

Sonnet: On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because It Was Frequented by a Lunatic

By Charlotte Smith

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
Its distance from the waves that chide below;
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
With hoarse, half-uttered lamentation, lies
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
I see him more with envy than with fear;
He has no nice felicities that shrink
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe.

Source: The Longman Anthology of Poetry (Pearson, 2006)



Charlotte Smith wrote Elegiac Sonnets in 1783 while she was in debtor's prison with her husband and children. William Wordsworth identified her as an important influence on the Romantic movement. She published several longer works that celebrated the individual while deploring social injustice and the British class system.