

**Fashioning a Voice of Her Own:
The Poetics of Place in
Dorothy Wordsworth's Poetry, Narratives, and Travel Writing**

BY

Gabrielle A.F. Kappes

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Introduction

“I trod the Hills again,” Dorothy Wordsworth writes in her poem, “Thoughts on my sick-bed.” Noted by Ernest de Selincourt, Wordsworth’s first biographer, in a letter from Dora Wordsworth to Edward Quillinan, the poem was written when the bed-bound Wordsworth received a bouquet of spring flowers. Toward the end of her life and confined to her bed, she recollects her youth marked by her passion for walking. She wandered over the hills of Grasmere, the Lake District and beyond, traveling to Germany, touring the Continent, Scotland, and the Isle of Man. Whether she journeyed with her brother William, her dear friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, her sister-in-law Mary Hutchinson, or treaded the countryside alone, connecting with places in the natural world functioned as a means for Wordsworth to cultivate her poetic voice. Wordsworth’s authoritative strides plant her strong sense of purpose and identity as a writer.

Wordsworth chose the hearty and strict occupation of walking as a means of expressing her individualized independence. Unlike many women of the early nineteenth century, Wordsworth did not confine her duties to the domestic sphere. As opposed to looking to domestic tasks of raising a family or tending to a home, Wordsworth did not establish her sense of place inside but instead looked outwards to her immediate landscape. We know so much about Wordsworth’s occupation with the place of the natural world through her writing. Her subject was Nature. Snubbing hedgerows and prim flowerbeds, Wordsworth instead sought the untamed streams, valleys, and vales. Whether it was a moonlit lake outside her window or the brawny dales of Scotland, these wild and expansive scenes inspired Wordsworth to cultivate and assert her poetic voice in the natural world. Through Wordsworth’s journals and poetry, we are able to grasp a

sense of how place, writing, and landscape are so closely linked. She consciously possesses a sense of self through the style of walking, becoming creatively inspired by the impending wilderness.

Wordsworth's artistic identity is firmly rooted in landscape. In fact, walking proved to be a method of grounding her creativity in the tangible and natural world. So many of her journal entries and poems are based on the premise of treading the countryside as a means of experiencing the creative process. The analogy between walking and writing is useful: walking strides over ground in the same way that writing covers the blank page. Pressing the earth with footsteps resonates blackening the page with pen. Walking marks boundaries, and writing invents territories of creative interpretation. The boundaries, in both instances, can be imaginary and concrete. Indeed, Wordsworth finds her place in the natural world as a constant journey through landscape. For Wordsworth, the imaginative process of writing is also intertwined with corporeality. Physically immersing herself in the natural world inspires Wordsworth to write. It is not a large leap, then, to argue that Wordsworth feels freedom through walking. Yet, instead of viewing walking as a means of escape, Wordsworth's footsteps leave a permanent trail of authorial identity.

The walking poet is a prevalent trope in the literature of Romanticism. Entire works have been composed around the process of wandering as a means of inspiring poetic composition. What, then, makes Wordsworth's identity as a walking writer unique? In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to understand that contemporaries of Wordsworth have viewed her as a naturalist of sorts, a woman who has been praised for her diaries of acute observations, but not necessarily for their aesthetic

value. Her fellow writers, including William, Coleridge, and Thomas de Quincey, saw her journals as containing raw observations and records of the minuscule details of landscape. Coleridge claimed Wordsworth captured the “subtlest beauties & most recondite faults” (qtd. Woof 130) and possessed an “eye watchful in minutest observation of nature—and her taste a perfect electrometer—it bends protrudes, and draws in, at subtlest beauties & most recondite faults” (qtd. Woof 130). While her bright and watchful eyes can arguably be ones of a naturalist’s, her writing is also valuable for examining an alternative perspective of the Romantic movement.

The reviews of her work by close friends and family showed that they never realized Wordsworth’s identity as an accomplished writer. Her brother’s fame overshadowed her large body of work that includes poetry, travel journals, and narratives. However, that is not to say that William’s work did not invade her consciousness as an artist. Although Wordsworth wrote during the same period as her brother did, and often in the same living quarters, we, as scholarly critics, should not push her writing to the background of the Romantic canon. Wordsworth was self-consciously aware of her authorial identity and produced writing that is a significant contribution to the Romantic literature. While the siblings had a close relationship—Wordsworth lived with William at Grasmere and Alfoxden, and she traveled abroad with him—she was able to exercise her own identity as a writer was separate from William and should be critically examined by scholars as offering alternate insights about the Romanticism from those of her male counterparts.

Criticism surrounding Wordsworth has focused almost entirely on her the *Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*. Scholars often refer to the popular quote from her

Grasmere Journals, which concerns a comment about her authorship. Upon viewing the natural beauty surrounding a moonlit island house in the Rydale water, Wordsworth gushes, “it made me more than half a poet” (*Grasmere* 81). Many critics have interpreted this instance as a marker of Wordsworth’s “inability to produce poetry” (Comitini 318), which is part of how she “constantly denigrates herself and her talent in a manner that goes far beyond common protestations of modesty” (Levin 3). It is often noted that Wordsworth must be comparing herself to William’s colossal body of poetic works. And while Wordsworth very well may be calling to mind her brother’s poetic identity—she does reference a line from his “Home at Grasmere” just a moment before—Wordsworth’s assertion can also be read in the context of her own authorial identity, as a writer concerned with the creative process. If Wordsworth is to define a poet as master of form and rhetoric, then she emphasizes the value of the creative process that encompasses the trial and error practice of testing words, images, and editing phrases. While “half a poet” understood from a modern point of view might seem to indicate that Wordsworth’s writing was only half as good as her brother’s, it can also be interpreted as suggesting the Romantic imaginative process. Wordsworth writes within the Romantic tradition where fragments and sketches constitute the aesthetic of forming and cultivating a poetic voice. The creative process for her is just as important as the final verse or prose.

Although Wordsworth wrote more than thirty poems during her lifetime, only a handful of them were ever published, and those that were published were inserted anonymously into William’s volumes. Even though her writing was not published until the late nineteenth century, much of her work remains in manuscript form. However, there has yet to be a published collection of her poetry (the closest is Susan Levin’s

appendix of Wordsworth's verse). Her amassed body of work consists of over thirty poems, the notable *Grasmere Journals and Alfoxden Journals* (1897), *Recollections of a Tour of Scotland* (1803), *Excursion Up Scawfell Pike* (1818), as well as a slew of other travel and excursion journals. In addition, she also wrote a short children's story and the *Narrative of George and Sarah Green* (1808).

Much of the scholarship surrounding Wordsworth has ignored a large amount of her work and has often focused on her Grasmere and Alfoxden journals for their insights into her brother's creative process. In the same way that Wordsworth's contemporaries paired her with William, recent criticism has also focused upon Wordsworth's relationship to her brother. Susan J. Wolfson argues that Wordsworth's writing exists in a "conversation" with William where Wordsworth's poems and her narrative "reveal efforts to test modes of experience and self-representation different from those privileged and practiced, and promoted by her brother" (139). While such discourse is useful in underlining the point that many of William's poems were based on instances described in Wordsworth's journals, the criticism still lacks in proving that Wordsworth's own writing deserves focused and critical attention. What if Wordsworth's writing was the material for her *own* poetry? In recent years, this question has been explored and more attention has been given to Wordsworth's work for its own creative energies. In fact, recent analysis has shown that Wordsworth should not have fallen into the background of the Romantic Movement. Indeed, she should forcefully stand at the forefront of the Romantic feminist movement.

Feminist criticism of Romantic studies has prized Wordsworth, as well as other women Romantic writers such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Tighe, and Maria Edgeworth, as

different from but representative of Romanticism. The feminist approach to the Romantic movement has examined Romantic women writers for their gender differences and sexual politics. Yet some feminist critics have pinpointed Wordsworth as perpetually inhabiting the shadow of her male Romantic counterparts. Margaret Homans approaches Wordsworth's writing through a Freudian theoretical lens and firmly places Wordsworth within the social context—and often the social constraints of her male counterparts. Homans's psychoanalytical approach ignores the aesthetic value of Wordsworth's work as unique in its own right, regardless of the social situation. Similarly, Marlon B. Ross interprets Wordsworth's presence within Romanticism as unwarranted and questions: "If one of Romanticism's definitive characteristics is the self-conscious search for poetic identity, how can Wordsworth, who tended not to conceive of herself as a poet, be considered a 'Romantic'" (29). Even if Ross fails to acknowledge the entirety of Wordsworth's poems, his criticism can still be read as attempting to perpetuate the inclusive canon that contains the six male High Romantic poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Shelley, Byron, and Keats.

Nevertheless, feminine studies concerning Romanticism have sought to redefine the trends and tropes that have been so characteristic of the Romantic tradition. In *The New Feminist Criticism*, Elaine Showalter spearheads the "second phase of feminist criticism," which showcases the "discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic coherence, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate our culture" (6). In her book, *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne K. Mellor astutely answers Ross's claim by asking, "What if there are other ways of constructing the self than that attempted by William

Wordsworth?" (154), which encourages a rewriting of Romanticism that introduces Wordsworth as an individual agent free from the constraints of her brother. In the introduction to Mellor's *Romanticism and Feminism*, she also writes that Romantic women writers are "central to any discussion of the problem of gender in English Romantic writing and criticism, since the particularly prominent status of their work helped construct even as it represented their society's attitudes toward sexual difference" (3). Questioning the established Romantic canon, Mellor implies that women writers of the Romantic movement should be interpreted by the alternate viewpoints and insights that they offer to Romanticism. Studies by established Romantic critics, M.H. Abrams and Cleanth Brooks have used the six canonical male poets of the era to landmark critical notions and assumptions about Romanticism, but feminist studies of Romanticism challenge their methods and conclusions, redefining the Romantic canon, and re-envisioning Romantic literature that's based upon critical analysis of Romantic women writers.

One of the prominent works in feminist criticism of Romanticism is Susan Levin's book *Dorothy Wordsworth & Romanticism*, an extensive investigation of Wordsworth's poetry and prose. Levin lays the fundamental groundwork for all in-depth critical studies of Wordsworth. Scholars of Wordsworth are indebted to Levin for her theoretical insights into Wordsworth's literary works that have previously been judged in regard to William's poetry or have been dismissed completely from Romantic studies. While Levin's discourse has proved to be immensely useful, it has also left room for other critics to add to the growing theoretical discourse about Wordsworth's work, specifically concerning areas of Wordsworth's poetic voice and creative process. Levin

values Wordsworth's writing for its ability to exhibit "a pattern of subversive pressure within the male-dominant romantic movement that results in creation of a kind of feminine romanticism" (10). However, Levin analyzes Wordsworth as representative of her domestic quarters, in fact the second chapter, "Home," places Wordsworth back inside the household realm. Ultimately, viewing Wordsworth as a member of the domestic atmosphere creates a stark division between the male and female themes of Romanticism. While Levin's assertion usefully examines the differences between the two gendered traditions, it overlooks Wordsworth's contribution as a woman writer of the Romantic era who moves beyond the confines of a prescribed place.

My approaches to Wordsworth's writing do not completely differ from Levin's. Like Levin, I too argue that while the "literary quality and importance of the Grasmere journals are finally being recognized...much of Dorothy Wordsworth's work is still unknown" (3). My project concentrates on the "unknown" and still critically undiscovered works of Wordsworth. The following study of Wordsworth's writing focuses on four of Wordsworth's poems, her *Narrative of George and Sarah Green*, *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland*, and *Excursion up Scawfell Pike*. *Excursion* and *Narrative* have not been reedited as modern editions. These works, as well as the others, are definitive elements of Wordsworth's literary canon. By concentrating my attention on Wordsworth's underrepresented works, I hope to give voice to literature that contains valid merits and aesthetic insights about Romanticism. In turning a critical eye away from her popular and well-critiqued *Grasmere* and *Alfoxden Journal*, I hope to draw attention toward the significance of her poetry and narratives that have too often been deemed not "in any sustained way interesting as literature" (Fadem 17).

My purpose for this project is to refute such claims by giving absolute attention only to the works of Wordsworth. I hope to reinvigorate the field of Romanticism by showing that Wordsworth writes within the vein of the established practice, while also forging a distinctly feminine tradition of writing. Early nineteenth-century women writers do not possess the same voice as their male counterparts, and these differences in cultivating a poetic voice of their own should be given thorough attention. Therefore, I participate in a reexamination of the Romantic canon, which has more often than not, privileged the voice of the male bard over that of the female poet.

I argue that Wordsworth is self-consciously aware of her authorial identity and cultivates a poetic voice by situating her literary and physical place in the natural world. Place is of utmost importance to her creative mindset. Not only does she use the natural world as subject matter for her writing, but also landscape—both familiar and foreign—attracts Wordsworth’s creative sensibilities. Walking the countryside of the Lake District and Scotland allows Wordsworth to physically connect with nature. Like a cartographer, Wordsworth traces the borders of Grasmere, the larger Lake District, and Scotland in order to develop her authorial voice.

Each chapter of my thesis focuses on a collection of Wordsworth’s writing. Chapter 1 “Rooting Poetic Voice in Landscape: Dorothy Wordsworth’s Poetry” examines Wordsworth’s verse as a means of showing how she situates her poetic voice in the familiar setting of the Grasmere landscape. Traversing Grasmere, Wordsworth shapes her artistic identity by finding her poetic voice in the immediate landscape surrounding her home of Dove Cottage. Conjuring a prophetic vision in the Grasmere’s landscape, Wordsworth cultivates and frames her poetic voice. However, as a woman writing poetry

in the Romantic era, Wordsworth often struggles with asserting her poetic voice. I position my analysis of Wordsworth's poetry within the larger tradition of what it meant to be a poet during the Romantic era.

In Chapter 1, I include four close readings of Wordsworth's poems that are exclusively concerned with the expression of place. I begin my analysis with "Grasmere –A Sketch" (18??) and conclude with "Thoughts on my sick-bed" (1832) in order to shift from poems that present the tangible world to poems that locate place within the imagination. Oscillating back and forth between how Wordsworth cultivates and struggles to assert her poetic voice, I show the complexities of rendering a distinctly feminine voice within the masculine tradition of Romanticism and present Wordsworth's solutions to this dilemma. "Floating Island at Hawkshead, An Incident in the schemes of Nature" (18??) reflects the fragmentation of poetic voice and the struggles with crafting verse. "[A] Sketch" (18??) portrays how Wordsworth seeks to connect her poetic voice to her prophetic vision. Self-consciously reflecting upon the loss and recovery of her vision, Wordsworth situates her voice in landscape. I show how these three poems operate in response to "Thoughts on my sick-bed," a poem that is neglected by scholars, but deserves a serious amount of attention. "Thoughts" illustrates how the cultivation of poetic voice turns into a wholly recollected process. As a poem that functions mainly within Wordsworth's imaginative faculty, it addresses the internalization of vision as a means of developing and asserting a poetic voice. "Thoughts" can be read as a response to William's "Tintern Abbey" in which she directly addresses her brother as a means of showing how her poetic voice is as mature and experienced as his. Ultimately, Chapter 1

creates a dynamic dialog between four of her poems that are specifically concerned with place as a means of fueling an artistic identity.

In Chapter 2, “The ‘Inner Histories’ of Grasmere: Community as Archive in Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Narrative of George and Sarah Green*,” I argue that Wordsworth negotiates her identity as an author within her Grasmere community. Like many women writers in the early nineteenth century of the Romantic era, she was anxious about the public reception and circulation of her work. Her *Narrative* is a textual example of how Wordsworth reconfigures her identity as an author within the context of her Grasmere Vale. She negotiates her authorial identity through the means of relying upon her Grasmere community as an archive that collects and preserves the “inner histories” of the Vale. Using the *Narrative*, I show how Wordsworth uses recollection to shape her authorial identity—as well as realize its limitations. Whereas in Chapter 1 I look at Wordsworth’s use of the ground as a recording device for her poetic sensibilities, in Chapter 2 I analyze Wordsworth’s attraction to the “simple images of felicitous space” (Bachelard xxxi), such as elements and objects in landscape, as a means of creating a boundary to preserve the community’s memories of the Greens and other Grasmere histories. The familiarity with the landscape helps Wordsworth to recount the tragedy of the Greens and the community’s efforts to raise funds for the Green children. The loss of the Greens provokes Wordsworth to examine where the couple’s memory can still be found. Recollections of the Greens are preserved in the archive of the community. Thus, Wordsworth repositions her brother’s “spots of time” by applying this notion of talk to a where communities can recollect similar experiences. She rephrases “spot” to make it representative of what she coins as the community’s “inner histories” (*Narrative* 52), the

occurrences, eccentricities, and habits of Grasmere inhabitants. In creating a record of her community through the form of the written *Narrative*, Wordsworth negotiates her authorship, confronting its limitations and legitimizing it in her immediate community and landscape.

