted to Smith than Bowles, and no poet has been more wrongly attributed with initiating a literary vogue than Bowles, who clearly follows her example before any other."[77]

Despite Coleridge's attribution of the development of the English sonnet to Smith and Bowles, and the obvious signs of Smith's influence on his earlier poetry, Coleridge would later claim Bowles as the foremost sonneteer in the English language, completely omitting any mention of Smith. Feminist critics have argued that the reason for Coleridge's preoccupation with Bowles and omission of Smith is a question of gender; at the time Coleridge begun his poetic career, the sonnet was already popularized by several preeminent female poets. Daniel Robinson argues that in this period, women were making the "sonnet claim", establishing their right to the previously masculine sonnet and the literary legitimacy

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[74] M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, eds. Frederick W Hilles and Harold Bloom (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 527

[75] Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric", 540-41

[76] Brent Raycroft, "From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom: Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet", *European Romantic Review*, 9:3 (1998), 377

[77] Daniel Robinson, "Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim", *European Romantic Review* 6:1 (1995), 114

it carried.[78] When viewed in the context of this female literary tradition, Coleridge's preoccupation with Bowles, whose sonnets he described in the 1796 version of his Sonnet "To Bowles" as possessing "mild and manliest melancholy" (Col 163, l. 8), and in the *Literaria Biographia* as "so tender, and yet so manly",[79] becomes a strategy of reappropriating the sonnet for the male gender. Brent Raycroft suggests that "Coleridge's stress on Bowles's manliness can be interpreted as an attempt to make their [Bowles's and Smith's] difference absolute, and in the process separate a pair of poets whose names and poetic practices were in fact intimately intertwined."[80] Daniel Robinson asserts that

> The anxieties of form Coleridge associates with the sonnet are complicated by the embarrassments of gender. Considering Coleridge's participation in the female-dominated sonnet revival sheds new light on the ways in which male poets, such as Coleridge, Bowles, Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd, followed directly Charlotte Smith's lead.[81]

Thus, Coleridge's focus on Bowles to the exclusion of Smith, despite the similarities between the two poets, can be attributed to gender anxiety and a wish to separate his own poetry from the feminized poetry of Sensibility.

COLERIDGE AND THE SONNET

Although Coleridge repeatedly claimed Bowles as his primary source of inspiration for his sonnets, he claims to have written the sonnet "To the Autumnal Moon" at age sixteen, a year before the first publication of Bowles' sonnets and two years after the publication of Smith's, which would indicate that Coleridge's interest in the sonnet had already progressed to writing his own before he read any of Bowles' sonnets. Although J. C. C. Mays claims in the notes to the poem that "there are good reasons to believe that it is of later date", dating it to 1789 at the earliest, Coleridge's own dating and the contents of the poem indicate that the primary influence for the sonnet is not Bowles' sonnets, but rather those of Smith.

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[78] See Robinson, "Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim", 99

[79] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* 2 vols., eds. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I:17

[80] Raycroft, "From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom", 375

[81] Daniel Robinson, "'Work without Hope': Anxiety and Embarrassment in Coleridge's Sonnets", *Studies in Romanticism* 39:1 (2000), 82

In "To the Autumnal Moon", Coleridge follows the pattern he later describes as the sonnet ideal; the sonnet begins by describing the moon, using the observation to comment on the nature of hope: "Ah such is HOPE! as changeful and as fair! / Now dimly peering on the wistful sight; / Now hid behind the dragon-wing'd Despair:" (Col 103, ll. 9-11). As I have shown in the previous chapter, the moon's visionary powers are a typical feature of Smith's sonnets, as well as the description of hope as desirable but fickle. The vocabulary of the sonnet is also clearly reminiscent of the poem of Sensibility: the moon is described as a "pale orb" (Col 103, l. 5), hope is "changeful" and fickle as a quickly-fading "meteor" (Col. 103, l. 14) All of this vocabulary is also present in Smith's sonnets: the moon is an "orb" exuding a "pale beam" (ES IV, ll. 8, 1), hope is described as a fickle flatterer (ES VI), the quickly-fading glowworm symbolizing hope is a "meteor" (ES LVIII, l. 6). None of the sonnets in Bowles' first edition feature the moon, whereas *Elegiac Sonnets* contains several poems addressing the moon in its first edition, with several more added in later editions. Daniel Robinson emphasizes the sonnet's similarity to Smith's poems, referring to "To the Autumnal Moon" as "an imitation of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* in subject, tone, and form".[82] Coleridge's early sonnet thus shows that although he would later downplay Smith's influence on his poetry, it is not only Bowles, but also Smith, that influences his early poetry.

Many of Coleridge's early sonnets draw vocabulary and structure from Smith; like "To the Autumnal Moon", "To the Evening Star" also draws its vocabulary and structure, albeit badly mangled, from Smith's nocturnal sonnets: "Must she not be as is thy placid sphere / Serenely brilliant? Whilst to gaze a while …" (Col. 22, ll. 9-10) is comparable to Smith's "And while I gaze, thy mild and placid light" (ES IV, l. 5). Coleridge's sonnet continues: "Ev'n till she quit this scene of earthly toil; / Then Hope perchance might fondly sigh to join / Her spirit in thy kindred orb, O star benign!" (Col. 12-14) This borrows not only the vocabulary, but the concept of Smith's Sonnet IV, in which she addresses the moon with the hope "That in thy orb, the wretched may have rest: / The sufferers of the earth perhaps may go, / Released by death – to thy benignant sphere […] Poor wearied pilgrim – in this toiling scene!" (ES IV, ll. 8-10, 14)[83]

[82] Robinson, "Work Without Hope", 82-83

[83] Several other sonnets by Coleridge show clear similarity to Smith's sonnets, but as not all of them have a nocturnal setting, they fall outside the scope of this thesis. Some examples worth further examination are "Composed in Sickness", "Anna and Harland", "On Hope" and "To the River Otter".

As Christopher Miller points out, “Parody is a close relative of mimicry”, and the year after publishing his debut volume *Poems on Various Subjects,* in 1797, Coleridge published three “Sonnets Attempted in the Manner of ‘Contemporary Writers’” under the nom-de-plume of Nehemiah Higginbottom in *Monthly Magazine*.[84] The three sonnets are parodies on the mannerisms of contemporary writers; the first one deals with a nocturnal setting and is clearly intended to parody the nocturnal poem of Sensibility.

> Pensive, at eve, on the hard world I mus’d,
> And my poor heart was sad: so at the moon
> I gaz’d – and sigh’d, and sigh’d – for ah! How soon
> Eve darkens into night. Mine eye perus’d
> With tearful vacancy, the *dampy* grass,
> Which wept and glitter’d in the paly ray:
> And I did pause me on my lonely way,
> And mus’d me on those wretched ones, who pass
> O’er the bleak heath of SORROW. But, alas!
> Most of MYSELF I thought: when it befell,
> That the sooth 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.”
> Ah! My poor heart’s inexplicable swell!
> (Col 356)

The sonnet mocks the idiom of Sensibility and its “stock vocabulary […] affective setting […] occult visitations, the locus of feeling in the ‘poor heart’.”[85] It is worth noting that the version Coleridge included into his *Biographia Literaria*, in addition to overloading the poem with even more italics and small capitals, changes the phrase “Eve darkens into night” into “Eve saddens into night”, which is reminiscent of Coleridge’s own “The Eolian Harp”: “And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light, / Slow saddening round” (Col 232, ll. 6-7). The phrasing also appears in Coleridge’s earlier work “Songs of the Pixies”: “Hence! thou lingerer, Light! / EVE saddens into NIGHT.” (Col 111, l. 76). With this altered line, Coleridge thus mocks the poem he once felt was his best accomplishment, renouncing his own use of the language of Sensibility.

