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Wordsworth's Lucy Poems

John K. Locke
Loyola University Chicago

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WORDSWORTH'S LUCY POEMS

by

John K. Locke, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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LIFE

John Kerr Locke was born in Chicago, Illinois, January 18, 1933.

He was graduated from Dowling High School, Des Moines, Iowa, June, 1950. He attended Loyola University, Chicago for the school year 1950-51. In 1951 he entered the Society of Jesus, and continued his college work at Xavier University, Cincinnati, from which he was graduated, June, 1955 with the degree of Bachelor of Literature. In September, 1955, he began his graduate studies for Loyola University at West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I do not place the quality of Wordsworth's poetry much lower than Shakespeare's. That may seem a bold claim, but where for variety and vitality of pure poetic expression, can you match the wealth of Shakespeare except in Wordsworth?"¹ Perhaps some critics would claim that Mr. Read's statement is too bold, but they will all agree that Wordsworth is one of England's greatest poets, that few if any, poets have ever been so deeply affected by the world of nature around them, and that even fewer have been able to translate their feelings into such simple and moving verse in order that others might share their feelings. Critics will further agree that Wordsworth's inspiration and poetic skill were at their peak during the period when he wrote the five short poems known as "The Lucy Poems." At this point, though, their agreement ceases. There are almost as many interpretations and explanations of these poems as there are commentators.

¹Herbert Edward Read, Wordsworth (London, 1948), p. 172.

The purpose of this thesis will be to review these interpretations, to work out a new interpretation of the poems in close conjunction with the Prelude, and finally, to correlate and evaluate the previous interpretations in the light of the interpretation proposed in the thesis.

Nearly all of the essays written on these poems have concerned themselves with one and only one question: "Who was Lucy?" The question is not without value in understanding the poems, but it is not the most important question that must be considered; and an answer to it will give only a very shallow understanding of the poems. The important questions that must be considered are: What does Lucy stand for in Wordsworth's mind? What did he see and experience when he contemplated this girl, and what is he trying to express to his reader through her?

The answers to such questions can be found only if the reader of the poems knows something about the state of mind and beliefs of the poet, and is able to sympathize with him. This does not mean that the reader will necessarily agree with the beliefs of the poet, but he must be able to feel with him. Robert Frost in a recent telecast remarked, before beginning to read a simple poem of his on an ant: "You must allow me my little extravagances."² He then went on in the form of a side

²From a telecast of a lecture by Robert Frost to a group of school children, July 11, 1957, Station WTTW, Chicago.

comment to note that this is true of any poet one reads. If the reader cannot allow the poet his "little extravagances," he cannot appreciate the poet's work. This is especially true of Wordsworth. If the reader cannot allow Wordsworth the extravagance of his pantheistic view of and love of nature, the soul is taken out of Wordsworth's poetry. This is why many do not understand and appreciate Wordsworth. As Mr. Read remarks, "Poetry is rarely approached in perfect mental freedom. We are not able to accept it as a simple sensuous experience because we are not naive enough; we tend to confine it, instead, within the narrow range of our own intellectual sympathies. In the case of Wordsworth, this has led to a complete distortion of judgment."³ The distortion of judgment in regard to the "Lucy poems" has been to see in them nothing but a few delicate, melancholy lyrics stimulated by the death of a girl whom Wordsworth fell in love with during his school days, or melancholy reflections on the possible death of his beloved sister. This thesis will try to show that the poems have a deeper meaning for Wordsworth.

To see this deeper meaning it is necessary first to examine what Wordsworth's attitude toward the world around him was when he wrote these poems. What did he see in nature? What was the place of his fellowmen in his concept of nature and the

³Read, p. 29.

universe? what was nature's office in regard to man? When these questions have been answered it will be possible to see where the "Lucy Poems" fit into Wordsworth's philosophy, and what Wordsworth was trying to convey to his readers through Lucy.

One difficulty immediately arises in such an approach.

Wordsworth's philosophy of man and nature was constantly shifting.

In the early part of his life, before he went to France in 1791, he contemplated becoming an Anglican minister. At this time his beliefs were traditional. At the time of the first draft of The Prelude, Wordsworth was definitely pantheistic in his outlook.

The 1850 edition of The Prelude, however, shows a drastic change.

Most of the pantheistic passages have been deleted or changed, and the tenor of the poem is definitely theistic. To correlate these changing views into one is an impossible task, and unnecessary for the work of this thesis. If research and study are

limited to the 1805 version of The Prelude and to other smaller poems written before 1805, a fairly consistent view can be

found. To understand the "Lucy Poems" it is necessary to consider the period of Wordsworth's career up to 1805, and nothing which follows, since the "Lucy Poems" were written in 1799 and 1801.

Thus the problems of correlating the "different Wordsworths," and explaining the reasons for the change of view lie outside the scope of this thesis.

The order of procedure in this thesis will be as follows.

First the previous interpretations of these poems will be grouped under four headings and summarized. This will show what work has already been done in the field, and bring to light the problems which must be dealt with. Secondly some passages from and commentaries on the 1805 version of The Prelude will be considered. This will bring to light Wordsworth's philosophy of nature and man as well as his state of mind at the time the "Lucy Poems" were written, and thus make it possible to understand these poems intelligently. Thirdly the "Lucy Poems" themselves will be considered and interpreted in the light of the preceding chapter. Lastly, an attempt will be made to evaluate and correlate the various interpretations of the poems.

CHAPTER II

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE "LUCY POEMS"

A few of Wordsworth's critics have passed the "Lucy Poems" over in silence, claiming, as Andrew George does, that "to analyze such poems as these is almost a sin," and that those "who are able to comprehend these poems will be least disposed to discuss them."¹ Most critics, though, have been more daring than Mr. George and have submitted the poems to some sort of a critical analysis.

About forty years ago the question of the identity of Lucy suddenly became a burning issue to Wordsworthian critics; and there followed a series of polemics, primarily in The Times Literary Supplement, presenting a number of conflicting solutions to the problem. The discovery of the love affair with Annette Vallon added new fuel to the fire, and new solutions were worked out in the light of this event. Finally, Freud was called in

¹Andrew J. George, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (Boston, 1904), p. 831.

to analyze Wordsworth's relations with his sister, Dorothy; and another interpretation was worked out identifying Lucy with her.

The numerous interpretations of the poems can be grouped under four general heads. The first is the "literal interpretation," which sees Lucy as some mountain girl whom Wordsworth loved in his youth, and who met with an early death. The second group comprises the interpretations identifying Lucy with Wordsworth's sister Dorothy. The third group would interpret Lucy as Wordsworth's expression of the ideal English maiden. Lastly, Lucy is interpreted as an expression of Wordsworth's Nature Spirit.

De Quincey seems to have been the first to offer an interpretation of these poems, and his was the literal interpretation. The poems, he claimed, show that Wordsworth had been "disappointed at some earlier period, by the death of her he loved, or by some other fatal event."²

Catherine Punch in her book on Wordsworth notes that he often used fictitious names for friends and relations included in his poetry. "Wordsworth constantly introduces members of his family and friends into his poems, but very frequently either

²Thomas De Quincey, Recollections of the Lake Poets, ed. E Sackville-West, quoted by Fredrick W. Bateson, Wordsworth, A Re-Interpretation (London, 1954), p. 152.

without naming them, just putting as a title 'To---,' or giving them fictitious names; thus Emmeline or Emma in his poems stands for his sister Dorothy, or Lora, Laura for his daughter Dora, Edward for his son Johnnie, and so on."³ This, Miss Punch surmises, is what he has done in the case of Lucy who was "obviously" an early love of his. "She was a lovely girl of the Lake District whom Wordsworth loved passionately."⁴

Emile Legouis develops this first interpretation at greater length. He interprets the poems in the light of the separation from Annette Vallon and the consequences it had on Wordsworth's love for her. Wordsworth parted from Annette in 1792 and the poems were written in 1799 and 1801. Thus they were written seven years after Wordsworth left Annette, but before he and Annette had agreed on a permanent separation in 1802. This period of Wordsworth's life was a time of great mental and moral anguish. He still wanted to marry Annette, Legouis notes, but long separation from her had cooled his love, and his desire to marry her was based mainly on a sense of duty. He had been disappointed and disillusioned by the French Revolution; and in Germany he had found a cold and unfriendly country. As a result

³Catherine Punch, Wordsworth: An Introduction to His Life and Works (London, n.d.), p. 72.

⁴Ibid., p. 70.

all foreign countries had become repugnant to him. He longed for England again, and the only solace and consolation he found was in memories of his homeland and his first love. "It is indeed at this date--1799--that Wordsworth's mind reverts to the early time of his life and to his native hills, in order to draw new faith and strength from them. One can fancy Lucy loved by the Hawkshead pupil about the end of his school time, or by the Cambridge student during one of his vacations. What we have to consider here is that Wordsworth conveys to her, into the grave where she has long been buried, the assurance that it is she whom he was right in loving, she whose love had sunk deepest into his heart."⁵ In the poem "I travelled among unknown men" Wordsworth returns to Lucy, and though these verses are not directed against Annette, still by ignoring her Wordsworth rejects her and returns to his first and true love. Annette "is a foreigner and a townswoman. If ever the poet now did marry her it would be out of gratitude or from a sense of duty, but with the inward certainty of having wrecked his life."⁶ Thus Lucy has two claims on Wordsworth's love which Annette has not. She is a beautiful mountain girl moulded by nature, and she is English.

⁵Emile Legouis, William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon (London, 1922), p. 72.

⁶Ibid., p. 64.

Professor Harper in his well known biography of Wordsworth did not commit himself on the question of the identity of Lucy; rather, he tried to present disinterestedly the various views of the critics and let the reader judge for himself. In a later article, though, he subscribes to this first opinion. "I am convinced that they record, and in the delicate distillation of memory, a real experience of youthful love and bewildering grief," he says, speaking of the "Lucy Poems." "The maiden whom he loved was a child. He loved her with the ennobling passion of a high-minded boy."⁷ Professor Harper tries further to identify Lucy by limiting Wordsworth's period of association with her to the summer of 1788. Wordsworth spent that summer at Hawkshead and frequently visited relatives at Penrith. Between these two places is Dovedale and the Springs of Dove. Here, Professor Harper believes, Lucy lived and died; and here in the summer of 1788, Wordsworth met her.

J. Rendel Harris claims that Harper's position is entirely untenable, because the residence of Wordsworth's relatives was due east of Hawkshead, whereas Wordsworth clearly states that he approached Lucy's cottage from the east, not the west.⁸ Harris' evidence for this is the poem "Strange fits of passion

⁷George M. Harper, "Wordsworth's Lucy," TLS (Nov. 11, 1926), 797.

⁸James Rendel Harris, After-Glow Essays No. 8 (London, 1935), p. 12.

have I known" where Wordsworth described how he kept his eye on the moon as he approached her cottage, and how the moon dropped behind the cottage just as he reached it.

