

## ESSAY

# Mutual Dependency

The Relationship between William and Dorothy Wordsworth in The Prelude and The Grasmere Journals

BY REBECCA HAQUE

**OPHANED** at an early age, and separated for many years in their childhood by circumstances beyond their control, William and Dorothy clung to each other in their adult years. Their strong attachment to each other manifested itself in a yearning for an intimate, nurturing family life together, and in their prose and poetical writing both brother and sister have paid tribute to their mutual love and devotion. More than William, however, it was Dorothy who longed to set up house with her brother. From the age of six she had been shuttled back and forth among various distant relatives, and as she grew older, she constantly dreamt of the day when she would be able to live once again with William and her other brothers. In a long letter written to her friend Jane Pollard in 1793, Dorothy's dream of life is clothed in warm and homey images of a stable, secure, and mutually fulfilling future. In addition, the letter contains a poignant confession of regret at the enforced separation of the siblings, and an unequivocal affirmation of the ties that united them. Dorothy writes:

I have laid the particular scheme of happiness for each season. When I think of winter I hasten to furnish our little parlour, I close the shutters, set out the tea-table, brighten the fire. When our refreshment is ended I produce our work, and William brings his book to our table and contributes at once to our instruction and amusement, and at intervals we lay aside the book and each hazard our observations upon what has been read without the fear of ridicule or censure. We talk over past days, we do not sign for any pleasures beyond our humble habitation 'the central point of all our joys'. Oh Jane! With such romantic dreams as these I amuse my fancy during many an hour which would otherwise pass heavily along, for kind as are my Uncle and Aunt, much as I love my sweet little cousins, I cannot help heaving many a sigh at the reflection that I have passed one and twenty years of my life, and that the first six years only of this time was spent in the enjoyment of the same pleasures that were enjoyed by my brothers, and that I was then too young to be sensible of the blessing. We have been endeared to each other by early misfortune. We in the same moment lost a father, a home, we have been equally deprived of our patrimony by the cruel hand of lordly tyranny. These afflictions have all contributed to unite us closer by the bonds of affection notwithstanding we have been compelled to spend our youth far as under. 'We drag at each remove a lengthening chain' this idea often strikes me very forcibly. Neither absence nor distance nor time can ever break the chain that links me to my brother's.

Of course, as is well-known, it was Raisley Calvert's timely and fortuitous gift of a legacy to the aspiring poet in 1795 which provided the wherewithal that enabled William and Dorothy to set up house together for the first time. The legacy proved to be a godsend both in the wide world of literature and in the smaller private world of the two Wordsworths. Freedom from the unsettling anxiety of financial insecurity, and the presence of a devoted sister who took over the responsibility of running the routine household affairs, gave William the time and the confidence to become the great poet that he was destined to be.

Dorothy was not only a frugal and adept housekeeper, she was also William's cherished friend and companion. Moreover, in her role as home-maker and nurturer from the first days of living together at Racedown till his marriage to Mary Hutchinson in 1802, Dorothy became a surrogate mother for the poet and eventually came to be associated by him with the sublime, spiritual, feminine principle in nature. Thus, while she was herself emotionally and economically dependent on William, her presence and her personality were soon beginning to have a profound impact upon her brother's creative imagination. In effect, as Richard Fadem points out, 'Dorothy played in her dependent capacity an instrumental role in helping to create Wordsworth the poet, certainly the poet he came to be'.

William Wordsworth both loved and needed his sister. However, his attitude towards her in his

poetry is not always one of unequivocal affection and adulation. Although in his major autobiographical poems noticeably in Tintern Abbey and the Prelude he celebrated her as a restorative and curative force in his creative life, he is more ambivalent in the Lucy poems. As Richard Matlak has pointed out, the relationship of William and Dorothy was not 'exempt from normal strains'. Matlak's argument is convincing, and it is easy to concur with him as he pinpoints the reasons for William's unconscious hostility towards Dorothy. Matlak argues:

Wordsworth's relationship with Dorothy was probably stifling and inhibitive at the time of the Lucy poem's composition.... During this extremely intense and concentrated period (October 1798–February 1799), when Wordsworth was writing so much of importance in addition to the Lucy poems the Matthew poems, 'Lucy Gray', most of part I of The Prelude, 1798–99, together with its associated passages, 'Nutting' and 'There was a boy' the poet's relationship with Dorothy and Coleridge figured prominently in the psychobiographical context of his work. Wordsworth was depressed at Goslar, mainly because he was separated from Coleridge and was growing uneasy about the constancy of Coleridge's friendship and devotion.... Dorothy could hardly be of comfort in this situation because it was the added cost of keeping her that prevented Wordsworth from joining Coleridge, first in Ratzburg and later in the expensive university town of Gottingen. The consequence of Wordsworth's depression for his work was the fantasy of Dorothy's death in the Lucy poems.

Apart from the kind of ambivalence recorded in the Lucy poems, Wordsworth was generally very grateful for Dorothy's constant companionship. He may have felt somewhat 'stifled and inhibited' during his trips abroad with his sister, but for the most part he is unequivocal in declaring that he considered his relationship with her to be artistically restorative and generative. For example, in Tintern Abbey which prefigures The Prelude in both style and subject-matter the poet is especially appreciative of Dorothy's spontaneity and her ability to respond to Nature with the innocence and wonder of a child. Her presence, in fact, restores within the poet his earlier, lost self, and the reflection of his own 'former' self in Dorothy's instinctive, animal response to Nature helps him reaffirm his faith in himself and his art:

.... 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. Oh! yet a little while  
May I behold in thee what I was once,  
My dear, dear Sister.

The double emphasis on the word 'dear' underlines the intensity of the emotion felt by Wordsworth, and it serves to accentuate his overwhelming gratitude for Dorothy's beneficial influence at a critical juncture in his journey towards self-discovery.

Of course, Wordsworth's fullest expression of gratitude for his sister's soothing and healing presence is to be found in his autobiographical epic, The Prelude. I Book VI ('Cambridge and the Alps') Wordsworth confesses to Coleridge his immense delight at the reunion with his sister in the summer of 1787. In the following passage, the poet is not only celebrating Dorothy's active participation in his life, he is also celebrating the opportunity to share his innermost thoughts with a person who loved and appreciated him. In addition, the young poet's joyous discovery of the beauteous face of Nature is made more wonderful by the knowledge that his sister finds as great a pleasure in Nature as he does.

In summer among distant nooks I roved  
Dovedale, or Yorkshire dales, or through by-ways  
Of my own native region and was blest  
Between those sundry wanderings with a joy  
Above all joys, that seemed another morn  
Risen on mid-noon : the presence, friend, I

mean

Of that sole sister....  
Now after separation desolate  
Restored to me such absence that she seemed  
A gift then first bestowed....  
My sister and myself, when, having climbed  
In danger through some window's open space,  
We looked abroad, or on the turret's head  
Lay listening to the wild-flowers and the grass  
As they gave out their whispers to the wind.

In Book X ('Residence in France Continued'), Wordsworth acknowledges the fact that it is Dorothy's love and devotion which helps him to recover from the disillusionment and despair he had felt in the years following the French Revolution. The Confused and troubling events of the period between 1792–95 which included, among other things, the rise of the tyrannical Robespierre, the Reign of Terror, and the war between England and France had shattered his idealistic vision of a new egalitarian society. Furthermore, Godwinian rationalism had not only failed to provide solace, it had led to the 'paralysis of his creative life'. It was at this time September, 1795 that Wordsworth and Dorothy moved into Racedown house in Dorset, and it is here that Wordsworth's recovery and his discovery of renewed poetic vigour are brought about in the company of the dedicated and loyal Dorothy. As in Tintern Abbey, the mere presence of his passionate and vivacious sister enables the poet to imaginatively recapture his past and thus connect once again with Nature:

.... the beloved woman in whose sight  
Those days were passed....  
Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
With my true self (for, though impaired, and  
changed  
Much, as it seemed, I was no further changed  
Than as a clouded, not a waning moon);  
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still  
A poet, made me seek beneath that name  
My office upon earth, and nowhere else