Coleridge later reprinted this sonnet in the *Biographia Literaria* as a sign of his early recognition of the flaws of contemporary poetry, claiming that its purpose was “to excite a

[84] Miller, *The Invention of Evening,* 50

[85] Ibid.

good-natured laugh at the spirit of doleful egotism".[86] This contrasts with what he writes in the preface to *Poems on Various Subjects* the year before publishing the sonnets: "To censure [egotism] in a Monody or Sonnet is almost as absurd as to dislike a circle for being round."[87] The sonnet seems to mock the very concept that Coleridge himself stated as the guiding principle of the sonnet – using nature observations to develop a melancholy feeling. Although Coleridge himself identified the three sonnets as written in parody of his own and his friends' styles, Brent Raycroft astutely points out that in order for the sonnets to be published in the *Monthly Magazine,* their subjects must have been identifiable to the editor and to the general reading public.[88] Raycroft identifies the first sonnet as a parody of Smith's style, and the second, parodying "low, creeping language and thoughts, under the pretense of simplicity"[89] as a parody of Bowles's style[90].

The Higginbottom sonnets parody concepts central to Coleridge's own poetic vision; poetry centering on the self and its experiences, simplistic language and the ballad and hybrid forms. Coleridge is thus mocking not just his role models, but himself, pointing out the traps these forms hold for the unwary writer. The Higginbottom sonnets effectively mark the end of Coleridge's attempts at sonnet writing, but not the end of the influence the subjects of the parody, Smith, Bowles and Wordsworth, hold over his later poems.

"THE EOLIAN HARP" AND COLERIDGE'S TWO NIGHTINGALES

"The Eolian Harp" utilizes, like many of Smith's sonnets, a nocturnal setting, but the mood of the poem is epithalamic rather than melancholic. In addition to "The Eolian Harp", I will also look at "On an Autumnal Evening", a poem which Miller claims "can be read as a direct precursor to 'The Eolian Harp'",[91] and which is interesting because it suggests Smith's influence on Coleridge's early poetry.

[86] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* I:27

[87] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects*, v-vi, as quoted in Robinson, "Work Without Hope", 92

[88] Raycroft, "From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom", 383

[89] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I:27

[90] Raycroft, "From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom", 382-83

[91] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 51

Although “The Eolian Harp” is epithalamic in its mood, suggestions of melancholy are interwoven into the poem, appearing particularly in the first stanza. The poem begins by addressing “My pensive Sara!” (Col 232, l. 1). The use of the word “pensive” suggests melancholic meditation; it is also a typical feature of the poem of Sensibility. Later in the stanza, the melancholic progression of sadness increasing as daylight fades away is projected onto nature itself: “And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light, / Slow saddening round” (Col 232, ll. 6-7). The use of the pathetic fallacy and the pensive character of Sara thus create an underlying melancholic mood which is contrasted by the epithalamic mood created by the metaphor of the harp and the wind as lovers. The use of the pathetic fallacy to invoke an emotion is a method typically used in Smith’s sonnets, as is contrasting two different moods by utilizing the pathetic fallacy in order to make the surroundings describe a mood contrasting with that of the speaker – in “The Eolian Harp”, both moods are externalized, described by the surroundings rather than being a contrast between the surroundings and the internal landscape of the speaker.

“On an Autumnal Evening”, or “Absence: a Poem”, features the mixed melancholy and epithalamic moods of “The Eolian Harp”, and the lines “Like those rich hues that paint the clouds of eve! / Tearful, and sadd’ning with the sadden’d blaze” (Col 102, ll. 102-03) which seem to have been reworked to become part of the opening stanza of “The Eolian Harp”. What makes the poem interesting to this study, however, is the striking similarities between the language of the poem and that of *Elegiac Sonnets*.

The similarity is apparent in lines such as “Mine eye reverted views the cloudless day, / When, Isca! on thy banks I joy’d to rove, / While hope with kisses nurs’d the infant love.” (Col 102, ll. 80-82); compare this with Smith’s “Farewel, Aruna! – on whose varied shore / My early vows were paid to nature’s shrine, / When thoughtless joy, and infant hope were mine” (ES XLV, ll. 1-3). Both poems thus use poetic Latinate names for the rivers Exe and Arun, and both use the river as a symbol of nature’s nurturing influence in youth.

Other examples of the poem borrowing its phrasing from *Elegiac Sonnets* are “Where love a crown of thornless roses wears” (Col 102, l. 89), which is strikingly similar to Smith’s “Love’s own thornless roses bind your brow” (ES XX, l. 9), and lines that, while they do not correspond directly to any particular lines of Smith’s, clearly use a vocabulary and syntax pulled directly from *Elegiac Sonnets*: “Yet dear to fancy’s eye thy varied scene / Of wood, hill, vale, and sparkling brooks between; / And dear to fancy’s ear the earliest song / That floats on

morning's wings thy fields among!" (Col 102, ll. 97-100). Thus, the influence of Smith's language on Coleridge's early poetry is clearly traceable in "On an Autumnal Evening"; while "The Eolian Harp" shows Coleridge developing his own style to a much greater degree than "On an Autumnal Evening", remnants of the nocturnal melancholy and pensive mood of *Elegiac Sonnets* is still found in the later poem.

Coleridge's two poems both entitled "To the Nightingale" clearly illustrate the difference between his early use of the classical imagery and the idioms typical of Sensibility, and how he later rejects these in favor of the conversation poem. The first poem makes use of the classical idiom, referring to the nightingale as "Sister of love-lorn poets, Philomel!" and describing it as "warbl[ing] sad thy pity-pleading strains", as well as being the "MINSTREL of the MOON!" (Col 227, ll. 1, 11, 16). All of this metaphorizes the bird; the poem makes use of the classical image of the nightingale as the transformed Philomel, doomed to forever lament her fate. The same imagery is used by Smith in her Sonnet III, where she refers to the nightingale as a "songstress sad" who "Tell'st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe" (ES III, l. 3), and alludes to the myth of Philomela and Procne with the speculation "Say – hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong, / Or died'st thou – martyr of disastrous love?" (ES III, ll. 11-12).

Although the poem foreshadows the later nightingale poem with its dismissal of how "bards in city garret pent […] address *thy* name, / And Her's, the full-orb'd Queen, that shines above" it continues with the line "But I *do* hear thee…" (Col 227, ll. 2, 6-7, 8). With these lines, Coleridge expresses a belief that while it is necessary for the true poet to have an immediate connection to what he writes about, rather than blindly following convention, the use of classical allusion and metaphor is not in itself an issue to him at the time.

The poem continues "O! have I listen'd, till my working soul, / Wak'd by those strains to thousand phantasies, / Absorb'd hath ceased to listen!" (Col 227, ll. 12-14). Coleridge is not only making use of the method of using a nature observation to move into introspection, he is also drawing attention to the practice, and through that, to his own awareness of the practice. The poem does, however, not end by using the observation of the nightingale to develop a lonely feeling, but rather, like "The Eolian Harp" moves into an epithalamic mode; the poem ends by first drawing a comparison between the nightingale and a woman playing the harp, concluding in favor of nature's own singer over the artificial music, but then, surprisingly, brings in a third element and concludes that better still is to hear his fiancée call

him by “the Husband’s promis’d name” (Col 228, l. 26). The poem thus foreshadows Coleridge’s movement towards natural language and domestic situations; the natural and the domestic are raised above the artificially beautiful.

The *Lyrical Ballads* poem entitled “To the Nightingale” differs strongly from the first one. The poem uses the same Milton quote as Coleridge’s first nightingale poem – “’Most musical, most melancholy’ Bird!” – only to deny the concept in the same breath: “A melancholy Bird? Oh! idle thought! / In nature there is nothing melancholy.” (Col 517, ll.13, 14-15). Coleridge here discusses the pathetic fallacy, commenting that it is not the bird in itself which is melancholy, but Milton who has “fill’d all things with himself / And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale / Of his own sorrow” (Col 517, ll. 19-21). Coleridge thus seemingly rejects the usage of the pathetic fallacy; however, as James Holt McGavran astutely points out, “If there is nothing melancholy in Nature, Coleridge surely knows there is nothing inherently joyful there either.”[92] Despite his rejection of the pathetic fallacy, Coleridge thus uses another pathetic fallacy when describing the nightingale as “joyful”. In addition, Coleridge continues to make use of the pathetic fallacy in his later poems; his rejection of the melancholy nightingale thus seems based on its status as a poetic cliché rather than an image drawn directly from nature.