In Chapter 3, “Mapping Foreign Lands: Wordsworth’s Travel Writing as the Creative Process,” I show that unlike the familiar landscape of the Grasmere Vale and the collective community of the Grasmere inhabitants, the foreignness of the terrain prompts Wordsworth’s self-conscious reflection of her creative process. I examine this preoccupation through the following three sections of this chapter. First I show that Wordsworth’s hand-drawn maps in *Recollections* illustrate her attempts at visualizing foreign territories as a means of materializing her creative process. By analyzing Wordsworth’s maps, I examine her creative process. Then I turn to examine how the fragmented images of the imagination are unified into a completed vision. In this manner, Wordsworth makes her creative process unique by situating it within a feminine tradition. Finally, I analyze Wordsworth’s imagination as a function of Romanticism. Ultimately, Wordsworth self-consciously reflects upon her creative process forefronts the illusionary Romantic image. Jerome McGann’s criticism of the Romantic image in *The Romantic Ideology* proves to be immensely useful in situating Wordsworth’s creative process within the larger scheme of Romanticism. Wordsworth’s elusive imagery transcends historical and cultural specificity. Passages in *Recollections* and *Excursion*, while firmly situated in a specific landscape, have an ambiguity that makes their descriptions appear relevant to a myriad of European geographies.

Ultimately, my project seeks to reexamine the scholarship of Dorothy Wordsworth and attempts to highlight the aesthetic value of her often obscured and neglected literary works. Cultivating a poetic voice in relationship to the natural world becomes the principal manner in which Wordsworth creates a literary tradition that is a manifestation of her own creative intentions. I hope my attention to Wordsworth's work generates a new picture of who she is as an author and how, from analyzing her writing, we can get a new understanding of Romanticism.

Chapter 1

Rooting Poetic Voice in Landscape: Dorothy Wordsworth's Poetry

An avid walker, Dorothy Wordsworth toured the hills and dales of her familiar home, the Grasmere Vale, to inspire her creative imagination. She turns away from the domestic sphere, locating and attaining a sense of place in the natural world. By traversing Grasmere, Wordsworth shapes her artistic identity and finds her poetic voice in the immediate landscape surrounding her home of Dove Cottage. Conjuring a prophetic vision from Grasmere's landscape, Wordsworth cultivates and frames her poetic voice.

As a woman writing poetry in the Romantic era, Wordsworth sometimes struggles with asserting her poetic voice. Critics of Wordsworth's poetry have often pegged her as lacking of self, poetic voice, and authorship. "To my Niece Dorothy, a sleepless Baby," "An address to a Child in a high wind," and "The Mother's Return"—all written between 1805 and 1807—were published in her brother William's 1815 edition of his collected poems and were "signed in some editions 'A Female Friend' or 'By My Sister'" (Levin 113). Due to the fact that only five of Wordsworth's poems were published during her life, Margaret Homans argues that Wordsworth's poems "derive their energy from the tension between her desire to be a poet and her resistance to this desire" (42), yet this claim assumes that the poetic voice relies upon public recognition. Homans also claims that Wordsworth's specific instances of citing "family news and domestic detail" are "part of her evasion of traditional poetic prose" (42). Yet, Wordsworth's poems are a tradition unto themselves that depict their own contexts, patterns, and trends.

Nevertheless, there has also been a long tradition of criticism of associating Wordsworth with her brother William. One of Wordsworth's most famous critics is Virginia Woolf, who, in *The Second Common Reader* (1932), writes that Wordsworth and William "must feel, they must think, they must be together" (153). Woolf also claims that Wordsworth's prose was the raw material for William's poetry, as she "stored the mood in prose, and later William came and bathed in it and made it into poetry" (153). While it is debatable whether or not William did use much of Wordsworth's prose writing to inspire his verse, this assumption offhandedly ignores Wordsworth's own identity as a writer. An analysis of Wordsworth's poetry shows that she was conscious of herself as an artist and, more specifically as a poet. Wordsworth and the narrator of her poems share an affinity of voice; hence, I will refer to the speaker as Wordsworth.

While Wordsworth's poetry can arguably be seen as "exist[ing] intertextually with those of her brother" (Levin 112), ultimately, the goal of my project is to demonstrate how Wordsworth's poems speak for themselves. Removing the looming figure of her brother William from the forefront of my criticism, Wordsworth's poems can be analyzed intertextually within the canon of her work. Furthermore, Wordsworth publically acknowledges her poetic identity among friends and family while often struggling to assert her voice. Mary Hutchinson writes in a letter that Wordsworth, when asked to give a friend something "that would be valuable when she was gone" (qtd. Levin 113), copied one of her poems and signed it "poetess" (qtd. Levin 113)—a sign of Wordsworth's proclamation of her feminine poetic identity.

Before I begin my analysis of Wordsworth's poetry, I believe that it is necessary to frame her poetry within the larger context of what it meant to be a poet during the

romantic tradition. One possibility is to use William's definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (qtd. Abrams 47) and his definition of a poet as "a man 'who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them'" (qtd. Abrams 55). Although these claims suggest that passion reigns over rationalization, imagination, and self, it is significant to question if these statements can hold true for women writing poetry during this era. In relying too whole-heartedly upon William's words to contextualize all poetry of the romantic period, other underrepresented poetic voices may be drowned out. In understanding criticism in relation to Romantic women writers, it is pertinent to acknowledge not only if women poets' work highlights these traditions, but also to examine how this genre of poetry works to redefine the term *romantic*.

In this chapter, I provide four close reading of Wordsworth's poems that are specifically concerned with the articulation of place. In all of the verse that I analyze, Wordsworth possesses a self-conscious awareness of her attempts to cultivate her voice from the landscape. Beginning with "Grasmere –A Sketch" (18??) and ending with "Thoughts on my sick-bed" (1832), my analysis shifts from poems that are more concerned with a tangible place to those that are occupied with a metaphorical place of the imagination. I show how Wordsworth cultivates her poetic voice in the natural world. Then I look toward poems where Wordsworth struggles to assert her voice. "Floating Island at Hawkshead, An Incident in the schemes of Nature" (18??) depicts the fragmentation of poetic voice. In this poem, Wordsworth grapples with the trials of

fashioning a voice from landscape. “[A] Sketch” (18??) reflects how Wordsworth attempts to connect her poetic voice to her prophetic vision. She self-consciously meditates upon the loss and recovery of her vision as it is situated in landscape. I will show how these three poems operate in response to “Thoughts on my sick-bed,” a poem that can be considered Wordsworth’s tour de force. “Thoughts” addresses the internalization of vision as a means of developing and asserting a poetic voice. I argue that “Thoughts” is as a response to William’s “Tintern Abbey,” where Wordsworth reacts to William’s claim that her creative mind is inexperienced when compared with his. Ultimately, this chapter will create a dynamic dialog between four of Wordsworth’s poems that are concerned with place as a means of crafting an artistic identity.

“I stood an Inmate of this vale”: Place and Position in “Grasmere –A Fragment”

“Grasmere –A Fragment” celebrates the beauty and mystical qualities of the Grasmere Vale. The twenty-two-stanza poem details Wordsworth’s premier encounter with Grasmere and focuses upon the relationship between the Vale and its cottages. The familiarity of the setting encourages Wordsworth to locate her sense of place away from confines of the domestic sphere and reassert it in the natural world. Concerned with exterior space, “Grasmere” details Wordsworth’s journey to possess and embody a poetic voice that stems from landscape.

Some critics of Wordsworth argue that the natural world alienates her poetic voice. Homans describes Wordsworth’s poetry as participating within the “Masculine Tradition” (qtd. Levin 113), “a tradition that especially during the romantic period

reinforced woman's otherness by so feminizing nature...it is almost impossible for woman to have the kind of subjectivity necessary to poetic discourse" (qtd. Levin 113). Homans' argument overlooks the idea that Wordsworth's poetry can be analyzed within its own canon that does not necessarily need to feel burdened by the Masculine Tradition. It is important to acknowledge that perhaps while Romantic women writers wrote within the Masculine Tradition, they also participated in uniquely feminine traditions. Wordsworth was one of these writers. Analysis of her poetry illustrates how the scope of Romanticism can be widened based upon her alternative insights. Unlike Homans' argument, I believe that feminizing nature enables Wordsworth to exert a kinship with the natural world. In fact, one of the main ways that Wordsworth expresses such a close affinity to the Vale is by aligning her voice within its expanse. Wordsworth uses her relationship with nature to develop and negotiate her poetic voice. The poem begins by expressing a harmonious union between the natural world and the domestic realm:

Peaceful our valley, fair and green,
And beautiful her cottages,
Each in its bow, its sheltered hold,
Or underneath its tuft of trees

Many and beautiful they are;
But there is *one* that I love best,
A lowly shed, in truth, it is,
A brother of all the rest

Yet when I sit on rock or hill,
Down looking on the valley fair,
That Cottage with its clustering trees
Summons my heart; it settles there. (1-12)

The above verse repositions the domestic sphere in the natural world, situating terms such as “nook,” “sheltered,” and “tuft” to suggest a nurturing and pastoral setting. The feminized nature also appears in the pronoun “her” (2) that modifies cottages, blatantly showing nature as an all-possessing and all-encompassing feminine force that embodies natural and manmade objects embedded in its landscape. Wordsworth is attracted to one particular place, a “lowly shed,” which presumably is Dove Cottage. The home, however, appears not as an imprisoning hovel, but instead is a place positioned within the larger scheme of the Vale. The third stanza represents how the domestic sphere is repositioned in the natural world, and it attracts Wordsworth’s gaze, “[t]hat Cottage with its clustering trees / Summons my heart; it settles there.” The experience described is mystical and verges on revelation. The natural world embodies Wordsworth’s spirit and therefore Wordsworth positions her voice within the specific place of the Vale. Wordsworth constructs Grasmere’s natural attributes with her possession familiarity and femininity, which, in turn, allows for the grounding of her poetic voice.

In addition to feminizing the natural world, Wordsworth also feminizes the Romantic trope of the wanderer. The Romantic poetic tradition often prizes the character of the wanderer as possessing a prophetic vision. In most instances, such as William’s “The Ruined Cottage” and *The Excursion*, this character is male. Wordsworth reconfigures the character of the wanderer as portrayed in these texts:

Of fertile fields and hedgerows green
Might more seduce a wanderer's mind
To wish that *there* his home had been.

Such wish be his! I blame him not,

My fancies they perchance are wild. (emphasis in original) (14-18)

Wordsworth distinguishes between her own vision and that of the “wanderer’s mind,” claiming that the male wanderer prefers a cultivated landscape, while she—a female wanderer—prefers a place of absolute wilderness. The critical term in the above passage is “fancies,” which conjures the notions of creative faculties and imaginative tendencies. Wordsworth situates her “fancies” with the feminine tradition, as opposed to a masculine one, and furthermore seems to criticize that masculine tradition. In repositioning her imagination as attracted to the wildness of the Vale, Wordsworth situates her poetic voice in a place different from that of the domestic sphere.

Having framed the Grasmere landscape as the home for her poetic voice, Wordsworth recounts her first meeting with Grasmere and continues to identify with the Romantic trope of a wanderer:

A Stranger, Grasmere, in thy Vale,
All faces then to me unknown,
I left my sole companion-friend
To wander out alone. (49-52)

Wordsworth’s recollection of her first experience with the hamlet of Grasmere illustrates her as an outsider to the vale and community, which is quite a different portrait from the

familiarity of landscape that she eventually feels at home in. The above depicts her repossession of the wanderer's identity. Wordsworth defines herself as a wanderer who not only has a prophetic vision and keen insight, but also as a traveler who leaves behind her companion—presumably William—to rekindle her own unique connection to the natural world. Wordsworth's literal separation from her brother metaphorically suggests that her voice is not eclipsed by his presence, but instead, is developed by her own traditions of poetic discourse that do not rely upon the masculine tradition as a crutch. Unlike Homans's assertion that women lack the "subjectivity necessary to poetic discourse" (qtd. Levin 113), Wordsworth proves that she is able to possess a distinct vision that is self-consciously reflective.

Thus, recollecting her first encounter with the Vale, Wordsworth describes how she found her poetic voice in Grasmere's wilderness. After venturing to the top of a summit overlooking the Grasmere vale, she possesses a moment of poetic clarity:

–Beside that gay and lovely Rock
There came with merry voice
A foaming streamlet glancing by;
It seemed to say "Rejoice!"

My youthful wishes all fulfill'd
Wishes matured by thoughtful choice,
I stood an Inmate of this vale
How *could* I but rejoice? (81-88)

The above passage can be read as the natural world speaking back to Wordsworth with “merry voice,” and Wordsworth conclusively responding by echoing the Vale’s jubilant cry. However, Levin argues that Wordsworth “in fact does not rejoice, that the life described is sad and unfulfilled” (153). Although it is true that the definition of “inmate” during the nineteenth-century was related to patients of an “insane asylum” (Levin 153), I believe that Wordsworth’s joy is sincere. Even though it may seem like Wordsworth is forcefully and unwillingly imprisoned in the vale, this is not the case. “Inmate” can also be defined as an “inhabitant in relation to a house or dwelling place” (*OED*).

Wordsworth domesticates the natural world in order to align herself with a feminized nature. The domestic sphere is repositioned within landscape. Wordsworth envisions the vale as her home, and therefore, Grasmere becomes a place where the author can situate her poetic voice. The critical phrase in this passage, “thoughtful choice,” contradicts Levin’s interpretation by establishing the speaker’s independence as a result of her self-possessed individuality. In the same way that the vale joyously shouts, “Rejoice!” Wordsworth, too, arrives at a moment of epiphany and exuberance. The ending rhetorical question makes the point obvious: she and the natural world sing with the same voice. The speaker’s repetition of the term “rejoice” echoes nature’s call. Even the trimeter rhythm of the shortened last line—a unique departure from the plodding rhythm of tetrameter—emphasizes Wordsworth’s unanswerable question, and allows term “rejoice” to ring and resonate over the hills.

“Grasmere” illustrates how Wordsworth asserts her poetic voice in a familiar and natural setting. In situating her voice outside of the constraints of the domestic sphere, Wordsworth also reconfigures her voice as unique from that of the Romantic masculine

tradition. She positions her place as a poet within landscape, but also uses this natural setting as a means of cultivating a voice distinct from her male contemporary poets.

“A moment lost”: Grasping Vision in Landscape

The brief three-stanza poem “a Sketch” details the struggles with asserting and grounding poetic vision in landscape. The notion of place in “a Sketch” appears shrouded in an ambiguity that often seems to blur its poetic form. Place obscures vision and makes it difficult for Wordsworth to hold onto it. The form and layout of the poem suggest this vagueness of vision and setting. In the same way that “Dorothy’s journal-writing provides a special kind of evidence for the way that style is influenced by place, and place by style—or in this case, by a confluence of styles” (Newlyn 329)—Wordsworth’s poetry, and specifically “a Sketch”—also illustrates how form influences place, thereby linking poetic voice to the natural world.

Like “Grasmere,” “a Sketch” details the relationship between the Grasmere Vale and a cottage. The steady rhythm of iambic tetrameter is counteracted by the dashes and choppy line breaks in the final stanza of the poem:

There is one Cottage in our Dale
In naught distinguish’d from the rest
Save by a tuft of flourishing trees,
The shelter of that little nest

The publick [sic] road through Grasmere Vale

Winds close beside that Cottage small;
And there 'tis hidden by the trees
That overhang the orchard wall.

You lose it there—its serpent line
Is lost in that close household grove—
—A moment lost —and then it mounts
The craggy hills above.

In the first two quatrains, there appears a set of binaries between man-made developments and the natural surroundings. By creating a dynamic dialogue between the two, the speaker bridges the domestic sphere and the natural world. Form mirrors content in “a Sketch.” The rhyme scheme circles back on itself within the first two stanzas in the *a* rhyme of “Dale” (1) and “Vale” (5) and *c* rhyme of “trees” (3, 6), and this consistency of rhyme stresses the sameness and familiarity of place.

The layout of the poem visibly changes in the third stanza where dashes blur and bridge the boundaries of the binaries between the domestic sphere and the natural world. The choppy and uneven quality of the lines reflects the fragility and elusive nature of voice in landscape. Wordsworth struggles to possess the vision of the orchard wall, but it becomes lost within a cluster of trees. Dashes bookend “[a] moment lost,” depicting the isolation of the phrase from the remaining the verse and suggesting the ambiguity of place as opposed to its familiarity in the first two stanzas. The repetition of “lost” and the repeated “o” vowel in “lose,” “lost,” “close household grove,” “moment lost,” “mounts,” and “above,” emphasizes the emptiness felt from something missing.

Yet the fleeting vision of the orchard wall, while elusive, possesses a consistent mobility as suggested by the “serpent line” that evokes a sinuous and winding motion. Wordsworth’s vision of the wall, although uneasy to discern, reappears as “it mounts / The craggy hills above,” implying that vision has a perpetual existence in the natural world. The poem seems to portray Wordsworth as wandering the hills of Grasmere Vale and chasing her poetic vision. “[A] Sketch” presents a series of ambiguities of whether or not Wordsworth will be able to repossess her vision. The sparse form of the poem and its irregular layout echo the elusive and fragile relationship that the poet has in possessing a poetic vision.

“Grasmere” and “a Sketch” are both concerned with the Grasmere Vale and they show instances of repositioning the domestic realm in the natural world. Yet “a Sketch,” unlike “Grasmere” depicts vision as ambiguous, misleading, and indiscernible. Wordsworth’s vision hides itself in landscape, and she must rapidly trod the hills and vales hoping to catch it. As vision flows farther away into the horizon, Wordsworth struggles to capture its essence.

