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# ROMANTICISM & GENDER

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## *Writing the Self/Self Writing: William Wordsworth's Prelude/ Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals*

played by autobiography in culturally reinforcing this particular Romantic self.

### *Writing the Self*

Masculine Romanticism has traditionally been identified with the assertion of a self that is unified, unique, enduring, capable of initiating activity, and above all aware of itself as a self. The construction of such self-consciousness was the project of one of the most influential literary autobiographies ever written, William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Responding to Locke's sceptical insistence that since human consciousness is mutable, constantly receiving new sensations and ideas, so also must human identity be discontinuous, Wordsworth attempted to represent a unitary self that is maintained over time by the activity of memory, and to show that this self or "soul" is defined, not by the body and its sensory experience, but by the human mind, by the growth of consciousness. In the last decade, however, deconstructive critics, most notably Paul de Man and those influenced by his work, have rightly argued that Wordsworth's project was undercut by his own recognition that language can never be more than an alienating "garment," can never be "the air we breathe." They have tracked the way images of an achieved unitary self give way in *The Prelude* to figures of elucement and defacement, to images of a lost boy, a self "bewildered and engulfed," and the "broken windings" of the poet's path.<sup>2</sup>

However fragile and tenuous the self linguistically constructed in *The Prelude*, the poem's overt rhetorical argument and structure locate it, as Meyer Abrams argued, within the genre of "crisis autobiography," a secularization of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious autobiographies grounded in a narrative of confession and conversion, of retrospection and introspection, based on the literary model of St. Augustine's *Confessions*.<sup>3</sup> It tells the story of Wordsworth's fall and possible (but never certain) redemption. Or more precisely, as Herbert Lindenberger argued,<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth constructs his past as a series of moments in which he experienced a separation from all that he felt to be most sacred and from which he was restored, however momentarily, to a sense of wholeness and well-being. The most traumatic episodes for Wordsworth are stealing the boat on Lake Ullswater, which left him, he claimed, with a sense of a power in Nature outside of his own

Central to the construction of both masculine and feminine Romanticism is the conception and linguistic representation of the self. Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden and Grasmere Journals are exceptionally revealing autobiographical self-writing. And yet several recent readers of these Journals have described Dorothy as a person without a self or identity. Margaret Homans insists that her "poetic identity" was silenced by her adherence to her brother's equation of unspeaking nature with the female; James Holt McGavran, Jr., claims that in her relations with her brother she paid the "terrible price" of "the loss of any firm sense of personal identity"; and even Susan Levin's far more insightful and complex rendering of Dorothy Wordsworth's subjectivity finally describes her "self" as precarious, vulnerable, ambivalent, as a "negative center,"<sup>1</sup> whose writing is primarily characterized by gestures of "refusal." Why has Dorothy Wordsworth's self so often been read as either repressed or inadequate, her writing defined as the failure to achieve narrative representation of a distinct subjectivity? Is this the only, or even the most appropriate, way to read her *Journals*? To answer these questions, we must consider both the way in which the self was constructed in the Romantic period, and the role

mind, of "huge and mighty forms that do not live/Like living men" (I:424–5);<sup>5</sup> his residence at Cambridge University, during which his "imagination slept" and he was reduced to an aimless wanderer, a "floating island, an amphibious thing, / Unsound, of spungy texture" (III:340–1); and his political commitment to the French Revolution, to an abstract theory of social justice that was denied by historical events. This last produced in Wordsworth what he portrayed as the crisis of the true believer, a radical disillusionment that resulted in an allegiance to pure reason, mathematics, and an aesthetic theory which deadened both his feelings and his ability to perceive imaginatively. But Wordsworth's falls, couched in tropes borrowed from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, are represented as potentially fortunate. As he asserts in moments of high rhetorical confidence, they have led him to an ever subtler understanding and more profound conviction of his poetic vocation, of the "one life" that flows between his mind and nature, and of the enduring coherence of his self, the tenuous bridge strung by memory over the abyss between his past existence and his present writing self, over that

vacancy between me and those days  
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind  
That sometimes when I think of them I seem  
Two consciousnesses—conscious of myself,  
And of some other being.

(II:29–33)

Wordsworth bases the construction of his self or poetic identity upon a genetic, teleological model, one that establishes three developmental stages of consciousness, beginning with the self-consciousness of the child who experiences the external world and his own being as one ("I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature"), progressing through the growing self-consciousness of the schoolboy ("more like a man/Flying from something that he dreads, than one/ Who sought the thing he loved"), and arriving finally at the realization of the power of consciousness as such, at the achievement of that "philosophic mind" which is the "counterpart" of Nature's own creative power (XIII:88). The self thus empowered is imaged positively in many ways during the poem: as a river or stream, now visible, now hidden, that gathers force as it flows (XIII:166–80); as a circuitous path or journey that leaves home only to return, spiralling upward, at a higher level of knowledge;

as a wanderer or tourist exploring the "cabinet or wide museum" of nature and society (III:653); and as an organic growth ("Fair seed-time had my soul," I:305). Each of these tropes, of course, has negative implications that are also figured in the poem: the stream can be turned aside or dry up, the circuitous path can return only pointlessly to its own beginning, the tourist-wanderer can remain an alien, organic growth can produce mutations and monstrous abnormalities. These attempts to stage the growth of the self, and the role played by language in the construction of this subjectivity, have been fully described by numerous Wordsworth scholars, most notably Geoffrey Hartman,<sup>6</sup> and I need not dwell upon them longer here.

What I wish to emphasize is the way in which the self or consciousness linguistically constructed by William Wordsworth, as both the subject and the author of *The Prelude*, is not the "higher"—and potentially universal—self he dreamed of, but rather a specifically *masculine* self. This self is represented as the struggling hero of an epic autobiography in which Wordsworth asserts without irony that the growth of the poet's mind can represent the growth of the common *man*. Marlon Ross has identified the tropes of heroic quest and conquest that structure the poet's efforts in *The Prelude*, and Alan Liu has tracked the subtle discourses in which Wordsworth rhetorically envelops Napoleon's achievements within his own.<sup>7</sup> The goal of Wordsworth's epic quest, his "heroic argument and genuine prowess" (III:183–4), is nothing less than the triumph of the maker of the social contract, the construction of the individual who owns his own body, his own mind, his own labor, and who is free to use that body and labor as he chooses, the achievement of "Man free, man working for himself, with choice/ Of time and place, and object" (VIII:152–3). As Wordsworth entreats, "Now I am free, enfranchis'd and at large, / May fix my habitation where I will" (I:9–10).

Moving from the level of the rhetorical to the psychological, we can recognize with Richard Onorato the Oedipal pattern of exclusively masculine childhood development and regression that is embedded in *The Prelude*.<sup>8</sup> Wordsworth conceives the development of the poet's self as dependent first upon a definitive separation from the mother, imaged both as a pre-Oedipal source of primal sympathy or "first-born affinities" for the "blessed babe" and, after his own mother's death by which "I was left alone" (II:292) and "destitute" (V:259), as the "ministry of beauty and of fear" provided by a female Nature to whose "care" he was "entrusted" (V:451).

This childhood separation produces in Wordsworth a never-satisfiable desire for reunion with that originating mother. His desire, Marlon Ross has argued, is contoured by its rivalry with other males; be they powerful father figures (troped in Wordsworth's poem as either the divine creative power and authority of "God" or as numerous isolated male figures of resolution and independence—the old soldier, the blind beggar, the good shepherd) or as challenging peers (especially Coleridge, to whom *The Prelude* is anxiously addressed). This Oedipal model operates at both a psychological and a discursive level, as what Harold Bloom has called an "anxiety of influence" that produces strong misreadings of earlier prophet-poets, of Spenser, Milton and the Bible.<sup>9</sup> The result, announced by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* in a moment of surpassing confidence, is the construction of an autonomous poetic self that can stand alone, "remote from human life" (III:543), face to face with Nature and the poet-prophets of the past, "as I stand now / A sensitive, and a *creative* soul" (XI: 255–6).

