

Hearing Women: Voice in Sonnet Sequences

by
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for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba
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Abstract

To fully appreciate the potential complexity of voice in a sonnet sequence by a woman, the reader must consider the work in its entirety as integrated and complete. Inasmuch as works in this genre by women are so often out of print, or only partially anthologised, few people have read them in this way. Careful reading, both with and against patriarchal definitions, is essential in such an heavily encoded conventional genre. Since language and tone are dependent on voice, Barthes' "layering of significance" comes from reading the words on the page with an ear for the possible voices the poet employs through performance, juxtaposition and structure.

In the first chapter, I discuss individual short poems to overcome some of the disadvantages of working with texts which are not readily accessible, to create a familiar literary environment, to demonstrate particular vocal strategies, to clarify concepts, and to offer a clear argument on the nature of hearing multivocal texts. By reading a poem through multiple perspectives and through many other poems, I expose its dialogic nature as the expression of shifting identity. I show that, by isolating the poetic voices of women from the canon, it is possible to hear them in relationship to each other, not just in relation to men.

Chapter Two explores the inter-relationship between voice and structure, ranging from Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) to Adrienne Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems* (1974). Discussion of the importance of voicing for understanding *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1806) by Charlotte Smith, and for revaluation of British Romanticism where the development of poetic forms, politics and diction are concerned, occupies Chapter Three. Detailed consideration of the structural changes in two sequences by Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965) makes clear, in the fourth chapter, that the positioning of sonnets influences their tonality. *Sonnets from a Lock Box* (1929) by Anna Hempstead Branch, in a brilliant display of evolving ideas and symbols, wrestle with the difficulties for a woman who tries to escape from the box of patriarchal control. Her sequence can be seen as the culmination of the genre and of this dissertation.

While offering new ways in which to read voices in poetry by women, I hope to kindle scholarly interest and enthusiasm, and so further the recuperation of sonnet sequences by women as an appropriate focus for dialogue.

Dedication

To my maternal grandmother from whom I first comprehended the power, the range and the humour of a woman's voice; to all women, those I know and those I do not know, who are not heard; and to all those women and men who wish to hear our voice.

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I would like to thank all those who, throughout this endeavour, sparked my enthusiasm, let me hear their voices and lent me an ear. My earliest thanks must go to Dr. Walter Swayze, Kathie Teillet and Dr. Uma Parameswaran for believing I had something to say that they wished to hear. Maureen Robinson helped me to hear more acutely, and both Dr. David Williams and Dr. Robert Kroetsch encouraged me to hear voices outside the realm of literary orthodoxy, and validated those voices.

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Without the women who wrote poetry but were silent for so long this work would not have been possible.

My most personal thanks go to the five generations of my family for their love and support: to the boys and men who endeavoured to hear my voice, compelled me into clarity, read my silences and did not complain too often of my many voices, and to the girls and women whose voices resonate and echo in polyphony, harmony and antiphony, and whose range and variety enrich the chorus that tells our story.

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Introduction

Voces feminasque cano(nise)

[T]hese particular echoes constitute a kind of underground cipher-message for the attentive poetic ear. (Hollander)

In general, it seems to me a feminist critique will be better served by “over-reading” in a number of senses, than by underreading. . . . It needs to over-read, to read to excess, the possibility of human (especially female) gendered subjectivity, identity, and agency, the possibility of women’s resistance or even subversion. (Neely)

There are tell-tale signs of premature burial all over the canon. (Russ)¹

This study is an attempt to uncover the strategies women use in sonnet sequences to allow their voices to be heard by listeners who wish to hear. It is an enquiry into the nature of voice within sonnet sequences by women, the manipulation of voice within individual sonnets, and the consequent resonances and echoes that lead to a more general indeterminacy of tone. It is, necessarily, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted in its retrieval, restoration, advertisement, promotion, analysis, comparison and (re)valuation of neglected sonnet sequences by women. I investigate the manner of voice in which women, having been trained to silence, express themselves, and how both women and men can unlearn not hearing women’s voices. Many of the vocal strategies some women use are highly successful, some less so. But if we are to hear what women are really saying, we have to try to our uttermost to hear both the successes and the “failures.”

One major aim of this project is to discover how some women read (and re-read) traditional sonnet sequences by men, and how they consequently re-write them. The problem is not only learning how to speak and how to hear, but also how to validate women’s experiences as being different from men’s and to give women’s voices (and experiences) the same weight

and importance as men's. If two voices are in opposition—one female, one male—then the important, the significant, voice is not usually considered to be the woman's. From a woman-centred point of view, the least desirable, but “safest,” voice in which to speak is patriarchal, the voice of the traditional sonnet sequence, so the question arises as to how a woman can protect herself and speak out. When a woman chooses to speak in a “patriarchal” voice, only the context can tell us whether she is being “straight” or ironic, a context a sonnet sequence can provide.

A sonnet sequence can replicate life in that it allows sufficient space in which the poet can employ a variety of vocal strategies. In life, we play many roles which require corresponding voices. The soothing or joyful voice of the grandmother is not the voice of the virago rebelling against her constrictions. And not all our voices are equally silenced. In the reading of poetry by women, I argue, the “acceptable” womanly voice is often heard to the loss of the political or protesting voice. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847-1850) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), for example, has become epitomised by the voice of womanly heterosexual love expressed in “How do I love thee, let me count the ways” (42), and little has been written on the political and literary implications of a Victorian woman writing an amatory sonnet love sequence, or on the verbal violence within that sequence.

I seek the reasons for the loss of particular women's poetic voices, for the under-reading of poetry by women, and for the dis-memberment of their bodies of work, by interrogating reading practices, poetic ambition, culturalisation, politics, and literary critical theory. I neither claim objectivity nor do I necessarily extend my reading into a universal paradigm. My intent is to be as open-minded as possible and not to be constricted by any one contemporary critical method, both within and without feminist criticism, although the restrictive sonnet form obviously calls for formalist techniques of close reading. In particular, like Alicia Ostriker in *Stealing the Language* (1986), “I attempt to read by the light that poems themselves emit, rather than by the fixed beam of one or another theory which might shine where a poem is not and leave in darkness the place where it is” (13). On the other hand, as Terry Eagleton argues, “Any method or theory which will contribute to the strategic goal of human emancipation . . . is acceptable” (211). My thesis, however, is founded upon an extensive study of poetry and literary criticism by both women and men, and is firmly anchored to the social conditions and expectations at the time the work was written. Since the hearing of different voices is dependent on both the writer and the reader, the text is always in process.

I also want to communicate how exciting it is to (re-)discover and over-read poetry by women, much of which has lain dormant for centuries and decades. Michel Foucault contends that a scholar “would not try to judge He [*sic*] would multiply, not the number of judgments, but the signs of existence” (1989:196). But in texts the signs of existence are language. Multiplicity comes from tone which is dependent upon voice, the significance of which comes from reading the words on the page with an ear for the possible voices the poet employs through performance, juxtaposition and structure. There is no such thing as a single voice for women, and no woman considered here speaks in an “authentic” univalent voice.

Gender and Genre

A genre study has the advantage of crossing shifting boundaries imposed by gender, culture, time and space. “Genre, because it is both conservative and progressive,” as Carol Neely reasons in “The Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequences” (1978), “mediates between the social change and the unchanged psychological impulses” (383). Speaking of Edna St. Vincent Millay’s sonnets, Debra Fried suggests, in “Andromeda Unbound” (1985), “Our silence attests rather to a failure to ask the right questions about how traditional poetic forms such as the sonnet may serve the needs of women poets” (1). Mary Gerhart argues in *Genre Choices, Gender Questions* (1992), that the gender questions we answer depend upon the genre choices we make; together genre and gender should “make explicit some of the hidden assumptions that obscure or distort our understanding of both” (6).

Cultural expectations about “feminine” and “masculine” qualities not only shape our perception of what women or men should be, but also, and of great concern in this study, codify our reception of poetry along gender lines. If, as has been done, we promote a paradigm in which all poetry by women appears to be simple, domestic, sentimental, “feminine” versification, we create an environment in which the voices of women will not be heard. If we come to poetry by women with the assumption that it is trivial, we may well fulfill our own prophecy. Because we will not give it the careful analysis that it deserves, we may miss the possibility of recognising a complex voice, thereby undervaluing such poetry. A discourse of power in a voice of authority can still be effective in the continuation of oppression, suppression and exclusion although it operated more openly in the past.

Sonnet sequence traditions both reflect dogma about a stereotypical woman, and forcefully confine actual women within it. A woman who writes a sonnet sequence, therefore,

has to write against the image of women constructed by patriarchal thought. But as a woman writer of the tradition she becomes the object of the male gaze, wherever that gaze occurs, including within the critical heritage. Such reification may be reflected in the overwhelming tendency to read poetry by women biographically.

Fried asks, "What sort of gender associations can a poetic form such as the sonnet accumulate, and how may such associations, and consequent exclusions, make that genre an especially lively arena for the revisionary acts of women's poetry?" (1). I would respond that the sonnet form has been available for, and has been used by, "marginal" groups, including women, for centuries—Lady Mary Wroth (c.1587-c.1652), Mary Monck (1677?-1715), Mary Tighe (1772-1810), Frances Kemble (1809-1893), Alice Meynell (1847-1922), P.K. Page (b.1916). Even if we stay within the male tradition, John Milton (1608-1674) opens the sonnet up to a variety of content, and John Keats (1795-1821) to variations in form, including the absence of rhyme in "O thou whose face hath felt the winter's wind" (173-174). Neither Milton nor Keats, however, extends his experiment into a sequence, and the use of the sonnet sequence is, of course, much less frequent than the use of the sonnet.

The very fact that men are still most strongly associated with the sonnet sequence, and that women practitioners are seen in terms of the male tradition, makes it ideal for a gender-genre study, for we can investigate the changing balance of formal traditions and innovations both within the male tradition and outside, at the margins occupied by women. Neely, who sees patriarchal textual readings as always exclusionary, suggests in "Constructing the Subject" (1988), "feminist critique will be better served by 'over-reading' [texts] as if for the first time, instead of merely rereading them or deconstructing traditional readings." She sees the need "to read to excess, the possibility of human (especially female) gendered subjectivity, identity, and agency . . . to over-read men's canonical texts with women's uncanonical ones" (15-17). Some scholarly work on sonnet sequences by women has been undertaken in recent years. Nevertheless, our inherited critical assumptions about sonnet sequences still concern such works as Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595), Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (c.1591), and George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862), despite the comparatively recent scholarly work on Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621), and our greater, but possibly superficial, familiarity with *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847-1850) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) and *Monna Innominata* (1882) by Christina Rossetti (1830-

1894).² This particular genre is well suited, therefore, as a site to investigate how certain women recreate the poetic voices readers hear.

A gender study of voice within sonnet sequences can, I suggest, destabilise simplistic categorisation of gender *differánce*. I minimise the risk inherent in a such a study of claiming specific content or technique as woman's exclusive territory and overlooking their presence in men's poetry by investigating the use poets make of traditional conventions, and by referring to sequences by both women and men. A major advantage of a genre study, as opposed to an exclusive study of theme, imagery or feminist issues, or the study of a single poet, is the opportunity to approach specific poetry with minimal predetermined agenda. The requirements of genre, so to speak, override other concerns.

Within the broader context of studies on poetry by women, it is useful to look at a group of poets who experiment with the same genre, with the purpose of discerning their vocal techniques. Whereas it would not be spatially possible to discuss and to compare adequately the complete works of several poets in a single study, sonnet sequences are sufficiently short to make the beginning of an overview possible. At the same time, a sequence is a sufficiently extended work to allow the poetic voice to be heard across a broad and varied range. A sequence may have a structure which invites the poet to assume many voices, supplying contexts which are not redeemable in occasional or discrete sonnets. The formality of the sonnet within the less constrictive sequence may also afford a coherent aesthetic experiment, provide a framework which may make re-evaluation possible, and satisfy our desire for a creative tradition. Reading sequences intently may also make us more attentive critics.

Sequences, Selections, Strategies, Silence and Succession

Before describing the argument of this study in more detail, I need to clarify my critical position and some of my terminology. Since I reject the homogeneity implicit in treating woman or women as if they were a common entity or even a stable object/subject, I continually experience, like many feminists, a need to differentiate among concepts of women. Where I have co-opted terms used by other scholars and critics, my choices are intended to demonstrate or point toward the recognition of what H el ene Cixous refers to as "Our richness [as] composite beings" (xii). *Feminine* and *masculine* commonly denote gender culturalisation, while *female* and *male* emphasise biological gender; neither set of terms adequately signifies any actual person. Therefore, I prefer to use *female/feminine* and *male/masculine*, indicating the

conjunction of biology and culture within any person and thus within any tradition. When I need to emphasise political persuasion I sometimes use compound terms—*female/feminine/feminist* and *male/masculine/masculinist*—as linguistic reminders that we are all composites of our biology, culture and politics.

Because the classification *poet* refers to one aspect of a particular historic person-in-process, usually a man, when I need distinguishing terms for sex/gender I use *woman-as-poet* (a woman who is a poet) and *man-as-poet*. Dashes are better than parentheses, as used for example by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke in their translation of Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985)—“speaking (as) woman” (222)—because the parentheses too quickly elide into “speaking woman.” Occasionally, for a different semantic purpose, I reverse the words to *poet-as-woman* (a poet who is a woman) and *poet-as-man*. In the first phrase, the person modifies the creativity; in the second, creativity modifies the person.

According to Porter and Burke, “‘speaking (as) woman’ would try to disrupt or alter the syntax of discursive logic, based on the requirements of univocity and masculine sameness, in order to express the plurality and mutuality of feminine difference and mime the relations of ‘self-affection’” (222). While accepting their proposition, I question the covert assumption of a “normative” *parler-homme*, or *écriture masculine*, along with the implication that society is necessarily dualistic. If John Milton, Robert Browning and T.S. Eliot represent “masculine” writing, for example, I do not know how to categorise Walt Whitman, Gerard Manley Hopkins and e.e.cummings. Neither men nor women -as-poets are always comfortable with “univocity and masculine sameness.” Nevertheless, voice is almost certainly more problematic for women than for men.

For a work to be considered as a sequence in this study, the poet has to demonstrate that she saw her sonnets as a complete and single work, rather than as a collection of occasional sonnets, and to signify her intent. A poet may identify her work as a continuous poem compiled of discrete but loosely connected sonnets. Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), for example, establishes the status of her sonnets by entitling them as a complete work, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1806), and that title proclaims that the principle of connection is an elegiac tone and a concern with death. In *Sonnets of Sorrow* (1918), Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1853-1919) also signals by her title that this is a sequence and that the tone will be elegiac. Her sequence *Heloise to Abelard* (1907) is a dramatic narrative. Often, however, we have to read a work very carefully to recognise that it is indeed a sequence.

Each of the poets and the poems that I choose to hear has been selected because of something important that we can learn about the voice of women. After extensive research I discovered that there are many sonnet sequences by women, the existence of which is still unsuspected by scholars. This unanticipated *largesse* of sonnet sequences necessitated careful selection of works for this study. Many works had to be omitted and so I rejected short sequences. I wanted to cover the greatest possible historic and geographic range, while concentrating on works that have had little or no critical attention. My most detailed discussions are on *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1806) by Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), *First and Second Love* (1911-1917) and *Sonnets* (1918) by Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965), and *Sonnets from a Lock Box* (1929) by Anna Hempstead Branch (1875-1937). Each of these poets occupy a chapter. My analysis of the structure of *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839) by Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley (1806-1855) and *Abelard and Heloise* (1907) by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1853-1919) is also extensive. I broaden the historical parameters from Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) to *Twenty-One Love Poems* (1974-1976) by Adrienne Rich (b.1929).

These sequences by women, despite many dissimilarities, do share a number of similar strategies and concerns which make it productive to present them as a group. At the same time, their dissimilarities eliminate any simplistic assumptions about sonnet sequences or about women's writing. All poetry, of course, reflects both the personal and historical circumstances of the poet to some extent, but I wish to highlight the diversity of these poets at the same time as I discover similarities amongst them. I therefore juxtapose sequences which cross geographic boundaries, those which were popular in their own time with those which were not, writers of the twentieth century with those of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the wealthy and the not so wealthy, mothers and the childless, wives and spinsters. I have deliberately chosen writers who cover a variety of women's positions.

As a participant in a reclamation project which grows stronger with periods of feminist activity, I am breaking new ground in the retrieval, analysis and evaluation of this neglected poetry, and I am helping to lay the foundation for further interest and study. My initial interest was simply to uncover poetry about which we were ignorant and to share the excitement of working with poetic texts that have lain virtually untouched, like *Sonnets from a Lock Box* (1929), by poets such as Hempstead Branch, who are nearly unknown in our time but were often popular in their own. Many of these sonnet sequences—I have located and retrieved over fifty—

are only available in an original or limited edition (see Appendix I). Many, like *The Circling Year* (1902) by the Canadian Agnes Maule Machar (1837-1927), appear to be unknown and unheard of and have been out of print since the deaths of their creators.³ The continuous unavailability of so many sequences by women is the result neither of their poor aesthetic quality nor of accident. As Gerda Lerner cogently reasons, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) was “a process developing over a period of nearly 2500 years” (8), and part of the maintenance of that patriarchy is the political act of silencing literature by women. As Joanna Russ notes in *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, “There are tell-tale signs of premature burial all over the canon” (115). Even a preliminary survey of these newly accessible texts uncovers poetic treasure.

One of the exciting results of this re-discovery and re-appearance of sonnet sequences by women is the access it provides to works that have not been critically assessed. Any reader can listen to the voices of these poets free from the evaluations provided by a long line of critics. Phyllis Pearson Elmore, in the first chapter of her (unpublished) Ph.D. dissertation on Barrett Browning (1990), discusses the critical heritage of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and claims that the cumulative effect of negative and condescending criticism has resulted in the current neglect of this work. The particular sequences central to this study have not been burdened with decades of patriarchal criticism, nor even with feminist analysis. Feminist scholars applied their expertise first to major works by major “great” poets and then others, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, analysed specific works—sometimes only partial works—of women, often to demonstrate the effect of patriarchy on such writing. Both of these activities privilege men for, implicit in the search for the negative effects of society upon authorship, there is a prior assumption that writings by women are inferior and require *apologia*. The *oeuvres* of these sonneteers are not inferior, merely different.

We know that many women, including writers of sonnet sequences, were very popular, influential, and admired by other poets. Sometimes the evidence for their popularity and influence is circumstantial as in the number of reprints and editions; sometimes it may be inferred from internal evidence of borrowings and allusions in subsequent writing; and sometimes there is undeniable external historical proof of a specific, wide-ranging readership. The effect of Charlotte Smith’s poetry, as I begin to show in chapter three, is far-reaching. After her estrangement from her husband, she supported herself, her husband, numerous children, and some grandchildren by her pen, an astonishing accomplishment for any writer of that time and

for any woman. Her poetry was admired by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Barrett Browning was certainly aware of it. The *Athenaeum* urged that Barrett Browning should succeed Wordsworth as poet laureate (DNB). She was greatly admired by Emily Dickinson (1831-1886), an admiration expressed in "Her—'last Poems'" (312) which is a tribute to Barrett Browning upon her death, and by Christina Rossetti who, in her introduction to *Monna Innominata*, specifically acknowledges the influence of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Admirers made pilgrimages to the home of Wheeler Wilcox, as Elizabeth Towne (1905) tells us, and by the age of twenty-one the poet "helped support the Wheeler household," including "her older brother and sister" (James 607). Farjeon "could find a publisher for whatever she cared to write" (DNB). It appears that Rossetti and Barrett Browning influenced Hempstead Branch (James 227), as Wylie later influenced Millay who, in turn, influenced Anne Sexton. And Marianne Moore influenced Elizabeth Bishop who won the Pulitzer prize in 1955 (Gilbert 1985:1407, 1553, 1489 & 1738). Since, as Marge Piercy states in her introduction to *Early Ripening* (1987), "We rebound and surge forward from each other's work" (4), we can only wonder what women like these might have achieved poetically if all writing by women had been available to them in print rather than *via* this tenuous linkage.

Women writers of sonnet sequences did not have the benefit of an obvious, continuous, mother line.⁴ The eventual submergence of all of the sonnet sequences which are the major focus in this study, although Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) and Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1806) are making a comeback, has often made them unavailable to later poets, a fact which has enormous implications for the question of influence. Often, as in the case of Smith (which I discuss more fully in chapter three), her influence upon both minor and major poets is of great literary importance while, at the same time, it may appear to be quite local. *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Turkey and Hungary* (1839) by Stuart Wortley seems to be still completely unknown; she has no entry in the comprehensive *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (Grundy 1990), and although she is in J.R.de J.Jackson's bibliography, he lists no poetry later than 1835, mentioning only that she "continued to publish verse until 1851, especially in the annuals." Most twentieth-century sonnet sequences by women are out of print; only the poetry of Millay and Rich is readily available. Even though some sonnet sequences by women have never been lost, notably *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and *Monna Innominata*, they have all been under-read.

Vocal Strategies

To discuss the use by women of varied vocal strategies, I adopt and modify John Hollander's *echo*, Irigaray's *mimicry*, and Elizabeth Harvey's *ventriloquized voices* (116-142). Although Joseph Loewenstein, in *Responsive Readings* (1984), tends to hear echo in a very negative way, his insights into the nature and poetic utility of this figure can be useful. He claims that echoing male-stream narrative potentially reveals "the semantic indeterminacy of an utterance" and "extends and reorganizes the public context, the narrative situation of speaking" (18). Although this is both a passive image and a deconstructive reading, nevertheless, in the hands of a woman-as-poet, an echo often actively and constructively moves the reader to a "reevaluation of a prior text" (21). In an ideal situation, echo redistributes power. The structure of Wroth's sequence and its relationship to those of her father and her uncle, Sir Robert and Sir Philip Sidney, create reverberations both between her sequence and each of theirs as well as within her *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. Smith's deliberate echoing in *Elegiac Sonnets* of a company of men-as-poets from Petrarch to Alexander Pope revises many poetic conventions. Such usage, with its "revisionary power," can also, as John Hollander argues in *The Figure of Echo*, "constitute a kind of underground cipher-message for the attentive poetic ear. . . . [T]he role of questioning is crucial in the literary device of the echo" (ix,12) and Smith, in fact, subtly questions gendered assumptions in sonnet sequences through ironic reversal.

Mimicry and parody are close relatives and their use by a woman-as-poet both destabilises the patriarchal text and challenges its hypotheses by drawing attention to the basic assumptions that it is making. Inasmuch as the expected speaker of a sonnet sequence is a man, all sonnet sequences by women have a tendency to mimicry. Parody can be a more creative, less satiric form as we shall see in Smith's Werter [*sic*] series. Irigaray's *mimetism*, as Porter and Burke explain, is an

interim strategy for dealing with a realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is posited as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her. (220)

A woman-as-sonneteer, such as Stuart Wortley speaking as Inez, for example, may assume the patriarchal roles attributed to women but undermine them by irony, juxtaposition and other complex verbal strategies. Inez, then, critically portrays woman as depicted in the convention.

My final term with respect to voice is *ventriloquism*, a term that Harvey uses to speak of the practice of men who silence women by speaking through a specific woman's voice (116-142). She claims, for example, that men, speaking in Sappho's "voice appropriate the power of her poetic reputation, while subjecting her either to male disdain . . . or the voyeurism implicit in male constructions of lesbianism" (9). My use of *ventriloquism* refers to a woman's practice of speaking through the voices of others, usually men, not for disdain or voyeurism, but to destabilise the "masculinity" of the sonnet sequence tradition, to facilitate a gender role inversion, and to claim the power of a long line of poets. She overlays, rather than undercuts, his voice, sharing power rather than inverting or redistributing it.

Echo, mimicry, parody and ventriloquism all give rise to a *multivocal* production. Gary Waller, in *The Sidney Family Romance* (1993), uses the term "multiple voices" in talking of Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*: "Within the poems, too, writing is depicted as a way of giving a woman not merely reactive roles to male desires but multiple and changing voices of her own" (216). His meaning is of sequential voicing, and appears to refer to changes in mood and tone. I use *multi-voicings* both in Waller's sense and to depict a single person who speaks in different voices simultaneously.

The title of this introduction illustrates such multivoicing and announces the broad purpose of my study. Etymology is challenged as Latin competes with English, as *cano* resonates with cano(nise), and as the perception of "man" as a universal is (yet again) denied. Both Virgil and epic poetry become feminised as this intertextuality becomes an *intersexuality*, since a woman co-opts a man's words to her own use. Whereas Virgil sings and celebrates arms and the man ("*Arma uirumque cano*"), as he tells us in the opening words of the *Aeneid*, I sing and celebrate voices and women, as I tell you early in this study. The use of *feminas* turns masculine singularity (*uirum*) into female plurality. At the same time, I attempt to turn *cano* into canonise—even though I know that the literary canon is merely a gentlemen's agreement—as I seek recognition for the bodies of work of these women. Through this multi-vocality the reader experiences "the pleasure of the text," and also "gains access to bliss (*jouissance*) by the cohabitation of languages working *side by side*: the text of pleasure is a sanctioned Babel" (Barthes 4).

More subtle echoes come from less obvious sources. Walt Whitman's echoes of Virgil, for example, open *Leaves of Grass* with "One's-Self I sing" and *Song of Myself* with "I celebrate myself," while in *The Children of Adam* "I Sing the Body Electric." I echo and endorse an

Anglo-Saxon poem from the *Exeter Book*, which can have been written no later than the eleventh century: "I sing of myself, a sorrowful woman,/of my own unhap" (cited Lerner 1993:169). For women, too, sing themselves and sing of the condition of women. Women's singing is sometimes a dirge, sometimes a comfort, sometimes an ululation but often a celebration.

Organisation

The effect of the juxtaposition of the women's voices in this study is choric. Sometimes an individual work, such as *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Turkey and Hungary* creates an internal choral effect. In the first chapter of this study, which lays the foundations for an exploration of some of the many vocal techniques women use in sonnet sequences, I discuss short poems from the eighteenth to the twentieth century which create resonances amongst themselves. They all speak to and from communities outside the patriarchal circle. These poems have been chosen specifically to offer a wide range of such communities in terms of historical period, geographical area and sexual orientation and to explore some of the many vocal techniques women use in sonnet sequences. I use shorter poems because complicated vocal strategies are sometimes more readily recoverable within shorter works. This poetry also allows me to extend the range of this study, to clarify concepts, to offer alternate readings, to overcome some of the disadvantages of working with texts which are out of print, to create a familiar literary environment, to demonstrate choric effect, and to illustrate both similarities and differences in the voicing of women.

The exploration of the revision of convention by the rewriting of traditional themes begins in the second chapter, on the structure of specific sonnet sequences. The historic range is from Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) to Rich's *Twenty-One Love Sonnets* (1974-1976). The structure of each of the five sonnet sequences is integral to the voicing involved in the presentation of a woman's love.

Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) fully engages the following chapter and builds upon the foundations already laid. It considers her role in transforming the Renaissance sonnet sequence into a recognisable Romantic genre. A discussion of an early group of meditative descriptive sonnets that have received some (slight) critical attention places her within the context of the "great" (male) Romantic poets and Romantic critical theory. Moving through her use of the ventriloquism, echo and mimicry of Petrarch and Goethe, the chapter closes with her use of seascapes to explore political issues.

Through a discussion of Farjeon's two long sequences, *First and Second Love* (1914-1917) and *Sonnets* (1918), chapter four clearly shows the effect of context upon voice in discrete sonnets. Written at the same time, against a backdrop of war, these two very different sequences have many sonnets in common. Inasmuch as either sequence has received any critical attention, the interest has been in the biographical details of *First and Second Love*.

An exegesis of *Sonnets from a Lock Box* (1929), by Hempstead Branch, fully occupies the final chapter. Not only is this chapter the culmination of all the previous discussion, the sequence can be seen as the culmination of the genre. Although poets writing after Branch, such as Millay, Rich and Geoffrey Hill have produced some remarkable sonnet sequences, their contribution to the tradition is, arguably, no greater than that of Hempstead Branch. Her sequence is a brilliant display of evolving ideas and symbols even as it wrestles with the difficulties for a woman who tries to escape from the box of patriarchal control. The box is also, in effect, lined with mirrors as concerns and images echo and reflect throughout the work.

Notes

1. The title of this introduction is a feminised version of the opening line of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "*Arma uirumque cano.*" The epigraphs are from John Hollander's 1981 *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (ix), Carol Thomas Neely's 1988 "Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourse" (15-17) and Joanna Russ' 1983 *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (115).

2. A recent CD ROM search showed forty-five entries for *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* from 1981 to mid-1995.

3. Machar's novels, however, are gaining a little attention; see Carole Gerson's "Agnes Maule Machar" (1993) and "Three Writers of Victorian Canada: Rosanna Leprohon, James De Mille, Agnes Maule Machar" (1983); Leonard Vandervart's *Ideas in the Fiction of Victorian Canada: James De Mille, Agnes Maule Machar, and Robert Barr* (unpublished dissertation 1990); and Ruth Compton Brouwer's "Moral Nationalism in Victorian Canada: The Case of Agnes Machar" (1985).

4. For talking of the father line, the words patrimony and patrimonial are available. Richard Stern has just coined the term *Sistermony* (1995) for a sister-brother relationship. It says much to the question of the on-going effects of centuries of patriarchy that the equivalent words for woman signify marriage. She has no inherited right, no claim to a line of writers.

Chapter One

Do You Hear What I Say? Speaking and Listening

Yet the agrammatical “women as knower” constitutes a new subject of knowledge that is not only female but is also not a single monadic individual.

(Gallop)

There is a timbre of voice
that comes from not being heard
and knowing you are not being
heard noticed only
by others not heard
for the same reason.

(Lorde)

How I love these vital threads passed round among women, especially those of us who are expected to be completely split from each other by class, education, race, age, homophobia. How important this is, to our lives and our literature.

(Grahm)¹

Through specific outstanding examples of contemporary and early modern women’s poetic voicings this chapter establishes ways in which we can hear the voicing techniques women use to undermine, to re-inforce and to endorse various political positions and to achieve arresting poetic effects. In this chapter I will argue that to hear such voices is to hear the shifting frames of reference which these poets invoke and to begin to understand women’s poetry in ways discouraged by the conventional emphasis on authentic personal expression and by the absence of an accepted coherent tradition. To begin a consideration of reading and voice, and to begin to form an hypothesis on the varieties of women’s irony, I discuss “The Woman’s Labour” (1739) by Mary Collier (1679?-1762?)—for if voices have been muted historically, then those of working-class women have been the most effectively silenced—“Washing-Day” (1797) by Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1823), “Yuh Hear ‘Bout?” (1983) by Valerie Bloom (b.1956),

and *She Who* (1972) by Judy Grahn (b.1940). Whenever a poet under study, such as Grahn, offers some poetic theory, however little or fragmentary, I apply it. I also refer extensively to the poetics and complex voicing of Audre Lorde (1934-1992) and to the poetics of Adrienne Rich (b.1929). The inclusive consciousness suggested by these poets and supplied by the reader will be seen again in the “frames” of the sequences discussed in chapter two.

Moreover, by looking at writing by women of different periods, classes, colour and sexual orientation, it is possible to hear women’s voices in relationship to each other, not just in relation to voices of men. I have chosen these particular poets primarily because of the ways they use voice to expand meaning, but also because together they reveal a collective ironic response. They are ironic in surprising ways, revealing more self-consciousness than has been assumed.

These particular poetic works allow for definition of terms, and for a clear argument on the nature of hearing multivocal texts, vital to my later discussion of sonnet sequences by women. The very length of a sonnet sequence, which enables us to hear the complexity and polyphony of a woman’s voice, may also impede a determination of tone and a clear preliminary discussion of critical terms. Particular vocal strategies can be more readily heard in these individual short poems than in extended sequences.

Language Control

Throughout this study, I indicate that women are alienated from man-made language and show how they reclaim that same language for their own use. If “one controls people’s memory,” as Michel Foucault argues, “one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles” (1989:92) and hence their history and their language. As Judy Simons perceives, “For women, so long denied a voice of their own, and beset by public expectations of how that voice should sound, the dilemma of defining a personal utterance gains added intensity” (195). That added intensity affects not only poets, but also those scholars and critics who have understood that the silencing of women is political. This phenomenon has been only too apparent in the discontinuities and repetitions of women’s movement toward sexual equality. The concern of Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (1993) is precisely that lack of continuity through women’s ignorance of preceding generations: “Without knowledge of the past, no group of women could test their own ideas against those of their equals, those who had come out of similar conditions and similar life situations” (12). When women have indeed

spoken, they have not been heard for long, a fact which has created discontinuities in their literary as well as their political history. Even if one were to argue that the submergence of poetry by women has not been intentional, it would still be political for it is caused by the limited self-interest of patriarchal vision. If, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues in *Contingencies of Value* (1988), "there is a politics of personal *taste* as well as a politics of institutional evaluation and explicit evaluative criticism" (25), that aesthetic has not provided a healthy environment for the survival of writing by women, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when "taste" was moral and idealised.

Although there has, in fact, been a submerged tradition of sonnet sequences by women, most readers have been unaware of this tradition, so that the poetry by these women has been seen as non-incremental and discontinuous. Despite the disingenuous complaint by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) of a lack of poetic grandmothers, she and Emmeline Stuart Wortley (1806-1855) would have been aware of such writers of sequences as Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), Mary Robinson (1758-1800), Mary Tighe (1772-1810) and Felicia Hemans (1793-1835). Smith wrote *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784), Robinson *Sappho to Phaon* (1796), Tighe *Psyche* (1810) and Hemans *Female Characters of Scripture, Records of Autumn, 1834, Records of the Spring of 1834, Sonnets, Devotional and Memorial and Thoughts During Sickness*, but Barrett Browning chose to underplay that knowledge.² *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847-1850) were known by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) who responds to them in *Monna Innominata* (1882), and by such later writers of sonnet sequences as Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965), Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1853-1919), Elinor Wylie (1885-1928) and Anna Hempstead Branch (1875-1937). But part of the problem for readers in hearing women's voices and in reading their sonnet sequences, is that we have not been aware of this continuous women's tradition in the genre. We have not learnt the ways in which successive woman-as-poets have modified previous voicings, and how they have created their own choric voice. Related to this ignorance of a women's tradition is a tendency to define continuity through such major figures as Barrett Browning. Although we are now discovering that there were many early modern poets who, writing at the same time, would have known of each other's work, the deprivation of women who wrote with little knowledge of earlier poetry by women is still with us, giving new meaning to the term *the generation gap*.

My readings of Bloom demonstrate that the greater the gap between the expectations of writer and reader, the greater the likelihood for misreading. Gender-specific attitudes toward

language and meaning are possible sources of such expectations. For example, if we expect a woman to be self-depreciating, simple or modest, that is what we hear. As one example of how a poet's voice may be misread as simultaneously personal and conventional, we might briefly consider *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. This sequence has, until recently, always been read "straight," as if it could be epitomised by the voice of some ideal womanly heterosexual love. Such a reading has been aggravated by the persistent anthologising of "How do I love thee, let me count the ways" (42). The persona and the poet are presumed to be identical or collapsed into the wife of Robert Browning. Although *Sonnets from the Portuguese* was written in Barrett Browning's maturity, even Rich finds her love poems "conventional, though her political poems are not" (1977;13). And yet Rich believes that, as a political writer, Barrett Browning has amply demonstrated her awareness of the sexual double-standard and the implications of marriage for women.³ I suggest not that Barrett Browning did not know what she was writing in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* but that her readers have refused to hear her, despite such heavily encoded clues in the very first sonnet as the disparity between herself and Theocritus. The easy assumption to make here is that she is placing herself within a long line of poets. Sappho might appear to be a better choice for a woman-as-poet/Greek scholar, especially since Barrett Browning has mourned her lack of poetic grandmothers. I suggest that one reason why she mentions Theocritus is to enable her to reject him as a model, even as she rejects Petrarchan sonnet sequences by men as suitable models for women. Her voice signals are often subtle.

Critics of both Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) and Barrett Browning, furthermore, seemed either unaware until quite recently of the classical content of their poetry or under-valued its significance, resulting in a peculiar muting of their voices. These poets had not been seen to be claiming identity with that Greek symbol of the highest poetic status, the (male) cicada. Although Barrett Browning's classical education has never been in doubt, and the reader has already been alerted in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* to be aware of classical allusions through her opening reference to Theocritus, scholars still seem not to notice her identification with the cricket, an insect which is the English translation of the Greek cicada: "My cricket chirps against thy mandolin" (4;11). The assumption has been that as the mandolin-playing singer, the male has the higher poetic status. Rory Egan, in "Classical Intimations in the Poems of Emily Dickinson" (1991), shows that when Dickinson uses the cricket, she is fully aware that she is adopting for herself the ultimate poetic symbol (47-53). Since only the male cicada sings, both poets cross gender lines. Perhaps it is only in considering the two poets together that we

appreciate the degree of misreading when these poets are read as implying modesty and humility—or ethereal quaintness.

The fact that Jane Gallop, in *Reading Lacan* (1985), needed to coin a(n un-grammatical) phrase—“women as knower”—that includes both unity and diversity indicates that women’s knowledge has been ignored, co-opted, under-valued, or treated as an amorphous mass. Unlike Gallop, however, I argue that not only “the common denominators,” the “intersections,” but also “their unions” (19), the totality of the common and the exceptional, are of interest. There may be no implicit “common denominator,” only those imposed by under-reading. Applying Elizabeth Spelman’s argument in *Inessential Woman* (1988) to poetry instead of lives, “rather than assuming that women must have something in common as women . . . we have to investigate different women’s [poetry] and see what they have in common *other* than being called ‘women’s’ poetry” (137). We need both the common and the unique. I am suggesting that a major commonality may lie in female/feminine/ feminist use of voice. Women’s social irony can illuminate women’s poetic irony and *vice versa*, giving rise to “unsettling confrontation[s] with [the] contradictory plurivocity” (19) within social intercourse, within individual poems, within individual sequences, between sequences by the same woman, and amongst sonnet sequences by women.

We need to gather together and to study the knowledge and writings by women that are available so that we can re-form “women as knower,” can stop re-cycling the women’s movement, can stop re-inventing the distaff, and can explore new paths, other countries, “other affirmations” (Foucault 1989:144), so that we can see connections. Although Grahn is speaking specifically of lesbians-as-poets, she points to the importance of the loss of earlier woman-voices: “The connections of contemporary Lesbian poets to each other, though they may have developed late, are of vital importance to the growth of our ideas” (1985:57). We need now to make connections not only with today’s women-as-poet, but with those long dead. It takes all women to constitute women-as-knower of women’s experience, and all women-as-poets to make women-as-poet.

Learning to Hear

Poetry is the birth place of language, as Lorde claims in “Poetry is Not a Luxury” (1977) and where it “does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps us to fashion it” (37-38). But sometimes important things still remain unsaid because there are no words. In *First and Second*

Love (1911-1917), Farjeon expresses the difficulty of the speech act itself, especially in terms of sexual desire: "silence utters in a perfect trust/Things that we blur and spoil with difficult speech" (5;9-10). Farjeon, like all poets, tries to sharpen the focus of language, but her need is intimately tied to her sex and gender. Stuart Wortley, in speaking of "A Night Storm at Venice" (56) in *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839), says, "it is stamped upon the brain:/ . . . /And there must long, unlocked by words remain" (12;14), presumably until the words she seeks are available. The eloquence of such a partially chosen silence, however, bears little relation to the oppression of enforced silence or to the muting caused by the refusal or inability to hear. When Barrett Browning interrogates both speaking and hearing by asking "do ye hear/What I say" ("Apprehension" 12-14), the answer is probably "not exactly" and the problem she is delineating is precisely that isolated by reception theory. Until more people, both women and men, read more literature by more women, we continue to mis-read, mis-re-present, mis-prize and mis-prize their works.

A consideration of the ways in which Collier's "The Woman's Labour" and Barbauld's "Washing-Day" engage in dialogue with "The Thresher's Labour" (1736) by Stephen Duck (1705-1756) and the male poetic tradition, lays the foundations for the more complex readings, in chapter three, of the sophisticated rewriting, in *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1806) by Smith, of the sonnet sequence tradition as established by men and of the works of such specific male writers as Petrarch and Goethe. Like Smith also, but unlike their "great" male contemporaries, Collier unabashedly writes for money: "I think it no Reproach to the Author, whose Life is toilsome, and her Wages inconsiderable, to confess honestly, that the View of putting a small Sum of Money in her Pocket . . . had its Share of Influence upon this Publication" (4). Collier's head-note sets a wry tone for her text.

Collier's and Barbauld's distinct responses by women of different classes to a poem by a contemporary man resonate with each other because they are both answering the same work, and because Barbauld, of course, is also replying to Collier. Barbauld's voice is far more complex, giving rise to multi-readings. Her overt vocal manipulation and negotiation of the conventions, in particular, provide useful models by which to see some ways that a poet might signal her use of voice, and the difficulty that might arise in determining tone. Smith's responses, also in the eighteenth century, to both earlier and contemporary men, are far more intricate, so that it becomes easier not to hear what she says. Her persona(e)'s voices are polyphonic.

I suggest that poetry by women, including sonnet sequences, is, among other things, a criticism (in the best sense of that word) of the language and aesthetic of men-as-poets. Barbauld's "Washing-Day" clearly demonstrates that "Poetry is," as Rich argues in her introduction to Grahn's *The Work of a Common Woman* (1977), "among other things, a criticism of language" (8). Bloom's "Yuh Hear 'Bout?" dramatically criticises the poetic tradition in *Standard English* (Bloom's term) by entering into a bilingual dialogue and shows, in particular, that signification is racially determined. The strategies I develop in reading "Yuh Hear 'Bout?" will be applied to sonnet sequences by women.

Although Bloom's "Yuh Hear 'Bout?" may serve as a paradigm for reading any sonnet sequence, it is particularly useful, in the context of this study, as preparation for an appreciation of *Elegaic Sonnets*, or for an understanding of the inter-relationship between the two long sonnet sequences, *First and Second Love* and *Sonnets* (1918), by Farjeon (see chapter four). Bloom focuses the reader's attention on her use of voice more blatantly than any other writer I consider. Her original poem, in *dialect* (Bloom's term), is a scathing comment on racism, but as we will see, the addition of a "standard English translation" underscores both the effect and denial of this racism, creating a complex of ventriloquism and mimicry. By juxtaposing two versions of a poem, Bloom creates resonances between them similar to, but more apparent than, those set up amongst sonnets in a sequence. Smith's use of these techniques is more subtle, and her implicit comparisons of the (male) sonnet sequence tradition with the real lives of women are easier to miss. Reading Farjeon's sequences together, which I suspect few have done, is complicated by their length. By using two distinct yet strangely indeterminate voices, she highlights the resonances and the antiphony between them, in ways that are more complicated and less obvious than Bloom's.

A discussion of Grahn's use of irony, voice and juxtaposition in her sequence *She Who*, in conjunction with her own poetics, begins to illuminate the relationship between the timbre of voice and the structure in sonnet sequences by women. Prior to the second half of this century women were less free to express themselves than they are today, and so, I argue, their voicing may be more opaque than that of their descendants, their strategies less obvious. The mandates of modesty, chastity and silence, for example, may well lead them to produce subtly ironic texts. Furthermore, since we expect them to have been constrained, we as readers may tend to mute their voices, hearing only what we have been conditioned to hear. Because today's women have

much more freedom to manipulate voice overtly, their techniques are somewhat more transparent, and their readers are less likely to read their work superficially.

Irony can take many forms and can be less emphatically oppositional or disjunctive than the kinds studied by Alicia Ostriker in her invaluable *Stealing the Language* (1986). These stylistic coping mechanisms help to close the discontinuities a woman may feel between her experiences of her poetic world and of her real world. The use of a female persona enables the poet to express her own experiences directly and/or through those disjunctions. The persona can take responsibility for the words uttered. The distance between the persona and the poet not only partially bridges but also emphasises the sense of discontinuity the poet feels whenever her perception of herself differs from that of the dominant culture, of her time or, in the context of this study, from the limited/limiting culture of the sonnet sequence tradition.

In multi-vocal dramas set up between or among voices, it is sometimes difficult to determine who is speaking. In a social context the speaker's inflection, facial expression, and body language might provide indicators, but a written text may be much harder to decipher. Annis Pratt's observation on the novel, in "Spinning Among The Fields" (1985), however, can be modified and extended to the ironies within sonnet sequences and other poetry by women: literature "brings together both the ideal and the real in a relationship of tension and conflict [which] produced an ambivalence of tone, irony in characterization, and strange disjunction in plotting which indeed mirror women's social experience" (95). Because of its depth and richness of meaning, poetry exaggerates the tensions Pratt perceives, resulting in ironies less direct than those we are accustomed to recognise. There is, I suggest, a similar "ambivalence of tone" in the apologies, such as those by Smith, that preface much of earlier women's published work.⁴

Labourers' Voices Raised in Dialogue: Duck and Collier

One way of hearing a woman's poetic voice, such as Mary Collier's in "The Woman's Labour," is by listening to its dialogue with another poetic voice, such as Stephen Duck's in "The Thresher's Labour." Collier and Duck share historic time, nationality, class, colour, genre and subject matter, so sex/gender becomes their most significant mark of difference. Duck was incorporated into a male/masculine/ masculinist (not to say misogynist) tradition through an elevation in his class status. He found a patron in Queen Caroline who gave him a thirty pound annuity, a grace and favour house, and a job. Later he took holy orders and was presented with a

living. Collier, of course, was doubly disadvantaged as a working-class woman. No such patronage was offered to her. She remained a single domestic worker.

The 1736 edition of Duck's poem initiates a series of poetic exchanges concerning the value of the "working" man or woman.⁵ Duck denigrates women as "a Throng/Of prattling Females . . . Ah! were their Hands so active as their Tongues,/How nimbly then would move the Rakes and Prongs!" (19-20), as he argues for the value of his labour. He keeps company with a long line of misogynist poets. In "The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Stephen Duck; In Answer To His Late Poem, Called 'The Thresher's Labour'" (1739), which was still in print in 1780, Collier calls Duck to task for his quite gratuitous misogyny. But whereas his poem can be placed within established traditions of pastoral lyric and misogynist satire, her poem is likely to be read as an artless personal statement or conventional answer. But Collier's poem, in fact, represents a critical revision of Duck's traditions and genres.

Although Duck's poem clearly belongs within a more general classical tradition, especially during a neoclassical period, Collier's does not. "The Thresher's Labour," as a poem on the rural worker, could be seen as a descendant of Virgil's *Georgics*. Whether or not Duck was aware of the work is not relevant to the reception of his poem; only his readers' *horizon-of-experience* is pertinent to the *horizon of expectations* from earlier texts (Jauss 1969:19, 23). Collier, as she sets out to prove that a woman's labour is much greater than a man's, has no such classical precedents. Like Barrett Browning later, she has to fit into the male genre. Her strategy is to take his lines and rewrite them: "In Briny Streams our Sweat descends apace,/Drops from our Locks, or trickles down our Face" (p.12) becomes her "Not only Sweat, but Blood runs trickling down/Our Wrists and Fingers" (p.14).

Collier's persona claims that the man, once he has finished threshing, has completed his work for that day. Women, on the other hand,

When Night comes on, unto our Home we go,
Our Corn we carry, and our Infant too;

. . . .

We must make haste, for when we Home are come,
Alas! we find our Work but just begun;

. . . .

You sup, and go to Bed without delay,
And rest yourselves till the ensuing Day;

. . . .

Our Toil and Labour's daily so extreme,
That we have hardly ever *Time to dream*. (pp.10-11)

In her poem, as Moira Ferguson points out, "Contrary to conventional wisdom, women are men's protectors" (viii). It therefore reverses the assumptions on which Duck's poem is based.

Collier's poem is not an expression of misandry—a word only coined in the 1980s—but is a strategic combat, in which the male poet has chosen the weapons. Anything a man can do, a woman can, and must, exceed. By day, he sweats; she bleeds. At night she works; he only dreams of work. He carries home his implements; she also carries her child and her corn. Yet by not complaining of men while asserting women's and men's positions, Collier avoids Duck's querulous tone. The poet is "an Old Maid" (Ferguson 1985:vii) and tells us in her head-note that she is "Now a Washer-woman." The use of a persona, therefore, enables the poet to achieve an aesthetic distance, thereby avoiding Duck's self-pity. The persona's labour has barely begun when the sun sets, a situation which, she remarks, "with Grief I find,/It is the Portion of poor Woman-kind" (p.6). By speaking to "the condition of women," Collier expands women's experience to include that of all (working) women, again avoiding Duck's tone of personal grievance. Although both poets are in earnest, and both use "mock" heroic couplets, her tone is both more "heroic" and more playful, although only he claims "Hero-like" (p.16) status, and equates himself with Cyclops, *Aetna*, Vulcan (p.12) and Hercules (p.25).

A woman may speak in two or more voices to accommodate different audiences or even different aspects of herself. Collier's persona is responding to Duck who is not her husband but a misogynist fellow worker. A woman, I suggest, often tones down her anger and irony in mixed company to avoid conflict and to allow both herself and her hearer to save face. Any woman has to live in a man's world, and limited mockery or playfulness, in both the home and the workplace, may be more comfortable and less threatening than anger. A partially muted voice, in any case, is preferable to no voice at all, but an indeterminate tone is not necessarily a muted one. At the same time, by controlling her anger, the persona can expose Duck's thoughtless misogyny.

Collier and her speaker are distinct, yet the combination of personal and poetic voices is not simple. Collier may be much more angry than her persona. The speaker has a husband—also a working man—whom she may love. The fact that a family drastically increases her workload, does not necessarily mean that she does not love its members, or wishes to be without

them. Perhaps the solitary Collier, as opposed to her persona, sees what makes woman “heroic” and her situation ironic is that double-bind.

Barbauld Joins the Battle of the Sexes

Barbauld, in “Washing-Day,” her response to Collier and Duck, directly challenges, not just one man, but the patriarchal world view. She renews the “old language” to make it “good enough for [her] descriptions of the world [she is] trying to transform” (Rich 1977:7). She co-opts “masculine” language, knowingly indulges in play, consciously uses a multiple voice, and makes a strong feminist statement. She takes advantage of the eighteenth-century tradition of mock epic to mock heroic attitudes, using echo, ventriloquism, mimicry and parody. She deliberately mutates poetic conventions and changes the accepted eighteenth-century poetic relationship between explicit signifiers and their signifieds, creating a multi-vocal text. Unlike Collier, Barbauld’s persona also mocks womanly heroics.

Katharine Rogers, in her article “Anna Barbauld’s Criticism of Fiction” (1988), claims that Barbauld shows remarkable acumen in her massive work, *The British Novelists* (1810). Rogers on Barbauld is worth citing at length:

Her particular sensitivity as a female reader also led her to inquire into the sociology of literature. . . . by distinguishing among different groups of contemporary readers Barbauld also looked for connections between the conditions of women’s lives and their writing. . . . But no one before Barbauld came close to systematic feminist criticism. (33,35 & 39)

Barbauld uses these attitudes in her poetry, making it multi-layered and multi-vocal.

Barbauld begins her poem “Washing-Day” with an epigraph from William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*:

. . . and their voice,
Turning again to childish treble, pipes
And whistles in its sound.—

Barbauld’s use of this excerpt has many implications. The most obvious are her attention to voice and her claim to her poetic heritage. She is not only responding to the poetry of Duck, she is also engaging in dialogue with Shakespeare.

This epigraph, of course, comes from the sixth age of Jaques “seven ages” speech: “his big manly voice,/Turning again to childish treble” (II,vii,161-162). Placing these lines back into

their larger context has further reverberations. Jaques' speech opens with "All the world's a stage,/And all the men and women merely players" (139-140). Barbauld's persona may be invoking the modes of play—both her own and Shakespeare's, ludic and dramatic—and the metaphor that we are all players.

"Washing-Day" opens with the Muses as gossips who are dressed like ordinary women. "All the world's a stage," but it is neither epic nor tragic:

The Muses are turned gossips; they have lost
The buskined step, and clear high-sounding phrase,
Language of Gods. Come then domestic Muse,
In slip-shod measure loosely prattling on . . .

then expect to hear
Of sad disasters—dirt and gravel stains
Hard to efface, and loaded lines at once
Snapped short—and linen-horse by dog thrown down,
And all the petty miseries of life.
Saints have been calm while stretched upon the rack,
And Guatimozen smiled on burning coals .

Sometime through hollow bowl
Of pipe amused we blew, and sent aloft
The floating bubbles .

so near approach

The sports of children and the toils of men. (1-4,24-30,79-81,83-85)

Barbauld's claim is the same as Collier's, that the labour of women is perpetual, "epic" and exhausting, but she uses much bolder humour as her vehicle. As post-Freudians, however, we have the advantage to know that jokes are often the light vehicles for serious messages. The tone can range from satire as Barbauld attacks "heroics" to an inclusive amusement at the absurdity of human life. She does not offer a univocal poetic, so that readings of this text change not only with the age and sex of each reader, but also with the day and mood of that reader as the poet distinguishes between different audiences.

Barbauld takes what she can use from male/masculine/masculinist behaviour, codes and traditions. Even though anecdotes about any person's early years, especially if s/he becomes famous, are often inspired by gossip (the Muse of Barbauld's poem), I record one now. Grace A. Oliver, in her "Biographical Sketch" of Barbauld, tells us that "an observer"—who, it can be deduced from textual evidence, was the granddaughter of Barbauld's father (Barbauld's niece rather than her daughter for she had no children except an adopted son)—recalls Barbauld's strategy when faced by a suitor who attempted to woo her in the garden: "[O]ut of all patience at his unwelcome importunities, she ran nimbly up a tree which grew by the garden wall, and let herself down in the lane beyond, leaving her suitor *planté là*" (21-22). Unconventional behaviour in an eighteenth-century "young lady" I should think. This unconventionality extends to her poetry.

If we are as "slip-shod" as Barbauld claims her Muse to be, we might underestimate the value of her symbols, and miss the significance of a woman equating her poetry with bubbles, which are airy, light, iridescent, pleasurable and of perfect form, but fragile. As Rich notes, "For many women, the commonest words are having to be . . . turned to the light for new colors and flashes of meaning" (1977:7). Although I do not see this as a new phenomenon, not for women-as-poets, nor for any poet, we may be startled by the aptness for women of striking new applications of a word or phrase, or of new symbols for women's creativity. Lorde, in an interview with Rich, uses this same metaphor for the poetic process: "I saw the way other people thought, and it was an amazement to me—step by step, not in bubbles up from chaos that you had to anchor with words" (1984:83). Lorde's thinking is not linear and rational; it is spherical and intuitive. It "bubbles up from chaos." Both Lorde and Barbauld are talking of poetry, specifically poetry by women, as bubbles.

Barbauld's persona tells us that "The sports of children and the toils of men" differ very little, a sentiment reflected in the pronouns within her epigraph, the lines she chooses to omit from the Shakespearean original, and her own text. Whereas Shakespeare specifies both "men and women," Barbauld offers a gender-neutral excerpt for her epigraph, in which the only personal pronoun is *their*. Since only men's voices turn "again to childish treble," however, *their* is implicitly masculine. In her use of slipping signifiers she mimics Jaques. He begins his speech with gender-specific terms—*men and women*—but quickly slips into gender-exclusive nouns with the school boy, followed by the lover with his mistress. In her text, the "we" who blow bubbles includes neither the poet nor the women doing the laundry. "We" are "the little

ones" tended by the grandmother (68-69). For this is a flashback: "I well remember, when a child, the awe/This day struck into me" (58-59). Barbauld leaves the childish playing to the men and children. Women's role on stage involves serious work.

The larger Shakespearean context, however, offers very different resonances and facilitates further explication of Barbauld's bubbles and "hollow bowl/Of pipe." Many of the words in her epigraph immediately resonate with her text: *voice, pipes, sound* and *childish*. The Shakespearean lines immediately following the epigraph are

Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (163-166)

The pipe is not only a play-thing; it is the mark of the approach to senility and death.

At the same time, the bubbles are also no longer merely the soap bubbles of children on washing-day. In *As You Like It*, Jaques tells us that the fourth stage is

a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. (149-153)

The bubble here represents the aim, the life and the death of the (misguided) military man, an aim that is as non-rational as his jealousy, his anger, his reputation and his oaths. Pipes and bubbles, then, can signify not only childhood, but also senility, poetry, death, pride, and war.

The relation of the martial and the marital—"Ye who beneath the yoke of wedlock bend" (9)—is a crucial topic here. In a single poem Barbauld mocks the epic, using modified, domesticated and femininised images of war to describe a domestic task. Many of the actions in her poem on laundry seem epic and martial: "thrown down," "crushed between the weight," "stretched upon the rack" and "burning coals," with their signification of torture and the 1525 martyrdom of the Aztec emperor Guatimozen. Her technique also involves ventriloquism and parody, for "then expect to hear/Of sad disasters" is almost as evocative as *Arma uirumque cano*, the opening line of Virgil's *Aeneid*. She also echoes, tongue in cheek, the epic in both the use and choice of epithets—*dreaded, lowering, sad disasters, and evil stars*—and mimics military

action with “crossing lines,” “linen-horse,” “red-armed”—a more obviously amusing description than Collier’s rewriting of Duck: “Blood runs trickling down/Our Wrists and Fingers.”

Throughout the poem the battle of the sexes is compared with patriarchal war. Historically, and as an accepted subject of poetry, there is no contest between the value of the two subjects. The martial nearly always wins out over the marital. And yet one cannot help but wonder what takes the greater valour, to rise each Monday to the endless, repetitive task of laundry or, in heroic posture, to face the cannon. On the other hand, the soldier is just “a soldier,” nameless and faceless once dead; Barbauld’s poetry is still/again available two centuries after she wrote it.

Although Barbauld does not offer us a picture of the poet as priest or prophet, or even as Shelley’s legislator (*Defence* 508), and her Muse chooses not to speak the “Language of Gods,” her persona is still “heroic,” both in her “labour” and in her challenge to patriarchal values. She does battle, but nobody dies. By using a mock epic voice, she challenges assumptions of what is really important and what is given a false value in a patriarchal world view, at the same time as she engages in dialogue with her contemporary poets-as-men. She is also self-deprecating as a participant in, and as a witness to, this Herculean endeavour in which every woman acts every week. She further invites all women to mock themselves and so laugh at a basically unfunny chore, one which is even less funny on a wet Monday. By making military language work in the domestic scene the poet creates new order. By changing the order, not the law, of the letters, metaphorically, she converts the marital to the martial and the martial to the marital, even as she writes her own gender-genre. And, finally, she allows other poets to laugh at/with her as poet.

Interrogating Language: Bloom’s Dramatic Voices

Both “Washing-Day” and “Yuh Hear ‘Bout?” may well serve as models for moving towards less limiting and limited assumptions about how to hear earlier women-as-poets. They both clearly show, as do such sonnet sequences by women as *Sonnets from a Lock Box* (1929) by Hempstead Branch, that in poems, revisionary language and concepts are forged together. Where Barbauld openly inverts convention, using humour and mockery, Bloom more indirectly uses irony and anger. In so doing, she, too, highlights the possibility of multivocality and the multiplicity of texts within a text. Focussing her spotlight upon the ways we know or refuse to know, she challenges many facets of the *status quo* both locally and globally.

Whereas Barbault plays with words, Bloom makes words perform a play. "Yuh Hear 'Bout?" almost forces the reader to enter a drama and to provide sets and stage directions. Although Bloom has set the stage, the reader has to fill in the gaps, to imagine the community.

Yuh Hear 'Bout?

Yuh hear bout di people dem arres

Fi bun dung di Asian people dem house?

Yuh hear bout di policeman dem lock up

Fi beat up di black bwoy widout a cause?

Yuh hear bout di MP dem sack because im refuse fi help

im black constituents in a dem fight 'gainst deportation?

Yuh no hear bout dem?

Me neida.

Centre-stage are the questions of the nature of hearing and not hearing, of texts and multi-texts, of Black, White and Colour.

A black Jamaican reader is probably a "good" reader of this text, but may have mixed feelings. Lorde remarks "how important poetry can be in the life of an ordinary Black community when that poetry is really the poetry of the lives of the people who make up that community" (1988:56). The black West Indian reader, then, may well be pleased to see/hear a poem in her/his language and about her/his reality but, at the same time, s/he may well be angry that "Whites" (of whatever colour) will not listen, will not hear.⁶ These two reactions create tension. Although Bloom states in *Let It Be Told* (1987) that "a conversational style, extreme brevity and an apparently throw-away last line were necessary to create the bitter effect I wanted" (85), the tone could also be one of hopelessness and helplessness. It is probably reasonable, however, to hear anger, or even repressed fury. Bloom notes "that people, older people in particular, are astonishingly gratified" when she gives a performance reading, which "suggests that poetry, or maybe just the use of authentic patois, touches deep nervesprings" (86-87). She has chosen to give precedence to a Jamaican voice, but that same Jamaican certainly does not have precedence either in her/his daily life or within the judiciary.

For non-speakers of West Indian dialect, on the other hand, reading this poem may not be a positive experience, especially for those who are white, if we acknowledge our own complicity in creating such an hostile environment for people whose race and colour differs from our own. Even if we understand the words and sentiments, "the pleasure of the

text” (Barthes 1973) probably eludes us. Only by reading it without too much concern for the meaning can we enjoy its musicality and its repetition of *d*. If we stay with it, by the time we reach “Me neida” we may well echo those words, ruefully, ironically or defeatedly.

I first came across “Yuh Hear ‘Bout?” in a 1993 anthology edited by William New and William Messenger. Their acknowledgments show that this poem was initially published in Bloom’s *Touch Mi Tell Mi* (1983). Having acquired that text which has the poem only in dialect, I wondered why, in a text called *Literature In English*, the editors saw the necessity to translate “Yuh Hear ‘Bout?” by a black woman and yet saw no need to translate *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, by a white man.

Changing contexts, personal, social and literary, always influence how many voices we hear. Furthermore, as Herrnstein Smith observes, “in accord with the changing interests and other values of a community, various potential meanings of a work will become more or less visible” (10). The inclusion of Bloom’s poem in a 1993 anthology directed at Canadian students, and with the addition of the translation which is immediately below the original poem, changes any reading of the original and makes both the reading and the reaction much more complicated for both white and black readers.

The relationship is very complex between these two different voices—one in dialect and the “other” in standard English—and among the two, three or four combinations which create different texts and different voicings: dialect in *Touch Mi Tell Mi*; an-“other” in standard English; dialect and standard English together in *Literature In English*; and the two spatially separated versions, one in *Touch Mi Tell Mi* and the “other” in the anthology, which is neither two poems nor two stanzas. I use the *original* for the poem as it first appeared in *Touch Mi Tell Mi* (1983), *translation* for the second “half” of the poem as it appears in *Literature In English* (1993), and *version* for each separate appearance or interaction.

Immediately, by removing the dialect, the concern extends beyond West Indians to all black and coloured people. This universalising is already present in the images of “di Asian people” and “di black bwoy,” but may be obscured by the particularising of the dialect.

Did you hear about?

Did you hear about the people they arrested

For burning down the Asian people’s house?

Did you hear about the policeman they put in jail

For beating up the black boy without any cause?

Did you hear about the MP they sacked
 because he refused to help
 his black constituents in their fight
 against deportation?
 You didn't hear about them?
 Me neither.

The dialect reader might be angered all over again as s/he wonders why it is necessary to pander to the "white" reader politically and to the non-dialect reader poetically, for the translation loses much of the musicality of the original. Since all the *d* words are now pulled to the beginning of lines, the first two sentences are much more prosaic.

The "white" reader may ignore the original poem altogether. If s/he realises the political implications of the apparent necessity for a translation, then the second version of the poem has succeeded as a political text. If s/he acknowledges the political implications of one, two or all three texts (original, translation, and both together) then, again, the poem is a political success. If the reading of the translation makes the reader aware of the irony of the need for the translation of a poem about the acts of listening and not listening, and encourages or shames the reader into looking at the original again, then the success is both political and poetical.

