

The Aesthetic of Dorothy Wordsworth

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Abstract

For many critics, Dorothy Wordsworth remains enigmatic. Critical attempts to define her and her work have frequently concluded she is pathetic and unsophisticated in her writing, and, at best, is important as an integral part of her brother William's creative development and his work. This paper hypothesizes that the aesthetic revealed in The Grasmere Journals and Dorothy's letters and poetry exhibits a carefully sculpted outward cheerfulness and harmony, and an inward melancholy born of fear of marginalization. The aesthetic revealed in these works illustrates an internalized understanding of 19th century philosophic ideals, gained through her extensive reading and contacts. The paper concludes that Dorothy Wordsworth consciously turned to Nature and in its "sweetness" found a solace and comfort signifying joy and belonging quite in contrast to the "melancholy" signifying loss and displacement. As her writing evolved, Dorothy ultimately turned inward through the faculty of her memory and once again found the sweetness inherent in Nature. In so doing, she finally achieved an ideal proportion and balance between her figurative oppositions of melancholy and sweetness, derived from the aesthetics of inward/outward, displacement/belonging, modesty/self-expression.

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Alan Grob recently called attention to a critical stance working its way through Wordsworthian studies that manifests itself as a “hermeneutic of disparagement” (187). While William has suffered at the hands of this critical school, Dorothy arguably has fared worse, relegated to the pathetic group of “women scribblers” whose work reveals little merit. Furthermore, she has been defined largely through her relationship to her famous brother. This paper proposes to look at Dorothy’s work and show that the aesthetic revealed in The Grasmere Journals, Dorothy’s letters, and poetry exhibits a carefully sculpted outward cheerful harmony, and an inward melancholy born of her fear of marginalization. Part of the hypothesis posits that the aesthetic revealed in these works illustrates an understanding of 19th century philosophic ideals, gained through her extensive reading and contacts. The evidence will show that Dorothy Wordsworth consciously turned to Nature and found in its “sweetness” a solace and comfort signifying joy and belonging quite in contrast to the “melancholy” signifying loss and displacement. As her writing evolved, Dorothy ultimately turned inward and through her memory once again found the sweetness inherent in Nature. In so doing, she finally achieved an ideal balance between the figurative oppositions of melancholy and sweetness.

The persona of Dorothy Wordsworth has intrigued scholars for a number of years. In 1940, Eigerman “lifted” passages from Dorothy’s journals which seemed to him like the poetry that “she never . . . dreamed she was writing,” trying to give her an identity as a poet (The Poetry of Dorothy Wordsworth). Other the other hand, Constance Hunting said in 1989 that Dorothy “cannot be labeled” (302). Numerous critics, however, have tried to do just that. Tomlinson praises Dorothy as William’s support and the source of fuel for his creative mind (44); contrarily, Ireys sees William dispensing with this source and moving into the realm of the imagination once the “muse” is no longer needed, and in fact, has become something of a hindrance (402). Others see Dorothy as a pathetic drudge, a woman forced by the sad circumstances of her life to become a member of William’s household. Kohn, in fact,

sees the Grasmere Journals as depicting Dorothy's failure as a woman and failure as a writer (572). Still others see in the rhetoric of her journals and letters a pathetic cry of despair meant to focus "William's attention upon her needs and concerns" (McCormick 482). Some have tried defining Dorothy's creative consciousness as one that is androgynous and depersonalized (McGavbran 339), and, in some ways at the very best, as an intrinsic part of William's formation of himself, the "I" persona he uses throughout his famous works (Levin). Grob presents a welcome moderating view toward William and his relationship to Dorothy as he brings to light examples of "error, distortion, and misrepresentation" (217) evident in the adversarial tactics of feminism and New Historicism, as critics probe William's work. Unfortunately, Dorothy's life and works have suffered a similar disparaging fate at the hands of critics, and frequently she ends up as fragmented parts or defined as a satellite of William as well as Coleridge. Dorothy's remarkable and complex aesthetic as reflected in her Grasmere journals, letters, and even her poetry may help explain her puzzling contraries.