Fragments of Earth and Verse in

“Floating Island at Hawkshead, An Incident in the schemes of Nature”

Like “Grasmere” and “a Sketch,” the themes of “Floating Island at Hawkshead, An Incident in the schemes of Nature” also revolves around a specific place. Yet unlike the previous two poems that I discussed, “Floating” does not take place in Grasmere, but in Hawkshead, the town where William attended grammar school. Although the

historical context of Hawkshead does not pertain to my argument, the Lake District village is only a short distance south of Grasmere and would presumably have been a place of familiarity to both siblings. “Floating” describes the deterioration of a piece of fertile ground as it floats and then vanishes into the lake. The poem obsessively revolves around these fragments of earth and their subsequent erosion. I argue that these slips of earth are Wordsworth’s self-conscious reflection on the fragmentation of her poetic voice. “Floating” is the extended metaphor of nature acting as a microcosm for poetry. Like “a Sketch,” Wordsworth has difficulty cultivating her voice within landscape, yet she seems to resolve this complication by sewing the imaginative seeds for future literary creations.

Wordsworth chooses the place of the island for its associations with inaccessibility. Even though she writes obsessively about the island, there is still a distinct separation between the poet and the unreachable destination. Wordsworth grapples with the limitations of her writing and struggles with wanting her poetry to possess permanence and leave a legacy. It is arguable that “Floating Island” is an example of

the ‘material sublime’ [that] denotes those moments either when the physical world announces itself within the textual gesture toward transcendence, effectively disrupting the act of suppression, or when the text itself foregrounds the materiality upon which the sublime experience is based. (Pipkin 600)

It is certain that Wordsworth grounds her poem in the materiality of the sublime in order to emphasize that she wants her writing to leave a permanent mark. The complexities of nature’s “schemes” are emphasized in the differences between the ephemeral island and

the organic sublimity of Nature. Wordsworth makes use of these impediments by showing the difficulty that she often has with cultivating a poetic voice.

Rooting her imagination in landscape, Wordsworth constructs the island as an example of the poetic voice. The scene is a tumultuous whirlwind of “[s]unshine and storm” (*Floating* 3):

Once did I see a slip of earth,
By throbbing waves long undermined,
Loosed from its hold; -*how* no one knew
But all might see it float, obedient to the wind. (5-8)

Wordsworth’s choice of the term “slip” denotes “a strip, a narrow piece or stretch, of land, ground” (*OED*) and “a piece of paper or parchment, esp. one which is narrow in proportion to its length” (*OED*). The former definition provides the appropriate context for the poem: the land is slight in shape and form, almost obscured by the high waves. Yet the latter definition is also quite significant as it suggests the underlying theme of writing and literary creation. The poet espies the small fragmented landmass as a metaphor for a piece of parchment paper. Because the island is out of the Wordsworth’s grasp, it is elusive and intangible much like the struggles that Wordsworth faces with writing. In the same way that Wordsworth searches for her place in the Grasmere countryside through the physicality of walking, she also embarks on a quest for a place of prophetic vision that will stir her poetic voice. Instead of searching for this metaphorical place to write in the domestic sphere, Wordsworth rampantly tours the vale, becoming inspired, entranced, and often possessed by nature’s spiritual powers. “Floating” shows

how Wordsworth surrenders herself to this natural world—“obedient to the wind” (8)—in hopes of asserting her poetic voice.

Fascinated by the island, Wordsworth remarks upon the island’s role in the ecosystem of the vale:

Food, shelter, safety, there they find

There berries ripen, flowerets bloom;

There insects live their lives –and died:

A peopled *world* it is; –in size a tiny room. (emphasis in original) (13-16)

The island is an entire world unto its own, “A peopled *world* it is; –in size a tiny room.” (16). The juxtaposition of these two phrases illustrates how one place can simultaneously represent a miniature spot as well as a wide expanse. The adjective “peopled” suggests a subtle union of man and nature. This small slip of an island is a universe unto itself, yet Wordsworth takes the metaphor farther than only having it swarming with birds and insects. The island is “peopled” by creatures that infuse it with life and sustenance. The author’s stress of “*world*” heightens her own awareness that this fragmented place is a microcosm of the world—a miniature universe. Yet the following phrase “in size a tiny room” underscores the grandiose world with insignificance. The island is but a small room. Wordsworth would use the space of the room to write in peaceful solitude, but she does not have that luxury. Instead, she turns to the rivers, hills, crags, and islands, constantly searching for a place of her own to express her creative identity. Nevertheless, even when she does find that place it dissolves before her eyes.

While the conceit of the island as a piece of paper suggests that writing is Wordsworth's universe, the landmass crumbles under the weight of the very world it attempts to carry. Therein lies the turning point of the poem:

And thus through many seasons' space
This little Island may survive
But Nature, though we mark her not,
Will take away –may cease to give. (17-20)

The island's dissolvability is absolute, and Wordsworth's dash marks the empty space of the island's loss. Through the imagery of the island, Wordsworth self-consciously contemplates her poetic voice. The above depiction of nature could arguably be viewed as making:

Nature into a feminine presence that can be self-destructive or that 'may cease to give.' Although nature's destructive possibilities are always present, whatever ruin occurs is part of forces continually operating in the world. They are complex—*schemes*—is plural but always organized. Asserting an amoral evolution in nature, the poem contains detached, objective description that says, 'That's the way things go.' (emphasis in original) (Levin 127)

While it does seem clear that Wordsworth aligns her poetic voice with the feminized nature, the complexities of nature's construction complicates the notions that Wordsworth has with developing her poetic voice. She struggles with her portrayal of nature not as the nurturing and motherly figure that she had previously depicted in "Grasmere" and "a Sketch," but instead as the deteriorating, elusive being. This

reimagining of nature reflects Wordsworth's anxieties with permanently possessing a poetic voice that is firmly situated in landscape.

However, the ending lines of the poem deliver yet another a change in tone:

Buried beneath the glittering Lake!

Its place no longer to be found,

Yet the lost fragments shall remain,

To fertilize some other ground. (25-8)

The phrase "lost fragments shall remain" clearly portrays the island's dismembered pieces like torn sheets of paper floating above the water. They finally become saturated with water, and sink into its depths. Wordsworth's description of the island is akin to that of parchment paper and the two become synonymous in the final couplet. The term "fragment" echoes that of a manuscript or poem and is also the term the author uses quite regularly as the title of her own poems. The trope of fragments is popular in the Romantic era. In fact, the fragment as, "something either unfinished or broken [can] be understood as both *a* genre within Romantic poetry and as *the* paradigm genre of Romantic literature" (emphasis in original) (Janowitz 443).

Wordsworth constructs the fragmented island as a metaphorical place where writing can take place. However, poetic voice seems to remain out of Wordsworth's grasp. The ending line, "[t]o fertilize some other ground," implies that the clusters of floating earth will aid in the growth of other islands. Similarly, the line also suggests that Wordsworth's fragments of writing will cultivate another literary work, perhaps her own or even those works of other writers. Wordsworth wishes for her poetic voice to leave permanence and a legacy. The "other ground" could even be indicative of her other

poems and journal writing. Wordsworth views her poetry—fragments—as laying the groundwork for other literary creations. She hopes that this work will inspire other writers, perhaps her female contemporaries, who also struggle with cultivating a poetic voice.

Wordsworth does not have a room of her own to write, yet this does not mean that she cannot establish her poetic voice elsewhere. Venturing into the countryside of the Lake District, Wordsworth finds a landscape of her own, one where her artistic sensibilities are created and self-consciously recognized.

Calling upon Poetic Voice: Recollection in “Thoughts on my sick-bed”

As opposed to “a Sketch,” “Grasmere –A Fragment,” and “Floating Island,” Wordsworth’s “Thoughts on my sick-bed” details how the bed-bound Wordsworth asserts her poetic voice in landscape through the medium of recollection. While “Floating Island” demonstrates Wordsworth’s grappling with notions of authorship and writing, the speaker of “Thoughts on my sick-bed” reaffirms her poetic voice by resituating her place in the immediate landscape of the Grasmere Vale. She uses recollection as a means of helping her to mentally experience moments when her poetic vision reigned paramount in the natural world. As the title suggests, she is caught in one place, physically immobile, yet she recalls the authoritative strides of her youth, thus repossessing her poetic voice by envisioning an imaginative landscape. The concept of place in “Thoughts” is grounded more in the imagination than the physical world.

The poem begins with a series of questions in which Wordsworth searches to rekindle her intimate connection with the natural world:

And has the remnant of my life
Been pilfered of this sunny Spring?
And have its own preclusive sounds
Touched in my heart no echoing string? (1-4)

Wordsworth doubts nature's ability to inspire a poetic voice. In desiring to reconnect with the Grasmere countryside, she laments the absence of the "echoing string"—her poetic voice—which remains unstirred by the first signs of spring. The rhetorical questions indicate a desperation and strong sense of compassion to reconnect physically and mentally with the landscape.

In order to create a bond with the natural world, Wordsworth relies upon recollection to reenergize and provoke her poetic voice:

With joyful heart in youthful days
When fresh each season in its Round
I welcomed the earliest Celandine
Glittering upon the mossy ground;

With busy eyes I pierced the lane
In quest of known and *unknown* things,
—The primrose a lamp on its fortress rock,

The silent butterfly spreading its wings. (emphasis in original) (9-16)

The corporeality located in the concrete imagery of Wordsworth's verse emphasizes the poet's longing to experience with the natural world. There is a strong sense of longing for movement over the landscape that runs throughout the above passage, which stresses

Wordsworth's desire to repossess her poetic voice by traversing the natural world. She describes her youthful activities, that with the cyclical arrival of spring "in its Round" (10), brings "the earliest Celandine / Glittering upon the mossy ground" (11-12). This particular plant bears "yellow flowers" and according to its symbolism, the flower's "thick yellow juice was formerly supposed to be a powerful remedy for weak sight" (*OED*). Wordsworth's specific choice of this flower purposefully encourages wide-eyed recognition and devotion to the natural world. The flower is a figment of her past and suggests a way for the bed-bound soul to regain her poetic voice. The fragrant image of the celandine flowers also allows Wordsworth to refresh her visionary powers through recollection. Through the physical act of composing verse combined with the mental faculty of recollection, Wordsworth redeems her authoritative strides in landscape.

With this newfound vision, Wordsworth freely recalls with vivid detail her natural encounters. Her role as visionary prophet can be identified in her "busy eyes" (13), which "pierced the lane" (13), implying a possessive gaze over the landscape. The movement of the poem becomes more pronounced with the enjambment between stanzas two and three and lack of punctuation in stanza three. The speaker seeks knowledge of "known and *unknown* things" (emphasis in original) (14), which expressively suggests Wordsworth's active role in regaining her prophetic vision and hence her poetic voice. Presumably the known objects are the tangible elements of nature, yet Wordsworth keenly describes how she is also acutely interested in nature's underlying spirituality. Her active mobility propels her stationary body into a motion of the mind. To be busy with creativity reveals "*unknown* things" (emphasis in original) (14), which are described as the "primrose a lamp on its fortress rock" (15), referring to the yellow hue of the

evening primrose whose petals appear like a luminous lampshade on rocky crags. This connotes knowledge and visions, as a lamp's light exposes the memories and past experiences. The concrete image's significance most likely is a result of Wordsworth's current bed stricken situation—perhaps propped up on pillows in bed with only the glow of the bedside lamp to illuminate her poetic musings. Inserting domestic objects or imagery in the landscape is a familiar trend in Wordsworth's poetry as I have shown in “a Sketch” and “Grasmere.” By combining elements of the domestic sphere in the natural realm, Wordsworth repositions her sense of place as belonging in the landscape.

Interestingly, M.H. Abrams, in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, takes his famous lamp analogy from Nathanael Culverwel's *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* because “it serves as a convenient inventory of analogies for the mind as receptor or projector—as mirror or lamp” (Abrams 59). Since Abrams writes exclusively about the male Romantic poets, Wordsworth's use of the lamp as representative of human perception could possibly reside in the male tradition. Perhaps if Abrams had paid closer attention to Dorothy Wordsworth's poetry, he would have found that this trope is situated in the Romantic feminine tradition. However, whether the analogy of the lamp is specifically feminine or masculine is a small dispute. What matters is that by reading Wordsworth's poetry, we get a better understanding of the wide scope of aesthetics and techniques that function in the Romantic tradition.

Wordsworth turns to recollection as a means of reestablishing her poetic voice in the immediate landscape. Bound to her bed at Rydal Mount, the speaker reminisces about her “careless days” (25) of youth when the spring of nature was full of promise,

hope, and possibility. However, she does not find this recollection as stimulating as her first-hand experience:

No! then I never felt a bliss
That might with *that* compare
Which, piercing to my couch of rest,
Came on the vernal air. (29-32)

It is significant to note Wordsworth's self-conscious process of recollection. Her memories come "piercing" (31) into her, suggesting an all encompassing revelation. Wordsworth's distinction adds an element of sad awareness, as though a realization of loss. However, the inspiration of the poem clearly stems from that which came on "vernal air" (32), as though her recollection wafted through an open window. The intangible quality of the recollection speaks to the ambiguous nature of Wordsworth's elusive creative process.

The tenth quatrain of "Thoughts on my sick-bed" marks a change of tone. Recollection is a form of prophetic vision, which in turn prompts the creation of a poetic voice. Unable to physically traverse the vale, Wordsworth relies upon recollection to remember her first-hand experiences in the natural world. These visions of her "youthful days" (9) expose the imagery of "known and *unknown* things" (14). Envisioning her memories of the Grasmere countryside, Wordsworth finally repossesses her poetic voice:

With some sad thoughts the work was done,
Unprompted and unbidden,
But joy it brought to my *hidden* life,
To consciousness no longer hidden. (emphasis in original) (37-40)

The above stanza relates the change in Wordsworth's process of exercising her poetic voice. The "work" completed refers to the mental work of visionary recollection accomplished by Wordsworth's "busy eyes" (13). By declaring recollection as "unprompted" (38), Wordsworth claims how it has become naturalized in her poetic process. Recollection of poetic visions is innate and organic to Wordsworth. However, the above passage details how Wordsworth possesses her poetic voice as a function of recollection. It has influenced her "*hidden* life" (39), presumably Wordsworth's poetic voice, and exposed her consciousness and her creative faculties. The emphasis on "hidden" and its repetition in the above stanza reflects the fact that even though Wordsworth's voice has been publically exposed, it is still deeply intertwined in her consciousness. The struggles that Wordsworth has in "a Sketch," "Grasmere," and "Floating Island" have been resolved in this poem. Therefore, the function of recollection in reference to Wordsworth's poetic process is to act as a kind of support device that reinvigorates her poetic voice.

As "Thoughts on my sick-bed" concludes, the focus of the poem becomes Wordsworth's newly found and uncovered poetic voice:

I felt a Power unfelt before,
Controlling weakness, languor, pain;
It bore me to the Terrace walk
I trod the Hills again;—

No prisoner in this lonely room,
I *saw* the green Banks of the Wye,

Recalling thy prophetic words,
Bard, Brother, Friend from infancy!

No need of motion, or of strength,
Or even the breathing air:
–I thought of Nature’s loveliest scenes;

And with Memory I was there. (emphasis in original) (41-52)

One of the most significant factors in the above stanzas is Wordsworth’s *self*-realization of her poetic voice. She consciously acknowledges the fact that her own recollection of past visions has prompted a revival of voice. Not only is the “[p]ower” (41) of recollection strong enough to evoke her verse, but it also reinvigorates her mental facilities. Peering out from her balcony, Wordsworth undergoes a kind of spiritual revelation. Leaving her bed-bound body behind, her spirit walks the Grasmere Vale once more. Having regained her authoritative stride, Wordsworth rallies her mental energies and envisions her body hiking through the countryside. Recollection has taken possession of Wordsworth’s mind, implying a spiritual awakening of poetic voice. The enjambment between lines 44 and 45 bridges the past with the present, as the switch to the present tense, “I trod” (44) creates a rapturous moment where Wordsworth in the faculty of her imagination is able to pursue the same land that she strode over in years past. The term “trod” not only highlights mobility, but also denotes “to follow the footprints or track of; to track, trace” (*OED*), suggesting Wordsworth’s relentless “quest of known and unknown things” (14) in nature. It also creates a moment where she metaphorically

follows the footsteps of her younger self. The poetic moment transcends recollection and verges on poetic epiphany.

Infused with energy due to the recalling of her poetic voice, Wordsworth assertively announces that she is no longer a “prisoner in this lonely room” (45), referring to her bed-bound sickness, while also echoing “I stood an Inmate of this vale / How *could* I but rejoice?” (“Grasmere” 87-8), and “[a] peopled *world* it is; -in size a tiny room” (“Floating” 16). However, whereas in the previously discussed poems Wordsworth is in the process of cultivating her poetic voice, it seems that in “Thoughts,” Wordsworth has finally found a place to release her voice. Her choice of past experience illustrates this sense of poetic establishment. She remembers traveling to the River Wye with William where he composed “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey” (1798). Her forceful assertion, “I *saw* the green Banks of the Wye” (46) counters William’s depiction her in his poem as a passive and naïve friend:

Nor, perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. (113-120)

“Thoughts on my sick-bed” is a response to William’s above lines. William Wordsworth,

[s]urrounded by his text, her voice is contorted into a perfect semblance of his requirements. The terrible irony, of course, is that while the Wordsworthian speaker in “Tintern Abbey” was free to live and move, however haunted by the taste of morality, Dorothy’s speaker is confined, bound to her bed, and there is no transcendence possible. Death seems literal now; it is not the metaphoric ‘wages of knowledge’ that Geoffrey Hartman so aptly points out in Wordsworth.