In a manner similar to the Higginbottom sonnet using a phrase from “The Eolian Harp” the second nightingale poem uses the method of paraphrasing the first in order to overwrite it with a new meaning, reflecting a change in sentiment:

> And youths and maidens most poetical,
> Who lose the deep’ning twilights of the spring
> In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
> Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs
> O’er Philomela’s pity-pleading strains.
> (Col 518, ll. 35-39)

These lines echo Coleridge’s own earlier poem both in its concept of the city dwellers repeating Milton’s phrase without any real connection with nature, but also in its use of the classical name of Philomel and the use of the phrase “pity-pleading strains”; however, the tone is ironic rather than pitying, and the phrase which was earlier used as a description of the birdsong is now part of the irony. Thus, Coleridge is distancing himself from his own earlier

[92] McGavran, James Holt, Jr., “Coleridge, the Wordsworths, and Androgyny: A Reading of ‘The Nightingale’”, *South Atlantic Review* , 53:4 (1988), 58.

use of the classical Miltonic imagery. This method of overwriting a previous sentiment is also found in Smith's later sonnets. I will discuss the two poets' use of the method more closely on page 67 using "Dejection: An Ode" as my example.

The poem describes the nightingale as male, and the song as a "love-chant" (Col 518, l. 48), consistent with the fact that the nightingale's song serves the purpose of allowing a male to attract a female to his territory. Smith's nightingale poetry describes the same movement from the classical/Miltonic image of the nightingale as melancholy to an aim for scientific accuracy in the description of its habits; she describes the nightingale as melancholy in Sonnet III, but in Sonnet VII she speculates on the migratory habits of the real bird rather than on the possible causes for its sorrow, and by Sonnet LV, "The return of the nightingale. Written in May 1791", she describes the nightingale's song as "the soft voice of young and timid Love / That calls these melting sounds of sweetness forth." (ES LV, ll. 7-8), contrasting it with her own unhappy mood. James McKusick comments on Smith's attention to the biological reality of the bird: "Although the sonnet [VII] invokes a distinctly literary nightingale, it is also very much engaged with the actual facts of natural history."[93] Although Smith uses the pathetic fallacy to make nature serve as a metaphor for the human condition, there is thus a movement towards increasing scientific accuracy in her natural descriptions. McKusick traces this combination of the poetical and the scientifically accurate from Smith to Coleridge: "Yet Coleridge's nightingale is also a singer or fellow-poet (evidently male) whose voice embodies the powerful, transformative emotions of joy and love. Coleridge follows Smith in regarding the nightingale as an embodiment of nature, possessed of mysterious powers."[94]

"FROST AT MIDNIGHT" AND "DEJECTION: AN ODE"

"Frost at Midnight" repeatedly sets up and frustrates the expectations for the elements of a nocturnal introspection in the style of Young in a manner so obvious, it seems deliberate. The poem begins by establishing its setting on a winter evening, indoors, thus raising expectations of the elements that belong to the introspective nocturnal – solitude, deep introspection, meditation on the frailty of life and lost loved ones. The poem initially seems to lead up towards the solitude expected from the introspective nocturnal: "The inmates of my

[93] James C McKusick, "The Return of the Nightingale" *The Wordsworth Circle*. (38:1/2) Winter 2007, 37

[94] McKusick, "The Return of the Nightingale", 39

cottage, all at rest, / Have left me to that solitude, which suits / Abstruser musings:", but then continues with "save that at my side / My cradled infant slumbers peacefully" (Col 53, ll. 4-6, 6-7). The poem underlines the uncanny aspects of the nocturnal: "This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood, / With all the numberless goings-on of life, / Inaudible as dreams!" (Col 453-4, ll. 11-13). In the typical introspective nocturnal, the isolation of night frees the mind and allows introspection; Coleridge, however, describes the silence as a hindrance to undisturbed thought: "Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs / And vexes meditation with its strange / And extreme silentness." (Col 453, ll. 8-10) Far from the quiet allowing introspection, it hinders it.

The poem then raises the expectation of a meditation on lost loved ones with the lines: "For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face, / Townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved, / My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!" (Col 455, ll. 41-43) Thus, Coleridge brings up a memory of a deceased loved one, only to immediately leap back to the "Dear babe" (Col 455, l. 44). Rather than meditating on the dead and the sensation of loss the thoughts of them bring, he abruptly shifts his focus to the living child and the joy he feels at the sight of his son. "My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart / With tender gladness, thus to look at thee" (Col 455, ll. 48-49). The poem then moves into a meditation on Coleridge's hopes for the child's future, a religious preparatio for life rather than death – in life, his child shall wander through nature, through nature taking in the God who is "Himself in all, and all things in himself." (Col 456, ll. 62). The poem thus differs radically from the expectations of a nocturnal poem created by Young's *Night Thoughts* and developed in Smith's nocturnal sonnets – it replaces those poems' melancholic atmosphere, solitude and sense of loss with hope for the child's future, companionship and love for the present, living child. It still shows other similarities to Smith's sonnets; "Frost at Midnight" is an example of Abrams's greater Romantic lyric; like Smith's sonnets, it bases its forays into the internal landscape in observations of the poets immediate surroundings – in this case the extreme silence of the winter night, the film on the grate, and the presence of the infant.

Christopher Miller points out that "Dejection: an Ode" is, despite the previously published Higginbottom sonnets' mock Sensibility, deeply indebted to the genre: "it invokes the pensive twilight scene that Coleridge had mocked in his satirical sonnet, a scene that typically mingled beauty and sadness in equal measure. […] it represents the passage of evening into night as coinciding with dark and sad thoughts; and it describes a melancholy of

mysterious origin."[95] The "melancholy of mysterious origin" is particularly interesting; like Smith, Coleridge is editing his causes for sorrow out of his poems, leaving the reader with no explanation for his "poor heart's inexplicable swell".

Like Smith's sonnets, "Dejection: an Ode" moves from descriptions of a nocturnal nature scene to the internal landscape of the speaker. Abrams mentions it as one of the poems that exemplify the greater Romantic lyric. In "Dejection: an Ode" the shift from the external scene to the introspective mode is repeated several times; Albert Gérard expands further on this repeating movement, describing it as "a heart-beat rhythm of systole and diastole, contraction and expansion, in which the poet's attention is wandering to and fro between his concrete, immediate experience and the wide and many-faceted world of the non-self".[96] If the sonnet with its fourteen lines is "no improper vehicle for a single thought" (ES, p. 3), the longer lyric thus has room for several; the connection between the external scene and the internal scenery serves as a pivoting point around which the poem can revolve.

The poem begins with an epigraph taken from *Sir Patrick Spens,* modernized by Coleridge – a process reminiscent of Smith's own intertextual relations with other poets and her translation and modification of quotes. The first stanza describes how the new moon encircles the old – an observation of a specific natural phenomenon which would not seem out of place in Smith's sonnets, which show particular attention to the moon in all its phases. The language Coleridge uses belongs to the conversation poem; the description of the moon eschews classical allusions and stock imagery altogether. Miller writes that "The *langue* of nocturnal meditation is thus resuscitated in the *parole* of Coleridge's conversational idiom";[97] although Coleridge has rejected high diction, the setting and mood is reminiscent of the poem of Sensibility.

Like the Higginbottom sonnet paraphrasing "The Eolian Harp", and the second Nightingale poem references the first, Coleridge again returns to an older poem – once more, "The Eolian Harp", which he once considered to be his best effort – in order to overwrite the previous sentiment of that poem, speaking of "the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes /

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[95] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 75

[96] Albert Gérard, "The Systolic Rythm: The Structure of Coleridge's Conversation Poems" [sic], *Essays in Criticism,* 10 (1960), 314.

[97] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 53

Upon the strings of this Æolian lute, / Which better far were mute" (Col 698, ll. 6-9). This evokes the previous lines "And that simplest Lute […] How by the desultory breeze caressed, / Like some coy maid half-yielding to her lover" (Col 232, ll. 12, 14-15), rewriting the same action cast in a different light by the speaker's altered stance. The wind is now sobbing and moaning, raking violently across the strings rather than caressing them; a perfect example of how the pathetic fallacy causes the surrounding impressions to be interpreted differently depending on the situation.

