

CHARLOTTE TURNER SMITH:  
A HARBINGER OF ROMANTIC POETRY?

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## ABSTRACT

### CHARLOTTE TURNER SMITH: A HARBINGER OF ROMANTIC POETRY?

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Charlotte Smith, a prolific and prominent poet of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, inspired many of her successors with the innovative poetic genres and subject matter that she introduced. Although her literary legacy was largely forgotten for centuries, she has been recently rediscovered by feminist scholars of Romanticism and is nowadays being cited as the first Romantic poet. Despite the many innovations in her poetry, this study, however, intends to problematize this labelling, by arguing that Smith's poetry fails to adhere to important Romantic principles. Hence, this research focuses on the concepts of transcendence and Burkean sublime, sensibility and subjectivity to reveal her complex relationship to Romantic preoccupations and tradition of poetry. The discussion of the poems is preceded by an introductory chapter about Smith's legacy and life as biographical references to her painful life are integral to any comprehensive discussion of Smith's poetry. Following the introduction, a theoretical chapter on the concept of Romanticism lays the foundations for the discussion. The close reading of the poems reveals that owing to her lack of formal education, Smith does not have the philosophical background that many of her male counterparts do; thus, the worldview presented in the poems is mostly superficial, lacking the profundity that is predominant in later, canonical Romantic poetry. However, her poetry does reveal the ethics of feminine sensibility, the complexity of the female dissent and the fluidity of subjectivity, which insights make her one of the most important and interesting lyrical voices of her time.

**Keywords:** English Romantic poetry, Charlotte Smith, the sublime, sensibility, subjectivity.



## ÖZ

CHARLOTTE TURNER SMITH: ROMANTİK ŞİİRİN BİR ÖNCÜSÜ MÜ?

Sert, Gökçe

Doktora, İngiliz Edebiyatı Bölümü

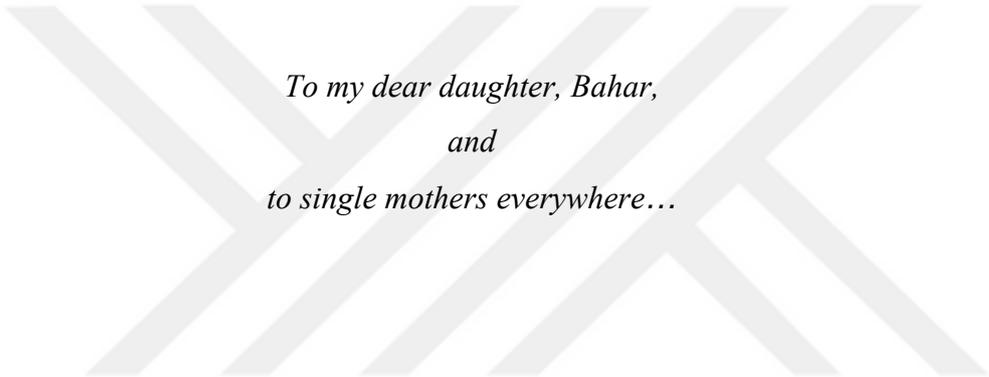
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18. yüzyıl sonlarında yaşamış, üretken ve öncül bir şair olan Charlotte Smith, kullandığı yenilikçi türler ve konularla kendinden sonra gelen pek çok şairi etkilemiştir. Her ne kadar edebi ünü yüzyıllar boyunca unutulmuş olsa da, şair son yıllarda feminist eleştirmenler tarafından yeniden keşfedilmiştir ve günümüzde ilk Romantik şair olarak anılmaktadır. Şiirlerinde pek çok yenilik barındırsa da, bu çalışma Smith'in Romantik olarak adlandırılmasını sorunsallaştırmakta ve aslında şairin önemli Romantik prensiplere uymadığını savunmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, bu çalışma, aşkınlık ve Burke'e göre yüce, duyarlılık ve öznellik kavramlarına yoğunlaşarak Smith'in Romantik düşünce yapısı ve şiiriyle olan karmaşık ilişkisini irdelemektedir. Şiir çözümlemelerinden önce verilen giriş bölümü, Smith'in şiirlerinin detaylı olarak anlaşılması için gerekli olan şairin yaşamöyküsüne ve edebi mirasına yer vermektedir. Girişin ardından gelen teorik bölüm, Romantik dönemin özelliklerini vererek tartışmanın zeminini hazırlamaktadır. Şiirlerin detaylı okumaları, Smith'in örgün eğitim eksikliğine bağlı olarak, dönemin erkek şairlerinin aksine, şairin felsefi bilgisinin eksikliğini ve dünya görüşünün yüzeyselliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Yine de, Smith'in şiirleri kadın duyarlılığını, topluma muhalif olmasının karmaşıklığını ve öznelğin akışkanlığını göstermesi açısından önemlidir ve şairi döneminin en önemli ve ilgi çekici lirik seslerinden biri yapmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** İngiliz Romantik şiiri, Charlotte Smith, yüce, duyarlılık, öznelik.





*To my dear daughter, Bahar,  
and  
to single mothers everywhere...*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: CHARLOTTE SMITH AND HER LITERARY LEGACY

#### 1.1. Aim and Scope of the Study

Romanticism is an intellectual, artistic, and literary movement that originated in the late eighteenth century and changed the face of Western culture with its break with the principles of the Enlightenment and its prioritization of creativity over uniformity, the rural over the urban, and of emotional sensitivity over stark reasoning. Even though the movement was an integral part of the arts, writers, philosophers, and critics of Romanticism seldom reach a consensus on the periodization as it did not “begin and end with the coronation and death of a monarch,” (Chaplin and Faflak xiii) nor did it have intricate relationships with a named historical event to name the period after. Hence, while one critic charts the beginning of English Romanticism to the outburst of the French Revolution in 1789 or the first publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1791<sup>1</sup>, another may argue that Romanticism in England is dated between the years 1776 and 1837<sup>2</sup>. These scholarly attempts reveal more about the inherent preferences and priorities of a critic than about the period itself. The problem with Romanticism gets all the more unfathomable as one endeavours to define it. Arthur O. Lovejoy<sup>3</sup> is a case in point as he articulates the differences he encounters when

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<sup>1</sup> Abrams in *The Glossary of Literary Terms*, ironically, fails to decide on a single date and gives two beginnings and has the period continue “through the first three decades of the nineteenth century” (175).

<sup>2</sup> Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner, in *Re-Visioning Romanticism* (1994) argue that the “once-certain boundaries of our field study – 1798 to 1832 – now blur, expand,” (7) and hence they conspicuously add the subtitle of “British Women Writers, 1776-1837” to their critical study, adding a twenty-seven-year extension to other people’s periodization of Romanticism.

<sup>3</sup> In his 1924 essay “On the Discrimination of Romanticism,” Lovejoy notes the ever-fluctuating nature of the term remarking, “the Word ‘romantic’ has come to mean so many things that, by itself it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign” (8). Lovejoy,

formulating a cohesive definition of the term. As Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner's study illustrates, with the emergence of modern literary criticism, especially feminism, new historicism and post-structuralism, the already problematic definition of Romanticism has become even more complicated because scholars have expanded the Romantic canon, which had been formerly mostly restricted to six male poets, and rediscovered poets from many previously marginalized groups such as women or the working-class. This newly found diversity and polyphony in the expanded canon is surely to be celebrated as it gives us a much more accurate picture of late eighteenth century society, restores the much-deserved legacy of some forgotten names of literary history, and gives voice to those who have, in effect, been silenced and pushed into oblivion through elitist and patriarchal persecution. However, this all-inclusive approach also runs the risk of jeopardizing the concept of a definable heritage of the Romantic revolution that transformed Western epistemology and arts by reducing it to an amalgam of loosely put themes and poetic concerns while neglecting, if not fatally diluting, Romanticism's artistic assertions and philosophical profundity.

As one of late eighteenth-century poets who has recently been re-discovered (Behrendt and Kramer Linkin xi), Charlotte Turner Smith is enjoying her long deserved second coming; she was a renowned writer of her time, having published extensively both in prose and verse. Her writings influenced great poetic celebrities such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jane Austen, John Keats and many more with her experimentation in form, voice, poetic persona, subjectivity as well as their outlook on nature. It is owing to this long shadow she casts on Romanticism that Stuart Curran, the editor of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, labels Smith as "the first Romantic when looked [*sic*] in retrospect" in his 1993 introduction to Smith's poetry (xix).

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instead, suggests recognizing the plurality of Romanticism, possibly even within the borders of one country.

Smith owes much of her comeback from scholarly and literary oblivion to the work of Stuart Curran whose aforementioned claim has inspired a considerable amount of academic work devoted to the analysis of Smith's prose and verse, many of which have been invaluable for this study. I, nonetheless, believe that the above quoted statement may be considered hasty and inaccurate as it disregards Smith's frequent oscillations between Augustan reliance on reason and order and Romantic sentimentalism, her allegorical conceptualizations imitated from her eighteenth-century predecessors as well as the complete absence of transcendentalism in her poetry. Hence, this study intends to engage in an intellectual debate with, and partially refute the claim that, Charlotte Turner Smith is the first Romantic poet. Instead, I would argue, that Smith is *one* of the key figures who paved the way for Romanticism and that she nevertheless failed to completely abide by it. Owing to her marginalized social position as a financially insecure, poorly educated single mother with radical political sympathies, Smith can neither fully submit herself to Neoclassical decorum and worldview predominating in educated English circles nor can she fully detach herself from the society, owing to the real pressures of making a living for herself and her children. One of the most important handicaps in Smith's Romanticism is her poems' inability to experience the sublime as the male Romantics did. Arguing that transcendentalism and the sublime are among the most important tenets of British Romanticism, I will discuss that Smith's poetry is unable to experience union with the divine or access great spiritual insight into the visionary experience while encountering magnificent natural forms. Smith actually *does* imitate the tradition of the Burkean sublime by placing her poetic personae on mountain tops and allowing them to experience the magnificence of the prospect. However, this superficial imitation of the sublime does not yield itself to a genuine semi-mystical awakening and sense of completion as it does in the male Romantics. Why she cannot show her personae experiencing the sublime has partly to do with her marginality as a woman writer: lacking the educational and philosophical grounding that her male counterparts largely enjoyed, Smith cannot synthesize the subject and object with their intellectual as

well as poetic profundity, and thus her poems fail to achieve sublime visionary moments. Instead, Smith turns her feminine gaze at the materiality of nature and dedicates her poetic energy to the depiction of the minute details in the physical environment, which is particularly important for female poets. Smith is surprisingly skilful at combining her aesthetics and scientific knowledge when detailing her descriptions of the botanical world, and she reverses the later, romantic superiority of the sublime over the beautiful: for Smith, the beautiful is more important and habitable for feminine existence. We may, thus, postulate that in her poems she opens up a new space of signification for herself where she can comfortably exert her agency and where she feels empowered. Smith's engagement with sensibility remains equally problematic when it is compared to the Romanticism developed by male poets. Smith is clearly in tune with the humanitarian sensibility of the eighteenth century and although occasionally impaired by her class-bias, she is mostly successful when it comes to sympathizing with those in need. Smith seems to be able to find an emotional connection between herself and the disenfranchised "others," who include peasants, immigrants, women and animals, because, she asserts, she is also a victim of the legal system and patriarchy. Hence, Smith's sensibility seems to be shadowed by her harsh criticism of her society and humanity at large. In this way, Smith not only warns her readers that oppression and inequality may have violent ends, but also uses this as an opportunity to create female figures whose open victimization calls the patriarchal codes of conduct into question. Hence, sensibility, which should have a socially bonding function, is used as a means of social critique, which further accentuates Smith's alienation from her society. Finally, Smith challenges the Romantic subjectivity that can vouch for the entire humanity with prophetic insight: for Smith, as for many other women poets, this role is an impossible one to enact comfortably, because women are hardly comfortable in their imposed positions of submission and silence. While trying to establish a strong and authoritarian poetic voice, Smith is also entrapped by societal expectations regarding the role and image of a woman (which she cannot risk challenging openly as she needs the financial support of her readers), which

eventually creates diverse and sometimes divergent subjectivities. Frequently encouraging her readers to associate the poetic voice with that of her own, Smith also adopts a masculine view in the sonnets where she impersonates Goethe's Werther<sup>4</sup>, or in her "translations" of Petrarch and Metastasio. Furthermore, the image of the distressed mother who needs support is frequently defied by the authoritative voice that appears in the footnotes which she extravagantly uses in her poetry, especially when boastfully displaying her knowledge of botany. Smith, therefore, despite her claims of sincerity, adopts a performative subjectivity which is not in line with the unitary selfhood of canonical masculinity.

I firmly believe that Smith's own life, her political views and the agonies that she endured for the majority of her life are fundamentally important in understanding her poetry and locating her within the literary canon. Even though I am aware of the risk of intentional fallacy and other drawbacks in referring to Smith's biography, most of the time I end up drawing parallelisms between her poetry and life. This is because of the fact that she takes her own biography as the major resource and source of her poems. Being devoid of an institutional training or university education or an opportunity to experience life outside the confines of the family limits her aesthetic resources to her empirical life. As I state elsewhere, for her poetry seems to be a space for her where she finds the power and energy to cling to life, and to reveal her psychodynamics in her struggle in life. Thus, her poetry goes beyond a means of earning her life and becomes a multi-layered process which opens itself up for different readings. In fact, one of the reasons why some advocate for her position as a Romantic is due to her integration of autobiographical elements in her writing in the first place, which makes biographical elements all the more crucial for this study<sup>5</sup>. To this

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<sup>4</sup> In her poems, Smith uses the English spelling of the German name, Werter, hence hereafter I will stick to Smith's version and use "Werter".

<sup>5</sup> The significance of biographical elements for Romantic poetry will be discussed further in detail in Chapter II in relation to the terms sincerity, authenticity, and selfhood.

end, I will make frequent references to her life and from time to time adopt a semi-biographical approach in my analysis. More importantly, however, I will draw a clear framework of English Romanticism, outlining its four essential principles which are transcendentalism, sensibility, reactionarism and sincerity<sup>6</sup>, and thereby discussing to what extent Smith can be considered a Romantic<sup>7</sup>, and how well, if at all, she abides by these principles.

Consequently, this dissertation is comprised of six chapters: the first chapter of the study, which is also the introduction, will give an overview of her literary legacy, with a focus on the influence she had over the canonical Romantic poets. This chapter is kept at an “introductory” level, as the title suggests, as I intended to preserve the detailed discussion of Romanticism and Smith’s poetry for the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two provides a theoretical background to Romantic poetry and explore the period through four key concepts. Firstly it explores the transcendental aspect of Romanticism as the genuine inspiration that the poet finds in nature, which allows a deeper understanding of the workings of humanity and the universe through the divine power that it reveals. Here the transcendental tradition of Romanticism in Christianity and Neoplatonic philosophy is traced, as Abrams does, and this part of the chapter dwells on the common desire of the poets to eradicate the gap between man and nature, and subject and object, through the creative force they see in nature and imagination. In my discussion of the significance of nature, I contrast eighteenth

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<sup>6</sup> It is Jacqueline Labbe’s *Writing Romanticism: William Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith* that has given me the key terminology as the fundamentals of English Romanticism and I have found it particularly useful. Labbe does not dwell on these terms at all, but simply mentions them in-between lines. In return, I will clarify each term by referring to mainstream Romantic scholarship and provide extensive explanation and exemplifications for each.

<sup>7</sup> The conceptualization of Romanticism that I am striving to do in this dissertation may be seen as archaic, given that many critics from the 1980s onwards consider Romanticism as a scholarly construct created to coherently categorize and study the diverse body of literary work produced in this period with firmly-established ground rules and principles. Even though I find this argument valuable, I would still like to approach the period as does René Wellek, who claims that there is a “unity of theories, philosophies, and style” (158) in all forms of European Romanticism – not just the English incarnations. Hence, I seek to define the Romantic principles as generally as possible, allowing them to encompass the myriad of interpretations of the period.

and nineteenth century views of nature and elaborate on the terms the sublime and the beautiful, both of which were key to Romantic aesthetics. The second key term is sensibility, which implied sympathy for the disenfranchised and the marginalized. Building up on the Enlightenment humanitarianism, Romantics were particularly interested in reflecting the authentic experiences of the poor and oppressed whom they approached with care and compassion. The third concept that I will dwell on is selfhood, or a writing of the self, as Romanticism's primary concern was the representation of the individual experience. In their endeavour to depict the idiosyncrasy of the private, they focused on the authenticity of the selves who wrote such works as well as the sincerity of the feelings they expressed. Sincerity which, for them, originally meant the correspondence of intention and text, also connotes performativity because the authorial intention must be performed through speech-acts. Hence, in this section I will dwell on sincerity, theatricality and authenticity of feelings. The next key aspect of Romanticism is "reaction," by which I mean the Romantic political radicalism and its opposition to the Neoclassical worldview. As Abrams explains in *The Correspondent Breeze*, the Romantic period cannot be stripped of its historical context as it was "imminently an age obsessed with the fact of violent and inclusive change" (46); therefore, in this section, I discuss the impact of the two revolts of the period that were international in their scope of influence: the American and the French revolutions, the latter being more prominent for English Romantic poets. The period is also notorious for its stark opposition to Augustan rationalism and this section focuses on the criticism and opposition that Romantics articulated with respect to the "analytic rationalism" and scientific empiricism of the Enlightenment (Drabble 872).

Based on these foundations, chapters three, four and five will discuss Smith's poetry in line with the Romantic elements: Chapter Three analyses Smith's use of the sublime. The sublime became a key concept for Romantic poetry following its extensive discussion in relation to nature and landscape in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime*

*and Beautiful* (1757). Charlotte Smith was familiar with Burke's work<sup>8</sup> and used the Burkean sublime and beautiful in her detailed depictions of the physical world. However, the sublime, which is typically associated with a sense of grandeur and magnitude and is thereby capable of inspiring transcendence of mind, fails to transport Smith's mind as she is deeply involved with the physical realities around her. In her poems, a profound immersion in their personae's own suffering and in minute details of the world hampers the possibility of visionary experience or higher understanding of the cosmos. Unlike the Burkean sublime, Smith prioritizes the beautiful that is associated with the gentle, the small, and the feminine. The chapter claims that by subverting the Burkean dichotomy between the sublime and the beautiful, she opens up a space of signification for herself where she can claim her authorial position and strength.

In Chapter Four, I will discuss the general profile of people she talks about in her poems and her identification with the disenfranchised. I will argue that even though Smith is capable of relating to the disenfranchised owing to her own marginalized position in the society, she nevertheless occasionally slips into class-consciousness. Being born into a genteel family, she adopts a slightly condescending view to her poetic subject. Yet, gradually in her poetry, we see the disappearance of this aloofness and witness the rise of her sensibility. In this increased social receptivity, I will maintain that Smith's ability to feel pity for the poor and needy is based almost entirely on the premise that she herself was a victim and can, therefore, relate to the victimized. In that sense, in her *The Emigrants* she draws parallelisms between herself and the French mothers who have left their country due to the Reign of Terror. By highlighting the victimization of women by military and legal systems, Smith criticizes society and lays bare the superficiality of the traditional valorisation of motherhood. The figure of the mother is also important in her volume of poetry for children,

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<sup>8</sup> In her critical biography of Charlotte Smith, Loraine Fletcher repeatedly mentions Smith's familiarity with and response to Burke's work not only in her poetry but in her novels, too. This idea will be explored further in the following sections regarding the sublime and the beautiful.

*Conversations Introducing Poetry*, where Smith condemns abuse – of slaves, animals, and women -, passes her ethical judgment and gives messages through the figure of Mrs. Talbot, a strong and sensible woman whose moral stance, knowledge and integrity make her an ideal role model through whom Smith criticizes her nation’s oppression of the “other” and creates an empowering woman who can transform the nation’s future by teaching her children the right and the wrong.

Finally, Chapter Five will discuss the subjectivity of Smith’s poetic persona and discuss how she is trying to reconcile an urge to craft a unified and authorial poetic voice and society’s expectation of a compliant, gentle and destitute woman who needs to be rescued. Playing with the tropes of femininity, Smith successfully creates the image of “a woman in despair” through her prefaces to her poems as well as through autobiographical elements in her poetry. However, this voice is hardly consistent, for some of her poems clearly adopt masculine speakers such as Werter or unnamed male lovers that suffer from unrequited love in a Petrarchan sense. Smith’s subjectivity is further complicated by the authoritative voice in her footnotes where she assumes a scientific and sombre tone. The polyphony in her poetry undermines her claim to sincerity and reveals that subjectivity is performative.

With the recent re-discovery of the women writers of the period, Romanticism is today “a tantalizingly slippery term” (Shiner Wilson and Haefner 1), being redefined by and reconsidered from different vantage points. This study aims to participate in this debate by providing a detailed account of Romanticism and questioning the position of Charlotte Smith in it. In my extensive definition of Romanticism as stated above, I focus on four main characteristics of the era, which are transcendentalism, sensibility, sincerity, and reactionaryism. These four keywords allow the dissertation not only to explore the epistemological shift from the Augustan to the Romantic worldview, but also to tolerate each poet’s individual reaction to the philosophical premises of what we have come to term

as the Romantic. The attempt to define Romanticism may sound like an abortive attempt but it is necessary, nonetheless. I believe that, because many recent publications evade such concrete definitions of the period, there has arisen much confusion about what is and is not Romantic. Therefore, with this dissertation I intend to clarify those pillars that Romanticism stands on as clearly as possible and within this framework to present a discussion about the poet at hand. In my definition, I also include some aspects of Romanticism which have been ignored or remained under-emphasized until recently; the first aspect is that of the philosophical traditions behind the Romantic poets' perception of the interaction between the human mind and the physical world around them. By focusing on the intersection of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Neoplatonism and associationist philosophy in the male poets, I will explore the lack of philosophical profundity in the writings of female poets, a point to which many critics seem to turn a blind eye while emphasizing their contributions to the period. However, this lack of engagement in transcendental philosophy and the Lockean tradition is going to be one of the dissertation's strongest objections to Smith's being labelled as a Romantic poet because Romanticism *is* transcendence; without the visionary side, there can be no Romantic synthesis. The second aspect of my definition of Romanticism is its focus on sensibility. Until recently, sensibility was largely ignored in discussions of the period; however, with its humanitarian and political facets as well as its focus on emotions, the concept is crucially important for the age, especially for women writers of the time as they were largely involved in objections to inequality and in abolitionist causes. Finally, in my definition of Romanticism I include "sincerity," a concept which was not included in many significant accounts such as those of Abrams but has gained increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades. Questioning a writer's sincerity from the perspective of performativity opens up new discussions regarding subjectivity and self-representation.

Within this theoretical frame, this study engages in a detailed problematization of Charlotte Smith's labelling as a Romantic in a way that has not been done

before in Smith studies. One particular problem that I faced while analysing Smith's poetry was the lack of book-length scholarship devoted entirely to Smith: with the exceptions of a few scholarly books written by Jacqueline Labbe, Carrol Lee Fry and Loraine Fletcher's critical biography and Judith Phillips Stanton's edition of Smith's letters, Smith is mostly studied as a minor author only briefly mentioned in books about women writers, or studied in single articles or chapters in books, which mostly dwell on her melancholy tone in *Elegiac Sonnets*. This study is an original contribution to scholarship also, then, in offering an extensive and comprehensive discussion of Smith's poetry including *Elegiac Sonnets*, *The Emigrants*, *Beachy Head* and *Conversations Introducing Poetry*. Among these, especially her volume of poetry for children, *Conversations Introducing Poetry*, has been largely ignored in academic studies, an issue which I attempt to address in my discussion of it in relation to sensibility in Chapter Four. This volume includes surprisingly bleak and harsh societal criticism which is uncommon in children's literature and hence appears to represent Smith's radical sympathies and political stance without any attempt at hiding them. The study also discusses Smith's dialogue with the Burkean aesthetics and her attempt at imitating the Burkean sublime and beautiful in her sonnets, *The Emigrants* and *Beachy Head*. In the discussion of *Beachy Head*, I refer not only to these aesthetic categories, but also explain the background in the scientific disciplines of geology and botany, which in the eighteenth century were newly being conceptualized and unexpectedly aligning themselves with the discussion of the sublime and beautiful. I make similar historical contextualizations of British patriotism, women's social roles, perceptions of motherhood, and home education, all of which can enrich our readings of the poems through gaining a more nuanced picture of late eighteenth-century England.

This study takes Charlotte Smith as a transitional figure, thereby diverging from much earlier scholarly work dedicated to her. Even though Smith's poetry increasingly gets closer to Romantic principles towards the end of her life, the

fact that her poems lack the philosophical perceptiveness that is so profound in Wordsworth and Coleridge, for instance, is a great handicap in them presenting any spiritual awakening, and this is a point that is not exploited in Smith studies. That Smith's descriptions of and interaction with nature remain on a purely empirical level is one of the pronounced arguments of this study as it is one of the important indicators that Smith's style of writing is closer to the Neoclassical tradition than to the Romantic tradition. Similarly, when narrating the suffering of others, Smith seems to be unable to break free from her own empirical reality, which can make the reader question the authenticity of the feelings in the treatment of the poetic subject matter. However, it is my contention that even though Smith may not completely abide by the principles of British Romanticism as we know it and very frequently falls short of the intellectual and philosophical profundity that we find and enjoy in canonical male Romantics, her poetry is still fresh and exciting because it represents how a marginalized female poet tried to exist in the divisive areas of nonconformity and repression: as I will repeatedly mention in this study, in her poetry Smith is trying to balance and judiciously represent different aspects of her identity; therefore, she is constantly juggling the need to write authoritatively while following the gender roles attributed to her. In this constant role changing, which is further aggravated by the changes in the literary taste and political instability, Smith is trying to create a space of signification for herself where she can exist and assert her identity. With her themes, motifs, and generic experimentation, her poetry influences English Romantic poetry greatly: both generations, in fact. Hence, she becomes a harbinger of poetic Romanticism, now, at last, pushing herself back into English literary canon that once pushed her out.

## **1.2. Smith's Life**

Charlotte Turner Smith<sup>9</sup> was born in 1749, as the eldest daughter of Nicholas Turner, into a genteel family. She lost her mother at the age of three, and when

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<sup>9</sup> hereafter referred to as Charlotte Smith

her father left England, she was left to the custody of an aunt, Lucy Towers, who was an important figure in her life. Her significance to Smith was not so much as a nourisher or caretaker, but as one that committed grave mistakes regarding her niece's life. Charlotte enjoyed an idyllic and lavish childhood in her father's London townhouse and Sussex estate, (Curran, "Introduction" xix) which she continually refers to in her work, and received an education that was, by the standards of her time, seen appropriate for a refined young woman. At the age of six, she attended a school in Chichester where she first took drawing lessons with a local painter, George Smith, who taught his young student "to see landscape feelingly, to appreciate not just physical features but the atmosphere that gave them meaning" (Fletcher 13). Even though she was gifted at painting, her short sight made it nearly impossible for her to practice more in this form. Instead, she shifted her attention to a close study of flowers and leaves. Smith's love for nature, landscape and botany, for which she developed a keen eye at an early age, continued to her last days and is seen clearly in her poems, in detailed and meticulous descriptions of the physical world. As her biographer, Loraine Fletcher puts it, "[i]t was a passion that lasted all her life, and matured into a philosophy" (13).

When the family moved to London, her father arranged a school for her in Kensington where she enjoyed being the pupil of the best masters in preparation for her introduction to society. Here, she was taught drawing, drama, and modern languages like French and Italian. She continued composing poetry, a passion she discovered at the age of six. The family's finances started to deteriorate (owing to her father's gambling debts), and she was taken out of school in 1761. Even though she never received formal training in writing during her school years, her education would have been considered "decent" for a young girl of her status; as Fletcher puts it, the only thing wrong with Charlotte Smith's education "was its brevity" (18). As we learn from her sister, Catherine's, letters, Charlotte's "passion for books continued unabated...and [was] chiefly confined

to poetry and works of fiction...she sent several of her compositions to the editors of *The Lady's Magazine*, unknown to her aunt” (Fletcher 19).

When she turned fifteen, her father decided to remarry an affluent lady because his financial situation was worsening owing to his gambling addiction. Having to live under the authority of a step-mother, Charlotte soon decided, and was encouraged by her aunt, also to get married, and the son of a West Indian merchant that her father had recently met seemed like a good match. At the age of fifteen, she found herself engaged to Benjamin Smith, whom she wedded on 23 February 1765, an event which she later mentioned in a letter, bitterly, as having been “sold a legal prostitute in my early youth”<sup>10</sup> (Stanton 625). What her father and aunt hoped would be a thriving match turned out to be a fiasco as her husband was unable to manage his money properly and was a physically and emotionally abusive man. Benjamin Smith soon went bankrupt, causing the utter devastation to his family. As he went to the King’s Bench Prison, so did Charlotte Smith, who, in the meantime, published her *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) to generate some money to help secure her husband’s release. “[C]hronically in debt” (Pinch 67), Benjamin Smith soon caused further complications for Charlotte, and the family had to leave England for Normandy in 1784 to run away from creditors waiting to have him imprisoned for debt. They had to live in exile for almost a year. Charlotte was five months pregnant when they set sail, and had no way of staying in England and legally keeping her nine children away from their father. For the next several months, she endured the difficulties in France, while translating Abbé Antoine-Francois Prévost’s “scandalous” novel *Manon Lescaut*<sup>11</sup> (Curran, "Introduction" xxiii).

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<sup>10</sup> In her letter to Sarah Rose, dating June 15th, 1804, she refers to her husband as “the monster (whose name it has been so long my misery to bear & to whom I was sold a legal prostitute in my early youth, or what the law calls infancy.” She continues to refer to him as a man “whose odious existence” has caused her much pain. Even though the earlier years of their marriage were slightly happier, Smith recalled matrimony in purely negative terms for much of her life.

<sup>11</sup> Curran writes that the novel had been translated into English twice before in redacted form and when the matter of originality was raised, Smith had to withdraw the book in 1786 shortly

By July 1789, Smith had given birth to twelve children, only six of whom would outlive her. Unable to tolerate her husband's unworthiness, infidelities and abuses, in 1787, at the age of thirty-eight she left her husband, and from then on relied solely on her writing skills to support herself and her children (Fletcher 1)<sup>12</sup>. From that time onwards, as William Cowper described, to provide for her large family Smith had to write "chain'd to her chair like a slave to his [*sic*] oar, with no other means of subsistence for herself and her numerous children" (qtd. in Pinch 67). In fact, Benjamin's father, Richard Smith, had foreseen his son's incompetence as a husband and father, and wanted to protect Charlotte and her children by creating a trust fund in his will. Yet the will was more complicated than he had intended, and Charlotte found herself in endless legal battles over her children's money (Pinch 67). It was her lawsuit that inspired Charles Dickens's famous Jarndyce versus Jarndyce case in *The Bleak House* (Fry 3).

Hence, Smith had no other way but to write, and in that effort to maintain her family in less than twenty-two years she published 63 volumes, often long volumes, of prose fiction, as they proved to be more lucrative, and of poetry and children's books. Her *Elegiac Sonnets* underwent many editions, and she

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after its publication. However, Curran implies, more than the originality, what disturbed the English market was the fact that it was *a woman* who had translated tales of passion, which was unacceptable by the "implicit gender codes of the late eighteenth-century British culture" ("Introduction" xxiii). Smith's experimentation with publishing prose is thus indicative of her feminist aspirations and her desire to defy conventions regarding what was considered proper for a woman in her society, which she was to question and challenge in the rest of her life.

<sup>12</sup> In *The Collected Letter of Charlotte Smith*, Judith Phillips Stanton narrates the following incident, which may shed light on Benjamin's brutality and abuses which continued even after their separation:

In late 1787, after their separation, she ventured to meet with him; he asked to see his "dear Wife and children" before he fled to Barbados. She met him at an inn both to show him that she had "no malice against him" and "to conceal his journey from his numerous creditors in Hampshire and Sussex." He followed her home and soon "took possession" of her study and began to treat her "with more than his usual brutality." Before leaving, a "new fit of frenzy" seized him. He broke into her drawers, destroyed "foul copies" of works in progress, took signed receipts for her subscription edition of the sonnets, and left. (xxii)

continued adding poems ; she also wrote the longer meditative blank verse poems, *The Emigrants* and *Beachy Head*, and a comedy called *What is She?*. By the end of her life, Charlotte Smith was still struggling to settle her father-in-law's will, which she could finally manage only two weeks prior to her death. In her final days, her health dramatically deteriorated; she suffered, possibly, from uterine cancer, chronic pains and pleurisy (Fletcher 329).

### **1.3. Smith's Legacy**

As a prolific writer in her lifetime, Smith was quite a popular literary figure in her lifetime. As Paula R. Backscheider observes, it was the achievements of Charlotte Smith that inspired many women of letters to pursue a career of writing; in fact, women writers of the following generation "had grown up watching Charlotte Smith's success and they became more engaged with history and more willing to assume an evaluative and even prophetic stance" (14). A creative translator, poet, novelist and essayist, Smith not only wrote abundantly, but also did something that very few literary figures achieved: she wrote both in prose and verse, and left a profound mark on English novel and poetry.

Even though Smith's work in prose is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it would be unfair to completely ignore her achievement in and contribution to the novel genre. Stuart Curran argues that if her novels were "readily available" today, she would occupy a crucial position in English fiction owing to her novels' concentration on important social matters such as class, gender, economics and power relations ("Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" 71) as well as her criticism of social institutions such as marriage, the legal system, the military, and politics, all of which failed and disillusioned her during her lifetime. In fact, it is evident that this disenchantment inspired Smith to integrate scraps from her life into her work, which further delve into the theme of the "wrongs of woman," the powerlessness of women in the patriarchal society of the late 18th century (Fry viii), as can easily be discerned by readers familiar

with her biography. As a novelist with ten books, Smith wrote in answer to the taste of her day while encompassing multiple genres, including gothic, epistolary, educational, and revolutionary works (Stanton xxxi). She was the first novelist to take as her setting a castle or a great house that is symbolic of England, and the matters of ownership or running of the house are intended to raise questions about the country's government, which later inspired the creation of many fictional houses such as Mansfield Park, Chesney World, Howard's End, Wragby Hall, Darlington Hall among others (Fletcher 1).

The political aspects of Smith's novels run deeper than the abovementioned metaphor as her writing is noted for her radical political sympathies. Even though Smith led a difficult and somewhat isolated life, she was by no means incognizant of the world around her; in fact, she was very much involved in the politics of the day and she was a fervent supporter of the French Revolution, belonging to the group of writers who were called, by their detractors, "Jacobins." There were writers who wanted radical reform or revolution, and the group included Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Helen Maria Williams, Robert Bage, Thomas Holcroft, Elizabeth Inchbald and Mary Hays (Fletcher 1). At one point, in the second half of 1791, while she was working on *Desmond*, she went to Paris to get the feel of events for herself (Fletcher 142), which is one of the many similarities she shares with William Wordsworth. Her allegiance to the French cause even allowed Charlotte Smith and her family to offer shelter to a group of emigrés, a deed which her biographer Loraine Fletcher considers "an extraordinary act of kindness given her anxiety then about duns and debts" (191). Her later novels, especially, draw on her political and personal affiliations and are at the cutting edge of change at a critical moment in history. Works such as *Desmond* (1792), *The Old Manor House* (1793), *Marchmount* (1796), and *The Young Philosopher* (1798) reflect the idealism of British liberals in the early days of the French Revolution, contemporary republican views on issues that would be part of the British reform movement for the next hundred years, and criticism of abuses of the law, the wealthy and powerful.

As a woman with no financial means beyond her pen, Smith “did have to bend continually to the dictates of the marketplace,” (Curran, "Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" 68) as she had to supply for her large family all by herself. That made the taste and preferences of the readers and publishers a very serious matter for her. The urgent need to sell her work, the need to appeal to popular taste, and maybe her own literary taste led her to utilize and repeat some Augustan poetic elements such as personifications of folly and worth, or pride and misfortune, which Fletcher describes as “survivals of the powerful conceptualising manner of Pope and the Augustan satirists of the earlier eighteenth century” (53). In her work, we cannot help but notice her reliance on Reason, which she considers supreme and imminent. She ends her Sonnet LXXXV, for instance, which originally appears in her *The Young Philosopher*, as:

So the schemes  
Rais'd by fond Hope in youth's enclouded morn,  
While sanguine youth enjoys delusive dreams,  
Experience withers; till scarce one remains  
Flattering the languid heart, where only Reason reigns! (10-14).

Regardless of the Augustan flavour in her work, Smith did resist compromising her political beliefs for the sake of selling more copies of books. She continued to voice her liberal political sympathies, “so much so that there scarcely seemed a more determined literary jacobin than she expressed in herself to be in the years 1792 and 1793” (Curran, “Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism” 69). The passion for the French cause, as expressed in her novel *Desmond* (1792), set in revolutionary France, was so grand that it earned her a toast by the British living in Paris – who had gathered on 18 November 1792 to celebrate the French defeat of the Austrian army in Netherlands (69). After Britain’s declaration of war on France in early 1793, she slightly changed the course of her political sympathies, as did the first generation male Romantic poets, and set her novel *The Old Manor*

*House* in America during the Revolutionary War, where she remains nevertheless critical of British politics. Eventually, like many others, Smith was disillusioned with the Revolution, which muted her political sympathies, and committed herself increasingly to a Rousseauesque view of nature outside the politics of left and right, and in this, again, she anticipates Wordsworth. In her poetry, and novels, she enhanced genres with the romantic descriptions of nature for which she became famous (Fry vii).

Smith, however, always considered herself a poet more than a novelist; writing novels was what she did to earn more money, not as an artistic endeavour. Although she wrote poems from as early as the age of six, she did not publish anything until she was thirty-five. She was an avid reader from her childhood onwards, and closely followed the literary trends of her time, so much so that she could liberally cite and get inspiration from the writers that she felt connected to<sup>13</sup>. Her favourite poem was William Cowper's *The Task*, which she religiously read over and over again, and it was to Cowper that she dedicated her long blank-verse poem *The Emigrants*<sup>14</sup>. Along with Cowper, she also admired Thomson and Gray, the key poets of the later eighteenth-century associated with

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<sup>13</sup> As she frequently alludes to canonical poets, Adela Pinch compares Smith's poetry to "echo chambers, in which reverberate direct quotations, ideas, and tropes from English poetry" (60).

<sup>14</sup> Smith reveals her admiration for Cowper's style and form when she humbly writes, The following performance [*The Emigrants*] is far from aspiring to be considered as an imitation of your inimitable Poem, THE TASK; I am perfectly sensible, that it belongs not to a feeble and feminine hand to draw the Bow of Ulysses. The force, clearness, and sublimity of your admirable Poem; the felicity, almost peculiar to your genius, of giving the most familiar objects dignity and effect, I could never hope to reach; yet, having read THE TASK almost incessantly from its first publication to the present time, I feel that kind of enchantment described by Milton, when he says,

The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear  
So charming left his voice, that he awhile  
Thought him still speaking.- (*Paradise Lost*, VIII. 1-3)

Her letter not only reveals her respect for Cowper as well as her compassion for the French emigres whose lives have been calamity-stricken, but also her unbaiting need to underline her femininity and sorrows, a justification she feels obliged to make as a woman poet. The multiple subjectivities that she performs in her poems, letters, and prefaces will be examined in detail in Chapter V.

the era's interest in sensibility. Thomson and Gray influenced the Romantics deeply with their poems of nature, especially Thomson's *The Seasons* (1721) whose landscapes peopled with harmonising figures never lost their popularity and which continued to be published through the hundred years following its first appearance (Fletcher 48). In Smith's Sonnet LXXXIV, "To the Muse," where the persona feels deserted by her muse, she quotes Gray's "Epitaph of Sir William Williams" in the concluding quatrain: "But, when in quiet earth that heart shall rest, / Haply may'st thou one sorrowing vigil keep, / Where Pity and Remembrance bend and weep" (12-14). The melancholy note and the indiscreet yearning for death at the close of the poem reveal that she is affiliated with the more popular poets of the time, whom she alludes to so frequently in her works that these quotations seem to have become almost instinctive.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, Smith also admired the poetry of Robert Burns, whose untimely demise affected and inspired her deeply enough to compose a sonnet titled "To the Shade of Burns."<sup>16</sup> Burns' *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* was published in 1786, nine years before *Rural Walks*. As Fletcher puts it, "[n]ine years can be a long time in literary history, but considering Charlotte's isolation and poverty, her recognition of Burns' genius and her ingenuity in getting hold of new volumes is impressive" (232). Another great source of inspiration for Smith was, as is most obvious in her work for children, is Rousseau, especially his *Emile*. This seminal work that emphasizes the importance of outdoor pursuits and the avoidance of rigorous formal education in children's early years stimulated Charlotte Smith to contemplate on the education of children, and of girls in

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<sup>15</sup> More examples of her fascination with Gray can include her annotation in "Ode to Despair" where she cites his "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," or "Elegy" and where she quotes his "On the death of Richard West." The fact that she can bountifully cite numerous poems effortlessly suggests her comprehensive reading of and passion for poems of Sensibility.

<sup>16</sup> Smith annotates her poem, and again quoting liberally from James Thomson's *Coriolanus*, she writes:

Whoever has tasted the charm of original genius so evident in the composition of this genuine Poet, a Poet "of nature's own creation"...cannot surely fail to lament his unhappy life, (latterly passed, as I have understood, in an employment to which such a mind as his must have been averse,) nor his premature death. (Smith, *The Poems* 71)

particular; in fact, at one point in her life, she even considered opening a school for girls, but never succeeded in realizing that dream. In *Conversations Introducing Poetry* and *Rural Walks*, she follows Rousseau's plan for Emile and for the development of Sensibility by living in the country, studying nature, caring for birds and animals and helping to relieve the sufferings of the poor (Fletcher 228). Chapter Four will elaborate on these issues and on *Conversations Introducing Poetry*.

More important than all other literary influences might be the effect of Shakespeare on her. In her work, she cites and annotates Shakespeare freely, almost impulsively, as – like all Romantics after her – she read the great English bard extensively, and he is prevalent in her imagination in all her writing, especially in the sonnets and letters. The passion for Shakespeare is one common denominator in all Romantic poets and “hers was as strong as and her knowledge probably more extensive than any except Lamb's” (Fletcher 241). In the opening of her Sonnet LXXIV, “The Wintry Night,” for instance, she quotes freely from *Macbeth*, “Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care” (1).

The current reconsiderations of Smith's poetry find her works to be of significance to literary history from a variety of different perspectives. Stuart Curran calls Charlotte Smith the first Romantic poet in England, on the basis that she “established enduring patterns of thought and conventions of style that became norms for the period” (“Introduction” xix). The question of her position as a Romantic will be discussed in greater detail throughout this dissertation and is therefore not elaborated upon here. Formally, though, she is also notable. One of the most important achievements of Smith as a poet was her contribution to the revival of the sonnet form in England. For Backscheider, Charlotte Smith's contribution is colossal; she explains that *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays*, which Smith published in 1784, has a particular mood and form that “seemed especially congenial to her” (317). She maintains that Smith:

let sensibility, the picturesque ode, and somber tones flow into her sonnets and impressively compressed them, thereby reinventing the sonnet and its purposes. Without question, she was a major contributor to the revival and is the poet associated with the rebirth of the sonnet as a popular form. (317)

In the seventeenth century, continues Backscheider, the sonnet had fallen into disfavour in spite of its rich legacy; after Milton the sonnet was not written for nearly sixty years (318). Although (claims Backscheider) Thomas Edwards published the first significant group of sonnets since the seventeenth century, each of his poems was written to someone and many were literary criticism (319). Until Smith's publication of her sonnets, Mary Monck, Catherine Talbot and Thomas Gray had published some sonnets, but none with an invigorating feel. The publishing success of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) was beyond Smith's initial hopes, and underwent a series of editing and expansions in the twenty years that followed its first appearance. It turned out to be a hugely influential collection of not just sonnets but also other poetic forms, many of which were "grounded in the elegiac mode but all testifying to the fertility of Smith's imagination and to the continually growing sophistication of her poetic abilities" (Behrendt, "Charlotte Smith" 193). When in 1833 Rev. Alexander Dyce published his *Specimens of English Sonnets*, he allocated nine pages to Smith's sonnets, more than Anna Seward (seven), Bowles (six), Coleridge (two) and Keats (one); only Wordsworth (with fourteen sonnets) is more fully represented among poets after Milton (qtd. in Behrendt, "Charlotte Smith, Women Poets and the Culture of Celebrity" 193).

Another novelty that Smith brought to poetry was her treatment of nature; as Fry puts it, she had a genuine passion for nature which she had developed during her peaceful childhood in Surrey (viii). Although her sonnets and novels refer to nature as a source of metaphor and symbolism, it is in her masterpiece *Beachy Head* that Smith explores nature in all its "multitudinous, uncanny particularity"

(Curran, "Introduction" xxvii). Curran explains the uniqueness of this collection as lying in the fact that:

In a sense the whole volume, with its variety of natural treatments - from the opening meditative reminiscence through fable to allegory to didactic moralism and religious exemplum, all attended by an array of botanical, geological, and ornithological learning - testifies to an alternate Romanticism that seeks not to transcend or to absorb nature but to contemplate and honor its irreducible alterity. In both its psychological and ecological timbres Smith's final volume strikes distinctly modern chords. ("Introduction" xxvii-xxviii)

"An alternate Romanticism that seeks not to transcend or to absorb nature" and "to contemplate and honor [nature's] irreducible alterity" are probably the most important observations that Curran makes regarding Smith's treatment of nature, and this is going to be one aspect of my central argument in the dissertation's discussion of Smith's depiction of the physical world around her. Wordsworthian Romanticism, a term Jacqueline Labbe coins to refer to classic, canonical English Romanticism, owes much to Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy's transcendentalism as Romantic poets see in nature a creative power which invokes an unquenchable desire to explore nature and be at one with it in order to reach a deeper understanding regarding the self, society and cosmos at large. In Charlotte Smith, however, as stated earlier, we do not have this transcendental aspect at all. Even though she is an enthusiastic reader and conceptually aware of the Burkean sublime, and attempts to exploit awe-inspiring sceneries and adopt prospective view from a mountain top, she does not go further and combine the Burkean sublime with a Neoplatonic frame of thinking. This is one of the points in which she differs from the early Romantics. In her poems, there is, in fact, no transcendence - spiritual, cognitive, or aesthetic. She stops at the limits of the visible. In a different line of thinking, we can say that she locates herself in Wordsworthian solipsism, but she does not have Wordsworth's Neoplatonism to take her out of the prison house of her consciousness. That is, both of the poets start with their personae's consciousness

in their poems, but she is not interested in going beyond the limits of that consciousness into the space of Wordsworthian egotistical sublime. What we have is a Lockean conception of nature speaking to the senses, which does not lead to a “beyond.” As a result, her depictions of nature fail to launch a profound awakening in the poetic persona as she is overly preoccupied with the imminent physical realities around herself as well as her own miserable life. As Fletcher puts it, her poems “give little sense of a world beyond the speaker; she feels pleasure in flowers or moonlight for a moment but reverts solipsistically to her own suffering, looking back at the past with regret” (50). Her inability to detach herself from worldly concerns hinders Smith from reaching a transcendental experience and instead draws her attention to the diminutive, the beautiful, and details like the flora, which she meticulously describes and attentively names in the botanic tradition of Erasmus Darwin<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, it would not be incorrect if we said that in her poetry we have prioritization of the beautiful over the sublime.