Dorothy's point of view begins to take on a unique shape when considered in light of Kant's century definition of the aesthetic. Kant states that when understanding and imagination merge spontaneously, the sublime is achieved. The mind entertains itself and chooses images that are then exhibited or communicated through words. As a result, the sublime is then revealed through both judgments of taste and communication acts (483). Kant affirms that aesthetic judgment is always subjective (476). In the context of the 19th century and the work of Kant and Schiller, Eagleton points out that "As a progressive refinement of sensation and desire, the aesthetic accomplishes a kind of deconstruction: it breaks down the tyrannical dominion of the sense drive not by the imposition of some external ukase, but from within" (104). From this perspective, this psyche, this spiritual element in Dorothy

Wordsworth, then determines her aesthetic judgment and notion of the sublime in which sensation is subjected to her reasoning faculties.

Dorothy's choice of vehicle for communicating her images and ultimately her sublime is well suited to her psyche. At first glance, it is apparent that Dorothy never intended to write to an audience apart from William; nevertheless, the apparent lack of dialogue between Dorothy and William troubles critics. One might argue, however, that Dorothy's intensely personal choice of medium, particularly her journal, represents in its essence what Kant described as the individual mind entertaining itself while being affected by the images which strike the eye (Kant 495). Readers today are privy to the most amazing outpouring of her subjective view of what is beautiful, particularized in images like cheerful women and household harmony. The communication acts in her writing also reveal her particular values of autonomy, responsibility, and freedom. Her writing exhibits a writer conscious of her word choices illustrating an aesthetic delineating her normative statements about the truth as she saw it. Dorothy chose consciously to live the life of an individualist, and chose to live a simple life. Her particularized view of her universe is governed by a certain consistency. Throughout, however, she also conveys a certain tension constantly expressed in terms like "melancholy/sweet." The tension between these complementary and sometimes contradictory notions of the self doesn't reach a synthesis until later in her life when Dorothy slipped in and out of "madness." Like the island in her poem "Floating Island at Hawkshead, An Incident in the Schemes of Nature," she was metaphorically disconnected from the world around her. In the poem she describes the "slip of earth" undermined by "throbbing waves," and "loosed from its hold." The lovely island might have offered shelter and food to numerous insects and birds; nevertheless, forces in Nature cause its destruction. For those who later come to see the island, she states in the final two stanzas,

Perchance when you are wandering forth
Upon some vacant sunny day
Without an object, hope, or fear,

Thither your eyes may turn—the isle is passed away.

Buried beneath the glittering lake!

Its place no longer to be found,

Yet the lost fragments shall remain,

To fertilize some other ground. (Hall 157)

Like the island that is buffeted about by Nature and which ultimately breaks away from the mainland and ceases to be, Dorothy faces the same unkind end. Yet, in her final years she also recognizes how the fragments of herself still offer some ennobling metaphoric fertilizer to those who have benefited from her intense loyalty and unselfish giving. A look at her writing in its entirety reveals that Dorothy's thematic and lexical items are clearly routinized choices on her part; these items begin with her early writing describing her displacement and end in her lonely room when she achieves her unusual harmony.

Dorothy's Grasmere journal¹ offers a natural place to begin delineating her definition of beauty and the sublime. The lexical items that pervade the work include "melancholy," cheerfulness," "heavenly," and "sweetness." At the beginning of The Grasmere Journals (GJ 1), Dorothy establishes that when William goes out of her presence she becomes melancholic and her view of beautiful sights is definitely affected for the worse. After she gives him a farewell kiss and sits for a long time crying, she says her heart "was easier." While she might have felt some respite from not having William around, her vision is definitely affected. The lake looked "dull and melancholy" now, though she "knew not why" and even the fine houses in her sight "disturbed" her more than when she was happy. She walks into Rydal a few days later hoping William might have written her a letter. On her way to retrieve the mail, she sees Rydal as "very beautiful" (GJ 2). When she discovers there are no letters and only one newspaper, on her walk back home Grasmere looks "very solemn" and she is "very melancholy." She adds, "I had many of my saddest thoughts & I could not keep the tears within me."