The conclusion of The Prelude contains a long lyrical eulogy of Dorothy. In this verse tribute wordsworth tells us to what extent he had been dependent on his sister for his own emotional and imaginative growth. Once again, Wordsworth refers to the fact that Dorothy's natural, vital, and reassuring presence sustains his own faith in his vocation. In moments of crisis in his poetic life, she had helped him return to the earlier state of harmonious interaction with Nature, and he eulogizes her as a soul-mate, a friend and guide who illuminates the dark days of despair with her purity and 'an unconscious understanding of the laws of things and life of nature'.

Child of my parents, sister of my soul,  
Elsewhere have strains of gratitude been  
breathed

To thee for all the early tenderness  
Which I from thee imbibed. And true it is  
That letter seasons owed to thee no less:...  
I too exclusively esteemed that love,  
And sought that beauty, which as Milton sings  
Hath terror in it. Thou didst soften down  
This over-sternness; but for thee, sweet friend,  
My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been  
Far longer what by Nature it was framed  
Longer retained its countenance severe...  
But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,  
Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,  
And teach the little birds to build their nests  
And warble in its chambers. At a time  
When Nature, destined to remain so long  
Foremost in my affections, had fallen back into  
second place....

Although we are left in no doubt as to the nature of the bond between brother and sister, Wordsworth's portrait of Dorothy at times nevertheless seems to relegate the self-effacing, devoted sister to the background while it is the image of the poetic genius which is foregrounded for the benefit of Coleridge and future readers of The Prelude. At the narrative centre of The Prelude is the articulate, visible, and self-conscious poet who is Wordsworth, and despite the 'strains of gratitude' in which Dorothy is apotheosized in the poem, she remains a floating and ephemeral figure on the periphery of our

vision. We get a sense of Dorothy's selfless involvement in areas of experience which were crucial to the poet himself, but it is difficult to see her as a separate and unique individual since Wordsworth fails to probe deeper into her character and personality. As Elizabeth Hardwick points out in her book Seduction and Betrayal, Wordsworth ignores what 'we imagine [she] must have often felt undefined, attendant, dangerously emotional, stumbling. All of this side of her life is a hole, a vacancy.'

Indeed, for many years, literary historians and critics had taken their cue from Wordsworth's verse and persisted in seeing Dorothy only as 'William's satellite'. It is only recently that her place in literary history has been evaluated in terms other than her existence as a famous poet's sister. Today, on the strength of her own writings, Dorothy is considered a distinctive writer whose diaries and Journals are worthy of critical attention for their innate formal and contextual merits.

One diary in particular The Grasmere Journals has been the object of concentrated scrutiny not only because of the detailed descriptions of Nature and the daily household activities, but also because it is here that Dorothy reveals more about herself and her relationship with her brother than she does in all of her other works put together. In 1799, Dorothy and William moved to the Lake Country village of Grasmere, and at one of Wordsworth's frequent trips away from home, Dorothy's loneliness acts as a catalyst in making her begin to write her prose autobiography:

I resolved to write a journal of the time till W. and J return, and I set about keeping my resolve because I will not quarrel with myself, and because I shall give Wm pleasure by it when he comes home again.

The Grasmere Journals is not really a true autobiography. Unlike Wordsworth's poetic autobiography The Prelude, which takes us on a journey from infancy to maturity and in which there is a great deal of introspective self-analysis as the poet struggles to achieve a stable poetic identity. The Grasmere Journals contain detailed accounts of only the period 1800–1803 and much of the work is repetitive and concerned with external activities: walking all over the beautiful countryside alone or in William's company; gardening toiling with her brother to grow flowers and vegetables; and doing the backbreaking household chores that had to be done by women alone, such as laundering, ironing, cleaning and cooking. Dorothy is meticulous in her descriptions of people, and her observation of Nature is at times so accurate and poetic that both Wordsworth and Coleridge transposed some of those graphic natural images into their own poems. However, Dorothy avoids introspection in her writing, and just as the brother had provided little of Dorothy's real self in The Prelude, the sister herself in turn desists from looking inward and revealing her innermost desires and fears. Dorothy observes the world around her, and records her feelings at particular moments in time, but she does not analyse or examine either her own motives and passions or those of others.