A less obvious difference between the original and the translation is in the form, especially in the number of lines and in the positioning of line breaks. The different forms reflect the different content. Although individual words and punctuation appear to have similar meaning, the intent is very different.

In the original the lines get longer or stay the same length up to, and including, the sixth line. The speaker becomes more eloquent and expansive as the indignities and illegalities pile up. There is no doubt that the initial actions took place; the questions are rhetorical. Then comes a retrenchment in the last two lines, both of which are shorter than the first. And, of course, no action was taken against the offenders. The speaker has to retreat to near invisibility, reflected in that "Me neida." It is as if a group of people were having this conversation over garden fences (gossiping), in front of their houses, or in the market, and are either winding down prior to departure, or need to disappear or physically to cohere as a group because of impending, potential interference or danger.

The translation brings into question the results—the arrest, the imprisonment, and the sacking—and also undermines the certainty that the initial actions—the burning of the house, the

beating of the boy, the betrayal by the member of parliament—took place. Although the form of the first four lines of approximately equal length is similar to that of the original, these lines are longer and so sound less emotional, more dispassionate. The meaning, and the enormity, of a politician who does not speak for, or to, his constituents is deferred by breaking up the long sentence, which only takes two lines in the original, into four lines of small fragments. Because the total meaning is deferred, the last two lines have no passion and little weight. Now the penultimate line asks whether you have heard of these happenings. The question is no longer rhetorical.

The form also articulates the many actions which should lead to the sacking of a member of parliament. At first we only know that he has been sacked, leaving the cause to speculation. Then we hear that he refused to help, but not whom he has refused to help. By the seventh line we have most of the information. All that is left to learn is the purpose of the black constituents' fight, a dispute which may well be a matter of survival depending upon exactly to what situation the people are to be deported.

Not only does the translation offer a different reading but, in conjunction with the original, it also sets up distinct vocal resonances. When faced with the original poem by itself, the reader automatically assumes the voice to be black West Indian. Unless a poet indicates otherwise, we tend to assume a single persona throughout a poem and so, if "Yuh Hear 'Bout?" is set on the page as a single poem, with translation and original together, it may follow that we still have a single speaker. In the second version, therefore, the translation denies us the certainty of a black Jamaican speaker not only for the translation but also for the original. In the simplest case, either both halves have a single black persona, who speaks both West Indian dialect and standard English, or they both have a single white speaker. Among the other possible *scenarios*, are two different speakers. It seems reasonable to disregard the possibility of a black dialect speaker for the translation and a Caucasian for the original, but there may be a Jamaican speaker of the original and a different standard English speaker for the translation. The poem, then, forces the reader's attention upon voice. By offering two or more distinct voices, the poem explicitly dramatises the problem of discerning the nature of the voice(s) implicit within a poem like *Elegiac Sonnets* or, even more pertinently, in Farjeon's two distinct sonnet sequences which replicate individual sonnets.

Whichever voice is privileged, the adult reader would have no difficulty in seeing not only the original but also the translation as political, because the translation emphasises the

stance of the first speaker. For the moment let us make the obvious assumption that the voice of the original is West Indian and that of the second is Caucasian. The tone of the latter, depending on where the speaker's and reader's loyalties lie and where s/he places her/himself with respect to race, class and gender, may be one of interest, indifference, curiosity, shame, (possibly) anger, or the satisfaction of racial prejudice when those "others" are both oppressed and silenced. The Jamaican tone, however, would still be one of hopelessness, helplessness, anger or repressed fury, but it would now be heavily underscored by both race and racism. The irony is bitter indeed.

If the speaker is the same in both the original and the translation, then mimicry is a possibility, but the question arises as to who is mimicking whom. If the speaker is Caucasian, s/he might be perceived as turning the whole poem into a racist "joke" by using Jamaican *patois* in the original. Many oppressed groups see the co-option of their language, art, costume and/or language by "Whites" as offensive, degrading, exploitative and/or insulting. In that case, the "Me neither" may be taken as an insulting mimicry of "Me neida," conveying complete indifference, a reading substantiated by the line breaks; or it may be taken as a message that, of course, the speaker has not heard and the events probably never happened anyway. "Me neither" could also express mild interest. I would like to believe that there is the possibility within the poem of a "white" reader expressing anger and concern that s/he has indeed not heard of these events.

If the speaker of the whole poem is a black West Indian then, in the translation, s/he is ventriloquising, mimicking, or accommodating all potential readers who neither speak the dialect nor are prepared to make the effort to read it. If s/he is helping the reader to understand the original poem and the political situation, then there is hope for co-operation in racial linguistic and epistemological relationships. If s/he is ventriloquising, then the invisible commentary may only be concerned with the status of standard English as opposed to any other kind, and the impossibility that "you hear what I say." If s/he is mimicking, however, the persona is either making a direct and bitterly ironic political-poetical comment on racism and indifference, or ridiculing Whites with their philosophy of non-involvement—see no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil—while, at the very least, being complicit in endemic racism. On the other hand, a black person who can speak in a conscious and deliberate double-lingual and double-edged voice throws into high relief the difficulties of cultural identification for an upper-middle class Black

in England. Although the original alone might be seen as black consciousness-raising, for the black communities within racist societies the addition of a translation leads to an ironic excess.

In a study of voice, reading provides more flexibility than performance, which pins down the characters. As readers, we are aware of the dramatic nature of this poem but are free to envisage the participation of a variety of speakers. Even “if [readers] cannot visualize the actions,” Bloom writes, “they are able to view it without preconceived ideas or interference and bring a fresh interpretation to the words” (86). So, although Bloom sees that the “common factor in all of my poems is that they are written for performance rather than simply to be read on the page” (86), performance too can be limiting. As the above readings suggest, imag(e)ining various performances is essential in determining tone and voice.

Many readers might presume (wrongly), as I did, that the second voice is definitively that of a white middle-class male speaker, the translator, possibly either New or Messenger since my context for introducing this poem was their anthology. Had such been the case, then the intersexual voicing would be doubly ironic. Not only have we not “heard” this black woman, we cannot understand without the intervention of a white male third party. Read in this way the poem nearly explodes with its excess of meaning. The bitter irony of such a translation of a Jamaican English political poem on unknowing, uncaring, punitive racism is almost overwhelming. Further readings, then, would always be reflected through the mirror of white arrogance.

Messenger, in response to my query as to the voices in this poem, drew my attention to the publication of the poem in *Let It Be Told* (1987), although their textual acknowledgement is to *Touch Mi Tell Mi* (1983):

The “standard English” stanza in “Yuh Hear ‘Bout?” is *NOT* by us, but by *Valerie Bloom herself*. . . . We decided to print the “dialect” and “standard” versions together (as Bloom did here) *not to “translate”* but (implicitly we hoped) to emphasize the politics of language. . . . Perhaps yet another kind of comment—or poem—derives from the juxtaposition. (Messenger’s emphasis)⁷

Bloom is certainly demanding that all readers should reconsider the politics of language and their own racial/racist position. The “white” reader, whatever her/his racial or racist stance, is forced into some recognition that many perceptions are racially and linguistically determined, and that there may not be equal opportunity under the law or in literature.

Bloom's two-part poem is very complex in the resonances that it sets up and in the depth of its interrogation of voice, an interesting *exemplum* of conscious, intentional, knowing, political multi-voicing. Since Bloom herself added the translation of "Yuh Hear 'Bout?" some time after its appearance in *Touch Mi Tell Mi* (74) in 1983, in effect creating a new version of the poem in *Let It Be Told* (90-91), we get different voicing effects than if the translation were by an editor. Speaking about a work-in-progress, Bloom remarks, "I found the confidence recently to attempt my first poem in Standard English." She continues,

I am also writing a parallel poem in dialect dealing with the same subject matter. They look like being very different poems and I don't think that it would have been possible to write either poem in the other language form and retain its essential character. (1987:85)

"Yuh Hear 'Bout?" can be viewed as an earlier experiment with received language, and neither the original nor the translation retains its "essential character" when juxtaposed with the other. It is almost, I am tempted to add, an experiment in how the fathers' language affects the mother tongue.

In this poem, Bloom is more concerned with racism than with sexism, and racial discrimination is not a white monopoly. Racism knows no age limit and is not gender specific. The poem gives no indication as to the age or sex of the speaker; incorporating the various possibilities would involve further readings and, probably, more voicings. The question of gender has been omitted in a context where that specifically should not happen—a woman reading a woman's poetry—although the poem itself encourages such marginalisation because all the gender-specific words are male. To some extent, the indecipherability, the inability to pin down the voice, to categorise its individual particularities, moves responses to the poem towards some universality.

The groups of people under consideration here—Black, White, Coloured, women and men—include groups of oppressed people—*black men/men of color* (hooks' term) and white women—the elements of which are always mutually exclusive. Black women, however, belong to two oppressed groups, Black and women. In the poem they are either represented by a black woman-as-speaker or, ironically, they are displaced to the margin from the central position they should occupy. The Asians have been completely displaced. Nor have I enquired into the colour of the M.P., which is surely pertinent. I have also left unexamined such changes in vocabulary as *lock up*, which is very graphic, constrictive and punitive, and *in jail*. Further irony lies in the

fact that we hear no more about the Asians whose house has been burnt or about the black boy who was beaten.

Through the juxtaposition of the original and its translation, Bloom maximises the potential for inclusive and expansive irony in this political poem by encouraging the reader to reconstruct the explanatory context. She deliberately chose to write her original poem in “the rich, oral tradition of the Caribbean . . . expressing her own sheer delight in the twists and turns of ordinary Jamaican speech” (L.K.Johnson 5). In “Language Barrier” Bloom writes of that delight in her rural voice: “Jamaica language sweet yuh know bwoy,/ . . . /Is not dat wi don’ like English’/But wi lub wi modda tongue” (1,39-40). By giving no prior indication in “Yuh Hear ‘Bout” that she is juxtaposing two different voices, Jamaican and British, she emphasises the language barrier, supplements “wi modda tongue” with the words of the fathers, and writes a new composite text. When Smith and Farjeon use similar techniques they are easy to miss.

In a sonnet sequence as we shall see, context is crucial to the identification of tone. In the three poems, “Yuh Hear ‘Bout?” (1983), “The Woman’s Labour” (1739), and “Washing-Day” (1797), which validate black or women’s domestic experience, tone is as critical as context. Collier’s tone becomes complex as she refutes Duck’s misogyny and calls attention to women’s double work load. Barbauld and Bloom, in two very different poems, both use voicing that is deliberately multiple. Both poets deal with non-“heroic” material and offer concrete examples of multi-voicing. Barbauld uses humour and the language of the fathers to speak from a woman’s experience in England in the eighteenth century, and to raise the status of domestic labour to epic proportions. Bloom demands that her reader recognise racial difference even at the momentary risk of the potential loss of gender difference.

Both Bloom, through her change of voice half-way through “Yuh Hear ‘Bout?” and Barbauld, through her use of an epigraph, a “masculine” form and epic language, signal their conscious manipulation of voice. They both employ “gossip” as Muse. Barbauld opens her poem by implicitly calling upon her Muse claiming that she has turned gossip. Bloom ironically uses a single stereotype for her title, to open her poem and as anaphora—“Yuh Hear ‘Bout?”—a phrase customarily used to preface the gossip of women. Gossip, however, need not just represent an irresponsible verbal community. It can be a collective voice.

Grahn's Twist on Madonna or Whore

Judy Grahn, like Valerie Bloom, is a performance artist, and part of her role, apparently, is to act as the voice of the lesbian community. Sue-Ellen Case argues that "Grahn's own readings of her works, like those of Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde, are performance events in the community that chart its voice" (51). In *The Highest Apple* (1985), Grahn herself says, "The effort of establishing and re-confirming self-definition in the voices of the contemporary Lesbian poets, has included reclaiming words with loaded, stereotypic content such, as Lesbian, dyke, whore, cunt, mother, daughter, birthing and the like" (70), and that "effort" is apparent. But, as we shall see with *Sonnets from a Lock Box* by Hempstead Branch in chapter five, established patterns of thought and language are not easy to shake.

Sonnet sequences by women implicitly destabilise the traditional depictions of women within the genre, but Grahn's sequence *She Who* has, as its overt intention, the redefinition of women as Grahn sees them, as opposed to patriarchal, heterosexual, and/or misogynist perceptions. In the words of Rich, "Over and over again Grahn calls up the living woman against the manufactured one, the man-made creation of centuries of male art and literature" (1977:14). Two recurring images of women in poetry by men, the virgin and the whore, are an inevitable palimpsest for sonnet sequences by women. Grahn tackles such stereotypes head on in "The enemies of She Who call her various names" (84)⁸.

This poem's strength lies in its use of voice, in its use of power, as the expression of a women-centred woman and a lesbian, and as an instance of what Lorde calls "a crucial exercise in learning how to absorb verbal abuse without faltering" (1984:71). If Rich is right and "Poetry is a criticism . . . of language" (1977:8), and there is "reason to fear its power" (1977:7), Grahn certainly negatively criticises the language of misogynists (whatever their sex). It seems less clear, however, that she completely disempowers these words. Her "language is [not] 'only words'"; it is power (Rich 1977:7), but can re-inforce the internalisation of her oppression.

Of the twenty-three discrete poems in *She Who*, I consider only two: "The enemies of She Who," on the whore of misogynist perception (84), and "She Who bears it" (85), on the birthing process, in which, I shall argue, Grahn subtly conflates Eve and the Virgin Mary. The context of these two poems within the sequence, especially their juxtaposition with each other, is crucial in determining their tone. The sequence opens with a poem that is a repetition of *She* and *Who* in various combinations, implicitly asking who she is. The sequence then presents various

images of women, some strong, some weak, some leaders, some victims. Grahn closes the sequence with a "list of universal qualities in women" (1978:76).

Grahn is very conscious of the potential of a double-text, without naming it as such. Asked how she could reconcile anger and humour in the same poem, she replied, "If you have two emotions, then you know I'm really talking about something more than just what I said I was talking about" (1983:99). But neither Grahn nor I mean by *double-text* exactly the same as Ostriker means, by a *duplicitous poem* (1986: 149). Although "contrary meanings coexist with equal force, because they have equal force within the poet" (Ostriker 1986:40-41), Grahn's poem does not "overtly transmit one message, covertly a contrary one" (149), but deliberately conveys two messages at once, which are not necessarily contrary, but are held in tension.

Syntactical codes and repetition are always important, but in "The enemies of She Who call her various names" (84) they may well be signals. Ostriker remarks of the previous poem, "She Who increases" (83), that "the lack of punctuation of the first two lines" allows two different syntactical readings. "The enemies of She Who call her various names" can be read as both the title of this poem and the entire first stanza. Within the words themselves only the capitalisation, which refers the reader back to the title of the sequence, prevents confusion. The enemies (of She) Who call, or the enemies of "She Who" call. In the second stanza, the punctuation separating derogatory names, each of which is prefixed with *a*, begins with commas. The commas followed by the indefinite article, which had acted as a kind of punctuation, are dropped as the syntax moves into virgules, and then only short dashes separate such bestial names as "cow - pig - chick" (7). Then the punctuation ceases altogether in the first two lines of the final stanza, although the indefinite article has been re-introduced. The effect of the syntactical changes is a sense of loss of control by the persona. The only verb in the poem is *call* which, paradoxically, is now out of her control even though she names it in her own voice.

Initially, however, that "call" resonates with the childish practice of "calling names," and so the persona should be in a position of authority and invulnerability. After all we are told from an early age that "Sticks and stones may break your bones but names can never hurt you." The speaker, then, appears to be ventriloquising and mimicking misogynists, like Barbauld deflating and disempowering them as childish.

The second stanza opens with "a whore, a whore,/a fishwife a cunt a harlot a harlot a pussy." There is no modesty, chastity and silence here. Although the vocabulary of a man, an enemy, is being filtered through the voice of a female persona, echoes of male voices come

through loud and clear. The irony carries a deep edge of anger. After the initial “a whore, a whore,” followed by “a harlot a harlot”—which sounds archaic in this context and may indicate mimicry—there is no more consecutive repetition throughout this stanza. As these words and phrases build up, there is a sense of intolerable oppression and the speaker’s rage becomes almost impossible to contain. She can keep control only by refusing repetition at this point.

The third stanza uses only the nouns *bitch* and *whore* modified by a range of epithets and prefaced with *you* in the first two and a half lines, until its final words: *a million dollar mistress*. The repetition of *you* personalises the insults while the racial words which, in this context, are racist—*black, white, brown* or *yellow*—universalise both the stereotyping of women and the pervasiveness of name calling. By this time, verbal oppression has become overwhelming. And yet, paradoxically, despite the *you*, that surfeit of epithets brings relief. No woman is black, white, brown, yellow, fat, old, cheap, high-class, a 2 bit whore and a million dollar mistress. The persona can resist internalisation of the sentiments expressed because not all the epithets can apply to her.

I cite the last stanza (the fourth) in its entirety for during this stanza the voice splinters into a dominant and a dominated voice:

a hole a slut a cunt a slit a cut
a slash a hole a slit a piece
of shit, a piece of shit, a piece of shit (84).

This is a strong, dramatic, choric, performance poem as the anger increases and the voice gets louder. The punctuation of the final line endorses this reading as the speaker runs out of breath and expletives, and resorts to volume and repetition. In a different voice, however, the persona’s anger may move into sorrow as she speaks the final, triple repetition, until all she is left with is the unending echo which contains both anger and sorrow. There can be no terminal punctuation because the verbal abuse of women has not terminated. The echoing effect is obtained through the repetition and the spaces provided by the punctuation in the final line. The echo is as unending as the abuse, and the abuse is as unending as the echo.

If the overall tone of the poem is anger, then the speaker feels violated by misogynist name-calling and yet, like Collier’s persona, has the energy of that anger to fight back. If the tone is wryly ironic, then she is acknowledging what some men say, while refusing to internalise their hatred. If the tone is despair, then she has internalised it.

By reading this poem in isolation, neither in the context of Grahn's sequence nor in the presence of other women, a woman-as-reader might find it hard not to internalise, and thus endorse, women's "more general powerlessness and sense of worthlessness" (Sedgwick 6). Of the three poems preceding "The enemies of She Who call her various names," two celebrate the power of women and the other one acknowledges their powerlessness at this time. "She Who" is strong, confident, independent, "and the first person" and she is I (78). She is a "wolf spider" (79;1) who "hunt[s] in packs" (79;6) and so survives through co-operation with other women. Weakness lies in separation. "All the old dams have broken knees" (80;18), however. The shepherd (Christ? Priest?) is a tyrant who, as yet, cannot be brought low until the persecuted know how. He kills those for whom he has no use and maims the others to keep them in subjection, including his wife. There is, then, the possibility that the persona of "The enemies of She Who call her various names," has also been maimed, has internalised the misogyny she evokes.

The poet herself says that *Common*, as in her sequence *A Common Woman* and *The Work of a Common Woman*, the title of her collected poetry,

reminded me of 'common whore,' 'common slut' or something that's sexual property, and reminded me of the commons of England and Boston where people could meet together and assert themselves. It reminded me of what we have in common, which is a cross-connection between us all. . . . The multiplicity of meanings gave the poems an extra emphasis which was both poetic and real and political, all at the same time. (1980:94)

Within the sequence I hear them all.

Nevertheless, the insistence on biological function and genitalia in "The enemies of She Who," even if only in ventriloquism and mimicry, argues against Grahn's own words concerning the *ordinary* woman. By not refuting the possibility that women can be reduced to their lowest common denominator, she runs the risk of endorsing that perspective. When she says, "What she has in common with herself and with other women becomes more important than what she is that is different from men" (1985:41), she is surely not intending to be so reductive.

The question arises, then, as to whether Grahn can transform her world through the use of these misogynistic words. For all that Steven Goldberg argues in *Why Men Rule* (1993) that stereotypes "are quintessential versions of reality and they must represent it" (105), in fact "the stereotype is a political fact, the major figure of ideology" (40) as Roland Barthes maintains in

The Pleasure of the Text (1975). The only ways that Grahn can disempower such language is to re-politicise it by making it truly, unequivocally her own, or by emptying it of sexist contempt, or by laughing a full, rich, belly laugh. Alone, I hear none of these tactics. Lorde, in “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,” writes, “If I look at my most vulnerable places and acknowledge the pain I have felt, I can remove the source of that pain from my enemies’ arsenals” (1984:146). I am not sure Grahn achieves this. The pain is still there, and is still contained in these words, which can still be used against us.

By showing the “range of ways in which sexuality functions as a signifier for power relations” (Sedgwick 7), the poet can, perhaps, separate herself from her persona. If Grahn is able to maintain that separation, perhaps we might hear mimicry. But if there is no persona, there may be just a cry of pain. The poet can, however, attempt to desensitise herself and others through a communal performative act.

By juxtaposing this poem and the birthing poem, “She Who bears it” (85), Grahn shows the versatility of vocal strategies, including poetic irony and communal performance. Again she uses ironic displacement and repetition. Although the first line of “She Who bears it” could be read as a continuation of the previous poem, she who bears the misogyny, by the second line—bear down, breathe—such a reading apparently cannot hold. In the earlier poem, we heard ventriloquism, mimicry and echo, expressing both anger and sorrow. In the later, Grahn uses echo, chant and incantation, and the result is celebration.

The poet creates a completely different world, as she moves from misogyny to woman-centredness. Harmony, the universality of the female experience, and its fluidity all come together in the the world of birth. The poem centres us within itself in the same way as the birth process centres some women upon their own bodies and the process in which they are engaged.

She Who bears it
 bear down, breathe
 bear down, bear down, breathe
 bear down, bear down, bear down, breathe
 . . .
 all over the world
 the waters are breaking everywhere
 everywhere the waters are breaking
 the labor of She Who carries and bears

and raises and rears is the first labor,
 there is no other first labor. (85;1-4,8-13)

The poem, unlike its predecessor, is definitive. It is completed by a period.

This song crosses both spatial and temporal boundaries in its rhythmic replication of the birthing process. It captures strong relief as the child is born, as the bearing down and labour are completed. Language is liquid and in touch with the cosmos, renewing Grahn's earlier symbolism in *The Common Woman* (1969) where she "is as common/as a thunderstorm" (67;28-29), not so common after all.

And yet Grahn is no sentimental writer with her eyes closed against reality. She writes her own aesthetics for *She Who* in her preface: "The *She Who* [*sic*] poems passed my critical judgment when each was able to set my own teeth on edge" (76), a (post-)modern version of Emily Dickinson's "the Art to stun myself/With Bolts of Melody!" (505;23-24). If it is to set my teeth on edge, I have to find another way to enter this poem.

Perhaps this song has more to do with the community than with the mother. Perhaps it is the midwife's song. Then the reader might need to know to what extent the midwife is complicit with patriarchal values, to what extent the child, not the mother who appears to be the subject, is of importance. It may be that the midwife has a romanticised view of birth—perhaps she has no children. Her chant could be just another form of domination.

These poems lie within the "concentration of the *power* of language" because poetry is "magic" (Rich 1977:8). And, as Rich further says, "The knowledge and use of this magic goes back very far: the rune; the chant; the incantation; the spell; the kenning; sacred words; forbidden words; the naming of the child . . . The physical reality of the human voice" (1977:8). Although Rich seems not to consider the misogynist poetic voice in her eulogy, it, too, has "physical reality." It, too, can chant and keen and name, as Grahn makes abundantly clear. At its best, Grahn's poetry is "language in its most potent form" (1980:100) which may neutralise the language of the misogynist, but may also intensify it.

To set my teeth on edge, I would need to hear both poems in the voice of patriarchal control. The ultimate teeth-setting effect of the earlier poem would come from a toneless reiteration of abuse or as if through the indifferent tone of a male newscaster. The "first labor" in "She Who bears it" may refer to Adam and Eve and all the misogyny involved in that myth. The significance of "the first labor,/there is no other first labor" would, then, relate to both the

work of man after his expulsion from Eden and to the expiation of sin by and for all women in the pains of birth.

My first reading of "She Who bears it," then, may be romanticised and idealised. Not every woman gives birth. Many babies are born in conditions suitable to neither mother nor child. Not all babies are wanted. And some mothers die in childbirth. The irony is bitter indeed if we are back in the patriarchal and misogynist worlds where it is Eve's sin that causes the pains of labour and in which Mary felt honoured to be a pregnant virgin. Birth may well be the first labour, a labour of Hercules metaphorically speaking, but it is not heroic and it is not necessarily desirable. The "first" birth, of Abel, together with the second birth, leads to fraternal murder, and the narrative logic of typological repetition requires that the redemption of humankind necessitates the sacrifice of Mary's child.

After reading this poem, especially in conjunction with "The enemies of She Who," I am left with the madonna and the whore, Mary and Eve. I tend to read "She Who bears it" as a celebration of procreation, as does Mary Carruthers who sees it as "a birth chant made from the midwife's instructions during natural childbirth" (311). But I do not experience Carruthers' sense of the total "exorcism of hateful names" (311) in "The enemies of She Who." Nor do I see *She Who* as "a Book of Common Prayer for women" (although I like the connection through "Common") which is, "especially through reading aloud, the ideal of Lesbian civility" (312). The tensions created by the juxtaposition of readings of misogyny with those of self-affirmation are just such tensions as I see in some sonnet sequences by women, especially *Sonnets from a Lock Box* by Hempstead Branch. When these poems set my teeth on edge I am back in the box of misogyny, and Grahn has not rewritten or reclaimed patriarchal power and stereotypes.

At this point we need to recall Grahn's awareness of texts with double voices and the tensions such texts create. If we hear both misogyny and lesbian affirmation we should again remember her claim: "I'm really talking about something more than just what I said I was talking about. . . . Let's go for what's real, let's take this and make something else out of it" (1983:99-100). Misogyny is real; abuse is real. With such topics as misogynist stereotyping in *She Who*, Grahn brings one aspect of the commonality of women into the open. Her poem is a strong political statement which advances the project of women-as-knower. But she also speaks of "The effort of establishing and re-confirming self-definition" and of reclaiming "words with loaded, stereotypic content" (1985:70). She shows the difficulty, the effort, of re-writing the

fathers' images through the fathers' language. She acknowledges the pain and negation and moves through and beyond them. By not denying them she can turn them to creative purposes.

Women always have to write through or beyond language contaminated by patriarchal and misogynist thought, always have to try to see past their own complicity in, and internalisation of, man-made images of woman. The "(masculine) other," as Gail Scott remarks in *Spaces Like Stairs* (1989), "is dangerous . . . because of the temptation, so strongly implanted, of self-hate, of total rejection of the image we see in the mirror" (31). The challenge for women is to refocus distorting mirrors, to circumvent the tricks of light. When the phallogentric mirror does not reflect her image, the poet/witch will have some difficulty in seeing round the looking glass, getting beyond the false image of misogynist internalisation. Whatever the degree of each woman-as-poet's consciousness of the male gaze, because the phallogentric image of the world and the spotlight of patriarchy impede her vision,

she did suffer, the witch;
 trying to peer round the looking
 glass, she forgot
 someone was in the way. (Micheline 2)

Hearing Women-as-Knower

These women-as-poets clearly demonstrate that to be able to know, women must first "become acutely, disturbingly aware of the language we are using and that is using us" (Rich 1977:7). Grahn brings this issue firmly to the forefront in "The enemies of She Who call her various names," in her poetics, and in the relationships she creates amongst the poems in her sequence. Bloom spotlights the effect of cultural codes and provokes the reader into imagining other worlds. Barbauld uses allusion, ventriloquism, mimicry, parody and the revision of a genre to destabilise concepts of the heroic. Collier, through her aesthetic distance from her persona and her dialogue with a misogynist, so like those of the *Querelle des Femmes*, can enter into Duck's genre and rewrite his lines.

These readings suggest that irony may well act as one of the "vital threads" running through poetry by women. Ostriker speaks of "a tone difficult to describe . . . a species of irony, it seems, but vulgar and cheerful [which] may be one of the chief contributions women are making to our literary history and personal repertoires" (1986:168). But this is surely not new in literature or society. Barbauld employs cheerful irony as early as the eighteenth century and,

although the “vulgar” component in the sense of uncouth might seem new it has, perhaps, in the sense of being shared by many women a longer history. What may be new to us now, however, is our recognition that women’s irony, then and now, can be two-valued or multi-valued and can range far beyond just the “vulgar and cheerful.” These ironic women-as-speakers can be motivated by fear, tact, anger and restraint. Their irony can be used strategically to defend womankind or particular groups of women or minority groups and, at the same time, to attack the patriarchal, misogynist or racist *status quo*. It can be used for self-definition. The speakers can be gentle or furious, mocking or satiric. The poets may delineate the impossible positions in which some women find themselves or suggest some avenues of escape. What all these poets do is question the acceptance of habitual modes of thought and language by changing the contexts in which those concepts are applied. Sometimes, depending upon the situation and vision of both the reader and the writer, these attempts at subversion succeed; sometimes they serve to reaffirm what they try to subvert. To be really successful both subversion and irony depend upon shared knowledge, confessed community, and the determination to hear what we say.

Many women-as-poets lay claim to some political expression of liberty. Some destabilise voice as a valid cultural authority, presence, or authentic being. When they assume a role or speak through a persona to express some true meaning or intent, their context and the manner, tone and attitude become crucial. And irony is only one aspect of that voice. Many rely on a community of response and understanding. It is as if lyric song becomes extended into a form of choral expression and participation.

We can “begin to grasp a material resource that women have never before collectively attempted to repossess” (Rich 1977:7), however, only after we have recognised the power of language. This has to be a communal effort. Once women acknowledge each other’s influence, then we can begin to hear a choric voice. For collectivity is dependent, in part, on the acknowledgement of poetic grandmothers. Barrett Browning chose to disclaim any such connections, but Grahn celebrates them as part of the larger community of women. When Grahn comments in her preface to *Confrontations with the Devil in the Form of Love* (1977), “How I love these vital threads passed round among women” (134), she is referring to the reciprocity of women as the muse/poet: first Ntozake Shange and Grahn, then Grahn and Rich, but for me also Rich and Dickinson, Dickinson and Barrett Browning, Barrett Browning and Felicia Hemans, to name a few acknowledged links (for Barrett Browning does acknowledge Hemans as a poet in

“Felicia Hemans”). Rich, of course, as Carruthers points out, was a friend of and an influence on both Grahn and Lorde (296).

Shange says in the preface to her *choreopoem* (1975), “I had begun a series of seven poems, modelled on Judy Grahn’s *The Common Woman*” (xii). Not knowing that she had inspired Shange’s poems, Grahn notes that *Confrontations* is “an unfinished set of poems, inspired after seeing an incredible stage production of Ntozake Shange’s poetry: *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*” (1975:134), another performance poem. The vital threads pass from Shange’s *Colored Girls*, as both racial marker and the rainbow that their dresses create, to the mourning of death and the celebration of life in Grahn’s “a funeral/plainsong from a younger woman to an older woman” (100-103)—which emphasises the centrality and continuity of women and is “for ritual use only”—to the urgency of Lorde’s *Need: A Chorale for Black Woman Voices* (1989). Lorde looks backward and forward as she joins her voice to the voices of the dead, urging us not to forget black women who have been battered to death.

Lorde’s *Chorale* is achingly haunting, political and poetical, but no matter how much I celebrate women-as-knower, or how sincerely I echo Lorde’s persona’s words, “I’m trying to hear you” (64), in “The Same Death Over And Over Again Or Lullabies Are For Children” (1978), even imaginatively Lorde’s experience cannot be wholly mine. *Chorale* is written by a black woman, predominantly to other black women, in commemoration of yet other black women. In her introduction to *Undersong* (1992) Lorde says, “For every poem written, there is a bedrock of experience(s) A molten hot light shines up through the poem from the core of these experiences” (xiv). Her light casts long shadows.

As Bloom is implying in “Yuh Hear ‘Bout,” it is often difficult to hear across culture, and also across time. Lorde said at a conference in Melbourne,

Because we share a common language which is not of our own making and which does not reflect our deeper knowledge as women, our words frequently sound the same. But it is an error to believe we mean the same experience . . . unless we agree to examine the history and particular passions that lie beneath each other’s words. (1988:70)

If our approach to poetry is an earnest endeavour to seek women-as-knower, with an awareness of how each of us contributes to that mosaic and yet with a minimum of preconceptions, we may be able to refute the expectation of “being completely split from each other by class, education,

race, age, homophobia” (Grahm 1978:134). For all the threads are vital. They are important “to our lives and our literature” (Grahm 134).

Women-as-poets, of course, have always have been conscious of mainstream poetry by both women and men. Lorde recalls “Walter de la Mare’s ‘The Listeners’—I will never forget that poem” (82), because it spoke to her small self in a very particular way, as it did to me. The words can haunt me yet: “‘Tell them I came, and no one answered,/ That I kept my word,’ he said” (27-28). Perhaps Lorde’s experience of promises is that to her they are sanctified but to others they appear to be of no significance. Perhaps she identifies with the poem through being an outcast, in some sense outside the law. Perhaps there is, for her, a pervasive sense that, although nobody answers, “there really is somebody in there” (82), somebody watching. That a woman is a scopic object to be watched, not a speaking subject to be answered, is one of the primary hypotheses of the sonnet sequence tradition. Perhaps the sense of speaking and nobody hearing is part of a child’s or a woman’s experience, which gives rise to her peculiar voice, and perhaps that is what women have in common. What we need to remember as we try to hear what women are saying is that, as Lorde perceives,

There is a timbre of voice
 that comes from not being heard
 and knowing you are not being
 heard noticed only
 by others not heard
 for the same reason. (“Echoes” 1-6)

Notes

1. The title of this chapter is from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "An Apprehension" (12-14), and the epigraphs are from Jane Gallop's 1985 *Reading Lacan* (17), Audre Lorde's 1993 "Echoes" (1-6) and Judy Grahn's 1977 preface to *Confrontations with the Devil in the Form of Love* (134).

2. Although Woolf, in *A Room Of One's Own*, made the notion of literary grandmothers popular, the concept was Barrett Browning's. Judy Simons remarks that Barrett Browning read, enjoyed and judged "thousands of novels," and those which she named "were all written by women. When she subsequently wrote, 'I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none', [she] was referring most specifically to her role as a woman poet in a patriarchal poetic line" (94). A study of which women deny the positive poetic influence of other women, and the relationship of such denial with similar denials by men with respect to women, would be an interesting future project.

3. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* deserves and requires a deeper study of its psychological complexity. Wendell Stacy Johnson's undervaluation of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, in *Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry* (1975), is but one of many:

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's comments on marriage are by no means alien to the spirit of Meredith's work. . . . Although the popular story of her elopement and happy marriage may make that comparison seem surprising, her better verse is far enough removed from the sentimentality of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* to support it. (54)

Johnson then chooses to omit Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti from his study.

4. There are prefaces and other theoretical writings by women which need to be systematically collated, but that is another project. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there appears to be no lineage of poetic man-i-festos or *apologia* by women, and, for early modern women, only apologies for being writers at all. It is difficult to determine the extent to which such apologies are socially-imposed concepts of female inferiority, however, and the extent to which they are a dramatisation, a carnivalesque dialogic written against patriarchal expectations. It is also difficult to determine whether these women-as-writers implicitly lay claim to some power, however apologetically, since "discourse and theory," as Robert Con Davis makes clear, is "the functioning of power as well as knowledge" (Gerhart viii).

5. The 1736 edition had “over six hundred subscribers, headed by the Prince of Wales and five other royal personages” (Ferguson iv). Duck is sometimes honoured as the first working-man’s poet.

6. I use “White” as a shorthand for both Caucasians and those who have internalised white standards and values.

7. I would like to thank William Messenger for his courtesy and help.

8. Since Grahn does not number the discrete poems, I refer to them by the page numbers in *The Work of a Common Woman* (1978).

Chapter Two

Particular Designs and Vital Sequences: The Effect of Structure

It is in the language of the poem that the fragments come together, echoing off each other in repetitions, in rhythms, in an intricate structure which may not be obvious on a first reading or hearing, but which works like the complexity of a piece of music. (Rich)

Yet the experience of which [Petrarch's] poems [of the *Canzoniere*] treat is presented as one whole and complete, though its expression is shifting and various, and the symbol of its completeness is the reflective posture of the opening poem itself, which can encompass and express both its variety and its unity. (Warkentin)

The particular design of a vital sequence will always come as a surprise.

(Rosenthal and Gall)¹

The focus of this chapter is the structure of specific sonnet sequences, the effect of structure upon dramatic presentation and voice, and the necessity to read a sequence as a single, ordered, integrated poem. The sequences which I have chosen for major attention in this chapter are all structurally innovative. Because structure is inherently difficult to communicate to a person who does not have the text, I will start with the most readily available of the sequences, move to the least complex, and close with the least available and most complex. Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) writes a "Sonnet of Sonnets" and challenges the tradition as established by both Dante and Petrarch with her *Monna Innominata* (1881). In *Twenty-One Love Poems* (1974-1976), Adrienne Rich (b.1929), by the use of a "floating" sonnet, radically alters the structure and our expectations of the sonnet sequence, and, in so doing, destabilises the concept of a single, authentic voice. Lady Mary Wroth (c.1587-1652) introduces a modified structural pattern in her sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621), and problematises both closure and

resolution in the “Crowne of Sonetts dedicated to Love” within it. In *Abelard and Heloise* (1907), Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1853-1919) makes explicit the traditional implicit dialogue between the (male) lover and the (silent, female) beloved, restructures the conventional sequence by giving approximately equal space to the voices of the woman and the man, and uses rhyme, genre, structure and omission to convert historical letters into a sonnet sequence. She unsettles our assumptions about gender, genre and voicing. Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley (1806-1855) risks a certain boredom by her lack of formal variation in some two hundred sonnets comprising *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839), which appear at first to be a loosely compiled collection of sonnets following the path that the poet took on her journey. The title re-enforces that impression. A closer scrutiny, however, reveals a complex organisational pattern which requires us to read the sequence as a complete ordered text.

The structure of sonnet sequences has often proved difficult to define and describe. Owing to the fairly rigid codes of the sonnet form, variations in a series of similar sonnets are immediately obvious. But because the loose and elastic sonnet sequence defies precise definition, changes in the structure of a sequence are less easy to discern, to explain, and to understand functionally. In “Love’s sweetest part, variety” (1971), Germaine Warkentin discusses the structure of the sonnet sequence from Dante up to and including English Renaissance men-as-sonneteers. She notes the lack of a theory on the sonnet sequence as such, but offers her article as a beginning, and argues that any sonnet sequence “involves a formal aesthetic program of considerable interest” (16). That aesthetic programme, however, is not fixed and stable and may need to be newly determined for each work in the genre.

Only Christina Rossetti, as far as I know, insisted upon the formal integrity of a sequence to the extent that, as Betty Flowers points out in “Had Such a Lady Spoken for Herself” (1992), she “refused to allow any single one of the fourteen sonnets [of *Monna Innominata*] to be reprinted separately” (15). Presumably Rossetti wished her sequence to be “presented as one whole and complete” (Warkentin 16), and saw a need for each and every sonnet to be read in the correct order for maximum impact, even though, unlike Flowers, she may not have seen her “biographical story” as “a model for an implicit narrative structure” (13).² *A Sonnet of Sonnets* (fourteen sonnets each of fourteen lines), Rossetti’s term, has the structural advantage of self-sufficiency and limitation. Her *Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets* (1882) has, as its title signifies, twenty-eight sonnets.

Rossetti herself makes it clear that she intends to modify the tradition as she has inherited it both from male predecessors and from Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), and her most obvious structural device is her use of Latin epigraphs from both Dante and Petrarch for each of her sonnets which are spoken by a woman, a “*donna innominata*.” In her introduction to *Monna Innominata*, she refers to the “charm” but “scant attractiveness” of Dante’s Beatrice and Petrarch’s Laura, and to “the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour” that these women have paid. Of the “bevy of unnamed ladies, ‘*donne innominate*,’ sung by a school of less conspicuous poets,” she remarks, “one may imagine many a lady as sharing her lover’s poetic aptitude,” which could lead to “mutual love [not] incompatible with mutual honour.” Her epigraphs claim that mutual honour. She asserts that her sequence explores the less than happy love of a “*donne innominata*,” who will be attractive rather than charming, and is more real to women’s experience than the “I” in Barrett Browning’s sequence. The implication seems to be that because Barrett Browning was happy in love she not only undervalued herself as poet in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) but also allowed others, including her husband, to do so. It is, of course, quite possible that Rossetti deliberately misreads *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.³

By ignoring the “structure which may not be obvious on a first reading” (Rich 1978:11) in any case, we mute the poet’s voice, for the structure of a sonnet sequence can act as its own echo box by “piling sonnet upon sonnet” (J.Goldberg 1986:24), or by the bringing together of fragments which, “echoing off each other . . . works like the complexity of a piece of music” (Rich 1978:11). Many sonnet sequences by women, however, are unavailable, except in rare book collections, and discrete sonnets have been randomly anthologised if at all. Few of the very few readers of these anthologised sonnets are likely to consider each sonnet as part of a larger integrated whole or to have access to that context. The consequent arbitrary reading of discrete sonnets taken from a sequence is, I contend, the equivalent of hearing stray bars of a symphony, reading random chapters of a novel, or seeing fragmented scenes from a play. By omitting the relationships of single sonnets to sequences, we neglect narrative and thematic connections, obscure symbolic systems, and ignore the complex modulations of voice.

William Shakespeare’s “Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments” (116) is a useful example of the effect of taking a discrete sonnet from its context, the sequence. Many people associate this sonnet with weddings, for Shakespeare’s marriage metaphor strikes deep chords. But Shakespeare’s marriage is of the minds only, not of bodies. If we read the sonnet only as a single discrete poem, we will have a very distorted view both of

this sonnet, which comes towards the end of the long series of sonnets to the young man, and of the sequence.⁴ When marriage might be a legal possibility in the following shorter series of sonnets on the dark lady, moreover, the persona never mentions marriage, metaphorical or otherwise. Without the context of the sequence, with its potential for elasticity and variety, then, our comprehension of an individual sonnet is diminished and, contextually, may even be faulty.

Such decontextualisation may not be accidental but can be used to encourage socially acceptable readings or to eliminate the socially unacceptable. The anthologising of selected sonnets can also effectively sanitise a sequence. “How do I love thee, let me count the ways” (42), from *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, for example, is often (unthinkingly) anthologised because it apparently reflects idealised womanly love whereas the sequence as a whole complicates this attitude. Margreta de Grazia’s lucid and convincing discussion, in “The Scandal of Shakespeare’s Sonnets” (1994), of the readings, misreadings and misprisions of Shakespeare’s sequence sheds useful indirect light on the de-structuring of many sonnet sequences by women.

The perceived need to circumvent the possible homosexual content of Shakespeare’s sonnets led George Steevens to refuse to edit them in 1766 and in 1793; by so doing he “attempted to conceal the (perceived) scandal . . . by reproducing the Sonnets in the form of a dusty document rather than of a lofty classic” (37). Many sonnet sequences by women tend to be seen, if at all, as “dusty documents” rather than as poetry which deserves and needs to be read. James Boswell the younger, in 1821, legitimises the choice of male/male desire by attributing it to Shakespeare’s “fondness for classical imitation” (221, cited by de Grazia 39).⁵ De Grazia, on the other hand, argues that the indiscriminate and anarchic womb, not the male relationship, is the scandal and creates havoc (48). By ignoring the series of sonnets on the dark lady, in effect distorting the structure of the sequence, Boswell limits the readings and Steevens makes the sequence unavailable.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith, in *Contingencies of Value* (1988), demonstrates another way to decontextualise. By dramatising Shakespeare’s sonnet one hundred and sixteen, she takes it out of context and imposes the dramatic roles of Hamlet and Polonius upon its persona, roles that the sequence does not sustain. Her long title ends with *Alternate Perspectives for Critical Theory* which, together with her argument that the value of any literary work is contingent upon various literary and social conditions, neatly sums up her topic. The “value” of sonnet one hundred and sixteen for Herrnstein Smith depends “upon which of two mutually incompatible interpretations I give it” (7). She is not speaking of a multi-text, for although the manipulation

of voice is crucial here, that manipulation is Herrnstein Smith's not the poet's. The poetic context makes it clear that the persona is no Hamlet and there is no evidence that he is like Polonius; these are roles which Herrnstein Smith chooses to superimpose. Such fusion of texts leads to confusion in reading. In a multi-text, the potential for variant readings is provided by the poet and may originate in echoes and resonances suggested by the structure of the text, or by intertextualities which the poet signals.

Women-as-poets have read and reacted to this sonnet since before its first publication and, rather than reading it with male/masculine vision, some have rewritten it by recontextualising it in their own sequences. Stuart Wortley rewrites it as "How many changes gather round me now" (78), and Barrett Browning as "If thou must love me" (14). Rewriting the sonnet in a context other than its position in Shakespeare's sequence makes apparent the expectations we usually bring to this sonnet, including the tools we apply to love poetry by white men-as-poets, and the effect of using these tools for reading poetry by women.

Anchoring Rich's Floating Sonnet

Adrienne Rich's "(The Floating Poem, Unnumbered)," an attempt to break linearity, also deliberately disrupts frames of references supplied by sequentiality and contextuality. In her introduction to Judy Grahn's *Confrontations With The Devil In The Form Of Love* (1977), Rich says, "I find myself wishing I could see these 'confrontations' inscribed every which-way on a wall—not hung together in linear sequence—for each takes on new meaning read with the others" (1978: 20). She wishes to emphasise links between poems that are not juxtaposed, not always to read "ordinally." Re-writing our world is hampered by its materiality, but Rich tries to overcome such limitations.

Twenty-One Love Poems (1976), with its floating sonnet, has far-reaching implications for the sonnet sequence as a genre. Although the aesthetic structure of a sequence has always been loose and elastic, Rich chooses to heighten its lack of rigidity. The very structure of a love sequence is being further transformed, then, even as heterosexuality, as its implicit content, is being challenged and destabilised by lesbian vision.

"(The Floating Poem, Unnumbered)" is the most important sonnet of *Twenty-One Love Poems*, the most innovative aspect of the sequence, and its most interesting structural device. Not only is "The Floating Poem" unnumbered but it is also the only titled poem, however parenthetically. Paradoxically, such entitlement tends to fix it as the key-stone, to anchor it.

Mary Carruthers underestimates Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* when she emphasises the technical innovation of its lesbian content and states that "in her treatment of this subject lies the revolutionary nature of Rich's in sequence" (300). The concept of a floating, transformative, unnumbered sonnet, caught between fixation and flotation, is far more subversive.

We need to be careful about what we call revolutionary. Grahn's lesbian poetry—not to mention Sappho's—precedes that of Rich and, unlike Grahn, Rich has not always written as a poet-as-lesbian. Furthermore, Shakespeare has already taught us not to expect necessarily heterosexual love in a sonnet sequence, and today's readers of both Rich and Grahn may be less shocked by their lesbian content than perhaps they were in 1969. Even more importantly, we need to be careful that we do not favour one aspect of a poem to the neglect of others. It is such critical judgments that could lead, in a hundred years time, to Rich being remembered only as the lesbian-as-author of a "dusty document."

Carruthers also speaks of the structure of both the sequence, *The Dream of a Common Language*, and its sonnets. Although "Rich substitutes for technical sonnets poems varying between thirteen and twenty lines," she contends, "'Twenty-One Love Poems' is modelled upon the traditional sonnet sequence" (300). Furthermore, "The poems are collected in three divisions, entitled (in order) 'Power,' 'Twenty-One Love Poems,' and 'Not Somewhere Else But Here,' and they constitute a complete statement pivoting on the sequence, 'Twenty-One Love Poems'" (296). It could be argued, then, that I am considering only one section of a longer poem. But, inasmuch as this study concerns love sequences which the poet has signalled as such, then *Twenty-One Love Poems* fits within my definition, with *The Dream of a Common Language* as an-other tripartite structure.

As in Valerie Bloom's "Yuh Hear 'Bout?" Rich's "addition," the floating poem, complicates the reading and multiplies the number of texts. It can, presumably, be read in any of the gaps between poems, and/or as the first and/or last poem(s). Potentially it separates each sonnet from the one preceding it and the one succeeding it. Only because of the constrictions of the printed page—it had to be printed somewhere—it lies between the fourteenth and fifteenth poems.

Whatever happens to us, your body
will haunt mine—tender, delicate
your love-making, like the half-curved frond

of the fiddlehead fern in forests
 just washed by sun. Your traveled generous thighs
 between which my whole face has come and come—
 the innocence and wisdom of the place my tongue has found there—
 the live, insatiate dance of your nipples in my mouth—
 your touch on me, firm, protective, searching
 me out, your strong tongue and slender fingers
 reaching where I had been waiting years for you
 in my rose-wet cave—whatever happens, this is.

It effects the reading of every other sonnet in the sequence in a most immediate way. At the same time, the floating sonnet varies in significance in each juxtaposition. And the positioning of the floating sonnet effects all communication with any other sonnet within the sequence.

Rich uses juxtaposition to contrast the love of women with a misogynist world view expressed, amongst other ways, in history and literature. Books over time are deceptively innocent, but

Once open the books, you have to face
 the underside of everything you've loved—
 the rack and pincers held in readiness, the gag
 even the best voices have had to mumble through,
 the silence burying unwanted children—
 women, deviants, witnesses—in desert sand

. . .
 of artists dying in childbirth, wise-women charred at the stake,
 centuries of books unwritten (5;3-8,15-16),

because “men would not, women could not, speak/our life” (5;18-19). Literature is replete with men’s disgust at and fear of women. We “still have to reckon with Swift/loathing women’s flesh while praising her mind,/Goethe’s dread of the Mothers” (5;11-13).

If we choose to read the floating poem now, the contrast is great. Moving from a world of gratuitous torture into the lesbian world, moves us from Swift’s loathing of women’s flesh to this union of women which is not sexual activity merely. The floating sonnet recalls the earlier loving gentleness of you “kissed my hair” (2;9) which has a poignancy not often encountered in amatory sequences, and highlights the bleakness of women’s history and of misogynist writings.

The hatred and brutality of “women charred at the stake” is in stark contrast with the tenderness, the delicacy, the coolness, the greenness, the alliteration, the sun modified by “washed,” and the “washed” modified by the sun of this love-making.

If the floating poem is “the sexual consummation poem” as Carruthers claims (301), rather than the most sexually explicit, there are implications that Carruthers does not explore. By allowing consummation to take place prior to the sequence *per se*, after the sequence is completed, or at any other time, Rich compels the reader to think carefully about the nature of sexual activity within an amatory sequence. She also questions the centrality of sexuality in a lesbian relationship. Furthermore, since Rich does not indicate that “The Floating Poem” can be placed only once in any reading, and does not limit its sexual activity to a single event (consummation), the gaps between the sonnets can be filled, blocked up, with the sexual act. By reading it in all twenty-two spaces, “The Floating Poem,” by surfeit, may paradoxically, no longer float. It could become a refrain, a burden. But it avoids surfeit precisely because it is “floating,” because it is not fixed and focussed upon incessant and excessive consummation in the way that such sonnets as “Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will” (135) does in Shakespeare’s “dark lady” series. A floating sonnet is the antithesis of “Will in overplus” (135;2).

Rich also causes the reader to re-think the nature of love as portrayed in traditional sonnet sequences. The persona/Rich is a forty-five year-old woman (3;14). Although the loving concerns of *Twenty-One Love Poems* are multiple, she expresses no overt paradox, uses no hyperbole, and is not dying for or through lust.

By using all three single personal pronouns, together with the floating poem, Rich achieves a level of universality and mutuality within the lesbian world. In the second poem, for example, the persona/Rich has been dreaming that “our friend the poet” (2;4) has entered the room. The speaker/dreamer

wants to show her one poem
which is the poem of my life. But I hesitate,
and wake. You’ve kissed my hair
to wake me. *I dreamed you were a poem,*
I say, *a poem I wanted to show someone* (2;7-11)

The persona/Rich wants to show others her own life, which is a poem, and her beloved, who is also a poem. Through the reciprocal nature of both love and poetry, the life of the persona/Rich

is a poem and she dreams the other into a poem. Rich, too, is a poet-friend. The "poem of my life" is her partner, "*a poem I wanted to show someone.*" The slippage between persons, only possible because they are all women, creates a unity among them. Reading the floating sonnet now, extends the flexibility of the poems; "Whatever happens with us" includes "our friend the poet," the persona and the beloved. What happens to any one woman effects all women. As Rich says in "From an Old House in America," "Any woman's death diminishes me" (1975:85).

The full implications of a sonnet sequence that has a floating poem have still to be explored. The number and variety of texts, however, is multiple but limited. Although Rich's sonnet "floats" it is still structured and it is still contained within the sequence. We are not free to impose other structures, and hence other readings, upon it.

The Circling of Wroth

There can be no indeterminacy with respect to the order of the sonnets within such a structure as Mary Wroth's "Crowne of Sonetts dedicated to Love" (1621), since the last line of each sonnet becomes the first line of the following sonnet. Wroth's crown, a "Sonnet of Sonnets," is structurally self-limiting. The ultimate constriction, in which the final and fourteenth sonnet begins with the last line of the penultimate sonnet and then repeats the thirteen lines that have already been repeated, necessarily confines the sequence to fourteen sonnets, but Wroth does not follow this pattern.

Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the first extant sonnet sequence by a woman, deserves a more thorough analysis of both its structure and its content than has yet been published or than this study can provide. Wroth's father, Robert Sidney (1563-1626), left an unfinished crown of sonnets and her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), wrote *Astrophel to Stella* (1591) which then become models for Wroth against which to try herself. She combines aspects of both these works; she includes a crown of sonnets after her father and, as her uncle does, uses both songs and variations on both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean sonnet forms.

The structure of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is tripartite. The division is delineated, and caused, by the "Crowne." This structure recalls the combination of Shakespeare's sonnets to the young man, those to the dark lady, and *The Lover's Complaint*, which appeared in print together, and is explored by John Kerrigan in *Shakespeare: The Sonnets and "A Lover's Complaint"* (1986). In *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the "Crowne" is an interlude occurring near the end of the sequence announced by the "formal apology to Cupid" in [P76]. After "the

speaker's efforts to idealize passion" in the "Crowne," she "abruptly switches back to the Anacreontic Cupid" (Roberts 126,136).

In *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* the relationship between the sonnet form and the distribution of the songs is marked, though not absolutely consistent. In *Astrophel to Stella*, on the other hand, the songs and sonnets form no apparent pattern. Wroth's songs tend to signal a change in the sonnet form, so that a series of sonnets in the Shakespearean mode is followed by a song which, in turn, is followed by a series of Petrarchan sonnets. The elegance of this structural symmetry is reminiscent of embroidery, tapestry, and quilting, where different colours, designs and shapes create emphasis and contrast.

Wroth defers her address to her muse until after she has demonstrated that she is a fit poet, and in this claims her right of succession. The first and last lines of the first sonnet of the first "true" sonnet sequence, *Astrophel to Stella*, are "Loving in truth, and fain in verse that love to show," as Anne Ferry points out, in *The Inward Language* (1983), and "'Fool,' said my muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write.'" Wroth reverses the process of inspiration and does not refer to her muse until the last sonnet of the last named Renaissance sonnet sequence after she has indeed searched her heart. She tells her muse to return to the court of Venus and inspire young lovers, for Wroth's persona has proven her "truth" that she is constant and can love indeed.

Although the reader has to defer meaning until the end of all sonnet sequences to some extent, and all sequences have internal echoes, in some sequences by women, notably in Wroth's crown, the cumulative effect continuously returns the reader to the beginning. A crown of sonnets tends, through its structure, endlessly to postpone fulfillment and to defer meaning because the form is inherently circular. The first and last lines of the crown are the same, creating a phrase and its echo through which each sonnet modifies and amplifies the others. It is through such circling that we can begin to see how some women solve the inherent problem of closure and discontinuity, or reach the accommodation for which Rossetti strives in *Monna Innominata* between the iconic woman represented in the conventions of courtly love poetry and the self-absorption of the woman-as-poet.

Since Wroth's crown begins and ends in a labyrinth, and opens and closes with a question "In this strang labourinth how shall I turne?" the maze-like disjunction of rhyme and syntax, and the lack of closure, correlate content with form. The question which opens the crown comes full circle as the concluding line of the final sonnet, denying not only closure but

also resolution. Ending a sonnet with an unanswered query implicitly denies closure. Ending a sonnet sequence with the unanswered question that opened the sequence allows even less resolution. Such an ending also denies the very notion of writing poetry as an ordering of experience, with the assumption that the ordering in itself brings some relief. Furthermore, the particular question that Wroth, as Pamphilia, asks is, in itself, problematic.

At first, Wroth's opening question, may sound like a request for information, such as one might seek in the maze at Hampton Court, but may also evoke Ariadne and Theseus. In this instance, the persona is both Ariadne and Theseus, both the guide and the wanderer, both female and male. In the Ariadne-Theseus myth, a man who is lost receives help from a woman who loves him, an ineffectual love in terms of her own satisfaction. In Wroth's sequence, in which the female persona speaks to (the male) Amphilanthus and seeks aid from (the male) Cupid, there is no satisfaction at all. The woman is helpless in her double role as the needy and the rescuer. At the same time, however, by being both Ariadne and Theseus, Wroth claims an important place in literature and in mythology, co-opts both the feminine and the masculine, feminises a masculine genre, and aligns herself both with women-as-poets and with men-as-writers of sonnet sequences.

Although all Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan sequences of love sonnets explore the speaker's psychological states, Wroth's sequence, interrupted by the "Crowne of Sonetts," may represent a condition of unrelieved inwardness; it is, in effect, an internal monologue. Jeff Masten suggests of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, in "Shall I turne blabb?" (1991), that "privacy and circulation are tied closely to gender in this first sonnet sequence by an Englishwoman" (69). He argues cogently for a "sustained lack of reference," and an "inscrutable private language" (67) in Wroth's sequence. He also notes a certain lack of authority, an absence of "title page, preface, dedication, or date," the work's lack of "interpolations by, additions from, or transcriptions of others," and any addressee such as family, "friend, or patron" (68). Furthermore, Josephine Roberts remarks in "Lady Mary Wroth's Sonnets" (1979), that by "the creation of a female persona," Wroth also "explores the emotional struggles of a fiercely independent woman who is beset by doubts . . . to dramatize the conflict between passionate surrender and self-affirmation" (319). The result is a continuous *aporia*, in which Pamphilia is in murky darkness.

"Crowne of Sonetts" is no linear quest, as *sequence* might imply, but rather, as the term *sonnet cycle* implies, the seamless curvature of a crown, an endless "labour." The wanderer

comes to no destination; there is no way out because the exit of a maze is also its entrance. Not knowing which way to go, because all paths lead to the same unattainable destination, all the persona can do is continually turn, a motion of perpetual and eternal deferment.

The Power of Love: *Abelard and Heloise*

A sequence is a device which invites attention to relations among poems and voices. Such structural devices may include juxtaposition as in Grahn's "She Who" (1973); or a floating sonnet, as in Adrienne Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems*; or the implicit non-termination of Mary Wroth's encircling crown. Other women-as-sonneteers use a loose narrative structure, which is, nevertheless, more fixed than Grahn's or Rich's, and speak through the voices of such legendary lovers as Sappho in *Sappho and Phaon* (1796) by Mary Robinson (1758-1800), and *Tasso to Leonora* (1914) by Margaret Woods (1856-1945). Ella Wheeler Wilcox, in *The Love Sonnets of Abelard and Heloise* (1907), chooses to create a dramatic narrative with two voices rather than a single speaking subject, incorporating the lament or complaint tradition.

Abelard and Heloise is structured upon its adaptation of the letters of its title characters, its use of two voices, its allocation of space for each voice (Abelard has twenty-five percent fewer sonnets than Heloise), and its use of both the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet forms. By including a "Foreword" Wheeler Wilcox claims authenticity:

In embodying these [five remarkable] letters in sonnet form I have retained to a great degree their identical language. In no instance has liberty been taken with the original meaning or purport. The sonnets are therefore little more than a rhyming paraphrase of the immortal love-letters of Abelard and Heloise.

Although the poet speaks only the truth, she does not speak all the truth. Her selection of extracts from the letters is very specific and her structure is purposeful. She omits the homilies, lectures, and religious debates. Although she does indeed state that she is rewriting five letters, she gives no indication of the existence of "The Letters of Direction." Sexual passion is her topic, not religious or philosophical polemic. By making the claims she does in her "Foreword," she minimises the risk of being accused of impropriety in her choice of topic; she is only a conduit. By claiming to create only "a rhyming paraphrase," she also trivialises her achievement, showing suitable "womanly" modesty.

The passion which led to Abelard's castration and Heloise's entry into a convent was mutual but the sequence emphasises, validates and foregrounds female/feminine passion.

Abelard and Heloise makes explicit the implicit dialogue with a more or less silent beloved, a convention of the traditional sonnet sequence. The most well-known explicitly dramatic sonnet occurs in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (I,v,93-106) in which the title characters each speak a quatrain and then alternate lines with one exception (I,v,104). Using Shakespeare as a precedent, Wheeler Wilcox extends his technique for a single sonnet to structure sonnets within a complete sequence. Of the twenty-two sonnets in *Abelard and Heloise*, Heloise speaks the first six, Abelard the following six and Heloise the next five, all of which are Shakespearean in form. The following five sonnets are formally Petrarchan, of which Abelard speaks three and Heloise the final two. Unlike Juliet, in Shakespeare's play, Heloise speaks more than Abelard does, and is both the first and the last speaker; Romeo both begins and closes the earlier sonnet. In both Shakespeare's sonnet and Wheeler Wilcox' sonnet sequence, the drama is overt, the voices distinct.

Wheeler Wilcox, through the structure of her sequence, emphasises the power of patriarchal authority over a woman's voice. Up to, and including, the seventeenth sonnet, both Heloise and Abelard use the Shakespearean form. The change of form to Petrarchan is abrupt and structurally significant. Starting with Abelard in the eighteenth sonnet, the form remains Petrarchan to the end and each of his three Petrarchan sonnets opens with the command "Write no more." With these words, a new positioning of a direct citation from the historical letters, Abelard commands Heloise to silence. In his final three sonnets he tells her five times not to write and once to be silent. His final words are "write no more to me" (20;14).

When Abelard changes the sonnet form, when he tells Heloise to "Write no more," she merely follows his formal example but does not obey his injunction. The use of Petrarchan sonnets forces Abelard to repress the emotions he cannot order. Only silence can suppress his final self-centred "me." The new form silences him but emphasises her disorder. She still has two more sonnets.

Despite his uncontrollable passion, Abelard's words in his three Petrarchan sonnets are structured around the consistency of his argument for the religious imperative, the sacrifice and degradation of the flesh. He reminds Heloise that "Immortal life is something we must earn/By conquest of the baser self" (20;6-7). The heart cannot accommodate both sexual "Desire and faith" (18;6) and, since "We left the world, to purify our thought" (18;2), they must seek purification through the "crucifixion of the flesh" (18;7). As long as she writes to him, so long

will her “letters prove my foes” (18;9). And yet he has continued to write to her despite his own edict, so his only salvation now lies in silence.

His struggle is expressed through the fact that he needs the scope of his three sonnets to obey his own edict. In two parallel clauses he shows her the true path of love:

To love you, means to leave you with no sign:

To love me, means to let my life go free. (20;10-11)

Not only must she “write no more,” but their love will be more honoured and honourable if she will “Let silence give our sorrowing love true worth” (20;9). In his final sestet he still admits his love for her but claims that true love expresses itself by total self-denial and self-abnegation. But even in his last lines, it is apparent that his success is only partial:

But when death calls our purged souls from earth,

Oh, may your senseless clay rest close to mine!