The same self-involvement which prevents Smith from transcending nature is also visible in her treatment of others’ pain and suffering. Although Smith is a pioneer in her engagement with political events and human suffering (Backscheider 322, 355), she fails to fully connect or associate with her subjects because her poems almost always hurry to return the discussion back to herself and her own wretchedness, which is the greatest obstacle in her awakening or opening themselves to greater human realities. In their introduction, Clubbe and Lovell explain that for the Romantics, selfhood was a major concern and they viewed the fall of man as a direct consequence of pride; hence, they thought that:

[t]he true poetic genius must annihilate self, [as] Blake insisted again and again, and this Blakean annihilation of self is close to the Shelleyan sympathetic or ethical imagination. The annihilation of self was the Romantic experience. It was an

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<sup>17</sup> I intend to dwell on her attitude to the sublime and beautiful in much more detail in in Chapter III.

expansionistic experience that involved the loss of the sense of personal identity by absorption or union or reconciliation with that which is greater than or outside of the self. (3)

In Smith's compositions, however, we do not see this annihilation of the self – either in her earlier sonnets, or in her later meditative longer poems where she comes closest to Romanticism. In her poetry, she remains self-absorbed, which prevents her from reaching Romantic synthesis, the merging of the subject and object in the experience of the sublime. In other words, as she cannot achieve the sublime, she cannot move from a Cartesian to a post-Cartesian form of subjectivity, or from the realm of Being to the realm of Becoming. Immediately after her abortive attempt to achieve the sublime, she turns back to the practicalities of life. In psychological terms, she can never free herself from the reality principle, which cripples her Romantic imagination. Her egotistical boundaries remain intact. She establishes her authority through autobiographical references to her own experience (Backscheider 353). Smith repeatedly and emphatically claims that she can understand the suffering of the “other” much better than the others because she too has been subject to victimization in her own country and suffered from both physical and social exile. It is because of her struggles as a mother, as a woman, and as a political dissident that she can relate to slaves, emigrants, or anyone who has been exposed to oppression.

Smith may have her limitations –in her writing or maybe even in her personality, as she has been frequently criticized for tormenting her readers with her personal problems, but none of these can obliterate her significance for English literature. I believe that she is one of the, if not the most, important figures that bridge eighteenth and nineteenth century English poetry. Unlike Abrams, who sees Neoclassical and Romantic poetry as polar opposites, recent scholarship claims that such compartmentalization is artificial and inaccurate, because the former is

a constituent element of the latter<sup>18</sup>. I believe that Charlotte Smith's feminine writing and aesthetics present a different yet all the more invaluable account of the age. With her inclusion, exclusion and subversion of literary and artistic conventions, she becomes an exciting new terrain for critics to explore. With her oscillation between the Neoclassical and the Romantic traditions, she becomes one of the many missing links that connect these two fundamental but overlapping epochs to show us, as Stephen Behrendt puts it, that "the gap ... is not a gap" after all. It is through transitional poets like Charlotte Smith that we have come to see that "what traditionalist literary history long viewed as a hiatus, a missing link, recent revisionary scholarship has revealed to have been a remarkably active and productive literary milieu" ("The Gap" 25).

In this period of literary inventiveness, Smith became a central source of inspiration for many, the most important of whom would be William Wordsworth, who not only read her extensively but also personally met her<sup>19</sup>. The two were distantly related and Wordsworth visited Smith whom he admired as a Nature poet, a novelist with a passion for sublime landscape, and a fellow supporter of the French Revolution. Wordsworth had read her first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* as a fourteen-year-old schoolboy at Hawshead. He continued to read her into the early years of the nineteenth century (Fletcher 334). When he visited Smith, he was only twenty-one and far from the literary fame that he acquired later. To help him with his literary pursuits, Smith gave him letters of introduction to Helen Maria Williams and to Brissot, whom she had probably met during her Paris visit (157). Wordsworth's fascination with Smith's work

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<sup>18</sup> In fact, for Aidan Day, the Augustan age and Romanticism blend into each other so seamlessly that the canonical poets of Romanticism can easily be labelled as belonging to the "late Enlightenment" with the exception of their constant obsession with imagination and idealism. Day believes that political radicalism, which is traditionally associated with early Romanticism, is a fundamentally Enlightenment principle (181-182).

<sup>19</sup> In her letter to Lucy Hill Lowes, dated 27 November, 1791, Smith mentions being visited by "Mr. Wordsworth (whom I could not take leave of, till he embark'd) till it was too late" (Stanton 38).

did not end with this visit. In Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry for the Christmas Eve of 1802, for instance, we read that her brother is reading Smith's sonnets. 25 years later than that journal entry (in 1827), William Wordsworth specifically asks Alexander Dyce to include her poem "I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night" into his anthology in 1827. And in a footnote to his "Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees' Heads" composed on a walking tour in the summer of 1833, he adds that the form and

something in the style of versification, are adapted from the "St. Monica," a poem of much beauty upon a monastic subject, by Charlotte Smith: a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered. She wrote little, and that little unambitiously, but with true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English Poets; for in point of time her earlier writings preceded, I believe, those of Cowper and Burns. (qtd. in Fletcher 334)

Dwelling on the similarities between Smith and Wordsworth, in her *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth 1784-1807* Jacqueline M. Labbe argues that the interaction between the two poets was mutual, and Wordsworth and Smith used to read each other quite attentively, a collaboration which makes the two the co-founders of English Romanticism be seen as creating "a poetics as a joint project" (16). Labbe writes:

The Romanticism that comes to be written by Smith and Wordsworth starts out, in the 1780s and 1790s, by elaborating and commenting on models that had attained a literary currency by the century's end: using poetry to express and contain emotional states, demonstrating a perfect grasp of form, finding one's place within a community of writers. Their Romanticism, however, also talks back to these traditions and writes into being a curiosity about what, and how, poetry can mean that resonates throughout their period of co-writing (*Writing Romanticism* 15).

Labbe argues that Wordsworth and Smith are equally central to the formation of Romanticism and that their literary achievements were shaped and influenced

by their readings of each other's work. Comparing Wordsworth's partnership with Coleridge to that with Smith, Labbe concludes that the latter pairing was a "cross-fertilization" as it was solely grounded on "a continuing meeting of minds and imaginations" (17).

It is not only Wordsworth whom Smith influenced with her verse. Stephen Behrendt traces the impact of Smith on poems composed during or soon after her lifetime and notes that Anne Bannerman, Amelie Opie, and Helen Maria Williams were all greatly indebted to Smith's experimentation with the sonnet form as well to her choice of subject and style. Behrendt also points out the uncanny similarities between Smith's work and other canonical and non-canonical poets of the time. He mentions Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, James Lacey, and John Taylor to exemplify Smith's pervasive influence upon English poetry ("Charlotte Smith" 194).

As Wordsworth put it, Smith was a poet "to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered." Nonetheless, Charlotte Smith's literary fate unravelled exactly as Wordsworth's prophetic vision foretold: she encouraged the creativity of other poets and became largely forgotten by the literary history. When Wordsworth was composing *The Prelude* in the years 1799-1805, Charlotte Smith was one of the most popular and venerated poets, yet by the early twentieth century she had been all but forgotten, and, Wordsworth had been centralized in the Romantic canon due to his reappraisal by Victorian critics such as Matthew Arnold (Roe 7). Along with lack of critical attention, part of the reason for Smith's legacy lapsing and being left on the periphery of Romantic literary tradition was due to her personal difficulties that were publically known; the story of her troubled life overshadowed her literary accomplishments, a problem which many women writers encountered. Smith's groundedness in the material realities around her and her poems' inability to experience transcendental release and spiritual rebirth, that have already been discussed, is another factor that made her poetry

seem more superficial and down-to-earth compared to the work of her male counterparts. Finally, her fierce criticism of her society at a time when English patriotism was being forged may have made her an unlikable literary figure for her contemporaries. Today, however, Smith is seen in a new light: increasing number of scholars are appreciating what Smith was doing in a time of transition. For one thing, she was responsive to the changes in literary taste and political events of her time, and she incorporated these into her writing in her own unique way. Secondly, she tried to show the world the different facets of herself in spite of societal pressure and limiting norms: she presented such different personae as the political misfit, the grieving mother, the strong author, the assertive botanist, and the sensible woman. Within the restrictions imposed on her, Smith tried to open up spaces of existence and empowerment for herself; she reversed the Burkean dichotomy of the sublime over the beautiful and made an aesthetic choice by prioritizing the beautiful over the majestic, and she deliberately inserted details of her life to connect with her subject matter, and condemn the victimization of marginalized groups. Even though, intellectually speaking, she might have been short of the premises of Romanticism, Smith, in fact, presents a different, an alternative aesthetics within which a woman is trying to exist as a poet.

## CHAPTER 2

### ROMANTIC POETRY

Romanticism is no one thing. It is many very individual poets, who wrote poems manifesting a greater diversity of qualities, it seems to me, than those of any preceding age. But some prominent qualities a number of these poems share, and certain of these shared qualities form a distinctive complex which may, with a high degree of probability, be related to the events and ideas of the cataclysmic coming-into-being of the world to which we are by now becoming fairly accustomed. (Abrams, *Correspondent Breeze* 46-47)

Although Romanticism has its different incarnations in Britain, Continental Europe and America, due to the focus of this dissertation, I will merely focus on British Romanticism, which is classically charted between the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1789 and 1837, the crowning of Queen Victoria. Until recently, critics of the period limited British Romanticism with the work of six male poets: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. Yet the limitations of this canon were laid open by the new historicist and feminist scholarship. Should pre-Romantics or women writers such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Jane Austen or, the very subject of this dissertation, Charlotte Smith, be also considered Romantic? The question of Barbauld and Austen is beyond the scope of this dissertation and hence will remain unanswered here. As for Charlotte Smith, it was Stuart Curran who complicated her status or place in terms of literary periodization by calling her “the first Romantic.” Even though Curran’s work put Charlotte Smith back on the literary map and did inspire many academic studies on her long-forgotten legacy, as I also explained in the previous chapter of this study, the statement is flawed owing to its sweeping generalization. This dissertation argues that Smith is clearly a Romantic precursor because she can

tap into Romantic sensibility by creating a melancholy wanderer who seeks shelter and comfort in nature while recalling the tragedies of her own life, or when she feels for the disenfranchised groups such as slaves, women, emigrants, animals, or children, or when she integrates the sublime and the beautiful, two key Romantic concepts in her own way, into her poetry. Even though Smith experiments with blank verse, and revives and personalizes the sonnet tradition, the presence of Romantic elements remains superficial as she fails to engage in the Romantic debates on imagination and transcendentalism; her main aim in her poetry is more to describe a situation than to philosophize about humanity or to unite with the divine. Moreover, as Charlotte Smith fails to use language in an evocative and emotive fashion like other Romantic poets and occasionally relies on allegorical conceptualizations commonly associated with the Augustan age, Curran's hasty claim on Smith's romanticism becomes all too problematic.

In this chapter the argument is based on the major paradigm shift between the early eighteenth century and the Romantic period. This change did not happen abruptly as incorrectly suggested by some critics. Frye complains<sup>20</sup> that Romanticism has been ushered by some transitory writers such as Charlotte Smith who functioned as missing links that connected eighteenth and nineteenth century poetries. To this end, this chapter will present a detailed account of British Romanticism, explaining the characteristic features that make the period so unique while comparing these against Neoclassical poetry, pre-Romantics and Smith's poetry. Traditional and outdated though it seems, a thorough discussion of the Romantic age cannot be separated from its historical and social backdrop which changed the English society and lifestyle radically, altering the way the universe was interpreted.

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<sup>20</sup> In his "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," Frye discusses that treating Augustan age and Romanticism as if they were antithetical to each other caused many misconceptions regarding the era's true nature, and many students graduated having internalized "a vague Notion that the age of sensibility was the time when poetry moved from a reptilian Classicism, all cold and dry reason, to a mammalian Romanticism, all warm and wet feeling" (144).

In my definition of Romanticism, I will adopt the same argument as René Wellek's who in his essay "The Concept of Romanticism" insists that:

The great poets of the English romantic movement constitute a fairly coherent group, with the same view of poetry and the same conception of imagination, the same view of nature and mind. They share also a poetic style, a use of imagery, symbolism, and myth, which is quite distinct from anything that had been practiced by the eighteenth century, and which was felt by their contemporaries to be obscure and almost unintelligible. (158-159)

I am fully aware that such a totalizing account of a literary period has its limitations. It is true that not all six canonical poets embrace the Romantic characteristics in the same degree and consistently throughout their careers. However, I intend to focus on the basic premises which make up the infrastructure of Romanticism; the principles that I will lay out in this chapter will clearly show the epistemological shift from Augustan age to the Romantic period and will leave room for the poets' personal interpretations of the time. This approach may sound anachronistic, especially when considering that such an approach has been critiqued harshly by feminist and new historicist scholars. Feminist critics have dwelt on the gendered politics of Romantic lyricism, arguing how a masculine poetic subjectivity dominates a feminized physical environment. They are also highly critical of the male-centred literary canon of Romanticism, which ignored the valuable contributions and work of female writers of the time. New historicism, on the other hand, approaches the period differently, associating the Romantic emphasis on interiority with a desire to retreat from the intense domestic and international socio-political events. In my discussion of Romanticism, I refer to all these aspects and approaches in the movement; yet, I highlight the movement's classical affiliation with transcendental philosophy which helps us understand the ideological and philosophical complexity of the period, which is sometimes ignored or unacknowledged due to reductionist definitions of Romanticism. I am hoping

that my definition of Romanticism will cater for canonical writers as well as Charlotte Smith and display the multifacetedness of Romantic poetry, its complexity and contradictions in all its glory.

I am also painfully aware of the many other aspects of Romanticism which I cannot include in this study; I, for instance, cannot mention the medieval resonances, the gothic tradition and the fascination with the folk literature in this study as they would be irrelevant to the main focus of this dissertation. Had I studied her novels as well, which are regarded as the primary examples of the female gothic, these aspects would have been invaluable and critical.

## **2.1. Transcendence**

According to Schlegel, Romanticism means transcendence<sup>21</sup>, a claim with which Alan Liu agrees when he says “Transcendence is the issue. Romantic imagination [is] a mediation between the worldly and otherworldly whose definitive act [is] the simulation of transcendental release” (76). Central as it is to Romanticism, transcendence can be simply defined as seeing or trying to reach the eternal, the divine through the physical or worldly. The main reason why this union with the eternal is so fundamental for Romantic philosophy is because there is a strong Christian side to Romanticism which deems that mankind is “fallen,” has severed its connection with the divine and nature, and this connection must be mended.

As M.H. Abrams painstakingly reminds us in his *Natural Supernaturalism* (33), Christian teachings were deeply rooted in Wordsworth and Coleridge, the former having been given a religious training at Hawkeshead, and the latter, aiming to be “the Milton of his age” was a “tolerable Hebraist” and a philosopher-theologian and dreamed of being a Unitarian preacher at one point in his life.

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<sup>21</sup> Here I refer to Friederick Schlegel’s characterization of Romantic writing as medieval, Christian, and transcendental as opposed to classical, pagan, and worldly in his *Athenaeum*.

Keats was much less interested in religion than any of his great fellow-poets, but he had studied Milton religiously through Wordsworth. Shelley, too, was much devoted to Milton despite his agnosticism. Hence, the canonical Romantics had absorbed the Miltonic account of the Biblical fall:

which occurred with very little or no lapse of time after the creation and resulted in the separation of man from God, as well as the split of primal man into male and female sexes...As evil is the principle of division, so redemption is the principle of reintegration; and the process of redemption is a return which reverses the results of the fall, in a cumulative reunion of male to female, paradise to the world, and heaven to earth, until man, having reunited in himself all the divisions of nature and having become again spiritualized, is rejoined with the Creator in a perfect unity in eternity. (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 153-154)

A similar argument is also prevalent in Geoffrey H. Hartman's "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness,'" where he notes that the relationship between consciousness and anti-consciousness is parallel to the story of dismissal from Eden: after tasting the apple, man becomes aware of his "sheer separateness of self" and seeks a way back to Eden for which "the naively sensuous mind must pass through separation and selfhood to become spiritually perfect" (556).

Abrams notes that starting with Bacon, there was an emphasis on the "marriage of mind and nature" or the synthesis of the object and subject. The aim of Bacon's *Great Instauration* is to investigate "whether that commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things... might by any means be restored to its perfect and original condition," through establishing "forever a true and lawful marriage between the empirical and the rational faculty, the unkind and ill-starred divorce and separation of which has thrown into confusion the affairs of the human family. Such a marriage will herald our entrance into:

the "kingdom of man," which is closely equivalent to our entrance into the moral Kingdom of God promised to us in the latter days,

for it will be a return to the condition of the original Eden by way of man's resumption of the "purity and integrity" of the mind of a child. (*Natural Supernaturalism* 60)

Despite their great resentment of the Enlightenment, the Romantics, Wordsworth in particular, still heralded Bacon, after Shakespeare and Milton, as a man in whom was enshrined "as much of the divinity of intellect of this planet can hope will ever take up its abode among them" (qtd. in *Natural Supernaturalism* 59) and sought to create a secular Romantic synthesis of the mind and nature by "reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being" (66). Hence, it is Romanticism's greatest quest to attempt to reconcile this divorce of mind and nature,<sup>22</sup> and in so doing, Abrams argues, Romantics utilized the conceptual tools of Platonic or Neoplatonic Idealism, which the British Romantic poets not only utilized but also actively contributed to promoting.

Even though elements of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy were deeply embedded into the Western canon, in the work of Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante, its popularity peaked in England when Floyer Sydenham translated nine Platonic dialogues between the years 1759 and 1780. In 1792, Thomas Taylor began translating the rest and published the first complete English version of Plato's works, incorporating Sydenham's translations, in 1804 (Jenkyns 201-

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<sup>22</sup> Whether canonical English Romantic poets achieved this sacred marriage of the subject and the object is beyond the scope of this study. However, suffice it to say that poststructuralists, such as Paul de Man, are strongly convinced that it is impossible to attain. In their effort to harmonize the mind and nature, Romantics prioritized the symbolic over the allegorical, which was argued for passionately by Coleridge as he believed that a poet's use of allegory could not close the divide between an image and the idea that the poet is attempting to express through the deployment of that image. Coleridge argued that symbolic figuration, on the other hand, achieves what allegory cannot: the unification of the image *with* the idea *in* the symbol. In his "The Rhetoric of Temporality" de Man contends Romanticism fails to close the gap between interior and exterior realities, and continues to function in the allegorical realm as, de Man, argues, Romantic conceptualization of the self is problematic as such a union as Romanticism seeks to find of the eternal with the self is impossible and illusory, which is demonstrated in textual inconsistencies.

202). Coleridge got familiar with Taylor's translation at Christ's Hospital<sup>23</sup> and became the leading influence in disseminating transcendental and idealist philosophy in England (Jenkyns 202). Shelley, too, was a follower of the fad and is to this date often hailed as *the* Romantic most influenced by Plato as he not only read Plato extensively but actually translated him (J. Wallace 229).<sup>24</sup>

Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy responded to the Romantic desire to discredit and displace the mechanistic worldview and empiricism of the Enlightenment which they found unfit to relate to human experience and human needs<sup>25</sup> as in the ancient teachings, the Romantics found "an integral universe without absolute divisions in which everything is interrelated by a system of correspondences, and the living is continuous with the inanimate, nature with man, and matter with mind" (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 171). The Romantics rejected the Enlightenment focus on analysis and separation, instead, sought a synthesis, complete annihilation of "all distinction," as Abrams calls it (177), and union with the divine, and hence partially grounded their philosophy on Neoplatonism which cherishes the belief that the soul can ascend to higher levels of reality and return to its own ultimate origin, the transcendent One which is inaccessible to sense perception and which can only be accessed through mystical experience (Sheppard 11). Largely borrowing from the German

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<sup>23</sup> Wendling explains that after settling in Bristol, Coleridge began reading the history of philosophy, the Cambridge Platonists (especially Cudworth), and Joseph Priestley in preparation for his political and religious lectures of that year. Coleridge had perhaps already read some Plato in Greek, or in Latin translations from the Greek, but his references to Plato at this time are still largely filtered through these English expositors (115).

<sup>24</sup> Wallace traces "the ethereal, dreamlike writings of Shelley" with the Neoplatonic understanding of Plato, concerned with "the notion of mystic transcendence to a world of greater reality, greater beauty, greater unity" (230).

<sup>25</sup> I will dwell on Romanticism's great rejection of the Enlightenment emphasis on reason, analysis and empiricism later in this chapter under the subtitle "Reactionism." But briefly, the Romantics reacted against the doctrines of empiricism popularized by John Locke at the end of the seventeenth century. The reduction of the mind to a mere passive receptor of sensory impulse in empiric tradition led the Romantics to turn to notions of a transcendental or eternal realm akin to Plato's realm of Ideas.

philosophical tradition, English Romantics believed that this reconciliation of the object with the subject was possible only through imagination<sup>26</sup>, and the mystical experience could be found in nature which possessed a similar creative power as does the divine. Schiller, in his “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” lays the foundation of this Romantic principle as he tries to find the reason for man’s fascination with nature and explains that it is the “creativity of life in them, the fact that they act serenely on their own, being there according to their own laws; we cherish that inner necessity, that eternal oneness with themselves” (180). To him, nature and human beings were once one and the same, and we should again seek this union to achieve divinity. Long though the following quotation is, the next annotation is needed to better clarify the Romantic desire to synthesize the object and the subject as Schiller claims:

They [natural object] *are* what we *were*; they are what we *should become* once more. We were nature like them, and our culture should lead us along the path of reason and freedom back to nature. Thus they depict at once our lost childhood, something that remains ever dearest to us, and for this reason they fill us with certain melancholy. Because at the same time they portray our supreme perfection in an ideal sense, they transport us into a state of sublime emotions... only if both [individuals and nature] are combined with one another – only if the will freely adheres to the law of necessity and reason maintains its rule in the face of every change in the imagination, only then does the divine or the ideal emerge. Hence in *them* we forever see what eludes us, something we must struggle for and hope to approach in an endless progress, even though we never attain it. *In ourselves* we see an advantage that they lack, something that they either could never participate at all, as in the case of beings devoid of reason, or participate in only inasmuch as they proceed down the same path that *we* did, as in the case of children. (181)

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<sup>26</sup> In his *Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling locates in the concept of the “imagination” of the productive artist, the faculty which enables the poet both “to think and to reconcile contradictions,” and which annuls, by uniting in a single activity and product, the ultimate contradiction working “at the roots of the artist’s whole being,” between nature and intelligence, conscious and unconscious, subject and object (qtd. in Abrams *Natural Supernaturalism* 174). For Hartman consciousness and Imagination are one and the same (556).

Schiller's concepts of melancholy, sublimity and Romantic attraction to children and child-like fascination in the face of natural phenomena are to be returned later in this chapter<sup>27</sup>, but for the time being I would like to dwell on the place and significance of nature and transcendentalism for Romantic poetry as the Romantics believed that interaction with nature could enable the long-sought union with the divine, which could be achieved through a "circuitous journey" from innocence to experience or a higher innocence enabling the poet to learn the powers inherent in consciousness itself. Hence the poetic persona can "spiral upward to a higher state of consciousness, even a sublime transcendence, in which he comes to understand the ultimate harmony between the workings of nature and his own mind and to consummate a marriage with nature through his 'spousal verse'" (Mellor 13).

As this spiritual growth in Romanticism is possible through the divine inspiration that nature provides, the depiction of the physical world rises to prominence, which has occasionally led the period to be equated with, or reduced to mere, nature poetry owing to the emphasis laid on the lengthy descriptions of the physical world. Utilizing natural scenery as poetic subject matter was by no means a Romantic invention; in fact, as the tradition of eighteenth-century descriptive poetry reveals, poets had a significant apprehension and appreciation of the natural world prior to the big six of Romantic poetry. For instance, even the forerunner of Neoclassicism, Alexander Pope himself engaged in extensive

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<sup>27</sup> Using Schiller's ideas to explain the Romantic synthesis of the subject and object may appear anachronistic as it is commonly believed that Wordsworth and Coleridge read Schiller extensively in their trip to Germany in 1798-99, after publishing the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. However, in his book *Coleridge, Schiller and Aesthetic Education*, Michael John Kooy argues that "Schiller's work was available to Coleridge in England both before and after" the abovementioned trip "through periodicals like the *Monthly Magazine* and *The German Museum* as well as through the loose affiliation of English Germonophiles he kept contact with" (5). Kooy concludes that given Coleridge's prevalent literary and philosophical interests of the time, it is hardly believable that he did not know of Schiller's ideas. Therefore, I believe that there is a chance that Schiller's ideas inspired Coleridge's poetry, if not his overall influence in Romanticism in general, not simply in the English context.

nature portrayal in his topographical *Windsor Forest*. In the opening lines of the poem, he says:

Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,  
Here earth and water, seem to strive again;  
Not *Chaos* like together crush'd and bruis'd,  
But as the world, harmoniously confus'd:  
Where order in variety we see,  
And where, tho' all things differ, all agree. (Pope and Rogers 11-16)

In Pope's classically Neoclassical diction, there is an aloofness and distance from the subject matter, which is not depicted in detail but rather in swift generalizations and lists of natural forms. It is almost as if "nature doesn't really even exist ... except as a token of the social values of order and prosperity" (Day 44-45). The poetic persona seems to be more absorbed in social order and stability than immersed in the beauty of the scene. Moreover, the language used in the description of the scene remains on a referential level, not being able to achieve the evocative and emotive resonances that characterize Romantic poetry. The lack of interaction between the perceiving mind and the external reality, however, becomes an issue to be dealt with in Romantic epistemology which prioritizes the mind's personal and individualistic reception and processing. In "Tintern Abbey," for instance, Wordsworth not only evades classical allusions and personifications of the natural world, but also illustrates how the memories of natural impressions can inspire elevated thoughts in the mind. As Day notes, nature is important as it "manifests the same transcendental energy as informs the human mind and at the same time provides an objective, material barrier which allows the individual subject to recognize transcendence without being overwhelmed by it" (45). In the poem, the speaker declares that it has been five years since he last visited this location and admits that he often sought refuge in the memory of this place when he was alone in urban settings:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind  
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,  
As have no slight or trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts  
Of kindness and of love. (Wordsworth and Curtis 26-36; vol. 1)

Wordsworth here suggests that the human spirit can be sublimely “lighten’d” or inspired by nature to commit acts of “kindness and love” (36; vol. 1) and the “affections [aroused by nature] gently lead” (43; vol. 1) the speaker to “see into the life of things” (49; vol. 1). Vain though this may sound, he maintains, he still returns to that moment to find solace and understand life:

And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. (94-103; vol. 1)

To John A. Hodgson, this is “Wordsworth’s transcendentalism in its barest form” (373). Sensations drawn from this direct contact with nature cultivate the feelings and nourish the mind which, in return, perceive the world and the workings of the divine Power in a new light. Wordsworth continues to write variations of how the poet is inspired by the forms of nature that offer him deeper insight into the workings of humanity and the universe for the rest of his poetic career, the apex of which is his *magnum opus* *The Prelude*, in which nature is reckoned as a great instructor and enabler of poetic ability to provide abundant

“types and symbols of eternity / Of first and last, and midst, and without end to teach him the truth about life” (Wordsworth and Curtis 640-641; vol. 3).

This metaphysics of subject-object interaction was popularized by a particular type of Romantic poetry, which Abrams calls “The Greater Romantic Lyric”<sup>28</sup> and was inaugurated and practiced extensively by Wordsworth and Coleridge. In this type of poetry, the individual is in a particular outdoor setting where he engages in a monologue – or sometimes dialogue with a silent listener, be it present or absent. The speaker begins with the description of the landscape, and a particular aspect in the landscape evokes an emotion, a memory or a thought in the speaker, which launches an insight in the poetic persona. Once nature activates the mind, the speaker faces a dormant spiritual crisis<sup>29</sup> “in a colloquy that specifies the present, evokes the past, and anticipates the future, and thereby defines and evaluates what it means to have suffered and to grow older” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 123) and eventually comes to a moral decision or resolution of the problem. Often the poem has a cyclical organization, ending where it began in the first place, “but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation” (Abrams, *Correspondent Breeze* 76-77). Abrams calls this cyclical pattern “the lyric device of the return-upon-itself” which is used deliberately “to transform a segment of experience broken out of time into a sufficient, aesthetic whole,”

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<sup>28</sup> The term is coined by M. H. Abrams in his essay “Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric,” later reappeared in his own *The Correspondent Breeze*, to signify an extended lyric poem of nature description and meditation. Earlier examples of the greater Romantic lyric also include Coleridge’s “conversation poems,” formulated by G.M. Harper, such as *Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement*, *This Lime-Tree Bower*, *Fears in Solitude*, and *The Nightingale*.

<sup>29</sup> In *Natural Supernaturalism* Abrams specifies different types of “spiritual crisis: In some of these poems the confrontation occurs at a time of spiritual crisis which is called “dejection” (the *acedia*, *deiectio*, or spiritual aridity of the Christian experts of the interior life); and the ancient struggle for the blessedness of reconciliation with an alienated God becomes the attempt to recover in maturity and earlier stage of integrity with oneself and the outer world, in a mode of consciousness for which the standard name is joy. (123)

imitating the iconic Greek motif of the snake with its tail in its mouth symbolizing eternity and the divine process of creation, since it is thorough, self-sufficient, and infinite (81-82). Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" which I have just quoted above is an example of this mode, an extended model of which is present in *The Prelude* as it also begins with the poet alone out in the open, responding to the natural scenery and proceeds by the mind recognizing a new stage in its growth.

Another great master of the Greater Romantic Lyric is Coleridge, who not only invented the mode and firmly established its pattern, but also wrote abundantly and perfected it. For the sake of convenience, the study will refer to only one of Coleridge's poems, "Frost at Midnight," revealing the meditations of the solitary speaker who enjoys the stillness of the night with his baby sleeping in cradle next to him. The poem is a telling representation of Romanticism in its concept of the child, in this case Coleridge's son Hartley, as a catalyst of the imaginative energy. The contemplative mind soon disengages itself from the physical locale, moves back in time to the time of his own childhood and infancy, then forward in time to express a blessing, the hope that his son shall have the life in nature which the speaker could not achieve. The poem is an example of the effect of the natural world on the mind as the physical forms around the speaker serve as the catalyst to his musings, or as Coleridge puts it, become "a toy of Thought" (23), as he meditates on his child's future and relationship with nature, the contrast between the urban and rural setting and the comparison of adulthood and childhood. The mental time traveling ends exactly where the poem started: with the frost and "silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the Moon" (74-75).

When depicting the mind's interaction with the physical world and the divinity in nature which serves "as a symbol or even substitute for God, and as revelatory of universal truth" (Johns-Putra 107), the Romantics were relying on popular eighteenth century theories of aesthetics, the most significant of which is the theory of the sublime, a concept codified by Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical*

*Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), but conventionally traced to Longinus<sup>30</sup>. The sublime in relation to the physical world may be defined as a grand form that induces awe and wonder in the perceiver. In *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, sublime is demarcated as:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 39)

Identifying the experience of the sublime with the idea of pain or the annihilation of the self, Burke maintains that landscapes of great dimension that give rise to the idea of infinity, obscurity, profound darkness, intense light, or sharp angles all initially arouse a feeling of terror or fear, yet gradually inspire astonishment, admiration, reverence and respect (57).

More important than the object is the intricate response it produces, which, in fact, makes Burke an important figure for *epistemology* – that branch of philosophy which focuses on the mental processing of and reaction to information. In the case of the sublime, the subject's response upon encountering a grand form involves not a simple intimidation or feeling of being threatened, but rather a sense of transcendental beyond or spiritual transportation from the physical, “a sensation of being lifted out of the scene and into a mediation of the vast of the natural world and thus of the universe” (Johns-Putra 107). A paragon of the sublime occurs in Book XIII of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* when he describes his impressions during a walking trip where the speaker and his friends

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<sup>30</sup> Greek philosopher, Longinus, in his essay entitled “On the Sublime” associated the concept with the style of elevated rhetoric that had the capacity almost to transform the mind of the listener – to take the listener out of his or her ordinary reality (Johns-Putra 117).

rose early to watch the sunrise on the Mount Snowdon. They climb the mountain at night, and they need to break through a layer of mist. The poetic persona is leading the group, moving ahead of the others, and describes the sudden impression of moonlight over him.

instantly a light upon the turf  
Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,  
The Moon hung naked in a firmament  
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet  
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist. (Wordsworth and Curtis 38-  
42; vol. 3)

In his objection to Lockean empiricism and prioritization of sight over other sense perceptions, Wordsworth creates a scene where the sight is blurred by the mist and other senses are heightened. The poetic persona, hence, soon hears the mighty sound of running waters, which he cannot see but only hear because of the mist, and right at that moment there appears a “majestic intellect” in him. Once he sees beyond the illusion of the sea created by the mist, he recognizes the divine creative force behind this sublime landscape, a power which can sync physical reality and higher minds and can be felt even by the “least sensible” person. So as not to kill the effect of this section, I would like to quote the lengthy passage *per verbatim*:

a mind sustained  
By recognitions of transcendent power,  
In sense conducting to ideal form,  
In soul of more than mortal privilege.  
One function, above all, of such a mind  
Had Nature shadowed there, by putting forth,  
'Mid circumstances awful and sublime,  
That mutual domination which she loves  
To exert upon the face of outward things,  
So moulded, joined, abstracted, so endowed  
With interchangeable supremacy,  
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,  
And cannot choose but feel. The power, which all  
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus

To bodily sense exhibits, is the express  
Resemblance of that glorious faculty  
That higher minds bear with them as their own. (74-90)

It is only through the assistance of nature that the mind can recognize and connect with the transcendent. The physical stimulus offered by nature has the power to move even “the least sensible,” but it is only the “glorious faculty” of higher minds that can reach the beyond. The phrase “glorious faculty of higher minds” is a conspicuously Neoplatonic expression, referring to a more evolved human being that is increasingly prepared to unite with the transcendental realm.

## 2.2. Sensibility

“The poetry of sensibility is at base a literature of psychological exploration, and it is the foundation on which Romanticism was reared,” declares Stuart Curran in his famous essay, “The I Altered” (197). This crucial term, sensibility, can be described as one’s capacity for sensitive feeling and emotional response to those in need, which innately comprises a reliance on emotion rather than intellect. The subtle denunciation of logic for the sake of sentiments, of course, is a response to the unadorned rationalism of the Enlightenment and Hobbes’s cynicism regarding the benevolence of the human kind<sup>31</sup>. It was in the Earl of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* published in 1711 that Hobbes’s distrust of human self-centeredness was questioned. Contrary to Hobbes, Shaftesbury championed sensibility and maintained that human beings are endowed with the feeling of affection – for themselves as well as for others - and forgiving tenderness, which are innate human characteristics and that the intensity of one’s compassion for and awareness of the joys and griefs of others is “the true measure of one’s virtue and gentility” (Kitson, “Mapping” 186). Later in the century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau voiced his fervent opposition to rationalism as he also prioritized emotions over reason as the

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<sup>31</sup> In his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes famously maintains that humans are innately selfish and motivated mainly by ambitious self-interest.

governing human principle and sympathy for the others, and he regarded the natural state of human beings as one characterized by innocence and freedom, and hence laid the philosophical foundation of sensibility with his humanitarian approach<sup>32</sup>. For Rousseau, humankind was born into the world in a state of near-perfection which was later corrupted by the mandates of social life. In Chapter Eight, Book I of his famous *The Social Contract*, Rousseau argues that the transition from natural to social has a profound impact on man:

substituting in his behavior justice for instinct, and by imbuing his actions with a moral quality they previously lacked. Only when the voice of duty prevails over physical impulse, and law prevails over appetite, does man, who until then was preoccupied only with himself, understand that he must act according to other principles, and must consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. Although, in this state, he gives up many advantages that he derives from nature, he acquires equally great ones in return; his faculties are used and developed; his ideas are expanded; his feelings are ennobled; his entire soul is raised to such a degree that, if the abuses of this new condition did not often degrade him below that from which he has emerged, he ought to bless continually the wonderful moment that released him from it forever, and transformed him from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man. (166-167)

Pursuing the natural demands of class, religion and ambition, Rousseau maintains, implanted envy and greed in human beings. True liberation could only be gained by rejecting social pressures and earning free expression, which would raise the human to a transcendent status, the level of the Divine (Mansfield 17-18).

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<sup>32</sup> Even though Rousseau is celebrated as a forerunner of the Enlightenment, which allegedly highlights the supremacy of logic and order, Day aligns the French philosopher with the more *humanitarian* side of the Enlightenment. He asserts that in the Enlightenment, there was room for questioning authorities, models and institutions as well as capacity to cater for feelings and individual subject and that Voltaire and Rousseau belonged to *this* segment of the Enlightenment (71).

Even though the term “cult of sensibility” often has a negative connotation as it may sometimes refer to melodramatic works whose sole purpose is to make the reader shed tears for others, I would like to use the term with its more modern implications, referring to “the poet’s sensitive response to the sensations, thoughts, and emotions of experience as made evident in his or her writing” (Morner and Rausch 199). Contrary to the *early* eighteenth century poetry characterized by a restraint of feeling and precision of expression, the later decades of the century witnessed a new kind of verse epitomized by James Thomson, Thomas Gray and William Cowper, who attempted to broaden the poetic vision by including elements of sensibility in their poems, replacing the prevalent satirical mood with a meditative one and drawing on nature as a link to the core human values lost to society trapped in urban and court life. The observations regarding the natural world were of secondary importance to the reflections they aroused, yet fundamentally important in terms of the inspiration they evoked in the next generation of poets<sup>33</sup> (Thorne 181).

The reflective tradition, also called the “Age of Sensibility” covering the period between Pope’s death in 1744 and the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, with its pre-Romantic sensibilities is today considered a continuation of the cultural phenomenon of Sensibility which prioritized emotions and affections in human relationships (Day 49; Kitson, “Mapping the Current Crit. Landscape” 186). Many critics today, Adela Pinch and Jerome McGann being two of them, see an organic continuation between Sensibility and Romanticism as both are concerned with identifying the origins of our affection and emotions<sup>34</sup> (Kitson,

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<sup>33</sup> Frye, in fact, in his “Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility” – which I have also quoted above - critiques the accounts of Romanticism which completely ignore the Age of Sensibility which is fundamentally crucial in the laying out of the principles of Romanticism.

<sup>34</sup> Adela Pinch’s 1996 book, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* and Jerome McGann’s *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* of the same year aim to restore sensibility to Romantic studies. McGann believes that the Romantic emphasis on emotions, which is prevalent in sensibility and sentimentalism are the movement’s great objections to Enlightenment rationalism:

“Mapping” 186). To Christopher Nagle, sensibility was not a brief, transitional phase, as most scholars suggest, but it was a predominant mode of thinking that continued to exist and increased its popularity in the decades following the French Revolution. The mode, Nagle argues, evolved and found room for itself in the texts that are traditionally seen as iconic representatives of Romanticism:

Romanticism is built on the ground of Sensibility and is so thoroughly invested in its rhetorical and stylistic tropes – and thus, in its ideological investments as well – that what is most distinctive about the literature we call Romantic might be the uses to which it puts Sensibility. In the moments of contact between the two traditions, we can see the discursive process of Romantic incorporation – of the embedding and redeployment of generic, stylistic, tropological, and ideological elements of literary texts of Sensibility. (Nagle 3)

With the humanitarian sensibilities that they inherited from Thomson’s generation of poets and the philosophical background laid by Shaftesbury<sup>35</sup> and Rousseau, the Romantics valued and celebrated life, and believed that the individual experiences of the marginalized and disadvantaged should also be considered occasions for poetry. As he famously puts it in the preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth chose his subject matter from ordinary people, “incidents and situations from common life, and to describe them, throughout,

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The poetics of sensibility and sentiment are especially apt for the purposes I am sketching here. They brought a revolution to poetic style exactly by arguing – by “showing and telling” – that the traditional view of mind and reason would no longer serve a truly reasonable – in eighteenth-century terms, a *sensible* – mind. These poetries, along with other literatures of sensibility and sentiment, worked their revolution by developing new and non-traditional modes of expression – styles that were the dress of their new thoughts. These new thoughts, whose (western) roots are in ancient sceptical philosophy, assume that no human action of any consequence is possible – including “mental” action – that is not led and driven by feeling, affect, emotion. (5-6)

<sup>35</sup> Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713, also called Anthony Ashley Cooper) was educated by Locke. He was an early representative of the moral sense school, believing in a “natural sense of right and wrong.” He had a firm conviction in the existence of altruism and argued for the utilitarian basis for morality, which could be reinforced by, but could exist independent from, religion (Lacey 322)

as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men” (Wordsworth 293), and the prime reason why he chose to write about “[h]umble and rustic life,” (281) was because “in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity” (281), and hence an idiot boy or a female vagrant could all be considered good enough subject matter for Romantic poetry. The humanitarian sensibility of the age did not allow the poets to discuss these marginal or trivial figures as separate cases, but encouraged poets to delve deep into social matters that distressed the society as they are critical of the establishment and wanted to improve the society for good. Hence, as Butler writes in *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, the writer of the 1790s is much more inclined “to express sympathy for certain well-defined social groups. Humanitarian feeling for the real-life under-dog vein from the 1760s to the 1790s, often echoing real-life campaigns for reform” (31).

Those who aligned themselves with that humanitarian concern for others were passionate about particularly “real-life campaigns for reform”: slavery. Many Romantic poets, especially women, voiced their outright support for the abolition of slavery which they considered a disgrace to their nation’s legacy. With their sympathies for the revolutionary spirit in France, the Romantics were opposing bondages and inequalities of all kinds, and slavery – which as I will explain more fully later in this chapter and also in Chapter Four, was a grave problem to be addressed. William Cowper was among the first who opposed slave trade and colonial slavery and articulated his disapproval in *The Negro’s Complaint* and *Sweet Meat Has Sour Sauce, Or the Slave Trader in the Dumps* (1788). His poems were distributed as pamphlets as part of the Abolition campaign of 1788-9 which inspired many others including Thomas Day, Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, William Roscoe and Anna Barbauld to compose poems on the cause (Richardson 461). Coleridge, too, opposed the British slave trade between 1780 and 1807, and gave a lecture on the slave trade in Bristol in 1795 (Sonoi 27).

A few years later, in his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Blake continued the humanitarian tradition and condemned enslavement in all shapes and forms; he compared the situation of shackled black slaves and people enslaved in England to certain institutional codes and customs. In the poem, Blake voices his criticism of “tithing,” which enables the church to get a share of farmers’ earnings, through the female speaker, Oothoon. She then disparages the oppression women are made to endure in the hands of a theocratic state that incarcerates women in marriage. Blake sees such misogynistic confinement as atrociously abusive:

With what sense does the parson claim the labour of the farmer?  
What are his nets and gins and traps; and how does he surround  
him  
With cold floods of abstraction, and with forests of solitude,  
To build him castle and high spires, where kings and priests may  
dwell;  
Till she who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot, is bound  
In spell of law to one she loathes? And must she drag the chain  
Of life in weary lust? Must chilling, murderous thoughts obscure  
The clear heaven of her eternal spring (128-135)

While the Neoclassical age was mostly preoccupied with cultivation, order, elegance, and courtly decorum, the educated and urbane population of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century shifted their attention to the way of life in the poorer regions of their own nation. Although the lower classes were formerly denied decent literary representation, the Romantics, with their opposition to inequality and injustice, expressed their radical sympathies for the disenfranchised populations (Harding 43-44). Adeline Johns-Putra notes that most of the major Romantics at some point in their lives declared their criticism of class systems. One of the most original voices of Romanticism that portrayed the conditions of the poor and illiterate was Robert Burns (1759-96) who also had a modest, agrarian background and who was one of the few Romantics that actually had to work to make a living. His poetic work, written from direct contact with working classes, and seasoned with colloquial language,

demonstrates the Romantic interest in depicting the life of individuals from all walks of life, not simply because of the compassion for them but also for the authenticity of their experience. Canonical Romanticism shares Burns's concern for the subjugated; William Wordsworth wrote enthusiastically of the sweeping away of the aristocratic excesses of the French *ancien régime* with the Revolution, for example. The young Percy Shelley "augmented the political statements of his [Wordsworth's] pamphlets with what could be read as a deeply personal gesture in protest against class oppression, when he married the socially inferior Harriet Westbrook" (Johns-Putra 102-103). Even though their later lives<sup>36</sup> can make us sometimes reconsider the genuineness of these sentiments, the very presence of the poems in the first place is good enough a reason for us to celebrate the effort and recognize their humanitarianism.

### **2.3. Selfhood and Sincerity**

Contrary to the above mentioned social concerns of the Romantics, Abrams in "Spirit of the Age" argues that "[t]he great Romantic poems were written not in the mood of revolutionary exaltation but in the later mood of revolutionary disillusionment or despair" (107) and hence are, for the most part, obsessive representations of selfhood. This emphasis on the interiority of the poet has been a significant part of scholarly studies on the canonical definitions of Romantic poetry as a mode that turns inward, away from contemporary social scenes. Even though, as the previous section of this chapter has shown, there is abundant work demonstrating the social and humanitarian sensibilities of the Romantics, it is true that there are equal, if not more, poems illustrating the self-absorbed explorations of the self, especially in later Romantic works written after the loss of that early optimism about the French Revolution. The withdrawal from the social to the personal realm is marked by the Romantic interest in subjectivity as

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<sup>36</sup> Wordsworth's change of heart regarding his radical sympathies and shift towards a more conservative position in life, and Shelley's marriage to Harriet with a modest background lasting only for short years, ending with her suicide shortly after his elopement with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin.

they believed that each individual has an idiosyncratic mental and emotional world that needs to be delved into in poetry.<sup>37</sup> Due to the bloodshed in the aftermath of the French Revolution, they thought that transforming the whole society is possible through transforming the individuals. This is their justification for their “inwardness” in their poems<sup>38</sup>.

Contrary to the rational and objective nature of eighteenth century poetry where the poets were more concerned about acting like the spokesmen of their society rather than individuals’ unique perception, the Romantics more than any other generation of poets before them wrestled with the problem of selfhood. For Mellor canonical, or as she calls it “masculine” Romanticism has traditionally been identified with the avowal of the self that is “unified, unique, enduring, capable of initiating activity, and above all aware of itself as a self” (145). She

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<sup>37</sup> For Harold Bloom, this bifurcated Romantic interest can be explained with “the internalization of quest-romance.” He argues that in all Romantics, there are two modes of energy: the first mode he calls Prometheus and the second “the Real Man, the Imagination” (11). The Prometheus is more attuned with the social and political milieu and engages in literary and institutional revolutions and reformations. The Real Man, the Imagination, on the other hand, emerges after horrifying catastrophes and is, therefore, “typified by a relative disengagement from revolutionary activism, and a standing side from polemic and satire, so as to bring the search within the self and its ambiguities” (11). He maintains:

In the Prometheus stage, the quest is allied to the libido’s struggle against repressiveness, and nature is an ally, though always a wounded and sometimes a withdrawn one. In the Real Man, the Imagination stage, nature is the immediate though not the ultimate antagonist. The final enemy to be overcome is a recalcitrance in the self. (11)

Bloom gives Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* as the ultimate work that illustrates these two phases of the Romantic quest; the initial quest belongs to the poet-as-Prometheus whereas from Book VI onwards there is a great disillusionment due to England being at war with France and the Revolution betraying its own premises. Bloom explains that in his crisis, Wordsworth discovers the strength of his own imagination, and is able to initiate his maturing, yet fails to attain it due to his “anxiety for continuity.” Bloom maintains:

The Imagination phase of his quest does not witness the surrender of his Selfhood and the subsequent inauguration of a new dialectic of love, purged of the natural heart, as in Blake. Yet he wins a personal triumph over himself in Book XII of *The Prelude*, and in the closing stanzas of *Resolution and Independence* and the Great Ode. And the final version of *The Prelude* is not of a redeemed nature, but of a liberated creativity transforming its creation into the beloved (19-20).

