LITTLE SONGS
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Women, Silence, and
the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Columbus
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Billone, Amy Christine, 1972–
Little songs : women, silence, and the nineteenth-century sonnet / Amy Christine Billone.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Sonnets, English—History and criticism. 2. English poetry—Women authors—
History and criticism. 3. English poetry—19th century—History and criticism.
4. English poetry—18th century—History and criticism. 5. Silence in literature.
Elizabeth Barrett, 1806–1861—Criticism and interpretation. 8. Rossetti, Christina
Georgina, 1830–1894—Criticism and interpretation. 9. Southern, Isabella J.
—Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.
821.042—dc22
2006033726

Cover design by Melissa Ryan.
Text design and typesetting by Jennifer Shoffey Forsythe.
Type set in Adobe Palatino.
Printed by Thomson-Shore, Inc.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the Ameri-
can National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
And then there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here—the sonnet.

—VIRGINIA WOOLF, To the Lighthouse

Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,—
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.

—EBB, Sonnets from the Portuguese #13
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LITTLE SONGS came into being with much support. I am thankful to the English Department, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Office of Research Administration at the University of Tennessee for enabling me through research and travel grants to spend extended periods of time at the British Library as well as to share my work on nineteenth-century women’s sonnets at several informative conferences in this country and abroad. The Professional Development and Research Award that I was given by the University of Tennessee in the summer of 2003 and the Hodges Grant for Research in Lieu of Teaching that I received from the Department of English in the summers of 2002, 2003, and 2005 were useful in helping me meet my research goals.

I would like to thank the British Library for permitting me to study countless rare books and manuscripts; as a result, I was able to discover fascinating work by nineteenth-century women poets that has fallen out of the canon. I am obliged to the Department of English for granting me a sabbatical leave, which I used to finish Little Songs. I would like to thank my students, in particular Ann Broadhead, for their research into and insightful comments about the issues I discuss. I am indebted to Allen Dunn for the valuable feedback he provided me as I brought the last pieces of the manuscript into place. Especially, I would like to thank the head of the English department, John Zomchick, who stood by me and advised me while I worked to complete this book.

I owe an enormous amount to several scholars who served as role models even before my project began to take shape. Sandra Bermann, Claudia Brodsky, Suzanne Nash, and Susan Wolfson opened new avenues of thought for me and helped me find my voice. Esther
Schor not only read early versions for me but also assisted me in many practical ways as I brought *Little Songs* into its current form. Linda Shires has offered me thoughtful advice and encouragement. U. C. Knoepflmacher has been a tremendous source of inspiration, a helpful sounding board for my ideas, a wonderful editor, and a dear friend. Indeed, my debts to him exceed what I can express here.

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues Anne Jamison, Tamara Ketabgian, Robert T. Lehe, Joshua Mason, Natania Meeker, Yumi Selden, and Andrea Sherman, whose intelligence and compassion have guided my scholarly as well as my personal development for many years.

Scott Lewis aided me with his groundbreaking work as an editor of the Browning letters and by sharing his knowledge and ideas with me over tea in London. I greatly benefited from the extraordinarily insightful readers’ reports I received after I submitted my manuscript for publication. In addition I would like to thank Sandy Crooms at The Ohio State University Press for her kindness and professionalism.


Most of all, I want to say thank you to my family for their long-standing reassurance, understanding, and faith both in me and in my work. My father, Michael, my mother, Christine, and my sister, Nina, have spent many hours proofreading drafts of *Little Songs* and many years listening to my ideas evolve point by point. Finally, I will always be grateful to my husband, Shannon Burke, for this, as well as for everything I write.
We have only recently become aware of the instrumental role that women played in England’s nineteenth-century sonnet revival. Our oversight, which lasted two centuries, may have stemmed from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s shifting attitudes toward the sonnet form. In his *Sonnets from Various Authors* (1796), Coleridge selected sonnets by Helen Maria Williams, Charlotte Smith, and Anna Seward, and printed them next to his own. Of these, Smith had published her sonnets first, in her *Elegiac Sonnets* of 1784, and she seems to have restored single-handedly an enthusiasm for the disputed form. But Coleridge later expressed great admiration for the sonnets of William Lisle Bowles, who had published his work just after Smith’s. Twenty-first-century critics recapitulated Coleridge’s appreciation for Bowles, hypothesizing that the latter made possible a kind of loco-descriptive poetry that Romantic writers would imitate. Although Coleridge eventually dismissed his youthful enjoyment of Bowles’s poetry, his earlier excitement may have persuaded modern critics to associate the sonnet revival with Bowles rather than to credit his legitimate precursor, Charlotte Smith. Indeed, Coleridge’s preference for Bowles over Smith most likely resulted from his effort to distance himself from the female-dominated elegiac sonnet tradition. Following Coleridge’s lead, modern critics may have been complicit in their act of historical disavowal.

It is now recognized that Charlotte Smith inspired an energetic resurrection of sonnet writing; a powerful revival that would continue
even into the twentieth century. In so doing, she dwarfed the accomplishments of her male precursors such as Thomas Edwards and Thomas Warton who also helped to legitimize the sonnet form. In Stuart Curran’s words, “[The sonnet’s] rebirth coincides with the rise of a definable woman’s literary movement and with the beginnings of Romanticism. The palm in both cases should go to Charlotte Turner Smith, whom Wordsworth a generation after her death accurately described as ‘a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered.’” Following Smith, women poets went on to produce an outpouring of elegiac and amatory sonnets. Wordsworth read these poems and drew inspiration from them—his own first published poem in 1787 was a sonnet inspired by Helen Maria Williams—although he claimed he turned to sonnet writing because of Milton alone.

While scholars now concede that women initiated the sonnet revival in England, Little Songs at present serves as the only book-length study devoted to a range of female sonneteers from the long nineteenth century. Little Songs may be read as a supplement to, but more importantly, as a reconceptualization of Jennifer Wagner’s A Moment’s Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century English Sonnet (1996). Wagner considers Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Hopkins, and Frost. She does not, however, examine any women poets of the period. A more recent study, Joseph Phelan’s The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet (2005), updates Wagner’s approach by giving space to female as well as male sonneteers. However, Phelan does not make gender his point of focus. Rather, he divides his chronological study into classes of sonnets—political, devotional and amatory. Unlike Phelan, I concentrate on nineteenth-century female sonneteers, juxtaposing well-established figures such as Elizabeth Barrett and Christina Rossetti with overlooked poets such as Anna Maria Smallpiece and Isabella Southern. Through this approach, I aim to uncover a neglected element of intellectual history: how British women writers from the late eighteenth until the beginning of the twentieth century entered the lyric tradition through their use of the sonnet form.

In spite of my effort to bring non-canonical women into focus, I am not simply rendering invisible women poets visible and making muted, forgotten, or misunderstood words freshly audible. I also am exploring the connection between femininity, silence, and the sonnet that nineteenth-century women poets stress both in the themes of
their poems and in their letters, prefaces, and notes. These sonneteers align femininity with what Charlotte Smith terms “blank despair,” Elizabeth Barrett calls “hopeless grief,” and Christina Rossetti names the “silence of love that cannot sing again.” I maintain that the female poets who embraced the compressed sonnet form at a time when women could only with difficulty enter the lyric tradition were drawn to its structural affinity for reticence. Ultimately, I argue that the sonnet, better than any other form, allowed nineteenth-century women poets to investigate and promote gendered interpretations of silence.

SILENCE AND THE SONNET

Since its very origin, the sonnet has been associated with silence. As Paul Oppenheimer argues, the sonnet was the first lyric form since the fall of the Roman Empire designed not for song or for performance but for silent reading. Between 1225 and 1230, the sonnet developed out of a courtly love tradition predicated on the absence or unattainability of a beloved addressee; at the same time, it broke from that tradition by developing a radically nonmusical structure.

The word “sonnet” in itself encapsulates the paradox that complicates the modern lyric. On the one hand, critics and lexicographers have assumed that the word “sonnet” (sonetto) means “little song,” or more specifically “little sound,” and that it derives from the Italian suono or “sound.” This notion of the sonnet’s essentially musical structure leads critic John Fuller, and many others, to speak with confidence of “the sonnet’s original musical setting.”

On the other hand, the sonetto’s diminutive suffix undermines its claims to musicality. Oppenheimer explains that the first appearance of the word “sonnet” did emerge in the Italian word sonnetto, generally attributed to Dante’s Vita Nuova of 1294; however, this word was never explicitly defined. The term is only critically discussed when it appears not in Italian but in the Latin word sonitus, of Dante’s De Vulgari Eloquentia (before 1305). Dante places the sonnet below the canzone and the ballata because, unlike these more noble forms, the sonnet needs something from the outside (presumably music) and fails to create this quality from within. Oppenheimer notes that in classical Latin, sonitus can mean murmur, but usually conveys the idea of “noise as in empty sound, bombast, thunder" (181).
Furthermore, Oppenheimer posits that the Italian sonnet’s peculiarly asymmetrical structure, which is built around a formal and thematic rupture or “volta,” marks a radical departure from the musical lyrics of the troubadours. He notes that since no “musical settings for Petrarch’s sonnets can be assigned a date earlier than 1470, well over two centuries after Giacomo [da Lentino] wrote his first sonnets,” there simply may have been no prior attempt to fit words to music (178).

