Dorothy Wordsworth and the Writing of Resolve

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Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere journal is a document of a shared life at Dove Cottage. But it was begun as a response to, and as a way of coping with, absence. The first entry of the journal, for 14 May 1800, records that Wordsworth's[1] brothers William and John (the latter of whom was present at the cottage from January to September 1800 to help William and Dorothy set up their home) had set off on a trip to Yorkshire. Dorothy stayed behind and, mournful at parting with William especially, her walk back home was drawn out by the need to sit often to gather herself: 'I sate a long time upon a stone at the margin of the lake, & after a flood of tears my heart was easier'.[2] During another of these extended sittings, she made a profound decision:

> Sate down very often, tho' it was cold. I resolved to write a journal of the time till W & J return, & I set about keeping my resolve because I will not quarrel with myself, & because I shall give Wm Pleasure by it when he comes home again. (*GJ*, p. 1)

The journal that unfolds subsequently between 1800 and 1803 is the result of Wordsworth's 'resolve' to write it, and the two sittings that lend structure to this entry are expressive of two meanings that the word 'resolve' holds in play. First, there is the firm setting of intention that resolve or making resolutions signifies – an active determination and steadfastness of purpose. Second is the experience that has provoked this form of determined grit. 'Resolve' carries another, counter-sense of dissolution or softening ('to melt; to dissolve; to become liquid'). It is a term, now rare but in circulation up to the early twentieth century (according to the *OED*), that one would most

[1] 'Wordsworth' refers to Dorothy Wordsworth unless otherwise specified.

[2] Dorothy Wordsworth, 'The Grasmere Journal 1800–1803', in *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford 2002) p. 1; hereafter *GJ*. All references are to this edition and are given in the text.

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likely come across in relation to chemical processes and compounds, but that has a related emotional sense, wherein one might 'lapse into or be given over to a particular emotional state', especially grief and the onset of tears.[3] This other meaning lurks behind Wordsworth's conscious resolve to write, and indeed the entry as a whole charts a movement from one form of resolve to the other: the fixed determination to 'write a journal' can only come after a restorative 'flood of tears' has been released; the mind can only be steeled towards the task of writing once feeling has been given room and worked through (and the writing itself, if a crucial means of working oneself towards resolution, must also accommodate the vagaries of feeling and its psycho-physiological expressions). Wordsworth's attention to the details of her scene of resolve combines the psychological and the natural; the stone on which she sits, the lake's edge, and her own 'flood of tears' all form an emotional topography in sympathy with her larger project, as she lingers on a threshold between stony composure and more fluid feeling. The journal offers a means to explore, test, and reflect on her own mental, physical, and affective dissolutions, but the boundary between keeping oneself together and falling apart is a fine margin.

My point in drawing attention to the double work of 'resolve' in the above entry is to focus on the dedicated *intention* that continually guides, structures, and makes room for vicissitudes of feeling and action in the Grasmere journal. As something that necessarily softens and submits to the fluctuations of emotional and embodied experience as much as it attempts to gird the subject against them, resolve encompasses for Wordsworth a constant interplay between determination and forms of lapse. In its duplicity, resolve is therefore, as I hope to show in this essay, an important window onto how the journal form accommodates Wordsworth's lived philosophy of habit. I use 'lived philosophy' here because, whilst the Grasmere journal has long been admired and studied for the keen insights it gives into the rhythms and routines that shaped Dorothy and William's everyday life, it also considers and enacts the paradoxical nature of habit as a 'double law' – a perpetual tension between activity and passivity – as it is characterised in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophical enquiries. If Wordsworth was a creature of habit, her prose writings show that she was also interested deeply *in* habit, and her letters and Grasmere journal especially show a writer whose intense scrutiny of her own embodied experience and behaviour, and that of those close to her, gave her ample opportunity to reflect on what habit is, how it is formed, and how one can and has to live with one's own habits. The word 'resolve', expressive at once of dutiful, deliberate plans and of relinquishing oneself to mental, physical, and emotional lapses, captures Wordsworth's experiment with the

[3] *OED*, 'resolve', *v.*, senses 1–5.

journal form in the context of habitual domestic care, and this essay explores the concept of resolve as a frame through which to consider the complement of habitual self-management and mismanagement accomplished through the journal. It considers in particular the resistances to a medicalised regimen and routine that Wordsworth observes in the Grasmere journal, despite her immersion in the prevalent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture of health regimen, and asks finally what her embrace of the journal as a non-prescriptive form can reveal about her tolerance of the fluctuating nature of self-control in comparison to her brother, and her willingness to let writing follow the course of habit as much as attempt to change it.

