

Recasting Dorothy Wordsworth: A Woman Writer's Undiscovered Literary Voice

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Abstract

Women writers are often neglected in the literary canon. More often than not, critically acclaimed Romantic writers were male. The most famous Romantic poet, known for his poetic genius is William Wordsworth. Not much scholarly attention has been given to his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth, who wrote extensively but not publicly. This paper sheds light on Dorothy Wordsworth's journals as worthy of further literary recognition. Many literary critics and scholars have underestimated the value of her writing as not poetic enough, but in her rigorous documentation of everyday life, readers are able to gain insight into the harsh effects of patriarchy on women writers. Unlike her brother, Dorothy's sense of self was not egotistical and instead hesitant and unsure. This paper uncovers Dorothy's divided sense of self as evident in her writings and claims that her literary genius has gone unnoticed and could be considered as experimental and life writing.

Keywords: Romantics, Dorothy Wordsworth, poetry, life writing, journals

Dorothy Wordsworth has been endlessly linked to the canonical Romantic poet, William Wordsworth. As William's sister, Dorothy was frequently studied in light of her brother's literary achievements. Only recently have scholars and critics studied Dorothy as separate from Wordsworth, as a documenter of events, and arguably, an idiosyncratic female poet in the Romantic era who ought to receive further literary consideration. The debate remains centered around the placement of Dorothy within the Romantic era, alongside other male and female writers. Dorothy possesses a form of literary genius that has been neglected by society and scholars, due to her being a woman. Wordsworth employs sensibility and "an overflow of emotions" in his production of poetry, while Dorothy is left to make use of the remains, mainly writing prose, journal entries that seem to be structured in a mechanical voice. Dorothy's writing is experimental in nature and stylistically is the antithesis of Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime' and his definition of writing. By closely examining selected passages from Dorothy's published work, this paper attempts to highlight Dorothy's suppressed individuality as a female writer living in a society which stunted her intellectual growth as a literary figure.

Dorothy's writings, primarily *The Alfoxden Journal* and *The Grasmere Journal*, reveal a divided self: a domesticated female self living in eighteenth century England and, a poetic self unable to move beyond the restraints of a patriarchal society. Dorothy may have been more creative, more dedicated to realizing her true potential as a female Romantic writer, if only patriarchal ideological indoctrination had not existed. Wordsworth has been accused numerous times of using Dorothy's journals and descriptions of minute things to add color to his poems. In his provoking essay, "Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, and the Woman Writer's Fate" Stephen Behrendt speaks of women writers' anxiety and refers to Wordsworth as taking advantage of Dorothy's abilities as a writer:

Shelley...chose to include that information and to publicly detail her physical and psychological anxiety and her attempt to compete with the literary men who surrounded her is instructive, for her experience as a woman of words ties her to contemporaries like Anna Letitia Barbauld....as well as Dorothy Wordsworth, whose words were repeatedly appropriated by her brother in poems that for two centuries have been regarded as his. (80)

If we are to suppose that Dorothy's literary genius was in fact worth Wordsworth's appropriation of it for his own benefit, then the question of Dorothy's abilities as a writer is brought to the surface.

Critics have argued about whether Dorothy ever recognized her abilities as a poetess in the Romantic era and if we ought to identify her as a Romantic poet, placing her alongside other writers. Susan Levin's influential book, *Dorothy Wordsworth & Romanticism*, makes great efforts to defend Dorothy as a prominent writer of the

Eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Levin aspires to create an innovative understanding of Dorothy by refuting multiple criticisms against Dorothy. When it comes down to whether Dorothy's writing may ultimately be characterized as imaginative or praiseworthy, Levin describes Dorothy's writing as mainly "characterized by refusal: refusal to generalize, refusal to move out of a limited range of vision, refusal to speculate, refusal to reproduce standard literary forms" (4). For Levin, Dorothy's incapability to produce works of art that adhere to the norm or the definitions of poetry is not in actuality a setback, but rather a conscious choice, not to conform to the norm. Levin manages to create a sketch of a rebellious Dorothy, a Dorothy whose individuality and prominence as a poetess has long been disregarded, not because of the authenticity of Dorothy's poetic genius, but mostly due to society not recognizing her as a leading Romantic female poet, for according to Levin, "if she does not fit the pattern, it may not be because she is somehow underdeveloped but rather because she possesses a consciousness that is simply not aggressive in the usual manner of Western, masculine humanity, a consciousness that does not enter into that 'subjugation' her brother deplors" (16). This suggestion leads us to yet another argument which asserts that there is always a problem with placing the female poet alongside the male poet, or comparing the female poet's literary achievements to that of the male poet's, in an era where evidently the male dominated the female in most, if not all, aspects of life. *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices* includes Isobel Armstrong's thought-provoking essay, "The Gush of the Feminine," in which she attempts to conclude the argument by stating, "It is often hard to place women poets in a network of histories and relationships. Their interests do not follow the same intertextual relations as those of the male poets, nor does the trajectory of their intellectual debates parallel that of male writers" (16). As such Dorothy's positioning remains debatable as a Romantic poetess.

Although it is occasionally difficult to place women poets in the same category of male poets, as well as evaluate their achievements in relation to that of male poets, it does not mean that it should not be attempted. This is not to deny that women poets, in this case Dorothy Wordsworth, possess individuality and achievements of their own. However we may address this issue, the answer remains debatable. Should poetry written by men be the scale of which we may measure all female poets by? Or are we to study Dorothy's poetry in isolation from her brother's poetry and other male poets' of the century? Dorothy and William are inextricably linked, in the sense that he played the governing role in her life. His supremacy and patriarchal effects were seen throughout her life, all the way to her ailment and death. Just as several critics have relentlessly studied Wordsworth's life and placed Dorothy as his shadow, as merely a supporting character, then it is time for the roles to be reversed, and to reconsider Dorothy's life by placing Wordsworth as the Other, or the supporting character.

Dorothy was constantly functioning as her brother's support system, which meant there was no room for her own creativity to flourish. Being completely engulfed

by her brother's presence and demands, how could she have ever believed in herself as a poetess? In *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne K. Mellor quotes one of Dorothy's statements: "I should detest the idea of setting myself up as an Author,' she told her friend Catherine Clarkson" (162). There is an apparent contradiction, as mentioned earlier, which indicates that Dorothy suffered from a divided self, a troubled sense of identity torn between being a domestic woman and the challenges of being a female poet. How could she have truthfully "detested" the idea of being a poet, if all of her journal-keeping and numerous poems supposedly stem from a deep desire to write down what she witnessed and felt?

Although Dorothy's journals are seemingly mechanical and extremely fragmented, Mellor has a different view, stating that, "Dorothy's Grasmere Journals are extraordinarily rich and compelling autobiographical self-writing...Dorothy linguistically recreates the texture of a particular woman's life, a life lived in great part outdoors, in a natural environment she found constantly stimulating and delightful" (163). Mellor's matter-of-factness is somewhat dangerous in the sense that Dorothy did not "constantly" feel stimulated by the natural environment around her. At many times, she felt a certain numbness towards everything around her, and that is partly subscribed to the suppression of her poetic identity and rebellious self. This is evident in the way many of her journal entries are in fact straightforward and again, mechanical, almost without a personal feeling to them, lacking a strong sense of an "I". *The Alfoxden Journal* specifically reveals a rather unaffected Dorothy, merely stating events without including sentiment or sensibility. She describes her days robotically, "January 28th Walked only to the mill" and "January 30th William called me into the garden to observe a singular appearance about the moon. A perfect rainbow...an uninteresting evening" (5). Although Dorothy's ability to note down imagery is in fact extraordinary, she lacks a sense of self as well as an understanding of herself as a female writer with great potential. For example, "January 31st All the Heavens seemed in one perpetual motion when the rain ceased; the moon appearing, now half-veiled, and now retired behind heavy clouds, the stars still moving" (5). Her description of the Heavens and the aftermath of the rain is immensely poetic. She does have an extremely observant eye, but she lacks the ability to include her own voice or her sense of "I" and does not tell her journal how this imagery evokes sentiment within her, if any at all. This returns to the aforementioned argument which suggests that Wordsworth robbed her of the sensibility which arguably belongs to the feminine self. Mellor audaciously emphasizes the means by which Wordsworth and other Romantic poets stole from the female a large part of her feminine essence, and her paragraph is worth quoting in full:

When he claimed that poetry is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' from a man who has 'thought long and deeply,' Wordsworth and the Romantic poets who followed him effectively stole from women their primary cultural authority as the experts in delicate,

tender feelings, and, by extension, moral purity and goodness. (23)

The key words in Mellor's argument are "primary cultural authority." It is worth noting that this specific authority is culturally designed and constructed, an authority attributed to women by society. The argument is somewhat dangerous as it confines women to a certain category which is fundamentally based on a social construction that has unfortunately become deeply rooted throughout the centuries. Instead of dismantling the binaries of male/female, sense/sensibility, reason/passion, and a number of others, Mellor involuntarily advocates their importance in maintaining order and conventionality. Mellor's certainty and hostile approach towards claiming what ought to be Dorothy's inherited right stems from a defense mechanism or a desire to make use of, or rightfully claim, that which women have been endorsed with: sensibility and emotionality.

Romantic writers aimed to merge with nature. This immense yearning for becoming whole with nature does not cancel out the male poet's false belief in his masculine superpowers, which may overtake Nature's divine supremacy. Feminist critics argue that the male Romantic poet attempted and succeeded in feminizing nature in order to conquer it and rule the world as a certain God, for "by usurping the mother's womb, life-giving power; and feminine sensibilities, the male poet could claim to be God, the sole ruler of the world" (24). Furthermore, if the male poet is a male God, there would be no place for a female God, therefore no place for a female poet; no place for Dorothy. Mitzi Meyers informs us of the ideologies at work in the Romantic era in her resourceful essay, "De-Romanticizing the Subject" that:

In the Romantic era, so the critics tell us, they're all little girls lost, with no access to power and pleasure and no desire of their own... A lack, an absence, at best a male poet's muse or colonized project, the feminine Other panders to masculine desire... The only good Romantic heroine is, like Wordsworth's Lucy a dead one. (Feldman, Kelley 88-9)

In a sense, Dorothy's intellectual and emotional growth as a poet is silenced and deadened, similarly to most, if not all, female characters in Wordsworth's poetry. It comes as no surprise then when we read Dorothy's diaries and notice a disintegration of the mind as well as of the self. As an obvious result, critics are also divided in terms of classifying Dorothy's writing, whether she links herself more to the "semiotic order" or the "symbolic." Levin pursues this argument even further by relating Dorothy's work to what feminist critics such as Helene Cixous have called upon, mentioning that "the language of writing the feminine, which Cixous and Irigaray describe as fluid, open, without discernable contours, also characterizes Dorothy Wordsworth's texts" (164). Levin's argument is not entirely convincing.

On the contrary, Dorothy's journals exhibit a suppressed self, at times rigidly mechanical, merely detailing passing events without much of an "I" behind her words. Dorothy was not allowed to "reach the semiotic chora," as Julia Kristeva writes in her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Leitch 2178). How could she possibly have had access to the semiotic level, when all she had to make use of was the symbolic order, the language of sense that Wordsworth and a patriarchal society left to her? If at times we do sense Dorothy's "I" seeping through her entries, it is momentary, and she quickly retreats into her isolated territory: the language of sense which she must make use of. In one of her entries in *The Alfoxden Journal*, she writes, "February 23rd. William walked with Coleridge in the morning. I did not go out" (9). One would think that Dorothy would have more to say about not going out, but instead she bluntly states it without expanding on it. Other interesting parts in Dorothy's journal revolve around her many walks with Coleridge. Strangely enough, she never mentions any of her conversations with Coleridge (if she had any) and again, merely states that she "walked with Coleridge through the wood...Coleridge came in the morning, which prevented our walking" (8-9). Dorothy's attachment to Coleridge at times seems suppressed, while at other times she experiences a flood of emotion which is ultimately silenced and ceases to exist. Mellor cites an example from Dorothy's journals, "I was melancholy and could not talk, but at last I eased my heart by weeping-nervous blubbering says William. It is not so. O how many, many reasons I have to be anxious for him" (165). Wordsworth silences her or undermines her tears, while Dorothy feels she has even logical "reasons" to be distressed. The pressure to regulate her feelings is obvious. And yet, her diaries are not an outlet for her emotional genius, but rather a place of reservation and diction. She remains in Wordsworth's shadow and was not allowed to flourish as a writer.

