

Carmen Saeculare VII.



GLOWING HOURS

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Carmen Saeculare VII.

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'GLOWING HOURS'



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DOROTHY WORDSWORTH WRITING

Dorothy as Dorothy Wordsworth or She Is Worthy of
Words

Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we work for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while. (Virginia Woolf, "Shakespeare's Sister" in *A Room of One's Own*)

To talk about Dorothy Wordsworth's writing one would probably need first to set up the name of the author, for the one writing under the aegis of a name of letters. Dorothy Wordsworth as a corpus of texts, as her (and not only her) inscription, is "the probably most remarkable and the most distinguished of English writers who never wrote a line for the general public" (Moorman, 1971, xvii). She herself, as one named Dorothy Wordsworth, rejected the use of writer-authorship for what she was doing, she never thought of herself as a writer: " 'I should detest' she said 'the idea of setting myself up as an author' "(ibidem)¹. Her prose (and poetry) is as lively and natural, as inevitable in its movement as a mountain stream, its language as transparently clear.

Journals-Memoirs: Theatre of Time and Self Writing

Dorothy Wordsworth's autobiography, her diaries, her journals, are all synonymous with her name, with the name of her as author, in the sense of a writing person, a person writing, authorship negated by her in that given epistemic context. Her writing is implicitly a confessional textual body, and since all confessional literature inscribes subjectivity (in diaries, letters, memoirs, journals, etc.), Dorothy's is also a site of inscription, graphesis, form, shape for her being in a time that is mentioned as date in her *Journals*, and which, here and now functions as literary (and also implicitly as bibliographical) reference.

The use of chronology in the *Journals*² is supposed to order the discontinuous, episodic, fragmentary, responsive writings that are direct and personal, intimate responses to all external stimuli, to all random, arbitrary or planned events that marked her living then and there. Dorothy Wordsworth, via writing, is comparable to the Bakhtinian dialogic voice. Her dialogic voice, the disruptive, is the alternative (uni)verse she can acquire. Dorothy cannot choose to act, to write in the imaginary, in the semiotic, as a alternative of the symbolic, as an alternative to the paternal law. In Juliet Mitchell's words, Dorothy, as Dorothy Wordsworth's corpus of texts "is set up by the law precisely as its own ludic space, its own area of imaginary alternative, but not as a symbolic alternative" (Mitchell, J. in Lodge, 1991, 427-428). She speaks, writes, thus in a hysteric voice, in the sense of the woman's masculine language talking about feminine experience, all her textual existence being "simultaneously what a woman can do both to be feminine and to refuse femininity within patriarchal discourse" (ibidem) Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* are not mere indexical references for the Samuel Taylor Coleridge and/or William Wordsworth's researchers, her writings are the poetical condensation of her own experiences, her reading life, a reading via writing ab-out her own life. Reading Dorothy Wordsworth "writing"

(as text and as process of creation) is, for a given reader, for me, close to reading autobiographically, which is an activity and a performance complex in itself. This way of reading, in Shoshana Felman's opinion is that the story one narrates does not guarantee that it is all one's, it only guarantees that it is narrated in one's own voice. Writing (and reading) autobiography ensures one about the primordially of the text as an original and personally ab-original source of telling a or the story. The autobiographical testimony of various women writers seems to confirm the insight of a "deceitful country" as Vita Sackville-West put it in her opening paragraph of her posthumous autobiography. As Dorothy Wordsworth's fear of authorship (as understood by her in the *belle lettre* environment of the two poets, Coleridge and brother William) so was later Marguerite Duras in her first pages of her autobiographical narrative: "I know what that I have written it,... I recognise the handwriting, but I do not see myself writing this journal...*la douleur* (the pain) is one of the most important things of my life." Duras and Dorothy Wordsworth exemplify that possibility encompassing the fact that women have a phantasmatic memory of their autobiography by the self-conscious effort of a voluntary recall. Unlike most people who write autobiographies from memory and cherish it as mnemonic trace, women's autobiographies are "what their memory cannot contain – or hold together as a whole" (Felman, 1993, 15) – although their writing inadvertently inscribes it. Like many other narratives that inscribe pain (pain/pen-sic!), the story present in Dorothy Wordsworth's inscribed self, in her texts "a story whose writing cannot coincide with the consciousness of the one writing" (Felman, 1993, 16). Her journal-text becomes the primal text, a text that can be later patterned. Parts of Dorothy's *Journals* are later repeated by then authorially recognised and now the highly canonised William Wordsworth, as the authorial fratricide proves later in the bastardisation of the 'daffodil theme'. In the following there is the scene and the sin of this 'daffodil theme' or the incest of creation:

When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow park we saw a few daffodils close to the water side. We fancied that the lake had floated the seeds ashore and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more and at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones as on a pillow for weariness and the rest tossed and reeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the lake, they looked so gay ever glancing ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them There was here and there a little knot and a few stragglers a few yards higher up but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity and unity and life of that one busy highway. We rested again and again. The Bays were stormy, and we heard the waves at different distances and in the middle of the water like the sea. (*The Grasmere Journals*, Thursday 15th April 1802.)

and its narcissistic Williamesque version, an 'alter' to the 'native' one:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils.
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but hey
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company:
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

(William Wordsworth *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*
in Milford, 1963, 114)

What Dorothy Wordsworth does, is inscribing herself into diaries-journals-memoirs-letters, non-canonical forms of self-expression, as literature marginalized or marginalized literature. As readings, these diaries induce the reader into the realm of the trope of metonymy, as it is shown by Roman Jakobson³ Dorothy's memoirs obey the principle of repetition, as repetition creates the illusion of continuity, of connections sustained in time and space. There is a 'counterforce at work' in all her diaries and journals because this force of the repetition. The rhetoric of repetition even creates the illusion of a narrative continuity⁴.

Dorothy's *Journals* linguistically represent a self that is not only relational, formed in connection with the needs, moods and actions of other human beings, but also physically embodied – not a 'mighty mind' but an organic body that feels heat and cold and hunger, that sees and hears and smells, that defecates and 'washes her head', that suffers both psychosomatic and physical disease. Such physical bodies have been for the most part absent from the canonical male autobiographies which have attempted to construct a permanent, even transcendental ego that endures beyond the limits of matter, time and space. (Mellor, 1993,157)

The thought of time in Dorothy Wordsworth (she as text, text as her, we as reading, reading as texts) was given by the existence of her diaries, which are carefully dated and ordered. Apart from the chronological analysis of historical and bibliographical data, the aim

now in this essay is to focus on the perception of self, name and consciousness as it is seen in some fragments of the *Grasmere Journals*. Time⁵ is a fundamental axis of mundane life as it is described in the *Journals*. The Dorothean subjective ordering of time produces, and induces the concept of *lived time*, an implicit interior order through which one can perceive its very being and the very being of the surrounding world. Lived time (*the time contained*) is different from the time thought. *Thought time* cuts the current temporal flow and rises thought to a metaphysical horizon from which, and through which time, in and for Dorothy Wordsworth, begets a new semnification and a new dimension. This sequential cut in the temporal, chronological way, puts together the essence of time itself, which, in this context, is a dual one, encompassing lived time and thought time. Lived time will find itself in temporal essence, in thought time, which becomes a category of time. In this metaphysical sense, in the *Journals* it acquires its full meaning, that of the subjective, interior time, with which she can perceive time passing for her and through her. The reference to the subjectively perceived time is fundamental, on the one hand because time passes for one and through one, on the other hand it highlights the fact that one perceives oneself and by it, it thus institutes a form of self-consciousness. Time here is invited in the realm of the 'sacred time' as it is stated by Mircea Eliade⁶, which is a reversible, invokable, repetitive primordial time that can be reactualized in given rites, here the remembrance of the diaries, and made distinct from a 'profane time', that is the time lived, unrepeatable, singular and unique. Just as the concept of the temple itself, which constitutes the interference of the sacred sphere in the profane realm, Dorothy Wordsworth's diaries can be equated to a time that does not flow but which it is rather intermittently playing upon a fort-da game of appearance and disappearance to ensure the solemnity of its existence.