<sup>38</sup> As Abrams famously puts it in “The Spirit of the Age,” “The great Romantic poems were written not in the mood of revolutionary exaltation but in the later mood of revolutionary disillusionment and despair” (107). In this apocalyptic disillusionment, the Romantic poet is seeking to find “paradises,” expand its consciousness, yet trapped within his solipsism (Bloom “Internalization” 6).

regards this construction of self-consciousness as the ultimate project of one of the most influential literary autobiographies ever written: William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. In his response to the Lockean reduction of human consciousness to a stable and passive receptor of sense data, and hence the view that human identity is discontinuous, Wordsworth attempted to "represent a unitary self that is maintained over time by the activity of memory, and to show that this self or 'soul' is defined, not by the body and its sensory experience, but by the human mind, by the growth of consciousness" (145).<sup>39</sup> This singular self is represented as the struggling hero of an epic autobiography, which is representative of the growth any man can achieve (147).

The Romantics' firm conviction about the uniqueness of their experience, identity, and creative impulse allowed them to use a very personalized language which was characterized by "self-scrutiny and vivid sentiment" (Drabble 53). That, coupled with their distinctive use of the lyric "I," encouraging the reader to associate the poetic voice with that of the poet himself, is the fundamental reason why Romantic writing is today considered "autobiographical." Even though Abrams regards the autobiographical details "creative... the more-or-less fictional work of art about the development of the artist himself, which is preoccupied with memory, time, and the relations of what is passing to what is eternal" (*Natural Supernaturalism* 80), the account of the poet is most often puzzling for the reader with its heavy emphasis on the *sincerity* of the experience. As Wordsworth famously puts in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Romantic verses are composed of the sincere "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" vital to the emotional bonding between the poet and the

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<sup>39</sup> Once again, deconstructive critics, most notably Paul de Man and those influenced by his work, are sceptical of how successfully Romantics have created a unified selfhood; they argue that Wordsworth's project of creating a stable subjectivity was betrayed by his own recognition that language can never be more than an alienating "garment." They have noted the multiple contradictions posed by the juxtaposition of images of an achieved unitary self in *The Prelude* alongside figures of effacement and defacement, to images of a lost boy, a self that is "bewildered and engulfed," and the "broken windlings" of the poet's path (Mellor 145).

reader (292). So the questions of who the speaker is and how consistent this “self”-representation is becomes perplexing for the reader.

Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode” may be a case in point to illustrate the extent of the speaker’s utterances undermining his own reliability. The poem begins with the speaker’s recollection of Sir Patrick Spence’s tale and acknowledgement of the similarities in his environment and that of the poem he recalls. This poem-within-the poem framework soon leaves its place to the singular poetic voice that calls for a storm to cure his “dull pain.” Speaking to a silent listener, a Lady (Sara Hutchinson), he confesses that the beautiful scenery outside fails to stir his emotions - “in this wan and heartless mood” he stares with “blank an eye.”<sup>40</sup> He says that once, there was a time when he could align himself with his inner joy and he could feel hopeful, but now he says, each affliction weighs him down:

each visitation  
Suspends what nature gave me at birth,  
My shaping spirit of imagination.  
For not to think of what I needs must feel,  
But to be still and patient, all I can  
And haply by abstruse research to steal  
From my own nature all the natural man –  
This was my sole resource, my only plan:  
Till that which suits a part inflects the whole,  
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul. (84-93)

The speaker’s attempt to explain his current state of mind as clearly and faithfully as possible is visible in these lines, but on closer inspection, the nature of these confessions casts doubt on the speaker’s constancy and earnestness

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<sup>40</sup> The poem dates 1802, after Coleridge’s famous trip to Germany in 1798-99, after which Kant “took possession of [him] as with a giant’s hand” (*Biographia Literaria* 107). For many critics, this period had a profound effect on Coleridge’s poetry, severing his ties with the sublime. In this absence of the sublime, he cannot bridge up the gap between himself and nature, and thereby remains imprisoned in his own consciousness. Hence, he stares at nature with “blank eyes” unable to feel anything. Therefore, this poem is labelled as a work of “de-sublimation” where the lyric ego is de-idealized and the sublime is undercut (Stoken 4).

because he makes several juxtapositions such as imagination and its absence, *feeling* and *thinking* about what one should be feeling, natural relationship to the world and a relationship distorted by “abstruse research.” Simultaneously, however, the narrator dismantles these distinctions, until it appears that the poem possesses a far distant message than that the poetic persona declares. For instance, the speaker confesses that his “shaping spirit of imagination” has been “suspended,” yet this seems unlikely because this revelation appears in a very well structured imaginative piece of writing. Or he tells us that he is unable to connect with the natural environment, yet the whole poem is a product of his interaction with the physical world and the reflections aroused by this contact. He tells us that his logic is likely to dominate his other mental faculties, but the organizing principle of the poem is not reason. When the poet complains about “viper thoughts” that are haunting him, instead of contemplating more about these, he recalibrates himself and focuses his attention on the physical environment around him. He eventually makes a choice between what is proper and what is not in terms of feelings and ideas, which makes the reader wonder whether he is playing a similar trick on us as well: is he in fact telling the truth or giving us what he assumes to be the proper and decent? All these contradictions in the accounts of a speaker who on the one hand creates the illusion of candour and who on the other damages the readers’ trust undermine the poet’s claims of sincerity. As Deborah Forbes notes:

What lyric poetry in general claims to offer [is] a fellow human being speaking truthfully to us. It would be possible to argue that the discrepancies we have noticed are proof of the poet’s insincerity: would a man as depressed and bereft of imagination as this one claims to be, be able to write such a masterful poem?  
(3)

In “The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon,” Angela Esterhammer notes that this aforementioned emphasis on spontaneity, a natural, unmediated response to stimuli in Romantic lyric is the key to the Romantic concept of sincerity. She notes that there are two important notions attached to

sincerity which are correspondence between inner reality and outward appearance, and that of not pretending or not acting<sup>41</sup> (101). Wordsworth insists, particularly in “Essays upon Epitaphs” (1810) and in his elegiac poems, that sincerity is the antithesis of acting. However, Esterhammer contends that Wordsworthian sincerity is only one of the various types of Romantic sincerity, the second of which is named after Byron. With Byron and some other “late” Romantics such as Letitia Landon, sincerity acquires a more *performative* aspect.

Esterhammer finds a performative and theatrical aspect in sincerity. She remarks that “in order for the standard of sincerity to come into play,” intention must be visible and readable in some external manner – through speech, behaviour, gesture or facial expression. In other words, intention must be *performed* and interpreted by others, just like in any other speech act, in the context of set social codes and conventions<sup>42</sup> (102). Hence, Byron’s explorations of “sincerity” in the late Cantos of *Don Juan* (1819-1824) reflect an acknowledgment of the fact that natural impulsive responses must be shown in the body through the use of gestures, intonations, expression, or even clothing in order to be communicated and become socially meaningful. This type of sincerity, to Esterhammer, is dangerously close to parody or excess, a paradox within sincerity which on the one hand signifies truthfulness and on the other pretence. She remarks that “[b]y definition, sincerity demands an exact correspondence between state of mind and

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<sup>41</sup> In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling – one of *the* names to have conceptualized sincerity, defines the term as “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling” (2).

<sup>42</sup> At this point, Esterhammer explores the etymology of the word, “sincere” which apparently entered the English language during the first third of the sixteenth century, the epoch of “the sudden efflorescence of the theatre.” This unexpected association of sincerity and theatricality reappears in Matthew Arnold’s 1881 preface to the *Poetry of Byron* where he identifies “the splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength” as the crucial attribute of Byron’s poetry while simultaneously critiquing the “affectations and silliness” of “the theatrical Byron.” This “odd” pairing of sincerity and theatricality in Byron is named by Esterhammer “the scandal of sincerity: it is inimical to performativity; however, it must be read in or on the body, and through the semiotic systems by which body language gets interpreted, and in that sense it is coextensive with performance” (102).

expression; yet the only available forms of expression demand to be interpreted according to public codes that belong to a different semiotic system than private mental states” (103). The concept of sincerity, then, is composed of three main apparatuses: interior states of mind and emotions, speech and body language, and the social codes used to decipher meaning. When the social dynamics, codes of conduct and conventions of interpretation come into play, can a poet truly and sincerely express and know the self, or is the poet doomed to lose any stability on the way to self-consciousness and self-presentation? Is it really possible to attain the unfailing subjectivity that Wordsworth was hoping to achieve in this equation with so many variables? For Deborah Forbes, self-consciousness is possible only “by becoming something other than the self” (5):

self-consciousness seems to require the presence of two selves: the self being observed (the self as object) and the self doing the observing (the self that is conscious, the self as subject). This proliferation of selves appears to discount the possibility that self-consciousness produces knowledge about a single, unified self. (6)

This division of selves is most clearly seen in poems where the poet looks back on a past self and comes to grips with the fact of self-alienation. Regardless of the type or aim of this retrospection, there is still some confrontation of person with shadow or self with self, and the intense lyricism of the Romantics may well be related to this confrontation “[f]or the Romantic ‘I’ emerges nostalgically only when certainty and simplicity of self are lost” (Hartman 559).

## **2.4. Reactionaryism**

### **2.4.1. Revolutions**

“The Romantic period was imminently an age obsessed with the fact of violent and inclusive change, and Romantic poetry cannot be understood, historically, without awareness of the degree to which this preoccupation affected its substance and form,” says M.H. Abrams in *Correspondent Breeze* (46). For

Jerome McGann, however, denying or ignoring this background is an enormous fallacy, and instead he proposes a method that insists on the supremacy of historically specific political and cultural transformations that influence not only the literary consideration but also the critic analysing it. McGann maintains that it is an awareness of cultural and historical specificity that characterizes Romantic works and the critical reception<sup>43</sup>. Hence, I called this section “reactionaryism” to signify the Romantic reaction against the significant political, social, and cultural phenomena of the era.

One of the catalysing political events of the epoch was the American Revolution and the War of Independence (1775-1783) during which the thirteen colonies broke away from British rule and reinvented themselves as a symbol of freedom for contemporary intellectuals like Blake, Coleridge and Byron. Although the loss of the thirteen colonies at the end of the American War of Independence was a severe blow to the nation’s imperial identity, the revolution had far greater repercussions than its economic consequence or military implications. The American Revolution triggered a new kind of international conflict, involving fundamental principles of human rights. The American success inspired and nourished various British groups who fought for suffrage and constituency reform in the parliament (Everest 16).

However, more influential than the revolution across the ocean was the one that took place right next door in Continental Europe: the French Revolution, which had a ripple effect on the transformation of ideologies and concepts worldwide. The promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity aroused the blood of large populations, and revived many English Nonconformists or radicals who saw the French as “a united people battling for survival and natural rights against

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<sup>43</sup> McGann maintains that Romantics themselves were very much self-conscious of this historical and cultural contingency and endeavoured to efface it through their choice of subject matter.

oppressive monarchical powers” (Brainbridge 19). In their prime, major Romantic poets, namely Wordsworth, Blake, Southey, Coleridge and later Shelley, “shared the hope in the French Revolution as the portent of universal felicity” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 64). Famously, William Wordsworth, who was in France in 1790, captured the sense of excitement for a young man and the promise of a new beginning in his epic poem *The Prelude*, exclaiming: “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!” (Wordsworth and Curtis 309-310; vol. 3). Unfortunately, though, the promise of the revolution was soon called into question and eventually shown to be utterly illusory as the revolution took a violent toll: in August 1792, King Louis XVI was overthrown and executed in 1793, followed by the execution of the Queen Marie Antoinette; in September of 1792, half of the Parisian prisoners were executed; a war broke out between France and England in February 1793; the Jacobin “reign of terror” headed by Maximilien Robespierre lasted from 1793 until his overthrow in 1794; France increasingly solidified its power as an imperial force and became aggressive in its foreign affairs as seen in its invasions of Italy in 1796-8 and Switzerland in 1798; and Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power, ultimately taking control of the country with the military coup of 1799.

This period of massive social and political unrest stimulated heated debates in England in terms of people’s reactions and responses to the Revolution, dividing the society into two distinct camps. On the one hand were the conservatives who openly despised the French Revolution for its presumptuous effort to overthrow the monarch, and on the other were the radicals who cherished the wave of change and demanded more democracy and human rights. The central figure in the conservative wing of the argument was Edmund Burke whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* soon became a bestseller achieving immense popularity and fame. Burke’s *Reflections* was published in November 1790, at a time when the revolution was still broadly supported by the British public. Yet with the power of his chivalric rhetoric and almost prophetic envisioning of the ferocious events which would soon take place in France, Burke managed to alter

the positive responses toward the Revolution and argued for an ancestral model of the nation. Jarvis explains:

What Burke sees, and deplores, in France is an attempt to remake a government on the basis of abstract ideas and theoretical speculations, ignoring circumstances, history, and the lessons of experience; such ideological constructions, in his opinion, are violations of nature, which itself provides a wise governance predicated on conservation, inheritance, and organic development (10).

Burke's conservative arguments and his attack on the revolution provoked many responses in favour of the Revolution. The most important one was Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (published in two parts in 1791 and 1792), which both ridiculed Burke's dramatic accounts of the events and defended the concept of "the natural rights of man,"<sup>44</sup> asserting the right to change the form of government. Other important contributions to the radical side of the argument include Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and William Godwin's claims for the rational perfectibility of humankind in *Political Justice* (1793) (Brainbridge 16-17). These publication wars, also referred to as the pamphlet wars, eventually ended when the British government introduced "a series of draconian measures intended to curtail the activities of the corresponding societies and prevent the free circulation of ideas" (Duff 31). In May 1792, George III issued a "Proclamation against Seditious writings," leading to the legal prosecution of writers with radical affiliations. The declaration of war between Britain and France in 1793 gave rise to anti-radical campaigns; accompanying the sense of frustration, the institutionalized censorship of free thought caused many thinkers, writers and poets of the time to "realign their political allegiances" (Brainbridge 16). This ideological threat

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<sup>44</sup> Natural rights of men are the "inalienable rights" that everyone possesses and could be the basis of a society. However, in the eighteenth century, the concept "man" did not include "everyone," for instance, women were largely denied their rights to receive education. Hence, in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Mary Wollstonecraft argued for the "natural rights of mankind" (Ruston 10-11).

was felt so acutely that the Pitt government established a nationwide spy network. Wordsworth and Coleridge were followed by spies for a while. There was also a very strict form of censorship. To Abrams' mind, this later period of revolutionary disillusionment and despair helped produce the best of the Romantic poetry, characterized by apocalyptic symbols and images (*Correspondent Breeze* 62).

From February 1793 until Duke of Wellington's victory over Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo in June 1815 Britain was at war with France, a long period which saw only two brief episodes of peace: the first of these, the Peace of Amiens, lasted from March 1802 to May 1803, and the second peace followed Napoleon's abdication in April 1814 and lasted until his return from exile on Elba in March 1815. On the whole, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were unprecedented in scale and intensity, involving entire populations of nations rather than small divisions of professional soldiers engaged in warfare. Owing to the continuous and eminent threat of a French invasion, in England it is assumed that as many as one in five of the British adult male population participated in some branch of the nation's armed forces between the years 1797 and 1805. Consequently, the wars placed a huge strain on manpower and resources in Britain; in fact, many poems testify to the conflict's human cost with their focus on wounded and discharged soldiers, war widows and orphans (Brainbridge 19).

Apart from its impact on the demography of English people, the on-going conflicts with France also helped the consolidation of English nationalism. The Restoration of 1660 had brought with it a visible increase in the rhetoric of national identity where Britishness was commonly associated with common sense, an ethic of compromise, and a respect for special circumstances rather than an adherence to general rules. As opposed, being French - a long-lasting enemy in terms of commerce, military, and ideology - was "demonized as the bearers of an adverse national character, one typified by a schizophrenic and

unpredictable oscillation between extremes of passionate sensibility and cold-hearted logicity. Frenchmen were either inhumane philosophers or all-too-human libertines,” lacking the British composure and reservation (Simpson 2-3).

The French Revolution changed the entire fabric of Europe; the changes caused by the revolution were mirrored in the literary achievements of the Romantics who challenged the established rules and forms, as well as the traditional diction and language of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Wordsworth and Coleridge were young when the French Revolution erupted, and they wholeheartedly accepted the principles of the new regime. However, they lost faith in it with the advent of the Reign of Terror and the ongoing conflict with France. With a change of heart, they eventually became rather conservative in their political views. Yet, the belief in liberty, equality, and fraternity remained intact even in the second generation Romantics who were raised in the oppressive post-revolutionary years. The desire to rise against tyranny and conventionality survived in the lives and work of Shelley, Byron, and Keats.

The war with France was not the only battle that Britain fought; the country had been involved in a number of essentially commercial wars in the eighteenth century (Jarvis 6). Despite the loss of its greatest colony with the American War of Independence, Britain was still an imperial power to be reckoned with as it maintained and strengthened its control of its other colonies in the Caribbean, Canada, and India and received “a significant stimulus” from its international trade with the East (6). By the end of the Napoleonic wars, Britain had emerged as the world’s most important and influential imperial power, expanding its dominion in India and the Caribbean, and acquiring further territory in the Mediterranean, South Africa, and Australia. This rapid expansion of the British empire was partly due to the transformations in the nation’s trading system in the eighteenth century: Britain increasingly became an exporter of manufactured goods and an importer of raw materials such as sugar from the Caribbean

colonies, tobacco from America, and tea from India. This new system relied heavily on slaves who were transported in large numbers from Africa to undertake painful and cumbersome physical work. By the 1780s, British ships were carrying over 30,000 slaves annually from Africa to the Americas, under conditions so inhumane that a third or more of the human cargo would perish at sea or in the critical early weeks of “seasoning” in the West Indies (Richardson 460). The awareness of the concept of basic human rights raised by the American and French Revolutions soon made slavery and welfare of slaves a public and parliamentary concern in Britain. The campaign for abolition began in the early 1780s, gained increasing support of evangelical Christianity and resulted in the abolishment of slave trade by Act of Parliament in 1807 and emancipation of slaves between 1833 and 1838.

The social developments in the last decades of the eighteenth century catered for the emergence of Britain as the first nation-state of a new type: an industrial-capitalist democracy which reached its full maturity about the end of the nineteenth century. The transition from an older agrarian economy was accelerated by the introduction of mechanical improvements, which led to rural unemployment and drift of labour from the countryside to new urban centres of industrial production (Rickword 13, Everest 10). With James Watt’s improved steam engine and the improvements in the textile industry, the fabric of the society changed radically. The rapidly increasing production of goods required a new communications system for distribution. Hence, roads were remedied; the Midlands was opened up by canals, which fostered the growth of industry in the already existing towns (Rickword 19). Coupled with the incredibly rapid population increase between the years of 1771 and 1831, when the English population increased from 6.4 million people to 13 million (Brainbridge 24), maybe for the first time in history, English people came to understand that the very human endeavour that produces goods for its comfort may also lead to its own apocalypse. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the manufacturing cities of England “disappeared into a thick haze of photochemical smog”

(McKusick 207). The environmental disasters, coupled with a fear of rapid industrialization and urbanization, as well as the changes in the nature of the countryside eventually gave rise to the emergence of a genuine interest in and sensitivity about nature in philosophical writings and literature.

#### **2.4.2. The Enlightenment**

The Enlightenment which is the bedrock of modern Western society is traditionally seen as a European and American intellectual movement of the eighteenth century, renowned for acclaiming reason and scientific method: the Enlightenment tradition holds that through the exercise of reason humanity can clear away its bondages - be it ignorance, intolerance and prejudice - and move towards the improved, ideal life that it deserves because, they maintain, human beings should strive for progress (Day 66).

The movement has its roots in seventeenth-century intellectual achievements and is global in its scope. In Britain, the prominent figures of the movement are Bacon, Locke and William Godwin; in France Descartes, Voltaire and Diderot, in Germany Kant, and in the United States Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine. These men of the Enlightenment, among many others who are unnamed in this very general account of the movement, had a very ambitious agenda: intellectually contributing to realms as disparate as empirical science, to political organization of states, and to the substitution of the cult of personal sensibility for collective religion (Mansfield 15). The minds behind the Enlightenment aimed to modernize mankind through the celebration of secularism, humanism, individualism, cosmopolitanism, and freedom – in every sense of the word, “freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one’s talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his own way in the world” (Day 66).

The Enlightenment is frequently critiqued in contemporary critical thought because its ideals still operate deep within the institutions and processes of

Western social and political systems. Yet, of course, one needs to remember that the Enlightenment was not a single thing and is full of contradictions, like any other movement, including Romanticism. Even though here I am going to compare the two movements, underlining their differences, I need to affirm that it is unfair to treat the Enlightenment as a mere cold exaltation of critical intelligence. It, in fact, was a more varied movement than that simplistic account, and the organic links it had with Romanticism cannot be denied as it affected the Romantics in more profound ways than meets the eye at first glance. The Romantics, even though they opposed some premises of the Enlightenment as I will explain below, can and actually should, be regarded as the “children of the Enlightenment” with their firm conviction in individualism and freedom (Day 181). The French Revolution, which inspired and affected the Romantics on such a core level, was an Enlightenment phenomenon, hailing equality and freedom. Hence, the Romantics were fed on the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment, but also became the movement’s fiercest critics as the Enlightenment is in favour of scientifically analysing, cataloguing, and dissecting, whereas Romanticism is all about synthesizing<sup>45</sup>, integrating, and creating with the intense emotions and childlike naiveté of the prophetic artist. To explore this fundamental difference between the two movements, I would like to start with the scholarly accounts which may shed more light on why the Romantics were highly critical of their predecessors.

For Morse Peckham and the critics of his generation, the Romantic revolt against the Enlightenment was due to a shift in epistemology that affected European thinking. Peckham states that literary Romanticism was the manifestation of this colossal change in the conceptualization of the cosmos and man’s place in it. Prior to the late eighteenth century, the cosmos was perceived as a static mechanism, a clockwork machine, organized in perfect hierarchy. In this

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<sup>45</sup> The details of Romantic synthesis can be found in the earlier sections of this chapter, especially under the subtitle “Transcendentalism”.

flawless system, the fundamental principle was uniformitarianism, which required docile obedience and had no room for originality or change (9). Therefore, the pre-Romantic ages were characterized by “the perfection, the static completeness, the orderliness and coherency of the simple rationalism of the Enlightenment” (Lovejoy 287). As Lovejoy explains,

Thus, for two centuries the efforts made for improvement and correction in beliefs, in institutions, and in art had been, in the main, controlled by the assumption that, in each phase of his activity, man should conform as nearly as possible to a standard conceived as universal, uncomplicated, immutable, uniform for every rational being. The Enlightenment was, in short, an age devoted, at least in its dominant tendency, to the simplification and the standardization of thought and life. (292)

However, in the late eighteenth century, this system collapsed and was replaced by a new metaphor: not a machine but an organism that is ever changing, growing and celebrating the energy of life (294). In this dawning age, the poets were also looking forward to breaking loose with the old literary norms and constraints associated with Neoclassicism and the *ancien régime*. As Abrams famously articulates, the Neoclassic poet was but “a mirror” whose fundamental function was to imitate the already-perfect universe abiding by the rules of “typicality, generality, and ‘large appearances’” (*The Mirror* 41).

In their theories on the working mechanisms of the human mind and imagination, the Romantics respond to the empiricist philosophies of the age which suggest that knowledge could be obtained only through senses and experience. This empirical mind-set was popularized mainly by John Locke, who dismissed the idealist accounts of Neo-Platonism, which was among the primary sources of inspiration for the Romantics, as they suggest that there are innate or *a priori* ideas in the human mind. For Locke, the human mind is similar to a blank sheet of paper, a *tabula rasa*, upon which sense data makes impressions. The human mind is thus regarded as originally passive, and

knowledge is arrived at by relating the ideas left in the mind by sensory stimuli<sup>46</sup>. Based on this view of the mind as “a reflector of the external world,” the inventive process of the Neoclassical artist was reduced to a “reassembly of ‘ideas’ which were literally images, or replicas of sensations”, much like the images reflected on the surface of the mirror “presenting a selected and ordered image of life” (Abrams, *The Mirror* 69). Dealing with these ideas in empiricism, the Romantics were haunted with the idea of the mind’s independence and they relied on the German idealists’ concept of imagination, the active human faculty that makes the mind an active creator rather than a passive receptor of sensory data.

For Peckham, this shift in the conceptualization of art and artist has to do with the altered perception of the universe of the new age which assigns new roles to the creative genius:

If the universe is constantly in the process of creating itself, the mind of man, his imaginative power, is radically creative. The artist is that man with the power of bringing new artistic concepts into reality, just as the philosopher brings new ideas into reality. And the greatest man is the philosopher-poet, who supremely gifted simultaneously does both. Furthermore, the artist is the man who creates a symbol of truth. He can think metaphorically, and if the world is an organic structure only a statement with the organic complexity of the work of art can create an adequate symbol of it. (12)

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<sup>46</sup> This, in fact, refers to only one class of Locke’s taxonomy of experience, sensation. Locke distinguishes two types of experience: sensation and reflection. While sensation is the mind’s perception of the world, reflection is the mind’s perception of its *own* operation; it is only by reflecting upon simple ideas that the mind is able to generate ideas (Kitson, "Beyond" 36). To account for this process, Hume adapted and improved the theory of “association of ideas,” also referred to as associationism, which was formerly explained by Plato and Aristotle (Burwick 17). According to associationism, knowledge of an object is built up from the simple ideas of perception (Kitson, "Beyond" 36). Below I will explain how this primary theory of association was later developed by Hartley and Priestly, who made quite an impact on early Coleridge.

In their metaphors created for the creative mind and the poet, the Romantics were again primarily inspired by Neoplatonism which had been entirely disregarded by the empiricist tradition. In Plotinus' basic figure of creation as emanation, the One and the Good are traditionally likened to an overflowing fountain, or a radiating sun, or (in a combination of the two images) to an overflowing fountain of light<sup>47</sup>. In this account, human perception emulates this divine overflow, which is the complete disavowal of a passive mind; instead, the mind is seen as an act and a power which radiates, which is why the favourite analogy for the Romantics regarding the activity of the perceiving mind is that of a lamp projecting light, which is also behind the analogy in the title of Abrams' book.

Another familiar Neoplatonic metaphor for the soul is a fountain, or an outflowing stream. It is also frequently used in Romantic poetry, to imply a bilateral transaction, a give-and-take, between mind and external object (Abrams, *The Mirror* 61). Wordsworth, who spoke of poetry as an "overflow of feeling," also spoke of whatever he "saw, or heard, or felt" on his visit to the Alps as:

a stream  
That flowed into a kindred Stream; a gale  
Confederate with the current of the Soul  
To speed my voyage (Wordsworth and Curtis 744-747; vol. 3)

Shelley, too, uses the metaphor of the fountain when he restores poetry to its glory and compares a great poem to a "fountain forever flowing with waters of wisdom and delight" (Shelley 367).

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<sup>47</sup> In *Ennead*, for instance, he writes: "The Good, which lies beyond, is the Fountain at once and Principle of Beauty: the Primal Good and the Primal beauty have the one dwelling-place and, thus, always, Beauty's seat is There (55; ch. 6, bk 1).

Another source of inspiration for the Romantics in their perception of the working mechanisms of the mind was associationism, the foundation of which was laid by Locke and Hume and further matured by Hartley. In *Observations on Man* (1743) Hartley proposed a “materialist physiological basis” for the working of association of ideas; in Hartley’s account, objects create vibrations in the mind and these sensations create ideas and complex knowledge (Day 61). It is the work of Joseph Priestley that connected associationism with rhetoric arguing that given its accurate explanation of the mental operations, associations ought to provide for the most effective and persuasive discourse. Following an associationist psychology, he introduced an associatist rhetoric in his *Courses of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*. His twofold purpose, Priestley declared, was to illustrate the association of ideas in rhetoric and to relate “the influence of Oratory, and the striking effect of Excellencies in Composition, upon the genuine principles of human nature” (vii). By the end of the eighteenth century, the theory of associations dominated the intellectual realm and eventually paved the way for discussions on the running mechanisms of the mind and nature of imagination because “association itself is nothing other than an operation of the imagination” (Craig 11).

For Coleridge, imagination is “the living Power and the prime Agent of all human Perception” (Coleridge and Roberts 205), it is a creative power analogous to the divine, “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (205)<sup>48</sup>. In his *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), Shelley also

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<sup>48</sup> Later in his career, In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge famously divides the powers of the mind into three: fancy, the primary imagination, and the secondary imagination. The fancy receives all its materials “ready made from the law of association” and corresponds to the empiricist explanation of the mind. The primary imagination, on the other hand, is the faculty which mediates between sensation and perception, actively ordering these faculties into a body of knowledge, without which they would simply be a mere “chaos of sense impressions.” The secondary imagination which corresponds to Kant’s aesthetic imagination, is that which deals with artistic creation:

The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it

champions imagination arguing that poetry is the most influential way of teaching morality, and that the creative imagination is the best way to awaken our sense of “the hidden beauty of the world” (357). For Shelley, poetry is “the expression of the imagination” (351); it is the mental process that re-creates the world in its own perception and defamiliarizing objects. Shelley describes how evanescent and spontaneous inspiration, creative force behind the composition of a poem is when he says:

A man cannot say, “I will compose poetry.” The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the color of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed. (370)

Like Wordsworth before him, whom he had studied extensively, Shelley also endows the poet with prophetic gifts as he “not only behold intensely the present as it is,” but also “beholds the future in the present” (353). Hence, Shelley argues, great poets are fundamentally important for the society as they are “the authors of language and music...the institutors of laws...the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life” (353) all at once and their poems are “the image of life expressed in its eternal truth” (356).

Their intellectual engagement was coupled with radical political ideas, and oftentimes the negative reception they received from society – for Coleridge and Wordsworth were politically alienated and at one point spied against because of their French sympathies, Byron was regarded as a scandalous figure due to his

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struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (206)

For Coleridge, then, while imagination is an indispensable force, fancy is more mechanical and deals with the fixed and determined, and thereby functions as a mode of memory: it mixes and modifies the stimuli, given by the law of association, by selection or by empirical will power and finally conceptualizes these into experience (Klein 54). Imagination, on the other hand, is more refined: the workings of the primary imagination are involuntary and it belongs to all, but the secondary imagination is the artistic imagination.

personal life, Shelley's opinions on politics and romance were too outrageous, and Keats was only a self-made poet after all. Hence, the Romantics often perceived themselves as sensitive and unappreciated. As Margaret Drabble describes them, unlike the more socially grounded Augustan writers, the Romantic poet was,

a sort of modern hermit or exile, who usually granted a special moral value to similar outcast figures in his or her writing: the pedlars and vagrants in Wordsworth's poem, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, Mary Shelley's man-made monster, and the many tormented pariahs in the works of Byron and P.B. Shelley – who were themselves wandering outcasts from respectable English society. (872)

This feeling of alienation was epitomized in the figure of the melancholy, solitary wanderer that is utilized often in Romantic poetry. One representative example of this can be Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-17) where he voices his feeling of isolation and loneliness in Canto III:

I have not loved the world, nor the world me;  
...  
I stood  
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud  
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,  
Had I not filed my mind, which thus itself subdued. (1, 6-9; Canto III)

In this isolation and loneliness, the Romantics did withdraw to their minds and thoughts, as Byron puts it, or more specifically to their childhood which they cherished nostalgically as a special period in human experience. As Sue Chaplin explains, Romanticism is a critical era in the conceptualization of childhood as a separate developmental stage in life<sup>49</sup>; “the child was no longer necessarily

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<sup>49</sup> Owing to this newly found appreciation of childhood, the period also saw the development of literature written in a variety of styles especially for children. Anna Laetitia Barbauld was among the many pioneers of early children's literature and much of her work had a highly didactic tone (Chaplin 40-41). As I will explain in Chapter IV, Charlotte Smith herself also wrote poems

understood as an adult in miniature, or as a chattel of the patriarchal family” (40). It was especially the work and ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who proposed new educational systems for children and who related childhood to natural innocence that shifted the paradigm regarding how children and childhood had been perceived by then. An important hallmark of the Romantic view of childhood was precisely a sense of purity, innocence and authenticity in children who can see the world with naïve fascination, free from adult conformity. Children’s capacity for imagination enables them to “see a World in a grain of sand, Heaven in a wild flower” (1-2) and to “Hold Infinity in the palm of [their] hand” (3-4) as Blake beautifully puts it in his “Auguries of Innocence.”

Wordsworth, similarly, admires children’s ability to see the world with innocence and simplicity and famously writes “The Child is father of the Man” in his poem of nine lines, “My Heart Leaps up when I Behold” (Wordsworth and Curtis 669; vol. 1) to suggest that adults have much to learn from children, that sense of wonder when they interact with nature. In this effort to recapture his childhood naiveté, Wordsworth often revisits his childhood memories, or as he calls it in *The Prelude*, “endeavoured to retrace / The simple ways in which my childhood walked” (Wordsworth and Curtis 160-161; vol. 3). Frequently in his poems, the adult poet is transported back in time, reliving a childhood memory once more, experiencing the bliss and terror of the experience all over again. He recreates the past experience vividly with the power of imagination and reflects on it with the maturity of the adult mind-set. Together, the childhood sensitivity to the environment and the imagination allow the poetic persona to undergo spiritual transformation, exploring his state of mind and contemplate on the power of a specific event to influence the development of an individual (Thorne 188).

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specifically for children, aiming to teach them natural sciences as well as transplant in them love of nature.

In brief, Romanticism was a quest to defy the Lockean empiricism of the Enlightenment by prioritizing emotions over senses, spiritual awakening and insight over materiality, and dynamism over status quo. In their effort to reverse these binaries, the Romantics derived much from the philosophical ideas of moralists, idealists, humanists, and associationists, and distilled their own theories of imagination and union of the subject and object from their extensive reading of European philosophy. Considering the rich philosophical background of their poetry, it is unacceptable to reduce the Romantics to the themes and motifs of their poetry such as “love of nature” or “sympathy for the poor and mad,” which is exactly what happens when canonical revisions are made to include previously marginalized figures such as Charlotte Smith. I definitely do not argue against revisions, as long as they do not oversimplify the pillars of the age and the ideological depth to it.

## CHAPTER 3

### NATURE AND TRANSCENDENCE

Nature is a significant category in Romantic poetry: it is a worldly representation of the divine creative power which helps humanity attain the long-lost connection with the transcendent realm through the power of imagination. As a threshold figure, Smith was not insensitive to the contemporary concept of nature and became one of the pioneering figures to incorporate lengthy nature depictions in her work, and innovatively associated these descriptions with the individual's disposition. For this reason alone, she is regarded as a Romantic poet by Stuart Curran. However, this dissertation problematizes this argument as, although nature is at the centrepiece of Smith's poetry, the way she treats nature differs from the way of the Romantic poets. This chapter intends to discuss the interaction of the persona in Smith's poetry with nature and argue that it cannot be considered Romantic because the account is unable to meet the transcendental aspect of canonical Romanticism. The study will maintain that Smith's persona fails to experience the semi-mystical bond with the physical environment, which comes so naturally to her male counterparts. Hence, this chapter intends to explore Charlotte Smith's account of the relationship or interaction between the individual and nature. Employing Curran's term "nature's alterity" as my reference point, I will argue how Smith poeticized each category, against the background of her sometimes misanthropic, distrust of civilization and mankind.

In this frame of thinking, her understanding of the sublime in her *Elegiac Sonnets*, *The Emigrants* and most importantly *Beachy Head* will be explored. I will argue that although Smith uses the language of the sublime and creates terrifying and magnificent scenes, and although she attempts to occupy a masculine position atop a terrifying, grand chalk headland adopting Labbe's prospect view, she cannot achieve transcendence. In Smith's poetry, the grand

landscapes cannot inspire a connection with the divine or a mental clarity regarding the divinity in mankind. In fact, she feels so uncomfortable with the sublime that she either ends the poem abruptly, as in the case of many of her sonnets, or she soon loses her firmness to maintain the masculine position atop a mountain. Instead, she “descends,” literally and metaphorically, from a masculine eminence to a feminine locus where she can observe and write about the minute details, usually of the flora<sup>50</sup>. I argue that this downward movement, instead of an uplifting transcendence, is partly because of her lack of a philosophical background for Smith reads the sublime only superficially, hence, she can only imitate the process and cannot attain it. Secondly, her inability to achieve a spiritual awakening is due to her marginality to the masculine power structures of her age which disenfranchise her in every possible way. As a woman who is very much immersed in the physical realities of her own miserable life, Smith cannot detach herself from the earthly to realize her spiritual connection with the divine creative power. I will argue that in an attempt to mimic the conventions of her time, she uses the language of the sublime but cannot go further. A case in point is *Beachy Head*, in which she prioritizes a mountainscape such that she engages in a geological debate, but, as she runs the risk of losing her authority as a poet, she fails to transcend the material existence of the landscape and finds herself inevitably stuck in the earthliness of nature. She further complicates her position when she eventually shuns geology, which, I will argue, is a masculine science. Eventually, Smith favors a more familiar and feminine branch of science and chooses to present *Beachy Head* through the eyes of a botanist. In this context, I am going to discuss the gendered implications of the two sciences, geology and botany, arguing that the scientific discourse of geology is more attuned with masculine power structures, whereas botany which lays emphasis on close observation of organic processes is more

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<sup>50</sup> Loraine Fletcher and Stuart Curran mention Smith’s near-sightedness as the major reason for Smith’s involvement with the miniscule, especially in *Beachy Head*. Even though this detail is significant, I chose not to include it in my analysis as it would have been too limiting and archaic to limit the study with the biography of the poet.

suitable for feminine indulgence. The final section of this chapter argues that Smith adopts a uniquely feminine aesthetization of nature which requires not transcending, but close observation of the material reality. Hence, Smith challenges the prevalent artistic practices that adopt Burkean aesthetics; instead, she offers an “earth-bound aesthetic” (Pascoe 193) which refrains from totalizing or transcending, but rather focuses on the very real details and powers of nature.

Exploring the trajectory of the conceptualization of landscape, which drastically altered the way the physical world was perceived in her time, would prepare a better ground for us to contextualize Smith’s conception of nature on a firmer ground. Gary Rosenberg explains that starting with the rediscovery of Greek and Arabic geometry in the Renaissance, the Western European view of nature started to change fundamentally, and the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, along with rationalism, individualism, democracy, and modern technology, marked a crucial change in the way man interacted with the landscape (1). The Scientific Revolution brought about the discourse and language to describe “the place” when conveying an understanding of similarities and differences in the structure of place or naming things. Hence, Rosenberg argues, a novel idea of the landscape was formalized in the late sixteenth, early seventeenth century (5), thereby rekindling debates on the aesthetics of the wild, unmediated, sublime landscapes and the ultimate experience of viewing and appreciating them.

These scientific conceptualizations of landscape found reciprocation in philosophy and aesthetics; as I explained in the previous chapter, one important contribution to the aesthetics of landscape was made by Edmund Burke, who redefined the sublime and the beautiful, and discussed the mind’s responses to these experiences. To Burke, the sublime is associated with a sense of magnificence and greatness, and has the power to evoke terror and inspire transcendence of the mind; whereas the beautiful is pleasing, gentle and delicate. These aesthetic categories profoundly affected the authors who adapted the taste

for sentiment during the second half of the century, producing literary works that emphasized the deep feelings aroused by nature's beauties and horrors (Fry 2). In poetry, the landscape descriptions "with an evocation of the mood and reflective thoughts aroused by the place" were popularized and were typically written in the sonnet form (Backscheider 320). These poems were called "sentiment of place" sonnets, a form which was transformed into a significant cultural form by none other than Charlotte Smith herself (320). Smith's *To Melancholy. Written on the Banks of Arun* is a fine example of how the natural landscape and the emotions of the poetic persona are connected, and testifies to what Daniel Robinson says: "The association of landscape and soul is largely an innovation of Smith's" (115). The poem's final lines read:

Here, by his native stream, at such an hour,  
Pity's own Otway I methinks could meet,  
And hear his deep sighs swell the sadden'd wind!  
O Melancholy!—such thy magic power,  
That to the soul these dreams are often sweet,  
And soothe the pensive visionary mind! (9-14)

In these lines nature evokes and solidifies the feeling of melancholy in the poetic persona, who admits that her mind is "soothed," or calmed and pacified by this emotion. In the earlier chapter, I explained how the Romantics viewed nature as an instrument of mental nurturance, through which the mind could come to know itself, its weaknesses and transcend. The mind's interaction with nature, in canonical Romanticism, is a means to both imaginative growth and social bonding. Regardless of the poets' singular takes on what this interaction signifies and how this transcendental awakening is achieved<sup>51</sup>, they are nonetheless united in underlining nature's inspirational effect on humans' understanding and attachment to the divine creative power (Curran, "Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" 75). In Smith's poetry, however, we cannot see the transcendental

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<sup>51</sup> Transcendence in Wordsworth is different from transcendence in Keats. Unlike Wordsworth, Keats views the sublime as "residing in the extinction and not the enhancement of identity" where the "individual consciousness is subsumed by the eternal" (Freeman 8-9).

aspect in nature's influence on human beings. Contrary to the stimulating effect that nature has on the mind in canonical Romanticism, there is "soothing," calming, or pacifying effect in Smith. The mind is not invigorated or nurtured to discover the divine or the universal principles, but rather mollified by nature which evokes the feeling of melancholy in the speaker. Smith's poetry is groundbreaking in her connection of nature and emotions; as Fry argues, "As Smith wrote ... poems with descriptions of natural scenery, she often drew correspondences between the persona's thoughts and the natural scenery that she describes. Nature mirrors the mood or parallels the situation of the persona" (21). Revolutionary though she is in connecting the speaker's mood to the physical environment, this innovation falls short of the sublime in canonical Romanticism because the interaction between Smith's speaker and nature fails to achieve the spiritual and mental profundity of her male counterparts.

Smith herself was a fond lover of nature. Having grown up in the country, she frequently recreates the natural beauties of the South Downs, an area extending approximately 20 miles inland from Eastbourne or Brighton on the east to Southampton on the west (Fry 19). She, in fact, calls herself "[a]n early worshipper at nature's shrine" (Smith, *Beachy Head* 346) and recalls her childhood days spent in Sussex countryside with a sense of pure nostalgia. However, in her poesy, she cannot attain the spiritual connection that Wordsworth can; in other words, she cannot see the organic bond between humanity and nature. She fails to perceive the "beyond" and *transcend* the physical reality.

There are a number of reasons for this lack in Smith's poetry; one fundamental reason is, Smith regards nature as "alterity,"<sup>52</sup> (Curran, "Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism" 75) not because of her lack of love or appreciation of it,

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<sup>52</sup> Curran argues that in Smith's view, nature is an "intricately detailed ecosystem that across time and space transcends human control" (76). In her poems, nature is a perfect system that functions effectively, even though human beings cannot see or appreciate it.

but rather because of her misanthropic distrust of people. In Smith's poetry, while nature "is represented as one whose integrity far outstrips the limited satisfactions all but the most deluded of human beings can expect from life" (75), human beings are immersed in a destructive mind-set, destructive of themselves and of others. An example of this could be her Sonnet LXXXIII, also titled "The Sea View." The poem opens with a shepherd figure placed on a mountain top, looking at the tranquil seascape beneath him. Everything in the opening lines suggests peace and serenity: the shepherd is comfortably "reclined," resting on the "soft turf that clothes the mountain brow" or the summer sun is gently setting "in purple radiance low." In a canonical Romantic poem, we would expect the poetic persona to be transported to a childhood memory, reflect on a problem that has been troubling him, and resolve this issue with heightened awareness and maturity that he reaches after an authentic interaction with nature, which is the pattern classically followed in the great Romantic lyric. Here, in Smith's sonnet, however, the poem takes an entirely different route as, the poem takes a violent toll when the speaker recalls the innate ferocity in humans:

Charged deep with deaths, upon the waves, far seen,  
Move the war-freighted ships; and fierce and red,  
Flash their destructive fire [.] – The mangled dead  
And dying victims then pollute the flood.  
Ah! thus man spoils Heaven's glorious works with blood! (10-14)

Mirroring the dusk that she has just described, Smith now moves on to the dark side of humanity: further out, the shepherd notices ships of war which are bringing devastation and death for many. Let alone sensing the divine creative power in nature, in Smith's poem, humanity brings destruction to "Heaven's glorious works" (14); thus, contrary to the canonical Romantic poems, we see that the two realms – of man and nature – are distinctly severed from each other, just like the sea line separating the sky and the sea<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> I will elaborate on Smith's anti-militarism more in detail in the next chapter.

This lack of appreciation or empathy is actually mutual: it is not only that humans do not understand and appreciate the mysteries of the earth, but nature also does not care much about the everyday problems of human beings. In Sonnet LIX, Smith pictures a “remarkable thunder storm,” as she puts it in the lengthy title. The poem begins with Smith’s description of the sublime thunderstorm with the “deep-ebattled cloud” (3) and “[t]errific thunders” (4) that pose a contrast to the serenity of the “Night’s regent” (6), the Moon, which is the closest we get to a poetic persona in this poem. In the absence of a lyric I, the human voice is substituted with the Moon that takes the central role; however, the Moon is quite oblivious to what is taking place below; she is “Unvex’d by all their [people’s] conflicts fierce and loud” (8):

— So, in unsullied dignity elate,  
A spirit conscious of superior worth,  
In placid elevation firmly great,  
Scorns the vain cares that give Contention birth;  
And blest with peace above the shocks of Fate,  
Smiles at the tumult of the troubled earth. (9-14)

In these lines, Smith acknowledges that the moon, or more generally nature, possesses “superior worth,” nonetheless, this loftier intellect is scornful of the miseries or “vain cares” of “the troubled earth,” or people. Once again, the realities of the human and non-human entities seem diverse and unaffected by each other<sup>54</sup>.

Smith repeats nature’s disinterestedness in human concerns once again in *The Emigrants* where she juxtaposes nature’s regeneration in April with the miseries

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<sup>54</sup> From a feminist vantage point, in her “Mild Dominion of the Moon” Kari E. Lokke reads the same poem entirely differently. To her, Smith makes use of images of transcendence and sublimity to distance herself from the “largely male dominated economic and political struggles of her time” (86), and in this sonnet, she maintains, Smith uses the moon, the conventional symbol of the female psyche, to depict how a superior (female) consciousness “finds peace within itself, a peace that transcends conflict and vicissitude” (88). I partially agree with this reading and believe that there is a common denominator here: that feminine nature is cut off from the patriarchal world that is characterized by greed and destruction. Whether this is a deliberate alienation, as Lokke interprets it, or an innate one, is debatable.

that thousands suffer from. Next to “the unhappy lot / of the wild lorn Exiles... thrown” (9-10) to the English coast due to “wild disastrous Anarchy” (11), the spring still arrives “With fragrant airs” (18). Even though the poetic persona wishes that this springtime will usher fresh new beginnings and restore her hope, she is unable to find the comfort and solace in nature. She remarks:

those years  
Have taught me so much sorrow, that my soul  
Feels not the joy reviving Nature brings;  
But, in dark retrospect, dejected dwells  
On human follies, and on human woes. (38-42)

For Anne Mellor, what is unique about women’s interaction with nature in their poetics is that they see nature as a companion<sup>55</sup>; however, in Smith we cannot see this bonding because, for her, humans are innately hurtful, which reminds us of Hobbes’ scepticism of human nature, and consequently there is an irreconcilable break between nature and mankind. For Curran, Smith only “exacerbates it [this alterity] to an extremity that one might argue is unique to her poetry.” In that respect, he compares her to Andrew Marvell and even, in our own century, Robinson Jeffers as “her only conceivable counterparts [with] such disparate voices as [hers]” and concludes, “From this perspective nature represents the only reality worth living, and human beings, though tragically able to recognize its validity, can never share in it without a sense of inadequacy” (“Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism” 75).

