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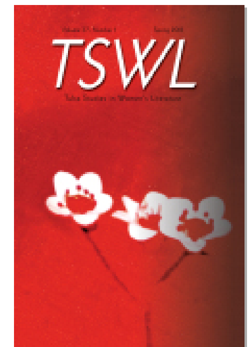

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Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, Volume 37, Number 1, Spring 2018, pp. 91-110 (Article)

Published by The University of Tulsa
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/tsw.2018.0004

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"Imperfect Notices": The 1820 Continental Journal of Mary Wordsworth

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ABSTRACT: *Through a close reading of Mary Wordsworth's 1820 Continental travel journal, this essay challenges her peripheral status in studies of the Wordsworth writing circle. It offers a formalist analysis of the text, demonstrating the qualities and aspects of Mary's writing that contribute to the importance of her journal in relation to the other literary endeavors of the tour. Mary's writing, with its elliptical style and panoramic descriptions, reveals a sophisticated and imaginatively creative mind, one that was an equal participant in the coterie of the tour's writers, including Henry Crabb Robinson and Dorothy Wordsworth. This essay seeks to free the journal from its critical relegation to a mere resource for William Wordsworth's* Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, *instead approaching the journal on its own terms. The analysis calls for further consideration of Mary's journals in relation to contexts of travel writing, romantic narrative, and women's writing.*

> I shall here close these my imperfect notices,—commenced at D's request; & with a notion, on my part, that they might be useful when she wrote her Journal,—but soon finding that with such a view, mine was a superfluous labour, I should not have had the resolution to go on, except at Wm's desire;—& from the feeling that my Daughter, & perhaps her Brothers might one day find pleasure, should they ever have the good fortune to trace our steps, in recognizing objects their Mother had seen.—At any rate this thought has been a powerful, & a heart-cheering stimulant often when without it, I should have sought repose. Paris Octr. 2d
>
> –Mary Wordsworth, "Journal of a tour on the Continent"[1]

In the latter half of 1820, Mary, William, and Dorothy Wordsworth toured Continental Europe accompanied by various friends and writers.[2] Each Wordsworth produced an account of their travels. William published his well-studied *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent* (1822) shortly after their trip, and Dorothy's journal has been included with later editions of her other works. Mary's account of the adventure, meanwhile, has never appeared in print. As Mary E. Burton has pointed out, Mary has "inevitably been overshadowed by her notable husband and his gifted sister," and she remains in the periphery of the Wordsworth circle, critically compartmentalized as the devoted copyist of and sometimes inspiration for her

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husband's and sister-in-law's writings.[3] Other than her letters to William, no focused attention has been given to Mary's writing; indeed, only a handful of contemporary scholars are even aware that she kept a notebook of the continental travels undertaken with Dorothy and William. Those who are familiar with the journal have traditionally glossed—more often mined—Mary's observations for what they can tell us about the work and activities of William and Dorothy. Most recently, Lucy Newlyn has excavated Mary's journal for a more inclusive view of the writing that emerged from the Continental travels, in a study that highlights the connections and intimacies between the three literary endeavors.[4] Despite this recent and important addition to the field, however, academic exposure and access to Mary's journal remains infrequent, at best.

At its most problematic, modern criticism maintains a superficial relationship with Mary's journal, approaching it as a resource only for studies of the better-known Wordsworths. This tendency has perpetuated assumptions about the nature and quality of Mary's journals (much as late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century critics demoted, and sometimes dismissed, Dorothy's writing), which perhaps explains why Mary's writing has remained only marginally recognized in Wordsworth scholarship. As a result, an important voice in the Wordsworth circle has been overlooked. In reading the journal solely for clues about William's composition or evidence of Dorothy's publication endeavors, scholars have missed Mary's participation and recognition in the Wordsworth's immediate writing coterie (including writers such as Henry Crabb Robinson and Sara Hutchinson). Left unexplored is Mary's distinctive attention to the qualities of sound and language, which represents the poetic fascination with the aural qualities of language at this time, and how Mary employed "imperfection" or incompletion in the attempt to bridge experience and language.[5] This essay provides an introductory reading of Mary's 1820 journal, attempting to read the journal on its own terms and highlight aspects of Mary's particular writing project. I present close readings of Mary's observations, identify her unique narrative abilities, and gesture towards a wider historical context of literary endeavor in which to reclaim and re-evaluate her writing. If, as we know, William relied as much on Mary's journal as Dorothy's when composing *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent*, then scholarship must wrangle equally with the depth and relevance of Mary's Romantic and literary progeny.[6] For this reason, the present essay makes only brief reference to the works of the other Wordsworths, instead delineating that, while commenced at the request of her sister-in-law and encouraged by her husband, Mary's travel journal presents a defiantly personal meditation and commentary on her observations.[7] Through the powerful stimulant of writing, she explores the new landscapes and individuals she encounters and gives voice to her unique position among the travelers.

* * *

Shortly after returning home to Rydal Mount in December of 1820, Mary transcribed her four small travel notebooks into a single fair copy, which quickly became a favorite among the Wordsworth circle. Her sister Sara Hutchinson remarked that she soon needed to copy the text herself, so that she could "lend [it] to whom [she] liked," adding that it would "make a very respectable figure in a Book."[8] Family friend and noted journalist Henry Crabb Robinson recorded,

> I do not know when I have felt more humble than in reading it, it is so superior to my own. She saw so much more than I did, though we were side by side during a great part of the time. Her recollection and her observation were alike employed with so much more effect than mine. This book revived impressions nearly dormant and corrected some errors in my own narrative.[9]

Hutchinson's and Robinson's remarks highlight the popularity and importance of Mary's journal among the extended group of family and friends. Perhaps more tellingly, Robinson notes that Mary's eye for detail and abilities as a writer "corrected" some of his own perspectives on the trip. A highly respected writer in his own right, Robinson recognized that Mary's observations were "employed to so much more effect" than his own. His evaluation of her writing gestures toward the mixing of sublime, beautiful, and banal imagery, the spatiotemporal immediacy of writing necessary to throw over scenes—as William famously advocates—"a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things [are] presented to the mind in an unusual way."[10] The impressions that her writing revived for Robinson and other members of the tour, or inspired in the readers who did not undertake the nearly six-month journey, come to belie the "imperfect[ion]" or incompletion Mary writes of in this essay's opening excerpt.

