

An “imperfect” Model of Authorship in Dorothy Wordsworth’s Grasmere Journal

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Abstract: This essay explores Dorothy Wordsworth’s collaborative, “pluralist” model of selfhood and authorship as it is elaborated in her Grasmere journal (1800-03). Nature and community, for her, are extensions of the self rather than (as they often are for her brother William) external forces to be subsumed by the self of the solitary artist. This model, however, is the site of ambivalence and conflict, and is therefore “imperfect” – a word Wordsworth herself uses to qualify the “summary” she believes her journal as a whole provides. It is “imperfect” not because it is inferior, weak, or deficient in some way, but because it is riddled with tension and inconsistency. Wordsworth embraces processes of collaborative creativity, but she also expresses – largely through her narrations of illness – dissatisfaction with such processes, and she sometimes finds relief in her solitary, melancholic musings. In these ways, she at once subverts, reworks, and reinforces conventional, ‘solitary genius’ paradigms of authorship.

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Dorothy Wordsworth’s well-known claim in an 1810 letter to her friend Catherine Clarkson – “I should detest the idea of setting myself up as an Author” (*Letters* 454) – has by now been interrogated at length. A survey of Dorothy Wordsworth scholarship of the past thirty years reveals that understandings of her as William’s self-effacing, silenced sister, one who was “constantly denigrat[ing] herself and her talent” (Levin, *Romanticism* 4), and who, despite poet Samuel Rogers’ urging, never viewed herself as a writer (Hamilton xix), have been largely dismissed. The sheer proliferation of criticism on her work suggests that she was an accomplished writer in her own right, and the content of this criticism shows her as possessing her own, unique sense of subjectivity and acute powers of observation. Moreover, though Dorothy Wordsworth seemed averse to publishing her work, she did “write to be read, circulating manuscripts to friends and family” (Levin, *Longman* xvii), and she allowed some of her poetry and prose to be published in her brother’s works. As Mary Ellen Bellanca observes in her recent discussion of the 50-page excerpt from Wordsworth’s journals that appeared in Christopher Wordsworth’s 1851 *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, “any lingering impression that her prose remained unpublished in her lifetime” has been dispelled (201). Part of what has enabled us to “read Dorothy aright” (xxv), to use Paul Hamilton’s words, particularly in recent years, is on the one hand a widespread critical de-bunking in eighteenth-century and Romantic studies of the myth of the solitary genius¹ and on

¹ See Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan’s *British Women’s Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History* (Palgrave, 2005); David Cook and Amy Culley’s *Women’s Life Writing, 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship* (Palgrave, 2012); Scott Krawczyk’s *Romantic Literary Families* (Palgrave, 2009); Michelle Levy’s *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (Palgrave, 2007); Julian

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the other a recognition of Wordsworth's "diffuse plurality of being" (Hamilton xxv), the "communal nature" of her creative processes (Newlyn, *William and Dorothy* xiii), her refusal of an "ego-dominant self" (Levin, *Romanticism* 34), and her sense of subjectivity as "intersubjective," as a "record of a collective vision and a shared enterprise" (Corbett 76). Wordsworth's above claim is therefore at once misleading and accurate: she was indeed an "Author" in the sense that she wrote with an audience in mind, and was even published, but her modest and mostly private literary aspirations, as well as her unusual self-portrayals, run contrary to the conventional, solitary, autonomous model of "Author" as she may have understood it.

This paper both extends and reformulates this tension surrounding Wordsworth's relationship to authorship by exploring the ways that her Grasmere journal (1800-1803) at once subverts, reworks, and reinforces the paradigm of 'Author' in the traditional, 'solitary-genius' sense of the term. The Grasmere journal – as opposed to Wordsworth's letters, poems, stories, travel narratives, and other journals – is particularly useful to an exploration that considers Wordsworth's fluid elaboration of self and her communal approach to writing.² She was not yet 30 when she moved to Dove Cottage in Grasmere with her brother William and began this journal, which, *as a journal*, and in its sheer length (it fills four separate notebooks), offers a sustained exploration of Wordsworth's burgeoning subjectivity. Left to herself, undistracted by the novelties and challenges of travel, and unconstrained by the more restrictive genre of poetry, Wordsworth develops as a writer in intimate connection with her brother, neighbours, passing vagrants and beggars, village life, and domestic rhythms. Examining her changing approach to writing, I focus especially on her approach to subjectivity by considering briefly the original manuscript copies of the journal and Wordsworth's descriptions of literary creation, and by scrutinizing her artful manipulations of the speaking "I." Wordsworth's compound notion of selfhood and authorship, I argue, shows nature and community as extensions of the self rather than (as they often are for her brother William) external forces to be subsumed by the self of the solitary artist. The Grasmere journal thus exhibits a version of what Sarah Prescott calls a "'pluralist' model of [eighteenth-century] women's literary history" – a "model which allows for ... fluidity and [a] sense of process rather than one which fixes women's literary experiences into rigid and often oppositional categories" (10).