This egotistical sublime, as Keats named Wordsworth's portrait of his heroic masculine self, depends upon the conventions of classical Western literary narrative: it has a beginning, a middle, and an end; it is the "story of my life" (I:667). To achieve coherence and endurance, this self or subjectivity must transcend the body and become pure mind, become a consciousness that exists only in language. It is the imagination that climactically reveals to Wordsworth not only the "glory" of his own soul, but the conviction that the "destiny" of every soul, its "nature" and its "home," is "with infinitude" (VI:538–9). Whether or not we as readers can accept Wordsworth's appropriation of the general or royal we in *The Prelude*, it is crucial to see that the soul or self he constructs is bodiless. Despite Wordsworth's myriad sensory interactions with nature as child and man, his minute and detailed recollections of what he saw and heard and felt, his self remains curiously disembodied—we never hear whether he is hot or cold, whether he washes himself or defecates, whether he has sexual desires or intercourse.<sup>10</sup> Only rarely does he mention that he eats or sleeps—and when he does, these quotidian details are either heightened into Shakespearean allusion, as when the "noise of waters" outside his hotel near Lugarno makes "innocent sleep / Lie melancholy among weary bones" (VI:579–80), or they function to demonstrate Nature's "sterner character," that admonitory power which serves to rouse the poet's heroic efforts, as when, on the banks of Lake Como, "the stings of insects" remind the poet that

Not prostrate, overborne—as if the mind  
Itself were nothing, a mean pensioner  
On outward forms—did we in presence stand  
Of that magnificent region.

(VI: 642–3, 666–9)

The Wordsworthian self thus becomes a Kantian transcendental ego, pure mind or reason, standing as the *spectator ab extra*, the detached observer both of Nature—that scene spread before his feet at the top of Mount Snowdon that becomes "the perfect image of a mighty Mind"—and of his own life.

... Anon I rose  
As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched  
Vast prospect of the world which I had been,  
And was; and hence this song, which like a lark  
I have protracted, in the unwearied heavens  
Singing....

(XIII:377–82)

Deliberately denying his material physicality, even his mortality, Wordsworth represents his poetic self as pure ego, as "the mind of man," which thereby

... becomes  
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth  
On which he dwells, above this frame of things  
(Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes  
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)  
In beauty exalted, as it is itself  
Of substance and of fabric more divine.

(XIII:446–52)

Precarious indeed is this unique, unitary, transcendental subjectivity, for Wordsworth's sublime self-assurance is rendered possible, as many critics have observed,<sup>11</sup> only by the arduous repression of the Other in all its forms: of the mother, of Dorothy, of other people, of history, of nature, of "unknown modes of being," of that very gap or "vacancy" which divides his present from his past identity. To sustain such a divine intellect, unspeaking female earth must be first silenced, then spiritually raped (as in *Nutting*), colonized, and finally completely possessed. By the end of *The Prelude*, female Nature is not only a thousand times less beautiful than the mind of man but has even lost her gendered Otherness.

But Wordsworth's masculine control of the female remains as problematic as his possession of an enduring self. The representation of gender in *The Prelude* is more complex than I could detail in the broad overview sketched in my earlier discussion in chapter one. Wordsworth consistently genders Nature and "the earth" as female; he also assigns the feminine gender to the moon and to flowers. He specifically identifies the small or hidden aspects of Nature with Dorothy:

thou didst plant its [my soul's] 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.

(XIII:233-6).<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, he assigns the masculine gender to the river Derwent, to the sea (I:596), and to the sun (II:175); and he appropriates the sterner dimensions of nature to his masculine self:

My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been  
Far longer what by Nature it was framed—  
Longer retained its countenance severe—  
A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds  
Familiar, and a favorite of the stars....

(XIII:228-32)

The immaterial soul or mind of man thus exists in tension with material Nature. Wordsworth initially genders the mind as feminine, taught by a female Sovereign Intellect that manifests herself through the "bodily image" of earth and heaven (V:10-17). But as the poem progresses, the mind or soul is increasingly identified with an imagination gendered as neuter, a *sui generis* or "unfathered" power (VI:525-42). As the mind moves ever further away from, or above, nature, it finally becomes simultaneously masculine and feminine: "the mind/Is *lord* and *master*, and that outward sense/Is but the obedient servant of *her* will" (XI:270-2, italics mine).

Gender is thus rhetorically implicated in Wordsworth's philosophical and psychological struggle to establish a stable linguistic relationship between the mind and nature, to construct a masculine identity distinct from that of the mother. In the climactic ascent of Mount Snowdon, Wordsworth finally wrestles gender to the ground—only to have the repressed rise up again. Having defined

poetic genius as definitively male in Book XII, existing in productive interchange with female Nature (XII:6-14), he confidently climbs Mount Snowdon, representing the scene before his feet and the mighty mind of which it is an image as a neutral "it." But what gender is creative power? When Nature exerts a domination upon the outward face of things, that domination is gendered as feminine. But when the higher mind of the poet exercises that same power, it is first neutered—"in the fullness of its strength/Made visible" (my italics)—and then, remarkably, regenerated as specifically masculine. Even Nature's power becomes masculine, the "Brother" of the poet's imagination (XIII:89). At this moment, Nature is effectively both repressed and cannibalized by the male poet, who now defines himself as a "sovereign" power "from the Deity" (XIII:114, 105). "Oh, who is *he* that hath *his* whole life long/Preserved, enlarged, this freedom in *himself*?" (XIII:120-1, my italics). When Nature reemerges in the poem as a sexual other, she is but "A handmaid to a nobler than herself" (XIII:240), subservient to the masculine poetic genius.

But Wordsworth recognizes that his hold on male supremacy is as insecure as his hold on his autonomous self. At the very end of this poem dedicated to a revelation of the male poet's possession of a godlike imagination "in all the might of its endowments" (VI:528), Wordsworth acknowledges that this very imagination, "the main essential power" which throughout *The Prelude* he has tracked "up her way sublime" (XIII:290), is resistantly female. Wordsworth thus reveals the stubborn Otherness of all that he has labored so long and hard to absorb into his own identity: the originary power of the female, of the mother, of Nature.

Wordsworth's attempt to represent an autonomous self with clearly defined, firm ego boundaries, a self that stands alone, "unpropped" (III:230), entirely self-sufficient and self-generating, both unmoored and unfathered, is undercut by Wordsworth's own slippery pronouns as a heuristic fiction, a "story." Hence the hortatory mode of the following:

Here must thou be, O man,  
Strength to thyself—no helper hast thou here—  
Here keepest thou thy individual state:  
No other can divide with thee this work,  
No secondary hand can intervene  
To fashion this ability

(XIII:188-93)

Although Wordsworth himself acknowledged its fictive nature, the existence of the autonomous individual self Wordsworth once so boldly claimed—"Behold me then/ Once more in Nature's presence, thus restored" (XI:392-3)—has become one of the enduring myths of modern Western culture.<sup>13</sup>

Wordsworth's *Prelude* rhetorically depended upon, and has been read by Meyer Abrams and many others as giving additional authority to, the historical emergence of the individual (male) self of social contract theory and economic capitalism, that "every Man" who, in Locke's famous formulation, "has a *Property* in his own *Person*."<sup>14</sup> More important, Abrams' influential way of reading *The Prelude* through the 1960s and '70s helped to shape the genre of literary autobiography, to determine the linguistic conventions by which the viable self has been represented in contemporary critical discourse. Although studies of autobiography as a genre have tended to focus on works in prose, taking as seminal texts Augustine's *Confessions*, Rousseau's *Confessions* and Goethe's *Dieckung und Wahrheit*, *The Prelude* has been hailed as the first work to present the writing of a single man's life within the conventions of the classical epic, thus elevating the genre of autobiography to the highest aesthetic status.

