

## WORDSWORTH'S AND POUND'S GIRLS

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### ABSTRACT

The comparison between the two poems is intended to show how the poets stand in sharp opposition to each other. It is obvious that the two poems have a common ground of theme; yet the similar object is presented differently in each poem. Wordsworth tells us a story about Lucy, who lived and died in oblivion except for her poet, who still derives inspiration from her memory. The poem is subjective and romantic.

Pound's poem, on the other hand, consists of a series of images which unify to objectify the purpose of the speaker. The speaker here is far from being the poet. The girl addresses herself. Her awareness of herself comes through what is known as the process of metamorphosis, which penetrates into the psyche of the girl. Consequently we see Pound's girl from the inside. Pound's poem has the objectivity of **imagism** in the same way Wordsworth's has the subjectivity of traditional sentiment.

## **SHE DWELT AMONG THE UNTRODDEN WAYS**

She dwelt among the untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A maid whom there were none to praise  
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye!  
Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me!

Wordsworth

## **A GIRL**

The tree has entered my hands,  
The sap has ascended my arms,  
The tree has grown in my breast  
Downward,  
The branches grow out of me, like arms.

Tree you are,  
Moss you are,  
You are violets with wind above them.  
A child — so high — you are,  
And all this is folly to the world.

Pound

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Though Wordsworth's «Lucy» and Pound's «A Girl» are separated by over eleven decades, and by the large disaffinities of their poets' artistic bent, the two poems have enough resemblances to make comparison profitable.

Wordsworth's Lucy is only a girl (and his Lucy poems remain more suggestive as long as autobiographical analogy is not forced on them). She is: «A violet by a mossy stone». Pound's : «Moss you are, / You are violets with wind above them.» The shrinking nature of the violet solicits the situation in which the two girls are found. This situation can, I think, be viewed through the various distances established between the different dimensions in each poem: the speaker, the girl, the world of man (the world) and the world of nature (nature).

The two girls stand at a distance from the world of man. This is revealed by the undertone of the two speakers who stand in the middle. The revelation, however, acquires a rather explicit expression towards the end of each poem. In Wordsworth: «..., and, oh, / The difference to me.»<sup>1</sup> In Pound: «And all this is folly to the world.»

The two poems, then, have a common theme. Yet an examination of the picture of each girl and the way she is treated by her poet shows the crucial difference between the two poems and the two poets.

In «Lucy» the speaker tells us that Lucy lived almost forgotten and that she was praised by none and loved by very few. She died unnoticed. In brief «she lived unknown, and few could Know/when Lucy ceased to be;»

Here there is no problem of the reader's comprehension. Despite the presence of the violet and mossy stone, the sense of the girl's solitariness is explicit enough. Lucy lives and dies in nature, but unnoticed. The speaker cannot help but extend his sympathy to Lucy, and the result is the distance established between the world of man and the rest of the dimensions. By using the pronoun «me» the speaker further exercises some kind of patronage over Lucy.

On the other hand, «A Girl» has no explanatory and connecting material, and it has no causal or commenting thoughts. It is incomparably concise. For example, the title is the only allusion in the poem to the juxtaposition of the whole imagery which runs from beginning to end.

Details of the conciseness can be noticed in the distance (between the dimensions of the poem) which is kept to a minimum, if not abolished altogether. Being free from the florid structure of the romantic vision of man and nature Pound views nature as an image to juxtapose with man. In the meantime, as nature and the girl are correlatives only one image is

needed for presenting the affinity between the two. The result is the girl as the tree, or, to be more emphatic, the tree is the girl. This is not overtly expressed but covertly sensed immediately after the title.

The tree and the speaker are one. So the three dimensions are presented as one without any waste of space, and consequently the distance between them is minimized. The tree is humanized by its integration into the speaker's self, and this integration, in turn, objectifies the speaker's sensation. This act of integration neutralizes the subjective disquisition of the speaker's self, and consequently the desire for patronage on the part of the speaker (his sympathetic attitude towards the girl) would not be needed.

More objectivity is achieved in the second stanza. The «objective correlative» which the first stanza presents in action is presented here as autonomous. Instead of being one with the speaker the girl emerges as one with nature (naturally free from the subjective self of the speaker).

Objectivity is further carried out by means of smaller units of nature images released from the main image which is already juxtaposed with the speaker's self. The girl is not only a tree but also a moss (combination of the animate and inanimate in nature) and «violets with wind above them» (combination of vegetation and vapour). Parallel to this is the girl as «a child so high».