North's *The Domestication of Genius* (Oxford UP, 2009); Sarah Prescott's *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740* (Palgrave, 2003); and Eugene Stelzig's *Romantic Autobiography in England* (Ashgate, 2009).

² In various ways, critics have explored Wordsworth's singular expression of self and use of narrative voice in the Grasmere journal. Anita Hemphill McCormick explores how the journal is framed by Wordsworth's "complex and troubled" personality (471); Alan Liu shows how it embodies a "self-completing" dome symbolic of "[Wordsworth's] personal day-to-day activity" (128); James McGavran underlines Wordsworth's unique subjectivity in which "eye" looks at "I" (235, 238); Patricia Comitini envisions the journal as "a site of philanthropic intervention, positioning feminine writing as social practice" (132); Sara Crangle explores Wordsworth's use of an unusual stream-of-consciousness style; and Kenneth Cervelli considers her subjectivity in the context of ecocriticism and "her relationship to the phenomenal world" (2).

The collaborative, “pluralist” model of authorship that pervades the Grasmere journal is, however, a site of ambivalence and conflict. As I show later in this paper, the journal usefully reveals such tension as it tracks the complex and oftentimes unknown reasons for Wordsworth’s various bodily ailments, as well as her anxiety surrounding, amongst other stresses, her changing relationship with her brother as he grows closer to and then marries Mary Hutchinson. As Wordsworth describes them in her journal, I contend, physical and mental ills are emblematic of an underlying dissatisfaction with her tendency to place herself within a community. Wordsworth’s hysterical episodes, moreover, are complemented (and confused) by moments of melancholic solitude – ones which seem to offer her some reprieve from a communal identity and at the same time align her with the (usually male and solitary) melancholic artist of her time. In my reading, the model of authorship Wordsworth’s journal exemplifies is, following Prescott, “pluralist,” “fluid,” and malleable, but, countering Prescott, also “oppositional” in the sense that Wordsworth is sometimes uncomfortable with collaborative processes. The model of authorship I am proposing is, therefore, “imperfect” – a word Wordsworth herself uses to qualify the “summary” she believes her journal as a whole provides (137). It is not “imperfect” because it is inferior, weak, or deficient in some way. Rather, it is “imperfect” because it is riddled with tension and inconsistency in its ambivalent approach to collaborative creativity.

Wordsworth’s Collaborative Self

A study of the Grasmere journal reveals Wordsworth’s sense of self and her writing as extensions of the people and objects that surround her. We see this both in the patchwork quality of the original manuscript copies and in the content of the entries themselves. In its original form, the voices of other authors appear, which has the effect of disrupting Wordsworth’s authorial presence. Within the four notebooks are, among other inclusions, five verses from her brother William’s “Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman,” drafts of “The Brothers” and “Emma’s Dell,” some passages that later come to form the *Prelude*, his “prose attack on moralist thinkers like Godwin and Paley,” and an early version of “Michael” (Wordsworth, *Grasmere* 144, 180, 205, 225). The siblings’ transcriptions of epitaphs from the *Life* of Benjamin Franklin and Hutchinson’s *History of Durham* are contained in the first notebook, a conversation with German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock is included in the third, and the final notebook concludes with three pages of extracts from Descartes (Wordsworth, *Grasmere* 144, 205, 225).