The language and composition of Mary's journal differ from that which she employed in her usual writing, suggesting conscious stylistic choices; her letters to family and friends are direct and to the point, whereas the travel journal attempts and exercises poetic and discursive abilities. Furthermore, despite the opportunity for elaboration once home, Mary's fair-copy editions maintain, according to Pamela Woof, a "breathless freshness of response that has no leisure to write full sentences, but records an eager attention."[11] This eager attention, retained from travel notes composed with neither leisure nor physical space for elaboration, manifests itself in Mary's robust, short sentences:

> a train coming along a sort of pier,—Passengers fresh from their beds,—Market women with their baskets on their backs,—on their heads,—Men & Boys, all laden;—nicely-shaped baskets of various sorts—with Poultry, vegetables & fruit beautifully packed.—Carts with Calves, living & dead,—one little black calf led by a cord gave its attendant some trouble;—a flock of sheep!—a

> busy, bustling scene,—All coming to market,—such a gay groupe—scarlet, blue every variety of colour—& how picturesque the dresses! The pipe, the baskets—"O now that the genius of Bewick were mine!" (p. 15)[12]

The concise and vibrant descriptions—the images that arise from modifiers like "passengers *fresh* from their beds" and "fruit *beautifully* packed"—result in an entry imbued with a spirit of excitement as well as progression; Mary leads each object before our mind's eye with an increasing sense of delight. Charged, energetic, and active, Mary records here the dawn arrival of a barge she and Dorothy watched from their hotel window. The sense of abruptness created by her compilation of verbal phrases instills movement into the passage in a bold and refreshing manner. Additionally, the spatial and directional changes signaled by the dashes aid in reproducing the procession for the reader *as* a procession. This shifting sense of focus and duration of attention, enacted by the changes in tense, prevents the writing from becoming static or merely an inventory of the passing objects. The suggested industry of the market people, the loveliness of the dresses, and the excitement and wonder of it all are rendered in unrestrained amusement until excitement brims over and an exclamation ensues.

While the use of the opening line from William's "The Two Thieves, or the Last Stage of Avarice" (1800), with its reference to Bewick, a popular engraver, gestures on its face towards the ability of painting (or engraving) to illustrate better the scene before her, the line also complicates the relationship between texual and visual arts. The image and emotion that "The Two Thieves" elicits undermines its initial desire for the "genius of Bewick" as the poem's commemoration of two thieves is just as intimate and captivating as the engraving it proposes to describe. Likewise, the active and suggestive language Mary's uses undermines her plea for further artistic ability. The images of this passage amply capture the excitement and kaleidoscopic sense of motion, color, and vivacity of the pier's procession. The use of the verse line brings with it the connotations of the poem, its invocation of visual art and then its substitution of the verbal arts. Perhaps Mary's inclusion of the line also gestures towards an anxiety about entering into the creative world already occupied by her husband and sister-in-law, anxieties surrounding her ability to capture or relay adequately the scenes before her. Her interest in the modes of representation and the blending of original and borrowed styles surfaces at the outset of the tour, though as the journal progresses, Mary relies less upon inclusion of other's words and more upon her own observation and artistic sensibility. The difficulty and the necessity of capturing experiences in language ultimately constitutes a central focus of Mary's observations about her travels, a theme to which I return in the final sections of this paper.

* * *

As the tour progressed and the group moved away from the bustling port towns towards the continent's interior, there are less "breathless" accounts of groups and commerce in the journal. Instead, Mary experiments with creating virtually three-dimensional written pictures of the wildernesses, villages, and forests she encounters. She addresses the following panorama to her absent daughter, Doro, as she climbs the ruins of a hillside castle in Germany:

> Suppose us standing upon its Tower rising out of a <u>Sea</u> of mist.—Woody hills on the <u>Shore</u>;—beyond & above these, the majestic Alps appearing in sunshine, revealing themselves by degrees. Just before us, upon the same rock with the Castle, a beautiful path leads up a flat green hill to a level with the Tower on which we stand—a pleasure-house or watch tower upon it.—Now, a little Valley at our feet opens out between us & the hill, & shews its Moss-hut-summer-house &c &—and more paths—a sweet slip of pleasure ground. Turning to the right, the Jura Mountains, quite clear;—<u>more</u> to the right, & opposite to the Alps, promontories & points running into the body of the mist;—real castles & imaginary ones, islands & trees, & ship-like trees all glittering in sun shine;—appearing, encreasing, & changing form continually. Mountains of different heights; woody, overwrapping, & peering above each other, bring me round to the region of the Alps—now brightened, enlarged & multiplied. (p. 44)

As in the previous depiction of a boat, this scene enacts the turning of one's head to scan a vista and mirrors embodied movement. However, the movement here is slower, more meditative; the viewer is no longer simply looking down at a hectic city scene but is in the middle of a sublime landscape. Mary moves the reader both up, above the clouds and earth, and down, below the path leading towards the little valley. Mary positions us in the middle of this enormity and slowly rotates the view. This slow and segmented construction of the view imparts an idea of the immensity of the scene to readers. Robinson may have had passages like this one in mind when he wrote that Mary "frequently described as in a panorama, the objects around her. These were written on the spot, and I recollect her often sitting on the grass, not aware what kind of employment she had. Now it is evident that a succession of such pictures must represent the face of the country" (p. 271).

