

## Further Reading

- The Poems of Charlotte Smith* ed. Stuart Curran (New York, 1993)  
 Florence Anna May Hillish, *Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist, 1749-1806* (Philadelphia, 1941)  
 Stuart Curran, 'The I Altered', *Romanticism and Feminism* ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, Indiana, 1988), pp. 185-207  
 Judith Pascoe, 'Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith', *RR* 193-209  
 Katharine M. Rogers, 'Romantic Aspirations, Restricted Possibilities: The Novels of Charlotte Smith', *RR* 72-88  
 Anoir, 'Memoir of Mrs Charlotte Smith', *Monthly Mirror* 3 (1808), Supplementary Number  
 Matthew Bray, 'Removing the Anglo-Saxon Yoke: The Francocentric Vision of Charlotte Smith's Later Works', *JWC* 24 (1993) 155-8  
 Jacqueline Labbe, 'Selling One's Sorrows: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and the Marketing of Poetry', *JWC* 25 (1994) 68-71  
 Daniel Robinson, 'Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim', *ERR* 6 (1995) 98-127

### Elegiac Sonnets: the third edition. With twenty additional sonnets. (1786)

To WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.<sup>1</sup>

Sir,

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

I am,

Sir,

Your most obedient and obliged servant,

Charlotte Smith

#### PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITIONS

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

Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought. Some of my friends, with partial indiscretion, have

<sup>1</sup> To WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ

<sup>1</sup> William Hayley (1745-1820), poet, biographer, translator, friend of Blake, Anna Seward, Cowper, and others. To date his most successful poem, at least in

commercial terms, was *The Triumphs of Temper*, to which Smith alludes in *Sonnet XLX*, below. Hayley and Smith were neighbours in Sussex, and Hayley was instrumental in helping her publish the *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1784.

multiplied the copies they procured of these attempts, till they found their way into the prints of the day in a mutilated state, which, concurring with other circumstances, determined me to put them into their present form. I can hope for readers only among the few who, to sensibility of heart, join simplicity of taste.

#### PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The reception given by the public, as well as my particular friends, to the two first editions of these small 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.

As a few notes were necessary, I have added them at the end. I have there quoted such lines as I have borrowed, and, even where I am conscious the ideas were not my own, I have restored them to their original possessors.

Woolbeding,<sup>2</sup> 22 March 1786

#### SONNET I

The partial<sup>1</sup> muse has, from my earliest hours,

Smiled on the rugged path I'm doomed to tread,

And still with sportive hand has snatched wildflowers

To weave fantastic garlands for my head;

But far, far happier is the lot of those

Who never learned her dear delusive art,

Which, while it decks the head with many a rose,

Reserves the thorn to fester in the heart.<sup>2</sup>

For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye

Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove,

Points every pang, and deepens every sigh

Of mourning friendship or unhappy love.

Ah then, how dear the muse's favours cost

If those paint sorrow best who feel it most!<sup>3</sup>

#### SONNET II. WRITTEN AT THE CLOSE OF SPRING.

The garlands fade that spring so lately wove -

Each simple flower, which she had nursed in dew;

Anemonies<sup>1</sup> that spangled every grove,

The primrose wan, and harebell, mildly blue.

<sup>2</sup> *Woolbeding* small town in the South Downs in West Sussex.

<sup>1</sup> *partial*

<sup>1</sup> *partial* friendly, partial to the poet.

<sup>2</sup> Philomel was seduced, according to Ovid, by her brother-in-law, Tereus, King of Thrace. She was turned into a nightingale, and her sad song was said to be caused by a thorn in her breast.

<sup>3</sup> In her notes, Smith acknowledges an echo of Pope, *Epistola to Abolard* 365-6: 'The well sung woes shall soothe my pensive ghost; / He best can paint them who shall feel them most'.

SONNET II

<sup>1</sup> *Anemone nemorosa* the wood-anemone' (Smith's note).

No more shall violets linger in the dell,  
 Or purple orchis variegates the plain,  
 Till spring again shall call forth every bell,  
 And dress with humid hands her wreaths again.  
 Ah, poor humanity! So frail, so fair  
 Are the fond visions of thy early day,  
 Till tyrant passion and corrosive care  
 Bid all thy fairy colours fade away!  
 Another May new buds and flowers shall bring;  
 Ah, why has happiness no second spring?

SONNET III. TO A NIGHTINGALE.<sup>1</sup>

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

Thy poet's musing fancy would translate  
 What mean the sounds that swell thy little breast,  
 When still at dewy eve thou leav'st thy nest,  
 Thus to the listening night to sing thy fate.  
 Pale sorrow's victims wert thou once among,  
 Though now released in woodlands wild to rove;  
 Say, hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong,  
 Or didst thou - martyr of disastrous love?  
 Ah, songstress sad, that such my lot might be:  
 To sigh and sing at liberty, like thee!