Adieu! adieu! and write no more to me. (20;12-14)

Love surviving death, and the promise of the union of lovers’ bodies in the grave, is a standard trope. But for Abelard to desire the adjacent burial of their worthless bodies, which have caused him such physical and spiritual pain, shows that he has not completely renounced the flesh for the soul. His hope that their love will be spiritualised and will survive death is therefore qualified.

Wheeler Wilcox portrays the confused and anguished lover of a sonnet sequence by her choice of genre and by omitting the religious polemic. By making Abelard’s final word “me” she also draws attention to the implicit narcissism of Petrarchan courtly love rather than to the confusion and anguish of the cleric who wrote *The Letters*. Furthermore, the Petrarchan sonnet form and the positioning of the edict to silence, emphasise the patriarchal vision of both the Church and the sonnet sequence tradition. By structuring the sequence in such a way that Abelard does not end the sequence, and so that his final word is neither Christ nor Heloise, but “me,” she makes the reader doubt that Abelard’s love for Heloise is as great as hers for him or that he subsumes his passion for her into a passion for Christ.

Superficially Wheeler Wilcox retains “to a great degree their identical language,” as she claims. The omissions, the choice of genre, the poetic structure and the power of rhyme, however, gently mimic Abelard, and point to the more linear logic of the (stereotypic) man—this and this so this—opposed to the (stereotypic) more circular, emotional response of the woman. Rhyme is inherently structural and Abelard’s rhymes, in his first sonnet (7), reflect his logic.

The *past lure* (Heloise) holds him *fast*. Whereas he was *pure*, now for *shame, alas*, her *name* must *pass* and be put *behind* him, in the *hope* that his *mind* might *grope* towards salvation, for now *despair* is *everywhere* (rhymes emphasised). The rhymes of Heloise do not lend themselves to such a tidy summation.⁶ Her distress, and consequently her disorder, is greater, her thoughts more complex, her rhymes less firm and coherent.

Heloise needs more sonnets than Abelard to express her love and to order her disorder. She is even less able than Abelard to find peace or to convince herself that she has renounced their love. She does not finally succeed but returns the reader to the beginning of the sequence in terms of imagery and theme. Her life as a *religieuse* has always savoured of hypocrisy, except that she does not pretend otherwise. Since she both opens and closes the sequence, the structure re-inforces the circularity of this woman's thinking and speaking.

In the opening sonnets, her state is similar to Abelard's; a pleasing symmetry occurs in the images of altars, fire and dousing used in each lover's second sonnet (2 & 8), although the speakers attach opposed meanings to these images. Heloise says, "There is no altar of celestial fires" (2;2), having metaphorically doused any hope of the fire of grace and salvation with the physical tears of a woman "weeping for my lover" (2;3). For him the fire is physical passion, and he lacks the flood "of grace divine" (8;10) to douse that fire; "the flames within me do not cease:/They are but hid with ashes" (8;9-10) and are only too ready to be rekindled. Later Heloise, too, equates fire with passion, and desires to "quench with tears the fire/Of memory" (15;11-12), but she knows even as she speaks that she can neither forget nor "grieve for what was done" (15;13).

In the first two sonnets Heloise makes clear that she is well aware that she "took the veil for Abelard—not God!" (1;12). Even though she must know it is a sin, she takes comfort in the constancy of her love. The monastery may "have estranged/My lover's heart" (1;13-14), but the veil has left her "own unchanged" (1;14). She makes no progress in the next sonnet, and goes further in her unrepentance. Heavenly love is unable to subordinate earthly love. In fact, "There is no altar of celestial fire" (2;2). Bowing to Abelard's will that she should take holy vows has plunged her into sin, "disorder" (2;5). She goes even further: "Remembered kisses feed me while I fast . . . / Though sworn to God, my life is wholly thine" (2;12,14). Her love and desire for Abelard can sustain her body even as she starves through religious imperatives and from lack of emotional nourishment.

Having made it clear that her love for Abelard is more powerful than her love for God, Heloise appears to be seeking some salvation, some consolation, by sonnet four. In the actual letters, Heloise' request for a religious relationship and instruction bears some fruit in the form of "The Letters of Direction." In the sonnet sequence it proves to be a mere manoeuvre. Heloise is prepared to use any method to gain her lover's attention, including a request for religious instruction. If calling Abelard "Master, Husband, Father" (3;13) will make him respond, she will use all or any of those titles. She insists that she is his wife (4;5,8), that "wife" defines both who she is and the relationship she wants with him. Only because he refuses her request to "Permit me once to look upon your face" (4;10), refuses openly to acknowledge their relationship, does she turn to subterfuge and return the religious imperative back on him:

may I not comfort borrow
 By your discourses on the means of grace?
 You cast your pearls before unheeding swine:
 Would you save souls? Then, Abelard, save mine. (4;11-14)

As a monk and a teacher he has a special obligation to her. She is part of his Christian responsibility and, as such, she should be able to turn to him for religious guidance.

Through the arrangement of their exchanges, *Abelard and Heloise* addresses the position of women in amatory poetry, especially in sonnet sequences, and in misogynistic myth, society and literature. Both Abelard and Heloise offer two versions of the events leading to their own and legendary catastrophic love relationships. In the first they blame the woman; in the second they inculcate the man. It is open to discussion whether first impressions remain or whether offering the accepted version and then countermanding it can mitigate the misogynist stereotype.

Originally, in sonnets nine and fourteen, they both blame Heloise. Abelard says,

that virtue like your own
 To guilty shame transformed a holy life,
 And the entrancing music of your tone
 Changed peaceful harmonies to jarring strife. (9;5-8)

Heloise appears to accept his judgment. She takes all the guilt for their marriage, and goes on to retell the fall of particular men, specifically Samson and Solomon, through the treachery of women. By revitalising misogyny she reinforces it.

Although Heloise does point out that Abelard's pain and destruction are caused neither by her treachery nor by her intent, the seed has been sown. Unlike Delilah, however, Heloise did not seek

to destroy;

Mine was the passion-blinded woman's role

Who gave her virtue for her lover's joy.

Convinced of love (14;10-13)

Hers was a gift of love, free and unconditional. If the end result is the same, however, some readers may feel, perhaps, it is almost irrelevant whether the intent was treacherous or whether the man's fall came about from the lack of the woman's control. When Adam uses Eve as a scapegoat, he blames her appetite not her treachery.

Not until three sonnets after blaming Heloise does Abelard acknowledge the possibility of a different reading: "I took your virtue, and gave you shame" (12;8). In a near parallel to his rhetoric, two sonnets later Heloise reverses the first part of her argument: "first your passion spoke and kindled mine" (16;10). Both speakers, however, take more space in which to blame the woman than they do to blame the man, and both blame her first, him second.

Wheeler Wilcox uses the structure of the sequence to thwart facile and comfortable expectations. Without the context provided by this structure, the enormity of what Heloise is doing in her final two sonnets would not be apparent. In an earlier Shakespearean sonnet Abelard says, "Our follies have set standards for the world;/Of our wild amours shall the centuries speak" (12;11-12). His intent is, that having become (in)famous for their earthly love, they need to set a pattern of repentance for others to follow. It is their Christian duty to offer such a corrective example. Heloise, however, deliberately chooses to misread him. Now, much later, in a Petrarchan sonnet, she offers herself as a new pattern of love. Without the context established by sonnet twelve, she might, indeed, appear modest. Assuming that Abelard means that they will be renowned for the constancy of their love, she hastens, tongue in cheek, to reassure him. She claims to be no faithful lover of legend. Even she, the epitome of loving and desiring womanhood, can be inconstant, or so she says: "Oh let my infidelity proclaim/To all the world how fickle love can change" (21;9-10). But she is indulging in a certain degree of sophistry. Before the sonnet closes, she asks Abelard to "Hear my disclosure of what seems so strange—/Tis God alone takes Heloise from you" (21;13-14). Were this the end of the sequence, we might believe in her conversion. But she has one final sonnet.

Heloise appears to have answered Abelard's plea that she should forget him and love only God—if we ignore the fact that she has neither obeyed his edict that she should “Write no more,” nor has she, therefore, forgotten him. Her spirit is broken (21;4). She promises that she will make every effort to smother the fires of love and passion, and not “endeavour to arouse” her sexual desire “By recollection's soft, seductive art” (22;1-2), words that are themselves seductive. Now that she knows that Abelard is “Insensible to passion's poison dart” (22;7) she will no longer think of him as her spouse. It has been a long, hard struggle: “My peace was born of anguish, but it lives,/A phenix [*sic*] risen from love's funeral pyre” (22;9-10). If the sequence finished here, again we might believe her.

The Petrarchan sonnets Wheeler Wilcox introduces towards the end of her sequence only have the appearance of expressing more resignation, solace and peace than is usual in the conflictual form. They have not told the truth for either Abelard or Heloise. He has spoken the words his Church and society endorse. When she claims that “At last God shows me proof of His regard,/And tranquil joys replace grief's uncontrol” (21;1-2), her stasis may only be temporary. Abelard is already silenced and Heloise is probably deluding herself. She may well be saying what she knows Abelard thinks he wants to hear.

Her final two lines, which, of course, are the final two lines of the work, return us to the beginning of the sonnet sequence. She not only echoes earlier lines but she returns to the earlier images and passion. No sooner does she claim that “There is no pleasure save what virtue gives” (22;12), than she recants. She closes the sequence by saying, “And yet—again to touch that mouth of fire,/To lose the world, and find it, in your kiss” (22;13-14). She gave her virtue, found pleasure, and lost the world and Abelard. She would gladly lose all again. She convinces us of her great love. It is significant that Abelard's last word is “me” and Heloise's is “kiss.”

Whether or not Wheeler Wilcox consciously uses the English/Shakespearean form to express the mutuality of Heloise's and Abelard's passion and the Italian/Petrarchan form to question the possibility of sublimating physical love to the love of Christ, her arrangement of forms has this effect. Combined with her dramatisation of Heloise, her Petrarchan sonnets refute such images of women as Petrarch's silent Laura and Dante's silent Beatrice, two virgins who, through their purity and piety, guided their would-be-lovers to Christ. Heloise makes it clear that from first to last she has no desire to be a courtly beloved. She desires a physical relationship. It is surprising to find so direct and authentic an expression of love's power and so subtle a questioning of sex roles in such traditional verse forms.

Intertwining Paths: Stuart Wortley's European Tour

Writers of sonnet sequences about love have three ways to represent lovers. They can, like Wheeler Wilcox or Sidney, choose such legendary or symbolic lovers as Abelard and Heloise or Astrophel and Stella. Or they can, like Rossetti, use an unnamed *donna innominata* and her lover. Or they can, like Barrett Browning and Edmund Spenser, to a greater or lesser extent, imply an identity between the poet and her/his persona. Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley, I shall argue, in *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839), uses all three methods of characterisation in three intertwined but fragmented series. The first fragmented love series she herself entitles *Inez to Manuel*. The speaker of the second I shall refer to as the *donna innominata*, taking Rossetti's lead. The speaker of the remaining sonnets is the poet-persona. Each of these three fragmented series of sonnets speaks with its own distinctive voice and maintains its own theme(s) throughout the sequence, but is dispersed in groups of consecutive sonnets.

By using *Inez* and a *donna innominata* as personae, Stuart Wortley may be playing Petrarchan convention (with its frequently notorious lovers) against the more common human condition. As Rich says in *Twenty-One Love Poems*, "*Tristan and Isolde* is scarcely the story" (17;6) to express daily human love. Even when women-as-poets do use legendary lovers, they might be making precisely the same point as Rich. For women's definitions of the heroic might differ from men's or be unsuitable for expressing women's love. *Great* lovers might not be great *lovers*. Whatever love may be to a man, to many women, as wives and mothers, love is a daily affair. Again using Rich's words, "[T]wo women together is a work/heroic in its ordinariness" (1974-1976:19;14-15). Both Rich and Grahn would agree that the common, not the legendary, is heroic.

For any woman-as-writer of a sonnet sequence, gaps will open up between her experience as a woman and her experience as a poet. For Stuart Wortley such gaps occur between her three visions of women-as-speaker: the poet, her *donna innominata* and her hysterical *Inez*. Stuart Wortley seems to enact a solution to the problem identified by Gail Scott in *Spaces Like Stairs* (1989): "how to write across the almost... hysterical... over-determination of her gaps" (31), by creating them through a very complex and fragmented tripartite structure.

In 1838, Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley sailed from England to tour Europe. In terms of patriarchal standards and values, her journey had no obvious point, no position to achieve, no

trophy to win. She was on a journey, not a quest, even though she could be seen as emulating the traditional behaviour of young men after leaving university (which, of course, she could not attend). Her journey has inherent tensions which the male grand tour would lack. She wishes to go but regrets her separation from her young daughter, Victoria. Her marriage appears to have been stable, but she falls in love. She is a patriot who takes delight in British battleships at anchor, but abhors war and its futility. Her journey is circular, its destination home. We only know these "facts" from her *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour*; they could, of course, be a fiction about her persona.

Her lengthy dedication to her sister-in-law and cousin, Georgiana Stuart Wortley, adds two more "facts." As a member of the British upper classes she is familiar with a variety of heads of state and diplomats. She does not take kindly to being "miserably lodged in a peasant's hut," and is condescending to lesser mortals: "Though the fare in those vessels [*trekschuit*] is the furthest removed from expensive, and the company, consequently, of a very mixed description, we experienced no sort of annoyance or inconvenience" (7-8). From this dedication we learn that her husband is with her on this tour, but his presence is certainly not indisputably evident within her sequence. Because of her status as a woman, although of the upper classes, Stuart Wortley is apparently not recorded in historical documents.

Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour resembles a verbal snap-shot album or a diary. It consists of two hundred and thirty poems, mostly sonnets but also, as in some Renaissance sequences, like Wroth's and Sidney's, some songs and other poems. Many of the poems are titled either by topic—"On Hawking" (1)—or by location—"The Suburbs of Vienna" (2).⁷ Her first non-sonnet is number eleven, her first song number one hundred and fifty-nine. On a first reading her sonnets may produce a certain level of tedium if the reader is looking for structural variety and innovation in the sonnets. Stuart Wortley consistently uses the Petrarchan format: fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, rhyming abbaabba cdcdcd, with little terminal punctuation at the end of quatrains. She neither uses a closing couplet nor does she consistently have a marked *volta* at the end of the octet. The only variation she shows is metric.

But the structure of this sequence creates tension within the form at its very inception. In terms of the sonnet sequence tradition, the opening is unconventional. Rather than starting with the problem the writer has with writing (Sidney), or his hopes that his beloved will be his reader (Sidney, Michael Drayton and Spenser), or the need for procreation (Shakespeare), Stuart Wortley opens in the heroic mode. "On Hawking" begins: "Twas on a plain of Austria—broad

and fair—/High flew the hawks, from hood and chain releas'd:/Higher and higher" (1-3). The broad, fair plain of Austria offers falconry, an aristocratic sport closely associated with chivalry, jousts and tournaments.

Rather than addressing the beloved (Drayton and Shakespeare), or the text (Spenser), or even a reader who is presumed to be interested in the poet/lover and the condition of love, Stuart Wortley opens *in medias res*. She apparently celebrates the freedom of the hawks, rejoicing in their new-found liberty, even though she knows their fate. The falcon has been released, and will fly yet higher to over-reach the hawks, enabling it to swoop down upon them. Perhaps her sense of joy at the hawks' freedom, is replicated in her freedom from domestic care.

This opening scene and subject at first seems more appropriate to epic, legend, romance and high adventure, than to a sonnet sequence. Prior to *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1806) by Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), all amatory sonnet sequences are centred upon the psychological state of a lover. George Meredith's and Edna St. Vincent Millay's tale-telling sonnet sequences, *Modern Love* (1862) and *Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree* (1923), lie in the future. Until this time, all sonnet sequences, including Smith's, have a clearly defined and self-conscious speaker. Stuart Wortley's speaker however, in sonnet one, gives no overt information as to her psychological condition or, indeed, anything whatsoever about herself, and the subjective I/eye is absent. Although the occasional "we," "our" and "my" appear in the early *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour*, the "I" only surfaces in the thirty-fifth sonnet, "Child of my heart," and concerns maternal, not sexual, love. The "I" again becomes submerged until the first overt love sonnet, "To thee I drink this parting cup" (48), but its re-appearance is intermittent.

One retrospective implication of "On Hawking" may be that the speaker's freedom is as illusory as the hawks'. This seemingly simple opening sonnet structures the concerns of the sequence to follow as effectively as does Drayton's, Sidney's, Spenser's or Shakespeare's. It addresses the human condition and also, within the larger context of the sequence, the situation of lovers and the ultimate peril of a love relationship. As with the hawks and the falcon, so for people:

beginnings void of stain
Lead but to dark conclusions—too much still
 We mix our pleasures with another's pain,
And good too closely neighbours upon ill. (1;9-12)

The under-tones of both Juliet and the Friar in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (II,ii,117-120; II,iii,1-30; II,vi,9-15) initiate the theme of tragic love. The image of bondage and falconry comes straight from the balcony scene when Juliet says, "O for a falconer's voice,/To lure this tassel-gentle back again!/Bondage is hoarse" (II,ii,159-161). By ventriloquising the voices of a woman and a man, Juliet and the Friar, Stuart Wortley refuses hierarchy and situates the lovers in the same space. Both are hawks; both are falcons.

In this first sonnet, Stuart Wortley's use of "vaulting" is visually stimulating: "The falconer's plumes danced dark upon the air,/And bounded their brave steeds, as vaulting there" (1;4-5). The conceit is striking. The image of the hawks as horses, specifically "steeds," reinforces the image of a medieval courtly pageant, as do the plumes as both decoration of the steeds themselves and as a metonymy for riders wearing their ladies' favours. "Vaulting" is in keeping with the chivalric setting—people "vault" into saddles—but it also captures the width of sky. The falconer, by his presence and his actions, darkens the vault of heaven. The "misplaced" epithet, "plumes danced dark," rather than the dark plumes danced, creates alliteration, assonance and resonance where it would not otherwise be, as sound echoes sense. This syntactical construction also replicates a waltz-like harmony that would be lost in the prosaic "dark plumes danced." The move from liquid consonants, through alliteration and sibilance, ending in that harsh "dark," generates the sounds and the movement towards the act of carnage that is about to happen.

Neat "moralistic" tags, a form of expression not infrequent in Stuart Wortley's sequence, are, in fact, an integral part of the sonnet and less definitive in meaning than they may at first appear to be. The final line "Heaven vindicates its outraged will!" is commenting on the destruction of the hawks. The line is also an apt *finale* to the tournament in the sky—the vaulted heaven. In chivalry the victor is understood to be the agent of Heaven's will, the punisher of its violators. Since behaviour will be given its just deserts on the jousting field, and the hawks have been vanquished, the hawks must be the offenders, possibly because of their predatory nature. But the line may be read as a pious Christian sentiment with "Heaven" signifying a metaphorical spiritual space. Then, either the falcons are guilty of gratuitous violence, or they are the means of vindication. Before the first sonnet closes, then, Stuart Wortley sets up an uncertainty as to the differences between conflict and peace, victor and victim, an uncertainty which later shows itself as a tension between war and patriotism.

The second sonnet, "The Suburbs of Vienna," offers another way of thinking about other aspects of the human condition. Safety lies in domesticity; but such a life is liminal. Although "suburb" (*sub urbs*) originally meant the residential area immediately outside the walls of a city, by the mid-seventeenth century it carried the derogatory overtones of slum. But Stuart Wortley, by the mid-nineteenth century, depicts "Snow-white dwellings," uncrowded streets, peace, calm, serene content (2;2-10). Until the eleventh line she gives no hint that suburban living might be bland, and a hint is all that finally appears. Sensible people, by choosing the suburbs,

are contented to remain

Even at the gates of life's proud restless scene
Partaking charily its stir—much pain
May spare themselves—'tis *they* perhaps may glean
The happiness—good—wealth, that others sow, in vain! (2;10-14)

A passive life may be the best bet. And yet Stuart Wortley-as-woman problematises that condition. The suburbanite has to "glean" happiness and wealth as if depending on what is left over from the harvest of the city life or lacking its cohesion, like the woman-as-traveller and the persona-as-lover. The confusing spaces in which they wander resemble the one in which the reader seeks for a structural principle to organise this sequence as a whole.

When the persona reaches the gates of Venice, a particularly striking use of imagery sets up resonances within the sequence. Two major images of seeming polarity, darkness and fire, first occur as she enters the city (45).

[The sun] rose! and blazed the sea beneath him free,
Whose waves seemed rolling waves of fires to be!—
Full proud his image-impress thus to bear!

. . . .

Night's shadows then in truth did swiftly flee!
Ere while a death-black mass of glooms remained,
As though they would frown back the rising sun—
With all the funeral hues of midnight stained—
They staid!—till fringed with fire they seem'd all spun
Of Light and Darkness both—He rose!—He reigned!
And they retreated—fled!—crushed, vanquished, and undone!⁸

(45;4-6,8-14)

In its consideration of love, darkness and fire, this sonnet intimates the possibility of a merging of polarities through love, but also acknowledges the fleeting nature of the “reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (*Biographia Literaria* v.2 ch.14;12).⁹

The sun is identified as male—“He”—and the sea is archetypically female. The compound “image-impress,” together with “proud . . . to bear,” carries associations with both coinage and consummation, but the persona develops the sexual connotations. He impresses; she bears. Because of its position beneath the sun, the liquid sea is blazed free. The speaker stresses the energy of the sun by the double repetition of the word *rose* (45:1,4,13) and by the powerful and unusual transitive use of *blazed*. At the moment of union between sun and sea, even the shadows or dark clouds, “seem’d all spun/Of Light and Darkness both” (45;12-13). Fire and darkness can briefly co-habit.

But all too soon the heat and light of the sun at day-break are reduced to a candle at night: “Love’s lamp . . . fed and trimmed;/ . . . shall light my sepulchre on earth” (48;8-9). Now the lamp, the night and the sepulchre replace the sun, the new day and the new scene. Later in sonnet ninety-three after lamenting that, her “soul is held and fettered!—‘tis not free” (93;10), the persona concludes with, “Another Sun must rise, or *this* one wane:—/Rise on the Sun, then, Love!—and rise for me!” (93;13-14). Again she equates the sun with love and passion; either the beloved will love her on the morrow as the sun rises, or a new beloved will arise. The sun now symbolises the lamp that leads to death, the constancy of love, and the hope of resurrection of a love old or new. Beginning with sonnet forty-five natural cycles acquire new connotations.

Stuart Wortley is setting up two separate paradigms of love by recording two different love affairs, both apparently unsatisfactory for the speakers at some times. Inez is a woman who is both lover and beloved in an otherwise conventional male/masculine Petrarchan sequence. The *donna innominata*, however, represents a more quotidian love. These two inter-twined love series have a tumultuous beginning in Venice which is the metaphoric turning point of the journey. The equation of Venice, water, tears, orgasm, love and lovers, as we see in sonnet forty-five, is easy to make, but that still does not explain the principle upon which Stuart Wortley organises her sequence.

The *donna innominata* not only suffers love’s pains, but strongly experiences its joys. She finds magic and mystery in the fusion of her own senses:

That music in my mind of magic might—

This light cast down, on every thought, so fair—

This stirring sweetness, like to moving air.—
 Can this be love?—the immortal and the bright!—
 'Tis surely love? for nought beside can be
 So strange and yet so sweet, so soft yet strong.
 'Tis love, the crown of all, crowned mystery!—
 My thoughts are gathering to a starry throng,
 And scattering forth their brightness far and free—
 Yet love that *Sun*, shines, dazzling, these among. (91;5-14)

The striking identification of the sun with love strengthened by contrast with “starry throng” anticipates Dickinson.¹⁰

But there is a vast space, emotionally, between Stuart Wortley’s two love series. The ambiance of the untitled series featuring the *donna innominata* consistently differs from that of “Inez to Manuel.” Unlike the suffering Petrarchan lover Inez, the *donna innominata* shares her experience of happiness and harmony with all the world. Inez’s version is darker and includes little light or music. She has only the dark, cold, graves and sorrow. For example, the sonnet immediately preceding the *donna innominata*’s “There is a Music in my mind to-night” (91, above) is from Inez to Manuel:

Forget me, then!—or if thou think’st of me,
 Think of me as Dead!—

 I fain would find my Heaven on *Earth!*—*not* share
 The mortal coldness of inconstancy!—

 A pall around my heavy memory spread,
 Or let *no* memory there reign strong and clear.
 Alas! my Life *in truth* with Love hath fled. (90;1-2,7-8,12-14)

Without faithful love, she will be metaphorically, emotionally and spiritually as dead as Juliet and Romeo in the tomb. Such earthly constant love, for her, is preferable to any Heaven. The frustrating, unrequited love of a Petrarchan sonnet sequence suits Inez as little as it does Pamphilia or Heloise.

The implication here is that Inez, alone, has constructed the love relationship, even as, like Wroth, she constructs herself as the speaker of the sonnet. As she leaves her beloved, apparently without seeing him, she confesses

I rang
 Mine own knell sternly, and did bend my knee
 At the Altar of dark Sacrifice, which none
 But I had built! (64;7-10)

Like Wroth, Stuart Wortley exploits the conjunction in one voice of the abandoned, isolated woman and the solitary poet.

Not only has Inez constructed the love relationship and herself as the suffering lover, she is also responsible for her "suicide" in her darkest sonnet:

My Thoughts, like venom'd snakes, lie curled and coiled
 About my brain, and act the hideous parts
 Of scorpion-suicides

...

With fire and flames encircled and entailed—

....

My Soul thus grows in Hades, dark and deep,
 Of those stern fiends

....

Oh! there is *more* than torture in their touch!—

Madness and Death! (156;1-3,5,9-10,12-13)

The fire and flames in the Inez series are the fire and flames of hell, not the glory of the sun. She suffers the torments of both the pagan and the Christian afterlife. Inez knows that she is killing herself, sacrificing her immortal soul, and inviting madness, and yet, like Heloise, she cannot prevent herself. In the last of her poems (211), which comes much later than her last sonnet, she is still lamenting lost love as synonymous with lost life, although there is no evidence that this love was ever more than an illusion.

The *donna innominata*, on the other hand, knows that her own emotions impede her vision and her speech. Before she can speak or show her love, "first must I full many a mist of Fear/And cloud of grief . . . /Essay to chase away" (129;5-7). She knows that she causes the mists and clouds that obscure the stars and that she can clear them out of her way. Neither the

world nor the beloved are responsible for her blurred vision. The "fearful stream of Passion" (52;9) does "engulph my Being" (82;9-10) she claims earlier, so that "I cannot rule my thoughts that round *one* theme/Hang, like to swarming bees, till *All* grow *One*" (82;1-2). Swarming bees are an effective simile for the pain and disorder of sexual love, but they are less dangerous than scorpions and they can be re-ordered, domesticated in a hive.

Speaking through Inez of her love for Manuel, Stuart Wortley mimics courtly love by presenting the tradition through a woman's eyes. She reverses the mirror which has reflected the torment of male lovers. She makes the traditional arsenal of symbols deal death, torture and madness to the female lover. Inez apparently has no power, except the power of speech, and speech does not extricate her from her torment. Although she may have been the more active lover, she has become the passive beloved. Unable to enter the city, she cannot enjoy the content of the suburb either. She cannot even play the hawk to Manuel's falcon. She confounds hawk and falcon, murdered and murderer, and yet, paradoxically, she does nothing.

To some extent, the "pleasure of the text" always lies in continual deferment, and, to some extent, the reader of any poetry has to defer meaning until the end of the poem, but sonnet sequences by both women and men insist on deferral. From Shakespeare to Rich, sequences encourage the reader to keep looping back to earlier sonnets. Sometimes even individual sonnets insist on their own lack of completion. Approached with a willingness to defer understanding, sonnet sequences can offer "the pleasure of the text" that Samuel Taylor Coleridge proposes in *Biographia Literaria*. In reading poetry he believes, the

reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. . . . at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. (v.2:ch.14;11)

A reader who primarily feels satisfaction from "the final solution" will be dissatisfied with sonnet sequences, for many sequences offer neither solution nor closure. Often they only terminate in the silencing of the speaker, as in Rossetti's *Monna Innominata*. Even such narrative sonnet sequences as *Modern Love* and *Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree*, with their apparent closure, generate questions concerning the outcome for the "protagonists" and provoke a re-reading in search of evidence for a possible "final solution."

As *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour* progresses it becomes apparent that, although the mind is attracted by the journey itself, Stuart Wortley has some form of organisation other than the route *per se*. The reader begins to experience a “retrogressive movement” and the sonnets from Inez to Manuel may be the key to the general structure. The first sonnet titled “Inez to Manuel” is sixty-two and the last is one hundred and fifty-six, although there are two later non-sonnets (168 & 211) devoted to the relationship. The sonnets “Inez to Manuel” generally fall into groups. The clustering of untitled sonnets around the “Inez to Manuel” sonnet groups is also conspicuous. In short, the sonnets from Inez to Manuel form a fragmented series which tends to run in groups and to be surrounded by sonnets from another fragmented series that are either untitled or have titles such as one might expect in a love sequence: “The Trembling Star” (115); “Thoughts at Sea” (128); the retrospective and, therefore, disordered “On Leaving England” (121) and “A Farewell to my Country. June 1858” (170); and “Farewell!—Forgive Me” (167) which immediately precedes the last “Inez to Manuel” poem. Furthermore, the sonnet immediately preceding the first sonnet from “Inez to Manuel” is “Athens described at Daybreak from the Sea” (61), and the one following the last is “A Sunset Hour at Therapia” (157). Both love series follow a metaphorical path from dawn to dusk.

Stuart Wortley’s structure, then, operates at two levels. Her obvious organising principle is the journey to Constantinople and back. But the other structure, intricate, not readily discernible, and tripartite, consists of a philosophical travelogue, a fragmented love sonnet series “Inez to Manuel,” and another fragmented, embedded, unsignaled, series concerning two unnamed lovers, “I” and “thou.” This last series has no title and the sex/gender of the speaker is indeterminate. All three series are intertwined, and the sonnets of any one series tend to cluster in groups. Such early sonnets as “On Hawking” and “The Suburbs of Vienna,” have philosophical broad concerns, and more specific resonances with the love poems, even as they describe moments of the journey. The first group of love sonnets, on the unnamed lovers, begins with sonnet forty-five, ends with “A Night-storm at Venice” (56) and leads into “A Storm at Sea on the Mediterranean” (57). Five sonnets later the first group of sonnets from “Inez to Manuel,” all titled “Inez to Manuel,” begins, ending at sonnet sixty-four. Any signal Stuart Wortley may give us lies in this structural pattern and functions retroactively, so that the reader “pauses and half recedes.”

The structure of *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour* vitally affects the reader’s response to voices within the sequence. By fragmenting and embedding two love series Stuart

Wortley makes possible at least three readings, a complex response similar to the one evoked by Valerie Bloom (b.1939) in "Yuh Hear 'Bout," in which the voices in each reading would differ. Stuart Wortley's sequence creates expansive opportunities for knowing women in fragmented and confused roles.

In the simplest reading, the poet is creating an interlinked "romance," and there is no identity between herself and her several personae. The voice would change its identity inasmuch as the unfolding romance/drama requires such changes, but the voicing and reading would be relatively uncomplicated. As in "A Woman's Labour" (1739) by Mary Collier (1679?-1762?), however, the persona creates an ironic distance, thus commenting negatively upon the Petrarchan tradition. Alternatively, like Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1823) in "Washing-Day" (1797), there may be an invitation to laugh at the human predicament. Whereas the tone established in the first two sonnets might militate against such a reading, the final sonnet and song with their comedic ending in celebration of an alternative vision, that of constant love, might validate humour.

If the sequence is deliberately concealing an illicit love affair (possibly fictive) by discouraging (bored) indiscriminate readers with its unvarying form, then there would be several voices which, like the imagery they use, might be in strong tension with each other. The embedding and signalling of one love series—"Inez to Manuel"—could effectively conceal the other if that is the poet's intent. The lack of variety in her versification would offer further camouflage. At the same time, by creating Inez and Manuel the poet could be signalling that the untitled love series needs to be investigated more closely, that it may have its own significance.

Finally, she may be unaware of the sexual content of her sequence which arises when Venice liberates her subconscious desires, launching both the untitled series and "Inez to Manuel." Now, we might expect to find disconcerting fusions among three or more voices: the objective, often philosophical, tones of the traveller, possibly Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley; the poet Stuart Wortley writing a love series "Inez to Manuel"; and the subjective voice of a woman in love, the *donna innominata*, possibly Lady Emmeline herself. In such a reading we hear a choric effect imaging those discussed in chapter one.

In her structure, Stuart Wortley addresses another problem for women in writing sonnet sequences: how does a woman move herself from object to subject, from fragmentation to integration. If, as R.L.Kesler argues in "The Idealisation of Women" (1990), "the fragmentation of the woman as object and the integration of the male speaker as subject go hand in

hand" (113), the woman-as-poet has some difficult obstacles to negotiate. By fragmenting her sequence through the use of three separate "narratives," opening the sequence in allusive but general chivalric terms and closing it with a song sung by a subjective I/eye, Stuart Wortley both incorporates and transcends the motives for fragmenting the woman and thereby achieves an integrated subjectivity.

Stuart Wortley artfully combines the forms of the Renaissance and the Romantic sonnet sequences. Her (fragmented) series *Inez to Manuel* recalls such Renaissance sequences as *Astrophel to Stella* or, more pertinently because of the sex of the speaker, and her frustration, Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. Spenser's *Amoretti* could have provided a model for a subjective, even biographical, love series, constituting a journey toward marriage. As Romantic poetry, Stuart Wortley's sequence has some affiliation with Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, inasmuch as it contains meditative sonnets as subjective responses to places, and a series of named love sonnets similar to Smith's sonnets "From Petrarch" and "Supposed to be written by Werter" [*sic*], all of which are discussed in the next chapter. Stuart Wortley's genius lies in combining so many strands of the sonnet tradition in a single sequence.

When Rossetti implies that she will portray "an inimitable 'donna innominata' drawn not from fancy but from feeling" (58), arguably Stuart Wortley had already done so. Stuart Wortley's *donna innominata* suffers the joys and the pains of love, but she controls her own destiny. It is quite possible that Rossetti knew of Stuart Wortley's sequence when she speculated that "one may imagine many a lady as sharing her lover's poetic aptitude."

If her untitled series of love sonnets reflects Stuart Wortley's own marriage, then *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour* precedes Wheeler Wilcox's *Sonnets of Sorrow*, in treating the theme of married love. The last sonnet (229) and the last song (230) of Stuart Wortley's anonymous series are also the last of the entire sequence, as the persona (and Stuart Wortley) returns to England. Both are untitled and both express unchanging love. In the sonnet, the world is bathed in the perfume of a summer morn, and is so drenched in love as to be almost overpowering to both touch and smell. The song expresses the same sentiments as Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning":

Tis the world of Heart and Feeling,

This unites us evermore!—

This our Union still is sealing—

. . . .

And thine—and thine for ever,
 Are my thoughts—all ages through;
 Though the universe shall sever (230;5-7,13-15)

No time nor distance can separate them, not even cosmic dissolution. She will love him “even to the edge of doom” (Shakespeare 116;12).

Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour clearly shows the benefit for women-as-poets of what M.L.Rosenthal and Sally Gall see as the advantage of *The Modern Poetic Sequence* (1983): “the sequence form allows for fragmented presentation and . . . consists of a series of independent centers and allows for an enormous range of emotion and connotation” (403). By using a complex, intertwining, tripartite structure, Stuart Wortley demonstrates the effects upon women of both the male/masculine perceptions of love, as they appear in traditional sonnet sequences and of female/feminine attitudes which concur with or question those perceptions. Her opening “pastoral” heroic sonnet may indeed offer a universal vision of the female/feminine condition, confirming Warkentin’s judgment about the design of more traditional sequences: “the symbol of its completeness is the reflective posture of the opening poem itself” (Warkentin 16). Love may well be as illusionary as freedom; hawk and falcon may be difficult to differentiate as symbols of the lover and beloved. Daily love may indeed become heroic; it is certainly a journey. By intertwining different narratives and voices, Stuart Wortley questions gendered assumptions in the conventional sonnet sequence and shows that “The particular design of a vital sequence will always come as a surprise” (Rosenthal and Gall 156). She writes a sequence which should further weaken any lingering assumptions about the artlessness of women poets.

Notes

1. The title and epigraphs for this chapter are from M.L. Rosenthal's and Sally M. Gall's 1983 *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (156), the introduction by Adrienne Rich to Judy Grahn's 1978 *The Work of a Common Woman* (11), and Germaine Warkentin's 1975 "'Love's sweetest part, variety': Petrarch and the Curious Frame of the Renaissance Sonnet Sequence" (16).

2. Betty Flowers, for example, as recently as 1992 writes of *Monna Innominata*, "The parallel to Rossetti's biography—she turned down two suitors on religious grounds—has not been ignored. We could ignore it here, but I think it best not to" (13).

3. Christina Rossetti may deliberately misread Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, for example, when she writes, "had the Great Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the 'Portuguese Sonnets,' an inimitable 'donna innominata' drawn not from fancy but from feeling" (58); or she may employ misprision in the sense that Harold Bloom means in his 1973 *The Anxiety of Influence*; or she may be deliberately underplaying Barrett Browning's influence on her own work as John Keats does with Mary Tighe (see chapter three).

4. I use *series* to refer to separate sections within a sonnet sequence, such as Shakespeare's sonnets to the young man and to the dark lady, and Farjeon's "First Love," "Interim," and "Second Love"; *fragmented series* for sonnets with the same theme, speaking with the same voice, but dispersed throughout the sequence, such as Stuart Wortley's "Inez to Manuel"; and *group* for consecutive sonnets that are part of a *fragmented series*.

5. Boswell denies the possibility of an actual male addressee within Shakespeare's sequence because any "'distinguished nobleman' would have taken offence at the 'encomiums on his beauty, and the fondling expressions' appropriate only to a 'cocker'd silken wanton'" (219, cited by de Grazia 39).

6. The first sonnet from Heloise to Abelard uses both rhymes with weak endings, *abhorring/warring*, and compound rhymes, *bore you/implore you* with the pun on *bore*.

By that vast love and passion which I bore you,

By these long years of solitude and grief,

By all my vows, I pray and I implore you,

Assuage my sorrows with a sweet relief.

Among these holy women, sin abhorring,

Whose snow-white thoughts fly ever to the Cross,
 I am a sinner, with my passions warring,
 All unrepentant, grieving for my loss.
 Oh, not through zeal, religion or devotion,
 Did I abandon those dear paths we trod;
 I followed only one supreme emotion,
 I took the veil for Abelard—not God!
 O vows, O convent, though you have estranged
 My lover's heart, behold my own unchanged! (1)

7. Because Stuart Wortley does not number her sonnets, I designate her sonnets by their page number.

8. Stuart Wortley, in this sonnet, obliquely echoes Milton in "Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint" (23). The rhythm and the sentiments of the last lines are not identical but do set up resonances. The echoes from Milton's last line, "I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night," are recomposed in Stuart Wortley's final two lines:

Of Light and Darkness both—He rose!—He reigned!
 And they retreated—fled!—crushed, vanquished, and undone! (13-14)

The darkness, the retreat, the shadows, together with the echoes of Milton, have faint vibrations with the Euridyce-Orpheus and Alcestis-Admetus myths.

9. Future references to *Biographia Literaria* by S.T. Coleridge will be abbreviated parenthetically to *BL*.

10. Dickinson equates the sun with love in "The Daisy follows soft the Sun" (106), "The *Sun—just touched* the Morning" (232), "Superfluous were the Sun" (999), and "The Sun went down—no Man looked on" (1079). These poets also resemble each other in their use of "crown" and of dashes. Although Dickinson often equates a crown with the poet, in "The *Sun—just touched* the Morning" (232) she associates sun, love, morning and crown, and in "The Sun went down—no Man looked on" (1079) she equates sun and crown.

Chapter Three

Voices Old and New: Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*

That in the very first edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* Smith produced studied variations on Petrarchan themes, and that later she headed her second volume with an epigraph from Petrarch, should alert the reader to her awareness both of the conventions of the traditional sonnet sequence and of the effect of her reversing its traditional gender roles. (Curran)

The seven hundred and eighty one subscribers to *Elegiac Sonnets* represent the nobility and gentry of the day. . . . There must have been a number, though, who, like Wordsworth and Myers, added their names because they were aware of a new voice in English poetry. (J. Wordsworth)

Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Swinburne's *A Forsaken Garden*, and Eliot's *Four Quartets* display the ways in which [Smith's] genre—and frequently her particular symbols—shaped major poetry to come after her. (Hoagwood)¹

With the publication of the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784), Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) begins the creative, financial and political process which finally makes it possible for her to leave her abusive husband in 1787, two years after the birth of her twelfth and final child, and so start her public life as a somewhat independent adult.² Her earliest undeniably political statement comes later; in her preface to *Desmond* (1792) she insists on a woman's right and duty to be political, especially if she is the mother of soldiers and statesmen: "But women it is said have no business with politics—Why not?—Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them, in which they have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged?" (cited Hilbish 148).³ Not to mention their sponsors, editors and publishers. It is significant, and pertinent to this study, that the only new editions (1992-1993) since the publication of the posthumous volume of Smith's poetry (1807) are edited by men—Stuart Curran, Terence

Hoagwood and Jonathan Wordsworth—as were the original publications in her lifetime.⁴ Given the political situation of women in the eighteenth century, the only ways in which Smith could attempt to ameliorate the condition of women was within her family and through her published writing.

Current re-evaluation of *Elegiac Sonnets* has paid attention neither to the interaction of form and voice within the sequence nor to the development of the sonnet sequence itself. Daniel Robinson, in “Reviving the Sonnet” (1995), very noticeably considers Smith’s sonnets as single poems in his comparison of them to those of Anna Seward (1747-1809), Mary Robinson (1758-1800), and Helen Maria Williams (1761?-1827), although he does treat Robinson’s *Sappho and Phaon* (1796) as a sequence. Similarly J. Wordsworth’s discussion of William Wordsworth’s use of discrete *Elegiac Sonnets* ignores form, voice and sequence. His choice to re-present a facsimile of the edition which Wordsworth owned implicitly directs the text to Wordsworth scholars, seeing Smith primarily as a possible poetic influence upon the later man-as-poet.

In this chapter I read *Elegiac Sonnets* in many ways; the ultimate intent, however, is to begin to delineate ways of reading poetry by women. To read Smith in terms of one’s own poetry (as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats ultimately do), is not the same as reading her for her own works’ sake. To read her as a woman (as Florence Hilbish does), is not necessarily the same thing as reading her as a poet; for excessive concentration on her autobiography tends to ignore her creative imagination. Reading her fragmentedly in the context of the “great” (male) Romantic poets with one’s own preconceived agenda (as J. Wordsworth does), is not the same as reading her sonnets in the context of her sequence. Reading her within the (male) literary tradition with the minimum of specific expectations (as Hoagwood does in his introduction to *Beachy Head: With Other Poems, (1807)*), is still not reading her within the context of writing by women. Not reading her at all (as most poets, scholars and critics of the last two hundred years have done), distorts the whole of the literary tradition in English, and radically affects studies of Romantic and Victorian poets.

None of her twentieth-century editors note specifically that Smith is the first poet to reclaim the sonnet sequence after its century of disuse and only the second English woman, as far as we know, to write a sonnet sequence, although some do mention that she is the first to use the sonnet in what came to be known as a distinctly Romantic way. Hoagwood notes that *Elegiac Sonnets* “established anew for English literature the importance of the sonnet and the sonnet sequence,” and Curran, in his introduction to *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (1993), that

the “revival of the sonnet in British Romanticism was driven as much by Smith’s dexterous artistic craft as by her theme” (xxvi). Robinson claims that before Keats and Wordsworth, Smith “favored a simpler, more natural language . . . a more natural, muscular English form . . . engaged in . . . metrical experimentation . . . in bold defiance of literary conventions” (106-107). He neither says nor demonstrates what he means by “muscular” and only discusses in any detail her “melancholy voice” (105).

Through her innovative form and content, Smith influenced the creation of later poetry, now known as Romantic, and that influence is apparent in circumstantial, historical and internal evidence. There were eleven editions of her *Elegiac Sonnets* and translations in both French and Italian (an accolade for English sonnets, perhaps), attesting, through circumstantial evidence, to her popularity. Her novels, which included a number of her sonnets, as Anne Ehrenpreis tells us in her introduction to Smith’s *The Old Manor House*, were read by Jane Austen, Queen Charlotte and Frances Burney (1969:vii). Smith appealed to women and men, queens and commoners, poets, authors and other buyers of books. Later women poets who knew Smith’s work include Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Smith’s sonnet-writing practice and her stated poetics, in the form of prefaces, provide guidelines for Coleridge’s 1796 definition of the “Romantic” sonnet, and some of the ideas and expressions used in Wordsworth’s preface (1800) may well have originated from Smith’s poetics. Coleridge states that he is “justified by analogy in deducing” the laws of the sonnet from the compositions of Smith and William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850) (543).⁵ Both Coleridge and Wordsworth acknowledge Smith’s poetic influence, and her poetry was read by Cambridge undergraduates (J. Wordsworth). Furthermore, a careful nuanced reading of Wordsworth’s and Keats’ poetry, such as that undertaken by a range of scholars, including F.W. Bateson (1954), George Whiting (1963), Burton Pollin (1966), Bishop C. Hunt, Jr. (1970), Paul Kelley (1982) and Stuart Curran, provides internal evidence of specific examples of how male Romantic poets read Smith.

As *Elegiac Sonnets* grows, by the addition of new poems to the end of the previous edition, the poet matures both politically and poetically. The most significant editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* were the first (1784), ending with the fourth poem in the Werter [*sic*] series (24); the third (1786) with thirty-six sonnets, the first of the additions being the final sonnet in the Werter series (25); the fifth (1789), with forty-eight sonnets, including three from Smith’s novel *Emmeline* (38-40); the sixth (1792) with fifty-nine sonnets, including five from *Celestina* (49-

53); and the second volume (1797) which has the most additions—thirty-three—of which all but nine are highly “irregular,” as opposed to only two in the first edition, and a further one in each of the third and fifth. Smith never changes the order of the sonnets in these successive enlarged editions. In the later poems she becomes more experimental in her form and also widens the circumference of her interests and concerns. Smith’s poetic practice suggests an answer to Suzanne Raitt’s question: “How can narrative, with its movement towards closure and completion, represent a subjectivity whose construction is by definition never complete?” (63). The ending of *Elegiac Sonnets*, and the completion of Smith’s self-characterisation, is always deferred by the new sonnets which Smith appends to the previous edition. Continuously Smith’s “project is abandoned rather than finished” (Brody 203).

When J. Wordsworth chooses, in 1992, to edit the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789), one through forty-eight, he imposes unnecessary restrictions upon himself. By not including the other half of the sequence, sonnets forty-nine to ninety-two, he denies himself the full pleasure of the text. Within a sonnet sequence each and every sonnet potentially modifies and amplifies any other sonnet. The first of the new sonnets (25) in the third edition, for example, completes the Werter series and the first in the sixth edition, “Supposed to have been written in a church-yard, over the grave of a young woman of nineteen” (49) illuminates sonnet twenty-four in particular. Obviously, if I had access to only the first two, or even any one of the first five, editions, my understanding of the Werter series would be restricted.

Smith follows the traditions of both elegy and sonnet sequence, but her emphasis, through successive enlarged editions, is on Anglicising and “feminising” the classical and “masculine,” in part by echoing and ventriloquising of Petrarch. The vocal strategies she uses to achieve this Anglicisation and feminisation, together with the appreciation of her sequence as an integrated work, needs and deserves careful study. I offer this chapter as a beginning.

Because Smith continued to add to *Elegiac Sonnets* as she developed as a poet and a woman, her sequence is an interesting study in the change not only from her youth to her maturity, but also in the tradition of the genre in its transition from the Renaissance to the Victorian form. As she gains in experience, acceptance and confidence, she experiments more freely with the sonnet form, creates greater depths and resonances within the sequence, increases her range of topics, and is more overt in her politics. Some sonnets consist of a single sentence, making an interesting tension between the form and the content.⁶ She imitates Petrarch, Metastasio and Goethe, and writes sonnets to specific people and on such natural phenomenon as

gossamer, a spider, glow-worms and snowdrops. Some of these later sonnets are set in Lapland, America and the Hebrides. One is written at Penshurst. She writes of the sea during the day and during the night, in winter and in summer, in storm and in calm, as seascape and as political site.

Although Sir Walter Scott is always a kindly critic, he does often point out pertinent and peculiar attributes. In Smith's work, he praises what proved to be Romantic characteristics. He applauds her detail and accuracy when speaking of natural phenomena, finds her various humble characters convincing, remarks that she is "uniformly happy in supplying them with language fitted for their station in life" (1910:331,322), and favourably compares her use of "ordinary" language to Fielding's (cited Ehrenpreis xvi). But she moves beyond the simplicity that Scott sees, as expressed in her meditative nature poems for example, to a greater sophistication of thought while retaining the simplicity of language. Were it not for the later sonnets, it would be even easier to see her sonnets "From Petrarch" as "merely" translations or imitations, rather than the re-writing that I will argue they really are.

By including imitations and translations, Smith extends the range of content of both elegy and sonnet sequence, giving both a "feminine" voice. The title of her sonnet sequence intimates that she is adapting the genre to include elegy; her content reveals that her elegiac voice lies, in part, in a transfusion of Petrarchan conventions of love and despair with the (real) political and living conditions of most of humanity, with real distress and real sorrow. Rather than writing polemical tracts, as her contemporary feminists Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Mary Anne Radcliffe (1746?-after 1810) had done, Smith dramatises, amongst other things, the difference between the hyperbolic anguish of a Petrarchan lover and the actual, daily life of an abused wife, an unsupported single mother and a long-term intended but thwarted beneficiary under crippling patriarchal law.

Smith explores the nature of her muse, validating that subject for other women and writes on topics which interest her as a woman. An overwhelming sense of powerlessness pervades her sequence; one of her most persistent themes is the unsatisfactory nature of her life as a poet and as a woman. She offers no resolution for this dissatisfaction. And yet Smith refuses to be modest and silent, and undercuts and co-opts myths of male supremacy. *Elegiac Sonnets* is political, both personally and nationally. She is "well aware that for a woman—'The post of honor is a private station'" ("Preface" 6). Her introduction to that comment, however, which is "notwithstanding that I am thus frequently appearing as an Authoress, and have derived from thence many of the greatest advantages of my life" (xii), would appear to separate the

public author from the private woman. Speaking from her own (private) experience, she becomes a (public) spokes-woman, converting the private to the public and the individual to the social. In his introduction to the 1993 edition of Smith's *Beachy Head: With Other Poems*, (1807), Hoagwood writes, "Smith devotes a substantial life's work to a complex representation of a legal, political, and economic structure that oppresses women, enslaves the poor, and violently opposes evolutionary change in the direction of freedom" (7). Although Smith's political and feminist ideology are expressed more openly in her novels and longer poems, even in her earliest work, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784), we can see that her concerns are less with her own life-story *per se*, than with the human condition towards the end of the eighteenth century.

A New Voice: Literary Influence and History

Throughout the following consideration of Smith's sequence, I use four approaches: literary history and influence; genre and transformation of voice; a deliberate *over-reading* (Neely's term), as compensation for the under-reading of the canonisers; and an investigation of recurring symbolism. This methodology provides a richly contextualised over-reading, and I can consider the suitability of each approach as I progress. The section opens with an analysis of the meditative "nature" sonnets that open *Elegiac Sonnets* (2-8), placing them in a Romantic context, emphasising the similarities and contrasts between Smith's "feminine" voice and other "manly" voices, and demonstrating that hers is a distinct voice, not just a Romantic precursor. The discussion moves into the two early series based upon Petrarch (13-16) and Werter (21-25), which demonstrate Smith's use of echo, mimicry and ventriloquism. I then look at two poems which first appeared in the fifth edition to show how Smith re-writes the sonnet sequence tradition, re-invents myth and re-works allusions (39,42). Finally I demonstrate how the sequence sets up echoes and resonances within itself, and modulates from the personal to the political, by discussing three seascapes: sonnet forty-four from the fifth edition, sixty-six and eighty-four from the final edition. Examination of such selections from *Elegiac Sonnets* shows that J. Wordsworth is correct in distinguishing Smith as "a new voice in English poetry," which he postulates W. Wordsworth did as early as the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789). It indicates, however, that J. Wordsworth undervalues her by the self-imposed limitation of his choice of edition.

Although a fairly arbitrary glance at the titles and first lines of Smith's poetry would show to what extent Wordsworth is indebted to Smith for his subject matter, her distinctive

“feminine” voice and sensibility, her capacity to create atmosphere, and her experimentation and expertise with form are, I suggest, even more pertinent to literary history. Not only has the group of seven meditative nature sonnets (2-8) not been considered together as an influence upon the Romantic tradition but, in those poems that have been read, the concept of literary history has been too narrow and the sonnets reduced to a set of influences. As early as 1784 Smith begins to transform tradition in more comprehensive ways.

In the spatial arrangement of this series of sonnets (2-8), Smith avoids being conventional. Since even the revolution of the year brings her no relief, natural order becomes irrelevant. The order of the sonnets is incongruous with the temporal occurrence of events: we might expect “To Spring” (8) and “To a Nightingale” (3) to be adjacent and to open the series, and similarly for “The Close of Spring” (2) and “On the Departure of the Nightingale” (7) to be at the end. But the series opens with “The Close of Spring” followed by “To a Nightingale” and ends with “On the Departure of the Nightingale” followed by “To Spring.” Were these seven sonnets a complete elegiac sequence of their own, we might expect “To Hope” (6) and “To the Moon” (4) to come at the end, inasmuch as they offer the little consolation that Smith’s persona finds. On the other hand, this displacement, deferral and inversion of the seasons resists established order, an order that Smith seems not to find in her life.

One of the delights of Smith’s sonnets, however, is the symmetrical arrangement she often employs; this series is no exception. The central sonnet is “To The South Downs” (5), cited by both J. Wordsworth and Kelley as an influence upon W. Wordsworth’s “An Evening Walk.” On either side of the fifth sonnet is “To The Moon” (4), which offers some hope—and has affinities with Coleridge’s “The Nightingale” (264-267)—and “To Hope” (6), which is hopeless.⁷ Moving out from the centre of the series, we find a neat symmetry in “To A Nightingale” (3) and “On The Departure Of The Nightingale” (7). And, finally, the series begins with “Written At The Close of Spring” (2) and ends with “To Spring” (8). Smith does impose an order, just not the conventional or expected.

This analysis of the series begins with the fifth sonnet since there is no “natural” order within this series and since “To the South Downs” (5) is central both to the series and to Smith’s early concerns. Because of the critical awareness of the influence of this sonnet specifically upon both Keats and Wordsworth, I read it in several different ways: within the context of autobiography, within the series, within *Elegiac Sonnets*, within the (male) sonnet sequence tradition as Smith knew it, and in the context of Romanticism.⁸

To The South Downs

Ah! hills belov'd!—where once, an happy child,
 Your beechen shades, your turf, your flowers among,
 I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild,
 And woke your echoes with my artless song.
 Ah! hills belov'd—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 broken heart to throb no more?
 And you, Aruna!—in the vale below,
 As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,
 Can you one kind Lethean cup bestow,
 To drink a long oblivion to my care?
 Ah! no!—When all, e'en Hope's last ray is gone,
 There's no oblivion—but in death alone! (5)

One not inconsiderable difference between Smith and Wordsworth is their perception of the effect their voices have upon nature. Smith's persona minimises the poet's role: I "*woke* your echoes with my artless song" (5;4 emphasis added). Wordsworth's states "I *taught*, 'a happy child,'/The echoes of your rocks my carols wild" (463;19-20 emphasis added), maximising his role, as he does in his preface.⁹ In her preface, Smith credits her readers with sensibility and taste (1784), whereas Wordsworth credits himself with teaching these to his readers (1800:735-741). Both Smith and Wordsworth, however, teach new songs for others to echo, and rewrite echoes from older songs.

Smith is also an innovator in tone for, as J. Wordsworth argues, "The melancholy of Gray and Goldsmith has given place to a more personal mingling of mood and observation." It is to Smith's fifth sonnet that Kelley refers when he remarks on Smith's and Wordsworth's "artificial melancholy" (220). There is nothing artificial in Smith's melancholic voice, however, as Hilbish shows in *Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist (1749-1806)* (1941), and as Smith herself says in her preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*: when "I first struck the chords of the melancholy lyre. . . . I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy." Whiting's insight that "a comparable blending of traditional ideas and real emotion" occurs in both Smith's seventh sonnet and Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) can be extended to include all of the series of

sonnets under discussion. By using the same words to describe the lack of artificiality in the melancholy of both poets, he answers Kelley's charge against Smith, while also validating Keats' sorrow. Smith's sentiment that "melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations these moments brought" ("Preface" 1,2) predates by sixteen years Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . recollected in tranquility" through "contemplation, thought and feeling" (1800:735,388,400).

Reading Smith's fifth sonnet within the sonnet sequence tradition evokes echoes of the (earlier) traditional lament by Shakespeare's persona in "How like a winter hath my absence been/From thee /. . . For summer and his pleasure wait on thee" (97;1-2,11). His absence from his "lovely boy" has changed his perception and appreciation of other seasons, even as he enumerates the pleasures that those seasons would normally have for him and are having for others. His sonnet ninety-eight is even more pertinent:

From you I have been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,

. . . .

Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell. (98;1-2,5-7)

Unlike his situation in the previous sonnet, now he cannot even enumerate the pleasures of summer, as Smith's persona can no longer feel the "beechen shades" although she knows that the grass and the flowers remain. Her condition causes the erasure of those shades.

Reading this sonnet in the context of both Smith's sequence and the sonnet sequence tradition does, of course, complicate the voicing. Shakespeare has already altered the traditional courtly love sequence by having a male persona engaging with a male object. In Smith's series a woman is the speaking subject, an innovation to a poet probably unaware of Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621). The (male) object has all but disappeared, becoming not only silent but invisible and insubstantial. If we read sonnet five as if Smith were the speaker and the sonnet were autobiographical, there are echoes of mimicry of the male tradition, and the suggestion that for lesser, artificial, courtly complaints a cup of water drawn from the classical Lethe might be both available and effective, but for real anguish even the English Arun, feminised and mythologised as the "Aruna," can offer neither forgetfulness nor solace.

If we read this sonnet autobiographically and in the context of Smith's sequence, the Arun takes on further mythological proportions—however local and diminished. It is treated as the source of poetry by Thomas Otway, William Collins, William Hayley (as Smith tells us in an endnote to sonnet thirty-three), John Sargent (identified by Curran in a footnote to the same sonnet), and Smith herself.¹⁰ Rather than bestowing forgetfulness upon the persona of this poem, however, this anglicised Lethe conveys a sense of the loss of that peaceful and pastoral space which occurred through Smith's marriage and consequent residence in London. There is also the sense of entrapment that a woman may well feel as a wife whose only socially accepted way to end her disastrous marriage is when "death doth us part." We know that she was married at fourteen and that the marriage was a disaster from the start. What little hope there was, has, like Keats' nightingale, flown away.

The very titles of the sonnets in this series (2-8) are evocative of Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale." Furthermore, her influence upon his poem extends beyond sonnet seven, singled out by Pollin and Whiting, and clearly includes the series of seven sonnets two through eight. Smith's seven sonnets of fourteen lines each is comparable to Keats' eight stanzas of ten lines each, allowing for the difference between sonnets in a sequence and stanzas in a continuous ode. In Smith's series, the nightingale departs in sonnet seven, leaving nothing "but despair" in sonnet eight. In Keats' ode, the nightingale does not depart until the last of eight stanzas, leaving the persona "Forlorn."

Sometimes Keats takes Smith's feminine image and makes it more masculine. Sometimes, options are more readily open to him, as a man, than they are for Smith as a woman. Smith's "Each simple flower, which [Spring] had nurs'd in dew/ . . . / Another May new buds and flowers shall bring" (2;2,13) becomes Keats' "mid-May's eldest child,/ . . . full of dewy wine" (5;8-9). Keats picks up and transforms "nurs'd" and "May new buds" to "May's eldest child," keeping the parent/child relationship but weakening the strong maternal image implicit in "nursed." He also changes that feminine "nurs'd in dew" to "dewy wine"; it would not be decorous for a poet-as-woman to indulge in "a draught of vintage" (11).

Smith's voice in the final line of "The Close of Spring" (2) is questioning, open, not conclusive, not promissory: "Ah! why has happiness—no second Spring?" This is not John Milton's consolation in "Lycidas"; neither is it Percy Bysshe Shelley's (later) hope that "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" with its rhyming couplet suggesting firm closure. It does,

however, set a pattern for both Keats' ode and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (1819), in closing with a question which denies closure.

In the "conversation" between Keats and Smith, a major theme in both her third and fourth sonnets and his stanza seven is the difficulty of being a poet in this harsh world. Keats denies Smith's hypothesis that the nightingale is melancholy because it has suffered, directly or indirectly, as have life's human victims but, at the same time, he, too, complains of the human condition. In his amplification of Smith's "Pale Sorrow's victims" (3;9), he is concerned with the aging, mutability and diseases of men, including, of course, the illness and death of his brother. Smith's emphasis, however, is on the distresses of women, including herself as a "songstress sad" (3;13). She feminises the nightingale by sharply and poignantly recalling Philomela and Procne, both of whom overcome "disastrous love" (3;12).

Smith continues the theme of suffering into her fourth sonnet, addressing the moon, "Queen of the silver bow" (4;1):

The sufferers of the earth perhaps may go,
 Releas'd 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! (4;9-14)

Those "sad children of despair and woe" may be metaphoric in the sense that despair and woe give birth to sad children. Or the phrase could refer to all people as children who suffer despair and woe. Or Smith may mean actual victimised children. And children, unlike men, cannot quaff the "one kind Lethean cup" (5;11) of the next sonnet to ease their "cup of sorrow." Nor can they swallow hemlock, opium or wine.

The death wish which closes Smith's fourth sonnet has, I think, no precedent in English poetry: she seeks oblivion, not in a pagan or Christian afterlife, despite that "pilgrim," but in the serenity of the moon. She is seeking more than the oblivion of the following sonnet, more than Keats' various modes of forgetfulness. She anticipates Keats' speaker in his sonnet "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" (1816) who discovers the "pure serene" (7) which makes him feel like some "watcher of the skies" (9). Later, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), with her female afterworld on "a morn by men unseen," writes "Ne'er saw I such a wondrous scene—/ . . . /Nor so serene array—" (24;13,15). Keats finds the possibility of a new serene through the

contemplation of the planets, Dickinson through a female afterworld, and Smith through an afterworld offered by that symbol of the feminine, the moon.

Smith's speaker in "To Hope" (6) does not significantly ameliorate her position, except inasmuch as she comes to accept the necessity of her lot. She creates an atmosphere of hope denied and delusion recognised:

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 (6;7-10)

Keats' echoes of Smith's phrasing, cadence and ambiance are more significant, perhaps, than verbal parallels. The nightingale has misleadingly given Keats' persona a glimpse of freedom from the cares of being a man, but his initial state has only improved a little. Smith's sonnet is to Hope, a bird whom the poet is trying to "lure" to her "haunts forlorn" (6;2) but who "flies" (6;8) away. Moving from stanza seven into stanza eight, Keats expresses disillusion and loss as he returns to his specific reality. The nightingale has "Charm'd magic casements . . . in faery lands forlorn" (7;69-70), but the poet now returns "from thee to my sole self!/Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well/As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf" (8;71-74). The use of "forlorn," "charm" and "charm'd," and the similar sense of "magic," "faery" and "Enchantress," are obvious, but, more powerfully, the loss, the despair, the flattering/cheating/deceiving hope/fancy/elf, and the return to self, are common to both poems.