From the highest sights of her vantage point, Mary moves to more minute or comprehensible objects: the path leading up the "flat green hill," the "pleasure-house or watch tower," and finally to the "little Valley at our feet" with its "Moss-hut-summer-house" and "sweet slip of pleasure ground." The constant flux from vast expanse to particular focus ensures that the impact of the Alps is not lost but revealed "by degrees." The halting nature of the dash here serves to mirror Mary's inability to take in

the whole scene before her; what she can see of the Alps is arresting and without transition. Instead of depicting a comprehensive view, Mary offers the scene as "brightened, enlarged & multiplied"—to be approached one piece at a time. The portrait of Alpine vastness and expansion invokes the sublime but backs away from a sweeping or seamless view that would, in its completeness, diminish the overpowering awfulness of the mountains.

By artfully choosing connotative and suggestive language—or in quoting lines from others—Mary constructs networks of associations and ideas with other Romantic writers. Mary's "sea of mist" not only describes the view from atop an Alpine eminence, it also evokes William's metaphor in *The Prelude: or Growth of a Poet's Mind* (1850) to describe the limitless capabilities of the imagination. These sublime views—real or imagined—reside in nature because they emanate from the "mighty mind" of the author.[13] The everyday or "rustic" qualities of life held innumerable attractions to Romantic writers, who seized upon them and the surrounding environments to explore human experience and meaning—including explorations into their own self-identification and patterns of thought. Indeed, some of Mary's strongest compositional abilities present themselves most fully when she describes moments of everyday stillness—emotional and philosophical spaces in which the haste of travel is suspended:

> 6 oClock W.[m] come in, & is changing his stockings; it has been heavy rain, & is <u>now</u> raining;—a thunder shower, enwrapping the jagged rocks & mountains in mist,—now, it passes away & they appear stupendous. W.[m] calls me to the window to see a large herd of goats crossing an Alpine bridge, over the high swoln torrent. A woman with a scarlet handkerchief tied round her head—her milk pail in one hand, a sieve-like vessel in the other. A boy with his dog follows;—& now the train of tinkling Kine, with the herd-boy, comes last. (p. 83)

The juxtaposition of the homely happenings of the interior with the Romantic and misty scenes of the exterior gives this scene an inviting intimacy and recalls the eighteenth-century tradition of "writ[ing] to the moment."[14] Here is a moment of observation quite unlike that of the bustling pier scene; though certainly not devoid of processional action just as vividly delineated as the earlier scene, Mary's style renders it more passive and reflective. The scene's propinquity is constituted in part by the thrice repeated "now" and the present tense in which it is written, effecting an unhurried and quiet moment of observation. She does not move the reader from object to object but instead instructs them to linger over each aspect of the scene. Most unexpectedly, the domestic anchoring of William changing his stockings aids to blur the line between our perspective and Mary's and, through the juxtaposition of interior and exterior images, provides an appealing contrast for the imagination. Through this arrangement, the reader too is called to the window as William calls Mary; she invites us

to share in what she sees and feels, to empathize in a moment of stillness and Romantic experience—the everyday, poetically blended with aspects of nature and rural humanity. Mary offers us images of the milkmaid and the young boy simply, without embellishments. The scarlet handkerchief is both utilitarian and art, as is the milk bucket the woman carries; Romantic writers turned towards the "lowly" to reclaim the beauty and dignity, the authenticity of those conventionally placed in the lower rungs of culture or societal importance.

The ways in which images and sounds are connected to ideas and emotions constitute one manner in which Mary simultaneously captures these experiences and resists mimicking or parodying the style of contemporaries. She emphasizes that which cannot be spoken or delineated clearly but must be instead felt and experienced. In detailing as she does these external scenes, we are given a glimpse of her interior state, which is often adventurous yet unobtrusive and reflective. For example, she often mentions "tinkling," as in "the train of tinkling Kine" or of Catholic villagers processing to Mass. The bells captivate Mary—indeed sounds of all sorts abound in the journal—and she begins to see them as representing the peaceful repose of their owners and the land itself. She grafts her firsthand response and experience of the bells into her journal, and the bells are mentioned almost exclusively in relation to dawns and twilights, which she considers the stillest times of the day. In her handling, the bells elicit ideas of ethereal stillness and peace even in the absence of visible cattle or villagers: "Golden clouds are now floating above the mountain tops,—W.[m] says he was awake, & looked out some time ago when the moon was in great glory.—The tinklings have begun—&, the sound tells me that it is time to prepare for our adventures" (p. 84). The "tinklings" become metonymic for calm and gentle ambience while also ushering in a sense of mystery as to the source—an elegant milkmaid with a bright handkerchief? A rustic shepherd, experiencing an unspoiled relationship to nature and to work as he follows beyond his flock? Each of these encounters, though seemingly unordinary, promises a new experience. Something mysterious resides in the everyday, in the tranquil on-goings of shepherds and country inhabitants. Certainly, Mary had seen many women and children herding cattle or sheep in Grasmere but none wrapped in misty rain descending from Alpine heights, and she paints the scene in an accordingly different and dream-like light.