This process of revisiting and rewriting an earlier poem to reflect a change in sentiment is reminiscent of several of Smith's later sonnets, which also refer to situations which were previously comforting but are no longer sufficient to soothe the speaker. Smith's Sonnet LXXX "To the invisible moon" mentions "Melancholy's votaries that delight / To watch thee, gliding thro' the blue serene [...]" (ES LXXX, ll. 2-3), and then states the difference in her own preferences: "Mild Sorrow, such as hope has not forsook, / May love to muse beneath thy silent reign; / but *I* prefer…" (ES LXXX, ll. 5-7). These lines implicitly refer back to her Sonnet IV "To the moon", which begins with the lines "Queen of the silver bow! – by thy pale beam, / Alone and pensive I delight to stray" (ES IV, ll. 1-2). The later sonnet echoes the earlier in words such as "delight" and "muse"/"pensive", thus implicitly placing the later sonnet's conclusion of despair and lost hope in relation to the earlier's conclusion of comparatively mild melancholy. Coleridge is thus using the same method as Smith to draw attention to how his emotional state has altered since the writing of "The Eolian Harp".

In addition, there is a hidden implication to the line – "The Eolian Harp" depicts a scene from Coleridge's courtship with the first Sara – Sara Fricker – which he wishes had not taken place – that "The Eolian Harp" was mute, the poem unwritten. This subtle allusion is one of the few personal references which remain in the published version of the poem; the references to Sara Hutchinson in the poem's precursor "Letter to –" have been excised from the poem and replaced by references to an unnamed "Lady" – with all the subtle implications of courtly love that appellation carries. Like Smith, he makes use of a hidden allusion to her real life issues in her poems, implicitly referring to the source of his despair, yet in a way which is oblique enough to conceal the reference from those not already in the know.

At the end of the first stanza, Coleridge expresses a wish that the storm the lunar phenomenon foretells might come soon, so that "Those sounds which oft have raised me,

whilst they awed, / And sent my soul abroad, / Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give, / Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!" (Col 698, ll.17-20). This echoes the poetry of Sensibility in which the power of the sublime has power to not only "awe" but also "raise" the spirit. Despite Miller's claim that the lines "A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear, / A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief, / Which finds no natural outlet, no relief, / In word, or sigh, or tear –" (Col 698, ll. 21-24) show that the poem "negates a major premise of Sensibility – that emotion can be mediated by language and sympathetically shared by a community of readers",[98] I would argue that these lines rather point to an anticipation of the emotional release of the coming storm; while nature remains calm – "this long eve, so balmy and serene" (Col 698, l. 27) – the speaker is unable to find an outlet for his grief, but he anticipates the outbreak of the storm which will allow him to form a connection with nature and submerge his own emotional turmoil in the terrible sublime. While the storm has not yet broken loose, Coleridge is aware of, and thus able to anticipate, its power of affecting emotional release through its mirroring of the internal state. Although the storms begins unnoticed, it coincides with the emotional release of the speaker's meditations on joy, and when he finally turns to the storm, the description allows him to externalize a scene of emotional catharsis – the aeolian lute returns as if commenting on the speaker's outburst of emotion: "What a scream / Of agony by torture lengthened out / That lute sent forth!" (Col 701, ll. 97-99). Following this is a series of images in which the wind becomes an "actor, perfect in all tragic sounds! / [a] mighty poet, e'en to frenzy bold!" (Col 701, ll. 108-09), soldiers groaning in pain, and a lost and weeping child, all enacting sympathetic scenes of terror and grief. Thus, the storm allows the speaker to externalize some of his pain, submerging it in the nature scene; a practice typical of Smith's sonnets.

The meditations on the nature of joy in "Dejection: an Ode" are often linked to Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality", but the sentiment in both poems – that joy belongs to the child and is lost in adulthood – is predated by Smith's sonnets, in which it is one of the recurrent themes. Brent Raycroft also links the language Coleridge uses in this stanza to Smith's poetry:

> in such phrasings as "though my path was rough" and "But now afflictions bow me to earth" we can hear another idiom. We are reminded of the "rugged path" in Charlotte Smith's first sonnet, and from her sonnet 84 the description of the speaker "Crush'd to

[98] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 53

> the earth, by bitterest anguish prest". When Coleridge speaks of the failure 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.[99]

Raycroft thus claims that "in this ode, when [Coleridge] needs to describe his dejection in the fullness of its power, his imagery and tone approach Charlotte Smith's signature style."[100] Smith has thus so to speak cornered the market on grief – her style and tone has become a shorthand for grief that other poets reach for when attempting to depict their own sorrow. Thus, while Coleridge attempts to liberate himself from previous influences and develop his own style, Smith remains an important influence on his poetry throughout his poetic career.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The link between Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth is often illustrated by Wordsworth's own claim that Smith was a poet "to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered"[101] The location of this quote, in the comments to "Stanzas … off St. Bees' Head", written "nearly twenty-five years after her death […] attests to her continued textual presence in his poetic life."[102] However, Judith W. Page argues that although much has been made of this quote, Wordsworth attempted to downplay Smith's and other women poets' contributions to his verse:

> Wordsworth, writing his Preface smack in the middle of this period, was, of course, aware of many of these writers and, as Stuart Curran has argued, was influenced by them. But Wordsworth defines himself against them, instead claiming kinship with a male tradition, that is, with Catullus and Pope, Milton and Shakespeare, rather than Charlotte Smith or Joanna Baillie. He does not even mention women writers in the Preface, because he does not want to be placed in their company.[103]

Page further suggests that Wordsworth "particularly felt the need to distance himself from popular contemporary women writers, who were, after all, his competitors."[104] The fact that

[99] Raycroft, "From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom", 386

[100] ibid.

[101] William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 342 (footnote)

[102] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 5

[103] Judith W. Page, *Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 39

[104] Ibid.

Wordsworth does not mention Smith until twenty-five years after her death, at a time when her popularity was already in its wane, seems to support Page's theory. In a manner similar to Coleridge claiming kinship with William Lisle Bowles, a lone male sonneteer among a large number of women sonneteers, Wordsworth is also attempting to masculinize poetry at a period where a large number of women poets were making their claim to poetical laurels. His success at this task can be measured in the perseverance of the myth of the lone male Romantic genius, working in reaction and opposition to Augustan poetry, rather than what more recent scholarship has shown to be the case – that the male Romantic is part of a tradition carried by both male and female poets, a tradition which displays organic growth from one style to another – an unbroken line leading from Finch and Thomson through Smith and her contemporaries to Wordsworth – rather than being a reactionary and dramatic break from the "stuffy" Augustan style of poetry.

Labbe mentions Keats' use of the term "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime"; as she points out, "Smith's poetry would occupy the same space: writing wherein the 'nature' and the 'identity' of the poet, far from being 'annihilated,' take center stage and claim full readerly attention".[105] Although Labbe's point is that the works of both poets are not as autobiographical as they may first appear, unlike in the Victorian dramatic monologue, where the speaker of the poem is clearly separate from the poet, "Wordsworth […] constructs a speaker who is, vitally, both Self and Other: an Other dependent on the aspects of the Self who writes the poem, but who is estranged from the sincere and authentic."[106] Smith, as well, constructs a persona whose ostensible sincerity is an intrinsic part of its appeal.

EVENING WALK

I will focus closely on Evening Walk, as it is one of Wordsworth's early poems, deals with an evening and nocturnal setting, and in places differs substantially between the 1793 and the 1836 edition. It is reasonable to assume that external influences will be most obvious in a poet's early works, before their own style has fully developed and external influences have been more seamlessly incorporated into their own idiom. Therefore, I will look

[105] Labbe, "Revisiting the Egotistical Sublime", 18

[106] Labbe, "Revisiting the Egotistical Sublime", 33

particularly at the first published edition, that of 1793, noting substantial differences between that and the 1836 edition.