"To Spring" (8) is Smith's first experimental sonnet, except for minor variation in rhyme scheme in "To a Nightingale" (3)—*abbacddc efefgg*. Formally, Smith is consciously aiming for an effective English sonnet.¹¹ Throughout *Elegiac Sonnets* she intermingles the Petrarchan, the Shakespearean and, occasionally, the Spenserean linked rhyme scheme. As Curran points out, "only two of Smith's [sonnets] follow this [Petrarchan] pattern. She is much more drawn to the Shakespearean model," a form which structures "forty-four of her sonnets. The rest [forty-eight, more than half of the final edition] are in various experimental hybrids, of a type then called 'irregular'" (4fn).¹² Although his comment is true in terms of the rhyme scheme, he does not consider the more important innovations in the relationship of prosody and argument.

Traditionally, the structure of the argument of a Shakespearean sonnet follows the rhyme pattern: the first quatrain introduces an argument, the second and third develop it further, and the couplet, often epigrammatic, closes both sonnet and argument. We see such correlation between

rhetoric and prosody in "To the South Downs" (5) for example. The first quatrain evokes Smith's childhood home; the second seeks in that place, but does not find, solace for her present sorrow; the third turns to another solution in the same locality; and the couplet accepts that there is no comfort except death. In a Petrarchan sonnet the octet conventionally offers a thesis and the sestet its antithesis.

Smith rarely uses a correspondence between prosody and rhetoric; fitting the argument to neither a strict three quatrains and couplet, nor to an uncomplicated octet and sestet. She favours a modified octet and sestet, but not necessarily as thesis and antithesis. Rather, she often presents a natural situation in the octet and, in the sestet, the human situation as complementary or antithetical, with strong closure at the end of the octet. The sonnet usually ends in a rhyming couplet, which is an integral part of the sestet but is often problematic. In her experimental sonnets, Smith often creates a tension or a counterpoint between the structure of the argument and the rhyme pattern.

The eighth sonnet tends to be Petrarchan rather than Shakespearean, except that the break helping to define two structural units comes at the end of the seventh line.

To Spring

Again the wood, and long with-drawing vale,
 In many a tint of tender green are drest,
 Where the young leaves unfolding, scarce conceal
 Beneath their early shade, the half-formed nest
 Of finch or wood-lark; and the primrose pale,
 And lavish cowslip, wildly scatter'd round,
 Give their sweet spirits to the sighing gale.
 Ah! season of delight!—could aught be found
 To soothe awhile the tortur'd 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. (8)

The argument (apparently) also falls into two sentences, dividing the sonnet in two. On a first reading, however, the sense and the tone continue into the eighth line, destabilising the expected pattern.

The rhyme pattern reveals further complexity both in itself and in the relationship of agreement and rhyme. If *conceal* is a slant rhyme with *vale*, then there are two Shakespearean quatrains, with a link rhyme across them which makes the octet, in terms of its rhymes, a modified Spenserean/Shakespearean: ababacac. In this instance, the total rhyme scheme is abab acac dcdeee. If, on the other hand, *conceal* and *vale* are not rhymes, then Smith's rhyme scheme—abcb adad edefff—is even more intricate and is a further departure from sonnets by other poets. The form is a hybrid more complicated than two simple Shakespearean quatrains followed by a simple Petrarchan sestet. The sonnet ends in a rhymed triplet, rather than the expected epigrammatic closing couplet of both standard Shakespearean and Spenserean sonnets or the unrhymed or partially rhymed triplet of the Petrarchan sonnet. The triplet at the end is, I think, her own invention and its rhyming agreement is in tension with both rhetoric and syntax with its breaks and dashes. The argument moves from “pain,” “tortur'd” and “wound” to “fair,” “harmony” and “balmy air” and back to “despair.” Furthermore, lines eight through eleven form yet another Shakespearean quatrain—cdcd—confounding the expected rhyming across multiples of four lines. The rhyme scheme, then, works in co-operation with both the syntactical break at line seven and the rhetorical break at both the end of line seven and the mid-point of line eight, while working against both syntax and rhetoric in the first two quatrains.

Despite local tensions between its argument and form, this sonnet conveys a sense of balance. The unexpected syntax, reversals and images resonate with other words, other lines, other structures. The reversal at the end of the final line, “but despair,” for example, parallels the unexpected turn within line eight. The last line of the sestet echoes with the last line of the octet, although the syntactical close of the first part of the sonnet occurs at the end of the seventh line. The sense of harmony and closure evoked by the triplet—the “prospect fair,” the “sounds of harmony,” the “balmy air” (carrying overtones of melody), and the “power to cure all sadness”—is jarred and unsettled by those final two words, in the same way as the sense of peace at the end of line seven is broken by the continuation into line eight. Smith has total control over her chosen restrictive and restricting form, an expertise which gives her amazing freedom.

The imagery, like the form, insists on being re-read because it thwarts standard expectations of a description of spring. The nest is only “half-formed,” with its potential for

fulfillment; but it is also open to destruction. The “lavish cowslip” is “wildly scattered,” carrying a sense of dispersal, of both excess and fragmentation. After re-reading, we can see that spring is, in itself, very fragile, very prone to damage. Those “tender green” leaves and grasses express their fragility in their tenderness. Smith has such consummate art that Coleridge’s assessment of effective poetry is applicable both to her sequence and to (some) individual sonnets: “The reader [is] carried forward . . . pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward” (*BL* 14;11). It is not only within discrete sonnets that form and content create resonances and demand to be reread; as my argument will make increasingly clear, the whole sequence acts as an echo chamber. Both form and content tend to be more sophisticated and challenging as *Elegiac Sonnets* proceeds, so later sonnets encourage the reader to return to those earlier in the sequence. In the context of the sequence as a whole, for example, the “sighing” of the “gale” in “To Spring” (8) reinforces and foreshadows the persona’s intrinsic unhappiness, and the “gale” itself also has the potential for devastation.

Over one hundred and sixty years have passed since Wordsworth partially acknowledged his debt to Smith, in 1833, and paid her an explicit critical tribute. In a note to “Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off Saint Bees’ Heads,” he acknowledges that his “versification” is based on “St. Monica” by “Charlotte Smith” so she is a very significant influence. He adds that she is

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 (*Works* 724)

How right he was in his prediction but, in this apparent praise, W. Wordsworth, like J. Wordsworth, is actually belittling Smith. She wrote neither “little” nor “unambitiously.” Furthermore, as Curran points out, Smith attained “a technical mastery in her final volume that qualifies her to sit among the most select poets of this [Romantic] age,” and W. Wordsworth would have known all her works. This reference to Smith comes in the final paragraph of a six-paragraph note. It has a slight and discontinuous history; George Whiting unearthed it (6) in 1963, Kelley again disinterred it (220) in 1982, and all three editors of the recent editions of her poems air it.

The (male) Romantics, I suggest, and Wordsworth in particular as the first, had the problem of dissociating themselves from successful women-as-poets and redefining what constitutes “manly” writing for poets-as-men when they wanted to establish their own credibility as “manly,” to validate self-exploration as a laudable quest, and to justify their self-absorption and their claim to “feminine” sensibility. Wordsworth associates manliness with importance—“when the style is manly, and the subject of some importance” (739)—and despair and idleness with unmanliness—“idleness and unmanly despair” (737). His statement that poets have been disinherited from “figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets” (736) is exclusionary, and implicitly undermines the legitimacy of women-as-poets who have no inheritance poetically or financially, and are neither sons nor fathers. As Marlon Ross argues, Wordsworth “joins forces with the disembodied voices of tradition and reaction, for he subtly and quietly reasserts and solidifies the priority of male needs and desires” (391).¹³

* * *

Smith’s manipulation of voice is as significant for the reading of literature by women as her experimentation with form, content and mood is for Romantic (and later) poetic history. Two series of sonnets, “From Petrarch” (13-16) and “Supposed to be written by Werter” (21-25), best exemplify her use of ventriloquism, echo and parody. Amongst the thirty-six sonnets that Curran sees “as not being her personal expressions” (xxvi), are these nine, in which she uses the voices of Petrarch (13-16) and Werther (21-25), and those in which she speaks through Metastasio (17) and characters in her own novels (38-40,49-53).¹⁴ Unlike Curran’s argument and Robinson’s claim that Smith tends “to submerge [her] gender by adopting male voices” (117), I claim that her personal expression, in an important sense, is most clear in these very sonnets.

Imitation was a popular mode in the eighteenth century, but if we read Smith’s ventriloquising sonnets as merely imitation we will miss their greater significance. If we read them while ignoring their context within her sequence and the conventions of the genre, we will under-read and under-value them. The determination of voice within these nine sonnets depends absolutely upon an awareness of her voice in other sonnets, in particular, her lyricism and her lack of hyperbole. Smith’s purpose in these sonnets, I suggest, is as political as it is poetical, and as poetical as it is political.

One might try to imagine how a mature (pregnant and/or nursing) woman, in an abusive situation, who has to worry about how to put bread on the table, bread which her husband is quite likely to throw at her, would react to the traditional Petrarchan love sonnet sequence with its hyperbolic imaginary complaint.¹⁵ Smith's despair was concrete, actual, and faced her every day in its potentiality. Reading her rewriting of Petrarch, Goethe and Metastasio enables us to understand, to some extent, such a woman's sense of some absurdity in the Petrarchan posture and conventions, and of the portrayal of the "ideal" woman when placed within the context of the situation of her own life.¹⁶ We can begin to perceive some intimations of her political/poetical reaction to this genre.

Through ventriloquism, echo and parody, Smith uses voices other than her own to express herself and her politics indirectly. Curran mentions that Smith "emphasizes again and again that she belongs to a long tradition of singers and that her poems transmit a number of ventriloquized voices" (xxvi), but he does not appear to be suggesting the intricacies of interplay among those voices, the resonances between the authentic and (what Elizabeth Harvey and I mean by) the ventriloquised or assumed voices, or the effect of such intertextuality.

A single sonnet may have many different voicings and readings, both intersexual and intertextual. By an *intersexual* utterance I mean one spoken by a woman (or a man) as if she (or he) were a man (or woman). Because this is a gender study of voice and much of my emphasis is on ventriloquism, echo and mimicry, I need to distinguish between intertextualities that arise between works by writers of the same and of the opposite sex/gender; the latter I designate as *intersexualities*. If the reader presumes that Smith simplistically adopts a male voice then s/he will not hear any intersexuality. The presupposition that the poet is a woman and that most of the sequence is spoken in a woman's voice gives rise to intersexual readings since both courtly love and sonnet sequences are traditionally written/spoken by men. Intersexual readings rely on knowledge of any particular sonnet's provenance, and arise through borrowings from, allusions to, and ventriloquism of texts by men. Smith gives endnotes on geography and natural history, and makes literary allusions, also endnoted, to Petrarch, Shakespeare, John Milton, Alexander Pope, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Erasmus Darwin, and Goethe, to name the most preeminent.

Since Smith would be unaware of Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, she would probably see herself as revolutionary in her usurpation of that male genre, the sonnet sequence, and would, therefore, be very conscious of the displacement that her voice would, and indeed does, cause. Through her use of the voices of men, "invoking a poetic meaning in excess of the

sentence" (G.Scott 90), she makes her readers much more aware of the woman-as-poet, -as the object of a love sonnet, -as a conventional symbol, -as mimic, and -as a very sophisticated speaker. By speaking through the voices of men, she mimics traditional Petrarchan love sonnets and the various conventions of the genre that she is rewriting.

Smith's complex multivocal sonnets exemplify what Nancy Lindisfarne sees as an effective approach for today's feminists; they treat "gender as a contested discourse" (82). Smith challenges and disrupts concepts which arise from gender constructs. She de-stabilises rigid hierarchical gender codes. She takes over, displaces and de-stabilises the centre, both under-lining and over-ruling the narrative voice of the dominant culture. In a "dialectical reversal of power," she takes the "radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female 'Other'" (Butler ix) to expose not only a man's dependency but also, in a complicated way, the "masculinity" of the supposedly feminine other.

She refuses the (potential) disadvantages of being a woman by capitalising on the power of the masculine voice and, in her subsequent intersexualities, spotlights masculinist positions even as she plays with male/masculine/masculinist texts. By using Petrarch's and Goethe's/Werther's voices, for example, she overcomes personal and social inhibitions and prohibitions. She uses the tension which Gail Scott sees arising between "borrowed [malestream] narrative" and the women's "movement towards becoming more 'centred' with the intervention of the feminist voice" (98). Ventriloquism, then, enables her to compare the grief of men-as-lovers with that of women-as-wives. She sets up reverberations between that ventriloquism and her own "authentic" voice.

If "women's narrative constructions of themselves are always precarious," as Jacques Lacan implies and Raitt states, then Smith takes advantage of the fact that "women's possession of their language is continually disputed" (150). By de-stabilising meaning through ventriloquism, Smith both emphasises and defies Raitt's thesis that the "instability of the narrative subject becomes a crisis of personal identity" (150). She refracts the male construction through her own prism of multiple meaning, causing both his identity and his narrative to fragment, in the same way as she fragments natural order in her early series of "nature" sonnets (2-8). Ventriloquism, in conjunction with the genre(s) Smith chooses to use, within which each sonnet is but a moment of being in time, fragments the personal I, both hers and the men-as-poets she mimics, and denies an independent, integrated, authentic voice and personhood.

Ventriloquism also allows Smith to play roles other than woman-as-wife, woman-as-mother, woman-as-daughter, poet-as-woman. Wearing other poets' clothes empowers her. It creates a space in which she can write of love, for example, for although as Judy Simons notes, "Poems and novels by women could safely take love as their theme" (189), a love-centred sonnet sequence by someone like Smith who was separated from her husband might be far more risky. The conspicuous absence of any testimony to love in Smith's own voice, except when muted to "a breaking heart" (5;8) as in sonnet five, illuminates her heterosexual love experience—which was, at the very least, a lack. At the same time, she refutes the possible charge of egotism and autobiography by speaking through an-other voice.

My interest at this point is to show that Smith sees the two series, Petrarch (13-16) and Werter (21-25), as cohesive units; to demonstrate her sense of humour which she displays in parody; to establish that she signals her intent as she moves from parody to subjectivity; and to open the possibility that she creates a structural pattern in the Petrarch series which she follows in the more complex Werter series. It will be useful to demonstrate her method of rewriting the tradition in "From Petrarch" before looking at the more complex later group "Supposed to be Written by Werter" (21-25).

Smith's first lines in the "From Petrarch" (13-16) group are always translations, identified in her notes, but her elaborations of those lines tell different stories. As Curran notes, "Smith does borrow Petrarch's underlying conception, but she treats it independently." In the first sonnet in the series, she establishes both the tradition and the male voice of the speaker by naming "Laura" which, significantly, Petrarch's original poem, number 145, does not do.¹⁷ All the sonnets in the series echo poems written after Laura's death. Smith's speaker refers to Laura only once before her own concerns take over.

Although it might be missed in a first reading, the most notable feature of sonnet thirteen is how untypical both the diction and the metre are in the sequence so far. Even a fairly cursory reading of all the sonnets available in the final edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* would soon disclose that this sonnet is unique within the sequence. Tetrameters immediately draw attention to this, the one sonnet in her entire sequence in which she uses only four feet *per* line.

Oh! place me where the burning noon
 Forbids the wither'd flow'r to blow;
 Or place me in the frigid zone,
 On mountains of eternal snow:

. . .

Prisoner or free—obscure or known,
 My heart, oh Laura! still is thine.
 Whate'er my destiny might be,
 That faithful heart, still burns for thee. (13;1-4,11-14)

In this rendition of Petrarch's protestation of undying love (145), Smith uses many standard binary tropes: in fame or in poverty, in youth or in old age, in Heaven or on earth, in freedom or imprisonment. Not only are the extremes unusual for her but, unlike nearly all other sonnets in *Elegiac Sonnets*, this one is rich in the vocabulary of the courtly-love tradition and opens on a declamatory note. In the first ten lines of the next sonnet Smith again echoes this traditional lexicon, replete with *golden tresses*, *Zephyr's sighs*, *charming eyes* (both pleasing and bewitching), *melting pity*, *nymph divine*, *suffusion*, *Beauteous tints*, *tender heart*, *melodious voice*, *goddess*, *not mortal maid*.

Smith's metrics and language signals that she begins the series with parody, exaggerating the hyperbole, the polarities, and the courtly conventions of Petrarch's sonnets. When, in sonnet fourteen, she re-writes Petrarch's "*Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale, / Ma d'angelica forma*" ("Her gait was not like that of mortal things, / But of angelic forms" (trans. Armi 90, 9-10)) as "Thy soft melodious voice, thy air, thy shape, / Were of a goddess—not a mortal maid" (14;9-10), she draws attention to her own parody by partially echoing Shakespeare's: "I grant I never saw a goddess go; / My mistress when she walks treads on the ground" (130;11-12).¹⁸ Shakespeare had replaced the unattainable lady who led Petrarch and Dante to God with an all too attainable mistress.

Although many of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* end in a despair that can only be cured by death, or in the acknowledgement of the thorns upon her path, in the final four lines of sonnet fourteen the sentiments and the "poetic" diction illustrate parodic excess.

Yet tho' 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:
 That shaft extracted, does not cure the wound! (14;11-14)

Throughout this sonnet, Smith emphasises stock phrases by repeating them: *charm/charm/charming* (14;3), *My heart, my tender heart/this heart, this tender heart* (14;8), *cure/cure*—both within these lines and from earlier lines. Her technique, here, is to encourage

the reader to look closely at what she is doing; then, having made her point, she is free to develop the series in ways that are pertinent to her own situation. One of the conspicuous devices she employs throughout *Elegiac Sonnets* is the repetition of “hope,” usually deferred or denied, “hopelessness,” and “thorns,” a cohesive technique similar to that which J.W.Lever sees in Sir Philip Sidney’s reiteration of *sighs, cares, heart, glory, grieve* (16). But even in her use of these recurring sentiments she is double-voicing, and sometimes multi-voicing, enabling her to depict real despair even while she parodies and revises Petrarchan love conventions.

In Smith’s next sonnet (15), and Petrarch’s sonnet two hundred and seventy nine, the dead Laura/“Laura,” though not named, is given a voice, but again the English poet makes a significant revision. Petrarch changes the speaker from his own persona to Laura at the end of the octet, following the Italian rhetorical model. Smith, however, gives “Petrarch” and “Laura” equal space by her significant break at the end of the seventh line, which is more regular even if less conventional.

Even before “Laura” speaks in line eight, the reader who has some familiarity with *Elegiac Sonnets* realises that Smith has returned to her own natural English vocabulary:

Where the green leaves exclude the summer beams,
 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 (15;1-5)

Petrarch’s “*O roco mormorar di lucide onde*” (229;3) becomes “with liquid lapse, the lucid stream” (15;3), replicating the sound of the water as its small waves lap against the pebbles. She replaces Petrarch’s emotional opening—“If a moaning of birds” (1)—with a descriptive summer image. The traditional zephyrs are now natural breezes, in keeping with Smith’s more natural diction. The exclusion of the sun is caused by the green leaves; its warmth is not removed by mountain tops or frigid zones. As was the deified woman earlier, the natural sublime is Anglicised. Instead of uttering loud complaints, “Petrarch” is able to say “Pensive I lay.”

Smith is not just rewriting the sonnet sequence tradition; she is deliberately feminising it as Wordsworth will later masculinise poetic sensibility. Smith/“Laura” expands a straightforward physical description of “Petrarch’s” grief with an organic image and a gender reference—“And like a blighted flower, your manly prime/In vain and hopeless sorrow, fade away” (15;11-12). This is no virile growth; the flower is blighted. It may not be too great a

stretch to suggest that Smith might be applying the same sentiments to the decline of the sonnet sequence in English prior to her own writing and to the decline of the Petrarchan courtly lover. She does, after all, open her own sequence with references to her "Partial Muse" (1;1); she mentions her need to snatch "wild flowers,/To weave fantastic garlands" (1;3-4) of poetry, referring to *Elegiac Sonnets*, and sees the need for new "garlands wild" (5;3) and her own "artless song" (5;4).

The "Laura" whom Heaven reveals in sonnet fifteen is, in her apotheosis, no fleshly woman and her speech is what one might expect from some Heavenly spirit. She is no longer a goddess. Heaven and earth still make their appearance, but instead of representing extreme polarities, earth is where Laura's/"Laura's" body lies; Heaven contains "her angel form" (15;7), an approximation of Petrarch's sentiments. Laura does, however, command "Petrarch" to "yield not thus to culpable despair" (15;13), to prevent "Grief and sadness" from causing his life to "decay," and to remember that sorrow is "vain and hopeless" (15;10,2). Whereas Petrarch's Laura ends with her own situation, her new heavenly vision, Smith's "Laura" ends with concern for "Petrarch."

Smith creates a tension between the division of voices, the rhyme scheme, the argument and the syntax:

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. . . ." (15;5-8)

"To say" (15;8) looks both backwards and forwards, so that it connects "Petrarch's" speech to "Laura's," as do Smith's use of rhyme to write across the first quatrain and the lack of strong punctuation to separate the two voices. Line eight focuses attention on the form, for, in a Petrarchan sonnet, we would expect the *volta* to occur at the end of that line, not at the beginning. Further, we would expect the rhymes to emphasise the argument by being arranged as an octet and a sestet. But the rhyme scheme in Smith's sonnet is Shakespearean, complete with a final couplet. Its terminal punctuation, however, occurs only at the end of lines twelve and fourteen, neither at the end of the first two quatrains nor at the end of the octet. In a sonnet heralded as Petrarchan we might have expected a more rigid formality. All the sonnets in this series appear in the first edition, but it is not until the preface to the third edition that Smith

expresses her own sense that although she has attempted some sonnets "on the Italian model" she feels that "those which were less regular will be more pleasing." This, too, is an understatement.

In both her Petrarch and her Werter series (21-25) Smith's persona speaks through the voice of a man, but the later series is more complex. For one thing, the last of this series, sonnet twenty-five, is not in the first edition; it is the first new poem of the third edition. Smith uses a strict Shakespearean form in the later series (21-25), establishing the sonnets as English despite their German provenance; her rhymes are true, the rhyme pattern is abab cdcd efef gg, and the argument falls into three quatrains and a couplet which is reflected in the syntax.

Furthermore, because Charlotte Smith speaks through Goethe to another "Charlotte," the beloved of Werter, the Italian "Laura" and the English "Charlotte" do not have the same significance and are positioned differently. "Laura" is immediately named to establish that the Petrarch series (13-16) either imitates or parodies Petrarch's sonnets. Charlotte is named only in the fourth sonnet of the Werter series. The role of "Charlotte" seems to be more creative. She functions not only to identify the series as both parodic and imitative, but also to act as an echo chamber for Charlotte Smith, thus providing an ironic inversion of the female object in the sonnet sequence tradition.

Smith is not merely multi-vocal; by ventriloquising other voices, she becomes a medium, a conduit. She writes a series of sonnets in which Charlotte Smith speaks through her persona of indeterminate sex who speaks through Goethe who speaks through Werter who speaks to "Charlotte." In terms of voice these five sonnets are circular. "Charlotte" is the prime mover as well as a stationary term in the fourth sonnet. The circle metaphorically begins and ends with "Charlotte."

The resonances between men's and women's voices in this sonnet are remarkable. The two most obvious male personae are distinct: a reactive one from within Goethe's novel authored by a man, the other within the sonnet sequence authored by a woman. Moreover, through Smith's adaptation of a line from *Eloisa to Abelard* by Pope (1688-1744), the intersexuality becomes multi-layered.¹⁹ Smith cites and acknowledges "And drink delicious poison from her eyes!" (21;8) as borrowed from Pope: "Still drink delicious poison from thy eye" (122). By changing the context and the voicing of the line, and deliberately changing the personal pronoun—in her endnote she cites the second person personal pronoun—Smith already has Werter ventriloquising Eloisa. The ventriloquism is then intensified as Smith speaks through Werter. This is intersexuality with a vengeance.

By references to Goethe and Pope, Smith also enables the reader to establish her tone. Although some women writing in the voice of some men may be able to talk sincerely of drinking "delicious poison from her eyes," the combination, in this instance, of the signalled ventriloquism, the Petrarchan tradition, Romantic despair and suicide, Pope's renowned misogyny, the disastrous nature of the love affair of Heloise and Abelard, and Smith's own enforced marriage at fourteen to a husband who was not only sexually unfaithful from the start but also flaunted his infidelities, makes parodic ventriloquism much more likely than straightforward imitation. The borrowing from Pope is placed emphatically at the end of the "octet" as Werter moves from inaction to action. Again Smith uses hyperbole, as she does in her earlier series modelled on Petrarch, not her usual mode of expression. Furthermore, the quatrain that closes with Pope's line opens with a reference to Goethe's lunatic and is endnoted by Smith: "Like the poor maniac" (21;5). Only a maniac, or a courtly lover, would use either such actions or such words. Smith is mimicking the courtly love tradition and the figure of the courtly poet. She is, at the same time, ranking herself with great eighteenth-century men-as-writers.

In this series Smith employs strategies similar to those she used in the Petrarch series (13-16). As we have seen, the first sonnet (13) of the earlier series supplied a context for that series through the title, the reference to "Laura" and the use of conventional language. Whereas all the sonnets in the Petrarch series were entitled "From Petrarch," in this series only the first is titled "Supposed to be Written by Werter" (21). The rest, twenty-two to twenty-five, are merely headed "By the Same," followed by a subtitle except in the case of sonnet twenty-four. "By the Same" emphasises the integrity of the series even though the last sonnet, twenty-five, was added in the third edition.

Smith again uses the declamatory opening for the first sonnet of the Werter series (21), as she did for the initial sonnet of the Petrarch series (13): "Go! cruel tyrant of the human breast!/To other hearts, thy burning arrows bear" (21;1-2). She uncharacteristically personifies love, and ends the sonnet with "So round the flame the giddy insect flies,/And courts the fatal fire, by which it dies." This sonnet contains all the obligatory emotionalism of the Petrarchan sequence, with "despair," "passion's helpless slave," an added emphasis on death appropriate for a potential suicide, and the "grave" as the destination. The conventional figurative language epitomises the courtly love tradition, and the quotation from Pope reinforces awareness of the extent to which she is conscious of changing the conventions not only of the Renaissance

sonneteers but also of the Enlightenment poetic structures. Smith prefers the sonnet form to Pope's heroic couplets.

Following the pattern set in the Petrarch series, the second sonnet of the Werter series, twenty-two, moves from a dramatic to a less dramatic mode. Again Smith uses traditional diction liberally: *sequester'd, sorrow, tears, melancholy, shades, soft Pity's sighs, hopeless love, despair and pain, plaintive strain*" and *wayward fate*. Although she rarely uses personification, here she personifies both "Friendship" and "Pity." Her final couplet reads, "Ah, Nymph! that fate assist me to endure,/And bear awhile—what death alone can cure!" It is not that she never uses any of these words elsewhere, but their abundance in the first twelve lines of this sonnet surely indicates her parodic intent.

The reader of the twenty-third sonnet, subtitled "To The North Star," may expect to find the conventional star of the Renaissance tradition. Because Werter continues to speak, we anticipate that the star will signify the female beloved whose love guides the presumed metaphorical male ship and whose indifference allows the ship to stray, possibly into danger. The movement within the Werter series parallels that of the Petrarch series for, by this third sonnet (23), although the diction and emotions are somewhat hyperbolic, Smith/Werter begins to express genuine feeling, in ordinary language. This central sonnet is pivotal in the series as Smith moves from parody to sensibility, again reflecting her skill in ordering groups of poems through symmetry.

I love to see thy sudden light appear
 Thro' 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 wave!
 So o'er my soul short rays of reason fly,
 Then fade:—and leave me, to despair and die. (23;7-14)

Both in a "traditional" reading of the star and the ship, and in a reading stressing the vexed relationship between reason and feeling, the north star is metaphoric. The star represents either the beloved or the light of Werter's reason. In either case, the storm is his own passion.

Because of this storm, the light of reason has become sudden, faint and fitful. The "Fair, fav'rite planet! which in happier days/Saw my young hopes" (23;2-3) is now obscured. But the

situation worsens; the reflection of the star “in the turbid water, rude and dark,/O’er whose wild stream the gust of Winter raves” (23;9-10), foreshadows the rude, dark, wintry death of the speaker. Whether we read the image as natural or metaphoric, the final half line, in which we again get despair and death, becomes integral to the sonnet. The opposition of reason and feeling again becomes an issue, but an issue which is, in part, the speaker’s own creation, a *chiaroscuro* effect from which he appears to derive some pleasure.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that “Supposed to have been written in a church-yard, over the grave of a young woman of nineteen” (49), which is the first new sonnet in the sixth edition, modifies and amplifies the series “Supposed to be Written by Werter.” The forty-ninth sonnet first appeared in a novel by Smith, *Celestina*, and is spoken by the heroine, Celestina De Mornay, when she thinks that she has lost the love of George Willoughby (Curran 45). She is standing by the grave of a woman whom she does not know, but presumes that the other died a “maid.” She wishes that they could change places because, she says, “Thou canst not now, thy fondest hopes resign/Even in the hour that should have made thee blest,/Light lies the turf upon thy virgin breast” (5-9). The fondest hope of Celestina is that Willoughby will marry her. More particularly, Celestina’s fondest hope is for the bliss of her wedding day. Given the emphasis on the chastity of women in the eighteenth century, it would be taken for granted, in the spirit if not always in the letter, that a woman would lose her virginity on her wedding night, so that the wedding and the loss of virginity are, for all intents and purposes, synonymous. To die a virgin, then, is both a loss and a lack, the loss of life and the lack of the (hetero)sexual love experience. Celestina, however, because she thinks that she has been rejected by the man she loves, fears that she may have to resign her “fondest hopes” and, possibly, go to her grave a virgin. For Smith, whose first sexual encounter was indeed the end of her “fondest hopes,” there are worse fates than dying a virgin.

Introducing this sonnet (49) into the sequence necessarily increases the multi-vocal quality of this series (21-25). Even though in both contexts, novel and sonnet, the speaker is a woman and the writer is Smith, the intertextuality is still significant. If the voice is uncomplicatedly Smith’s, the persona may be bitter, for she may at times wish that she had, indeed, died before her particular wedding night. On the other hand, the tone of the mature writer of the sequence, speaking and seeing through her young love-sick heroine, is possibly ambivalent. She may pity the grief and sorrows of young love while ironically comparing the

circumstances and the (excessive) emotions of her female character with her own experience of heterosexual love. If the voice remains Celestina's, to some extent she, too, is being hyperbolic.

In a consideration of sonnet twenty-four, then, it is as well to keep in mind the range of Smith's responses to emotional hyperbole. In a note, Smith identifies and translates the source for the first line: "'At the corner of the church yard which looks towards the fields, there are two lime-trees—it is there I wish to rest' [*Sorrows of Werter*, volume second.]"

Make there my tomb; beneath the lime-trees 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 fault'ring steps 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 WERTER—and his sorrows sleep. (24)

Werter is not dead. He is only contemplating the circumstances that would arise from his self-imposed death. Within the sonnet, the series and the sequence, Werter does not commit suicide. Within the novel, *The Sorrows of Werther*, he does. From the point of view of Werter, the sentiments expressed in this poem are either prescient or reveal his intentions. So Werter, inasmuch as he is Werther, is foreseeing his own death by his own hand.

It is not enough, apparently, in the sonnet as sonnet, that "Charlotte's" existence depends upon Werter's voice, because he is author(is)ing the text. Even when he is concerned with the prospect of his own death, Werter expects "Charlotte" to play a future role related to himself. He wishes for control beyond the grave. Even his death will not release her: "Charlotte . . . shall weep" (24;13). If she doesn't, then in a sense his suicide will have been in vain. It is she who has to glide (rhyming with suicide) in her approach, who can only pay tributes, sighs and tears by stealth; because he is a suicide, Werter will lie in an unmarked grave. The epithet "unhappy"

seems misplaced; the living “Charlotte,” not the dead Werter, will be unhappy. Smith’s speaker has already made it abundantly clear within *Elegiac Sonnets* that only the living can be, and are, unhappy; death is a “welcome release.” As Elinor Wylie (1885-1928) asserts in *One Person* (1928), “The happy dead” are “bound” in “an enduring bed . . . in the ground” (1;9,12-14), a sentiment that the rhyming words in Smith’s sestet also confirms: “Charlotte . . . shall weep,” while “[Werter]—and his sorrows sleep” in the “silent bed” of “the dead.” His last dramatic act requires her consciousness to give it meaning and glamour.

Goethe and Smith both suggest that the logical conclusion of all the death and despair in which the Romantic poet and the courtly lover indulge within Romantic, romance, and courtly love conventions is self-destruction. In contrast to Werter, the persona who speaks elsewhere in *Elegiac Sonnets* neither contemplates suicide nor does she ask for anything that is not hers, even though she foresees that the only cure for her suffering is death. She exerts no pressure upon those she loves. She has no time for the luxury of seriously contemplating death or of stating where she wishes to be buried. The word *suicide* (24;8) is meant to shock even as it undermines the master narrative. Smith indicates that suicide is real, non-reversible, and arises from, and results in, real tragedy. Furthermore, she implicitly questions the sorrow of an unmarried person in love when placed against the potential sorrow of a married woman. By using “Werter,” Smith is again juxtaposing the real life of real women who must keep going because of those they love, “women” as social and literary constructs, and the fictitious lives of invented male characters.

In whichever way we choose to read this sonnet, Charlotte is essential in its genesis. Werter’s survival is dependent upon her both as a temporary memory and, metaphorically, for eternity because her tears embalm him. This remains true whether we emphasise the real Charlotte Smith, Goethe’s Werther and Charlotte, or Smith’s Werter and “Charlotte.”

Furthermore, Smith must have been conscious that she shares her name not only with Werter’s beloved but also with a Queen.²⁰ In this series from *Elegiac Sonnets*, as in the seventy-fourth sonnet of *Amoretti* (1595), a strong sense of a secular three in one or one in three emerges. In “Most happy letters fram’d by skilfull trade,” Edmund Spenser celebrates the coincidence that his Queen, his mother and his beloved all have the same name. Smith’s use is more complicated, for “Charlotte’s” beloved commits suicide; although Smith may well have fantasised about her husband’s death, it would be *lese-majeste* to imply, however indirectly, that (the mad) King George III (1738-1820) might take his own life.²¹ These three Charlottes may seem to have nothing in common except their name, but Smith capitalises on that coincidence. She positions

herself amongst other women, including Queen Charlotte who read her novels and lent them to her ladies.² By emphasising "CHARLOTTE," Smith both hides behind her fictive creation and brings herself to the fore.

In such sonnets as Smith's twenty-first and twenty-fourth, the notion of an integrated, authentic, speaking subject is completely de-stabilised. Her use of other voices, her ventriloquism, disconnects her art from her experience, as well as from poetic tradition. Even and especially the name "Charlotte" is displaced, deferred, and problematicised. And, as bell hooks remarks in *Talking Back* (1988), "a name is perceived as a force that has the power to determine whether or not an individual will be fully self-realized, whether he or she will be able to fulfill their destiny, find their place in the world" (166). Inasmuch as we are our names, then, Charlotte Smith's characterisation of "Charlotte" defies identification. One thing that "Charlotte" is not, however, is marginalised, even though Smith the poet becomes so.

* * *

Writing of the chronology of poetry, Curran argues that the (deliberate) omission of Smith in the record occurred through the distortion and minimalisation of the importance of her work. The literary canon "has been written wholly, and arbitrarily, along a masculine gender line" (186), he writes, and "Manifest distortions of the record have accrued" (186-87). The conjunction of this comment from "The Altered I" (1988) and his choice to edit *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, implies that Curran believes that the loss of Smith's works occurred because she was a woman, and he goes on to say, "That was a destiny to which many women writers have been subjected" (xix). I would add to Curran's comments that the poetry of some women has been ignored because it was first under-estimated through misreading. Rather than reading Smith only as an influence, I will try to answer Carol Neely's call in "Constructing the Subject" (1988) for "new ways to surround, contextualize and 'over-read' men's canonical texts with women's 'uncanonical' ones" (17). In this section I will focus on two sonnets, thirty-nine and forty-two, and over-read them in a variety of contexts.

Robinson cites sonnet thirty-nine in full and refers to it as "an excellent example of Sensibility passing its aesthetic baton to Romanticism" (105). Hunt in "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith," points out that Wordsworth "'particularly' singled out [this sonnet] as worth including in Dyce's *Specimens of the British Poetesses* (87). Coleridge also included this sonnet in his collection" (123). J. Wordsworth chooses and cites four lines of thirty-nine because

W. Wordsworth noted it, and the first four lines of sonnet forty-two to illustrate Smith's "new voice" and remarks, "By way of a footnote one might add that Charlotte's use of the adjective, 'pillowy', predates the first example in *NED*."

In his discussion of the third quatrain of sonnet thirty-nine, J. Wordsworth says, "There is plain speaking here, a refusal to exaggerate emotion, that truly points forward." It is essential to read the whole sonnet before assessing the meaning and value of J. Wordsworth's remarks.

To Night

I love thee, mournful sober-suited night,
 When the faint moon, yet lingering in her wane,
 And veil'd in clouds, with pale uncertain light
 Hangs o'er the waters of the restless main.
 In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind
 Will to the deaf, cold elements complain,
 And tell the embosom'd grief, however vain,
 To sullen surges and the viewless wind.
 Tho' no repose on thy dark breast I find,
 I still enjoy thee—cheerless as thou art;
 For in thy quiet gloom, the exhausted heart
 Is calm, tho' wretched; hopeless, yet resign'd.
 While, to the winds and waves its sorrow given,
 May reach—tho' lost on earth—the ear of Heaven! (39)

Robinson believes that "The melancholy voice in Smith's sonnets is autobiographical" (105). Since J. Wordsworth does not indicate otherwise, it is fair to assume that for him, too, the voice is Smith's, since he introduces the paragraph in which he cites lines nine through twelve with "Sadness did not soothe Charlotte Smith." Given no evidence to the contrary, I suspect that W. Wordsworth and Coleridge also tend to read the persona's voice as uncomplicatedly Smith's.

The woman, then, is in love with "sober-suited night," with its aural overtones of knight, firmly placing the sonnet within the courtly ambiance. In the "expected" heterosexual reading with a woman as the persona, the triple reading of night as knight, as a physical, and as a metaphoric entity, is appropriate and aesthetically pleasing. The personification of night, with its "embosom'd grief" and "dark breast," is an instance of poetic transvestism. The sonnet is "simply" a Romantic expression of melancholy in which the speaker's feeling for nature is a

vehicle for more complicated human emotions. The couplet, then, expresses her grief and her pious wish to “reach—tho’ lost on earth—the ear of Heaven!”

Because sonnet thirty-nine is formally more experimental than most, Smith cues us into the fact that this sonnet is not as simple as it appears. Her argument is typically Shakespearean with its three quatrains, each composed of a single sentence and ending in a period. Although she gives firm closure in both form and content, in the rhyming couplet and in the desire for Heaven, the rhyme scheme is more complicated than is usual for her: abab cbbc cddc ee. It is reminiscent of Spenser with its linked rhymes, and of Petrarch in its recurring internal couplets. The effect of those internal couplets in the second and third quatrains is to separate the rest of the sonnet from the first quatrain, which contains the only reference to the moon. The last two quatrains are then more closely linked together through the rhyme, excluding the moon and lending emphasis to the lack of light and to the darkness of depression, reminiscent of sonnet twenty-three. Although we get partial relief in the third quatrain after “No repose,” with the somewhat lighter openings of the remaining lines—“I still enjoy,” “For in thy quiet gloom,” “Is calm”—each of these lines ends in a deepening melancholy.

But this is not just a discrete sonnet; it is part of a series from *Emmeline* and of the sequence *Elegiac Sonnets*. This is not “plain speaking.” It is ventriloquism and mimicry. Sonnet thirty-nine is enclosed between the other two sonnets which, Smith tells us, come from her first novel *Emmeline: The Orphan of the Castle* (1788). The central sonnet (39), to which J. Wordsworth refers, is written originally for a man’s voice, that of Godolphin, Emmeline’s lover. There are, then, at least two possible voicings: the (presumed) feminine voice of the persona of the sequence and the masculine voice of Godolphin. Immediately, we have the interplay of a female and a male voice. The extended contexts not only effect the reading(s), but the two different texts, the novel and the sonnet sequence, also lend themselves to further intersexualities which overlap and separate.

The night almost substitutes for the beloved, and again we have the *chiaroscuro* effect. In the novel, Emmeline and her companion Mrs. Stafford are “astonished to hear” Godolphin, who is unaware of their presence on the boat, deliver (what they take to be) a traditional love sonnet to a particular woman, although Emmeline “hesitated to believe herself the subject of his thoughts and of his Muse” (417). Paradoxically, however, Godolphin both identifies with and loves the night, in its sober suit, as he addresses and masculinises it. The feminine moon, then, may be conceived as a stand-in for a female beloved. Not only is the beloved Emmeline not

mentioned, but even as the moon she takes a back seat after the first quatrain, while the (masculine) sober-suited night (with overtones of funerals) remains to the end of the twelfth line. For this (male) speaker the moon is peripheral. The masculine night provides both the setting for and the equivalence between man and nature.

We can also read "To Night" in the light of Smith's highly probable perception that she is the first poet to revive the man-made Renaissance sonnet sequence form. The persona is again the man-as-lover, but the moon and the night take on further symbolic characteristics. Renaissance men-as-poets use a number of standard tropes, one of which, we recall, is that the lady is the north star by which the man-as-navigator/lover finds his direction. This trope is explicit in Sidney's title, *Astrophel and Stella* (star-lover and star) and becomes an extended metaphor in Spenser's sonnet, "Lyke as a ship" (34). When the star is eclipsed by clouds, the lover is lost and forsaken and can only hope that his star will shine brightly after the storm is past. But surprisingly, this speaker loves the masculine "sober-suited night," not the more conventional feminine star, the "faint moon." Smith thereby emphasises the narcissism and male bonding so often implicit in a male-authored sonnet sequence. The "moon" leaves barely a trace, "veil'd in clouds, with pale uncertain light" (39;3).

Considering this sonnet within the context of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith's parody of the conventions in the Petrarch series (13-16), and her ventriloquising of Petrarch and Werther, we see further parody. Having disposed of the moon in the first quatrain, the lover (and Smith) now turns to the expression of his own courtly-love position. He offers the traditional lament and uses gender-loaded words: *embosom'd grief* and *thy dark breast*. But "the dark breast" on which he finds "no repose" is that of the masculine night, creating an-other triangle in which the two masculine components bond, to the exclusion of the feminine. Hence, by mimicking the traditional sonnet, Smith mocks and trivialises the conventional deep depression, enfeebled mind, sorrows, *embosom'd grief*, lack of repose, exhausted heart, wretchedness, hopelessness and complaint. When Smith ventriloquises a male courtly lover, the effect, for all her reputation as a melancholic poet, is delightful.

Smith touches on another problem that women-as-writers face and an-other convention she is flouting, as she smudges the boundaries between genres: fiction and autobiography, polemic and narrative, elegy and sonnet sequence. Although there is every reason to suspect that part of the activity of women-as-poets is to re-write and claim any and all poetic discourse, literary problems which are peculiar to women-as-writers, may well, in part, account for their

tendency to use traditional forms and “out-moded” genres. Because poets are perceived to be men, the question of voice always arises for women-as-poets. By “ignoring” the works of poets-as-women, men avoid any necessity to re-write across sexual and gendered barriers. Even as W. Wordsworth co-opts topics previously considered feminine, he still maintains his male voice; in fact, he insists upon its manliness. It may well have been politic for Smith to be formally somewhat conservative in her overt expression of female/feminine matter, and to use multivocality for her covert female/feminine/feminist concerns.

J. Wordsworth is a good reader of W. Wordsworth, but he is not such a good reader of Smith. Not only does this sonnet speak with a man’s voice, at least in its initial context, it is, as I have shown, anything but “plain speaking.” What J. Wordsworth’s citations reveal is not an objective, dispassionate critique of Smith, but his own more canonical position which causes him to under-read Smith. If this sonnet is read with the assumption that it is Smith’s autobiographical expression of melancholy, its “refusal to exaggerate” may well indicate “plain speaking” in its (conscious) lack of poetic diction. Such an autobiographical reading reinforces emphasis on her simplicity of thought, feeling and expression, but also stresses her pertinence as a (largely unacknowledged) source for W. Wordsworth. When, however, this sonnet is read in a man’s voice, as in *Emmeline*, it epitomises and mimics the exaggeration and narcissism of courtly love sonnets. When moreover it is read as a ventriloquised male voice within *Elegiac Sonnets*, it is very far from “plain speaking” in its sophisticated mockery of the passions of the male subject in a courtly love posture.

Immediately after J. Wordsworth refers to Smith as “a new voice in English poetry” he cites the first four lines of sonnet forty-two and implies that both the “new voice” and this particular sonnet influenced W. Wordsworth. The tone is elegiac; the setting is the end of the day and the end of the year.

Composed During a Walk on the Downs, in November 1787

The dark and pillowy cloud; the fallow trees,
 Seem o’er the ruins of the year to mourn;
 And cold and hollow, the inconstant breeze
 Sobs thro’ the falling leaves and wither’d fern.
 O’er the tall brow of yonder chalky bourn,
 The evening shades their gather’d darkness fling,
 While, by the lingering light, I scarce discern

The shrieking night-jar, fail on heavy wing.
 Ah! yet a little—and propitious Spring
 Crown'd with fresh flowers, shall wake the woodland strain;
 But no gay change revolving seasons bring,
 To call forth pleasure from the soul of pain,
 Bid Syren Hope resume her long lost part,
 And chase the vulture Care—that feeds upon the heart. (42)

Smith coins *pillowy*, and uses *pillow* in a new sense. She also revitalises *fallow* as an epithet for the trees, which are wintering over. If the field is left unploughed over the summer, then it is referred to as summer fallow. The death-like stillness of the downs is broken by the emotion and agitation of the fourth line; as the leaves fall, the “cold and hollow” breeze sobs through and around “the fallow trees/ . . / . and wither'd fern.”

There is a strong turn from the emotional description of nature at a particular time and place in the octet of Smith's sonnet, to the correlation with her own condition in the sestet, marked by “Ah! yet a little—“ (9). The speaker's desire for death, as the only way to end her sufferings, is a *leitmotif* throughout *Elegiac Sonnets*. Smith frustrates that expectation of death here but, at the same time, takes advantage of the convention that a Shakespearean sonnet which moves from the end of the year to the end of the day would lead into a contemplation of death. Not only is the reader's anticipation unfulfilled in this particular sonnet, but so is the speaker's desire.

The natural movement, unlike the psychological, is unexpectedly cyclical. The sestet brings thoughts of spring. But this is not a rebirth as in “Tomorrow to fresh woods, and Pastures new” (*Lycidas* 193). There is not even the hope of recovery as expressed in Dickinson's “I dreaded that first Robin, so” (348). For the persona has little hope; even looking forward to spring brings no consolation. For her, as for us all, spring cannot bring complete rejuvenation; but, for the speaker, there is absolutely no mitigation of her sorrow. Any hope, in her situation, is deceptive, a Siren who may lead the persona to shipwreck upon the rocks unless it is possible that a woman-as-poet can recuperate Sirens.

In this sonnet, Smith re-writes myth and Petrarchan imagery. Through the use of the mythological “Syren” she alludes both to Ulysses and to the extended metaphor of a wandering ship at sea. But instead of a star and a storm, Smith's speaker co-opts, for her-self, the image of the Siren, who leads male epic voyagers astray.

The intrusion of the vulture at this point, with its implicit shock of decay and violation, is startling, although “fling,” “fail” and “wing” might have prepared us for it. The flash of surprised delight that is produced by this image in the final line is caused by Smith’s deferred reference to the traditional trope of death, in resonance with line eight of the octet. But when it comes, we no longer expect it. Her juxtaposition of images and sounds creates the maximum effect. The sibilance, alliteration and muted liquid consonants—s, l, f, r—of lines twelve and thirteen have prepared us only for a continuation of grief, with the possibility of despair. Again Smith frustrates our expectation.

The shrieking night-jar has metamorphosed into a vulture. Because Smith’s sonnets tend to stay close to home, Sussex, and because she offers endnotes to clarify allusions to the world of nature, and because the vulture is not a native of Britain, her choice of that bird is much more than happenstance. Smith provides a lengthy note to the night-jar but is silent about the foreign scavenger. The fact that the vulture is feeding upon her heart alerts us into taking the image seriously and recalling another vulture eating another bodily organ. The picture of the vulture eating the liver of Prometheus who is chained to a rock, reinforces those subliminal rocks evoked by the Siren. Again Smith relates her poem to a great male tradition, that of the mythic Prometheus. She becomes one with the defier of the gods and the patron of the human race, but in a very local and reduced way. Her vulture is really “the shrieking night-jar” (42;8), reflected in the parallel structure—the first half of the last line of the octet and the the first half of the last line of the sestet—and the violence (against women) is probably verbal and potentially physical. Perhaps she should have “discerned” more clearly the nature of the night-jar; after all the poem makes the reader hear it. Or perhaps, implying that the female Siren could vanquish the vulture whereas Prometheus could not, Smith’s persona indicates both the greater potential strength of women and her own need to employ that strength to banish care.

There is a biographical resonance peculiar to Smith in her use of the vulture. Referring to a litigation lawyer named Vampyre in her novel *Marchmont* (1796), she writes, “He croaked, and, lo! his fellows, and his partners, and his agents, flocked around, and numberless vultures fed instead of one” (cited Hilbish 188). The metaphor makes clear that lawyers live by scavenging from any client who cannot escape, including herself. But again, perhaps she thinks that it is her duty to free herself from them and from her despair; after all, “Laura” certainly told “Petrarch” that despair is culpable (15;13).

* * *

Some of the more impressive poems in *Elegiac Sonnets* are seascapes in which Smith not only employs nature in the presentation of “moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings,” but uses that same “exquisite” form, “encroach[ing] on the province of the elegy” (Coleridge 543), for the expression of her political views, especially her views upon the evil consequences of war. Living on the Sussex coast, Smith was at least as intimate with the sea as she was with rural England, *The Sorrows of Werther*, Petrarchan courtly-love conventions, and the sonnet sequence tradition. To close this chapter, therefore, I will attempt an over-reading of three seascapes—“Written in the Church-Yard” (44), “Written in a Tempestuous Night” (66) and “The Sea View” (83)—through contexts provided by the male sonnet sequence tradition and by other poets. Echoing the sonnets of Shakespeare and Milton, Smith’s seascapes prefigure the poetry of Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold.

These seascapes are not part of a continuous series, but they do represent a topic and metaphor which recur throughout the sequence. To fully appreciate these poems as a (dispersed) group, the reader needs the full text of all three.

Written in the Church-Yard at Middleton in Sussex

Press’d by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
 While the loud equinox its power combines,
 The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
 But o’er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
 The wild blast, rising from the Western cave,
 Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed,
 Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
 And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
 With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore
 Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
 But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
They hear the warring elements no more:
 While I am doomed—by life’s long storm oppress,
 To gaze with envy, on their gloomy rest. (44)

The power and the anarchy of the sea are typical of the Sussex coast at the spring or neap tides which occur at the equinoxes, and, since this is "Written in the Church-Yard," the speaker is close to a dangerous and indifferent power. At the same time, of course, the sea is symbolic of the political reality on both sides of the English Channel. The power in this sonnet is overwhelming: the "swelling surge," the "wild blast," "the huge billows," the "heaving bed," the "warring elements," "Tears," "breaks," "rave." "The sea no more its swelling surge confines" as law and order give way to anarchy. Set against that anarchy are images of domestic silence and stillness, throwing masculine violence and power into high relief. The "grassy tombs," "the village dead," "the silent sabbath," the "shells and sea-weed," all are violated by this storm. The moon, as the powerful mythic "arbitress," is momentarily over-ruled as the ocean and the wind, "The wild blast, rising from the Western cave," take centre stage. The expression of oppression is not merely individual; it is cosmic.

Within the context of the tempest, reference to "shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore/Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave" inevitably recalls the "sea-change" in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

Full fadom five thy father lies;
 Of his bones are coral made;
 Those are pearls that were his eyes:
 Nothing of him that doth fade,
 But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange. (I,ii,399-404)

This intertextual relationship may be subconscious, for Smith usually, and very conscientiously, notes any "borrowings." Although her own father, Nicholas Turner, was not buried in this churchyard, he may well have been in her mind at some level of awareness. Often the dead recall to us our own dead. For his adolescent daughter, he underwent an earlier "sea-change" when he remarried after being a widower for the twelve years of her childhood, an action which brought about her own disastrous marriage.

The last three lines of her sonnet move us back to earlier lines, but now the scene conveys human emotions. The elements are still warring but, unlike the dead, the persona both hears the tempest and is "by life's long storm opprest," with the implication that the wars raged amongst people, whether amongst individuals, between nations, or within different classes, are even harder to endure than conflicts in nature. In the same way as the sea "o'er the shrinking

land sublimely rides,” so fathers, institutions and nations sublimely ride over retreating and diminished individuals. The first word, *Press'd*, becomes the *opprest* at the end of the thirteenth line.

The “grave” at the end of the octet also changes, becoming the desire for the grave at the end of the sonnet and achieving a satisfying, aesthetic symmetry in tension with the open-endedness of the content. For Smith’s laying of her father to rest is almost provisional (he had died in 1775); the apparent closure of the rhyming couplet, with the final word *rest*, is not as firm as it might at first appear. The sonnet does not offer resolution because the final syntactical unit includes line twelve, to which it poses an antithesis. Moreover, that final “rest” refers to the disturbed restless bones on the shore. This “rest” is “gloomy,” rather than the “rest in peace” we tend to associate with graves and the Sabbath. The sound and sense of the final lines refer the reader back to the beginning, which we can now read in the light of the human condition described in the sonnet. The sounds of “Pressed . . . Moon” (44;1) are reversed in “doomed . . . opprest” (44,13) and “gloomy rest” (44;14), providing a resonant internal rhyming. Laying her father to rest is an unending, dispiriting task; his skeleton is prone to re-appearance. Although the grave has been desecrated and the silent Sabbath broken, at least “*They* hear the warring elements no more” (44;12). The speaker, however, is “doom’d” to live. Smith, like Keats, has “been half in love with easeful Death” (Ode 52), so that any horror that may arise from those bones whitening “in the frequent wave,” turns towards envy.

Despite the many end-stopped lines and the few mid-line breaks, single lines tend to look both backwards and forwards, modifying any reading even as it is made, and insisting on a slow perusal. By the use of a modified Petrarchan rhyme scheme, in which Smith does not carry the rhymes of the first four lines into the following four, she emphasises the rhyming words, the *heaving bed*, the *dead*, and the *grave*, in the same way as she does in sonnet twenty-four, for we expect abbaabba but get abbaacddc. In the final six lines, the rhyming is an irregular mix, and the syntactical form of the argument appears to be more Shakespearean. By “life’s long storm” in line eleven, we are already looking back to the beginning of the sonnet, aware that this is not a simple nature poem. The lack of firm closure, the restlessness of both nature and the bones, and the inconsistency of human behaviour and of the human condition, are all reflected in the form. When Anna Seward, Smith’s contemporary, objected to her lack of regularity, she did not perceive how effective and liberating that irregularity was after the rigidity of form in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Yet for all its apparent irregularity, forty-four is another *experimental hybrid* (Curran's term). Smith has used the form to counterpoint the sense. The octet emphasises the manifestation of nature. The first half of the sestet concentrates on the bones, and the second on the condition of the persona, although there is some overlap from the previous line in both instances. Smith's poem appears to use three quatrains and a couplet, as indicated by terminal punctuation, but its argument falls into an octet followed by a sestet. To counter-balance her depiction of nature out of control, Smith offers us a very controlled sonnet.

Again in the sixty-sixth sonnet, another seascape of cosmic form, we find an experimental hybrid, its form repeatedly in tension with itself. Expectations are continually thwarted.

Written in a Tempestuous Night, on the Coast of Sussex

The night-flood rakes upon the stony shore;
 Along the rugged cliffs and chalky caves
 Mourns the hoarse Ocean, seeming to deplore
 All that are buried in his restless waves—
 Mined by corrosive tides, the hollow rock
 Falls prone, and rushing from its turfy height,
 Shakes the broad beach with long-resounding shock,
 Loud thundering on the ear of sullen Night;
 Above the desolate and stormy deep,
 Gleams the wan Moon, by floating mist opprest;
 Yet here while youth, and health, and slumber sleep,
 Alone I wander—Calm untroubled rest,
 "Nature's soft nurse," deserts the sigh-swoln breast,
 And shuns the eyes, that only wake to weep! (66)

The first eight lines are Shakespearean both in rhyme and argument; the remaining six are Petrarchan in their rhyme, not a common arrangement within *Elegiac Sonnets*. Rather than one *volta*, however, occurring at the end of the eighth line, there are two, both marked with semicolons, one at the end of the eighth line and the other at the end of the tenth. Although normally the turn at the end of the octet would take precedence, the fact that the end of the tenth is succeeded by "Yet" makes it stronger. The first two lines of the "sestet," then, syntactically belong with the first two quatrains, since the description of nature occupies the first ten lines,

rather than the usual four, eight or twelve. The final lines make, in effect, another Shakespearean quatrain in both argument and (modified) rhyme, and there is no closing couplet.

The weighty effect created by the actual sounds that Smith uses produce other tensions. The first half of the first quatrain is very harsh with its "rakes," "rugged cliffs and chalky caves." The next two lines are softer, almost calming, as though the ocean has indeed made himself hoarse, and can only murmur as he mourns. The next six lines follow a similar pattern (66;5-10), starting with "corrosive" and "rock." Line six is not as soft as lines three and four nor as harsh as lines one, two and five. The harsh *k* sounds are replaced by long vowels and exploding *b* sounds in line seven, which slow the reading. The final two lines of this ten-line section are again softer, enveloped in the "floating mist" (66;10), but still have some long vowels which place emphasis upon the negativity of such words as *desolate* and *stormy*. The final group of four lines begins in a fragmentary way with its commas, but then becomes more fluid with its *s*'s and *w*'s. The sense evoked by the sounds is, to some extent, in tension with the meaning. The bodies of the drowned appear in soft lines (66;3-4), as does the utter misery of the persona's distress (66;13-14), a distress that cannot be diminished by soothing words. At the same time, the liquid nature of the moon and of grief is expressed in liquid sounds and meanings, moving from the sea to the moon to the speaker.

Throughout the first ten lines the eye is continually directed upward, but the final quatrain (66;11-14) is completely earth-bound; any movement here is metaphorical. The first quatrain is concerned with the beach and the surface of the sea. The focus then moves to the base of the cliff, to its height. Finally the eyes rest on the moon. Although the visual movement tends to elevation, each time we are brought down to the lowest level, often with implications of destruction. From the beach and the cliffs of lines one and two, which are being undermined in line five, we are dragged back to the dead who are buried in the depths (66;4). Paradoxically, the "rock/Falls prone" (66;5-6) before it leaves "its turfy height" (66;6) threatening the security of the beach and its cliff top. The moon is shrouded in mist. The final quatrain not only begins and ends on the earth with human subjects; its inward emotional movement is down, from youth, health and sleep to weeping. "The night-flood" has become a human flood of tears.

Despite the tensions between form and content, sound and sense, height and depth, this sonnet has its own symmetry. The sonnet begins and ends with an excess of fluid: "The night-flood" and "weep." The "octet" begins and ends with night: "The night-flood" and "sullen night."

“Written in a Tempestuous Night” (66) illuminates “To Night” (39) and “Written in the Church-Yard” (44), but this illumination was not available until the publication of the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* finalised the sequence. Sonnets thirty nine and sixty-six were both “written” by male characters in novels by Smith—sonnet sixty-six by Sommers Walsingham (Curran 58), the hero of *Montalbert: A Novel* (1795)—so again Smith creates intersexuality, multivocality and consequent irony. Now the sea mourns, but the night as a whole has moved beyond mo(u)rning, its “sober-suited” attitude in sonnet thirty-nine. It is sullen; it has a fit of the sulks. Earlier it was the wind that indulged in “sullen surges” (39;8), while the (male) persona found some calmness and resignation in giving his sorrows “to the winds and waves” (39;13). Now, significantly, there is no firm closure in a rhyming couplet as there was in “To Night” (39). As in “Written in the Church-Yard” (44) there is no comfort for the (female) persona.

On the other hand, Smith’s eighty-third sonnet, “The Sea View,” seems to be as far from the sixty-sixth as it is possible to be. The title is simple and the octet provides a scene from Arcady:

The Sea View

The upland Shepherd, as reclined he lies
 On the soft turf that clothes the mountain brow,
 Marks the bright Sea-line mingling with the skies;
 Or from his course celestial, sinking slow,
 The Summer-Sun in purple radiance low,
 Blaze on the western waters; the wide scene
 Magnificent, and tranquil, seems to spread
 Even o’er the Rustic’s breast a joy serene, (83;1-8).

The scene is familiar and homely, and is described in human terms. The “soft turf . . . clothes the mountain” (83;2). Smith brings the metaphor “the brow of a mountain” back into human focus.

“The Sea View” opens gently and descriptively with a meditation on rural England at its juncture with the ocean. A spectator on the cliffs in Sussex would be very aware of the sky and the horizon on a fine day, and of the sky and the lack of an horizon on a cloudy or misty day. It is the frequent lack of an horizon that causes its presence to be so noticeable. The movement from noon to sunset is also a movement from the soft, green turf to the “Blaze” of the sun’s magnificent “purple radiance” and back to the tranquility and serenity of the Shepherd, the

landscape and the seascape. The style and tone are conversational, established not only by content but also by the particular use of mid-line breaks and enjambment which de-emphasises the rhyming words in the Shakespearean mode. The time is indeterminate within the limits of summer and daylight. It could be broad daylight on a mid-summer's day when the sea and the sky meet on a visible horizon and yet the blue of the sky and the blue of the sea appear to mingle, or it could be sunset on a similar day. The insignificance of time and the "joy serene" of the sole character are appropriate for Arcadian pastoral, with its serenity, timelessness and calm.

Sonnet eighty-three appears to be precisely the idealisation of country people and rural ways of the past that Wordsworth rebels against when he writes "Michael," the "true" narrative of a "real" shepherd and his family. But we should be wary of premature interpretation. Smith may well have known both Mary Collier's and Stephen Duck's poetry which, as Moira Ferguson points out in *The Thresher's Labour*, "uncovers the reality of living in the country in contrast to the mythological unreality of the pastoral" (1985:v). Smith was also aware, through her personal experience, of the true labour involved in making a living for one's family and in maintaining a pastoral ideal. "The Sleeping Woodman" (54), for example, is by "toil oppress'd" (54;5); his sleep is "momentary" (54;8), "A sweet forgetfulness of human care" (54;12). We need to defer meaning until we know whether or not Smith is displacing a literary convention. But we have seen Smith using conventions critically and, since sonnet eighty-three is so near the end of the final edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, we have probably learned enough to be cautious.

The argument falls neatly into an octet and a sestet but, syntactically the *volta* is not strongly marked; there is only a comma. Such punctuation does not prepare the reader for the strength of the turn which adds to the shock-value of the sestet. The sharp contrast between sestet and octet creates the effect of a silhouette or shadow against a light background. "England's green and pleasant Land" (Blake 238) is the backdrop to war. The final six lines read

When, like dark plague-spots by the Demons shed,
Charged deep with death, upon the waves, far seen,
Move the war-freighted ships; and fierce and red,
Flash their destructive fire—The mangled dead
And dying victims then pollute the flood.