In contrast to traditional courtly love lyrics, early sonnets display a much more pronounced investment in absence; that is, the absence of any direct or implied address to a listening audience on the one hand, and the absence of multiple or dual personae on the other. Rather than engaging internal or external auditors in a performative debate, these sonnets record a process of dialectical self-confrontation through which a speaker inwardly articulates and then resolves a problem by means of the sonnet’s divided structure itself. For Oppenheimer, the modern emphasis on silence introduced by the birth of the sonnet also “heralds a departure from the tradition of lyrics as performed poems and introduces a new, introspective, quieter mode, a mode that is to dominate the history of Western poetry for at least the next seven centuries” (187; my italics).

WOMEN AND SILENCE

In The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar address the difficulty with which early women poets entered the lyric tradition. They cite Virginia Woolf’s myth of Judith Shakespeare—an allegory that demonstrates why no woman poet of Shakespeare’s status could have existed during the sixteenth century. Gilbert and Gubar extend Woolf’s metaphor to apply in modified form throughout the nineteenth century as well. An important reason that women were denied credibility as poets during the nineteenth century, Gilbert and Gubar suggest, may have been their lack of the “aesthetic models” made possible by formal education.13

As Rita Felski observes in Literature after Feminism (2003), feminist scholars have criticized Gilbert and Gubar for relying on a homogeneous and universalizing notion of “womanhood.” These contemporary accounts examine how gender is inextricably linked to a number
of other identity-based categories such as race, class, and sexuality. Since the 1990s, critics have also, in Felski’s estimation, become cautious about “the madwoman as an example of a feminist monomyth” (70). In *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (2005), Paula R. Backsheider critiques Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis, arguing that “by the end of the [eighteenth] century women poets were being recognized as one of the glories of the British nation” (382). Numerous critics observe that whatever the obstacles nineteenth-century women poets may have faced, they were in fact writing. In Anne K. Mellor’s words, “between 1780 and 1830, women dominated not only the production of the novel [ . . . ] but also the production of poetry.” And Backsheider claims, “What must be obvious from this book is that barriers did not stop a larger number of talented women than we have recognized” (385).

In *Little Songs* I do not maintain that nineteenth-century women poets were silenced as in prevented from speaking; on the contrary, many of the women writers I discuss were amazingly prolific. Nor do I argue that they were silenced as in being removed permanently from literary history. As Tricia Lootens clarifies in *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization*, “The silence around Barrett Browning—and around other poets—turned out not to be an absence.” Instead, poets enter and exit the canon for reasons more complex than their gender alone. What interests me is the overlapping, persistent, gendered attentiveness to silence that I have witnessed in nineteenth-century women’s sonnets. I want to suggest that nineteenth-century women poets’ attachment to silence results from Romantic and Victorian presumptions about normative gender and sexuality.

In *Little Songs*, I argue that Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Barrett, and Christina Rossetti, together with their female contemporaries, linked silence to gender, albeit in shifting and at times conflicting ways. Facing the historical absence of female precursors, as well as a continued artistic and intellectual silencing, and, finally, the challenge of calling attention to this social structure in their poems, nineteenth-century women’s involvement with unspeakability became very elaborate. These female poets needed to find ways of accentuating in words a problem that haunted and troubled them—the difficulty
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(If not in their minds the impossibility) of enjoying the same literary stature afforded their male counterparts—but they also needed to mask what they were articulating. It is partly for this reason that critics remain uncertain about Smith’s changing status as a poet, Barrett’s sentimentality and apparent conventionality, and Rossetti’s professed lack of having anything to say.

Elizabeth Barrett’s famous remark, “Where were the poetesses? [. . .] I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none,” reminds us of the relative isolation of the nineteenth-century woman poet.19 While Charlotte Smith was a celebrated poet during her lifetime, her reputation faded after her death (her successor, Elizabeth Barrett, most likely read none of her poetry). Anna Maria Smallpiece, a gifted Romantic sonneteer, probably was ignored even while she was still alive, as was the poet I carefully examine in chapter 4, Isabella Southern. Both Elizabeth Barrett and Christina Rossetti have suffered if not from the absence of recognition then from unfortunate acts of critical misrecognition.20

One of my goals in Little Songs is to awaken our ears and eyes to tones and configurations in nineteenth-century women’s sonnets to which we have previously been deaf and blind. I do not argue that nineteenth-century female sonneteers overcome silence in favor of lyrical speech; rather, I explore how they simultaneously posit both muteness and volubility through style and theme. Ultimately, I illustrate how later nineteenth-century women writers repudiated the structural and thematic affinity for speechlessness that preoccupied their female precursors, thereby ushering in a historical period that has demonstrated an increasing respect for women poets.

Biographical Hauntings

Although I utilize biography in my analyses of nineteenth-century female poets, I strive to avoid the pitfalls of reductive biographical readings. As Alison Chapman explains in The Afterlife of Christina Rossetti (2000):

Any feminist methodology which voices the silent, in fact, is caught up in an impossible double bind. On the one hand, in the logic of recovery, literary voices that have been silenced, repressed, or muffled from within the representational scheme need to be recovered in order to understand their contextual positions and to interrogate the construction of canonicity that
marginalised them in the first place. [ . . . ] But, on the other hand, the result is to project a voice onto what has culturally become the voiceless: an act of critical ventriloquy which overturns, yet leaves in place, the methodological binary voice / silence upon which the literary canon is constructed.²¹

My intention in *Little Songs* is not so much to give voice to what has been repressed as it is to decipher the formal and thematic strategies with which nineteenth-century female sonneteers approached silence. Felski stresses a third alternative to the death of the author (promoted by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault) and to the reading of literary works as allegories of female authorship: the careful navigation between biography and textual independence: “We can recognize that female authors have themselves been authored—that is to say, shaped by a multiplicity of social and cultural forces that exceed their grasp—without thereby denying their ability to act and to create. Similarly, we can factor the author into our readings of literary works without reducing literature to autobiography or assuming that such links determine the meaning of the work once and for all. Authorship is one strand in the weave of the text rather than a magic key to unlocking its mysteries.”²² Following this third approach outlined by Felski, I use biographical details to help decode puzzling references in nineteenth-century women’s sonnets, and I pay close attention to places where women poets expose aspects of their biographical selves. As Natalie Houston and Phelan emphasize, the sonnet possessed an unusual documentary function for nineteenth-century writers and readers. In Houston’s words, nineteenth-century “critical discourse about the sonnet generally assumed that it was a vehicle for truthful revelations.”²³ And Phelan explains that the sonnet was repositioned “as a site of privileged autobiographical utterance within the system of poetic genres” (43). At the same time, I resist reductive biographical interpretations. Felski points out, “authors are skilled in the art of deception and concealment, in putting on masks and performing in elaborate disguise. This is the case even, or perhaps especially, when they claim to be giving accurate testimony, to be telling us the truth as it really happened” (61). In many ways, as I will show, nineteenth-century women’s sonnets construct elaborate disguises which, rather than spotlighting biographical selves, as critics often assume to be the case, instead camouflage, obscure, and withhold them.²⁴ However, at other times, details from the authors’ lives puncture these same sonnets, and it would be a mistake, I think, to cover our eyes to every biographical light that shines through.
This book enters into conversation with three central cross-disciplinary debates: 1) those that trace silences in literary fiction (such as Simon P. Sibelman’s *Silence in the Novels of Elie Wiesel* [1995], Leona Toker’s *Eloquent Reticence: Withholding Information in Fictional Narrative* [1993], Patricia Ondek Laurence’s *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* [1991] and Janis P. Stout’s *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion* [1990]); 2) those that discuss how silence informs theory, feminist criticism or rhetoric (such as Cheryl Glenn’s *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* [2004], *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, edited by Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin [1994], *Languages of the Unsayable: the Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser [1989], and Tillie Olsen’s *Silences* [1978]); and 3) those that explore issues in gender theory (in particular I have been influenced by Judith Butler’s work).  

While I have drawn inspiration from the recent debates about silence, I offer the single existing study of the overwhelming impact that silence makes, not only on British women’s poetry but on the relationship between women’s sonnets and the development of modern poetry and thought. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler calls attention to the way that sexual difference functions not as a fact but as “a question, a question for our times” (177). It is with the same sense of timeliness that I approach my study. Because the women poets I examine in *Little Songs* wrestle with the sonnet form during a period where the use of lyric poetry was still in many ways blocked to them, their insights into the uncertain relationship between gender and language will be of particular interest to us now. We have entered the twenty-first century with more questions than answers about a bewildering topic that we can neither put to rest nor put out of our minds. What is sexual difference? What is gender? By what are we constrained? From what are we free? The female sonneteers I investigate in *Little Songs* intelligently question the meaning of terms that continue to perplex us—female, male, femininity, masculinity, woman, and man. My choice to gather together and evaluate a group of women poets when the term “woman” remains so much in flux does not result from naiveté or presumptuousness. By questioning a term like “woman” we do not invalidate it. Rather, as Butler stresses in *Undoing Gender*, “To question a term [. . .] is to ask how it plays,
what investments it bears, what aims it achieves, what alterations it undergoes. The changeable life of that term does not preclude its use” (180). My juxtaposition of British female sonneteers from the long nineteenth century likewise involves a simultaneous reliance upon and inquiry into the language we use (indeed into our very idea of language) as we struggle to conceptualize sexual difference and gender roles.