Harris then goes on to give what he considers to be the correct location and time of Wordsworth's association with Lucy. When Wordsworth was at Cambridge he vacationed with Robert Jones in the Vale of Cewyd. Not far from this valley is a large mountain called Aron Mawddwy, near the summit of which rises the river Dovey. Numerous springs gush out of the side of the mountain and flow down into the river Dovey. The mountain is by far the largest in the area, and, Mr. Harris surmises, anyone vacationing in the area would certainly visit it. If one approaches the mountain from the direction Wordsworth should have if he were coming from the Vale of Cewyd, a beautiful valley appears as soon as one reaches the summit. At the bottom of the valley is an old abandoned farm. This, Harris claims, is where Lucy lived, and where Wordsworth met her on one of his vacation excursions to the mountain. A number of striking details of the area bear out his proposition very well. The farm house is a small cottage, and beyond the cottage is a small orchard. The farm is called Ty-nant which means "the house by the stream." Around the property are many seldom used paths. If one came upon the place accidentally he would almost certainly approach by one of these "untrodden ways." The surrounding valley is resplendent with the beauties of

nature, and the murmuring of the little springs can be heard constantly. In the woods around the cottage are many large, moss-covered stones, and wild violets are a commonplace.⁹ All of these details can be found in the "Lucy Poems" either as descriptive details of Lucy's home or as similes describing Lucy.

Mr. Harris was unable to identify the family living on the property in Wordsworth's day. Further, he could find no plausible entry in the parish death register which could be identified as pertaining to Lucy. However, this he claims is no problem since the register records only those buried there in the church yard, while Lucy must have been buried in the hills near her home, since Wordsworth describes her as being "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, / With rocks, and stones, and trees."¹⁰

One, and only one critic, Mary E. Burton, would identify Wordsworth's Lucy as Mary Hutchinson.¹¹ The evidence for this opinion is very slight, and most critics are unable to see any plausibility in it.

The second group of critics would identify Lucy with Wordsworth's sister Dorothy. Three facts contribute toward the support of this theory: (1) a letter of Coleridge's, (2) Wordsworth's

⁹Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Mary E. Burton, The One Wordsworth (New York, 1942), pp. 117-18.

habit of concealing relatives and friends under pseudonyms, and (3) a comment of Dorothy's to Coleridge.

Coleridge in a letter to T. Poole comments on the poem "A Slumber did my spirit seal," noting: "Some months ago Wordsworth transmitted to me a most sublime epitaph. Whether it had any reality I cannot say. Most probably, in some gloomier moment he fancied the moment in which his sister might die."¹² On the strength of this letter DeSelincourt would identify Lucy in the other poems as Dorothy. Speaking of "She dwelt among the untrod-den ways" he says: "If Coleridge is right in saying that 'A Slumber did my spirit seal' was written to suggest what Wordsworth would have felt on the death of his sister, this poem had probably a similar source. And the fact that it was written at Goslar, when he was in her company, supports the conclusion."¹³

The second supporting fact for this interpretation is proposed in the latest definitive biography of Wordsworth by Mary Moorman who would identify Lucy and Dorothy on the grounds that Wordsworth used this name for Dorothy in other poems, notably "The Glow-Worm," and "Nutting."¹⁴

The third support for this opinion is found in a letter of

¹²Coleridge to T. Poole, April 6, 1799, quoted in The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, eds. E. De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1954), II, 472.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth (Oxford, 1957), p. 423.

Dorothy's to Coleridge. When she sent him the poem "Strange fits of Passion" she added the comment that it was a special favorite of hers. This, Miss Moorman contends, could only be because the poem is about her.¹⁵

Probably the most complete development of the "Dorothy interpretation" is by Fredrick Bateson in his Wordsworth, A Re-Interpretation. He begins his treatment of the problem by saying that Lucy has various origins. The literary origin of Lucy is Robert Anderson's song, "Lucy Gray of Allendale." However, there are non-literary aspects of the problem also. If she is a folk-song heroine, Bateson says, she is also a nature spirit and a real woman beloved by Wordsworth. The problem is to find out who the real woman is. Bateson identifies her as Dorothy. His strongest evidence derives from two other poems written about the same time, in which Lucy, or the Beloved Friend, is definitely Dorothy. The first of these poems is "Among all lovely things my Love had been." The second is the following recently discovered fragment of "Nutting":

Ah! What crash was that! with gentle hand
 Touch these fair hazels--My beloved Friend!
 Though 'tis a sight invisible to thee
 From such rude intercourse the woods all shrink
 As at the blowing of Astolpho's horn.
 Thou, Lucy, are a maiden 'inland bred'
 And thou hast known 'some nurture'; but in truth

¹⁵Ibid.

If I had met thee here with that keen look
 Half cruel in its eagerness, those cheeks
 Thus flushed with a tempestuous bloom,
 I might have almost deem'd that I had pass'd
 A houseless being in a human shape,
 An enemy of nature, hither sent
 From regions far beyond the Indian hills.¹⁶

This fragment, Bateson maintains, clinches the case for Dorothy, since it is obvious from the rest of the poem that the Beloved Friend is Dorothy. Furthermore the poem indicates a confusion in Wordsworth's mind between himself and Dorothy. In the other parts of this poem Wordsworth himself ravishes the hazel nuts and his ferocity is contrasted with the gentle ways of Dorothy. In this passage the opposite is true. Thus William and Dorothy are indistinguishable; in writing about one he is writing about the other.

If Lucy is Dorothy, a problem immediately arises. How can Lucy's early death be explained? To solve this problem Bateson calls upon Freud. In 1798, Bateson claims, Wordsworth found himself faced with a crisis. He was falling in love with Dorothy. He had faced crises before, for example, when he found that he was not in love with Mary of Esthwaite Water, and again when he realized that he had utterly failed Annette. This crisis was different, though; it was more horrible, because it implied the unthinkable crime of incest. Mary was "dead" to Wordsworth;

¹⁶The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, eds, E. De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1954), II, 504-06. Henceforth this edition will be designated simply as Works.

Annette had been driven from his consciousness. Now, Dorothy must die too, at least in her prototype Lucy. Furthermore any portrait Wordsworth paints of her must be sexless to cover up any suspicion of the "unthinkable crime" to which he was being tempted.¹⁷ Therefore, Bateson concludes: "It is possible that the dangerous relationship with Dorothy was now solved subconsciously, by killing her symbolically. Lucy who had been loved so dearly, was dead. The guilt possibilities were evaded by the removal, subconsciously, of the guilty object. Lucy's sexlessness also becomes intelligible once the identity with Dorothy is recognised. The emotional intimacies must not have a physical basis, even subconsciously. And so we get a rarefied etherial being."¹⁸

The obvious problems which arise when one tries to identify Lucy as Dorothy, or any single, definite girl, may be solved by denying that she is a definite girl. Perhaps she is merely an ideal portrait of English maidenhood. The individual poems themselves may have been inspired by various women, but that does not mean that Lucy can be identified with any one of them. Such is the conclusion of Eric Robertson: "It is possible, then that Lucy is a mere figment of imagination, or was some slight crumb

¹⁷Bateson, p. 152.

¹⁸Ibid.

of human character highly poetised. It is understood that the Wordsworth family . . . possesses no record or hint about an original for Lucy, and sees no reason to suppose that any serious affair gave rise to these poems of highly spiritualised passion."¹⁹

Connecting the same idea with Wordsworth's stay in Germany, James C. Smith conjectures: "I conclude, though without much conviction, that Lucy is an ideal figure, an ideal of English Maidenhood, born of the poet's longing for England during that 'Melancholy dream' of exile in Germany, and touched with memories of Mary Hutchinson."²⁰

The last of the four groups of interpretations, offered primarily by Dr. H. W. Garrod, comes closest to giving a real understanding of the poems. He explains the poems in the light of Wordsworth's Nature-Spirit. Some young girl, or girls, did inspire these poems; perhaps Dorothy was the occasion of some of them. However, Lucy is really an embodiment of ideal maidenhood and an expression of Wordsworth's Nature-Spirit.

Garrod conjectures that Dorothy must have been the inspiration for "Strange fits of passion," and that Wordsworth actually told Coleridge this. However, note that Garrod says that Dorothy is the occasion of this poem, not that Lucy can positively be

¹⁹Eric Robertson, Wordsworthshire (London, 1911), p. 152.

²⁰James C. Smith, A Study of Wordsworth (London, 1911), p. 29.

identified as Dorothy. In fact, Garrod says, she cannot be Dorothy, because the poem is a lover's poem. It is a lyrical ballad, not a domestic lyric, but rather a dramatic lyric. In "She dwelt among untrodden ways," Garrod identifies Dove as the Dove in the Derbyshire Hills a few miles south of Buxton. Again Dorothy is identified as the occasion of the poem. "Dovedale and the Dove belong to Dorothy; and in reading the 'Song' we ought to bear in mind the vivid romantic impressions left on Wordsworth's mind by this tour with his sister through Derbyshire."²¹

Garrod devotes most of his commentary to the poem "Three years she grew in sun and shower." This poem presents a difficulty for him, but not the difficulty which confronts most people. The "three years" is no problem. A child first becomes interested and attentive at the age of three, Garrod claims. Hence it is the logical time for Nature to take Lucy to herself and begin her education and development. The real problem lies in the last stanza. What was the meaning of Nature's work? Did she scheme to mould and then take Lucy away? or, did she do her work, and yet Lucy died? Throughout the first six stanzas Wordsworth has sustained a high degree of inspiration and art. Then, what appears to be a confused tumble follows in the last stanza. The solution lies in Wordsworth's view of Nature: "The truth is, as I believe

²¹Heathcote W. Garrod, The Profession of Poetry (Oxford, 1929), p. 81.

that between Lucy's perfection in Nature and her death there is, for Wordsworth, really no tragic antithesis at all. Lucy belongs to a world where the distinction between 'rocks and stones and trees' and our breathing human flesh, between 'mute insensate things' and the heart which has received into itself 'the silence and the calm' of them, has no place. Dying she is gathered up into her own world."²²

These poems are often not understood, Garrod claims, because critics are afraid to take Wordsworth at his word. In all the poetry written during the great period of Wordsworth's life, everything lives; and the persons he portrays throb with the same life as the rocks and trees, so much so that they can seldom be distinguished from Nature. They, the real Wordsworthian people, are not the characters of the Borderers. "The real people of Wordsworth are those at whom he looks so steadily that they can never fade into action, are never dramatizable. His real people are such beings as Lucy, as Ruth, as Lucy Gray: an order of beings who seem to have lapsed out of nature--the nature of woods and hills--into human connexions hardly strong enough to hold them. Perpetually they threaten to fall back into a kind of spirits."²³ Such is Lucy; like Ruth she seems to emerge from

²²Ibid., p. 83.

²³Ibid., p. 85.

Nature and then quietly slip back into Nature. "To be 'Nature's Child' is to be made one with Nature; and between Lucy's dying and her living in Nature there is, in truth, no difference save the difference which another of the Lucy poems expresses, the difference to a human creature not yet tame, not yet subdued to Nature's purposes: 'But she is in her grave, and O the difference to me.'"²⁴

If someone wished to take the Lucy in "Three years she grew," as Dorothy, Garrod would offer no objection, but would caution the reader that he must understand Dorothy as Wordsworth understood her. He had toward her an ordinary human feeling, but one which had a touch of spiritual passion added, a passion that is beyond mere brotherliness. When Wordsworth clearly speaks of her in some of his other poems, he does not often separate her from the appearances of nature. She seems to be some faun or nymph, who is never quite tied to a settled humanity. This inability to separate people from their surroundings, or from Nature, is a characteristic of Wordsworth. Therefore, Garrod warns, the reader must keep it in mind if he is to understand Wordsworth's poetry.