In this dysfunctional interaction between the flawed human kind and unspoiled perfection of nature, the mind can only appreciate the beauty and fail to achieve transcendence, which is exactly what we observe in Smith’s exposition of the sublime. As discussed in the previous chapters, Smith was familiar with the work

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<sup>55</sup> In *Romanticism and Gender*, Mellor maintains that women poets “grounded their notion of community on a cooperative rather than possessive interaction with a Nature troped [*sic*] as a female friend or sister” (3).

of Edmund Burke and she responded to his views in her novels.<sup>56</sup> However, as mentioned above, her response to Burke differs from the response of the canonical Romantics as even though she skilfully incorporates the language of the sublime to her reading, she fails to capture its essence, that is the mind's reaction to it and its transformation through it. Burke claimed that:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (39)

Such an emotion can only be produced, Burke argued, by a power greater than oneself:

I know of [sic] nothing sublime, which is not some modification of power...pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly. So that strength, violence, pain and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together. (64)

For Burke, the qualities of the sublime are a greatness in size, obscurity, profound darkness or intense light, and sudden, sharp angles. When up against overwhelming natural phenomena, the human mind first experiences terror or fear and then gradually astonishment, admiration, reverence and respect. Thus, "from the contemplation of a sublime landscape, one is led to a sensible impression of the Deity by whose power such magnificent scenes are created" (Mellor 85-86). The aftermath of this encounter with nature also involves a transcendence which has Neoplatonic overtones, which are also absent in

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<sup>56</sup> Loraine Fletcher argues that Smith extensively made use of Burke's metaphor of the house as a symbol of Britain, which I also referred to in the "Introduction" of this study (144). She also contends that Smith "must have read Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*" as she exploits the attraction and terror of sublime atmospheres in her novels and poems (52).

Smith's poetry. Canonical Romantics add a Platonic or a Neoplatonic awareness to the Burkean sublime, and this addition brings their poems onto a philosophically sophisticated, multiple and rich poetic space, which we cannot see in Smith's poetry.

In Smith's poetry, even in earlier ones, we notice the recycling of the language of the sublime; in Sonnet XII "Written on the Sea Shore. – October 1784," the poetic persona sets the scene "On some rude fragment of the rocky shore, and finds that "the wild gloomy scene has charms" for her as it suits her melancholy mood (7). The solitary speaker listens to the "deep and solemn roar" (4) or the "tempestuous howl" (5) of the wind and compares herself to the "poor mariner... Cast on a rock" (10-11). From this moment onward, we should expect a shift in the speaker's perspective: she needs to find a unique psychic understanding that she and the mariner are a part of a divine creation and that there is a grand scheme behind their miseries. However, this awareness never comes and the poem ends in despair, almost abruptly: "Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries, / Till in the rising tide the exhausted sufferer dies" (13-14). Another example to illustrate Smith's response to nature falling short of transcendence can be her Sonnet LII "The Pilgrim" where a "Faltering and sad and unhappy Pilgrim" (1) takes a solitary journey "along the giddy height / Of these steppe cliffs" (4-5) in the dark. Again, he hears the roar of the thunder and meditates on his loneliness:

Along Life's rudest path I seem to go;  
Nor see where yet the anxious heart may rest,  
That, trembling at the past – recoils from future woe. (12-14)

Even though Smith adopts the language of the sublime and creates sceneries that evoke terror and awe, the speaker cannot achieve the sublime experience as the spiritual crisis or the troubles of the poetic persona are not translocated onto a "beyond". The speaker cannot reach a new, amplified level of sensibility that would connect her to the universe and help overcome the troubles of the day.

Wordsworthian or the egotistical sublime as it is sometimes referred to is labeled as “masculine” by Anne Mellor as it seeks transcendence or a predominant desire to control the natural world that is both alien and threatening to the male writer, and is inaccessible to the female psyche. In Smith’s case, her inability to see beyond the physical world, experience a moment of heightened lucidity and achieve union with the divine has multiple reasons: the foremost is her lack of formal education and the philosophical training that male Romantics, especially Coleridge had. As I explained in the previous chapter, Coleridge has an intriguing theory of imagination, which caters for the synthesis of the subject and object, a theory that he distilled from the premises of Christianity, Neoplatonism, German Idealism, and associationism among others. His complicated epistemology runs not only in his own poesy, but also in Wordsworth’s as well, as he is deeply influenced by Coleridge. Shelley, too, devises his own philosophical framework and writes within the premises of Platonism and Idealism, which he acquired through the translations of the Greek masters. This metaphysical depth in the male Romantics’ symbolism is what separates them from Charlotte Smith whose poetry cannot adhere to the intellectual profundity of her counterparts. Well-read though she was, especially given her financial limitations and life conditions, Smith was deprived of the intellectual interaction or community that many of her contemporaries - as in the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Byron, or the Bluestockings society – could enjoy and prosper from. Hence, Smith’s familiarity with Western intellectual heritage remains surface-level as she only had her own mind to rely on, and very-real life problems kept her distracted and preoccupied.

Secondly, Smith’s first-hand empirical life experience is a big block for her to have transcendental experience and reach an enhanced sense of identity or imaginative expansion. As it is frequently acknowledged, in Smith’s poetry there are two undertones: melancholy and elegy. As Judith Hawley points out, “it is not always clear what or whose loss [Smith] is mourning,” “but overall her sonnets are pervaded by a sense of lament, of absence” (195). Because I have

mentioned her tragic life story in the introductory chapter, I see it redundant to narrate the difficulties that she had to endure, and I will dwell on the autobiographical elements in Smith's poetry further in Chapter Five. But as we have seen in the above-mentioned sonnets, even when Smith is describing a beautiful or an inspiring scene, she cannot forget her own miseries or lose herself in the moment to find comfort and solace in nature. She frequently refers back to her never-ending sorrow which "Death alone can cure!" ("Sonnet XXII" 14). Death is the only solution "e'en Hope's last ray is gone,/ There's no oblivion – but in death alone!" ("Sonnet V" 14). Even when she asks "tranquil nature" to give her rest or soothe her to rest ("Sonnet XL" 7), each time she returns to "the written troubles of the brain" (11).

Her immersion in the empirical reality and her own suffering creates an obstacle in her transcendental awakening, which is further augmented by her reliance on reason as *the* intellectual faculty to preserve her sanity and constancy. In Smith we see absolute faith in the power of reason: it is not spirituality, mysticism or philosophy but rather reason that a person can rely on. In her *Romanticism & Gender*, Anne Mellor underlines the fundamental role of rationality in feminine Romanticism, which is contrary to the masculine Romantic ideology that prioritizes the "feelings of the natural man" (33). Parallel to Wollstonecraft's famous celebration of women's rational faculty, Smith also repeatedly highlights, and allegorizes, "Reason" as the ultimate asset she has. In her Sonnet LXXXV, for instance, she compares the illusions and disillusionments of young ages to the maturity of older ages and champions the latter because "only Reason reigns!" (14). The same line of thought is maintained in the next sonnet, LXXXVI, where the speaker warns the reader that "wavering Reason" can lead one in the wrong path in "life's long darkling way" (14)<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Smith's reliance on reason and her frequent use of capital letters when mentioning the word can also be interpreted as her affinity with the Neoclassical poetic tradition and worldview, which is very probable as she not only had to obey these conventions to sell more volumes of poetry to take care of her large family, but also she read and imitated these works extensively, so she might have – voluntarily or involuntarily- internalized the idea of reason's supremacy.

Smith's complicated relationship with the landscape and the sublime appears in all its glory in her *magnum opus*. Her *Beachy Head* begins with a traditional concept of the sublime in line with the aesthetic taste of the early nineteenth century, that is the masculine or transcendental sublime, as John Pipkin calls it (600). However, this attempt is sabotaged once Smith joins the geological discussions about the formation and revolution of the earth because the site of geology and the position that she is trying to occupy prove to be rather problematic. Hence, in her depiction of the sublime, Smith complicates her situation by fighting multiple battles at once: she tries to imitate the language of the sublime, which she relatively succeeds in, yet fails to achieve the heightened state of clarity of mind or transcendence that is so fundamental for the male Romantics. As if to compensate for her lack of control, she, this time, gets involved in a very current scientific debate about the geological formation of the mountain on top of which she stands. This, however, is another lost cause because Smith's scientific background is not solid enough to back up her claims. Hence, the authorial position that she is claiming, both as a poet and a pseudo-scientist – which is already problematic owing to her position in the society - is further jeopardized while inadequately trying to achieve spiritual awakening. This position of authority could, in fact, never be granted to her as a female poet in the first place. Moreover, she is a marginalized figure: her radical political sympathies, lack of formal education and financial instability all deprive her of the authority that she seeks. Hence, even if she wants to appropriate a masculine terrain, assume the authorial position of a poet and a geologist, and reach a new enhanced sense of identity and will power, she is shunned from the center and thereby cannot fully identify with this alien site of existence. She, therefore, needs to desert the position of eminence, abandons her quest to achieve transcendence, and retreats to an earthly aesthetic.

Once she relinquishes her aspirations for the masculine sublime and geology, Smith treads on a much more familiar zone: that of botany where she can use

her feminine sensibilities and her keen eye to observe the details. She attempts to regain her authority, yet this time in a feminine site of being, that of the beautiful which reveals itself in the bountiful descriptions of flowers and plants. This time, Smith comfortably exerts her authority and even challenges authority figures such as Linneaus, the father of botany, or Shakespeare for their faulty categorization or lack of knowledge. She heavily annotates her poem and displays her extensive knowledge of botany by acknowledging reference books and citing Latin names of the plants. Her abandonment of the masculine sublime becomes much more obvious when she chooses to end the poem in a feminine space, a cave where her hermit figure passes away. Hence, through an “inward telescoping movement” where she moves from a panoramic and geological vision to a regional portrait and finally to a single figure (Lokke, "The Figure of the Hermit" 45), Smith solidifies her rejection of the masculine sublime and asserts her own take of the individual's interaction with nature. The discussion of the sublime and the beautiful in *Beachy Head* unavoidably overlaps with Smith's authorial position both as a poet and a scientist because she weaves the poem in such a way that the sublime and the discipline of geology become inseparable, likewise the discussion of the beautiful cannot be severed from her engagement with botany. Therefore, the following analysis is going to dwell on Smith's aesthetization of the landscape, her association of the Burkean categories with certain scientific disciplines and her endeavor to claim her identity through her interaction with nature. To John Pipkin, there is an innate connection between the sublime and identity because in all definitions of the sublime there is “a denial of, or turning away from, the powerful, material source of awe, terror, or linguistic/psychological saturation that has initiated the sublime experience, and a turning inward to locate within the self an analogue to this external power” (600). In Smith's case, she tries to find her strength in her authorship and scientific knowledge, which she cannot do through the sublime and geology but which she can very well assert through the beautiful and botany.

*Beachy Head* opens with a “unequivocally cosmic” perspective, offering a wide-angle view to the reader (Crisafulli 50). Through the poetic persona standing on the summit of a cliff overhanging the ocean, the poem invokes an eminent viewpoint. Jacqueline Labbe argues that the superior position, which she calls “the prospect view,” not only indicates “heightened awareness and enlarged vision” (*Romantic Visualities* x) but also reflects a superior *social* position that can command the respect of others (xi). She maintains:

the writer who places himself on an eminence... identifies himself with the aristocratic viewer, validating his own position as well as that of his work; his compositional ability, the skill with which he orders the parts into a harmonious whole while simultaneously endorsing no single component, mirrors the high-born prospect view. (xi)

Labbe argues that achieving this eminence is typically the privilege of the male writer as an extension of the social privileges his gender brings him. In the opening lines of *Beachy Head*, Charlotte Smith attempts to adopt such a prospective view and claim the privileges it entails. She stands on the “stupendous summit” of a “rock sublime” that overlooks the seascape of the British Channel (1). The scene is perfectly abiding with the Burkean definition of the sublime: “the awful hour / Of vast concussion,” (5-6) the “dark blue wave” (14), “the rippling tide of flood” (19), and the “shrill harsh cry” (21) of the birds flying above all create a majestic panorama. Writing about a landscape that she has been familiar with since her childhood, Smith probably reveals her inner “landed gentry” identity and assumes the honored, dominant point of view as well as the authority it bestows her. After extensive retrospective speculations about the history of the sight, the speaker begins to insert her criticism of man’s brutality to each other and the history of violence that has terrorized the region over the centuries<sup>58</sup>. The implication is clear: Smith is digressing because once again her distrust of humankind intrudes and she is haunted by her youth: “I once

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<sup>58</sup> The details of this argument can be found in the next chapter.

was happy, when while yet a child, .../childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned, / A guiltless exile, silently to sigh” (282, 287-288). Smith here is most probably referring to her early marriage, followed by years of misery. The intrusion of the autobiographical commentary risks her chance of achieving transcendence and authority of the text. Hence, in an effort to reclaim her position, she shifts her attention to the geological genealogy of the place and engages in the ongoing geological debates of the time and accounts for the origin of the world.

Although this move is unconventional for a female pre-Romantic poet, geology was a newly emerging science, one that could help Smith prove her knowledge and competence. Rosenberg explains that the Scientific Revolution introduced “the geometrization of nature” and used it to understand the structure and spatial relationships of nature as never before (1). The result was the emergence of all modern sciences including geology, which in the eighteenth century quickly became a popular past-time activity by “amateur enthusiast[s] collecting for the greater glory of an Enlightened God” (Wyatt 71). By the 1790s, it had assumed the status of *the* preeminent science of revolution (Bewell 246). From 1807 onwards, which is conspicuously the year *Beachy Head* was published, the endeavors of the amateur enthusiasts were drawn into an organized scientific institution: The Geological Society, founded “for the purpose of making Geologists acquainted with each other, of stimulating their zeal, of inducing them to adopt one nomenclature, of facilitating the communication of new facts and of ascertaining what is known in their science, and what yet remains to be discovered” (qtd. in Wyatt 71-72). Hence, observations of amateur individuals were collected, organized and put into a systematic discourse.

Geology also happened to be a new battleground for England and France, and one of the fundamental principles of the Geological Society was to formulate a nationalistic discourse of geology based on organizing and cataloguing the

physical world in such a way that was innately different from the French<sup>59</sup>. On the issue of the forces that shape the earth, English and French geologists had differing theories that were evidently reminiscent of their political aspirations. Having obliterated *ancien régime* quite recently, French geologists argued for a similar violent change in the formation of the earth and hypothesized that geological change was violent and sudden, and that the history of the world was a “history of the supersession and extinction of worlds” (Bewell 247). On the other side of the Channel, Britain was trying to maintain the status quo, both politically and geologically, which gave birth to two prominent geological theories: the first was Hutton’s Burkean view that geological revolutions are actually the effects of slow changes occurring over vast periods of time, and the second was “scriptural geology” which claimed that the biblical account of creation and deluge was compatible with science (Bewell 247).

To this newly emerging science of geology, however, women were not welcomed. The notions of femininity, decorum, financial restrictions that prohibited women from traveling abroad alone and engaging in exploration (C. McEwan 218), their eviction from formal education were but some of the reasons that paved the way for women’s systematic eviction from geology, or science at large. Apart from these well-known cultural constraints, maybe the most significant ideological reason was that the exploration of physical geography was often seen as a “field-based science” (218), which was rooted in overseas exploration and discovery, examining and charting new territories with imperialistic and masculinist motivations. The strange and exotic new places were often seen as seductive wild places that had to be studied, explored and mastered by the rational voyager. In this light, the fieldwork and geological pursuits in general, were symbolic exercises of masculinity, “a theatre for quest,

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<sup>59</sup> I will explain the forging of the British patriotism and how the war with France accelerated this process more in detail in Chapter IV.

both for the personal rite of passage into manhood and for intellectual enlightenment” (217-218).

In this changing conjecture, even though it is seen unfit for a woman to be involved in such scientific pursuits, Smith as an unorthodox character stepping the toes of so many societal roles and norms, addresses the issue of geology and shoulders the task to unfold the geological events that separated this land from continental Europe:

while Fancy should go forth,  
And represent the strange and awful hour  
Of vast concussion; when the Omnipotent  
Stretch'd forth his arm, and rent the solid hills,  
Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between  
The rifted shores, and from the continent  
Eternally divided this green isle. (4-10)

Smith immediately tackles a geological problem and contemplates on the geological event that separated England from France. In her note to the word “concussion,” she reveals that she is “alluding to an idea that this Island was once joined to the continent of Europe, and torn from it by some convulsion of Nature” (Smith, *The Poems* 217). However, immediately afterwards, she calls this theory in question and utters: “I confess I never could trace the resemblance between the two countries. Yet the cliffs about Dippe [where she resided 1784-1785], resemble the chalk cliffs on the Southern coast. But Normandy has no likeness whatever to the part of England opposite to it” (217). Soon after assuming a masculine position, Smith undermines her authority by not fully complying with the theories suggested, but she questions them, even challenges them on the basis of her own observation, just like an amateur natural historian. As Heringman notes, Smith’s note shows a genuine interest in geological theory, but there is also a side to her that distrusts theory (250). This immediate refusal or questioning of the newly self-organizing discipline may imply Smith’s innate anxiety when occupying masculine territory; even though she intends to solidify

her authority as a poet by engaging in empirical science, she quickly abandons this site of being; she quits the masculine sublime and geology, which attempts to provide a solid explanation for the “incalculable otherness” of Beachy Head (Freeman 11). Instead, Smith cherishes receptivity and attention, which is to be found not in scientific publications but her own observations of her immediate surroundings.

In the upcoming lines of the poem, Smith once again is in dialogue with geological theories and examines the sublime décor. Remembering the fossils she found on the Sussex Downs in younger years, Smith’s poetic persona entertains different explanations for her youthful observations:

Wondering remark the strange and foreign forms  
Of sea-shells; with the pale calcareous soil  
Mingled, and seeming of resembling substance.  
Tho’ surely the blue Ocean (from the heights  
Where the downs westward trend, but dimly seen)  
Here never roll'd its surge. Does Nature then  
Mimic, in wanton mood, fantastic shapes  
Of bivalves, and inwreathed volutes, that cling  
To the dark sea-rock of the wat'ry world?  
Or did this range of chalky mountains, once  
Form a vast bason, where the Ocean waves  
Swell'd fathomless ? What time these fossil shells,  
Buoy'd on their native element, were thrown  
Among the imbedding calx: when the huge hill  
Its giant bulk heaved, and in strange ferment  
Grew up a guardian barrier, 'twixt the sea  
And the green level of the sylvan weald. (372-389)

Here Smith is looking for an explanation for the seashells that appear to be misplaced: why are they at the top of this cliff? The first explanation is that the ocean once reached the top of the cliffs, yet this idea is rejected in the poem when she writes “Ocean.../Here never roll’d its surge” (376-378). The second argument is that fossils are “sports of nature” (Heringman 252): they were put there by nature, mimicking the shapes of sea creatures, bivalves. This

proposition is a traditional one, has Neoplatonic roots, assuming that the fossils were inorganic mineral that took on shapes inherent in nature because all forms were derived from a seminal root (Tayebi, "Undermining the Eighteenth Century Pastoral" 142). Yet, by the time Smith wrote *Beachy Head*, this theory was already discredited (142) and was replaced by the third theory Smith proposes, which argues that the chalk is a seabed uplifted from its original position (Heringham 252). The coexistence of these conflicting theories without Smith prioritizing one over the other is perplexing and self-contradictory. Even though in her footnotes to lines quoted above she admits, "I have never read any of the late theories of the earth" (Smith, *The Poems* 232), it is quite clear that she is cognizant of the theories. Hence, attributing the inconsistencies in her text to her lack of knowledge is immature. Instead, I believe that this is a deliberate choice implemented by Smith to question geology's, or science's in general, discourse that seems to assert its own fixed conclusions. By juxtaposing nature's mimicry of sea creatures and the more recent geological explanation, Smith implies that there is always room for fluidity and flexibility. If a scientist claims to offer a complete account of nature, to Smith this is nothing but a vain statement. She writes:

Ah! very vain is Science' proudest boast,  
And but a little light its flame yet lends  
To its most ardent votaries; since from whence  
These fossil forms are seen, is but conjecture  
Food for vague theories, or vain dispute,  
While to his daily task the peasant goes,  
Unheeding such inquiry, with no care. (390-396)

Smith again introduces scientific theories only to undermine them immediately afterwards. In the first half of this process, she sounds like an Augustan poet with her Neoclassical detachment and objective tone of voice. However, immediately afterwards, she undermines these scientific references. This unexpected transition makes us ask the same question again: in which tradition should we place her? Free from the taxonomic drives, this question poses a

challenge to us readers regarding her response to nature, to external realities or regarding subject/object relations. Her departure from the position of a Neoclassical poet has wider resonances as this voice resembles the voice of neither the former nor the forthcoming poets. She suggests that the very attempt to offer an explanation to geological occurrences is vanity because to Smith, studying the world from a masculinist, totalizing, and rational viewpoint can only give the partial truth. What Smith is criticizing here is not science itself: it is the rational Enlightenment male scientist that studies, analyzes, rationalizes and theorizes on the physical world from a distance, from an ivory castle, claiming to capture the entirety of the truth. Smith protests this Kantian intellectual and implies that the real truth is “down there,” in the stories of the peasant who minds his own business, unaware of the intellectual debates going on. Therefore, Smith lowers her gaze downward, to the material world and the minute details of the plants to give a fuller account of the region. For a very short moment, she sounds like Wordsworth as she refers to the peasant (the nonscientific mind of the underprivileged who knows other valuable things than science); however, she shortly afterwards departs from these Wordsworthian implications too. The poem, then, alters its own perspective and means of representing the world: Smith’s narrator abandons the transcendental sublime and geology for the sake of the “more attractive study” of botany (*Beachy Head* 441).

Like many of her female counterparts, Smith feels more comfortable when carefully attending “the minute characteristics of a smaller space” and thus gradually traverses from “the majestic to the minute, from the sublime to the beautiful, refusing to reinscribe her contemporaries’ hierarchization of these terms” (Pascoe 204). Hereafter, Smith utilizes her knowledge of botany which was, in her time, quite popular and predestined as the most appropriate of the sciences for the feminine disposition. Botany’s rise in the eighteenth century was partly due to imperial pursuits, ending up with exotic species being imported from around the globe. The plantations of tea and sugar-cane were fairly

developed thanks to botanical gardens in Britain like Kew where crop systems could be tested (Keane 64). The translation of Linnaeus's work in 1760s popularized and made botany accessible to a broader array of enthusiasts (King 15). Largely because of the simplicity of Linnaeus's *methodus propria*, or "sexual systems" of plant classification, botany became a widely practiced and vernacularized science from the 1770s onwards (King 3). Adding to botany's attractiveness was Erasmus Darwin's exotic long poem, *The Botanic Garden*, which popularized the Linnaean notion of botanical analogy. Although the poem received great attention from writers of both sexes, Darwin's poem became an object of particular fascination especially for women (Pascoe 199). Increasingly, botany became a part of genteel female culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It was considered both a science and an accomplishment, a popular pursuit that was a suitable and required body of knowledge for the educated girl. Hence botany was thought of as a science particularly suited for the feminine and recommended as an activity that was morally improving (King 16).

Smith uses her extensive botanical knowledge in a number of her texts, and in the context of *Beachy Head* it seems to offer her "the antidote to the grand narratives that [her] speaker engages but ultimately dismisses" (Keane 64). With botany, Smith finds a feminine terrain that focuses on the local, the minute, the material, which does not require her to transcend or totalize but to closely observe and catalogue. This keen eye on the details is in fact quite the opposite of the masculine sublime and the prospective view: Labbe maintains that:

details are both below notice and disruptive – perhaps even destructive – to the prospect view; they draw the eye inward and downward, not upward and outward. Details emphasize the body over the mind, engaging the attention to the potential detriment of disinterested comprehension. (*Romantic Visualities* 3)

In her depiction of the wood sorrel, for instance, Smith gets as detailed as she can: “light thin leaves, / Hearth-shaped, and triply folded” (231). In these lines Pascoe finds a “Darwin-inspired botanical writing intent on fashioning a world in which the forest is less important than the trees, or, rather, than the lacework of veins on one particular leaf” (202). The fact that Smith gradually narrows her gaze from the infinite and the sublime to the minute and particular is revolutionary and liberating for Pascoe:

By insistently focusing on the minute within even the grandest expanse, Smith suggests the escapist possibilities of the particular. Within the carefully delineated realm of the cottage garden, locus of female work and duty, Smith employs the extreme close-up of the botanist’s gaze, creating an explosion of dazzling specificity, so that the limitations of a female vantage point become forces of liberation. (Pascoe 204-205)

As she gets further away from the transcendental sublime, Smith enjoys giving lists of botanical species and heavily glossing them by providing the Latin equivalents, quoting books on botany. When the narrator remembers her Sussex childhood, for instance, a myriad of local plants are listed; the poetic persona enjoys the common names of the plants while the poet meticulously glosses the Latin equivalents in footnotes, thereby creating a botanically accurate language:

warrens, and heaths,  
And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,  
And hedge rows, bordering unfrequented lanes  
Bowered with wild roses, and the clasping woodbine  
Where purple tassels of the tangling vetch  
With bittersweet, and bryony inweave,  
And the dew fills the silver bindweed's cups-- (347-353)

Meticulously, Smith glosses “Vetch” as *Vicia sylbatica*; “bittersweet” *Solanum dulcamara*; “bryony” as *Bryonia alba*; “bindweed” as *Convolvulus sepium*; “harebell” as *Hyacinthus non scriptus*; and “pagil” as *Primula veris*. As King notes, the plants are no longer recited for their “emblematic, metaphorical, or

aesthetic associations,” (63) but they exist as botanical entities that are presented with the attentiveness of a scientist, playing by the book, adopting the legitimate taxonomy. The fact that she is rejecting the theory of geology while holding on to the science of botany indicates that Smith is not against science *per se*, but rather *the way* these two branches of science choose to look at the world. Rather than passing rigid judgments from atop, Smith prefers the close scrutiny of botany to reveal the mysteries of the world, and while doing that she wants to look as professional and as authoritarian as possible. In an effort to assert her authority on the field, Smith cites books on botany, such as *The Gardener’s and Botanists Dictionary* by Thomas Martyn (Smith, *The Poems* 236) or Dr. Aiken’s *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (239). Judith Pascoe observes that even though Charlotte Smith is not the first poet to supplement her work with extensive scientific notation, there is an innate anxiety in Smith to authorize herself. She elucidates that considering the fact that Wordsworth could publish his first volume of poetry *Descriptive Sketches and An Evening Walk*, with a title page announcing his credentials as “W. Wordsworth, B.A. of St. John’s, Cambridge,” Smith’s desire to compensate for her lack of a formal educational title by relying on scientific authorities is only natural and expected. “These experts,” Pascoe argues, “serve to authorize her assertions, but they also allow her to assert her own authority” (197).

As she is treading on feminine territory, Smith increasingly gains her authority and self-confidence; the lack of faith or dubiousness in her engagement with geology seems to have completely disappeared in this later part of the poem where she writes much more assertively. She criticizes Shakespeare and other poets for their lack of botanical knowledge, as well as Linneaus himself for his wrong identification. On cuckoo-flowers, for instance, she writes:

*Lychnis dioica*. Shakespeare describes the Cuckoo buds as being yellow [in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* V.ii.894]. He probably meant the numerous Ranunculi, or March marigolds (*Caltha palustris*) which so gild the meadows in Spring; but poets have never been

botanists. The Cuckoo flower is the *Lychnis floscuculi*. (Smith, *The Poems* 242)

Criticizing Shakespeare whose style was widely imitated, along with that of Milton's, in her age, Charlotte Smith displays confidence and authority that is not welcomed in a woman. Yet, she demonstrates her skill, knowledge, and authority in the marginal lines of her footnotes. In a "tongue-in-cheek" comment (King 64), Jacqueline Labbe finds an unspoken aside: "Poets have never been botanists (until now)" (*Charlotte Smith* 58).

She, similarly, criticizes Linnaeus for his misidentification of flowers that mimic insects. On the matter of "some resembling bees / In velvet vest, intent on their sweet toil, / While others mimic flies, that lightly sport / In the green shade" (444-447), Smith glosses:

*Ophrys muscifera*. Fly Orchis. Linnaeus, misled by the variations to which some of this tribe are really subject, has perhaps too rashly esteemed all those which resemble insects, as forming only one species, which he terms *Ophrys insectifera*. See *English Botany*. (Smith, *The Poems* 236)

Once again, the poetic voice in the footnotes assertively displays the confidence and authority that is not commonly welcomed for a woman poet. Yet Smith firmly clings to her position and rejects the aesthetics, norms and conclusions of the mainstream to offer her own account, her own truth. As Labbe also notes, in this final poem, Smith seems to gradually accept her marginality to the dominant culture, which eventually liberates her and caters for her engagement with the liminal and the marginal; "Once she has established herself as *willing* on the margin, as a woman, as a poet, as a figure on a headland, she fearlessly takes on the authorities she should, by cultural expectation, also to dominate her voice" (*Charlotte Smith* 58).

Smith's final rejection of the transcendental sublime is seen in the final lines of the poem where she abandons the mountain top and focuses on a traditionally feminine space, a cave "Just beneath the rock / Where Beachy overpeers the channel wave" (672-673) where the last character of the poem, the selfless hermit, dies altruistically trying to help a drowning man. Here, contrary to canonical Romanticism, the ending point is not the mind of the poetic persona, which comes back to the natural setting of the beginning lines after imaginative expansion triggered by imagination, but rather nature itself. We do not see an elevated understanding of or deepened insight into a spiritual problem and its solution; there is no effort to transcendentalize or control the forces of nature. Contrarily, in these later lines of the poem, it is not only that the first-person narrator of the poem completely disappears while the hermit figure is centralized, thereby having a chance for a heightened sense of awareness or an assertion of identity, but the hermit figure dies as well. Mortality, however, is not a grim ending that human beings need to defy or fight against; rather it is a natural ending to a natural process. Earlier in the poem, Smith recognized the transience of life, futility of human endeavor, and the eminence of death:

Hither, Ambition, come!  
Come and behold the nothingness of all  
For which you carry thro' the oppressed Earth,  
War, and its train of horrors--see where tread  
The innumerable hoofs of flocks above the works  
By which the warrior sought to register  
His glory, and immortalize his name--  
The pirate Dane, who from his circular camp  
Bore in destructive robbery, fire and sword  
Down thro' the vale, sleeps unremember'd here;  
And here, beneath the green sward, rests alike  
The savage native, who his acorn meal  
Shar'd with the herds, that ranged the pathless woods;  
And the centurion, who on these wide hills  
Encamping, planted the Imperial Eagle.  
All, with the lapse of Time, have passed away. (419-434)

This, to Smith, is the course of nature, a reality to be embraced rather than a grim end to be feared. Hence, in the closing lines of the poem, she introduces the hermit character who takes the forest as his home and eats wild fruits and bread for sustenance. Even though he is a recluse figure who has withdrawn himself from society, he still feels for human misery and “hazarding a life, too valueless” (701) he tries to save the drowning mariners, and when he fails, gives them a proper burial. When he drowns “by the waves wafted” (725) in his last act of charity, people attending his burial do not mourn because they know that he is freed from his earthly bondage. This feeling of lightness when the subject is subsumed by ocean waves infers a feeling of oneness with nature and deep respect for its ways. Here what we feel is something paganistic rather than visionary or transcendental. These figures come and go, that is, they live and rejoin nature, rather than transcend the human level of existence. Death is given as a point of passing from one form of life to another, but it is not something grim or something leading to an afterlife elsewhere. The idea that death is an occasion to rejoin nature distances Smith from the previous Neoclassical poets and later canonical Romantics. In these lines Smith’s poetic persona speaks very much like a pagan. However, when she resorts to the practicalities of her distressing life, she cannot maintain the voice of this pagan speaker, either.

Being unable to categorize Smith under any label leads us to look for a new poetic label or poetic space for her. The fact that Smith’s interaction with nature is so profoundly different from that of Wordsworth or Coleridge raises a question in our minds: Is the masculine, transcendental, or the egotistical sublime the only pattern available to us? Critics have recently been offering an alternative, feminine sublime which may better tune into the experience of the female poet<sup>60</sup>. To Anne Mellor, women writers make use of this feminine or domestic sublime to celebrate their natural union with the physical world (Mellor 2-3). Mellor

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<sup>60</sup> “Feminine sublime” is still a new notion, and there is not an abundance of work that theorize and conceptualize this phenomenon. The following definitions that are cited are only some of the initial attempts to address this gap in the study of the female experience of nature.

charts two forms of feminine sublime: One set of women writers accept the identification of the sublime with masculine empowerment, yet subvert it by equating it with patriarchal tyranny, especially in Gothic novels (91), while another group of women writers, poets in particular, revisit the mountainous landscapes of their childhood and experience a heightened sense of sensibility owing to the love, reverence and mutual connection. She explains that these poets experience:

no Oedipal anxiety, no recognition of human frailty or mortality. Instead, they represent it as a flowing out, an estatic [*sic*] experience of co-participation in nature they explicitly gender as female. For them, this female nature is not an overwhelming power, not even an all bountiful mother. Instead nature is a *female friend*, a sister, with whom they share their most intimate experiences and with whom they cooperate in the daily business of life, to the mutual advantage of each. (97)

Admirable though Mellors' efforts are in providing an account for the alternative sublime experience, her claims disseminate an essentialist claim that women are more connected to Mother nature because of their reproductive capacities and thereby have a more insightful understanding of the physical world. Going back to my main focus, in Charlotte Smith's case, I would argue, Mellor's feminine sublime fails to embody Smith's interaction pattern because of several reasons: firstly, in Smith there is a major emphasis on human mortality – not that she is obsessed with overcoming it, but it is more like a yearning for death as it may finally put an end to her miseries. Unlike some other female writers who may be devoid of Oedipal anxiety, I believe Smith wants to believe that she is a part of the male poetic tradition as she neurotically quotes her male predecessors and openly cries “Tell my name to the distant ages”<sup>61</sup> in her “To my Lyre” (48). I certainly do not see a subversive aspect in her use of the sublime, at least in her poetry – she does subvert patriarchy openly in her novels, but not so much in her verse. In fact, there is an effort to participate in it, but also a failure in so doing.

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<sup>61</sup> I will dwell on Smith's self-evaluation as a poet more in detail in the conclusion.

Finally, due to regarding nature as an alterity to human reality, we fail to see a sisterly bonding with nature. It is true that nature mirrors the emotional state of the poetic persona, yet this emulating disappoints the speaker when it comes to offering solace and ease of mind.

A secondary and a more inclusive definition of the feminine sublime comes from Barbara Claire Freeman, who sees the concept as “neither a rhetorical mode nor an aesthetic category but a domain of experience that resists categorization”. In the feminine sublime, she argues, “the subject enters into relation with an otherness – social, aesthetic, political, ethical, erotic – that is excessive and unrepresentable” (2). To Freeman’s mind, unlike the masculinist sublime that seeks to appropriate and dominate the other, the feminine sublime has no such intention, instead it takes up “a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness” (11). To this end, “a politics of the feminine sublime would ally receptivity and constant attention to that which makes meaning infinitely open and ungovernable” (11). Compared to Mellor’s definition, this one seems slightly more attuned to Smith’s experience of the sublime as the natural phenomena that she describes clearly inspire the feeling of *respect* in her. As Curran’s statement that I have previously quoted reveals, in Smith’s poesy there is a firm conviction in the excellence of the natural cycles, which humanity at large fails to acknowledge. However, this brief parallelism between Freeman’s theory and Smith’s worldview still does not serve as a perfect match to account for the unique response to nature we see in Smith’s poems.

Another alternative is presented by John Pipkin: the transcendental and the material sublime. Associating Wordsworthian sublime with the transcendental sublime, Pipkin explains that in the discourse of the transcendental sublime there is an attempt to transform the feeling of awe or fear into an “epiphany of spiritual self-awareness and imaginative empowerment” (600), whereas in the material sublime, the emphasis is on the material forces of the natural world, and thereby fear and anxiety are transformed into “feelings of commiseration or

identification with the material world, resulting in a moment of personal defiance, empowerment, or self-realization” (601). Pipkin argues that there are many versions employing the material sublime because it is not in stark opposition to the transcendental sublime but rather is already embedded within its discourse. Yet, while it is an indication of disruption in male writing, it is a prominent strategy for many women writers “struggling against an aesthetic ideology bent on masculinizing the discourse of transcendental sublimity” (601). He maintains that the material sublime is:

most often beginning, like the transcendental sublime, as an encounter with something terrible, overwhelming, or awe-inspiring in nature. The dialectic of self-other typically structuring this encounter with nature's power is not dissolved through a synthesizing moment of transcendence, as it is in many male-authored descriptions of the sublime; instead, the dynamics of the material sublime underscore the tension of this self-other relationship in order to stress the identity of the self as a conscious and distinct participant in the dialectic. (601)

Pipkin argues that the transcendental sublime demands the poetic persona first to yield to the power of nature in exchange for the intense feeling of self-expansion that follows the surrender. As submission is regarded as a threat to masculine identity, “this submissive capacity must be circumscribed within the feminized sphere of the intellectual or the spiritual self” so that the subject comes out strong and valorous from his quest (608-609). In the case of female poets, who are already marginalized in their society and trapped in obscurity, the sublime functions differently as even with the act of writing, they refuse to surrender and remain in the dark place socially assigned to them. He claims:

For the male Romantics, self-annihilation opens a space in which the poet can re-create a noncorporeal poetic self ...for female Romantics, however, poetic self-annihilation is suicide. Through the material sublime, then, women poets find a means of reinforcing their authorial identity while articulating a desire to shatter that identity and escape the oppressive forces that

discursively circumscribe their limited expression of selfhood.  
(610)

In Pipkin's argument, then, the momentary suspension of the integrity of the male poet's identity when encountering the sublime, in return brings him a heightened, new awareness; yet, the feminine poet cannot endure such a deferral since this would result in her complete disappearance. This demarcation of the male and female experience of the sublime can clarify the difficulty Smith encounters in the face of magnificence much better than the other models: as in *Beachy Head*, her intention to imitate the conventional, Burkean sublime quickly backfires and she runs the risk of losing the authorial grip of her poem. In an effort to re-establish her power, Smith resorts to using the language of geology, but her alienation from the realm of science betrays her and leaves her empty handed again. Unable to stay in the masculine terrain where she clearly does not belong, Smith retreats to a more feminine area, that of the beautiful, where she can reconstitute her integrity and authority.

This chapter discussed Smith's attitude towards nature and how she depicts the mind's interaction with the physical world; to this end, I looked into her *Elegiac Sonnets*, *The Emigrants*, and *Beachy Head* and observed that Smith's contact with nature does not follow the same pattern trailed by her male counterparts. Even though Smith attempts to follow the Burkean aesthetics of the sublime, which she partially manages to do but only superficially through the adoption of the language of the sublime, she fails to achieve the transcendental aspect of the sublime which needs to unite the subject with the divine and give the individual a new sense of lucidity. In Smith's case, there can be a number of reasons why she fails to achieve the subject object synthesis that is fundamentally important in Romantic philosophy. First of all, Smith is deeply immersed in her own physical reality: the feeling that she is miserable in her personal life and that she has to struggle very hard to provide for her family haunts her constantly and she fixatedly comes back to this point in many of her poems. The pressures of these

practicalities do not allow her to experience a heightened realization as she is deeply grounded in her material reality, which makes it impossible for her to find consolation or reach a spiritual awakening. Another reason why Smith fails to experience the sublime the way her male counterparts do is her significant lack of formal education and philosophical background: contrary to the male Romantics who can fully commit themselves to explore English, continental and Greek philosophy – and even visit the native land to learn the teachings, Smith can only rely on her own superficial reading of *some* intellectual figures, whom she cannot discuss with anyone. This lack of philosophical background poses an obstacle for her forming an understanding or theory of the mind's interaction with nature, which the male Romantics especially Wordsworth and Coleridge can design with ease due to their intellectual partnership and extensive readings. The unity of the self and the other, which canonical poets can recognize and tune into, is thereby not so natural for Smith who cannot relate to this union either philosophically or empirically. Because she has seen the worst in humanity – with the continuous disappointing experiences with her husband, lawyers, publishers and friends – Smith finds it hard to reconcile mankind and nature. For her, just like other Romantics, nature is a system of perfection - creative, inspiring and beautiful, yet unfit for human comprehension as humanity is marked by destruction, pain, and greed. In their ego-centrism, Smith believes, humans fail to appreciate the grandeur of nature. Hence, Smith is trapped in the dichotomy of nature versus man, and cannot reconcile the two binaries and achieve Romantic synthesis. Finally, and maybe more importantly than all the others, the masculine sublime and the transcendental aspect following the encounter with the sublime is an impossibility for Smith as it would mean the absolute self-eradication of the female poet. The masculine sublime requires the self to accept its subordination for the sake of the divine connection it will achieve afterwards, which means the loss of identity altogether in the female experience since women are already subjugated by patriarchal traditions. In that sense, the female poet is bound to seek the sublime in the material reality. This conundrum is seen most clearly in *Beachy Head* where Smith endeavours to

imitate the masculine sublime and claim the authority it bestows on the subject, which is unattainable for her. Her fall from the mountaintop to the cave underneath is symbolic of her descent from the transcendental to the earthy.



## CHAPTER 4

### ALTERITY, THE SUBJUGATED, AND THE MOTHER

“No disadvantage could equal those I sustained; the more my mind expanded, the more I became sensible of personal slavery; the more I improved and cultivated my understanding, the farther I was removed from those with whom I was condemned to pass my life; and the more clearly I say by these newly-acquired lights the horror of the abyss into which I had unconsciously plunged.” (Stanton 2)

As the above-quoted excerpt from her letter to an unnamed recipient, salvaged by her sister Catherine Anne Dorset, indicates, as early as in her teenage years, Smith drew parallelisms between the miseries, restrictions and obligations culturally-imposed on women and slavery. Throughout her life and all through her literary career, Smith worked on these pains which she believed vouched her to understand and speak for the disenfranchised, with whom she shared a similar life of agony. The way Smith connects her painful life story with those of others who share similar if not worse conditions is, in fact, quite in line with the literary traditions of the eighteenth-century, an era when sensibility and sentimentalism involved “men and women of sorrow who are acquainted with grief – responding to it in others, suffering it themselves” (McGann, *The Poetics* 7). Even though the two traditions, sensibility and sentimentalism are frequently and mistakenly used interchangeably, McGann draws a distinction between the two:

Although the two styles bleed into each other and cannot always be clearly distinguished...the discourse of sensibility is the ground on which the discourse of sentiment gets built. In terms of the crucial mind/body diad that shaped the originary philosophical discussions, sensibility emphasizes the mind in the body, sentimentality the body in the mind. The distinction is a rough one, but it corresponds to discernible features of writing and cultural attitude. (7).

As he himself also notes, this definition is hardly self-explanatory. The distinction that McGann is trying to make here is that while sensibility is about sympathizing with the sufferings of the others, sentimentalism is more self-involved and is about the emotions of/for the self. In that sense, as Christopher Nagle puts it, there is a social dimension to sensibility, which involves emotions, sociability and sympathy (46). All these resonances of the word busied the minds of the intellectuals and came to characterize their attitude to others, particularly to the underprivileged.

In this context, for Loraine Fletcher, the word “sensibility” means “sympathy with suffering, a tendency to impulse and rashness, a contempt for traditional forms, love of nature and a taste for literature, painting and music” (2). This definition is inclusive of the elements that that will be studied in this chapter as they are seen as important parts of the British Romantic movement: Smith’s sympathy for the “others,” which is an umbrella term that be used for categories marked by alterity: the French, women, the poor, and animals. As a politicized figure, Charlotte Smith was quite perceptive about the condition and suffering of the “other” and was capable of sympathizing with and relating to the subjugated groups in her world. To this end, this chapter intends to discuss Charlotte Smith’s critique of abuse and persecution while problematizing the English account of nationalism, imperialism, and capitalism in these overtly political poems. In so doing, the chapter will focus on poet’s attitude to nation and xenophobia, national stereotypes, class conflict, slavery, colonization, and women’s suffering in her some selected verse from her *Elegiac Sonnets*, blank verse epic poem *The Emigrants* (1793), *Beachy Head*, (1807) and her volume of poetry for children *Conversations Introducing Poetry*. For McGann, an important sub-genre of sensibility is “the literature of the child” which “assumes a particularly telling form when a mother appears [to be] the medium of the

child's inarticulate life" (*The Poetics* 65), which makes Smith's verse for children an original yet integral part of this chapter<sup>62</sup>.

The argument in this chapter is that, even though there is an Augustan elitism in Smith's earlier poetry, she feels increasing sympathy with those in need and extends her sympathies to the marginal and the impoverished, with whom she can relate on a personal level. Due to their similar fates, Smith believes that she is entitled to narrate the stories and advocate the rights of the disenfranchised. Similar to the argument in Chapter Three, again we see that while attempting to present the historical and national "others," Smith tries to adopt an eminent, grand vision which would grant her a position of authority. However, she cannot maintain her position of sublimity and authority for long and, instead, lowers her poetic eye to the individual stories of the victims and associates herself with them as a woman in distress or a selfless mother, which is a role that is socially acceptable and normative. In her *The Emigrants*, she denounces war and sympathizes with the French expatriates who had to leave their motherland due to the violence unleashed during the Reign of Terror. The most important reason why Smith can feel the misery of the "Catholic other" is because at one point in her life, she also experienced an involuntary exile on the other side of the Channel. Maybe rather than the physical exile she lived, her self-inflicted exile becoming her living practice was more traumatic, Smith can relate to the emigrants as a woman who feels in exile in her home country because she is a social outcast owing to her position as a single mother, female poet with radical political sensibilities. Hence, she cannot help but feel closer ties with the mother figures in her long blank-verse poem regardless of their social position. At a time when femininity and motherhood were equated and re-conceptualized in a new light in pre-industrial England, Smith not only underlines her motherhood to attract readers' sympathy that she risks losing with her harsh critiques of

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<sup>62</sup> The reason why I say "original" here is because *Conversations* have not been analysed from the perspective of sensibility.

bureaucracy and politics, but also draws attention to the woman's body and the inevitable sense of alienation women across the borders feel. In *Beachy Head* too, Smith continues her critique of patriotic discourses that aim to divide and rule: she clearly condemns narratives that juxtapose the French and the English as opposites and provides her own unique narrative of history. She also criticizes colonial pursuits and materialism as they eventually inflict harm on others. Finally, in *Conversations Introducing Poetry*, Smith introduces the character of Mrs. Talbot, a mother-teacher who teaches her children a new sense of ethics when interacting with nature. In this short volume of poetry and prosaic dialogues between the mother and her two children Emily and George, Smith mentions the fear and terror different animals are subject to at the hands of humans: fish, birds, insects, hedgehogs, as well as plants and trees – native or collected from different corners of the world during imperial pursuits – are all victimized or fear being mistreated by humans. Mrs. Talbot functions as the sound of sensibility, teaching children to be caring and loving when handling non-human beings. Smith also conspicuously hints at the fact that the very same ideology responsible for the oppression of women is also the agent behind the tyranny over animals and colonial subjects. In a form of realism that is hardly common in children's literature, Smith passes judgment on the wrongs of man and proposes an ecological sensibility.