Ah! thus man spoils Heaven's glorious works with blood! (83;9-14)

The scene has been polluted. The pastoral has become rough and satiric. "Charged deep with death," "the war-freighted ships," "The mangled dead," in conjunction with "mined by the

corrosive rock," "the long-resounding shock/Loud thundering" (66), has an anachronistic resonance with the mines, submarines, torpedoes and depth-charges of the second world war. The power of the sestet comes not only through late twentieth-century consciousness, not only from the weight of those long vowels, but also through the cognizance that the vehicle is the message, that the ships themselves are war-freighted, are charged deep with death.

The pivot between octet and sestet is "the Rustic's breast" which is displaced from Arcadian serenity through reference to the "dark plague-spots by the Demons shed" (9). The term *plague-spot* has four meanings: "a deep pit for the common burial of the plague victims," "A spot on the skin characteristic of the plague, or of some disease so called," "A locality infested with plague" (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*) and, figuratively, the "source or symptom of moral corruption" (*Concise Oxford*). Inasmuch as the industrial revolution threatens both the countryside and agricultural workers, the plague-spot, in its third meaning, could be seen as charged with psychic death. Arcady is no more. If the second meaning is emphasised, however, the Rustic becomes infected by some visible disease which is "charged with death," and Smith makes clear the contagious scope of war.

The smooth but shocking transition into the sestet is heightened by the tension between the content and the rhyme scheme: abab bcde dcddee. The first quatrain is rhymed on a straightforward Shakespearean pattern. The fifth line seems to presage a linked Spenserean form but that expectation is not fulfilled by the seventh line which rhymes with nothing that has gone before. Not only is the violent *volta* camouflaged by the punctuation, it is also concealed by the rhyme scheme. Arcadia is only unproblematic for the first few lines; it is de-stabilised before the sestet. For an attentive listener, Smith thwarts expectations as early as the seventh line rather than the ninth. She again uses a Shakespearean rhyme in an unexpected place, but now it is even more complicated than it is in earlier sonnets. This "quatrain," instead of being lines five through eight, may be formed by lines six through nine (cdcd), or even seven through ten (dcdc), or eight through eleven (cdcd). Whichever way we read it, there are strong linkages across the conventional turn which work against the reader's expectations. There are also rhyming couplets in unexpected places: lines four and five, and eleven and twelve. Again, the expectation of rhyme pattern based upon multiples of four is thwarted.

The apparent firm closure of the final couplet is also problematic. It is in extreme syntactical tension within itself, because the thirteenth line ends in a period, leaving the last line dangling. And the content of that line, ending in bloodshed, does not rest easy. Because the

rhymes are interlinked up to and including line ten, and the penultimate rhyming couplet is softened by the enjambment across line ten into line eleven, the new final rhyme is also unexpected.

“The Sea View” (83) validates and extends my readings of other earlier sonnets, especially “Written in the Church-Yard” (44) and “Written in a Tempestuous Night” (66). When discussing the forty-fourth sonnet, I said that it demonstrates Hoagwood’s comment that Smith’s poetry is symbolic and political. Since the sea is masculine and anarchic, it is obviously not the maternal cradle of birth. In sonnet eighty-three, the technology of war is usurping the role of the sun itself, exaggerating forces which might explain why the feminine moon makes only a fleeting appearance in sonnet forty-four.

Smith is not writing parody in sonnet eighty-three, although the Arcadian setting might have led the reader into expecting parody after the mode of her treatment of Petrarch and Werther. If so, that is just another expectation thwarted. Just as William Blake (1757-1827) juxtaposes “England’s green and pleasant Land” with “these dark Satanic Mills” (238) in 1804, so Smith contrasts rural England as a traditional Arcadia with the British government as a war-monger. Her poetry shows her awareness of, and concern for, social and political issues. The association among the bones which “whiten in the frequent wave” (44;10), Shakespeare’s and Ariel’s “sea-change,” and the bodies of the drowned which are “buried in his restless wave” (66;4) is extended to include “the mangled dead/And dying victims” (88;12-13) of war.

“The Sea View” (83) has no obvious precedent, but the sestet has surprising affinities with Milton’s vengeful prayer and political sonnet “On the Late Massacre in Piemont.” Milton’s fragmentation and Latinate construction mimic the choked feeling that anger, outrage and sorrow can elicit. Like Smith in her sestet, he uses both enjambment and mid-line breaks throughout to give an uneven effect. By using mid-line and end-line breaks, Smith achieves a choppy effect in the sestet similar to Milton’s. His enjambment, however, releases the flow of anguish:

in thy book record their groans
 Who were thy Sheep and in their ancient Fold
 Slain by the bloody *Piemontese* that roll’d
 Mother with Infant down the Rocks. (18;5-8)

The words, like the mothers and children, gain momentum as they roll onwards, unimpeded until they come to a full-stop with death on the rocks. Smith only uses enjambment once, but her long vowel sounds and extra stresses slow the reading and increase the heavy purport of what she is

saying: "*Charged deep with death, upon the waves far seen,/Move the war-freighted ships*" (83;10-11 emphasis added). The diction in Smith's sestet is reminiscent of Milton's sonnet, although the more conversational style of her octet is not. The intensity of his poem and her sestet carries the reader from beginning to end in a single movement.

Whereas Milton's is a single political utterance, Smith's sonnet has a deliberate disjunction between the octet and the sestet. Milton is being monologic; Smith's technique is more subtle. The disjunction does not cause the disintegration of the earlier image, which includes the shepherd, because the sonnet coheres through the syntax, through the linking rhyme scheme and, most importantly, through the eyes, "the Sea View," of the stationary persona. Without moving, s/he can see both the Shepherd and the battle.

Smith, like Milton, was a republican at heart, who hated all forms of oppression. Both the American and French revolutions had her full intellectual and emotional support, and the English revolution, complete with regicide, was in the not so distant past. At the same time, she had an abhorrence of war, which did not lessen when her son was injured in France and later died of his wounds. She found both the English-French and the English-American wars morally reprehensible, and would hold the king responsible. We have already seen in her Preface that she found the ban on women's interest in political thought and action an absurdity when women are mothers, sisters, daughters and wives of politicians, statesmen and soldiers. She again uses her pen to express her opinion. By writing poems she can both support revolution and oppose war.

In "Written in a Tempestuous Night" (66) Smith speaks of the ocean as a graveyard; in "The Sea View" (83) armed conflict is both a symptom and a source of corruption. With sons serving His Majesty in the theatre(!) of war, she knows only too well that even rural England is infested with that plague. Wordsworth also writes of the dislocations that wars produce. In *The Prelude* (later) the demobbed soldier "appeared/A desolation, a simplicity,/To which the trappings of a gaudy world/Make a strange background" (4;387-469). In the year previous to the publication of *Montalbert* (1795), Blake implicates the king (George III) and decries the residue of war when "the hapless Soldier's sigh/Runs in blood down Palace walls" ("London" 11-12). The potential *lese-majeste* of Smith's "Make there my tomb" (24), mentioned above, is not as farfetched as it might at first appear. Regicide is not a remote possibility. A sonnet near the end of the final version of the sequence and one from the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* can illuminate each other.

Smith was, of course, influenced by a large tradition and by many men-as-poets, but her own influence may extend beyond the Romantics. Since Coleridge cites Smith as a prime mover in changing the nature of the sonnet, it is reasonable to assume that she also influenced his definition of the elegy (or of what Morton W. Bloomfield calls the elegiac mode, as opposed to the elegy as genre): "It *may* treat of any subject, but it must treat of no subject *for itself*; but always and exclusively with reference to the poet himself. As he will feel regret for the past or desire for the future, so sorrow and love become the principle themes of elegy" (*Table Talk* 23 October, 1833: 280-281). Smith did not look forward to the future, and was not free to speak of love, so that her elegiac mode is largely that of sorrow or regret. In "The Elegy and Elegiac Mode" (1986), Bloomfield argues that the Romantic elegiac "tone was novel with its emphasis on the author" (150). After stating that the elegiac "mode is harder to define precisely than is the genre" (147-148), he cites "Adonais" as an example of the genre and "Dover Beach" as an example of the elegiac mode which is characterised more by tone and mood than by form. Bloomfield finds the "nineteenth-and twentieth-centuries' emphasis upon the elegiac mood rather than the elegy a noteworthy change" (155). He concludes his essay by relating the poetic expression of twentieth-century alienation to the Romantic elegiac mode:

Both the personal poems Coleridge speaks of and the alienation poems which have flourished in our century indicate the rise of a new kind of mood poem. This is not simply a new turn in the long history of the elegy, but a new kind of poem which has branched off from its parent line. (155)

And Smith was an early progenitor of that branch.

Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867), for example, owes much to *Elegiac Sonnets*. For an island people, the British have produced few poetic seascapes, and even fewer that carry the metaphoric weight of Arnold's poem and Smith's sonnets. Because of the "accident" of history, however, we are, in our particular moment, in a strange and privileged position of "knowing" Arnold's poem while we are only getting acquainted with Smith's poetry, giving rise to an anachronistic relationship between texts. Arnold's poem, with its despairing loss of faith and hope in personal love, seems to anticipate the seascapes and the elegiac despair of Smith's sequence.

Both Smith's and Arnold's descriptions often focus upon the centrality of sounds, and sometimes Arnold's echoes of Smith, in sound and sense, seem loud and clear. "Dover Beach" and Smith's sonnet eighty-three both open serenely. Arnold's "The sea is calm to-night. . . .

out in the tranquil bay" (1;5) replicates Smith's daylight "wide scene/Magnificent, and tranquil" (83;7). Her "The night-flood rakes upon the stony shore" (66;1) anticipates his "the grating roar/Of pebbles" (9-10). For both poets, not unnaturally, the view from the cliffs of England brings to mind France and conflicts between the two nations. But for both poets, such thoughts lead into reflections upon repetitive and endless armed conflict, and regret for a simpler past, Arcadian for Smith, the age of Sophocles for Arnold. The "warring elements" (12) of Smith's sonnet forty-four become a metaphor for human conflict in sixty-six, and are replaced with internecine war on a clear, calm day at sea in eighty-three. Arnold's calm night, when "The tide is full" (2), metamorphoses into "a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,/ Where ignorant armies clash by night" (35-37). The reverberations between Smith's "long-resounding shock" (66;8) and "long with-drawing vale" (8;1) and Arnold's "long, withdrawing roar" (25) echo down the years. Smith's contribution to English literature has certainly never been "either acknowledged or remembered" (Wordsworth 724).

Notes

1. The epigraphs for this chapter are from Stuart Curran's 1993 introduction to *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (xxv), Jonathan Wordsworth's 1992 introduction to *Charlotte Smith: Elegiac Sonnets 1789*, and Terence Hoagwood's 1993 introduction to *Beachy Head: With Other Poems, (1807)* (3).

2. In "Charlotte Smith's 'Literary Business,'" Judith Philips Stanton points out, "On separating from Benjamin, [Smith] had hurled herself into a legal and financial limbo: still married, she had no rights and owned nothing, not even the profits of her own labor. A surviving book contract for *Desmond*, (1792), drawn up with G.G. and J. Robinson, was made not between Robinson and Mrs. Smith but Robinson and Mr. Smith" (376-377). An unpublished letter from Smith written to her publishers, Cadell and Davies, on November 16 1796, and now held in the manuscript room in The British Library, may offer evidence of the steps she had to take to protect her property and her pride. Immediately under the address is a note "direct to *Mrs Smith* only." In the body of the letter she remarks,

you will also be troubled with a box directed to [myself?] care for a Mrs. Turner—which pray have the goodness to send to the Petworth and Arundel Coach—Having had one such thing lost in changing Coaches in London I was afraid to venturing it again I shall be oblig'd to you to let me know what you are disposed to give for the copyright of the [proposed?] volume of Poetry?"

3. All Smith's sons had successful careers in military or diplomatic service, which she initially had to finance. In *Desmond* she adopts a male protagonist, through whom she can discuss politics and censure social, legal, and economic systems (Hilbish 148). Anne Ehrenpreis remarks in her introduction to *The Old Manor House* (1969), "Her son Lionel, serving as Governor in the Windward and Leeward Islands of Jamaica in the 1830s, is remembered there for his extraordinary efforts on behalf of the slaves" (xviii), a fact that would please Smith. Florence Hilbish's 1936 dissertation *Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist (1749-1806)*, published in 1941, seems to be taken as authoritative—Hoagwood, for example, refers to Hilbish's "exemplary scholarly biography" (3)—although it is seriously flawed. Hilbish and J. Wordsworth, and even Curran, seem determined to find Smith in all or any of her fictional characters, producing readings which ignore her creative imagination. Curran does not extend his insight that "from the less than reliable expedient of tracing similar circumstances in the

novels" (xx), Hilbish draws unsubstantiated conclusions about Smith's father, Nicholas Turner, to Hilbish' reconstructed biography of Smith herself.

4. None of these new editions had been published when I began this study, but they make Smith's poetry more available to scholars and general readers. An interesting study for the future, given that all her editors are men, would be to compare their introductions, to see how they re-present her, and to assess the effect of their comments on future scholarship in greater depth than has been possible here.

5. Coleridge's definition is in his introduction to *William Lisle Bowles: Sonnets and Other Poems* (1796). It is significant that Coleridge not only refers to Smith in his introduction to a selection of "Sonnets from various Authors for the purpose of binding them up with the Sonnets of the Rev. W.L. Bowles" (544) but, as J. Wordsworth notes, "Smith is named first, as she should be." Bowles' (1762-1850) *Fourteen Sonnets* were first published in 1789, coincident with the fifth edition of her poems, five years after Smith's first edition. Bowles makes a specific point of denying that Smith's new sonnet form influenced or pre-dated his (Fry 77-78), despite his title: *Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive* (1789). According to William Tirebuck, the editor of an 1888 edition of sonnets, Bowles spent the years 1783 to 1789 "wandering and writing sonnets" (3). Smith rightly takes precedence; she is not only historically first but also preeminent.

6. There are eight such sonnets, though two are somewhat indeterminate because of Smith's punctuation practices. The earliest of these, fifty-two, first appears in the sixth edition (1790), the other seven in volume two of the ninth edition (1797).

7. Although Coleridge, in "The Nightingale," argues against the traditional significance of that bird as a standard trope, nevertheless, the sentiments expressed in the octet of Smith's fourth sonnet anticipate Coleridge's poetic action when his baby son awoke (98-103).

8. Both Kelley and J. Wordsworth refer directly to this sonnet, as opposed to any other, only because their concern with Smith is solely as a poetic influence upon W. Wordsworth and his "An Evening Walk." "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" elaborates upon Smith's theme. J. Wordsworth, in his introduction to *Elegiac Sonnets*, cites the first eight lines of Smith's fifth sonnet, and then comments, "It is not great writing." I agree with him but only to the extent that Smith writes many greater sonnets, most of which appear after the fifth edition.

9. Although Wordsworth acknowledges Smith neither as influential in his ode nor as the source for “a happy child” in “An Evening Walk” (1793), although he does initially enclose the three words within quotation marks in the 1793 poem, Mary Moorman points out that Wordsworth retained “a considerable admiration throughout his life for *Elegiac Sonnets*” (170), and J. Wordsworth notes that Wordsworth’s “relationship to Charlotte Smith went back a long way. The *Vale of Esthwaite*, written when he was seventeen, suggests that he may well have known her work [i.e. *Elegiac Sonnets*] at Hawkeshead Grammar School.” Since Smith is alive, very popular, and the pre-eminent poet in 1793, and since, as Bateson points out in a footnote, some of the changes in Wordsworth’s poetic style may have been influenced by “Smith’s popular ‘The Female Exile, (1792),’” rather than being “unnecessarily scrupulous” (Bateson 73), Wordsworth’s minimum acknowledgement of a borrowing may well have been politic.

10. Smith aligns herself specifically with male Sussex writers of her own day through this relationship with the Arun. Only Collins appears in *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* (1984), edited by Roger Lonsdale. Hayley, an esteemed writer of sonnets to whom Smith dedicated her first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, was a friend to both Anna Seward (1742-1809) and Smith.

11. Burton Pollin points out, “Keats’ reading of Charlotte Smith had been most intensive before 1815,” and further argues, “One should also remember that Keats’s odes of 1819 sprang from his attempts to transcend the sonnet form” (181). Pollin’s argument for a correlation between Keats’ ode and Smith’s seventh sonnet is grounded in the freedom of form and of rhyme scheme, as well as in the language, the themes and the orientation, but this particular sonnet is not as formally complex as many of her sonnets are; formally sonnet eight “To Spring” is a much clearer source.

12. It may well be that Smith herself coined the expression *irregular* to describe her own sonnets. Coleridge’s comments on her sonnets could indicate such a coinage. By saying that sonnets at that time were known as irregular does not give due credit to Smith’s experimental hybrids.

13. The later Romantics tend not to acknowledge or praise women writers at all. Charles Lamb (1775-1834) says of Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838), “If she belonged to me I would lock her up and feed her on bread and water till she left off writing poetry,” and refers to Bluestockings as “impudent, forward, unfeminine, and unhealthy in their minds” (Lucas 433). Earle Vonard Weller demonstrates that, as late as the writing of “To Autumn” (1819), Keats uses

many of Mary Tighe's (1773-1810) phrases and associations (327) without acknowledgement, and yet, in a letter to his brother George on the last day of 1818, Keats conceals her influence upon his work. He writes, "Mrs. Tighe . . . once delighted me—now I see through [her] and can find nothing in her—or weakness This same inadequacy is discovered . . . in *Women with few exceptions*" (2;8). Almost certainly, one of those unacknowledged exceptions is Smith as both Whiting and Pollin show.

14. Metastasio (1698-1782) "was Italy's major poet of the Enlightenment" (Curran, footnote p.23).

15. As the mother of twelve children, much of the time Smith would have been either pregnant or nursing. A note to the personal sketch by her sister, Catherine Dorset claims, "she nursed them all herself, and usually read while she rocked the cradle of one, and had, perhaps, another sleeping on her lap" (310; fn.2). Judith Stanton writes that her husband, "cursed her books, slept with the kitchen help, and heaved quarterns of bread across the table, striking her breasts" (396).

16. She was the primary care-giver for all her own children, for five of her nieces and nephews, and for at least six of her grandchildren. She was the main bread-winner, frequently and finally the sole financial provider. In her preface to *The Banished Man*, she writes, "I have been compelled to provide for the necessities of a numerous family, almost entirely by my own labour" (cited Hilbish 165). She saw herself as exiled from her paternal home by her father's second marriage, from her class by lack of financial resources, and from society by her equivocal married status and by her need to labour for subsistence (as she saw it). Although poverty is relative to other circumstances, and Smith's standard of living was luxurious when compared with that of the "working" classes, it is unlikely that many people had to work as hard as she did (in her many roles) to earn an uncertain income. When her daughter was seriously ill, Smith had to rely on the charity of the doctor, for she could not afford his fees. She shows her gratitude to him in her sixty-fifth sonnet.

17. To indicate when I am referring to the fictive Petrarch, Laura and Charlotte as recreated by Smith in her poetry, I use quotation marks: "Petrarch," "Laura" and "Charlotte." I refer to Goethe's *Werther* and Smith's *Werter* without quotation marks.

18. All translations of Petrarch are by Anna Maria Armi in *Petrarch's Sonnets and Songs* (1946).

19. Another interesting study for the future is the comparison of Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* (1796) and Wheeler Wilcox's *Abelard and Heloise*, all of which are wholly or partially written from the point of view of the woman.

20. Queen Charlotte's marriage to George III occurred in 1761, when Smith was at an impressionable age, and lasted over fifty years, the whole of Smith's adult life.

21. George III reigned in England during the American war of independence, the first stage of the industrial revolution, the French revolution and the French/British war. His first bout of prolonged and publicly acknowledged "insanity" probably occurred in 1788.

22. Ehrenpreis writes, "Queen Charlotte thought it [*Emmeline* (1788)] worth lending to her second keeper of the robes, Miss Frances Burney" (vii).

Chapter Four

Remarkable Frames of Reference:

Eleanor Farjeon, *Sonnets* and *First and Second Love*

Sonnets take on new meanings in a context designed to allow them to. (Neely)

What is required is a kind of internal distancing, an effort at defamiliarization which prevents those concepts from settling down into routine habits of thought.

(Norris)

I intend to argue that a *canzoniere* is not an anthology of separate poems, but involves a formal aesthetic program of considerable interest. The decision to place individual poems together, even if posterior to the act of writing each separately, nevertheless establishes for them a special and aesthetically very remarkable frame of reference, the use of which we can trace in many examples of the mode from Petrarch onward

(Warkentin)¹

A consideration of the two long sonnet sequences by Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965), *Sonnets* (1918) and *First and Second Love* (1949), provides an illuminating focus on the nature of both voice and genre because of their method of composition.² The structure of a sonnet sequence results from the poet's "decision to place individual poems together," as Germaine Warkentin observes in "Love's sweetest part, variety" (1975), establishing for them a "very remarkable frame of reference" (15). Farjeon's two sequences have many sonnets in common, providing different frames of reference for these poems. Her formal structures challenge some presuppositions we might have about the integrity of a single poetic work. They therefore encourage a close and careful look, in Warkentin's terms, at how structure and voice interact.

Despite the replication of individual sonnets, Farjeon's two sequences are not, in any meaningful way, the same, nor is *Sonnets*, in any sense, equivalent to any part of the other sequence. *First and Second Love* is a sonnet sequence in three parts portraying two "personal"

love affairs separated by a loveless "Interim." This sequence consists of three series: "First Love," sonnets one through thirteen; "Interim," sonnets fourteen through thirty; and "Second Love," sonnets thirty-one through forty-four. *First and Second Love* is longer and more personal, less "universal," than *Sonnets*, which is a philosophy of love, has eighteen sonnets, and is longer than any one of "First Love," "Interim" or "Second Love" but is shorter than *First and Second Love* as a whole. Although all the poems in *First and Second Love* were actually written between 1911 and 1917, they were not published until 1947, long after the two men addressed within the sequence were dead.³ Until that time, presumably, Farjeon considered that most of the sonnets not printed in *Sonnets*, the first section of *Sonnets and Poems* (1918), were too personal for public-a(c)tion, a publication that Farjeon herself oversaw.

While in no way disagreeing with Carol Neely's assessment in "The Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequences" (1978), that the "Italian model—fragmentary composition followed by careful selection and arrangement into a sequence—both justifies the expectation of structure in the sequence and predicts its loose elastic nature" (359), I would point out that Farjeon goes much farther than her predecessors in creating a shifting structure for her sequences. Unlike Michael Drayton's *Idea's Mirror* (1594) which, according to Neely, "was a structured yet elastic work which could expand, contract, and regenerate itself without altering its fundamental characteristics" (362), Farjeon's sequences do differ from each other in fundamental ways. What at first glance may appear to be minor structural changes are, in fact, both complex and far-reaching.

This technique of manipulating her own poetic voice by changing the framework of the sequence is not Farjeon's only method of creating vocal complexity, but it is her most important one, given the oblique nature of her poetry. *Sonnets* and *First and Second Love* have much in common with Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621). Jeff Masten's suggestion, in "Shall I turne blabb?" (1991), that "privacy and circulation are tied closely to gender in this first sonnet sequence by an Englishwoman" (69), can also be applied to Farjeon's sequences. They have limited publication histories, a "sustained lack of reference," an "inscrutable private language," a lack of "interpolations by, additions from, or transcriptions of others," an absence of "title page, preface, dedication, or date" (67) and, except for the very last sonnet of *First and Second Love*, no addressee such as family, "friend, or patron" (68). Although *Sonnets and Poems* and the inclusive sequence *First and Second Love* each has a title page, *Sonnets* and "Interim" first appear in the list of contents.

Unlike Adrienne Rich (b.1929), who declares feeling through her "Floating Poem" in *Twenty-One Love Poems* (1974), and challenges the conception of a stable text, Farjeon demonstrates the necessity for reading a sequence as a sequence if we are to discover her attitudes. Unlike Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), who breaks down the coherence of her sequence and voice, both by adding sonnets to successive editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) and by extensive ventriloquism, Farjeon relies on the pressures of new contexts to change the ways in which the sequence is read, the voice heard.

In order to suggest that Farjeon's sequences are better guides to her poetry than is her biography, I defer extended reference to her life and emphasise, instead, the publication history of her work. All eighteen sonnets published in 1918 as the sonnet sequence *Sonnets* within *Sonnets and Poems by Eleanor Farjeon*, re-appear in 1947, with almost no alteration but in completely different contexts. *Sonnets* has only one sonnet in common with "First Love," ten in common with "Interim," and seven in common with "Second Love." Sonnet forty-one of "Second Love" had appeared earlier as the closing poem of *Sonnets and Poems*, immediately following the two-sonnet sequence "Peace," but not as one of the eighteen *Sonnets*.⁴ And although both *Sonnets* and the series "Interim" end with "Shall we not laugh together" (XVIII/30), that sonnet has different resonances in each context, because it is the closing poem of the sequence *Sonnets* but not of *First and Second Love* as a whole.⁵ "Interim" is followed by "Second Love" in which the poet and the persona tend to meld. Such re-ordering is of crucial importance in understanding the voices of "Shall we not laugh together."

Because in this chapter I am primarily interested in the effect structure has upon voice, I shall first establish the nature of the voice of the speaker of *Sonnets*. At this time, I shall pay particular attention to the opening, closing and pivotal sonnets of this sequence. To determine voice, I shall read *Sonnets* as a sequence, ignoring, at this stage, its interconnectedness with *First and Second Love*. I shall then consider the longer sequence in terms of its internal structure, again paying close attention to the opening and closing poems of *Sonnets* in their new context, and to the opening and closing sonnets of "First Love," "Interim" and "Second Love." Of particular interest, also, are those sonnets which Farjeon alters in their transition from one sequence to the other. Since I argue that *Sonnets* is philosophical and "universal," while *First and Second Love* follows the traditional sonnet sequence and is more personal, I am especially concerned with those sonnets which seem markedly personal or impersonal in themselves, yet

occur in both sequences. That is why much preliminary consideration of Farjeon's biography may well be misleading.

The Ambiguity of Sex

A group of poems entitled *Sonnets* need not form a coherent sequence. But Farjeon numbers *Sonnets* consecutively, one through eighteen, and focuses upon the philosophy of love throughout. That the theme is love through a woman's eyes does not become at all apparent until the fifteenth sonnet, near the end of the sequence, when the persona is possibly identified as a woman—"this womb to which [unborn children] were so dear" (XV;4)—and the breeding metaphor becomes, perhaps, an expression of real maternal deprivation.

Sonnets begins in a way which is apparently both impersonal and philosophical by considering the nature of truth:

Man cannot be a sophist to his heart (I;1)

Contrary to first appearances, gender and genre will be crucial issues throughout *Sonnets*. Farjeon immediately puts on trial both her genre and courtly, heterosexual love. By referring to philosophy in a Petrarchan sonnet, she creates intertextuality between two distinct discourses and destabilises our expectations of both. We saw previously that Emmeline Stuart Wortley (1806-1855), in her opening to *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839), destabilises genres by invoking pastoral, and that Charlotte Smith, in her title, yokes elegy and sonnet sequence. The persona who begins a sonnet sequence with a poem on sophistry, will prove to be interrogating the sincerity of writers of amatory poetry in general and of sonnet sequences in particular.

By opening with "Man," and using a large and illuminated capital M to preface each of the first four lines in the manner of Medieval manuscripts, Farjeon both imitates, and comments upon, a heavily gendered tradition. She makes the absence of the traditional speaking I, the subjective eye of the sonnet sequence, conspicuous. *Man* is not only not a personal pronoun, but is either generic and universal or gender specific. Since *Man* has a capital initial letter because of its position in this literary text, it appears to be given universal status, emphasised by its elaboration. By opening her sequence with an embellished "Man," Farjeon draws attention to her use of a male genre and to the gendered complexity of "universal" man. As the sequence opens, then, we know the sex of the poet, Farjeon, but not of her persona, who subtly calls into question "Man"'s universality together with the speaker's own sincerity.

For a moment, I wish to look at the verbs rather than the imagery in this sonnet. Man cannot be a sophist and, in order not to be that which he cannot be, he must expose his intent. There is no option.

Man cannot be a sophist to his heart,
 He must look nakedly at his intent,
 Expose it of all shreds of argument,
 And strip it like a slave girl in the mart. (I;1-4)

That "must" is a command, an imperative, a requirement, a demand, and is unavoidable.

The first two quatrains set up a dichotomy between "Man's" conscience and the world, between his heart and his "outer sense."

What though with speckled truths and masked confessions
 He still deceives awhile the outer sense?
 At barely half his honesty's expense
 Still earns the world's excuse for the world's transgressions?
 His conscience cannot play the marshland elf, (I;5-9)

again declaring, at the beginning of the sestet, that man cannot be a sophist to his inner self. There now occurs some slippage between "heart" and "conscience," which by the eleventh line appear to assume identity with his soul, but that is not the crux of this sonnet's confusion.

If an action is not possible, then it is logically fallacious to go on to describe its results. And yet the speaker does precisely that:

His conscience cannot play the marshland elf,
 Confusing that poor midnight wanderer,
 His soul, with floundering lights and errant gleams.
 O what damnation man would deal himself
 If meeting her beyond his uttermost dreams
 He still could face his soul and lie to her. (I;9-14)

If man were to be a sophist to his heart, were to let his conscience suffer from delusions and illusions, were to confuse his soul, then he would suffer damnation. But since he cannot do these things, damnation cannot result. The couplet, then, is irrelevant speculation. He cannot lie to his soul, not even in his dreams.

A prosaic reading of the text leads to a philosophical fallacy, and yet the sestet speaks to our sense of reality. Whether we distinguish between heart, conscience and soul, we feel that if

we do not endeavour to speak the truth to ourselves, then we do indeed risk damnation, whatever we mean by that. The first sonnet sets up the question that the sequence attempts to answer, not whether total honesty to oneself is necessary but whether it is possible. The sequence also addresses the nature of damnation.

The "world's excuse" can only be for "the world's transgression," with the repetition of *world's* emphasising that limitation and questioning its value. The excuse is earned, and the expense is barely half his honesty. And yet the "speckled truths" and "masked confessions" lead to the "Confusing" of the soul with marshland lights. World and spirit are not readily separable. The use of masks, the value of the world's judgements, the debate between body and soul, the nature of truth, and the necessity to "face" that truth, begun here, continue throughout the sequence.

Although man cannot be a sophist to his heart, he appears to be at great risk. "Intent," apparently can be sophistic, and "intent," perhaps, can be scrutinised. It can be shocked into recognition of itself and exposed to private or public gaze. It can be stripped naked "like a slave girl in the mart," a difficult concept to comprehend. The exposure and the market combine to suggest an erotic transaction. To avoid the abstraction, we may visualise "Man" as a young, naked female, completely disempowered, and of only monetary value as labourer and breeder, the ideal(!) commodity of exchange. A prerequisite not to be a sophist is some form of emasculation. The implication, then, is that man can, and usually is, a sophist to his own heart, soul and conscience, even, or especially, in "his uttermost dreams."

However we read "Man," gender-specific man has the most to lose and so suffers the most. In a neat inversion, stripped of his sophistry, he is silenced, his mastery lost. If "Man" is universal, then a woman sophist would suffer the same fate. Woman, however, is already emasculated and may not see herself as far removed from the position of a slave even, or especially, if she is no longer nubile. Even so, the image of exposure in a slave market is shocking and unsettling.

Before we know that the persona is not a slave, in particular that s/he is not a "bond-slave" to nature (XII;9), and that she may be a woman (XV), Farjeon has reversed gender roles by making visible the hidden agenda of universal "Man." Either woman is universal "Man" and susceptible to sophistry, or she is "Woman," not "Man" and, therefore, may not be a sophist. But this, too, proves to be sophistry.

The search for emotional honesty is not easy; the pain, the energy and the profound uncertainties are intense. Conscience, whatever its worldly and deceiving tendencies, cannot confuse the soul. And yet in this opening sonnet decrying sophistry, there seems to be a lack of distinction between "Heart," "slave-girl," "intent" and "soul," though all are feminised directly or by implication. A movement toward androgyny might be suggested through the image of the slave, stripped of clothes as "Man's" "intent" is stripped of sophistry and convention. But the slave is not subjected to her own gaze; in fact she does not see most of herself. The "honest" appraisal is made by others, with the intent to purchase, abuse and prostitute. Furthermore, this call to self-inquisition occurs within that most conventional of genres, the sonnet sequence. What Farjeon most clearly shows at this point, as she moves from term to term and from image to image, is how easy it is to deceive oneself, how difficult it is to avoid sophistry, and how inadequate language is for such an endeavour.

Farjeon is a poet as well as a philosopher. By choosing to open her sonnet sequence with a discussion of sophistry, she implicitly brings into question the veracity and sincerity of the genre and the practitioner. A poet may well use evasive and deceitful rhetoric. The secrets of his "heart" may go unrecorded. Man (and the poet?) who uses polished argument may be particularly vulnerable to self-deception. For Sir Philip Sidney, "Man" should listen when his muse tells him to "look into thy heart and write" (1;14). For Farjeon, "Man," and the poet, should expose his intent at least, and especially, to himself. His discourse with his heart should be honest and open.

The more fanciful sestet echoes pertinent literary conventions, with its allusions to erotic life in the vocabulary of romantic adventure, and with some faint tinge of obligation to the poor lost heart and soul. But there is no knight errant to save the "wanderer"; only "errant gleams" which lead to the damnation of the soul. Love is oddly associated with integrity and self-interest, and an end to wandering, as if without integrity there can be no love. Since this is formally a Petrarchan sonnet, with a slightly variant rhyme pattern, it has no rhyming couplet, but the closure is exceptionally weak with its "to her." Although the feminine pronoun refers to the soul, conventionally female, it also functions as a subliminal transition into the next sonnet on love, the major theme of this sequence.

In the first sonnet, the sophist is sparing of the truth; the second opens with "O spare me from the hand of niggard love/That grasps at interest on what it lends" (II;1-2). Again the speaker uses mercenary metaphors to criticise a lack of openness. Only sophists and niggards

bargain with truth and love, weigh the cost, and work with fractions: "Such misers of the riches of the heart/ . . . /miss the whole, striving to save the part,/By the bare measure" (II;5,7-8), recalling the earlier "half his honesty's expense" (I;7). Uneasy dichotomies of world and spirit, of earth and heaven, continue. In "stint[ing] earth of bliss to add to heaven" (II;12), the "poor fools" (II;13) fail to realise that "life only gave ye this" (II;13) —the capacity and opportunity to love—"Because earth has such need of heavenly bliss" (II;14).

That *carpe diem* is more appropriate than *memento mori*, that love is to be experienced to the full, is spelled out in the next sonnet (III). "Man," niggard with love and partial with the truth, not differentiating between joy and pain, has only a "perjured wisdom" and so cannot form an adequate philosophy of love or life.

O perjured wisdom! half-truth hedged with lies!
 That makes a common stake of joy and pain,
 When tears are man's most mortal certainties
 And every instant's joy his heavenly gain. (III;5-8)

Love, with a capital L, should "be prodigal, nor look hereafter" (III;1), even if "the cost of golden laughter" (III;3) is "the dull coinage of leaden tears" (III;4). Tears are mortal and cannot be weighed against the moment's immortality of joy.

Nevertheless, even knowing the true value of love and truth, we cannot control our lives, our loves, our destinies, according to *Sonnets* five and six, "When all is said" (V) and "Certain among us walk in loneliness" (VI). For even "Our mightiest dreams still lean on circumstance" (V;6), so that "We cannot by the strength of our desires/Compel our destinies" (V;9-10). In *Morning Has Broken* (1986), Annabel Farjeon, the niece and biographer of the poet, cites an undated letter from D.H.Lawrence to his friend E.Farjeon, in which Lawrence took exception to these attitudes.⁶

There is dignity and beauty and worth in these sonnets. "Certain Among us Walk in Loneliness," and "When All is Said" expresses [*sic*] you perfectly. It is very good. But it is not quite true. We *can* by the strength of our desires compel our destinies. Indeed our destiny lies in the strength of our desires. (120)

In a sequence on truth in love, we should, perhaps, trust Farjeon the poet and distrust Lawrence the critic, especially since he thinks women should not and cannot be poets: "he doesn't want her poking into his song, and fussing over it, and mussing it up. Every man to his trade, and every woman to hers" (1927:101). But then Lawrence knows "There is an element of danger in

all new utterance" (1923:94), and a woman's truth might be unsettling. "When all is said" was reprinted as sonnet eighteen of "Interim" in 1947, and Farjeon did not alter her lines, "We cannot by the strength of our desires/Compel our destinies," to Lawrence's "our destiny lies in the strength of our desires." Inasmuch as the earlier sonnets may appear more androgynous, before a shift in five and six, they might have seemed more "Lawrentian." What Lawrence may not be fully perceiving is that while these two sonnets are her truth they are not his and the reason may be due, in part, to gender difference.

Not until the sestet of "Certain among us walk in loneliness" (VI), however, does gender differentiation become prominent, since none appears in the first person plural personal pronouns, *us* and *we*, used in the first eight lines. Although "We know that we are potent to create" (VI;5), "indifferent death" (VI;7) visits us all, whether we have achieved our potential or not. The sestet, however, deals with the absolute specificity of gender:

So women with the aching will to bear
 Still to the barren grave must barren go,
 And men that might again like Titans dare
 Angelic secrets, die and nothing know.
 Alas! why were we born to woe and bliss
 If life had no more need of us than this? (VI;9-14)

Despite the sexual neutrality of the octet, the sestet delineates quite clearly archetypal areas of concern for men and women, as seen by the persona, emphasised by that biological "barren . . . barren," where the grave and the womb are equated. Men are spirited questors. We are reminded of the ambiguity of "Man," the opening word of the sequence, and that we do not know the sex of the persona. But, in any case, our necessity to "life" is minimal. Even the bearing of children by individual women is not essential for the continuation of the race.

Through extreme sexual differentiation Farjeon moves from "Man," or a generalised "we," to two genders; love, as the unity of the soul is no longer the sole issue. In a strange inversion, women have replaced "Men" and the body, while men have replaced the slave-girl and the soul in the human equation, but their respective values are not clear. In fact, the persona says, "When I see two delay their wings at heaven" (VII;1) because they are too busy with "life's sleek counterfeit,/Convention" (VIII;1-2), then angels must "Break into tears of fire or furious mirth" (VII;4). The angels weep because "sublime" (VII;6), "nearly perfected" spirits (VII;5) set "the measurable years in dread/Against their single flash of measureless time" (VII;7-8).

Niggardly measuring, false values, “count[ing] the cost” (VII; 6) again risk the moment of immortality.

The answer to the ultimate philosophical question—if we are not necessary to life, why are we here?—is certainly not to follow convention, and to be “respectable,” or to obey the dictates of decorum, rather than philosophy, s/he responds in sonnets seven and eight. Not only do social standards cheat us of timelessness, so too, do intellectual systems:

So issues strange to nature are debated,
Woven in nets and beaten into bars,
While nature’s issue stands unconsummated
Upon the very boundary of the stars;
And souls whose very unity had been divine
Sundered shrink back from God’s to man’s design. (VII;9-14)

The “issues strange to nature” have nothing in common with “nature’s issue,” which is related, of course, to the barren woman of sonnet six. Nature’s issue is “unconsummated” because of “debates” on abstract issues. Not only is sophistry destructive of truth, but philosophy denies love, unity and divinity. The souls, who combined individual unity with the unity of two people, when sundered, not only shrink back “to man’s design,” but *by* it.

The desire for true wisdom, as opposed to “perjured wisdom,” is necessary to love, because unthinking convention “muffles up . . . / The wise examination of the mind” (VIII;4-5), and offers “easy conduct to the blind” (VIII;8). And through such an examination, the persona concludes that,

Love needs not two to render it complete,
O certainly love needs not even one!

. . . .

When sunlight falls upon unpeopled valleys
No presence can increase or dim its fall,

. . . .

If solitary into the light and song
I come, I know I have my treasure whole,

. . . .

Yea, and still have it whole, though only one
Should follow me—or none, beloved, or none. (IX;1-2,5-6,9-10,13-14)

Love, then, exists without need for ears to hear, or eyes to see. When the tree falls it makes a noise even if there is no listener. One person, alone, can fully experience love.

But the speaker may be indulging in errant self-deception. The conviction of “the light and song,” of the “treasure whole,” falters in the couplet and, rather than firm closure, leaves ambiguity. The meaning of the last five words is obscured in its repetition: “or none, [who are beloved], or none [at all]”; or “or none . . . or none” where “beloved” is merely an endearment in the vocative, and the second “or none” is an echo, wistful or defiant, perhaps. Either reading could also be triumphant. S/he, and love, are self-sufficient.

But the doubt has been sown, both in the reader’s mind and in the persona’s. The very next sonnet opens with the question, “What is this anguish then that always stands/Mingled in love, if love be love’s sole end?” (X;1-2). The rhythm and the pattern of repetition, as it begins to fall into a kind of non-sense—“in love if love be love”—questions the truth of the stand on love so far. The speaker goes on to argue, yet again, that “We are life’s purpose, he much less is ours” (X;6) and, in an extended agricultural metaphor, concludes in the sestet that only through love can “we behold a God revealed,/And serve life’s purpose not like beasts but gods” (X;13-14). But there is no joy in this sonnet, no song (IX;9), no “golden laughter” (III;3). Love becomes only the sole/soul reason for enduring life’s “fierce needs [which] make torments of our powers” (X;8). Again, we do not know whether this is escapism or tragic suffering.

Philosophy and love, however, still do not find reconciliation, for neither do life and love. The persona now has “love again and life again/By either hand, and cannot join their palms” (XIV;1-2). The “Poor heart, poor beggar of bleak charities” (XIV;7), an “almsman” (XIV;9), “famished” (XIV;10) recalls the earlier slave-girl. Although both life and love give her “alms” (XIV;4) and “dole” (XIV;5), s/he “scatters publicly” that given by life, while “love’s lies/Unspent, unspent for ever in my heart” (XIV;5-6). The mercenary language, the referral back to earlier metaphors and similes of trade, and the repetition, “Unspent, unspent” recall the folly, and probably sin, of hoarding love’s gifts. Love should be “prodigal” (III;1) not niggardly (II;1) but, this poem implies, love may not be reciprocated.

Indeed neither life nor love appear to be concerned with the whole person. They separate body from heart: “Love asks not who doth my body dress,/Nor life who stoops to clothe a heart so poor” (XIV;11-12). Even when s/he has them by “either hand” they are still single, and s/he asks them, “Why do ye always come in singleness?” (XIV;13), but gets no answer.

S/he desires unity, not duality. S/he begs them to "Meet in me once, and I will want no more" (XIV;14). Her plea, however, also goes unanswered.

For life and love never do "Meet in me once." In the fifteenth sonnet, which apparently identifies the speaker as a woman, she "to the barren grave must barren go" (VI;10), presumably because "issues strange to nature are debated,/.../While nature's issue stands unconsummated" (VII;9,11). In the most poignant of *Sonnets* s/he says,

Farewell, you children that I might have borne
 Now must I put you from me year by year,
 Now year by year the root of life be torn
 Out of this womb to which you were so dear,
 Now year by year the milky springs be dried
 Within the sealed-up fountains of my breast,
 Now year by year be to my arms denied
 The burden they would break with and be blessed.

Sometimes I felt your lips and hands so close
 I almost could have plucked you from the dark,
 But now your very dream more distant grows
 As my still aching body grows more stark.
 I shall not see you laugh or hear you weep,
 Kiss you awake, or cover up your sleep. (XV)

The schism of body and mind, work and thought, implicit throughout the sequence and made concrete in "Certain among us walk in loneliness" (VI) where woman, body and labour are set against man, mind and thought, results in sterility.

The starkness of the poem is unremitting. Even the end-line rhyming words form a pattern, only slightly mitigated, of loss and death: *Borne* as in birth, pain and burden; *year*; *torn*; *dear* as in precious and costly; *dried*; *breast*; *denied*; *blessed*; *close* as in near and confining; *dark*; *grows*; *stark*; *weep*; *sleep*. It would seem that in this poet-as-woman's philosophy, at least prior to 1918, "We cannot by the strength of our desires/Compel our destinies," because "Our mightiest dreams still lean on circumstance" (V;9-10,6), as well as on propriety, decorum, respectability. As the persona asks in sonnet five, "if life brings no metal to the flame/What shall we fashion of it in life's name?" (V;13-14). The answer, for some women, appears to be

that they cannot fashion life if life itself does not offer the opportunity. Although, perhaps, "Love needs not two to render it complete" (IX;1), life needs two to propagate. Without love, all creativity may be thwarted.

Since "Farewell, you children that I might have borne" (XV) seems so strangely personal, within the more philosophical *Sonnets*, it raises questions as to why Farjeon included this poem and put it in an emphatic position, fourth from the end. One answer is that her concerns are with both the human condition in general, and women's condition in particular. And the difference in biological function of men and women is significant to her. Tied in with that difference is women's dependence on circumstance to fulfill their reproductive potential. D.H.Lawrence, in attempting to rewrite Farjeon, is insisting on overlaying her particular womanly perception with his particular manly one.

A woman-as-writer of a sonnet sequence may be in an ideal position to criticise literary and social traditions and conventions when she can convince the reader of her authority. If Christopher Norris is correct to say, in *Derrida* (1987), "It is only possible to criticize existing institutions from *within* an inherited language, a discourse that will always have been worked over in advance by traditional concepts and categories" (16), then a sonnet sequence should be an ideal critical medium. I suggest that for Farjeon to get the "required . . . kind of internal distancing" (Norris 16), she needed fourteen sonnets to establish her voice as bardic, spaciouly philosophical, human. In "an effort at defamiliarization which prevents those concepts from settling down into routine habits of thought" (Norris 16), she had to delay identifying the persona as (possibly) a woman to prevent her voice from being misread.

One reason why this sonnet seems so personal, is that it is concerned with women's biology from a woman's perspective. Had Farjeon chosen to mourn equally both male and female loss of children, as she does when writing about physically unfulfilled women and mentally unfulfilled men in the sestet of sonnet six, she might have maintained an ungendered "philosophic" voice. Had she omitted its octet, "Farewell, you children" (XV) could be seen to evolve naturally from a meditation on the divisions of body and heart, life and love, for the sestet is not inherently gender-specific.

Sonnet fifteen, however, is not such an anomaly as it might at first appear. The octet picks up and develops the natural, agricultural imagery, the shared pains of common "labour" of earlier sonnets. After all, the persona tells us in sonnet ten,

Only when love across the heavy fields
 Divinely treads to labour with the clods,
 He breaks the goad that life is glad to yield,
 And lifts the yoke that bowed us to the sods (X:9-12)

Although the action is not the same, nevertheless there are strong resonances between the last two lines cited here and "The burden they would break with and be blessed" (XV;8). Sonnet fifteen also resonates in its temporal "year by year" (XV;1,3,5,7) with the "seasons of significance" (V;7-8).

The most pertinent context to place sonnet fifteen firmly within a developing philosophy of love is the sestet of sonnet eleven:

Life without love, O bitter, bitterest birth!
 Love without life still leaves us in our need.
 Ah, love, give up to me my patch of earth,
 My pinch of seed! Hast neither earth nor seed?
 Then whence these visions of thy presence born,
 These shining visions of flowers and fruit and corn? (XI;9-14)

The reference to birth, both perverted and denied, is obvious. The visions in this sonnet are "of flowers and fruit and corn." The visions in "Farewell, you children that I might have borne" (XV), echoing "of thy presence born," are the children, whose "very dream more distant grows" (XV;11).

Not only is sonnet eleven not gender specific, it is gender inclusive. The womb, "the barren grave" (VI;10), becomes "my patch of earth." Sperm, conventionally referred to as seed, is "My pinch of seed." The persona is androgynous. The lack for a man is as intense as the lack for a woman. No available womb for him, no available seed for her, when love has "neither earth nor seed." Again life and love together are essential, as are earth and seed, or seed and earth.

Perhaps sonnet fifteen, then, is as metaphoric as sonnet eleven, and the apparent sex of the persona is still not determined. The seemingly personal quality may be due merely to the fact that "woman" is always seen as gender specific, whereas "man" is so often seen as gender neutral. After all, the persona does open the sequence by raising that very point. Birth metaphors by men are taken as precisely that, metaphors. In a metaphoric, gender-neutral

reading of sonnet fifteen, the “children” may be children of the brain, the heart and the soul, as well as of the body. They could even be those undiscovered “Angelic secrets” (VI;12).

Immediately after sonnet fifteen, the speaker returns to ungendered language and metaphors, even as she amplifies references to children, burdens, passion, aridity, dreams, wombs and unconsummated birth; she also circles back to the opening mercenary metaphor. Now, however, thinking metaphorically, we might be more apt to reconsider the “spending” as masculine, in terms of the Victorian metaphor for ejaculation, and hear resonances from Shakespeare’s “Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame” (129;1-2).

O lovely life, how you have worn me out

....

I am as weary as a child tonight

And with my heavy lack of burdens bowed

....

Passion is spent, and nothing was it spent on,

And grief run dry of having no wounds to cure

....

I have only patience left: such patience, sure,

Is not life’s child and mine, but mine and death’s. (XVI;1,4-5,9-10,13-14)

That the children, womb and breasts of sonnet fifteen are indeed metaphoric is now much clearer. The paradoxical “heavy lack of burdens” is not likely to be the lack of children since it occurs in conjunction with the gender neutral “I am as weary as a child tonight.” Now the metaphoric child is patience. A child of “death’s” is far more ominous than the un-realised child of the previous sonnet (XV), and refers us back to the mortality incurred by not seizing moments of passion for heart and soul. Patience is not a virtue.

The sequence now takes us through “the grave/And womb of time” (XVII;12-13), obviously metaphoric, in the penultimate sonnet. The bardic voice returns with full emphasis, as the persona becomes prophet and seer in an archaic mythology which complements earlier references to fairy love or Romance, and is equally “errant.”

I have seen apparitions. I have heard

Rumours within my soul’s profoundest cave.

Movements remote and mighty have been stirred

In my ancestral blood, while from the grave

And womb of time strange thunders did arise
 That shook the throne of thought and prophecies. (XVII;9-14)

Now the dreams and the visions are apparitions and prophecies. The barren womb becomes “my soul’s profoundest cave.” Rather than “the sealed-up fountains of my breast” (XV;6), her “ancestral blood stirs.” Rather than the roots torn from the womb, now “strange thunders did arise” foretelling storms. Power and liquidity replace powerlessness and aridity.

But the sequence does not stop with this archaic bardic power, it returns to the philosophy of love. The final sonnet, eighteen, which recalls past times, past metaphors, and past situations, is enigmatic, and the attitude toward “Love” is difficult to determine. The sonnet (18) does not offer any resolution for the sequence. Even if the opening of the octet and the sestet appear to do so, the ending undoes both resolution and certainty.

Shall we not laugh together, you and I,
 I being at last fulfilled, at last at rest
 Within the strength of your beloved breast,
 Shall we not laugh once at a day gone by
 When, wan as things that lie below the earth,
 Things choked and buried, sunless and unsought,
 This richest life was only lived in thought,
 Seed without fruit, unconsummated birth?

Love, in that time when you have called me yours
 And have with kisses long outbreathed old fears,
 Love, let me not remember these! these hours,
 Save with one smile to drown their thousand tears.
 Then fold me in your bosom, deep away
 That memory cannot touch this loveless day. (XVIII)

The first four lines offer a sense of “fulfillment” and peace, and yet, even here, there is a slight disturbance. If “you” is a person, we might expect the speaker to be “at last at rest” *upon* “your beloved breast.” But to be “at rest/Within the strength of your beloved breast” may well be metaphoric, with an implication that the persona has become absorbed by “Love,” and not by a human being. Although it might sound as if s/he has found fulfillment in physical contact, that is

not what s/he says. The bleakness of the next four lines also tends to argue against her statement that s/he has in-deed, found “rest” and “fulfillment.”

In *A Nursery in the Nineties* (1935), Farjeon recalls that when she was about ten she “liked Keats best” (cited A.Farjeon 23) of all the poets, and sonnet eighteen reverberates loudly with John Keats’ sonnet “Why did I laugh tonight? No voice will tell.” I see his poem not only as a source for, but as a point of entry into, Farjeon’s sonnet:

Then to my human heart I turn at once.
Heart! Thou and I are here sad and alone;
I say, why did I laugh! O mortal pain!
O Darkness! Darkness! (4-7)

Keats’ persona is talking to his heart, and is questioning why he would laugh given that he is “sad and alone” and in “mortal pain.” But at least he laughs, repeated three times. Farjeon’s speaker asks, twice, “Shall we not laugh,” and the final answer appears to be no. This is no laughing matter.

Farjeon’s persona may also be “sad and alone” for “Love” does not necessarily imply two, does not require one and an-other. The speaker has already told us that “Love needs not two to render it complete,/ O certainly love needs not even one!” (IX;1-2). But we saw then that perhaps s/he sounded more convinced than s/he was. S/he may be suffering from the severe loneliness of the “waste” of our “potent[ial] to create” (VI;4-5). If “you” is her heart, then that “beloved breast” may be equated with “the sealed-up fountains” (XV;6) of sonnet fifteen. Days have gone by, including, presumably, the day when s/he said “Farewell, you children that I might have borne” (XV), who sound very similar to that “unconsummated birth,” “Seed without fruit,” and “Things choked and buried, sunless and unsought” (XVIII). There are no children, no consummated births, no “golden laughter” (III;3), only the “leaden tears” (III;4), which “are man’s most mortal certainties” (III;7).

The indecipherability of this final sonnet continues into the eleventh line, when the persona pleads, “let me not remember these! these hours,” for the reference “these” is not clear. S/he may want not to remember the “choked and buried” things, but the syntax, and the break between the octet and sestet, argue that s/he does not want to remember the “kisses,” or, perhaps, the “old fears.” Logically, kisses, rather than fears, would be remembered “with one smile.” But since all those are in the past, “these” should refer to now, but the present would seem both difficult and undesirable to forget, when s/he is “at last fulfilled.” “[T]hese hours” of the present

time, rather than being fulfilled, are suddenly revealed, in the penultimate word of the sonnet and the sequence, as “loveless.” Instead of experiencing life and love, “This richest life was only lived in thought” (XVIII;7). Philosophy offers cold comfort.

Desire in Language

As a woman writer of a sonnet sequence concerned with heterosexual love from a woman’s perspective, Farjeon is unknowingly picking up the labyrinthine thread that Mary Wroth began to unravel. Although Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) is concerned with both patriarchal thinking and female desire, Farjeon—like Mary Robinson (1758-1800) in *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley in *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839), and Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1853-1919) in *Abelard and Heloise* (1918)—tackles more directly than Wroth the problematical relationship between female desire and a patriarchal society. Like Elinor Wylie (1885-1929) later in *One Person* (1928), in *First and Second Love* Farjeon questions the validity of the fathers’ language, partially expressing her critique in her ability to coin negative versions of the patriarchal vocabulary. Her sequence epitomises “feminine” passivity, and the anguish such passivity can cause.

Farjeon’s use of such terms as *unlove* (4;13), *unbuilding* (5;4), *unsaid* (7;1), *unpossessed* (7;11), *un-ease* (9;8) *untrue* (12;9), *unfit* (13;2) and *unrest* (7;9) is peculiar to “First Love” and demonstrates not merely a partiality for litotes, but the speaker’s continued refusal to act. The fourth sonnet begins the series of passivities, as if she can undo her own sexual transgressions. She tells her “beloved” (3;1) to “unlove me” (4;13). She sees a necessity for “guardian walls” (5;4) if they are to remain “In love’s fast friendship” (5;6), walls that do not require any “unbuilding” (5;4). Love, as opposed to lust, a word she has still not used, “once possessed will not be unpossessed” (7;11).

Even the publication of this sequence was a kind of active-non-resistance, an undoing of her silence. According to the dust-jacket, Farjeon never intended to publish *First and Second Love*. Thirty years after the completion of the sequence, she had the sonnets published under her own supervision “rather than leave their later publication to chance.” This sequence, written during the first world war, was not made public until after the second.

Farjeon began her apprenticeship for the sonnet sequence early. While probably still in her ‘teens (1890’s), according to A.Farjeon, she invented “the spoof Elizabethan poet, Nathaniel

Downes Scholars were deceived, literary reviewers took the work for genuine The poems pertain to have come from Nathaniel Downes' only preserved work, *The Shepheard's Gyrlond*, printed in 1594" (80). The wildly hydraulic octet of one of the sonnets from the *Gyrlond* reads:

My deare, my onely loue, my bosomes floure,
 With laughing misicke dayly mocks my sighs,
 And I beneathe her hardly wielded powre,
 Grow faint with longings that she doth misprize.
 The lyttel god wych dwells within her eyes,
 Still drawes my teares – O drawe them into her
 Whose natural sun her natural fountein dries,
 That sluggishly her streames of pitie stir. (cited A.Farjeon 80)

Farjeon may well have acquired her early knowledge of heterosexual love from literature, but in *Sonnets* and *First and Second Love* she shows that she could move far beyond convention and imitation. Nevertheless, Lawrence wrote, "I wish you had never read a line of Elizabethan poetry in your life, and then we might have had pure utterance from you" (cited A.Farjeon 120). Farjeon consciously imitates some of her prestigious men-as-models in stressing the unattainability of a beloved who inspires the act of writing. Imitation also helps her to claim her poetic seriousness, to establish her right to the form, and to indicate her poetic heritage by deliberately working within the parameters of the tradition.

Woman, the apparent object of discourse in sonnet sequences authored by men, has a major impediment to seeing herself as a speaking subject with an authoritative voice and legitimate desire(s) of her own. Before a woman becomes a writer, she is a reader. It may be difficult for her to articulate her desire(s), therefore, because her image of herself has inevitably been contaminated by such male-fictions as the idea that a woman's role is to be desired, not desiring.

It is also difficult for any woman to express sexual desire for which she has no vocabulary and, as an early post-Victorian, single woman, Farjeon's sexual language (and her experience) is a deficiency her sonnets explore. The English language still has no words for the subtleties of sexual pleasure, for *jouissance*. As Richard Howard notes in his introduction to Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), "The Bible they translated calls it 'knowing' while the Stuarts called it 'dying,' the Victorians called it 'spending,' and we call it

coming" (vi). The two middle terms are male specific. The most recent can apply to both sexes but, even then, is not very subtle as it connotes orgasm only. In her search to overcome her difficulty, Farjeon uses circumlocution, striking imagery of moisture and aridity, and the tripartite structure of *First and Second Love*.

Women are coerced into denying their sexuality in the same way that men are induced to go to war, through propaganda, through the power of words, through "a subtle network of discourses, special knowledges, pleasures, and powers" (Foucault 1978:72). Here, and throughout the three sections of Farjeon's sequence, the speaker implicitly reveals that she has a perceived need to conceal her love and, even more importantly, to conceal both her sexual desire and her discomfort with that desire from herself, from her beloved, and from society. Speaking of sexuality, Michel Foucault argues that

in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present. (1978:3,17)

And Foucault is speaking of the inability to articulate male/masculine sexuality, and of the hypocrisy ensuing not "by reasons of some property inherent in sex itself, but by virtue of the tactics of power immanent in this discourse" (Foucault 1978:70). The fathers' language cannot possibly articulate and reveal woman's desire.

The first world war is the never-to-be-forgotten backdrop to *First and Second Love*, which is an attempt, unlike the philosophical *Sonnets*, to express a woman's love and desire. In the course of this attempt, "First Love" follows the confusions of love with lust. The difficulty, for the poet and her readers, lies in naming woman's desire and, therefore, the impossibility of comprehending and ordering the inexpressible. In "First Love," sonnets one through thirteen, the speaker seeks to differentiate between love and lust, and to attribute some value, positive or negative, to each, but she cannot find the words. Between her first love and her second, she experiences a period of aridity depicted in "Interim," sonnets fourteen through thirty. Her "Second Love," sonnets thirty-one through forty-four, speaks of a frustrated love, which becomes absolutely unattainable after the death of her beloved at the front, the subject of the final sonnet.

In the same way as Farjeon establishes her philosophical voice in fourteen *Sonnets* before risking misreading through "Farewell, you children" (XV), she takes ten sonnets to

establish a personal voice and theme in the series "First Love" before including the more impersonal "Man cannot be a sophist to his heart" (11). None of the other philosophical *Sonnets* are repeated in "First Love." As in *Sonnets*, the opening poems of each series are pivotal to an understanding of *First and Second Love*. "First Love," "Interim" and "Second Love," all begin with a personal pronoun, *O my, I* and *You* respectively.

The first line of the first sonnet of the opening series, suggests two of Farjeon's major themes throughout *First and Second Love*: the change caused by sexual passion and the obliquity of the language available for describing the position of woman-as-lover:

O my white star turned red! art thou the same
 That once looked tranquilly beyond the night,
 Now leaping into golden restless flame,
 No more a shining, but a burning light?
 Once I have dared to name thee: but thy name
 So shaken is by that which now shakes me,
 I know not in my trouble whether to claim
 The name that was for that which seems to be.
 But if this new strange radiance be ill,
 A bastard brother to my wondrous star,
 O pure and ancient splendour! light me still,
 Shine swiftly on me, do not appear so far!
 For all my strength now feeds a fire so bright
 I dare not foster it to the utmost height. (1)

By opening the sonnet with an enigmatic "white star turned to red," Farjeon immediately signals that her concern is not only with her feelings but also with the conventional language of desire.

The passion here is a far cry from the speculative mood at the beginning of *Sonnets*, and immediately sets the tone for a very different sequence. Now the problem is not with masks, and "speckled truths" (I;5), the sophistry of self-deception, but with the very nature of reality, knowledge and language. The "marshland elf" (I;9), the "floundering lights and errant gleams" (I,11) of the first *Sonnets* are replaced with leaping, "golden restless flame," "burning light," "strange radiance" and "pure and ancient splendour!" References to the tradition are not oblique, through Petrarchan form, sophistry and potential "errant" knights, but direct, through

the experience of the speaker. A more philosophical language has been replaced with a more symbolic one.

Immediately, the reader endeavours to make sense of that symbolism, but the clues are few. One recalls the starry precedent of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*. But Sidney's star is the female beloved; if Farjeon is following while modifying the convention, then the star as "bastard brother" may indicate a female speaker, an "illegitimate" male. The "white star turned red," however, may symbolise passion or love more generally. Given the historical context, and the red colour of the planet Mars, the opening line could allude to the movement from peace to war. Venus, both as the god of love and as the evening/morning star, is another strong association. With war, as with the emotional instability of passion, the purity of peace and love turns into the blood-shed and passion of slaughter and lust.

The persona then seeks to identify her condition, but can find no name as she circles her way around the problem of the inadequacy of language. Perhaps love (or friendship) and passion cannot co-exist. As the tranquillity of her love is replaced with passion in the first sonnet, her "white star" turns to red, and the shining "golden flame" to "a burning light." The metamorphosis imagined in the sky shakes the very foundations of her being.

Through the use of internal and end rhymes—*white, night, light, light, bright, height*—the speaker emphasises this metamorphosis. The first rhyme forces the "white star" into relationship with the night. The speaker is situated within the darkness. She can no longer look "tranquilly beyond the night," for the "pure and ancient splendour" apparently no longer automatically "light[s] me still." She needs to plead that it should (continue) to do so. But her ambiguous syntax reflects that not only does she have no language by which to name her condition; she does not know whether that not-to-be-named is good or evil, for "still" resonates with both "tranquilly" and "ill" (9). The star certainly has dubious antecedents: "bastard," "foster." The second quatrain, tied to the first by a linked rhyme, moves from the question of the identity of the basic force moving the speaker to that of the applicability of the same name to both past and present forces. The rhyme in the couplet returns to the beginning of the sonnet and to the question asked in the first quatrain. She knows that the star and the flame have been transformed, and asks whether they are, nevertheless, the same. In neither instance, however, does she actually name either condition.