Dorothy was no elsewhere, no other self she can grow into. Her most powerful knowledge is thrust back into her body. (Alexander 205-6)

However, I believe that Wordsworth is not pinpointed by her brother’s definition of her, but repositions his configuration of her. Wordsworth transcends her bed-bound state through recollection. This act of transcendence should not be read as Wordsworth’s separating her identity from that of her brother, nor as an act of movement beyond the text. Instead, she counters the image that he constructed of her as an inexperienced and naïve bystander. Wordsworth directly addresses her brother, and her outpouring of emotion seems to be as much of a call of shared kinship as it is an assertion of her self-professed poetic vision that stands separate from William’s visions, recollections, and verse. She asserts her poetic identity and her poetic vision, “I *saw*” (46), as having the same magnitude as William’s prophetic vision. Alexander’s reading of “Thoughts on my sick-bed” ignores any sense of self that Wordsworth may possess as a poet.

Wordsworth does not rely upon her brother’s evaluation of her in “Tintern Abbey,” but instead, draws upon her own poetic vision to shape and define her creative identity.

“Thoughts on my sick-bed” concludes with Wordsworth’s coming to terms with her bed-ridden illness, and therefore realizing that she can exert her poetic voice without having to physically traverse the Grasmere vale. She walks the hills through the process of recollection. Wordsworth ultimately renounces the “breathing [of] air” (50), thereby declaring that her voice transcends her mortal state of being. The act of recollecting her past experiences in the memory of her immediate landscape allows Wordsworth to relive and repossess her poetic voice.

As a woman writing poetry in the Romantic era, Wordsworth often struggled with cultivating and asserting her poetic voice. Her poems demonstrate how she conjures her poetic vision from the immediate and familiar landscape. As much as the discussed poems are products of Wordsworth’s imaginative faculties, they are also firmly grounded in the place and context of the Lake District and often specifically the Grasmere Vale. Therefore, as all of the above poems are set in a familiar setting, this tangible place sparks Wordsworth’s cultivation of her poetic voice.

Beginning with “Grasmere –A Fragment” and ending at “Thoughts on my sick-bed” I show how the trajectory of poetic voice moves from the external realm of the natural world to the mental world. In “Grasmere,” Wordsworth aligns her voice with a feminized nature and possesses poetic voice from the familiarity of the Grasmere setting. “[A] Sketch” suggests Wordsworth’s struggles with viewing her poetic vision in landscape, while “Floating” depicts how Wordsworth attempts to grasp and assert her cultivated poetic voice in landscape. Ultimately, Wordsworth achieves voice by exploring the complications of Nature’s cyclical characteristics as having both nurturing forces and destructive designs. The poetic imagery of the decaying island as a

microcosm for her poetry underlines how Wordsworth attempts to grow a poetic voice that can be situated in the natural world with lasting permanence. “Thoughts on my sick-bed” focuses on the significance of recollection in the context of repossessing a poetic voice. Bound to her bed, Wordsworth can no longer physically traverse the hills and vales, but through the use of poetic recollection, she reimagines her prophetic visions and experiences, and therefore regains control of her poetic voice.

One of the most critical factors of “Thoughts on my sick-bed” is Wordsworth’s response to William’s claims in “Tintern Abbey.” She refutes his suggestion that she lacks the equivalent of his insight and prophetic vision. Contesting his criticism, Wordsworth repositions her poetic voice as possessing a strength and vitality of its own that reigns separate from her brother’s. The ability of Wordsworth to claim a voice as distinct from her male counterpart shows that “Wordsworthian” poetics can no longer be used to define the poetic characteristics of William. Instead, it must encompass both William’s and Wordsworth’s poetic aesthetics. In the following chapter, I will further address how Wordsworth repositions William’s poetics by examining her poetic voice in relation to the Grasmere community.

Chapter 2

The “Inner Histories” of Grasmere: Community as Archive in Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Narrative of George and Sarah Green*

On March 19, 1808, George and Sarah Green, two Grasmere residents, perished in the crags of Langdale Fell on a “stormy night” (de Selincourt 7). The couple left behind their eight children, whose fates and livelihoods were passionately addressed by the Grasmere community. Inhabitants of the Vale raised money for the food and lodging of the orphans, and some members even adopted a few of the children. Having employed one of the Green children for a few years, and having personally known George and Sarah, Wordsworth rallied to the remaining family’s aid and wrote the *Narrative of George and Sarah Green* (1808) to raise funds to support the children. William also urged his sister to craft an account of the Greens, so as to “leave behind a record of human sympathies and moral sentiments” (qtd. *Narrative* 8).

There has been a significant lack of academic criticism concerning Wordsworth’s *Narrative*, which has fueled my decision to pay close attention to this neglected text. Most scholarship of the *Narrative* has often been associated with Wordsworth’s attitudes of sympathy toward the impoverished inhabitants of Grasmere, where the text “demonstrates not, as scholars have previously assumed, that the community could be relied upon to assist the impoverished, but rather that absent exigent circumstances dire poverty would go unnoticed and unrelieved” (Levy 553). This viewpoint highlights that

Wordsworth's *Narrative* is only concerned with the social politics concerning the Green incident, while ignoring the work's aesthetic value. I, however, show that the *Narrative* is an incredibly important work in Wordsworth's canon in depicting how she crafts her voice by defining the Grasmere community as an archive that stores the oral histories of the Vale.

Perhaps one of the reasons that the *Narrative* has been ignored is due to the strains of authorial anxiety that run throughout the text. Because Wordsworth negotiates her identity as an author in relation to the wider Grasmere community, it may appear on the surface that Wordsworth renounces any authorial autonomy. Yet as Lucy Newlyn argues, the apprehension concerning authorship was not an isolated occurrence. Romantic women writers were often fraught with apprehension concerning the public reception of their work:

Anxiety was accentuated...when a woman who lived in close proximity with a male role model began to experiment with writing, thus entering a terrain that was seen, both professionally and privately, as his own. (Newlyn 226)

In the instance of Wordsworth, her brother William inhabited the position as a "male role model" and overshadowed her with his fame as the visionary and celebrated poet of the era. However, Wordsworth's personal anxiety concerning the publication of her work, specifically the *Narrative*, did not prevent her from expressing her creative energies.

According to the title page of Ernest de Selincourt's first edition, the extensive title of Wordsworth's account is *A Narrative Concerning George and Sarah Green of the Parish of Grasmere addressed to a Friend*. Wordsworth's original title emphasizes not only the couple's significance, but also the place of Grasmere and the narrative's purpose

of acting as a history of, for, by, and in the community. Like community, place is also of critical importance, and as the relationship between the two develops, the text can be read as a series of recollected histories of the Greens and other Grasmere inhabitants stored in the community's oral traditions.

Wordsworth negotiates her authorship through the means of relying upon her Grasmere community as an archive that collects and preserves the histories of the Vale. Analyzing the *Narrative*, I will argue that Wordsworth uses recollection as a backdrop to shape her authorial identity—as well as realize its limitations. The community as an archive exists as a metaphorical place where Grasmere histories are stored. Whereas in Chapter 1 I explored how Wordsworth depicts the ground as a recording device for her poetic sensibilities, in Chapter 2 I will analyze how Wordsworth is attracted to the “simple images of felicitous space” (Bachelard xxxi), such as elements and objects in landscape, as a means of creating a boundary to preserve the community's memories of the Greens and other Grasmere histories. Landscape becomes the critical ground where Wordsworth makes memory found. The familiarity of the landscape helps Wordsworth to recount the tragedy of the Greens and the community's efforts to raise funds for the Green children. Recollections of the Greens are preserved in the archive of the community, as a means of using talk to safeguard histories. Thus, Wordsworth repositions her brother's “spots of time” by applying this notion of talk to how communities—rather than individuals—recollect similar experiences. She rephrases “spot” to make it representative of the community's “inner histories”—the occurrences, eccentricities, and habits of Grasmere inhabitants. In creating a public record of the

Green incident through the form of the written *Narrative*, Wordsworth negotiates her authorship, confronting its limitations and legitimizing it within the familiar setting.

Crafting a Community Archive and Recognizing the Limitations of Authorship

Wordsworth wrote the *Narrative* after William's 1799 and 1805 editions of his *Prelude*. It can be assumed that Wordsworth was knowledgeable of the *Prelude* and familiar with William's coinage of "spots of time" because Wordsworth was as William's amanuensis. I argue that Wordsworth repositions William's "spots of time" in the *Narrative* as a means of asserting a *community's* recollection of memory through place.

In Book 1 of the 1799 edition of the *Prelude*, William uses the phrase "spots of time" in order to provide a link between childhood experience and adult imagination:

There are in our existence spots of time
That with distinct preeminence retain
A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
By trivial occupations and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds—
Especially the imaginative power—
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
Such moments chiefly seem to have their date
In our first childhood. (1799: I. 288-94)

Jonathan Wordsworth describes William's "spots of time" as:

Response to tragic occurrences in the region, traditional or recent, has the effect of ‘impressing’ (imprinting, stamping) images upon the mind –images of places where the occurrences took place, or where the poet heard of them. Over the years these images are visited, revisited, within the mind, becoming the focus of new imaginative feelings, such as the child could not have heard. (183)

While William’s “spots of time” are primarily concerned with the individual’s recollection of past experiences, Wordsworth’s “spots,” as depicted in the *Narrative*, demonstrate how the community recollects tragic occurrences that have transpired in the Grasmere Vale, and stores or impresses these histories within their bodies. By repositioning William’s “spots of time,” Wordsworth alters how established tropes of the Romantic canon.

Throughout the *Narrative*, Wordsworth uses the term “spot” frequently. She begins the *Narrative* by asking her readers to “recollect the spot” (*Narrative* 43) of the Greens’ Grasmere dwelling. Similar to this instance, “spot” often signals not only a personal recollection, but also a community’s recollection. In describing the place where the Greens perished, Wordsworth recollects her own experience:

[t]hose foot-marks were now covered with fresh snow: the *spot* where they had been seen was at the top of Blea Crag above Easedale Tarn, that very *spot* where I myself had sate [sic] down six years ago, unable to see a yard before me, or to go a step further over the Crag. (emphasis my own) (*Narrative* 45)

Grounding the reader in landscape, Wordsworth ventures into a personal recollection of her own experiences on Blea Crag. Quite clearly: “Dorothy survives; the Greens do not. The narrative becomes in part a reassertion of her own life” (Levin 50). Levin’s assertion

suggests that the process of recollection involves past memory as much as present existence. Wordsworth's repetition of "spot" stresses how place provokes a remembered sentiment. Wordsworth's situation of peril acts almost like a prediction of the Greens' fate. Her dangerous experience on the crag marks the Grasmere landscape as containing gothic attitudes that verge on the visionary. Recounting the last footsteps of Sarah Green, Wordsworth attempts to mimic her own experience with Sarah's. However, the process of recollection is purely imaginative where,

the narrative possesses an undercurrent of subjective energy, clearing a path for subtextual interpretation. And yet Dorothy's communion with Sarah Green (the only genuinely psychological event in the narrative) takes place in the shadowless daylight world of Grasmere because the entire community felt the impact of the Greens' deaths. Grasmere's inhabitants...[wish to] make sense –collectively –of a tragic event. (Cervelli 83)

Cervelli dovetails Sarah's and Wordsworth's experience into one communal reflection. Wordsworth provokes the reader into imagining the Greens' fateful experience. She uses her own familiarity with the Grasmere countryside to engage the reader—her "friend" (*Narrative* 43)—as an active participant in the community as well as in the narrative. It also suggests Wordsworth's familiarity of the hazardous crags shows her kinship to the Grasmere Vale.

Wordsworth and William's usage of "spot" depicts a recollection of memory through place. Wordsworth imagines "spot" as not only a tangible but also as a metaphorical place. In Wordsworth's *Narrative*, "spot" exists in the present tense as well as the past, bridging two times and belonging to neither, an "*intimate space*" (emphasis in

original) (Bachelard 78) that is unforgettable and dynamic. Wordsworth etches her own experience into the metaphorical space, augmenting in the text an intimacy that is not individual but communal, as it seems that Wordsworth is “grounded *in a community*” (emphasis in original) (Mellor 164).

Part of Wordsworth’s role as author of the *Narrative* is to act as a speaker on behalf of her community. Describing the impact of the Green tragedy upon the tight-knit community, Wordsworth situates this incident in the social order of the Grasmere society. The members of the community appear as a corporeal archive of Grasmere occurrences and histories through the mediation of talk:

It is, when any unusual event happens, affecting to listen to the fireside talk in our Cottages; you then find how faithfully the inner histories of Families, their lesser and greater cares, their peculiar habits, and ways of life are recorded in the breasts of their Fellow-inhabitants of the Vale; much more faithfully than it is possible that the lives of those, who have moved in higher stations and had numerous Friends in the busy world, can be preserved in remembrance, even when their doings and sufferings have been watched for the express purpose of recording them in written narratives. (*Narrative* 52-3)

The community’s ability to retain snippets and fragments of Grasmere history demonstrates how they engage with occurrences in Grasmere through social measures. The “fireside talk” indicates a domestic atmosphere—yet the scene appears to have more gravity than idle women gossiping about the locals. Wordsworth suggests that communal talk—sparked by daily habits, eccentricities, and abnormal incidences—“acts as a catalyst for the verbal organization of daily life” (Levin 46), implying that the community is as an

oral archive—not a literary one. The “inner histories” are “recorded in the breasts of their Fellow-inhabitants of the Vale,” a metaphor of corporeality that is similar to Wordsworth’s description of the Greens’ land as their “heart’s heart,” (*Narrative* 49), suggesting that the intangible gets preserved in physical and human form.

Yet how literally should Wordsworth’s metaphor be interpreted? It seems that the Wordsworth stresses the corporeal recording process as faithful—as though the physical digestion of the oral histories somehow authenticates them as an act of preservation. To be inscribed within their “breasts” implies a strong sense of sentimental value—these histories do not claim to be factual so much as they are shaped by the feeling of their beholder. Individual members of the Grasmere community preserve their own experiences, but together they enact what Margaret Ezell calls “social authorship” which “erase[s] the notion of manuscript authorship that did not have as its primary aim a commercial readership and, likewise, any sense of a culture of reading and writing in which it was engaged. Instead, the notion of author...tends to dismiss non-commercial texts as ‘aristocratic,’ ‘amateur,’ and ‘vulnerable’” (17). Wordsworth did not seek a “commercial readership” with the composition of the *Narrative*. Instead, she constructs a “social authorship” that functions as a public archive. There is not one singular author, but instead, multiple perspectives, interpretations, and recollections.

Wordsworth repositions William’s “spots of time” by preserving the “inner histories”—the intangibility of history and experience—within her text that functions as an archive. The “inner histories” will not be lost to the “busy world” because they are safeguarded in the recesses of the Grasmere inhabitants’ bodies. Recollection resides in a metaphorical place within the corporeal body. Wordsworth materializes the oral

traditions of her community through the physical text of the *Narrative*. Therefore, it seems that Wordsworth wishes to authenticate her narrative by transferring the authorizing act of talk into the written word. However, the Grasmere community acts as “a cohesive social force” (Levin 41), and an individual’s attempts at rendering the communal into a self-involved endeavor, such as written composition, are not always successful.

In order to understand Wordsworth’s negotiation of her authorship in relation to the *Narrative* and the Grasmere community, it is first necessary to explore the early-nineteenth perception of how Romantic female—and male—writers frequently evaded publishing. Often due to political and societal conventions, women refrained from public reception—contributing to what Lucy Newlyn labels the “rhetoric of modesty” (226) and the “anxiety of reception” (224). I believe that though Wordsworth expresses anxiety about the publication of her works, in the instance of the *Narrative*, she resolves her apprehension by emphasizing the community as a metaphorical place where “inner histories” can be archived and preserved, which displaces the authority usually associated with authorship.

The setting of the community is next to the “fireside,” a place that Wordsworth often mentions in her Grasmere journals. The hearth is central to the acts of oral communication and tradition where Wordsworth and her brother composed and read aloud their work, which “suggests that genial warmth that is needed to nurture a private creative self, but which is insufficient to ensure the safe passage of writing into a hostile public environment” (Newlyn 229). The Grasmere community, who often gathered round the domestic and central fireplace, became the compromise between publication

and anonymous composition. Through the function of talk, communities are able to preserve strains of histories without the anxiety of public criticism. Their histories are shared within the confines of a community where they are experienced, talked about, and then archived through the process of recollection.

In discussing the limitations of Wordsworth's authorship, it should not be assumed that there is less value to Wordsworth's work or that she is any less of a creative writer. By limitations of authorship, I am specifically referring to the *Narrative* as a text that attempts to mimic the function and purpose of the community archive.