Contemporary theorists of autobiography have wrestled with the very problems that Wordsworth foregrounded in his poem, the uncertain relation between the self-as-lived and the self-as-imagined, between the referential and the written self, the gap or vacancy between "two consciousnesses." If the writing self can remember how it felt but what it felt remember not, to what degree can it claim referential authority for its memories? To what degree is the written self always already a metaphor, in James Olney's phrase?<sup>15</sup>

Even as they debate whether an autobiography can claim a special truth status, or whether it is only a literary fiction,<sup>16</sup> too many of the leading theorists of autobiography have assumed that the self constructed either by memory or by figurative language is finally unified, coherent, and capable of agency. Georges Gusdorf argued that autobiography arose in the eighteenth century out of a combined Christian and Romantic belief in the value and uniqueness of the individual life. Structurally, he asserted, autobiography "requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time" and is thus "a second reading of experience," one that "is truer than the first because it adds, to experience itself consciousness of it."<sup>17</sup> Explicit in Gusdorf's influential formulation of the genre is the assumption that the self so reconstituted will ex-

press "a complete and coherent" image of "inmost being," what Gusdorf calls "my destiny"; implicit in his formulation is a capitalist ideology that defines value in terms of material possession—"In narrating my life," Gusdorf claims, "I give witness of myself even from beyond my death and so can preserve this *precious capital* that ought not disappear" (my italics).<sup>18</sup>

Philippe Lejeune and Elizabeth Bruss, in their highly regarded efforts to codify the conventions or literary rules of autobiography, also assumed that the subject revealed in autobiography is unified. Lejeune famously defined autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality,"<sup>19</sup> a definition that implies that the self has a structure and chronological development that can be narrated, that coherence exists between the present and the past (a "retrospective" of "his own existence"), and that the ontological presence of this self (this "real" person) is not in doubt. Elizabeth Bruss also assumed that a written autobiography requires a "unity of subjectivity and subject matter—the implied identity of author, narrator, and protagonist,"<sup>20</sup> the identity marked by what Lejeune has called the "autobiographical pact," the identity of the signature on the title page with that of the subject of the narrative.<sup>21</sup> Despite post-structuralist and deconstructive critiques of the existence of a referential self or an author outside of the linguistic text, Bruss continued to regard the autobiographical self as "an arbitrary cultural fact but *not* a delusion."<sup>22</sup> Drawing on speech-act theory, she defined the "fundamental identification (or conflation) of two subjects—the speaking subject and the subject of the sentence" as "crucial to the autobiographical project, to the unity of observer and observed, the purported continuity of past and present, life and writing."<sup>23</sup>

Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for the most part read too simplistically by theorists of autobiography, nonetheless helped to establish the generic conventions of autobiography, conventions that predicate the existence of a subjectivity that is coherent over time, that can be represented linguistically as a bounded image, a completed "soul," and that can exist beyond the confines of the physical body, beyond death. This is the self which in several canonical masculine Romantic texts was glorified as the creator of reality, as the "human form divine":

So was it with me in my solitude;  
So often among multitudes of men.

Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich,  
 I had a world about me; 'twas my own,  
 I made it; for it only liv'd to me,  
 And to the God who look'd into my mind.  
 (*The Prelude*, 1805, III:139–44)

### Self Writing

What if there are other ways of constructing the self than that attempted by William Wordsworth? As both post-modernist and feminist theorists have argued, the unified, agential, coherent self sought by the author of *The Prelude* and assumed in most social contract and rational choice theories may not exist. Deconstructionists, following Nietzsche's trenchant insistence that the subject is "not something given" but "something added and invented and projected behind what there is,"<sup>24</sup> have insisted with Derrida and Lacan that the self can only be a subject position in language, therefore fluid, mutable, non-essential—what Kristeva called the "questionable subject-in-process."<sup>25</sup>

Most feminists have been unwilling to follow Roland Barthes par *Roland Barthes* and embrace the reduction of the subject to a purely textual and rhetorical production because they have not wished to relinquish the authority and the referentiality of the self as an agent of political change and social justice. Nonetheless, they have contested the masculine concept of the self proposed in the canonical autobiographical texts from Augustine's *Confessions* to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. They have suggested alternate models of the self, grounded in the specific historical and political experiences of both women and men, and produced by the social construction of both sexuality and gender in a particular culture and time.<sup>26</sup>

Reading Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden and Grasmere Journals, we find a very different concept of self from the egotistical sublime proposed in her brother's poetry. We need to be able both to recognize this alternative model of subjectivity and to grant it equal status with her brother's if we are accurately to describe the range of "Romantic self-consciousness." First let us look at the poem that, critics agree, most succinctly captures this other mode of identity, Dorothy's *Floating Island at Hawkeshead, An Incident in the schemes of Nature*.

Harmonious Powers with Nature work  
 On sky, earth, river, lake, and sea;  
 Sunshine and storm, whirlwind and breeze  
 All in one duteous task agree.

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.

Food, shelter, safety there they find  
 There berries ripen, flowerets bloom;  
 There insects live their lives—and die:  
 A peopled world it is;—in size a tiny room.

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.

Perchance when you are wandering forth  
 Upon some vacant sunny day  
 Without an object, hope, or fear,  
 Thither your eyes may turn—the Isle is passed away.

Buried beneath the glittering Lake!  
 Its place no longer to be found,  
 Yet the lost fragments shall remain,  
 To fertilize some other ground.<sup>27</sup>

Having assumed "one duteous task" in which all "harmonious powers," including human life, "agree" with Nature, the poem presents a floating island loosed from its hold, passively moved by the wind. And yet this fluid, constantly shifting, circumscribed island is a "peopled world" where birds, insects, flowers all find food, shelter, safety, then death. A domesticated world—"in size a tiny room"—the island survives till Nature takes it away, till it is "buried." Yet even then its "fragments" remain "to fertilize some other ground."

Composed shortly before her madness and often repeated during it, this poem constitutes Dorothy's most mature response to her

brother's concept of the self.<sup>28</sup> Recall that William had denounced his youthful life at Cambridge in these terms:

Rotted as by a charm, my life became  
A floating island, an amphibious thing,  
Unsoiled, of spongy texture, yet withal,  
Not wanting a fair face of water-weeds  
And pleasant flowers.

(*Prelude* III:339–344).

In contrast, Dorothy's poem affirms a floating island life or self that is interactive, absorptive, constantly changing, and domestic—it can be contained within a tiny room. It is a self that produces and supports other lives—warbling birds, blooming flowers, a “crest of trees”—a self that provides food, shelter, safety for others. It is a self that is sometimes visible, sometimes not, a self that can appear and disappear in a moment, a self that is constructed in part—but only in part—by the gaze of others. “I see” it but some day “you” may not. It is a self that is profoundly connected to its environment, to those “harmonious powers” of sunshine and storm, of nature and human society, that surround it, direct it, even consume it. Margaret Homans reads this “diffuse” self negatively as a figure of dissolution, even annihilation,<sup>29</sup> but Susan Wollson is surely right in seeing the movement from “I” to “you” to “all” as an “expansion of individual subjectivity into visionary community.”<sup>30</sup> Above all, this is a self that is *embodied*, that is composed of organic fragments that literally fertilize the ground. Significantly, it is a self that *does not name itself as a self*; the metaphor of the floating island as a life or self is one that has to be intertextually transferred from her brother's poem.

Susan Levin has noted the degree to which Dorothy Wordsworth's floating island self conforms to one model (among several possible models) of feminine identity, that proposed by the contemporary Self-in-Relation school of psychology derived from British object-relations theory by Nancy Chodorow, Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan.<sup>31</sup> Dorothy's sense of self is fluid, relational, exhibiting the permeable ego boundaries Chodorow attributed to the social construction of the feminine gender in those Western cultures in which females are assigned the role of primary infant caregiver, of mother. Like many female autobiographers who preceded her—like Margaret Cavendish, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, and Anne Bradstreet—Dorothy Wordsworth

constructed her identity “by way of alterity,”<sup>32</sup> in relation to a significant other, whether a man, a woman, God, nature, or the community.

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 delicately 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. Shirley Neuman, pointing to “this near-effacement of bodies in autobiography,” has suggested the main reasons for it—a Platonic and Christian tradition that identifies the self with the soul and hence the spiritual as opposed to the sensual, together with an Enlightenment definition of “man” as the Cartesian ego which has only to think in order to be.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps equally determining, the canonical male-authored autobiographies have been for the most part the production of a leisured, bourgeois, racially dominant class, of men who are at least temporarily free from the physical deprivations of hunger, cold and poverty, and thus have the luxury of constructing a mind detached from a body. In contrast, Dorothy's *Journals* join much African-American, working-class, and female autobiographical writing in an inscription of the body as a determining condition of subjectivity.