## SONNET IV. TO THE MOON.

Queen of the silver bow,<sup>1</sup> by thy pale beam,  
 Alone and pensive, I delight to stray  
 And watch thy shadow trembling in the stream,  
 Or mark the floating clouds that cross thy way.  
 And while I gaze, thy mild and placid light  
 Sheds a soft calm upon my troubled breast;  
 And oft I think, fair planet of the night,  
 That in thy orb the wretched may have rest.  
 The sufferers of the earth perhaps may go,  
 Released by death, to thy benignant sphere,  
 And the sad children of despair and woe  
 Forget in thee their cup of sorrow here.  
 Oh, that I soon may reach thy world serene,  
 Poor wearied pilgrim, in this toiling scene!

## SONNET III

<sup>1</sup> The idea from the 43rd sonnet of Petrarch. Secondo parte: *Quel rosignoli, che si soave piange* (Smith's note). of the moon.

## SONNET IV

<sup>1</sup> *Queen of the silver bow* Diana the huntress, goddess

## SONNET V. TO THE SOUTH DOWNS.

Ah, hills beloved! - where once, an happy child,  
 Your beechen shades, your turf, your flowers among,<sup>1</sup>  
 I wove your bluebells into garlands wild,  
 And woke your echoes with my artless song.  
 Ah, hills beloved! your turf, your flowers remain;  
 But can they peace to this sad breast restore,  
 For one poor moment soothe the sense of pain,  
 And teach a breaking heart to throb no more?  
 And you, Aruna,<sup>2</sup> in the vale below,  
 As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,  
 Can you one kind Lethæan<sup>3</sup> cup bestow  
 To drink a long oblivion to my care?  
 Ah no! When all, e'en hope's last ray, is gone,  
 There's no oblivion but in death alone!

## SONNET VI. TO HOPE.

Oh hope, thou soother sweet of human woes!  
 How shall I lure thee to my haunts forlorn?  
 For me wilt thou renew the withered rose,  
 And clear my painful path of pointed thorn?  
 Ah, come, sweet nymph, in smiles and softness dressed,  
 Like the young hours that lead the tender year,  
 Enchantress come, and charm my cares to rest!  
 Alas, the flatterer flies, and will not hear;  
 A prey to fear, anxiety, and pain,  
 Must I a sad existence still deplore?  
 Lo! the flowers fade, but all the thorns remain,  
 'For me the vernal garland blooms no more.'<sup>1</sup>  
 Come then, 'pale Misery's love',<sup>2</sup> be thou my cure,  
 And I will bless thee, who though slow art sure.

## SONNET VII. ON THE DEPARTURE OF THE NIGHTINGALE.

Sweet poet of the woods, a long adieu!  
 Farewell, soft minstrel of the early year!  
 Ah, 'twill be long ere thou shalt sing anew  
 And pour thy music on the 'night's dull ear'.<sup>1</sup>

## SONNET V

<sup>1</sup> Smith notes a borrowing from Gray's *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* 8: 'Whose turf, whose shades, whose flowers among.'

<sup>2</sup> 'The River Arun' (Smith's note).

<sup>3</sup> *Lethæan* water from the River Lethe, river of forgetfulness in Hades, which enabled souls to forget their previous existence.

## SONNET VI

<sup>1</sup> Smith notes the borrowing from Pope, *Imitation of the first Ode of the fourth Book of Horace* 32.

<sup>2</sup> This is, Smith notes, a borrowing from Shakespeare, *King John* III iv 35.

## SONNET VII

<sup>1</sup> A borrowing, as Smith notes, from Shakespeare, *Henry I* Prologue 11.

Whether on spring thy wandering flights await,<sup>2</sup>  
 Or whether silent in our groves you dwell,  
 The pensive muse shall own thee for her mate,<sup>3</sup>  
 And still protect the song she loves so well.  
 With cautious step, the love-lorn youth shall glide  
 Through the lone brake<sup>4</sup> that shades thy mossy nest;  
 And shepherd girls from eyes profane shall hide  
 The gentle bird, who sings of pity best.  
 For still thy voice shall soft affections move,  
 And still be dear to sorrow and to love!

## SONNET VIII. TO SPRING.

Again the wood, and long withdrawing vale,  
 In many a tint of tender green are dressed,  
 Where the young leaves unfolding scarce conceal  
 Beneath their early shade the half-formed nest  
 Of finch or woodlark; and the primrose pale  
 And lavish cowslip, wildly scattered round,  
 Give their sweet spirits to the sighing gale.  
 Ah, season of delight, could aught be found  
 To soothe awhile the tortured bosom's pain,  
 Of sorrow's rankling shaft to cure the wound  
 And bring life's first delusions once again,  
 'Twere surely met in thee! Thy prospect fair,  
 Thy sounds of harmony, thy balmy air,  
 Have power to cure all sadness but despair.<sup>1</sup>

## SONNET IX

Blessed 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 when, with selfish pride,  
 Friends on whose faith the trusting heart relied  
 Unkindly shun th' imploring eye of woe;  
 The ills they ought to soothe with taunts deride,  
 And laugh at tears themselves have forced to flow!  
 Nor *his* rude bosom those fine feelings melt,  
 Children of sentiment and knowledge born,  
 Through whom each shaft with cruel force is felt,  
 Empoisoned by deceit or barbed with scorn.