In Wordsworth’s journal entries themselves, we find a similar multi-voiced structure. She allows a varied group of “derelicts” with their own “separate existence” to “walk the pages of the Journal,” writes Pamela Woof, and she “becomes herself a figure in their scene” (Wordsworth, *Grasmere* xvi-xvii). Among this multitude of eccentrics are a “very tall woman, tall much beyond the measure of tall women” (9-10), two “honest looking” drunken soldiers (44), a “bow-bent” postman with his “little wooden box at his Back” (64), “a poor woman who had drowned herself” (65), and Isaac Chapel the sail-maker (78). Wordsworth’s voice is not entirely effaced, of course; she is, after all, the

central figure in the journal entries, and these entries, intermixed with her own miscellaneous scribbles, “jottings and sums,” grocery lists, German grammar lessons, and Lessing translations (Wordsworth, *Grasmere* 143, 180, 205) insist upon her presence in the larger notebooks. Nonetheless, the combination of her voice with those of others is suggestive not of a linear, complete narrative of self-exploration, but of a multi-layered hybrid understanding of subjectivity that confuses the notion of a clear, authorial mark.

A collaborative understanding of authorship is similarly reflected in Wordsworth’s descriptions, within the journal entries, of literary production. She sees literary creation as a shared, public activity, often undertaken spontaneously, even nonchalantly. Some journal entries find her simultaneously observing and recording activity in her immediate surroundings – surroundings often peopled by others. She writes as William “is shaving” (60), for instance, or “eating his Broth” (119), and she sometimes describes herself in the very process of writing: “Here I have long neglected my Journal,” she tells us in a September 1800 entry (22), going on to complete the entries she has missed (22). The journal, moreover, reveals Wordsworth’s participation in William’s own literary production. She frequently describes her brother engaged in such activities as “altering his poems” (17), and it becomes clear that she is sometimes physically present while he composes, as when “we were at Breakfast [... and] with his Basin of Broth before him untouched & a little plate of Bread & butter he wrote the Poem to a Butterfly” (78). Contrary to William’s famous assertion that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (611), creative inspiration and writing here unfold simultaneously, and in the company of others. The journal similarly shows collaboration to be central to the processes of editing and revision. In her descriptions of her own activities, Wordsworth emerges as a kind of editor – copying, revising, and critiquing her brother’s poetry, or, to use Patricia Comitini’s phrase, “[chronicling] the flow of manuscripts” (142). There are multiple references to the siblings’ corrections and additions to *Lyrical Ballads*, and Wordsworth’s transcriptions of her brother’s works are sometimes described as extensive, as in the following instance: “William was looking at the Pedlar when I got up – he arranged it, & after tea I wrote it out – 280 lines” (118). Perhaps Wordsworth faithfully transcribed William’s poems verbatim, or perhaps she made alterations (if only slight ones) as she went; whatever the case, her journal forces us to question the role of William as solitary creator – an interrogation also enhanced by the fact that the journal (as has been well noted) “provid[ed] material for some of [William’s] best-known poems” (Levin, *Longman* xvii). The vision of authorship provided by the journal, just as it exposes the presence of others embedded within Wordsworth’s work, reveals her own authorial role in the production of her brother’s work and so raises questions of authorial autonomy.

Wordsworth’s artful manipulations of the first-person voice in the journal similarly complicate any concrete notion of “Author” and are suggestive of a subjectivity characterized not by autonomy but by community, fluidity, and cooperation. Rather than the expected and consistent use of ‘I’ in autobiographical narrative, her account oscillates variously between ‘I’ and ‘we.’ She uses ‘we’ when referring to joint activity

between her and her brother, of course, as when she writes, “We spent the morning in the Town” (33), but she also employs ‘we’ to align her inner emotional state with that of another, as when, upon her and William’s return from the continent, she writes, “We ... sate upon the Dover cliffs & looked upon France with many a melancholy & tender thought” (125). On other occasions, Wordsworth describes herself as blending – seemingly unwittingly – with her companions and her surroundings through an often-ambiguous pronoun usage. In a June 1800 entry, she suggests that she has gone for a walk alone, noting, “I staid at home about an hour & then walked up the hill to Rydale lake.” This is immediately followed by the use of ‘our’ to describe her return – presumably accompanied by William – to Dove Cottage in the evening: “On our return all distant objects had faded away” (12). A brief assertion of her own experience, evident in the use of the “I” pronoun, is interrupted by the first-person-plural narration of her walk home. This interruption is abrupt for us, as readers, but her movement between a solitary and an accompanied state is so ordinary for her that it requires no syntactical transition, clarification of pronoun referent, or contextualization.