As the days progress, each time no letter arrives she feels “the deepest melancholy

¹ Dorothy Wordsworth: The Grasmere Journals, ed. Pamela Woof. Oxford: OUP, 1991. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text and abbreviated GJ.

(Monday), “sadly tired, (Tuesday morning),” and “so Sad (the following Monday)” even when she sat on the lakeside. That Tuesday when she was expecting a letter from William, “It was a sweet morning.” In this same mood of sweet expectation, she enjoyed a “delightful evening” and on Wednesday walks up to the rocks “above Jenny Dockeray’s” and enjoys a “prospect divinely beautiful.” When a letter does arrive from William that Friday she experiences a “sweet mild rainy morning” the following day, and at that moment Grasmere now “looked divinely beautiful.” This pattern continues throughout the journal, underscoring that for Dorothy sublimity is equated with William’s presence, and her melancholy grows out of her sense of separation from her brother.

Other descriptions in the journal, however, point out that Dorothy’s sense of sublimity is more complex than being defined solely by William. She tells us about people and events that define “melancholy” by other acts of separation and displacement. We begin to sense that her love of William is heightened by her dread of being left alone, displaced as she was after her mother’s death. One particularly good example occurs in February 1802. On Friday the 12th, as Dorothy records (GJ 66), while William was writing, a poor woman comes a begging, a common event throughout the journal. Dorothy describes her as a “woman of strong bones with a complexion that has been beautiful, & remained very fresh last year, but now she looks broken, & her little Boy, a pretty little fellow, & whom I have loved for the sake of Basil, looks thin and pale.” Dorothy comments on these changes of appearance to the woman who tells her that they have been ill, and their house had lost its roof in a storm. Dorothy continues, “The Child wears a ragged drab coat & a fur cap, poor little fellow.” She and William had seen the child before who now wears the same coat he had on before. “Poor

creature!” When the woman and child leave, Dorothy adds, “I could not help thinking that we are not half thankful enough that we are placed in that condition of life in which we are.” Perhaps the most telling part of her comments, however, is her observation that “This woman’s was but a common case.” Later that day she looks out her window to see a cart passing and to hear the cry of a child. She notices that the cart was not very full, and that a woman with a child in her arms followed close behind. Dorothy sees this as a “wild & melancholy sight,” a sight she understands to be something she fears is happening to her, a sight that represents the opposite of what is beautiful.

Dorothy’s letters ² also underscore how her fear of abandonment has a profound effect on her behavior. As early as 1787 when living with her grandmother, Dorothy experiences the same feelings when her brother once again leaves her. “Yesterday morning I parted with the kindest and most affectionate of Brothers, I cannot paint to you my Distress at their departure” (L 1). Dorothy experiences “a thousand tormenting fears” at the prospect of being abandoned to her ill-natured grandfather. She then finds herself “forlorn and dull” (L 2) Some years later, after she and William have established a residence, she writes of their experiences with Basil, the child they have taken in to educate. In part, thanks to the money they receive from Montagu, she is finally able to hire a servant, “one of the nicest girls I ever saw” (L 19), and Dorothy is able to hire a woman to wash. The financial situation gives time to make clothes for Basil, and spend hours every morning walking with the child (L 19-20). A year later, Dorothy writes from

² Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Alan G. Hill. Oxford: Calendon Press, 1985. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text and abbreviated L.

Alfoxden about her plans with William and Coleridge to travel to Germany “for the purpose of learning the language, and for the common advantage to be acquired by seeing different people and different manners” (L 25). The easing of financial difficulties has given her the chance to do more of the delightful things of life. And what about the child who has been such a delightful addition to her life? “Poor Basil! We are obliged to leave him behind as his father, on account of having

altered the course of his pursuits in the law, will not be able to pay the additional expenses which we should incur on his account.” Dorothy then spends several paragraphs explaining why Basil would be better off now in the company of others. And that’s the last mention of Basil the “charming boy” (Racedown, 1795, L 19) for some time. Not surprisingly, in a letter of 1800, Dorothy thinks of Basil when William is away, and in her loneliness says, “I wanted my little companion Basil” (L 44). So why does this woman who always writes of children and expresses her great love of children behave this way? The logical conclusion would seem that her sublime life first and foremost is defined by a sense of belonging. When William is about to leave for Germany, she really has no other choice but abandon the life with Basil she has known. Critics have made much of Dorothy’s need for belonging, and her cry out to William, albeit surreptitiously, to notice her and remember her and, perhaps, feel sorry enough for her that he won’t also abandon her.

