

Further Reading

- The Poems of Charlotte Smith* ed. Stuart Curran (New York, 1993)
 Florence Anna May Hilbish, *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
 Anon., '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', *TWC* 24 (1993) 155-8
 Jacqueline Labbe, 'Selling One's Sorrows: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and the Marketing of Poetry', *TWC* 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.¹

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

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ

¹ 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 XLV*, 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 several 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,² 22 March 1786

SONNET I

The partial¹ 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.²

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!³

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;
 Anemonies¹ that spangled every grove,
 The primrose wan, and harebell, mildly blue.

² Woolbeding small town in the South Downs in West Sussex.

SONNET I

¹ partial friendly, partial to the poet.

² 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.

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

SONNET II

¹ *Anemone nemorosa*: the wood-anemone (Smith's note).

No more shall violets linger in the dell,
 Or purple orchis variegate 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.¹

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 diedst 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,¹ 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

¹ 'The idea from the 43rd sonnet of Petrarch. Secondo parte: *Quel resignioul, che si soave piange*' (Smith's note).

SONNET IV

¹ *Queen of the silver bow* Diana the huntress, goddess of the moon.

SONNET V. TO THE SOUTH DOWNS.

Ah, hills beloved! – where once, an happy child,
 Your beechen shades, 'your turf, your flowers among',¹
 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,² in the vale below,
 As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,
 Can you one kind Lethæan³ 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'.¹
 Come then, 'pale Misery's love',² 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'.¹

SONNET V

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

² 'The River Arun' (Smith's note).

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

SONNET VI

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

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

SONNET VII

¹ A borrowing, as Smith notes, from Shakespeare, *Henry I* Prologue 11.