Habit has long been recognised as a key, if multifaceted, concern in William Wordsworth's poetry and prose. James Chandler's *Wordsworth's Second Nature* (1984) establishes Burkean principles of 'custom' and habit as an indisputable influence on the poet's thought, especially his political sympathies and the place of poetry within them. Beyond this important study, habit has been traced as a foundation of his vision of ethical life (especially as an Aristotelian form of moral virtue), and more recently as a shaping principle in the devotional practices that his verse enacts and embodies.[4] Yet whilst William's work has been firmly established as a rich site for considering the nature of habit and its intellectual history, offering a varied scene of 'his complicated and intertwined feelings about habit as an aspect of being human' (as Seamus Perry has it)[5], much less has been said about Dorothy Wordsworth's writings as sustained engagements with the life and nature of habit.

Certainly, the Grasmere journal has been studied as a careful record of a shared life of routine and repetition, as well as for the insight it gives into both Dorothy's and William's writing habits – their process of composition and revision. It also frequently draws the attention of ecocritically minded scholars, for whom the journal is an important study in what it means to *in*-habit a place, in looking at and listening attentively to the nonhuman habitats that surround and intertwine with Dove Cottage.[6] There is, however, a certain seamless quality to readings of the habitual in Wordsworth's

[4] See respectively Adam Potkay, *Wordsworth's Ethics* (Baltimore 2012) pp. 4–5, 36–7, and Christopher Stokes, *Romantic Prayer: Reinventing the Poetics of Devotion* (Oxford 2021) pp. 128–55. Jessica Fay also offers a valuable study of habitual and rhythmic repetition as an index of William and Dorothy's High Anglican sympathies in 'Rhythm and Repetition at Dove Cottage', *Philological Quarterly*, 97/1 (2018) pp. 73–95.

[5] Seamus Perry, 'Wordsworth, Mill, and the Force of Habit', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 42/2 (2011) pp. 116–22: 121.

[6] See Kenneth Cervelli, *Dorothy Wordsworth's Ecology* (London 2007); Elizabeth Weybright, 'The Everyday Soundscape: Sound and Mixed Aesthetic Modes in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals', *European Romantic Review*, 28/3 (2017) pp. 325–32;

journal, as though she were not a writer for whom habit was as rich and complex a concept as it was for her brother. For Lucy Newlyn, Wordsworth's Grasmere journal is an exemplary model of Lockean 'habits of association' in both form and content:

> Only by understanding the hold that associationism has on her thinking can we come to appreciate the analogies that link her journal entries together. Dorothy does not spell these out because they are part of a habit of mind she takes for granted. Habit, familiar associations, and local attachments are fundamental to the way she uses figurative language as a means of reinforcing 'the curious links | With which the perishable hours of life | Are bound together'.[7]

If habit governs and shapes the Grasmere journal, it does so here already at the level of involuntary action and cognition that, as Locke would have it, is born of repetition. Indeed, the frequency with which Wordsworth repeats the same household tasks, walks the same routes, and observes the same flora and fauna presents the journal as a compelling case study in habits long acquired; it is a text which embodies the continual tread of the 'smooth path' – Locke's famous image for the process by which 'Custom settles habits of Thinking in the Understanding', and in which body and mind are always co-involved.[8] Yet just as close study of Locke's convoluted discussions of habit in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and writings on education reveals the anxieties that underlie these smooth, comfortable grooves of thought and action, so should one be cautious about reading the Grasmere journal purely as an index of settled, accepted habits that are 'taken for granted'. Instead, I would like in this essay to consider Wordsworth's approach to the journal as a means of observing the relationship, and the tussle, between will (one's conscious desires and actions) and tendency or inclination (one's predispositions or constitutional traits) that habit brings to light. I turn first to Wordsworth's commitment to household management as an early and ongoing site of reflection on this relationship.

'I am determined to act with resolution'

Although the move to Dove Cottage was a chance for Wordsworth and her brother to embrace the 'joint work', as Newlyn puts it, of settling together

Sarah Weiger, '"A love for things that have no feeling": Dorothy Wordsworth's Significant Others', *European Romantic Review*, 23/6 (2012) pp. 651–69.

[7] Lucy Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: 'All In Each Other'* (Oxford 2013) pp. 145–6.

[8] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford 1975) II.33.6 (p. 396).

in a home and a community, it is Dorothy who is cast invariably in the role of primary domestic caregiver.[9] Pamela Woof's description of her dedication to William during the years of the Grasmere journal as 'a mother's care' (*GJ*, p. xvii), for example, recalls the many extant readings of Wordsworth's self-effacement on behalf of her brother's literary pursuits. Yet taking care seriously as the key concern of the Grasmere journal need not echo such readings when it is acknowledged that reflecting on her domestic role and capabilities was a formative site of Wordsworth's thinking about the contours of her self-determination.