#### **4.1. Class Consciousness, Anti-Militarism, and Motherhood**

In her earlier poetry, Smith seems to have her affiliations more with the genteel class that she was born into than with the unprivileged. She emphasizes this background in her prefaces to attract a gentler group of readers. By the time she published her *Elegiac Sonnets*, she was no longer a member of the country gentry, she had given birth to eleven children, two of whom had already died, and she was imprisoned in the King's Bench with her husband. Still, in her Preface she created a title for herself: Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, in Sussex, referring to her childhood home, which she left years ago, maybe in an effort to

recuperate her public image. As Fletcher says, “Charlotte’s own class bias as a daughter of landed gentry never deserted her” (171), and this Augustan elitism can be seen in her Sonnet IX, for instance, where she is slightly condescending toward the shepherd figure. There is a sense of snobbery in her disdain of the shepherd whom she believes has an easier existence because he takes life for granted and does not question his reality:

Blest is yon shepherd, on the turf reclined,  
Who on the varied clouds which float above  
Lies idly gazing — while his vacant mind  
Pours out some tale antique of rural love!  
Ah! he has never felt the pangs that move  
Th' indignant spirit, ...  
Nor his rude bosom those fine feelings melt,  
Children of Sentiment and Knowledge born. (1-6, 11-12)

In this 1784 poem, sensibility and reflection are reserved for those born to a privileged class, as the capitalized “Knowledge” suggests: because they are blessed with education, the argument goes, they can feel and question their reality better, which makes them superior to the rural people who are blessed with ignorance and enjoy a life of indolence<sup>63</sup>. In her later poetry, she begins to imagine the rural poor in “a less patronizing way” (Fletcher 49) and finds a more sympathetic tone when describing those in need: In her “Elegy,” for instance, she portrays the miseries of a woman who is mourning for the loss of her father and lover, which reminds us of Wordsworth’s 1798 poem “The Female Vagrant.” In Smith’s poem, the poetic persona is described as the “Victim of Despair” (15) and is granted her own voice to articulate the pain that she has to endure, which makes her more relatable and lifelike. In “The Dead Beggar” she portrays the pain an upper-class woman feels in a beggar’s funeral:

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<sup>63</sup> Her Augustan class-consciousness can also be seen in her poems dedicated to aristocrats, like Sonnet XVIII dedicated to the Earl of Egremont where she celebrates his “glorious ancestry” (2). She remarks, “In birth, and wealth, and honors, great thou art! / But nobler in thy independent mind” (9-10).

Swells then thy feeling heart, and streams thine eye  
O'er the deserted beings, poor and old...  
Mourn'st thou, that *here* the time-worn sufferer ends (1-2, 5)

The glimpses of sensibility Smith finds in the above-mentioned poems as well as “The Peasant of the Alps” and “The Forest Boy” where she also introduces her anti militarism peak in her two long poems, *The Emigrants* and *Beachy Head* where she gets very political and open about her criticism of oppression.

In *The Emigrants*, which aims to present the miserable conditions of the French emigrants fleeing from the Reign of Terror for England, Smith not only touches upon an existing political situation, but also articulates her anti-war philosophy and lays bare how wars harm mothers and children in particular. While she abhors war and characterizes military pursuits as masculine endeavours, she cherishes Liberty and Peace, for both of which she uses feminine pronouns. Furthermore, she goes beyond the dominant nationalist ideologies of the time and extends her sympathies to the French people, even to the royal family, despite her Revolutionary aspirations. Due to her compassion for the emigres, Smith was accused of having a change of heart regarding her radical sympathies. However, her political standing was far from the implications of these accusations. In her treatment of the emigrants as “political refugees” and stretching her sympathies to them (Keane 45), she draws parallels between her disenfranchised situation and that of the emigrants. Smith relates to the French on a personal level, feels for their pain and calls for a humanitarian compassion that necessitates overlooking age long prejudices. Similar to *Beachy Head* in which she suggests that England and France were once geographically one and the same, in *The Emigrants* she argues that the pains people suffer or the love that they have for their children – whether French or British - make them all the same, hence defying the dichotomy of *us versus them*. This long poem also reveals Smith's absolute belief in the ideals of the French Revolution; she wholeheartedly objects to abuse of power in any shape or form, whether it

happens on her side or on the other side of the English Channel. Regardless of nationalities, the French clerk who abuses his power by presenting false artefacts to his congregate, or English politicians using legislations to subdue women, or upper classes universally exploiting peasants, Smith defies exploitation in any form or shape and cherishes love, compassion, equality and liberty for all humanity.

In *Beachy Head*, Smith once again challenges the prevalent conceptions of nation and time, and dwells on the futility of war waged for the sake of glory and patriotism. Problematizing the concept of nationality by charting the history of Beachy Head which has been invaded by many different commanders throughout its troubled history, Smith explains that all those glorious soldiers who died there are now lying side by side in the land where a peasant is grazing his herd. Hence, Smith concludes, the endeavour of the farmer is much more meaningful than waging war against an enemy who is in fact not so different from “us.” Smith further extends her criticism of nationalism by condemning colonialism, which enriches some at the expense of impoverishing others. Once again, she argues that the possession of material gains through abuse of power and exploitation is unethical and hence unacceptable. For Smith, all these materialist pursuits are in vain because the ultimate truth is in nature: humanity is not superior to nature, to her accepting and internalizing laws of life, and making peace with death is the ultimate human reality.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, Charlotte Smith aligned herself very strongly with the radical political views and never attempted to hide her sympathy for the ideals of the French Revolution, especially in her prose work. The republican cause that valued change and liberty excited Smith as it did many other women writers. However, the revolution which aroused the blood of young intellectuals and writers in its early days, took a violent toll in early September, 1792, when the Parisian mob killed approximately half of the 2,600 people held in prisons and the Jacobins insisted on getting rid of the monarchy for the sake

of a republic. Subsequent to the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, “the nation veered towards chaos” (Fry 80), and the glorious days of the Revolution were followed by Robespierre’s Reign of Terror. The tumultuous times compelled thousands to desert their country and seek refuge elsewhere; among these émigrés were aristocrats, who were terrified at the castle burnings in the countryside, and priests who refused to accept the civil constitution of the clergy (Fry 80). Many arrived on the South Coast at night by rowing boat, hardly with anything else than the clothes they had on. The coming of the French emigrants prompted discussions regarding national identity and charity. As Linda Colley explains in *Britons: Forging the Nation*, the eighteenth century was significant in Britain’s creation of a national identity: the critical period between 1707, the Act of Union which joined Scotland to England and Wales, and 1837, the formal beginning of the Victorian age, was a time when the British national identity “was forged” (1) by putting themselves against “an obviously alien ‘Them’” (6) which, during the Romantic period, was mostly the French. The Protestant British now had the chance to offer Christian charity to the Catholic French and “offered opportunities for extending Britain’s ideological superiority and national pride” (Craciun 200).

During these difficult times, despite all the financial difficulties they were going through, Charlotte Smith and her family offered shelter to groups of emigrants in their residence, a deed which Smith’s biographer Loraine Fletcher considers “an extraordinary act of kindness given her anxiety then about duns and debts” (191). From first-hand experience with the emigrants and what she learned from their stories, Smith concluded that “many of the Revolution’s victims were innocent of anything more than an accident of birth” (192). Maybe more than making room for the émigrés in her own house, what makes this issue of the French émigrés so personal for Charlotte Smith was the fact that her daughter, and her eldest and favourite, Augusta fell in love with one of the immigrants. Alexandre Marc-Constant de Foville was an aristocrat and a soldier whose estate in Normandy was seized shortly before he escaped to Brighton around

November. He and Augusta fell in love and decided to get married as soon as possible. Alexandre de Foville convinced Charlotte that he loved Augusta, which made Charlotte quite happy, thinking that her daughter “would make the love-marriage denied to her” (Fletcher 196-197). Indisputably, Smith spoke with both her son-in-law and other exiles during the months before Augusta’s marriage. Thus, *The Emigrants* is undeniably an outcome of Smith’s empathy for the unfortunate and is partially a plea for tolerance and compassion for the French expatriates, with whom she once shared a similar fate when she accompanied her husband in his exile in Normandy in 1784-85.

*The Emigrants* is a very personal response to all these political events that are taking place around her. In her poetic practice, she seems to be reversing the feminist motto, the personal is political into the political is personal as she cannot help but openly reveal her political stance and sympathy for the distressed in her poem. But for a woman to occupy a political space or standing in the eighteenth-century was not considered proper or acceptable. As Marion Ross writes, a woman with a political attitude was doomed to occupy “a position of dissent”:

Simply to speak about politics is to place oneself *against* the political establishment, where women’s role is normatively defined solely by silent obeisance... For her, to speak politics is automatically to assault the status quo. Her primary problem is how to speak politics without being contaminated by the moral compromises which characterize mainstream politics. (92)

As a woman writing from the margin, Smith definitely belongs to Ross’ tradition of dissent, which she solidifies with her stance in *The Emigrants*. In an age when English patriotism is being formulated, she emphasizes with the Catholic French who are traditionally seen as the antagonist of the Protestant English. In her dedication to William Cowper whom she admires deeply, she explains her hope that her poem will be a bridge between the two nations:

Your philanthropy, dear Sir, will induce you, I am persuaded, to join with me in hoping, that this painful exile may finally lead to the extirpation of that reciprocal hatred so unworthy of great and enlightened nations; that it may tend to humanize both countries, by convincing each, that good qualities exist in the other; and at length annihilate the prejudices that have so long existed to the injury of both. (Smith, *The Poems* 133)

In her humanitarian attempt to show her compassion for France, which at one point in her life offered her refuge, Smith depicts the war-stricken country and the state of its citizens. She begins her critique of war by depicting the prevalent condition of France arguing that the violence that has been going on has nothing to do with the Revolution or with liberty. For Smith, war and violence unleashed on people are embarrassing and appalling for everyone, the violent scenes make “The sick heart shudder” and people “[blush] for [their] species” (*The Emigrants* 67-68; bk. 2):

*There* the trumpet's voice  
Drowns the soft warbling of the woodland choir;  
And violets, lurking in their turfy beds  
Beneath the flow'ring thorn, are stain'd with blood.  
There fall, at once, the spoiler and the spoil'd;  
While War, wide-ravaging, annihilates  
The hope of cultivation... Lo! the suffering world,  
Torn by the fearful conflict, shrinks, amaz'd,  
From Freedom's name, usurp'd and misapplied. (68-73, 79-81;  
bk. 2)

Smith's combination of natural elements like “violets” and the choice of the word “cultivation” suggests that war is conflicting with the life-giving, fertile and feminine creative energy of the earth. To her, and many others, war is not only inhumane and brutal, but also terminative of life, happiness and prosperity and a universal disgrace to humankind. Hence, the war is killing not only hope but also regeneration in nature. To Smith, the fact that mankind is capable of inflicting harm and destruction on its own kind is unacceptable:

Woes such as these does Man inflict on Man;  
And by the closet murderers, whom we style  
Wise Politicians; are the schemes prepar'd,  
Which, to keep Europe's wavering balance even,  
Depopulate her kingdoms, and consign  
To tears and anguish half a bleeding world (*The Emigrants* 319-  
324; bk. 2)

For Smith, whose son was maimed at war,<sup>64</sup> wars are bloody games of deceitful politicians who cause unimaginable loss and pain to families left behind. Yet, it is not only the politicians who abuse their power and injure their public; Smith is equally blunt in her criticism of the French clergy which once:

held forth  
To kneeling crowds the imaginary bones,  
Of Saints suppos'd, n pearl and gold enchas'd,  
And still with more than living Monarchs' pomp  
Surrounded; was believ'd by mumbling bigots  
To hold the keys of Heaven (*The Emigrants* 132-137; bk. 2)

The fact that Smith writes this poem to voice her support for the French emigrants seems to contradict with what she is doing here. Although the French clergy is among those new comers, they cannot escape from the poet's condemnation of their exuberant gratification in luxury and power back in France. This "simultaneous tone of hospitality and hostility" (Keane 46) shows Smith's utter rejection of oppression and abuse in any way or form; even those that she initially set out to advocate are subject to her sharp tongue. Another explanation for this twist can be explained with reference to Ross' concept of dissent: as a female poet stepping on masculine territory by passing judgment on political events, and writing poetry, Smith might be feeling uncomfortable about the extent of her nonconformity, and in order not to lose the support of her mostly English readers who are newly discovering their patriotic sentimentalism, she might be avoiding an idealized depiction of the French system. By underlining

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<sup>64</sup> Her son Charles was wounded in France. He continued to serve in the army and died of yellow fever during a trip to the West Indies to settle debts against the Smith state (Fry 13).

the corruption that led to the Revolution in the first place, Smith is not only stating her firm opposition to abuse and manipulation, but also flattering the pride of her readers and warning them against possible negative consequences of such indulgence and abuse.

She also denounces the French nobility for their lowly treatment of the poor and their lack of ethics when acquiring wealth. The “bare-foot” peasants “whose hard hands / Produc'd the nectar he could seldom taste” (*The Emigrants* 172-173; bk. 2) and humble abbé:

Witness'd a life of purest piety,  
While the meek tenants were, perhaps, unknown  
Each to the haughty Lord of his domain,  
Who mark'd them not; the Noble scorning still  
The poor and pious Priest. (*The Emigrants* 182-186; bk. 2)

To Smith, the French nobility’s greatest debauchery was to consider themselves superior to the common men; “Nurs’d in the velvet lap of luxury,” (238) Smith argues, the aristocracy’s self-indulged vanity as well as its “ill-acquired wealth” were the source of the social corruption which eventually unleashed great terror on the nation and Europe at large. Here she manages to align herself with the poor and distance herself from the aristocracy in a way that she could not in her previous poetry. Another reason why she can sympathize with the poor is because she has been victimized by “legal crimes” (*The Emigrants* 36; bk. 1) in England and now she stands firmly against “legaliz’d power abused” (*The Emigrants* 284; bk. 2). By mentioning the fact that she has been victimized in England as well as the abuse of power by the clergy and aristocrats in France, Smith clearly defies any act of power abuse or violation of rights regardless of nationalities. Her “acute political consciousness” (Lokke, "The Mild Dominion" 94) awakened by her own marginalization and victimization as a woman allows her to transcend the nationalistic dichotomies, and approach the issue of social hierarchy, economic inequality and human rights violations on a more global

scale and extend her sympathies to anyone that has been hurt the way that she has been. Thus, she uses this wisdom to assert that all people under the same sun are equal and that the manmade differences that set us apart are artificial when she cries: “Teach the hard hearts / Of rulers, that the poorest kind.../Is equal to the imperious Lord” (*The Emigrants* 426-429; bk. 2). She claims that the war against France is a scheme of “closet murderers, whom we style / Wise Politicians” (160).

In the second book of her *The Emigrants*, Smith further refers to rustic community and draws the reader’s attention to the rural British landscape which is far from idyllic, but stricken with disease and poverty:

Alas! in rural life, where youthful dreams  
See the Arcadia that Romance describes,  
Not even Content resides!--In yon low hut  
Of clay and thatch, where rises the grey smoke  
Of smold'ring turf, cut from the adjoining moor,  
The labourer, its inhabitant, who toils  
From the first dawn of twilight, till the Sun  
Sinks in the rosy waters of the West,  
Finds that with poverty it cannot dwell;  
For bread, and scanty bread, is all he earns  
For him and for his household--Should Disease,  
Born of chill wintry rains, arrest his arm,  
Then, thro' his patch'd and straw-stuff'd casement, peeps  
The squalid figure of extremest Want;  
And from the Parish the reluctant dole,  
Dealt by th' unfeeling farmer, hardly saves  
The ling'ring spark of life from cold extinction (177-193; bk. 2)

The picture of the peasant that the poet draws is miserable: working in arduous conditions, dwelling in a miserable house, and barely making ends meet. Similar to the French peasants who have been poorly treated by the nobility, the British country-dwellers are also wretched, which may eventually lead to an uprising similar to that in the neighbouring country. Hence, Smith calls the British to take a hard look at themselves, or in her own words, “Study a lesson that concerns ye much,” if they want to evade such a disaster in the future:

that if oppress'd too long,  
The raging multitude, to madness stung,  
Will turn on their oppressors; and, no more  
By sounding titles and parading forms  
Bound like tame victims, will redress themselves! (*The Emigrants* 333-337; bk. 1)

She warns that unless the country revises its methods, soon its “fair Order sink” and “lawless Anarchy / O’erturn celestial Freedom’s radiant throne” (*The Emigrants* 342; bk. 1). The implication that England may suffer a turmoil similar to that in France if its ways are not changed is a serious criticism directed at her mother land as well as one of the many similarities that Smith is trying to find between the two countries, negative and hopeless as they might be. For Nagle, “[s]ensibility is the shorthand for a dominant cultural belief in feeling as the glue that holds society together” (5), but in *The Emigrants* the function of sensibility is different: in fact, it is not connecting or “gluing” Smith to her own society; it is doing the exact opposite. The feeling of sensibility she feels for those in need leads her to critique the ways of England and connect more closely with people on a global scale, as long as they do not terrorize others, of course.

Even though sensibility and empathizing with the needy are cherished by the literary traditions of the eighteenth century, for a woman to write political criticisms as openly as Smith does is not without its problems. As a woman poet who is already treading on masculine territory, as poetry-writing is traditionally regarded as a masculine pursuit due to the dominant conception of inspiration mechanism, a woman poet with a political stance is in trouble twice as much: in a status of “double dissent,” putting her in a unique conundrum. The political woman poet needs to devise a method to reinstate her poetic authority while balancing “a chaste conscience with faithful submission to the ‘politic father’” (Ross 93). She cannot run the risk of remaining silent or disrupting the status quo any more than she has already done. She is aware that she is walking on a slippery slope trying to achieve balance between her normative feminine role

and transgressive authorial identity. For Smith, this act of balancing the two fundamental parts of her nature while writing about her emotions for the disenfranchised involved providing a historical account to establish her authority. In an effort to begin the poem in full command, from a point of eminence, Smith sets the poem on the cliffs at Brighton on “a morning in November, 1792.” As in her earlier verse as in *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith again establishes herself as the narrator and stands on a mountain top to give us her general impressions and an account of the current historical events. What is interesting and unique in Smith’s account of the Revolution’s aftermath is how she fails to adopt the grand perspective of a historian. Instead, she chooses to focus on the minute details and individual stories. This feminine sensibility and attention to specificities rather than the totality of the situation not only recalls her inability to imitate the tradition of the sublime analysed in the previous chapter, but also indicates a new mode of history writing that came into fruition in the eighteenth century. In *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830*, Gerald Newman charts the configuration of the English nationalism to the eighteenth century which witnessed a new interest in the native language and literature as well as a “symptomatic” revival of national historical studies (114). This revival of historical studies, eventually, produced two historiographical models: The first is the large project often characterized as the grand march of history. Deriving from the conventions of classical history writing where there is a focus on politics and statecraft yielding to a linear narrative, this first model retained enormous prestige into the eighteenth century, as the historical account of Edward Gibbon, William Robertson, and David Hume illustrate. The second mode of historiography emphasizes a narrative description of minutiae, which examines records of a single place or group over a few years, typically no longer than a decade or two, such as the record of economy of silk weavers in Lyons just before the French Revolution in 1789. In this second model, personal experience, eyewitness accounts, and even “spectatorial sympathy” are largely used, so by it has a more subjective tone to

it (Kelley 287-288)<sup>65</sup>. This general split in the way historical events are narrated is also associated with gender dichotomies; the late eighteenth-century and Romantic-era critics insisted that the grand history modelled on Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) had been and should remain "the work of male historians," whereas the second model which adopts the women's eye keen on details and stories of people have a more feminine vibe to it (Kelley 287). For Jacqueline Labbe, Smith's war poetry, despite her "strategies of displacement" cannot "transcend the historical moment rupture" and stays firmly grounded in material reality (*Writing Romanticism* 51). Echoing my argument in Chapter Three, then, I argue that Smith fails to adopt a generalized, eminent perspective on history-writing and limits herself to the stories of the individuals. By so doing and passing her own individual judgment on the pains individuals suffer, Smith once again adopts a feminine style of writing that detains from objective truth or scientific methodology, but focuses on the human factors and emotions that make each individual experience exclusive. For Behrendt, it is only natural for the female poet to restrict her discussion of war with stories of individuals. He explains that there were pragmatic reasons for why women could not engage in explicit anti-war writing as they would be economically, socially, and politically deprived of assistance from community should they be seen as "disloyal." This predicament eventually urged oppositional women to implement "a strategy of indirection or substitution" (*British Women* 86):

they typically stressed the suffering inflicted on private individuals (and their families) by war-making, concentrating on sentiment and pathos to carry their arguments against not *this* particular war (and its nationalistic imperatives) but rather against war in general (and its universal consequences). They frequently employed the trope of the nation-family to emphasize by analogy how the devastation of the family parallels the inevitable

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<sup>65</sup> The two modes of history writing are uncannily similar to Burke's distinction of the sublime and the beautiful, which I explained in Chapter III. Once again we see two traditions of writing where one is more inclined to adopt the eminent perspective, and the other to focus on the minute.

destruction also of the state, the intimate microcosm of the former figuring the public macrocosm of the latter. (87)

In Smith's poem, we see this pattern repeating itself: starting with the prospect view on a mountain top, in about a hundred lines, the poetic persona lowers her eye to the stories of the suffering individuals:

Behold, in witness of this mournful truth,  
A group approach me, whose dejected looks,  
Sad Heralds of distress! (*The Emigrants* 94-96; bk. 1)

Following Behrendt's formula, in her discussion of how war injures people, Smith especially focuses on groups that she can relate to as a woman: she uses her gender to reconfigure her position in the society, alludes to her status as a suffering mother who has experienced exile. The reference to her femininity and motherhood is important here, as I will explain further in the next section, Smith repeatedly draws the readers' attention to the fact that she is a mother and a woman in need, which I believe is a tactical manoeuvre.

The eighteenth century was an important period in the conceptualization of feminine roles and motherhood, and for Vivien Jones the economic transformation England was going through was largely responsible for the construction of gender roles. As I also briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, England's economy was changing from a feudal organization to "pre-industrial capitalism" which led to the ascendancy of the middle class (Jones 10). In this new economic organization, Jones explains:

to have, or to become, a "leisured" wife was a measure of social success, underwriting the dependence of that economy on the isolated unit of the nuclear family, serviced by an invisible working class. According to one view, women's role within this model is passively functional. They are the objects of exchange on which male social mobility depends, and conduct literature is similarly reflective, a means of reconciling women to a domestic, deferential position. (10)

In redefining the gender roles, motherhood in its new context came to be associated with production, which not only clinched the centuries-long subordination of women, but also equated “childbearing women” with “a national resource” (R. Perry 206), and as natural resources, mothers drew the responsiveness of cultural attention. By the middle of the eighteenth century:

[w]riters began to wax sentimental about maternity, to accord it high moral stature, and to construct it as noble, strong, and self-sacrificial. Admiration for mothers – and for maternal devotion – came to be a banner under which the newly constituted middle class marched. (R. Perry 214)

This valorization of motherhood appears natural to us, the twenty-first century reader because, as Kristeva and Goldhammer put it in “Stabat Mater,” we are still living in a society that equates women with creation and motherhood (133). However, the eighteenth-century conceptualization of maternity was a break with a long tradition that associated conception with an active male agent and a passive female recipient who provided a nurturing but a possibly dangerous environment for the baby to grow up in. In a very long account of the Western tradition starting with Aristotle, Margaret Homans reports the narrative of conception as follows: for Aristotle, the woman’s role in conception was entirely passive, and therefore inferior, as he believed that an embryo was formed only when menstrual blood was activated by semen. A similar argument was also put forth by Aquinas, who supported that “the female generative virtue provides the substance but the active male virtue makes it into the finished product.” The limited scientific findings of the seventeenth century were in line with the canon and further instated that the fetus originates from the father and is simply sustained and fed by the mother. The simple conclusion drawn from this theory was that the father is the creator of the form and spirit, and the mother is a passive contributor to the matter (154). Homans writes:

This fantasy, that the child originates in and belongs to the father and that the mother provides merely the environment in which the child grows, persisted throughout the nineteenth century in ordinary assumptions about maternity, as the evidence of guidance books for mothers suggests. (156)

These guidance books revealed another commonly held belief which was that the mood of the mother was permanently transferred to the disposition of the child through the mother's blood. Hence, for any possible character flaws or mood swings in the child, it was the mother's unsatisfied desires or longings during her pregnancy to be blamed. Therefore, mothers were advised self-control and restraint on their emotions for the wellbeing of their children (156).

In addition to the scientific and (pseudo-) scientific myths regarding maternity, the Western concept of motherhood was also significantly shaped by another ideological figure: Virgin Mary, who "not only represents an exaggerated version of the Aristotelian view of women's passive role in reproduction, but it also specifically articulates this view in terms of language, in the myth of the Virgin's impregnation by the Word" (Homans 156). To Homans, virgin birth was far from being an empowering image for women, but quite the opposite. Similar to the Aristotelian account, the virgin myth underestimated the role of women in conception and emphasized the "intactness" of her body as she remained a virgin even after birth. The glorification and deification of Christ, in fact, required such holiness and abnormal perfection of his mother:

the point of Christ's incarnation is that, born of a mortal woman, he unites God's spirit with human flesh; and yet in order to preserve the notion of his holiness, his mother was increasingly depicted as abnormally perfect herself, until in 1854, her immaculate conception (the belief that she too was conceived without sex) became dogma too, effectively neutralizing the idea that the incarnation makes Christ human. Christ as God's word must pass through a mother's body, but in as spiritual and nonphysical a manner as possible, scarcely touching or being touched by female flesh. As Warner points out, the worship of Mary as mother is predicated on a profound hatred for women's bodies. (Homans 157)

The reduction of Mary's role in the reproduction and the exaltation of her motherhood was to the extent that she became the role model for all women to aspire to as little a role in the creation of new beings – of children and of creative works as well. The reduction of women's role to mere transmitters of children or any form of artistic creation from their "spiritual, paternal origin into embodied form and then out into the world" results in the absolute vilification of and evasion from the "mother's powerful flesh," which, to Homans, is the hallmark of the symbolic order (160).

Within this context, the revision, reconceptualization and adulation of motherhood did not have a positive impact on the lives of English women; it, in fact, promoted an even fuller domestication. The more women's lives were defined in relation to maternity, paradoxically the more it led to an aggravated "devaluation of everything women did relative to men's accomplishments" (Homans 22). As the "grand function of woman...is, and ever must be, *Maternity*," women were not welcomed to participate in other social arenas such as politics or writing that were traditionally masculine territory and seen to be "in conflict with women's 'proper duties'" (22). Hence, the cultural eagerness to celebrate maternity and women, bizarrely, resulted in women's further confinement and invisibility in the society. In literature, possibly the only area where women could produce was "sensibility" which was seen in line with the feminine role of the compassionate caretaker.

In *The Emigrants*, Smith dedicates a significant portion of the poem to the representation of victimized mothers; she presents us with three mother figures that suffer from loss in the terror of war created and fought by men, and these women are similar to Smith in that they are also in distress and exiles in a system that utterly hurts them. In that sense, as Jacqueline Labbe argues, Smith's presentation of motherhood "fuses a personal identity as Mother with portraits of hunted and despairing mothers physically affected by war...in this poem the

experience of mothers chimes with exile and alienation, and signals Smith's rejection of culture" (*Charlotte Smith* 81). From a position of feminine sensibility, Smith condemns all parties involved in war-making and the apparatus of warfare. The first mother figure appears around the middle of the first book: Smith takes "gay unconscious children" who amuse themselves with some "fretted stone, or glossy shell / Or crimson plant marine" in the middle of the destruction (204-205; bk. 1). Smith approaches their playfulness with sympathy, and remarks "Happy age! / Unmindful of the miseries of Man!" (210-211; bk. 1). Right next to them stands the mother who feels the "miseries of Man" to the fullest:

Alas! too long a victim to distress,  
Their Mother, lost in melancholy thought,  
Lull'd for a moment by the murmurs low  
Of sullen billows, wearied by the task  
Of having here, with swol'n and aching eyes  
Fix'd on the grey horizon, since the dawn  
Solicitously watch'd the weekly sail  
From her dear native land, now yields awhile  
To kind forgetfulness, while Fancy brings,  
In waking dreams, that native land again! (212-220; bk. 1)

Homesick and grief-stricken, this mother figure longs for her past aristocratic lifestyle as she imagines the painted galleries and rich rooms of Versailles where people "paid willing homage...to empire" (225-226; bk. 1). Even though she is a member of the noble class with access to power and material gains, Smith does not approach her with the same cynicism as that she has for the priest discussed above. In fact, the detail "too long a victim to distress" seems to suggest that her life in France was not happy despite the material comfort surrounding her. In her depiction of the mother figure, Smith avoids condemnation but rather highlights her femininity and physical manifestations of her pain and motherhood when she points out her "tearful eyes and heaving bosom round" (229; bk. 1). By referring to the body of the mother, Smith defies the traditionally abstract glorification of the mother and presents her pain through earthy imagery. In fact, the images of

“milk” represented here with the mother’s bosom and tears are classical allusions to motherhood. As Kristeva and Goldhamer argue:

Milk and tears are the signs *par excellence* of the *Mater dolorosa* who began invading the West in the eleventh century and reached a peak in the fourteenth. From then on she has never ceased to fill the Marian visions of all those, men and women (or frequently male child, female child) who suffer the anguish of some maternal frustration (143)

By referring to the mother’s bosom and tears, then, Smith is creating here a Lady of Sorrows, or *Mater dolorosa*, from the French other. The holiness attributed to the mother is quite subversive in that Smith ignores past hostilities between nations or classes, and valorises her French counterpart in her elegant mourning for everything that she has lost in the masculine war.

Smith builds a stronger tie of feminine sensibility with the second mother figure that she presents later in the poem. In Book II, Smith introduces the French royal family. Even though it seems counter-intuitive that Smith, with her radical political sympathies, could relate to the French monarchy, her maternal self cannot help but feel compassion for the royal mother and son. The young prince Louis, heir presumptive of France who was seven years old when his father was executed earns Smith’s sincere compassions. As Stuart Curran glosses in his notes to the poem, the young prince died in 1795, two years after the publication of Smith’s poem. At the time of Smith’s writing of the poem, he was imprisoned with the other members of his family (Smith, *The Poems* 154). Smith calls the young prince:

Innocent prisoner!--most unhappy heir  
Of fatal greatness, who art suffering now  
For all the crimes and follies of thy race;  
Better for thee, if o'er thy baby brow  
The regal mischief never had been held (*The Emigrants* 126-  
131; bk. 2)

For Smith, the prince most certainly does not deserve being imprisoned or treated as a traitor simply because he was born a royalty. As a mother Smith does not care about the symbolic importance of the crown or monarchy, or how he needs to be sacrificed for the common good of the people or the republic. On a much basic and human level, Smith thinks about an innocent child who is held captive at the hands of his own people because of misconceived ideas that are far less significant than this boy being held alive. Smith continues penning her compassion for the royal family by extending her empathies to Queen Marie Antoinette. She writes:

Thy wretched Mother, petrified with grief,  
Views thee with stony eyes, and cannot weep!—  
Ah! much I mourn thy sorrows, hapless Queen! (*The Emigrants* 152-  
154; bk. 2)

Once again she relates to the Queen, whom one would expect her to disapprove of owing to her support for the French Revolution, on a much human level – as a mother who understands the terror and agony of another mother fearing for the life of her child. In this critical moment of the poem, Smith evades seeing the French royal family as the Other and feels empathy for them and tries to justify their humanness to the British readers who have for centuries been dictated to persecute the Catholic Other. She comes to see the queen as a grief-stricken mother, a fellow woman in pain who deserves compassion and forgiveness: “Whate’er thy errors were, / Be they no more remember’d” (*The Emigrants* 160-161; bk. 2). She is no longer an “other” for Smith, but a sister she can relate to in this terror of war. After all,

who knows,  
From sad experience, more than I, to feel  
For thy desponding spirit, as it sins  
Beneath procrastinated fears for those  
More dear to thee than life! (*The Emigrants* 169-173; bk. 2)

Smith again typically relates her own personal grief and sense of disillusionment to that of the Queen's. Feeling betrayed by their own country, these two mothers – Smith suggests – share a similar fate of alienation and loneliness. In a period renowned to glorify mothers and motherhood, Smith's representation of the vulnerability and victimization of mothers is striking.

Smith further develops her theme of the mothers' victimization during the time of war with the third mother figure that she introduces in the second book of the poem. This mother is trapped in a wasteland where "like columns of volcanic fire, / The flames of burning villages illum'd / The waste of water" (225-227; bk.2). "[T]he frantic shrieks /Of mothers for their children" (229-230; bk. 2) can be heard from a distance. In this setting, it is a "pity [to be] still alive" (231; bk. 2). The woman is all by herself with her children as her husband is a fighting soldier, and she has to do everything in her power to save her child:

A wretched Woman, pale and breathless, flies!  
And, gazing round her, listens to the sound  
Of hostile footsteps-- No! it dies away:  
Nor noise remains, but of the cataract,  
Or surly breeze of night, that mutters low  
Among the thickets, where she trembling seeks  
A temporary shelter-clasping close  
To her hard-heaving heart, her sleeping child,  
All she could rescue of the innocent groupe  
That yesterday surrounded her. (258-267; bk. 2)

The fact that all she could save from the previous day's attack is her "sleeping child" suggests that the woman has already lost a lot – her home, or maybe other children as can be inferred from "the innocent groupe" that was formerly with her. Victimized by "the lawless soldier" (272; bk. 2), the woman soon suffers the death of the child in her arms, and she soon joins the child in her own demise:

True to maternal tenderness, she tries  
To save the unconscious infant from the storm  
In which she perishes; and to protect

This last dear object of her ruin'd hopes  
From prowling monsters, that from other hills,  
More inaccessible, and wilder wastes,  
Lur'd by the scent of slaughter, follow fierce  
Contending hosts, and to polluted fields  
Add dire increase of horrors-But alas!  
The Mother and the Infant perish both!- (282 – 291; bk. 2)

This figure of the self-sacrificing and grieving mother becomes the epitome of Smith's condemnation of war and its annihilation of maternity. Soldiers who are expected to save and protect women and children that are supposed to be the nation's treasures, as Ross claims, are nonetheless hunted and slaughtered.

Yet, women's ill-treatment is not limited to the times of war and violence, as Smith's own experience proves. She refers to her own sufferings in the hands of bureaucracy and law:

Attempting still,  
With feeble hands and cold desponding heart,  
To save my children from the o'erwhelming wrongs,  
That have for ten long years been heap'd on me!-  
The fearful spectres of chicane and fraud  
Have, Proteus like, still chang'd their hideous forms  
(As the Law lent its plausible disguise). (351-357; bk. 2)

Following the portrayal of three French mothers wronged by war, Smith now relates her own situation to theirs; women are persecuted everywhere, be it by violence or "chicane and fraud," making them feel like the enemy or the exile in their own country through various violations of basic rights. As Jacqueline Labbe writes, "[u]nderlying Smith's imagery is an accusation: even as the Revolution has betrayed its allegiance to Liberty, so too English law has betrayed its commitment to equality" (*Charlotte Smith* 85). Similar to the French mothers' futile efforts to fight the soldiers and save their own and their children's lives, Smith finds herself "feeble" in the grips of the legal system that is meant to protect them. This irredeemable sense of "otherness" is cross-cultural and

central to the female experience, and Smith can tune into this universal feminine alienation *because* she is a mother: after all, “a woman rarely ... experiences passion – love or hate – for another woman, without at some point taking the place of her own mother – without becoming a mother herself” (Kristeva and Goldhammer 150). Janis Birkeland writes that if people understand war in terms of the fear of others and nationalism, it is the powerful that abuse this misconception because then people do not blame the politicians, but the flaw of human nature for the malice. She explains as follows:

fear and “them versus us” thinking ... need treating, but treating them as the root problem can be counterproductive. The problem is better understood in terms of the false dualisms that have been used by powerful interests to divide and rule, such as capitalist / communist, male / female, skilled / unskilled, white / black. These divisions are made plausible and encoded by “hierarchical dualism” – the organizing principle of Patriarchal thought. Ideologies that pretend to subsume gender and other differences under a Western model of Man only reinforce the false dichotomy between Man and “Other” (37).

For the British people, the false dichotomy had been “us, Protestant British” versus “them, Catholic French.” With the revolution, another equation was added to the existing dichotomy, which became “us, the monarchy-ruled Britain” versus “them, the republican French.” Charlotte Smith associated herself more with the French Revolution than the grand narrative of English nationalism. Yet, it is because she surpasses the simplistic binaries of republic versus monarchy or revolution versus ancient regime, she relates to the queen and the crown prince on a much deeper level: she relates to them as a mother and human being who empathizes with the pain and suffering of the others. Smith argues that because she has suffered from “proud oppression, and from legal crimes” of her native land, referring to the incessant lawsuit of inheritance, and because she too has once known “Involuntary exile” (*The Emigrants* 56; bk. 1), referring to her obligatory stay in Normandy, she can feel and speak for the French émigrés more eloquently than others. In an age in which the grand

narrative of nationalism and history writing are so pronounced and significant, Smith goes beyond the traditional mode of history writing by inserting individuals' stories, which add a human touch to narrative. She challenges the false dichotomy of the French versus the British, she can relate to the French emigrants and French sufferers and hopes that her verse is going to be a beam of light on the way to dismantling this national prejudice. By rejecting totalizing discourses and grand narratives that aim to create and solidify the differences, Smith desires to form interconnectivity between different people from different backgrounds and from different nations.

In fact, in her epic *Beachy Head* too, Smith proposes that Britain and France are not so different from each other – historically and geographically. In *Beachy Head*, as in *The Emigrants*, Smith focuses on the similarities rather than the differences between the two nations and hence challenges nationalistic prejudice that terrorized her time. Even in her choice for the setting of the poem, Smith chooses a geopolitically important place: Beachy Head, which, as she indicates in her footnotes to the poem, is “the first land made” when crossing the Channel from the coast of France (Smith, *The Poems* 217). By selecting a locale where the geographical distance between the countries is the smallest, Smith thins the lines that separate the two nations. By noting the geographical differences between the two countries, which I have explained in Chapter Three, she suggests that the two pieces of the land used to be one and the same.

More important for the focus of this chapter, however, is what Smith writes about history and grand narratives of patriotism and nationalism. We soon realize that Beachy Head has a “troubled history,” full of conflict and destruction (Heringman 249). Hence, Smith's presentation of the history of the landscape offers an abundance of ambiguity and contradiction. Smith's narrator seems to open the poem with a patriotic spirit, presenting the imperial pursuits and expansion of England, mentioning “The ship of commerce richly freighted, makes /Her slower progress, on her distant voyage, /Bound to the orient climate”

(*Beachy Head* 41-43). After briefly acknowledging the eminent French invasion, Smith soon returns to her depiction of England's imperial pursuits:

But let not modern Gallia form from hence  
Presumptuous hopes, that ever thou again,  
Queen of the isles! shalt crouch to foreign arms.  
...  
Imperial mistress of the obedient sea;  
But thou, in thy integrity secure,  
Shalt now undaunted meet a world in arms. (*Beachy Head* 143-  
145, 151-153)

Even though Smith's tone in these earlier lines may sound patriotic, nationalistic, and even imperialist, it is reasonable to argue that Smith is adopting a different authorial self that is appealing to the popular taste and desire of her readers. As Jacqueline Labbe contends in *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry, and the Culture of Gender*, Smith adopts different identities in different sections of her texts: in the foreword and earlier pages she adopts a more conventional style and register in an effort to earn the emotional and financial support of her readers, which she needs to earn a living and support her family. In her footnotes, Labbe argues, Smith sounds more authoritative and scientific, and in the rest of the text she is a firm feminist and libertarian (5-12). The same pattern can be observed in *Beachy Head*, too, where the poet starts with the glorious imperial endeavours of England which will never succumb to the impending French in an effort to arouse sympathy and support in her readers as she is a "woman writing in the face of overwhelming sorrows and trials... she appeals to her reader's familiarity with the roles women play, and writes poems accordingly: we see most often the distressed and needy woman, sometimes a romantic damsel, sometimes a devoted mother, sometimes a martyr to sensibility" (5). Here in the opening sentences of *Beachy Head* she adopts conservative nationalism and patriotism, maybe for fear of not losing the support of her readers.

She maintains her conventionalism in her historical account of the cliff's past: beginning in distant ages with a description of its earliest invaders, Smith charts all the invading powers from ancient Scandinavia to Napoleonic France, all the enemies have once tried their chance at occupying and taking control of the territory. As Theresa M. Kelley puts it, "Although there are large temporal gaps between Scandinavian, Norman, and a possible prospective French, invasions, Smith presents all these events as formally successive events" (301). The linearity of this historical survey coupled with the nationalistic emphasis on the British endurance against ever-lasting foreign threat, in fact, reflects Smith's imitation of the Enlightenment and masculine modes of history writing, which soon proves to be temporary and miniscule compared to the rest of her epic masterpiece. Smith loses her focus within a few lines and relapses into a critique of imperialism and ends up flattering France and Norman conquest. To Kelley, this oscillation between the culturally and historically dominant perspective and that of the more "marginal" sympathies may be "to forestall renewed public hostility toward critics who had long been exercised about her Gallic and revolutionary sympathies" (295). Hence, the supposed praise of the imperialist expansion and the military achievements of the past as well as the classical approach to history writing may not go beyond Smith's way of mimicking the conventions of her day to restore what has been left from her reputation. This argument sounds all the more convincing because Smith is clearly not at ease using the grand narratives of her age since she seems to be merging back together England and France by giving the reader not the usual history of England's success, but rather a trivial French naval victory. She writes:

England! 'twas where this promontory rears  
Its rugged brow above the channel wave,  
Parting the hostile nations, that thy fame,  
Thy naval fame was tarnish'd, at what time  
Thou, leagued with the Batavian, gavest to France  
One day of triumph--triumph the more loud,  
Because even then so rare. (*Beachy Head* 155-160)

In her extended footnote<sup>66</sup> to the section, Smith glosses that she refers to the events in 1690 when the French admiral Tourville arrived on the coast of England with a fleet consisting of seventy-eight large ships and twenty-two fire-ships ( Smith, *Poems* 224). Even though the French fail to take advantage of this victory, Smith seizes the opportunity to celebrate a moment of embarrassment for England and a moment of victory for France. This alternate history that Smith provides show that to her “the hostile nations” (*Beachy Head* 156) separated by the channel are not that different for her. She concludes this section remarking that wars and battles are:

a list  
Which, as Fame echoes it, blanches the cheek  
Of bold Ambition; while the despot feels  
The extorted sceptre tremble in his grasp. (*Beachy Head* 163-66)

Smith’s argument is quite clear and in line with the anti-militarist tone of *The Emigrants*: military battles are futile and transitory; one who achieves victory for the time being knows that it will soon be fleeing and thus holds the “extorted sceptre” in his trembling hand, waiting to be overthrown. In the meantime, “the reflecting mind returns / To simple scenes of peace” (*Beachy Head* 224). Hence, almost eleven years before Shelley’s renowned “Ozymandias,” (1818) Smith asserts the ephemerality of national and individual achievement and makes peace with this human truth.

Eventually, Smith puts aside the grand and masculine, and turns her attention to the individual and minute by declaring, “How gladly the reflecting mind returns / To simple scenes of peace and industry” (*Beachy Head* 168-168). Later in the poem, in a footnote, Smith notes that many of the “fortresses or castles built by Stephen of Blois” have been “converted into farm houses,” (Smith, *The Poems*

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<sup>66</sup> To Angela Keane, “a history so ‘grand’ that the narrative cannot be contained in the verse, however, and the details spill over into an extensive note, in a pattern that is repeated throughout *Beachy Head*. The notes themselves are often querulous [*sic*], as though the author cannot decide whether they add to or diminish the authority of her verse (61).

238) as if to suggest that the destruction and death entailed by wars and politics is almost always replaced by the rejuvenating and prosperous nature and human toil. Eventually, the poet eliminates all the distinction between the familiar and the other, the grand and the minute when she writes:

The Conqueror's successors fiercely fought,  
Tearing with civil feuds the desolate land.  
But now a tiller of the soil dwells there,  
And of the turret's loop'd and rafter'd halls  
Has made an humbler homestead – Where he sees,  
Instead of armed foemen, herds that graze  
Along his yellow meadows; or his flocks  
At evening from the upland driv'n to fold. (*Beachy Head* 498-505)

With these lines, Smith not only defies the linear flow of time that demarcates past, present and future but also sees an organic unity of men, though centuries apart, still together on the same land. She also challenges the duality of “us” versus “them.” Smith connects the ancient conqueror with the humble farmer currently living on the land, and thereby challenges man-made categories that persecute people. Contrary to the Wordsworthian pattern where the revolutionary poet turns a nationalist patriot, Smith evolves the other way round and seeks for a looser connection with her father-land. Or, because she has been so severely traumatized by her legal battle, she associates not with Britain but with nature and France. To Smith, military achievements, nationalities, or even historical periods are artificial and unnecessary notions; the ultimate reality is nature and productive endeavour that is based on decent, hard work and not exploitation or restraint.

British women played a prominent public role in the crusade against slavery (Behrendt, *British Women* 155) and like many other women writers of her era, Smith too was critical of England’s imperial pursuits: in fact, considering that her husband Benjamin Smith is the son of a Caribbean merchant whom Charlotte helped in bookkeeping, it would not be wrong to assume that she has genuine

insight into British exploitation of colonies and colonial subjects. Her assessment of abuse resurfaces in *Beachy Head* when she openly condemns the inhumane exploitation of workforce in the colonial plantations for the simple “toys of Nature” (*Beachy Head* 55). She writes, “And they who reason, with abhorrence see / Man, for such gaudes and baubles, violate / The sacred freedom of his fellow man” (*Beachy Head* 57-59). It is interesting that for the second time, Smith aligns herself with “reason” and argues that those who “think” can understand that military and colonial quests are the major reason for the inequalities between different nations. Doing this for the sake of trivial things like gems or raw material is ludicrous.

Amongst all these inequalities and abuses, in *Beachy Head*, there is one figure<sup>67</sup> that earns Smith’s sympathy and compassion: the farmer whose “honest toil” Smith praises (183). He:

braves himself  
The heaviest snow-storm of December’s night,...  
He were content with what the earth affords  
To human labour; even where she seems  
Reluctant most. (184-185,190-192)

Even though nature is not generous and bountiful as is usually depicted, Smith’s hermit is still thankful and appreciative of his simple life. Hence, the poetic persona almost envies the blissful life that he has. Smith reveals her compassion and envy for the simple agrarian life when she writes:

More happy is the hind,  
Who, with his own hands rears on some black moor,  
Or turbary, his independent hut  
Cover’d with heather, when the slow white smoke  
Of smouldering peat arises – A few sheep,  
His best possession, with his children share

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<sup>67</sup> The hermit figure, whom I talked about previously in the sublime section, can also be discussed here but in order not to repeat myself I avoid including it here once again.