Miller points out that in the poem, Wordsworth “adopts the conventions of eighteenth-century evening poetry – pensive thoughts, twilight hauntings, perceptual allegories” (Miller 85), many of which are present in Smith’s poetry. The scenery listed off in the initial lines of the poem is typical of the twilight settings Miller lists in *The Invention of Evening*:

> FAR from my dearest Friend, 'tis mine to rove
> Through bare grey dell, high wood, and pastoral cove;
> His wizard course where hoary Derwent takes
> Thro’ crags, and forest glooms, and opening lakes,
> Staying his silent waves, to hear the roar
> That stuns the tremulous cliffs of high Lodore;
> Where silver rocks the savage prospect chear
> Of giant yews that frown on Rydale’s mere;
> Where peace to Grasmere's lonely island leads,
> To willowy hedge-rows, and to emerald meads;
> Leads to her bridge, rude church, and cottaged grounds,
> Her rocky sheepwalks, and her woodland bounds;
> Where, bosom’d deep, the shy Winander peeps
> 'Mid clust’ring isles, and holly-sprinkl’d steeps;
> Where twilight glens endear my Esthwaite's shore,
> And memory of departed pleasures, more.
> *An Evening Walk* 28, 30, ll. 1-16[107]

The poem thus begins by establishing a twilight setting, rattling off a list of locations conforming to Miller’s list: “the bower, the hilltop, the field, the graveyard, and the shoreline”.[108] This focus on specific, named places is also typical of Smith’s poetry; as Bishop C. Hunt points out, both Smith and Wordsworth are preoccupied with realism of locality, naming rivers, landmarks, places to ground themselves in a real landscape, attempts to “appeal to a standard of biographical accuracy which serves to guarantee the genuineness of the emotional experience which the poet is trying to convey.”[109] Jacqueline Labbe phrases this in a manner more attuned to the performativity more recent research has shown is a key part of both Wordsworth’s and Smith’s creations of their poetical personas: “For both poets, place offers the creation of locality, which in turn leads to a kind of anchoring within the landscape,

[107] *Evening Walk* quotes taken from William Wordsworth, *An Evening Walk*, ed. James Averill (London: Cornell University Press, 1984). The 1793 edition is printed on even page numbers, the 1836 edition on odd pages.

[108] Miller, *The Invention of Evening*, 7

[109] Hunt, “Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith”, 83

so that self (or perhaps selves) can be derived *from* landscape, and hence naturalized".[110] The focus Wordsworth places on the river Derwent and surrounding nature as sources of poetic inspiration, especially notable in *The Prelude*, are reminiscent of Smith's descriptions of the river Arun and her praise of the Sussex Downs; like Wordsworth is famed for, Smith focuses on nature's formative influence on childhood happiness and poetic development: "Ah! Hills belov'd! – where once a happy child, / Your beechen shades, "your turf, your flowers among," / I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild , / And woke your echoes with my artless song." (ES V. ll. 1-4) Smith's paraphrase of Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" is echoed by Wordsworth's quote of Smith's sonnet in *An Evening Walk*: "Fair scenes! With other eyes, than once, I gaze, / The ever-varying charm your round displays, / Than when, ere-while, I taught, "a happy child," / The echoes of your rocks my carols wild" (EW 30, ll. 17-20). Not only does Wordsworth directly quote Smith, the line also paraphrases Smith's sonnet further; note the similarity between the lines previously quoted, both dealing with rousing the echoes of the scene with childhood songs. Thus, what has earlier been seen as an invention by Wordsworth – the concept of nature as a nurturing influence during the poet's early years – can be traced back to Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*.

The theme of the stanza – the difference between childhood joys and adult awareness of grief – is similar to Smith's sonnets on childhood. In Sonnet XXVII, the speaker observes children at play and comments on the difference between childhood's carefree cheer and an adulthood fraught with pain: "O happy age! when hope's unclouded ray / lights their green path, and prompts their simple mirth" (ES XXVII, ll. 5-6) Michael Mason points out in a footnote to Wordsworth's "Anecdote for Fathers" that "the normal adult condition is represented as being such that painful ideas are never far away.",[111] a sentiment Wordsworth and Smith both share and repeatedly contrast with the carefree and joyous state of childhood in their poems.

The 1793 edition has the lines "Then did no ebb of chearfulness demand / Sad tides of joy from Melancholy's hand" (EW 30, ll.21-22); notably the capitalized Melancholy is replaced in 1836 edition by "The spirit sought not then, in cherished sadness, / A cloudy substitute for failing gladness." (EW 31, ll. 15-16). Melancholy, with a capital "M" and the

[110] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 78

[111] William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 2:nd ed., ed. Michael Mason (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007) , 133 (editor's footnote)

personification that implies, is a concept closely linked with the poetry of Sensibility; in the 1836 edition, the lines are altered so that while the emotion conveyed remains the same, the overt connection to the poetry of Sensibility is erased.

Jacqueline Labbe points out in *Writing Romanticism* that the 1791 edition places the phrase “a happy child” between quotation marks, making the reference to Smith’s sonnet explicit, while in the 1836 edition, the quotation marks have been omitted, obscuring the quotation and the influence of Smith’s poetry on Wordsworth’s poem. Labbe also points out that the phrase “deep embattl’d clouds” (EW 34, l. 55) is likely taken from Smith’s Sonnet LIX, “Written in September 1791”, where the phrase appears as “many a deep-embattled cloud” (ES LIX, l.3).[112] Labbe believes Wordsworth may have read a manuscript copy of sonnet LIX when he visited Smith in November 1791. There are several other instances in *An Evening Walk* where the turn of phrase clearly echoes Smith, notably “Now, while the solemn evening Shadows sail […] I love beside the glowing lake to stray” (EW 54, 56, ll. 191-195), which is reminiscent of Smith’s “Queen of the silver bow! – by thy pale beam / Alone and pensive, I delight to stray” (ES IV, ll. 1-2).

The figure of the female vagrant that appears in An Evening Walk is reminiscent of the suffering mothers that appear in Smith’s poetry. Smith’s *The Emigrants* were published in the same year as *An Evening Walk*, and is, along with its offshoot “The Female Exile”, which Smith dates as written in November 1792, similar in nature to that poem. Stuart Curran describes Smith’s *The Emigrants* in particular as “charged […] 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 alienated.”[113] Both *The Emigrants* and *An Evening Walk* open with nature descriptions, into which the sequence about the female vagrants are later woven; however, Smith makes the suffering of the emigrants the main theme of her two poems, while the figure of the female vagrant in *An Evening Walk* is a shorter and somewhat abruptly ended aside.

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[112] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, p. 12

[113] Stuart Curran, “Romantic Poetry: The I Altered”, in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 202

Both Wordsworth and Smith paint a somewhat melodramatic depiction of suffering motherhood: the female vagrant and the female exile have both been parted from their husbands by war, and are both in desperate straits, fearing for the safety of their children. The children, meanwhile, are shown to be unaware of their plight, focusing on childish games: "Her innocent children, unconscious of sorrow, / To seek the gloss'd shell, or the crimson weed stray" (ES 98, ll. 17-18). This is similar to *An Evening Walk,* which shows its vagrant woman and her children playing together: "Oft has she taught them on her lap to play / Delighted, with the glow-worm's harmless ray" (EW 64, ll. 275-76). The similarity of these female portraits may owe something to cross-fertilization from Wordsworth's visit to Smith in 1791, but it is difficult, if not impossible to determine which way the inspiration goes. In *Fellow Romantics*, Labbe shows that Smith takes inspiration from Wordsworth's works as well as vice versa, and, as the publication dates of the two poems are quite close together, it is difficult to determine whether this is a case of the poets influencing each other during their meeting in 1791, as Labbe theorizes, or if they are independently reaching a similar treatment of their subjects.