<sup>2</sup> 'Alludes to the supposed migration of the night-  
 ingale' (Smith's note).

<sup>3</sup> Smith notes the allusion to Milton, *Sonnet I* 13-14:

'Whether the muse or love call thee his mate, / Both  
 them I serve, and of their train am I.'

<sup>4</sup> *brake* thicket.

SONNET VIII

<sup>1</sup> *all sadness but despair* an allusion, as Smith notes, to

*Paradise Lost* iv 155-6: 'Vernal delight and joy, able to  
 drive / All sadness but despair'.

## SONNET X. TO MRS G.

Ah, why will mem'ry with officious care  
 The long lost visions of my days renew?  
 Why paint the vernal landscape green and fair  
 When life's gay dawn was opening to my view?  
 Ah, wherefore bring those moments of delight,  
 When with my Anna,<sup>1</sup> on the southern shore,  
 I thought the future, as the present, bright?  
 Ye dear delusions, ye return no more!  
 Alas, how different does the truth appear  
 From the warm picture youth's rash hand portrays!  
 How fades the scene, as we approach it near,  
 And pain and sorrow strike how many ways!  
 Yet of that tender heart, ah, still retain  
 A share for me, and I will not complain!

## SONNET XI. TO SLEEP.

Come, balmy sleep, tired nature's soft resort,  
 On these sad temples all thy poppies shed,  
 And bid gay dreams from Morpheus<sup>1</sup> airy court  
 Float in light vision round my aching head!<sup>2</sup>  
 Secure of all thy blessings, partial power,  
 On his hard bed the peasant throws him down;  
 And the poor sea-boy, in the rudest hour,  
 Enjoys thee more than he who wears a crown.<sup>3</sup>  
 Clapsed in her faithful shepherd's guardian arms,  
 Well may the village girl sweet slumbers prove;  
 And they, oh gentle sleep, still taste thy charms  
 Who wake to labour, liberty, and love.  
 But still thy opiate aid dost thou deny  
 To calm the anxious breast, to close the streaming eye.

## SONNET XII. WRITTEN ON THE SEASHORE. OCTOBER 1784.

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

## SONNET X

<sup>1</sup> *Anna* probably a reference to Catherine Anne  
 Dorset, Smith's sister, who wrote charming childrens'  
 stories of animals in human dress.

## SONNET XI

<sup>1</sup> Morpheus was the Greek god of sleep.

<sup>2</sup> In later editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith noted the  
 borrowing from William Mason, *Elegy V: On the Death  
 of a Lady* 12: 'Float in light vision round the poet's head.'

<sup>3</sup> As she notes, Smith is recalling 2 *Henry IV* / III 1  
 18-20:

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
 Seal up the shipboy's eyes, and rock his  
 brains

In cradle of the rude impetuous surge?

O'er the dark waves the winds tempestuous howl;  
The screaming seabird quits the troubled sea,  
But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me,<sup>1</sup>  
And suits the mournful temper of my soul.<sup>2</sup>

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

SONNET XIII. FROM PETRARCH.<sup>1</sup>

Oh place me where the burning noon  
Forbids the withered flower to blow;  
Or place me in the frigid zone  
On mountains of eternal snow;  
Let me pursue the steps of fame,  
Or poverty's more tranquil road;  
Let youth's warm tide my veins inflame,  
Or sixty winters chill my blood:  
Though my fond soul to heaven were flown,  
Or though on earth 'tis doomed 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!

SONNET XIV. FROM PETRARCH.<sup>1</sup>

Loose to the wind her golden tresses streamed,  
Forming bright waves with amorous zephyr's sighs;  
And though averted now, her charming eyes  
Then with warm love and melting pity beamed.  
Was I deceived? Ah surely, nymph divine,  
That fine suffusion on thy cheek was love!  
What wonder then those lovely tints should move,

## SONNET XII

<sup>1</sup> For echoes by Smith and Wordsworth see *L'ingratis* i 157 and n., below.

<sup>2</sup> 'This line is not my own, but I know not where to look for it' (Smith's note). In later editions of the volume Smith replaced this with the annotation, 'Young'. As Curran notes, her source is in fact Edward Young's *The Revenge* (1721):

Rage on, ye winds, burst clouds, and  
waters roar!

You bear a just resemblance of my  
fortune,

And suit the gloomy habit of my soul.  
(I i 5-7)

## SONNET XIII

<sup>1</sup> 'Pommi on'! sol, occide i fiori e l'erba. Petrarch, Sonnetto 112. Parte primo' (Smith's note).

## SONNET XIV

<sup>1</sup> 'I'vano i capelli d'oro all'aura sparsi. Sonnetto 69. Parte primo' (Smith's note).