All she tells us is that "Once I have dared to name thee:" but even this short clause is not transparent. The colon encourages a multiplicity of readings as it both isolates and connects.

She may have named only once, on one occasion. Alternatively, since naming is power, she might have controlled the situation once she has named it or “claimed” it. Perhaps she named a passion in the past—once—which she thought was desire, but now realises that the former state was inadequate to the name she gave it. Her problem is whether the name more appropriately signifies her condition then or her condition now. And those conditions may include friendship, love, and violent, frightening lust.

She continues, in the third quatrain and final couplet, to question “this new strange radiance.” But now she distances herself from it as if it were “A bastard brother” which she dared “not foster,” even as she asks the “pure” light to “not appear so far” and possibly to “light me still.” She may feel that she needs protection, guidance. Or, perhaps, she implies that, given the intensity of the fire she “feeds” so directly with her being, even idealising love-language could be inflammatory. In a sonnet that is interrogating the nature of sexual desire, within a sequence that is pre-occupied with both language and desire, she refers to passion not only as illegitimate, with all its connotations, but as masculine. But she does not end this passion which is ignoble in comparison with her wondrous star. Because she is employing all her strength to feed the fire, even though her passion is now a “burning light,” even though her white star has turned to red, she still refuses, or is unable, to name, express and thereby question that desire. The red planet Mars, named for the god of battle, has apparently usurped the relatively innocent, white light of Venus, god of love, and replaced the morning and the evening star with its promise of renewal. The persona has become a war zone.

Farjeon’s linguistic balancing—“name thee . . . thy name,” “So shaken . . . now shakes”—is reminiscent of some of Shakespeare’s sonnets, including “Let me not to the marriage of true minds” (116), his poetic expression of the possibility of constant love in a mutable world. Farjeon’s speaker, however, is considering the mutability of love under the pressure of passion, and the effect that has upon her. What she seems unable to decide is whether it is this Shakespearean sonnet that is her model or “Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame,” with its symmetrical “lust in action . . . till action lust” (129;1-2). Her second quatrain, then, brings the speaker no nearer to understanding, naming, or ordering her passion, and the reader no nearer to a definitive reading.

To make some sense of the words on the page, the reader “fills in.” The non-specific “thee” could be the feelings, the lover, or Love, with a capital L. If the name is “Love,” then the question is whether “that which shakes me now” is “Love,” or whether the “trouble” is shaking

her confidence in language. The persona, like Rich's persona of *Sources* (1981-82), appears to experience "a passion so unexpected/there is no name for it" (XI;11-12).

Throughout, "First Love" is an expression of the disorder of sexual desire and the guilt the speaker feels in a sexually evolving relationship. Fearing her desire, and perhaps desiring her fear, Farjeon's persona asks "Can love be evil?" (2;1). Although "music [is] the food of love" (*Twelfth Night* I,i,1), she wonders, what "if an unskilled I/Jar the fine melody with ill-tuned strings?" (2;5-6). In the third sonnet which begins by affirming the need to "be wise" (3;1), her "spirit trembles in the glow/Of your brief circling arm" (3;3-4). Not only are her vocabulary and her morality too limited to define desire and to assess its moral value, she also is not sure of the social consequences, of whether "shame must follow love too little hid" (3;12). She knows that she acted "In innocence" (3;9) but, if there is to be blame, then "I was to blame/For half the sum of silent things we did" (3;9-10). She had no words at the time, and she still has no words. Without words, there can be no understanding. We are left wondering whether she is troubled because she showed, by look or word, her love. She may be potentially ashamed because she refrained from restraint, was immodest or not silent. On the other hand, those "silent things we did" could indicate a lack of chastity. The sestet, with its "knowledge," its loss of "innocence," its "blame," "shame," secrecy and silence, rings with that first Fall in the Garden of Eden. The speaker closes this third sonnet with conflicting emotions, with "sorrow which with joy divides my soul" (3;14).

The first sonnets establish the speaker's personal tone and sense of vision, but there are other pivotal sonnets that stress her particular predicament. The seventh sonnet of "First Love" indicates such a time of crisis, as she explores "death," with its implications of sexual "dying." Having asserted that she "will turn/The loving of you only into good" (6;12), she opens seven with "Say I am dead" (7;1). Love is "Life's miracle.":

it is not the clay we fuse
In fires which make us ash, is not the breath
Whose quiet extinction leaves us tranced in death:— (7;12-14).

The acts of fusion of our bodies in sexual intercourse "blight the thing they seek to prove" (7;7). Sexual fulfillment spoils the purity of love, turns the white star to red. What she chooses to remember "of our only hour," therefore, is "God's deathless gift to man, the power to love/Beyond the urgent body's temporal wise" (7;5-6). This sonnet, unique in that it does not

end in a period, leaves itself open to interpretation, and the speaker open to possibility, temptation and sexuality.

Consummation appears to be both spiritual and physical by the eighth sonnet:

I love you chiefly by the heavenly plan
 Which from the spirit's fountain undefiled
 Drew us, two separate souls of single light,
 And, crowned, committed us to this brief night. (8;11-14)

Two "separate souls" find unity. But, conventionally, night may represent the death of the soul, so that "this brief night" may refer to the union of bodies alone.

But the imagery immediately prior to and following these two sonnets is fluid and in need of control. Farjeon's persona must build a dam "Between . . . /The spirit's strength and the body's frailties" (5;7-8) because her "bodily consciousness" comes "with bitter tidal waters leaping/To whelm us, and to leave us drowned or weeping" (5;11,13-14). She will endeavour to change her "clouded eyes to clear" (6;4) and turn her weeping into laughter (6;13). The ninth sonnet invokes

immortal motions

Which sweep our lives with heaven-commanded oceans
 Upon whose floods our spirits toss and swing.
 So, dazed with the divinest ecstasies
 Whose currents drive the everlasting tides,
 The too-bewildered heart in peril rides
 Through tumults of high glory and un-ease.
 But when the storm-creative streams drop deep
 And leave the heavy waters smooth again,
 Oh, what surviving heart refrains to weep
 O'er its memorials of tempestuous pain? (9;2-12)

The storms and "floods," the "tumult" and "high glory," which "toss and swing" our spirits, creating "un-ease" and "tempestuous pain," may also connote orgasm. Passion ends in *post-coital tristesse*. Tears precede and follow sexual climax. A price is exacted, partly because "unsubstantial words" (9;2) are inadequate to describe her passion, and partly because of the inadequacy of man to treat "immortal love" other than "mortally."

This sonnet lacks transparency as do so many in Farjeon's sequence. "The too bewildered heart in peril rides" is our only clue to reading this sonnet within a sexual context. But it is also the "surviving heart" which cannot refrain from weeping. It would seem that passion carries mortal danger, that not all hearts do survive. On the other hand, it is now the heart rather than the soul that is at risk. More problematic is the emphasis upon the divine. The "oceans" of passion are "heaven-commanded" leading to "divinest ecstasies/.../Through tumults of high glory" even if there is "un-ease."

Sonnet ten seems more explicit in so far as she finally names lust, but it also unsettles any temporary unity of body and soul. There are two types of passion, she insists, spiritual and carnal, and they do not comfortably cohabit. The opening aphorism may indicate that she has succumbed to desire:

Too frail, too frail! our bodies are our cheats.
 The soul has premonitions of its fire,
 And dizzy for the star of its desire
 Mistakes for spirit-flame the earthly heats.
 Alas, alas, I looked on clouds as lights—
 Ah, was that passing season only loss?
 Full well I know the image was not dross
 I prayed to through an agony of nights.
 No, what I prayed to was love's very feature,
 I never served in prayer the secret lust;
 When I was clear of passion's two-fold nature
 And wrestled with all I must not, all I must,
 The knife that made my baser parts its sheath
 Did that which never had been love to death. (10)

The closing couplet, with its slant rhymes, is still open to opposing readings. If the knife is strong desire, then the sheath can be either her vagina or her entire body as the site of sin rather than as a spiritual temple. If the knife is the penis and the sheath the vagina, then intercourse has taken place, actually or imaginatively and "lust" has, for the moment, "died."

But this "lust" sounds like rape: "The knife that made" does not sound like willing surrender. The act proves that "love" was not love and, furthermore, killed any chance of its becoming so. Once rape has entered our consciousness, we re-read the sonnet for clarity.

Although the octet, with its echoes of sonnet one, certainly seems to express the speaker's own passion, the sestet questions her intent, and seems to deny mutuality. Rather she seems to be denying that she "asked for it."

The speaker, however, has been seeking a way to move "Beyond the urgent body's temporal wise,/Whose acts can blight the thing they seek to prove,/Devils that might have been divinities" (7;6-8). Like Shakespeare before her, she sees lust and its satisfaction as polluting, as a cause of "tempestuous pain" (9;12), for "spent passions prove/How mortally men use immortal love" (9;13-14). It is not clear, in "First Love," whether the sexual act destroys the love between a man and a woman, whether physical desire, in and of itself, necessarily reveals the lack of a spiritual union, or whether lust is masquerading "in love's name" (12;8), is itself "loveless" (12;8) and may lead to rape. If the act were consensual, then the speaker appears to have internalised the stereotypical dualities of virgin/whore. The only way she knows to deal with that situation is through repression, idolatrous prayers (10;8-10), and a claim of "rape"; for, as Lawrence argues, since morality arose from deep fear and hatred, it "had to take on a righteous appearance . . . said that the instincts, intuitions and all the activities of the procreative body were evil, and promised a reward for their suppression" (1929:61). Rending, painful self-division is the consequence.

After the emotion of sonnet ten, eleven creates a sense of distance. Having reached the profound sense of inner conflict in Medieval dialogues between the body and the soul, the series moves smoothly into "Man cannot be a sophist to his heart" (11), the only sonnet shared between "First Love" and *Sonnets* (I). The positioning of this sonnet both as the opening of *Sonnets* and towards the end of "First Love" (11) makes possible drastically different readings. Since the embellished M of "Man," extending into the next three lines, no longer appears, and since the sonnet itself is embedded within a love series, neither the sonnet nor the "Man" take the weight they bear in the introduction to *Sonnets*. Positioned as it is in "First Love," it now has a context within the series and the sequence, both of which are immediately based upon a subjective, confused, suffering "I." But the neutrality that puts "Man" in a position of extreme humility and exposure is now more painful. The speaker's own sense of shame and exposure equates her very closely with the slave-girl, and her self-inquisition emphasises the power of self-deception.

The persona's torment, her discomfort with the needs of the body, and her perception of love as a separation of body and soul, are, perhaps, best expressed in the penultimate sonnet of "First Love" (12):

There was not much a blunted world would blame,
 Nothing was ventured, nothing forfeited,
 Yet there were instants I must hold in shame,
 Swift-flashing instants that as swiftly fled,
 When like the demons of delirious sleep
 The body's unsuspected tempters surged,
 Taking the gulf of honour at a leap,
 And in love's name their loveless challenge urged.

Then must I say, I was to love untrue?
 I must have said so if I had not driven
 The tempters out, and with the tempters you,
 Lest you and I grew weak against the spell,
 Not of wing'd love that carries passion to heaven,
 But wingless passion dragging love to hell. (12)

Again I hear echoes of Shakespeare's "Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame" (129): Farjeon's last two lines recall his "heaven that leads men to this hell" (129;14). To be true to love she has to drive out the demons, the tempters, and the man himself, so that she can protect herself and him from the "spell" of the body. She moves from apology, through calculation, to the demonisation of the body, to a portrait of chivalric womanhood and, finally, asserts that, unlike Shakespeare's persona and dark lady, she has been good. His writing dramatises a loss of control. Hers may dramatises that the speaker is naive, too well-read, and afraid of experience.

Although Farjeon's twelfth sonnet does not end in a couplet, the dichotomy of "heaven" and "hell" indicates some sense of closure, however unsatisfactory. It also suggests a firm and strong resolution, in terms of the sonnet and in terms of the speaker's own resolve "To shun" (Shakespeare 129;14) compromising situations. I am left, however, wondering to what extent she has resisted "wingless passion," to what extent she regrets her resistance, and to what extent she is deceiving herself.

And yet her question—"Then must I say, I was to love untrue?"—stands in isolation, as the first line of the sestet and as a line syntactically complete in itself, emphasising its importance and its lack of an answer. It could imply that she may now see herself as being untrue to their love because of her resistance to sexual desire. Lawrence would call her a sexual

coward. She is concerned with saying the “right” thing. Shame, as opposed to guilt, is often a response to public convention—“honour.”

Farjeon may well be rewriting Barrett Browning’s sonnet twenty-four:

Let the world’s sharpness like a clasping knife
 Shut in upon itself and do no harm
 In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
 And let us hear no sound of human strife
 After the click of the shutting. (24;1-5)

The echo of Barrett Browning’s opening line in Farjeon’s “The knife that made my baser parts its sheath” (10;13) earlier, in conjunction with “There was not much a blunted world would blame” (12;1), is too striking to ignore. Recognising the re-writing is imperative. Where Barrett Browning expresses the sense that a physical bond between a man and a woman can protect them from the world outside their enclosure, Farjeon’s persona finds lust dangerous. The danger to her soul lies in her body; she experiences a strong tension, not between the individual and society at large but as between the flesh and the conscience of an individual, causing “human strife.” She is distressed because “bodily consciousness will often thrust/Awareness of the spirit out of reach” (5;11-12). But, in fact, the world is probably defining her options, her notions of honour. She is, indeed, afraid of its censure.

At the end of “First Love” we are back where we began. The final words are “Not that I loved too much requires my tears,/I loved too little, and love stopped his ears” (13;13-14). Now “love” is not capitalised. But we still do not know whether love stopped his own ears or whether love stopped the ears of her “Lost friend” (13;9). Nor do we know whether her friend is lost through death, through separation, or as a direct result of that “brief night” (8;14). And did she love too little because she did not follow her desire, or because she gave into it?

Sonnets Old and New

“Interim” is embedded within *First and Second Love* as *A Crowne of Sonetts dedicated to Love* is embedded within Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. Whereas Wroth’s crown is labyrinthine, “Interim” is a desert, a wasteland. The crown invites re-reading because it returns the reader to the beginning through its structure. The sonnets in “Interim” invite re-reading because of the new context. Of the seventeen sonnets in “Interim” (14-30), ten were in *Sonnets: II to VIII* are 15 to 21, XV is 28, XVI is 22 and XVIII is 30.

“First Love” opens with ten poems not in *Sonnets* and sets up the symbolic opposition of the red and white stars, but “Interim” begins conversationally and realistically with one new sonnet followed by eight old *Sonnets*. The first sonnet of “Interim” posits the opposition of love and friendship:

I have found friends such as not many find,
 And if I die my friends will grieve indeed,
 But I to none of them am so designed
 As, gone, to leave his heart in special need.
 I see how each one has his own first thought,
 And where that first is, nothing is but first—
 I may come welcomed, or stand by unsought,
 They love not me, as I must them, with thirst.
 For I make life significant to none,
 I am not any other's share of heaven.
 Must I be glad that when my time is run
 The lives I love will in a day swing even?
 Yea, since I may not look for more.—But oh,
 If I should hear one call me as I go. (14)

“Interim” begins with thirst (14;8), but particularly sexual thirst, as the “his” in lines four and five indicate. Friends are necessary, but not vital. She wants to be “first” to one man, for whom her departure will “leave his heart in special need.” The sonnet does not offer the hope that this will ever come about, and the poignancy of these lines only increases with the following sonnet.

With the next seven sonnets of “Interim” (15-21), starting with “O spare me from the hand of niggard love” (15), we begin re-reading the series of *Sonnets* two through eight in the light of “First Love” and of the first sonnet of “Interim.” This new context introduces specific preoccupations: the speaker's own repressed sexual desire and her awareness that she has only friendship which is insufficient. A miser “of the riches of the heart” (15;5) takes pride in saying “I stinted earth of bliss to add to heaven” (15;12). Although this “I” is not the persona, there is sufficient echoing of the dilemmas she faced in “First Love” to suggest that she now sees herself as such a miser. This sonnet explains her earlier confusion in the ninth: the heaven-commanded passions should not be the subject of regret and the heart should not be concentrated upon

survival. After all, she asks, why are we given "sight if not for seeing," hearing if "we dare not hear," and "in life's name this high passion of love,/But in life's name its passionate height to prove?" (16;11-14). She now sees, too late, that the gratification of the body is a necessary gift from God to his people.

Both youth and passion are to be seized. There is no profit in abstention: "Not to have proven young rapture is the crime,/Unproven it will be quenched no less, no less" (17;11-12). In its new context, a minute lexicographical change emphasises the personal sense of urgency and regret. In *Sonnets* Farjeon writes "was the crime" (IV;11); in "Interim" she replaces "was" with "is." Similarly, in the next sonnet, former plurals become singulars, emphasising the once and only time of youth and passion. In *Sonnets*,

Our mightiest dreams still lean on circumstance,
The essence of pain and joy is in our gift
But not its seasons of significance (V;6-8),

But now our "dream still leans" (18;6) and time shrinks to one "season of significance" (18;8). Now lines from the twentieth poem, "nature's issue stands unconsummated/Upon the very boundary of the stars" (20; 11-12) reverberate with the opening sonnet of *First and Second Love*, which concludes, "For all my strength now feeds a fire so bright/I dare not foster it to the utmost height." The confusion of "First Love" over the nature and value of desire has greater impact, becoming the missed "season of significance."

In sonnets twenty and twenty one, the speaker admits her susceptibility to the weight of convention. She has been guilty of scanning "the creeping audience of earth" (20;2), and of accepting "life's sleek counterfeit,/Convention" which offers "easy conduct to the blind" (21;1-2,8). Not only is the repression of sexual desire obnoxious, but marriage itself, and the convent, which Heloise found so inadequate, are merely prizes "for apt scholars" (21;11), offering only "A veil for knowledge and a ring for love" (21;12). The penalty for denying life is deathly patience, weariness, the burden of lack, and the aridity of grief run dry (22). "Interim" becomes a critique of the attitudes in "First Love."

There is another small but significant change from *Sonnets* (VIII) to "Interim" (21). In "Interim," convention, "A handbook of few rules for many cases" (21;9), can only be a "smooth text for any questioning heart:/Know nothing, and be less than that thou art" (21;13-14). Either the heart is personified, or it is so integral to personhood that it is "thou," both the person and the recipient of the answer. In *Sonnets*, that last line reads, "Know not, and be less than, the thing

thou art" (VIII;14). Not only is the heart a "thing," but the syntax makes it the object of "know not," linking self-deception to conventional attitudes.

With the introduction of "new" sonnets, she tells us that not only "the creeping audience of earth" (20;2) demands deception and refuses knowledge, but so do her friends. She finds it necessary to

struggle with my constant heaviness
To cheat them into being kind at whiles.
I must pretend some happiness.
So few Can long endure even the beloved sad,

. . . .

It is so strange with friends to act a part,
And know they hope you will not show your heart. (23;7-10,13-14)

It is only when she is "left alone,/And those who love me leave me to myself" (24;1-2), that she can experience joy.

The twenty-fourth sonnet and the beginning of the twenty-fifth are a celebration of such unexpected joy. When she is alone joy comes "like a dancing elf," (24;4), "like a child" (24;5), "like a faun" (24;7), "like a bird" (24;8); "like a hunter" (24;11), "like a labourer" (24;12). Having repeated "joy" eight times, six of which open lines, the speaker ends with "And when at night I think my heart is dead,/Joy like a lover stands beside my bed" (24;13-14). Uniquely, in either sequence, she opens the next sonnet with words from the last line of the previous one:

Joy like a lover, joy with eyes as proud
And deep and certain as love's very eyes,
And love's own resolute hands, strips off my shroud,
And brings a bride-veil—O my joy, who sighs? (25;1-4)

Joy and love come together in fantasies that are easier to live with than reality.

But the substitution of "a bride-veil" for "my shroud" begins a downward spiral. Since the veil and the ring are merely "prizes" for knowledge and love "for apt scholars" (21;11-12), they can be as sinister and restrictive as the shroud. The veil immediately leads into sighing even before the first quatrain ends. Now a "pitiful unrelated ghost" (25;9), a ghost related to both the shroud and the veil, "a ghost that pines in air" (25;6), about which she knows not "Is it myself, is it some other I?" (25;5), takes over the sonnet. It is imperative that this other part find her because,

My joy and I are phantoms till you do,
 Ships set afloat on seas that have no coast,
 Unanchored stars that streak the inky blue. (25;10-12)

Again, the relationship of that “pitiful unrelated ghost” to the persona is indeterminate. Even she does not know. The ghost is certainly not kin to the traditional steadfast star, nor to the red and white stars of the opening sonnet of the sequence, but may be related to “conscience” in “First Love” (11) which is also the first poem of *Sonnets*.

Finally, language and speech, speaking and listening, are named as issues for she needs a constant, a Logos, to pray to and to hear her. The sense of loss, bewilderment and lack of a firm anchor lead her to “come to wish I could believe in God” (27;1). In opposition to the “Unanchored stars,” her faith is “fixed and formless” (27;5). But she cannot pray to her “own godhead” (27;10), “To midnight’s star, or the gold star of day” (27;11)—and both red and white stars seem of little use to her in “Interim.” She cannot pray to these things because “In my despairs/I want a listening deity for my prayers” (27;13-14). But she finds no listener.

Sonnet twenty-eight, “Farewell, you children that I might have borne,” is the fifteenth poem of *Sonnets*. With the addition of “new” poems, however, and the change in structure, this sonnet becomes a personal rather than a metaphorical statement. Although “all things do not have to end in death” (27;7), her body now becomes a symbolic grave-yard. Now sonnets nineteen and twenty also take on heavier, personal significance, as the persona identifies herself as one of the women who “with the aching will to bear/Still to the barren grave must barren go” (19;9-10). Had the red star been grasped from “the very boundary of the stars” (20;12), the “issue” might have been “consummated” (20;11), and she would not need now to say “Farewell” to her unborn children.

Even in a sexually active heterosexual relationship, as long as a woman has any hope of pregnancy, that hope can be dashed and revived on a monthly basis. The white star of conception can turn to the red star of menstruation. Year by year is, of course, longer, and more wearing, than month by month, and the reiteration may presage aging and its losses, its unfulfilled potential, as she “to the barren grave must barren go” (19;10). The litany of “year by year” (28;1,3,5,7), in one instance separated only by “Now,” marks a boundary between actively living and merely existing. Those unending years again resonate with the statement that “The essence of pain and joy is in our gift/But not its season of significance” (18;7-8). The context of

“Farewell, you children” in *Sonnets* (15) does not reveal that the speaker has missed her own “season.”

This poem has been the subject of some obfuscation by Farjeon’s niece and biographer, A. Farjeon. In *Morning Has Broken*, she insists that only shortly before her liaison with George Earle, “Eleanor knew almost nothing of sex in theory or practice.”⁷ The biographer claims that the poet told her that Earle explained the mechanics of sex to her in 1920, “drawing in the sand at their feet diagrams of the male and female parts and how they worked” (139-140). This claim would lead us to believe that, “Farewell, you children that I might have borne” (28), published in 1918, could only be a fantasy or an acknowledgment of the persona’s (perpetual) virginity.

Later, as a result of her union with Earle, Farjeon became pregnant, but an “early miscarriage came as a blow. It was her only conception. The sonnet ‘Farewell, you children that I might have borne’ was written at this time out of her sorrow” (142). While it is possible that A. Farjeon forgot that this sonnet appeared in *Sonnets and Poems* as early as 1918, remembering its presence only in *First and Second Love*, not published until 1947, it is more probable that being a child of her time, she goes out of her way to protect her aunt’s reputation. In her final chapter over one hundred and forty pages after the reference to Farjeon’s miscarriage, she mentions that in:

1953 a BBC radio programme about Edward Thomas was recorded. In it was a suggestion that Eleanor had been his mistress, and that, with his wife, there had been a ménage à trois. . . . The misrepresentation weighed heavily on Eleanor’s mind and most likely impelled her to consider publishing Thomas’s letters in a manner that would put the matter straight.⁸ (283-284)

It is tempting to conclude that Farjeon was indeed thinking of Thomas, who died in 1917, when she wrote “Farewell, you children.” But this biographical reading limits interpretation severely by denying the poet’s capacity to imagine and project. Moreover, when Farjeon re-positioned her poem in *First and Second Love*, she placed it not in “Second Love” but in “Interim.”

Although, as in *Sonnets*, the womb could be metaphorical, the incremental sense, within the context of “Interim” and of *First and Second Love*, is that the persona feels certain that she will never have children. Part of the earlier metaphoric reading of “Farewell, you children” (XV) in *Sonnets* is based on its juxtaposition with sixteen, “O lovely life, how you have worn me out”, which contains the line, “I am as weary as a child to-night” (XVI;5). “O lovely life” comes near the end of *Sonnets*, but it reappears near the centre of “Interim” (22), six

whole sonnets before “Farewell you children” (28). The new separation and order weakens a primarily metaphorical reading of “Farewell you children” in “Interim.” If the children are not now metaphorical, one could speculate that the persona might have suffered miscarriage(s), be menopausal, or have had a hysterectomy, but such speculation is irrelevant because it denies the integrity of the new sequence. Although the persona may indeed be aiming for dramatic effect, or be exaggerating because she is depressed in the interim between two love affairs, believing that her love life is finished, the sequence “Interim” intimates that she may well be regretting the abstinence she attempts in “First Love.” She has belatedly come to the realisation that the “Eternal love” of the “mother by her baby’s bed” (4;6-7) can only come about after sexual consummation.

The next sonnet (29), which epitomises the aridity that is a result of desire denied or otherwise unfulfilled, is the penultimate sonnet of “Interim.” The wind has made the speaker restless all night, but this is a wind that “drowns the housetops like the Flood” with every gust “spattered with dry rain” (29;6,5). The reason for this flood of dry rain—surely the ultimate image of aridity—is the “Wild night without, and wilder thoughts within—“ which could be an echo and inversion, replete with her distinctive dash, of Dickinson’s “Wild Night—Wild Nights!/Were I with thee” (249). The cause of Farjeon’s persona’s wildness, as she tells us in the final three lines, is the “Insatiate longing to the point of stress,/With which the world outside, and I inside,/Reel under hollow storms, unsatisfied.” “Inside” is opposed to “the outside world,” but it also connotes the space within her body. The storms are hollow because she is unfulfilled, because she has never been pregnant, and because the rain is as dry and empty as her sex life.

The final sonnet of “Interim” (30) is also the final poem of *Sonnets* (XVIII), “Shall we not laugh together.” There are two very small changes between the 1918 publication and the republication in 1947. First, “Shall we not laugh together, you and I” becomes “Shall we not laugh together, he and I” (30). The change in pronoun is all important. Now it is clear that the persona is referring to a male lover, not her heart, not Love, a difference that the change in context confirms. The second is from “at last at rest/ Within the strength of your beloved breast” (XVIII;2-3) to “at last at rest/Within the strength of some beloved breast” (30;2-3), with the implication that “some” is not the same as any man’s.

“Shall we not laugh,” begins with “we,” explicitly “he and I,” so the poem may invoke actual people, including a “you” to whom the poem is addressed. Although the persona could, of course, be talking to herself, to the reader, or to Love, at the beginning of the sestet, the listener

is addressed as "Love," one who is capable of speaking, of possessing, and of giving kisses. He is a person who is addressed as "you" for the rest of the sonnet, but is not necessarily the "he" of the octet. Furthermore, the phrase "some beloved breast" is vague in terms of person and may, or may not, have anything (or everything?) to do with the person she invites to "fold me in your bosom so deep away" (30;13). There may be two men (or one or three), the lover of the dead affair and the new lover who has "called me yours," whose "kisses long outbreathed old fears" (30;9-10), who is the reason why she is "at last fulfilled."

If "he" (30;1), "you" (30;9,13) and "Love" (30;9,11) are one and the same, then the sonnet has no specific object of address and may be an internal monologue, as in *Sonnets*, with "he" and "you" being absent. Having asked herself what the chances are that they will ever laugh over this, or some other "day gone by" (30;4), she turns to him, at some future time, and asks him, for the sake of the love they once had, to "fold me in your bosom so deep away/That memory cannot touch this loveless day" (30;13-14). She may, then, merely be projecting a future, perfect time when she might be fulfilled, in which case, she may well be reduced to the necessity of but "one smile to drown their thousand tears" (30;12).

The lack of referentiality which is apparent in *Sonnets*, then, still operates in the sestet of sonnet thirty of "Interim," giving rise to uncertainty over the number of lovers, their identities, and the sequentiality of the relationships implied. If there are two men, one in the octet—"he"—and another in the sestet—"Love" and "you"—who is also the "some" of the sestet, then the hours she wishes to forget (30;11), and the old fears that this new lover "outbreathed" (30;10), are the hours spent with the first man, "he." In which case, asking the current "Love" to "fold me in your bosom" when she is already within "some beloved breast" seems superfluous. But since she is "at last fulfilled, at last at rest/Within the strength of some beloved breast," it is difficult to comprehend how, then, "this" can be a "loveless day." The "you" of the sestet, surely, cannot be "Love," with or without a capital letter.

Looking at the form does not clarify the issue, for the argument does not fall so neatly into two parts as the arrangement on the page and the syntax might suggest. The Petrarchan rhetorical form does not support the disposition of the polarities within the poem. If this were a Petrarchan sonnet, as its appearance would suggest, then the dichotomies would either all lie within one segment, or would be divided between the two parts, so that one term in the octet would be answered or refuted by another in the sestet. The thought of laughter (30;1,4) moves into tears (30;12), but the fulfillment of line two becomes the "unconsummated birth" of line

eight. The “rest/Within the strength of some beloved breast” (30;2-3) is equated with “things that lie below the earth,/Things choked and buried, sunless and unsought” (30;5-6). There is no apparent symmetry.

If the form is Shakespearean, as the rhyme scheme in the sestet might suggest, we would expect fairly strong punctuation at the end of each quatrain which would move the argument onward, climaxing in the couplet. Although there is a couplet, separated from the previous line by terminal punctuation, the second quatrain is a syntactical continuation of the first, forming a single question. The denial of the reader’s expectation creates a tension reminiscent of some of Smith’s sonnets.

There is also no simple correlation between the use of tenses and the form, either Petrarchan or Shakespearean. The sonnet is concerned with three different times in the persona’s life, and emphasises the centrality of this subjective time throughout. The first four lines are set in the future, the next eight in the past, and the couplet in the present. There is no progression of tenses in each quatrain, nor a separation of tenses by octet and sestet.

Within the sonnet sequence tradition, as Smith shows so well in her “From Petrarch” series, violent changes from one emotional state to another are standard tropes, but that is not necessarily what is occurring here, when laughter turns to tears. The first three lines could be conversational with a slight bite, but the repetition in the fourth line becomes desperate. If we cannot laugh over an old love affair, will the attendant emotions be repressed, metaphorically “below the earth,/. . . choked and buried, sunless and unsought” (30;5-6)? Although there is less emphasis on laughter than there is on “happy” in Edmund Spenser’s first sonnet of *Amoretti* (1595)—“Happy ye leaves” (1), “And happy lines” (5), “And happy rymes” (9)—when the persona is clearly unhappy, and in Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn”—“happy, happy boughs!” (21), “And, happy melodist” (22), and “More happy love! more happy, happy love!” (25)—when the happiness of the frozen figures is in doubt, there is nevertheless a superfluity of speculative laughter that is not achieved by the persona. It would seem that the answer to “Shall we not laugh?” is still no. She will neither laugh with him, nor without him, no matter how many days go by.

It is as though she sees herself as metaphorically dead and buried, “sunless and unsought,” with perhaps the heavy knell of a pun, “sonless,” for the seed is without fruit. This unconsummated birth, besides being a contradiction in terms, does not parallel the “unconsummated birth” of the Son of God. For ordinary women such a birth is impossible and

would be unnatural. There is no birth. There might, however, be a phantom pregnancy to go with her phantom lover (25), for “This richest life was only lived in thought” (30;7). The speaker could, however, be both metaphorically and psychically “at last fulfilled” (30;2). But even then the conjunction with “at last at rest” returns us to the possibility of death. “Shall we not laugh together” is therefore even darker and more labyrinthine than Wroth’s *A Crowne of Sonetts dedicated to Love*.

How Not To Say

Farjeon’s *First and Second Love* is, as far as I know, the only long sonnet sequence permeated with war, and the agony of war.⁹ Thomas, the putative beloved who is addressed in “Second Love,” was killed on Easter Monday, 1917. His patriotic duty, as he saw it, caused him to enlist, although Robert Frost, who was a friend, offered to try to find him work in America for the duration of the war. As Farjeon writes in the “Foreword” to *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years* (1958), “He could have been safe, if he had chosen to be” (ix). *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*.¹⁰

Edward Thomas, which Farjeon dedicates to his wife Helen, consists of his letters to Farjeon, starting with the very first, “a postcard, marked Jan.19, 1913” (5), and ending with the last, dated April 3, “which came after his death” in 1917; they are “printed in full without omissions” (ix). She occasionally adds some thoughts of her own but it is not clear whether they are all after the event or to what extent she kept notes at the time. “Second Love” is a poetic rendition, to some extent fictive, of her feelings towards Thomas.

In the “Foreword” to *Edward Thomas* Farjeon summarises their relationship from her own perspective:

My friendship with Edward Thomas began in the late autumn of 1912. It was a friendship death could not end. . . . The continuity of his letters enables me to follow closely the course of those years in my life When I met him I was thirty-one, and only just emerging from a fantasy-life into one of natural human relationships. . . . [A]t twenty-nine [I] was emotionally immature as a girl of eighteen. . . . [Edward] counted on me for friendship; and I loved him with all my heart. . . . [O]nly by two words, in one of his last letters from France, did he allow himself to show me that he knew. . . . Helen, my brother Bertie, and one

or two close friends, had my confidence; Edward trusted me never to give it to him. If I had, our friendship must have come to an end. (ix-x)

This, then, is the background to "Second Love," an unconsummated relationship. Farjeon and Helen Thomas remained friends all their lives.

"Second Love" opens with a direct address to Thomas on his needs and her desires. In its opposition of love and friendship, it resonates with the opening sonnets of both "First Love" and "Interim," bringing both into focus.

You seem to me beyond all men to need
 The love of men and women, and to have set
 The knotted meshes of a stubborn creed
 About your spirit like the Roman's net,
 Turning your weapon in the circus-ring
 Upon the very person of your soul,
 And, ere the down-turned thumbs their verdict bring,
 Bidding it in the sand self-strangled roll.
 Friend, with the bright and naked blade of love
 In the arena I would be your foe,
 Its edge upon those treacherous toils to prove—
 Yea, though the leaping spirit brought me low
 I would those fetters carve, and then fall down
 While life set on your soul the freedman's crown. (31)

In this replay of the opening sonnet of "Interim" (14), where she has love to offer but only friendship to receive, she at least now has an object of desire, but that desire is not reciprocated, a courtly love situation with sex role reversal. She has located her "pitiful unrelated ghost" (25;9), but she and he still occupy "separate spheres" (25;13), so that, as in "Interim," "My joy and I are phantoms" (25;10).

Farjeon gives the courtly love convention to which she alludes a particularly violent twist. The knight errant with the "naked blade of love" would free the beloved from his "fetters," but she is the beloved's foe, a gladiatorial sacrifice, for his fetters are forged by his acceptance of his civilisation's code. He is, in fact, such a one as the sophist, who denies life with philosophy and this sonnet is a personal revision of the opening of *Sonnets*. He has "Woven in nets" (20;10) the creed which has caused him to "shrink back from God's to man's design" (20;14), delayed

his "wings to heaven" (20;1), and made of himself a defeated gladiator. Philosophy not only denies love, unity and divinity, it is life-denying and suicidal, especially when the philosophy includes *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. Even before the verdict of death is administered from outside the gladiatorial arena, the beloved turns his weapon "Upon the very person of your soul,/ . . . /Bidding it in the sand self-strangled roll." Love, and her love in particular, would save him at whatever cost to herself.

But the sequence suggests otherwise. She is as restricted by convention as he is. In "First Love," she hints at rape (10), possibly projecting her fear and her desire upon the man. Now the speaker's self-criticism is fully primed and ready to turn upon another. He is, in effect, her own ghost, her animus. She wants him to be her gladiator, not the other way round.

But to contain her love within friendship, she discovers, is very difficult and requires a philosophy of another kind. She says "it is enough/That for an instant you are by to share/The instant in its passage" (32;10-12), and she has previously said that "every instant's joy [is] heavenly gain" (16;8). As "Second Love" moves into a group of six sonnets, thirty-three to thirty-eight, which are also *Sonnets* nine to fourteen, the need to believe that "Love needs not two to render it complete" (33;1) becomes urgent. Now her statement that she knows that her "treasure" (33;10) will remain "whole, though only one/ Should follow me—or none, beloved, or none" (33;13-14), carries less conviction. The last five words sound wistful rather than triumphant. Love's "anguish" and life's "torments" may lie, to some extent, in the need to "serve life's purpose not like beasts but gods" (34;14), obeying society's edict.

The following sonnet (35) opens with some hope that "Second Love" may be more fruitful than "First Love," for "A few of us who have faltered as we fared/Love has returned for" (35;1-2). In fact this sonnet in its new context is less hopeful, less androgynous, less reciprocal than it appeared to be earlier. In *Sonnets* (XI) love is impersonal, and can choose to give or deny woman and man their "patch of earth,/ [Their] pinch of seed" (XI;11-12). But "love" may be the all too personal beloved in "Second Love," and

Life without love, O bitter, bitterest birth!

Love without life still leaves us in our need.

Ah, love, give up to me my patch of earth,

My pinch of seed! Hast neither earth nor need? (35;9-12)

Here is the only instance within all of her sonnets of Farjeon repeating the same word as an end rhyme, thereby altering *Sonnets* eleven, where *seed*, as an internal rhyme, appears twice in line twelve.

When a sonnet sequence is a relatively firm structure, particular contexts emphasise even very small changes in individual sonnets. In conjunction with its new context, that minute change of one letter, as *seed* becomes a second *need*, makes a tremendous difference. The emphasis is on the need for life, precarious for a soldier at the front, and the need for love, which cannot be fulfilled by the dead. She desires fertility, "my patch of earth,/My pinch of seed! He, however, appears to have no such "need."

The greatest transformation in a single sonnet occurs in "I hear love answer," which is the twelfth poem in *Sonnets* and the thirty-sixth in "Second Love." Change of context amplifies the differences between the poems. In *Sonnets*, the speaker still finds hope of some fulfilling future, apparently through "love":

Not being her [nature's] bond-slave, I alone can give
 Visions that are unmingled with her earth,
 But since this present in her habit you live
 I must meet nature to fulfil their birth. (XII;9-12)

As "earth" rhymes with "birth," evoking images of the earth mother, the implication is that a metaphorical pregnancy is a possibility. But then the almost trite imagery of the final couplet suggests that for this idealising speaker any "meeting" or cohabitation with "nature" is as uncomfortable as that awkward eleventh line indicates. Even "love" now takes on physical form which "generates" vision. There is no marked conflict of body and spirit:

Only when you and I come clear of the clay,
 Beloved, I will fulfill them [visions] as I may. (XII;13-14)

Not only does the loss of rhythm in the penultimate line stress the difficulty of the passage from bodied spirit to pure soul, but the question arises as to how one can "meet" "nature" and "come clear" of it simultaneously.

Both these difficulties are removed in the "Interim" version (36), but a third remains. In both versions, until the couplet the speaker is "love" and the sonnet now reads,

I hear love answer: Since within the mesh
 Of flesh and blood you labour for awhile,
 I, even I, must labour in the flesh,

And wipe it of the stain the world calls vile.
 I am not nature's force. Nature will forge
 Her indomitable end without my aid,
 And men enjoy her, or with rising gorge,
 Cry out upon her, shameful and afraid.
 Nor am I nature's bondslave. I can give
 Visions that to her forces nothing owe,
 Whose shadows, in her habit while you live,
 From heaven move across the earthly show.
 But when the clay we sojourn in is cold,
 Beloved, you shall my shadeless face behold. (36)

This entity is powerful enough to give visions, and to meet or bypass nature. But this same "love," apparently, is currently embodied in "clay." The last line of "Interim" seems to indicate that either the speaker changes from "love" to the lover at the beginning of the couplet, or that "love" and the "lover" are identical throughout.

The only resurrection possible is in some afterlife for, writing with the knowledge that the addressee of the series was killed in the first world war, Farjeon replaces "birth" and "earth" with, and devalues them by, the mercantile, tawdry associations of "owe" and the "earthly show." Any potential for choice in the final word *may*, with its hint of spring (May) and its promise of rebirth, is totally lost in the variant sonnet of "Second Love," as are both "earth" and "birth." This loss of "earth" and "birth" parallels the loss of "earth" and "seed," in sonnet thirty-five, because the beloved all too literally has "neither earth nor need" (35;12).

Even the smallest changes are revealing. The "clay" of the closing couplet in *Sonnets* is no longer a rhyming word in "Second Love" but is displaced almost to the centre of the line. Whereas in *Sonnets* "clay" signifies the body within only one sonnet (XII), in "Second Love" (36) it resonates with the context provided by the eighth sonnet of *First and Second Love*: "So, as the spirit whose earthly case is cracked" (8;1). Within this larger context, and in conjunction with "cold," the "clay" vividly evokes death, and the dampness of the grave. This poem seems to be written from beyond hope of happiness.

The persona promises that her face will be "shadeless" in Heaven. This word, not used in the earlier version and suggesting a negative physical identity, again points to a larger context—the series which ends in the soldier's death, the sequence that is pervaded by war, and

other poetry concerned with shades and valour—which, when acting in concert, resonates with Virgil’s warrior-shades in the Elysian Fields. In the wider context “shadeless” also acts as a short-hand for the nameless faces of the war dead—or even the faceless names on war cenotaphs. There is a sense that in life her “visions” are no better than shadows or clouds; even if “heavenly,” they may be unwelcome, darkening (10;5). Although the version of the sonnet in “Second Love” flows more smoothly than the other, it is a revelation without conviction. When the context is war, “sophistry” may be the only consolation, a parody of divine love, all that is available.

Finally the speaker seems to name her feelings and to speak them out, as apparitions and prophecies (39) move her into thoughts of her lover, with whom she has only ever had a phantom relationship. But she has no listener, deity or otherwise, only a ghost, a Banquo figure, which may well be herself.

Is it a wrong to you, my friend, my friend
 Whom I would much more lightly lose than wrong,
 At certain times when the unnatural blend
 Of love and unfulfilment are too strong,
 To set your presence in my empty chair,
 Naming dear friendship by its dearer name,
 And with an echo fill the vacant air
 Of words your lips have never sought to name?
 Forgive, forgive the words you have not spoken!
 Forgive the words I shall not speak to you!
 Forgive the broken silence, still unbroken,
 When strength and resolution are worn through!
 Forgive the looks you are strange to, oh forgive
 The embrace you will not offer while you live. (40)

Her references to naming, speech, silence and words are overwhelming, the “future un-perfect” tenses fascinating.

The six repetitions of *forgive* in the sestet become excessive, so that the forgiveness is needed not for the speaking out loud alone now, but for the fact that between them these words have not been spoken or heard by either speaker. If we are to believe her earlier sonnets, it is not “the broken silence” that is the crime, but that it is “still unbroken.” She knew earlier that he

chose "The knotted meshes of a stubborn creed" (31;3), and that "nature's issue stands unconsummated" (20;11) by such nets, which deny "souls whose unity had been divine" (20;13). And she still knows that the "blend/Of love and unfulfilment" is unnatural. Because of the "strength and resolution" of repression, those souls "Sundered shrink back from God's to man's design" (20;14), or to convention. She needs forgiveness because she has been no "gladiator," no heroine of emotional honesty. But most of all she needs to forgive him for "the embrace you will not offer while you live" and which he cannot offer when he is dead. His death, which she is prophesying, makes her a shade, a Dido figure.

Her love must go the way "uncounted men/Have gone in vanishing armies day by day" (41;2-3) in this world of war. For her war is no convention, no battle of the sexes, but the deadly, devastating war in Europe. Each parting might be the last, each touch the final touch. Although "Love" might not need ears to hear or eyes to see (33), she has previously asked why are we given "sight if not for seeing," hearing if "we dare not hear," and "in life's name this high passion of love,/But in life's name its passionate height to prove?" (16;11-14). They have wasted their potential, possibly for ever.

As they say goodbye for the final time, they try to cheat death, to fake some form of resurrection even before he dies. His final spoken words to her are "I might meet you in London in three days" (42;7). Only one sonnet separates these words from "Easter Monday (In Memoriam E.T.)," the closing sonnet of the sequence. The foreshadowing is sombre. She finds her comfort in what is not said: "on a scarcely-finished phrase/We made our clasp, and smiled, and turned away" (42;5-6). She does not thank him

for sparing a pain I would have dared,
 But for the change of mind which at the end
 Acknowledged there was something to be spared,
 And parting not so light for you and me
 As you and I made it appear to be. (42;10-14)

Since the next sonnet is a continuation of this sonnet, I cite its octet immediately.

If you had held me in more tenderness
 I think you would have seen me once again;
 But had you held me in a little less
 Parting would not have stood to you for pain.
 And I am glad to know, in leaving me,

One pang you would not face kept us apart,
To set against the mortal agony

I would have gone to meet with all my heart. (43;1-8)

Both offer, at the very most, "masked confessions" (11;5). His creed, however, is life denying. Hers is life affirming, even if it entails embracing "mortal agony." Her last lines before the final sonnet are full of hope as her spirit sings "like a song of praise, 'I might see you in London in three days.'" Which brings us to his death, and that "day for praise," Easter Monday, when her love dies to this world.

"Easter Monday" is the last sonnet in an extended sequence of love poems in which she names no man, but the heading to this final sonnet reads, "In Memoriam E.T." She does not describe him in any way, and yet, although the sequence necessarily explores her female persona's psychological states, in the final sonnet she makes us see this man-as-soldier and his loss of tomorrows. She is, of course, intensely aware of the symbolism of Easter, and her title proclaims that consciousness. There can, however, be no resurrection in this world for the man and, for a while, Farjeon's sequence did not see the light of day.

Death allows Farjeon no space in which to continue writing. In this most devastating moment, Farjeon's poetry is very low-key.

Easter Monday

(In Memoriam E.T.)

In the last letter that I had from France
You thanked me for the silver Easter egg
Which I had hidden in the box of apples
You liked to munch beyond all other fruit.
You found the egg the Monday before Easter,
And said, 'I will praise Easter Monday now—
It was such a lovely morning.' Then you spoke
Of the coming battle and said, 'This is the eve.
Good-bye. And may I have a letter soon.'

That Easter Monday was a day for praise,
It was such a lovely morning. In our garden
We sowed our earliest seeds, and in the orchard

The apple-bud was ripe. It was the eve.

There are three letters that you will not get.

April 9th, 1917

“Easter Monday” is, ironically, the only sonnet in which the poet-persona promises the fruition of new life: an egg, seeds, apple-buds. The need, and the stress, are much greater than in earlier unconsummated births. Hiding the silver Easter egg, promising ultimate resurrection, is thoughtful, playful and loving, recalling happier days when children would search for eggs in the garden. His pleasure in the moment, his “praise [of] Easter Monday now,” a week early, may be a premonition, or just an expression of the uncertainty of any tomorrows, or a simple description of “such a lovely morning.” Never knowing that “It was the eve” of his death, he enjoyed this premature Easter Monday with its promise of renewal. The poignancy of “Good-bye. And may I have a letter soon” comes partly because we know that the soldier will receive no more letters, and partly because he expresses the implied hope that he still has some future, that he will not die yet.

Both the soldier, who was sent to the western front in January, and the persona are exiled from their garden of Eden, even though it has already been less than idyllic. The anticipated battle is not mentioned until line eight, immediately followed by “This is the eve,” bringing to mind Christ’s words on the eve of His redemptive death: “the hour is come” (John 17,1). The apples, which have obviously been stored over the winter, specially saved, perhaps, for the soldier in France, either because apples were his favourite fruit or because of all apples he preferred those grown in “our” orchard, recall that other Eve. This new “Eve” has also fallen into the sorrow of death caused by that first Fall, that first “apple.”

The day on which her beloved dies echoes with the day, only a week earlier, on which he received the apples, those harbingers of autumn and of death. So poignant is the speaker’s recall, and the coincidence of the events surrounding this Easter Monday, that the day he found the egg, the day he died, and the day on which she is recalling those days, fuse into a single day. Farjeon creates this identity by the repetition of images, words, and even whole sentences, across that disrupted space, that visual no-man’s land: “This is the eve”; “It was the eve”; “I will praise Easter Monday now”; “Easter Monday was a day for praise”; “It was such a lovely morning”; and “It was such a lovely morning.” But the last line and a half jolt us out of the dreamy trance of recollection into the harsh reality of the soldier’s death. It was the “eve” of her great, still unknown sorrow. The “three letters that you will not get” hang suspended, displaced from everything else in the poem.

Although the persona has given her beloved a voice beyond the time that fate, destiny, a shell, or God has allowed him, he is now silenced for ever—in reality, in the sonnet, and in the sequence. Only five lines separate his voice from the end of the sequence. He has spoken for the first and the last time. His death forces closure and silence. He is no Beatrice or Laura; she is not Dante or Petrarch.

In this final sonnet, a formal break after the ninth line provides a visual gap that cannot be bridged. No other sonnet in this sequence includes such a separation of parts, although all the others are indented at the sestet. This space before the last five lines, rather than the expected six, underscores the fragmentation of time which the bereaved so often suffer, and the brevity of her hope.

“Easter Monday” not only occupies an important position as the closing sonnet of *First and Second Love*; Farjeon also sets this sonnet apart from all the others through a variety of techniques, each of which she never uses elsewhere. It is the only titled sonnet. The lack of rhyme is unique within *First and Second Love*. This poem is the only sonnet that is personalised and dated, or that uses two distinct voices—hers and Thomas’. The spacing on the page, which sets “Easter Monday” visually apart from the other sonnets, reflects the latent rupture of war and distinguishes this sonnet from most others within the tradition.

Like the form, the syntax is unusual, and again sets this sonnet apart. The first four lines are a single sentence with no punctuation, no rhyme, creating an easy, conversational flow. The tone is that of a letter written by one who cares deeply about the correspondent. Lines six through nine, with their unusual frequency of in-line breaks, joined with end-stopped lines, create a tension which, with the absence of rhyme, now conveys a sense of doom and fragmentation, reinforced by that extra line and by the visual discontinuity. Poets often use enjambment and mid-line breaks to soften the “pouncing rhymes” of the sonnet (Keats’ *Letters* 255). Farjeon does so rarely. Her use of these techniques in the first three and a half lines after the break, together with the repetition of earlier lines, works similarly to draw attention away from the absence of rhyme.

“Easter Monday” lacks reference to specific persons. The speaker uses the first and second person singular in the octet, but in the sestet the pronouns are first person plural until the last line when she again uses the second person singular, causing even more disjunction between that line and the rest of the sestet. She offers no explanation for the change. We have no idea who the “we” are.

The poem ends with no sense of closure, only with the ache of loss. The day he died, "We sowed our earliest seeds." The ripeness of the old apples that he received has been replaced with the beauty and promise of the new, "ripe" apple-buds. But he will never again see their fruition. He will never again munch an apple from this, or any other, orchard. For her, seed time and harvest will revolve within the organic cycle. For him, there is only the metallic egg, no rebirth, no spring. He has little need for either a "patch of earth" (35;11) or "pinch of seed" (35;12).

Neither *Sonnets* nor *First and Second Love* is "an anthology of separate poems" (Warkentin 15). In *Sonnets*, Farjeon achieves "internal distancing" and a "defamiliarisation" which inhibits the reader's "routine habits of thought" (Norris 16). In *First and Second Love*, she initiates a different kind of "internal distancing," a struggle both to detach herself from feeling and to question her detachment. In the end, she cannot maintain this stance. Her final sonnet abandons "a discourse that [has been] worked over in advance" by the sonnet sequence tradition. In its simplicity and homeliness, in its anguish and pain, in its domestication of epic events and symbols, her final sonnet not only touches the heart but also causes the sonnets in both *First and Second Love* and *Sonnets* to "take on new meanings in a context designed to allow them to" do so (Neely 362).

Notes

1. The epigraphs for this chapter are from Carol Thomas Neely's 1978 "The Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequences" (362), Christopher Norris's 1987 *Derrida* (16), and Germaine Warkentin's 1975 "Love's sweetest part, variety": Petrarch and the Curious Frame of the Renaissance Sonnet Sequence" (15).
2. Farjeon's poetry has not been anthologised except for "Peace" in *Scars Upon my Heart* edited by Catherine Reilly, and has not been discussed by any critics, as far as I can discover, feminist or otherwise. *Sonnets* was published as the first section of *Sonnets and Poems* (1918) by Eleanor Farjeon in the same way as *Elegiac Sonnets* was published as the first section of *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems* by Charlotte Smith.
3. The beloved in "First Love" has not been identified and may be fictive. The beloved in "Second Love" is identified, in the final sonnet, as Edward Thomas (1878-1917), the poet.
4. Apart from the two sequences "Peace" and *Sonnets*, "Now That You Too" (41) is the only sonnet in *Sonnets and Poems*.
5. For clarity, I number *Sonnets* in Roman numerals and sonnets from *First and Second Love* in Arabic.
6. Edward Thomas, the (fictive) "beloved" of Farjeon's "Second Love," and Farjeon herself, were part of a *coterie* of poets including Robert Frost, D.H. Lawrence and Alice Meynell.
7. Farjeon had several (non-conventional) love affairs, never married, and lived with George Earle, a married man, from 1920, when she was thirty-nine, until his death in 1949.
8. Farjeon published the Thomas letters in 1958.
9. *1914* (1914) by Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) is only a five sonnet sequence.
10. This line is cited from "*Dulce et Decorum Est*" (1917) by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in *No Man's Land I: The War of Words* (1988) that "male linguistic fantasies . . . a revision of *materna lingua*" (255) can involve erudite and classical *patrius sermo* (243-262). Owen, however, uses Latin partly to challenge and to refute classical concepts. Their argument could also be reversed; women-as-poets might deliberately convert *patrius sermo* back into *materna lingua*, unlike Gilbert and Gubar. Part of the appeal of the last sonnet of "Second Love," as we shall see, lies in the contrast between its "mother tongue" and such *patrius sermo* as Owen's title.

Chapter Five

Spinning Around, Past and Through Coffers and Coffins: Re-covering Anna Hempstead Branch and *Sonnets from a Lock Box*

[W]hat we value so highly, what we spend so much time discussing and teaching, may have taken the turns it has in the past, and may be assuming the forms that it does in our own period, because of an essential (possibly inevitable) retrenchment. (Bate)

That is your crime, which you didn't commit: you disturb their love of property. . . . If we submit to their reasoning, we are guilty. (Irigaray)

Since Gyn/Ecology spins around, past, through the coffers/coffins in which "knowledge" has been stored, re-stored, re-covered, its meaning will be hidden from the Grave Keepers of tradition. (Daly)¹

Sonnets from a Lock Box (1929) by Anna Hempstead Branch (1875-1937) is not only the most exhilarating sonnet sequence that I have read, but demonstrates the use of evolving symbols, the perspective of an educated woman and, arguably, the maximum potential of the form. Of all the sonnet sequences, authored by both women and men, that I have discussed or referred to in this study, this work most clearly shows the necessity of reading a sonnet sequence in its entirety to discover the ways in which a writer responds to this traditional genre. At the same time, however, there is not, nor must we expect, a straightforward, readily comprehensible, progression, for this work is a sonnet sequence, not a narrative—not even a narrative sonnet sequence. Gaps and traces, some of which are very faint, may lead to confusion for both the reader and the persona, partly because, as Michel Foucault points out in "Revolutionary Action" (1971), "A whole series of mis-understandings relates to things that are 'hidden,' 'repressed,' and 'unsaid'" (214). The cumulative effect of the poet's themes, symbols and repressions makes Samuel Taylor Coleridge's remarks on the effective reading of poetry even

more relevant to *Sonnets from a Lock Box* than to *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) by Charlotte Smith (1749-1806). Hempstead Branch's sequence progresses "Like the motion of a serpent . . . or like the path of sound through air . . . and from the retrogressive movement [the reader] collects the force which again carries him onward" (*BL* 14;11). This way of reading leads to a methodology that I find eminently suitable for an understanding and appreciation of her work.

The most exciting way in which to approach this sequence, then, is through exegesis, because the symbols, themes, concerns and arguments evolve and develop sequentially. Although separate sonnets may be read and enjoyed in their own right, only the whole sequence of thirty-eight sonnets can demonstrate its integrity and richness. Discrete sonnets cannot show the multi-faceted aspect of the poet's symbols, or her development of the themes that money is the root of all evil and that no philosophical system, especially the Judeo-Christian, is sufficient. She investigates the burden of the past, including myths, philosophies, and the effects of civilisation as a man-made and patriarchal system. She explores conventional ethics from many perspectives.

In the same way as Coleridge offers a methodology, Foucault offers a point of entry into these *Sonnets from a Lock Box*, the major theme of which is the effect of power and the nature of control. Over forty years before Foucault says, in "Intellectuals and Power" (1972), "we have yet to fully comprehend the nature of power" (213), Hempstead Branch seeks to investigate "the forms of control, surveillance, prohibition, and constraint" (Foucault 213). Although she refuses "to ignore the problem of power," she implicitly acknowledges great difficulty in "finding adequate forms of struggle" (Foucault 212), forms that are, to some extent, "discontinuous theories that . . . stand at the threshold of our discovery of the manner in which power is exercised" (Foucault 215). But the persona finds that in an attempt to refuse both power and control, she continually becomes re-entrenched in the box of constriction, demonstrating, perhaps, Foucault's own theory that "It seems that we are winning, but then the institution is rebuilt; we must start again. . . . I think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system" (1971^a:230). In fact, the very acts of questioning old systems and imagining new freedoms seem to strengthen the box the persona of the sequence is trying to escape. She continually finds that she becomes complicit and discovers that patriarchy is a hydra; no sooner does she cut off one head than another appears.

The speaker of *Sonnets from a Lock Box* endeavours to unearth and disclose secrets, not the hidden powers of the unconscious. She is partially aware that, for the father to maintain control, the secrets of the father's will must remain secret, must be protected from the eyes of the curious by boxes and walls but, as Foucault argues, "It is perhaps more difficult to unearth a secret than the unconscious" (214). The persona of the sequence continually confronts secrets, hieroglyphs, runes, misinformation, deceit, and sleight of hand. No sooner does she celebrate the uncovering of one secret than she finds herself controlled and oppressed by another. From beginning to end, she continuously raises new questions as she answers others.

Though a daughter might get the mastery over her father's key, might get possession of his savings, the persona shows that the ultimate power still lies with him. In his potential power over her even beyond her death (3;13-14), he has some affinity with the Godhead. He can bemuse his daughter through writing, symbols, legends, magic and algebra, using both the "sacred cross and devil's ring" (4;8). Fathers, both alive and dead, familial and institutional, the speaker suggests, control their offspring by any means.

The issue of power and control extends beyond that of the father in the nuclear family. In the world of *Sonnets from a Lock Box*, the patriarchal social order encourages men, especially perhaps old men, to exert power and control over the universe. Some make maps, some use alchemy, and yet others, astrology. The alchemist thinks his success is vital, because wealth is power. The astrologer, too, thinks his success is at least as vital. Since the very stars and planets hold councils and build "strong immortal towers" (7;10), he thinks that man must find a way to regulate the influence of these bodies, or be powerless and out of control.

Sonnets from a Lock Box is a unique sequence in many ways, not the least of which is its concern with the poor and the oppressed. Although the sequence opens with the personal, it soon becomes universal. Hempstead Branch despairs on behalf of people she does not know, people controlled without their consent. Her persona's resistance to her father's will is extended to a censure of all the Fathers who are powerful extortionists. In particular, like William Blake (1757-1827) before her, she accuses all self-appointed experts, and those who are implicated in any form of abuse of power. Like Luce Irigaray, in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), Hempstead Branch knows that "If you submit to their reasoning, you are guilty"; we must consciously "disturb their love of property" (211) including, and especially, their perception of people as property.

Hempstead Branch opens her sequence by questioning the testamentary will of the father which lies in the lock box, a metal cash-box, a coffer, a coffin, but, as *Sonnets from a Lock Box* develops, she extends her questions to a consideration of the will of God the Father, of the right by which biological and Heavenly paternity gives power over the children, of the same right which allows men to buy and sell children into slavery, and of whether there is any moral distinction between these “fathers” writ(ing)es/rights/ rites. On reading “God bought the world and for it gave His Son” (16;9), the reader might, at first, see this line as a statement and acceptance of Christian doctrine. S/he might well miss the fact that this is a purchase, not a gift and, therefore, the ethical problem of a God sacrificing His Son, if s/he did not know that, in the ninth, tenth and twelfth sonnets, Hempstead Branch has already spoken on the evils of child slavery. Without the earlier sonnets (1-4), the reader cannot know that money is the vehicle by which fathers enforce their will, and that the persona continually questions the father’s power over his children. If the reader is unaware that the poet is testing philosophies (5-8), s/he might think that this is just another denigration of patriarchal Christianity. Without the cumulative knowledge that the basic premise of the sequence is the inherent evil of both barter and sacrifice, the reader might not recognise the equivalent problematics of buying anything with another’s life or with divine power.

Another challenge in reading *Sonnets from a Lock Box* is that, as Irigaray remarks, “We haven’t been taught, nor allowed, to express multiplicity,” nor to read it, even though “Of course, we might—we were supposed to?—exhibit one ‘truth’ while sensing, withholding, muffling another” (210). Hempstead Branch’s persona tries to find and speak her truths by taking “one model after another, passing from master to master, changing face, form, and language with each new power that dominates [her]” (Irigaray 210), in an attempt to resist patriarchal control. Consequently, recurring patterns of images alter in context and meaning as the sequence evolves. The metamorphosis of the tinsel shapes (1;14) to the cash-box made of black tin (2;3-4), the “golden bone” (2;7), the “old riddles [which] spread metallic veils” (4;7), the desire to turn base metal into gold (6), “The great metallic bodies of the night” (7;5), the coins, the rings, the “Silver and gold” (30; 10-13) is one example. The elaboration of the “sacred cross” (4;8), the “Algebraic Sign” (4;14), and “the sacred X” (15;12) as mystification, as a cross, a common abbreviation and symbol for Christ, and, eventually, some new, more complex symbol, is another pattern group. And there are the straight lines: the trees (1;6,13), “the golden bone” (2;7), the pointing finger (3;7), “a bloody sword” (8;9), the “sharp stylus” (18;7), “the thin whip of

logic" (21;4), the broomstick (25;10), a rod (26;1), and "the invisible finger of the god" (27;3). Hempstead Branch writes a sequence "invoking a poetic meaning in excess of the sentence" (Scott 90), predominantly through deferment, accretion, metamorphosis and the elaboration of meaning.

The very title, *Sonnets from a Lock Box*, implies both sequentiality and containment. That "box" begins as a cash-box, but may also be the sonnet form itself which becomes even more restrictive than William Wordsworth's convent rooms and hermit cells (199;1-2), and challenges both John Donne's "pretty rooms" ("Canonization" 32), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "moment's monument" (117;1).² Even when she opens up the form, the constraint remains, often emphasised by consecutive, terminally end-stopped lines. This box has a lock as an integral part of its structure so that further questions arise as to when, why, by whom, and under what circumstances, it is locked and not locked. The reader soon begins to speculate on what will emerge from this new box: another Pandora, perhaps, or hope, the sole gift left to Pandora, or just more boxes.