Wordsworth’s sense of self as an extension of the people and objects that surround her is also evident in her frequent omission of any pronoun whatsoever, as in an August 1800 entry, where she writes, “A fine day – walked in the wood in the morning & to the firgrove – walked up to Mr Simpsons in the evening” (18). Her vivid descriptions of nature are often similarly devoid of the first-person-singular pronoun (in contrast to the descriptions of many of her Romantic counterparts), as in the following passage:

The small Birds are singing – Lambs bleating, Cuckow calling – The Thrush sings by Fits, Thomas Ashburner’s axe is going quietly (without passion) in the orchard – Hens are cackling, Flies humming, the women talking together at their doors – Plumb & pear trees are in Blossom, apple trees greenish – the opposite woods green, the crows are cawing. We have heard Ravens. (96)

Plants, humans, landscapes, and objects become intertwined in Wordsworth’s collective, non-possessive vision of self and nature. The only pronoun in the passage – “we” – has no clear referent; though it might refer to her and William, it could refer to her, William, Thomas Ashburner, the talking women, as well as the lambs, birds, flies, and other animals that inhabit her scene. The absence of an ‘I,’ combined with the unknown “we” referent does not merely have the effect of making Wordsworth disappear from the scene, however. Though she is not necessarily an active participant, we are acutely aware (because of the diary form) that she is at the very least an observer, and her unusual use of the present tense places her firmly within the setting, as though she is part of an ongoing process. In these ways, despite – and perhaps due to – the absence of syntactical cues, she becomes an integral part of the activities described. Through these various examples, then, we see that Wordsworth’s pronoun usage is not, as Margaret Homans suggests, merely “symptomatic” of her larger self-effacement (71), nor is it, as

Anita Hemphill McCormick contends, a straightforward case of subsuming 'I' within 'eye,' nor simply, as Newlyn suggests, evidence of Wordsworth's "experimental style" ("Experimental" 328). Rather, in my reading, Wordsworth's random, inconsistent, and seemingly natural alternation between 'I,' 'we,' and no pronoun at all is indicative of a sense of self that extends beyond the boundaries of her own body and places her firmly – if rather cryptically – within her surroundings.

Wordsworth as Hysterical, Melancholic Artist

Wordsworth's collaborative vision of subjectivity and authorship challenges the autonomous 'I' of the solitary artist, but I would like to suggest that this collaborative model is simultaneously fraught with tension. Such tension is apparent in the very opening lines of the journal, when Wordsworth explains her decision "[t]o write a journal of the time till W[illiam] & J[ohn] return, & I set about keeping my resolve because I will not quarrel with myself, & because I shall give Wm Pleasure by it when he comes home again" (1). Her promise to give her brother "Pleasure" is undoubtedly a creative incentive, therefore reinforcing the assets of the collaborative model, but Wordsworth also asserts that she starts the journal to avoid "quarrel[ing] with [her]self," a phrase suggestive of intense and conflictual interiority.

There is evidence in the journal that such inner conflict stems in part from Wordsworth's inextricable intertwinement with others, and that she expresses this conflict through recurrent symptoms suggestive of 'hysteria,' a condition that, it was believed in this period, struck women almost exclusively and manifested itself in a vast array of mental and physical symptoms. The prevalence, mysteriousness, and Protean nature of hysteria point to the possibility that, rather than having an identifiable physiological cause, the condition was rooted in women's limited social roles, and, more specifically, in their frustration with such roles. As I discuss below, Wordsworth experiences some of the symptoms listed in physician-writer Robert Whytt's 1764 treatise on nervous, hypochondriacal, and hysterical disorders, including "periodical headaches," "wind in the stomach and bowels," "fear, peevishness," "wandering thoughts" (28), "disturbed sleep, frightful dreams, [and] the night-mare" (74). She also experiences "affections of the mind, as fear, grief, anger, or great disappointments" as William Buchan describes them in an immensely popular 1798 edition of his treatise, *Domestic Medicine* (447). Wordsworth also occasionally experienced the jibberish, muteness, "dimness of sight" (Whytt 28) characteristic of the condition, and although she does not appear to have regularly exhibited what Whytt calls "hysterical faintings and convulsions," she seems to have had a mild hysterical fit around the time of William and Mary's wedding.³