LITTLE SONGS

The first chapter of this book, “Breaking ‘the Silent Sabbath of the Grave’: Romantic Women’s Sonnets and the ‘Mute Arbitress’ of Grief,” explores both Charlotte Smith’s confrontation with silence in her *Elegiac Sonnets* of 1784 and the responses of Smith’s female contemporaries. I examine how Smith fuses silence and speech in her poems: unspeakability (“blank despair”) coexists with a fragmented but sustained poetic language. To achieve this effect, Smith employs grieving masculine personifications—characters that are unable to speak or even to continue living but can only die in despair. The speaker persistently compares herself to these male figures—wan-derers, mariners, pilgrims—without ever specifying the source of her own grief.27

At the same time, Smith pursues a number of feminized abstractions which vary between polar extremes, such as Melancholy and Hope, Solitude and Friendship. It is Smith’s endless appeal to these oppositions that provides her with a constant source of poetic speech. In the final section of the chapter, I examine the responses of Smith’s female contemporaries who were influenced by her poetics but who gravitated to silence in slightly different ways. Helen Maria Williams transposed Smith’s elegies into a more comforting key while Anna Maria Smallpiece took issue with Williams’s optimism; in spite of this similarity, Smallpiece conflicts with Charlotte Smith in the reasons that she gives for her own sorrow. While Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* reveal varying sources of grief, Smallpiece’s sonnets are all pressured by the difficulties of lesbian love—problems that Smallpiece does not explicitly verbalize; instead she communicates her struggles through ambiguity and indirection.

My second chapter, “‘In Silence Like to Death’: Elizabeth Barrett’s Sonnet Turn,” investigates Barrett’s turn to the sonnet after the death of her brother in 1840. Seeing the sonnet’s reticent structure as a
metaphor for inexpressible grief, Barrett tries to highlight unspeakability and to find a way of undoing it. Explaining that grief must be expressed “in silence like to death” and that “poetry resembles grief,” Barrett, like Smith, envisions poetry as representative of silence. While Barrett’s sadness about her brother’s death impeded her sonnets’ ability to provide consolation in 1844, her 1850 Sonnets from the Portuguese appear to reverse her previous beliefs. Even though Barrett seems to translate death into life and grief into love in her 1850 sonnets, I demonstrate how Barrett’s speaker actually remains haunted by death from the beginning to the end of her sequence. Barrett may speak to two people at the same time, to a dead beloved and to a living one, but she refuses to translate death into life. The only progress that takes place between 1844 and 1850 is that Barrett’s sonnets at last claim to be versions of living flowers rather than dead ones. Yet while these flowers might be alive, Barrett splits them apart until they “burst, shatter, everywhere!”; what we see in the end are not living flowers but pale, bare branches. Consequently, silence functions at once as both a hinderer and a nourisher of Elizabeth Barrett’s art.

My third chapter, “Sing Again: Christina Rossetti and the Music of Silence,” untangles the different ways that Rossetti perplexes scholars with the tension between her restraint—her quiet voice—and with the musical nature of her poems. Silence operates on two different levels in Rossetti’s poetry. First, her apparently female speaker continually reminds the reader that she cannot express herself, and second, her poetic lines cancel themselves out, producing a vagueness of situation and an unsteadiness of voice. I refer to the first category as one of “stated” silences since they are openly acknowledged, and the second category as one of “semantic” silences since they upset the exchange of ideas. And yet all of Rossetti’s sonnets have a musical quality: the speaker skillfully sings that she cannot sing and also sings lyrics that seem to lack content.

In this chapter, I argue that Rossetti produces both music and silence, both women’s voices and their absence. Requesting that nameless, forgotten women sing, Rossetti proves her question unanswerable. However, she does bring these women back. Unremembered women poets from history adopt many identities in Rossetti’s sonnets, forcing everyone into speechlessness and also into an eternal musical request for forgotten women’s impossible song. Pushing Barrett’s encounter with grief one step further, Rossetti destroys her sonnet cycle “Monna Innominata” in its final words: “cannot sing
again.” But, as I will show, Rossetti follows both Smith and Barrett in her definition of silence, finally characterizing poetry as the music of inexpressivity itself.

In my fourth chapter, “‘Silence, ‘Tis More Cruel Than the Grave!’: Isabella Southern and the Turn to the Twentieth Century,” I consider how the contemporaries of and the first successors to Elizabeth Barrett and Christina Rossetti reworked the assertions made by their most celebrated female counterparts. I begin by looking at sonnets by Maria Norris, Dora Greenwell, and Michael Field, all of whom refer in their poems to Barrett and Rossetti by name. At first glance, Norris, Greenwell, and Field seem to write sonnets that thoroughly praise their poetic heroines. However, as I will illustrate, these sonnets present fundamental reevaluations of the poets they appear to extol. After a brief discussion of Norris, Greenwell, and Field, I devote a much longer section of the chapter to a study of Isabella J. Southern, whose book *Sonnets and Other Poems* (1891) finds fault with Barrett’s and Rossetti’s work. While Barrett never read Charlotte Smith and while Christina Rossetti rejects Barrett by name in *Monna Innominata*, Southern addresses Barrett and Rossetti without ever telling us their names (although she obviously has read them). Refusing to designate who Barrett and Rossetti are, Southern tirelessly repeats and alters their sonnets in her own works. I propose that later nineteenth-century women sonneteers’ movement away from the kind of silence that absorbed their female predecessors anticipates modern and contemporary thought.

Unlike recent interpretations that have stressed the importance of male sonneteers from Wordsworth to Frost, this book makes a case for the vital role women sonneteers have played in literary history. With voices that still remain almost too faint for us to hear, nineteenth-century women poets wrote on two different levels—mutely and musically—complexly gendering the double function of sonnets, and, by extension, of all lyric poems, as at once soundless and harmonic “little songs.”
While male poets moved from amatory to political, social, and religious subjects in their sonnets, nineteenth-century British women mainly turned to sonnet writing as a means of confronting “hopeless grief.” Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* of 1784, Helen Maria Williams’s gentler sonnets of 1785, Anna Maria Smallpiece’s sonnets in *Poems, Moral, Elegant and Pathetic* of 1796, Elizabeth Barrett’s grieving sonnets of 1844 (together with her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in 1850), and Christina Rossetti’s later poetics of renunciation all thematize inconsolable sadness. Yet, a turning point occurs during the second half of the nineteenth century. As I have shown, Maria Norris, Dora Greenwell, and Michael Field refer to Barrett and Rossetti by name in sonnets that appear to praise their poetic heroines but that also offer subtle critiques of the very poets they seem to eulogize. Likewise, Isabella J. Southern, who published *Sonnets and Other Poems* in 1891, puts forth a dramatic revision of Smith, Barrett, and Rossetti. By explicitly rejecting silence, Southern enthusiastically leads us into the twentieth century.

For the women poets I analyze in my first three chapters, grief originates from unnamed sources. In the *Elegiac Sonnets*, Charlotte Smith varies her reason for bereavement from sonnet to sonnet (or else fails to specify any cause at all). Helen Maria Williams follows Smith’s direction, although she introduces a more optimistic approach. Anna Maria Smallpiece confuses grief due to sickness with betrayal by a faithless friend with sadness because of a friend’s death.
Elizabeth Barrett never provides a motivation for her despair (though biography and evidence in her poems point to her beloved brother’s tragic death). Christina Rossetti writes of forgotten women from history whose indistinct grief she seems cryptically to share.

Described by a century of women sonneteers, grief is inextricably intertwined with silence. Smith equates her suffering with the “blank despair” of an unhappy exile; Barrett believes “full desertness” must be expressed “in silence like to death”; Rossetti ties the culmination of sadness to the “silence of love that cannot sing again.” Not only do these poets claim that the justification behind their grief is untellable; they also presume the communication of their sadness can never fully occur. The figures beset by misery in these women’s sonnets have no listening audience: the drowning mariner who utters inaudible cries, the “statue set / in everlasting watch and moveless woe,” the “donna innominata” who did not speak “for herself.”

Women do not simply liken their grief to wordlessness; rather, they suggest that this anguish may itself rise from the impossibility of speech. Smith’s exiled wanderers cannot make their pain known, and the speaker, whose distress seems to have no derivation, identifies her predicament with their own. For Barrett, “irreparableness” combines incurable grief with her inability to incarnate nature in poems. And Rossetti troublingly reminds the reader that her “donna innominata” “cannot sing again.”

I have suggested that women poets gravitated toward the sonnet form because, with its exigent rules of meter, syllable count, rhyme scheme, and structural shifts, it offered them a ready-made metaphor for the difficulties of articulation. Highly compressed and restrained, the sonnet helped to make inexpressibility visible. Yet the sonnet had always occupied an ambivalent ground: positioned between brevity and music, the “little song” ostensibly both can and cannot sing. It thus presented nineteenth-century women writers with a paradox that reflected their situation: their gestures of assertion were ultimately accomplished through rhetorical constructions that insisted on the stifling of assertion.