Wordsworth's text acts as a collection of communal histories through prose, but the unique bond and social order of talk among the Grasmere community members cannot be replicated. Wordsworth acts like "the recorder for the community and its reporter to others" (Wolfson 141). An evaluation of Wordsworth's authorship in relation to the *Narrative* will work to reposition her authorial identity. Therefore, authorship can be understood as a linguistic compromise that attempts to express the community's "inner histories." The compromise gives rise to linguistic complexities, such as that:

[h]er positive description of a community in which experience and relation of that experience almost conflate, a community that maintains itself through talk rather than through writing, is bound up with nostalgia for the dignified but simple communal life Dorothy portrays. Yet she produces writing, which might appear an unwelcome supplement to the people's talk. (Levin 47)

While I do not believe it is necessary to pinpoint the community's archival position as a marker of "simple" life, it is useful to examine Wordsworth's negotiation between talk and writing. The aesthetic value of talk within the Grasmere community is unique

because of its corporeal preservation. The community as an archive allows Wordsworth to counter much of the anxiety that many women writers of her era felt concerning the publication of their work:

the ambition to be recognized by a public readership was seldom acknowledged, and when acknowledged was hedged around with a rhetoric that recalls Sheridan's 'culprit', but in which the familiar topics of modesty reflected genuinely low self-esteem.

(Newlyn 226)

Although Wordsworth did not wish to be recognized by an audience, she did address her "public readership." Upon ending her narrative, Wordsworth confesses to the limitations of her authorship:

and I hear I have spun out my narrative to a tedious length. I cannot give *you* the same feelings that *I* have of them as neighbours and fellow-inhabitants of this Vale; therefore what is in my mind a full and living picture will be to you but a feeble sketch. (emphasis in original)

(*Narrative* 86-7)

Wordsworth acknowledges written composition as a compromise for the oral histories of the Vale. In a direct address to her audience, Wordsworth stresses the pronouns "you" and "I" to create an immediate bond to her readers while also admitting to the distance that occurs between a person writing about experience and those reading the account. The readers of the *Narrative* have an outsider's status whose relationship to the Greens—no matter how sentimentally connected he or she may feel—will never reach the status of "neighbours and fellow-inhabitants of this Vale." For Wordsworth, even though the

Narrative is in manuscript form, it has never truly left the recesses of her creative imagination. The “full and living picture” suggests that the text is a series of moments strung together, and the fact that they reside in her “mind” seems similar to the corporeality of the Grasmere histories that are recorded in their “breasts.” Wordsworth’s desire to literally embody her narrative implies that through physical possession, the story stays where it belongs—amongst a community who understands, cherishes, and creates these histories. Wordsworth’s announcement of the text as “but a feeble sketch” should not be assumed as a derogatory assessment of her work.

In fact, as I have discussed at lengths in Chapter 1, she often titled her poems “fragment” and “sketch.” This decision implies that once mental images are recorded upon the page, they lose their liveliness and vitality. Kept within the creative imagination, images can still be fresh and therefore are able to be changed and reconstructed. It is arguable that Wordsworth turns to the Grasmere community’s archival abilities to replace her own attempts at authorship. Yet her maneuver is part of the broader Romantic tradition where

It was frequently the case in this period that creative identities were constructed from positions of apparent weakness—or rather, that identity was itself reconfigured, so as to make apparent weaknesses into strengths. Women writers were intensely alive to the ways in which they might turn their own subordinate status to creative use; and they frequently collapsed the division between writing—and reading—subjects as a mode of self-empowerment. (Newlyn 232)

I support Newlyn's suggestion that Wordsworth's position during the Romantic era was "subordinate." The phrase "subordinate status" can be used to compare Wordsworth's creative abilities with her male counterparts, but it also indicates that this position is *imposed* upon Wordsworth by societal constructions. The *Narrative* partakes in the process of reconstructing her identity as a writer—negotiating the boundaries of public reception and community appreciation.

Wordsworth also works to reconfigure the relationship between the community and individual as recording devices. She had no intentions for the *Narrative* to be widely received. Instead she intended for it to circulate among friends, thereby participating in a form of Ezell's "social authorship." In a letter to her friends the Clarksons, Wordsworth relates the impossibility of the *Narrative*'s publication:

My dear friend...I cannot express what pain I feel in refusing any request of yours, above all one in which dear Mr. Clarkson joins so earnestly, but indeed I cannot have the narrative published. My reasons are entirely disconnected with myself, much as I should detest the idea of setting myself up as an Author. I should not object on that score as, it might have been published without a name, and nobody would have thought of me. But on account of the family of the Greens I cannot consent. Their story was only represented to the world in that narrative which was drawn up for the collecting of the subscription, so far as might tend to produce the end desired, but by publishing the narrative, I should bring the children forward to notice as individuals, and we know not what injurious effect this might have upon them. Besides it appears to me that the events are too recent to be published in delicacy to others as well as to the

children...Thirty or forty years hence, when the characters of the children are formed and they can be no longer objects of curiosity, if it should be thought that any service would be done, it is my present wish that it should be published, whether I am alive or dead. (*Middle Years, 1806-1811* 453-43)

Wordsworth's polite refusal to publish the *Narrative* reflects not only her concern for the privacy of the Green children, but also shows her dismissive attitude in acknowledging an individualized account of authorship. The *Narrative* of the Greens and histories of other Grasmere families exists in the archive of the community. Hence, Wordsworth does not publically expose this history because she recognizes that the story has been recorded in the minds and bodies of the community. She denies individual responsibility, suggesting to the Clarksons, "it might have been published without a name, and nobody would have thought of me," which does not necessarily imply that Wordsworth was not proud of her *Narrative*. On the contrary, Wordsworth recognizes that the *Narrative*'s composition is a result of communal storytelling and oral traditions. Wordsworth includes her own personal experiences and details, but these histories are also not just individually based but part of a communal archive.

While the *Narrative* centers on the tragedy of the Greens and their children, it also depicts a brief—and often scattered—account of other Grasmere members, whose situation seems to relate to the Greens in similar ways. In the endnotes of the *Narrative*, Wordsworth recounts another Grasmere history that reminds her of Sarah Green's daughter's desire to join the search party to find her parents' bodies:

the circumstance reminds me of Mary Watson, then 73 years of age, who when her Son was drowned in the Lake six years ago walked up and down upon the

shore entreating that she might be suffered to go in one of the Boats, for though others could not find him, she said “Do let me go, I am sure I can spy him!” I never shall forget the agony in her face—without a tear. She looked eagerly toward the Island near the shore of which her Son had been lost, and wringing her hands, said, while I was standing close to her, “I was fifty years old when I bore him, and he never gave me sorrow till now.” The death of this young man caused universal regret in the Vale of Grasmere. (*Narrative* 90)

Wordsworth threads together the “inner histories” of the Grasmere community in a manner that shows the unifying force of the Grasmere landscape. Mary Watson thought that by physically traversing the banks of the lake, her familial bond would surely resurrect the body of her son. Yet in this instance, “communal and natural bonds can equal, if not replace, familial ones” (Levin 45), as Wordsworth—an outsider to the Green and Watson family—acts on behalf of her community in recording the two histories alongside one another. Wordsworth also presumes that by locating these histories close together within the text of the *Narrative*, (even through physically “standing close to her”) she will be able to embody and consume these histories. Wordsworth through her writing strives get as close as she can to the “intimate space” (Bachelard 79) of the merger between experience and memory. All occurrences within Grasmere are due to the geographic ties that mark the boundaries of a communal habitat. The death of Watson’s son “caused universal regret in the Vale of Grasmere,” a moment of Wordsworth’s use of metonymy where the geographical place of Grasmere stands for its inhabitants.

Like the notion of the Grasmere community as an archive that contains the records the “inner histories” of its members, Wordsworth’s *Narrative* also acts as a kind

of archive that, though it may reflect permanence in its inscription, can be added to and edited beyond its date of original conception. The *Narrative*'s text is malleable, dynamic, and shifting. In fact, years later, Wordsworth added to her manuscript of the *Narrative*, writing in pencil directly underneath the above passage:

The end of Mary Watson herself was more tragical [sic] than that of the young man. She was murdered a few years ago in her own cottage by a poor Maniac, her own Son, with whom she had lived fearlessly though everyone in the vale had had apprehensions for her. The estate at her death fell to a grandson. He had been sent to Liverpool to learn a trade, came home a dashing fellow, spent all his property—took to dishonest practices, and is now under sentence of transportation.

(*Narrative* 91)

Perhaps Wordsworth did not want to publish the *Narrative* upon request of the Clarksons because she knew its composition was not finished. In the same way that the oral histories of the Grasmere community are accumulated throughout time to create an archive, so are the histories of the *Narrative*'s characters updated and edited as time progresses. The Grasmere community's sincere concern for Watson demonstrates how "societal bonds may be more dependable and secure than ties of blood" (Levin 45). Hence, the community's attempts to archive their members' histories act as a kind of "social assistance" (Levin 44), forming a web of histories that reside in each Grasmere inhabitant.

“Their own heart’s heart, their land”: The Surfacing of Memory in Landscape

Wordsworth’s reliance upon the community archive shows the importance of landscape as a grounding mechanism that sets the boundaries of the Vale and its inhabitants. While the “fireside” chats may occur indoors, the expansive Grasmere landscape creates borders that encompass, preserve, and legitimize these experiences and tales.

The practical reason for Wordsworth’s composition of the *Narrative* was to publicize the tragedy of the Greens not only to those in the Grasmere community, but also to Wordsworth’s well-off friends who would be in a position to donate funds to the Green orphans. In composing the *Narrative*, Wordsworth chooses the Grasmere landscape as a means of asserting authority over the Green episode. This was by no means a stretch of the imagination for Wordsworth—the dangerous precipice of the crags and the misty climatic atmosphere were the tragic instigators of the Greens’ death. Perhaps due to the Grasmere landscape’s role, Wordsworth not only firmly roots the account into the familiar scenery of the land, but also assertively pulls the landscape to the forefront of her narrative. In the same way that a literary text acts as a means of preservation, Wordsworth is also able to recall the memory of the Greens from the imagery of the landscape. The Grasmere ground, therefore, becomes a kind of catalyst for recalling the experiences, memories, and habits of the deceased couple.

Commenting upon the poor living conditions of George, Sarah, and their children, Wordsworth recounts their brief involvement with the Grasmere community and the current disused state of their furniture and possessions. The Green family was fraught

with poverty and “[t]hey must very soon have parted with their Land if they had lived; for their means were reduced by little and little till scarcely anything *but the Land* was left” (emphasis in original) (*Narrative* 49). Wordsworth makes note of the destitute conditions of the Greens by stressing their bond with their property. The Greens prized their land above all their other possessions, and it seems that Wordsworth places particular importance on the land’s function in recalling these attachments. Wordsworth’s own stress on “*but the Land*” highlights the irony of the moment—the Greens would have sold all of their other belongings before parting with their property, and indeed, since their death, the house and land had been sold. The Greens’ intimate relationship with their land enables Wordsworth to conjure their memory. In the above phrase, landscape appears as a sponge absorbing experience that awaits recollection. Yet, Wordsworth implies that the land’s intransience and permanence will outlast human presence.

We can only speculate as to whether or not the Greens’ relationship to their land was more than a matter of possessing property, as Wordsworth’s narrative cannot be read as an authentic or factual account of their existence. But in the *Narrative*, Wordsworth certainly augments the Greens’ relationship to the land as possessing a sentimental and physical attachment. Wordsworth describes how they sold peat “which they dug out of their own hearts’ heart, their Land” (*Narrative* 49). The metaphor outlines how the Greens were radically attached to their land, so much so that the land has shifted from being an exterior place to residing inside the bodies of the Greens. Sentimentally, the land was a second heart to the Greens, a kind of life force that fueled their existence. The metaphorical roots of the land ran deep inside them, and the earth grounds their memory. She does not want this connection to be lost. Having recognized the land’s unique

importance to the Greens, Wordsworth wishes to perpetuate their memory specifically in the Grasmere landscape, suggestive of the text as natural monument. The metaphor also implies a corporeal connection between land and body. It seems to suggest that through the embodiment of land, the Greens' essence or memory can never desist. If the land is a permanent force, then the histories of the Greens will never disappear, but instead, will reside within the Grasmere landscape through memory. The land appears not only as a means of preservation—literally the Greens' bodies will be laid to rest in the earth—but also as a metaphorical place of refuge for Wordsworth to hinge her *Narrative*. She wishes to recapture the intimacy between land and the Greens before it is lost. The *Narrative* appears as a text that seeks to rejuvenate this connection.

Bachelard's philosophical investigation of experience on what he terms to be the "simple images of *felicitous space*" theorizes that people are drawn to spaces of intimacy and memory, and similarly, Wordsworth relies upon her poetic sensibility to magnify the relationship between landscape and memory. (emphasis in original) (Bachelard xxxi)

Bachelard argues that images of space:

seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogized space...Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor...For it concentrates being within limits that protect. In the realm of images, the play between the exterior and intimacy is not a balanced one. (Bachelard xxxi-xxxii)

The land represents a space that the Green family loved. They held onto the plot of land when all their other possessions had been sold. Wordsworth's affinity to her immediate Grasmere landscape makes her keen to recognize the Greens' attachment. She "seizes" this intimacy in her imagination and creates an imagined space—a metaphorical place of the mind as depicted in her *Narrative* where landscape is real and imagined. Bachelard's insistence of the unbalanced relationship between exterior and intimacy implies that there is a constant desire to internalize and embody the exterior space. In this scenario, Wordsworth's poetic sensibilities of the imagination stress her ability to use landscape as a space of preservation and possession.

In Chapter 1 where I argued that Wordsworth sought her immediate landscape of the Grasmere vale to exercise the presence of her poetic voice. Likewise in the *Narrative*, Wordsworth draws upon the landscape as a means of conjuring the memory of the Greens. The notion of a "eulogized space" (Bachelard xxxi) is of particular significance as it emphasizes space as a place that is sacred and praise-worthy. Wordsworth's *Narrative* makes reference to the Greens' love of the land in order to pay homage to their lives and impose their legacy upon Grasmere's natural world.

The land's legacy acts as a critical theme toward the end of the *Narrative*, when Wordsworth recounts the family's relationship with their plot of property:

The love of their few fields and their ancient home was a salutary passion, and no doubt something of this must have spread itself to the Children. The Parents' cares and their chief employments were centred [sic] there; and as soon as the Children could run about even the youngest could take part in them, while the elder would do this with a depth of interest which cannot be felt, even in rural life,

where people are only transitory occupants of the soil on which they live.

(*Narrative* 75)

Wordsworth augments the Greens' connection between themselves and the land by deeming this relationship a "salutary passion," indicative of possessing an aesthetic value. The land's importance becomes part of a family tradition, where children inherit the significance of its value from their parents. Yet instead of the legacy ending there, Wordsworth wishes to preserve the memory of the Greens, to keep their histories alive. In the same way that the land was at the "heart's heart," it also remains at the center of interest, a space that stores the memory of histories and evokes recollection of them. Wordsworth has taken it upon herself to reimagine the Greens' experiences in the vale in the form of the *Narrative*—a factual record, but also an imaginative inference on the "inner histories" of the Grasmere community. The above passage ends with an emphasis on the eldest Green child, whose strong passion for the land moves beyond the realm of sensibility and into that "which cannot be felt." The *Narrative* is a "reverberation" that allows its readers to "experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of the past. But the image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface" (Bachelard xix). The act of writing about landscape as a space allows for this surfacing of memory. Therefore, landscape becomes a kind of binding mechanism in the *Narrative* that memories and "inner histories" adhere to.

The Grasmere landscape embodies both natural and man-made objects that play an important role in the surfacing of memory. After Wordsworth pays her respects to the Greens at their wake, she stumbles out of their house and is immediately absorbed by the household items that pepper the Greens' property:

We went out of doors, and were much moved by the rude and simple objects before us—the noisy stream, the craggy mountain down which the old Man and his Wife had hoped to make their way on that unhappy night—the little garden, untilled—with its box-tree and a few peeping flowers! The furniture of the house was decayed and scanty; but there was one oaken cupboard that was so bright with rubbing that it was plain it had been prized as an ornament and a treasure by the poor Woman then lying in her Coffin. (*Narrative* 55)

Wordsworth creates a connection between the Grasmere landmarks and the Greens family. She immediately associates the Greens' fateful journey with the "craggy mountain" as though being in the landscape's company makes the Greens' memory tangible. The overgrown garden is a sign of neglect and evokes Wordsworth to feel as though the land sentimentalizes the loss of the Greens and, as a result, appears in shambles. The Greens' furniture is strewn around the yard either for sale or for scavengers. In particular, the presence of an "oaken cupboard" stands out among the ruffraff. Wordsworth associates its worn and bright sheen with the inference that it must have been Sarah's favorite. The cupboard—as an object apart from all others—perhaps attracts Wordsworth because it represents an "inner space [that] is also [an] *intimate space*, space that is not open to just anybody" (emphasis in original) (Bachelard 78). An object such as the cupboard can be viewed as a fetish or talisman that serves as a reminder of memory. Wordsworth's poetic imagination merges its physical presence in the yard with the past memories it had with Sarah Green. The cupboard, then, is as an archive that contains memories that the poetic imagination seeks to make tangible. The

domestic object of the cupboard sparks Wordsworth's imagination and memories in the same way that

[t]hese household closed objects such as chests and cupboards contain the things that are *unforgettable*, unforgettable for us, but also unforgettable for those to whom we are going to give our treasures. Here the past, the present and a future are condensed. Thus the casket is memory of what is immemorial. (emphasis in original) (Bachelard 84)

Relating to Wordsworth's observations, the "unforgettable" quality of the cupboard contains the memory of the Greens. The metaphorical "things" that can be given from these objects reside the legacy of the memory. Hence, the creative imagination locates the memory in these objects as a means of connecting community to memory as well. Time becomes "condensed" in that its existence practically becomes irrelevant. The memory of the Greens stands outside of time in that Wordsworth makes present the "inner histories" of the past. The significance of preserving an archive of memory is in creating not only a personal intimacy with these memories, but also to perpetuate their existence by making their legacy public. This publicizing occurs through the archival function of the Grasmere community. The cupboard, like the casket, can be understood as a "memory of what is immemorial"—suggesting that the recollected experience appears on the outer edges of time, an archive of the imaginary realm that exists beyond its tangible boundaries.