³ Although critics have not considered the possibility that Wordsworth, as she describes herself in the Grasmere journal, exhibited hysterical symptoms, there have been discussions of what Robert Gittings and Jo Manton call "the tensions to which [she] was subject" (98). Katherine T. Meiners, for instance, highlights Wordsworth's "crises of intelligibility" and describes the journal as a "narrative of recurring pain" (489), while Anita Hemphill McCormick argues that the journal "speak[s] circuitously ... about

In fact, what might be labelled Wordsworth's frequent hysterical symptoms – her headaches (4, 23, 33, 44, 45, 52, 83, &c.) and toothaches (14, 15, 16, 23, 32, &c.), and her various allusions to bowel troubles, other physical ailments, agitations of mind, and the need to “lay long” or “take laudanum” (35, 38-39, 44-45, 50, 71, 83, 91, 102, 115, 130-31 &c.) – are related to, perhaps even caused by her communal vision of subjectivity. Wordsworth's interdependence with William in particular, and to a lesser degree with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Mary Hutchinson, even if at times deeply fulfilling, appears repeatedly to incite or aggravate her ills. This process is not always described directly, but Wordsworth's syntax is strongly suggestive of an unusual cause-and-effect relationship in which the distress or physical troubles of others provokes her own mental or bodily ills. Her declarations of malaise, for instance, oftentimes immediately follow assertions of William's own malaise. “William was very nervous. I was ill in the afternoon” (101), she notes in one entry. We find a similar example in the following, this time in reference to Coleridge's intestinal discomfort: “Coleridge's Bowels bad, mine also” (101). This process is sometimes described more explicitly, as when Wordsworth notes that her “spirits were agitated very much” upon receiving letters (81). The syntactical structures of certain diary entries suggest that her mental unease (as well as that of others) often manifested itself as physical discomfort, as is clear when she writes, “We all went weary to bed. My Bowels very bad” (53) – a process made explicit in one entry where she anxiously awaits letters from Coleridge and Hutchinson: “I had a woful headache & was ill in stomach from agitation of mind” (111). The symptoms Wordsworth describes – intestinal issues, headaches, nervousness, ill spirits, insomnia, the conversion of mental distress into bodily symptoms – are, as suggested above, indicative of hysteria. These symptoms, many of which force her to bed and inhibit her creativity – often for several hours at a time, in some instances for an entire day, and on one occasion (shortly after William and Mary's marriage) for more than a week (133) – are often framed as responses to her intimate connections with those around her.

Wordsworth's hysterical symptoms might indeed be read as expressions of dissatisfaction with her domestic, intellectual, and social position, particularly as it relates to her collaborations with others. Hysterical symptoms have sometimes been interpreted as comprising a language of protest, even when the sufferer does not entirely understand *what* or *why* she is protesting. Isobel Armstrong sees hysteria as coming from “blocked emotions, a blocked language” and representing “the seizing up of experience” (23-24), a phenomenon which enables the sufferer's communication of her frustration with her existence, albeit indirectly. Janice Utell, though she does not mention hysteria per se, looks at a similar process in Wordsworth's later writing, and, with reference to Virginia Woolf's *On Being Ill*, suggests that “the story of the sick person [can be] told though the evidence presented by the body” (5). This evidence also makes its way onto the page for Wordsworth, who, in her declining years, according to Utell, “found herself increasingly marginalised from the workings of the Wordsworth

[Wordsworth's] pain” and shows that her final decades of mental instability are in fact “congruent with her earlier personality” (488).

household” and in her writing “deploys tropes of memory and imagination as liberating, freeing her from the confines of her sickroom” (Utell 12). Wordsworth therefore envisions “the sickroom as a creative – and conflicted – space for life writing” (10), writes Utell.

The processes that both Armstrong and Utell describe are present in the Grasmere journal in Wordsworth’s accounts of her most dramatic experiences of hysteria – those involving fits, severe anxiety, or an inability to move, speak, or do anything but lie still. Such experiences, in which her creative faculties are inhibited considerably, are tied in the journal to stresses stemming from a relationship with her brother which, though at times characterized by a creative “commerce of spirit” (Newlyn, *William and Dorothy* 313), is in other instances imbued with pain and dysfunction. On one occasion, Wordsworth, “knowing” that “William had slept miserably,” writes, “I lay in bed while he got some sleep but was much disordered” (105). On another occasion, she notes, “I was melancholy & 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 Have I to be anxious for him” (37). Her anxiety for her brother – the reasons for which are, at least in this description, elusive – result in the hysterical symptoms of intense sadness, muteness, weeping, and gibberish. But Wordsworth does not depict herself as a mere irrational hysteric, for she uses the journal as a way of highlighting William’s misreading of her state as mere “nervous blubbering.” Though she is not able to properly articulate the reasons for her suffering, the symptoms themselves, along with her definitive assertion – “It is not so” – allow her to communicate her discontent.