William has come in, presumably from walking; he has been out and has interacted with the scene while Mary remained inside, removed from the people and events she portrays. This glass between her and objects, in this case literal—though oftentimes not—keeps her journal's objects wrapped in a shroud of otherness. Passages of this nature present opportunities to tease out the style of her emergent voice, to trace her influences and the

ways in which she resists or adapts them to prose. She does not write in the overwrought, highly stylized poetic diction that William rails against in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) nor does she take on the persona or perspective of the objects or individuals she observes.[15] Mary's writing instead straddles the line between creative writing and travel record. While perhaps writing less as a consciously stylized tourist than Dorothy or Robinson—in that she had no intentions of publication or profit—Mary nonetheless is no ordinary travel writer, and her language and grammar constitute the nuanced and expressive subjectivity of raw observational talent that critics have admired, though few in number.[16]

* * *

Though characterizing Mary's writing as "jottings," the early Wordsworth biographer William Knight nonetheless, in a rare instance of commentary, praises Mary's work in his introduction to Dorothy's journal: "it is hard to say whether the jottings taken at the time by the wife, or the extended Journal afterwards written by the sister, is the more admirable, both as a record of travel and as a commentary on the poet's work."[17] Others have already noted that William turned to Mary's journal as often as he did to Dorothy's for *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent*. At issue, however, in Knight's assessment, is the persistent relegation of the women to recordkeepers of the poet (here, even in an edition of Dorothy's own work). Fortunately, more recent scholarship on Dorothy has placed her on more equitable footing with William and revealed the deeply collaborative writing practices between the siblings.[18] Mary's journal has the potential to be equally revelatory. As well as illuminating the extended nature of the writing circle (that is, the inclusion of herself and others, such as Robinson), Mary's journal presents an opportunity for analyzing where and how each writer departed in subject or in the framing of their (often shared) experiences of the tour.

The journals of Mary and Dorothy, though often treating similar if not the same scenes and events, operate and function differently and to different ends. The constrasting approaches and purposes are worth exploring, particularly to demonstrate the position Mary's writing takes in relation to Dorothy's more self-consciously professional travel-writing. Dorothy wrote with publication in mind, ostensibly shaping her writing according to audience expectations and marketability.[19] Her work was to be a travel guide, and she often includes detail about popular attractions, travel routes, and reference images for her readers. William later added a series of poems intended to "ornament" Dorothy's journal, presumably calculating that the addition would further sales.[20]

One of the tour's most fantastic moments, and one that also displays the different writing approaches of the Wordsworth women, centers on a stormy night spent inside traveling cars in the Swiss village of Herzogenbuchsee. Despite the threat of what would become a tremendous thunderstorm, Mary, Dorothy, William, and their cousin Thomas Monkhouse refused what they felt were an innkeeper's unreasonable rates, resolving instead to lodge within their traveling *voitures* (cars). Both women write entries detailing the storm, and in Mary's, we can see the culmination of her stylistic achievement. Her descriptions recall the gothic suspense and mystery usually encountered in an Ann Radcliffe novel, exhibiting her ability to create a dramatic narrative. The passage displays qualities of a well-wrought gothic fiction but with the added wonder of authenticity:

> Faint lightening had been gleaming before us during the whole of these proceedings,—it now became more vivid, & soon a determined thunder-storm came on. We were situated in a close part of the Town,—an opening to the Jura in front;—above which the only piece of sky that to us was visible—& hence the lightening flashed! One candle burnt brightly from a window before us,—& from many other windows proceeded lights, moving about, or stationary—Wild sounds came from an unintelligible Watchman,—A deep-toned dog howled, terrified I suppose by the storm,—& then, the wildest thing of all—was the appearance of a Man, in his night cap, with a lantern in his hand, upon a gallery immediately over our heads;—he held up his light above the rail of the Gallery—to look at the storm.—Perhaps the weight of rain, at that time falling, had made him apprehensive of a flood,—& my own mind, was not quite free from the thought that we might be taken from our station by some torrent bursting above,—the situation well justified the thoughts, if the rain continued much longer. Or, did this man look out being moved by human kindness to us houseless strangers, unable to rest while the storm raged without shewing himself, to give us an opportunity, should fear urge us, to ask for admittance into his house?—(he from his house had witnessed our parleyings with the Host [innkeeper]). But, looking from the Gallery for some time, & afterwards coming down stairs, opening his door & even walking out of it in the rain—he, seeing us tranquil, & making no appeal to his hospitality, closed his door;—the light repassed the lower window—along the Gallery & disappeared, & the storm went on without respite for some time. When it ceased or perhaps before it had quite ceased, we all got to sleep. (pp. 46-47)

These images reveal Mary's imaginative talent at work, framing and imbuing the experience with a sense of adventure and even horror. She blends the external panorama, already superbly described, with her interior thoughts and projections, such as the man's motivation for stepping out onto the gallery. Dorothy's version of the same night appears more as a precaution or advisory anecdote to warn subsequent travelers about the sometimes extreme weather of the region, made more frightening by the group's decision to remain within their traveling cars:

> we were pleased to while away the time by watching broad flashes of lightening in the distant horizon above the Jura boundary. At length we dropped asleep; but were soon rouzed by a fitful sound of gathering winds—heavy rain followed—and vivid flashes of lightening with tremendous thunder. It was very awful; Mary and I were sitting together—alone—in the open street;—a strange situation! yet we had no personal fear. Before the storm began, all the lights had been extinguished, except one, opposite to us, and another at an Inn behind, where were turbulent noises of merriment, with singing and haranguing in the style of our village politicians. These ceased; and after the storm, lights appeared in different quarters;—pell-mell rushed the fountain;—then came a watchman with his dismal recitative Song or Say—the church-clock telling the hours and the quarters—and house-clocks with their silvery tone. One scream we heard from a human voice; but no person seemed to notice *us*, except a man who came out upon the wooden Gallery of his house right above our heads, looked down this way and that, and especially towards the voitures. Mary and I fancied he had some humane feeling for us, thinking of the terrors of the storm; but William and Mr. M[onkhouse] gave him credit for no such sympathies. The beating of the rain, and the rushing of that fountain were continuous; and with the periodical, and the *irregular* sounds (among which the howling of a dog was not the least dismal) completed the wildness of the awful scene, and of our strange situation;—sheltered from wet, yet in the midst of it, and exposed to intermitting blasts, though struggling with excessive heat, while flashes of lightening at intervals displayed the distant mountains and the wide space between,—at other times a blank gloom.[21]