Many have attempted to turn Dorothy into “poor Dorothy.” However, she was not seen that way by William nor by countless relatives and friends including Coleridge, Mary, Dora, De Quincey and others. This image of Dorothy as “poor” has unfortunately obscured critical perception of her definition of sweetness. Not surprisingly, when Dorothy chose to write about “sweet” things, she wrote primarily about natural scenes, not about metaphysics. Throughout The Grasmere Journals, a litany of descriptions, taken in their entirety, share a remarkable similarity. At the beginning of her journal, Dorothy describes a “sweet” morning, Tuesday, the 20th. She says, “Everything green & overflowing with life, & the streams making a perpetual song with the thrushes & all little birds” (GJ 4). Several weeks later on Sunday, the 14th, she says, “Made bread-- a sore thumb from a cut –a lovely day—read Boswell in the house in the morning & after dinner under the bright yellow leaves of the orchard—the pear trees a bright yellow, the apple trees green still, a sweet lovely afternoon” (GJ 22). Later in the year, in winter, on Friday, the 27th, she says, “Snow upon the ground thinly scattered. It snowed after we got up & then the sun shone & it was

very warm though frosty—now the Sun shines sweetly” (GJ 42). Still in December on the 6th, 1801, “ – we had a sweet walk, it was a sober starlight evening, the stars not shining as it were with all their brightness when they were visible & sometimes hiding themselves behind small greyish clouds that passed soberly along” (GJ 45). In March of 1802, she writes, “a sweet evening as it had been a sweet day, a grey evening, & I walked quietly along the side of Rydal Lake with quiet thoughts—the hills & the Lake were still—the Owls had not begun to hoot, & the little Birds had given over their singing” (GJ 79). Even in her letters, we see an occasional reference to sweetness, and it is couched in the same terms: In a letter dated 27 February, 1800, she writes, “We had scarcely passed it [an old gibbet] when we were saluted with the song of a lark, a pair of larks a sweet, liquid, and heavenly melody heard for the first time, after a long and severe winter.” Years later, in 1808, Dorothy writes, “Oh, that you could see the bonny cottages and their tufts of trees and the sweet green fields. It is a soothing scene . . . “ (GJ 92). In her letters, Dorothy occasionally refers to people as “sweet” as well, as when she describes William’s children as “sweet wild Creatures” (L 111). The preponderance of her use of “sweet” however is directed toward natural scenes that fill her with pleasure and a soothing mood; frequently “sweetness” occurs in moments when she is alone as well. The fact that she chooses the word “sweet” in a context that remains consistent over years of writing reflects a routinized aesthetic, one with positive and, for Dorothy, fulfilling connotations; clearly her sense of “sweet” has definite referents, quite positive in relation to her sense of melancholy. Thus, while “melancholy” may signify loss, anguish, and displacement, “sweet” signifies joy, singularity, and belonging. It should, then, come to us as no surprise that Dorothy was actively involved in reading Lessing (GJ 72), reflective of the German Romantic movement; a strong argument can be made that her view of the sweetness perceived in the beauty of Nature may well reflect her understanding and acceptance of the 19th century philosophical notion that achieving the sublime through communing with Nature can help relieve the painful present.