The other critics, biographers, and commentators of Wordsworth who treat these five poems can be classified under one of the four heads listed above. All of the commentators who have

²⁴Ibid., p. 86.

offered a significant contribution to the understanding of the poems or a radically different approach to them have been mentioned.

A review of these four interpretations will show that there are basically four questions that can be asked about these poems. Who was Lucy? What was Lucy? What was Wordsworth trying to express through her? What is the relationship of these poems to his other poetry? The question, or questions, which the reader proposes to himself will determine his approach to the poems, and will hence determine the type of interpretation he will give. The first question is shallow because it does not consider Wordsworth's other poetry. The answer to this question will give the reader either the first or the second of the interpretations considered above, namely, that Lucy is a definite girl whom Wordsworth loved or that she is his sister Dorothy. The answer to the second question, if that is as far as the investigation goes, will probably be that Lucy is an ideal English Maiden. Again, this is an interpretation which considers just the poems themselves isolated from Wordsworth's philosophy and his other poetry. If this second question is asked in conjunction with the third and fourth questions, an answer similar to Dr. Garrod's will result. The purpose of this thesis is to ask and answer these last three questions as a unit. To do this it is necessary, first to look to The Prelude to obtain an understanding of Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature and Man. When this background

has been established, it will be possible to answer these three important questions intelligently. The further problem of correlating the above interpretations into a unit can be taken up after the poems themselves have been studied and understood.

CHAPTER III

NATURE AND MAN

It is possible to understand and appreciate the poetry of some men without knowing the men themselves, without studying their doctrines and beliefs, their moods and personal feelings. To a large extent this is true of Shakespeare, but it is not true of Wordsworth. A Shakespearean tragedy, for example, is an objective presentation of a tragic story, whereas a poem like "Tintern Abbey" is largely a presentation of Wordsworth's own personal emotions and the reflections induced by the experience described. To understand such poetry and appreciate it fully the reader should know something about the man Wordsworth. In Wordsworth's case it is an easy task, because he has left his readers a key to his poetry in The Prelude, or The Growth of a Poet's Mind.

The Prelude describes the development of the poet Wordsworth from his childhood days, up to the time of its ^{completion} ~~publication~~ in 1805. The prime raw material for the production of the poet was his natural temperament. He was extremely sensitive, impressionable, and imaginative. This temperament was developed and influenced by the surroundings of his childhood. The places where he lived were blessed with beautiful scenery; and he was

allowed a large measure of freedom, which enabled him to spend much time out of doors enjoying nature and gathering the impressions which would make him the great poet of nature.

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
 Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear;
 Much favour'd in my birthplace, and no less
 In that beloved Vale to which, ere long,
 I was transplanted.¹

Even as a child he spent hours roaming through that beloved Vale, drinking in its beauty.

Yes, I remember, when the changeful earth,
 And twice five seasons on my mind had stamp'd
 The faces of the moving year, even then,
 A child, I held unconscious intercourse
 With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
 A pure organic pleasure from the lines
 Of curling mist, or from the level plain
 Of waters colour'd by the steady clouds.²

The child grew up, went to Cambridge, and from there fled to France. In France he was stirred to a new love and appreciation of man and the capacities of man. There he met and fell in love with Annette Vallon. This hour of bliss and hope was only a prelude, though, to dark years which lay ahead. The horrors of the French Revolution left Wordsworth disillusioned; his forced separation from Annette filled him with remorse and eventually cooled his love for her. He sought refuge in intellectual pursuits and turned to the philosophy of Godwin. There he found a

¹The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind, 1805 Edition, ed. Ernest DeSelincourt (London, 1932), I, 305-309. Henceforth this edition will be referred to simply as Prelude.

²Ibid., I.586-93.

barren desert. The turn of the century found Wordsworth at Goslar in Germany, lonely, disgusted, and longing for England, but strangely enough, writing some of the greatest poetry of his life. This period of feverish inspiration was the result of all that had gone before, from his boyhood romplings to his longing to return to England. In reviewing his life he was able to build up a philosophy of Nature and man and express this in poetry:

Wordsworth's conception of nature and its ministry to human spirit arises from boyhood experience. What is deepest and most vital in it as in his poetry was derived, not from books or from Coleridge, but from the fields, the waters, and the mountains about Hawkshead. Here, at least, the child was father of the man. This early experience took on added significance in the light of later experience: the eager days and troubled nights of the French Revolution, the months of torment and despair that followed upon its later phases as well as upon the attempt to find in pure intellect a guide to life. The darkness of the years in "the weary labyrinth" made the sunshine of Hawkshead seem brighter, and the complacent, narrow speciousness of rationalism threw into relief the spontaneous wisdom of a life close to nature. Likewise, the lonely months at Goslar with their separation from moors, mountains, and hollow vales contrasted with the joyous days of wandering in the open at Alfoxden and Racedown.³

That period of loneliness and solitude gave birth to The Prelude and Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature and man which permeates The Prelude.

If there is one belief, one train of thought that runs

³Raymond Dexter Havens, The Mind of a Poet (Baltimore, 1941), p. 88-9.

through the whole of The Prelude it is the idea that nature is something more than just inert matter. For Wordsworth nature lives. The flowers breath, rocks speak admonitions to him, and bubbling springs bid him to rejoice.

The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight and
 Giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
 Tumult and peace, darkness and the light--
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.⁴

Each natural object he came in contact with was just one part of the great universe which was animated by one spirit. Speaking in The Excursion of this spirit he says:

Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
 No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
 It circulated, the Soul of all the worlds.⁵

To many poets the idea of a life in nature, a soul permeating the whole universe, is merely a rhetorical device. With Wordsworth this is not so. "To him every natural object seemed to possess more or less of a moral or spiritual life, to be capable of a companionship with man, full of expression, of inexplicable affinities and delicacies of intercourse. An emanation, a particular spirit, belonged, not to the moving leaves or water only,

⁴Works, II, 212.

⁵Excursion, IX.13-15 (Works, V, 287).

but to the distant peak of the hills arising suddenly, by some change of perspective, above the nearer horizon, to the passing space of light across the plain, to the Lichened Druidic stone even, for a certain weird fellowship in it with the moods of man."⁶

There seems to be a certain confusion in Wordsworth's own mind, however, about the nature of this animation. Does each object of nature possess its own soul? Sometimes he speaks as though this were the case, as in the following apostrophe in The Prelude:

Ye presences of Nature, in the sky
And on the earth! Ye visions of the hills!
and Souls of lonely places!⁷

Yet this is not the only possible interpretation. Would Wordsworth say that there are not several souls, but one soul animating the whole universe? And, if so, is this soul God? In other words, is Wordsworth's view of nature a type of pantheism? The correct answer, at least as far as Wordsworth's beliefs in 1805 are concerned, seems to be that there is one soul animating the universe, and that his doctrine is pantheistic. This conclusion is based on a number of passages from The Prelude, of which the following are typical examples:

⁶Walter Pater, Appreciations (London, 1920), p. 35

⁷Prelude. I. 490.

A soul divine which we participate,
A deathless spirit.⁸

To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,
I gave a moral life, I saw them feel,
Or link'd them to some feeling: the great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.
Thus much for the one Presence, and the Life
Of the great whole.⁹

To God and Nature's single sovereignty,¹⁰

but, Great God!
Who send'st thyself into this breathing world
Through Nature and through every kind of life,¹¹

And God and Man divided, as they ought,
Between them the great system of the world
Where Man is shepherd, and which God animates.¹²

The following quotation, found in a manuscript but not included
in The Prelude, is an even clearer expression of this pantheism:

--In which all beings live with god, themselves
Are god, existing in the mighty while,
As indistinguishable as the cloudless East
At noon is from the cloudless West, when all
The hemisphere is one cerulean blue.¹³

Still a definitive answer cannot be given. Certainly, in
the passages noted above, Wordsworth expresses an immanent

⁸Ibid., v.16-17.

⁹Ibid., III.124-31.

¹⁰Ibid., IX.237.

¹¹Ibid., X.386-89.

¹²Ibid., XIII.266-69.

¹³Melvin M. Rader, Presiding Ideas in Wordsworth's Poetry
(Seattle, 1931), p. 141.

pantheism. Yet, as will be seen in what follows, he is not consistent in the conclusions he draws from his philosophy. He seems to claim that the universe in one being animated by one soul, yet there are individuals in the world. Nature is an individual. Man has a certain amount of individuality and independence. He speaks of Nature ministering to man, and of man responding to Nature's guidance. It is the old problem of the one and the many, but Wordsworth made no attempt to solve it. It must be remembered, though, that Wordsworth was not trying to develop a systematic philosophy. He was recording his own experiences and his reflections upon those experiences. The result is a vague philosophy of Nature and man which contains inconsistencies that will come to light under a close logical examination, and which he himself modified in later years. Thus, death plays an important part in all of Wordsworth's poetry, yet at the time the "Lucy Poems" were written he certainly had no definite death philosophy. The most definite thing that might be said is that death seems to be for Wordsworth a return to Nature and a loss of individual identity. Yet, as will become evident in Chapter IV this is not a consistent view either. Nature seems to be an individual person, Lucy seems to be an individual, and her death is a return to life with her Mother, Nature. Certainly at this period in his life, Wordsworth's philosophy of death was very incomplete.

Wordsworth saw that the life of Nature possesses certain

striking characteristics, the foremost of which is joy. Many of his short poems speak of the manifestations of this joy in a field of daisies, a sparkling brook, or a human smile. It was this joy he learned to share, and Nature was his teacher.

O Soul of Nature! excellent and fair!
 That didst rejoice with me, with whom, I too
 Rejoiced through early youth, before the winds
 And roaring waters, and in lights and shades
 That marched and countermarched about the hills
 In glorious apparition.¹⁴

Another of these characteristics is love. The whole universe is bound together by a spirit of love which governs the relations of things with things, of things with men, and of men with men. By love Wordsworth does not mean merely human love between man and woman, but a deeper, more spiritual love inspired by contemplation of the mysteries and beauties of Nature.

By love, for here
 Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
 All truth and beauty, from pervading love,
 That gone, we are as dust. Behold the fields
 In balmy spring-time, full of rising flowers
 And happy creatures; see that Pair, the Lamb
 And the Lamb's mother, and their tender ways
 Shall touch thee to the heart; in some green bower
 Rest, and be not alone, but have thou there
 The one who is thy choice of all the world,
 There linger, lull'd and lost, and rapt away,
 Be happy to thy fill; thou call'st this love
 And so it is, but there is higher love
 Than this, a love that comes into the heart
 With awe and a diffusive sentiment;
 Thy love is human merely; this proceeds

¹⁴Prelude.XIII.93-101.