Both passages engage with characteristically Romantic, sublime, and even gothic literary elements: the raging storm, the dimness of light contrasted with the flashes of lightning, ominous sounds, and the captivating details of the candles in motion. Both scenes open with the natural event of rain and lightning, though Mary begins by framing the entry in terms of the storm's rising intensity. This sense of escalation continues throughout; the shifting and limited sense of perspective in the "faint" gleams of the lightning that become more vivid and the "close part" of the town with the "opening" of the mountains through which only a "piece of sky" is visible together build a sense of anticipation and climax, which is then answered by the exclamation, "hence the lightening flashed!" The exclamation is a jolt of excitement in the narrative, much as the lightning was to Mary after the period of expectation. This sense of partial revelation is prevalent throughout the passage and, paired with a strong appeal to sight and sound, rounds out Mary's panorama.

Dorothy, too, appeals to the noises and visions of the night. In contrast to Mary's, though, her description relies less on natural phenomena and evocative description and more on the human element within the scene. Dorothy returns the events to the familiar and anchors them in detail; the "wild sounds" Mary hears from the "unintelligible Watchman" become, in Dorothy's narrative, the expected but "dismal" song of the man's trade,

which is then paired with the familiar church clock and the "house-clocks with their silvery tone." Though many aspects of the scene are "dismal," "awful," or "strange," Dorothy provides a cause or explanation for each, as in the unexpected scream that rises from "a human voice." She notes, wryly, the similarity of the riotousness within the inn to that of Cumbrian politicians, whereas all Mary mentions of others, aside from the watchman and the mysterious man on the gallery, is the roving candle lights of unseen but present beings. Thus, the watchman and, most significantly, the man upon the gallery, appear supernaturally against the backdrop of the storm. She cannot see the watchman nor speak with the man in the night cap. Mary focuses then on the man she can see, trying to read his intentions and thoughts. She calls to the fore the human sentiments of sympathy and compassion through her inquiry of his thoughts. The juxtaposition of a fierce, unpredictable nature, and the mysteriously apprehensive man, present a striking meditation on human fragility and emotion.

Mary intensifies her narrative through the allusion to sights and sounds, culminating in the appearance of "the wildest thing of all": "a Man, in his night cap, with a lantern in his hand, upon a gallery immediately over our heads." At this point, she slows the procession of images to dwell on this solitary form and his possible motives for braving the weather; the composition is reminiscent of the "Sea of mist" scene, where she collapsed the otherwise wide scope of the valley into the particulars of the paths and summer huts. In this instance, the man's entry into the scene forms passage's climax, like another jolt of lightning—as if with a flash he appears, a living image in the terrible storm. The elliptical narration almost entirely gives way here, as Mary follows the man and his motions to the abatement of all other action. She interprets his actions, supposing he shares the same apprehension she does of a flood, and her question, addressed to no one, "did this man look out being moved by human kindness," lulls the storm's rise. His retreat marks both the end of the storm's terror and the adventure, as the scene closes with the *voitures*' inhabitants drifting into sleep.

While her account elicits fewer specifics of the night than does Dorothy's and includes less individual description, what Mary chooses to record features an elusiveness that exploits the imagination.[22] Her journal escapes the boundaries of travel writing, attempting to occupy a middle ground between a record of experience and a designed creative utterance. Mary displays here that added Romantic "colouring of imagination" that can translate the experience to the reader; she shapes her scene almost wholly around the powerful and ominous nature of the storm, telescoping from the raging environment to the single man within it. She and her group, along with the reader, belong to the inclusive "us" and "we," which further strips the narrative of exact description or definition. Dorothy in contrast separates the viewers: "Mary and I" and "William and Mr. M[onkhouse]." Similarly

the objects Dorothy describes are individually assessed and depicted, and she builds them, opposite from Mary, from interior to exterior; the passage focuses immediately on the group and then pans outward to the storm. In portraying the events of the night, Dorothy grounds and situates them in relation to her companions: the party was "pleased to while away the time by watching" the storm, the gathering of the winds roused them from sleep, Mary and she "fancied" the man upon the gallery had empathy for them, "William and Mr. M. gave him credit for no such sympathies."

The writers' different engagements with language and narratorial perspective create the differing advantages of the two passages. Dorothy constructs an inventory of the night's events while Mary suggestively captures the intensity and turmoil of the scene through the arrangement of her prose, the building up of verbal phrases and the sequence of actions suggested between them. Mary amasses images of the storm, shifting between appeals to the auditory and visual stimuli, exterior and interior. Her passage aims at mirroring the storm's intensity through its very language, as she does in other scenes throughout the journal.

* * *

Mary's relationship with language shapes the form and style of what she terms (earnestly or not) her "imperfect notices" and emerges as focal to her experience, both as a traveler and as a writer. Unlike William and Dorothy, Mary spoke no German or French, and therefore, her sense of and sensitivity to nature and humanity largely mediated her impressions and understanding of any scene.[23] While her companions struggled to translate what they heard in conversations, Mary was free to revel in the rhythm and sound of language. For Mary, as Thomas De Quincey describes, "the less you understand of a language, the more sensible you are to the melody or harshness of its sounds."[24] Language piques her imaginative powers and pervades almost every passage of her writing; she meditates intensely on her linguistic separation (and at times physical separation, as well) from the people and objects around her. Her entries generally do not relay conversations or experiences of other members of the party but instead focus on her own interactions and perspectives on the journey. Inclusions of other texts, infrequent as they are, lend histories and reports of the places she observed, informing her impressions of awe or sympathy.[25]