Since journals function on a double axis, that of the time and place, it is significant to mention the location of the journals, but not

as geographically defined as Alfoxden, Grasmere, etc... Geographical names and naming of the places are insignificant, as chronological time, for the pleasure of the Dorothian text. These *loci* are in our (ir)responsible reading the site of Dorothy as Dorothy-'I'. Significantly, there is not a definite 'I' of the one named Dorothy⁷ in Dorothy Wordsworth, and if there is, it functions as a point of reference and not as an omnipotent subject. It is either the first person plural 'we' or some non-personal participant, rarely and timidly the 'i', or *pétit* 'I'. Reading Dorothy Wordsworth's *Alfoxden* and *Grasmere Journals*, we find a very different concept of self from the egotistical sublime proposed in William Wordsworth's oeuvre, Dorothy's 'secret' writing is an alternative model of subjectivity via:

– the alter-native, non-grammatical, anti-syntactical, 'i':

The lake looked to me I knew not why dull and melancholy, and the weltering on the shores seemed a heavy sound. I walked as long as I could amongst the stones of the shore. The wood rich in flowers. A beautiful yellow, palish yellow flower that looked thick round and double, and smelt very sweet – I supposed it was a ranunculus – Crowfoot, the grassy leaved rabbit-toothed white flower, strawberries, geranium – scentless violet, anemones of two kinds, orchises, primroses. The heckberry very beautiful, the crab coming out as a low shrub. (*The Grasmere Journals*, May 14, 1800.)

– the relational, ambiguous, shifting, mirroring, (m)othering, encompassing, narcissistic 'i' in 'we':

We amused ourselves for a long time in watching the Breezes some as if they came from the bottom of the lake spread in a circle, brushing along the surface of the water, and growing more delicate, as it were thinner and of a paler colour till they died away. Others spread out like a peacock's tail, and some went right forward this way and that in all directions. The lake was still where these breezes were not, but they made it all alive. I found a strawberry blossom in a rock. The little slender flower had more courage than the green leaves, for they were but half expanded and half grown, but the blossom was spread

full out. I uprooted it rashly, and I felt as if I had been committing an outrage, so I planted it again. It will have but a stormy life of it, but let it live if it can. (*The Grasmere Journals*, Tuesday, 29th December 1801.)

– the non-personal, obscure, secretive, indefinite 'I':

in the twilight – it was a grave evening – there was something in the air that compelled me to serious thought. The hills were large, closed in by the sky. It was nearly dark when I parted from the Lloyds that is, night was come on and the moon came out from behind a mountain mass of Black clouds – O the unutterable darkness of the sky and the earth below the moon! and the glorious brightness of the moon itself! There was a vivid sparkling streak of light at this end of Rydale water but the rest was very dark and Loughrigg fell and Silver How were white and bright as if they were covered with hoar frost. The moon retired again and appeared and disappeared several times before I reached home. Once there was no moonlight to be seen but upon the island house and the promontory of the Island where it stands, "That needs must be a holy place" (*The Grasmere Journals*, Thursday, 18th March 1802.)

Her *Journals* assume a potentiality within her self and her othered 'other', identified, at times, narcissistically with William. The consciousness of her writing is a shared one and this vision will be the economy that fuels her further writing. For her, Williams' absence as the condensation of any desire, should be and must be written, over his continuing presence, over "the half eaten apple" (Anne Mellor). As it is viable and visible in the *Journals*, her writing is not to legitimise or to present her as an artist or writer-author, her writing, hidden from the public eye (public 'I', sic!), as Emily Dickinson's private, "madwoman in the attic" (Gilbert-Gubar) writing, it is an attempt to give a shape to that factual Siamese living with William that bound her to the name of Wordsworth and to whatever bound them to a given time and place.