More from the brooding Soul, and is divine.¹⁵

Besides these characteristics and others, which have no particular bearing on this thesis, Nature has certain functions. The principal among these are her functions in regard to man. In a very real sense Wordsworth's Nature can be called "Mother Nature." She fashions man's body, she moulds his soul, she is a moral teacher and guide to man, she reveals her truths to his intellect, and she comforts him when he is in distress.

Nature through all conditions hath a power
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
Grandeur upon the very humblest face
Of human life.¹⁶

Much more important, though, is her influence upon man's mind, his intellectual life, and his emotions. The human mind is animated by the same eternal creative spirit which animates the whole universe, but the mind of man has a power greater than that which the other things in the world have. It is able to enjoy and understand the objects of Nature around it. It is able to penetrate through the surface of these objects, and come to a knowledge of the Spirit or Soul which animates the universe. It can take all the diverse and discordant elements in the world and unite them into a harmonious whole. The human mind, however,

¹⁵Ibid., XIII.143-65.

¹⁶Ibid., XIII.282-86.

does not work by itself. It is helped and guided by "Mother Nature." When Wordsworth was a child, he tells his reader that "the earth and common fact of Nature"¹⁷ spake to him and taught him. As time went on Nature continued to instruct him and develop his personality.

The mind of Man is fram'd even like the breath
 And harmony of music. There is a dark
 Invisible workmanship which reconciles
 Discordant elements, and makes them move
 In one society. Ah Me! that all
 The terrors, all the early miseries,
 Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
 The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd
 Into my mind, should ever have made up
 The calm existence that is mine when I
 Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
 Thanks likewise for the means! But I believe
 A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn
 Of infancy doth open up the clouds,
 As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
 With the gentlest visitation; not the less,
 Though haply aiming at the self-same end,
 Does it delight her sometimes to employ
 Severer interventions, ministry
 More palpable, and so she dealt with me.¹⁸

Through the external objects around man Nature works on the emotions of man, giving him the moods and feelings which help to guide his life.

From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
 Of calmness equally are nature's gift,
 This is her glory; these two attributes
 Are sister horns that constitute her strength
 This two-fold influence is the sun and shower
 Of all her bounties, both in origin

¹⁷Ibid., I.615.

¹⁸Ibid., I.351-71.

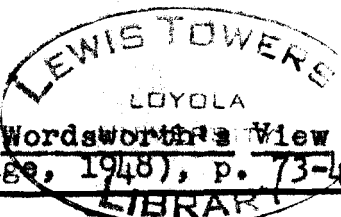
And end alike benignant.¹⁹

More than this, Nature reveals truths to the intellect of man, giving him insights into life and the meaning of life. Starting from the objects around him, she works through his emotions and feelings to his intellect. "The feelings of delight attach themselves to those objects through which the Spirit desires to lead a man to the truth. If a man will be wisely passive in the presence of nature he will find his feelings purified and enlarged, and he will receive knowledge fitted to his need. Moreover, in this process he may have rare moments in which he is lifted above his usual existence into a communion with the Spirit, in which he perceives the true life of the universe."²⁰

One of the prime emotions through which Nature works according to Wordsworth, is the moral emotion. Hence Nature is a moral teacher and guide to man. The Spirit of the universe is a moral spirit which guides and reprimands man when he needs it. One striking example of this is the well known incident which occurred when Wordsworth was a small boy. He untied a small rowboat, which did not belong to him, from its mooring and set out for a little excursion on the lake. He was enjoying his stealthful ride immensely until suddenly a steep rock arose on the horizon. At first it added to the beauty of the scene, but, as he approached,

¹⁹Ibid., XII.1-7

²⁰Norman Lacey, Wordsworth's View of Nature and Its Ethical Consequences (Cambridge, 1948), p. 73-4.



it took on a different aspect:

that craggy Steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge Cliff
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge Cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
Strode after me.²¹

Trembling with fear the poet rowed back to the shore, tied up the boat, and went home filled with the sharp sting of remorse. Nature had caught him in the act of theft and had reprimanded him for it.

Nature's ethical teachings likewise extended to Wordsworth's dealings with his fellowmen. From a study of Nature and man, he was taught as he grew to maturity, how to live and deal with man:

first I look'd
At Man through objects that were great or fair,
First commun'd with him by their help. And thus
Was founded a sure safeguard and defence
Against the weight of meanness, selfish cares,
Coarse manners, vulgar passions, that beat in
On all sides from the ordinary world
In which we traffic.²²

This brings up the question of man's place in Wordsworth's view of Nature. From his earliest days, for he was given to a constant study of Nature, he loved the objects of Nature around him--the trees, rocks, flowers, and fields of the beautiful lake

²¹prelude.I.405-12.

²²Ibid., VIII.449-56.

district. Nature used these objects to arouse his emotions, to guide him, instruct, and mould his personality. But what about his fellowmen? It is assumed that Nature was forming and guiding them as she was him, but from Wordsworth's own standpoint-- did they affect him as the objects of Nature did? Or, did they have no place in his scheme of things? The answer is that they affected him even more profoundly. Nature was his object of worship first, but as time went on his love of Nature led him to an even profounder love of his fellowmen. "Nature was preparing in him the natural love of mankind which came to him in his twenty-second year. Often during childhood he had been surprised by the sudden appearance of a shepherd emerging from the mountain mist, who had appeared 'in size like a giant stalking through the sky.' At other times he had seen him at a distance, his form 'glorified by the deep radiance of the setting sun.' Thus man too took on something of the grandeur of his setting, and unconsciously he was led to love and reverence for human nature."²³ The affair with Annette and the hope in man which the French Revolution bred, fostered and deepened his love for man. The forced separation from Annette after he left France further deepened it. Because he felt the sting of remorse that followed his abandonment of the woman he loved and was able to feel with

²³Lacey, Wordsworth's View of Nature, p. 17-18.

her in her crisis, he was able to sympathize, in the fullest sense of the word, with the thousands of women separated from their husbands and lovers by war. This experience inspired some of his most beautiful poetry.

The emotional and spiritual crisis he was subjected to in Germany added additional fuel to his devotion to man, primarily because it was the love of Dorothy and Coleridge which helped him recover from his mental anguish, and which:

Revived the feelings of my earlier life,
Gave me that strength and knowledge full of peace,
Enlarged and never more to be disturb'd.²⁴

His experiences in France, however, did lead him to shift his attention to a different class of people. Before that time he had turned to the leaders, the politicians, the revolutionaries who were supposedly out to save the world for liberty, but for whom liberty meant a freedom from the shackles of the old monarchs and a freedom to be enslaved by themselves. These men had disappointed Wordsworth. He became disgusted with them, and came to the conclusion that the objects he had considered would lead him to nothing but pride. He was willing, therefore, to look on humble things henceforward.

To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon those unassuming things that hold
A silent station in this beauteous world.²⁵

²⁴prelude.X.925-27.

²⁵Ibid., XII.50-52.

Consequently he combined his love for man with his love for Nature and turned to a contemplation of those men who are most like Nature--simple, humble, rustic folk, the men to whom he had been attracted as a boy.

My first human love,
As hath been mentioned, did incline to those
Whose occupations and concerns were most
Illustrated by Nature and adorn'd,
And shepherds were the men who pleas'd me first.²⁶

From the contemplation of these simple men he was led to an understanding of the real worth and beauty of men. It was indeed an extremely ideal conception which did not consider the hardships of such a life as the shepherd's, but it remained with him throughout his life and enabled him to maintain his love and respect for man under the most adverse circumstances. He is thankful for this initial insight.

Call ye these appearances
Which I beheld of Shepherds in my youth,
This sanctity of Nature given to Man
A shadow, a delusion, ye who are fed
By the dead letter, miss the spirit of things,

.
But blessed be the God
Of Nature and of Man that this was so,
That men did at first present themselves
Before my untaught eyes thus purified,
Remov'd, and at a distance that was fit.

.
Starting from this point,
I had my face toward the truth, began
With an advantage; furnished with that kind
Of prepossession without which the soul

²⁶Ibid., VIII.178-83.

Received no knowledge that can bring forth good,
No genuine insight ever comes to her.²⁷

"This sanctity of Nature given to Man," Wordsworth says.

This line is a perfect summary of what he found in his contemplation of man. When he turned from the contemplation of rocks, flowers, and streams to the contemplation of shepherds and simple folk, he was not abandoning Nature. Rather, he was turning to the contemplation of Nature's most perfect product. All of his life he had felt that every object of Nature was animated by a soul, a Nature-Spirit. What he loved in those objects was not the objects themselves, but the insight and understanding they gave him of Nature herself. Each object of Nature was merely an instrument through which Nature manifested herself to Wordsworth. The amount of perfection manifested depended upon the capacities of the object of Nature. A barren rock could manifest certain perfections, a hillside of daisies could manifest certain others, and so forth. Man, he found, is the perfect medium through which Nature manifests herself.

Then rose
Man, inwardly contemplated, and present
In my own being, to a loftier height;
As of all visible nature's crown.²⁸

Man is not only beautiful in himself but he is capable of feeling

²⁷Ibid., VIII.427-61.

²⁸Ibid., VIII.630-33.

and responding to Nature, of loving and of acknowledging his dependence upon Nature. To contemplate a simple, humble man who lived close to Nature and responded to her guidance gave Wordsworth his deepest insight into Nature.

Therefore Wordsworth vowed to sing of these humble folk and of Nature as manifested in their lives:

Of these, said I, shall be my Song; of these,
 In future years mature me for the task,
 Will I record the praises, making verse
 Deal boldly with substantial things, in truth
 And sanctity of passion, speak of these
 That justice may be done, obeisance paid
 Where it is due: thus haply shall I teach,
 Inspire, through unadulterated ears
 Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope, my theme
 No other than the very heart of man
 As found among the best of those who live
 Not unexalted by religious hope,
 Nor uninformed by book, good books though few,
 In Nature's presence.²⁹

Thus he chose to depict these people because, "being nearer to nature than others, they are on the whole, more impassioned, certainly more direct in their expression of passion than other men: it is for their direct expression of passion that he values their humble words. In much of what he said in exaltation of rural life, he was but pleading indirectly for that sincerity, that perfect fidelity to one's own inward presentations."³⁰

Such are the attitudes, beliefs, and moods of Wordsworth

²⁹Ibid., XIII.231-44.

³⁰Pater, Appreciations, p. 51.

at the time the "Lucy Poems" were written in 1799 and 1801. He believes that there is a spiritual presence dwelling in all things, and in the mind of man. It is the soul of both. As the soul of all things this Nature-Spirit ministers to all things, and especially to man. She is man's maker, teacher, guide, friend, and counselor. The man who will live the fullest, most satisfying life, is the man who will let himself go, who will be docile to the guidance of Nature, and willing to learn from contemplating the objects of Nature and especially, those men who are close to Nature: the simple, humble folk. The men Wordsworth chose to write about, therefore, were the simple folk, people who lived in rural areas to which the sophistications, customs, and conventions of society had not penetrated. Only in such rural areas did he feel that it was possible to read the lesson Nature had to teach, because only there could he find human nature in its essential, elemental, life. His picture of man is extremely idealistic, and he has been criticized for failing to face or consider the problem of evil, the battle for survival against the forces of Nature, the degrading moral evils of man. It is true that he has neglected such considerations, but his point is that from contemplating Nature and these humble folk, he was able to see an underlying goodness and beauty that remains no matter what evils mar the surface. A man may be physically deformed, or morally degenerate, but he has superior

potentialities which, if he is willing, Nature will develop to the full.