Mary's observations thus emerge through an estranged lens. There are no dialogues with the people she encounters; she has only the rudiments of gesture, expression, and tone with which to grasp meaning. In part, the journal's strength, interest, and effectiveness stems from this solitary and even isolated position. Dorothy and William, with their smattering of German and French, were involved in discussions and experiences to

which Mary could have no access. She could not ask, for example, why work in a Swiss field occured so late in the season or for what purpose two Italian men were working on a stone walkway (p. 134); she likewise could not thank one of these laborers for his kindness to her:

> Steps at length led us to the meadows, an old & a young Man engaged in repairing these—I was before the rest, & coming to a part where a step was wanted, the old man with a kind look proffered me his hand, nor would he suffer mine to be withdrawn until he had led me to the bottom of that flight;—I was much affected by this instance of natural gallantry, & the benevolent countenance of the old Man—& sorry that I could only express by my looks a sense of the attention. (pp. 72-73)

Her intent to convey only what she noticed first-hand suggests a careful attention to and interest in nonverbal communication. Mary relays a sense of a shared human experience that transcends the meaning of words, instead residing in the physical encounters between people that can be universally understood.[26] She writes of the body and the emotions, the sights, sounds, thoughts, and reactions of the tour, and how she herself understands or interprets them. Linguistic isolation allows her to notice, for instance,

> the very great resemblance between the sound of the German & our own language,—especially when it proceeds from Children;—sitting at an open window where a groupe were at play & listening to the happy sound as my nature always leads me to do, I felt a flash of surprize at the recollection that those little Creatures were talking German! the sound exactly what one might have heard at the foot of Rydal hill on a Sunday evening, when the whole village are at play—the laugh—the shrill note were the <u>very</u> same. (p. 19)

Though she cannot understand the semantic meaning of the words, Mary nonetheless makes contact with the scene before her by relating it to her realm of understanding and experience—in this instance, that of children at play. Her position as the group's only mother—writing partly in hopes that one day her children might retrace her steps and share in her sensations as they recognize "the objects their mother had seen"—underlies Mary's particular attention to the other mothers and children she encounters (p. 164). Her experiment is similar to that of William's shocking *Lyrical Ballads*, undertaken in the "language really used by men," in which one can get closer to "the essential passions of the heart."[27] Her elevated sensitivity to and awareness of the aural qualities of language, including its ability to express or transmit emotion, is emphasized by her reflection that she listened to the children playing because "my nature always leads me to." Mary explores how human spirit or, as in the previous example, happiness can signify itself through tone and laughter and is not exclusively bound to comprehension of a word or sentence. Mary sometimes refers the reader

to Dorothy's journal in these cases because, as she says, "not being able to relate conversations I should spoil every thing" (p. 154). Mary tends to refer to Dorothy's journal for specific facts or details, keeping for her journal only those experiences that moved her or at which she was personally present (p. 154). She in fact owes the heightened sense of her writing's appeal, its references to intrinsic and embodied humanity, to this linguistic wall of inaccessibility and incomprehension: "The first sound I heard this morning, was from the voice of a female in the adjoining Apartment,—the Mother, or a friend teaching a little child its prayers; patter, patter, patter, echoed by a slender note" (p. 127).

Mary's engagement and interaction with objects acquire their meaningfulness through the chasm in comprehension, allowing her to experiment with meaning and form to understand these encounters. "Patter, patter, patter" has no fixed meaning but, like the "tinkling" of the kine, transforms in her handling to represent gentle calm, a beautiful sound that announces the piety and innocence of the small child. The interaction between the adult and child is celebrated and revered, manifested and preserved because the semantic content of the prayer is withheld. Mary's journal presents many formulations of this attention to the perceived sentimental or romantic import of foreign languages. Her interests in the non-semantic elements of language—its "transrational" qualities—bear upon her narrative style.[28] Her employment of stylistic and thematic nuance renders accessible those most striking and significant encounters that she cannot directly translate—like the boat of Catholic worshippers, moving softly along Lake Cuomo towards Cadenabbia: "Met a Boat laden with Peasants returning from Church,—chaunting a religious service,—a Priest was among them; his voice heard singly—then the crew gave the responses,—it was a soothing, & a beautiful image moving on the calm plain of water" (p. 111).

While the presentation of the journal in this manner may seem overly compact, or even fragmentary, the images themselves and the ways in which they are imaginatively and pictorially constructed, grow large in the imagination—both that of the reader and the author. Though Mary cannot understand what a vagrant woman says, the reader can feel her loss and despair through Mary's prose, in ways analogous to her husband's verse. We are able to envision and encounter the dignity of nuns as they pass through a French city and the joyousness of a wedding in a rural German town. Passages such as these, as Robinson noted, characterize Mary's "enviable faculty," "sparing of reflections which ought rather to be excited by than obtruded in a book of travels" (p. 271). In maintaining the brevity and concision of her initial impressions and rejecting elaborate adornment, Mary offers a suggestive rather than explanatory manner of narration, one that emphasizes personal experience:

> Waked at 12 oClock by the angry dashing of the Lake upon the shore, what a change! When we went to sleep it was quietly glittering in the moon-shines—I got out of bed to look at it,—Waves were breaking on the shore, as if a tide were coming in, & would soon reach the walls of the house:—No other appearance of a wind.—The mountains at that hour looked very sublime,—O it is a solemn spot!—A boat going out at the closing-in of night, the moon not then bright, gave me wild, adventurous feelings of solitude & danger. (p. 78)

Even though "we" went to bed, this passage highlights the Romantic connection between the individual and Nature. Mary alone wakes to the sound of the turbulent water and assesses the scene for its causation and for its potential to become dangerous. However, this nature, at this hour and in this context, does not for Mary arouse terror or the need to seek out her companions but instead becomes a deeply personal and spiritual experience. It indeed is a "solemn spot," which evokes excitement that only Mary is able to revel in. The "sublime" mountains humble her while the faint moon falls upon the lone boat embarking upon this tempestuous water. The scene profoundly affects Mary, and her writing gives us a glimpse of that wild feeling.