On the one hand, women poets needed to take the form away from the male sonneteers who had owned it for centuries. In so doing, women initiated what amounted to the first clearly recognizable female lyric tradition in Britain. On the other hand, the sonnet had not only been disparaged for a century prior to Smith’s revival of the form, but it also continued to be critiqued after Smith by master
sonneteers such as William Wordsworth and John Keats. Negatively contrasted with the epic, the sonnet makes Wordsworth think of nuns in “their convent’s narrow room,” while Keats feels uncomfortable that English must be chained by “dull rhymes.” The swiftness with which sonnets must take place, the limits placed on what they can expose and their lack of inherent musicality (which Dante criticizes) all call this lyric form into question. Male poets resolve these dilemmas through the comfort of the sonnet’s fixed shape and through its sharp, potentially revelatory turns. Revelation, however, is precisely what nineteenth-century women poets refuse to dramatize. They consequently do not follow the consolatory framework of elegiac sonnets by Thomas Gray and William Lisle Bowles; nor do they recapitulate Petrarch’s amatory sonnet structure or implant something akin to Wordsworth’s poetic encounters with the sublime.

Women sonneteers therefore blatantly violate the strategies of compensation and redemption that were often used by their male counterparts. As we have seen, Charlotte Smith’s sonnets fall into two categories: they either court the feminized personifications that make speech possible or else they describe absolute wordlessness. This second category distinguishes Smith’s work from that of her male precursors and contemporaries. Furthermore, Barrett’s sonnets oppose Wordsworth’s treatment of the sublime; while his sonnets move upwards and outwards with the turn from octave to sestet, hers burrow further inwards in order to create a more pronounced sense of voicelessness. And Rossetti rewrites not only the male-authored amatory sonnet tradition but even Barrett’s own *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, when she attempts to draw a “more tender, if less dignified” portrait “than any drawn even by a devoted friend” (2:3, 86). For Isabella Southern, on the other hand, the appeal of silence is illusory; what seems golden to others reveals itself to be “the parchèd gold of desert sands / Dreary and desolate.”

I have argued that famous nineteenth-century women poets such as Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Barrett, and Christina Rossetti perform a four-step motion in their sonnets. They begin by confirming women’s voicelessness; next they show how women’s silence culminates in poetic speech; to illustrate this, they banish men from language altogether; finally, they struggle to eliminate gender through their poetry’s double attraction to muteness and sound. For Charlotte Smith, neither male nor female personifications can speak; however, it is the feminine rather than the masculine incarnations
that stimulate poetic language. Despite this gender reversal, Smith continually relates her speaker to the despondent male personifications whose expulsion from language is absolute. Yet, poetry lends both genders equal access to silence and voice. The writer (whether male or female, as Smith’s sequence displays) achieves boundless poetic speech and also fails to translate emotions into words; this inaudibility (revealed in gaps, compression, elision, broken syntax) informs lyric poetry as a genre.

Like Smith, Elizabeth Barrett attests to women’s silence—the “silent-bare” blankness of grief—and she also overturns conventional gender roles. Barrett at times mocks Wordsworth, with his “humble-lidded eyes, as one inclined / Before the sovran thought of his own mind,” and even indirectly challenges him—“I tell you”—as being “incredulous of despair, half-taught in anguish.” And she repeatedly undermines the male beloved’s laurels in Sonnets from the Portuguese by depriving the man of the language he desires from her: “I drop it at thy feet.” Rather, it is woman’s silence (as opposed to man’s speech) that makes up poetic language, for the lyric—as sonnets represent—occurs through pauses, confinement, and restraint: the “ren[...]t garment of [the woman speaker’s] life, in brief.” Nevertheless, like Smith, Barrett eventually attempts to cancel out gender references, for she finally equates “the silence of [her] womanhood”—her divided position as “un[one]”; her torn words—with the trials of language: the act of splitting her “spirit so far off from myself. . . me. . . .” Just as the speech/silence opposition ceases to be a polarity for Barrett, so the male/female binary eventually fuses for her into the inseparable union required for the composition of true poetry.

Christina Rossetti counters Barrett by pushing her engagement with silence to another level. Both the premise and the conclusion of “Monna Innominata” acknowledge the unknown and nameless speaker’s inability to sing. But Rossetti’s sonnets closely resemble the project that Smith and Barrett undertake. To begin with, she hypothesizes that a silent woman—one who was merely written about at a distant point in history—might have shared her lover’s “poetic aptitude.” Then she writes a sonnet sequence that appears to confirm this woman’s silence. Just like Smith and Barrett, however, Rossetti steadily inverts the gender alignments that her sequence presupposes. The female poetic speaker absorbs all other personae until it becomes unclear how to separate Rossetti from the “donna innominata” or the speaker from her addressee. And this speaker
creates an echo chamber of self-references. Thus, not only does Rossetti mute masculinity by assimilating her male into her female persona, but she also excludes masculinity from her poetry’s territory; her sonnets consist of ceaseless recitations of the speaker’s silent but all-encompassing individuality. At the same time, the speaker’s identity divides from itself, crossing over genders and historical periods. Because un-recalled women’s sonnets both can and cannot “sing again,” they must play a splintered role not unlike what poetry in general must perform. Simultaneously rupturing and consolidating personalities, “Monna Innominata” (or “M-on[no]-na In-no-mi[me]-nata”) submits masculinity as well as femininity to poetry’s divided status as silence and sound.

By uniting and disjoining gender and silence, nineteenth-century British women poets manipulated the very form that women of other nations avoided. Compellingly, twentieth- and twenty-first-century women poets in America as well as in England refuse to follow the example of their earlier British women counterparts. True, women poets such as Augusta Webster, Michael Field, and Edna St. Vincent Millay carried the sonnet from the end of the nineteenth century into the next. Although contemporary women writers still draw energy from the form, “most women poets have shied away from the sonnet for decades.”2 In the end, the twentieth and twenty-first century “has brought a great flourishing of poetry by women, but most of that poetry has been free form” (Stout, “Fretting Not” 31). It seems that after taking the sonnet to the limits of renunciation, women began to rebel against the very social restraints that the sonnet permitted them to grieve.

Tracing a century of sonnets, I have shown how silence intensified in women’s work; in the wake of this revival, women now revert back to the same freedom of form that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British women poets claimed. Isabella Southern predicted this shift by rejecting Elizabeth Barrett in favor of Robert Browning (who did not write sonnets) as one who wins “ore for future days.” Tightly holding the sonnet in their hands for one hundred years like “the essence sucked out of life,” women finally drop the form at our feet. Well-known twentieth-century male poets such as Robert Frost, W. H. Auden, and E. A. Robinson ardently embraced the sonnet, but women once again turned away, at last finding more unobstructed means to perform the lyric’s complexly gendered dance between incoherence and clarity, brevity and wholeness, blankness and song.
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION


2. In Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), Paula R. Backsheider argues that “[w]ithout question, [Charlotte Smith] was a major contributor to the revival and is the poet associated with the rebirth of the sonnet as a popular form” (317). In Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and
Petrarchism (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), Mary B. Moore explains that “Smith, not Wordsworth, is responsible for resurrecting the sonnet as a viable literary form after its neglect during the late seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries. Smith’s book was the first in over a hundred years to use the sonnet form in sequence. Smith’s sonnets are thus the originary text for the romantic sonnet” (152). And in “Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism,” South Central Review 11 (1994), Curran suggests that Charlotte Smith is “the single most important voice that has been until quite recently suppressed from the historical record” (71).


5. Phelan makes this point about Coleridge’s effort to remasculinize the sonnet through his admiration of the “‘mild and manliest melancholy’ of [Bowles’s] poetry” (12).

6. Backsheider declares that “[t]oday, beside the slim output and mediocrity of the other revivalists (Thomas Edwards, Thomas Warton) Charlotte Smith seems a giant” (317).


8. Wordsworth’s first published poem was a sonnet called “On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress.” It was first published in the European Magazine XL (March 1787) under the pseudonym “Axiologus.” Phelan argues that “[i]n aligning himself with Milton’s ‘manly and dignified’ sonnets, Wordsworth is attempting to place some distance between himself and the female-dominated elegiac sonnet tradition of the late eighteenth century; and there is no doubt that part of his aim in returning to Milton was to ‘remasculinise’ the sonnet” (12). Jennifer Ann Wagner makes a similar claim about Wordsworth’s turn to Milton in an effort to masculinize a female-dominated genre. See A Moment’s Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century English Sonnet (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 13.

9. While Moore discusses Charlotte Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets and Elizabeth
Barrett’s Sonnets from the Portuguese in Desiring Voices, she does not focus on women’s involvement in the nineteenth-century sonnet revival. Instead, Moore moves forward chronologically from Petrarch to Louise Labé, Lady Mary Wroth, Smith, Barrett, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

10. Throughout Little Songs I will refer to EBB as Elizabeth Barrett instead of as Elizabeth Barrett Browning in part to distinguish her from Robert Browning and in part because she wrote all of the sonnets I discuss before she was married. When needed, I shorten Christina Rossetti to Rossetti; if I mention her brother I use his full name, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.