One further note should be added, before the "Lucy poems" themselves are taken up. Wordsworth lived in an age when it had become plebeian and old-fashioned to believe in revealed religion and in a personal God. Materialism, pantheism, and deism were in vogue. "The progress of Materialism during the nineteenth century had a curious effect upon intelligent people; by which I mean in whom reason and feeling had harmoniously developed. In so far as their rational faculties assented to the tenets of scientific materialism, to the detriment of their belief in revealed religion, to that degree their emotional faculties sought a substitute for religion in poetry."³¹ People were starved for something to feed their emotional and religious life. To fill this need they turned to the Romantic poets. "Poetry became for such people, not an art to be enjoyed, but the source of a faith to be sustained. Now the poetry of Wordsworth was peculiarly suited to the requirements of such people. Into it they could read, if they so liked, an emotional pantheism which satisfied their instincts without compromising their intelligence. From it they could derive a humanism which compensated them for the imagined defects of Christian dogma."³²

³¹Read, Wordsworth, p. 29.

³²Ibid.

It is important to keep this in mind in attempting to understand Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth lived in the same world as the people described above, and was seeking the same substitute for religion that they were. Hence when he speaks in pantheistic terms, when he speaks of a Nature-Spirit guiding man, when he speaks of a soul permeating the whole universe, he is to be taken literally. Certainly this is true for the period of his life considered in this thesis; the beliefs of his later life are another question. Much distortion of Wordsworth's poetry, and much dissatisfaction with the Romantic poets in general has resulted from the fact that the critic of a later date cannot take the poet literally. As a result he tries to explain everything superficially or symbolically, thereby taking the heart and soul out of the poetry. There is a certain amount of symbolism to be sure, but in general what Wordsworth says can be taken literally. This is one of the "extravagances" which this poet must be allowed, if the critic wishes to understand Wordsworth rather than inject his own interpretation into the framework of Wordsworth's words and meter.

CHAPTER IV

LUCY: NATURE'S MASTERPIECE

The five short poems known as the "Lucy Poems" were written by Wordsworth during his brief stay in Germany or shortly thereafter. "Three years she grew in sun and shower," De Selincourt notes, was composed in the Hartz Forest in 1799.¹ "A slumber did my spirit seal" was also written in Germany sometime in 1799. It was this poem which Wordsworth sent to Coleridge that spring. Of it Coleridge remarked: "Some months ago Wordsworth transmitted to me a most sublime epitaph. Whether it had any reality I cannot say. Most probably, in some gloomier moment he fancied the moment in which his sister might die."² "She dwelt among untrodden ways" and "Strange fits of passion have I known" were also written in 1799, then copied by Dorothy and sent to Coleridge. Speaking of this last poem Dorothy said: "The next poem is a favourite of me--Dorothy."³ "I travelled

¹Works, II, 506.

²Ibid.

³Moorman, William Wordsworth, p. 423.

among unknown men" according to Wordsworth's own declaration, was written in 1799, but there is serious doubt about this. It did not appear among the other "Lucy Poems" in the 1800 version of Lyrical Ballads, and therefore, DeSelincourt conjectures, must have been written after his return from Germany.⁴ It was sent to the printer to be included in the 1802 version of Lyrical Ballads, but through an oversight was omitted. Finally Wordsworth sent it to Mary Hutchinson with the instruction that it was to be read after "She dwelt among." It is significant to note the time of the composition of the poems. They were written at a time when Wordsworth received little or no inspiration or consolation from the world around him. As a result his mind turned back to England, to the glorious days of his youth; and the subjects he chose to write about were those associated with his beloved England. One critic says that "one is compelled to the conclusion that the poet at Goslar rubbing his chilly hands over his writings in that year of abnormal frost, was determinedly a composer, a maker, a seizer of themes which he transmuted and rearranged."⁵

The identity of the Lucy described in these poems has been for years a subject of speculation among critics; but it is pure speculation, because Wordsworth has left no clue which could

⁴Works, II, 427.

⁵Eric Robertson, Wordsworthshire (London, 1911), p. 150.

lead to the identification of Lucy as some definite girl whom he knew. Hence, if Wordsworth has left no clue to her identity it can be concluded that it is not necessary to know the identity of her to appreciate and understand the poems. In writing these poems Wordsworth was primarily a poet, not a biographer. It would certainly be rash to conclude that Lucy is entirely fictitious. Undoubtedly some girl, or perhaps several girls inspired these poems. However, the poems can be appreciated without the knowledge of her identity. The reader should note, however, that there are two questions involved here: the problem of attempting to determine whether Lucy is a definite girl or not, and the problem of identifying her if she is a definite girl. It will make a difference in the understanding of the poems if Lucy is a definite girl or if she is a composite ideal. Consequently this question will come up again for consideration and careful study. However, whichever view may be taken of this problem, the poems can be fully appreciated without knowing the definite identity of Lucy.

In considering the poems the following order will be followed: "Three years she grew," "Strange fits of passion," "A slumber did my spirit seal," "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," and "I travelled among unknown men." This order, which is neither Wordsworth's order of presentation, nor a strictly chronological order, was chosen because it lends itself to a development of thoughts which parallels the findings of Chapter

III, as will become evident. The complete text of the five poems can be found in the appendix.

It was seen in the preceding chapter that, according to Wordsworth's philosophy, a soul animates the whole universe and each of its parts, that this soul, or Nature-Spirit, guides and develops man, and finally, that man himself is the greatest of Nature's productions. These five short "Lucy Poems" are a concrete expression of these beliefs. They tell the story of a young girl whom Nature took to herself and moulded into the perfect child of Nature, of a child who was perfectly docile and responsive to "Mother Nature," and finally, they tell of Wordsworth's own feelings and reactions toward this child of Nature.

The first of these poems, "Three years she grew," gives the clearest expression of this. The poem expresses an implicit faith in Nature's consummate art and describes how she would fashion a girl to be her own: "a girl in whom her different moods and the beauty and grace of her fairest forms would be reflected."⁶

The poem expresses first an admiration for Nature and all her beautiful sights--the mountain springs, the floating clouds, the bending willow, the stars at midnight, and the dancing rivulets. Reflecting on these, Wordsworth feels that Nature is

⁶E. Hershey Sneath, Wordsworth: Poet of Nature and Poet of Man (Boston, 1912), p. 143.

the fit tutor for this beautiful child. Nature takes Lucy and makes a special favorite of her, and Lucy begins to learn from the world of Nature around her.

The Girl, in rock and plain
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall reel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.⁷

. . . and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.⁸

Note that the transformation and development of the child is mainly an emotional development. She will feel an overseeing power; she will listen to rivulets and beauty shall pass into her face; and her final transformation is described in terms of vital feelings.

And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy will I give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.⁹

At the end of her development one will be able to say that "Lucy has spent her days in a happy mountain dell, and there she has felt the impulses and the influences of nature in her most beautiful aspect, and these impulses and influences have moulded

⁷Works, II, 215.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

both her spirit and her body until she has grown into the exquisite being described in the poem."¹⁰

Nature's chief characteristic, joy, will become her own.

She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs.¹¹

The midnight stars shall be dear to her; the trees and elements will pay homage to her: "The floating clouds their state shall lend / To her; for her the willow bend."¹² She will have the ability to see the good and beauty even in such a fearful and seemingly contradictory manifestation of Nature's power as a storm.

Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.¹³

Such is Wordsworth's conception of the ideal education and development of a child. In view of his philosophy of Nature and man reviewed in the last chapter, it is just what one would expect. The education here outlined "is really expressive of Wordsworth's faith in Nature's moulding or fashioning power. He is not giving vent merely to charming fancy. We have seen it

¹⁰Punch, Wordsworth, p. 74.

¹¹Works, II, 215.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

manifest over and over again that the Poet regards it as one of Nature's functions to mould both the body and the soul of Man, and here Wordsworth shows, in exquisite verse, just how skillfully she can perform her office, and by what methods it is accomplished."¹⁴

Such is what Nature would do for a child who became exclusively her own, but did this ever happen? Did such a girl ever exist? Yes, Wordsworth says, "The work was done."¹⁵ The picture, however, is not a detailed and individualized picture. What did Lucy look like? When did Wordsworth meet her? How old was she when she died? To these and a host of other pertinent questions Wordsworth offers no hint of an answer. There are two possible reasons for this. Perhaps Wordsworth did not have a particular girl in mind when he wrote this. Perhaps Lucy is a composite of young girls he had seen in the rural districts of England, and who impressed him as being typical children of Nature. The better answer would seem to be that Wordsworth wants to so identify her with Nature that individualization would be out of place. The important thing in this case is not the individual character of Lucy, but what she has become through the ministrations of Nature. Wordsworth is not nearly as interested

¹⁴Sneath, Wordsworth, p. 143-44.

¹⁵Works, II, 216.

in an individual as he is in the aspects of Nature which that individual reveals to him. Lucy, therefore, is not so much an individual as she is a part of Nature's universe. "Lucy's whole being is moulded by Nature's self; she is responsive to sun and shadow, to silence and to sound, and melts almost into an impersonation of a Cumbrian Valley's peace."¹⁶

Two problems arise from a study of this poem, one in regard to the "three years," the other in regard to Lucy's death.

For years critics have wondered just why Wordsworth picked "three years" of age for the beginning of Nature's work. It would seem that, if Nature wanted to take Lucy to herself and make Lucy her special child, she would have taken her to herself from the days of her infancy. If some reason can be found why Nature would postpone taking her, what is the significance of "three years?" One critic offers three possible solutions.¹⁷ First, it may be that Wordsworth had no reason at all for choosing three years; perhaps it is merely an arbitrary span of time. Secondly, it may be specific and biographical. Perhaps Wordsworth had some definite girl in mind, in which case some definite event may have occurred in the girl's life which would dictate the statement about three years. Lastly, the age of three may have

¹⁶F. W. H. Myers, Wordsworth (London, 1925), p. 139.