In light of this topic, Virginia Woolf creates William Shakespeare's imaginary sister in order to illustrate women's status in earlier centuries. Woolf was not far off, as Dorothy is in fact the writer's, suppressed, confused sister, unwelcomed into the literary world. Woolf sums up this argument efficiently and vividly in the following passage:

Any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village...for it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been...so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. (1023)

Hence, Dorothy did in fact have mental as well as emotional breakdowns towards the end of her life, after a life of struggling to establish an identity. Even if we suppose that Dorothy was able to construct her own identity as a writer, it would not suffice in the eyes of Wordsworth or prominent literary figures. Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical*

Ballads exposes his understanding of the poetical character and his function within society, “He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness” (Leitch 655). It is extremely interesting that Wordsworth refers to the poet as a man, and he goes on to stress the gender of the poet “a man, it is true” alongside with the high sensibility he is blessed with. Thus, there is no room for the female poet to attempt to compete with the male poet. Wordsworth is aware of the importance of sense and sensibility, logic and passion in order to create poetry. He implies that his sole purpose is simply to:

choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them...in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way. (Leitch 650)

We can expand on Wordsworth’s line of thought and incorporate metonymy: ordinary things (which Dorothy’s journals offer him) are then made extraordinary (his sensibilities), by adding color to Dorothy’s otherwise colorless dictation of events. Perhaps the most obvious example is seen through Dorothy’s description of daffodils and the emotions they stir within her. She encodes the event in her journal and by juxtaposing her description with Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”, Levin provides both accounts for the reader to judge whether Wordsworth is truly original or bordering on plagiarism of his sister’s thoughts and words. Dorothy writes, “We saw a few daffodils...we fancied that the lake had floated...a long belt of them...some reeled and danced” (34). Wordsworth’s lines are derived chiefly from Dorothy’s wording of events and her detailing of the imagery around them. He states, “I wandered lonely as a cloud/that floats on high o’er vales and hills, When all at once I saw a crowd/A host, of golden daffodils” which are “fluttering and dancing” (35). The major difference is seen through Dorothy’s usage of the pronoun “we” while Wordsworth deletes Dorothy and focuses on his “I.”

Unlike Wordsworth, Dorothy does not place herself as the sole witness of the event; she does not deny her brother’s existence and she treasures sharing the experience with him. Dorothy has constantly been his shadow, unable to see herself alone, as her own entity. Wordsworth is only able to see himself. Throughout all of his poetry, there is hardly “we” pronouns. Everything is subjective to him; everything he witnesses must act as the mirror to his own soul, not anyone else. To be able to be the perfect poet, he uses Dorothy’s language of sense and adds his own sensibilities to it, believing himself to be “androgynous.” Susan Wolfson highlights this concept in her essay, “Gendering the Soul” which is found in the book, *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*:

As the close of The Prelude, this rhetoric is emphatically gendered:

a feminine soul, whether figured as part of the poet's own sensibility or as its nurturer, exists but to influence and serve masculine creative power. The "Sister of my Soul" that the poet gratefully acknowledges, has helped him rise "up to the height of feeling intellect. (38)

Thus, Dorothy's function is merely to aid Wordsworth in achieving his full intellectual and emotional capacities and genius. He is aware that he must possess a double-gendered soul if he is to succeed, and the closest as well as easiest person to "help him" is Dorothy.

