I. Introduction

This paper discusses the significance of the materiality of text in \textit{Beachy Head} (1807), where Charlotte Turner Smith uses the margins of the printed page to challenge cultural formations of authoriality as they developed historically in relation to \textit{Lyrical Ballads} first published in 1798 jointly by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Recent work in the burgeoning field of gender and authorship studies has turned to the analysis of Romantic women poets’ contribution to the discourse of subjectivity, and to the complex issues of authority, the public image of (female) authors, “Romantic theatricality,” entrepreneurialism, and gendered resistance to dominant male Romantic forms of poetry.\footnote{See Mellor; Wilson and Haefner; Feldman and Kelley; McGann; Behrendt; Trilling; Pascoe, \textit{Romantic Theatricality}; and Hoagwood and Ledbetter.} This paper builds on this literature to explore how, and whether, the material book pertains to the ways in which Charlotte Smith interrogates putative, “feminine” and “masculine” models of writing and self-fashioning in her contemplative blank-verse long poem, \textit{Beachy Head}, which was published posthumously in 1807 but remained largely unread until the modern republication of her poetry in 1993.\footnote{Stuart Curran’s \textit{The Poems of Charlotte Smith} (1993). References to Smith’s poetry are to this edition. My references to the text proper in particular are included in the text by line numbers, while an “n” is attached to a page reference number to refer to an authorial note on that page. Smith’s notes were originally attached to the end of the volume but reprinted in this edition as footnotes.} Participating within a broader revisionary current in Romantic women writers studies, this
paper challenges received notions of Romanticism by attending to the signal role that Smith’s material practices play in the way she offers an alternative discourse of authorial personae and/in the book, a contribution that remains little acknowledged in most accounts of *Beachy Head*. Thus the paper focuses on how Smith considerably enlarges the notion of what constitutes the “lyrical” by reimagining the authorial persona as a socially- and textually-embodied self as her use of print apparatuses and textual spaces in the poem radically re-defines and ultimately rewrites the print culture which effectually confines feminine writing.

II. The Public Figure of Smith and the Autobiographical Impulse

With the revival of scholarly interest in Charlotte Smith and other Romantic women writers in the early 1990s, modern readers began to explore how gender and poetic identity constitute a productive sphere of conflict within the poetics of loss and self-fashioning that Smith forged and Wordsworth, one of her greatest admirers, soon took up in *The Prelude* (1805, 1850). For example, Sarah M. Zimmerman argues that Smith and Wordsworth share a Romantic impulse to fuse biography and poetic ambition, individually fashioning a lyric persona that is an autobiographical fiction. In fact, this modern explication of Smith’s poetics of self-defense and self-promotion chimes with Smith’s contemporary readers, who used to recognize the poet’s autobiographical impulse as the most salient feature of her works; with the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems* in 1784, followed by the multiplying editions of the collection from the same year onwards, and the appearance of *The Emigrants* in 1793, Smith has become a popular cultural figure whose

---

3 The renewal of critical interest in Smith has been enriched by Curran’s “The ‘I’ Altered” and his modern edition of Smith’s poetry; Fletcher’s *Critical Biography*; and Stanton’s *Collected Letters*. For discussions about the historical reception of Smith and other women Romantics, see Linkin; Linkin and Behrendt; and Newlyn.

4 See *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* 51-72. See also Hunt and Hoagwood, who track the record of Wordsworth’s verbal, metrical and thematic echoes of Smith.

5 We haven’t seen yet any book-length study of the publishing history of Smith’s poetry. For shorter accounts of the versions of Smith’s poetic volumes and their current textual status, see Labbe’s headnotes in her recent edition of Smith’s