Relating experiences, particularly those observed in solitude or at the margins, underlies Mary's narrative project, as evidenced by the "adventurous feelings of solitude" she frequently encountered while traveling. While in many of her entries Mary mentions her companions' locations or notes their activities, much of her focus is on her solitary observations. Whereas Dorothy relays her interviews with village locals or critiques customs and fashion such as "little girls in grandmother's attire" and William writes of Europe as a "realized romance," Mary frequently records that she is walking alone or writing apart from the others.[29] This solitude is not unwelcome; indeed, when obliged to take Dorothy's seat in the *voiture*, Mary remarks that she does "not remember ever to have felt more sorry to separate myself from my own thoughts and enjoyments" (p. 126).

* * *

Mary's journal is comprised of incidents and scenes evocatively expressed through her handling of language and her prose structure as well as her manipulation of latent meanings and imagery to capture experiences of the continental journey. She writes with a sense of movement and motion, in one moment opening up the Swiss Alps before us and in the next, narrowing the scene to the glow of a fireplace; her ability to portray sublimely what is overwhelming or quietly what is intimate underlies the narrative accomplishment of her writing. Her employment of language is oftentimes novel and unexpected, especially for someone historically circumscribed as Mrs. William Wordsworth: copyist, mother, and wife.

Returning to the epigraph that opens this study, the evolution of Mary's journal—from initial request by Dorothy, to sustained encouragement from William, and finally, and most importantly, to a gift to Doro and a "powerful" stimulant to her personal experiences of the trip—delineates the deep Romantic connection between writing and the self and the importance of sharing those experiences. That she records so many of these moments "on the spot" enables Mary to capture and transmit the vital, essential nature of the object or landscape she perceives. In doing so, Mary constructs, in her own manner, what her husband called "spots of time."[30] These moments do not, however, recall formative moments in the life of a developing poet, as we understand them in regard to William, but rather milestones in the emergence of a creative narrative voice—one that underscores the importance of meaning and experience. This voice should be reclaimed from obscurity and explored more fully not only for its questioning of language and humanity in nineteenth-century Europe or for its implications in Wordsworth studies, but principally as part of the historical and literary legacy of Mary Wordsworth.

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NOTES

[1] Mary Wordsworth, "Journal of a tour on the Continent," 1820, DCMS 92, Dove Cottage Manuscripts, Wordsworth Trust, Jerwood Centre, Grasmere, 164. "D" refers to Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary's sister-in-law, and "Wm" to William Wordsworth, Mary's husband. The four original notebooks Mary used during the journey are held at the Jerwood Centre: Mary Wordsworth, "Notes on a Tour of the Continent," 1820, DCMS 91, Dove Cottage Manuscripts. DCMS 92 is the first fair-copy edition of the notebooks and is also known as MS A of the journal. I have attempted to transcribe passages from "Journal of a tour on the Continent" with fidelity to the original, including Mary's shorthand and orthography. Mary paginated each of her fair-copy editions but with errors; in DCMS 92, there is no page marked 88 and two pages marked 93. This essay does not cite material from either of the misnumbered pages, so to avoid adding unnecessary confusion, I have made no attempt to compensate for the pagination errors. DCMS 92 was previously transcribed and made available online by the publishing company Day Books. There exists, however, many transcription errors—some critical—and no reference

notes for the general reader; see "Mary Wordsworth's travel journal (DCMS 92) 11 July to 23 December 1820," Day Books, accessed 7 November 2017, http://www.day-books.com/assets/daybooks_wordsworth_diary.pdf. Subsequent references to Mary's "Journal of a tour on the Continent" will be cited parenthetically in the text to DCMS 92.

[2] To avoid confusion, all three Wordsworths will be referred to by their first names throughout the article.

[3] Mary E. Burton, introduction to *The Letters of Mary Wordsworth*, ed. Burton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), xvii.

[4] Lucy Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: "All in Each Other"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Mary's journal is discussed in chapter thirteen, "The Continent" (pp. 242-64).

[5] There are several excellent in-depth studies of the Romanticism's interest in language and linguistics: Marcus Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory: William Hazlitt, Language, and Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); John Beer, *Romanticism, Revolution and Language: The Fate of the Word from Samuel Johnson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); William Keach, *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics*, Literature in History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Arden Reed, ed., *Romanticism and Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

[6] See Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 536. Barker mentions William's dependence on his wife's and sister's journals but provides no further commentary on Mary's journal or its presence in *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent*. In "The Continent" chapter of *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Newlyn goes farther than any previous study to trace connections between Mary's writing and William's verse. Her central focus, however, is the Wordsworth siblings, and Mary's writing is mentioned briefly and subordinately in respect to this larger project.

[7] While deprived of the space in this essay, the relational aspect of the several writings that emerged from the 1820 journey—the cross-references, deferrals, and corrections to each other's work—presents a rich area of study, one where Mary's writing has yet to intervene. Challenging the notion of a solitary genius, her journal's inclusion and importance to the other literary projects of the tour highlights the collaboration and sharing (still more interestingly, collaboration and sharing *after* the tourists returned home) necessary for the creation of historically more canonical texts, like that of *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent*. As Michel Foucault might argue, Mary's journal constitutes an untapped node of the Wordsworthian writing network, towards which the present essay can only gesture.