* * *

A process of implicit questioning, clarification and further questioning begins with the first sonnet:

How nonchalantly I spend with little thrift
 His proud sparse earnings which were the frugal pay
 Of a man's stout will and honorable day.
 What insolent spending of that sturdy gift!
 When I reflect on him he seems like one
 Who on a bleak hill set a lonely pine.
 He saw the North Star in its branches shine.
 His honest valors are by me undone.
 Why I should own his box I cannot see.
 For his scant legacy I am unfit.
 Yet since he's in the yard I have his key,
 And somehow I am master over it.
 I am like one who decks the Holy Tree
 With tinsel shapes; then casts it in the pit. (1)

As in the first sonnet of Eleanor Farjeon's (1881-1965) *Sonnets* (1918), the discourse on man here effectively mutes the subjective I who is speaking as the sonnet opens. Because he unquestionably occupies such a solid block of lines, and because he actively accumulated the wealth, the man appears to be, at the least, an important subject of this sonnet.

The poet initially leaves us in suspense, effectively supplying a signifier "I" which has no definitive signified. Since there is so little information about the speaker, we tend to picture only the man, his values and his labours. One reason why he takes such a predominant position is that we know his sex; we do not have that same information for the speaker. If we read in stereotypes, it may seem that somebody who is unfit to inherit, who undoes a man's valour, and who "decks the Holy Tree/With tinsel shapes," cannot be male.

Read as an introduction to *Sonnets from a Lock Box*, in a way similar to the first reading of Farjeon's "Man cannot be a sophist to his heart" (I) in chapter four, Hempstead Branch's first sonnet establishes the persona's relationship to the tradition, both poetical and patriarchal. The inheritance is a gift from a proud man. As a solitary tree, in conjunction with the north star, the man is firmly placed within the poetic tradition. The speaker, however, is nonchalant, thriftless, insolent, unworthy and unfit. S/he is both trivial and blasphemous, not only decking the Holy Tree with tinsel but also casting it into some unidentified pit.

At the same time, for better or worse, s/he is now the "master," and takes over the inheritance. The possibility is strong that this is a mastery that s/he does not want. "Why I should own his box I cannot see" (1;9) need not only be a claim of unworthiness; it could also be a complaint: "Why me?" Certainly, this inheritance is a form of control reflected in those nine terminally end-stopped lines. A further tension remains between the constriction of the "lock box" and the constriction of the sonnet form. Although the burden in both cases is inherited and cannot, apparently, be refused, unless, perhaps, s/he "casts it in the pit," it can be transformed, if only with tinsel. The question remains throughout the sequence, whether trimming the tree is sufficient or whether it needs more radical treatment.

When we have read the sequence in its entirety, we come to this sonnet for a second time knowing that the speaker is a dead man's daughter. Such deferment of information is part of the gradual evolution of characters and symbols that are the heart, life and brain of this sequence. Every image, and every concept, looks both backwards and forwards to the other sonnets in the sequence. Nothing is simply what it appears to be, nor is anything simple.

The tree, the lonely pine, has a complex of associations. Not until the third sonnet do we discover that the speaker is a daughter. Since the man's daughter has inherited his meagre savings, then, the assumption is that he has no son. There is no-one to continue his name. No longer will the north star shine through any "Branch" of his family tree. The "Star" has been eclipsed and annihilated. The daughter herself becomes the "tinsel shapes" on the Holy/family tree. She is his scant and short-lived legacy.

The "lonely pine" set "on a bleak hill" has less mundane affinities with the "Holy Tree," because it resonates with the tree of Golgotha, formed from the tree of life, upon which Christ was crucified when the Son of God paid for the sins of man, to prevent mankind from being cast into the pit for ever. More specifically, as mythology would have it, Christ paid for the sin of woman in the shape of Eve. Now the hard earnings of a faithful man are dissipated by his apparently feckless daughter.

The seemingly innocent portrayal—which is never innocent—of the differences between the father and daughter, male and female, masculine and feminine, which casts the man in the traditional heroic mode, is loaded. It may well be that she rejects his values as the maintainer of honour, frugality, pride, resolution, solitude, valour, and financial stability. She may choose to desecrate the "Holy Tree," as the tree of life, as the tree of knowledge, and as the crucifix, casting Christianity itself into "the pit" by re-turning his Christ-mas tree to a pagan symbol of the equinox. Being unfit to "own his box," to inherit within the patriarchy, may prove to be a positive stance, a position of freedom.

Since words of constriction cluster in the sestet of this first sonnet—*box*, *yard* and *pit*—she may be resisting the control inherent in the father's box. At the same time, these locating terms are both simple and vague, offering the potential of shifting meanings. In other contexts, yard could signify a measure; here it is a circumscribed exterior space, probably the graveyard. Pit has the negative connotations of a disposal site for garbage, including corpses, and of hell. The box is taking on some of the dimensions of a coffin.

The image of the box becomes more explicit in the second sonnet, both in its actuality and in its metaphoric significance.

I, from the clerk, receive my private key,
 With curious circumstance and grave parade.
 Now my strong box is on the table laid.
 There's a stout wall between all folks and me.

The door is locked so that no one shall see.
 Here with my fortune I sit down alone—
 This glittering skeleton, this golden bone.
 With what I do no man can disagree.
 And all this pompous opening of locks
 And shutting them again that I may look
 As if by stealth into a black tin box,
 And cut off coupons in a little book!
 Here lies my wealth, swathed like a buried king.
 From his dead hand I strip the jewelled ring. (2)

It is a "strong box," as in safety deposit. Both black and strong, it is a cash-box, and yet it is merely a "black tin box." It is also a casket, a coffin, in which lies his skeleton. But it is, perhaps most of all, a room in a bank with walls as stout as his will was stout (1;4). It is not, however, a totally voluntary enclosure like a convent cell. The room is to some extent a prison, with locks that are opened and closed with great solemnity, which the speaker may mock and even enjoy, and which yet effectively prevent her from seeing, as well as being seen by, other people. The end-stopped lines of the octet reflect that constriction; the enjambment in the sestet tries to deny it; but the final three lines, again end-stopped, re-enforce it. Her father's will has, in effect, created that "stout wall between all folks and me." A dead father has as much power as a living father. Through patriarchal institutions, he still controls her life and her fortune even as she risks inheriting the power he possesses and the control he exercises.

This sonnet also extends the motif of male dominance. The wealth, mummified, will swathe and bury her (with an implicit pun on "mummy"?). The persona may appear to be in control, since she is the subject for most of the sonnet and the opening word is *I*, but the clerk, not the client, is in control in a bank and, especially, in a bank vault. He is the active player in the first three lines. He invests the proceedings with ceremony.

Part of the ceremony is the giving and receiving of a private key, presumably the key to the strong box but also, perhaps, the key to her future. The persona finds the ceremonial somewhat absurd, even as she is controlled by her father and by the clerk. It is all "pomp and circumstance" (*Othello* III,iii,360), another male disposition. But such giving and receiving mimics the giving and receiving in matrimony, another ceremonial cash transaction, involving another "jewelled ring," an-other loss of freedom, an-other bondage.

This sonnet (2), then, reiterates and clarifies some words and concepts in the first sonnet, and elaborates some major symbols. It takes on some of the unwritten associations, and begins the transformation of others. The undercurrent of death, burial and corpses now reaches the surface. The “grave parade” is a form of funeral procession. The skeletons and bones merge into “his dead hand.”

A peculiar metamorphosis occurs through the “glittering skeleton.” Fathers’ bones have strange powers. We saw in chapter three that Smith, in “Written in the Church-Yard” (44), may well have been unconsciously re-writing the “sea-change” in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Now another father has suffered “a sea-change/Into something rich and strange” (*Tempest* I,ii,399-404). The persona of *Sonnets from a Lock Box*—like the persona of *One Person* (1928) by Elinor Wylie (1885-1928), an American contemporary of Hempstead Branch—is “the daughter of your skeleton” (Wylie 12;12), but in a more straightforward temporal relationship. The desire of the persona in Wylie’s *Sequence* (published posthumously) is that men will think that she is slender and beautiful. But now it is the father’s skeleton which is beautiful and costly, glittering and golden. The key to understanding his purpose in life is through his glittering gold, symbolising wealth. It is money that shapes the man, this Midas figure, money that strangely moulds his bones and skeleton.

The “jewelled ring” introduces a new shape, the circle. Until the end of the second sonnet, the shapes have been straight and angular: keys and pines, yards and caskets. The box, whatever connotations it takes, is a basic parallelepiped, the most right-angled of structures. Again, if we choose to deal with stereotypes, or even archetypes which tend to be stereotypes mythologised, we may see feminine/feminist “progress” as we move from male/masculine straight lines to female/feminine circles, but there is no evidence here for such a reading. At the same time, the “wealth” and the “jewelled ring,” especially in conjunction with “this dead hand,” could symbolise her inheritance of his (possible) poetic powers. She is living on “surplus value” by clipping coupons, small squares, sonnets. As in punitive usury (where money “breeds” for Shylock), the creation or making of poems may be deadly, perverse.

The third sonnet, still pre-occupied with the will of men, finally identifies the persona as a female survivor who has no power. Again, end-stopped lines in the first quatrain are restrictive:

Here lieth Personal magic in a box.

All that my father had he left to me.

His ghostly properties defy these locks.
 His Will still works, although I lose the key.
 If here stood judge and Jury . . . yet austere, free,
 My father's Will, ungovernable, unshaken,
 Would point his finger at the Judge—and he
 Would say, 'This woman's wealth shall not be taken.'
 So in this box I feel it throbbing still,
 That living entity, my father's Will.
 And I still see, concealed in this black tin,
 His pulsing energy that throbs within.
 If from this box his Will can rise and save
 And lift my body—oh, why not from the grave! (3 poet's ellipses)

The sonnet continues and reinforces the previous death imagery. It opens with *Here lieth* which, of course, is the stuff of epitaphs. The next word is capitalised, so mimicking the gravestone format.

Imagery and ambiance are Gothic here because the body is transmuted into material and symbolic wealth. In the same way as the Gothic so often represents the repressed, this sonnet pulses with repressed sexuality. The repeated capitalisation of *Will*, emphasising her father's controlling nature, transforms him into his "Will," or his "Will" into him. It is his will, personified, which acts as he would act, pointing his finger, an extension into a phallic symbol of the imagery of straight lines. A "woman's wealth" is her chastity, which "shall not be taken," and his "Will" has the potential to "rise" and "lift my body." In her capitalisation and repetition of *Will*, Hempstead Branch may well be alluding to Shakespeare's "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast my Will" (135), with its "Will in overplus" (135;2), and thus be emphasising the "Will"-power of male sexuality. The power, the control and the property rights/rites of the persona's father reach beyond the grave and evolve from, and into, a perverse sexuality, which promises—or threatens—a type of resurrection.

The fourth word of this sonnet, however, may already have sent us off at a tangent: "Here lieth . . . magic." As we quickly scan the previous sonnets, we see that there might be hints of magic, but in sonnet one they are slight. Perhaps the complex of the bleak hill, the lonely pine, the North Star and the Holy Tree have more significance than we have credited. Christ's birth-place was marked with a star and He was crucified upon a tree. The eastern star

was mobile, miraculous—the fixed pole star is a phallic navigational convenience merely. The placing of the star on the top of the Christmas tree is a complex of religious beliefs. It could be argued that the expulsion from Eden was stage-managed and inevitable; to fulfill God's plan, Adam and Eve must eat of the Holy Tree. Most magic is sleight of hand.

Magical illusions are more prominent in the second sonnet. The father's skeleton and his dead hand materialise in the cash-box. The will of the father, and the father himself, are transmuted into something glittering, golden and valuable. He is her wealth, and her wealth is "swathed like a buried king." But her father is dead and, for him, wealth is of little use. The tin box has become more than a casket; it is a burial or bank vault, a mausoleum, perhaps even a pyramid. The hope of resurrection, which sounds remarkably like a threat, indicates that his ownership and control of her body here on earth may well be translated and prolonged not only beyond his own death, but even beyond hers. Not only have her father and his will merged, but there seems to be some blending between her father and the Godhead. His will has not only risen but, in some undefined way, has also saved, as if the experience of inheritance produces, or requires, faith in resurrection.

The sense we had, in sonnet two, of the transformation of the box into vault, mausoleum, pyramid, is spelt out in sonnet four. This will, this man, does in-deed deserve and need a pyramid, a deep crypt, to contain him:

This trivial box seems not the fitting thing
 To hide such magic with its black tin lid.
 Oh, build it rather like the pyramid
 In whose deep crypt is buried some old king;
 A crypt adorned with ancient lettering;
 Graved with strange shapes and legendary tales
 Wherein old riddles spread metallic veils
 With many a sacred cross and devil's ring.
 Set reasonings here with query and surmise.
 And syllogisms from some logician's brain.
 Inscribe vague prophecies whose half-closed eyes
 Shine like dim jewels set by Tubal-cain.
 Carve magic here with iridescence fine
 And Runes and Spells and Algebraic Sign. (4)

Such a box might look just like any other deed-box, but its power over her is metaphorically the power of absolute monarchy.

Sonnet four begins the scrutiny of language and its powers, inherent, of course, in a last will and testament. The persona of *Sonnets from a Lock Box* interrogates such specific forms of written language as “ancient lettering;/Graved with strange shapes” (4;5-6) —both engraved and suitable for a grave—“legendary tales” (4;6) and “old riddles” (4;7) which the ages have still not solved. Like the tinsel tree, the “old riddles” are decorative with their “metallic veils” (4;7), a non-organic metaphor which may well be less than benevolent or benign. The persona moves from description to command, with its “syllogisms from some logician’s brain” (4;9-10) recalling Farjeon’s sophist (I;1). The inscriptions become “vague prophecies” (4;11) with “half-closed eyes” (4;11), which “Shine like dim jewels” (4;11-12), which may be related to the eyes and jewelled ring of the dead father. Although, in the course of this sonnet, language includes the adornment of ancient lettering and syllogisms, stories, wills and riddles, the rhyming couplet, with its firm closure, offers a possible alternative. Magic, with its appealing iridescence, moves from the inherent magic and poetry of historical runes to spells, which are by their nature ambiguous, to algebraic signs. All three meanings of spell—the spelling of words, magic, and a spell of time—are operative here. Magic and language together create mystery and enchantment. Whether that is intrinsically good or evil is not clear.

The religious symbolism here may facilitate an understanding of the specific signification of each language form. The old hieroglyphic riddles contain both “sacred cross and devil’s ring.” With the straightness of the cross and the circularity of the ring, the poet continues to elaborate on the concept of shapes. Previously, the round ring and the straight pine and Holy tree were in different poems; now they are in the same line. But there is no apparent guide as to the value of a cross as opposed to a ring, as to whether sacred and devil are mutually exclusive terms, or as to the relative merits of god or devil. This dilemma will reappear in Wylie’s “Pastiche,” which was not published until 1932, three years after *Sonnets from a Lock Box*. In the context of the nature of the word, and the impossibility of deciphering truth, Wylie’s persona, trying to establish the source of the authority for the moulding of woman, asks, “Does Christ or Lucifer seal this alchemy?” (12). For Wylie’s persona all dualities are interchangeable, including Christ and Lucifer. With Hempstead Branch’s the situation is not yet clear as she struggles to work through the implications of her inheritance.

In subsequent sonnets, five through eight, the box becomes a cell with various degrees of confinement. The self-imprisonment of men and their occupations become the subjects of speculation and comment. The logician of sonnet four becomes a cartographer (5), a would-be alchemist (6), an old astrologer (7), and a herald (8). An isolated man, unnamed, with the exception of Hans Glauber the alchemist, voluntarily confined in a "box," sits and calculates, replacing the female speaker who is attempting to escape such constrictions.

Such men can create only still life. The "quaint geographer might subtly trap/The ocean and the earth into a map" (5;2-3), working in his cell; "But with its seasons still the earth turns round" (5;14). He may embellish his chart "well with many a quaint design" of beast, or vegetable, or war; but each of these devices seems equally important, equally empty. The cartographer presents a "tabulated scheme" (5;9), a "diagram of story" (5;10). What he misses, however, are earth's "mysteries of pain and dream,/Its love, its pride, its passion and its glory" (5;11-12). His maps in no way affect the heart of life. As the box gives way to a cell, the occupation of each man seems trivial. The earlier "trivial," then, may become displaced from the "box," be unsuitable, or overflow it—"not the fitting thing" (4;1). "Fortunes," on the other hand, like languages, "lie on paper and make no sound" (5;13), while vitally affecting those who live and are subject to the wills of others.

Hans Glauber, the only person who is named in this series, and one of the few named in the whole sequence, practices alchemy in "such a silence" (6;1) within his cell. Using "strange formulas" (6;3) and his "crucible and scales" (6;2), a modification of the geographer's compass and scales, he seeks the philosopher's stone. He measures; he writes; he compounds. In many ways his activities are a continuation of the magical engraving of sonnet four. He tries to capture the secret of transmutation that "great Fortunes curiously hold/The power that turns base metals into gold" (6;13-14). The silence of money is highly pertinent here since death, the ultimate silence, can, through legal inheritance, already make skeletons glitter and turn bone to gold.

Like the geographer, the astrologer wishes to schematise the mysteries of nature. In his cell he "might calculate/The movements" of the planets, "Ascribing to each star its proper spell/And brooding on its laws, prognosticate" (7;1-4). Hempstead Branch now extends the meaning of "spell" to include location, while it still inherently carries, from earlier sonnets, the difficulty and ambiguity of any spell. The planets hold a "council chamber" in the sky, and "The stars build up their strong immortal towers" (7;9-10). The astrologer desires to find a system that will allow him to forecast the powerful effects of universal "magnetisms" which control

empires and “coerce the mind” (7;6-7). Systems used in attack and defence are the essence of power.

Great fortunes, in their effects upon us, are intrinsically as powerful as anything in the universe. The closing lines of sonnet seven assert, “The planets sweep their treasuries through the air./So through the world magnificently bright/Great Fortunes move with Planetary Powers.” Money and power are equated and capitalised. The speaker feels that the planets and stars are beyond both our control and our understanding, for they are “Bearers of unintelligible light” (7;11). But even if we cannot comprehend them, we can use their motions as an analogy for our own concerns.

The last sonnet in this series, focussed on solitary men and their occupations, considers the officer of heraldry (8), whose function is only embellishment. He engraves shields, emblazons standards, thereby attesting to the power of the bearer. Again the power is reflected in, and arises from, “Great Fortunes” (8;1). Again the fortune becomes the man: “How warm with history Great Fortunes are,/How blazoned with rich heraldic signs” (8;5-6). Fortunes are “warm with history” and fortunes make men warm.

With this series (5-8) the imagery moves from agriculture to war, from mapping (5) to heraldry (8), as the ritual and “pomp of war” (8;8) now replace the pomp and circumstance of the clerk’s earlier ritual (2). On a cursory reading, the two lists of ornamentation in the sonnets on heraldry and cartography are similar—martial and organic. The apple, the corn, the winepress and the grape (5;7) are reduced to “The oil, the corn” (8;8), in the movement from one sonnet (5) to the other (8). The geographer uses “The elephant, the bullock and the ape” (5;6), beasts of burden, except for the ape with its human tendencies. The herald, in scrolling the pedigrees of great fortunes, chooses animals for their strength, pride and blood-thirstiness, or for their cunning and power of retreat: “The Lion Rampant” (8;3) and “The Running Fox” (8;4). “The battle axe, the frigate and the mine” (5;7) are embellished and transformed to “strong cities, ships and mines” (8;7), war, crowns, and “a bloody sword,/Cruelly bright with the cold flash of steel” (8;9-10). The imagery becomes less agricultural, more martial. Inasmuch as these are sonnets from a lock box, and inasmuch as that box has now been opened, an analogy between the speaker and Pandora seems *apropos*.

* * *

Sonnets from a Lock Box now moves from the power, control and confinement of individual men—the persona’s father, Hans Glauber, “experts”—to another solitary but archetypal male. In opening with a phrase that echoes the previous four sonnets, the pivotal ninth sonnet stresses continuity within the sequence and, in its archaisms, the continuity of patriarchy throughout the ages. The persona elaborates the message of the prophets of the Old Testament, and her message needs a prophetic, free-flowing, less constrained voice, although it opens conversationally enough:

There was a man that lived before the Flood—
 He said, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ Then
 He fled from out God’s presence and from men
 And the deep earth cried with his brother’s blood.
 Take heed of him, ye that have bought and sold
 And deal in living flesh—lest not in vain
 A bitter cry calls down the curse of Cain.
 Take heed of him, ye tillers in bright gold.
 I say that from these coins go up such cries
 Their protestations shall assail the skies.
 Where will you hide, you fugitives from God?
 . . . You that are flushed with guilt
 Little will it avail that you have built
 An opulent city in the Land of Nod. (9 poet’s ellipses)

The sonnet takes a cosmic perspective upon man’s need and search for power which now leads into the ultimate forms of possession—murder and slavery. “Cain,” according to Augustine in the *City of God*, means “possession.” The power the (dead) father has over the daughter moves into the control of brother over brother, man over man, through coins of exchange, those symbols of oppression that cry out with the voices of the victims. The “bloody sword” (8;9) of war, and the meditation on “How few they are whose colours shall endure./How few they are whose blood rides proud and true” (8;13-14), moves into the blood of Abel. The sequence as a whole moves from “The Lion Rampant”(8;3) to the bloody hands of Cain, to murder, and from “The Running Fox” (8;4) to the cunning brother to the slave owner, to the wandering Jew, to Shylock. The slave traders and owners, like Cain, use others as objects of barter, as means to a fortune.

All patriarchs are under indictment. Yet this sonnet, like the first, relies on the deferral of signification. We might tentatively hazard a guess, by the fourth line, that the first subject of this sonnet is Cain. We might also think of all the men who have stood by, or participated in, the killing of their brothers. Not only fathers are being judged; brothers, too, are subject to interrogation. The opening line brings Noah to mind, and the third raises the ghost of Adam. Once he had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and knew himself to be naked, "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God" (Gen.3,8) as the subject now flees from "God's presence." The implicit invocation of these great patriarchs is intentional.

The question arises, then, as to the morality of commanding a daughter to keep faith with her father's will, in terms of both cultural power and the concrete legal document. It may not be desirable for a daughter to be complicit in patriarchy. The desire and search for gold is corrupt whether it is expressed in a deed-box, transmuted by alchemy, acquired by the misappropriation of a brother's birthright, accumulated through the buying and selling of slaves, or taken from "the deep earth" (9;4). Cain would find no respite in his exile. There is no place to hide for those who, like Midas, are flush with guilt, and should flush with guilt. For the exploiters of others, no building feat will provide refuge or win forgiveness. A daughter should not, surely, be complicit with men who are living in their own Land of Nod, with their consciences sleeping.

The ninth sonnet also enables the persona to move, in a grand panorama, from historical time into the present and into the political reality in the United States so that, in the tenth sonnet, she can consider the actual coins currently in circulation. Her anger grows as she develops her references to the slave trade and to corrupt coinage. In the opening line of sonnet ten, she exclaims "How strange it is that these bright coins should be/Stamped with the Bird of freedom!" (10;1-2). American coinage is too soiled with the blood of its people to justify the use of such an image. A land whose skies are full of the cries of the oppressed, leaves no room for the darting eagle (10;14). Placing "the Bird of holiest Liberty" (10;4) on the coins of the realm, those "national emblems" (10;5), is another hypocrisy. The conscience of the nation has already been "whited by too many lies" (10;10). America, with its racism and slavery, is a land of "whited sepulchres" (Matt. 23,27).

The equation of gold with coinage is repeated and explicit in this sonnet; coins are "discs of gold" (10;11). The national treasury and the designers of coins join the "tillers in bright gold" (9;8) and the alchemist as objects of censure. The "jewelled ring" (2;14), the "devil's

ring" (4;8) and coins are all circular, and now we can see that such circularity does not necessarily indicate progress. The speaker suggests that "men's dark biographies" (10;12) should be displayed on the coins—like the presidents' heads? The suggestion is ambiguous. Perhaps presidents inevitably "deal in living flesh" (9;6).

Sonnet sequences often reflect on personal despair; Hempstead Branch speaks of the despair of the oppressed and the despair she feels over the state of her country. The "bitter cry" (9;7) of the previous sonnet becomes "outcries of despair" (10;3) because "The Unpaid Toiler has not been set free" (10;8). To replace the eagle with "The crouching figure of the childish slave" (10;13) would be to "Carve on these coins the truth" (10;9). Rather than "In God We Trust" (my citation, not the poet's), coins should "declare,/Ye serve the rich, the poor ye do not spare" (10;6-7).

The complex associations of death, revelation, mechanisation, gold, monarchy, labour and sleep come together in the eleventh sonnet, with the addition of Judgement Day. The persona opens by asking "What dreams burn here, never to be revealed?" (11;1). Again there is a floating referent; the signifier "here" is indeterminate. Most obviously, "here" means within this sonnet and its "great tombs" (11;4), or within the cell or bank vault, or in the box as either cash-box or coffin. All suggest confinement. "Here" could also refer to the United States, or to the Earth in general, or to the coins.

In the same way as we are not sure of the location of "here," we do not know what the "dreams" might be. Neither can we be sure how "dreams burn" (11;1). Nor will our curiosity be easily satisfied; these dreams will never be revealed (11;1). But, inasmuch as "Men's souls sleep here" (11;11), perhaps the burning dreams refer back to "the Land of Nod" (9;14) or forward to an everlasting fate. Even this tentative conclusion is undone before it can be reached, however, for the dreams may also be "visions of [some kind of] archangelic things!" (11;2). Men's dreams, then, may be heavenly, unless the nature of archangels is also open to speculation.

From the beginning of the sequence, the persona has complicated the image and value of various metals. Now the "rich gold" (11;3), tainted with death, is both a cross rhyme with "cold" and "mold" in the concluding couplet, and is associated with gorgeous images of the "ancient kings" and their coronation or burial robes (11;4). Both the gold, metaphorically, and the kings in reality, are sealed in "great tombs" (11;4).

Transforming the metal cash-box into a cell and into a tomb does not alleviate the situation, or protect the earth from contamination. The earth itself contains destruction, becomes

its own charnel house and, like the father's organic bones, becomes inorganic. To this point in the sequence, men are buried in the deep earth but they also rape her for her gold (9;8). The earth contains "mysteries of pain and dream,/Its love, its pride, its passion and its glory" (5;11-12). The "deep earth cried with" Abel's blood (9;4). But now "this glittering ground" (11;12), "this cruel earth, so bright, so cold" (11;13), reflects the earlier "bloody sword,/Cruelly bright with the cold flash of steel" (8;9-10). The earth is not only a burial ground or an element to be mined for gold, it becomes inorganic, looks and feels like metal. The sense that those "metallic veils" (4;7) may, as an inorganic metaphor, be malevolent, is now confirmed, but only adds to the conundrum.

As early as the second sonnet, the poet establishes an association between deadly kings, fortunes and confinement; now she adds a graphic funeral.

Pick! Pick! Last night I heard the solemn spade
 With clocklike sound and unremitting toil
 Dig its slow sense of time into the soil.

The box was lowered. The pious parson prayed. (11;5-8)

Reading *pick* as both a verb and a noun, the sexton has to use a pick before he can use "the solemn shovel," implying that the earth is frozen, both cold and hard. "Pick! Pick!" mimics the "clocklike sound" as if the sound itself, rather than the "solemn spade," "Digs its slow sense of time into the soil." The perception of time alters. In burial, time slows to a stop. A similar change in perception occurs in "I Felt a Funeral" (280) by Emily Dickinson (1831-1886), and the repetition of "Pick! Pick!" resonates with the "treading—treading" (3) and "beating—beating" (7) of Dickinson's poem.³ The personae in both poems undergo altered states of consciousness.

A complicated re-writing of Donne's "Holy Sonnet 7"—"At the round earth's imagined corners, blow"—as the sonnet moves into the sestet, replaces the resonances with "I Felt a Funeral." The persona of Donne's sonnet moves from his request, in the octet, that Judgement Day should come now, into his realisation, in the sestet, that he needs more time to repent. He has no doubt, however, that at the final trump, the "numberless infinities/Of souls" (3-4) will rise and to their "scattered bodies go" (4). Although the persona of Hempstead Branch's sonnet exonerates the body and condemns the soul, she seems equally certain of Gabriel's power:

Blow, Gabriel, on thy trumpet! With that sound
 Sing up men's bodies to a glorious morn.

Men's souls sleep here. Where is that godlike horn
 Shall call them up out of this glittering ground?
 Out from this cruel earth, so bright, so cold,
 Live things spring not from its unliving mold. (11;9-14)

In the meanwhile, for both poets, "Men's souls sleep." The sleeping souls, in *Sonnets from a Lock Box*, are presumably dream visions. But, in the same way that we do not know where "here" is, in "What dreams burn here" (11), the persona seems uncertain that the "godlike horn" is anywhere. Furthermore, whereas the English poet's persona has no doubt that the sleeping souls will arise, the American poet's not only questions the existence and the efficacy of that last blast, she unequivocally denies the possibility of resurrection. When the "cruel earth" becomes hard and barren, so that "Live things," including sleeping souls, "spring not from its unliving mold," we reach the utmost in devastation, hopelessness and eternal death. Resurrection cannot take place.

The parallel structure of sonnets ten and twelve emphasises their parallel arguments. These are the first two sonnets in the entire sequence which adhere strictly to the Petrarchan rhyme scheme and syntax. The positioning of the controlling images of each sonnet is the same. Sonnet ten opens and closes with the Bird (10;2,14); sonnet twelve opens and closes with an urn (12;2,14). In connection with the "Bird of Freedom" (10;2), sonnet ten opens with "these bright coins" (10;1), discusses the fate of "The Unpaid Toiler" (10;8), and then suggests that we should "engrave/Men's dark biographies" (10;11-12) upon American currency. The twelfth sonnet starts with the echoing injunction:

Inscribe in austere characters this screed.
 'As in a golden urn here lies the dust
 Of a poor boy whose dreams were so august
 He might have changed the earth' (12;1-4)

Now the boy's passion glows "In this bright coin" (12;9). Because men are "traffickers in greed" (12;5), and spend "rashly what you hold in trust" (12;6), they are both "unwise stewards and unjust" (12;7). The reference is, of course, to the Bible and the steward who, for safety, buried his talent in the ground (Matt.25,26). Now men can bury children, both actually and metaphorically. As in "Here lieth Personal magic in a box" (3), money and power wholly appropriate life forces and energies.

Earlier, the engraving on a pyramid honours “some old king” (4;4); now the urn of “a poor boy” needs engraving. The “golden bone” (2;7) is now the “dust” of a boy, but his urn is golden. The deceased in all three sonnets are male. The “never to be revealed” dreams and visions (11;1) have become the august unfulfilled dreams of a boy. “But what the great deeds are he might have done/Are secrets which we shall not ever learn” (12;11-12). Once again we remain in ignorance.

The association of “august” and “boy” recalls Virgil’s “Eclogue IV,” sometimes referred to as the Messianic eclogue, in which the vision of a new golden age under Augustus depends upon the birth of a child (8-10). Since Virgil tells us that the birth of the boy will lead to bountiful fertility (18-25), and since the earth is now “unliving mold” (11;14), the death of the boy who “might have changed the earth” is a loss that we cannot afford. Instead of the promise of the boy’s life, there is only a coin, which contains all that is left, in which “His passion glows and his brief visions burn” (12;10).

This “bright coin shining like the sun” (12;9), which is all that is left, reverberates with “son,” as in Farjeon’s “Shall we not laugh together, he and I” (“Interim” 30;1). Once again, the persona appears to be figuratively sonless. But the situation in *Sonnets from a Lock Box* is worse than in “Interim.” In the earlier sequence, “things that lie below the earth,/Things choked and buried, sunless and unsought” (30;5-6), are “Seed without fruit, unconsummated birth” (30;8), but there is still the possibility of new life. For the later persona, “Out from this cruel earth, so bright, so cold,/Live things spring not” (11;13-14). There is no son, no sun, no light, no love, no warmth, and no hope of resurrection. The speaker can only take “this coin in my hand as one/Lifts priceless ashes in a funeral urn” (12;13-14) as a symbol of his value.

An imposed confinement—in an urn, a coffin, a bank vault, a cell, a tomb, a pyramid—leads, in the thirteenth sonnet, into the nature of imprisonment and the connection, or lack of connection, between cause and effect:

Am I a prisoner? What have I done? . . .
 What is this silence and this heavy door?
 Suppose ‘tis bolted and I go out no more?
 I sweat all over and I seem like one
 Hid in a dungeon by some cruel king.
 There is an evil in this atmosphere.
 Here is the sudden thrust of swordlike fear.

The air seems full of subtle reasoning.
 What web of craft here weaves a rich design!
 With sighs of men forgotten! What prayers are these!
 Some whispering of things strange and malign
 Masters my will with cruel images!
 Now fierce magnetic energies constrain
 My flesh to shake and all but freeze my brain. (13 poet's ellipses)

The finality of the eleven terminally end-stopped lines echoes the finality of the shutting of the heavy door. "*LASCIATE OGNI SPERANZA VOI CH'ENTRATE*" (*Inferno* III;9). The continual stopping of lines also forces a constriction on the sonnet itself. The "magnetic energies constrain" her flesh, all but freeze her brain, and reach their limits within the fourteen lines of a sonnet.

Paradoxically, sound enters the sequence in this place of silence, rather than the previous appeal to sight and touch and, with the sound, comes the certainty of malignity and evil. The opening of the sonnet, with its "What have I done?" and "What is this silence," is similar to the opening of the sestet, with its "What web" and "What prayers." The "web of craft" is an extension of the spells of Hans Glauber (6) but the purpose of the design now is not the philosopher's stone but the constraint of the persona in what approaches a living death. The octet begins with personal questions, while the sestet includes other "men forgotten!" Although in the octet the question mark leaves room for the possibility of an answer, the sestet removes it. The question marks have become exclamation marks. There is some kind of "strange" communication going on here related to a most powerful sense of possession. But, again, we face secrets and the lack of revelation.

Compared to circumstances in earlier poems the situation has deteriorated. The king is again powerful, but now he is alive, cruel and arbitrary. The heraldic representation of a sword is now a metaphoric sword of fear. The private room with its "stout wall" (2;4) and locked door becomes a dungeon. Whereas in the second sonnet others were locked out, now she is locked in. In the first sonnet, at least she is "master over" the key; now whispering masters her will. The earlier experts sought to find logical schemes through reasoning (4;5,7); now reasoning is subtle and sinister. The astrologer in his cell seeks the knowledge to forecast the effects of universal "magnetisms" which "coerce the mind" (7;6-7). Now the "magnetic energies" appropriate her life force even more effectively than in sonnet three, while recalling the pole star of the first sonnet and, therefore, the tree and the star. Magic again makes its appearance. The "Personal

magic in a box" (3;1) is now the evil, malign whispering, the subtle reasoning, and the web of craft.

It may be that at this point the persona realises that she has become completely possessed by, and obsessed with, the power of coffers/coffins, for this sonnet marks a turning point from human control to the power of gods. In the fourteenth sonnet, the persona begins a tentative search for some other meaning, some other way of living. The father's will has caused her to reach the nadir of her life. The power, cruelty and sterility of the patriarch—father and king—has reached its limit.

* * *

I have paid little attention to sonnet form so far, but now the change in form is important. Even as Hempstead Branch extends the use and the meaning of the sequence, she experiments with the sonnet. She is a sophisticated practitioner, and admired both Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (James 227). She experiments with the number of lines and with the rhyme scheme, using variations on the Shakespearean, Petrarchan and Spenserian sonnet, and one poem consists of couplets throughout. Normally she places the lines of her sonnets on the page continuously; occasionally she adds a space between the end of the octet and the beginning of the sestet, sustaining an accord between appearance, syntax, meaning and lineation. Sometimes a comparison of two sonnets of identical form, such as ten and twelve, indicates the depth of the significance of her use of a particular form; at other times the irregularity speaks for itself.

Sonnet fourteen, which is pivotal, is unique and significant in that it has the most irregular rhyme scheme of any of *Sonnets from a Lock Box*: aba bbb ccc dedde. But any hope we might have that this "irregularity" will break the patriarchal box is not satisfied.

What witchlike spell weaves here its deep design,
 And sells its pattern to the ignorant buyer.
 Oh lacelike cruelty with stitches fine—
 Which stings the flesh with its sharp mesh of fire.
 God of the Thief and Patron of the Liar,
 I think that it is best not to inquire
 Upon whose wheel was spun this mortal thread;
 What dyed this curious robe so rich a red;

With shivering hues it is embroidered.
 With changing colors like unsteady eyes.
 I think the filigree is Medea's wreath.
 Oh, treacherous splendor! In this lustrous prize
 Of gold and silver weaving, madness lies.
 Who purchases this garment—Sire—buys death. (14)

By beginning innocently enough with an aba rhyme but continuing with two triplets, bbb and ccc, the pattern emphasises the rhymes: *fire, liar, inquire, and thread, red, embroidered*. The second triplet carries across the *volta*. These rhymes enable a smooth transition from Mercury, through the Fates and the Furies, to Medea. In the final five lines, although the rhyming order is dedde, the syntax is two end-stopped lines, followed by enjambment leading into an end-stopped line thirteen. Lines twelve and thirteen effectively form a rhyming couplet, then, causing a complete separation of the final line. That final isolated line is a warning. The spell has become deadly, as, later, the spelling of words also becomes deadly.

As we have seen, Hempstead Branch continually changes and elaborates images, creates associations, and introduces myths, legends and hieroglyphics. Here she draws heavily upon pagan myth as more appropriate to her needs, paralleling her earlier action in the first sonnet, and creating a bridge into her consideration, in sonnet fifteen, of the Hebrew God. She incorporates "feminine" images and witchcraft. Heat and passion replace coldness and sterility. The snake is preferred over coins and straight lines. Her choice of Medea and Mercury, with their power and treachery, serves her purpose well and offers no simplistic alternatives to easy transitions from patriarchal will. The pagan is not necessarily an improvement on the Christian. Female mythic figures are not necessarily "better" than their male counterparts. Madness may be an improvement on a frozen brain; witchcraft may be a creation of patriarchy, or it might subvert it; fire may, or may not, be preferable to ice; but in any case, purchase again leads to death.

When "What web of craft here weaves its rich design!" (13;9) is transported into this sonnet as "What witchlike spell weaves here its deep design," the change from "rich" to "deep" is particularly subtle and important as the emphasis moves to the seduction and irresistibility of such "weaving." The associations of "rich" have all been negative: gold, coins and fortunes. The "deep earth," however, before it became "this cruel earth, so bright, so cold" (11;13), cried with Abel's blood (9;4). "Deep" has positive potential; "rich" has none. Furthermore, the "deep design" makes "lacelike" patterns. That "feminine" touch of craft, however, is not necessarily a

good thing, with its "cruelty," its "stitches fine," which like the shirt Medea made, "stings the flesh with its sharp mesh of fire." The spell progresses from a fairly abstract concept, through a lace-like pattern to a mythological "robe," to "Medea's wreath." The combination of fascinating splendour with danger can lead to madness.

The speaker in sonnet fifteen concludes that "A fiercer God has seized me by the hair" (15;8), and the allusion to "I thought once how Theocritus had sung" (1), from *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847-1850) by Barrett Browning (1806-1861), is unmistakable: "a mystic Shape did move/Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair" (1;10-11). Hempstead Branch had access to, and knowledge of, Barrett Browning's sequence, of course, and so recasts the image. At the same time, however, the earlier image found an echo in the later poet-as-woman, was pertinent to her own experience. But whereas the English woman-as-poet identifies the "mystic Shape" as love, the American makes no identification of her "fiercer God." As the former's speaker rejects Theocritus as a poetic model, however, so the latter's revision rejects the Church as a theological model. Criticism of the clergy leads into a consideration of the Godhead and earlier modes of worship. Hempstead Branch seeks for her personal alternative to the Judeo-Christian God of patriarchy.

Exploitation, barter and murder are not confined to the sublunar world. All acts necessary for the wills of the fathers to be executed on earth or in heaven, involve cash transactions: the cash-box, the thirty pieces of silver given to Judas, and the world itself as a marketable commodity. In the sixteenth sonnet,

God bought the world and for it gave His Son.
 Among the stars the great transaction's done.
 The Jews preferred Barabbas and they paid
 The Son of God by whom all things were made.
 In mighty symbols let these walls rehearse
 The legend of the Silver and the Purse. (16;9-14)

Barabbas the thief is spared and Jesus is crucified by the will of the Jews, and it is a mercantile transaction in which the price is "The Son of God." But far more importantly, Jesus dies on the cross by the will of His Father, another mercantile transaction in which the price is, again, "His Son." Perhaps Jesus is that "poor boy whose dreams were so august/He might have changed the earth" (12;3-4), a close relative of "the crouching figure of the childish slave" (10;13). Saving Barabbas, a thief, and sacrificing Christ, yokes together Jews, Shylock, God, and Mercury, who

is the "God of the Thief" (14;5). Since God has sold His Son into death, a refinement upon the behaviour of pagan gods, the concept of trafficking is no longer limited to human slavery and wars. It is extended to the gods including, and especially, the Christian God.

Those who "have bought and sold/And deal in living flesh" (9;5-6) were warned that they should be aware that "A bitter cry calls down the curse of Cain" (9;7) upon them. Sonnets ten and twelve speak of the evil of bartering childhood for coin of the realm. Now a warning is going out to all "Lords of Market Places" (16;5). The juxtaposition of Jesus Christ, "Lords of Market Places" and "Masters of Exchange" brings to mind Christ's act when He "cast out all of them that sold and bought in the Temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers saying, 'Ye have made [the Temple] a Den of Thieves'" (Matt.21,12-13), again recalling, within this sequence, the thieves' patron, Mercury. The "Masters of Exchange" (16;8) are grouped with the masters of "Heaven and Hell" (16;8), again placed side-by-side with no indication of the true or relative value of either. Heaven, the stars and God the Father are contaminated by financial dealings.

In this sonnet, Hempstead Branch exemplifies Coleridge's *dictum* that the "secondary Imagination . . . dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (BL 13). She "*fuses* . . . by that synthetical and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination" (BL 14), intellect and emotion, Christianity and witchcraft. Spelling now includes the story-teller through the spelling of words and through the spelling of tales, as well as the magician. Furthermore, now we will "spell/Legends of purchase . . . /With blood of gods" (16;6-7). Admonitory themes in sonnet sixteen are to be "graved" (16;2), both recorded—engraved—for future generations and placed in a grave—entombed. But even as the "old theologies" (16;4) are "graved" upon the walls, these same walls shall "rehearse/the legend of the Silver and the Purse" (16;13-14) in "mighty symbols" (16;13). The prison is now "this enchanted cell" (16; 1) but, nevertheless, a cell "Upon the walls of" which we will keep accounts in blood.

Many images and concepts come together in this sonnet, the elaboration of which begins to reveal some of the "secrets" inherent in the sequence. The "magic in a box" (3;1) which her father bequeathed to her, gods and Gods, various spells and acts of writing, and enclosed cell-like spaces which have been a controlling metaphor throughout the sequence, culminating in the "dungeon" of sonnet thirteen, combine in this sonnet. "Hermetic doctrines" (16;3) are a controlling metaphor, and Hermes, as the god of thieves, liars and alchemists, is the controlling

symbol. Enchantment and deception rule as we reach the dark heart of trafficking in flesh and blood for personal gain.

Magic is also transformative and secretive, and subject to change. The "Personal magic in a box" (3;1) is the will of the father who, even after his death, can proclaim "This woman's wealth shall not be taken" (3;8). Power, control and magic are, deceptively, enclosed in "This trivial box" (4;1) which hides "such magic with its black tin lid" (4;1-2). On the other hand, we can "Carve magic here with iridescence fine/And Runes and Spells and Algebraic Sign" (4;13-14), a sign which moves into a new indecipherable configuration when the persona declares, "I . . . bring my queries to the sacred X" (15;11-12). And sonnets come from a lock box, creating the magic of poetry within the constriction of the sonnet.

* * *

The music, seduction and power of both language and money fully occupy sonnet seventeen. In this sixteen-line sonnet, magic allows the speaker/singer to transform language, to create harmony, to celebrate poetry and to break form. The ambiguity inherent in magic is reflected in the conjunction of coins and various parts of speech, themselves inherently ambivalent.

Oh, carve these coins with words like golden fruit,
 The lustrous apples of Hesperides;
 Magical words as from a spirit lute
 Heard from enchanted islands over seas.
 From out the silent coins what sounds are these?
 It is the music of words being fitly spoken
 As apples that the smiling gods have broken
 From the rich boughs of Paradisal trees.
 Engrave them deep with signs of silver fret
 Letters of silver their sweet sounds enfold.
 Oh pluck the lovely syllables and set
 In baskets of silver shining apples of gold.
 Leave letters in a circle round and round
 Like apple seeds buried in golden dust.

The fruit thereof shall be both sweet and sound,
 Dropped from the singing tree—'In God we trust.' (17)

This sonnet reaches a zenith even as thirteen fell to a nadir. Even on a first acquaintance with the sequence, the reader would be overwhelmed with such a celebration following the despair, the questioning of the Godhead, and the consistent criticism of the human race.

By using sixteen lines, the poet can use new rhythm and rhymes to create new harmony. The effect of the extra lines, the end words, the enjambment and internal rhymes is to lead us into different vocal patterns. Golden occurs in the first line and, like silver, is frequently repeated until the two precious metals join "In baskets of silver shining apples of gold" in line twelve, when *gold* is the end rhyme. [*S*ounds as in hearing (17;5,10), as in sounding the depths (17;5), and as being firm, fit, wholesome (17;15), reverberate with meaning, but in its internal use, it resounds acting as an echo-chamber for the end rhymes *sound* and *round*. The repetition of "round and round" has the same echo effect but also reinforces the images of circularity: coins, apples and circle.

Hempstead Branch plays variations upon the basic Petrarchan, Shakespearean and Spenserean rhyme schemes, extending the range of any one sonnet form. No sooner have we assumed a Shakespearean rhyme scheme and argument, encouraged by the period at the end of line four, than we meet with two couplets. The first—*seas/these*—might indicate a Spenserean rhyme-linked sonnet; the second—*spoken/broken*—preceded and succeeded by *these* and *trees* respectively, suggests a change to the Petrarchan form, again shaped by the period at the end of the octet. In two distinct places there are four consecutive lines, seven through ten and nine through twelve, that end in non-rhyming words. This sonnet harmoniously incorporates three distinct sonnet forms, but the more we look for pattern, the more it seems to escape us.

A closer look at the central lines may clarify the source of this sonnet's musicality. Lines six through eleven demonstrate many of Hempstead Branch's poetic techniques. Isolating the "second quatrain" first draws attention to the repetition of *From* as an opening word. It also enables us to read these four lines as the second quatrain of a modified Shakespearean sonnet or as the second half of a modified Petrarchan octet. Whether we read them as Shakespearean or Petrarchan, they are irregular in that there is a strong break at the end of the fifth line. The enjambment across the next three lines creates fluidity, starts swiftly with the small words, "It is the," begins to swell with the "music of Words" which sing on the tongue, and then opens up

into the slow and sonorous “spoken/As apples” as the mouth opens wide on the “O” and on the “As a.”

The “smiling gods have broken” is full-bodied in its own right with those hard consonants and long vowels. Because of the line break at “broken,” a tinge of fear complicates and slows down the reading until we reach the end of the next line. The question also arises as to whether we would not be much better off with many smiling gods than with just the harsh, jealous God who “bought the world and for it gave His Son” (16;9). In our dread, even as the words in our mouths cause us to hesitate, we rush across the enjambment, almost skip the little words, rest momentarily on the “rich” because of its previous associations, and alight gratefully upon the “boughs of Paradisal trees.”

If, however, we read against the syntax to investigate the effect of a lack of rhyme in lines seven through ten, the harmony changes. We move from deep golden sounds to the more tinkling sounds of silver, recalling the earlier sonnets and the juxtaposition of for-tunes and tinsel. Whereas we might expect to move smoothly across the enjambment because of the lack of rhyme, in fact we rest on those non-rhyming end words. The word *broken* creates a gap and a disjunction between the gods and the boughs, as we have already seen. Its long vowel and harsh consonants, and the repetition of *From* at the beginning of the next line, throw it further into relief. The following end word, *trees*, is emphasised by its position, the syntax, and the long vowel.

The following line begins richly and slowly. The words which are to be engraved on the coins are being engraved into our minds and memories. Signs we have met before. As we ponder these particular signs, signs of which we know neither their shape nor their meaning, we move on to silver, about which we know little in the context of *Sonnets from a Lock Box*. The “silent coins” may become silver coins, and the similarity of sound is pleasing. The word “fret,” however, delays us again as we hesitate over its meaning. The two obvious possibilities are fretwork using a fretsaw creating filigree, and fret as in to grieve. The second is the common meaning, the one that is likely to spring to mind first. Furthermore, although “filigree” occurs in sonnet fourteen, engraving and fretting are not the same process and, in fact, may rarely be used together.

Before we reach the final word of these lines, *unfold*, with its following period, its long vowel, and its final hard consonant, we have to move from “fret” to “Letters.” The delay over “fret,” however, is deliberate, and picks up on yet a third meaning of the word: the marker

between notes on a musical fingerboard to assist in tonal accuracy. These “letters of silver,” with those soft vowels and liquid consonants, cannot be said swiftly. The “silver” leads us gently into the “sweet sounds” and the climactic “enfold.” Against all expectations, then, the non-rhyming end words are both emphatic and harmonious. They have encouraged us to accept the invitation to “pluck the lovely syllables.” We can taste them in our mouths.

The coupling of the new organic image, “fruit,” with the old inorganic gold, creates a seductive new image of taste. The gods are smiling as they pick the apples. The Paradisal tree, still associated with the “Holy Tree” (1;13), the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, now offers another redemptive reading of the opening sonnet. The golden apples of Hesperides, picked from the Paradisal tree, have an affinity with the “tinsel shapes” with which the persona “decks the Holy Tree” (1;14). But whereas the seduction of the fruit of the tree of knowledge led to the pit of hell which, in the first sonnet, joins with the “Holy Tree,” presumably of Paradise, the seventeenth sonnet ends with “the singing tree,” an image of harmony and joy.

In her chant the persona sings of circularity three times within the space of four words: “circle round and round.” The letters of the alphabet form words by which we can write letters that may then be placed in baskets. Unlike the persona in Farjeon’s “Easter Monday,” who has received her beloved’s “last letter” and knows that “There are three letters that you will not get,” the persona of *Sonnets from a Lock Box*, can have hope in and for letters. The “apple seeds” may be “buried in golden dust,” recalling Farjeon’s silver egg, seeds and apple-buds, but Hempstead Branch’s seeds result in fruit which “shall be both sweet and sound.” Apples of Hesperides, this fruit from Paradise, shall be “Dropped from the singing tree” (17;16).

The magic of witchcraft and the transmutation of the Blood of Christ together appear to effect a transformation begun in sonnet fourteen. The new Christian legend and the old pagan theologies appear to have arrived at some synthesis. The tone, the structure, and the concepts have all changed in this sonnet celebrating joy and harmony, richness and beauty. Despite the coins, the gold, and the nature of men, the first four lines are positive, luxurious and musical. Hempstead Branch encourages us to taste and savour words as if they were indeed “The lustrous apples of Hesperides.” The sibilance, the liquid consonants, and the preponderance of soft vowels combine so that the words themselves are singing. Each line is harmonious, creating its own enchantment, and we are offered two extra lines to enjoy. I can think of no other poem in a sonnet sequence which exudes such delight at the sound and taste of words.

Although in the wider context of the sequence, the persona of *Sonnets from a Lock Box* interrogates language, words here are not inherently both true and false as they are in the introductory sonnet of *One Person*: “Although these words are false, none shall prevail/To prove them in translation less than true” (1-2). Hempstead Branch’s concern is more with how we use words, and how we deliberately give false messages, especially if we perceive some financial advantage. There is no inherent, preconceived value attached to “words.” Within some poetic contexts, however, the lute, like the harp, is a symbol of harmony. If “Magical words as from a” lute provide music then, presumably, “Magical words as from a spirit lute” also provide music which is, perhaps, even more harmonious. Previously, when “In such a silence” Hans Glauber “summoned to his aid some airy power” (6;1,5), references to gold, spirits, sound and magic were negative. Now, however, magic, lute and spirit appear to be more positive images.

Magical words are also associated with “enchanted islands over seas.” With their Romantic and Homeric associations, such islands can be very dangerous. The persona again risks possession. There is no inherent reason, however, to assume danger from such islands or to imagine Sirens who beguile men with their singing, especially in a sonnet sequence that has used none of the traditional Renaissance tropes. Although Smith reclaims and reinstates female figures such as the Siren, the stance of Hempstead Branch toward what came to be known as Romantic myths is less readily identifiable.

The power of words, witchcraft and the death of Christ have apparently been sufficient to transform sterility into fertility. Previous images now take on different meanings. The first few words of sonnet seventeen, given their context in terms of earlier sonnets, could well be read as a complaint against the inscriptions on American coins, but the celebratory tone of this sonnet soon leads us to read differently here. The silver coins, through their new similarity to golden fruit, create music from their own silence, the reverse of the sounds created from the silence of the dungeon in sonnet thirteen. And yet, there is little difference between “Carve these coins with words” (17;1) and “Carve on these coins the truth” (10;9), when the earlier admonition was that coins should “declare,/Ye serve the rich, the poor ye do not spare” (10;6-7). Even the “words like golden fruit” (17;1) do not automatically indicate a change in direction, for words can lie, and gold has already been implicated in murder and in control through the abuse of power. But, as Foucault remarks of other discursive practices in “History of Systems of Thought” (1970), “These transformations cannot be reduced to precise and individual discoveries” (200). Possibly the constrictions, the control, the trafficking and the murder within

patriarchal systems, symbolised by coinage, can be momentarily charmed away. The "Holy Tree" (1;13), the tree of knowledge and the cross of Christ can become part of the beautiful visual and aural image of the singing tree.

There are, however, sinister undertones when the "music of words" comes from "silent coins" engraved and fretted with silver signs. Although harmony is one of the major themes of this sonnet, "Oh, carve these coins with words" are the opening words and "In God we trust," the words to be carved, are the closing ones. Letters are engraved around the circumference of a coin, as well as being left "in a circle round and round/Like apple seeds buried in golden dust." Because we can "Carve magic" (4;13) and engrave signs, because language is magical and transformative, American coinage, soiled as it is with the blood of children and slaves, ironically "Stamped with the Bird of freedom" (10;2), may, idealistically, carry hope for the future. Those words, that fruit, that hope for humankind, however, seem to depend on and validate the inscription on American coins, "In God we trust," and the persona has consistently criticised patriarchy, both human and divine, and the imposition of patriarchy on our ideas of divinity. Perhaps "God" itself has been transformed and is no longer the God of patriarchy, or perhaps she has again been seduced, possessed, enchanted.

* * *

The magic and the mystery, the enchantment and the spelling, are again under pressure in the following sonnet (18), but now the emphasis is once again on power and control. The word is so powerful that we must beware of "The burning letters of the alphabet" (18;4). No longer can we set "letters of silver" (17;10), and we must "Beware the magic of the Talking Sage/Beware the fiery rune that he has written" (18;5-6). Both the spoken and the written word may be magical and coercive. The "Talking Sage," having appropriated metal and sharpened his stylus, "has smitten" words of fire upon "the golden page" (18;6-8). The word now becomes mightier than the sword, and in that transformation there is no loss of power. We may well be back where we started. On the other hand, we do now know that we should question all words and knowledge, and such questioning is often the beginning of creative resistance.

Within sonnet eighteen the rune is transformed into the coin, the circle, the Sign, the Eucharist, the Word, and the power over Heaven and Hell. As the persona still fights to get out of the box, as she attempts her personal revolution, her symbols continue to evolve. In the process of questioning some patriarchal systems, however, she remains blind to the implications

of some other concepts; but in this sequence nothing remains static. The warning, “Beware the fiery rune” (18;6), changes to “Beware the Presence of the Bread and Wine./This money is a sacramental thing” (18;11-12). The bread and wine, like the earlier ashes in the urn (12;9-14), are related to money. The possibility opens up that this is more than just blood money although still closely related to those thirty pieces of silver. Now “It is the Word, it is the magic spell/That gives these coins powers of Heaven and Hell” (18;13-14), and we all know that Jesus is the Word, the spirit made manifest. Either redemption is tainted or money has been redeemed. Hempstead Branch, unlike Smith, does not use our presumption to frustrate our expectations; she makes it very difficult for us to assume anything. She unsettles the ground beneath our feet, so that any assumption we might attempt to stand upon is always extremely unstable.

In its possible recovery as a positive symbol, however, even in its association with the Eucharist, the Word and the “magic spell,” money is a thing apart, a disjunction emphasised by the syntax and rhyme of lines ten through twelve (partially cited above). The first two lines (18;10-11) underline their disjunction by a period, while offering some unity because they form a rhyming couplet: “Sign / . . . Wine.” But, since the sonnet also ends in a couplet, *spell/Hell*, “This money is a sacramental thing,” enclosed between periods and strong rhyming couplets, becomes totally isolated. Not only does the reader have to refer back past the periods, back past the strong rhyme *Sign/Wine* with their capital letters and periods, to find the rhyme for *thing* but, having done so, finds a weak dactylic rhyming word—*lettering*—with an even weaker stress, causing further separation of line twelve from the rest of the sonnet. The relationship between redemption and money is both ambiguous and fragmented.

If coinage now has positive associations with the Eucharist, the Word and magic, those associations are tainted by another reading of the Biblical myth. In many ways sonnet eighteen resonates with the negations in sonnet sixteen and reveals another, but not better, side of the coin of Redemption, of the Blood of Christ and of monetary exchange. In the earlier sonnet, the Jews bought Jesus with “Silver” in a “Purse” (16;14) and sold Him for Barabbas. God also took part in this transaction. Lettering “streams/With blood of gods” (16;6-7). “Heaven and Hell” end the octet of sonnet sixteen and also close sonnet eighteen. Now “It is the Word,” the Godhead or, more specifically Christ, “That gives these coins powers of Heaven and Hell” (18;14) indiscriminately. We are back to the thirty pieces of silver. “In God we trust” (17;14) might be insufficient because our faith is too weak, because what we want and what God wants are very different, and/or because God is inadequate and commercial.

Sonnet nineteen introduces another very ambiguous image, the snake. Its Biblical references to the serpent that “drags its glittering belly on the ground” (19;10) also illuminate sonnet eighteen. Man’s Fall in the Garden of Eden has three immediate consequences and another deferred one. Sexual activity can no longer be innocent; humankind is exiled from Eden; God tells the serpent, “upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life” (Gen.3,14). As a deferred consequence original sin meant that the Son of God had to die for the redemption of fallen humankind. We should “Beware the Presence of the Bread and Wine” (18;11) because of its potency and the price exacted. We should be aware—both conscious and ashamed—of our sin, and of the necessity for the body and the blood of Christ to cleanse us. The serpent glides “through our earthly almanac” (19;5) and, like the words “In God we trust,” encircles a coin. It, too, appears to be in the cash-box.

The sequence moves from the “powers of Heaven and Hell” (18;14) to the “Golden Snake” (19;1) with its power over the heavens, the earth, and the minerals under the earth. This “glittering” (19;10), “Golden” (19;1), “brazen serpent” (19;13) “flashes round the earth with glittering scale./In writhing circles of the Zodiac/It leaves among the stars its brazen trail” (19;2-4), as well as being the subtle serpent of Genesis with infernal power. Furthermore, with its “sinuous weaving” (19;6), it replicates the letter S, and so it, too, can turn *words* into *swords* by its spell.

This sonnet also issues a warning: “Tear not its metal from the dust—that prize/Bears in its fangs a poison too profound” (19;11-12). These lines are part of an unconventional and final quatrain, which is separated from the rest of the sonnet by a period. This quatrain is something of a *non sequitor* as it introduces an unexpected, but not completely new, reference to mining (the earlier reference is to “ye tillers in bright gold” (9;8) in the poem on Cain). The injunction carries a floating reference: its. Syntactically, “its” refers to “dust” and metals are (simplistically) mined by removing the dust of the soil (tilling). The fangs and poison are, then, metaphorical, and money coined from such metal is the “root of all evil” (I Tim.6,10). The conjunction of serpent, belly, ground and dust in both Genesis and the sonnet, however, associatively connects “its” to the snake, undoing the metaphoric effect. The coalescence of metal, ground and snake extends the realm of the serpent to include both dust and metal. Either way, the glittering, golden metal/serpent, through venom, brings potential death, repeating the Paradisical drama when, through knowledge, the serpent initiates death.

The serpent, however, is a bivalent symbol; it can bring both death and health, although the image of the snake up to, and including, the penultimate line of sonnet nineteen appears to be entirely negative. It has an affinity with the milling on the edge of coins, always suspect, as it glides “around a coin in circling track” (19;7). Furthermore, despite its attractive, though metallic, adjectives, the picture is of a venomous “brazen serpent,” recalling the Biblical Nehushtan (2 Kings 18,4). After “the Lord sent fiery serpents” many people died. In response to God’s answer to his prayer, however, Moses built a brazen serpent, so that “if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived” (Num.21,6-9). The serpent in this sonnet has (at least) two faces. And in its ability to assume the shapes both of a straight line and of a circle when it “swalloweth its tail” (19;8), the serpent may be potentially both benign and malign.

The warning against mining, metal, snake and poison is followed, unexpectedly, but in the spirit of the Biblical account, by the injunction to “Seek the brazen serpent lifted up” (19;13) echoing “lift my body” (3;14). Perhaps she, too, is brazen. The image is not only of Moses’ serpent but also of a snake lifting up its head in the act of striking. “Seek” in the latter case may mean either search and destroy, or search and avoid. Only a comma, however, separates “up” from the final line: “Whence healing pours as from a magic cup.” Given the Presence of the sacred chalice in the previous sonnet, we could now be imag(in)ing the Holy Grail. Once more *Sonnets from a Lock Box* has taken an unexpected turn, although, by now perhaps, unexpected turns should be anticipated.

On a more mundane level, the serpent and healing are combined, in everyday symbolism, in the caduceus, which takes us back to Hermes, even as Hempstead Branch lays the foundation for future transformations. In the constant fluidity of the poet’s images, associations, myths, legends and hieroglyphics, the poet is both shape shifter and forger. The snake on the staff is a creature of the underworld, the familiar of Asclepius, a healer who attempted to play god, so that the caduceus may be seen as possessing magical potency in the same way as do the royal sceptre (Rose 566), the black rod, the witch’s broomstick, and even the Holy Tree, anticipating H.D.’s recovery of “the Sceptre/the rod of power:/ . . ./ it is Caduceus” (p.7) in *The Walls Do Not Fall*.⁴

Once again the straight line coalesces with other images. We have seen how, as early as the first poem, the “lonely pine” with its shining branches (1;6-7) transmutes into “the Holy Tree” with its “tinsel shapes” (1;13-14). The key appears in the first sonnet, when it rhymes with

see and *tree*, and is then prominently featured as the first rhyming word of the second sonnet. It is repeated in the third sonnet as a rhyming word, *key/free* (5). The pointing “finger” (3;7) symbolises “My father’s Will” (3;6-7) even after death and, by sonnet five, the geographer is using a rule to “trap/The oceans and the earth into a map” (5;1-3). The key becomes the bolt that locks the dungeon door (13;2-5), while “the sudden thrust of swordlike fear” (13;6) is an abstract echo of “a bloody sword” (8;9). The straight line is potent, restrictive and lethal. Its use is infrequent but powerful.