The rugged shed when wintry tempests blow (193-199)

The sharp contrast between the farmer's simple life and the complications of the civilized world is seen maybe most clearly in this poem, which is why *Beachy Head* is the closest Smith gets to Romanticism. She not only describes the farmer in a sympathetic light but also yearns for his freedom: "He is free; / The dread that follows on illegal acts / He never feels" (210-212). Her yearning for the simple life becomes even stronger when she recalls her days of childhood, spent in the same region:

I was once happy, when while yet a child,  
I learn'd to love these upland solitudes,  
And, when elastic as the mountain air,  
To my light spirit, care was yet unknown  
And evil unforeseen: - Early it came,  
And childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned,  
A guiltless exile, silently to sigh (282-288)

Smith's earlier lack of identification with the rural poor in *Elegiac Sonnets* which was explored earlier in this chapter, seems to be overcome in her later career; now she can connect with the poor because she is longing for the simplicity of the farmer's life. Unlike her, the farmer can enjoy his liberty, is free from legal restrictions and is satisfied with the little that he has. Smith, on the other hand, is bound – legally and financially; she cannot run away from her responsibilities as a caretaker, she is abused by the legal system that is meant to protect her and is no longer looking at nature with that childhood naiveté as she is deeply immersed in her misery. Hence, the sensibility she feels is a result of her discontentment and disillusionment with her life.

In her two long poems, *The Emigrants* and *Beachy Head*, Charlotte Smith condemns abuse of power, oppression and tyranny in any shape or form, regardless of the perpetrator or the victim. She stretches her sympathies universally to all those that have suffered from cruelty as she has throughout her

life. Being a woman in a nation that typically considers itself masculine in its formulation of identity, Smith is already associated with the marginal, and her sympathies for the French Revolution and French people, her identity as an authoress treading on masculine territory, and her victimization by the legal system that deprives her family of the inheritance they are entitled to are further pushing her to the edges of periphery in her own motherland. Hence, it is comprehensible and predictable that she associates herself with other disenfranchised subjects such as women, emigrants or slaves. What is unique about Smith and what makes her different from her male counterparts is her ability to save herself from morbid contemplations on human mortality, as well as her firm conviction that humanity can achieve the ultimate synthesis of the masculine and the feminine: she believes that as long as a universal code of ethics is established, humanity can live in balance and at peace with one another. Provided that power is not abused, respect is paid and compassion is felt for all living beings - be it women, children, peasants, or slaves – Smith believes that people can create the ideal harmony.

#### **4.2. Animal Rights and the Mother-Teacher**

Romanticism attached special significance to representing positions of alterity and unique and alternative forms of consciousness, which not only refers to the experience and perception of people from various walks of life, but also the representation of animal reality and their anterior consciousness. In her poetry for children, Smith too explored this new terrain to depict the form of “otherness” in animals. Her firm conviction in the alterity of animals is again visible in her juxtaposition of animal consciousness characterized by naiveté and egoistic human exploitation of non-human beings. Smith, like many other Romantics after her, criticizes the Cartesian prioritization of human needs and human consciousness over those of animals and supports an alternative ethics regarding interaction with nature: she compels her readers to acknowledge that animals have their own kind of agency. In so doing, Smith not only becomes an

early advocate of animal rights, but also politicizes the issue by drawing conspicuous parallelisms between the abuse of animals and the abuse of women and colonial subjects.

With animal life making its debut in Romantic poetry, many Romantics adopted animals as part of their poetic subject matter. Known for his commitment to vegetarianism, for instance, Shelley can be named as one of the many Romantics who supported animal rights; in Canto VIII of his *Queen Mab*, he envisions a time when people recognize their kinship with animals: “No longer now / He slays the lamb that looks him the face” (211-212). Robert Burns is just another Romantic poet that is particularly interested in the “brown, furry, feathered or carapaced part of nature” (Kenyon-Jones 145) and openly expresses his sympathies for a mouse whose nest is turned up by his plough. He apologizes:

I'm truly sorry man's dominion,  
Has broken nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion,  
Which makes thee startle  
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,  
An' fellow-mortal! (7-12)

Burns' account points to the similarities between man and mouse: they are after all both “earth-born” and mortal, which basically makes them companions. Even though there are moments of anthropomorphism (attributing human qualities that are “the sole province of humanity” to animals), which, according to Oerleman, is the only way Romantics could capture the alterity or otherness of the animal world, Burns' emphasis on brotherhood and equality is important as this stance supposes that Man and Nature should not be seen as adversaries, but as parts of an organic whole (69-70).

This interest in the animal world can be interpreted as the Romantic rejection of or uprising against the Enlightenment view regarding the superiority of human beings over the non-human world based on dualism. Plumwood explains that

“Dualism is the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by the domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive” (31). Dualisms such as reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, heaven/Earth, and man/woman are the key ones for Western thought, and the former party is considered prioritized over the latter. She upholds that:

in dualism, the more highly valued side (males, humans) is construed as alien to and of a different nature or order of being from the “lower,” inferiorised side (woman, nature) and each is treated as lacking in the qualities which make possible overlap, kinship, or continuity. The nature of each is constructed in polarized ways by the exclusion of qualities shared with the other; the dominant side is taken as primary, the subordinated side is defined in relation to it. Thus woman is constructed as the other, as the exception, the aberration or the subsumed, and man treated as the primary model. The effect of dualism is...to ‘naturalise domination,’ to make it part of the very natures or identities of both the dominant and the subordinated items and thus to appear to be inevitable, ‘natural.’ (32)

Plumwood argues that the historical inferiority of women and nature in the West has been based on a network of assumptions involving a range of closely related dualistic contrasts, especially the dualism of reason and nature, or of humanity and culture on the one side and nature on the other (33). She asserts that dualistic conceptual structures identify women with femininity, the body, Earth, sexuality, and flesh; and men with masculinity, spirit, mind, and power. This implies that men have innate power over both women and nature, a philosophy which continues to operate to the disadvantage of women, nature and the quality of life (Plumwood 21).

This dualistic conceptualization is not a new invention; Marti Kheel affirms that it was highly championed in the Greek world where man is defined as rational and intellectual category and its counterpart, nature, is taken as irrational and senseless. In his analysis of the classical age, Kheel finds a utilitarian ground

that reduces nature and women to thoughtless beings that exist merely to serve the rational Man. He maintains that both Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy contributed to the conception of nature as inert or mindless matter. It was the Aristotelian notion of purpose and function that especially helped to shape the Western world's instrumental treatment of women and nature. According to Aristotle, there was a natural hierarchical ordering in the world within which each being aimed to reach its fullest potential by moving toward fulfilment of its own particular end. Since the highest end of Man was the state of happiness achieved through rational contemplation, the rest of nature was ordered to help Man to attain this ultimate goal. Thus, plants existed to give subsistence to animals, and animals to sustain Man; and the specific function of women, animals, and slaves was to serve as instruments for the attainment of the highest happiness of free, adult Man (246). He maintains that religious teachings also contributed to an instrumental and hierarchical conception of nature. In the Yahwist tradition, animals were created by God as helpers or companions for man; echoing this account is the Biblical version where man is given dominion over all creatures that tread on the earth; predeceasing echoing that report. Unsurprisingly, “[b]oth stories, in their distinct ways, reinforce the notion that women and nature exist only for the purpose of serving ‘Man’” (246-247).

The ancient and Judeo-Christian views of man's superiority over the non-human world was further reinforced by René Descartes, who draws sharp contrasts between human and non-human consciousness, and likens animals to machines, devoid of thought or consciousness. In Descartes' view, animals:

have no mental powers whatsoever, and that it is nature which acts in them, according to the disposition of their organs; just as we see that a clock consisting only of ropes and springs can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can in spite of all our *wisdom*. (48; part 5)

On the flipside, in this account, humans are utterly different and innately superior to the rest of nature owing to their mind. To Descartes the mind and consciousness is either fully present, as in the case of humans, or entirely absent, as in the case of animals. Cartesian definition of consciousness or thought involves multiple mental faculties involving pondering, calculating, willing, perception as well as attention and noticing; since some of these features such as calculating and pondering are particularly human attributes, Descartes concludes that thinking is a superior activity, reserved merely for humans. But since some of these features (e.g. calculative functions, pondering) were taken to be peculiarly human, this amalgamation facilitated the conclusion that the whole set of operations which could be called thinking was similarly confined to humanity's privilege, thereby in Cartesian line of thought non-human entities are entirely devoid of thinking.

Another reason why Cartesian philosophy prioritizes human consciousness is Descartes' firm belief in man's possession of an immortal soul, which makes it impossible for man to be equated with machines. As a disciple of Plato, Descartes argues that there are two kinds of entities in the universe: things of the spirit or soul and things of a physical or material nature. To Descartes, human beings are conscious, and consciousness cannot have its origin in matter (Singer 200). This dualism not only creates a binary opposition between the mind and the body, but more importantly further differentiates man from animal; through an account of perception, Descartes discerns sensations construed as modes of thought from sensations construed as modes of matter or body. To Descartes, sensation consists of two parts: the impression made by an external object on the organ of sense, and the mind's awareness or contemplation of this impression. Descartes, predictably, favours not the empiric data or the bodily stimuli, but rather the mind's contemplation based on this impetus (Plumwood 113-114). Hence, Plumwood concludes:

Descartes' main strategy for achieving hyperseparation and eliminating human/animal and mind/body continuity was then to reinterpret the notion of "thinking" in such a way that those mental activities which involve the body, such as sense perception, and which appear to bridge the mind/body and human/animal division, become instead, via their reinterpretation in terms of "consciousness," purely mental operations, "modes of thinking" (Descartes 1973: VII, 81). Sensations proper now fall under the heading of "thinking," and are quite distinct from any bodily operation of sight, hearing, smell, which humans might share with animals. Animals themselves have only the lower or bodily grade of sensation and "lead their lives merely by physical movements," those "movements of their fear, hope, joy, that they can have without any thought." (115)

The eventual effect of this distinction is an unbridgeable rift of mental and bodily activities, as well as a gap between mind and nature, human and animal, man and woman where the former is always privileged over the latter.

Romanticism was an effort to bridge up this gap between man and animal: thanks to Rousseau's concept of the noble savage, nature and man's connection with the natural world was idealized and hence "[b]y seeing ourselves as part of nature, we regained a sense of kinship with 'the beasts'" (Singer 202-203). Like many of their male Romantic counterparts, two of whom have been mentioned above, women writers of the era produced a significant body of texts about animals, which not only condemned oppression of animals, but also invented the educational practice they called "the study of nature," which was "a compensatory alternative for girls (and very young boys), who were excluded from education and professions in natural philosophy" (Bowerbank 21). This "study of nature," which was typically written in the form of conversations or dialogues between a mother figure (real or surrogate) and children taking a walk in the countryside and contemplating on natural subjects, not only valued animals with a utilitarian mentality, but also preached charity when caring for animals. In these women's texts, Bowerbank explains, God's wisdom is traced

in the bounty of nature and hence each creature, regardless of size, is seen as deserving human compassion:

These women attempted to achieve a peaceable “economy of charity” – to use their phrase – within the confines of woman’s domain; their compassion was patterned as condescension of human to animal and, as such, did not challenge the patriarchal frame. Nevertheless, the weed was planted in these women’s pedagogical writings for an alternative and ethical approach to natural philosophy... Although both woman and animal remained chained to abstract nature as hierarchy, the challenge was set: can we develop a concept of compassion radical enough to extend justice and integrity to all beings? (21-22)

Hence, these educational texts penned by women aimed not only at informing, but also of transforming children, giving them a sense of ecological ethics and thereby altering humanity’s exploitative relationship with non-human entities. Charlotte Smith’s *Conversations Introducing Poetry* stands out as an example of these women’s study of nature. This volume of poetry is more personal for Smith than any other of her works. According to her Preface, she wrote the book with a particular five-year-old child in mind, a child who had just arrived from a foreign country with no command of English but with genuine interest in birds and insects. This five-year-old was none other than her own granddaughter, Lureza. The child’s father, Nicolas Smith – her son - had to send his daughter by his Persian lover to be educated by his mother, Charlotte Smith. Smith was “passionately fond of Lureza, whom she considered unusually intelligent” and used this opportunity to pen down her personal view of the ethics regarding human and non-human interaction (Fletcher 326).

The volume dwells on natural subjects and includes outspoken criticism of human recklessness in their treatment of nonhuman entities through the cosy exchanges between Mrs Talbot, a wise and knowledgeable mother, and her children Emily and George. However, the volume departs marginally from Bowerbank’s account in that in Smith’s poems we do not see “condescension of

human to animal,” in fact, it is quite the opposite. Smith’s poems for children are marked by a clear sense of human cruelty, which is uncommon in children’s literature. When describing human’s attitude towards animals, Smith condemns deliberate and undeliberate acts of brutality as man kills for sports, scientific curiosity or souvenir of imperial pursuits. Just as explained in the previous chapter in her poems for children, there is a sense that humans and animals are fundamentally different from each other. This alterity of the animal world is accentuated especially through Smith’s critique of human abuse of animal, whether it is due to scientific curiosity, personal amusement or any other reason. For Mrs Talbot, and Smith alike, the random killing of even an insect is unethical and abhorring. As a fierce believer in freedom and equality, Smith believes that animals too deserve their liberty, which is a revolutionary concept for her time. In return, the animals, quite unlike the Cartesian account, are capable of fearing the inevitable suffering that they can bear at the hands of their human captivators. In that sense, Smith’s poetry for children *is* a challenge to “the patriarchal frame,” therefore, representative of her dissent from the mainstream discourse. In “To a Butterfly in a Window,” for instance, she releases a butterfly trapped indoors saying that short as its lifespan may be, even a butterfly deserves to enjoy its liberty and make life to its fullest. The butterfly should “go! and soar to life and light”:

Beneath some leaf of ample shade  
Thy pearly eggs shall then be laid,  
Small rudiments of many a fly;  
While thou, thy frail existence past,  
Shall shudder in the chilly blast,  
And fold thy painted wings and die!  
Soon fleets thy transient life away;  
Yet short as is thy vital day,  
Like flowers that form thy fragrant food;  
Thou, poor Ephemeron, shalt have filled  
The little space thy Maker willed,  
And all thou know'st of life be good. (13-24)

Smith here argues that even a tiny butterfly which is hardly seen worthy to deserve human sympathy, with the exception of appreciating its beauty, equally deserves to make its own choices and enjoy its liberty regardless of its short time on this earth, in the same way as a human being does or should. It should reproduce and live the life that God intended it to have. Short though its life may be, it is a life that needs to be lived, and they have every right to enjoy it, as a human being does.

Her respect and compassion for animal life reappears in “Invitation to the Bee” in which she praises the industry of the “little active busy bee” in a warm, loving manner. She observes the bee as it “revel[s] on the broom” or “suck[s] the clover’s crimson bloom” and praises its “little ode to industry.” When the summer ends and the weather gets cold, however, Smith acknowledges that the bee is going to have a difficult time and hence invites the bee to come and live with her:

But when the meadows shall be mown,  
And summer's garlands overblown;  
Then come thou little busy bee,  
And let thy homestead be with me,  
There, shelter'd by thy straw-built hive,  
In my garden thou shalt live,  
And that garden shall supply  
Thy delicious alchemy;  
There for thee, in autumn, blows  
The Indian pink and latest rose,  
The mignonette perfumes the air,  
And stocks, unfading flowers are there,  
Yet fear not when tempest come,  
And drive thee to thy waxen home,  
That I shall then most treacherously  
For thy honey murder thee. (25-40)

Smith here is of course anthropomorphizing the animal, attributing it humanly consciousness to depict the fear-based relationship between animals and humans in which creatures ever need to be alarmed at a possible manifestation of cruelty

or violence that humans may inflict on them. Yes, there are people who murder bees in exchange for their honey, but the poetic persona is not one of them: Smith offers a different trajectory, a healthier relationship between the object and the subject, the human and the non-human, a relationship that is based on trust and compassion. She cries, “Ah, no!—throughout the winter drear/I’ll feed thee, that another year/Thou may’st renew thy industry” (41-42). In Smith’s account, humans and animals live together in peace, free of exploitation and fear. She wants to achieve an equilibrium where mankind does not pragmatically abuse creatures, but caringly offers them food and shelter. The sympathy and concern she feels for animals is genuine and heartfelt. A similar compassion is also present in “A Walk by the Water” where the speaker is trying to assure the “timid fishes” (17) not to fear her and her company. Challenging Descartes’ view that animals are incapable of having emotions, Smith typically characterizes animals as capable of fearing. In this poem, she tries to soothe the fish that “[shuns] with fear [their] near approach” (16). The speaker bolsters the animal that they do not intend to harm or catch, but simply “read in nature’s book” (20). Fletcher describes Smith’s religious affiliations<sup>68</sup> remarking “[t]hough she believed in God, her religion lay in her sense of a spirit and a permanence in Nature, and in her love for her children. Revealed religion was not very important to her, and she had no consolations to offer herself about an after-life” (46). The way she tries to find God in nature and “read the book of nature” uncannily resembles the mottos of Deism, the Enlightenment philosophy that postulates that God is present but indifferent to the workings of the world that he created and can only be known through a close study of nature. Although we do not have any information regarding Smith’s involvement or cognizance of Deist philosophy, her language echoes the school, making her sound like an Enlightenment intellectual.

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<sup>68</sup> This is the only piece of information I could find related with Smith’s faith in God.

Smith repeats her critique of hunting and torturing animals in a subsequent poem, “The Hedgehog Seen in a Frequented Path” where she questions why a simple and harmless animal whose only diet is “but the beetle and the fly/... The swarming insects of the wood” (4-5) is tortured by a “man or thoughtless boy.”. She asks:

Should man to whom his God has given  
Reason, the brightest ray of heaven,  
Delight to hurt, in senseless mirth,  
Inferior animals?—and dare  
To use his power in waging war  
Against his brethren of the earth? (7-12)

To Smith, mental faculties and reason do not imply mankind’s superiority, hence, domination and control over nature and animals; on the contrary, it assigns people ethical responsibility when dealing with vulnerable and weak creatures. Unfortunately, Smith seems to be pessimistic about mankind’s ability to reform its behaviour in the short term as she recommends that the hedgehog should stay clear of humans:

Poor creature! to the woods resort,  
Lest lingering here, inhuman sport  
Should render vain thy thorny case;  
And whelming water, deep and cold,  
Make thee thy spiny ball unfold,  
And show thy simple!  
Fly from the cruel; know than they  
Less fierce are ravenous beasts of prey,  
And should perchance these last come near thee;  
And fox or martin cat assail,  
Thou, safe within thy coat of mail,  
May cry—Ah! noli me tangere. (13-24)

To Smith, the hedgehog is safer out in the woods when it is surrounded by predators of different kinds as its natural covering is capable of protecting it from

many, except for human beings who would be determined to pierce through its coat merely for amusement<sup>69</sup>.

These brief and singular instances of sympathy acquire a more social dimension when they are read together with the prose that accompanies the verse. It is especially through the character of the nasty Harry Scamperville, an aristocratic boy that Smith lays bare how cruel human beings can get – not only with their treatment of animals, but of their own kind as well. Harry haughtily invites George to join him on “monstrous good sport,” hunting (Smith, *Conversations* 2). George, however, is reluctant to join his peer because his mother has taught him differently. He has been raised to have a low regard for hunting, shooting and fishing, and see them as trivial and destructive pursuits, not his birth right as a human. For Harry, George’s rejection of hunting and fishing is illogical and incomprehensible: the only rational explanation for why someone would not be fond of fishing for him is fear of drowning, not compassion for animals. When Harry insists that he should go fishing with him, George replies:

But I can find no pleasure in putting a miserable worm on a hook, and making it wreath in torture; nor in seeing the poor fish swallow the bait and hook too, ... I like much better to see the ponds let down, as they were this spring, and thousands of little fishes jumping in the nets, or shining like silver in the shallow water as they flounce about.

HARRY. But where is the difference, pray? Were not those fishes to be eaten just the same?

GEORGE. No; for they are not caught for that purpose; when the ponds are drawn they are often taken out of the water where they are bred, to be removed to other ponds where they remain: my brother and I were employed to carry them to these last; and our

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<sup>69</sup> In fact, Smith’s use of the phrase “negro face” (183) when describing the hedgehog suggests that animal rights may not be the only thing in the poet’s mind when composing the poem. Smith might very well be thinking of man’s, or in this case, her people’s affairs with other nations as well; drawing a parallel between all that are subordinated, Smith reveals her sympathies for colonial subjects as well as animals, an issue that she revisits in “To a Firefly of Jamaica, Seen in a Collection” which will be analysed later.

great pleasure was to put them in gently one by one, and observe how they seemed to enjoy themselves as they were restored to their own element, and swam away. (*Conversations 4*)

Here Smith is contrasting her ecological ethics concerning human-animal interaction with the general perception in society: on the one hand, George represents the individual who respectfully observes and delights in nature's abundance and cycles, and on the other Harry celebrates man's supremacy over nature which warrants him the licence to kill – or torture – animals. He considers the Talbot children's endeavour to save fishes "stupid" as he would rather enjoy the thrill of killing not only in fishing but also in "the famous sport" of dog hunting. He considers anyone sharing George's sympathies "an absolute milk-sop! just like a man milliner" (4). Harry's pride in being the only son of a Baronet, destined to inherit a great estate in the future, boosts his already too-inflated ego and turns him into the epitome of the toxic masculinity and nobility that associates nature with subordination and femininity, and finds the right to treat anyone he outranks as badly as he treats animals. His quick ridicule of George's ethics of human involvement with nature represents the dominant ideology which considers that anything or anyone different or subordinate deserves to be exploited for the satisfaction, amusement or the needs of the superior and mightier. In this case, the white upper-class aristocratic male figure believes that he has the ultimate primogeniture to exploit nature and animals whom he associates with the feminine and inferior. Harry's obnoxiousness is the embodiment of how society can corrupt the individual and comes to testify to Smith's critique of what is wrong with humanity. Her lack of faith in people resurfaces with the abuse and cruelty unleashed by Harry. However, there is always hope, which is possibly the reason why Smith is penning these poems in the first place. The effort of writing instructive poems for children suggests that, with early and proper instruction of ethics, children can grow up to become sensible adults who know the *right* way to interact with nature. There is a Rousseauesque valour in this endeavour; similar to what Rousseau does in his

*Emile*, Smith proposes a form of education for children through which they can internalize bio/ecocentric ethics when relating to animals.

Smith returns to the issue of animal torture once again in “Conversation the Third” in which the mother and children discuss squirrels being tortured out of whim. Unfit for food, squirrels are nonetheless pursued and destroyed “in mere wantonness, using a short stick loaded at each end, which thrown with great force among the boughs, often brings these pretty lively creatures bleeding to the ground.” Mrs. Talbot further explores mankind’s cruelty by giving more gruesome details: “Sometimes too an idle sportsman, who has perhaps been disappointed of his game, fires his gun among them, and brings two or three down, maimed or dead, from their happy domicile above him” (Smith, *Conversations* 17). At this point in the conversation, Emily the young daughter draws an intriguing parallelism between herself and the squirrel, remarking:

EMILY: How extremely barbarous!—If I had brothers who were so cruel out of mere wantonness, I am sure I could not love them. I should think they would torment me just the same if they could.  
(17)

As Onno Oerlemans puts it in *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*, “[w]hen they are noted at all, animals in poetry and art have been immediately converted to figures, as symbolic devices signifying the poets themselves” (71). Here, it is inevitable to read the passage from a feminist stance: Smith condemns patriarchy which equates masculinity with the stronger leg over the weak and petite feminine, abusing the latter on a whim, as Smith herself endured for most of her life. This criticism is conveyed not only through the poems themselves but also through the character of Mrs. Talbot, a teacher-mother who transmits her ecological wisdom to her children and to the child-reader. Contrary to the belief that children are perfect in themselves and do not need education to learn the most natural ways, Smith believes that a teacher with the correct sensibility is needed to help children find truth and ethics. Without the maternal affection

and feminine insight into nature, children can easily turn into little monsters, as epitomized by Harry. In fact, home education was quite common in eighteenth century England and the oral tradition, similar to what Mrs. Talbot is doing in *Conversations*, was fundamental when transmitting values and customs (Simonton 30). It was the mother's duty as the primary care-taker to set the standards of morality and behaviour and take care of the children's educational development (31): "With time, competence, and interest, mothers taught daughters themselves," says Simonton, for instance, to highlight women's significance in education (35). With her feminine sensibility, extensive knowledge on natural sciences and maternal affection, Mrs. Talbot creates an exemplary mother figure that defies ideological persecution against women and introduces an empowering mother figure who has the ability to transform the society by sharing her wisdom with the young, her children and the readers. Another issue of victimization that Smith raises in this collection of poetry concerns itself with collecting animals as specimen, which again has social and political implications. In her objection to unnecessary and cruel destruction of animal life, regardless of the motive or the reason – be it for a private collection, scientific research, or artistic imitation of the splendour, Smith once again emphasizes her strict conviction that each living being is entitled to have its own subjectivity and liberty to live without captivity. In "Conversation the First," Mrs Talbot explains that when she was young, she used to enjoy catching butterflies and paint their pictures. But soon, she discovered the brutality in the act of pinning the insect:

and let it flutter for hours and even days in misery, that I could never bear to do it. I was afterwards shown how to kill them immediately, by pouring a drop of aether on their heads; but I thought I had no right to deprive one of these beautiful creatures of their short existence, which in some sorts lasts only a day. And therefore I contented myself with copying from flies in collections already made. (*Conversations* 8).

In “Conversation the Seventh,” Smith resumes her discussion of animal collections when George describes a visit he paid to Beechcroft’s uncle, who has a rich collection of creatures from the East and West Indies; birds, shells, fish as well as garments and weapons of the inhabitants of the South Sea islands. At this point, Mrs Talbot is quite sensitive about not to discourage her children from observing nature, yet equally cautious about advising them to start their collections; hence, while she dwells on the description of the peacock, which greatly draws Emily’s attention, she also dwells on the viciousness of tearing an animal from its natural habitat and bringing it to an unfit climate. The bird, after all, depends on “the honey and the sweet juices secreted in the most odorous flowers” for its sustenance, and it would be hard to provide the animal with these during a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, on the way to England. Hence, there is a “pragmatic” solution to solve this problem, the animals are

therefore usually shot, for the cabinets of the curious, with water forced out of a small tube, as the only means of preserving their plumes uninjured. And sometimes, as I have been told, the children of the Negroes shoot them with small pine. One attempt, however, to bring a humming bird living to England was made some years ago by an Officer of the Artillery. He fed it with sugar, and actually succeeded in keeping it alive till he reached the residence of the late Duchess of Richmond, for whom he designed it: but though he had preserved its fragile life so far, it expired on the very instant he was presenting it to the Duchess. (*Conversations* 34)

In *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England*, Marjorie Swann explains that the enthusiasm for collecting, which actually became a part of English culture in the Renaissance, permeated English culture in the seventeenth century; she maintains that by 1690s, collecting was considered an activity of social importance, getting increasingly popular among the aristocracy, which enjoyed keeping artworks, and the middle class, which collected all sorts of items from antique coins to scientific instruments, minerals, medals, rare or unusual zoological specimens, plants, natural and manmade

objects from Asia and the Americas, intricate carvings, portraits of important historical figures (2). To Swann, this early modern vogue of “cabinets of curiosities,” signifies “one aspect of the brave new world of consumer goods,” where acquiring unique objects was fuelled by an emerging “global mercantilism.” As international trade expanded, domestic economy grew and diversified, markets spread, and commodity production increased; so did consumer goods which proliferate in Western Europe, making their exchange and possession crucial to construct identities (Swann 5). Hence, Swann explains:

This growing Renaissance preoccupation with physical objects was intertwined with fundamental economic, cultural, social, and psychological changes which culminated in the seventeenth-century emergence of an ideal self as owner: the individual surrounded by accumulated property and goods. Thus we find in the burgeoning consumer culture of early modern Europe the origins of a recognizably modern form of consciousness. (5-6)

The significance of curiosity cabinets and the rarities from exotic lands continued in the eighteenth century, a time when British colonialism was ruling much of the world. Hence, the British society of the period was fascinated with exotic, colourful curiosities, transported to their European setting from the far end of the world. Given the identity-forging potential of material possessions that Swann argues, it is only natural to link the exotic curiosities from the colonies to the imperial representation of eighteenth-century England. Brown notes that pets, especially birds, were a sign of the expansion and commercialization of English society in the eighteenth century (Brown 44), and the objects in curiosity cabinets “serve primarily as a synecdoche for imperialist exploitation” (43). Thus, the act of collecting and exhibiting these rare items from exotic lands is a natural extension and a fundamental marker of British imperial pursuits.

Smith’s melancholy poem “To the Fire-Fly of Jamaica Seen in a Collection” problematizes the act of collecting and exhibiting animals with a post-colonial

twist as she condemns not only the demise of the animal, but also the act of robbing the animal of its native habitat to exhibit it as an icon of imperialism. The poem focuses on the inhumane treatment in collecting live specimen from their native habitat to display them in the home land, England. The poem begins with the terror the poetic persona feels upon seeing the firefly dead behind a glass container on a piece of canvas and continues with the apposition of this image against the splendour the fly once had among the “tall majestic trees,” luminous and free. Smith’s ending to the poem once again highlights her condemnation of the malpractice of killing and displaying animals: regardless of the motive behind, be it for scientific inquisitiveness or artistic inspiration, Smith associates collections with “vanity” and “ostentation.”

In this poem, the firefly is not the only character who suffers the consequences of British imperialism. To go further with her criticism of colonialism, Smith introduces a native fugitive with whom the fire-fly, as it is away from home, shall never meet again:

The recent captive, who in vain,  
Attempts to break his heavy chain,  
And find his liberty in flight;  
Shall no more in terror hide,  
From thy strange and doubtful light,  
In the mountain's cavern'd side,  
Or gully deep, where gibbering monkeys cling,  
and broods the giant bat, on dark funereal wing.  
Nor thee his darkling steps to aid,  
Thro' the forests pathless shade,  
Shall the sighing Slave invoke;  
Who, his daily task perform'd,  
Would forget his heavy yoke;  
And by fond affections warm'd,  
Glide to some dear sequester'd spot, to prove,  
Friendship's consoling voice, or sympathising love. (17-32)

Drawing a parallel between the scientific curiosity and imperial pursuits, both of which tear the local inhabitants, human or nonhuman, from their natural habitat

of peace and harmony, Smith condemns imperialism and the damage it causes on nature as well as people's lives. The vision of Jamaica prior to colonialism is idyllic and romantic, and it is in stark contrast to the brutality and coercion inflicted on the people and animals and the everlasting feeling of alienation that they currently feel. Neither the firefly which is torn from its land nor the slave who is doomed to forced servitude in his birthplace is free. Smith refers to local products that have high commercial value, such as coffee and cocoa, as well as the situation of a "sighing slave" who "his daily task performed" and "forgot his heavy yoke." By doing so, like many other women writers of her time, she undertakes the responsibility of expressing her opposition to colonialism and slavery during a time that witnessed a massive expansion of British Empire which by 1820 ruled 200 million people, over a quarter of the world's population (Coleman 237). The most discernible manifestation of this burgeoning overseas empire was the importation and widespread availability of gratifying tropical goods - such as coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, and tobacco. These exotic merchandises, which had once been luxury items for the aristocracy alone, permeated into British daily experience, changing the fabric of eighteenth-century life. However, the widespread consumption of these items brought about an ethical concern regarding their production process (238). Britain's involvement in slave trade resulted in at least six million people's coercion into slavery to work on both sides of the Atlantic and meet the massive need for work force (Brown 26). The gruesome details of the slave trade from the storing and shipping of human cargo to the horrific display of the trade's apparatuses, such as whips, fetters, and iron masks for forced feeding (Coleman 241) were increasingly revealed to the British community through dissemination of information.

Jamaica, which is relevant to the subject of this particular study, was one of those plantations whose colonial economy was based strictly on forced labour and whose history is full of conflict and tension. When Jamaica was discovered by Columbus in 1494, the island was very sparsely populated and remained to be

so under the Spanish rule that lasted for one and a half century. Following two consequent English raids in 1596 and 1643, the island's control shifted hands in 1655, and gave "Cromwell a base near the centre of the Caribbean Sea for his ambitious Western Design" (Sheridan 294). The population of 9,504 slaves of 1673 quickly rose to 50,000 slaves a decade later (296). Revolts and runaways of maroons, who were originally freed or runaway Spanish Negro slaves who found refuge in the rugged interior of the island (296), were commonplace in the West Indies and Guiana throughout this period. In Jamaica rebellions and guerrilla warfare, predominantly led by Koromantyn ex-slaves, were virtually continuous from 1665 to 1740 (Brown 46). After the conquest of 1655 the Maroons united with slaves who escaped from the English slave-owners in growing numbers and frequently raided the plantations:

For a time in the 1730's Jamaica was an armed camp. British troops, local militia, Mosquito Coast Indians and even bloodhounds were mobilized to comb the mountain fastnesses [*sic*] to search out the elusive Maroon. The extension of sugar culture was severely checked by this long period of internecine warfare. Not until the period following the Maroon treaty of 1739 did settlements begin to form in those parts of the island where none chose to venture before. (Sheridan 296)

Despite the ongoing conflict, the island's sugar economy considerably expanded between 1741 and 1775, leading to a considerable rise in slave imports, commodity exports, white and slave population, patented and cultivated acres, sugar estates, and property values. In the period between 1731 and 1775, slave imports nearly doubled and sugar production increased by about 170 per cent (296).

Smith herself was no stranger to the horrors of slavery; in fact, she had insider's information about the slave trade. Smith's father-in-law had made his money out of the slave plantations of the West Indies (Fletcher 30). Throughout the years she spent with the family, she gradually learned more about the family

business and some disturbing details about the money they earned, most probably through her husband Benjamin. He told her about:

the thirteen inches width allotted to women, sixteen inches to men, on the specially designed slave decks where they were chained except for a brief daily period of exercise. He told her how the crew were encouraged to rape the women repeatedly on the voyage so they would be pregnant with mulatto children, and worth more, when they were auctioned. He told her how often bodies were thrown over the side when disease broke out. Sometimes they died for no apparent reason, he said. About forty-five in a hundred did not survive the voyage, on an average run. Sometimes the whole cargo was lost. Occasionally they broke loose and killed the crew, so the investors lost their ship as well. But on a good run, immense profits could be made. (31)

Smith glosses her knowledge of the mistreatment of the natives in the West Indies in a footnote to her poem “To the Fire-fly of Jamaica, Seen in a Collection”; she notes:

The wretched Negro, fearing punishment, or driven to despair by continual labour, often secretes himself in these obscure recesses, and preys in his turn on his oppressor at the hazard of his life...After the toils of the day, the poor African often walks many miles, and for a few hours loses the sense of his misery among his friends and companions (*The Poems* 205).

The sentimentalism in her tone aims to evoke a much-deserved sympathy in the young readers of the poem for the colonial subjects that are being much more severely maltreated than the firefly. Smith here deliberately draws parallelism between the pursuits of natural history and Britain’s imperial agenda and, thereby, denounces West Indian exploitation. As Porter argues:

While picking up the tropes of 1790s abolitionist verse, Smith’s focus on the impaled fire-fly asks her young readers to consider not only the analogy between animal cruelty and slavery, but also if and how the seemingly innocuous science of etymology might participate in the injustices of British colonialism. (39)

Even though Smith's collection of poems for young readers does not suggest a concrete solution to the problem of colonization, it does offer its unique take on animal specimens. Smith suggests that rather than collecting animals and exhibiting them in cabinets, one should capture the beauty and bounty of nature through art, or more specifically poetry. In fact, by collecting poems from various sources including published works by Cowley, Cowper, Gray, William Broome and Joseph Wharton, her own published works, and the portfolio of her sister, Catherine Ann Dorset, in this very volume, Charlotte Smith acts as a poetry-compiler, as "an educational miscellany" (Porter 34):

Smith melds the roles of the literary and scientific collector. Each poem in *Conversations* represents an animal or plant, making the collection of poems a figure for the natural history collections and botanical gardens so popular in late eighteenth-century Britain. Smith's narrative accentuates and consciously plays with this overlap between poetic and scientific collection. (35-36)

By including literary representations of various plants and animals from different corners of the world, from geraniums to olive trees, from missel thrushes to green-chafers, Smith collects specimens in verse forms to be studied by young readers. She heavily annotates her poems with Latinate terminology to provide extensive taxonomy of her subjects and hence creates an ecological microcosm of her own, which does not necessitate any killing.

By way of conclusion, this chapter discussed Charlotte Smith's overall attitude towards persecution, victimization and alterity. With the exception of her earlier poetry in *Elegiac Sonnets* Smith can relate to the pains and sufferings of the marginalized and suppressed groups as she also feels like an outsider in her own homeland, England. In *The Emigrants*, she sympathizes with the French, the people of a country that once offered her shelter in her times of distress, as long as they do not inflict harm on or abuse others. In this context, we see that Smith

overcomes patriotic prejudices and can associate effortlessly with the mothers across the Channel with whom she shares a similar sense of alienation and victimization. Although she, as far as we know, never experienced physical violence (though, considering her husband's ill-temper, it is quite likely), the way she talks about her legal difficulties communicates a similar sense of betrayal by her own country's legal system. Hence, Smith secedes from the glorified motherhood of the eighteenth-century and subverts the cult of the *Mater dolorosa* by attaching to her a material and genuine life story with her pain and suffering, and by highlighting her physicality which is a taboo. Although she occasionally flatters the English virtues and ways of handling problems, she is quite critical of the dominant discourse, which she holds responsible for the distresses and misfortunes of her family. However, it is not only Smith and her family that suffer at the hands of the nation: the colonial subjects and animals too are inflicted with similar agonies. In *Beachy Head* and *Conversations*, Smith's sharp-tongued critique of slavery, imperialism and oppression hardly go unnoticed and reveal her whole-hearted conviction about egalitarianism across the different peoples and species. By narrating the stories of the individuals who are capable of feeling sadness, fear and hope and by connecting with them on this very basic level – be it the French mother, a fire-fly, or a peasant, Smith defies man-made limitations and classifications, and extends her sympathies globally to anyone or anything that has suffered from oppression. Her objection to ill-treatment and violence sneaks even into her work for children where the poems typically end with images of negativity and violence that is uncommon even in Blake (Labbe, *Charlotte Smith* 168). Her poems in these collections reveal her subtle but powerful dissent from patriarchal ideology which subordinates certain beings to others due to its dualistic hierarchy. This dissent embodies a Romantic tendency, this time, objectified by a woman poet. Her Romantic counterparts emphasized more the situation of the slaves or the animals, or the underprivileged in general. However, Smith contributes to the Romantic frame of egalitarianism by adding a woman's sensibility to this emphasis.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUBJECTIVITY, SINCERITY, AND POETIC VOICE

“I could not write upon anything, without some personal experience and foundation.” - Lord Byron

“The ‘subject’ is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is” – Nietzsche

One of the most important Romantic preoccupations is subjectivity: the self or the consciousness that is revealing its unique perception of the world around. However, this “self” is hardly a simple concept because it is most often described as “a set of politically motivated textual effects that work to define various subject-positions within a social structure” (Henderson 3). The fact that the subjectivity is an intersection of personal emotions and cultural norms or roles complicates the matter, and as a period immersed in these complications of subjectivity, the Romantic era witnessed the production of multiple subjectivities. For Henderson, the stable male subjectivity that I discussed in Chapter Two, which she calls “subjectivity with internal depth,” was only “one of the many models of subjectivity during the Romantic period” (163).

In the case of Charlotte Smith, we see a rich diversity of subjectivities: as a female poet and a single mother responsible for taking care of her children, Smith needs her readers’ and publishers’ financial support and she frequently voices her agonies and creates the image of a “damsel in distress” that needs to be saved in her prefaces to poems. Inviting an autobiographical reading of her poetry, Smith encourages her readers to associate the melancholy wanderer or the distressed solitary figures of her poetry with herself, the self-sacrificing mother. However, her poetry also includes other voices, sometimes of males, which make it impossible to associate the poetic persona with the female poet. For instance, in *Elegiac Sonnets* there are poems that are impersonating Goethe’s Werter or sonnets written in Petrarchan model which appear to depict the

unrequited love of a male speaker. To complicate the matter even worse, Smith quits her role as a distressed mother and steps into a role of authority figure who almost patronizes the reader with her extensive knowledge of geology, botany and history. Although she cannot sustain her firmness for long and relapses into feminine softness and melancholy, the prevalence of authority and the multivocality in her poetry open up new subjectivities for Smith while negotiating between the society's expectations of a female writer and her own understanding of an authoritative poet. Hence, this chapter intends to discuss how Smith simultaneously complies with and subverts the social gender roles imposed on her and how she struggles to create a unique poetic voice in her *Elegiac Sonnets* and *Beachy Head*.

Establishing an authoritative voice that can serve as the “critical voice for society and humankind” (Tayebi, “Quest” 424) is one of the most pronounced preoccupations of the Romantic poet. This authoritative voice of the traditionally masculine branch of Romanticism has been associated with a unique and unified self (Mellor 145). In this account, the poet is prophetic, acting as the “unacknowledged legislator,” as Shelley puts it, voicing his opinions for the humankind as a “transcendent, passionate leader and representative of human nature” (Tayebi, “Quest” 425). Yet this consistent persona of the poet who can speak for the whole of humanity is hardly possible for women poets as they feel largely alienated and separated from the social order. As Meena Alexander explains, while the male Romantic poets “sought out clarities of visionary knowledge,” women poets whose lives were largely identified with familial and cultural bonds, weighing them down represented their worldview, struggling to “capture a subjectivity that endured and supported the fabric of daily life, haunted always by a sense of subservience” (3). Hence, women poets found themselves in a unique conundrum: how can a woman being taught to restrain her desires, hide her true feelings and ideas under the mask of obedience and silence capture an authoritative and unique poetic voice that would be simultaneously self-representative and conforming, idiosyncratic and feminine,

sensible and critical, maternal and assertive at the same time? The impossibility of this task at hand, in Smith's case, results in a "psychic split," as Fry calls it (138), which like a prism reflecting different colours concurrently, creates multiple subjectivities that co-exist and subvert traditionally prescribed gender roles. Even though Smith repeatedly encourages the readers to associate the poetic voice with herself - the Charlotte Smith of the Bignor Hall, in Sussex, the martyr of many injuries and the grief-stricken mother – she synchronously creates multiple selves that contradict with her initial claim of sincerity.

As Fry puts it, "[f]ew writers have presented themselves in their works so fully as did Charlotte Smith" (3); she deliberately chooses to present herself again and again in her novels and poetry through autobiographical details, almost publicizing her agonies to create an image of herself that is likable and relatable for her readers. For Duckling, Smith had "good reason" for neurotically referring to her agonies as the "amount of pain Charlotte Smith endured in her life time epitomizes the nightmare scenarios of many eighteenth-century women" (204), the details of which I explained formerly in Chapter One. Hence, Smith constructs for herself the typical "woman in distress" image through which she represents herself as overwhelmed by melancholy and sorrow, longing for relief through death and insists that her poems are an extension of her mental state. As she openly declares in her Preface to the Sixth Edition of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, her inspiration for her poems was "unaffected sorrows" that she endured; she "wrote mournfully because [she] was unhappy" (Smith, *The Poems* 5). This is not an isolated incidence: Smith continually addresses her reader directly in her prefaces to her poetry and openly explains her personal problems and financial difficulties, blurring the distinction between "Charlotte Smith the agonized woman," the writer, and the poetic persona in her melancholy poems. She, for instance, openly refers to being subject to "such calamities as the detention of their property has brought on my children," or other unfortunate destinies that have befallen on her children such as:

Of four sons, all seeking in other climates the competence denied them in this, two were (for that reason) driven from their prospects in the Church to the Army, where one of them was maimed during the first campaign he served in, and is now a lieutenant of invalids. (*The Poems* 7)

Uncommon for a woman of genteel background, as Smith claims and represents herself to be, Smith's explicit, if not sharp, condemnation of the "inhuman trustees" (8) who were supposed to protect the rights of Smith and her children is almost scandalous given the century's appraisal of propriety and silence in women. However, Smith uses these environmental factors as a shield against the possible criticisms that may be directed at her. Although the first edition of her *Elegiac Sonnets* was printed while she was still in the King's Bench prison with her husband in 1784 and the volume went through nine editions over the course of the next sixteen years and ever expanded in the poems it included (Curran, "Introduction" xxiii), Smith refuses to acknowledge any amelioration in her life standards. Quite the opposite, she claims, "The injuries I have so long suffered under are not mitigated; the aggressors are not removed," causing her to "pass in anxiety, in sorrow, in anguish" (*The Poems* 7, 9). In fact, with the mentioning of her daughter Augusta's death<sup>70</sup>, "[t]he loveliest, the most beloved of my daughters, the darling of all her family" (7) who died at childbirth in 1775, and the injustices the rest of her children had to endure suggest that her conditions did not improve, but only deteriorated and sealed her misery. Actually, as Labbe notes, by 1784 her oldest children were old enough to support her rather than the other way round, yet Smith never quits describing them as "requiring her aid" (*Charlotte Smith* 65). This melancholy tone of a grieving woman continues in the rest of *Elegiac Sonnets*, drawing conspicuous parallelism between the actual Charlotte Smith and Smith the poet. As Stuart Curran phrases it, the prefaces

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<sup>70</sup> Augusta died on 23 April 1795, aged twenty. To Fletcher "Charlotte's better life died with her, and she never fully recovered" (239).

provide “a convenient haven for unburdening her griefs and displacing their stresses into art” (“Introduction” 72).

Her “Sonnet LXXVI – To a Young Man Entering the World” can be cited as a poem with conspicuous references to Smith’s own life as indicated in the footnote inscribed by the poet herself. Contrary to the reader’s initial expectation, the poem is addressed not to her son “who suffered with many others in an event which will long be remembered by those parents who had sons at a certain public school, in 1793”<sup>71</sup> (*The Poems* 65), but about another young man, another student at the same school. The possibly public humiliation of her son’s expulsion from his school is sublimated in a poem that is encouraging a young man to fight against “Tyrants” (8) who may strip him of his “titles, wealth and power” (3). The injustices that the young man may be subjected to is quite similar to those that Smith reveals in her prefaces where her children cannot get their hands on what is theirs by birth right. She claims that her children are:

deprived of every advantage to which they are entitled; and the means of proper education for my youngest son denied me! while the money that their inhuman trustees have suffered yearly to be wasted, and what they keep possession of on false and frivolous pretences, would, if paid to those it belongs to, have saved me and them from all these now irremediable misfortunes. (Smith, *The Poems* 7-8)

Other examples of autobiographical details can be found in Smith’s sonnets where she refers to her own motherhood and mentions the death of her daughter, Augusta. As I mentioned in Chapter Four and in relation to her prefaces above, Smith recurrently underlines the fact that she is responsible for taking care of her children and is selflessly writing to provide for them, and in this context the death of her daughter Augusta becomes a predictable and convenient subject

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<sup>71</sup> Curran reveals the identity of this son and the details of the event saying that it is Lionel, a principal in schoolboys’ rebellion at Winchester College and he “was forced to step down” (Smith, *The Poems* 65).

matter for Smith to explore as the poems combine autobiographical elements, maternity and the mournful tone that is ever-present in her work. Her “Sonnet XCI – Reflections on Some Drawings of Plants” is a poem where a mother clearly mourns for a dead child. The poem starts with the speaker’s attempt to capture the beauty of flowers in a drawing, which is juxtaposed against the loss of a child whose portrait she carries on her “body:

save the portrait on my bleeding breast,  
I have no semblance of that form adored,  
That form, expressive of a soul divine,  
So early blighted; and while life is mine,  
With fond regret, and ceaseless grief deplored —  
That grief, my angel! with too faithful art  
Enshrines thy image in thy Mother's heart. (9-14)

If the word “mother” had not appeared in the very last line of the poem, this sonnet could have very well been a classical Petrarchan sonnet where the (male) speaker mourns for the death of a female lover, Laura in most cases. However, Smith reverses the male form into a feminine one by composing a sonnet of absence about a dead daughter, which is a “self-conscious transformation of the tradition” (Backsheider 371). Smith inserts her interest in botany and drawing, commonly feminine pursuits and underlines the unquenchable pain, the “ceaseless grief” she feels because of her daughter’s loss. It is as if the speaker’s pain is engraved upon her body as she is carrying her daughter’s portrait on herself, and she explicitly refers to the gender of her speaker.