¹⁷Francis Christinsen, "Three years she grew in sun and shower," The Explicator, IV (December, 1945), no. 18.

been considered by Wordsworth as the point of transition from infancy to childhood when the infant first acquires a creative sensibility. This last possibility closely parallels the common-sense explanation of Professor Garrod. Garrod says that any child first becomes interesting at the age of three. Hence, Nature would not want to take Lucy to herself before that time. At the time when Lucy became interesting Nature took her to herself and began to mould her according to her own plan.¹⁸

Lucy's death is a problem that cannot be so easily dismissed. In the other four poems the death of Lucy is not so much of a problem. There it is merely a fact; and Wordsworth is relating his own reaction to that fact. In this poem, however, the meaning of the death of Lucy is the important factor. What was the meaning of Nature's work? Did she scheme to mould and then take Lucy away? Or did she do her work, and yet Lucy died? Throughout six stanzas Wordsworth has sustained a high degree of inspiration and art. Then, what appears to be a confused tumble follows in the last stanza. If Wordsworth's pantheistic world, animated by one soul, is kept in mind a solution can be worked out. As was noted in Chapter Two, Professor Garrod claims that in Wordsworth's conception of Nature and Nature's universe there is really no difference between Lucy's living and her death. She was a part of Nature, she seemed to emerge from Nature, and

¹⁸Garrod, Profession of Poetry, p. 82.

afterwards she quietly slipped back into Nature. To Wordsworth personally there is a difference; she is gone and he must sustain the personal loss. This is brought out clearly in the other "Lucy Poems." From Nature's point of view, though, there is no difference. Nature had completed her masterpiece when Lucy reached maturity, and perhaps Wordsworth felt that Nature should then take Lucy from this world and incorporate her into the universe, to prevent decay of such a masterpiece which would result from contact with imperfect and sophisticated men who had no appreciation of Nature, or to prevent her deterioration by time.

Perhaps Lucy's death has a more personal significance for Wordsworth. The poems, it must be remembered, were written in Germany in 1799. During the Godwinian period of his life he lost his vision of Nature, and never fully regained it. At the turn of the century he was writing his best poetry, however, not from insights into Nature received at that time, but rather, from the memory of his earlier experiences in England. Perhaps the death of Lucy is a figurative death, by which Wordsworth means that he has lost some of that vision that was once suggested to him by some young girl. Perhaps he means it more literally. He thought he once possessed such a love in the days with Annette, but she was found wanting. His love for her had nothing to do with Nature, it was too passionate. By 1799 Annette and the whole magnificent portrait of the French Revolution, of which she was

a part, faded with disillusionment. The whole scene died. Perhaps there were others whom Wordsworth thought would fill his ideal, but they too, like Annette, "died" of the plague of human imperfections.

The question of the meaning of Lucy's death is closely connected with the question of whether Lucy is a definite girl or a composite. If the Lucy of the poems can be taken as a definite girl, her death may be taken as an actual event, and the meaning of that death is that for Nature there is little difference between life and death. After her death Lucy remained a part of the whole living universe, though she lost her individuality. If Lucy is not some definite girl, but an idealization inspired by one or several girls, her death can be taken figuratively. In this case her death would express Wordsworth's own disillusionment, and the fact that nowhere in the world could the perfect Lucy be found. At times in his life Wordsworth caught glimpses of what Nature's perfect child would be like, and from these glimpses he painted this portrait. Of necessity Lucy must die, she is too ideal; it is impossible for such a child to go on living in this world. She would necessarily pick up some of the sophistication of the world around her, and thereby lose her simplicity and close union with Nature. Perhaps Wordsworth found several Lucys, but each of these died the moment their imperfections became apparent to the poet.

To summarize then, the first of these "Lucy Poems" describes

Nature's work in the production of her masterpiece, the type of child such a production would be, and the meaning of Lucy's ensuing death.

The same close connection of Lucy and Nature is apparent in the other four poems, though not as explicitly. She is described as "fresh as a rose in June."¹⁹ Or again, she is:

A violet by a mossy stone
 Half hidden from the eye!
 --Fair as a star, when only one
 Is shining in the sky.²⁰

After death she becomes an indistinguishable part of Nature's great universe.

No motion has she now, no force;
 She neither hears nor sees;
 Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
 With rocks, and stones, and trees.²¹

Again, it is not the individual that Wordsworth is interested in but the individual as a work of Nature. This is true of all of Wordsworth's typical people, but Lucy is even more abstract and more a part of Nature than Wordsworth's other people such as Peter Bell, Lucy Gray, or Poor Susan. "Lucy must be counted among the solitaries, although clearly different from the others. . . . These poems have an extraordinary quality . . . remoteness . . . clarity . . . and microcosmic perfection. They touch the

¹⁹Works, II, 29.

²⁰Ibid., p. 216.

²¹Ibid.

same issues as Wordsworth's other poetry of solitude and relationship, but their extreme spirituality of tone and lack of literal context is altogether untypical."²²

More predominant in these four poems than the description of Nature's work is the poet's reaction to Lucy. He describes the type of mood he was in when he used to visit her, the effect she had on his life, the type of love he had for her, the fear and anxiety he felt over the possibility of her death, and the pangs her actual death brought to his heart.

His love for Lucy put him into sort of a trance.

A Slumber did my spirit seal;
 I had no human fears;
 She seemed a thing that could not feel
 The touch of earthly years.²³

These lines, according to Miss Moorman, "describe with a serene simplicity this creative sleep of the senses when the 'soul' and the imagination are most alive."²⁴ Another of the poems describes the same experience. It seems a sort of Nature trance. With eyes fixed on the descending moon he approached Lucy's cottage--

²²John Jones, The Egotistical Sublime (London, 1954), p. 70.

²³Works, II, 216.

²⁴Moorman, William Wordsworth, p. 426.

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,
Kind Nature's gentlest boon!²⁵

This trance brings up the question of the kind of love expressed in these poems. Wordsworth's love for Lucy was a special type of love, very spiritual in nature and almost devoid of strong passion. One critic describes the love expressed in these poems as follows: "Wordsworth was a solitary in his love poetry. For that reason he is all the more precious, because we get from his what we get from no other poet. The Lucy poems owe some of their exquisiteness to their utter withdrawal from the poetry of Mating. And they have a lovely quietness, rare in love poetry. Opening on a note of trance-like ecstasy, they close on a note of trance-like peace."²⁶ It is a love of deep respect and devotion. "Purer love and deeper respect for women's loveliness can hardly be found in literature."²⁷ This does not mean that Wordsworth was incapable of strong passionate love, nor that he would hesitate to express such a love in poetry if he felt it. Of his relations with his wife, it is true, he has left no account, but he has left a very vivid account of his relations with Annette Vallon. It is included in the original of the Ninth Book of The Prelude and later published as a separate poem under

²⁵Works, II, 29.

²⁶Catherine MacDonald MacLean, Dorothy and William Wordsworth (Cambridge, 1927), p. 57.

²⁷Robertson, Wordsworthshire, p. 153.

the title of "Vaudracour and Julia." It is a vivid account of two lovers who could not marry because of parental opposition. The girl was found to be pregnant and was whisked away by her parents to a remote and secret place until the birth of the child. The greater part of the poem is devoted to telling of the lover's plight after his beloved is gone. He searches and seeks to find her, spends time in prison, and does everything humanly possible to be united with her again. Many of the details of the story are different from Wordsworth's relationship with Annette, but the story was inspired by his love for Annette, and portrays a love entirely different from the love portrayed in the "Lucy Poems." Speaking of "Vaudracour and Julia," Herbert Read says:

There speaks a true lover, and a man never loves twice in exactly this way. The full force of Wordsworth's adolescent emotions were expended upon Annette. And if there are some who would admit this, yet claim that such emotions are casual in their origin and that a greater love exists between man and woman which is spiritual, then I in my turn would claim that such spiritual love found expression not in Wordsworth's tribute to his wife, but in those mysterious but beautiful lyrics known as the Lucy poems--poems which give expression to some passion that is too strong to be merely visionary and too idealistic to be associated with mundane emotions.²⁸

Yet the love expressed in the "Lucy Poems" is so real that it can be used as a strong argument in support of the theory that Lucy was some definite girl. It is hard to see how Wordsworth could have had so deep a love for an idealization abstracted

²⁸Read, Wordsworth, p. 116-17.

from several girls.

In one of the poems Lucy is described as "fair as a star when only one / Is shining in the sky."²⁹ One critic, Mr. Harris, surmises that the star Wordsworth had in mind was Lucifer, which is often seen alone in the half darkened sky.³⁰ If this is so, the name may have some significance, for Lucy was certainly Wordsworth's "light bearer." She it was who gave new light to his mind and imagination, a new insight into the inner workings of Nature herself.

Lucy's death plays a prominent part in each of these four poems. In "Strange fits" the possibility of her death haunts Wordsworth, and her impending death seems to be foretold by Nature herself as the brilliant moon suddenly slips out of sight when Wordsworth reaches her cottage. MacLean notes that the poem "gives expression to the quite unreasonable mood of anxiety which absence from a loved one causes. The mood is conveyed through the contrast between the lover's anxiety and the apparent well-being of the loved one, and by the nature of the observation of a man or woman in great emotion, and by the symbolic tinge which this observation has. The fitting symbol is the moon--moon disappears, flare of alarm."³¹

²⁹Works, II, 30.

³⁰Harris, After-Glow Essays, p. 21.

³¹MacLean, Dorothy and William Wordsworth, p. 50.

"She dwelt" and "A slumber" express the poet's melancholy mood consequent upon the death of Lucy. "I travelled" seems to be a reflection upon the joys Wordsworth experienced when he was in England. During the lonely days in Germany his mind returned to Enland, and therefore, naturally, to the thought of his lost Lucy.

The matter-of-factness of Lucy's death as treated in these four poems is another argument that Lucy was a real girl who actually did die. The treatment seems too clear-cut and definite to be merely a symbolic death of some sort. The lack of other confirmations of this opinion, though, as well as the treatment of her death in "Three years" still leaves a merely figurative death a possibility.

Wordsworth's reaction to Lucy's death brings to light a defect or incompleteness in his philosophy of Man and Nature. From Nature's side it seems to make no difference whether Lucy lives or dies, but to Wordsworth there is a world of difference. He feels her death strongly, and expresses in these poems a poignant grief. Nature is cruel to him in taking away his Lucy, and for this cruelty he has no explanation. "Nature's work was in a sense effaced, when death, another great power not controllable by man, appeared on the scene, and Lucy was no more a creature of this world--all that was left was a memory

lingering round the scene where she had dwelt."³² Why should Nature be so cruel? Why should she destroy the work of her hands by death, sickness, and other forms of destruction? Why should man be allowed to destroy the work of Nature and to degrade his fellowman? Wordsworth had no solution for these contradictions which he found in the world around him. It seems these were questions which he did not consider, problems which he had to endure but for which he could offer no solution.

To summarize then, it has been shown in this chapter that the "Lucy Poems" are a concretization of the philosophy of Nature and man found in The Prelude. In The Prelude, Wordsworth explained that it is the office of Nature to mould the body and soul of man. That process is described in "Three years she grew." The most perfect man and the man who will live the fullest life is the man who will surrender himself completely to the guiding hand and teachings of Nature. Lucy is the perfect example of this docility. She led a life of close intimacy with Nature; she is the perfect example of Nature's child. In The Prelude Wordsworth vowed that he would write about the humble and simple folk he had known, because these alone lived a life close to Nature, these alone had been unspoiled. Certainly Lucy is the foremost of these simple folk and the closest to Nature. The question of whether Lucy is one definite girl or not is

³²Punch, Wordsworth, p. 74.

a problem that cannot be solved with certitude; there are good arguments on both sides. However the love expressed for Lucy by Wordsworth and the way he treats of her death would seem to swing the balance toward an affirmative answer. Certainly she had some reality, and certainly the thought and emotion expressed in these poems were inspired by real people. It is also certain that Lucy as an individual is not as important to Wordsworth as she is when considered a part of Nature's universe.