Most important, when reading Dorothy's *Journals*, we must resist the generic contracts imposed by contemporary theorists of autobiography. Philippe Lejeune's demand for a linear, coherent, “retrospective narrative in prose” or James Olney's defining trope for the self, metaphor: Instead, we must expand the generic range of “autobiography” to include *all* writing that inscribes subjectivity, to diaries, journals, memoirs and letters. As readers, we must open ourselves to other ways of conceptualizing identity, to other verbal structures, other rhetorical figures. Dorothy's *Journals*, like most diaries, by men or by women, are discontinuous, episodic, fragmentary, responsive to the randomness and arbitrariness of events. As Felicity Nussbaum has forcefully argued, many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diaries represent a self that is not unified, rational or intentional, and thus register an ideological



contestation with the dominant belief in a unitary self promoted in the religious, philosophical, political and economic tracts of the time.<sup>34</sup>

For examples of male-authored diaries in the Romantic period that represent such a discontinuous subjectivity, we might go to Coleridge's *Journals* and *Biographia Literaria*, to Byron's *Letters and Journals*, to Keats' *Letters*, or to Godwin's unpublished *Diary*. Yet when we do, as I hope to show in detail in my reading of Keats' letters in the next chapter, we find that gender still makes a difference in the construction of subjectivity. To take a brief example here, consider the following passages from Byron's letters to his fiancée, Annabella Milbanke:

The great object of life is Sensation—to feel that we exist—even though in pain—it is this "craving void" which drives us to Gambling—to Battle—to Travel—to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment.—I am but an awkward dissembler—as my friend you will bear with my faults—I shall have the less constraint in what I say to you—firstly because I may derive some benefit from your observations—& next because I am very sure *you* can never be perverted by any paradoxes of mine. (September 6, 1814)

You don't like my "restless" doctrines—I should be very sorry if *you* did—but *I* can't *stagnate* nevertheless—if I must sail let it be on the ocean no matter how stormy—anything but a dull cruise on a level lake without ever losing sight of the same insipid shores by which it is surrounded. (September 26, 1813)<sup>35</sup>

Byron like Dorothy Wordsworth takes the randomness and fluidity of life as a given (I have elsewhere described this as Byron's endorsement of the ontology of Romantic irony). 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 just such a bounded ego, one that leads him tendentiously to assert a stable self he does not in fact possess: "*I* can't *stagnate*." Byron's insistence on his independent selfhood here produces not a relationship of sympathetic exchange with his fiancée, but rather one of contested opposition—"you" can never be perverted by any paradoxes of mine, "You don't like . . . I should be very sorry if *you* did." Where a feminine subjectivity like Dorothy's enthusiastically embraces a

relational, fluid self, a masculine subjectivity like Byron's anxiously resists it.

Structurally, diaries and journals both satisfy and frustrate the reader's desire for linear narrative, telling embedded stories but abruptly concluding or interrupting them to record whatever else happened. Their governing trope is not metaphor but *metonymy*, both in the sense proposed by Roman Jakobson—in which the governing structural principle is contiguity, either temporal or spatial, a contiguity Jakobson associated with stylistic realism<sup>36</sup>—and in the traditional rhetorical sense of synecdoche, in which a part stands for a whole, a single individual for the community of which it is a member.<sup>37</sup> But even as we embrace metonymy as a structuring principle occasioned by random contiguity, by happenstance, we must also recognize the counterforce at work in structuring all diaries, and Dorothy's *Journals* in particular: the principle of repetition, a repetition that creates the illusion of continuity, of connections sustained through time and space.

The opening entries of Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden Journal, written in 1798 as an *aide-mémoire* upon learning that she and her brother must soon quit the first house they had rented together, illustrate her characteristic linguistic construction of subjectivity:

ALFOXDEN, 20th January 1798. The green paths down the hillsides are channels for streams. The young wheat is streaked by silver lines of water running between the ridges, the sheep are gathered together on the slopes. After the wet dark days, the country seems more populous. It peoples itself in the sunbeams. The garden, mimic of spring, is gay with flowers. The purple-starred hepatica spreads itself in the sun, and the clustering snow-drops put forth their white heads, at first upright, ribbed with green, and like a rosebud, when completely opened, hanging their heads downwards, but slowly lengthening their slender stems. The slanting woods of an unvarying brown, showing the light through the thin net-work of their upper boughs. Upon the highest ridge of that round hill covered with planted oaks, the shafts of the trees show in the light like the columns of a ruin.

21st. Walked on the hill-tops—a warm day. Sate under the firs in the park. The tops of the beeches of a brown-red, or crimson. Those oaks, fanned by the sea breeze, thick with feathery sea-green moss, as a grove not stripped of its leaves. Moss cups more proper than acorns for fairy goblets.<sup>38</sup>

Significantly, there is no "I," only an observing eye, an empathic consciousness that exuberantly reaches out to the natural environ-

ment, noting colors (green paths, silver lines of water), forms (sheep gathered together, paths become water channels, slanting woods, shafts of trees), and especially movement (oaks fanned by the sea breeze). Typically, she catalogues minute particulars: purple-starred hepatica, early and then more mature snow-drops, brown-red or crimson beech-tops. And yet this disparate, random catalogue finds connection: nature is not an alien other but a humanized community: the country "peoples itself in the sunbeams." Rhetorically constructing this interconnection, Dorothy relies on simile ("like a rosebud," "like the columns of a ruin," "as a grove not stripped of its leaves"), metaphor (the upper boughs are a "thin network," significantly a metaphor drawn from the realm of female domestic production), allegory ("moss cups" for "fairy goblets"), and centrally, metonymy ("the garden, mimic of spring"). Dorothy's is a subjectivity-in-process, an eye hungry for change—always responsive to the constant movement in nature ("after the wet dark days")—and invoking endings when they are not immediately present (the tree shafts become the "columns of a ruin"). Above all, Dorothy's is an embodied consciousness, one that walks and sits, one that feels the warmth of the day.

When the "I" enters this discourse, as it does for the first time on 3 February, it functions as a point of reference and not as a controlling subject:

I never saw such a union of earth, sky, and sea. The clouds beneath our feet spread themselves to the water, and the clouds of the sky almost joined them. Gathered sticks in the woods; a perfect stillness. (4–5).

"I never saw"—Dorothy's "I" serves to emphasize the uniqueness of this event in her experience; at the same time, it assumes the existence of a potential harmony in nature, one that reconciles motion and stillness, her self and the other ("our feet"). Dorothy's subjectivity is one that *shares* its consciousness—this vision "with Coleridge," this journal entry with William, this work ("gathered sticks") with the entire household that will be warned by her firewood.

Dorothy reaches out to her natural surroundings as a source of unflinching pleasure and nourishment: nature is constructed as both bountiful and vast, so encompassing that her own subjectivity can be entirely absorbed into it.

February 26. . . . Walked to the top of a high hill to see a fortification. Again sat down to feed upon the prospect; a magnificent scene, *curiously* spread out for even minute inspection, though so extensive that the mind is afraid to calculate its bounds. (8)

Dorothy can "feed upon" this expanse of nature without the terror of the Burkean sublime; only a mind detached from the body fears self-annihilation, a fear that her embodied subjectivity does not share.

As Dorothy feeds upon nature, so she provides food for others. She feeds not only the body—going to Coombe for eggs, to the bakers for bread and pies, to the woods for fir-apples—but also the imagination. Literally, as many have noted, she fed William's and Coleridge's poetry, providing images and tropes for William's *A Night-Piece* ("the moon . . . in the centre of a black-blue vault"), *The Ruined Cottage* ("the sheep, that leave locks of wool, and the red marks with which they are spotted, upon the wood"), and most famously, the daffodils for *I wandered lonely as a cloud*. For *Christabel*, she supplied "The night cloudy but not dark" and "One only leaf upon the top of a tree—the sole remaining leaf—danced round and round like a rag blown by the wind"—but note that Coleridge transformed Dorothy's image of quotidian domesticity into one of alienation—"The one red leaf, the last of its clan." Dorothy's *Journals* thus nourish the work of those she most loves, William and Coleridge.