Wordsworth and Wordsworth. In a Volume Without Contours
or How Can We Know the Dancer From the Dance(?)

Dorothy was with William, her brother, in poetry as she was in his life. She reveals herself in her journals with complete simplicity, a woman of sensibility easily moved to tears, and equally to sheer delight, keenly alive to the human needs of friends and neighbours, devoted to her brother as the centre and the core of her life. The relation between these two was intimate, perhaps, as the relation between brother and sister can be. (...) William and Dorothy, both unusual people, unusually endowed, had a degree that goes beyond our ordinary ken the capacity for passionate affection towards their intimates. (Moorman, 1971, vxiii-xix)

Besides writing her *Journals*, Dorothy Wordsworth's poems, that were also hidden from alien eyes. Her own words hit the truth, in confessing that she was more than half a poet, she was a poet in prose. "She had not only the 'eye watchful in minutest observation of nature', which rejoiced Coleridge, not only the unusual depth of sensibility that struck De Quincey, she had the poetic imagination" (Darbishire in Moorman, 1971, xv). She saw things in an unified universe of creation "she saw them alive and she saw them whole, with the unicity which belongs to things seen by a painter or felt by a composer (ibidem). Sometimes distancing herself from the poetic eye-I, her verse is vexed into a first person, a self that is seen from outside, the inner turned out, the 'inward eye' that floats over indescribables, ineffables that metaphorically function as her corporeal, somatic and thus also syntactic textual constructs:

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.

Might see it from the verdant shore
Dissevered float upon the Lake,
Float with its crest of trees adorned
On which the warbling birds their pastime take.

(...)

Buried beneath the glittering Lake!
Its place no longer to be found,
Yet the lost fragments shall remain,
To fertilise some other ground.

(Dorothy Wordsworth *Floating Island at Hawkshead*
in Mellor, 1993,155)

Dorothy's poem affirms a floating island, she herself becoming a Lacanian floating signifier, a self that is "interactive, absorptive, constantly changing and domestic" (Mellor, 1993, 156). Her floating self, an island (be that at Hawkshead or anywhere else) self patterns forward a model, one of the many possible models of femininity, that of the object relation as depicted by N. Chodorow, K. Miller and C. Gilligan but especially that of Winnicottian *transitional object* in a specific transitional space, transitional phenomena, her writing⁸. Her sense of being, her sense of writing, is relational, fluid, fluctuating between writing William and writing herself and is strongly cathected to the first. She (de)-(re)constructs her identity, her presence, even her absence(s) by "way of alterity" (Mary G. Mason), in relation to the significant other, "whether a man, a woman, God, nature, or the community" (Mellor, 1993, 157), the "half eaten apple". It is significant, in this context to consider one of the possibilities of William Wordsworth's Lucy poems that depict a recognition more than that of a sibling, more than that of a muse, more of her in him and him in her, that Lacanian mirror stage acknowledged in writing, the difference that it induces:

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
– Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.
She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be.
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

(William Wordsworth *She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways*
in Milford, 1963, 94)

The "violet by a mossy stone" finds its path in Dorothy, the theme is converted, repeated, reinforcing the writerly, metonymical name of the Wordsworths, cathected to each other and subjected to their implied names of creating words that matter in a symbiosis that feeds in order to feed:

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

Lured by a little winding path,
Quickly I left the publick road,
A smooth and tempting path is was
By sheep and shepherds trod.

Eastward, towards the lofty hills
That pathway led me on
Until I reach'd a stately rock
With velvet moss o'ergrown.

(...)