Should fire this heart, this tender heart of mine?  
Thy soft melodious voice, thy air, thy shape,  
Were of a goddess, not a mortal maid;  
Yet though thy charms, thy heavenly charms should fade,  
My heart, my tender heart could not escape,  
Nor cure for me in time or change be found:  
The shaft extracted does not cure the wound.

SONNET XV. FROM PETRARCH.<sup>1</sup>

Where the green leaves exclude the summer beam,  
And softly bend as balmy breezes blow,  
And where, with liquid lapse, the lucid stream  
Across the fretted rock is heard to flow,  
Pensive I lay; when she whom earth conceals,  
As if still living, to my eyes appears,  
And pitying Heaven her angel form reveals,  
To say, 'Unhappy Petrarch, dry your tears!  
Ah why, sad lover, thus before your time,  
In grief and sadness should your life decay,  
And like a blighted flower, your manly prime  
In vain and hopeless sorrow fade away?  
Ah, wherefore should you mourn, that her you love,  
Snatched from a world of woe, survives in bliss above!'

SONNET XVI. FROM PETRARCH.<sup>1</sup>

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

For ye beheld my infant passion rise,  
And saw through years unchanged my faithful flame;  
Now cold in dust, the beauteous object lies,  
And you, ye conscious scenes, are still the same!

While busy memory still delights to dwell

On all the charms these bitter tears deplore,  
And with a trembling hand describes too well

The angel form I shall behold no more,  
To heaven she's fled, and nought to me remains  
But the pale ashes which her urn contains.

## SONNET XV

<sup>1</sup> 'Se lamentar angelli o verde fronde. Sonnetto 21. Parte secondo' (Smith's note).

## SONNET XVI

<sup>1</sup> 'I'alta che de lamenti miei se piena. Sonnetto 33. Parte secondo' (Smith's note).

SONNET XVII. FROM THE THIRTEENTH CANTATA OF METASTASIO.<sup>1</sup>

On thy grey bark, in witness of my flame,  
 I carve Miranda's cypher, beauteous tree;  
 Graced with the lovely letters of her name,  
 Henceforth be sacred to my love and me!

Though the tall elm, the oak, and sombre pine,  
 With broader arms may noon's fierce ardours break,  
 To shelter me and her I love, be thine;  
 And thine to see her smile and hear her speak.

No bird, ill-omened, round thy graceful head  
 Shall clamour harsh, or wave his heavy wing,  
 But fern and flowers arise beneath thy shade,  
 Where the wild bees their lullabies shall sing;  
 And in thy boughs the murmuring ring-dove rest,  
 And there the nightingale shall build her nest.

SONNET XVIII. TO THE EARL OF EGREMONT.<sup>1</sup>

Wyndham, 'tis not thy blood, though pure it runs  
 Through a long line of glorious ancestry,  
 Percys and Seymours, Britain's boasted sons,  
 Who trust the honours of their race to thee;

'Tis not thy splendid domes, where science loves  
 To touch the canvases, and the bust to raise;  
 Thy rich domains, fair fields, and spreading groves —  
 'Tis not all these the muse delights to praise.

In birth and wealth and honours, great thou art,  
 But nobler in thy independent mind;  
 And in that liberal hand and feeling heart  
 Given thee by Heaven — a blessing to mankind!  
 Unworthy oft may titled fortune be;  
 A soul like thine is true nobility!

SONNET XIX. TO MR HAYLEY. ON RECEIVING SOME ELEGANT LINES  
FROM HIM.

For me the muse a simple band designed  
 Of 'idle' flowers that bloom the woods among,

## SONNET XVII

<sup>1</sup> 'Scrivo in te l'amato nome / Di colui, per cui, mi moro.' I do not mean this as a translation; the original is much longer, and full of images which could not be introduced in a sonnet — and some of them, though very beautiful in the Italian, would I believe not appear to advantage in an English dress' (Smith's note).

## SONNET XVIII

<sup>1</sup> Sir George O'Brien Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont (1751-1837), Sussex philanthropist, liberal, and patron of the arts.

## SONNET XIX

<sup>1</sup> *idle* the quotation marks are puzzling; possibly Charlotte is thinking of the sermon on the mount, Luke 12:27.

Which, with the cypress and the willow joined,  
 A garland formed as artless as my song;  
 And little dared I hope its transient hours  
 So long would last, composed of buds so brief,  
 Till Hayley's hand, among the vagrant flowers,  
 Threw from his verdant crown a deathless leaf.  
 For high in fame's bright fane has judgement placed  
 The laurel wreath Serena's poet<sup>2</sup> won,  
 Which, wov'n with myrtles by the hands of Taste,  
 The muse decreed for this her favourite son.  
 And those immortal leaves his temples shade,  
 Whose fair eternal verdure shall not fade!