In *Evening Walk*, Wordsworth "often uses the contrast, prominent in Gray and Smith, between the delight of the scene and the melancholy of the poet."[114] This is particularly notable in the stanza where the poem describes how evening turns toward night:

> No purple prospects now the mind employ
> Glowing in the golden sunset tints of joy,
> But o'er the sooth'd accordant heart we feel
> A sympathetic twilight softly steal,
> And ever, as we fondly muse, we find
> The soft gloom deep'ning on the tranquil mind.
> Stay! pensive, sadly-pleasing visions, stay!
> Ah no! as fades the vale, they fade away.
> Yet still the tender, vacant gloom remains,
> Still the cold cheek its shuddering tear retains.
> (EW 74, ll. 379-82)

The language used clearly belongs to the poem of Sensibility. The phrases "accordant heart" and "sympathetic twilight" show the speaker's attunement to nature; evening awakens a pleasurable melancholy in the viewer with its "pensive, sadly-pleasing visions", and although evening fades away, the melancholy awakened by viewing the nature scene remains, both

[114] Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 195

emotionally present as a “tender, vacant gloom” and physically evidenced by the “shuddering tear” remaining on the speaker’s cheek. The section reappears virtually unedited, save for the first two lines, which are deleted, in the 1836 edition; despite rewriting and editing his work, Wordsworth thus chooses to retain the language and ideas of Sensibility which are apparent in this section.

In the 1793 edition Wordsworth refers to the nightingale as “Salut[ing] with boding note the rising moon” (EW 76, l. 392); in the 1836 ed., the bird’s note has become “gladsome” (EW 77, l.335) rather than “boding”. The former description of the bird is consistent with its portrayals in the poetry of Sensibility, while the latter shows more kinship with Coleridge’s portrayal of the bird in his second nightingale poem.

The moonrise is used as a metaphor for hope; hope, like the moon, casts light on a distant scene, but not where the speaker is currently standing. This is an image set in a specific time and place, thus grounding the speaker in a realistic landscape. This image of the moon as a symbol for hope is characteristic of Smith’s sonnets, as is the grounding of a specific image in a specific scene.

This devotion to spatial and temporal precision extends even to the titles of the poems; Smith’s sonnets have titles such as “Composed during a walk on the Downs, in November 1787”, “Written September 1791, during a remarkable thunder storm, in which the moon was perfectly clear, while the tempest gathered in various directions near the earth”, and “To melancholy. Written on the banks of the Arun, October 1785”. This tendency can be seen in Wordsworth’s poetry as well, with titles such as “Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite” and “Lines written at a small distance from my House and sent me by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed”, and “Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802”; another sign of Smith’s influence on his style.

While Smith’s sonnets typically describe a single unified moment, *An Evening Walk* projects a sense of progressing time; after the image of the moon casting light on parts of the scene, she is described as climbing higher in the sky to cast her light across the entire scene. While *Elegiac Sonnets* thus show a unity of scene, image and moment in time – Smith herself described them as “no improper vehicle for a single sentiment” (ES, p. 3) – *An Evening Walk*, due to being a longer poem shows a progress from late afternoon to midnight through a series of changing images.

I have touched upon Coleridge's "The Nightingale" in this chapter's section on Coleridge; in this section I will study Wordsworth's contributions to the collection, attempting to show how the depictions of nocturnal scenes in *Lyrical Ballads* show echoes of *Elegiac Sonnets.* The title of *Lyrical Ballads*, with its juxtaposition of two disparate genres, is itself an echo of *Elegiac Sonnets*, another formal experiment that hybridizes two genres.

"Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree" evokes Smith's lines "the wild gloomy scene has charms for me, / And suits the mournful temper of my soul" with the line "Stranger! These gloomy boughs / Had charms for him" (LB 113, ll. 23-24). Although Smith's lines are themselves an adaptation from Edward Young's play *The Revenge* – "Rage on, ye winds, burst clouds, and waters roar! / You bear a just resemblance of my fortune, / And suit the gloomy habit of my soul"[115] – Wordworth alludes specifically to Smith's assertion that the scene "has charms" for the melancholy viewer. When creating a scene of melancholy, Wordsworth thus alludes to *Elegiac Sonnets* and the melancholy mood they imply; a move very similar to Smith's own habit of alluding to other texts in order to evoke their particular moods and contexts in her own poetry and novels.

There are other echoes of *Elegiac Sonnets* in the poem; the solitary subject, the melancholy mood, and the isolated setting among them. Although Smith's sonnets are all written in first person, several of them involve Smith more or less explicitly taking on a different persona; notably Goethe's Werther or a character from one of her own novels. The solitary man in Wordsworth's poem is reminiscent of Smith's Werther, who wanders "Amidst thy wild-woods, and untrodden glades, / [where] No sounds but those of melancholy move" (XXII), while Wordsworth's lone wanderer, equally despondent and lovelorn, pines and dies in much the same manner: "and so, lost man! / On visionary views would fancy feed, / Till his eye streamed with tears. In this deep vale / He died, this seat his only monument." (LB 114, ll. 43-46).

"Lines: Written when sailing in a boat at evening" is in the 1798 edition part of a single poem consisting of the poem and the following "Remembrance of Collins"; after the division, the first poem consists of four quatrains, two lines longer than a Shakespearean

[115] Edward Young, *The Revenge* (I.i.5-7), as quoted by Stuart Curran, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, 20 (editor's footnote).

sonnet, and like Smith's sonnets, it is a compact poem used as "[a] vehicle for a single sentiment" (ES, p. 3). The poem is also thematically similar to Smith's sonnets; the speaker views a nature scene, and draws from it a melancholy sentiment – "How rich the wave, in front, impressed / With evening twilight's summer hues, […] And see how dark the backward stream! / A little moment past, so smiling!" (LB 334, ll. 1-6). The last quatrain, like the couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, uses the preceding description of the scene to meditate on the foolishness of youthful optimism: "heedless of the following gloom, / He deems their colors shall endure" (LB 334, ll.10-11). This is clearly reminiscent of Smith's sonnets dealing with childhood and youth, in which the difference between childhood happiness and the adult experience is emphasized.

"Remembrance of Collins: Written upon the Thames near Richmond" shares the river setting with the poem it was originally part of, and is also reminiscent of Smith's sonnets; it is particularly similar to the ones linking the poet Otway with the river Arun in its linking of Collins with the Thames.

> in thy waters may be seen
> The image of a poet's heart,
> How bright, how solemn, how serene!
> Such as did once the poet bless,
> Who, pouring here a later ditty,
> Could find no refuge from distress
> But in the milder grief of pity.
> (LB 335, ll. 10-16)

The description of the river as reflecting the poet with which it is linked is found in Smith's Sonnet XXVI: "And still the poet – consecrates the stream." (ES XXVI, l. 8) The description of the poet as in a state of grief alleviated by pity is also typical of Smith, who describes her chosen poet as "Pity's own Otway" (ES XXXII, l. 10). Smith, as well, mentions Collins in sonnet XXX, "To the River Arun", but then linked with Arun, not the Thames. The poem ends with a shift into the nocturnal mode, which despite the poem's earlier similarity to Smith's sonnets is in a style which is distinctly Wordsworth's own: "The evening darkness gathers round, / By virtue's holiest powers attended." (LB 335, ll. 23-24).

Labbe discusses Smith's "Lydia", published in the ninth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets,* two years after the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, as an example of the cross-fertilization of Smith and Wordsworth.[116] This poem, a lyrical ballad written by Smith, shows that the

[116] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism,* 47

relationship between the two poets is not a one-way relationship where Wordsworth the pupil reads Smith's poetry; Smith is reading and commenting on his poetry as well. Backscheider points out that even prior to the influence of Wordsworth, Smith's style is not static, but evolves over time: "The first two editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* are filled with the modes, imagery, and Latinate language of the Augustans, but by the fifth and sixth edition there is more emphasis on the picturesque and the sublime, and the language of many poems seldom rises above ordinary speech."[117]

"Lydia" shows clear similarities to Wordsworth's "The Thorn". Both poems use a variation on ballad form, with alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines, and repetition of phrases across stanzas to recall the ballad refrain: "When Edward bade me mark the place […] He mark'd the moonlight on the wave, / And bade me mark it too." (ES p. 128, ll. 43-48) and "It stands erect, and like a stone / With lichens is it overgrown. // "Like rock or stone, it is o'ergrown / With lichens to the very top" (LB 119, ll. 10-13). The form Smith uses is a variation on the ballad stanza – quatrains rhyming ABAB with three tetrameter and one trimeter line. In "The Thorn", Wordsworth uses a more complex form – the stanzas are eleven lines with the intricate rhyme pattern ABCBDEFFEGG, where the third and ninth line are trimeter and the others tetrameter.