This notion of hysteria as an expression of unhappiness is further illustrated in Wordsworth’s outright hysterical fit at the time of William and Mary’s marriage. Despite her fondness for Mary, her physical and mental distress over the threat the marriage posed to her own relationship with William is made clear when she wears the wedding ring “the whole of the night before” the ceremony (126). Wordsworth describes a scene immediately following the wedding (which, due to her intense distress, she does not attend) in a passage “heavily erased in the manuscript of her journal” (Newlyn, *William and Dorothy* 178):

I kept myself as quiet as I could but when I saw the two men running up the walk, coming to tell us it was over, I could stand it no longer & threw myself on the bed where I lay in stillness, neither hearing or seeing any thing, till Sara came upstairs to me & said ‘They are coming’. This forced me from the bed where I lay & I moved I knew not how straight forward, faster than my strength could carry me... (126)

Wordsworth, in this instance, fits the model of the hysterical sufferer who is stripped of her rational faculties and governed by physical impulses. She is so distressed that she can do nothing but “thr[o]w [her]self on the bed” and lie there, completely still, unaware of her surroundings, and with blunted senses, unable to hear, see, or, presumably, speak. Wordsworth expresses through her body what she seems unable to express in

words, and in this way her hysterical symptoms might be seen as what Mark Micale, with reference to the work of Dianne Hunter, describes as “an alternate nonverbal body language” and “a self-repudiating form of feminine discourse in which the body signifies what social conditions make it impossible to state linguistically” (80). Indeed, Wordsworth here fails to describe, in words, exactly why this wedding is so distressing for her, but her bodily distress at least communicates the severity of her discontent – a discontent incited by a relationship with her brother that is at once “a sacred non-sexual union,” as Newlyn calls it (*William and Dorothy* 313), and an agonizing, even damaging dependency.

The Grasmere journal complicates the model of collaborative subjectivity, not only in the way that it presents Wordsworth as a distressed woman who suffered many of the symptoms of hysteria, but also in the way that it offers a portrait of her as rational, intellectual, and solitary melancholic. The journal thus both reinforces and confuses what Jennifer Radden describes as a commonplace demarcation “between loquacious male melancholy and the mute suffering ... of women” (45), a demarcation that manifested itself in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a distinction, according to Elizabeth A. Dolan, between the “rational capabilities” of the male “melancholic genius” and the pathologized “sensibility,” “emotion,” “passion,” and hysteria of the eighteenth-century woman (25, 27). Helen Deutsch places this distinction between male melancholy and female hysteria in a literary context: “[W]hile the suffering body earns the hypochondriacal man the right to speak as a sensitive subject, as doctor or novelist, it makes the hysterical woman a sentimental spectacle, heroine or patient” (58). In this way, what Deutsch calls the “embodied ‘woman of feeling’” (35) – the woman who was at once hysterical and intellectual – was a rare, even non-existent, figure in the long eighteenth century.

Such a figure emerges, however, in the Grasmere journal. Wordsworth, whether intentionally or not, describes herself as suffering intermittently from hysterical symptoms (as shown above), and the mere fact that she captures these symptoms in prose, in her journal, aligns her with both the female sufferer and the “loquacious” male melancholic – a phenomenon made overt in the passage quoted above in which Wordsworth writes, “I was melancholy & could not talk.” Her simultaneous occupation of the roles of hysteric and melancholic intellectual can also be detected in her remarks on literature in the journal. Interspersed amidst numerous references to her study of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Fielding, Boswell, Smollett, and others – she writes of being “melted to tears” upon reading *Paradise Lost* (62). Here, certainly, her response to the text is emotional bodily, and visceral. However, Wordsworth makes known her intellectual depth in engaging – alone – with Milton’s masterpiece, and her emotional response confirms that she is in fact synthesizing with nuance and sophistication a text that is unquestionably meant to move its readers profoundly. In other instances, she engages more critically with the texts she reads, as in her analysis of “[Charles] Lamb’s play” (presumably his 1802 poetic drama, *John Woodvil: A Tragedy*), whose “language is often very beautiful,” she writes, “but too imitative in particular phrases, words &c. The characters except Margarets unintelligible, & except