If the persona is redeeming the serpent/Satan in sonnet nineteen, in the next she is making yet another attempt to find a replacement for both this unsatisfactory world and the Judeo-Christian God. She claims, “Now I perceive that I no more belong/To this wan world of passionate pale things” (20;1-2). She prefers “The silent music Holy Logic sings” (20;4) and “the Great Lover whereto I am bride” (20;8). She has had to “break through/The fearful magnetism of the Lord” (20;9-10). Previously magnetisms sway, bind, control and “coerce the mind” (7;6-7), and “fierce magnetic energies constrain/My flesh to shake and all but freeze my brain” (13;13-14). This is no gentle wooing. The Lord “is not like gently falling dew” (20;11). His relationship with His Son and His people is not renowned for mercy which “droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/Upon the place beneath” (*Merchant* IV,i,167-168). In fact he may well, metaphorically, demand his “pound of flesh” since his “fierceness” is as a “sharp-edged sword” (20;12). The lack of punctuation and the consequent enjambment (20;9-12) force these images into a new cohesion. Hers is an unmerciful God.

Together sonnets twenty and twenty-one are a re-writing of Donne’s sonnet “Batter my heart, three-personed God” (14). The personae of both sonnets place the onus upon God, to some extent, to use violence to beat impurity out and, in the words of Hempstead Branch, to “drive in anguish clean and fresh/Around . . . my steed-like will” (21;8-9). She asks what there is in “the angry self of my proud brain/That it desires the sharp cruel rein/And the thin whip of logic?” (21;2-4). The speaker’s will must be questioned now, not the will of her father, of her Fathers, or of God. She knows that she has a choice, to “create the rocks up which I run/Or sink in chaos” (21;13-14.) But she seems unable to succeed without assistance, so determines, “Then once again/The God shall drive” (21;7-8). And yet she expresses no sense of peace, or even of acceptance of herself or “The God,” whoever He might be.

The noun *whip* echoes yet another meaning of *yard* (1;11) as a rod used to administer strokes. It consists of a straight rod and shape-shifting thongs which are straight at the time of

contact with flesh. The thinness of the whip emphasises its power to “scourge” and the nature of that power. The whip’s ability to “thresh” (21;4) the “impure mesh” (21;5) recalls “the sharp mesh of fire” which “stings the flesh” (14;4) with its conjunction of both Medea and Mercury, so that together the images are harbingers of death. But pain might lead to truth. Since the whip can, apparently, separate the pure from the impure, it may possess healing powers even as it wounds. “Let it thresh/For good and all” (21;4-5) is jarring in its colloquialism, and connects the threshing to the “good,” as opposed to the “bad,” and to eternity. The whip, with its staff and serpentine thongs, also has affinities with the caduceus.

Although sonnet twenty-one evolves from the previous sonnets and shares their concerns, it is also pivotal in that it marks the start of a new experimentation and some lessening of constraint. Since the persona now rejects the mundane world, she needs, yet again, to define her own, and she begins by using a different form for sonnet twenty-one. This is the only sonnet in this sequence that has no break at all at the end of the octet, although it follows the Petrarchan rhyme scheme. Insofar as there is a turn, it occurs half-way through line seven. The new form and the enjambment on all but lines ten, eleven and twelve reflect the pressure under which she is living and writing.

In this new dimension of her search, the persona enters another landscape and introduces a pilgrimage motif. As she begins, “Holy Logic sings” to her both “silent music” and “a wilder song” (20;4,3). But, in sonnet twenty-one, there is only the possibility that, after “the quick magnetic pain/Of the invisible scourge” (21;6-7), a non-specific “you” might be able to “hear a music shrill and rare” (21;11). The change apparently occurs because she has committed herself to the line of logic, to cause and effect, to deduction, to the “truth” (21;6). No detours, no circles. She goes “straight up” (21;12), perhaps in an attempt to assuage “the supersensuous flesh” (21;1). She moves from the “invisible scourge” (21;7) to a “transparent rock” (21;9), past “invisible crags” (21;10), with “crystal feet” up “the glassy hill” (21;12). These images culminate in the ultimate loss of vision in the “burnt out sun” (21;14).

Whatever the merits of pilgrimage and scourging, the next sonnet (22), with its music and rejoicing, is reminiscent of the seventeenth, except that now numbers replace the earlier words and letters. Number is not “fixed and still” (22;1), for “number within number shines and sings” (22;9). Whereas the persona both asks, and partially answers, a personal question in the previous sonnet (21), now she appears to see cosmically. In a pyrotechnic display, “I hear planetary music crashing./Great chorals sway with Bacchic energy” (22;6-7). Because

“Bacchus” occurs between “Great chorals” (22;7) and “churchly cycles” (22;8), the persona also co-opts the great works of Johann Sebastian Bach. The sequence has moved away from fatherly wills, cash-boxes and arithmetic; “numbers” now refer to poetry, music and dancing.

This celebration, however, may well prove to be yet another expression of possession similar to, and yet very different from, the one in “Am I a prisoner?” (13). The use of “Bacchic” relates the music of the spheres to wine with its implication of uninhibited sexual activity and the Eucharist as both sacrifice and transformation. The “supernatural will,” rather than the will of her father, expresses itself in “changing modes” (22;3-4), but may still allow little hope for escape from possession and containment.

In this celebratory sonnet, the poet replicates the “changing modes of supernatural will” in sixteen lines. The persona knows that “number within number” mystically begets “godlike shapes of many an alphabet,/Bodied in air, with their deep patternings” (22;10-12). Amidst the “wild garments floating free” (22;5) and the “Great Festivals like goddesses advancing” (22;14), the persona feels that “if I abide in you/I shall feast well and shall be saved by dancing” (22;15-16). That “you” is fairly non-specific. It might refer to the numbers, or to “The godlike shapes of many an alphabet” (22;11), or to the “Great Festivals” aligned with goddesses rather than gods, or to the “magnetisms” of the numbers which “create my flesh anew” (22;13), rather than to the control of her body expressed earlier in sonnet thirteen. The earlier non-specific receptive “you” (21;11), now becomes the equally non-specific protective “you” (22;15). If the two you’s are one and the same, then by rendering “a music shrill and rare” (21;11), the persona creates within the other an environment which is empowering for herself.

As we saw with the previous sixteen line celebratory sonnet on words, syllables and letters (17), the sequence cannot maintain euphoria, enchantment, possession. Whereas that earlier sonnet used enjambent and a modified *volta*, a technique suitable for the celebration of words, this sonnet has a space at its centre, creating two equal and harmonious halves, appropriate for a celebration of number. But, in both instances, the persona has to return to the box—if, indeed, she ever left it. The twenty-third sonnet begins lyrically enough but it seems tainted by the touch of earth. The “planets move/In rhythmic patterns to the music of Love/Dancing high rituals round religious fires” (23;2-4), but, by the end of the sonnet, the image has become “on earth the old sidereal dance,” possibly alluding to sexual intercourse. If so, then it refers back to “I abide in you/. . . by dancing” (22;15-16), which has now, like sex, lost its promise.

Even more disturbing, the world of business mimics the music of the spheres: “industrial patterns weave/In changing rhythms round the earth; they leave/Wheels within wheels in intricate design” (23;6-8). These particular circular patterns are surely less than desirable. In the same way as the previous colloquialism “For good and all” (21;5) was jarring, the “Wheels within wheels” carry a strong association with questionable business practices, tainting the “intricate design” and the rhythmic dance, since fast footwork so often keeps industry just ahead of the law.

The persona repeatedly moves from being passive to being active. Sonnet twenty-three expresses her apparent non-participatory appreciation of the “silver lyres” (23;1) and the dance of the spheres, “high rituals” and trance, the snake and “the Living Vine” (23;12) with its reference both to Bacchus and to Christ. A meditative vigil upon the circle and the line, the X and the sign, the invisible and the veiled, staves and music follows (24). Finally, in sonnet twenty-five, she appears to take absolute control. She is both the speaker and the subject of an orgasmic experience in which she collapses the straight line, music, death, God and the witch.

This sonnet, perhaps more than any other in the box, demands a multi-reading.

Into the void behold my shuddering flight,
 Plunging straight forward through unhuman space,
 My wild hair backward blown and my white face
 Set like a wedge of ice. My chattering teeth
 Cut like sharp knives my swiftly freezing breath.
 Perched upon straightness I seek a wilder zone.
 My Flying Self—on this black steed alone—
 Drives out to God or else to utter death.

Beware straight lines which do subdue man's pride!
 Tis on a broomstick that great witches ride.
 Wild, dangerous and holy are the runes
 Which shift the whirling atoms with their tunes.
 Oh like a witch accursed shall she be burned
 Who having flown on straightness has returned. (25)

This poem is itself “Wild, dangerous and holy,” with its mixture of excitement and dread, adventure and catastrophe. Everything is operating on the straight line; there are, with the

possible exception of “whirling atoms,” no circles, no coins, no serpents. Not only is the line straight, it is one directional. Any attempt to return results in death.

Hempstead Branch rewrites, consciously or not, Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” with its music, magic and energy. Coleridge’s (fictive) poet, with his magic chant, his “sunny dome,” his “caves of ice” (47) and his “floating hair” has affinities with the later poet’s witches and would-be witches, with freezing breath and “wild hair backward blown.” Both poets issue warnings that verge on challenging and dangerous invitations. Coleridge’s persona cautions “Beware! Beware!/ His flashing eyes, his floating hair!” (49-50), whereas the other cautions against undermining man’s pride. “Kubla Khan” offers a spell to create a safety zone between the reader and the inspired poet: “Weave a circle round him thrice,/And close your eyes with holy dread” (51-52). *Sonnets from a Lock Box* can only suggest that it is inadvisable to return from that “shuddering flight.” Both poets use and re-write the conventional Petrarchan conceit of the polarities of fire and ice to express desire and the impossibility of fulfillment. Both poems create “holy dread” and both poems are exhilarating; much of that exhilaration comes from the images, the symbols, and the celebration of sexuality.

The last time we encountered freezing was in “Am I a prisoner?” (13), in which “cruel images” master “my will” (13;12) and “fierce magnetic energies ./. .all but freeze my brain” (13;13-14). At least now the persona is active as well as re-active. Earlier, she describes her will as “steed-like” (21;9) and sees the necessity for God to “drive in anguish clean and fresh/Around” (21;8-9) it. Now “My Flying Self” depends “on this black steed alone” to drive out to God. For better or worse, she is in control; she is the driver, even if she is also driven. But failure leads to death. If “My chattering teeth/Cut like sharp knives my swiftly freezing breath” is a concrete image, there is no inherent danger. At least she is still shivering, so has not yet succumbed to hypothermia. If the sentence is metaphorical, then there is danger since “it is best not to inquire/Upon whose wheel was spun this mortal web” (14;6-7). The severing of this thread is death, and is associated with the witch Medea (14;11).

One of the most conspicuous aspects of this sonnet is the number of concepts for which we still have no value judgement. We do not know that “the void”—perhaps related to “the pit” (1;14)—is necessarily bad, although we are accustomed to thinking that voids should be filled by us, for, as modern readers, we have a fear of black holes filling themselves. We cannot even really assess the value of such a little, but unusual, void as the space separating the octet from the sestet of this poem, although across that potential abyss we may have moved from one

kind of witch to another, and we know the value of neither. A “shuddering flight” could be cold or uncontrolled, on the verge of mechanical failure, or the ultimate (sexual) ecstasy. It could also be related to “the magnetic energies [which] constrain/My flesh to shake” (13;13-14), in which case, she may be possessed rather than in control. The warning, “Beware straight lines which do subdue man’s pride!” is immediately followed by broomsticks and witches, probably indicating that “man” is gender specific and that the sexual undertones are relevant. “Plunging straight forward” may be reckless and fool-hardy, or adventurous and courageous. An “unhuman space” is not the same as an inhuman space, and whether we embrace such a space or avoid it depends on our feelings towards our own species.

The two most important images to which we still cannot attribute value are God and the witch. We do not know how to assess whether it is desirable for a witch to reach God, especially since the persona has not created much faith in the benevolence of a God who sells His Son. The goddesses, associated with “Great Festivals” (21;14), sound more appealing. The previous reference to witches, “What witchlike spell weaves here its rich design” (14;1), which yokes Medea the witch of “treacherous splendor” (14;11-12) to the Fates and to Mercury the “God of the Thief and Patron of the Liar” (14;5), makes both seem less than desirable.

Hempstead Branch celebrates female sexuality, even as she warns that “great witches,” like the runes, are “Wild, dangerous and holy” (25;10-11). *Witch* as a derogatory term was, of course, an invention of patriarchy, a way to subdue women’s knowledge, power and sexuality. And the question arises as to whether there is any difference between a witch who is accursed and one who is not. Even Asclepius has his familiar. The hazard for witches is not the outward ride, but the audacity of returning, of daring to “subdue man’s pride” through logic or through sexuality. Perhaps the safe return from this straight trip necessarily proves that the witch has great power and so deserves to be burned, a logic commonly followed in the witch trials. After all, a witch who does not return might, by definition, be the only witch who is not cursed. Although a broomstick might offer a means of escape from the box, if the attempt fails, the coffin may become a funeral pyre.

Female sexuality is also the topic of the next sonnet: “Around this rod my writhing self might twist” (26;1). Although the energy of the previous sonnet originates from straight lines, now it comes from the serpent of the caduceus, a powerful image of female sexuality. The speaker needs to wrap herself around the staff “As close as binds the skin upon the grape” (26;8), as the vagina binds itself to the penis, a strange global analogy for the caduceus.

The “splendor of [the snake’s] poisoned mesh” (26;2) is both an expression of the fear of female sexuality and a reminder of Medea and Nehushtan, as the speaker continues her discussion of the dual nature of the serpent. Again sexuality has lost its innocence. She knows “Not yet my sinuous coil from the ground/Can lift its lust—save by this one escape” (26;5-6), making the earlier metaphors of the lifting up of the speaker (3;14) and the brazen serpent (19,13) explicit, and continuing the association between the serpent and Satan.

Only “This fearful straightness” (26;7) offers an escape, though from what she does not say. The serpentine persona seeks a melding of herself and the rod, in a total identification, even at the loss of her own personal identity. As Wylie’s persona in *Sequence* distances herself from her own skeleton with the pronoun *its*, this persona likewise distances herself from her sexuality twice (26;2,3).

Since lust and escape are bound together, perhaps she is now re-writing Shakespeare’s “Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame” (129) from the other side of the mirror, from “Truth’s other side” (Irigaray 210). The persona “Can lift its lust” only momentarily and only by sexual intercourse. “This fearful straightness” which both constricts and liberates, is an act that both relieves and provides an immediate burst of energy. After the “writhing” of the octet and the desire for escape, the satisfaction of her lust, just before the end of the octet, leads into “Now upward springs the fierce determined power,/And its sharp brightness shoots my sensuous nerves” (26;9-10). Although the function and nature of “shoots” in this single and complete sentence is not clear, as a late twentieth-century reader I cannot dissociate it from the injection of a mood-altering drug. The “godlike speed” at the beginning of the next line endorses such a reading. Yet even were that reading valid, it would be insufficient.

For once again Hempstead Branch throws a new curve in the final sentence as she goes back to rewriting Donne’s “Batter my heart.” The personae of both poems experience a reversal of stereotypical sexual roles through rape metaphors in the closing couplets. Donne’s persona, assuming the “feminine” passive position, assures God that “I/Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,/Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.” When the persona of the later sonnet, which images sexual intercourse as a serpent and a rod, says, “Now by this straightness, I lay hold on God/Who in His Town set up His Holy Rod,” she takes the active “masculine” role; she “lays” Him. The metaphoric implication is that she is “His Town,” as Donne’s persona is “like an usurped town” (5). There has been another change, another angle of vision. Even if she cannot escape from the box of patriarchy, she can at least change her perspective. In a reversal

of such mythic tales as the rape of Leda by Zeus, or the impregnation of Mary the mother of Jesus, the persona revels in the ultimate female sexual fantasy within patriarchy. She is distinct and in control of her own destiny; she is wholly possessed and possessing.

Although God and His actions are not readily comprehensible, and the relation between lust and God is not clear, some illumination comes from the next sonnet (27), in which the persona, once again, loses any gains she may have made. It opens with the bridal imagery of "the Golden Ring" (27;1), "the wedding hour" (27;7), "the Bride" and the veil (27;8). The "glittering rod" (27;2), "the invisible finger of the god," with a small g (27;3), is the latest link in the transformation of such collectively ambiguous straight lines as the "lonely pine," the key, the pointing finger of her "father's Will," a sword, the straight line of logic, broomsticks and rods. In its invisibility the finger of the god has interesting associations with the "invisible scourge," the "transparent rock," the "invisible crags," "My crystal feet," and "the glassy hill" of the pilgrimage of sonnet twenty-one, the beginning of the break to freedom. But the Lover "Confers the Ring upon the Lesser Star" (27;14). There is hierarchy and a price to pay. It is upon a "new coin" that the "Golden Ring/Settle[s]" (27;1). Marriage is a cash transaction, a settlement, a prostitution, which takes us back to "Oh, carve these coins with words like golden fruit" (17). The coins are associated with the "apples of Hesperides" which were a present to Hera from Zeus on their wedding day.

Music and numbers are as ambiguous as any other symbol in *Sonnets from a Lock Box*. Numbers in sonnet twenty-two, are no longer "fixed and still" (22;1). "[N]umber within number" (22;9) creates great symphonies, begets "godlike shapes" (22;11), calls for the image of the goddess. The recuperation of that "old sidereal dance" (23;14), in the following sonnets, heals and protects through "procreative dance" (24;13). The will of the Harp, as opposed to human and Divine will, "Confoundeth Kings and altereth desire" (28;12). Confounding kings is, presumably, positive. Yet "Number is the god's invisible throne/. . . /Since music moves and governeth all things" (28;7,9) sounds very patriarchal, with its "god," "throne" and "governeth."

It is possible, however, that music as the prime mover has replaced the patriarchal God. In the next two lines, which are also the final two lines of sonnet twenty-eight, there is no rhyming couplet, and the final word, rhyming with *things* and *strings*, is very weak with its dactylic *numberings*. These two factors alone would make the closure less than firm, but the content also necessitates rethinking: "Here stretched in pain along the broken wire/The God still breathes creative numberings." Before it was broken, the wire was a straight line; now it is a

broken straight line. Earlier, when we encountered “the smiling gods have broken” (17;7) there was a foreboding which is now almost realised. When they were breaking apples from the boughs, the line ended with “broken.” Neither God nor gods are themselves broken, but all now seem more vulnerable. Inasmuch as this God “breathes creative numberings” (28;14), He may still be of consequence, but His position is (finally) in jeopardy. If he is still, as in motionless, then He may well be passive as well as vulnerable. He, like man, might Fall.

* * *

The value of music is of special interest in sonnets that particularly celebrate music either explicitly or through overt song. The change in form in sonnet thirty, for example, again appears to signal another song within the sequence, and immediately engages the reader’s curiosity.

Each flaming word on its high errand sprang.
 ‘Silver and gold,’ they choired every one—
 ‘Silver and gold’ . . . like sweet birds in a tree.
 ‘Silver and gold’ the fiery letters sang . . .

‘Silver and gold,’ said Peter, ‘have I none—

But what I have that do I give to Thee.’ (30;9-14 poet’s ellipses)

This is the only sonnet that Hempstead Branch sets on the page in three distinct quatrains and a non-rhyming couplet, with space between each segment. She uses consecutive anaphora “‘Silver and gold’” (30;10-13), which draws attention to the three ellipses that end the third quatrain. Each segment has its own rhymes arranged in a somewhat Petrarchan, rather than Shakespearean, style. Immediately, then, there is some tension between the rhyme and the form. The first two quatrains end in periods, indicating a Shakespearean progressive argument rather than the Petrarchan thesis and antithesis. In the last six lines, silver and gold become a refrain.

When the sonnet opens with “In such a cell one time a monk did set,” the first reaction is to think that this sonnet has been placed out of order. The major series on imprisonment and masculine endeavour began with sonnet five and we have not encountered a solitary person in confinement since “Am I a prisoner?” (13). By mimicking the openings of the sonnets set in a cell (5-8), this sonnet recalls earlier sonnets and themes but, in its form, it declares its difference.

Perhaps, like Wordsworth's convent cells, this sonnet will prove to be a creative reordering of the universe.

The monk in his cell is not looking for a system; he is illuminating a manuscript. The images in the poem are organic and evoke an ambiance of peace. The harmony is soothing and gentle rather than energetic and exhilarating. In both its imagery and its lyricism, this sonnet most closely resembles "Oh, carve these coins with words like golden fruit" (17;1). But whereas those images were associated with the Old Testament and Greek mythology, these are associated with a missal and Christianity. This monk's artistry is so great that "heavenly trumpets blew with holy might/Such lovely sound as no one can forget" (30;6-8). There is no ambiguity. Even the gold and silver are only representations, are only painted. Perhaps Christianity without the Father, then, is the answer, with or without witchcraft.

A poet concerned with the coercive power of numbers, signs and systems, naturally saves her thirtieth sonnet to speak again of those thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas. The last two lines, not a rhyming couplet, are a key to the sonnet as a whole, and I choose the word advisedly. St. Peter is the holder of the keys to Heaven, and the last two lines of the sonnet echo Peter's words in The Acts of the Apostles: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee" (3,6). Finally here is an unconditional gift; no money changes hands. In the Bible, Peter continues, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (3,6). But only because God "bought the world and for it gave His Son" (16;9), can Peter have the power to heal. Again the speaker is caught in a conundrum not of her own making.

Consideration of the "alphabet" has been evolving throughout the sequence, but now the metaphoric power of language is spelled out. The speaker moves from the image of the monk who "wreathed such splendors with the alphabet" (30;5) into a consideration, in sonnet thirty-one, of people, language and story-telling. The persona states that "when we spell/In alphabets we deal with living things;/With feet and thighs and breasts, fierce heads, strong wings" (31;1-3). The concerns and the images are, to a certain extent, new. Hempstead Branch insists on a living alphabet. She knows that no metaphor can be innocent, and that, at least to some extent, people are constructs of language.

From body parts the persona moves to "Maternal Powers, great Bridals" (31;4). Women, more than men, are constructed and fragmented through language, especially within the tradition of the sonnet sequence, and are controlled through marriage and parenthood within patriarchy. This sonnet, then, makes a statement against the blazon—perhaps even such a blazon

as the Song of Songs—against the world view which gives rise to the verbal dismemberment of women and to dead and abusive metaphors, and against the implicit misuse of language. “There is a menace in the tales we tell” (31;5).

More warnings with obvious and even more explicit connections to previous warnings occur in this sonnet. Two are contained in a single line: “Beware of shapes, beware of letterings” (31;9). Shapes and letters possess “such magic as alters dream” (31;10) The sonnet closes with a warning and with a strong statement:

Beware the magic of the coin that sings.
 These coins are graved with supernatural powers
 And magic wills that are more strong than ours. (31;12-14)

The magic of language, with its inherent power for good and evil, for “Heaven and Hell” (31;4), may well have a will not only stronger than hers, but also than the fathers’. Coins certainly outlive us all, again punning on “graved.” But that does not really help in understanding them. If they are the thirty pieces of silver, they symbolically possess supernatural power and enforce the will of God the Father. More disturbingly, this new warning against singing coins unsettles any hope we might have had that “Oh, carve these coins with words like golden fruit” (17) was a true epiphany.

The significance of these particular coins appears to become clearer in the following sonnet, “There were Three Shepherds once” (32;1). In an elaboration, and confirmation, of earlier references to *The Merchant of Venice*, usury and the pound of flesh, as she retells of that most heroic of acts, the Nativity, Hempstead Branch uses heroic couplets for the only time in *Sonnets from a Lock Box*. Such heroics also recall the heroic status of the father in the first sonnet, indicating a bitterly ironic, rather than an anti-semitic reading. In this version of the Nativity, the three shepherds see the Star of Bethlehem as

A brightly shining Coin in the sky
 And being Jews, they said, ‘Let’s look around!
 There may be Lucky Pennies in the ground;
 And since the law falls sharper than an axe,
 Collect—and so be ready for the tax.’ (32;2-6)

Jesus, of course, was born in Bethlehem because Joseph went “To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife” (Luke 2,5), so that the shepherds might well need lucky pennies to pay their own taxes. The North Star (1;7) has been transformed into the stars amongst which “the great

transaction's done" (16; 10), referring to God's sale of Christ, into "the Harp of stars" (28;1), into a Coin and, implicitly, to the star of Bethlehem.

Symbolically, Christ is the lucky penny. The result of the search for "Buried Treasure" (32;8), is "the Penny" which "shone with magic light/And in a woman's bosom nestled bright" (32;9-10). Again two apparently opposing readings are operative. The traditional image of infinite riches in a small room as a metaphor for Christ in Mary's womb, feminises the "box," and may signal a positive value for treasure boxes and sonnets. On the other hand, that metaphor is strikingly similar to "the glittering skeleton" in the deed-box (2). Perhaps, then, the buried treasure comes full circle to the opening of the sequence, with its deed-box, coffin and deceased father. Instead of a cash-box and a coffin, the Jews find "a manger dark as any purse" (32;13) and a baby. There is still ambivalence. The transformation of the coin into the Baby Jesus, "the God who is the Universe" (32;14), may only appear to validate and to explain all the coins, and gods, that have rattled through the sequence. Alternatively, it might seem that this is a climactic sonnet, a suitable end for *Sonnets from a Lock Box*.

Immediately, however, the persona again undermines any such resolution. The nebula are "like Bullion" (33;1), the skies are a great market place and a betting shop, where "gods of Trade and Produce ./. spin bright coins" (33;7-8), resulting in "mighty contracts signed in Heaven and Hell" (33;9). Previously Heaven and Hell were different even if not easily distinguishable from each other; they now appear to be synonymous, both symbolically in the sky and in legal contracts.

Those "contracts" allow legalese to supersede the images of mercantile activity in the following sonnet (34). The opening word of three lines of this sonnet is *Whereas*. The first image is legal and sacrificial: "Whereas; the shining symbol of Exchange/Stretched on the altar of the Market Place/ Glitters" (34;1-3), an unexpected word even though the sacrifice is only a "brightly shining Coin" (32;2). The next image arises from "Whereas; forsaken by the gods ./. /It shineth still with dewdrops fresh and sweet" (34;4,7). The reader's understanding of the signified for "It" has to wait until the following line: "Its warm wool trampled in the bloodied ground" (34;8). The image of the bloodied Lamb forces us back to the beginning with the "symbol of Exchange/Stretched on the altar ./. . like the Golden Fleece" (34;1-3). The "shining Coin" (32;2), "the shining symbol of Exchange," and the Lamb are one and the same, and all have been forsaken by the gods, including God the Father who sacrificed his Son in the contract between Heaven and Hell.

The first “Whereas” opens the sonnet and the third opens the sestet: “Whereas the Priests of Trade . . . /Conduct strange rituals of blood and fire” (34;9-10), relating pagan and Christian myths and trade. Little blood has been shed in the previous sonnets but now it is a major issue related to the market-place. The blood of Abel (9;4) becomes the blood of gods (16;8) which is now transformed into the Blood of Christ with its properties of transubstantiation (18; 11-12). The Blood of Christ is, perhaps, the ultimate agent for alchemical changes. Certainly it was the price demanded as atonement for the Fall. Furthermore, Jason won the Golden Fleece through the aid of Medea—princess, goddess, witch—but the price he ultimately paid was the lives of his two sons. More lambs sacrificed by their parents.

The final clause for each “Whereas” is the closing rhyming couplet: “No prophet cries . . . ’Here lies the Ancient Pain./This is the Lamb that from the beginning was Slain” (poet’s ellipses). Not only did God sell His Son, the sale was His intention from the beginning of time. Although we know by this point in the sequence that “the Ancient Pain” resides in the sacrifice of the Lamb, we still do not know for sure which God is earlier “stretched in pain along the broken wire”(28;13). The God of the fathers, in his relations with His offspring, is the archetypal father. It would also seem clear that He did, indeed, plan the Fall from Eden, that He keeps secrets, and is no more to be trusted than the coins which bear the inscription “In God We Trust.”

The following sonnet (36), only three sonnets prior to the end of the sequence, returns to the early series of isolated men, presenting a doctor; this time the topic requires eighteen lines. He is skilful, but he cannot heal the pain in the world. Nevertheless, he aims for unity as a system, for, as a “bone-setter” (36;3), he sees severance as evil. In his search for such unity he gathers together many earlier symbols, both major and obscure. As a doctor, of course, his own symbol is the caduceus. In his attempt to heal, he measures, uses scales, mutters algebras, and credits the “Unknown quantity” (36;6-8), presumably X. His intent is to

make a golden skeleton

Clothed in men’s flesh . . . from many an ancient bone . . .

And all the glittering coins that shine and run

And caper in men’s pockets shall be One. (36;9-12 poet’s ellipses)

Although the clothing of flesh, the brilliance of the skeleton, and the hope of unity may all appear desirable, another Asclepius, by creating Mammon, will have committed the sin of *hubris* and exceeded Frankenstein’s manufacture of a monster. And golden skeletons, we recall, may

be found in coffers and coffins (2;7). Furthermore, those “smiling gods” who broke apples from the boughs of the trees of Paradise (17;7-8) are now among those who shall “be cursed” for breaking “the golden bough” (36;16), with all the religious connotations of *The Golden Bough*. Smiling gods and returning witches are equally at hazard. Unity seems to create exclusivity.

Finally, or almost finally, in the penultimate sonnet, the sequence comes full circle, and all is still.

I lay upon my knees the Funeral Box
Wherein a god lies dead as glittering stone.

His pulse is still—here lies his golden bone,
Dust unto dust! (37;1-4)

God and her father are as a “seamless garment when the Lord has died” (36;18), a single entity, and they are both finally dead, still. “Dust unto dust!” She has apparently worked her way through the patterns of power, the coercion of coins, the wonder of words, and the magic of music, and refused their seduction.

But it is never so simple. Tyranny cannot be so easily overthrown. Before the first quatrain has closed, the father/god again shows signs of vitality: “Dust unto dust!—but yet he breaks the locks” (37;4). The most positive reading would be that through his indisputable death, the father’s/god’s hold upon the daughter is finally released, the locks are finally broken. It is more likely that even a lock box, even a box he has locked himself, even a “Funeral Box,” cannot constrain him. When she tells us, “His living speech is mute” (37;5), we have no confidence in his silence. And nor should we. She was possessed before; she was seduced before; and only now she acknowledges that from his tongue “the sweetest strains of music sprung/And shaped the world with music wild and free” (37;7-8). As the sonnet closes, “He casts the golden coins from his eyes” (37;12), and again offers the ultimate promise of sonnet three: “Ye shall be lifted up if I arise” (37;14). Despite the “if,” this promise of resurrection is God’s excuse for selling His Son, and the method by which God, the Church, and the fathers maintain control, and may make even Christ complicit.

Hempstead Branch closes her sequence with the voice of the preacher, and shows that all language, like all coins, are but symbols of exchange which, she has already told us, are deadly. There is nothing that language and money cannot cause, and there is nothing that language and money do not contaminate. Even as money “translates” (38;11), it “makes no sound” (38;12),

and silence can be more powerful than words and maintains secrets. Lines, circles and the unknown sign are equally equivocal. Even when words sing, as in the octet of this sonnet, or especially when coins and fathers sing, we must resist seduction and, inevitably, we must return to the mundane, to the arithmetic of trade in the sestet. The voices—and silences—of God, fathers, preachers, and experts, their propaganda, systems and secrets, are most dangerous.

Sonnets from a Lock Box exemplify Mary Daly's perception in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) that "'knowledge' has been stored, re-stored, re-covered" in "the coffers/coffins" of patriarchy and religion (xiii), and Walter Jackson Bate's in *The Burden of the Past* (1972) that values are established through continual and "(possibly) inevitable retrenchment" (9). Hempstead Branch might well add that it is the teaching and the preaching of the fathers that ensures that retrenchment. She also appears to agree with Nietzsche that religion belongs to "a sleight-of-hand, an artifice . . . a secret formula, in the rituals of black magic" (Foucault 1971^b:141).⁵ But as for spinning "around, past, through the coffers/coffins," that is much easier to say than to do and, in any event, the ethics of spinning are also suspect. Even if *Gyn/Ecology* could keep its meaning "hidden from the Grave Keepers of tradition," such secretiveness is not desirable, as it is potentially another face of the patriarchy. We are all caught in those locked boxes, those coffers and coffins, and we are all complicit. As H.D. knows, "idols and their speech is stored/in man's very speech" (1944:p.15). Hempstead Branch, particularly in her pleasure in words and symbols, shows that even when we try to resist "their reasoning, we are guilty"; even as we try to "disturb their love of property" (Irigaray 211), we re-inforce it. A first step, however, and a step Hempstead Branch boldly takes, is to recognise that patriarchy is a system of power and control, which manipulates through language and money, using coercion and seduction. She refuses to justify the ways of gods or men.

This woman-as-poet who tries to escape the boxes of patriarchal language and constriction, paradoxically chooses that most constrictive poetic form, the sonnet. Inasmuch as she does escape, unlike Pandora she seems to offer little hope and even less faith. And yet, despite all her denial of the possibility of female creativity, she has left us these incredible *Sonnets from a Lock Box*. Even though they are written from within the prison of patriarchy, and neither poet nor persona can spin free, Hempstead Branch does put a new spin on the concerns of the traditional (male) sonnet sequence by suggesting the sterility of seduction through language.

Notes

1. The epigraphs for this chapter are from Walter Jackson Bate's 1972 *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (9), Luce Irigaray's 1985 *This Sex Which Is Not One* (211) and Mary Daly's 1978 *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (xiii), as is the title.

2. It could be argued that Donne's "pretty sonnets" have little connection with his own *Holy Sonnets*, although his "well-wrought urn becomes/The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs" (Canonization 32-34) is nearer the mark. Rossetti's sonnet is introductory to *The House of Life* (c.1881) and has no number.

3. These two poems have an intriguing interwoven effect when read together. Dickinson's persona "heard them lift a Box" (9). The persona of *Sonnets from a Lock Box* is aware that "The box was lowered." The "Mourners" of the earlier poem first tread and then, "When they all were seated,/A Service, like a Drum—/Kept beating" (5-7). The repetition of *treading* and *beating* has a solid pulse-like, hypnotic quality culminating, for Dickinson, in "Boots of Lead" (11) and the tolling of a bell" (12-13). Both Dickinson and Hempstead Branch transfer epithets; in this instance the word *solemn* qualifies the spade. In the later poem, although his value is uncertain, "The pious parson prayed," which could well be ironic. Whereas the speaker in the Dickinson poem "Finished knowing—then" (20), the speaker in the Hempstead Branch poem has only the prospect of a mechanical, clockwork, inorganic future. If God is the master mind who set in motion the clock of creation, the end result is sterility and death.

4. Hempstead Branch's *Sonnets from a Lock Box* (1929) could well be a precursor of H.D.'s *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944).

5. A detailed reading of *Sonnets from a Lock Box* in terms of Nietzsche could be an interesting study. Foucault, in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1972), talking of origins, in particular the origins of religion, refers to Nietzsche's "*The Gay Science*, 151, 353; and also *The Dawn*, 62; *The Genealogy*, 14; *Twilight of the Idols*, 'The Great Errors,' 7" (fn.141).

Conclusion

In Our Beginning

Our interpretation of a work and our experience of its value are mutually dependent, and each depends upon what might be called the psychological "set" of our encounter with it (Herrnstein Smith)

Perhaps in the microcosm of Renaissance criticism we can find one example of why this disappearing act keeps recurring, how patriarchy keeps reproducing itself, and what can be done to resist this reproduction. (Neely)

but if you do not even understand what words say,

how can you expect to pass judgement
on what words conceal?

yet the ancient rubrics reveal that
we are back at the beginning:

(H.D.)¹

Although I have demonstrated that there has, in fact, been a continuous line of sonnet sequences by women, I hesitate to call it a tradition. For women-as-poets to establish conventions, they would need to be aware of each other's work in the genre. The line is not totally discontinuous; any woman-as-poet would surely have read the work of her contemporaries and recent predecessors, when available. Such works as *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839) by Emmeline Stuart Wortley (1806-1855), however, probably had a very limited readership, reflected in the apparent lack of a second edition. But it seems clear that early twentieth-century women-as-writers of sonnet sequences would also be ignorant of such works as *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1806) by Charlotte Smith (1749-1806). Furthermore, in the absence of a discernible tradition, any sonnet

sequences by women which receive some scholarly attention, such as those by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), Elinor Wylie (1885-1928) and Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950), are evaluated only within the context of the male tradition.

The title of this conclusion has many meanings. First, my study is offered as the beginning of an investigation into ways by which women-as-poets change the sonnet sequence. Carol Neely's remark on current critical theories in "Constructing the Subject" (1988) can be extended to include sonnet sequences by women, and thus be put to greater use than her own context supplies. It is precisely "in the microcosm of Renaissance criticism [that] we can find one example of why this disappearing act keeps recurring, how patriarchy keeps reproducing itself, and what can be done to resist this reproduction" (5). As long as we insist on reading all sonnet sequences only within the context of critical studies on works in this genre by Renaissance men-as-poets, we will always under-read those by women-as-poets and find them wanting. As Anna Hempstead Branch (1875-1937) shows in *Sonnets from a Lock Box* (1929), it is difficult enough to try to escape the constrictions of patriarchy without setting up paradigms that doom us to failure, even as they extend and consolidate dominant power.

We have begun to see the difficulties that must be overcome before we can appreciate sonnet sequences by women and hear how these poets express themselves. Not only are works by women-as-poets not "canonised" through reprints or inexpensive editions, literary criticism has been founded on works by men, especially where the evaluation of conventional genres is concerned. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues in *Contingencies of Value* (1988), the cause and effect of valuation maintain a (vicious) circle because our

interpretation of a work and our experience of its value are mutually dependent, and each depends upon what might be called the psychological "set" of our encounter with it...the nature and potency of our own assumptions, expectations, capacities, and interests with respect to it—our 'prejudices' if you like

(10)

When we consider the reader's *horizon-of-experience* and *horizon of expectations*" (Jauss 1969:19,23), it is not surprising that on both counts sonnet sequences by women have historically been undervalued. We have little experience of reading works in this genre by women and our expectations for non-canonical works are notoriously low. There is much work to be done. Only by reading as much as possible will we be able to hear the voices of women-as-sonneteers and what they are saying.

In our beginning, “the reflective posture of the opening poem itself” shapes the presentation of the sonnet sequence “as one whole and complete” (Warkentin 16). This observation seems even more true for sequences by women, who may, like Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965), have a greater need to establish their voices early than male writers do. These writers may also invite us to hear echoes of still another beginning in the work of their poetic grandmothers. Furthermore, my study will, I hope, stimulate the beginning of a serious interest in the many sonnet sequences written by women. We need a chorus of voices to tell our story, the voices of women-as-poets and the voices of readers and scholars. Other selections, other readings, will enrich and amplify my version, my selection, my reading, my hearing, my story.

One project outside the scope of this thesis which is urgently required is a study of individual sonnet sequences by women within the context provided by the complete *corpus* of the poet. It would be less easy to make simplistic assumptions about *Elegiac Sonnets* and *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847-1850), for example, if they were read within the context of the complete works of Smith and Barrett Browning respectively, as well as within the sonnet sequence tradition. A survey of all Shakespearean criticism would suggest that if all we had were William Shakespeare’s sonnets, our assessment of both him and them would not be as high as it is. A poet may reach greater heights in subsequent work or in other generic forms, and this is particularly true of Smith. Her influence upon William Wordsworth extends far beyond *Elegiac Sonnets*, but that, too, must be the subject of another study. Suffice it to say for now that Wordsworth owes elements of style, modes of thought, and even forms of language in “Tintern Abbey” and *The Prelude* to Smith’s *The Emigrants*, a political and philosophical pastoral in blank verse.

Another study long overdue, would be a careful examination of *Sappho and Phaon* (1796) by Mary Robinson (1758-1800); Daniel Robinson’s “Reviving the Sonnet” (1995) makes only a slight beginning. This may be the first sonnet sequence to ventriloquise the voice of an historical personage within a fictive account; it is the first sequence after the Renaissance which purports to be from a named lover to the beloved; and it is the second in English written in the voice of a woman to a man. One of the most difficult aspects of writing this thesis was the need for exclusion; important works, like Robinson’s, were necessarily omitted.

Poetry represents an attempt to order disorder; arguably, the more restrictive the form, the more determined the attempt. In this respect, the sheer number of sonnet sequences written

by women during or just after the first world war is a phenomenon which does not occur in writing by men-as-poets, and it points to the need for another kind of investigation. The clustering of sonnet sequences by women around 1918, a time when possibilities for women were opening up, replicates the similar clustering of this genre by men in the Renaissance. *Sonnets of Sorrow* (1918) by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1853-1919), *First and Second Love* (1911-1917) and *Sonnets* (1918) by Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965), and *Sonnets From Hafez* (1920) by Elizabeth Bridges (1887-1977), all refer to the armed conflict of 1914-1918, as do the later *One Person* (1928) by Elinor Wylie (1885-1928) and *Epitaph for the Race of Man* (1934) by Edna St. Vincent Millay. The chaos of war, the ultimate consequence of patriarchal domination, fear and aggression, may have been a factor in the choice of a traditional and ordered genre by these twentieth-century women-as-poets. In different ways, each of these sonnet sequences attempts to maintain decorum, to order disorder, in the throes of war, death, frustrated sexual desire, and increasing social, personal and political freedom. As these poets wrestle with the concept of decorum in war, poetry, and personal relationships, they leave little space for Virgil's "*Arma virumque cano.*"

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), that feminist poetics is the expression of victimisation (xi,48-49,591), but such a reading omits the amplitude and variety of women's voices, individually and collectively. In *No Man's Land I: The War of Words* (1988) they claim that "women's revisionary imperative frequently involves a desperate effort to renovate the entire process of verbal symbolization," possibly including "overturning the sentence-as-definitive-judgement" (240, 230). I would quarrel with that "desperate attempt"; many women-as-poets successfully employ both broad and subtle humour. They do not just "renovate"; they re-invent by building on what was already there. While they enrich symbols, images, language and concepts as they hold them up to a poetic light which reflects and refracts them, they also overturn and thoroughly restructure the sonnet sequence as a definitive statement on the subject of heterosexual love and relationships and as a collective, traditional judgement on the nature of women.

A study of voice such as this has important implications for feminist criticism and women's studies. If "the possibility of a coherent feminist politics seems to require a singleness of voice and purpose," as Elizabeth Spelman postulates in *Inessential Woman* (1988), then "The sheer variety of women poses enormous epistemological problems" (161,160). Poetics and politics are not, of course, interchangeable, but are nevertheless vitally connected. The great

diversity of voices amongst women, and the wide range of voice of any one woman, together with her potential for multi-voicing, create a choric sense of "voice and purpose." Only if we listen to this chorus of voices can we hear how different they are from each other and the extent to which they might harmonise.

Knowledge of the vocal strategies, of the patterns of organisation of both form and syntax, and of the richness of the concerns and content which emerge from sonnet sequences by women, can enhance all poetry. That we are reading for the first time poetry by forgotten women, and participating in the re-vision of literary history, has implications for poetry being written today. Audre Lorde says in *Sister Outsider* (1984), "We have the power those who came before us have given us, to move beyond the place where they were standing" (144). But the ground is firmer, the direction clearer, and the power greater, the more we know of those who came before us. Our knowledge of their voices strengthens ours. *Voces feminasque cano(nise)*.

Notes

1. The title of this conclusion is from John, I, 1: "In the beginning was the Word." The epigraphs are from Barbara Herrnstein Smith's 1988 *Contingencies of Value* (10), Carol Thomas Neely's 1988 "Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourse" (5) and H.D.'s 1944 *The Walls Do Not Fall* (p.14).

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Appendix I

Sonnet Sequences by Women Arranged Chronologically

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- . *Sonnets, Devotional and Memorial*. Works. 587-591.
- . *Records of the Spring of 1834*. Works. 591-596.
- . *Records of Autumn, 1834*. Works. 596-598.
- . *Thoughts During Sickness*. Works. 658-59.
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- . *Aspirations*. *Sonnets*. 5-8.
- . *A Plea*. *Sonnets*. 13-16.
- . *To Nature*. *Sonnets*. 29-32.

---. *Cain and Abel. Sonnets.* 82-85.

---. *A Protest. Sonnets.* 93-95.

---. *A Symphony of Sonnets. I to X. In Ear of Cluny Water. Sonnets.* 106-115.

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---. *They Desire a Better Country.* Before 1870. *Works.* 383-384.

---. *By Way of Remembrance.* Before 1870. *Works.* 384-385.

---. *Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets.* Before 1882. *Works.* 58-64.

---. *Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets.* Before 1882. *Works.* 73-82.

---. *If Thou Sayest, Behold, We Knew It Not.* Before 1882. *Works.* 261-262.

---. *The Thread of Life.* Before 1882. *Works.* 262-263.

---. *Out of the Deep have I Called unto Thee, O Lord.* Before 1886. *Works.* 264-269.

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- . *North American Time*. *Native Land*. 33-36.
 - . *In the Wake of Home*. *Native Land*. 56-60.
 - . *Twenty-One Love Poems*. *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*. New York: Norton, 1978. 23-36.
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Appendix II

Stuart Wortley: *Sonnets Written Chiefly During a Tour of Holland, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Turkey* (1839) Reference by page number:

On Hawking

Tw'as on a plain of Austria—broad and fair—
High flew the hawks, from hood and chain releas'd:
Higher and higher, still with speed increas'd
The falconer's plumes danced dark upon the air,
And bounded their brave steeds, as vaulting there!
A little while—and that fair flight hath ceased:—
Who would their eyes upon the sequel feast,
And view the prey's destruction and despair?—
'Tis still so here!—beginnings void of stain
Lead but to dark conclusions—too much still
We mix our pleasures with another's pain,
And good too closely neighbours upon ill.
Can the least creature's loss become our gain?
Ah, no!—Heaven vindicates its outraged will!

(1)

The Suburbs of Vienna

Fair are the city suburbs—many a row
Of snow-white dwellings wins the admiring gaze,
And calls forth the exclamation of pleased praise.
The setting sun rose-tints their whiteness now,
Far fairer than the crowded streets they show,—
Within the gates!—that throng'd and busy maze;
And peace and calm content in these fair ways
Have surely set up their abode below—
And here reside, untroubled and serene.
Ah! those who are contented to remain
Even at the gates of life's proud restless scene
Partaking charily its stir—much pain
May spare themselves—'tis *they* perhaps may glean
The happiness—good—wealth, that others sow, in vain!

(2)

Written on First Arriving at Venice

The sun rose glorious soon o'er the Adrian Sea,
 To light us on our way to Venice, fair!—
 And all that beauteous is, and mournful there.
 He rose! and blazed the sea beneath him free,
 Whose waves seemed rolling waves of fires to be!—
 Full proud his image-impress thus to bear!
 What splendours did each sparkling foam-wreath wear!
 Night's shadows then in truth did swiftly flee!
 Ere while a death-black mass of glooms remained,
 As though they would frown back the rising sun—
 With all the funeral hues of midnight stained—
 They staid!—till fringed with fire they seem'd all spun
 Of Light and Darkness both—He rose!—He reigned!
 And they retreated—fled!—crushed, vanquished, and undone! (45)

To thee I drink this parting cup, full brimmed—
 This cup of an unfathomable woe!—
 And drain each drop of fire!—yet must I go!
 My heart is wounded and my sight is dimmed;
 That cup with every poison-dew seems rimmed:
 Fear, Self-reproach, Suspense together flow,
 And all their torments I too keenly know.
 No matter!—for Love's lamp is fed and trimmed;
 And this shall light my sepulchre on earth.
 Life! thou long torture!—let thy rack but be
 With buds of Hope's young roses flowering forth,
 Adorned and brightened, and 'tis well with me!
 Farewell! farewell!—I murmur not; 'tis worth
 Our while to weep, if through our tears Heaven's smile we see! (48)

On Venice

Venice! thou Queen of Sea! in ruin Queen!—
 As none may doubt who look in love on thee,
 The great Sun seems thine Element!—for he
 Is so incorporate still with thy fair scene—
 So mirrored deep within thy lagoons serene:
 That he seems round thee like thine own Sea!—
 He builds a throne of glorious majesty,
 Of beaten gold and burnished silver sheen,
 In thy refulgent streets!—triumphal road!—
 That seems but made for Victory, Pomp, and Joy!
 Of Star-wreathed spirits thou might be the abode,
 Like those bright spheres which Time dares not destroy,
 Swung in the ethereal element—but trod
 By Angel shapes!—yet Time works *thee* annoy! (52)

Inez to Manuel

How could I leave that spot, so soon to be
 Bless'd with thy radiant presence? 'twas a pang
 Unutterable; for I would fondly hang
 For years upon thy foot-print lovingly—
 Thy foot-print in the dust; and I could flee
 With hateful courage (while my armed Soul sang
 Its proud, bold paean!)—from my bliss! I rang
 Mine own knell sternly, and did bend my knee
 At the Altar of dark Sacrifice, which none
 But I had built!—Oh, courage harsh and vain!—
 O'er whose cold triumph I must make my moan;
 A triumph but of bitterness and pain—
 Ah! that it had been less! that it had flown—
 And left me like a slave that links, loves, clasps his chain! (64)

How many changes gather round me now!—
 Since *thou* art changed—all, all is changed for me.
 Since *thou* art altered—altered all like thee!—
 I ask not wherefore—and I know not how!
 Too much they dare who love!—for they must bow
 To their new Master, who henceforth shall be
 Their tyrant—nor beneath *his* Mastery,
 Shall they one independent thought avow!
 But none know what they dare when *first* they love!
 Sunny the surface of his Sea doth beam,
 As though but for the halcyon spread!—and dove!
 But there the Storm-birds, swift as lightnings gleam,
 Shall dart and darken—those false tides above,
 And the black clouds part of that Ocean seem! (78)

I cannot rule my thoughts that round *one* theme
 Hang, like to swarming bees, till *All* grow *One*!
 And yet that theme I fain would learn to shun.
 It is my Life's too fair, but fatal dream—
 Too dangerous do its deep enchantments seem,
 But dearer than my Soul!—undone!—undone!—
 I cannot rule my thoughts; each rising sun
 Sees me still drifting further down the stream!
 Oh! fearful stream of Passion!—wave by wave
 Does thou engulf my Being!—must it be?—
 Is there no power to strengthen or to save?
 No token of a change these eyes can see:
 Days past and days to come *one* likeness have.
 I know my *Future* so, *it seems a Memory*! (82)

Inez to Manuel

Forget me, then!—or if thou think'st of me,
 Think of me as Dead!—I could not bear
 That thou should deem of me—but grant this prayer—
 As living—yet unloved—unloved of thee!—
 Deem of me as the Dead!—or never be
 I fain would find my Heaven on *Earth!*—*not* share
 The mortal coldness of inconstancy!—
 If there I am in chillier atmosphere
 To dwell—let, let it be but as the Dead!—
 Mine ever loved and my once loving!—Hear!—
 A pall around my heavy memory spread,
 Or let *no* memory there reign strong and clear.
 Alas! my Life *in truth* with Love hath fled.

(90)

There is a music in my mind to-night—
 A visitation of sweet thought—and rare!—
 I know not whence, but feel them springing there,
 Aery and delicate, as Wind or Light—
 That music in my mind of magic might—
 This light cast down, on every thought, so fair—
 This stiring sweetness, like to moving air.—
 Can this be love?—the immortal and the bright!—
 'Tis surely love? for nought beside can be
 So strange and yet so sweet, so soft yet strong.
 'Tis love, the crown of all, crowned mystery!—
 My thoughts are gathering to a starry throng,
 And scattering forth their brightness far and free—
 Yet love that *Sun*, shines, dazzling, these among!

(91)

Yes! Morning comes, in roseate splendour seen,
 The flowers like many-jewelled trophies show!
 And into lovelier Beauty blush and blow,
 Of diamond-emerald seems this dewed turf green;
 Music is heard through all the air serene!—
 Like one continuing stream, how doth it flow—
 Emparadising sense and spirit so!—
 On Nature's heart now let her children lean,
 Glad Morning!—gracious Nature!—'tis in vain
 My soul is held and fettered!—'tis not free,
 For I am Victim of Love's costly pain!
 Still through his light alone my eyes can see
 Another Sun must rise, or *this* one wane:—
 Rise on the *SUN*, then, Love!—and rise for me!

(93)

Listen awhile!—but lend me thy loved ear,
 And I will teach my soul of souls to *thine*!
 The coils of thought will curiously untwine,
 And strive to show how deeply thou art dear!—
 But first must I full many a mist of Fear
 And cloud of grief, that dull this doom of mine,
 Essay to chase away, ere yet can shine
 The Star of perfect Love, full, strong, and clear!
 Then, then behold it all one blaze of Light—
 Itself a glowing Firmament of Fire,
 All unextinguishably clear and bright—
 Though oft thus girt by clouds—deep, dark, and dire,
 That do disturb its splendour!—check its might!—
 Listen!—and smile—and bid, these heavy glooms retire! (129)

Inez to Manuel

My Thoughts, like venom'd snakes, lie curled and coiled
 About my brain, and act the hideous parts
 Of scorpion-suicides!—(while fiercely smarts
 That brain pierced through, of each dear dream despoiled)—
 With fire and flames encircled and entailed—
 Alas! in their own burning heads each darts
 A death sting, and in mine own Heart of hearts!
 Nor may their power be checked—their aim be foiled—
 My Soul thus grows in Hades, dark and deep,
 Of those fierce fiends, that martyr it so much—
 That torture too themselves, nor pause, nor sleep!
 Oh! there is *more* than torture in their touch!—
 Madness and Death!—and *neither* strong to *keep*
 Their hold upon that mind, which sigheth even for such! (156)

Severed—Yet United

To thee, whate'er betides me,
 Turn my thoughts, the deep—the true;
 Though a World from thee divides me,
 Yet a World unites us too!

'Tis the world of Heart and Feeling,
This unites us evermore!—
This our Union still is sealing—
 Thousand—thousand sweet time o'er!

To thee—to thee for ever!—
 Turn my thoughts—the fond, the true;
 Worlds may darkly, sternly sever,
More than Worlds the ties renew!

And thine—and thine for ever,
 Are my thoughts—all ages through;
 Though the universe shall sever,
 Love hath snatched Creation's clue! (230)

Ella Wheeler Wilcox: *The Love Sonnets of Abelard and Heloise* (1907).

Heloise to Abelard:

Within the breast these sacred garments cover,
There is no altar of celestial fire:
I am a woman weeping for my lover,
The victim of a hungering heart's desire.
Veiled as I am, behold in what disorder
Your will has plunged me; and in vain I try,
By prayer and rite, to reach some tranquil border,
Where virtues blossom and where passions die.
But when I think some conquest gained, some tender
And radiant memory rises from the past;
Again to those sweet transports I surrender;
Remembered kisses feed me while I fast.
Though lost my lover, still my love endures;
Though sworn to God, my life is wholly yours. (2)

Heloise to Abelard:

Before the altar, even, unrepenting,
I carry that lost dream with all its charms;
Again to love's dear overtures consenting,
I hear your voice, I seek your sheltering arms.
Again I know the rapture and the languor,
By fate forbidden and by vows disbarred;
Nor can the thought of God in all His anger,
Drive from my heart the thought of Abelard.
My widowed nights, my days of rigorous duty,
My resignation of the world I knew,
My buried youth, my sacrifice of beauty,
Were all oblations offered up to you.
O Master, Husband, Father, let me move
With those fond names your heart to pitying love. (3)

Heloise to Abelard:

Know then the anguish of my sad condition,
And break the silence of unending days;
Appease me with one sentence of contrition,
For that command which doomed me to these ways.
I am your wife. Despite my sacred calling,
Despite my vows, my consecrated life,
Despite the fate so tragic and appalling,
That wrecked two hearts, yet still I am your wife!
May you not, then, in pity for my sorrow,
Permit me once to look upon your face?
Or, that denied, may I not comfort borrow
By your discourses on the means of grace?
You cast your pearls before unheeding swine:
Would you save souls? Then, Abelard, save mine. (4)

Abelard to Heloise:

Knowing the years of our delight were past,
 And those seductive days no more could lure,
 I sought religion's fetters to make fast
 The sinful heart that purposed to be pure.
 In this seclusion, to conceal my shame:
 In this asylum, to forget. Alas!
 The very silence shouts aloud your name:
 Through every sunbeam does your radiance pass.
 I fled, to leave your image far behind,
 I pictured you the enemy of hope,
 Yet still I seek you, seek you in my mind.
 And down the aisles of memory I grope.
 I hate, I love, I pray, and I despair,
 I blame myself, and grief is everywhere.

(7)

Abelard to Heloise:

Religion bids me hold my thoughts in check
 Since love in me can have no further part;
 But as wild billows dash upon a wreck,
 So passions rise and beat upon my heart.
 The habit of the penitent I wear,
 The altars where I grovel bring no peace;
 God gives not heed nor answer to my prayer
 Because the flames within me do not cease:
 They are but hid with ashes, and I lack
 The strength to flood them with a grace divine,
 For memory forever drags me back
 And bids me worship at the olden shrine.
 Your image rises, shrouded in its veil,
 And all my resolutions droop and fail.

(8)

Abelard to Heloise:

I looked into the heaven of your eyes,
 And dared the flames of hell: I heard you speak,
 And strove no longer to be strong and wise—
 Earth's rapture lay in being fond and weak.
 Oh, paradox! that virtue like your own,
 To guilty shame transformed a holy life,
 And the entrancing music of your tone
 Changed peaceful harmonies to jarring strife.
 I would forget, and think that you forgot,
 Our wild abandon and the sinful thrall
 Of stolen hours of bliss. Oh, bid me not
 The memory of those vanquished days recall!
 While you remember, how can I forget?
 Or hope's star dawn, till passion's sun has set?

(9)

Abelard to Heloise:

You call me Father; I was parricide:
 You call me Master; it was sin I taught:
 You call me Husband, yet you were my bride
 But after blight and ruin had been wrought.
 Blot out those words, and substitute instead,
 The darkest titles wounded pride can name.
 Through me your honor and your peace lie dead;
 I took your virtue, and I gave you shame.
 Not we alone in passion's pit were hurled;
 Because we failed, shall other lives be weak?
 Our follies have set standards for the world;
 Of our wild amours shall the centuries speak.
 For my salvation let your tears be spent;
 Advance in virtue, and repent! repent!

(12)

Heloise to Abelard:

Not mine the right to murmur or complain,
 For I alone am your misfortune's cause.
 I am the portal of your house of pain;
 For Heloise you broke God's holy laws.
 I meshed your greatness in my beauty's snare;
 You found destruction, gazing in my face;
 And Samson's fall and Solomon's despair
 Are lived again in Abelard's disgrace.
 Yet grant me this poor comfort, for my dole—
 I sought not, like Delilah, to destroy;
 Mine was the passion-blinded woman's role
 Who gave her virtue for her lover's joy.
 Convinced of love, I hastened to pour out
 Life's dearest treasures, that you might not doubt.

(14)

Heloise to Abelard

I made no use of pretext or defense;
 I valued virtue, only to bestow;
 Like white, high noon-tide, glaring and intense,
 Love drowned the world of reason in its glow.
 To be beloved by Abelard—that thought
 Absorbed all other purpose like flame,
 Such havoc passion in my bosom wrought,
 I banished honor, and invited shame.
 I thrust out duty, and installed desire;
 I aimed at nothing but possessing you.
 Oh, God, could I but quench with tears the fire
 Of memory of those delights we knew!
 Could I forget, or grieve for what was done,
 Divine forgiveness might be sought, and won.

(15)

Heloise to Abelard

I give but lip-repentance for my sins,
 And no contrition to my soul is known;
 Each day my lawless memory begins
 Recounting pleasures that were once our own.
 Each night I see my Abelard in dreams.
 Entranced with love, we turn away from books;
 And all of wisdom in your utterance seems,
 And all of rapture in your words and looks.
 And I remember that dear place and spot
 Where first your passion spoke and kindled mine.
 What tide of time can wash away, or blot
 Such mem'ries from the heart? Has love divine,
 And your misfortune, brought you into peace,
 While I still strive with storms that never cease?

(16)

Heloise to Abelard

Do you, in slumber, some-times stretch your arms
 To clasp the yielding form of Heloise?
 Do you recall my kisses and my charms?
 Or have those pleasures lost their power to please?
 Within these walls, I weep and ever weep.
 This cloister echoes my rebellious cries:
 Worn out with sorrow I relive in sleep
 The unabating grief that never dies.
 Shall Abelard, the all-entrancing theme,
 Consume the soul that ought to seek God's throne?
 How can I hope the Power I so blaspheme,
 Will grant me pardon, or my sins condone?
 Oh, you whose face I never more may see,
 Have pity on my plight, and pray for me!

(17)

Abelard to Heloise

Write me no more. Let all communion end.
 We left the world, to purify our thought.
 But prayer is vain, and penance comes to nought,
 When human passions with our hearts contend.
 No alchemist within the heart can blend
 Desire and faith; the peace which we have sought,
 By crucifixion of the flesh is bought.
 Let rites redouble, and let prayers ascend.
 Your letters prove my foes. When I would gird
 God's armor on, and pinion to the dust
 Regrets that bar my path to Paradise,
 I fall inert, before each burning word;
 Resolve is slain, as by a dagger-thrust;
 And Christ is hidden by your ardent eyes.

(18)

Abelard to Heloise

Write me no more. Bestow yourself on God.
 Your letters stir me with a deep unrest,
 Old half-healed wounds reopen in my breast,
 And blood-drops stain the young unsullied sod
 Where walked the feet of Faith, repentance-shod.
 My prayerful tho'ts swerve in their upward quest,
 And carnal love is once again their guest—
 Again, in dreams, is pleasure's pathway trod.
 Write me no more; you draw me back to earth.
 Moved by your words, I lose the better way,
 My purpose falters, and my courage faints.
 Oh, crush each lawless impulse at its birth,
 Learn the large meaning of the word "obey,"
 And drain the bitter chalice of the saints.

(19)

Abelard to Heloise

Write me no more. Grow diligent in prayer;
 Let God, not Abelard, be your concern.
 When mem'ries torture, and when passions burn,
 Look to the Cross, that refuge of despair;
 Its outstretched arms are ever waiting there.
 Immortal life is something we must earn
 By conquest of the baser self. Oh, turn
 Your thoughts from earth, to worlds divinely fair.
 Let silence give our sorrowing love true worth.
 To love you, means to leave you with no sign:
 To love me, means to let my life go free.
 But when death calls our purged souls from earth,
 Oh, may your senseless clay rest close to mine!
 Adieu! adieu! and write no more to me.

(20)

Heloise to Abelard

At last God shows me proof of His regard,
 And tranquil joys replace grief's uncontrol.
 Desire no longer riots in my soul;
 Gone are the dreams of love and Abelard.
 My holy meditations are not scarred
 By scalding tears from memory's brimming bowl;
 My thoughts fly unimpeded to the goal
 Dethroned your image and forever barred.
 Oh, let my infidelity proclaim
 To all the world how fickle love can change!
 A rival rules the heart once deemed so true.
 Yet, ere you think me sunk in utter shame,
 Hear my disclosure of what seems so strange—
 'Tis God alone takes Heloise from you.

(21)

Heloise to Abelard

No more will I endeavor to arouse,
By recollection's soft, seductive art,
The guilty fondness of your suffering heart;
To fate's decree my broken spirt bows.
I think of you no longer as the spouse,
But as the father, set from men apart,
Insensible to passion's poison dart,
The holy steward in God's sacred house.
My peace was born of anguish, but it lives,
A phenix risen from love's funeral pyre.
The path to Duty is the path to Bliss:
There is no pleasure save what virtue gives.
And yet—again to touch that mouth of fire,
To lose the world, and find it, in your kiss!

(22)

Cross Reference between Farjeon's *Sonnets* and *First and Second Love*:

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