Wordsworth's *Narrative* uses landscape and objects within the familiar Grasmere Vale where the Greens' memory can be preserved. She exercises her creative imagination to illustrate the "simple images of *felicitous space*" (emphasis in original)

(Bachelard 78), which acts as a means of objectifying memory in a tangible space.

However corporeal a space may be, Wordsworth's *Narrative* engages in a reimagining of space by situating memory in a specific place. She writes about the Greens in manuscript form, but preserves the histories of all Grasmere community members by using landscape as the geographical boundaries for a community that is an archive.

Wordsworth, like many women writers in the early-nineteenth century of the Romantic era, was anxious about the public reception and circulation of her work. Her *Narrative* is a textual example of how she reconfigures her identity as an author within the context of the familiar Grasmere community and landscape. The tragedy of the Greens is a significant subject for Wordsworth to establish her voice as an active part of the Grasmere community. Wordsworth recounts not only the histories of the Greens, but also includes her own experiences as well as other inhabitants' stories. She negotiates her authorial identity by relying upon the Grasmere community as an archive that collects and preserves the "inner histories" of the Vale. The Grasmere community's oral traditions turn talk into a place where these where these histories can be found.

Wordsworth reconstructs her brother's "spots of time" to reflect the community oriented function of recollection. Landscape appears as the imaginary boundary of the communal archive, retaining the memories of its inhabitants. The "*intimate space*" (emphasis in original) (Bachelard 78) of landscape prompts the recollection of memory and attracts a companionship among Grasmere inhabitants—Wordsworth included—and their land.

Wordsworth highlights the Greens' relationship to their land, and in turn stresses her own attachment to the immediate landscape as a dweller in the Vale and as a member of the community. In the following chapter, I will explore Wordsworth's ties to the land further

by examining her journeys through foreign terrains, where travel writing is a way for Wordsworth to self-consciously construct her creative process.

Chapter 3

Mapping Foreign Lands:

Dorothy Wordsworth's Travel Writing as the Creative Process

At the end of the eighteenth century, the scenic tour was in vogue as a way for English men and women to go “native” (Trott 74), to explore and experience other cultures in a geographically new landscape. But English travelers often did not have to journey far to encounter alien territories. Some seeking landscapes of the picturesque and sublime ventured to areas such as the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands (Trott 75). Dorothy Wordsworth was one of them. In fact, in 1823 Wordsworth classified her generation as a “writing and publishing (especially *tour*-writing and *tour*-publishing) age” (emphasis in original) (qtd. Butler 364).

Place has always held significance for Wordsworth. In Chapter 1 I examined how the immediate landscape of the Grasmere Vale became a medium for Wordsworth to develop and establish her poetic voice. In Chapter 2 I showed how Wordsworth explored the advantages and limitations of a self-possessed poetic voice within the context of the Grasmere community. I argued that the Grasmere community was an archive that provided a means for Wordsworth to ground her voice in a familiar social setting. In this chapter, I focus on Wordsworth's travel narratives, specifically *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland* (1803) and *Excursion up Scawfell Pike* (1818), in order to show how she turns away from her beloved Vale and ventures into foreign territories where she maps not only new lands but also her creative imagination. In leaving the Grasmere

Vale, she confronts the foreignness of unknown landscapes. In this sense, both travel narratives function as examples of Wordsworth's "topographic writing" (Bellanca 138), which uses the natural landscape as inspiration for the imaginative aspects of writing. The travel narratives act like cartographic maps, illustrating not only a geographical place but also offering a metaphorical chart of Wordsworth's creative process. While touring the Scottish Highlands and climbing one of England's tallest mountains, Wordsworth walks unknown terrain, tracing its borders and boundaries.

Wordsworth's confrontation with foreign lands parallels the ways in which her creative process is also a kind of a mapping of the imagination. The mental faculty of the imagination strings together images to formulate a unified vision, and in this way, "vision almost seems to become a real landscape" (de Man 7). The artist then attempts to translate this imagistic vision into either verbal or pictorial representations. However, there is never a concise one-to-one correspondence between the writer's imagination and the linguistic representation. No matter how elegant or polished the representation may be, there remains a gap between what is written on the page and what the author's imagination intended. Yet the intentions of the writer are to *attempt* to express the imagination and present its essence in an accessible format.

As an author, Wordsworth is preoccupied by this dilemma of the creative process, and the foreignness of landscapes sparks this fixation. Like facing the wilderness of unknown lands, she confronts the elusiveness of the imagination and therefore becomes interested in the *process* of mapping the imagination. Writing for her is a successive series of attempts at rendering mental imagery into a visual display. Her writing shows a self-conscious effort at depicting the mechanics of the creative process.

In illustrating the imagination, Wordsworth strings together images of her mental faculty. These images contain an ambiguous and elusive nature because they are part of the imagination, and as a result, it is difficult to express their essential characteristics through language. What eventually appears on the blank page is a linguistic compromise for what began in the imagination. In the following chapter, I will define Wordsworth's resulting imagery that has been deciphered into the written word as "imagined landscapes." In this manner, the images that compose the imagined landscape are illusionary and are shifting in their visual appearance. These qualities of the landscapes are not only situated as products of her visions but in addition are firmly rooted to the broader scope of Romanticism. The aim of this chapter is to show how Wordsworth attempts to express her creative process and to explore how the tradition of Romanticism frames her travel narratives.

Unlike the familiar landscape and community of the Grasmere vale, the foreignness of the terrain prompts Wordsworth to reflect on her creative process. I will examine this preoccupation through the following three sections of this chapter. First I will show that her hand-drawn maps in *Recollections* visualize foreign territories as a means of materializing her creative process. By analyzing her maps, I will look to see how creative process works. Then I will turn to examine how the fragmented images of the imagination are unified into a completed vision. In this manner, she makes her creative process unique by situating it within a feminine tradition of her own creation. Finally, I will analyze Wordsworth's imagination as a function of Romanticism.

Cartography of the Mind: Mapping Scotland and the Imagination

In 1803 Wordsworth participated in a six-week scenic tour of Scotland along with her brother William and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Although the three friends traveled to hamlets and lochs by carriage and boat, walking was their primary mode of transportation. She wrote sketches and took brief notes of the countryside while traveling, but *Recollections* was completed in full after the journey had already taken place. Upon its first revision, *Recollections* was not meant for public eyes but only for “the sake of a few friends, who, it seemed, ought to have been with us” (qtd. Levin 78). However, Wordsworth soon decided to publish the tour and subsequently revised the original text, “producing five manuscript versions” (Levin 79). Nineteen years later, *Recollections* still had not been published publically, and she made her second journey to Scotland with Joanna Hutchinson, resulting in *Journal of my Second Tour in Scotland* (1822). She revised *Recollections* again during her second trip to Scotland, but, once again, the manuscript was never published.

Nevertheless many of Wordsworth’s travel journals were distributed to a limited audience in what can be qualified as a “liminal publication,” suggesting that “texts like this occupy an ambiguous yet spacious and flexible borderland” (Bellanca 137). I would like to apply Bellanca’s notion to *Recollections*. This concept is not only applicable to its marginal publication status but also pertains to the text’s portrayal of the creative process. Inhabiting a liminal existence, Wordsworth’s creative process occupies the space between geographical territories and her imagined landscape.

One of the ways in which Wordsworth attempts to visualize this ambiguous space of her creative process is through the practice of cartography. Wordsworth's map-making seeks to materialize her creative process. By including hand-drawn maps in her editions of *Recollections*, she uses the aid of cartography to evoke a visual representation of her creative process. Recognizing the limitations of the written word, Wordsworth attempts to translate her mental imagery of the Scottish landscape into pictures. The addition of maps in *Recollections* is also significant because it suggests, "how many other rough sketches, verbal or pictorial, might have been made on the spot throughout the journey" (Walker 20). This notion implies that her work is not limited to poetry, narratives, and journals but also includes a greater array of creative renderings.

Wordsworth's fascination with maps was apparent before she began making her own. In the third week of her tour, she approaches Loch Long, which spills into the firth of the Clyde River, and contemplates her first encounter with cartography:

Often have I, in looking over a map of Scotland, followed the intricate windings of one of these sea-lochs, till, pleasing myself with my own imaginations, I have felt a longing, almost painful, to travel among them by land or by water.

(*Recollections* 117)

The primary concern is Wordsworth's passion for shifting between a geographical place and an imagined landscape. She begins with the tangible object of a map of Scotland, looking at it presumably from Dove Cottage. She interacts with the Scottish map not to trace a linear path to a definitive destination but instead to explore the process of journeying. She is fascinated by "the intricate windings" of the loch, emphasizing the importance of the loch's path, similar to the snaking "serpent line" ("Sketch" 9) and

“winding path” (“Grasmere” 53) that I have discussed in Chapter 1. She internalizes the loch’s mapped course, and as a result, it stirs her imagination to the point where she begins to craft her own imagined landscapes. The passage is consistent to the formula of Wordsworth’s creative process. She is drawn to “travel” for its mobility, not in the hopes of reaching specified destinations, but instead to move “among them.” The materialization of her creative process through cartography depicts her attempts at mapping the intricate workings of her imagination.

In the same way that Wordsworth was attracted to the map of the Scottish loch, all six of her hand-drawn maps contain bodies of water. The sketches, drawn by free hand, are dispersed among *Recollections* and illustrate the curves and boundaries of lochs, rivers, and islands. Her cursive script, “Windings of the River Tummel” (*Recollections* 169), titles one of the more intriguing sketches. It depicts a curvaceously irregular single line that swoops vertically across the page. She makes reference to her cartography in the text:

When left to ourselves we sate down on the hillside, and looked with delight into the deep vale below, which was exceedingly green, not regularly fenced or cultivated, but the level area scattered over with bushes and trees, and through that level ground glided a glassy river, not in serpentine windings, but in direct turnings backwards and forwards, and then flowed into the head of the Lake of Tummel; but I will copy a rough sketch which I made while we sate upon the hill, which, imperfect as it is, will give a better idea of the course of the river-which I must add is more curious than beautiful –than my description. (*Recollections* 168)

Like the untamed landscape depicted in many of her poems, Wordsworth is drawn to the wilderness of the uncultivated natural world. Surveying the landscape from atop a summit, she identifies the River Tummel as the ultimate representation of journeying. It “glided,” signifying its harmonious appearance with nature, and the river’s “glassy” reflection evokes the image of a mirror, as though if she got close enough, she could see her face in the water’s surface.

Yet Wordsworth is careful to clarify her wording of “glided” as “not in serpentine windings,” which would suggest idleness, characteristic of aimless wandering. Her gloss refutes the meaning of “serpentine” as rambling aimlessly and instead “direct turnings” stresses the purposefulness of the river’s path. As I have mentioned earlier, her use of “serpentine” echoes the “serpentine line” (9) in “a Sketch” where both references to the windings are meant as undeviating. Perhaps she is anxious about having her river appear idle and aimless. By clarifying the river’s directness, Wordsworth emphasizes the immediacy of its uninterrupted path. The inclusion of her cartographic illustration in the text ratifies the elusive nature of interpreting text. Wordsworth is self-consciously aware of the problem of a created text—it can be glossed with a variety of different interpretations. She chooses the form of a map because it adds an aesthetic value of explanation and corporeality that is lacking in language. Wordsworth believes that her picture “will give a better idea of the *course* of the river...than my description” (emphasis my own) (*Recollections* 168), when in fact, the sketch gives no indication to the observer that the river’s windings should be viewed as purposeful instead of idle. The ambiguity and limitations of language seem to plague her cartographic attempts. Wordsworth’s

expression of the creative process through either verbal or pictorial means is fraught with anxieties about representation and authenticity.

Not only is Wordsworth self-consciously aware that language acts as a compromise for the creative process, but she is also interested in the Romantic image's elusive qualities. One of the reasons for her materialization of her creative process through map-making is due to her desire to stabilize the ambiguous nature of her images. Her cartographic endeavors reflect Mario Praz's investigation of the romantic image as having an illusionary nature:

The essence of Romanticism consequently comes to consist in that which cannot be described. The word and the form, says Schlegel in *Lucinde*, are only accessories. The essential is the thought and the poetic image, and these are rendered possible only in a passive state. The Romantic exalts the artist who does not give a material form to his dreams –the poet ecstatic in front of a forever blank page, the musician who listens to the prodigious concerts of his soul without attempting to translate them into notes. It is romantic to consider concrete expression as a decadence, a contamination. (qtd. McGann 23)

Wordsworth's maps, and even her text, seem to be "accessories" to her creative process. The hand-drawn maps are shadows of the larger scheme as depicted in her creative process. However, she attempts to give "material form to" *her* "dreams." The visual format of cartography makes tangible what was an elusive Romantic image. She redefines her maps in the body of her text shows how she views the "concrete expression" of her creative process as merely symbols of ideas. Verbal and pictorial

representations are a kind of enigma where the reader must guess the meaning behind the text.

The maps act as a material aid to the written word. Other hand-drawn maps in *Recollections* perform a similar function: they provide a visual guide to a geographically foreign terrain. The following description accompanies a faintly drawn map of Loch Katerine and its surrounding lochs:

The stars were beginning to appear, but the brightness of the west was not yet gone; -the lake perfectly still, and when we first went into the boat we rowed almost close to the shore under steep crags hung with birches: it was like a new discovered country of which we had not dreamed...We hardly spoke to each other as we moved along receding from the west, which diffused a solemn animation over the lake. (*Recollections* 190)

While the above passage has little to do with the map aside from the common subject matter of Loch Katerine, Wordsworth's view of the loch as a "new discovered country of which we had not dreamed" illustrates how her traversing over foreign territories impacts her imagination in ways unlike the familiarity of the Grasmere Vale. As opposed to the Grasmere Vale, it appears that the Scottish Highlands are not a landscape where she seeks to assert her poetic voice. Instead she turns to prose and cartography to create a visual representation of her creative process. In the above passage, she describes the boat's wake as sending "a solemn animation over the lake," and the same can also be said of her cartographic endeavors. Sketching the loch, Wordsworth captures its animate and flowing qualities. Natural elements of the Scottish Highlands stir Wordsworth's imagination, provoking her to cultivate her *continuous* creative process through visual

interpretations. The fluid movement of her prose echoes the boat's ripples over the lake. The flowing movement of the passage is a common characteristic of her travel writing prose. It is similar to a stream-of-consciousness form of writing and evokes the sense that Wordsworth wishes to encapsulate the fluid process of her imagination through language.

The same can be said of Wordsworth's maps. The corresponding map to the above passage has scarcely any linear or perpendicular lines but instead contains flowing and winding representations of the lochs. The graceful style of the maps is her attempt at capturing the indecipherable newness of the terrain. Instead of drawing maps that are highly stylized and realist renderings of Scotland, she opts to represent the land in an elusive and ambiguous manner.

Ultimately, the maps depict geographically unfamiliar natural objects and materialize Wordsworth's elusive creative process. The foreignness of Scotland sparks her imagination with visions that are wild and new to her. Like a cartographer surveying a new territory, she maps her mental innovations in hopes of preserving them through visual measures.

“A Woman's Illustration”: Sewing Scenes in Scotland

It is arguable that Wordsworth's travel journals represent “her uniqueness and importance as a recorder of the journeys of men and women in nature” (Levin 77). While Levin's assessment of Wordsworth is applicable when viewing a text as a cultural artifact of early nineteenth-century culture, Wordsworth's travel journals reveal so much more

than only her ability to “record” daily life. It is necessary to examine *Recollections* as not only a woman’s contribution to the often male-dominated travel narrative genre but also as a feminine augmentation of the Romantic creative process.

Wordsworth’s self-consciousness of the creative process could arguably show that the travel journals depict value in “the very process of viewing and of writing about seeing more sophisticatedly than most travel writers” (Levin 78). Particular emphasis should be placed on *process*, as Wordsworth’s writing presents a focus on the developments of the imagination. The imaginative process is a compilation of images that are patched together to create a unified scene or imagined landscape. Traversing the lochs, streams, or pikes of the Scottish Highlands, she internalizes the natural objects of the immediate landscape. However, she cannot capture the essence of these natural objects. Instead, her imagination formulates imagistic representations of each natural scene. Images act like fragments; they are snippets and splinters of what was once a unified landscape. A useful definition of natural objects shows that “their origin is determined by nothing but their own being. Their becoming coincides at all times with the mode of their origination” (de Man 4). Wordsworth’s objects of her imagined landscapes are never stable but consciously seek redefinition in and of the creative imagination.