It is possible that there is a good psychological reason for Dorothy's refusal to be more critical and analytic: the traumatic childhood experiences of loss and homelessness probably led to the fear of being too bold and independent even in her writings. Although Dorothy's inner life is absent in the Journals, there are many passages which betray the intensity of her feelings for her brother William. His presence kept her alive and vital, and his absence made her suffer. A whole series of entries at the beginning of The Grasmere Journals written during William's absence from home from the period between May 14, 1800 to June 6, 1800 shows us an anxious, lonely, insecut Dorothy, whose tense expectancy of her brother's return is manifested in the physical symptom of a constant headache. Even Nature does not soothe her at these times:

I state a long time upon a stone at the margin of the lake, and after a flood of tears my heart was easier. The lake looked to me I knew not why dull and melancholy, and the wailing on the shores seemed a heavy sound. (15)

No letters! no papers... I was sadly tired, ate a

hasty dinner and had a bad headache (2)

... wrote to William after dinner, nailed up the beds, worked in the garden, sat in the evening under the trees. I went to bed soon with a bad headache. (20)

I expected a letter from Wm... I had a bad headache went to bed after dinner, and lay till after 5 not well after tea. (21)

No letter. No William... I lingered out of doors in the hope of hearing my brother's tread. (23–4)

No William! I slackened my pace as I came near home fearing to hear that he was not come. (24)

The need for William's physical nearness is so pronounced that it leads us to speculate that Dorothy must have had unconscious terror of losing him as she had lost her mother and father at the age of six. His presence is constantly desired because his presence alone gives her a sense of security and permanence. In his absence, all her thoughts focus on him with an urgency akin to hysteria, and she is constantly concerned with his safety when he is travelling:

I will be busy, I will look well and be well when he comes back to me.

Of the Darling! Here is one of his bitten apples! I can hardly find in my heart to throw it into the fire... Sate down where we always sit. I was

full of thoughts about my darling. Blessings on him.

Even a momentary separation is enough to send her into a panic about his return:

William and I walked together after tea first to the top of white Moss, then to Mr Olliff's. I left Wm and while he was absent wrote out poems. I grew alarmed and went to seek him. I met him at Mr Olliff's.

On the other hand, when William is with her, she glows with a sense of contentment, and she and William seem like two souls in harmony with each other:

We made up a good fire after dinner, and William brought his Mattress out, and lay on the floor. I read to him the life of Ben Jonson... (88)... we sat a long time with the windows unclosed. I almost finished writing the Pedlar, but poor William wore himself and me out with labour. We had an affecting conversation. (89–90)

I went and sat with W and walked backwards and forwards in the orchard till dinner time he read me his poem... After dinner we made a pillow of my shoulder. I read to him and my Beloved slept....

Wordsworth marries Mary Hutchinson on October 4, 1802, and soon after this event, Dorothy stops writing in her Journal. Although Dorothy accompanies the newly-weds on their honeymoon, she does not attend the wedding ceremony. Her description of her own emotional state on the day on which her beloved brother was being wedded to another woman reveals a great deal about her inner conflicts. She appears almost numb with grief at the thought of losing William to another woman:

... I saw them go down the avenue towards the Church. William had parted from me upstairs. I gave him the wedding ring with how deep a blessing! I took it from my forefinger where I had worn it the whole of the night before he slipped it again onto my finger and blessed me fervently.... I kept myself as quiet as I could, but when I saw the two men running up the walk, coming to tell us it was over. I could stand it no longer and threw myself on the bed where I lay in stillness, neither hearing or seeing anything, till Sara came upstairs to me and said 'They are coming'. This forced me from the bed where I lay and I moved I knew not how straight forward, faster than my strength could carry me till I met my beloved William and fell upon his bosom. (154)

After reading this passage, we come to realize that Dorothy must have steelled herself to accept the situation with grace and courage. After all, unless she is able to subsume her own wishes to the wishes of her brother, her very survival is put at risk and, as Norman Fruman points out, from this time onward 'until her mind and body broke down in her early sixties, [Dorothy] was a tireless servant of William's needs and those of his household'.