SONNET XX. TO THE COUNTESS OF A——. WRITTEN ON THE ANNIVERSARY  
OF HER MARRIAGE.<sup>1</sup>

On this blessed day may no dark cloud or shower  
 With envious shade the sun's bright influence hide;  
 But all his rays illumine the favoured hour  
 That saw thee, Mary, Henry's lovely bride!

With years revolving may it still arise,  
 Blessed with each good approving Heaven can lend;  
 And still with ray serene, shall those blue eyes  
 Enchant the husband, and attach the friend.

For you, fair friendship's amaranth<sup>2</sup> shall blow,<sup>3</sup>  
 And love's own thornless roses bind your brow;  
 And when, long hence, to happier worlds you go,  
 Your beauteous race shall be what you are now;  
 And future Nevills through long ages shine,  
 With hearts as good, and forms as fair as thine.

## SONNET XXI. SUPPOSED TO BE WRITTEN BY WERTHER.

Go, cruel tyrant of the human breast,  
 To other hearts thy burning arrows bear!  
 Go where fond hope and fair illusion rest —  
 Ah, why should love inhabit with despair?  
 Like the poor maniac<sup>1</sup> I linger here,  
 Still haunt the scene where all my treasure lies,  
 Still seek for flowers where only thorns appear,

<sup>2</sup> *Serena's poet* Serena is the protagonist of William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781).

## SONNET XX

<sup>1</sup> Mary, Lady Abergavenny (1700-96) married Henry Nevill, Earl of Abergavenny (1755-1843) on 3 October 1781. She was the daughter of Smith's brother-in-law.

<sup>2</sup> *amaranth* a mythical unfolding flower.

<sup>3</sup> *blow* bloom.

## SONNET XXI

<sup>1</sup> 'See the story of the lunatic: "Is this the destiny of man? Is he only happy before he possesses his reason, or after he has lost it? Full of hope you go to gather flowers in winter, and are grieved not to find any — and do not know why they cannot be found." *Sorrows of Werther*, Volume 2' (Smith's note).

And drink delicious poison from her eyes.<sup>2</sup>  
Towards the deep gulf that opens on my sight  
I hurry forward, passion's helpless slave,  
And, scorning reason's mild and sober light,  
Pursue the path that leads me to the grave:  
So round the flame the giddy insect flies,  
And courts the fatal fire by which it dies.

SONNET XXII. BY THE SAME. TO SOLITUDE.<sup>1</sup>

Oh solitude, to thy sequestered vale  
I come to hide my sorrow and my tears,  
And to thy echoes tell the mournful tale  
Which scarce I trust to pitying friendship's ears.  
Amidst thy wild woods and untrodden glades,  
No sounds but those of melancholy move;  
And the low winds that die among thy shades  
Seem like soft pity's sighs for hopeless love.  
And sure some story of despair and pain  
In yon deep copse thy murr'ring doves relate;  
And hark, methinks in that long plaintive strain,  
Thine own sweet songstress<sup>2</sup> weeps my wayward fate;  
Ah, nymph, that fate assist me to endure,  
And bear awhile what death alone can cure!

SONNET XXIII. BY THE SAME. TO THE NORTH STAR.<sup>1</sup>

Towards thy bright beams I turn my swimming eyes,  
Fair, fav'rite planet, which in happier days  
Saw my young hopes (ah, faithless hopes!) arise,  
And on my passion shed propitious rays;  
Now nightly wandering mid the tempests drear  
That howl the woods and rocky steeps among,  
I love to see thy sudden light appear  
Through the swift clouds driv'n by the wind along;  
Or in the turbid water, rude and dark,  
O'er whose wild stream the gust of winter raves,  
Thy trembling light with pleasure still I mark,  
Gleam in faint radiance on the foaming waves:

<sup>2</sup> In later editions Smith added a footnote acknowledging a borrowing from Pope, *Eloisa to Abelard*.

Still on thy breast enamoured let me lie,  
Still drink delicious poison from thy eye,  
Pant on thy lip, and to thy heart be  
pressed.

(ll. 121-3)

## SONNET XXII

<sup>1</sup> "I climb steep rocks, I break my way through  
copses, among thorns and briars, which tear me to

pieces, and I feel a little relief." *Sonnet of Werther*,  
Volume 1' (Smith's note).

<sup>2</sup> *songstress*: the nightingale.

## SONNET XXIII

<sup>1</sup> "The greater bear, favourite of all the constel-  
lations; for when I left you of an evening it used  
to shine opposite your window." *Sonnet of Werther*,  
Volume 2' (Smith's note).

So o'er my soul short rays of reason fly,  
Then fade - and leave me to despair and die!

SONNET XXIV. BY THE SAME.<sup>1</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 oft at twilight morn, or closing day,  
The faithful friend with faltering 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  
Gilds the long grass that hides my silent bed,  
The tear 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 her poor Werther and his sorrows sleep.