These insights tell us something about her sense of the sublime, but don't yet explain why Dorothy never developed her own talents as a writer beyond her journal and letters. In this light, two new lexical items emerge that help us define her view of beauty: modesty and harmony. In 1806 Dorothy responds to a comment by Lady Beaumont who had told Dorothy she is capable of writing poems "that might give pleasure to others besides my own particular friends" (L 76). William also expressed pleasure in some lines she had written; Dorothy attributes his pleasure to partiality toward her. She admits she did try and write a story once but "failed so sadly that I was completely discouraged" (L 77). She says humbly that "I have no command of language, no power of expressing my ideas, and no one was ever more inept at molding words into regular metre." She says she emulated William and tries when she is walking alone to "express my feelings in verse; feelings, and ideas such as they were, I have never wanted at those times; but prose and rhyme and blank verse were jumbled together and nothing ever came of it." William insisted that she "place" her writing next to his and she did so, though unwillingly (L 78). While this passage expresses her modesty and humility, other evidence helps explain her reticence for writing more verse. The first instance of this evidence is her views toward women's roles in the community and as mothers. In 1800 she describes the wife of a Clergyman in the neighborhood, as a mild, gentle woman, cheerful in her manners "and much of the gentlewoman, so made by long exercise of the duties of a wife and a mother" (L 45). Dorothy's admiration of this woman definitely translated into her own role. In letter upon letter she confirms her useful role in the household as she looks after the children, and performs various household duties. And though she proclaims her cheerfulness in these duties, we can't but be struck by her comment at the end of a letter to Lady Beaumont in 1806 that Christmas day is her birthday. She says, "God bless you my kind good Friend—we shall drink a health to you on Christmas Day in a bottle of port wine. You may remember that it is my Birthday; but in my inner heart it is never a day of jollity" (L 81). She also reveals part of her aesthetic in her work ethic. In

1801 she describes Coleridge's wife as a poor match for her friend. "She is to be sure a sad fiddle faddler" (L 49) who takes hours readying herself and her children for dinner. Based on all this evidence, it is no surprise that by 1818, Dorothy defines well-educated girls as those who are "remarkably modest and unaffected—lively, animated and industrious" (L 149). These are the ideals she has subscribed to throughout her life, ones that define a gentlewoman.

What role does Dorothy's education play in nurturing her aesthetic? According to her biographers, Gittings and Manton, Dorothy was profoundly affected by the teachings of John Ralph, and that "The ethics of this upbringing stayed with her through life. From it came many of her most appealing characteristics: scrupulous honesty, a spirit of service, cheerfulness, all the generous spirit which saw the best in ordinary men and women" (6). Writers like Mrs. Barbauld, Hannah Moore, and Erasmus Darwin also affected Elizabeth Threlkeld's education which she subsequently passed along to Dorothy (10). According to Gittings and Manton, De Quincy was later to appreciate the depths of Dorothy's intellect and character. He was astonished, in fact, that Dorothy had had "so little formal education" (167). Dorothy's own writings reveal a voracious reading habit that continued throughout her life, a habit showing interesting depth as well as variety. According to *The Grasmere Journals*, she read Shakespeare (GJ 7; 97; 100), Boswell (GJ 22), Southey (GJ 27), Spenser (GJ 41; 79; 91; 110), Chaucer (GJ 46; 47; 92), Milton (GJ 105), Mother Hubbard (GJ 105), Ariosto (GJ 105), the life of Ben Jonson (GJ 66), Jonson's poems (GJ 66), as well as contemporary writers long since forgotten including Knight (GJ 14). She translated Lessing's fables (GJ 63; 65) and read Lessing's work (GJ 72); she read works in German (GJ 73;75; 76; 82). We know from her letters that she was fluent in French, and in 1794 began reading Italian (L 18); she read Beaver's African Memoranda (L 115), the *Edinburgh Review* (L 136), and knew the work of Felicia Hemans as well as the writer herself

(L 175). She translated works from German, and translated into German one of William's poems that is included in the Alfoxden journal (Butler 169). The fact that De Quincy was surprised at Dorothy's lack of formal education simply points up her own modesty in revealing the depth of her reading and that she had not been afforded the recognition offered to those who went to university. This remarkable list of writers she read and languages she practiced, adds ample evidence to the view that the language she chose to use in her own writing was clearly a conscious choice; she was not limited by a lack of education or a meager library. Her reading tastes also indicate her personal interest in philosophers of the period who likely helped shape the aesthetic she so clearly reflects in her writings.