Dorothy's subjectivity is most complexly constructed in her *Grasmere Journals*, written between 1800 and 1803, so that "I will not quarrel with myself" and to "give Wm pleasure" (15). She thus defines the dual purpose of her writing: to give form to her conviction of relatedness at those moments when it is threatened, when she is alone, and to share her subjectivity with others. It is this need to embody her relationships, in writing and in the material world, that produces the kind of comment some readers have found ludicrous or excessive:

Now for my walk. I *will* be busy, I *will* look well and be well when he comes back to me. O the Darling! Here is one of his bitten apples! I can hardly find in my heart to throw it into the fire. I must wash myself, then off. . . . (97)

For Dorothy, William's absence must be written over by his continuing presence—in her thoughts, in her writing, and especially in the material evidence of his presence, the half eaten apple. For

her, relationships exist in and through the body, bodies that must be exercised and washed in the effort to look well and be well, bodies that document their existence by eating apples.

These *Journals* thus construct, not so much that narrative of loss proposed by Susan Levin, a narrative of William's courtship of Mary Hutchinson and Dorothy's emotional devastation at her brother's marriage,<sup>39</sup> as a substantiated record of *relatedness*, of loving and being loved, and of the constant physical and emotional effort required to achieve and sustain that condition of "blessedness."

24 May 1800. Walked in the morning to Ambleside. I found a letter from Wm and from Mary Hutchinson and Douglass. Returned on the other side of the lakes—wrote to William after dinner, nailed up the beds, worked in the garden, sate in the evening under the trees. I went to bed soon with a bad head-ache. A fine day. (20)

24 July 1800. W. went to Ambleside. John walked out. I made tarts etc. Mr. B. Simpson called and asked us to tea. I went to the view of Rydale to meet William. John went to him—I returned. W. and I drank tea at Mr. Simpson's. Brought down Lemon Thyme, greens etc. The old woman was very happy to see us and we were so in the pleasure we gave. She was an affecting picture of patient disappointment, suffering under no particular affliction. (30)

These two entries, selected at random, communicate the texture of an ongoing life, one grounded in physical necessities (baking, gardening, making beds), in social communication (drinking tea with neighbors), in meaningful work.

Dorothy Wordsworth's ambition was not to become a poet—"I should detest the idea of setting myself up as an Author," she told her friend Catherine Clarkson<sup>40</sup>—but to create a home. Orphaned at seven when her mother died and her father sent her away, never to see her again before his death five years later, Dorothy lived happily with her "Aunt" Elizabeth Threlkeld until she was fifteen. But then she was abruptly removed to her maternal grandparents' house where she felt ignored, unloved, oppressed. She eagerly accepted her uncle William Cookson's offer to live with him and his new wife, but soon found that she was expected to do an enormous amount of childcare and housework; in effect, she functioned in the amount of Cookson household as an unpaid *au pair* for five years.<sup>41</sup> Although she was fond of the Cooksons and their rapidly growing family, she

soon began to crave her own home, one that in her fantasy life was always connected with the ties of blood, with her brothers, and, increasingly, with William and John. Dorothy's deepest need and desire—to be loved and needed, as well as to love—was fully gratified by William's growing tenderness toward her and by his obvious need for the service she could provide, the making of a comfortable home on a very small income.

The Grasmere Journals document Dorothy's successful achievement of her heart's desire, the creation of a domestic community where she could speak and act freely and where she knew that she was wanted and secure.<sup>42</sup> Modern feminists may well be appalled by the exhausting burden of physical labor that Dorothy performed: as the *Journals* amply record, at Dove Cottage Dorothy did the vegetable and flower gardening (sowing, weeding, harvesting, preserving), baking, laundry (washing, bleaching, drying, starching, ironing, folding), clothes-making and mending, shoemaking, housecleaning, wallpapering, whitewashing and wall painting, carpet binding, mattress making, carpentering and window glazing. In addition, she copied and recopied William's poems. But Dorothy did this work with vigor and pride; her subjectivity was grounded on the conviction that she was of as much use to others as they were to her.

Dorothy's Grasmere Journals are extraordinarily rich and compelling autobiographical self-writing. In episodic, irregular entries, Dorothy linguistically recreates the texture of a particular woman's life, a life lived in great part outdoors, in a natural environment she found constantly stimulating and delightful, a life lived in a body that felt the cold and the heat, that suffered headaches and toothaches and bowel disfunctions, a life of relentless physical labor but also of intellectual stimulation and, most important, of almost constant affectionate companionship.

Dorothy Wordsworth could articulate what she saw perhaps as vividly as any writer of English prose; only John Ruskin can equal her ability to teach us *how to see*. As *readers*, we treasure her autobiographical journals for enabling us to see as she did, to see a birch tree:

It was yielding to the gusty wind with all its tender twigs, the sun shone upon it and it glanced in the wind like a flying sunshiny shower. It was a tree in shape with stem and branches but it was like a Spirit of water. (61)

or daffodils:

they grew among the mossy stones about and about them, some rested their heads upon these 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. (109)

For Dorothy, however, such observations are valuable not so much for their inherent beauty, as because they document an ongoing interaction with what is for her "a blessed place" (118), a place where God and trees and daffodils and the "busy highway" of human life all fuse. The birch, for instance, is a "favorite" which she and her brother seek out in all seasons; six months later it "is all over green in *small* leaf more light and elegant than when it is full out. It bent to the breezes as if for the love of its own delightful motions" (122). Not only does Dorothy return to the same spots month after month—the black quarter of the wood, Churnmilk Force, Rydale—but she also *names* those spots that she particularly associates with people she loves—"John's Grove," "Sara's Gate." Thus Dorothy, like Susan Ferrier and Sydney Owenson Morgan, systematically *domesticates* the sublime.<sup>43</sup>

The blessedness of Grasmere, for Dorothy, is constituted both by the abundant and ever varying beauty of the lake country and by her daily participation in a human community. More prominently than her observations of nature, her *Journals* record her interactions with other people. We see her involvement with the numerous beggars which the particularly severe winters and economic "hard times" of the war years (1800–1803) produced, beggars she never failed to succor to the best of her limited abilities; with her neighbors, and especially those in dire circumstances, Peggy Ashburner and the Fishers; with her friends, both those of childhood (Jane Pollard, Mary and Sara Hutchinson) and of adulthood (Catherine Clarkson), with whom she kept up an almost daily correspondence; and with all those who were welcome visitors to the meagre accommodations of Dove Cottage (in addition to the Hutchinsons, the Coleridges, the Lloyds, de Quincey, Basil Montagu, the Lambs, the Pooles, the Simpsens and many more). Dorothy's sense of being grounded in a community is articulated in its most linear form, as Susan Wolfson has shown, in the *Narrative of George and Sarah Green* she wrote in 1808, her account of what she and her neighbors did to relieve the distress of the eight suddenly orphaned children of the impoverished Greens.<sup>44</sup> But this sense of *belonging* radiates through the Grasmere Journals: "May 31, 1802. . . . My tooth broke

today. They will soon be gone. Let that pass I shall be beloved—I want no more" (129).

Dorothy's empathic involvement in her friends' emotions was so intense that it often made her physically ill. Again and again, after receiving a letter or visit from Coleridge during his agonies of opium withdrawal, unrequited love for Sara Hutchinson and domestic incompatibility, she recorded her reactions: "I was melancholy and could not talk, but at last I eased my heart by weeping—nervous blubbering says William. It is not so. O how many, many reasons have I to be anxious for him" (57). Her participation in their joy could be equally overwhelming. On the day of her best friend's marriage to her brother, 4 October 1802, an event that secured Dorothy's place forever in the Wordsworth household, she was physically prostrated by the power of her feelings:

William had parted from me upstairs. I gave him the wedding ring—with how deep a blessing! I took it from the forefinger where I had worn it the whole of the night before—he slipped it again onto my finger and blessed me fervently. When they were absent my dear little Sara prepared the breakfast. 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 any thing, 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. He and John Hutchinson led me to the house and there I straved to welcome my dear Mary. (154).