SONNET XXV. BY THE SAME. JUST BEFORE HIS DEATH.<sup>1</sup>

Why should I wish to hold<sup>2</sup> in this low sphere,  
'A frail and feverish being?' Wherefore try  
Poorly, from day to day, to linger here,  
Against the powerful hand of destiny?  
By those who know the force of hopeless care  
On the worn heart, I sure shall be forgiven;  
If to elude dark guilt, and dire despair,  
I go uncalled to mercy and to heaven!  
Oh thou, to save whose peace I now depart,  
Will thy soft mind thy poor lost friend deplore,  
When worms shall feed on this devoted heart,  
Where even thy image shall be found no more?  
Yet may thy pity mingle not with pain,  
For then thy hapless lover dies in vain.

## SONNET XXVI. TO THE RIVER ARUN.

On thy wild banks, by frequent torrents worn,  
No glittering fancies or marble domes appear,  
Yet shall the mournful muse thy course adorn,  
And still to her thy rustic waves be dear.

## SONNET XXIV

<sup>1</sup> "At the corner of the churchyard which looks  
towards the fields, there are two lime-trees. It is there  
I wish to rest." *Sonnet of Werther*, Volume 2' (Smith's  
note).

## SONNET XXV

<sup>1</sup> "May my death remove every obstacle to your  
happiness. Be at peace, I entreat you; be at peace."  
*Sonnet of Werther*, Volume 2' (Smith's note).  
<sup>2</sup> *bold* remain.

For with the infant Orway,<sup>1</sup> lingering here,  
Of early woes she bade her votary dream,  
While thy low murmurs soothed his pensive ear,  
And still the poet consecrates the stream.

Beneath the oak and birch that fringe thy side,  
The first-born violets of the year shall spring,  
And in thy hazels, bending o'er the tide,  
The earliest nightingale delight to sing,  
While kindred spirits, pining, shall relate  
Thy Orway's sorrows, and lament his fate!

## SONNET XXVII

Sighing I see yon little troop at play,  
By sorrow yet untouched, unhurt by care,  
While free and sportive they enjoy today  
'Content and careless of tomorrow's fare!<sup>1</sup>  
Oh happy age, when hope's unclouded ray  
Lights their green path, and prompts their simple mirth,  
Ere yet they feel the thorns that lurking lay  
To wound the wretched pilgrims of the earth,  
Making them rue the hour that gave them birth,  
And threw them on a world so full of pain  
Where prosperous folly treads on patient worth,  
And to deaf pride, misfortune pleads in vain.  
Ah, for their future fate, how many fears  
Oppress my heart and fill mine eyes with tears!

## SONNET XXVIII. TO FRIENDSHIP.

Oh thou, whose name too often is profaned,  
Whose charms celestial few have hearts to feel!  
Unknown to folly and by pride disdained,  
To thy soft solace may my sorrows steal  
Like the fair moon, thy mild and genuine ray  
Through life's long evening shall unclouded last;  
While the frail summer friendship fleets away,  
As fades the rainbow from the northern blast.  
'Tis thine, oh nymph, with 'balmy hands to bind'<sup>1</sup>  
The wounds inflicted in misfortune's storm,  
And blunt severe affliction's sharpest dart;

SONNET XXVI

<sup>1</sup> Orway was born at Trotten, a village in Sussex. Of Woolbeding, another village on the banks of the Arun (which runs through them both), his father was rector. Here it was, therefore, that he probably passed many of his early years. The Arun is here an insubstantial stream, winding in a channel deeply worn, among meadow, heath and wood' (Smith's note). Thomas Orway (1642-85), dramatist, was known chiefly for his tragedy, *L'énice Présernée* (1681). He died in

poverty, and is said to have choked to death on a bread roll.

SONNET XXVII

<sup>1</sup> '[James] Thomson' (Smith's note); the borrowing is from *Antimoon* 191.

SONNET XXVIII

<sup>1</sup> 'Collins' (Smith's note). The borrowing is from *Old to Pity* 2. William Collins (1721-59), see also *Sonnet* XXX below.

'Tis thy pure spirit warms my Anna's mind,  
Beams through the pensive softness of her form,  
And holds its altar on her spotless heart.

## SONNET XXIX. TO MISS C——. ON BEING DESIRED TO ATTEMPT WRITING A COMEDY.

Wouldst thou then have *me* tempt the comic scene  
Of laughing Thalia<sup>1</sup> — used so long to tread  
The gloomy paths of sorrow's cypress shade,  
And the lorn lay with sighs and tears to stain?  
Alas, how much unfit her sprightly vein!  
Arduous to try and seek the sunny mead,  
And bowers of roses, where she loves to lead  
The sportive subjects of her golden reign!  
Enough for me if still, to soothe my days,  
Her fair and pensive sister<sup>2</sup> condescend  
With tearful smile to bless my simple lays;  
Enough if her soft notes she sometimes lend,  
To gain for me, of feeling hearts, the praise,  
And chiefly thine, my ever partial friend!