The effect of Lucy upon Wordsworth is also portrayed in these poems. Through her Wordsworth gained a deeper insight into Nature and into the meaning of the life of the universe. Because of Lucy he was able to see more clearly how man fits into his philosophy of Nature. The one spirit which animates the universe is extended to the mind and body of man. Man emanates from this vague being called Nature. In his life he is sustained and developed by Nature. In death he merely slips back into the universal life of Nature.

Association with Lucy brought out the best in Wordsworth, and his love for her was of a very different type from his love for Annette. It was not passionate; it was not anxious. Rather, it was a deep spiritual love which gave birth to peace and joy. Her death, whether it be taken as an actual fact or as a figurative death, was a bitter disappointment to him; and his sweetest memories are of Lucy turning her wheel beside an

English fire.

Such is the interpretation of these poems which this thesis proposes: they are closely related to The Prelude; they describe Nature's Masterpiece and Wordsworth's relations with her. Man is the most apt medium through which Nature can manifest herself; and among men a little girl, simple, innocent, and perfectly docile to the guiding hand of Mother Nature is the most perfect medium. As Nature brings Lucy to maturity, she produces a masterpiece. The contemplation of her brings man to a deeper insight into Nature herself. The whole idea is similar to the Catholic idea that each creature manifests God's goodness. The more perfection the creature possesses, the more it reflects God's own infinite perfection and goodness.

CHAPTER V

EVALUATION AND CORRELATION OF PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Now that an interpretation of the "Lucy Poems" has been presented, it is possible to turn once more to the previous interpretations offered to attempt an evaluation and correlation of them. If the poems are a description of Nature's masterpiece and Wordsworth's reactions to her, the various critiques can be evaluated on the basis of their contribution toward an understanding of the poems which is in harmony with Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature and man. Though the various interpretations offered seem at first glance contrary or contradictory, most of them are in reality merely different approaches to the poems. For example, many have limited their study to the identification of Lucy. The findings of such a search will not give the reader a complete understanding of the poems, but they will contribute background details which will help toward a fuller interpretation of the poems. Consequently such a search, though it is shallow and does not offer a complete answer, is a good beginning.

As was pointed out at the end of the second chapter, there are four questions which can be asked about the "Lucy Poems." These constitute the different approaches to the poems. The first of these questions is: Who was Lucy? No one has ever

been able to come up with a definitive answer to this question. Wordsworth left behind no clue to her identity and his friends and relatives never mentioned such a person in their writings about Wordsworth. Consequently, many have doubted that the question can be asked. They would answer that she is not one girl, but a composite of many. This seems highly improbable in view of Wordsworth's love for her, her death, and the descriptive details given about her home and its surroundings.

The critics who claim that Lucy is a definite girl are careful not to attempt to give a positive identification of her. De Quincey merely stated that he "thought" Wordsworth had been disappointed in love in his youth.¹ Legouis surmises that one can "fancy" the Hawkshead pupil in love with some young girl.² Of all the identifications offered, the one by Mr. Harris is the most definite, most reliable, and the most helpful toward a real understanding of the poems. His careful study of the biographical details of the problem and his thorough visitation of the scene of Wordsworth's vacations have resulted in some very convincing conclusions. His descriptions of the valley near Aron Mawddwy, of the cottage, and the surrounding area give the reader a much clearer picture of the setting in which Wordsworth probably met Lucy. Even if there was no Lucy living in that

¹Bateson, Wordsworth, p. 152.

²Legouis, William Wordsworth, p. 62.

valley, one can see how she could be conceived by Wordsworth as he contemplated the beauties of that valley. Here was a haven of Nature, and here would be the ideal place for Nature to mould her masterpiece. Here Lucy would be separated from the distracting hustle and bustle of city life. Here she could learn from Nature by daily, close association with Nature's mountains, streams, forests, and wild life.

Another possible answer to the question about the identity of Lucy, is to identify her with Wordsworth's sister Dorothy. To evaluate this opinion it is necessary to note first the place Dorothy played in her brother's life. In 1778 when Wordsworth was only eight years old his mother passed away. From that time forward the family was broken up. Dorothy was sent to Halifax to live with a cousin of her mother, a Miss Elizabeth Threlkeld. The following year William went to Hawkshead to begin his preparatory schooling. For nine years Dorothy did not see William or her other brothers. Finally during the vacation of 1787 Dorothy returned to Penrith, the home of her grandparents, for the summer, and there was reunited with her brothers. William arrived a few days before the others and hence had a few days alone with Dorothy. These few days were the beginning of a close bond of affection that lasted for the rest of their lives. It came at a time of emotional crisis for both Dorothy and William. Dorothy had been unhappy since she left her brothers, and the treatment of the Wordsworth children at the home of their

grandparents and uncle was anything but cordial. Servants treated the children as intruders and their uncle did nothing for them without letting them know that their presence was an imposition upon him. Hence William was welcomed by Dorothy as the first person in years who understood and loved her. "The 'strange and wayward wight' who came into her life that day, however unwelcome he was to some members of the household, found a place prepared for him in his sister's heart at least, and she soon found that when William sat beside her talking, even a letter to her dear friend Jane had to be postponed, while every moment that could be stolen from work under her grandmother's eye was spent with him."³ Their uncle, Uncle Kit, took a special dislike to William, and if it had not been for the happy reunion with his sister the days spent in that household would have been days of torture. In Dorothy's company he found happiness and joy. "The rediscovery of Dorothy after nine years 'separation desolate' was like a 'gift then first bestowed.' Her companionship proved 'a joy above all joys,' 'another morn risen on mid-noon,' the crowning happiness of a happy boyhood--for William was really intensely happy in spite of Uncle Kit."⁴

The close ties formed that summer between Dorothy and William remained firm despite another period of separation. In

³Moorman, William Wordsworth, p. 73.

⁴Ibid.

1788 William matriculated at Cambridge and thereafter saw little of Dorothy until they came together to live in 1794. The reunion with William in that year and their decision to live together was the fulfillment of Dorothy's dreams. Dorothy's presence, in turn, was precisely what William needed to recover from the spiritual confusion and desolation into which he had fallen after the disillusionment of the French Revolution and the enforced separation from Annette which constantly preyed on his conscience. "The part played by Dorothy at the time of Wordsworth's moral crisis was a simple one. By giving him her love and sympathy and daily care and presence, she destroyed the terrible blankness that descends on us when we are suddenly parted from someone we have loved habitually. She filled this blank, and not mutely or passively, but as an active consoling and inspiring agent."⁵ As a result of this association Wordsworth always felt toward his sister a deep love and gratitude. She was his salvation during his moral crisis, and it was her presence that made it possible for him to regain the memories of earlier years and write the greatest poetry of his career. On Dorothy's part this association resulted in the same deep love and affection, but it was tinged with an anxiety and possessiveness which was the result of her neurotic temperament. This is not to suggest that there was anything sexual or sinister in Dorothy's

⁵Read, Wordsworth, p. 93.

affection for her brother: "The abnormality lay in her neurotic sensibility, and in the absence of any normal outlet for her feelings. This intensified her affection for her brother, wrought it into positive and protective instincts not often found in the relationship. There was apparently no jealousy in her attitude toward Annette, nor afterwards toward Mary Hutchinson."⁶

A study of this close relationship between brother and sister has led some critics to conclude that it was the inspiration of the "Lucy Poems." MacLean surmises, at the end of her treatment of the poems, that "these poems are all based on the moods, emotions and states of feeling which were part of the poet's life with his sister, and which would not have been part of his life with any other woman."⁷ It is easy to see that the love which Wordsworth had for his sister closely parallels the type of love expressed in the "Lucy Poems," but the identification of Lucy as Dorothy presents two difficulties. First, and most important of all, Dorothy did not die young. It would seem that the clear-cut description of Lucy's death and the poet's poignant grief at her passing must have some foundation in fact. If Lucy is Dorothy it has no such foundation. At the time these poems were written Dorothy was very much alive and the joy of William's association with her was at its height.

⁶Ibid., p. 92.

⁷MacLean, William Wordsworth, p. 56.

Secondly, the three facts taken as supporting this opinion are not convincing. Coleridge's guess that "A slumber did my spirit seal" was inspired by a gloomy mood when Wordsworth "fancied the moment in which his sister might die" may be nothing more than a bad guess. Certainly it cannot be stretched to cover the poems where the death of Lucy is treated as a cold fact.

Secondly, the fact that Wordsworth concealed his relatives under pseudonyms and that he actually did refer to Dorothy as Lucy in "The Glow-Worm" and "Nutting" does not prove that Lucy is always Dorothy. Lucy was a favorite name with Wordsworth and sometimes he used it when he was clearly not referring to his sister, as in the poem on "Lucy Gray." Furthermore when he does refer to Dorothy as Lucy it is easy to recognize the fact from context. Lastly, it is very difficult to see how the fact that Dorothy classified "Strange fits of passion" as a favorite of hers leads to the conclusion that all the poems are about her, because in the other poems Lucy's death is not feared but lamented as an actual fact.

Mr. Bateson has attempted to overcome this unsurmountable difficulty of Lucy's death by explaining it away as a psychological escape from the guilt feelings consequent upon the beginning of an incestuous relationship. His interpretation of the poems has one great advantage, namely, that it proposes an answer to all the problems which must be faced in explaining the poems, and it gives a consistent interpretation of all five poems.

However, it too is divorced from any consideration of Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature, and in addition to this it seems to make Wordsworth either a very morbid or a perverted character.

Bateson anticipates this last objection and attempts to answer it by citing a quotation from a letter of Wordsworth's in which he denounces the clergy's vow of celibacy. Wordsworth says, "If we would truly spiritualise men, we must take care that we do not begin by unhumanising them, which is the process in respect to all those who are now brought up with a view of the making of that unnatural vow."⁸ This quotation, Bateson claims, proves that Wordsworth was not morbid. Hence, Bateson concludes, his interpretation of the "Lucy Poems" cannot be taken in a way which would make Wordsworth a morbid character. However, it seems that Bateson is arguing from the wrong side. If the quotation proves that Wordsworth was not morbid, then it follows that an interpretation of his poetry which would make him such cannot be accepted. It does not follow that one can accept Bateson's interpretation and reject the logical conclusions of it.

An interpretation such as Bateson's seems to underestimate Wordsworth's work. The bulk of his poetry expresses a Nature philosophy; and these poems, too, though they are not philoso-

⁸From a letter of Wordsworth's to W. F. Hook, Feb. 5, 1840, quoted in Bateson, Wordsworth, p. 154.

phical in the way The Prelude is, do present in concrete reality at least an aspect of Wordsworth's philosophy. More than this, they portray a human person and human love in the light of Wordsworth's Nature philosophy. As was already seen they "give expression of a greater love between man and woman, a love which is spiritual; a passion that is too strong to be merely visionary and too idealistic to be associated with mundane emotions."⁹ The love Bateson describes is far inferior to such an idealistic conception.