Feeling a desire to self-consciously define the nature of these images, Wordsworth evaluates her creative process as being applicable to themes that are common of Romanticism. Upon journeying to a small village in Scotland, she encounters a cottage garden and remarks upon its alien order:

Every cottage seemed to have its little plot of ground, fenced by a ridge of earth; this plot contained two or three different divisions, kail [sic], potatoes, oats, hay; the houses all standing in lines, or never far apart; the cultivated ground was all together also, and made a very strange appearance with its many greens among the dark brown hills, neither tree nor shrub growing; yet the grass and the potatoes looked greener than elsewhere, owing to the bareness of the neighbouring hills; it was indeed a wild and singular spot-to use a woman's illustration, like a collection of patchwork, made of pieces as they might have chanced to have been cut by the mantua-maker, only just smoothed to fit each other, the different sorts of produce being in such a multitude of plots, and those so small and of such irregular shapes. (*Recollections* 49)

In the above passage, Wordsworth enters the frame of the wild and unknown landscape. The extreme organization of the garden plot attempts to organize the foreignness of the land. Like her poetry, she uses domestic metaphors as a means of arranging the wild landscape. The orderliness of household-like divisions among the "cultivated ground" seems to appear like a "practical aesthetic" (Bohls 177) where "beauty is naturalized as a daily phenomenon" (Bohls 177). However, the "wild and singular spot" counteracts the "daily phenomenon" of the images. Furthermore, it is paired with the metaphor of a "women's illustration," two seemingly opposite configurations. Wordsworth calls the garden "wild" as a sign that she is outside of the domestic sphere. Yet the garden, however orderly and domesticated it may appear to be, is uniquely different from the untamed and rough aspects of the landscape. She combines the familiarity of the domestic with the wild aesthetic associated with unknown territory. She channels a

notion of the sublime that Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* describes as: "the beautiful concerns social or sexual relations, and turns upon the still more powerful feelings of terror or pain" (Trott 72). Burke's sublime captures two distinct traditions side-by-side: the awesomeness of landscape and its feminine characteristics. While the garden's "very strange appearance" suggests that the territory is utterly alien in its location and façade, Wordsworth's qualifies the scene as a "woman's illustration," a self-reflexive attempt at depicting the feminine aspects of the sublime as well as situating her creative process within a woman's tradition.

Upon further examination of Wordsworth's "women's illustration," her use of the word "women" is neatly paired with the "mantua-maker" metaphor, because a mantua is "a kind of loose gown worn by women" (*OED*). The dressmaker, who does not have to necessarily be a woman, highlights the artisanal and handcrafted aspects of sewing. In the same way that the garden plot contains an array of shapes, the gown reveals a sewn together patchwork of fabrics. However, the significance of this passage stresses the way that Wordsworth mirrors herself in the mantua-maker. In this alignment, the mantua-maker is feminized. Wordsworth is the woman composing the illustration. She emphasizes the process of dressmaking more so than the final product of the completed gown. Her mental method of interpreting the landscape and subsequently creating a written discourse is identical to the manual process of sewing cloth to create a dress.

The metaphor of the "mantua-maker" works well for understanding Wordsworth's motives and methods of her creative process. She sews together natural objects of the Scottish Highlands in order to create her imagined landscape. In fact, her

journey through Scotland can be viewed as a series of scenes that she systematically approaches and leaves. This focus is similar to the early nineteenth-century travel writer's encounter with the picturesque. William Gilpin describes this aesthetic as the "expectation of new scenes continually opening" (qtd. Trott 47). The continuous process of scenes and images overlapping with another is a consistent factor in Wordsworth's creative process. Like the craft of the mantua-maker, she sews together scenes from Scotland's landscape and, by doing so, invents her creative process.

Not only does the "mantua-maker" metaphor capture characteristics of the feminine Romantic tradition, but it also relates to the Romantic tradition of the imagination to the creative process:

Romantics resort to masculine metaphors of power not only because they are socialized and indoctrinated into a masculinist tradition but also (and tautologically) because these metaphors allow them to reassert the power of a vocation that is on the verge of losing whatever influence it had within and over that tradition. (Ross 29)

The above criticism refers to the masculine tradition in Romanticism of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence," which portrays the idea that predominantly male Romantic poets write in relation to their literary fathers. Wordsworth seems to disown the use of the "masculine metaphors" and instead inserts a specifically feminine metaphor, which shows her as functioning in a feminine Romantic tradition rather than a masculine one. By uniting the wild singularity of the garden with the "woman's illustration," she makes her creative process unique by repositioning characteristics of the domestic sphere in a wild and unknown setting. She suggests an alternative tradition that contains a different

set of metaphors from those suggested by Ross. The opposed viewpoint crafts her romantic tradition as distinctly feminine. Instead of looking back toward her literary fathers, she invents a practice in landscape that is based upon customs of the domestic sphere.

In order to tease apart the “mantua-maker” as a signpost of Wordsworth creating a distinctly feminine genre, it is necessary to examine the trends of eighteenth-century women’s travel writing. Contextualizing *Recollections* in the vein of travel writing and in relation to its male counterparts, “[w]omen travel writers turn toward this aesthetic as a means of augmenting their legitimacy as writers in a male dominated genre” (Bohls 17), and “women travel writers “broke out of the masculine tutelage to make unrecognized contributions during the formative period of modern aesthetic thoughts” (Bohls 3). By using the feminine metaphor of the “mantua-maker” as a marker of her creative process, Wordsworth repositions herself in relation to the male tradition of travel writing by manifesting a genre of her own creation.

If contemporary criticism of *Recollections* seems somewhat scarce, it is because the genre of travel writing has been dominated by the masculine tradition. William Wordsworth’s *A Complete Guide to the Lakes* was widely read by his contemporaries and consequently used as a template against other travel writing. The lack of criticism surrounding *Recollections* may be a sign of the male canon’s forceful presence, or it could be argued that Wordsworth’s travel narrative has been marginalized due to her gender. However, it is important to note that her text does not seem to show any signs of anxiety or strain in relation to her male counterparts. In asserting her creative process within a feminine tradition, Wordsworth self-consciously acknowledges that she offers an

alternative viewpoint and insight that participates in and often challenges the male tradition.

“Some optical delusion”:

The Illusionary Romantic Image in Scotland and the Lake District

Wordsworth’s creative process is made up of images that are sewn together to create her imagined landscapes. These fragmented images are often ambiguous and misleading. Levin comments upon the elusive nature of her images and deems them to be “forgeries” (76). I believe that because her images do not produce a one-to-one correspondence with reality; they should not be condemned as a forgery but instead be celebrated as characteristic of the Romantic images’ illusionary nature.

As I have previously shown in this chapter, Wordsworth attempts to produce pictorial representations of her imagined landscapes through her cartographic endeavors. She also aligns the creative process within a distinctly feminine tradition. Self-consciously involved with the expression and representation of the creative process, her concern with the Romantic image is yet another reflection upon the creative process. The Romantic image often appears as an escape from reality, where perception interacts with the natural world on a highly imaginative level. However, while this is true to an extent, it seems that her travel writing does not abandon the geographical world but attempts to use the creative process as a bridge between the imaginary realm and the reality of the foreign terrain. In this manner, her creative process inhabits a “flexible borderland” (Bellanca 137).

Wordsworth's process of threading scenic images together to create an imagined landscape emphasizes the illusionary aspects of the terrain's form. Standing on an island with William and Coleridge in the heart of Loch Lomond, she spies the double head of Dumbarton rock shrouded in mist. Its "ghost-like appearance" (*Recollections* 87) has an aura of intrigue, and the rock inspires her to patch together scenes of the natural landscape:

Right before us, on the flat island mentioned before, were several small single trees or shrubs, growing at different distance from each other, close to the shore, but some optical delusion had detached them from the land on which they stood, and they had the appearance of so many little vessels sailing along the coast of it. I mention the circumstance, because, with the ghostly image of Dumbarton Castle, and the ambiguous ruin on the small island, it was much in the character of the scene, which was throughout magical and enchanting—a new world in its great permanent outline and composition, and changing at every moment in every part of it by the effect of sun and wind and mist and shower and cloud, and the blending of lights and deep shades which took place of each other, traversing the lake in every direction. The whole was indeed a strange mixture of soothing and restless images, of images inviting to rest, and others hurrying the fancy away into an activity still more pleasing than repose. (*Recollections* 88)

Wordsworth's nonchalant observance of an "optical delusion" is her self-conscious way of defining the creative process. Through the mental faculty of the imagination the trees, once rooted to the island, turn into floating ships upon the Loch. She thoughtfully patches together the scenic images to formulate her imagined landscape. The ominous

castle, the ruin, and trees-turned-ships are the main figures. She even highlights her imagined natural objects as “image[s],” all contributing to the invented “character of the scene.” The term “scene” literally refers to the scenic representation of the land but also stresses its contrived elements as a theatrical scene of performance, hinting at her authored role. Yet another meaning of scene is the “screen for the reception of images projected from a lens” (*OED*), emphasizing that the patchwork of images Wordsworth has pieced together are her imagined landscape. She names the created scene “a new world,” suggesting its novel creation and individualistic aspects. Wordsworth notes that the framework of her imagined landscape reveals a “permanent outline and composition,” definitive and concrete even though it is “changing at every moment” due to external elements of light and shadow. The noteworthy juxtaposition between a stabilized frame of reference and an ever-shifting model highlights the imagined landscape’s nature as being a continuous process. The scene never becomes finalized until it is written down. Therefore, writing arrests the process of imagining, which perhaps is a reason as to why Wordsworth appears highly self-conscious about her creative process. Through the means of cartography and by aligning her methods within a feminine tradition, she experiments in different ways to define and therefore preserve her creative process. The illusionary aspects of the Romantic image make this procedure difficult, hence Wordsworth’s text often captures the self-conscious nature of her process.

Wordsworth concludes the above passage by remarking that it was a “strange mixture of soothing and restless images,” stressing the complexities of her images. Yet her final comment proves significant when viewed as pertaining to her creative process, “others hurrying the fancy away into an activity still more pleasing than repose.” The

term “fancy” can be defined as an “inventive design” (*OED*) and “mental image” (*OED*), referring to Wordsworth’s imagined landscapes. She remarks on the pleasure that occurs when creating these shifting landscapes. Her gaze as a woman traveler does not stabilize her imagined landscapes. Instead, the constant fluctuation of the landscape’s movements signifies the illusionary nature of the image. Wordsworth’s shift from the reality of the Scottish Highlands to her imaginary landscape can be positioned next to what Lascelles Abercrombie deems Romanticism as “*a tendency away from actuality*” (emphasis in original) where “[w]e see the spirit of the mind withdrawing more and more from commerce with the outer world, and endeavouring, or at least desiring, to rely more and more on the things it finds within itself (qtd. Perry 7). Part of this conception of Romanticism seems to fit Wordsworth’s reliance and dissuasion with the natural world. In using the foreignness of the terrain to inspire her creative process, Wordsworth creates an imagined landscape that has the same unstable characteristics as the fluctuating aspects of the natural objects. However, as opposed to Abercrombie’s notion, Wordsworth perhaps does not wish to venture into the recesses of her mind as a means of nurturing the imagination. Instead, she consciously creates an open dialogue between her imagined landscapes and the actual Scottish terrain. In this manner, the above passage can be seen as existing in “an ambiguous yet spacious and flexible borderland” (Bellanca 137) where her imagined landscapes do not stem from reality but are nurtured in her imagination.

The illusionary qualities of Wordsworth’s images reflect Praz’s view of romanticism as “consider[ing] concrete expression as a decadence” (qtd. McGann 23). Wordsworth’s travel writing identifies the crux of Romantic illusions and their

contradictions. In the same way that Romantic poetry has been identified as “not offer[ing] a relief and escape but a permanent and self-realized condition of suffering, a Romantic Agony” (McGann 131), the above passage of her travel journals can be seen as depicting the ironic compromise that occurs between language and the creative process. Confronting foreign terrain triggers Wordsworth’s self-conscious afflictions in redefining her creative process. The act of writing stabilizes the elusive images, and therefore in the process, the images lose some of their original intentions.

The illusionary imagery in Wordsworth’s text and its contradictory aspects are apparent not only in *Recollections* but also elsewhere in her travel writing. As opposed to the familiarity of the Grasmere Vale, she confronts unknown landscapes and defamiliarizes them through the ambiguous nature of her imagery. In *Excursion up Scawfell Pike (October 7th, 1818)*, she ascends the mountain with her friend, Miss Barker, an unmarried woman who built herself a house in Borrowdale Vale because she was inspired by the countryside. At the end of Wordsworth’s account of her Scawfell Pike adventure (recounted on October 21st, two weeks after the event had occurred), Wordsworth recollects a peculiar incident that occurred when she and Miss Barker stood at the top of the pike with their guide and overlooked the expanse on a clear and calm autumn day:

I forget to tell you that I espied a ship upon the glittering sea while we were looking over Eskdale. “Is it a ship?” replied the Guide. “A ship, yes, it can be nothing else, don’t you see the shape of it” [Wordsworth said]. Miss Barker interposed, “It is a ship, of that I am certain. I cannot be mistaken, I am so accustomed to the appearance of ships at sea. [”] The Guide dropped the

argument; but a moment was scarce gone when he quietly said, “Now look at your ship, it is now a horse”. So indeed it was – a horse with a gallant neck and head. We laughed heartily, and, I hope, when again inclined to positiveness, I may remember the ship and the horse upon the glittering sea; and the calm confidence, yet submissiveness, of our wise Man of the Mountains, who certainly had more knowledge of clouds than we, whatever might be our knowledge of ships. (*Excursion Up Scawfell Pike* 430)

As I have mentioned earlier, Levin views Wordsworth’s optical deception as “forgeries” (76) and asks, “[m]ight not a person transferring a natural scene to the printed page also be involved in a kind of forgery, a meddling with pen and ink?” (77) While the question addresses the imitative aspects of poetic invention, it implies a one-to-one correspondence of the natural landscape to the written word. Wordsworth’s “forgeries” show that she interprets the visual landscape in a different manner than how it actually appears. She does not set a “natural scene” to paper, but instead produces a recollection of her imagined landscape. Her prophetic vision allows for such “forgeries”–or inventions–to exist.

Instead of understanding the above passage as “forgeries,” I would suggest, alternatively, that it instead showcases the elusiveness of the Romantic image and Wordsworth’s capacity to engage in the creative process. Wordsworth’s interest in the forms of the horse-turned-ship is an example of her self-conscious preoccupation with the fragmentation of images. Fifteen years after Wordsworth’s revelations of her creative process were conceived in *Recollections*, she is still consumed with the formation of optical illusions that are a product of her imagination. Wordsworth’s observation of the

horse-turned-ship runs parallel her ships-turned-trees of the Scottish Highlands. At first, she is absolutely certain of her ship-observation. The “glittering” effect of the sea adds the visual aspect of light fragments, as though these splinters of sunlight are yet another scenic effect of Wordsworth’s perception. The choice of a ship is significant, not only as she has referred to it before in her Scottish vision but also because it connotes travel and movement. It also reflects the fact that while Wordsworth was on her first tour of Scotland, she received notice that her younger brother, John Wordsworth, had perished in a shipwreck. Not only charged with sentimental value, the ship seems to be an emblem of exploration and ambiguity of movement. The ship possesses a mobile existence at sea, traveling from one port to the next, and Wordsworth also perceives it as having an ambiguous nature. Like the elusive natural objects of Wordsworth’s imagined landscapes that she attempts to sew together, the ship also has a shifting nature. Its identity through the gaze of the poet is not fixed and therefore lacks any essential properties that would stabilize its existence. The ship without a consistent character is in a constant state of flux. It changes from one property to the next, participating in a continuous process of shifting identities. The illusionary nature of the ship highlights Wordsworth’s involvement with the Romantic image.

One of the most significant aspects of the above passage is that the illusionary aspects of the object are not only perceived by Wordsworth, but also commented upon by Miss Barker. She wholeheartedly agrees with Wordsworth that it is indeed “a ship, I cannot be mistaken, I am so accustomed to the appearance of ships at sea.” Miss Barker’s perception naturalizes the ship within its assumed context. Deluded by Wordsworth’s imagination, Miss Barker reaffirms the ship’s existence. However, the

guide politely corrects Wordsworth's inaccurate perception, to which she laughs, amused at her mistake. Nevertheless, the incident appears as a marker not only of her poetic process but an experience that Wordsworth feels is significant to recollect and remember.

Like her recounted travels through Scotland, *Excursion up Scawfell Pike* is a recollection, not an experience that has been recorded as it unfolds. In the same way that the "inner histories" of the Grasmere Vale are stored within the inhabitants, Wordsworth feels that the ship incident can be stored and used as a means of recounting her experience through the written word. Yet what seems noteworthy about this particular recollection is that the memory is different from the actual experience. According to the recollection, the horse has not replaced the ship, but the objects are envisioned alongside one another, "the ship and the horse upon the glittering sea." Although Wordsworth says, as written in the dialogue, that she sees the horse as a recollection, she fragments the single object into two occurrences: ship and horse. In her remembrance, the objects stand side by side against the scenic backdrop of the sea. These objects all possess an ambiguous nature where the process of recollection marries them as intrinsically related to each other. The implications of this assertion indicate that Wordsworth is not concerned with an object's accurate form but that she prizes the process of inventive creation more so than the final product as set down in writing.