## SONNET XXX. TO THE RIVER ARUN.

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

Thy shadowy rocks unhappy love shall seek,  
Where mantling loose, the green clematis<sup>1</sup> flaunts,  
And sorrow's drooping form and faded cheek  
Choose on thy willowed shore her lonely haunts.

Banks which inspired thy Orway's plaintive strain!  
Wilds whose lorn echoes learned the deeper tone  
Of Collins' powerful shell!<sup>2</sup> Yet once again

SONNET XXIX

<sup>1</sup> Thalia muse of comedy.<sup>2</sup> sister Erato, muse of lyric poetry.

SONNET XXX

<sup>1</sup> Clematis: the plant bindweed, or virgin's bower, which towards the end of June begins to cover the hedges and sides of rocky hollows with its beautiful foliage, and flowers of a yellowish white and of an agreeable fragrance, which are succeeded by seed-pods, that bear some resemblance to feathers or hair, whence it is sometimes called Old Man's Beard' (Smith's note).  
<sup>2</sup> 'Collins, as well as Orway, was a native of this country, and I should imagine at some period of his life an inhabitant of this neighbourhood, since, in his beautiful *Old to the Death of Colonel Ross*, he says:

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

And in the *Old to Pity*:

Wild Arun too has heard thy strains,  
And Echo, midst my native plains,  
Been soothed with Pity's lute.  
(Smith's note)

William Collins (1721-59) was a native of Sussex, in which county the village of Harting is to be found.

Another poet, Hayley, is thine own!  
Thy classic stream anew shall hear a lay  
Bright as its waves and various as its way!

## SONNET XXXI. WRITTEN ON FARM WOOD, SOUTH DOWNS, IN MAY 1784.

Spring's dewy hand on this fair summit weaves  
The downy grass with tufts of Alpine flowers,<sup>1</sup>  
And shades the beechen slopes with tender leaves,  
And leads the shepherd to his upland bowers,  
Strewn with wild thyme; while slow-descending showers  
Feed the green ear, and nurse the future sheaves.  
Ah, blessed the hind whom no sad thought bereaves  
Of the gay season's pleasures! All his hours  
To wholesome labour given, or thoughtless mirth;  
No pangs of sorrow past or coming dread  
Bend his unconscious spirit down to earth,  
Or chase calm slumbers from his careless head.  
Ah, what to me can those dear days restore,  
When scenes could charm that now I taste no more!

SONNET XXXII. TO MELANCHOLY. WRITTEN ON THE BANKS OF THE ARUN,  
OCTOBER 1785.

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

## SONNET XXXIII. TO THE NAIAD OF THE ARUN.

Go, rural naiad, wind thy stream along  
Through woods and wilds, then seek the ocean caves  
Where sea-nymphs meet their coral rocks among,  
To boast the various honours of their waves!

## SONNET XXXI

<sup>1</sup> 'An infinite variety of plants are found on these hills, particularly about this spot. Many sorts of orchis

## SONNET XXXII

and cistus of singular beauty, with several others with which I am but imperfectly acquainted' (Smith's note).

## SONNET XXXIII

<sup>1</sup> *British bards*: 'Otway, Collins, Hayley' (Smith's note).

<sup>2</sup> John Sargent, author of *The Mine* (1785).

'Tis but a little, o'er thy shallow tide,  
That toiling trade her burdened vessel leads;  
But laurels grow luxuriant on thy side,  
And letters live along thy classic meads.

Lo, where mid British bards' thy natives shine!  
And now another poet helps to raise  
Thy glory high - the poet of *The Mine*<sup>2</sup> -  
Whose brilliant talents are his smallest praise:  
And who, to all that genius can impart,  
Adds the cool head and the unblemished heart!

## SONNET XXXIV. TO A FRIEND.

Charmed by thy suffrage shall I yet aspire  
(All inauspicious as my fate appears,  
By troubles darkened, that increase with years)  
To guide the crayon, or to touch the lyre?  
Ah me! the sister muses still require  
A spirit free from all intrusive fears,  
Nor will they deign to wipe away the tears  
Of vain regret that dim their sacred fire.  
But when thy sanction crowns my simple lays,  
A ray of pleasure lights my languid mind,  
For well I know the value of thy praise;  
And to how few the flattering meed' confined,  
That thou, their highly favoured brows to bind,  
Wilt weave green myrtle and unfading bays!

## SONNET XXXV. TO FORTITUDE.

Nymph of the rock, whose dauntless spirit braves  
The beating storm, and bitter winds that howl  
Round thy cold breast; and hear'st the bursting waves  
And the deep thunder with unshaken soul;  
Oh come and show how vain the cares that press  
On my weak bosom, and how little worth  
Is the false fleeting meteor happiness,  
That still misleads the wanderers of the earth!  
Strengthened by thee, this heart shall cease to melt  
O'er ills that poor humanity must bear;  
Nor friends estranged, or ties dissolved be felt  
To leave regret, and fruitless anguish there.  
And when at length it heaves its latest sigh,  
Thou and mild hope shall teach me how to die!