All the parts of imagery are conclusively tied up with the last line. Whatever the girl is and however she is envisaged «is folly to the world» (cf. Jesus: «to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness»). This introduces the fourth dimension in the poem as well as establishes the dimensional distance between all dimensions. If the girl in the second stanza (in case «all» is taken only as a reference to the minor units of the images) «is folly to the world» she would be even «more folly» in the first stanza. And this organically links the second stanza with the first one. The image in the first stanza makes up for the absence of the speaker's self in the second stanza and keeps it sanctioned by implication.

The concluding line is the only conceptual statement in the poem. Yet it expresses all that Wordsworth says about his Lucy in his own poem.

In comparison, Wordsworth's picture is less precise. For example, the last two lines of the first stanza, «A Maid whom there were none to praise / And very few to love:» are anticipations of the first two lines of

the last stanza, «she lived unknown, and few could know / when Lucy ceased to be;». Lucy lived almost unknown to the world, and she would probably die so.

The speaker's sensation in Wordsworth's poem is evidently subjective. This is particularly noticed from the conclusion whose thematic effect is strikingly similar to that of Pound's . «the difference to me» occurs with the speaker's sudden awareness that Lucy «is in her grave,» as the word «but» and the rhetorical words «and, oh» may suggest.

The intricate design of imagery in Pound's poem makes it simply suggest more than it says. The title and the first stanza evoke the image of the girl as a tree along with the process of interaction between the tree and the speaker's self. The image (and other minor units of it) acquires concreteness by the mere fact that it is expressed independently in the second stanza. At first glance its independence may imply an act of isolation until we reach the concluding line whose conceptual thought restores the image and its minor units to its origin in the first stanza.

If a commentary on Pound's «A Girl» were needed one might be tempted to add Wordsworth's conclusion, «The difference to me». But it would have been quite different from Pound's concise design, for such addition or the like is already embodied in the first stanza.

The difference between the two poems can be equally attempted by examining what is often described as the aesthetic distance each poem has. Wordsworth's poem has no such distance to establish, as the speaker tells the reader about a traditional sentiment (the solitariness of Lucy) anticipating direct response promptly accorded on the part of the reader. Here the sentiment is transferred to the reader by means of a traditional syntax of language, and without a non-traditional intermediate between the sentiment and the reader.<sup>2</sup> In a sense Wordsworth's poem is mimetic by design.

In Pound's poem the speaker's sentiment is transformed into an image first, then it is dissociated from the image to give the image itself objective presentation. In the first stanza the speaker experiences the creation of his sentiment while in the second he experiences the recreation of the image. The process is twofold, and between the first and the second stanza one can envisage the distance between life and art, or content and form. Distance here may be viewed in terms of the speaker's control over his content and form. It is the aesthetic experience which the

speaker finds futile to tell others about, simply because it is not abstract, direct or verbal. Hence comes the speaker's declaration in the last line that the aesthetic experience «is folly to the world.»<sup>3</sup>

Pound's poem can, I think, be read in the light of Wyndham Lewis's statements on Vorticism which appeared (at about the same time Pound's poem did) in the second number of **Blast**. Lewis says that «the first reason for not imitating nature is that you cannot convey the emotion you receive at the contact of nature by imitating her, but only by becoming her.... Imitation... will never give you the meaning of the object or scene, which is its spiritual weight.»<sup>4</sup> In this essay on Vorticism, Lewis attempted to formulate a «new synthesis».

In the meantime, Pound's «A Girl» invites the speculation that it is an unconscious recollection of Wordsworth's «Lucy». It may be so but Pound «made it new». Like Lewis, perhaps, he was after «a new synthesis» of the traditional sentiment and the new form.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 — On one occasion Pound remarks that «Wordsworth is.... the orthodox sign for comprehension of nature,....» He was always aware that poetry for Wordsworth was more of a conception rather than a reception of nature.
- 2 — However, in his interesting analysis of the poem F. W. Bateson believes «simple though the poem may appear to be, it is not just a series of straight forward statements.» «Rational Irrationality: 'She dwelt among the untrodden ways'», **The Northern Miscellany of Literary Criticism**, (Autumn, 1953) Page 43.
- 3 — In the various imagist poems he wrote, Pound tends to believe that poetry is basically an experience of psychic delight which the poet finds difficult to communicate in statements. In view of this situation Pound presumably found the image more effective in terms of communicative efficacy. However, such a poem may be read (with the conclusion as a clue) as a parody implying the lack of appreciating imagism on the part of contemporary readers and writers.
- 4 — This statement is quoted by Brian Petrie in a review article, 'The hard clean and plastic nature of Vorticism', **The Times Higher Educational Supplement**, (January 1977) Page 15.