The melancholic/sweet tension manifested in her role as a harmonious part of a cheerful household as well as her fear of abandonment and marginalization evolves over time. Her view of money provides an interesting case in point. Dorothy's consistent charity to beggars and neighbors often seems to confirm her sense of belonging to a happy household. As early as 1789 when William Wilberforce gave her ten guineas a year "to distribute in what manner [I] think best to the poor" (L 6), she expresses an apparent delight in distributing needed money. Gittings and Manton describe this as "an astonishing opportunity for Dorothy, who had been almost an object of charity herself" (24). From the time of Calvert's legacy, and Dorothy's care of Basil which brought in more needed funds, Dorothy always seemed to see the funds being directed toward her life with William. By 1803, on the eve of his marriage to Mary, however, Dorothy's attitude changes abruptly. In a letter to her brother Richard, she states frankly that her view of her life with William from that point on would be as a boarder with "an indifferent person." She says she will continue to live with William, but he will have "nothing to spare" and she would need 60 pounds a year in order to "gratify all my desires" (L 51). Clearly Dorothy realizes that she must begin to depend on herself for the security she has sought. When she states bluntly that she "shall stand in need of the money which John intended for me" (L 52), her practicality and sense of survival come in

stark contrast to her earlier view of sublimity as defined through William. Yet, she plans to continue living with him, and outwardly her need for harmony remains intact. It is no surprise, however, to know that Dorothy also ceased writing the Grasmere journal in 1803. Whatever sublimity she had found in her life with William was at an end and while her outer demeanor still expressed a will toward harmony and self-sacrifice, she needed to re-define her aesthetic of the sublime.

Subtle differences in Dorothy's writing after 1802 indicate how this sense of self was evolving. While Dorothy never overtly objects to her domestic role, subtle changes in the outward cheerfulness and generous sensibilities that she has always displayed become apparent. In keeping with her consistent expressions of appreciation and pleasure, in 1810 she describes William's children as "sweet Wild creatures" (L 111). In 1812 she writes to De Quincey telling him about the loss of Catherine who was so dear to him (L 121). We also see how vital Dorothy's presence was to others in the household. She was the one to witness Catherine's death since both William and Mary were absent when their daughter died. Then, again, in 1813, she was alone with Thomas when he died and, once again, William and Mary were away. During this same period of time, however, Dorothy's habitual response to sad or melancholy events also changes gradually. In her letters, she begins to express an abrupt change from her feelings in 1800 when she wept at William's departure. In a letter to Thomas De Quincy in 1809 she describes a time when she sat "musing by myself" (L 97); where earlier the scene might have seemed melancholy, now the weather was very delightful, and she experiences pleasant thoughts. When De Quincey married, Dorothy was disappointed in his choice of wife and maybe in his marriage for she went so far as to describe his wife as a "stupid, heavy girl . . . reckoned a Duncie at Grasmere School" (L 144).

Entries in the journal and her letters exhibit subtle discrepancies between her outward cheerful demeanor and her inward insecurities and loneliness. The subjects of her poetry³ present the same dual nature. In the poems toward the end of her lucid life, however, Dorothy expresses

an ideal balance. On one hand, Dorothy's melancholy remains evident in her children's verse dated 1806-1807. In 1806 in a letter to Lady Beaumont, Dorothy admits she had tried writing "a little story" for children "but failed so badly" and "was completely discouraged" (L 77). In the poem "The Mother's Return" (CP 181), however, her voice as a babysitter rings true, essentially belying her apparent inability to write effective works for children. In the poem, Mary apparently has been away for a month and the children long for her return. Dorothy has kept them occupied with stories and walks in the garden, and explanations about the changes occurring in Nature. When it is bedtime the children run up to bed and are soon asleep. Dorothy's pleasure in entertaining the children is clearly evident. Concurrently, however, it is painfully clear she is only a substitute mother. She doesn't really belong, not as a mother might. Her importance and usefulness to the family stands in stark contrast to her melancholic sense of not quite belonging. At the same time Dorothy expresses this inward melancholy, in "Grasmere- A Fragment" (CP 184), dated sometime around 1805,