The speaker in both poems seems to stand outside the local community; reporting on the local events from the perspective of an impartial observer. Both speakers report on supernatural events; in Smith's case the local belief in a spectral horseman and in Wordsworth's the covering of moss on the infant's grave rippling when the townspeople gather to dig it up. While neither speaker views these supernatural events directly, they make no comment on the veracity of the events, seemingly accepting them as fact. Neither poem has the supernatural as its main focus, using the events rather to add folkloristic coloring to the tragic but more mundane major theme of the poems. While Wordsworth's speaker never speaks to the subject of his poem, voyeuristically observing her from a safe distance through a spyglass, Smith's speaker engages directly with the poem's subject, but ultimately decides not to attempt interfering with her vigil, motivating her decision with the observation that "The hopes of half the World, poor Maid! / Are not more rational than thine!" (ES p. 129, ll. 63-64) Thus, while Wordsworth's narrator is a distant observer, Smith's narrator engages directly

[117] Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry,* 367

with her subject, but decides against interfering. Thus, Smith's narrator is ultimately also a passive observer, as Wordsworth's is in even the poems where his narrator interacts directly with the subjects of the poem.

Thus, like Wordsworth uses Smith's vocabulary and themes, altering and adapting them to suit his own style, Smith does the same to Wordsworth, borrowing the ballad form and the folkloristic content of *Lyrical Ballads* and adapting it to her own style. Wordsworth is not the only younger poet Smith borrows from; in a note to "The Forest Boy", Smith comments that the stanza she is using has been used by Robert Southey before her (ES p. 111, footnote), showing her awareness of the output and styles used by younger poets.

SONNETS

Wordsworth's love of the sonnet form is often attributed to his admiration for Milton, though newer scholarship has shed light on the debt he owes to Smith and other female sonneteers. Dorothy Wordsworth describes a Christmas Eve spent together with her brother: "I have been beside [William] 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 […] My beloved William is turning over the leaves of Charlotte Smith's sonnets".[118] Bishop C. Hunt quotes this passage citing it as evidence that "Milton's sonnets of course were important to Wordsworth, but he owes a considerable debt to the minor sonneteers, especially Charlotte Smith".[119] Whether or not one considers Smith a "minor sonneteer", the fact that Wordsworth chooses to read his own sonnets and those of Milton along with Smith's hints at a high regard of her sonnets. Stuart Curran attributes the sonnet revival of the late 18:th Century to Smith: "The entire sonnet revival of the Romantic period was impelled into existence by this [Smith's] vision, and, even where (as with Wordsworth) the tonalities are reversed, the underlying dynamic of an isolated sensibility informs all the sonnets written in Smith's wake."[120]

[118] Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth,* ed. E. de Selincourt, Vol. I, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 186

[119] Hunt, "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith: 1970", 82

[120] Stuart Curran, "Romantic Poetry: The I Altered", in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)

Wordsworth's three sonnets to Sleep are reminiscent of Smith's sonnets on the same theme. The opening apostrophe of the first sonnet – "O GENTLE SLEEP!" (WS 11, l.1)[121] – echoes Smith's Sonnet XI: "And they, O gentle Sleep! still taste thy charms …" (ES XI, l.11). In the second sonnet, Wordsworth attempts to lure Sleep in by "tenderest names", calling it a "Balm that tames / all anguish" (WS 11, ll. 6-7), echoing Smith's entreaty "Come, balmy Sleep! tired Nature's soft resort!" (ES XI, l.1). Smith's sonnet laments that sleep comes easily to those who are happy, thus implying that those who really need its respite are deprived of it: "And they, O gentle Sleep! Still taste your charms / Who wake to labour, liberty, and love. / But still thy opiate aid dost thou deny / To calm the anxious breast, to close the streaming eye." (ES XI, ll. 11-14). Wordsworth's sonnet makes the envy implicit in Smith's sonnet more explicit, describing sleep as "Perverse, self-willed to own and to disown, / Mere slave of those who never for thee prayed, / Still last to come where thou art wanted most!" (WS 11, ll. 13-14).

Wordsworth's sonnet "I long have watched" is clearly kin to Smith's elegiac sonnet. It begins with a nocturnal nature observation: "I WATCH, and long have watched, with calm regret / Yon slowly-sinking star – immortal Sire / (So might he seem) of all the glittering quire!" (WS 28, ll. 1-3), observing how the star sinks towards the horizon and disappears. Many of Smith's sonnets also show this kind of close observation of the night sky and its phenomena, with the same type of focus on the act of gazing – "And *watch* thy shadow trembling in the stream […] And *while I gaze* …" (ES IV, 3, 5). Wordsworth uses his observation of the star to draw a parallel to human life: "health, power, glory, from their height decline / Depressed; and then extinguished: and our state / In this, how different, lost Star, from thine; / That no to-morrow shall our beams restore!" (WS 28, ll. 11-14).

As Coleridge points out, the sonnet which "develop[s] some lonely feeling" based on observations of nature is Smith's specialty, and in *Elegiac Sonnets* we can find many examples of this type. Although Smith's Sonnet II is not a nocturnal sonnet, it deals with the same theme, and the similarities between it and Wordsworth's sonnet are striking. Smith's sonnet begins with the lines "The garlands fade that Spring so lately wove, / Each simple

[121] Quotes from Wordworth's sonnets are taken from two sources: William Wordsworth, *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth,* (Edinburgh: Turnbull and Spears, 1963), referred to by the abbreviation WS, and William Wordsworth, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), abbreviated SS.

flower which she had nursed in dew" (ES II, ll. 1-2) and ends with the lament "Another May new buds and flowers shall bring; / Ah! why has happiness – no second Spring?" (ES II, ll. 13-14). The manner in which the nature observation is used to highlight the similarity, and more importantly the difference between nature and the human condition, is strikingly similar – both point to a fading of nature's joys, then points out the cyclical nature of these phenomena and the linear nature of human life.

Not all of Wordsworth's sonnets deal with the personal; Hunt points out that Wordsworth "combine[s] the tradition of the short, meditative lyric about 'lonely feelings' and 'the scenery of Nature', with the 'public' voice of Milton's political and patriotic sonnets."[122] This is evident in Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sketches.* I will compare sonnet I:XXVIII, "Elizabeth", looking at the early version from the Dove Cottage Manuscripts, which is published in *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems* as an alternate reading text, with Smith's Sonnet LIX "Written in September 1791":

Hail, Virgin Queen! more welcome than the star
Of Dawn to the strong traveller, faint with toil!
Hail, sovereign Lady, whom this thankful Isle
Blesses, respiring from that dismal war
Still'd by thy potent voice. But from afar
The adversary makes a fierce recoil,
Tempests which with the mischief of the soil
Dreadful alliance claim. Her royal car
Meanwhile, by prudence swayed, glides safely on
In silver purity, from menaced taint
Emerging, like the queen of night!
For where she moves, the stormy clouds are gone
Or tarrying, under a divine constraint,
Reflect some portion of her glorious light.
SS 180

What awful pageants crowd the evening sky!
The low horizon gathering vapors 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 pavillion 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 gives Contention birth;
And blest with peace above the shocks of Fate,
Smiles at the tumult of the troubled earth.
ES, LIX

The language and imagery Wordsworth uses shows strong similarities to Smith's sonnet; in "Elizabeth", the stormy clouds "Reflect some portion of her glorious light", while Smith describes the moon as "Gild[ing] the dark shadows that beneath her lie". Elizabeth's royal car gliding safely on is reminiscent of Smith's "calm pavillion" in which the moon is

[122] Hunt, "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith", p 83

seated “In placid elevation firmly great”. Wordsworth makes his comparison between Elizabeth and the moon explicit in line 11 – the clouds that threaten her are implied to represent the war with Spain and domestic unrest under her reign. While Smith’s poem is not as obvious in its political content, Kari Lokke draws parallels between Smith’s sonnet and the French Revolution.[123] Wordsworth’s sonnet reverses Smith’s usual practice, evident in her sonnet, of drawing a comparison from nature to an emotional state, rather drawing a comparison to nature from a description of a historical figure – as Hunt points out, he combines Smith’s meditative nature imagery with Milton’s public voice.