Some commentators, seeking to emphasize Dorothy's vulnerability and deep-seated anxieties concerning her brother's marriage, have read this passage as a form of "psychic suicide," the unconscious revelation of her powerfully repressed anger at William for his betrayal of their primary relationship.<sup>45</sup> A legitimate self-concern certainly underlies this passage. As William later wrote to the wife he so passionately loved and desired, he felt "the blessed bond that binds husband & wife so much closer than the bond of Brotherhood—however dear."<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, returning to the Hutchinson's house on the arm of her brother, Mary following behind, accompanying them—seated in the middle—on their honeymoon coach journey home to Grasmere; then walking in John's Grove—"the first walk that I had taken with my Sister" (161)—

Dorothy became convinced that she was still beloved and at home. Her Journal ends four months later, on an intensely cold winter day, with Dorothy's account of yet another moment of tactful communal charity, buying gingerbread she didn't need but which had been baked for her by the blind Matthew Newton and his wife. As Kurt Heinzelmann so perceptively commented, this is "bad home economics but right neighborly action," specifically directed toward a family that "had the good sense to leave a special place for 'the sister' to read to them beside the fire."<sup>47</sup>

The self that is written in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* is one embodied in a routine of physical labor, of the daily production of food and clothing and shelter. It is a subjectivity embedded in the communal life of a village in the English Lake District in the early nineteenth century, a time of severe hardship for both Dorothy and her neighbors. It is a self that derives its sense of well-being from its continuing connections with those significant others she herself carved, in an ideogram of relatedness, both in her Journal (126) and on stone: her brother William above all, but also her sister-friend Mary Hutchinson, Coleridge, Sara Hutchinson, and John Wordsworth. It is a self built, as were many other nineteenth-century women's selves, on a model of affiliation rather than a model of individual achievement.<sup>48</sup> The life-writing of her Journals linguistically constructs a subjectivity that in its detail, physical embodiment, energetic activity, and *enacted consciousness*—Dorothy Wordsworth *is* what she sees and does and eats and feels and speaks and writes—is one of the most convincingly recorded subjectivities of the Romantic era.

A self grounded, as Dorothy Wordsworth's was, in relationship, in connection, always runs the risk, as contemporary feminists have reminded us, of masochistic self-sacrifice, even of annihilation. Indeed, many readers of her *Journals* have concluded that Dorothy's self was arrested in its development, overwhelmed by her brother's egotism, crippled and even finally entombed in her brother's household.<sup>49</sup> For such readers, the temptation to interpret Dorothy's madness, at the age of 64, as an unconscious rebellion against a life of "persistent, almost obsessive self-sacrifice" in which she insistently fulfilled "the role of nurse, housekeeper, secretary, and slave to any household in sickness or trouble"<sup>50</sup> will probably prove irresistible. And indeed there is a "crazy logic of reversal"<sup>51</sup> in Dorothy's dementia. After years of walking, she will not move, but demands the support of not one but two attendants; after years of doing the family laundry with the help only of old

Molly Fisher, she becomes incontinent, requiring a maid "entirely devoted to her" because her laundry must be done every day; after years of eagerly welcoming guests, she refuses to see anyone; after years of hanging on William's every word, she no longer cares if he is present; after years of providing verbal inspiration to poets, she now speaks in an obscene or entirely private language; after years of letter-writing, she now refuses either to write or to read them, because she is "too busy with her own feelings"; after years of patiently enduring cold (sleeping in rooms without a fire, her insides sometimes so "sore with cold" that she could not sleep at all), she demanded a bright fire in her room at all times: "'Stir the fire' is her first salutation," wrote Mary, "and that must either be done or a hubbub ensues."<sup>52</sup>

But those of us who have observed the impact of Alzheimer's disease or senile dementia<sup>53</sup> on relatives or friends we know well may be loath to read Dorothy's behavior as revenge. We might equally validly construe her twenty-year madness as a triumph of the relational self. For in her sickness she received from Mary Hutchinson Wordsworth nursing so attentive, efficient, patient and loving that she survived long beyond the usual five to eight years prognosis common for nineteenth-century sufferers of senile dementia. Dorothy Wordsworth gave help for as long as she could, even voluntarily renouncing her comfortable home at Rydal Mount when she was sixty to move to grim, dirty, cold lodgings at Whitwick to keep house for her nephew John, a move that led to her physical collapse. And when she in turn needed help, she received it, to the last day of her eighty-four years, enjoying moments of lucidity in which she articulated a continuing sense of connection with those around her—as in her last written words, a postscript to Mary:

Mrs. Pearson is very poorly and the Doctors say she cannot live. We have got a cow and very good milk she gives. I only wish you were here to have some of it. Thomas Flick is a little better and we are all quite fit. Mary Fisher's Sister is just dead.<sup>54</sup>

If the linguistic representation of subjectivity is the ultimate goal and achievement of autobiography, of self-life-writing, then diaries and journals construct a subjectivity or kind of self as effectively as do linear prose or poetic narratives. The self they present is of course different, different in each diary, different in its continuities and discontinuities, in its coherences and incoherences. By excluding such journals and diaries as Dorothy Wordsworth's from

the canon of English autobiography, students of the genre have notably impoverished our understanding of the complexity and range of human subjectivity, of the role of gender in constructing subjectivity (both masculine and feminine), and of the bodily or somatic dimension of identity.

In the context of academic English Romanticism, the traditional tendency to view Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* primarily as sourcebooks for Coleridge's and William's life and poems—a practice vigorously contested in recent years—has led to a more serious misunderstanding. By taking her brother's proposed model of subjectivity as *the* Romantic self, cultural historians have failed to see the continuity between Dorothy Wordsworth's floating island self and the subjectivities embodied in earlier and later texts by both women and men. The self that authors and is represented in the writings, both in prose fiction and in poetry, of the women writers of the Romantic period, is by and large (but certainly not always) the self constructed in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*—a relational, fluid, embodied self. Let me underline this point. I am not suggesting that male Romantic writers constructed one kind of self and female Romantic writers another. Rather, I am arguing against Foucault that there is no such thing as "*the* Romantic self" or "*the* Modern self," but only differing modes of subjectivity which can be shared by males and females alike, and even by the same person in the course of a long and variegated life. A male writer, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, can produce a feminine subjectivity and vice versa. I have been calling Dorothy Wordsworth's relational self a "feminine Romantic self" only because I wish to contrast it to the ideologically dominant construction of subjectivity in this age, that "masculine Romantic self" too often assumed by literary critics and psychologists to be the only authentic, or at least the most viable, self.

A final point on the relation of genre to the construction of subjectivity. To the objection that I have been comparing generic apples and oranges, an epic poem and a journal never intended for publication, I would respond that I could have grounded my argument concerning William Wordsworth's desire to construct a self that is bounded, unitary and agential upon a literary genre as confined as Dorothy's quatrains in *Floating Island at Hawkeshead*, the sonnet. A glance at William's sonnet, *With ships the sea was sprinkled*, may illustrate this point. Confronted with fluidity and randomness (a sea covered with ships "veering up and down, one knew not why"), the poet immediately attempts to impose a teleo-

logical order upon both the universe and his own experience by selecting one ship to serve as master of the whole: "A goodly Vessel did I then espy/ Come like a giant from a haven broad." Gendering this ship as a sexually available female ("lustily along the bay she strode"), the poet immediately desires to possess her ("I pursued her with a Lover's look"). The ship becomes the object of desire: as such it is immediately equated with political and economic power—"where she comes the winds must stir." Troped as a "rich" and highly appraised ship, the self or way of being in the world that the poet desires is one that can rule the elements, control its own destiny, "brook no tarrying." That Wordsworth here genders this self as female only underlines my argument that he conceives of the unitary, independent, agential self as universal, available to men and women alike.<sup>55</sup>

home feeling of shelter and security was gone for ever" (Hughes I p. 105). On her mother's "unremitting care" of Felicia, see Chorley I p. 25.

Felicia Hemans' intense bonding with her mother is evidenced by her decision, within a year of her wedding, after the birth of her first son Arthur, to return with her husband to Bronwylla, in Wales, to live with her mother and sister. She remained in her mother's house, first at Bronwylla and then across the Clyde at Rhyllon, until her mother's death. Left to provide alone for her sons' care and education, Felicia Hemans then moved to Waverlee, near Liverpool, for three years, and finally joined her brother in Dublin until her death on May 16, 1835.