Does Dorothy then have any part in the "Lucy Poems"? Certainly she has the same part in these poems that she had in all of her brother's poetry written at this time. Without her love, care, and sympathy they would never have been written. Furthermore, it is quite possible that she was partly an inspiration for these poems, and that the love which Wordsworth felt for her was the same kind of love he expressed in the "Lucy Poems." However, in view of the death of Lucy which must have had some reality, it is impossible to positively identify Lucy as Dorothy.

In general, then, it is impossible to identify Lucy. However, the results of the various attempts to identify her can help toward a real understanding of the poems, if the study is carried on further, and if the poems are studied in conjunction

⁹Read, Wordsworth, p. 117.

with Wordsworth's other poetry, notably, The Prelude. In itself even the study of Wordsworth's relations with his sister is immensely valuable, because it gives the reader an understanding of and a concrete example of the spiritual love described in the "Lucy Poems." However, if the reader stops his study of the "Lucy Poems" with an investigation of her identity, he will have a very shallow understanding of the poems, and probably a very warped idea of Wordsworth as a poet.

The answer to the second question--What is Lucy?--has often been expressed in terms of the ideal English maiden. This answer comes closer to a real understanding of the poems. Certainly Lucy is Wordsworth's conception of the ideal English maiden; but she is more, she is the exemplar of all maidens in all times. This is the interpretation that emerges if the poems are studied in the light of Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature and man. Professor Garrod followed this method in his short article on Lucy contained in his Wordsworth, Lectures and Essays; and this is the type of study which this thesis has developed. It can now serve to unite the various approaches to the poems into a whole, although, as is obvious, some of the various interpretations within the four approaches have to be rejected.

The core of the problem is to find an answer to the last two questions proposed in Chapter Two, namely: What was Wordsworth trying to express through Lucy? and, What is the relationship of these poems to Wordsworth's other poetry? The poems,

it was concluded in the last chapter, are a concretization of the philosophy of Nature and man expressed in The Prelude. Lucy is Nature's masterpiece and through these poems Wordsworth describes Nature's work in producing this masterpiece and his own reactions to the finished product. The other three approaches to the poems will fit within the framework of this meaning and help to fill out the concrete details. Mr. Harris' approach to the poems through a study of the valley of ~~C~~ewyd gives a vivid picture of the scene and surroundings which may well have inspired these poems, and where Wordsworth probably met Lucy, if she was a definite girl. The study of Wordsworth's relationship with his sister brings to light a beautiful spiritual love, which is much more lasting and deeper than a strong passionate love. It is a love of gratitude and friendship rather than one of desire. Once this relationship has been understood, one is able to understand more fully Wordsworth's love for Lucy, which was the same type of love. The interpretation which would see in Lucy the ideal English maiden takes on a new and richer meaning once the poems have been studied in the light of The Prelude. Lucy is indeed the ideal child of Nature. Thus all four approaches to the poems present valid questions and answers that will give the reader a deeper understanding of Wordsworth and his poetry.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to review the various interpretations of Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems," to work out a new interpretation of the poems in close conjunction with The Prelude, and finally, to evaluate the various interpretations in the light of the one proposed in the thesis and correlate them into a unit.

In the second chapter it was shown that there are four interpretations given to the poems: the literal interpretation, the Dorothy interpretation, the ideal-maiden interpretation, and the Nature-Spirit interpretation. A review of these interpretations showed that there are four approaches to the poems. One can attempt to identify Lucy. One can attempt to discover what Lucy signified to Wordsworth. One can study what Wordsworth was trying to express to his readers through her. One can study these poems in conjunction with Wordsworth's other poetry and then interpret the "Lucy Poems" in the light of the philosophy expressed in the other poetry. The last approach is the one proposed in this thesis.

The Prelude, it was seen, expresses a pantheistic Nature philosophy. For Wordsworth Nature is more than just inert matter; everything lives. The whole universe is permeated and vivified by one spirit which can be called Nature, Nature's function in the universe is to form, mould, and vivify. Her functions in regard to man are the same. She moulds his body, develops his mind and his emotions, and serves as his moral and intellectual teacher. The man who will live the fullest, most satisfying life, is the man who will let himself go, be docile to the guidance of Nature, and willing to learn from contemplation of the objects of Nature. Such docility and natural perfection, Wordsworth felt, could be found only among the simple folk who live in rustic areas to which the sophistications and conventions of society have not penetrated. Consequently, it was these men and women whom Wordsworth chose to study and to portray in his poetry. Contemplation of them gave him his deepest insights into Nature and the meaning of life; and they served as the best media through which Wordsworth could communicate his philosophy and his experiences to others.

The "Lucy Poems" are a concretization of the philosophy of Nature and man expressed in The Prelude, and Lucy is the perfect example of Nature's child. She lived close to Nature; and Nature was her teacher, guide, and constant companion. Through Lucy, Wordsworth gained a deeper insight into the meaning of the

life of the universe, and through her he expressed to his readers the offices of Nature toward man. The one spirit which animates the world is extended to the mind and body of Lucy. She seems to emanate from this vague world of Nature, to be sustained in life by Nature, and in death she becomes once again an indistinguishable part of Nature.

Association with Lucy brought out the best in Wordsworth and his love for her was of a very different type from his love for Annette. It was a deep spiritual love. Lucy's death, whether it be taken as an actual fact or as a figurative death, was a bitter disappointment to Wordsworth. At the time he wrote his poems his sweetest memories were of Lucy turning her wheel beside an English fire, of Nature's masterpiece and his love for her.

Whether Lucy was a definite girl or whether the figure in the poems was inspired by several such girls, is a question that cannot be definitely answered. The same must be said about the question of Lucy's death. It is impossible to decide with certitude whether it is a real or a figurative death. However, the evidence presented in this thesis, notably the matter-of-fact treatment of her death, Wordsworth's love for her, and his grief over her death, swing the balance in favor of an affirmative answer to both questions. The poems were probably inspired by one definite girl, and her death was probably an actual fact.

Since neither Wordsworth nor his associates have left a definite clue to Lucy's identity, a positive identification of her is impossible; but an attempt to identify her will give the reader good background material for understanding the poems.

Lucy certainly was not inspired by Dorothy alone. She may have been partial inspiration for these poems, and the love expressed in the poems is similar to the love Wordsworth had for his sister. However, Dorothy did not die, and the death of Lucy is too real to be a merely figurative death. Furthermore the attempt to explain her death away as a psychological necessity is at best improbable and a degradation of Wordsworth's character.

Lucy was certainly Wordsworth's expression of the ideal English maiden. In the light of the interpretation presented in this thesis she is more; she is the ideal child of all times. If any young girl is docile and responsive to the guidance of Nature, she will become another Lucy; she will become another of Nature's masterpieces.

The research and conclusions of this thesis offer a two-fold help to the reader of Wordsworth's poetry. Obviously, the thesis will assist the reader to understand more fully the five short "Lucy Poems." The collection of the various interpretations shows the reader what critics and scholars have thought about these poems over the years, and points out the relation of the

interpretations to each other. The consideration of Wordsworth's philosophy as presented in the 1805 version of The Prelude, will enable the reader to see what Wordsworth was trying to express to his readers through Lucy.

Secondly, it is hoped that this thesis will give the reader a deeper insight into Wordsworth himself and the whole of his poetry. It has been said that the poetry of the Romantics is spilt religion. If this is understood in the right way, it is at least partially correct. Wordsworth was a man who possessed a deep poetic insight into Nature, and a rare creative ability to express his experiences in verse. He was seeking to understand the meaning of life, and of the world around him. He lived in an age, however, when it had become passé to believe in a revealed religion; and even those who still professed a religion certainly did not have a vital faith which put meaning into their lives. It was a mere formality. As a result, he could not obtain the ultimate answers he sought. If this is kept in mind his rapturous descriptions of Nature, of scenes he saw, and of the simple folk he knew, take on a new meaning. He had a much deeper insight into the beauty of these creatures than most men do, but he lacked the Faith which would put meaning into his world and lead him from an understanding of Nature to an understanding of the Creator of nature. His poetry, consequently, is spilt religion in the sense that the force of his emotional insight

into nature is spent on creatures; it spills over them instead of extending to their Creator. The result is an apparent sentimentality which makes Wordsworth's poetry repulsive to some people.

The "Lucy Poems" are another example of Wordsworth's deep insight, this time into a young girl instead of trees or rocks. However, they also exemplify Wordsworth's frustration. Before Lucy's death he was anxious, after her death he was filled with a deep grief. He was unable to grasp the meaning of her death, and consequently his grief becomes all the more poignant and pathetic.

It is hoped that the work of this thesis in pointing out the type of love Wordsworth had for Lucy, and the close relationship between these poems and the philosophy expressed in The Prelude, will enable the reader to appreciate Wordsworth's poetry more fully. The man who has a deep and living faith but lacks the poetic insight of Wordsworth, can pass through Wordsworth's appreciation of nature to its Creator. Wordsworth has seen and appreciated the beauties of nature far more than the average person can. If the average man would deepen his faith and his understanding of his Creator, he can use Wordsworth as a stepping stone. Furthermore, he will learn by contrast to appreciate more fully the gift of his Faith. In studying Wordsworth's poetry he will come in contact with a man who saw

far more in the world around him, but who was confused and frustrated because he could not fully understand the beauty he saw.

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APPENDIX

TEXT OF THE LUCY POEMS

I

Three years she grew in sun and shower,
Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown;
This Child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A lady of my own.

"Myself will' to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

"She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And her's shall be the breathing balm
And her's the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

"The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

"And vital feelings of delight
 Shall rear her form to stately height,
 Her virgin bosom swell;
 Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
 While she and I together live
 Here in this happy dell."

Thus Nature spake--the work was done--
 How soon my Lucy's race was run!
 She died, and left to me
 This heath, this calm, and quiet scene;
 And never more will be.

II

Strange fits of passion have I known:
 And I will dare to tell,
 But in the Lover's ear alone,
 What once to me befell.

When she I loved looked every day
 Fresh as a rose in June,
 I to her cottage bent my way,
 Beneath an evening-moon.

Upon the moon I fixed my eye,
 All over the wide lea;
 With quickening pace my horse drew nigh
 Those paths so dear to me.

And now we reached the orchard-plot:
 And as we climed the hill,
 The sinking moon to Lucy's cot
 Came near, and nearer still.

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,
 Kind Nature's gentlest boon!
 And all the while my eyes I kept
 On the descending moon.

My horse moved on; hoof after hoof
 He raised, and never stopped:
 When down behind the cottage roof,
 At once, the bright moon dropped.

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
 Into a Lover's head!
 "O mercy!" to myself I cried,
 "If Lucy should be dead!"

III

A Slumber did my spirit seal;
 I had no human fears:
 She seemed a thing that could not feel
 The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
 She neither hears nor sees;
 Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
 With rocks, and stones, and trees.

IV

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.

V

I travelled among unknown men,
 In lands beyond the sea;
 Nor, England! did I know till then
 What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream!
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And she I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed,
The bowers where Lucy played;
And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.¹

¹Works, II, 29-30, 214-216.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. John K. Locke, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

January 14, 1958
Date

J.P. Marion, S.J.
Signature of Adviser