The ship-turned-horse possesses illusionary aspects that render the image in a kind of agony of instability, a characteristic critical of the Romantic tradition:

When reading Romantic poems, then, we are to remember that their ideas –for example, ideas about the creativity of the Imagination, about the centrality of Self, about the organic and processive structure of natural and social life, and so forth –

are all historically specific in a crucial and paradoxical sense...In the Romantic Age these and similar ideas are represented as trans-historical–eternal truths which wake to perish never. The very belief that transcendental categories can provide a permanent ground for culture becomes, in the Romantic Age, an ideological formation –another illusion raised up to hold back an awareness of the contradictions inherent in contemporary social structures and the relations they support. As far as Romantic poetry is concerned, this General Ideology informs all its work as an implied and assumed premise which takes various forms specific to the particular writers and their circumstances. (McGann 134)

McGann’s assessment of the Romantic ideology relates to Wordsworth’s rendering of the creative process as depicted in *Excursion* and *Recollections*. The “centrality of Self” can be identified in her artistic ability to use her perception as a lens that filters images and natural objects. Her cartographic methods can be seen as a lens that attempts to materialize the creative process. I have also argued that Wordsworth’s feminine traditions are a lens for how she views her creative process. Each of the instances discussed in this chapter show that she constantly attempts to make transparent the elusive elements of her creative process, her imagination. In the passage detailing the ship mirage, once again she focuses upon the “organic” materials of the natural world to translate and navigate the ambiguous and shifting nature of placing her images to the page. But she seems to get caught in the “ambiguous yet spacious and flexible borderland” (Bellanca 137) that resides between the actual geographical world and the imaginary realm.

Nonetheless, the paradox of Wordsworth's dilemma is not a result of her gender, nor is it due to any insecurity that she may have had as an author. It is the crux of the Romantic paradigm: her elusive images are "represented as trans-historical—eternal truths which wake to perish never" (McGann 134). The historical aspects of place and time, presumably Miss Barker and the guide, have no relevance to Wordsworth's perceptions. The experience recounted as a recollection transcends the stability and factuality of the material world. Therefore, objects take on the properties of malleability for the very reason that they are elusive. The ambiguous characteristics of the ship-turned-horse are not grounded in a historical timeframe nor are they a journalistic record of factual occurrences, they instead are an "ideological formation—another illusion raised up to hold back an awareness of the contradictions inherent in contemporary social structures and the relations they support" (McGann 134).

The contradiction of the essence of the object—whether horse or ship—is of absolutely no importance to Wordsworth. She even laughs at the notion, as though it were absurd that there could be a rational explanation for an object's identity. In fact, Wordsworth strips the guide of its essential properties as she gives him the mystical title of "Man of the Mountains," which transcends any name he may have had. Wordsworth's creative process not only surpasses the physical properties of objects, but it also disregards common or factual knowledge, as she makes the claim that the guide, "certainly had more knowledge of clouds than we, whatever might be our knowledge of ships." The unstated implication is that any knowledge that Wordsworth had of maritime activities is unimportant. The historical and factual elements of the scene prove to be

irrelevant. What does matters are the elusive aspects of the images, which lack a definite shape and form up until the point that they are written down.

As I have discussed, Wordsworth's creative process highlights the ambiguity and shifting nature of objects. The elusive quality transcends their essential properties and natural surroundings. The resulting imagined landscapes only reflect their former state in minor ways. In *Recollections*, Wordsworth toured Loch Katerine and the Trossachs during the second week of her travels. The night after touring around the Loch, William and Coleridge slept in the barn of a local family's house while Wordsworth rested in a small pantry room. However, her situated domestic inhabitation does not put a damper on her organic imagination. She portrays the elusive aspects of her imagined landscapes:

The door was shut between us, and they had a bright fire, which I could not see; but the light it sent up among the varnished rafters and beams, which crossed each other in almost as intricate and fantastic a manner as I have seen the under-boughs of a large beech-tree withered by the depth of the shade above, produced the most beautiful effect that can be conceived. It was like what I should suppose an underground cave or temple to be, with a dripping or moist roof, and the moonlight entering in upon it by some means or other, and yet the colours were more like melted gems. (*Recollections* 107)

Secluded in the pantry room, what sparks Wordsworth's fancy are not the domestic objects inside of the room but those outside of it. The refracted light from the next room's fire that shines on the ceiling rafters catches her eye. Even though she "could not see" the fire, she is still captivated by the light that has been stripped of its source. Much like the shifting objects of the scene in *Excursion*, the elusive nature of the light, encourages

Wordsworth to imagine its alternate states of being. The appearance of the beams, webbed with light, is similar to the “under-boughs of a large beech-tree.” Unlike the ship-turned-horse, Wordsworth is not deluded by the light’s deceptive effects but instead is consciously aware of the illusionary aspects of her imagination. The key point of significance in this passage is the degree of self-consciousness to which Wordsworth moves from one elusive image to the next. The domestic interior of the pantry turns into an organic exterior. Her choice of a beech-tree to represent the effects that the light has upon the rafters is significant as it shows that on some elemental level, she wants to revert the beams back to their living-state of trees. Yet, the shifting images of the light do not stop changing at the beech-tree. In fact, Wordsworth imagines the tree as producing the effect of “an underground cave or temple.” The light’s original state has evaporated and instead it possesses an ambiguous nature. The elusiveness of the images is similar to the “optical delusion” (*Recollections* 88) of Dumbarton Castle. Wordsworth ends the passage by comparing the refracted light to possessing colors of “melted gems” (*Recollections* 107). This simile highlights how Wordsworth’s illusionary methods of her creative process depict the ambiguous nature of her objects and imagery. Gems are usually found in solid formations, but Wordsworth underscores the jewels’ liquid nature. Unlike their former solid state, the gems are formless and malleable. Ultimately, the above passage reflects how Wordsworth transforms the pantry room into a mystical underground cave. By preferring the enclosed organic sphere to the domestic one, Wordsworth shows how the elusive nature of landscape is a cog in her creative process. The series of images possesses an ambiguous state, and Wordsworth shifts from one to the next as though they appear as images upon a screen.

Like the implications of the ship-mirage, Wordsworth's room-turned-cave reflects McGann's commentary of the illusionary aspects of the Romantic ideology:

The poetry supplies a reflection of the world (as we commonly say), but the image is generated from the poetry's "reflex" or response to that world and its own act of observation. In this way the poetry draws itself into the world it is "reflecting." The process forces the poetry to become what it beholds, to translate its observations (via the images) into equivalent emotional signs, and finally to open itself to further acts of self-conscious 'reflection' in (and upon) the poetry itself. (McGann 130)

Even though McGann qualifies the Romantic ideology as based upon the aspects of Romantic poetry, the same theory can be applied to prose. The images of the beech-tree and cave can be viewed as a "reflection of the world," the world in this instance meaning the domestic sphere of the Scottish cottage. In discussing the creative process, McGann acknowledges that the poetic image is a reflected entity of the world. This makes sense in the case of Wordsworth's travel writing where the beech-tree can be read as an illusion or reflection of the light refracted upon the rafters. Yet in the same way that these elusive images occupy the liminal space between the actual geographic world and the imaginary realm, they also—through their realization in text—become part of the world that they reflect. McGann remarks upon the poetic process as a mean of "becom[ing] what it beholds," which seems to be a function of Wordsworth's "topographic [style of] writing" (Bellanca 138) where the reader's only knowledge of the geographical setting is what appears through the poetic image. Yet the "self-conscious 'reflection'" of Wordsworth's writing resides in how objects never have a stable state of being. They are constantly in a

process of ambiguity where their existence and verbal properties depend upon the state of nearby objects.

Wordsworth's travel writing highlights her self-conscious concern with the creative process. Her texts act like cartographic maps, illustrating not only geographical place but also offering a metaphorical chart of her creative process. McGann argues that "[t]he grand illusion of Romantic *ideology* is that one may escape such a world through imagination and poetry. The great truth of Romantic *work* is that there is no escape, that there is only revelation (in a wholly secular sense)" (McGann 131). Wordsworth attempts to bridge the divergent aspects of romanticism: her creative process illustrates how the ambivalence and elusiveness of images make it impossible for them to exist in the actual geographical world. They are still grounded in landscape, however imaginary it may be. Her travel writing shows the recognition of this paradox. Although many elements of her poetics agree with McGann's conception of the Romantic ideology, it seems that Wordsworth verges on challenging the fact that there is no escape. She dabbles in cartography as a means of dovetailing geographic manifestations with imaginary representations. Map-making becomes a means for Wordsworth to materialize her creative process. She sews fragmented images together like patchwork and situates her process firmly within a feminine tradition. Wordsworth's creative process, while distinctly feminine, also exists within romantic tradition of McGann's making. Wordsworth's elusive imagery transcends historical and cultural specificity. Passages in *Recollections* and *Excursion*, while firmly situated in a specific landscape, have an ambiguity that makes their descriptions appear relevant to a myriad of European

geographies. In confronting the foreign terrain of Scotland and the Lake District, Wordsworth also self-consciously navigates and invents her creative process.

Coda

Walking and climbing the valleys and dales of the Lake District and Scotland, Dorothy Wordsworth finds a place to assert her poetic voice in the wild landscape. Place was of particular importance to her, as she journeyed from one spot to the next or transformed an interior space into an imagined natural wonder. Self-conscious of her identity as a writer, she uses place to develop a poetic voice of her own making. She projects a sense of outward mobility by relocating from the hearth of Dove Cottage to the crags of the Scottish Highlands. She seeks places in landscape that contain an expansiveness and wild singularity. Wordsworth cultivates her voice and creative process by inhabiting a place in the natural world.

I have suggested that Wordsworth, as a woman writing poetry in the Romantic era, often struggled with cultivating and asserting her poetic voice. Her poems illustrate how she attempts to conjure up a prophetic vision from the immediate and familiar landscape. Grounding her poetic voice in the place and context of the Lake District, Wordsworth seeks to overcome this tension revealed in establishing a poetics of place. Beginning with “Grasmere –A Fragment” and ending at “Thoughts on my sick-bed,” her poetic voice moves from the external realm of the natural world and turns into a purely mental concoction. In “Grasmere,” Wordsworth aligns her voice with the feminized nature and possesses a poetic voice from the familiarity of the Grasmere setting. In “a Sketch” and “Floating Island,” Wordsworth asserts her poetic voice in landscape and sees it deteriorate. She explores the complications of nature’s cyclical characteristics as having both nurturing forces and destructive designs. The poetic imagery of the decaying natural world as an example of how Wordsworth attempts to grow a poetic

voice that can be situated in the natural world with a lasting permanence. “Thoughts on my sick-bed” focuses on the significance of recollection in the context of repossessing a poetic voice. Bound to her bed, Wordsworth can no longer physically traverse the hills and vales, but through the use of poetic recollection, she reimagines her prophetic visions and experiences and therefore regains control of her poetic voice.

I have attempted to show in Chapter 1 that an extensive analysis of Wordsworth’s poetry illustrates how her lesser-criticized work possesses an aesthetic value that is of significance to the Romantic movement. One of the most critical factors of paying close scholarly attention to Wordsworth’s poetry is to pinpoint how she directly responds to Wordsworthian Romanticism. As I have suggested, “Thoughts on my sick-bed” can be read as Wordsworth’s response to William’s assertion in “Tintern Abbey” that his sister lacks the worldly experience and creative means that he has achieved. I believe that Wordsworth, in referencing the River Wye, refutes her brother’s condescending claims that she lacks the equivalent of his insight and prophetic vision. In fact, Wordsworth contests his criticism and repositions her poetic voice as possessing an individuality and creativity of its own that merits distinction from the ballads and lyrics of her brother. Her sheer gumption to declare a voice as distinct from her male counterpart through the form of poetic verse is exceptionally striking, as scholars have pegged her as having an “inability to produce poetry” (Comitini 318).

A master of prose *and* verse, Wordsworth’s response to William challenges the discourse of “Wordsworthian” poetics. The overarching term can no longer be used to define William’s poetic techniques. Instead, it must include both William and Wordsworth’s aesthetic traditions. I hope that my attention to her poetry warrants future

scholarship of the discipline and encourages a Romantic criticism that gives Wordsworth the attention she deserves as a prolific poet.

Like my choice to analyze the often-overlooked poetry of Wordsworth, I also have dedicated an entire chapter to her *Narrative of George and Sarah Green*. Scholarship of the *Narrative*, while sparse, has often been associated with Wordsworth's attitudes of sympathy toward the impoverished inhabitants of Grasmere where the *Narrative* "demonstrates not, as scholars have previously assumed, that the community could be relied upon to assist the impoverished, but rather that absent exigent circumstances dire poverty would go unnoticed and unrelieved" (Levy 553). This viewpoint highlights that Wordsworth's *Narrative* as being concerned only with the social and political elements of the Green incident and ignoring the work's aesthetic value. I, however, have shown that the *Narrative* is an incredibly important work in Wordsworth's canon in depicting how she crafts her voice by defining the Grasmere community as an archive that stores the oral histories of the Vale.

Critics have also used Wordsworth's anxieties of authorship to overshadow the aesthetic value of the *Narrative*. Yet the anxiety of publication was a prevalent concern that both Romantic women and men faced in the early nineteenth century. I have suggested that Wordsworth's *Narrative* is a textual example of how she reconfigures her identity as an author within the context of her Grasmere Vale. The tragedy of the Greens proves to be a useful subject for Wordsworth to establish her voice as an active part of the Grasmere community. Wordsworth recounts not only the histories of the Greens but also includes her own experiences as well as other inhabitants' stories. She negotiates her authorial identity by relying upon her Grasmere community as an archive that collects

and preserves the “inner histories” of the Vale. The Grasmere community’s oral traditions act as a place where these histories can be found.

Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* has proved immensely useful in my analysis of Wordsworth’s *Narrative*, as the notion of “*intimate space*” (emphasis in original) (Bachelard 78) stresses the Greens’ relationship to their land and also highlights Wordsworth’s own attachment to her immediate landscape. The conception of a familiar space is closely related to that of place, and it appears that these two phenomenological elements are indicative of Wordsworth’s self-conscious trust in her surrounding landscape and community of the Grasmere Vale. Landscape appears as the imaginary boundary of the communal archive, retaining the memories of its inhabitants.

The *Narrative* is a key focal point in my project as it shows how Wordsworth articulates a strain of Romanticism that is different from that of the canonical Romantic poets. Like Wordsworth’s response to William’s “Tintern Abbey,” her *Narrative* also replies to another one of her brother’s claims. She repositions the famous “spots of time” to reflect the community-oriented function of recollection, rather than showing it as an individualistic experience as William does. The reconfiguration of this established Romantic trope shows an alternative viewpoint that broadens and challenges the already established themes and concerns that define literature of the Romantic canon. We now can appreciate a community-oriented perception of writing during the Romantic period that is unique from the individualistic and often egotistical Romanticism of the canonical poets.

Finally, I have suggested that Wordsworth’s travel writing highlights her self-conscious concern with the creative process. Like my decision to analyze the *Narrative*, I

have chosen *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland* and *Excursion up Scawfell Pike* because they are products of scholarly neglect. These texts deserve critical attention because they illustrate how her writing reflects the traditions and trends associated with Romanticism. Her travel writing acts like cartographic maps illustrating not only geographical place but also offering a metaphorical chart of Wordsworth's creative process. Relying upon McGann's conclusive study of the Romantic image, I have shown how Wordsworth attempts to bridge the divergent aspects of romanticism: her creative process illustrates how the ambivalence and elusiveness of images make it impossible for them to exist in the actual geographical world. However, these elusive images are grounded in landscape. Wordsworth's travel writing depicts a self-conscious recognition of this paradox. Ultimately, her creative process, while distinctly feminine, also exists within the Romantic tradition of McGann's making.

Wordsworth's writing reflects the customs of Romanticism, and I hope that my project has shown that her insights into the movement deserve the same amount of consideration that have been given to her contemporaries. My project seeks to award attention to a Romantic writer whose work has too often than not been eclipsed in light of the amassed body of work by the canonical Romantic poets. Her writing is a self-conscious realization of the creative process that is unique from that of her male and female contemporaries. My consideration of her underrepresented works hopes to present a writer who has an aesthetic value, which holds significance within the Romantic canon. Often challenging the verse of her brother and repositioning his established Romantic motifs, she carves a path of her own making to cultivate a voice that is situated within the natural landscape. Whether she inhabits the familiar setting of the Grasmere

Vale or confronts the wilderness of the Scottish Highlands, Wordsworth constructs and is a product of her own traditions and customs concerning the poetics of place that perpetually exist in dialogue with Romanticism.

Dorothy Wordsworth's writing participates in and challenges current perceptions about Romanticism. Up until this point in criticism about Wordsworth, her work has either been ignored or viewed exclusively in conjunction with William's poetry. In the few instances that Wordsworth is examined as a writer of her own traditions, she is often positioned as subordinate to the male canonical writers of the Romantic era. I hope my project predicts how we will regard Wordsworth's writing in the future, where there can be comparative analyses between Dorothy and William that situate the two writers as both possessing distinct and separate poetic voices. But at this point in time, Wordsworth's neglected texts must be given absolute scholarly attention in order to reveal how she contributes to a conception of Romanticism that has evolved to include rediscovered works and underrepresented writers.

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