Margarets do not shew themselves in action” (24). Such critical expertise and intellectual sophistication are also seen in her analysis of an early version William’s poem “The Pedlar,” which, though William “could find fault with no one part of it,” according to her “[is] uninteresting & must be altered” (63).

The instances in the journal in which Wordsworth occupies the role of the solitary melancholic intellectual, a sort of disembodied poet, complement other instances (described above) in which she seems, more simply, hysterical. She sometimes occupies the role of musing melancholic even as she resists it, as is evident in the opening pages of the journal, when she is alone, saddened by William’s absence, and writes, “The quietness & still seclusion of the valley affected me even to producing the deepest melancholy – I forced myself from it” (4). In other instances, Wordsworth is less inclined to resist her self-characterization as solitary melancholic, as when she confidently declares in one entry, “I want not society by a moonlight lake” (7), or when she writes, “I could have stayed in this solemn quiet spot till Evening” – had William not been waiting for her elsewhere (121). On another solitary outing, she embraces this model more fully, when she notes, “I had been very melancholy in my walk back. I had many of my saddest thoughts & I could not keep the tears within me.” In this case her melancholy does not merely provoke tears, as it might for the prototypical hysteric. Rather, it incites a description of her surroundings that reveals her keen ability to appreciate and describe the beauties of nature in all their gravity, and then withdraw into her self: “Grasmere was very solemn in the last glimpse of twilight [...] [I]t calls home the heart to quietness” (2). She sometimes describes herself as nothing less than a solitary visionary and poet, as when – as though temporarily escaping from those in her company – she refers to the “most vivid of my own inner visions” (129), or in the oft-quoted passage from a March 1802 entry, “I had many many exquisite feelings when I saw this lowly Building in the waters among the dark & lofty hills, with that bright soft light upon it – it made me more than half a poet” (81). Such solitary contemplation is presented, in certain instances, as a clear alternative to the pain that human relationships offer. In one entry, written as the marriage of William and Mary approaches, she complains, “I was so full of thoughts of my half-read letter [from Wm and Mary] & other things.” She then describes herself as “glad” to be left alone: “I had time to look at the moon while I was thinking over my own thoughts – the moon travelled through the clouds tinging them yellow as she passed along, with the two stars near her, one larger than the other. These stars grew or diminished as they passed from or went into the clouds” (84). In this instance, her sadness over human separation is sublimated into a melancholic description of her surroundings that captures the movements, colours, and sizes of clouds, moon, and stars.

These last examples show Wordsworth occupying the role of solitary melancholic artist – a model made unique by Wordsworth’s status as a woman, and by complementary examples in which she occupies the role of bodily, discontented hysteric. Both of these roles serve to complicate, in their espousals of solitariness and interiority, Wordsworth’s collaborative elaborations of subjectivity and authorship elsewhere in the journal. These multiple, conflicting versions of Wordsworth, as they

are described in the Grasmere journal, result in an unusual “pluralist” model of authorship. Wordsworth is indeed an “Author,” but her formulation of this model is multi-layered and comprises her role as an artist who at once eschews traditional ideas of authorship by embracing a collaborative version of self, protests this very role through physical and mental ills suggestive of hysteria, and sometimes withdraws – also a partial expression of discontent – and occupies the role of solitary melancholic artist. The journal, in my reading, becomes complexly layered and tension-filled, the site of collective vision and collision. Wordsworth’s claim in her penultimate journal entry – that “Wm has been working beside me, & here ends this imperfect summary” (37) – provides, in a sense, an accurate assessment of her writing, for her journal is, in these various collaborations and collisions, “imperfect,” at least in relation to the ‘solitary genius’ model. But if we are to recognize a model of authorship that embraces the multiplicities and contradictions of the text, Wordsworth’s “imperfect[ion]” is in itself a literary asset, and the above passage provides a fitting conclusion to the Grasmere journal.

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