## FICTION

# An Asian Encounter with Romanian Communism

BY MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

Continued from last week

**T**raditionally, religious observance in Romania was extensive and religious allegiances generally followed ethnic lines, with about 80 per cent of all Romanians nominally belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Greek Catholic or Uniate Church, to which about 10 per cent of the population belonged, was incorporated into the Romanian Orthodox Church by fiat in 1948. Roman Catholics, largely of Magyar (Hungarian) and German origin, constitute about 6 per cent of the population, whereas Calvinists, Jews, Baptists and Lutherans cover the remaining 4 per cent.

The country's many orthodox monasteries, as well as Transylvanian Catholic and Evangelical churches, some of which date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, are repositories of artistic treasures, as one can see in Caldarusani. The famous painted monasteries of Bukovina are an important part of European architecture.

At the open field of Caldarusani Monastery, Rauf joined another accompanying family at a picnic. Some of the food items, such as mashed potatoes, cucumber and Romanian wine came from the monastery. He had never had the occasion to taste wine as drinking alcohol is strictly prohibited in the Muslim society. As a matter of fact, there is a religious taboo on drinking intoxicating items like wine. Anis said, 'A little sip of wine would not affect your religious belief. Moreover, Roma-

nian wine is made of grapes. If you can eat grapes and drink the juice of grapes, what is the harm of consuming wine, which is purely made of grapes. Rauf listened to Anis' argument and replied, 'Grapes, and for that matter their juice would not make you drunk, but wine, whether it is made from grapes or rice, would make you intoxicated. An intoxicated man or woman cannot dedicate himself/herself to God in prayer. That is why it is not permissible to drink any alcoholic item according to religious injunction.'

Meanwhile, Lucy was busy preparing food. When the food was ready, Lucy requested Anis to come over to serve the food. Arguments were over. Anis, accompanied by Rauf, went to the place of eating. This was the first time that Rauf had the privilege of tasting wine as Anis insisted on drinking wine to honour the European social custom.

After having lunch, both Anis and Rauf went over to see the vineyard where the grapes are grown. Plenty of land is used for the cultivation of grapes, and the quality of grapes in Romania is very high.

Lucy had a mother and a brother. Lucy's mother occasionally spent times with her daughter as, in old age, she became sick. Anis had developed wide contacts with the Romanian business and official community and had established his own business firm. In about a decade, Anis had achieved the reputation of being a wealthy business man in Bucharest. In his firm, he employed about a dozen Romanians. His entrepreneurial

skill and dynamism was looked upon by the Romanian business community zealously. With the help of Anis, Rauf had made a number of acquaintances.

In the mid-eighties, socialist countries in Eastern Europe offered scholarships to students in Third World countries to study in their countries, particularly in the faculties of medicine, agriculture and science. As a result, a good number of students came from Pakistan to study in Romania. Students were selected by the Government as well as by the communist parties.

In this process, Anis and Gupta, another student from Pakistan, came to Romania for higher studies. Gupta is another interesting character. He studied medicine and graduated from Bucharest University, but engaged in business. He never practised his own profession. While doing business, he was reported to be unscrupulously involved in smuggling of hard drink and cigarettes. He developed a mechanism in cooperation with the Securitate to do business. On one occasion, Gupta did not maintain good relations with the Securitate, which resulted in landing him in custody. He was caught by the police as foreign cigarettes, whisky and foreign currency were found in his room. Foreign cigarettes, particularly Kent cigarettes, became a household word in Romania. Kent sold like hotcakes. One stick of Kent cigarettes worked like magic in finding good quality products from a salesgirl in a shop.

To be continued

## POEM

# The Outcome

By Rezauddin Stalin

Nothing has to be inevitable

It is last which is the outcome.</