38. Henry Chorley first identified *The Siege of Valencia* as Hemans' best work, marked "by more distinct evidences of originality" than her previous poetry: "None of her other poems contain finer bursts of strong, fervid, indignant poetry than 'The Siege of Valencia'" (Chorley I pp. 89–90).

39. Anticipating Rossetti's opinion, Lord Jeffrey, in his famous review of Hemans' *Collected Poems* for *Edinburgh Review* (XCIX), both described at length what women writers can and cannot do, and defined Hemans' work as "a fine exemplification of female poetry," "infinitely sweet, elegant, and tender," a poetry which achieves a "delicate blending" of the human emotions with the objects of the external world and brings "all that strikes the sense into unison with all that touches the heart" (Jeffrey's review is reprinted in Volume V of the 1839 Blackwood edition of *The Works of Mrs. Hemans*).

## Chapter 7

1. Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*, chap. 1–2; James Holt McGavran, Jr., "Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals—Putting Herself Down," in *The Private Self—Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock, p. 232; Susan Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, pp. 26, 4. Meena Alexander offers a similar reading of Dorothy's subjectivity, in "Dorothy Wordsworth: the grounds of writing," *Women's Studies* 14 (1988), pp. 195–210; see also her *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley* (1989).
2. For readings of Wordsworth which emphasize his hermeneutic and rhetorical doubts, see Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton, pp. 173–209, *Blindness and Insight*, and *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*; Cynthia Chase, *Decomposing Figures*; Jonathan Arac, "Bounding Lines: *The Prelude* and Critical Revision," *Boundary 2* (1979), pp. 31–48; Susan Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence—Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry*; William Galperin, *Revision and Authority in Wordsworth—The Interpretation of a Career*; David Simpson, *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry*; Tifoltana Rajan, *Dark Interpreter—The Discourse of Romanticism*; and Frances C. Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Communicative Spirit*.
3. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, see esp. pp. 71–140.
4. Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's Prelude*.

5. All references to Wordsworth's *Prelude* are to the 1805 edition, *The Prelude—1799, 1805*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979). Cited hereafter in text.
6. Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814*.
7. Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire—Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry*, see esp. pp. 15–55; Alan Liu, *Wordsworth—The Sense of History*.
8. Richard J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet—Wordsworth in The Prelude*, see esp. pp. 174–182. Here I accept the arguments of Nancy Chodorow (in *The Reproduction of Mothering*), Juliet Mitchell (in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*) and other feminist psychologists that the Oedipal complex applies only to male children, and that females follow a very different model of psychic maturation than the one posited by Freud as the "Electra complex," a model that discourages the development of strong ego boundaries.
9. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence—A Theory of Poetry*.
10. Wordsworth's sexual liaison with Annette Vallon is of course never mentioned in *The Prelude*, and is rhetorically displaced into the love story of Vaudracour and Julia; even the "slight shocks of young love-liking" that he attributes to the festive company of maids and youths whom he joins during his summer vacation is rhetorically depersonalized: they "mounted up like joy into the head / And tingled through the veins" (not my head, my veins; IV: 325–8, *italics mine*).
11. For discussion of the way Wordsworth precariously represses the Other, see Susan J. Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry*; Cynthia Chase, *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition*, chaps. 2–3; Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on the Prelude*; and E. Douka Kabilogou, "Problematics of Gender in the Nuptials of *The Prelude*," *The Wordsworth Circle* 19 (1988) pp. 128–135.
12. Kurt Heinzelman discusses this passage as a *locus amoenus* in which Wordsworth's male body becomes the landscape which Dorothy's feminine art of gardening refines and improves, in "The Cult of Domesticity—Dorothy and William Wordsworth at Grasmere," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor, p. 66.
13. Although they approach the issue from very different methodological perspectives, both the traditional historian of ideas Karl Joachim Weintraub in *The Value of the Individual—Self and Circumstance in Autobiography*, and Michel Foucault in his enquiry into "the archaeology of knowledge" initiated in *The Order of Things* (1966) concur in defining the late eighteenth century as a pivotal moment in the evolution of the idea of the self, the beginning of an episteme in which the individual has a new sense "of something taking place in himself, often at an unconscious level, in his subjectivity, in his values, that traverses the whole of his action in the world" (*Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, pp. 82–3). It is probably not accidental that this is also the historical moment when the very word "autobiography" is coined, by the poet Robert Southey in 1809.

This modern self is assumed as a given in the canonical Victorian auto-

- biographies by John Stuart Mill, Cardinal John Henry Newman, John Ruskin and Edmund Gosse; for studies of the Victorian/modern self, see Linda H. Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography—The Tradition of Self-Interpretation*; Avrom Fleischman, *Figures of Autobiography—The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England*; Susanna Egan, *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography*; Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Turning Key—Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800*; and Heather Henderson, *The Victorian Self—Autobiography and Biblical Narrative*. For other modes of Victorian subjectivity, see Regenia Gagnier's study of Victorian working-class autobiographies in her *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920*.
14. Carole Pateman has demonstrated the way in which the individual assumed capable of entering into the social contract in both classical and modern social contract theory is exclusively male, in *The Sexual Contract*; John Locke's equation of the individual with the ownership of his own capacities, attributes and physical body occurs in his *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett, 2nd ed., II, p. 27.
  15. "Metaphors . . . are that by which the lonely subjective consciousness gives order not only to itself but to as much of objective reality as it is capable of formalizing and controlling," writes James Olney in *Metaphors of Self—the Meaning of Autobiography*, p. 30. Despite its rhetorical status, Olney argues that the self so constituted in metaphor is "a coherent and integral self, potential at first and destined, though no one can foredraw the exact shape of destiny, to be realized through many experiences until it shall become this one, and no other, self" (p. 326).
  16. The most subtle studies of the relationship between the fictive and the referential self in autobiography are by Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography—Studies in the Art of Self-Invention and Autobiography as a Reflexive Art*; Huntington Williams, *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography*; William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography—Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*; and the essays collected in two volumes edited by James Olney, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical and Studies in Autobiography*.
  17. Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," trans. James Olney, in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, p. 38.
  18. Gusdorf, pp. 35, 39, 29.
  19. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, foreword by Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary, p. 4. This definition first appeared in Lejeune's *Autobiographie en France* (Paris: A. Colin, 1971).
  20. Elizabeth W. Bruss, "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film," in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, p. 297. Bruss first proposed her generic rules for autobiography in her *Autobiographical Acts—The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*, pp. 10–18.
  21. Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact" and "The Autobiographical Pact (*bis*)," in *On Autobiography*, pp. 3–30, 119–137.
  22. Bruss, "Eye for I," p. 298n.



23. Bruns, "Eye for I," p. 301.
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann, p. 267. This deconstructive reading of both the subject and the autobiographical compact was first undertaken by Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *MLN* 94 (December 1979) pp. 919–930, and by Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (1984). Mary Jacobus repeats this deconstructive reading of the self in *The Pretense, in Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference* (1989), Chap. 1.
25. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, p. 125.
26. The influence of gender upon autobiography is a rich field that has only recently begun to be explored. The most useful texts to date are Estelle Jelinek, ed. *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980); Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987); *The Female Autograph*, ed. Donna C. Stanton (1984); *Lifelines—Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, ed. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (1988); *The Private Self—Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (1988); and Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject—Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (1989).
27. "The Collected Poems of Dorothy Wordsworth," in Susan Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, Appendix One, pp. 207–9.
28. On Dorothy's resistance to her brother's psychic and poetic strategies, see Susan J. Wolfson, "Individual in Community: Dorothy Wordsworth in Conversation with William," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor, pp. 139–166.
29. Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*, pp. 83–85.
30. Susan J. Wolfson, "Individual in Community," p. 145.
31. Susan Levin's fine study of Dorothy Wordsworth stresses the similarity of Dorothy's concept of subjectivity to Chodorow's concept of feminine identity. *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, p. 5, but Levin insists, wrongly I think, on Dorothy Wordsworth's fear of the self-annihilation implicit in an identity founded on relationship, on the other. The classic texts of the Self-in-Relation school of psychology are Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1974); Jean Baker Miller's *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (1976); and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982).
32. Mary G. Mason has analyzed the "evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity" in the writings of Cavendish, Julian, Kempe and Bradstreet in "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," in *Lifelines*, ed. Brodzki and Schenck, 19–44.
33. Shirley Neuman argues that all autobiography, whether written by men or by women, represses the body, seeing the representation of a feminine body in the texts by Kate Simon and Violette Leduc that she discusses in "An Appearance walking in a forest the sexes burn: Autobiography and the Construction of the Feminine Body," *Signature: A Journal of Theory and Canadian Literature* (1989) pp. 1–26, as "anomalous" (p. 2). I would argue instead that the body is prominent in several female-authored, working-class and African-American autobiographies (e.g. by Joanna Southcott,