[8] Sara Hutchinson to Thomas Monkhouse, 23 November 1821, in *The Letters of Sara Hutchinson from 1800 to 1835*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), 225. There exist five versions of Mary's 1820 tour in the Dove Cottage collection: DCMS 91, the original four notebooks, roughly octavo in size, in which Mary recorded the tour; DCMS 92, Mary's first fair-copy; DCMS 93, in which Mary expanded and rearranged DCMS 92; DCMS 94, which Hutchinson copied from DCMS 93; and lastly, DCMS 95, written in an unknown hand, also based off of DCMS 93. All manuscripts are housed at the Wordsworth Trust's Jerwood Centre at Dove Cottage, Grasmere.

[9] Henry Crabb Robinson, *On Books and Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley, vol. 1

(London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1938), 299. Robinson joined the group at Lucerne in August, remaining for the duration of the journey. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[10] William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*," 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1802), vii.

[11] Pamela Woof, *William, Mary and Dorothy: The Wordworths' Continental Tour of 1820* (Grasmere: Dove Cottage, 2008), 8. Woof's brief but helpful pamphlet overviews the Wordsworths' writings, both journalistic and poetic, that emerged from the journey.

[12] Mary quotes the opening line of William's "The Two Thieves, or the Last Stage of Avarice," first published in William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, vol. 2 (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800), 92. In the quote from Mary's journal, an illegible word appears above "nicely."

[13] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, 2nd rev. ed., ed. Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), book 13, line 69, doi:10.1093/actrade/9780198728337.book.1.

[14] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 721. Ross discusses the importance of letters and personal writing as form in his introduction (p. 22).

[15] Romantic authors moved away from taking on the experiences and views of others, which they viewed as false, instead choosing a third-person narrative voice by which to explore themes and invoke the reader's imagination. For example, Coleridge's celebrated *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) describes a mysterious and cursed sailor from a third-person perspective. William's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," in the same collection, comments on class inequalities and greed but not through impersonating the elderly Blake. Perhaps William's best known poem—"Lines Written (or Composed) a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (1798)—relates the author's own experiences upon revisiting a site that held great meaning to him.

[16] See Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 248, for an additional view of Mary's writing as it relates to that of William and Dorothy.

[17] William Knight, preface to *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1897), xiii. The line cited is the extent of Knight's analysis of Mary's journal, and he does not engage with the journal in any capacity outside of commentary and record. See also Ernest De Selincourt's *Dorothy Wordsworth: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), in which, in an introductory footnote, De Selincourt discusses the size of Mary's journal relative to Dorothy's.

[18] Woof and Newlyn have published extensively on the works of Dorothy; *William and Dorothy Wordsworth* constitutes Newlyn's most recent. See also Rachel Feder, "The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth," *Studies in Romanticism*, 53 (2014), 541-59; Susan M. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, rev. ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009); Woof, "Dorothy Wordsworth, Writer: The Middle Years," *Wordsworth Circle*, 45 (2014), 3-11; and Mary Ellen Bellanca, "After-Life-Writing: Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals in the *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*," *European Romantic Review*, 25 (2014), 201-18.

[19] See Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 245.

[20] Hutchinson to Monkhouse, 23 November 1821, in *The Letters of Sara Hutchinson from 1800 to 1835*, 225.

[21] Dorothy Wordsworth, "Journal of a Tour," 1820, 2 vols., DCMS 90, Dove Cottage Manuscripts, 218-19.

[22] Dorothy's more individual description can be seen in her account of the discussion she and Mary had with William and Monkhouse, in which they denied any compassion on the part of the man on the gallery but instead explained it was likely anxiety for himself and his property. Mary omits the discussion, transmuting their statement to aspeculation ("Perhaps the weight of the rain . . ."), and placing it alongside her own philosophical reflection as to his motive.

[23] The group was greatly relieved by the arrival of Robinson, who was much more conversant in German than either William or Dorothy. See William Wordsworth to Robinson, 12 March 1821, in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol. 4, *The Later Years*, *Part I, 1821-1828*, 2nd ed., ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 43.

[24] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46.

[25] Aside from William's poetry, Mary also copied from Henry Matthews's *Diary of an Invalid: Journal of a Tour in Pursuit of Health; in Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, and France, in the years 1817, 1818, and 1819* (London: John Murray, 1820), 319. Mary includes his firsthand account of the devastation in Martigny caused by severe flooding, meditating on the remains and ruins she witnessed of that catastrophe ("Journal of a tour on the Continent," p. 148).

[26] For an expanded analysis of Romantic embodied humanism, see Alan Richardson, "Embodied Universalism, Romantic Discourse, and the Anthropological Imagination," in *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 151-80.

[27] William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*," vii. William, one of several nineteenth-century authors interested in language and imagination, writes of the importance of understanding "in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other" (p. viii).

[28] The term "transrational" is borrowed from Russian Formalism, particularly the work of Viktor Shklovsky. See, for example, Boris M. Éjxenbaum's overview of the concept in "The Theory of the Formal Method," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971), 3-37.

[29] Dorothy Wordsworth, "Journal of a Tour," 226; and William Wordsworth, "Elegiac stanzas," 1820, DCMS 96.30, Dove Cottage Manuscripts. DCMS 96 is a transcription of William's collection of poems from the tour, copied by Hutchinson. Wordsworth connects many of the scenes with their historical significance—whether it be his personal history, as when he first saw the scene as a young man, or their ancient Greek or Roman connections. For instance, in the sonnet "The Source of the Danube," William evokes Argo and the search for the golden fleece.

[30] In the eleventh book of William's *The Prelude*, the poet writes:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A vivifying Virtue, whence, depress'd
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,

> In trivial occupations, and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> Are nourished and invisibly repair'd. (ll. 208-15)

"Spots of time" therefore refers to memories and moments of life that despite the passage of time or the effects of circumstance, buoy the imagination and spirit. For William, much of his poetry deals with returning to these spots and drawing out the import of each. They represent a powerful aspect of memory and imagination, creativity and authorial voice.