14. Rita Felski, Literature after Feminism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). In Little Songs, I limit the geographical space of my study to England and the time period to the nineteenth century. In this way I remain aware of the limits of my sample and do not presume to extend my findings “into an all-encompassing theory of authorship” (88).


17. In Cheryl Glenn’s words, “There is not one but rather many silences, and like the spoken or written, these silences are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate rhetoric. Thus, silence is at once inside the spoken and on its near and far sides as well.” See Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 160.

18. For an intelligent and thought-provoking study of the relationship between Victorian women’s writing, silence, and the literary canon, see Lootens, Lost Saints.

19. Barrett (Browning), The Brownings’ Correspondence, edited by Philip Kelley, Ronald Hudson and Scott Lewis (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1984–), Vol. 10: 14. From this point on, I will refer to The Brownings’ Correspondence as BC.

20. Marjorie Stone devotes her book Elizabeth Barrett Browning (London: Macmillan, 1995) to an exploration of “how intersecting ideologies of gender and genre, sometimes compounded by the artificial barriers of historical periodization, have acted to obscure or conceal Barrett Browning’s poetical achievement in a range of poetical or literary modes” (8). In Jerome J. McGann’s words, “A number of books about Rossetti appeared in the early
1930s, several quite good, but after that she virtually disappeared from the academic scene for almost three decades; and even then she remained a marginal interest for another ten years or more.” “The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti,” in Victorian Women Poets: Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, edited by Joseph Bristow (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), fn 7, 185–86.


22. Felski, Literature after Feminism, 91.


24. For this reason I am wary of arguments that depend too much on what Joan W. Scott calls “the evidence of ‘experience’”; in Scott’s words, “It is precisely this kind of appeal to experience as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation—as a foundation upon which analysis is based—that weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference.” See Scott’s “Experience” in Feminists Theorize the Political, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 24.

25. Butler acknowledges the importance of writing about women so as to combat the “pervasive cultural condition in which women’s lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all.” Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (London: Routledge, 1990), 4. However, she also urges us to abandon our attachment to the notion of prediscursive sex- or gender-specific identities. For Butler, “gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody” (179). In Gender Trouble, Butler makes three important points: 1) the gendered self is produced through the stylized repetition of acts through time—that is, through performativity; 2) gender serves as the discursive/cultural means by which sexual difference is established as prediscursive; 3) ultimately, both gender and sex need to be thought of as culturally constructed categories.

26. Rather than relying on what many critics misperceive as the formulaic assuredness of her early work, Butler embraces uncertainty in her more recent studies. Instead of maintaining her earlier proposition that both sex and gender are culturally constructed categories, she explains that rather than being prior to discourse or enabled by discourse, sexual difference remains “a question that prompts a feminist inquiry, it is something that cannot quite be stated, that troubles the grammar of the statement, and that remains, more or less permanently, to interrogate.” Undoing Gender (London: Routledge, 2004), 178. For this reason, Claire Colebrook is mistaken when, in proposing a revision to Judith Butler’s interpretation of sex and gender, she writes, “As we have already noted, Butler’s concept of gender as effected
through performance precludes the notion of positive sexual difference. Sex is produced as that which gender has always already named and stabilised.” Gender (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 243.

27. Women’s effort to silence resistance, when silence itself was the object of this resistance, resulted for nineteenth-century women sonneteers in what they term “blank despair” or “hopeless grief.” As Juliana Schiesari shows in The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), men alone were thought capable of melancholy during the Renaissance. Jahan Ramazani locates the shift from compensatory to non-consolatory poems of mourning in twentieth-century work. See, for example, Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). In Little Songs, I propose a different model of literary history, showing how women sonneteers invented contemporary elegiac poetics a century in advance. Compelling recent studies of how mourning and melancholy operate (written about poetry, race, and politics, respectively) include David G. Riede’s Allegories of One’s Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Poetry (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), Anne Anlin Cheng’s The Melancholy of Race (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Judith Butler’s Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (New York: Verso, 2004).

28. The list of currently known and forgotten nineteenth-century female sonneteers that I provide in this book is necessarily selective. Discussing women sonneteers who appeared in sonnet anthologies and in criticism of the nineteenth century, Houston remarks, “The sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning were especially praised, and Charlotte Smith, Anna Seward, Felicia Hemans, Christina Rossetti, Eliza Cook, Adelaide Procter, Dora Greenwell, Augusta Webster, Alice Thompson, Emily Pfeiffer and many others were frequently mentioned in accounts of important sonnet writers.” “Towards a New History: Fin-de-siècle Women Poets and the Sonnet,” in Essays and Studies 2003: Victorian Women Poets, edited by Alison Chapman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 152. In her essay Houston chooses to examine sonnets by Mathilde Blind, Michael Field, and Rosamund Marriott Watson. Considering the large number of women poets who contributed to the nineteenth-century sonnet revival, exciting work still remains to be done in this field.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Wordsworth’s note to “Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off Saint Bees’ Heads,” from his “Poems Composed or Suggested during a Tour, in the Summer of 1833.”
2. I will follow Smith’s own English spelling of “Werther” as “Werter” throughout this chapter.


4. The final two-volume edition of the Elegiac Sonnets contained ninety-two sonnets, together with other elegies. The poems continue to draw from more and more voices as the collection expands. Three Petrarchan translations from the first and second editions extend to four in the third edition; three sonnets taken from Goethe’s Werter in the 1784 collection expand to five in the third and fourth editions. In the fifth edition, Smith adds three sonnets originally included in her first novel, Emmeline, and in the sixth edition she goes on to add five from her next novel, Celestina. When the collection had reached its final version it contained a total of thirty-six poems communicated by ventriloquized voices.


6. Bowles’s Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive (1789) was published in nine distinct editions in fifteen years. The difference in the effect of Bowles’s and Smith’s escalating prefaces, Schor argues, is that “Smith’s sonnets come to indict the moral authority of her audience” while Bowles’ sonnets “come to invoke the moral authority of God” (61).


11. In her book Romanticism, Lyricism, and History (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), Sarah Zimmerman reasons that Smith’s “autobiographical poet’s absorption in private sorrows operates with a theatrical dynamic,” engaging audiences in an easy shift “between personal and social
dilemmas” (xv). Zimmerman backs up this argument with discerning studies of early editions of the poems (“the intensely autobiographical quality” of the single poems per page and the engravings that accompany several sonnets) (48). However, we might note that these eighteenth-century marketing features no longer apply to Smith’s work; in Stuart Curran’s 1993 edition, more than one poem is printed by page, with no illustrations.

15. Labbe, Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender, 166. Labbe’s tendency to rely on assumptions about the autobiographical nature of Smith’s sonnets betrays itself in various ways throughout her book. For example, in the introduction, “Embodying the Author,” Labbe discusses Smith’s “Sonnet LXII: Written on passing by moon-light through a village, while the ground was covered with snow.” She theorizes that in this sonnet, “Smith simultaneously enacts her gender in her plea for help and her womanly despair, and rejects such a role in her wandering about” (13). However, to readers of Smith’s novels (and during her lifetime Smith’s readers were privy to details from her novels in a way that we no longer are today) it is clear that this sonnet first appeared in Smith’s novel The Old Manor House (published in 1794, before its appearance in the seventh edition of the Elegiac Sonnets, Vol. 2 in 1795) and that it was supposedly written by the hero Mr. Orlando Somerive as he wanders the countryside searching for his lost love, Monimia. Labbe makes no mention of this novel in her introduction and does not refer to it for nearly 100 pages.
17. Backsheider, Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry, 332. Backsheider views the “number of critics who have recognized a double voice” in Smith’s sonnets as an improvement on purely autobiographical readings: “Adela Pinch and Mary Moore, for instance, both see Smith juxtaposing literary tropes and personal experience. Kathryn Pratt demonstrates that the speaker functions as both spectator and spectacle, and she uses individual sonnets as examples” (332).
18. The detailed footnotes in Curran’s edition of Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets provide the most basic information from her novels. For Sonnet 85, we learn only
that it was printed “in Smith’s *The Young Philosopher: A Novel* (1798), where it is written by Mrs. Glenmorris to accompany the botanical drawings of her daughter Medora” (73). This explanation offers no evidence of the financial ruin to which the poem contextually alludes; nor does it set up Sonnets 85 and 86 as responding to one other. For Sonnet 86, we are merely told that it is “written by Delmont to his mother-in-law Mrs. Glenmorris as he awaits favorable winds for crossing from Wales to Ireland” (74). These insufficient details suggest that to achieve full understanding of Smith’s sonnets, we must (like Smith’s contemporaries) read the many novels in which her poems first appeared.

19. As we will see in Elizabeth Barrett’s work, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets frequently correlated flowers with poetry itself. Thus, Smith begins the first poem of her collection, “The partial Muse has from my earliest hours / Smiled on the rugged path I’m doom’d to tread, / And still with sportive hand has snatch’d wild flowers, / To weave fantastic garlands for my head” (13). Read in this context, Sonnet 85’s opening exclamation, “The fairest flowers are gone!,” intimates that Smith’s own “fair” poetry has been swept away—only Reason (masculine or feminine) commands her heart in the closing line.