In other sonnets which are commonly associated with Augusta’s death, this connection between the grief-stricken mother and Smith is less clear. “Sonnet LXXIV – The Winter Night,” for instance, ends with a yearning for death after the demise of a beloved:

Ah! when this suffering being I resign,  
And o’er my miseries the tomb shall close,

By her, whose loss in anguish I deplore,  
I shall be laid, and feel that loss no more! (11-14)

In his note to line 13, Curran identifies the pronoun “her” as Smith’s daughter Augusta; however, the poem itself does not give us any other indication as to whether this biographical association is correct or not. In fact, it is nearly impossible to detect whether the speaker is male or female, mourning for a female lover<sup>72</sup>. Still, if we accept Curran’s argument, then we can claim that in this poem too, Smith appeals to her readers’ sympathy by recreating a mother grieving after her child’s death as “[her] sad soul recalls its sorrows past” (3). Unable to sleep in the dark and cold of the night, the speaker seeks comfort outdoors, which she fails to achieve and exclaims her desire to be buried next to her child where she will not suffer anymore. A similar ambiguity is present in “Sonnet LXXXIX – To the Sun” where the poetic persona is lamenting for the loss of a “form / I loved – so fondly loved” (11-12). For Curran, the connection is again very clear, and almost simplistic: the form so fondly loved is none other than Smith’s daughter. The gender of the speaker is again not hinted at very openly: the only clue we can see is the dismissal of the Sun, the ultimate masculine symbol: for the desolate speaker, the Sun no longer signifies life and prospect as all hope is gone now that the beloved person is gone:

Celestial lamp! thy influence bright and warm  
That renovates the world with life and light  
Shines not for me – for never more the form  
I loved – so fondly loved, shall bless my sight;  
And nought thy rays illuminate, *now* can charm  
My misery, or to day convert my night! (9-14)

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<sup>72</sup> I will return to the ambiguity of the speaker later in this chapter, but for the sake of argument, here I will accept Curran’s association. Yet, the speaker in this poem can function as both a mother mourning after the death of a dear child, or a male lover grieving over a female lover’s demise.

The parallelisms that Smith builds between her life and that of the poetic persona, encouraged by the personal accounts that are abundantly detailed in her prefaces invite an autobiographical reading of her poems, associating the “I” of her poems with Charlotte Smith. When the speaker of “Sonnet IV – To the Moon” mentions her “troubled breast” (5) and her desire to “soon ...reach thy world serene, /Poor wearied pilgrim – in this toiling scene!” (13-14), or when she cries that she can find “no repose” on the “dark breast” (9) of the night and that she is like the “mournful, sobersuited” (1), “cheerless” (10) and gloomy night, possibly because having a similar disposition herself, we cannot help but associate the carefully created “woman in distress” image presented in the prefaces with the speaker of the poems that demonstrate similar qualities. For Angela Keane, the sonnets “do inhabit a self-consciously biographical domain, one that Smith insists we understand in the prefaces to the many editions of the *Sonnets*” (7). What is interesting in this self-reflexivity of the poems, however, is that they seem to fail having a therapeutic effect on Smith, as she relentlessly returns to her agonies without achieving a sense of consolation. As the title to the volume signifies, there is an element of elegy in the poems, which Smith fully exploits by conveying a mourning voice, although in most cases the cause of the mourning is not clear. However, the mode of elegy requires a sense of relief, a consolation at the end, which Smith never seems to reach in the course of her literary career. Owing to the over-emphasis on her personal difficulties, Smith was in fact accused of being too self-involved to such an extent that it obscured her poetry. In response to her *The Emigrants*, for instance, the *Critical Review* writes:

Herself, and not the French emigrant, fills the foreground; begins and ends the piece; and the pity we should naturally feel for those overwhelming and uncommon distresses she describes, is lessened by their being brought into parallel with the inconveniences of a narrow income or protracted law-suit. (Basker 299)

This unhealthy fixation with gloom brings forth the question of Smith's sincerity; is she actually in so much pain or is there an ulterior motive behind this carefully constructed image? I say "constructed" because "writing autobiographically is a thoroughly creative activity" (Jay 1055) as we have come to learn with poststructuralism. Paul de Man says in "Autobiography as De-facement," "We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act it produces its consequences" and then rightfully asks,

but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? (920)

I would like to clarify the "technical demands of self-portraiture" that de Man refers to by referring to another article: John Shotter's "Social Accountability and the Social Construction of You" where he highlights the importance of the society when it comes to self-presentation. Shotter argues that it is the other people, usually parents and caregivers that shape our narratives of the self:

what we talk of *as* our experience of our reality is constituted for us very largely by the *already established* ways in which we *must talk* in our attempts to *account* for ourselves – and for it – to the others around us...And only certain ways of talking are deemed legitimate. (141)

For a female poet who is already at odds with the society's figures of authority, the metaphorical parents and care-givers so to say, for Smith, the "certain ways of talking" about herself is in fact very limited. Sensibility and sentimentalism are available to her, but other modes of existence are not: she is not permitted to assume positions of authority or engage in writing more masculine genres of poetry as she is a woman, basically. Therefore, operating within the limits available to her, Smith needs to find a safe haven which would make her an

acceptable figure in the public eye; for an eighteenth century woman, the damsel in distress and the grieving mother as the safest images that Smith can construct and repeatedly reinforce, even though this is mostly performative. Through what Christopher Bode calls “discursive self-construction,” Smith decisively produces an identity which she continually writes again and again as her own life (58-59).

Despite the strong emphasis that Smith lays on her prefaces and despite her encouragement that the poems represent herself, in fact, as Keane aptly observes, it is a fallacy to hastily identify the biographical Smith and the speakers of the *Elegiac Sonnets* “as the unmediated expressions of woe of an unhappy woman” (10). What Smith is writing is a *sonnet sequence*, a chain, an artistic creation where she explores different moods of the same, singular emotion: melancholy (Backscheider 326). Sonnet chains involve a careful construction and exploitation of a single sentiment, which “invites us to look at the artifice of performance rather than the integrity of the expression” (Keane 10). Hence, her insistence on refusing solace, her overt emphasis on her painful life and her relentless repetition of the details of her unhappy life all suggest a careful construction of authorial image that Smith creates and maintains throughout her writing career. As I have previously mentioned, Smith was dependent on the money she earned through her writing to provide for herself and her large family; therefore, she could not risk losing the emotional and financial support of her readers who had come to love and care for this *woman in need*. Fry argues that Smith “hated her role as ‘needy author’” as she was born into the country gentry (10) and could not come to terms with the fact that she actually had to “beg” for financial support. However, it was a role she had to play, all the more so because she was a woman, because of the very material difficulties she was experiencing. Consequently, Smith deliberately plays the role of the victimized woman, which is not only in line with societal expectations but also guaranteed to grant her the sympathy and support that she needs.

In his 1798 poem "The Unsex'd Female," Richard Polwhele attacks women writers on the ground that by voicing their opinions in public, women defy "NATURE'S law" (2) and destroy their softer charms by transgressing the boundaries that they have to respect and obey. In the poem, Polwhele openly attacks Charlotte Smith, whom he sees as a disciple of Mary Wollstonecraft by saying, "And charming SMITH resign'd her power to please, / Poetic feeling and poetic ease" (95-96). Writing at a time when the reception of women's writing was so politicized and hostile, Smith *had to* reclaim her gender and prove that she was not "unsex'd" or unnatural as Polwhele portrayed her to be, and hence she had to represent herself as a gendered woman in distress, a self-sacrificing mother and a woman who had to write, though unwillingly, despite knowing that she was dissenting. In this performative self-representation, Smith chose a role among the various "femininities" that she could "assume depending on class, urban or rural locations, proclivities and opportunitites" (Fay 159). At the one end of the spectrum, Fay explains, is the "hyperfeminine" or the damaged woman who "relies on her attraction for men," in the middle is the respectable married woman who "attends her social, domestic and maternal duties without questioning her role in the patriarchal order," and finally there is the fallen woman, who has "been sexually active prior to or instead of marriage" (159-160). Of these roles available to her, Smith aligns herself with the respectable (un-) married woman who nonetheless performs her duties, especially her maternal duties, impeccably. This "normative femininity" imposed by the society is of course constructed, to which Smith adapts through performativity. With her carefully constructed self-representation, she presents herself as the ultimate altruistic mother and the woman who needs to be rescued:

Of course, the desired mode of rescue is to buy Smith's poems, which the reader will have done, turning the sympathetic reader into the heroic rescuer of this distressed woman. By creating this opportunity to come so dramatically to her rescue through the careful combination of autobiography and fiction, Smith enables her readers will continue to buy her work. (Andrews 15-16)

In “Charlotte Smith, Women Poets and the Culture of Celebrity,” Stephen Behrendt describes Smith as “a shrewd businesswoman” whose “entire family and personal history is almost a paradigm of Darwinian survival,” and she knew that she had to exploit and thereby profit from the role of the suffering wife and mother. By subverting the very gender stereotypes, Smith engages in “a calculated campaign of merchandizing [her] personal difficulties for financial profit” (196). In so doing, Smith appeals to popular sympathy by polishing her feminine role with what Mellor calls “modesty topos” (8) to appear less threatening to the patriarchal order that perceives her – or the female writer in general - as transgressive and decadent. Again, in her prefaces and dedications, Smith appears to adopt humility through which she appears to acknowledge her “place” as a female writer and act in propriety and self-effacement as is expected of her. In her preface to the third and fourth editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, for example, she writes:

The reception given by the public, as well as my particular friends, to the two first editions of these poems, has induced me to add to the present such other Sonnets as I have written since, or have recovered from my acquaintance, to whom I had given them without thinking well enough of them at the time to preserve any copies myself. A few of those last written, I have attempted on the Italian model; with what success I know not; but I am persuaded that, to the generality of readers, those which are less regular will be more pleasing. (*The Poems* 3-4)

For anyone who knows Smith closely, this act of modesty is unconvincing because we know that she started writing poetry early in her infancy, at the age of six, and always thought of herself as a poet. In a letter she once wrote to Cadell and Davies, her publishers, she wrote: “In the stillness of the night, verses occur to me” (Fletcher 339), suggesting that she is and wants to be a poet. However, in this above quoted preface and in others, she presents her motive of writing differently: in her account, she is writing not because of the creative impulse,

out of talent, or because of the catharsis she experiences when sublimating her agonies, but rather because of financial concerns<sup>73</sup>, the public demand or the encouragement of friends that urge her to continue writing. Moreover, even though she is doing something quite revolutionary, that is regenerating and reforming the sonnet form to suit her purpose, to convey a single sentiment, she is acting self-consciously, unsure of the effect her poems will have on her readers. In another preface, however, she comfortably steps into the role of an “Authoress” only to undermine her position of authority noting, “I am well aware that for a woman – ‘The Post of Honor is a Private Station’” (*The Poems* 6). Hence, Smith is very much aware of the constructed image of femininity and does everything in her power to convince her readers that she is following the rules set for her. That is why, in her dedication to *Elegiac Sonnets* she asks for “protection” from William Hayley, whom she adulates as “the greatest modern Master of that charming talent” next to whom she sees herself as nothing “more than a distant copyist” (*The Poems* 2).

However, as Fletcher argues the “[a]ssertion of the writer’s powerlessness and marginality is nonetheless assertion.” By stepping into the literary arena and publishing her work under her name, Smith is actually making a claim, which she forcefully reinstates by assuming that her “depression, economic vulnerability and fears for her children are no improper subjects for one of the most historically privileged genres” (53), meaning the sonnet. This assertion and claim sometimes comes out more forcefully than Smith intended. Even though she struggles to maintain this conformity and humility for as long as she can,

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<sup>73</sup> For Fletcher, even the mention of the factors that forced her into publication “reluctantly, to raise money for her children” are dubious and hardly convincing as:

it was a claim genteel writers made then, that family duty forced them to become professionals, or that they were coerced into publication by overzealous admirers...or because their work had already appeared in distorted versions without their consent. (54)

This comment strengthens my claim that Smith may be using publically likable tropes of modesty and obligation to increase her popularity and decrease her chances of being more marginalized than she already is.

there are moments when a stronger, assertive and dissident – or to use the wording of Duckling an “increasingly bitter, sarcastic and querulous voice” (203)- comes out, like Freudian return of the repressed, which makes us see through Smith’s performativity. For instance, when responding to the accusations regarding the belated publication of the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*, she is as bitter as she can get:

Those who have expressed such impatience for it, were apprehensive (indeed they owned they were) of the loss of the half guinea they had paid. I have more than once thought of returning their money, rather than have remained under any obligation to persons who could suspect me of a design to accumulate, by gathering subscriptions<sup>74</sup> for a work I never meant to publish, a sum, which no contrivance, no success, was likely to make equal to one year of the income I ought to possess. Surely, any who have entertained and *expressed* such opinion of me, must either never have understood, *or must have forgotten*, what I was, what I am, or what I ought to be. (*The Poems* 8)

Smith’s assertive self-defence in the face of false accusations of chicanery is anything but feminine as she argues her case logically, without any sentimentalism, saying that she, after all, does not need the money of a non-believing reader. By referring to her personality, honour, class and duties (“what I was, what I am, or what I ought to be”) she is standing up for herself. In fact, for Jacqueline Labbe, that Smith is openly condemning her husband and legal advisors is also subverting the feminine image that she is trying to convey. To Labbe, the public discussion of her legal troubles and flaws of her husband actually lays bare “her husband’s failure to provide,” which she should endure as a proper lady:

she escapes censure (although not totally) because she preserves a patina of feminine sensibility and need for succour, but her impatience with a legal system that cannot even acknowledge her

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<sup>74</sup> She published the fifth edition of her *Elegiac Sonnets* by subscription (Andrews 16).

separate existence challenges complacent definitions of feminine sensibility. (*Charlotte Smith* 28)

Smith achieves a state of in-betweenness in her femininity and “unfemininity” with her critique of her husband and the legal system: on the one hand her complaint is justified as she is clearly victimized, on the other hand, she as a *wife* separated from her husband is not endowed with any rights as she claims to have, which makes “the lawyers reluctant to discuss the case with her.” By publicly exposing the details of her private affairs, however, Smith claims the rights legally denied to her by the power of her pen (*Charlotte Smith* 28-29).

A similar sense of in-betweenness is also prevalent in her poems where, just as I have briefly mentioned above, the gender of the melancholy speaker remains unclear or is clearly masculine. Hence, in some poems, Smith adopts a voice that is “both hers and not hers” (Bakscheider 328). To give a very simple mathematical account, of the ninety-two sonnets in her *Elegiac Sonnets*, thirty-six of them have a speaker distinctly different from Smith herself. Especially in the earlier editions, the poems were largely imitations of the Petrarchan model or included poems that assumed the voice of Werter or imitated Age of Sensibility poems that Smith adored and “duly annotates” (Curran, “Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism” 72). To complicate the matter even worse, in some poems it is nearly impossible to detect who the speaker or what the gender of the speaker is.

Petrarch is a central source of inspiration for Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*, which includes four translations and one imitation of *Il Canzoniere*. In her sonnets that she claims to have translated from Italian, Smith repeats the traditional tropes of the genre where the male speaker declares his love for, or in this case mourns for the early demise of, his beloved, typically named Laura in the Petrarchan tradition. Smith follows the conventions almost to the letter, objectifying the woman and using a fixed rhyme scheme. In her “Sonnet XIII – From Petrarch,”

for instance, she has a Shakespearean rhyme scheme, *ababcdcd efefgg*, and presents a mournful male lover who grieves after the death of Laura:

Tho' my fond soul to Heav'n were flown,  
Or tho' on Earth 'tis doom'd to pine,  
Prisoner or free—obscure or known,  
My heart, oh Laura! still is thine.  
Whate'er my destiny may be,  
That faithful heart, still burns for thee! (9-14)

As Zuccato notes, in the original Petrarchan version of the poem, Laura's name is not mentioned (59), where Smith seems to include her deliberately to clarify who the poetic persona is. The unnamed male speaker earns a name in "Sonnet XV - From Petrarch" where Smith identifies him as "Unhappy Petrarch" (8) who engages in an imaginary conversation with the dead lover who promises to wait for him in heaven. What makes this poem particularly striking is the fact that its dialogic nature enables Smith to give voice to both Petrarch and Laura: the first seven and a half lines are reserved for the male speaker, while the remaining section of the poem is for Laura to console Petrarch. Dividing the poem almost precisely into two, Smith adopts both masculine and feminine voices, which in her version occasionally refuses to silence the dead female voice and grant her a voice to speak even after death. The imitation of the masculine poetic tradition and the empowerment of the female object, eventually, create a polyphony in the poetic voice.

Another male figure that Smith channels in her poetry is Goethe's Werter (she uses the English spelling of the name). Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* was first translated into English in 1779, five years before Smith's 1784 publication of *Elegiac Sonnets*, and she incorporates this iconic Romantic figure in her poems. Goethe's novel is about a young man who loves Lotte, a married woman, so deeply that he eventually commits suicide. The intensity of Werter's affections makes him the perfect voice to utter the "single sentiment,"

melancholy – that Smith is exploiting. The most interesting of Smith’s Werter-sonnets is “Sonnet XXIV – By the Same”<sup>75</sup>:

Make there my tomb, beneath the lime-tree’s shade,  
Where grass and flowers in wild luxuriance wave;  
Let no memorial mark where I am laid,  
Or point to common eyes the lover’s grave!  
But of at twilight morn, or closing day,  
The faithful friend with falt’ring step shall glide,  
Tributes of fond regret by stealth to pay,  
And sigh o’er the unhappy suicide!  
And sometimes, when the sun with parting rays,  
Guilts the long grass that hides my silent bed,  
The tears shall tremble in my CHARLOTTE’s eyes:  
Dear, precious drops! – they shall embalm the dead!  
Yes – CHARLOTTE o’er the mournful spot shall weep,  
Where the poor WERTER – and his sorrows sleep!

It is interesting that while adopting a male voice who is pouring his emotions for the object of his affections, Smith uses her own name, Charlotte, twice, as if to complicate her position: she is both the subject and object, “the transmitter and the receiver of” Werter’s feelings (Pinch 62). As she experiments with the poetic voice and perspective, Smith is clearly defying the simple association of the author with the lyric I. She does not take herself out of the picture completely, either, and hence in a light-hearted play, she plays multiple roles and creates poetry where the subject-object relationship is “interfused” (Labbe, *Charlotte Smith* 12)

The ambiguity Smith invites in her Werter-sonnet pertains in other sonnets where we cannot determine the speaker’s gender. Although Smith encourages her readers to associate the pensive, melancholy speakers of her poems with herself when she writes “I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy” (*The Poems* 5), as we have seen above, she complicates her subjectivity when she seamlessly

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<sup>75</sup> “same” here is referring to Werter.

steps into a male persona, or creates a speaker who gives no clues as to who he or she is<sup>76</sup>. An example of such a poem with an unclear speaker can be “Sonnet LXXVIII: Snowdrops.” The poem starts with Smith’s classical melancholy wanderer who “with pensive, silent step, explore[s]/The woods yet leafless; where to chilling airs/ Your green and pencil’d blossoms, trembling, wave” (7-9), lamenting after a loved one:

Ah! ye fair, transient children of the ground,  
More fair was she on whose untimely grave  
Flow my unceasing tears! Their varied round  
The Seasons go; while I through all repine:  
For fixd regret, and hopeless grief are mine. (10-15)

The poem offers no clues as to the gender of the speaker: using Smith’s biography, one may be tempted to read it as Smith lamenting for Augusta. Yet, as Labbe claims, “there is the language of romance to suggest lost love” (*Charlotte Smith* 77) where the inconsolable (male) lover is visiting the tomb of the dead female beloved frequently and washes it with tears. The fact that in her poems Smith can occupy multiple positions - sometimes in different poems in the same volume, sometimes in the prefaces and sonnets, or sometimes in the same poem simultaneously – suggests her ability to play with her subjectivity which she considers “governable.” Even when writing sonnets, which are generally “thought to be the genre of the personal (rather than as, say, the genre of the highest formal restraint” (Pinch 70), Smith does not abandon the control of her subjectivity or chooses however she wants to appear to her readers: even though the single sentiment is maintained, she can easily transform her voice into that of a male lover or a grieving-mother to fully exploit all facets of melancholy. Even though the sentimental note in her poetry, the never-ending suffering and complaint seem to undermine the quality and richness of Smith’s

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<sup>76</sup> I have already mentioned this ambiguity in relation to her “Sonnet LXXIV: The Winter Night,” which is traditionally read as a poem about Augusta’s death but includes no clear indications of the speaker as the mother.

writing, I believe that the control she exerts on her self-representation and deliberate exploitation of stereotypes for her own advantage is a fertile ground for opening new discussions regarding subjectivity and subversion of gender roles. While she *appears* to be a perpetual victim of grief and a “universal object of pity” (Pinch 70), Smith demonstrates her confidence and skill when adopting the masculine position of the writer and the speaker in Petrarchan sonnets. From this vantage point, her works make us question: if the speaker is and is not Smith simultaneously, do the feelings she reports belong to her, too? Is she really sincere in the profound and unquenchable pain that she repeatedly constructs? To answer this question, I will go back to Backscheider’s point that she is, in fact, writing a sonnet chain, exploring different facets of melancholy: her artistic creation, even though it may have some autobiographical details, makes it possible for her to survey different subjectivities at once. However, her material requires her to appeal to the feelings of pity and sympathy of her readers, and hence through discursive self-construction, she repeatedly narrates her life of misery in the prefaces and inserts conspicuous threads in her poetry that encourage the reader to associate the speaker with Smith herself.

Smith’s relatively more controlled self-representation in her short sonnets is almost entirely dismantled in her epic *Beachy Head* where the subgenres and diversity of the topics she handles complicate her control of subjectivity. It is especially in the marginal texts, the footnotes, that Smith loses the grip of obedient, grief-stricken mother image that she so carefully and consistently weaves into her poems and prefaces. In *Beachy Head*, however, where she presents detailed accounts of social critique and scientific knowledge, a more authoritative and dissident female voice, which challenges the concept of a stable Romantic self appears. As Labbe notes, because the notes are “both a part of a text and marginal to it” (*Charlotte Smith* 44) they become both integral to its meaning and easily dismissible providing an ideal space for subverting the traditional feminine voice expected of a woman writer:

The marginal nature of notes proved an opportunity to explore spaces not thought proper for a woman to visit, and there she establishes a marginal persona whose grasp of botany, science and culture is unfettered by convention...she uses the notational space to enlarge her creative space; notes open up the restrictive terrain she maps in, say, her prefaces. (45)

The function of the marginal notes in *Beachy Head* are twofold in many senses: they are multi-generic in that they combine prose and verse, they help Smith strengthen her claim of authority as a poet while enabling her to defy the stereotype and quiet mother. Through the marginal notes, Smith is able to demonstrate the scope of her knowledge despite being denied the right to receive education. Although Smith is still treading softly so as not to lose the public support upon which her family's survival depends, she creates "an alternate Voice, a Self who finds more freedom of expression in the margin that is allowable in the poems" (49). If the main part of the text, the poem, is socially constructed, is masculine, and is therefore restricted to her access, then she can explore the marginal, which she already occupies socially and politically, in the exploration of the voice and the self. She reveals pieces of herself which are scattered through her footnotes and the entirety of her work. These fragments open up small spaces of dissent where she can challenge authority. As I discussed in Chapter Three in relation to geology and botany, in these notes Smith opposes the idea that England was once part of continental Europe. She says, "I confess I never could trace the resemblance between the two countries. Yet the cliffs about Dieffe, resemble the chalk cliffs on the Southern coast. But Normandy has no likeness whatever to the part of England opposite to it." (*The Poems* 217). This mild voice of opposition authorized only by the power of observation gets stronger in a few pages where she glosses "The beamy adamant, and the round pearl" (51) remarking: "Diamonds, the hardest and most valuable of precious stones. For the extraordinary exertions of the Indians in diving for the pearl oysters, see the account of the Pearl fisheries in [Robert] Percival's

*View of Ceylon*" (219). By advising sources to her readers, Smith is demonstrating her intellectual capability, which becomes almost unstoppable when she discusses botany, a discipline that she loved since her youth. By giving both the Latin and English names of the plants, sometimes even commenting on the regional differences, Smith reinstates her authority. In the case of animals too, Smith acts as a woman of intellect, glances of which are seen in her *Conversations*. She, for instance, identifies "the social bird" (*Beachy Head* 467) as "The Yellow Wagtail. *Motacilla flava*," gives details of its habitat and diet with a brief mention of how it is perceived in France:

It frequents the banks of rivulets in winter, making its nest in meadows and corn-fields. But after the breeding season is over, it haunts down and sheepwalks, and is seen constantly among the flocks, probably for the sake of the insects it picks up. In France the shepherds call it *La Bergeronette*, and say it often gives them, by its cry, notice of approaching danger. (*Beachy Head* 237)

To further establish her expertise, Smith also engages in intellectual debates with figures of authority and actively responds to their ideas. On one occasion, for instance, she refers to Dr. Aikin, the writer of the essay "On the Application of Natural History to the Purposes of Poetry." Upon Dr. Aiken's comment that many poets note the hum of the Dor Beetle (*Scaraboeus stercorarius*) in their evening wanderings, Smith offers an alternative that is "more remarkable:" the Fern Owl, also known as Goatsucker, Night Hawk, the Jar Bird, or the Churn Owl (*The Poems* 239). Hence, in these notes, Smith reflects a different aspect of herself: one that we cannot see in her melancholy poems or self-pitying prefaces with their own agenda. In her notes to *Beachy Head*, Smith portrays herself as an intellectual woman who is aware of the limitations imposed on her by her society yet who is also eager to find sites of existence for herself, no matter how small or marginal these sites may be. In these peripheral texts, she comfortably presents her observations, knowledge and responses. It is a shame she cannot

delve deeper into this alternate persona which she has the courage to create in her final days and never actually got to see published in her lifetime.

In her self-representation Charlotte Smith proves that she is more than a mournful voice: she is a clever business woman who needs to sell work and in order to do that, she exploits the traditional gender roles and represents herself as a wretched mother, working diligently to support her family, or a “damsel in distress” dependent on the support of her readers. Through the framework of the prefaces she carefully pens in the beginning of many of the editions of her poetry, Smith repeatedly invites her readers to interpret her poetry autobiographically, associating the melancholy wanderer with herself, whose life is no secret to her readers. When we move into the poems, however, we see that the woman represented in the preface, is not present in the sonnets where there is a different collection of voices including men, lovers, mothers, or ungendered melancholy figures. The co-existence of these figures not only reveals the performative aspect of Smith’s writing, but also her skill at representing different subjectivities that have only one common point: melancholy. The experimentation with different subjectivities finds a new life in *Beachy Head* where Smith subverts the society which has marginalized her by adopting a voice of authority addressing the reader from the *margin*. In an attempt to assert her influence, which is denied to her both poetically and socially, Smith uses her footnotes to display her competence, knowledge, and criticism. Implicitly and explicitly, the footnotes allow Smith to represent an aspect of herself which she cannot reveal in the main text. If “the virtue of masculinity is its ability to stand up to the forces competing with it; a characteristic of femininity is its multiplicity, its shiftiness in the face of those same forces,” says Labbe (*Charlotte Smith* 3) which is exactly what happens with Smith. The feeling of awkwardness and fragmentation which urges the male Romantics to seek unity with the divine and attain a unified sense of self works in an entirely different way for Smith: she reflects different sides of her self in

different works, in different sections of her text, fragmenting herself into pieces so that she can hide under plain sight and exist.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study problematized the claim that Charlotte Smith should be considered a Romantic poet and argued otherwise by providing a detailed account of the pillars of British Romanticism. One assertion that this dissertation attempted to reintroduce was that British Romanticism was deeply grounded in philosophical ideas of multiple schools of thought, the most important of which were Neoplatonism, associationism, idealism, the Burkean aesthetics, and humanitarianism. All these rich traditions of thinking were synthesized by the canonical Romantics to formulate their own response to their environment, which challenged the mechanistic worldview and the sense-based perception of the Lockean tradition and the Enlightenment. Although Charlotte Smith was a prominent writer of her time, profoundly influencing great writers including the canonical poets of Romanticism profoundly, it was the contention of this dissertation that Smith should not be labelled as a Romantic because she falls short of the rich philosophical background that her male counterparts had. Smith was ground-breaking in many ways, which was why she was revered by Wordsworth, who famously called her “a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered” (qtd. in Fletcher 334). The characteristics of Smith’s poetry that drew Wordsworth and Coleridge to it included her depiction of solitariness, attraction to rural nature, an emphasis on emotions, and drawing of a correspondence between the physical world and the speaker’s mood, which, to Zimmerman, constitute the foundation of Romantic lyricism and Abrams’ definition of “the greater Romantic lyric” (104). Smith combined all these elements with a sense of social responsibility or a “radical sensibility – a perception, through feeling, of the need to change the oppressive system of laws and government” (Fry 15). While Wordsworth and Coleridge grew increasingly conservative and lost their

initial creative zest in their poetry, Smith's poetry continued to improve and to grow provocative in its condemnation of social practices that subjugated certain groups.

Regardless of the innovations and the increasingly Romantic undertones in her poetry, it is a fact that for the majority of her literary career Smith failed to adhere to the Romantic philosophy and worldview. While the male Romantics developed their ideas on subject-object interaction, imagination and the sublime out of an amalgam of Hartley, Neoplatonism and Burke, Charlotte Smith, whose lack of formal education and intellectual isolation hindered her engagement with these theories, devised her response or opposition to the Enlightenment in rather different ways, relying on her own intellectual resources. Even though Smith was an avid reader, and familiar with Burke, she nonetheless read him quite superficially, to adopt only the vocabulary of the sublime, not the experience itself. By reversing the prevalent hierarchy, she ranked the beautiful over the sublime, failing to capture the transcendental aspect of the sublime which required the unification of the object and the subject for the latter to experience a higher sense of understanding of the universe. The split of the subject from the object, or man from nature, was felt so acutely by the canonical Romantics that they looked for ways of overcoming this fragmentation, and this was the trademark in their transcendental poetics. In Smith, however, we see no attempt to bridge this gap, as she is deeply immersed in melancholy, physical reality, her own tragedy and the minute details of the natural world. This prioritizing of the beautiful over the sublime is, in fact, not peculiar to Smith; Homans can trace the same attitude in Dorothy Wordsworth's depiction of nature in her journals (16). Similarly, Alexander notes the tendency in women poets to evade the abstractions or high sublimity that is common in their male counterparts (68). The rejection of what may be called a Wordsworthian, masculine or egotistical sublime, then, is not unique to Smith. What is unique is her integration of the language of science with her poetry. Her language, which is already devoid of the evocative or emotive aspects, becomes even more referential when she

integrates the Latin terminology of botany. Hence, it is both her poems' content and their language that are earth-bound and grounded in material reality. As the poetic personae cannot experience the transcendental or visionary experience, in Smith's poems we cannot see the ego fragmentation of the Wordsworthian sublime. In Wordsworthian Romanticism, when the usually male poetic persona encounters a majestic natural phenomenon, he is so profoundly stirred, cognitively, that the experience transports him beyond the linguistic realm, causing an absence or negation of meaning and creating a feeling of Romantic alienation. This sense of loss or fragmentation is not experienced by Smith's female personae. In addition to the lack of philosophical background, this inability to experience the sublime may also be due to a deliberate evasion on behalf of the female poet and her personae, for whom transcendence poses the risk of complete annihilation since they are already largely invisible to the society. Smith, furthermore, sees nature and mankind as alterior to each other, which makes the reconciliation impossible. Had she the philosophical background that Coleridge and Wordsworth had, maybe she would have searched for ways of reconciling the two realities. Smith, however, seems to feel like an outcast in her society which repeatedly betrayed her trust, and her poems show personae who feel more at home in nature. She, therefore, delights in observing and studying nature in detail, without seeking to transcend it, overcome it, or be consumed by it. Her bio-ethics involves co-existence where one does not try to dominate or discriminate against another.

This ethical attitude of observing and detailing without positioning herself in opposition to her object is prevalent in her poetry in general, especially in relation to her treatment of victimization. Although she occasionally slips back into class-based persecuting in her earlier poetry, Smith increasingly displays sensibility towards the suffering of the marginalized groups. In *The Emigrants*, for instance, she sympathizes with citizens of France, the country where she was once an immigrant. In this poem, Smith defies the trope of English patriotism which was being newly configured at the time, often by constructing it in direct

contrast to the hated French. By extending her sympathies to the French, to whom she has always been sympathetic due to her faith in the Revolution, Smith shows that she can feel sympathy for anyone – especially the underprivileged. She carefully draws the line by criticising the clergy for having once abused their power to take advantage of people’s faith for their personal gain, while easily associating with the real victims of the war: mothers and children. As she always felt victimized by bureaucracy in her country, Smith severely criticizes the legal and military systems that are *supposed* to protect mothers, who have been regarded as so-called national treasures. She is equally bitter in her critique of the victimization of the colonial subjects and animals in her *Beachy Head* and *Conversations Introducing Poetry*. Her condemnation of societal practices reflects a feeling for a feminine sense of sensibility in that she relates to her subject matter as a woman in distress or a mother struggling through the difficulties of life alone, and highlights the fact that all these underprivileged groups have been subjugated by the same patriarchal ideology.

The dissertation also discussed Smith’s self-representation and argued that Smith carefully inserts bits and pieces of her distressed life in her poetry and prefaces to construct the image of a mournful woman in distress. This image not only reinstates and follows the traditionally reinforced image of a passive woman that needs to be saved and thereby softens her public image as a radical, but also enables her to earn her readers’ sympathy, thus encouraging them to continue buying her work. As she deliberately invites her readers to associate with the mournful voice in the poems with Charlotte Smith the poet, she represents herself as a “feminine woman” and not an “unsex’d woman,” as most women writers were stigmatized to be. The fact that Smith’s poetry includes other voices and subjectivities (such as male lovers created after the Petrarchan model, Werter, or ungendered melancholy figures) is a clear indication that Smith *performs* the feminine role that the society is dictating and expecting her to fulfil, as well as demonstrates a playfulness regarding different subject positions. The

difficulty that Smith experiences in confining herself to a passive feminine figure, however, resurfaces in her posthumously published *Beachy Head*, in which her dissident voice of authority cries out loudly in the footnotes to the poem. As an embodiment of her own marginality, these peripheral texts become spaces of authority that enable Smith to display her intellectuality and insight into botany, history, zoology, and literature. Hence, the feeling of oddness and fragmentation which urge the male Romantics to seek unity with the divine and attain a unified sense of self works in an entirely different way for Smith: she hides different aspects of her “self” in different sections of her text, fragmenting herself into pieces so that the more complex living woman’s selfhood can hide in plain sight and exist within the pages of her works.

I believe that this fragmented subjectivity and the survivalist spirit lie at the core of Smith’s poetry and that it is a representation of the dilemma in women’s literature: negotiating the demands of the society with the demands of creative authorship. While, on the one hand, the woman poet is expected to be submissive and reserved, being forced to operate within a limited number of genres that are suitable for the elaboration of feminine topics and sensibility, on the other, as a poet she wants to assertively unleash her creativity and her critique of the society. The burden of balancing these two seemingly irreconcilable spheres eventually causes a self-conscious fragmentation in the female poet, causing Smith to reveal partial reflections of herself in various poems and in various textual spaces. While her elegiac and melancholy mood and gendered self-representation penetrates most of her work; political dissidence, scientific knowledge, and experimentation with masculine subjectivity appear only in some of her work, which reveals the firm grip she has on her portrayal of herself and creative side. For many women poets, sticking to the feminine modes of writing or depicting the quotidian details of their everyday life was good enough a space for them to exist, but not for Smith because there is visible anxiety in her to be like her male precursors or contemporaries. While most female writers of Smith’s time confined themselves to domestic space, Smith’s poems are always

set outside, in nature, imitating the sublime, for instance. With her literary allusions, imitation of the sublime and adoption of the sonnet form – which conventionally accommodates male voices –, Smith, I believe, tries to find a place for herself in the male tradition of writing, which, as she also discovers, is almost impossible. Thus, deliberately or not, she needs to subvert these traditions and modify them to suit herself. Along with the creative limitations, Smith was also surrounded by practical and financial difficulties that compelled her to negotiate the dictates of the market and the society with her own political views, on which she was unwilling to compromise. This anxiety that Smith experienced while trying to balance these different pulls can be noticed when her poetry is read in its entirety, but it is fully embodied in the fable “The Dictatorial Owl” which was published posthumously together with *Beachy Head*. The poem is about “A female Owl” (3) who knows a thing or two about the world and shares her wisdom with her fellow birds, “the daw, the magpie, and the crow,” who want to “profit by her learned lore” (12, 11). The owl tells stories of sensibility and failed marriages, which uncannily echo the same themes that Smith frequently exploits in her novels rather than in her verse:

She often had to tell, in piteous tone,  
How a poor chough by some sad chance was shent;  
Or of some orphan cuckoo left alone  
She would declaim; and then with loud lament,  
To do them good, she'd their disasters tell,  
And much deplore the faults they had committed,  
Yet “hop'd, poor creatures! they might still do well.”  
And sighing, she would say, how much she pitied  
Birds, who, improvident resolv'd to wed,  
Which in such times as these to certain ruin led! (31-40)

The owl is received well by her fellow birds who praise her “wonderous learning” (47). They remark that “Nor female since the pope, / Ycleped Joan, with Strixaline could cope” (49-50). The owl is so flattered by this fame she attains in her old age, “when grown gray with age” (41) that she decides not to remain as

a nocturnal animal, but to step into the daylight: “no more shrinking from the blaze of day, /Forth flew she” (56-57). Yet, when the owl tells her stories in daylight, she is quickly disliked by the rest of the animals and exiled for good: “Till out of patience they enrag’d surround her, /.../With cries and shrieks her hooting they o’erwhelm,/And drive her back for shelter to her elm” (91, 99-100). Ruth Salvaggio explains that there is a conventional association of femininity with darkness and masculinity with light (243); hence, the female owl in Smith’s poem, a female storyteller who leaves her usual night-time routine to tell her stories out in the public in broad daylight, can easily be interpreted as a dissenting female poet whose hubris is to write in the masculine tradition and tell her stories publically. Salvaggio observes that the female poet (Anne Finch) to may prefer nighttime over day and retreat “*from* the domain of man and [step] *into* the space of woman” (247). In Smith’s poem, however, we see the opposite where the female poet deliberately wishes to step into the daylight, but is not allowed the liberty. Her wisdom and life experience actually authorize her to tell her stories and criticize the social institutions – as long as she does it in the proper, feminine way: at night, in her own domain. As soon as she leaves her socially-constructed boundaries to reach bigger populations, she is cast aside, marginalized and silenced. “Severely mortified” with “[n]o salvo [to] cure her wounded pride” (101, 103), the female owl believes that she is “meant to dictate, govern, and direct; / That wisdom such as hers included po’er” (106-107), implying that Smith was aware of the danger she posed for the society and had to hide in the darkness of the night not to be cast out. Because she needed the financial aid to support her family, maybe more importantly because she was very conscious of her literary legacy, Smith could not dare be cast out like the “female owl” that transgressed the boundaries out of vanity or over self-confidence. Smith had to constantly restrain herself, which occasionally became harder to manage as she also wanted to authorize herself and make herself heard. Hence, she created diminutive spaces of signification for herself where she could exist without posing danger to the society she had to operate in.

This study is not without its limitations, which I hope further studies about Smith will explore. Some fertile ground to be explored about Charlotte Smith might include the ways in which her poetry could be read from a psychoanalytical vantage point. Given Smith's problematic relationship with patriarchal ideology, her positioning in the symbolic order could be studied. Such a study may also benefit from psychoanalytic discussions of the sublime and elaborate on Smith's inability to reach it from a psychoanalytical perspective. Secondly, as occasionally noted by critics such as Dahlia Porter and Jacqueline Labbe, Smith's poetry includes puns, which may be analysed from a deconstructionist perspective to lay bare the inherent inconsistencies and multiple meanings to her poems. Another area of interest can be Smith's poems for children; as her *Rural Walks* and *Conversations Introducing Poetry* are hardly studied and there is very little published on these volumes. Finally, Smith's letters can be studied extensively to give a fuller account of the poet's subjectivity in relation to her creative works. This would extend my study into a work related to different focus from the present one.

This dissertation also revealed Smith's poetry as one that represents a woman poet's sense of in-betweenness. She is a woman poet trying to write like a man: she avoids the representation of the quotidian and homely occupations of women, instead setting her poems outdoors, trying to imitate the masculine tradition of the sublime, failing unwittingly in this, only to find herself in the feminine beautiful. She is "[a]bsorbed in style and thought" of Romanticism (Curran, "Introduction" xix), but again unable to detach herself from the conventions and mind-set of Neoclassicism. She is both class-conscious and sensible, sympathizing with the underprivileged sometimes so easily and sometimes with difficulty. She is sincere in her affections and emotions, but also simultaneously performative, portraying herself in a way that the society demands her to be. Finally, she is both philosophically superficial and intellectually challenging, compensating for her lack of formal education with a

self-taught knowledge of and taste for literature, botany, and history. Smith's versatility shows us how noncanonical voices can provide us with insight into the formation of the traditions that are idiosyncratic of the period.



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## APPENDICES

### A. CURRICULUM VITAE

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#### EDUCATION

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MA	METU English Literature	2008
BS	Bilkent University, English Language and Literature	2004
High School	TED Ankara College	2000

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2016 -	METU Department of Modern Languages	Assistant Chair

2013-2015	METU Department of Foreign Languages Education	Part-Time Instructor
2008-2011	METU Department of Modern Languages	Syllabus Committee, Material Development
2005 -	METU Department of Modern Languages	Full time English Instructor

## FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Advanced English, Beginner German, Beginner French

## CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS

1. G. Gülen, B. Hasanbaşođlu, E. ŐeŐen T. & G. (Sert) Tokdemir. *Academic English: Survival Skills I*. Ankara: Yargı Yayinevi, 2009.
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## B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

### CHARLOTTE TURNER SMITH: ROMANTİK ŐİİRİN BİR ÖNCÜSÜ MÜ?

Romantizm entelektüel, sanatsal ve edebi bir akım olarak on sekizinci yüzyılın sonlarında ortaya çıkmış ve Batı kültürünü, Aydınlanma prensiplerinden kopuşuyla, yaratıcılığı sıradanlığa, kırsalı şehre, ve duygusal hassasiyeti kuru akılcılığa tercih edişiyile, önemli şekilde şekillendirmiştir. Dönemin önemine rağmen, pek çok yazar ve filozof, ortak bir Romantizm tanımına varmakta zorlanmış, hatta dönemin başlangıç ve bitiş tarihlerinde bile fikir birliğine ulaşamamıştır. Özellikle son dönemlerde feminist, yeni tarihselci ve yapıbozumcu eleştiriler, Romantizmin halihazırda sorunlu olan tanımını, iyice karmaşıklaştırmış ve İngiltere’de altı erkek şairle sınırlandırılan dönemi, ötekileştirilmiş olan kadın ve alt tabakadan şairleri de ekleyerek genişletmişlerdir. Bu çalışmalar, her ne kadar unutulmuş seslere yeniden yer vermesi ve dönemi daha kapsayıcı bir gerçeklikle sunmayı amaçlaması nedeniyle önemli olsa da, Romantik dönemin çığır açıcı reformlarını ve Batı epistemolojisine ve sanatına getirdiği yenilikçiliği göz ardı ederek, dönemi sadece belirli bazı temaların bireşimine indirgemektedir.

Feminist araştırmaların bir sonucu olarak, on sekizinci yüzyılın sonlarına damga vuran ancak uzun bir süre unutulmuş olan Charlotte Turner Smith ismi de yeniden gündeme gelmiş ve pek çok çalışmaya ilham vermiştir. Zamanında hem düzyazı hem de manzum eserler vererek William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jane Austen, John Keats ve daha nicelerine doğaya bakışı, şiir türlerinde yaptığı yenilikler, kimlik ve şiirsel ses anlamında ilham veren Smith, İngiliz Romantizminde bıraktığı derin izler nedeniyle, şiirlerinin de editörü olan Stuart Curran tarafından “ilk Romantik şair” ilan edilmiştir. Bu ifade Smith’i yeniden edebiyat sahnesine çıkarsa da, bu çalışmanın da ortaya çıkardığı gibi

aslında pek de doğru olmayan bir genellemeden ibarettir, çünkü Smith'in Neoklasik dönemin bir gerekliliği olan rasyonel düşünme ve düzenden tam kopmadığı, alegorik kavramsallaştırmaları sıklıkla kullandığı, bunun yanında Romantik dönemin çok büyük bir parçası olan yücelik ve aşkınlık (transcendence) kavramlarıyla sorun yaşadığı görülmektedir.

Charlotte Smith şiirlerinde ve özsözlerinde sıklıkla kendi yaşamına göndermelerde bulunduğu için, çalışmaya kısa bir yaşam öyküsü ekleme gerekliliği doğmuştur. Charlotte Turner Smith 1749 tarihinde, soylu sayılabilecek bir aileye Nicholas Turner'in ilk kızı olarak dünyaya gelmiştir. Üç yaşında annesini kaybeden ve babası ülkeden ayrılınca teyzesi Lucy Towers'a emanet edilen Smith, babasına ait mülklerde ve İngiliz kırsalında huzurlu ve pastoral bir çocukluk geçirmiş, döneminin kibar genç kadınları için uygun sayılabilecek bir eğitim almıştır. Altı yaşında Chichester'da bir okula gitmiş, ressam George Smith'ten dersler almış ve peyzaja dair ilk fikirlerini oluşturmuş ancak miyop olması sebebiyle ilgisi kısa sürede çiçeklere ve botaniğe kaymıştır (bu detay, özellikle son dönem şiirleri açısından önemlidir). Doğaya, bitkilere ve manzaraya erken yaşlardan itibaren duyduğu bu sevgi, edebi eserlerinde de kendine yer bulmuş, kariyeri boyunca büyüyerek bir hayat duruşuna dönüşmüştür.