Dorothy features in Wordsworth's poetry as another part of himself that remains hidden and yet called upon for inspiration. Camille Paglia's book, *Sexual Personae* examines how women were viewed throughout history and devotes one chapter to Wordsworth's romanticism. She asserts that, "Dorothy is bodiless and sexless... because she is Wordsworth's Jungian anima, an internal aspect of self momentarily projected... Wordsworth is looking into a magic mirror... and seeing himself in Dorothy's eyes... Dorothy hovers at Wordsworth's side... maintaining silence until summoned" (307-308). Therefore, Dorothy is to be utilized and called upon.

Jane Spencer's book, *Literary Relations* examines many sibling relations in the light of a literary career which affected one or both of the siblings. Spencer defines Dorothy and Wordsworth's relationship as "poetic partnership" and simultaneously elevates Dorothy by illustrating that Dorothy "offers..not just access to the feminine but to perception itself: providing the poet with his sense organs, she becomes almost his creator" (181-2). By presenting "Irregular Verses," a poem Dorothy wrote in 1827, Spencer locates and underlines Dorothy's psychological and emotional struggle as a female poet overshadowed by her brother's presence, stating, "Dorothy lists the psychological blocks to her development as a poet: 'Bashfulness, a struggling shame/ a fear that elder heads might blame-or something worse-a lurking pride...'" (185). From "Irregular Verses" we are able to postulate that Dorothy may have understood the obstacles facing her success and intellectual growth as a poet. On the one hand, she was aware of her surroundings, but did not conscientiously attempt to rebel against authority. On the other hand, her choice of writing poetry and keeping journals may be perceived as her own means of rebellion.

Dorothy's journal entries and poetry are largely based on detailing images and at times raise questions that possibly arise from her subconscious. As far as her journal entries are concerned, we have looked at a few instances where it is evident that she is unaware of her own sense of self, her subjectivity and her "I." Dorothy's journal entries are far more impersonal than her poems. Through a closer reading of her journal entries along with a few of her poems, we are able to see a different Dorothy, a Dorothy who does question the order of things, even if only for a moment. For example, in *The Alfoxden Journal* there is one simple yet intriguing entry in which Dorothy asks, "Query:

Are the male and female flowers on separate trees?" (3). Despite the simplicity of the question, there is a deeper interpretation and meaning to the question. Dorothy poses a question that seems irrelevant to the status of the flowers. What difference does it make whether the flowers are separated by gender/sex or whether they are united? From this question, we are able to infer that Dorothy did consider the complexities of gender roles and social constructions. Although Dorothy's brother continued to linger around in her mind and life, there are a few moments where it seems as though she was trying to dismantle binaries and identify her own self, separated from her brother's presence. Ironically, this tends to happen when William is physically gone. Yet even when he is gone, her mind still manages to link him to everything around her, which is apparent in *The Grasmere Journals*. Even when Dorothy begins to write more personally, referring to her feelings, these emotions are usually in one way or another tied to him. When William is gone, she states that she "Read Timon of Athens... the quietness and seclusion of the valley affected me even to producing the deepest melancholy", "It was a sweet morning...no letters! No papers. I was sadly tired, ate a hasty dinner", "Read Macbeth in the morning...I sate till I could hardly drag myself away, I grew so sad" (40-1). From these few entries, we are able to deduce that Dorothy was well-read and was intrigued by great literary masterpieces.