## SONNET XXXIV

<sup>1</sup> *meed* reward, tribute.

## SONNET XXXV



## SONNET XXXVI

Should the lone wanderer, fainting on his way,

Rest for a moment of the sultry hours,

And though his path through thorns and roughness lay,

Pluck the wild rose, or woodbine's gadding flowers;

Weaving gay wreaths beneath some sheltering tree,

The sense of sorrow he awhile may lose;

So have I sought thy flowers, fair poesy,

So charmed my way with friendship and the muse!

But darker now grows life's unhappy day,

Dark with new clouds of evil yet to come,

Her pencil sickening fancy throws away,

And weary hope reclines upon the tomb;

And points my wishes to that tranquil shore

Where the pale spectre care pursues no more.

10

## The Emigrants, A Poem, in Two Books (1793)

TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

Dear Sir,

There is, I hope, some propriety in my addressing a composition to you, which would never perhaps have existed had I not, amid the heavy pressure of many sorrows, derived infinite consolation from your poetry, and some degree of animation and of confidence from your esteem.<sup>1</sup>

The following performance 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.<sup>2</sup>

The force, clearness, and sublimity of your admirable poem; the felicity, almost peculiar to your genius, of giving to the most familiar objects dignity and effect, I could never hope to reach — yet, having read *The Task* almost incessantly from its first publication<sup>3</sup> to the present time, I felt 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)

And from the force of this impression, I was gradually led to attempt, in blank verse, a delineation of those interesting objects which happened to excite my attention, and which even pressed upon an heart that has learned, perhaps from its own sufferings, to feel with acute though unavailing compassion the calamity of others.

A dedication usually consists of praises and of apologies; *my* praise can add nothing to the unanimous and loud applause of your country. She regards you with pride as

TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

<sup>1</sup> Cowper praised Smith's abilities when introduced to her by William Hayley in early August 1792.

<sup>2</sup> Ulysses acquired, when young, a bow which he never used, valuing it so highly that he left it at

home. The contest to draw its string and win the hand of Penelope forms the culmination of the homecoming which ends *The Odyssey*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Task* was first published in 1784.

one of the few who, at the present period, rescue her from the imputation of having degenerated in poetical talents; but in the form of apology I should have much to say, if I again dared to plead the pressure of evils, aggravated by their long continuance, as an excuse for the defects of this attempt.

Whatever may be the faults of its execution, let me vindicate myself from those that may be imputed to the design. In speaking of the emigrant clergy,<sup>4</sup> I beg to be understood as feeling the utmost respect for the integrity of their principles, and it is with pleasure I add my suffrage to that of those who have had a similar opportunity of witnessing the conduct of the emigrants of all descriptions during their exile in England — which has been such as does honour to *their* nation, and ought to secure to them in ours the esteem of every liberal mind.

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.

Yet it is unfortunately but too true that with the body of the English, this national aversion has acquired new force by the dreadful scenes which have been acted in France during the last summer<sup>5</sup> — even those who are the victims of the Revolution have not escaped the odium which the undistinguishing multitude annex to all the natives of a country where such horrors have been acted. Nor is this the worst effect those events have had on the minds of the English: by confounding the original cause with the wretched catastrophes that have followed its ill management, the attempts of public virtue with the outrages that guilt and folly have committed in its disguise — the very name of liberty has not only lost the charm it used to have in British ears, but many who have written or spoken in its defence have been stigmatized as promoters of anarchy, and enemies to the prosperity of their country. Perhaps even the author of *The Task*, with all his goodness and tenderness of heart, is in the catalogue of those who are reckoned to have been too warm in a cause which it was once the glory of Englishmen to avow and defend. The exquisite poem, indeed, in which you have honoured liberty by a tribute highly gratifying to her sincerest friends, was published some years before the demolition of regal despotism in France — which, in the fifth Book, it seems to foretell.<sup>6</sup> All the truth and energy of the passage to which I allude must have been strongly felt when, in the Parliament of England, the greatest orator of our time quoted the sublimest of our poets — when the eloquence of Fox did justice to the genius of Cowper.

I am, dear sir,

With the most perfect esteem,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

CHARLOTTE SMITH

Brighthelmston, 10 May 1793

<sup>4</sup> *the emigrant clergy*. On 26 May 1792 the French government decided that priests who refused to join the Constitutional Church were effectively traitors, and should be deported. With the end of the monarchy on 10 August that decree became immediately effective, and led to the exile of many clergymen to England. The presence of three bishops and 220 priests among the victims of the September massacres underlined the dangers to the clergy at this moment.

<sup>5</sup> The storming of the Tuileries (10 August 1792) was followed by the imprisonment of the king and his family, and the September massacres of royalist and other prisoners in Paris (3-7 September).

<sup>6</sup> *Task* Book V includes a passage in praise of liberty (ll. 446 ff.), and one contrasting the monarchy in England and France (to the detriment of the latter) (ll. 331-62).