20. For example, “The spot where pale Experience hangs her head” (44; my italics).

21. Smith was a strong supporter of Mary Wollstonecraft, who made a similar argument about detaching women from pure emotion and aligning them with reason through education.


23. Backsheider observes that Smith echoes earlier poems in this sonnet: “Again the poem echoes earlier poems, including Dryden’s many meditations on Reason’s wavering light” (335).


28. Moore comments about Sonnet 9: “Associating the erotic literary tradition
with shallow feeling and with masculinity, contrasting the rude pastoral shepherd with the feeling speaker, Smith seems to imply that male voices ignore or are ignorant of actual suffering” (158). As the “rude pastoral shepherd” is only one of two distinct types of silenced masculine personifications (and Smith persistently identifies her speaker with the opposing kind: the wanderer, mariner, exile, etc.), I only agree with Moore’s reading in part.

34. See Bowles, *Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive*, 9. Robinson also uses this sonnet by Bowles to show how “Bowles’s sonnet offers a sense of hope that Smith’s lacks” as Bowles’s sonnets in general “tend to lack the immediacy of grief that mark hers, affecting more of a grief-stricken pose than heartfelt sorrow.” See “Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim” (*European Romantic Review* 6: 1 [1995]: 98–127) (115).
35. Even though Bowles resembles Smith in his use of masculinized individuals and feminized abstractions, I am crediting Smith with this innovation as she published her sonnets before he did.
37. In Book II of *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes Death as the “other shape, / If shape it might be call’d that shape had none / Distinguishable in member, joynet, or limb, / Or substance might be call’d that shadow seem’d” (133).
39. Wordsworth read these poems (his own first published poem in 1787 was a sonnet inspired by Williams, “On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress”), and surely drew inspiration from them, although he claimed he turned to sonnet writing because of Milton alone. Wordsworth’s first published poem appeared in the *European Magazine* XL (March 1787) under the pseudonym “Axiologus.”
40. See, for example, *Poems, Moral, Elegant and Pathetic: And Original Sonnets by Helen Maria Williams* (London, 1796), 213–20. I was able to examine at the British Library both an early copy of this manuscript and Anna Maria
Smallpiece’s volume, Original Sonnets, and Other Small Poems (London: J. Johnson, 1805).


42. Smallpiece, Original Sonnets, and Other Small Poems, 40.

43. Williams, Poems, Moral, Elegant and Pathetic, 216.

44. Smallpiece, Original Sonnets, and Other Small Poems, 1–3, 6, 8–9, 33, 36.

45. Ibid., 4, 8, 37–38, 45.

46. For an account of the only three existing reviews of Smallpiece’s poems, see Stephen C. Behrendt, “In Search of Anna Maria Smallpiece,” Women’s Writing 7:1 (2000): 55–73. Behrendt also discusses Smallpiece’s sonnets in “Telling Secrets: The Sonnets of Anna Maria Smallpiece and Mary F. Johnson,” European Romantic Review (Special Issue: The Romantic-Period Sonnet) 13 (2002): 393–410. He is not as convinced as I am about the strong homoerotic impulses that drive Smallpiece’s work.

47. Smallpiece uses variations on the word “friend” such as “friend sincere” (2), “false friend” (10), “Friend belov’d” (20), “friendship faithful” (27), “distant friend” (32), and “faithless friends” (33) at least forty-two times in her collection of fifty-one sonnets.

48. It is important to note, too, that Smallpiece removes the male gender of some naturalized personifications such as the “fainting wretch” (24) reminiscent of Bowles, the “poor sailor” (24), and the “night trav’ler” (44). This further reinforces her implicit affiliation with them.

49. In “Wordsworth and Gray’s Sonnet on the Death of West,” Peter J. Manning points out that “the governing contrast between abounding nature and the withered speaker in the sonnet derives from the conventions of Italian Renaissance love poetry in which the lover mourns the loss of his beloved” (SEL: Studies in English Literature 22:3 [Summer 1982]: 515). Manning also calls our attention to other moments in Gray’s sonnet that imply his love for West was sexual in nature. For example, Gray uses the word “fruitless” (which can mean “having no offspring”) instead of “fruitlessly.” Furthermore, the phrase “imperfect joys” in line 8 “echoes a Restoration sub-genre of erotic poetry concerned with sexual impotence and frustration” (515).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. After 1850, and after her marriage to Robert Browning, Barrett turned away from the sonnet form, working instead on alternate forms, such as the epic in her novel-in-verse, Aurora Leigh (1857). In Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woman
and Artist (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), Helen Cooper relates the “formal discipline” of the sonnet to “the speaker’s imprisonment”: “The decision to leave the ‘close room’ of the Sonnets was paralleled by Barrett’s decision to leave her room in Wimpole Street” (109).

2. Although Barrett derived creative energy from her attraction to the constraints of the sonnet form, she also shielded her genius through these very constraints. For this reason, Barrett’s brilliance is more apparent to the casual reader in her letters than it is in her poems. In his introduction to The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Her Sister Arabella, Scott Lewis calls attention to the discrepancy between Barrett’s epistolary and poetic accounts of the same events, concluding that the former is “in many ways more evocative” than the latter (xxxi).

3. See Esther Schor, Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria. Schor argues that Wordsworth himself “would use [Gray’s] Sonnet’s central figure of thought, the elegiac topos of the failed response, as the motivating trope of the Intimations Ode” (57). In her critique of Wordsworth, Barrett may indirectly echo the elegiac sonnets that his work at once dismisses and embeds.

4. It would have been difficult for Barrett not to think of Wordsworth’s “Elegiac Stanzas: Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle” (1807) when her own brother drowned in 1840. As I will discuss later, it was at this point in her career that her relationship with Wordsworth became especially intense.


7. See Mary Russell Mitford, Recollections of a Literary Life (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852). As Mitford made public, “this tragedy [of her brother’s drowning] nearly killed Elizabeth Barrett”; she had insisted against her father’s will that Edward stay by her bedside in Torquay, therefore feeling
herself to be the cause of his nearby death (170–71).


10. As I established in the introduction, Oppenheimer disputes the sonnet’s supposed musical status, illustrating how the sonnet moves not toward but away from an already existing song form. While Barrett believed poetry differed from grief in its “singing” nature, she persistently called this assumption into question through her use of the sonnet form.

11. Marjorie Stone argues that “Barrett Browning clearly subscribed to many Romantic ideologies” (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 11). These include “the continuing attraction of Romantic Prometheanism, the Romantic cult of transcendent artistic genius, Romantic tropes of the sublime and the revisionary struggle with Milton and Dante” (10–11). However, Stone suggests that Barrett was also led to question many Romantic principles “given the critical distance fostered by her gender” (11). I agree with this line of argument and will use this chapter to further investigate Barrett’s simultaneous attraction to and revision of Wordsworth’s poetics.


13. At the beginning of her article “Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Cross-Dwelling and the Reworking of Female Poetic Authority,” Linda M. Shires reminds us of another famous writer’s negative reaction to aspects of Barrett’s poetry. As editor of the Cornhill magazine, William Makepeace Thackeray rejected one of Barrett’s poems because he believed it to be “highly inappropriate for his audience”; Barrett’s exchange with Thackeray in 1861 “forcefully exposes,” as Shires makes evident, “not just literary values in crisis, but also authorship in crisis. In particular, the exchange exposes an enforced split between roles of the analytical poet and the domestic lady, a separation of roles which Barrett Browning’s career both publicly exposed and dramatically reworked, but could not entirely evade.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30:2 (2002): 327–28.

14. John Woolford makes the same observation about the double meaning of the word “ebb” in “Elizabeth Barrett and the Wordsworthian Sublime,” *Essays in
15. The attention that Barrett draws to her own identity here serves to distinguish her writing from Charlotte Smith’s; as we have seen, Smith speaks from the point of view of many ventriloquized voices.

16. In her sonnet to Haydon, Barrett echoes Wordsworth’s own sonnets to the same painter—in particular, one published in 1816 that identifies the painter’s skill with the poet’s own, beginning “High is our calling, Friend!” and another on Haydon’s picture of Napoleon: “the one Man that laboured to enslave the World” much like the “unguilty Power” of the sun.


21. In order to help him appreciate Wordsworth’s poetry, Barrett writes in 1842 to her former Greek tutor, Hugh Stuart Boyd, “Read first, to put you into good humour, the sonnet written on Westminster bridge” (BC 6:126).

22. Wordsworth’s sonnet abounds in death references: the “deep” calmness, the disinterest of nature (“at his own sweet will”), the “very houses” that “seem asleep,” the stillness of “all that mighty heart,” the exclamation to God, as if in despair.

23. Clearly, Wordsworth’s City is “bare” in its link to death, but the extricability of silence from bareness here is also indicative of the oscillating motion his poetry enacts.