It is unclear whether she was interested in reading books or poetry by female writers such as Charlotte Smith, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and others. Perhaps she did not feel there were significant precursors that she could look up to, since most of the literary field was conquered by male writers, the closest living example to her being Wordsworth, who as we have gathered had an immense and completely engulfing effect on her life and literary suppressions. Wordsworth's inability to support Dorothy's literary career stems from his egocentric view of himself as a great poet. According to Michael Baron's detailed study of Wordsworth, he is unable to share anything with anyone, let alone his sister who may threaten his authoritative position as the patriarchal figure of the household as well as a male literary figure. Baron pinpoints one of Wordsworth's problems in his book, *Language and Relationship in Wordsworth's Writing*:

But always with Wordsworth choice is a problem when it involves other people. Grasmere is 'my own; and not mine only' in two ways: first, his land is exclusively his own but what he sees from it is someone else's. Secondly, Grasmere belongs to his partner as well as to him, his childhood companion, Dorothy. But he does not give her a voice in 'Home at Grasmere'. She is part of himself. (96)

Again, Dorothy is not allowed to be her own entity or to discover the suppressed poet within her. She must be infused with Wordsworth's sense of self, not to stand on her own, and any attempt to separate herself from him and his influence would have been futile, given that we could argue that her attempts at writing have been unrecognized

and neglected. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar illustrate in their literary masterpiece, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, women writers were unable to compete with their male counterpart, as such Dorothy was incapable of fighting against society and her fate as a woman, as Wordsworth's sister. Gilbert and Gubar raise remarkable questions and issues, while concurrently defining the female writer's predicaments:

The 'anxiety of influence' that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary 'anxiety of authorship'- a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. (48-9)

As a result of this immense strain on the female poet's mind and soul, her definition of herself or her sense of "I" becomes increasingly problematic:

For all literary artists...self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative "I am" cannot be uttered if the "I" knows not what it is. But for the female artist the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself. (17)

Thus, we arrive at one cause, if not *the* main cause of Dorothy's downfall into physical ailment and mental illness. Her constant suppression as a female poet has affected her mental, emotional, and physical health. Mary Jacobus' book, *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference* offers Thomas De Quincey's view of Dorothy's repression as a poet and more importantly, a woman, "De Quincey goes so far as to suggest that intensive tutelage by her brother was an indirect cause of Dorothy's later sufferings" (258). De Quincey's observation sheds the light upon the causal factors of Dorothy's downfall.

Levin presents a closer look of Dorothy's condition by quoting from her journals, "I have not recovered the use of my legs" and Levin diagnoses this as a form of:

immobility and pugilism... Dorothy finally lets go and lives out the reverse of those qualities into which she has been forced...After years of eagerly awaiting William's return from his travels, she no longer cares about his presence...After years of supplying words to the writers around her to help them define the world, she retreats into her own private language. (71)

Levin's argument is based on logic and a certain touch of creativity, and she manages to hit home. Dorothy's later poems are poignant and carry a loud, resonating cry for freedom and an assertion of her identity. One of her most passionate and forthright poems is "Thoughts on My Sickbed," in which she poses questions that revolve around her own life, perhaps even as a female suppressed poet. For example, she fervently describes "The silent butterfly spreading its wings", "The caroling thrush, on his naked perch/Towering

above the budding trees”, “But joy it brought to my hidden life/To consciousness no longer hidden” (Levin 219-20). We may suppose that the “silent butterfly” is a symbol of Dorothy’s suppression and silence, while the “thrush...towering above the budding trees” is a symbol for Wordsworth’s dominant character. She refers to her life as “hidden” which supports our argument of her containment within a small circle that involved her brother, Coleridge, and a few others. Dorothy’s life was “hidden”, her identity and success as a poet was hidden until she began to define her own identity, “to consciousness no longer hidden.” Unfortunately for her, this revelation comes a tad bit too late. Another poem which reflects this desire to break free of society’s and her brother’s restraints is “When Shall I Tread Your Garden Path?” in which Dorothy questions her ability to soar high and free, “When shall I wander, free as air/And track the foaming rill/A prisoner on my pillowed couch” (231). The poem could simply mean Dorothy’s ability to physically walk and enjoy nature, or it could have a deeper meaning, where “your garden path” means Wordsworth’s literary path or career, exemplifying her conscious or even subconscious will and desire to cross the boundaries into his territory.