- Mary Prince, Maya Angelou, Sally Morgan, Olafudah Equiano, Malcolm X, and the Victorian laborers surveyed in Regenia Gagnier's study of British working-class subjectivity) as well as in the genre of the journal and diary, whether authored by men or women, that academic studies of autobiography have unjustifiably excluded. Moreover, despite Neuman's claim, the body does appear in a few canonical male-authored autobiographies—I think especially of Rousseau's catheters and Thoreau's sweating labor at Walden—but this somatic dimension of the self has been overlooked in most critical interpretations of these texts.
- In this context, we might consider Patricia Yaeger's telling comment that "if *somatophobia*, or fear of the body's fleshiness and mutability, characterizes our conflicts with women's bodies, then *asomnia*, or bodilessness, characterizes our way of describing and thinking about the father," "The Father's Breasts," in *Refiguring the Father—New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy*, ed. Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 9.
34. On the ways in which diaries represent a self that is not unified, rational or intentional and thus register an ideological contestation with a dominant ideology of a unitary self, see Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Toward Conceptualizing Diary," in James Olney, ed. *Studies in Autobiography*, pp. 128–140.
35. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, Vol. 3, pp. 109, 119. I discussed these passages as examples of Byron's romantic irony in my *English Romantic Irony*, pp. 31–32.
36. Roman Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, pp. 90–101.
37. On the use of metonymy to figure an individual woman's participation in a larger community from which she draws her sense of identity, see Doris Sommer, "Not Just a Personal Story: Women's Testimonios and the Plural Self," in *Lifelines*, ed. Brodzki and Schenck, pp. 107–130.
38. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Mary Moorman, p. 1. Cited hereafter in text, by page number.
39. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, p. 21.
40. *Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Alan Hill: to Mrs. Thomas Clarkson, dated 9 December 1810, p. 113. Margaret Homans' influential argument in *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* that Dorothy Wordsworth's poetic talent was silenced by her brother's identification of nonverbal nature with the female has little textual basis, since Dorothy never expressed a desire to write or publish, regarding her verses as occasional rather than *Journals* as private, to be read only by her immediate family circle. Because she assumes the universal validity of a masculinist poetics and subjectivity, Homans fails to consider the possibility that Dorothy possessed both a subjectivity and an ideology different from her brother's, one grounded in the belief that making a home is as valuable a human activity as making a poem.
41. For the details of Dorothy's life, see the biography by Robert C. Matthews and Jo Manton, *Dorothy Wordsworth*.
42. Kurt Heinzelman also reads Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* as a successful resolution of a psychic trauma, one that he identifies as the "crisis of

- the empty nest," in "The Cult of Domesticity," Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism*, pp. 68–78.
43. William Wordsworth, in his *Poems on the Naming of Places*, also domesticated the sublime in this feminine fashion. As I have indicated, the binary oppositions between masculine and feminine Romanticism are not grounded on biological sex. Moreover, they finally break down into a more fluid continuum of literary constructions produced by the male and female writers of the Romantic period.
  44. Dorothy Wordsworth, *George and Sarah Green—A Narrative*, ed. E. de Selincourt. On the construction of community in the *Narrative*, see Susan J. Wolfson, "Individual in Community," pp. 154–163.
  45. James Holt McGavran, Jr., "Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals—Putting Herself Down," pp. 237–8.
  46. *The Love Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth*, ed. Beth Darlington, p. 82, cf. p. 229.
  47. Kurt Heinzelman, "The Cult of Domesticity," pp. 75–76.
  48. The model of identity as affiliation rather than achievement has been proposed for the lives of many nineteenth-century American women both by Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, p. 165, and by Carol Holly, "Nineteenth-Century Autobiographies of Affiliation: The Case of Catherine Sedgwick and Lucy Larcom," in *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Paul John Eakin, pp. 216–234.
- In an essay that came to my attention only after completing this chapter, Kay K. Cook reaches conclusions concerning Dorothy Wordsworth's construction of her subjectivity in her *Journals* that support the argument I am making here, "Self-Neglect in the Canon: Why Don't We Talk about Romantic Autobiography?," *Autobiography Studies* 5 (1990) pp. 88–98.
49. For examples of this negative reading of Dorothy's self, see Richard Fadden, "Dorothy Wordsworth: A View from 'Tintern Abbey,'" *The Wordsworth Circle* 9 (1978) pp. 17–32; Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*, pp. 20–23; Donald Reiman, "Poetry of Familiarity: Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Mary Hutchinson," in *The Evidence of the Imagination*, ed. Donald Reiman, Michael C. Jaye, and Betty T. Bennett, pp. 142–77; and McGavran, Jr., "Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals—Putting Herself Down," pp. 230–33. Anita Hemphill McCormick also reads the Journals as a narrative of repressed anxieties and hostilities, in "I shall be beloved—I want no more," Dorothy Wordsworth's Rhetoric and the Appeal to Feeling in *The Grasmere Journals*, *Philosophical Quarterly* (Fall 1990) pp. 471–493.
  50. This is the conclusion of her biographers, Gittings and Manton, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, 233.
  51. The phrase is Elizabeth Kincaid-Ehlers' (cited in Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, p. 68n).
  52. For the details of Dorothy's dementia, see Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, pp. 68–9; Gittings and Manton, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, pp. 271–5.
  53. The medical diagnosis of Dorothy Wordsworth's condition is given in Gittings and Manton, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, Appendix Two, pp. 282–3.

54. First published in Gittings and Manton, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 278.
55. The gender politics in this sonnet are given a different twist in Wordsworth's letter to Lady Beaumont in which he explains that the

Ship in this Sonnet may . . . be said to come upon a mission of the poetic Spirit, because in its own appearance and attributes it is barely sufficiently distinguished to rouse the creative faculty of the human mind; to exertions at all times welcome, but doubly so when they come upon us when in a state of rennissness. The mind being once fixed and roused, all the rest comes from itself; it is merely a lordly Ship, nothing more;

This ship was nought to me, nor I to her,  
Yet I pursued her with a lover's look.

My mind wanoons with grateful joy in the exercise of its own powers, and, loving its own creation,

This ship to all the rest I did prefer,

making her a sovereign or a regent, and thus giving body and life to all the rest; mingling up this idea with fondness and praise—

where she comes the winds must stir;

and concluding the whole with

On went she, and due north her journey took.

Thus taking up again the Reader with whom I began, letting him know how long I must have watched this favorite Vessel, and inviting him to rest his mind as mine is resting. (my italics)

Letter to Lady Beaumont, 21 May 1807, in *Selected Letters of William Wordsworth* (London: Oxford University Press—The World's Classics, 1954), pp. 92–3.

Wordsworth's equation of the ship with the poetic imagination enables him both to possess the female entirely ("My mind wanoons . . . its own creation") and to dismiss the Othered object, the ship, without regret, secure now in a community of exclusively male readers. For the interchange of sympathy between two genders, Wordsworth here substitutes the (masculine) imagination's playing with itself, exhausting itself, coming to rest among an accepting band of brothers.

### Part III

1. William Hazlitt, in his essay "On Effeminacy of Character," cites the poetry of John Keats as his primary example of "an effeminacy of style, in some degree corresponding to effeminacy of character," and concludes, "I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr. Keats's poems was deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of strength and substance." See William Hazlitt, *Table Talk*, p. 254.
2. On Brontë's writing as "crude," "coarse" and hence implicitly masculine, see G. W. Peck, Review of *Withering Heights*, *American Review* VII, June 1848, pp. 572–85; and other reviews cited below.
3. Susan J. Wolfson has persuasively studied Keats as a figure who complicates the definitions and rhetorical strategies of gender in poetry for both