³ "Appendix One: The Collected Poems of Dorothy Wordsworth," ed. Susan M. Levin. Dorothy Wordsworth & Romanticism. New Brunswick: Rutgers The State University, 1987. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text and abbreviated CP

Dorothy writes about her rejoicing in the vale, her chosen home; the sentiments echo the "sweetness" she consistently found in Nature, a sweetness that helped relieve her pervasive melancholy. "When first I saw that dear abode, / It was a lovely winter's day:" (lines 41-42) and "My youthful wishes all fulfill'd, / Wishes matured by thoughtful choice" (lines 85-86). In 1806 it seems that Dorothy has found the home she's always dreamed of, and has chosen by her own volition to stay. As usual, the solace found in Nature's sweetness counteracts the melancholy, in this case, in her domestic life where, not incidentally, she still maintains an outward semblance of cheerfulness and helpfulness.

By 1826, a marked change in tone and outlook has occurred. In “Lines Addressed to Joanna H. from Gwerndovennant June 1826” (CP 188), she hears the thrush she had heard before yet finds the voice different (line 21) and adds, “Through languid air, through leafy boughs / It falls, and can no echo rouze” (lines 23-24). Finally she says, “Mournfully shall I say farewell / To this deep verdant, woody dell” (lines 53-55). Dorothy’s mood and response to the natural scene clearly have changed from her earlier intense pleasurable response to the scene. Her forward to the poem helps explain this change:

A twofold harmony is here,
 I listen with the bodily ear
 But dull and cheerless is the sound
 Contrasted with the heart’s rebound.

The cheerfulness that once could have relieved her melancholy, found in the sweet sounds of birds heard through the “bodily ear,” no longer affects her. Since this function is no longer being performed, Dorothy turns to the heart’s response, the second aspect of the “twofold harmony.” The heart now performs the function formerly relegated to the senses.

In “A Holiday at Gwerndovennant” (CP 191), 1826, Dorothy adds yet another dimension to the relationship between Nature and her heart. She begins the poem by acknowledging the joy of the children and realizing their sorrow that the holiday will end. She then says the children face the prospect that soon the happy days of childhood will pass and they’ll be separated from each other

. . . And trust me, whatsoe’er your doom,
 Whate’er betide through years to come,
 The punctual pleasures of your home
 Shall linger in your thoughts—

Dearer than any future hope,
Though Fancy take her freest scope.
For Oh! Too soon your hearts shall own
The past is all that is your own. . . . (lines 147-155)

In these lines, a new aesthetic seems to be evolving, consisting of an ideal balance between the sublimity she once found through the sweetness of Nature on the one hand, and her melancholy on the other. As she has grown older, like her brother William, she echoes his thought that strength will be found in what remains in the memory. For the children, pleasures of home will remain alive in their memories. Dorothy's sublimity has added the dimension of her memories of pleasures. In the face of melancholy and displacement, Dorothy no longer speaks of looking to what she has, but rather, what she once had. Her sense of displacement is complete; she need no longer fear displacement nor hope for a brighter future.

The poetry illuminates other sorts of closure. In "Irregular Verses" (CP 201), written in 1829 or 30, Dorothy confirms what she said in her letters as to why she never wrote verses for publication when younger. She admits that while she "reverenced the Poet's skill" and would have liked to sing Nature's praise," bashfulness, shame (line 91), and fear of derision (line 92) held her ambition to write in check.