25. Barrett’s 1838 sonnets find their counterparts in her 1844 collection. Like her “Bereavement” / “Consolation” pendant of 1838, “Grief” (1844) addresses the potentially incapacitating effect of mourning; in both “To Mary Russell Mitford in her garden” (1838) and “On a portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon” (1844), the speaker feigns inferiority with respect to a rival artist.
who stands in closer proximity to nature than she does. The latter group of poems, however, shifts emphasis from the overcoming of limitations (those of grief, silence, conventional femininity, etc.) to the paralysis of “hopeless grief.” If nature and its poetic embodiment are feminized and dismissed in Barrett’s 1838 Mitford sonnet, this rejection develops in Barrett’s 1844 Haydon sonnet into a critique of the Wordsworthian sublime.

26. Phelan also takes issue with recent critics who, in his words, “have described the Sonnets from the Portuguese as a narrative of self-emancipation” (56). Phelan argues that, instead, the Sonnets stage “the myth of rescue developed and sustained by Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning” (58). For reasons that will become clear in the rest of this chapter, I disagree with Phelan’s line of argument as well as with easy narratives of transcendence and recuperation in the Sonnets.


30. While the focus of Felman’s book The Scandal of the Speaking Body is on speech rather than writing, many of her claims are relevant to Barrett’s sonnets, which also address problems of speech as a bodily act. In her afterword to the new edition of Felman’s book (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), Judith Butler writes, “The ‘I’ is thus embarrassed by its proclamation because it seeks to represent itself, but finds that it is more than can be represented. To the extent that this ‘more’ is signified by the body, it follows that the body interferes with every promise. The body is at once the organic condition of promise making and the sure guarantor of its failure” (119).

31. In Giving an Account of Oneself (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), Butler relates her earlier theories of how both sex and gender are socially constructed to the difficulty with which she can give an account of herself: “There is a bodily referent here, a condition of me that I can point to, but that I cannot narrate precisely, even though there are no doubt stories about where my body went and what it did and did not do. The stories do not capture the body to which they refer. Even the history of this body is not fully narratable. To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one’s life. There is a history to my body of which I can have no recollection” (38).

sublime as mediated by Keats’s own rewriting of Wordsworthian tropes.


35. Ibid., 131. This tension between attraction and attractiveness has implications for speech and silence. In her article “The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnets from the Portuguese,” Mermin pinpoints this strain: “Traditionally in English love poetry the man loves and speaks, the woman is beloved and silent. In Sonnets from the Portuguese, however, the speaker casts herself not only as the poet who loves, speaks, and is traditionally male, but also as the silent, traditionally female beloved.” ELH 48:2 (1981): 352.


37. Even though the “she” in “A slumber did my spirit seal” reads as distinct from the speaker of the poem, de Man points out that “Wordsworth is one of the few poets who can write proleptically about their own death and speak, as it were, from beyond their own graves” (225). This is the same dynamic that we saw earlier in this chapter—Wordsworth’s treatment of self-consciousness in his sonnets. De Man explains that for this reason the “she” in the poem “is in fact large enough to encompass Wordsworth as well” (225).


39. In his chapter on melancholy in Barrett’s poetry, David G. Riede comments that “Leighton, Mermin, and Cooper have all argued that the utterance, I love thee, from a woman speaker transforms the courtly love tradition by switching the amatory gender roles of lover and beloved, and for the first time makes a woman the subject rather than merely the object of loving” (128). And Riede adds to this discussion “that the lovers’ exchanges all follow from the exchange of divine contemplation for earthly love. This is a choice to leave melancholy behind, and it is reiterated many times in the sonnets” (128). While Barrett appears to “leave melancholy behind” in her sonnets, I am arguing that she cleverly complicates this ostensibly celebratory progression with both the double use and the double meaning of the word “thee”—a maneuver that other critics have not observed.


41. As we saw in Barrett’s use of the word “ebb” in her sonnet on Wordsworth,
we might hear in the word "bare" another hint of self-referentiality. This anticipates what we will see in the following chapter, where I expose Christina Rossetti’s equation of speechlessness with selfhood.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Rossetti frames "Monna Innominata" with the explanation that had Barrett "only been unhappy instead of happy," she might have written such a sequence in place of her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (2;3, 86); see *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition*, 3 vols., edited by R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, c. 1979–). From now on I will cite all of Rossetti’s poetry from these volumes, and I will abbreviate citations accordingly. Marjorie Stone chooses not to discuss Barrett and Rossetti as mother/daughter figures but as sisters: “First, Rossetti’s serious aspirations as a writer began in her adolescence during the 1840s, at a time when Barrett Browning’s 1844 *Poems* had recently established their author as England’s leading woman poet. Since Barrett Browning did not die until 1861, her career overlaps substantially with the first intense decade of Rossetti’s writing career.” See Stone’s essay “Sisters in Art: Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning,” *Victorian Poetry* 32:3–4 (Autumn–Winter 1994): 341. In *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), Angela Leighton points out that while Rossetti greatly admired Barrett’s work, she “never met her great luminary, and William recalls that Barrett Browning herself never expressed any knowledge of Rossetti’s work” (129).

2. Constance W. Hassett introduces her book, *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), with the following observation: “One might almost say that silence itself is Rossetti’s medium” (1). In her book, Hassett uses the term “patience” to mean “something like the quality that readers have also called ‘reticence’ or ‘reserve’” (1).


4. I am using Butler’s definition of “feminist”/“feminism”: “Feminism is about the social transformation of gender relations. Probably we could all agree on that, even if ‘gender’ is not the preferred word for some” (*Undoing Gender* 204).

5. By drawing on Butler to talk about Rossetti, I do not mean to conflate twenty-first-century and Victorian views. However, I find Butler’s terminology
useful here. In Victorian times as well as in the present tense, feminism has depended upon both an openness to the complexity of gender roles and a willingness to reconsider habitual presumptions about “what is possible in gendered life” (Gender Trouble viii).


7. I am grateful to Anne Jamison who helped me to articulate the terms “stated” and “semantic” in my discussion of Rossetti’s work.

8. Cynthia Scheinberg indicates a blindness in critics when it comes to assessing the religious forces that drive Victorian women’s writing. She argues that while it may be tempting to read these forces as resulting in women’s writing that is “didactic,” “submissive,” and “unenlightened,” we need to be careful not to underestimate the technicalities of Tractarian poetics. See Women’s Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 9. Joseph Phelan follows Scheinberg’s lead, viewing the sonnet as “a privileged point of intersection between feminine and Tractarian poetics” (93). In Rossetti’s case, Phelan argues, “the well-established tradition of seeing the sonnet as a privileged vehicle for autobiographical utterance meets the Tractarian doctrine of reserve to produce poetry which is both deeply personal and carefully depersonalized” (94). Consequently, in Phelan’s words, “Rossetti’s is a quiet poetry which forces us to listen very carefully for minute changes in tone and texture” (98). Through my study of the interplay between “stated” and “semantic” silences in Rossetti’s sonnets, I aim to make these “minute changes” audible in Rossetti’s highly nuanced writing.

9. It is perhaps significant that Elizabeth Barrett’s own turn to the sonnet occurred just four years earlier—in her 1844 collection—poetry from which the Rossettis surely drew inspiration.


12. Isobel Armstrong, Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics (New York: Routledge, 1993), 339. In her book, Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics (New York: Palgrave, 2004), Mary Arseneau aims to supplement Armstrong’s discussion by showing how “Rossetti’s empowered and liberated statements, both poetic and political” emerge not in resistance to her religious faith but rather “in terms made available to her
by her religious faith” (3). Arseneau grounds Rossetti’s withholding style in Tractarian poetic principles of reserve; according to these principles, “Intense emotion must be expressed indirectly; and this indirection, a veiling and guarding of meaning, is reserve” (Arseneau 69). In certain ways, Arseneau’s approach intersects with Lynda Palazzo’s; both Arseneau and Palazzo argue that Rossetti’s theology functions as “female-centred, domestic, and infused with a reverence for the spirituality of daily life.” (Arseneau 2). Also see Lynda Palazzo, *Christina Rossetti’s Feminist Theology* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).


15. All quotes from “Winter: My Secret” appear on the same page of Rossetti’s *Complete Poems: 1:1, 47.*

16. Hassett also observes the echo to *Goblin Market* in this passage. See Hassett 61. She does not, however, relate the possibility of sexual aggressiveness to Rossetti’s addressee in “Winter: My Secret.”

17. As Foucault demonstrates in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, the repressive hypothesis that we associate with the silence and secrecy imposed on sexual practices during the Victorian regime resulted not in silence but in “a veritable discursive explosion” (17). It is in a similar way that I see Rossetti’s repression of selfhood in her poems—as creating rather than eliminating an explosion of self references.


19. Rossetti’s use of “And I am,” which she will repeat in the last line of her third sonnet (“I am, I am”) recalls the ending of both Barrett’s sonnet “Consolation” and Rilke’s Sonnet II, 29 in *Sonnets to Orpheus*. These poets’ reiteration of “I am” might intentionally recall not only the Bible but also Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s definition of the primary imagination in his *Biographia Literaria*: the “repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (167).

20. This line must be read in conjunction with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s definition of the sonnet as “a moment’s monument.” His words might be read, “m-o-me-nt’s mon (“my” in French)-u-me-nt.” To break this phrase down further, “u” sounds the same as “you,” and “ment” is a homophone for “meant.” The last word, then, becomes “my you meant” or the speaker’s assumed possession of another’s meaning. With their vagueness and ambiguity, Christina Rossetti’s words read like an obvious revision of monumentality, and the references to selfhood that she embeds in her line overtake her brother’s
self-references in his own.