In Dorothy’s *The Grasmere Journal*, she pays very close attention to the intricate details of everyday life, the weather, her observations, and her own bodily changes. The entries are succinct and short as she begins to suffer from overwhelming fatigue and headaches. She is able to discern the pain, stating, “Friday May 4th: My head bad and I lay long” and “Saturday 5th. My head bad and I lay long” and “Saturday 19th. I was not quite well and did not rise to breakfast” (45-49). From May 1802 to January 1803 Dorothy’s health starts to deteriorate. Most entries revolve around trying to feel better, healthier, laying in bed, having tea, and attempting to get out of bed. If considered as simple every day documentation, the journals lose their value. The writing is considerably important when looked as life writing and illness narration.

Dorothy’s writing is then hard to place in a category. Its everydayness is an important part of its structure. She had an impeccable ability to discern her surroundings and chart the mundane elements of life, making her work revolutionary if read as partly life writing. Life writing has become increasingly popular as a literary genre. Many other writers such as Virginia Woolf kept diaries and when critics revisit them, they can find value in their chartering of everyday life. More significant is the process of self-reflection and self-actualization that the critics see in women writing their lives. The process of the mind and body’s deterioration is seen throughout the documentation of life’s events in the journals. Once a highly perceptible writer, Dorothy’s physical illness and subsequent mental decline (thought to be Dementia) affected her writing ability. That is not to say the writing quality changed, but rather, a raw perception of disease and illness began to take over her work as she struggled to come to terms with her final days. According to Janine Utell in her essay, “Views from the Sickroom: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Writing Women’s Lives of Illness,” Dorothy’s final breakdown occurred during the years 1824 to 1836 and her journals attest to this:

The private writing of the Rydal journal, which covers the years at Rydal Mount from 1824 until 1835 (the year when Dorothy Wordsworth suffered her final, irrevocable mental collapse), illuminates even more devastatingly the retreat of the woman writer into the sickroom, into an inner life of illness where no one can follow. (41)

Dorothy did not consider the mind and the body to be one. Instead, she considered herself a prisoner of the body, and still believed that the mind could transcend the body's limitations. She refers to herself more than once as an "invalid", and later letters between Wordsworth and his friends illustrate how family begins to look at her deterioration:

In her decline, Dorothy Wordsworth found herself increasingly marginalised from the workings of the Wordsworth household; her private writing deploys tropes of memory and imagination as liberating, freeing her from the confines of her sickroom. The line 'No prisoner in this lonely room,' which appears in 'Thoughts on My Sick-Bed' (Dorothy Wordsworth 208), shows up again and again in poems and drafts and fragments in various forms. (38)

Accordingly, Dorothy's journals demand a closer look in terms of recognizing her contributions to life writing and journaling, especially in regard to women's status in society and their roles as sisters, mothers, and as individuals who become afflicted with old age and illness. Dorothy's confinement within the Wordsworth household and within her own body envisions a different view from the Romantics. The mind and body are not one for Dorothy. Rather, they are separate and she negotiates these different definitions. Unlike Romantic writers and her brother's strong belief in his powers (both in body and in mind), she accepts her reality and finds meaning in it.

Dorothy's own words doubtlessly recapitulate this paper's argument in "Irregular Verses." Although she addresses her Goddaughter, Julia, it seems as though Dorothy was speaking to us. Her words tackle the extremities which Wordsworth and society placed on her abilities and chances to flourish. Certain lines seem to address our perplexities when attempting to place her into a certain category of poets. Although allegedly clouded by mental illness and misjudgment, Dorothy's later years included some of her finest work. She writes, "You ask why in that jocund time/Why did I not in jingling rhyme/Display those pleasant guileless dreams", "I *reverenced* the Poet's skill/And *might have* nursed a mounting Will" (Levin 203). Dorothy declares her poetical status; she "might have" achieved much more literary success and substantial recognition as a poet. Dorothy's burden was doubly formed; Wordsworth's presence, alongside living in Eighteenth century England, a society which shaped her view of herself and created a marginalized *Dorothy*, rather than a *Dorothy Wordsworth* who may have blossomed and flourished as a paramount Romantic writer.

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