Aile Londra'ya taşındığında, Smith babasının ayarladığı Kensington'da bir okula devam ederek resim, tiyatro ve Fransızca ve İtalyanca gibi modern dillerde eğitim görmeye devam etti, çok erken yaşlarda keşfettiği şiir yazma yeteneğini geliştirdi. Babasının kumar borçları nedeniyle ailenin maddi durumu sarsılmaya başladığında, 1761'de okulu bırakması gerekti ancak okumaya ve yazmaya olan tutkusu hiç azalmadı. Smith on beş yaşına geldiğinde, babası finansal durumu iyi olan ve kendisinden genç biriyle yeniden evlendi. Bir üvey anne ile yaşamının zorluklarını kısa sürede anlayan Charlotte, teyzesinin de telkinlerini dinleyerek, zengin bir tüccarın oğlu olan Benjamin Smith'le nişanlandı ve yıllar sonra bir mektubunda acıyla bahsedeceği gibi “genç yaşında yasal bir fahişe gibi

satıldı.” İyi bir evlilik olması umuduyla başlayan bu birliktelik, Charlotte için tam bir düş kırıklığıyla sonuçlandı çünkü eşi para idaresi konusunda başarısız, kötü huylu ve saldırgan bir adamdı. Evlendikten kısa bir süre sonra, Benjamin Smith aileyi iflasa sürükledi ve hapse atıldı. King’s Bench hapisanesinde eşine eşlik eden Charlotte Smith, kocasının hapisten çıkmasına yardım etmek için para bulma çabasıyla *Hüzünlü Soneler*’i (*Elegiac Sonnets*) yayımlattı. Borçlardan yakasını bir türlü kurtaramayan Benjamin Smith’se ailenin başına başka sorunlar da açarak, alacaklılardan kaçmak için 1784’te Normandiya’ya gitti ve ailesini de peşinden sürükledi. İngiltere’den ayrılırken beş aylık hamile olan ve yasal olarak hiçbir hakkı olmadığından çocuklarını da babalarından ayrı tutamayan Charlotte da bir yıl sürecek bu sürgünde dokuz çocuğuyla birlikte eşinin yanında Fransa’da kaldı; türlü zorluklara göğüs gerdi, çeviriler yaparak aile ekonomisine katkıda bulundu. 1787’de artık eşinin zorbalıklarına ve sadakatsizliklerine daha fazla dayanamayarak eşini terk etti ve sadece yazarlıktan elde ettiği gelire kendisine ve çocuklarına bakmaya başladı. Oğlunun beceriksizliğini çok önceden öngören Richard Smith, aslında Charlotte ve çocukları için bir vasiyet bırakmıştı; ancak vasiyet tahminlerin ötesinde karışıklıklarla dolu olduğu için Charlotte Smith kendisine ve çocuklarına bırakılmış olan parayı ancak ölümünden birkaç hafta önce alabilmiş ve ömrünü yasal savaşlarla geçirmişti. Ailesine bakabilmek için yazmaktan başka hiçbir şansı olmayan Smith yirmi iki yılda altmış üç cilt roman, şiir ve çocuk kitabı yazmış, şiir kitaplarına sürekli eklemeler yapmış, uzun ve serbest nazım türünde şiirler ve muhtemelen bir de komedi oyunu yazmıştır. Üretken bir yazar olan Charlotte Smith kendinden sonra gelen kadın, erkek pek çok yazarı etkilemiş; gotik, devrimci ve didaktik pek çok türde eserler yazmıştır. Romanları, İngiltere’yi temsil eden büyük bir kalede ya da malikanede geçen ilk yazar Smith’tir ve aidiyet ve yönetim meselelerini sorgulamasıyla kendinden sonra gelen Mansfield Park, Howard’s End gibi pek çok kurgusal eve de ilham vermiştir. Yaşamı zorluklarla dolu olsa da Charlotte Smith zamanının gerçeklerinden asla kopuk değildi ve Fransız Devrimi’nin ateşli bir savunucusuydu. Hatta öyle ki 1791’in ikinci yarısında, olaylara bizzat şahit olmak için Paris’e gitmiş, devrim sonrası Terör Saltanatı’ndan kaçan Fransız

mültecileri evinde misafir etmiş ve romanlarında devrimin ideallerine geniş olarak yer vermiştir. Okuyucularının maddi desteğine ihtiyacı olduğu için, zaman zaman yayıncıların ve okuyucuların taleplerine boyun eğmek ve dönemin sanatsal tercihlerine uymak zorunda kalsa da yeri geldiğinde kendi ülkesi olan İngiltere'yi eleştirmekten geri durmamış, politik inançlarından taviz vermemiş, ancak bir miktar sesini kısmıştır.

Para kazanmak amacıyla yazdığı romanlarında yanında, Smith aslında kendisini her zaman bir şair olarak görmüştür. Otuz beş yaşına kadar bir şey yayımlamasa da, gençliğinden beri iyi bir okuyucu olmuş ve amatörce de olsa şiir yazmıştır. En sevdiği şiir William Cowper'ın *The Task* (Görev) şiiri olmuş, şiiri defalarca okumuş ve serbest nazım türünde yazdığı *The Emigrants* (Göçmenler) şiirini de Cowper'a adanmıştır. Cowper'ın yanı sıra, dönemin duyarlılıkla anılan şairlerinden Thomson ve Gray'i de takip etmiş, şiirlerinde onlardan alıntılara yer vermiştir. Smith'in şiirlerindeki melankoli ve ölüme duyulan özlem temaları, bu yazarlara neden çekildiğini göstermektedir. Smith için bir başka ilham kaynağı da İskoç şair Robert Burns olmuştur; öyle ki şairin erken ölümü üzerine Smith bir sone yazmış ve *Hüzünlü Soneler*'e eklemiştir. Bunlara ek olarak, özellikle çocuklar için yazdığı eserlerde Rousseau'nun ve yazdığı *Emile*'in etkisi görülmektedir; çocuklar için doğada geçirilen zamanın önemini ve örgün eğitimin olumsuzluklarını ortaya koyan bu eser, Smith'in çocukların, özellikle kız çocuklarının, eğitimini düşünmesine fırsat sağlamış ve *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (Nazımı Tanıtan Konuşmalar) ve *Rural Walks* (Kırsal Yürüyüşler) kitaplarında *Emile*'de tasvir edilen yolu takip etmiş, kırsalın duyarlılığın gelişmesindeki öneminden, doğayı incelemenin, hayvanlarla ilgilenmenin öneminden bahsetmiştir. Belki hepsinden daha önemlisi, kendinden sonra gelen tüm Romantik şairlerde olduğu gibi, Shakespeare'in etkisi olmuştur. Eserlerinde, Shakespeare'den sıklıkla ve özgürce alıntılar yapan Smith, büyük İngiliz şairi öyle etraflıca okumuştur ki, aklının bir kösesinde ve eserlerinde hep onun sesi vardır.

Tüm bu ilham kaynaklarını harmanlayarak, Charlotte Smith İngiliz şiirine son derece büyük katkılarda bulunmuştur; bunlardan en önemlisi on yedinci yüzyılda gözden düşmüş olan sone formunu yeniden canlandırması olmuştur. Milton'un ölümünden sonra ufak tefek soneler yazılmış olsa da, hiçbiri Smith'in *Hüzünlü Soneler*'inin yakaladığı başarıya ulaşamadı. Geleneksel olarak karşılıksız aşkın irdelendiği bu şiir türünü, Smith yeni baştan yaratarak ağıt ve soneyi birleştirmiş, konuyu melankolik iç değerlendirme ve öz-sunuma genişletmiştir. Aslında bir kadın sesinin kullanılmadığı soneleri, Smith zaman zaman Goethe'nin Werther<sup>77</sup>'i gibi, zaman zaman acı çeken bir anne gibi, zaman zamansa karşılıksız aşkı yüzünden acı çeken kadın mı erkek mi tam da anlayamadığımız bir kişinin ağzından yazmış ve kendisinden sonra gelen şairlere pek çok yeni kapı açmıştır.

Charlotte Smith'i önemli kılan bir başka özelliği de eserlerinde yer verdiği detaylı doğa tasvirleridir; çocukluğundan getirdiği doğa sevgisini eserlerine taşıyarak doğanın bolluğunu ve farklılığını, ona üstünlük sağlamadan ama saygı göstererek yansıtmaya çalışmıştır. Ancak bu doğa algısı, daha ileride de detaylandıracağım gibi, Romantik şiirde görülen doğa algısından çok farklıdır. Romantik şairlerin çoğunda Platonik ve Neoplatonik felsefenin öğretileri ışığında doğadan ilham alma, sonrasında zihnin gücüyle onun ötesine geçme çabası Smith'te hiçbir zaman görülememektedir. Her ne kadar döneminde çok popüler olan Edmund Burke'ün kitaplarını okumuş olsa da, Smith bu fikirleri başka felsefelerle birleştirerek doğanın ötesindeki aşkın ve bilişsel uyanışa gidemez ve doğayı sadece maddesel düzeyde inceler ve takdir eder. Bu dünyevi tasvirlerin bir diğer nedeni de Smith'in kendisini, yaşamının zorluklarından ve çevresindeki “gerçek” acılardan soyutlayamamasıdır. Bu nedenle bakış açısı ufak detaylara takılıp kalmakta, “yüce”dense “güzel”e yönelmektedir.

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<sup>77</sup> Smith şiirlerinde, bu ismin İngiltere'de popüler olan Werter halini kullandığı için, çalışmada ben de Smith'in versiyonuna sadık kaldım.

Charlotte Smith'in yazınında ve hatta belki kişiliğinde eleştirilecek noktalar muhakkak vardır; ancak, bunların hiçbiri İngiliz Edebiyatı için öneminin önüne geçmemelidir. Bana kalırsa Charlotte Smith on sekizinci ve on dokuzuncu yüzyılları birbirine bağlayan en önemli yazarlardan biridir. Bu iki yüzyıl, kısa bir süre önceye kadar taban tabana zıt olarak görülmüş olsa da, günümüz eleştirmenleri iki dönem arasında organik bağların altını çizmekte ve onlara göre Charlotte Smith iki dönemi bağlayan kayıp halkalardan biri, hatta belki de en önemlisidir.

Romantisizm farklı ülkelerde ve farklı bağlamlarda değişik şekillerde yorumlanmıştır. İngiliz Romantizmi'ye klasik olarak William Wordsworth'un 1789'da *Lyrical Ballads*'ı (Lirik Baladlar) yayımlamasıyla, Kraliçe Viktorya'nın 1837'de tahta çıkması arasında yılları kapsar ve William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley ve John Keats ile anılır. Pek çok eleştirmen, dönemin özelliklerini tutarlı bir şekilde sunmanın olanaksızlığından bahsetse de, bu çalışmada Romantik dönemi özetleyen ve zengin psikolojik, ideolojik ve felsefi derinliğini verecek dört anahtar kavram belirlenmiştir: aşkınlık, hassasiyet, tepkisellik ve kimlik.

Schlegel's göre, Romantizmin özü aşkınlıktır ve bu önemli terim "dünyevi olanı görerek ebedi ve tanrısal olana ulaşmak" olarak tanımlanabilir. Romantizm için aşkınlık kavramının bu denli önemli olmasının bir nedeni Hristiyan anlayışında yer alan, insanın "düşmüş" olduğu ve tanrısal ve doğal olanla bağlarının kopmuş olduğu ve bu bağın yeniden onarılması gerektiği inancıdır. Kendilerine örnek aldıkları Milton gibi, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats ve Shelley de bu inancı benimsemiş ve erilin dışıyla, dünyanın cennetle, insanın ve aklın doğayla yeniden birleşmesiyle bütünlük hissine erişileceğine inanmışlardır. Aklın ve doğanın, bir diğer deyişle obje ve süjenin sentezi Romantizmin en önemli amacı olmuş ve bu yolda Platonik ve Neoplatonik felsefeden yararlanmışlardır. Özellikle on sekizinci yüzyıl sonlarında Floyer Sydenham tarafından Eflatun'un diyaloglarının bir kısmının İngilizce'ye tercümesiyle yeniden popüler olan bu

okullar, Romantiklerin Aydınlanma çağının mekanik dünya görüşü ve katı empirisizmine olan tepkilerini dayandırabilecekleri bir taban sunmuştur. Bu antik okulların, analiz ve ayrıştırmaya dayalı Aydınlanma metotlarına karşı sentez ve tanrısal olanla birleşmeyi öngören, ruhun gerçekliğin farklı seviyelerine yükselerek asıl kökenine duysal etkilerle değil de mistik deneyimlerle ve hayal gücüyle ulaşılabilirliğini öneren prensipleri Romantiklerin görüşlerinin şekillenmesinde etkisi çok büyük olmuştur. Romantikler, aradıkları mistik deneyimin, tanrısal bir yaratma gücüne sahip olan doğa aracılığıyla mümkün olduğuna inandılar. Doğayla etkileşim sayesinde masumiyetten deneyime ve daha yüksek bir masumiyete erişerek bilincin gücüne erişebileceklerine ve böylece aşkınlığa ulaşarak doğanın ve bilincin uyumuna ulaşacaklarına inanıyorlardı. Ruhsal uyanış için doğanın yeri bu denli hayati olduğundan, fiziksel dünyanın tasvirleri de Romantik edebiyat için önem kazandı. Doğayla tasvirleri şiirde daha önce de var olmakla beraber, Romantik dönemde odak noktası aklın doğayla ilişkisine ve doğanın akılda uyandırdığı yüce fikirlere kaymıştı. Romantik şiirde artık doğayla olan ilişki, akli beslemekte ve zihin dünyayı, evreni ve yaratana daha farklı bir şekilde kavrayabilmekteydi.

Doğa ve insan zihni arasındaki ilişkiyi mercek altına alan Romantikler, Edmund Burke'ün estetik ve yüce kavramlarından da etkilenmişlerdi. Fiziksel dünya bağlamında yüce, acı, tehlike ya da korkunç öğeler taşıyan ve insanda güçlü duygular uyandıran varlık ya da şekiller olarak tanımlanabilir. Burke'e göre, insana sonsuzluk hissi veren, çok karanlık, aşırı aydınlık ya da keskin kenarlara sahip nesnelere yüce kavramıyla ilişkilendirilebilir ve böyle objelerle karşılaşan kişiler, kısa bir süreliğine de olsa kendilerine yabancılaşırlar ve fiziksel olanın ötesine geçerek, aşkın ya da tinsel gerçeklik alanına taşınırlar.

Romantik dönem için çok önemli olan bir diğer kavram olan duyarlılık, kişinin zor durumdaki başkalarına hissettiği duygular olarak tanımlanabilir. Aklın yerine duyguları öne çıkaran bu kavram, Aydınlanma'nın usçuluğuna ve Hobbes'un insanlığın iyiliğine yönelttiği şüpheciliğe bir başkaldırıydı.

Shaftesbury Kontu'nun 1711'de yayımladığı *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (İnsanların, Davranışların, Fikirlerin ve Zamanların Özellikleri) başlıklı eseri, Hobbes'in ben-merkezci fikirlerini sorgulayarak insanların başkalarına duygusal yakınlık kurmaya meyilli ve affedici olduklarını öne sürdü. Daha sonra Jean-Jacques Rousseau da usçuluğa karşı çıkarak duyguları aklın önünde tuttu ve insanları saf ve özgür olarak tanımlayarak duyarlılık kavramını insani bir bakış açısıyla oluşturmuş oldu. Erken on sekizinci yüzyıl hisleri kontrol etmeye önem verirken, James Thomson, Thomas Gray ve William Cowper gibi şairler şiirlerine duyarlılık katarak, dönemin yazım tarzından daha düşünceli, toplum ve şehir yaşamına hapsedilmiş insanla doğa arasındaki ilişkiye yoğunlaşan eserler ortaya koymuşlardır. Duyarlılık dönemi olarak adlandırılan bu zaman 1744'te Pope'un vefatıyla *Lirik Baladlar*'ın basımı arasındaki zamanı kapsamaktadır ve duyarlılık akımının bir devamı olarak görülmektedir. Fransız Devrimi sonrası yazına olan etkisi nedeniyle duyarlılık geçici bir faz değil, Romantizm'in önemli bir parçası olarak görülmektedir (Nagle 3). Thomson, Shaftesbury ve Rousseau'dan öğrendiklerini harmanlayan Romantikler yaşama ve özellikle de ötekileştirilmişlerin yaşamına önem vererek deneyimlerini aktarmaya önem verdiler. Bu sayede toplumu eleştirerek, toplumu dönüştürmeyi amaçladılar. Bu gayeyle, Fransız Devrimi'nin eşitlik ilkesini benimseyen Romantikler her tür adaletsizliğe savaş açtılar ve kölelik karşıtı yazılar yazdılar ve eserlerinde alt tabakanın yaşamını yansıttılar.

Romantik dönemin bir diğer önemli kaygısı da kimlik ya da belik kavramlarıydı. Bazı eleştirmenlere göre bu içe dönüşün nedeni, Fransız Devrimi sonrasında gelen vahşetin yol açtığı düş kırıklığıydı ve buna bağlı olarak yaşamöykülerinden esinlenmiş eserlerinde, bütüncül, dayanıklı, kendini bilen, inisiyatif alan ve kendine has bir kimlik oluşturmaya çalışmışlardır (Mellor 145). Deneyimlerinin, kimliklerinin ve yaratıcılıklarının benzersizliğine inanan Romantikler, dil kullanımlarında öznel kalmış, " lirik ben" kullanımlarıyla, okuyucunun şiir kişisi ile şair arasında bir paralellik kurmasına izin vermiştir.

Abrams gibi bazı yazarlar bu otobiyografik detayların kurgusal olduğunu söylese de, yazarın “içtenlik” iddiası okuyucu için kafa karıştırıcı olabilmektedir. Esterhammer için içtenlik, içsel gerçeklikle dış görünüşün uyumlu olmasıdır ve eleştirmen Romantik dönemde iki farklı tür içtenlik olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bunlardan biri Romantik şair Wordsworth’le diğeri de Byron’la eşleştirilmiştir. Wordsworth tipi içtenlikte rol yapma yokken, Byron tipi içtenlik edimseldir, içsel niyet toplumca kabul edilen jestler, tonlamalar, ifadeler ve hatta kıyafetlerle edimsel olarak sergilenir.

Tepkisellik, Romantik dönemin bir diğeri önemli özelliğidir. Bu bağlamda, Romantiklerin İngiltere’deki ve dünyadaki sosyo-politik gelişmelere ve çağın egemen düşünce yapısı olan Aydınlanma felsefesine verdikleri tepki kayda değerdir. Dönemin en büyük politik olaylarından biri Amerikan Devrimi ve Bağımsızlık Savaşı (1775-1783) olmuştur. On üç koloninin İngiltere’den kopuşunun ciddi ekonomik etkileri olsa da ülkenin emperyalist kimliğine verdiği zarar ve aydınlarda yarattığı eşitlik tutkusu çok daha büyük olmuştur. Bu devrimden daha önemli bir diğeri devrimse Fransız Devrimi olmuş ve özgürlük, eşitlik ve kardeşlik vaadiyle büyük kitleleri peşinden sürüklemiştir. Gençliklerinde, pek çok İngiliz Romantik şair, Fransız Devrimi’ne sempati duymuş, hatta olayların içinde olabilmek için Paris’e gitmişlerdir. Ancak devrimin kanlı tarafı, Terör Saltanatı ve sonrasında Napoleon’un başa geçmesiyle hayalleri yarım kalmıştır. İlerleyen zamanlarda politik duruşları tutuculuğa kaysa da, yine de tüm Romantiklerde zorbalığa ve gelenekselliğe duyulan tepki var olmaya devam etmiştir. Bu dönemde İngiliz halkı da devrime olan yaklaşımlarına göre ikiye ayrılmış, hükümetin halka büyük bir baskı ve sansür uygulamasına neden olmuştur. Şubat 1793’ten Haziran 1815’e kadar Fransa’yla süren savaş, ülkenin demografik yapısını değiştirmekle beraber İngiliz vatanseverliğinin kurgulanmasına da vesile olmuştur. Buna göre İngilizler akliselim ve taviz gibi kavramlarla tanımlanırken, düşman Fransızlar şizofrenik ve aşırı hassasiyetle buz gibi mantık arasında sallanan dengesizler olarak tasvir edilmiştir.

İngiltere bu dönemde ticari savaşlar da vermekteydi. En büyük kolonisi Amerika'yı kaybetmiş olsa da Karayipler, Kanada ve Hindistan'daki egemenliği devam etmiş, Akdeniz, Güney Afrika ve Avustralya'dan da topraklar ele geçirmiştir. Bu hızlı yayılımla beraber, İngiltere işlenmiş malzemeler ihraç eder ve şeker, tütün ve çay gibi ham madde ithal eder duruma gelmiştir. Bu sistem yoğun bir şekilde Afrika'dan getirilen ve acı dolu ağır işlere koşulan kölelerle yürüyordu. 1780'lere gelindiğinde, İngiliz gemileri Afrika'dan Amerika'ya yılda 30,000 köle taşıyordu ve taşıma koşulları kesinlikle insani değildi. İnsan hakları konusundaki duyarlılıkların artmasıyla kölelerin durumu toplumda ve parlamentoda tartışılan bir konu haline gelmiştir. Kölelik karşıtı eylemler 1780'lerin başında başladı, köleliğin 1807'de kaldırılması ve kölelerin 1833-38 arasında azat edilmesiyle devam etmiştir.

On sekizinci yüzyılın sonlarında İngiltere, eski tarıma dayalı ekonomik yapısından uzaklaşarak endüstriyel-kapitalist bir demokrasi halini almıştı. Bu değişim, kırsal kesimde işsizliğin artmasına, işgücünün şehirlere kaymasına neden olmuş ve mekanik yenilikleri beraberinde getirmiştir. James Watt'ın buhar makinası ve tekstil endüstrisindeki gelişmeler toplumu dönüştürmüş, yeni ulaşım yollarını mecbur kılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, yollar yenilenmiş, kanallar açılmış, nüfus hızla artmaya başlamıştır. Bu hızlı değişimler elbette halkın bir kesimini de endişelendirmiş, çevresel felaketler, sanayileşme ve şehirleşme nedeniyle doğaya olan ilgi ve hassasiyet artmıştır.

Batı medeniyetinin belkemiği olan Aydınlanma hareketi akli ve bilimsel yöntemleri öne çıkarmasıyla tanınır. Kökeni 17. Yüzyıla dayanan ve öncüleri arasında Bacon, Locke, William Godwin, Descartes, Voltaire, Diderot, Kant, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson ve Thomas Paine gibi isimlerin bulunduğu Aydınlanma hareketi, usun gücüyle insanlığı esir eden cehalet, tahammülsüzlük ve önyargı gibi zaafaların alt edilebileceğine ve böylece insanlığın hak ettiği ideal hayata ulaşacağına inanmaktadır. Romantikler her ne

kadar Aydınlanma çağının katı usçuluğunu ve duyuları ön plana geçiren felsefelerini eleştirseler de, aslında özgürlük ve bireycilik kavramlarını onlardan öğrenmiş ve entelektüel olarak Aydınlanma'dan beslenmişlerdir. Romantizmin, Aydınlanma'dan ayrılmasının en önemli nedeni, evreni bir saat gibi işleyen bir mekanizma yerine, devinim içinde ve uzvi olarak tanımlayan yeni bir paradigmanın ortaya çıkmasıdır. Bu yeni algı beraberinde yeni yazın türleri ve formlar da getirerek eskiden kopma çabasında olmuştur. Romantikler, insan zihnini tanımlarken Locke'un boş levha benzetmesini bir kenara bırakarak, Yeni Platoncu anlayışı benimsemiş ve zihnin yaratıcı gücüne vurgu yapmıştır. Romantikler ayrıca, Locke geleneğinden gelen ve Hume, Hartley ve Priestley tarafından geliştirilen çağrışımçı felsefeden de beslenmiş ve yaratım süreci ve çağrışımlar arasındaki ilişkiye yoğunlaşmışlardır.

Toplumsal sorunlarla ilgilenmelerine rağmen, Romantik şairlerin içe dönük olduklarını iddia etmek de pek mümkündür. Bu içedönüşün nedeni, çoğu zaman kendilerini toplumdan dışlanmış, uyumsuz kişiler olarak görmeleridir. Bu nedenle, Romantikler için her şeyin daha saf ve temiz olduğu çocukluk dönemi ayrıca önemlidir. Şairler, dolayısıyla, dünyaya çocuklar gibi saf, yaratıcı ve basit bir algıyla bakmaya çalışmış, şiirlerinde sıklıkla çocukluklarına dönmüşlerdir.

Çalışmanın üçüncü bölümü, Charlotte Smith'in şiirlerindeki doğa algısını ve aşkınlık kavramına yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bir ara dönem figürü olan Smith, uzun doğa tasvirlerine yar vermiş ve doğayı kendi içinde kusursuz olarak betimlemiş, ancak Romantik şairlerin deneyimlediği aşkınlık hissine yaklaşamamıştır. Bu bağlamda *Elegiac Sonnets'ten* (Hüzünlü Soneler) seçilmiş şiirler, *The Emigrants* (Göçmenler) ve *Bechy Head* (Kıyıbaşı) şiirleri incelenmiştir. Romantik dönemin en temel eserlerinde, doğa insanın zihnini besleyen, kendini tanımasını sağlayan ve dolayısıyla tinsel bir uyanış yaşamasını sağlayan kutsal bir varlık olarak görülmektedir. Charlotte Smith'in şiirlerindeyse, bu tinsel boyutu görmemekteyiz. Erkek Romantik şairler için, doğa zihni uyarıcı bir görev üstlenirken, Smith'in şiirlerinde sakinleştirici bir etki göremeyiz. Doğa ve şiir

kişinin ruh hali paralellik göstermektedir, ki bu o dönem için oldukça yenilikçidir, ancak yine de klasik Romantizm'in ulaştığı aşkınlığa ulaşamaması açısından gelenekseldir. Bu eksikliğin nedenlerinden biri, Smith'e göre doğa "öteki"dir – bu doğayı sevmediği anlamına asla gelmemektedir ancak insanlığa olan güveni sarsıldığı için, Smith doğa ve insan gerçekliklerinin bir araya gelebileceğine inanmamaktadır. Örneğin "Sonnet 83 – The Sea View" ("Sone 83 – Deniz Manzarası) şiirinde şiir kişisi olan çoban, bir dağın eteklerinde yumuşak torağın üstünde dinlenirken betimlenir. Sıradan bir Romantik şiirde, kişinin çocukluğuna dönüp bir aydınlanma ya da olgunlaşma deneyimlemesi beklenirken bu şiir farklı bir şekilde ilerler ve insanlığın savaşlarla yol açtığı yıkım ve ölüm anlatılır. Anlamak bir yana, insanlık doğaya zarar vermektedir. Buna karşılık olarak, doğa da insanlara karşı umursamazdır. Sone 59'da, örneğin, ay aşağı bakıp insanların acılarını gördüğünde bundan etkilenmez ve kendi üstünlüğünün yeniden farkına varır. Doğanın vurdumduymazlığı, *Göçmenler* şiirinde tekrar konu edilir ve bu yönüyle diğer kadın şairlerden sıyrılır. Pek çok kadın şair doğayı bir arkadaş olarak görse de, Smith'te durum farklıdır ve bunun nedeni insanlığın kusurlarıdır.

Smith'in yüce anlayışı da başka yazarlardan farklılık göstermektedir. Erken dönem şiirlerindeki manzara tasvirlerindeki dil, Burke'ün yücesine yaklaşıp da, peşi sıra gelmesi gereken aşkınlık deneyimlemesi bir türlü olamamaktadır. Anne Mellor'a göre, aşkınlık deneyiminin özü gereği içinde doğayı kontrol etme isteği vardır ve kadın bilincinde böyle bir istek yoktur. Bir diğer nedense, erkek Romantikler'in felsefe temeliyle sentezledikleri görüşleri sayesinde çerçevesiz aşkın deneyimlerinin, Smith için erişilmez olması ve gerçek yaşamının zorlukları nedeniyle kendini tinsel bir deneyime bırakamamasıdır. Tüm bunların yanısıra, Smith aklın gücüne inanmakta ve şiirlerinde bunun altını çizmektedir ve bu da aşkın alanını deneyimlemesinin önüne geçmektedir. *Göçmenler* ve özellikle de *Kıyıbaşı* şiirlerinde görkemli manzaralar tasvir edip, yüce kavramıyla direkt ilişkili olan dağ tepelerinden seslense de, bulunduğu erkil duruş, kadın şairi rahatsız etmekte ve aşkınlığı deneyimleyememektedir.

Toplum tarafından zaten dışlandığını hisseden Smith, tinsel bir deneyimden de uzaklaşmaktadır. Bunun yerine, bakışını aşağıya – daha detaylı ve küçük nesnelere bulduğu yere – çevirmektedir. Dil kullanımında da, hislere hitap eden, duyuşsal ve çağrışımsal bir dil değil de gönderisel dilini kullanmakta, jeoloji ve botanik bilimlerini şiirine dahil etmektedir. Sonuç olarak, Smith doğayı tinsel bir deneyime ulaşmak için kullanılan bir araç gibi görmemektedir. Yüce yerine güzeli tercih ederek, Burke'un teorisini baş aşağı çevirmiş, pek çok kadın şair gibi aşkınlık yerine detayları tercih etmiştir. Erkek şairlerin ulaşabildiği aşkınlığın, kadın şairler tarafından ulaşılamaması, eleştirilenleri yeni arayışlara yöneltmiştir: Anne Mellor'a göre, kadınlar doğadan kopuş yaşamaz ve bu nedenle onu bir dost gibi görmeye devam eder. Barbara Clare Freeman'a göreyse kadın şairler doğaya hükmetmek yerine doğanın ötekiliğine saygı duyar, ki bu Smith'in algısına daha yakındır. John Pipkin'e göreyse aşkın yanında bir de "maddesel yüce" vardır. Aşkın yücelikteki tinsel uyanış ve yaratıcı güçlendirme, maddesel yücede bulunmamaktadır. Bunun yerine doğanın fiziksel gerçekliği tasvir edilmektedir. Bu nedenle, aşkın yücelikte, kişisel gelişim uğruna doğanın üstünlüğünü kabulleniş vardır. Toplum içinde ikinci plana atılan kadın için bu kabulleniş tam bir yok olma anlamına gelirken, erkek şairler için yeni kapılar açmaktadır. Smith'in yaşadığı endişe, özellikle *Kıyıbaşı* şiirinde, otoritesini ve kimliğini kaybetme endişesidir ve bu nedenle kendini rahat hissettiği maddesel gerçekliğe geri dönmektedir.

Çalışmanın dördüncü bölümü, Charlotte Smith'in ötekileştirilen gruplara karşı hissettiği duyarlılığa eğilmektedir. Erken yaşta yaptığı mutsuz evliliği mektuplarında köleliğe benzeten Smith için ezilen ve ötekileştirilen gruplara yakınlık hissetmek zor değildi. Bu nedenle, kendi yaşamından ve deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak başkalarının acılarını anlatabiliyordu. Bazı erken dönem şiirlerinde, alt sınıftaki kişilere tepeden bakan ve yargılayıcı bir tavra bürünen Smith, kariyerinin ilerleyen dönemlerinde bu tavrı bir kenara bırakmış ve şiir kişilerine daha fazla yakınlık hissetmiştir. Özellikle *Göçmenler* şiirinde, kadın ve çocuklara rahatlıkla sempati duyabilmekte, kendisi de acı çeken biri

olduğu için bu konudaki yetkinliğine güvenmektedir. Aslında, Fransa'dan kaçan bu göçmenler, Smith için kişisel bir meseleydi de çünkü kendi evini de göçmenlere açmış, çok sevdiği kızı Augusta'yı da bu göçmenlerden biriyle evlendirmiştir. Şiirinde, bir zamanlar gücünü kendi menfaati için kullanan Fransız din adamlarını eleştirse de, kraliyet ailesi dahil her kesimden insana yakınlık göstermektedir. Başkalarının hikayelerini anlatırken, bireylerin hikayelerine tek tek eğilmiş, savaşı ve devlet politikalarını eleştirerek insanların ezilmesini kınamıştır. Ona göre savaş, insanlık dışı ve zalimdi, yaşamı sonlandıran, mutluluğu ve refahı yok eden bir yüzkarasıydı. Bu bağlamda, savaş yüzünden darmadağın olan ve Katolik düşman olarak görülen Fransızlara bile sempati duymuş, ülkesindeki şiddetten kaçmak zorunda kalan göçmenlere yardım elini uzatmıştır. Bir dönem kendisi de ülkesini terk edip Fransa'da yaşamak zorunda kaldığı ve kendi ülkesi olan İngiltere'de de haksızlığa uğrayıp ötekileştirildiğini hissettiği için, Smith'in şiirlerinde göçmenlere, özellikle annelere duyduğu yakınlık anlaşılabilir bir durumdur. Bir kadın şairin şiirlerinde politik söylemlerde bulunması hoş karşılanan bir durum değildi; toplum tarafından uyumlu ve sessiz olması beklenen bir kadının zaten yapmaması gereken bir şekilde şiirlerini yayımlatıp bir de politik olarak hassas konulara girmesi, o kadının ötekileştirilmesi anlamına geliyordu. Smith, bu şiirinde devleti ve politikalarını eleştirerek, ötekileştirilmesini perçinlemiş ve insancıl tarafını ortaya koymuştur. Ancak, hayatta kalabilmek için muhtaç olduğu okuyucu desteğini kaybetmemek adına, kendisi için uygun görülen acılı kadın ve anne imgelerine sık sık dönmüş, toplumun annelik mitosunu ve anneliğin göstermelik yüceltmesinin aslında yapmacık olduğunu göstermiştir. Aslında kutsal kabul edilen annelerin askerler tarafından hiç de korunmadığını, güvendikleri devlet tarafından istismar edildiklerini hem kendi hem de göçmenlerin deneyimleri üzerinden anlatmaktadır.

*Kıybaşı* şiirinde de milliyetçi söylemleri reddederek İngiltere ve Fransa'nın ortak geçmişinden bahseder ve emperyalizmi kınar. Bölgenin daha önce defalarca maruz kaldığı işgalleri ve şimdi otlak olan yerlerde yatan ölü askerleri

bir çırpıda anlatarak, aslında ülkesinin, kendisinden çok da farklı olmayan düşmanlarına karşı giriştiği savaşın anlamsızlığından dem vurur. Maddi kazanç uğruna başkalarını sömürmenin ahlaksızlığından bahseder ve tek gerçeğin, insanlar gittikten sonra da varlığını ve döngülerini sürdürecektir olan doğa olduğunu vurgular. Tarihi olayları anlatırken, zaman zaman dönemin tarih anlatıcılığına uygun bir tarz benimseyerek genellemeler yapsa da, Smith yine bireysel hikayelere inerek dışıl bir anlatım tarzı benimser. Şiir ayrıca, kayınpederinin işi dolayısıyla Smith'in yakından tanıdığı kölelik kurumunu da eleştirir ve tüm bu vahşet ortamında, çiftçilerin yaşadığı sade ve basit hayata imrenir.

Çalışmanın bu bölümünde son olarak *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (Nazımı Tanıtan Konuşmalar) kitabındaki istismar ve kurbanlar ele alınır. Bu kitapta, Bayan Talbot karakteri aracılığıyla insanların doğayla etkileşimi sırasında takip etmeleri gereken ahlaki duruşu anlatır. Düz yazı ve nazımın iç içe geçtiği bu kitapta, Emily ve George adlı iki çocuğun, anneleri Bayan Talbot'la birlikte doğayı anlama ve öğrenme çabalarını ve hayvanların ve bazı insanların uğradığı kötü muameleyi görürüz. Hayvanların da korku, endişe gibi duyguları olduğunu, onların da insanların zevkleri ya da merakları nedeniyle işkenceye maruz kalmaması gerektiğini savunan Smith, Aydınlanma çağının insan-hayvan ikiliğindeki duruşuna karşı çıkmıştır. Dini metinlerde de çokça yer alan, insanın hayvana olan üstünlüğü fikri, Aydınlanma çağı yazarları tarafından da irdelenmiştir. Özellikle Descartes'in hayvanların ruhsuz birer makine olduğu, buna karşın düşünme yetisine ve ruha sahip olan insanın ona karşı üstün olduğu fikri, bu ikiliği iyice perçinlemiştir. Romantizm, bu ikiliği ortadan kaldırma çabasıyla pek çok eserde hayvanlara yer vermiş, kadın yazarlar da yazdıkları öğretici kitaplarla hayvanlara iyi davranmayı çocuklara öğretmeye çalışmışlardır. Oğlu Nicholas Smith'in kızı Lureza için yazdığı bu şiirlerle, Smith de insanların hayvanlara olan şiddet içeren davranışlarını kınamıştır. Her zaman eşitliğe inanan Smith için, hayvanların hatta böceklerin bile yaşam hakkı olmalıydı. Balını almak için arıya yapılan kötü muamele, ya da spor için avlanma

Smith için aynı derecede nahoş davranışlardır. Bu davranışlar karşısında, Smith hayvanların korku ve acı duyduğunu yazar ve Descartes'ın yukarıda belirtilen fikirlerine karşı çıkar. Smith'in eleştirileri, bir aristokrat olan Harry Scamperville'in acımasızlığıyla dile gelir ve insanların zulmetme becerisini gözler önüne serer. George ve Emily'yi bir türlü anlayamayan Harry, avlanmanın ve kendi sınıfsal üstünlüğünün tadını çıkararak etrafındaki herkesi ve her şeyi ezmekten büyük zevk alır. Aslında Harry, Smith'in toplumda gördüğü yanlışların beden bulmuş hali gibidir. Buna karşı çözüm ise basittir: anne şefkatiyle ve doğaya merhamet etme bilinciyle yetişmiş çocuklar. Smith bu kitabında, hayvanları ezen ataerkil yapı ile kadınları ezen ideolojinin aynı olduğunu satır aralarında verir. Emily'nin kendisini erkek çocuklar tarafından hırpalanan bir sincapla karşılaştırması bu açıdan önemlidir. Ancak Smith, Bayan Talbot gibi ahlaki duruşu ve bilgisiyle sağlam duruşlu bir kadın figürü oluşturarak, hemcinslerine güçlü bir rol model çizmiştir. Smith, şiirlerinde özel koleksiyonlarda sergilenmek için anavatanlarından koparılan hayvanların durumuna da değinmiş, bu sayede emperyalizmi bir kez daha eleştirmiştir. Alışkın oldukları iklimden ve yiyeceklerden koparılıp İngiltere'ye getirilen bu hayvanlar, ülkenin gücünün bir göstergesi olarak kabul ediliyor ve nadir bulunan şeylerin sergilendiği vitrinlerde teşhir ediliyordu. Smith, özellikle "To the Firefly of Jamaica, seen in a Collection" (Bir Koleksiyonda Görünen Jamaikalı Ateşböceğine) adlı şiirinde, bu koleksiyonların insanlık dışı olduğu gerçeğini ortaya koymakta ve nedeni ister bilimsel merak, ister sanatsal ilham aramak olsun, tekrarlanmaması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Aynı şiirde, ateşböceğiyle benzer bir kader paylaşan tutsağın durumuysa, okuyucuya emperyalizmin sadece doğayı değil insanları da köleleştirdiğini hatırlatmaktadır. Aslında kendisi de farklı hayvanların ve böceklerin tasvirinden oluşan bu kitap, koleksiyonların illa ki gerçekten toplayarak, öldürerek, sergileyerek değil de yaratıcı çalışmalarda o canlılara yer vererek olması gerektiğinin canlı bir kanıtı gibidir.

Çalışmanın beşinci ve son analiz bölümünün odağı, Smith'in kendini okuyucularına nasıl yansıttığını irdelemektedir. Aslında kimliğimiz ve öznelliğimiz, içinde bulunduğumuz sosyal yapı tarafından şekillendirilmektedir ve Smith bu sosyal etkiyi hem kendi lehine kullanmakta hem de onu altüst etmektedir. Şiirlerinde çok fazla otobiyografik detay kullanmakla ve hep aynı yalnız, hüznü şiiir kişisini kullanmakla eleştirilen Smith'in şiirleri aslında pek çok farklı kimliği ve sesi içinde barındırmaktadır. Bunlardan ilki, dönemin toplumsal yapısının da talep ettiği ve dayattığı acılı kadını ve anne imgeleridir. Yaşamak ve çocuklarına bakabilmek için okuyucularının maddi ve manevi desteğine muhtaç olan Smith, bu imgeyi şiirlerinde defalarca kullanır ve okuyucuyu, şiirlerindeki hüznü sesi şair Charlotte Smith'le özdeşleştirmeleri için adeta yüreklendirir. Hayatı acılarla yoğrulmuş olan bu kadın kurtarılmaya muhtaçtır ve bunu yapacak olan da okuyuculardır. Bu hissi yaratabilmek için, şiir kitaplarının başına eklediği önsözlerde sıklıkla yaşadığı sorunlardan ve yıllar geçse de azalmayan acılarından bahseder. Aslında acılı kadını imgesini yaratırken, bir yandan da bu imgenin içini boşaltmaktadır çünkü sessiz ve uysal olması gerekirken, kendini mağdur eden herkesi özellikle de kocasını yerden yere vurmaktadır. Şiirlerinde yer alan bazı detaylar da, önsözlerde anlatılan bu acılarla benzerlik gösterdiği için, okuyucu olarak Smith'in yaşamının içinde gibi hissederiz kendimizi. Örneğin, oğlunun okuldan atılmasına değindiği Sone 75, ya da doğum sırasında hayatını kaybeden biricik kızı Augusta hakkında olduğu düşünülen Sone 91, Smith'in acılarına şahit olduğumuz bazı şiirleridir. Kendisini açık seçik bir kadın ve bir anne olarak ortaya koyması, hem toplumsal kimliğine vurgu yaparak okuyucularının desteğini almak, hem de dönemin kadın şairlerini “cinsiyetsizlikle” suçlayan Richard Polwhere gibi önyargılı kadın düşmanları karşısında kendini mağdur ama bir o kadar da güçlü gösterme çabasıdır. Bir iş kadını olarak kendini ve yaşadığı sıkıntıları, bir pazarlama stratejisine dönüştürerek tek başına nasıl ayakta kalınabileceğini ve cinsel kimliğin edimselliğini göstermektedir.

Bir kısım şiirlerinde net olarak ayırt ettiğimiz kimliği, diğer bazı eserlerinde belirsiz kalır, öyle ki şiir kişinin Smith olup olmadığı konusunda içimize bir şüphe düşer. Yine Augusta ile ilgili gibi görünen bazı şiirlerinde, hissedilen matem duygusunun ölen bir çocuğun arkasından yas tutan bir anneye mi, yoksa ölen sevgilisinin arkasından hüznlenen bir erkeğe mi ait olduğu belli değildir. Başka bazı şiirlerindeyse düpedüz bir erkek kılığına girmekte ve şiiri onların ağzından yazmaktadır. Petrarch'tan taklit ederek yazdığı, ya da tercüme ettiğini iddia ettiği, şiirlerinde, zamanından önce vefat eden genç bir kadının – genellikle bu kadın Laura'dır - ardında yas tutan bir erkek betimlenmektedir. Özellikle Sone 15'te, Smith şiir kişinin adının Petrarch, Sone 13'teyse ardından yas tutulan kişinin Laura olduğunu net bir şekilde ifade etmiştir. Başka bazı şiirlerindeyse, Werter'in ağzından yazmış ve bu Romantik ikonu şiirlerine dahil etmiştir. Sone 24'teyse, Werter (Smith bu İngiliz yazımını kullanmaktadır) kendisi öldüğünde, arkada kalan sevgili Charlotte'ın nasıl üzüleceğini anlatmaktadır. Smith'in kendi ismi olan Charlotte'u iki kez kullanması, kendisini hem süje hem obje yerine koyduğu deneysel bir şiir olup, şiir kişisi ve şair arasındaki çizgiyle nasıl oynadığını göstermektedir.

*Kıybaşı* şiirindeyse, ana metinde yer alan sestem ayrı olarak, dip notlarda kendi otoritesini ve bilimsel bilgisini ortaya koymaya çalışan ikinci bir ses ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bir nevi kendi ötekileştirilmesinin bir yansıması olarak bu otoriter ses de “marjinden” yani metnin kıyısından yükselmektedir. Smith, ana metnin çevresini kullanarak toplumsal olarak dayatılan kimlikle açıktan açığa çatışmamakta ve bunu, metnin anlamı açısından önem taşıyan ancak kıyıda kalan notlarda yapmaktadır. Bitkilerin botanik bilimindeki Latince isimlerini kullanan, dönemin jeoloji teorilerine karşı çıkan, türler arasında karşılaştırmalar yapan, hayvan ve böceklerin beslenmelerini detaylı olarak veren bu ses, Smith'in entelektüel kimliğini ortaya koymakta ve okuyucuya, yakınan bir anneden çok daha fazlası olduğunu göstermektedir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma Charlotte Smith'in, Romantik şair olarak tanımlanmasını doğru bulmamaktadır. Dönemin şiirine pek çok katkı yapan yenilik getirmiş olsa da, Romantik hareketin içerdiği felsefi derinlikten beslenmemiştir ve bazı açılardan Neoklasik dönemin etkisinde kalmıştır. Yüce kavramıyla ilgili tereddüt, diğer Romantikler gibi tinsel bir deneyim yaşamasına engel olmuş, yüce yerine güzeli tercih etmesiyle dönemin özellikleriyle tam bir tezat oluşturmuştur. Doğa ve insanın yeniden birleşebileceğine dair inancı olmadığından, doğayı mükemmel ama “öteki” olarak tasvir etmiş ve fiziksel dünyanın korunmasıyla ilgili kendi ahlaki değerlerini oluşturmuştur. Her tür mağduriyete karşı durarak düşman kabul edilen Fransızlara, alt tabakadan insanlara, hayvanlara, ama en çok da kadın ve çocuklara duyarlılıkla yaklaşmıştır. Kendi yaşadığı acıların, başkalarının acılarını yazma ve onlarla bağ kurma hakkını kendine verdiği inancını sıklıkla konuyu kendine döndürmüş ve okuyucularının sempatisini kazanmaya çalışmıştır. Ancak bu acılı anne imgesi, Smith'in kullandığı imgelerden sadece biridir; çünkü aynı bir prizmadan yansıyan farklı renkler gibi, şiirlerinde kimliğinin farklı yönlerini ele çıkarmıştır.

Bu parçalanmış kimlik, Smith'in şiirlerinin en öne çıkan özelliği olmuştur ve aslında bir kadın şairin yaşadığı çatışmaları göstermektedir. Bir yandan toplumun, kendisinden beklediği gibi itaatkâr ve ağzı kapalı, sadece kendisi için uygun birkaç türde yazabilen bir kadınla, otoriter ve yaratıcılığını serbest bırakan bir şair kimliği arasında bocalamaktadır. Bu bocalama sırasında, kendisini bir bütünlük içinde yansıtamamaktadır. Smith'in gerçekte kim olduğunu, okuyucu olarak bize verdiği ufak tefek ipuçlarından, ya da bilinçsiz sızmalarda anlayabilmekteyiz. Ancak bütün bunlar, aslında Smith'in şiirlerinin güzelliğini oluşturmaktadır. Onu sadece bir geçiş figürü olarak değil, döneminin iç ve dış çatışmalarını anlatan en önemli lirik seslerinden biri olarak da değerlendirmeliyiz.

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