26. I will use the term “Rossetti” to name a possible speaker for the sonnets I discuss. I do not mean Rossetti’s literal person here but simply her poetic counterpart—in particular, a woman poet who lived at the same time that she did.


28. Marjorie Stone argues that “[t]he richness of the biblical, classical, and literary allusions in ‘Monna Innominata’ and the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* makes it all the more surprising that they were approached so uniformly as merely personal utterances, hidden behind the ‘blinds’ of their titles and, in Rossetti’s case, of her preface. The predominance of such approaches manifests the inveterate nature of the gendered paradigms that both poets sought to deconstruct.” See Stone’s essay, “‘Monna Innominata’ and *Sonnets from the Portuguese*: Sonnet Traditions and Spiritual Trajectories” in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, edited by Mary Arsenneau et al. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), 67.

29. Finn explains that the “woman to whom *Monna Innominata* gives poetic voice (and for whom it imagines ‘poetic attitude’) precedes Beatrice and Laura, and therefore logically precedes Dante and Petrarch. The sonnet of sonnets reveals itself as a construct composed of parts that could not come together except in the fictional use of language” (147).

30. Other critics have suggested the double status of the speaker/addressee in “*Monna Innominata*.” Chapman maintains that “within a hyperconsciousness of restrictive poetic space, and the repeated emphatic staging of closure at the end of each sonnet, the sequence voices the position of loss, absence and longing both specifically as a sequence addressed to Rossetti’s close friend Charles Cayley and generically as the unnamed lady of sonnet tradition” (“Sonnet and Sonnet Sequence” 108). And Sharon Bickle argues that there are two speakers of the sequence—the “translator” and the “poet”: “The role of the translator is superimposed on the silenced woman, and the
translator’s enterprise is the restoration of language to the silenced.” See “A Woman of Women for ‘A Sonnet of Sonnets’: Exploring Female Subjectivity in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Monna Innominata,’” in Tradition and the Poetics of Self in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Poetry, edited by Barbara Garlick (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2002), 128–29. The argument I am making in this chapter is more complex than a recognition of two possible speakers or two possible addressees. I am proposing that both the speaker and the addressee participate in an endless flux of shifting roles.

31. Like much of Rossetti’s work, these sonnets have a strong homoerotic subtext. It is therefore important to take into account that the female addressee might not be a forgotten woman from history at all, but a same-tense female beloved.


33. See Stone, The Culture of Christina Rossetti, 68. Stone ultimately argues that “despite their dramatically different conclusions, and despite the dramatically different lives of their authors, one might say that the ‘roots’ of ‘Monna Innominata’ and of the Sonnets from the Portuguese are often intertwined” (68).

34. See Flowers’s essay, “‘Had Such a Lady Spoken for Herself’: Christina Rossetti’s ‘Monna Innominata’” in Rossetti to Sexton: Six Women Poets at Texas, edited by Dave Oliphant and Robin Bradford (Austin, TX: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 1992), 29.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Very little is known about Isabella Southern, which is unfortunate; I was able to examine her work at the British Library. She dedicates her book Sonnets and Other Poems (London: Walter Scott, 1891) “To My Father Thomas Pallister Barkas.” More is known about her father who lived from 1819 to 1891, which means that he died the year Southern’s book was published. He was also known as the pioneer of Phonography in the North of England—many reporters took from him their first lessons in shorthand. Furthermore, he was committed to the Investigation of Spiritualism, which used mediums to carry out test séances.


7. Eventually becoming lesbian lovers and lifetime partners, Katherine Bradley was born in 1846 and Edith Cooper was born in 1862; they died almost at the same time of cancer—Bradley in 1914 and Cooper in 1913. Bradley and Cooper wrote eight books of poetry under the name of Michael Field. Two more books of their poems were published under the same name after their death.


9. In *Recovering Christina Rossetti*, Mary Arseneau points out that Rossetti fails in Michael Field’s sonnet to live up to an identification between Rossetti and Beatrice that has been proposed by other critics (212).


16. Dow often takes issue with Barrett’s easy reliance on religious themes and imagery in her poems. However, “Past and Future” is one poem that Dow feels works in a religious sense: “One of the few successful, genuinely religious poems is ‘Past and Future’; the religious feeling is profound and essential. One does not wish to suggest that E.B.B.’s religious feelings were not strong and genuine, only that her use of them is sometimes mechanical and extrinsic to the poem” (*Variorum Edition* ix).

17. In “‘Medicated Music’: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnets from the Portuguese,” Sharon Smulders reads the ending of “Future and Past” differently than I do: “But while she charges the beloved to ‘write me new my future’s epigraph,’ Barrett Browning in fact undertakes the task of revision herself. Writing anew the 1844 sonnets, she refigures the motif of imprisoning exclusion as one of saving inclusion” (208). According to my reading, the one
sense in which Barrett interferes with the revision process that she asks her beloved to undertake for her involves an underlying grief that will not disappear as a result of her love.

18. Barrett’s choice to address her beloved as an “angel” involves some gender ambiguity. As Helen Cooper clarifies in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woman and Artist, “The ‘angel,’ culturally associated in the nineteenth century with woman, is here used in an ambiguous way—as the earlier Seraphim had been. Barrett draws on a Biblical and Miltonic tradition that considered the angel as male, and yet the asexual quality of the angel associates the ‘new angel mine’ as her muse with the young boy at the end of ‘A Vision of Poets’ and the little boy whose singing would be the inspiration for Casa Guidi Windows” (108).

19. In “‘Some World’s-Wonder in Chapel or Crypt’: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Disability,” Christine Kenyon Jones draws attention to how Barrett makes no secret in her 1844 poems of the way that these poems were written by (and often use as their subject) “an author afflicted by sickness.” Nineteenth-Century Studies 16 (2002): 24. Jones hypothesizes that as a woman poet Barrett may have stressed her own sickness so as to make herself less intimidating in the eyes of her critics: “The critical response to a woman poet who had dared to align herself with Milton, Dante, and other great poets and use their subject matter might easily in this period have been so censorious as to place her beyond the pale as far as publishers, critics, and readers were concerned. As it was, however, Barrett’s openly acknowledged physical and emotional frailty made her seem much less threatening” (25).

20. In his essay, “Barrett Browning’s Poetic Vocation: Crying, Singing, Breathing,” Steve Dillon does a nice job of showing how attentive Barrett was in her poetry to moments when the human voice breaks into a cry. The cry in Dillon’s essay does not necessarily result in tears; rather Dillon associates it with the “ecstatic shriek, painful shout, or despairing moan to God.” Victorian Poetry 39:4 (2001): 510. Dillon shows how throughout Barrett’s career, she “continues to explore the problematic articulation of poetic voice—at the boundary of noise and language, of volition and helplessness, of human and divine—through the manifold use of the cry” (528). However, Dillon’s failure to account for any of the many instances in Barrett’s sonnets (particularly in her grieving sonnets of 1844 and in her Sonnets from the Portuguese) where she equates “hopeless grief” with the absence both of tears and of speech renders his overall conclusions less convincing.

21. Southern’s use of “less” as an ending to this word recalls both Wordsworth and Barrett. Wordsworth begins his description of the empty city in “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge” with a series of negations that include the word “smokeless”; like Wordsworth, Barrett fills her own octave in “Grief”
with negatives: “hopeless,” “passionless,” “desertness,” “silent-bare.” Southern changes this negation into a vacancy in her thirsty traveler’s dreams.

22. Together with other late nineteenth-century female sonneteers, Isabella Southern foreshadows present-day feminist political theories of silence. As Wendy Brown explains in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), while refusing to speak can serve as “a method of refusing colonization, of refusing complicity in injurious interpellation or in subjection through regulation,” it would nevertheless “be a mistake to value this resistance too highly, for it is, like most rights claims, a defense in the context of domination, a strategy for negotiating domination, rather than a sign of emancipation from it” (97).

23. Siddal was Rossetti’s model in many of his famous paintings (she also modeled for other members of Rossetti’s Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood). In 1862, Rossetti buried her with the only complete manuscript of his poems. He decided to recover the manuscript seven years later. The “Willowwood” sonnets appear in *The House of Life*, numbered 49–52; Rossetti introduces them into the collection toward the end of the “Youth and Change” section, which is the first part of the sequence. After Rossetti recovered the manuscript that he had buried with his wife, he published fifty of these sonnets in *Poems* (1870). His final version appeared in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881). Rossetti’s collected works then appeared in 1886 in two volumes (four years after his death at the age of fifty-three in 1882).

24. While Southern does not appear in Bristow’s volume, I agree with his overarching conclusion about the poetry of the 1890s: “this much-misrecognized literary decade was not entirely a doom-laden affair that hurtled the Victorian age toward its terminal point. Instead, it was a time whose apparent freakishness and faddishness, naughtiness and neurosis, pretensions and perversions are better understood as signs of its authors’ well-considered interest in devising fresh poetic models that could engage with the modern before further shifts in poetics became identifiably modernist.” See *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s*, edited by Joseph Bristow (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 39.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION


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