The poem provides further insights into the inward/outward aesthetic of her figurative melancholy and joy. She addresses the girl who asked for this Christmas poem:

. . . Her heart beats to no giddy chime
Though it with Chearfulness keep time
For Chearfulness, a willing guest,
Finds ever in her tranquil breast
A fostering home, a welcome rest.
And well she knows that, casting thought away,

We lose the best part of our day;
 That joys of youth remembered when our youth is past
 Are joys that to the end of life will last; (lines 87-95)

At this point Dorothy refers to the aesthetic of cheerfulness that guided her through her early years to sublimity, and places it now in the heart of the child. She realizes, however, that this is only a foster home, just as it was for her, since joy will cease to exist with the completion of youth. At that point, joy will only be found in memories, an echo of her verses above. What was an outward cheerfulness for Dorothy is now directed within; now she defines the sweetness once found through the bodily ear as being through her memory of joy and cheerfulness. As she finally discards the outward semblance of cheerfulness and gives herself control over its power, in some ways she is finally exerting a degree of hegemony, a sort of self-definition she never before had the luxury to express.

In two other poems written near the end of her lucid years, Dorothy once again revives the sadness of her melancholic marginalization; she then finds the solace she has always sought in Nature, only this time to seek it within her memory. In "Lines Intended for My Niece's Album" (CP 209), written in 1832, Dorothy states even more explicitly a sad realization of what she has become, thanks to her lifetime devoted to modesty and household harmony. In the last three stanzas, Dorothy's inner melancholy is outwardly apparent.

. . . But why should I inscribe my name,
 No poet I—no longer young?
 The ambition of a loving heart
 Makes garrulous the tongue.

Memorials of thy aged Friend,
 Dora! Thou dost not need,

And when the cold earth covers her
No praises shall she heed.

Yet still a lurking wish prevails
That, when from Life we all have passed
The Friends who love thy Parents' name
On her's a thought may cast. (lines 36-48)

These sad lines confirm Dorothy's expression of what her life has become thanks to her aesthetic of modesty and harmony. She expects no praise as she has never expected any praise. Any thoughts of remembrance once again should be directed through her family. In this poem written by this non-poet, Dorothy declares that she is now too old to change the course she set in her youth. As she always has balanced her melancholy and cheerfulness throughout her life, she presents yet another example of her oppositions at work, in the poem "Thoughts on My Sick-Bed" (CP 219), probably written in 1833, two years before she realized her own failing mental powers. Dorothy echoes how she plans to live within her memory, restoring the joys of earlier days:

. . . I felt a Power unfelt before,
Controlling weakness, languor, pain;
It bore me to the Terrace walk
I trod the hills again-
No prisoner in this lonely room,
I saw the green Banks of the Wye,
Recalling thy prophetic words,
Bard, Brother, Friend from Infancy!
No need of motion, or of strength,

Or even the breathing air:

-I thought of Nature's loveliest scenes;

And with Memory I was there. (lines 42-52)

In these lines, Dorothy manages to combine all the outward and inward tensions that have marked her own visionary gleam. Within the confines of her lonely room, a final displaced location, she is able finally to free herself through her mind; she is able to walk out wherever she wishes, and to create a life that is of her choosing. Through her memory she can go to Nature whenever and wherever she wishes, and revive the sweetness that has always given her solace.

She remembers what William said when he wrote "Tintern Abbey" on the banks of the Wye and realizes how prophetic he was. William at the time said he would find in his thoughts and memory the sort of joy Dorothy then expressed toward Nature, a joy expressed in the heart. During his discussion of gender in "Tintern Abbey," Robert Essick points out that Dorothy "offers the assurance of a stable metaphor" (301) of the poet's former self, a figure of mediation between "thinking things" and "objects . . . of thought" (301). In addition to William's means to access his own femininity (300), Essick sees Dorothy as a "necessary figure," a representation of William's own fear of marginality. As we re-direct the focus to Dorothy, we see Dorothy's own metaphor for solace and comfort and a relief from her own marginalization as she points once again to Nature's loveliest scenes that will continue to offer her sweetness, albeit it no longer through the bodily eye.

Through the faculty of her memory she is able to connect with the positive attributes and influences she has perceived inherent in Nature. In reviving this marvelous connection between herself and Nature, she finally achieves an ideal proportion and balance between her figurative oppositions of melancholy and sweetness, derived from the aesthetic of displacement/belonging, and modesty/self-expression.

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