CONCLUSION

While Coleridge initially claimed Smith as one of the two originators of the English sonnet, he would later downplay Smith’s influence on his poetry in favor of praising Bowles’s “manly melancholy”. Although Coleridge did not consider himself a successful sonneteer and wrote only a handful of sonnets, it is nonetheless possible to trace Smith’s influences on his poetry – particularly in the poems commonly classified as greater Romantic lyrics, a definition which is characterized by the shift between observation of an external nature scene and an introspective meditation linked to the external scene. In addition to the thematic similarities between Smith’s sonnets and the greater Romantic lyric, Coleridge’s language and imagery is also very similar to that of Smith, particularly in the beginning of his poetic career.

It is notable that Coleridge’s early imitation of Smith is dedicated “To the Autumnal Moon”. The nocturnal setting and the focus on the moon is typical of *Elegiac Sonnets.* Smith’s influence is also particularly notable in Coleridge’s first “To the Nightingale” poem, and her gradual abandonment of classical imagery and implicit rewriting of previous poems is echoed by Coleridge’s second nightingale poem, where he explicitly rejects poetic reliance on classical imagery in favor of direct observation of nature and a more conversational tone. Coleridge again returns to Smith’s nocturnal mode in *Dejection: An Ode*, where he uses several of Smith’s techniques; the shift between the external and the internal, linking the nocturnal setting with a despairing mood and making allusions to previous poems that alter the perception of both texts.

[123] Kari Lokke, “The Mild Dominion of the Moon” in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution,* eds Adriana Craciun and Kari Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 91

Smith's influence on Wordsworth was noted by Bishop C. Hunt as early as 1970, and has since been clearly demonstrated by many critics, not the least Jacqueline Labbe, who devotes an entire book to the subject. My focus has been on the nocturnal imagery of both Smith and Wordsworth, and in this imagery, the traces of Smith's influence are clearly apparent. The influence is particularly evident in *An Evening Walk*, at the beginning of Wordsworth's poetic career, but it remains apparent even in later works, particularly the sonnets, where Smith's influence is clearly detectable along Milton's – it might be said that the Wordsworthian approach to the sonnet is a fusion of the Miltonic and the Smithian sonnet. The nocturnal imagery Wordsworth uses is reminiscent of Smith's; the majesty of the full moon, the melancholy and stillness of the nocturnal scene and the similarity between an ever-changing nature and the ephemerality of human happiness – like Smith, Wordsworth uses the image of day fading into night as a metaphor for the loss of childhood happiness.

Thus, the influence of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* can be traced throughout the poetic careers of both Wordsworth and Coleridge, showing her to be part of the same gradual poetic movement from the Augustan to the Romantic that Wordsworth and Coleridge were previously credited with inventing.

CONCLUSION

Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* is a work which evolves over time, shifting further from the Augustan towards the Romantic with each edition published. Often, this transitional status is apparent also within the sonnets themselves, each sonnet containing elements of both the Augustan and the Romantic. Paula Backscheider states that Sonnet XII, "Written on the Sea Shore – October, 1784" "seems to have been conceived in the structures of feeling of the eighteenth century, partakes of the extreme emotions and unquiet minds of the Gothic mode, yet contains a mature expression of Romantic feeling and identity"[124].

Drawing inspiration from Thomson's realistic natural descriptions, Smith begins the break with Augustan metaphor and classical allusion that would later be completed by the Romantics. To Smith, the nightingale is both a representation of the melancholy Philomel, as well as a natural entity whose migratory habits are a suitable subject for scientific speculation. This gradual break with the traditional, metaphor-laden depiction of natural phenomena in favor of describing the natural world as it appears to a direct onlooker can be traced further to Coleridge's outspoken rejection of the entire concept of "a melancholy bird" in his second poem entitled "To the Nightingale".

While Smith's nocturnals are written in sonnet form, the Augustan nocturnal is usually a longer poem, typically written in heroic couplets or blank verse; Young's *Night Thoughts* is a notable example of just how long and many-faceted the Augustan nocturnal meditation can be. This does not mean that Smith's treatment of the nocturnal is less complex than Young's. *Elegiac Sonnets* is a sonnet sequence in more than one sense of the word; although each poem represents "a single sentiment" (ES, p. 3) condensed, the number of sonnets in the sequence allow Smith to approach her subject from a large variety of angles.

Smith is one of the poets who were at the forefront of repopularizing the sonnet form, and her treatment of the sonnet as a vehicle for a melancholic observation drawn from observation of her surroundings echoes throughout the writing of her contemporaries. However, compared to her contemporaries, Smith's personal brand of melancholy is depicted as more persistent and more painful. Where poets such as Anna Seward and Helen Maria Williams speak of Sensibility and Melancholy as "the tear 'tis luxury to shed" (HMW II:28,

[124] Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry*, 366

14), casting themselves as devotees of Sensibility in all its “voluntariness and surfeit of feeling”,[125] Smith, however, emphasizes the involuntary nature of her suffering from the very beginning of her sonnet sequence – “far, far happier is the lot of those / Who never learn'd [the Muse’s] dear delusive art” (ES I, ll. 5-6). By persistently depicting herself as an involuntary sufferer of Sensibility, rather than as enjoying a luxurious melancholy, Smith casts herself as the main character in a gothic drama; her suffering is depicted as genuine, and the delightful thrills of Sympathy belong to the reader, who can read Smith’s suffering as if she herself was one of the main characters of her novels.

Whole Smith’s influence on Wordsworth was recognized by Bishop C. Hunt as early as 1970, less has been written on her influence on Coleridge, who in his early years praised her as one of the originators of the English sonnet. Although the man who Coleridge credits as her co-creator, William Lisle Bowles, is credited by M. H. Abrams as the originator of the model out of which Coleridge would later develop the greater Romantic lyric, it seems that Smith has been unfairly left out of that equation. It is notable that so many of the poems by Coleridge defined as greater Romantic lyrics have a nocturnal setting, and that poems written as late as “Dejection: an Ode” show similarities to Smith’s nocturnal sonnets.

Smith’s influence on Wordsworth has been studied, not the least by Jacqueline Labbe, who has written extensively on the subject; however, there has been little focus on her influence on Wordsworth’s nocturnal poetry in particular. Although Wordsworth’s literary production is extensive, and not all of his poems are written in a style similar to Smith’s, her influence is clear in many of his works, particularly in the solitary introspection that imbues many of his nocturnal poems. Wordsworth’s sonnets show influence from both Milton and Smith, and he successfully combines Smith’s meditative nature imagery with Milton’s “public” sonnet to great effect.

While several studies have been written that compare Smith’s poetry with that of her contemporaries, few studies follow the development of the nocturnal; I hope my thesis will help to shed light on that area. While Jacqueline Labbe has recently published an excellent book on Smith’s influence on Wordsworth, there is not as much material on Smith and Coleridge; hopefully my thesis can be helpful to further studies on that topic. There are several other sonnets by Coleridge, particularly among the juvenilia, that show clear similarity

[125] Miller, *The Invention of Evening,* 40

to Smith’s sonnets, but as many of them do not feature a nocturnal setting, such as “Sonnet: Composed in Sickness” and “Sonnet: Anna and Harland”, they fall outside the scope of my thesis.

Smith’s contribution to the development of the English nocturnal is thus, like the rest of her production, in the words of Wordsworth, more than what has been “either acknowledged or remembered”.[126] Her direct influence on both Coleridge and Wordsworth is evident in the nocturnal poems written by them, and through her influence on later poets as well as her contemporaries such as William Lisle Bowles, Anna Seward and Mary Robinson, she has contributed greatly to the shaping of the English nocturnal poem.

[126] William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 342 (footnote)

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