(Dorothy Wordsworth *A Winter's Ramble in Grasmere Vale*
from *The Dove Cottage Papers* in Moorman, 1971, 223-224)

When she/Dorothy has the story, he/William has the telling, when he/William has the story she/Dorothy is telling. She is (re-)membering the days, she is writing of(f) *Fragaria Vesca*⁹, she, the mad-maid in Grasmere. She cannot read her story (she is not in possession of her own autobiography), but she can write it in the Other.

Postdorothea

Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the crossroads still lives. She lives in you and me... But she lives, for great poets do not die, they are continuing presences, they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her... The indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to bear was in her case not indifference but hostility. The world did not say to her as it said to them, Write if you choose, it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing? ... I thought, looking at the blank spaces on the shelves... For it is a perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet... A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history... Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips... (from Virginia Woolf's "Shakespeare's Sister" in *A Room of One's Own*, passim)

Maybe I've always written for no other reason than to win grace because of disappearance. To confront perpetually the mystery of the there-not-there. The visible and invisible. To fight against the law that says, "Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth". (Helène Cixous, *Coming To Writing*)

NOTES

1. "...the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author's privileges under the protection of writing's a priori status...the proper name and the author's name are situated between the two poles of description and designation: they must have a certain link with what they name, but one is neither entirely in the mode of designation nor in that of description, it must be a specific link...it establishes a relationship among the texts...a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization...The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name...shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes.." (Michel Foucault 'What is An Author? ' in Lodge, 1991, 200-201)
2. The separate *Journals* are: *The Alfoxden Journal (1798)*, *The Journal of a Visit to Hamburg (1798)* and, *The Journey From Hamburg to Goslar (1798)*, *The Grasmere Journal (1800-1803)*, *Recollections of a Journey Made in Scotland (1803)*, *Journal of a Mountain Ramble by Dorothy and William Wordsworth (1805)*, *Journal of a Tour on the Continent (1820)*, *A Tour in Scotland (1822)*, *A Tour in the Isle of Man (1828)*.
3. "The primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called 'realistic' trend, which belongs to an intermediary stage between the decline of romanticism and the rise of symbolism and is opposed to both. Following the path of contiguous relationship, the realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting and time. he is fond of the synecdochic details" (Roman Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles" in Lodge, D., 1991, 58-59)
4. Byron like Dorothy Wordsworth takes the randomness and fluidity of life as a given. But for Byron such mutability produces a subjectivity defined not as a "peopled world" but rather as a "craving void". The absence of a defined and controlling self produces in Byron a desperate desire for such a bounded ego, one that leads him tendenciously to assert a stable self he does not in fact possess (...) Where a feminine subjectivity like Dorothy's enthusiastically embraces a relational, fluid self, a masculine subjectivity like Byron's anxiously resists it. (Mellor, 1993, 158)
5. The concepts and categories of time have been taken from Corneliu Mircea "Timpul Originar" in *Timp si Melancolie*, Edit. Hestia, Timisoara, 1996., 191-206.
6. Mircea Eliade, 1996, 61-106.
7. Allusion to Balanche DuBois as the masterplot/masterplotting agent of desire in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*

8. "...the transitional object does not 'go inside'" nor does the feeling about it necessary undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned: It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between "inner psychic reality" and "the external world as perceived by two persons in common" that is to say, over the whole cultural field... At this point... it widens out into that of play, and of artistic creativity and appreciation..." (Minsky, 1996, 259)
9. *Fragaria Vesca* (Wild Strawberry) is the cover illustration after a watercolour by Elsa Felsko, of the 1971 New Edition of *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* (born at Cockermouth, 25 December 1771, died at Grasmere, Westmorland, 25 January 1855), edited by Mary Moorman, with and introduction by Helen Darbishire, printed by Oxford University Press. This second edition with new material by Mary Moorman, is a revised one after the first version of *The Alfoxden Journal* and *The Grasmere Journals* first published in 1958 in "The World's Classics".

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