Take, for example, her letter to her friend Jane Marshall (formerly Jane Pollard) from September 1795, where Wordsworth discussed an emergent plan to relocate to Racedown in Dorset with William. This plan centred around her becoming responsible for the care of Basil Montagu, the young son of John Montagu, fourth earl of Sandwich:

> It will be a very great charge for me I am sensible, but it is of a nature well suited to my inclinations. You know I am active, not averse to household employments, and fond of children. I have laid my plans as distinctly as I can but many things must depend upon unforeseen circumstances, I am, however, determined to adhere with the strictest attention to certain rules. In the first place economy and an attention to the overlooking every thing myself will be absolutely necessary for this purpose, not much time is necessary if it is done with regularity. I shall also have a good deal of work, (needlework) to do – and I am determined to take the whole care of the children such as washing, dressing them &c upon myself [. . .] I confess when I think of the importance of my duties I am anxious and sometimes fearful, but resolved as I am to do all that my abilities will permit I hope I shall not fail [. . .] I expect to have some trouble with the children at first, but I am determined to act with resolution and steadiness – I hope I shall succeed[10]

Wordsworth's aspiring domestic resolve, where a household and the behaviours of those within it are, she hopes, to be formed by regular 'strictest attention to certain rules', is at once local to the task at hand and a window onto a larger struggle between will and 'inclinations' that she is frequently preoccupied by. Noting other instances of her use of the term 'inclination' shows it to encompass a state of one's nature that cannot be altered, but is,

[9] Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 5.

[10] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol. i: *The Early Years: 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt and Chester L. Shaver, 2nd, revised, edn. (Oxford 2012) pp. 148–50; hereafter *EY*. References to Wordsworth's letters are to this edition and are given in the text.

rather, submitted to. Referring to William's failed studies at Cambridge, for example, she ventures that 'not combatting his inclinations, he gave way to his natural dislike of studies so dry as many parts of the mathematics, consequently could not succeed at Cambridge' (*EY*, p. 52). Writing to Lady Beaumont in 1804, too, Wordsworth apologises playfully for her bad handwriting, explaining that 'it is natural to me to do everything as quick as I can, and at the same time I hope you will believe me that it is a proof of my affection for you [. . .] that I do not do violence to my natural inclinations' (*EY*, p. 522). Yet as much as inclinations might be inherent preferences or actions, and as much as Wordsworth might hope that not hiding them from others is a marker of authentic feeling and friendship, she is also alert to the effort that sits behind them. Her capacity for domestic care is framed initially as an innate disposition or inclination, yet its dependence on adherence to 'rules', attention employed deliberately, and determined setting of resolve also suggests that these inclinations cannot flourish without a conscious, diligent form of will.

It has been well established that domesticity was a crucial site of self-fashioning for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women.[11] Wordsworth showing her working in this way situates her, as Patricia Comitini argues, within a tradition of female writers who reveal ostensibly 'natural' middle-class feminine virtues and labour – sympathy, charity, keeping and managing a household – as carefully constructed.[12] Yet beyond being a sphere for the performance of female virtue, domesticity is, for Wordsworth, also a space for empirical reflection on the formation (and failure) of habit. One only has to look at Wordsworth's keen attention to the domestic capabilities of others to see that her dedication to household management also fostered an interest in the relative malleability of human nature. Writing to Jane Marshall about their new 'manner of life' at Grasmere in September 1800, for example, leads her to discuss the success of their servant, Molly Fisher, 'an old woman 60 years of age whom we took partly out of charity and partly for convenience' (*EY*, pp. 295–6). Although Wordsworth relays

[11] See, for example, Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago 1985); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London 1987); Nancy Armstrong, 'The Rise of the Domestic Woman', in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford 1987) pp. 59–95; Michael McKeon, 'Outside and Inside Work', in *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore 2005) pp. 162–211; Jennie Batchelor, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830* (Manchester 2010).

[12] Patricia Comitini, '"More Than Half A Poet": Vocational Philanthropy in Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere Journals', *European Romantic Review*, 14/3 (2003) pp. 307–22.

feeling pleased eventually at how well things have turned out (and her letters and journal express much affection and friendship towards Molly), she also describes a bumpy start to managing her household, stating that her housekeeper was 'very difficult to teach so that I once almost despaired of her, but the goodness of her dispositions and the great convenience we knew we should find if my perseverance was at last successful induced me to go on' (*EY*, p. 296). Compare this to Wordsworth's confession to Mary Hutchinson in 1801 of her doubts about Sara Coleridge being the best match for their friend. She frames her concerns as a matter of irreconcilable temperaments ('Her radical fault is want of sensibility and what can such a woman be to Coleridge?'), but anxieties about Sara's domestic caretaking are also integral to her judgement: Wordsworth claims that Sara is 'indeed a bad nurse for C.', and in a humorous yet scathing comment on her apparent lack of focus and efficiency declares that 'She is to be sure a sad fiddle faddler. From about ½ past 10 on Sunday morning till two she did nothing but wash and dress her 2 children and herself, and was just ready for dinner' (*EY*, p. 330–1). Newlyn reminds us that the 'painful dissolution of Coleridge's marriage' is one of the 'domestic subplots [. . .] involving disruptions to the steady habits of home life' in the Grasmere journal,[13] yet Wordsworth's insistence on 'perseverance' as the engine of smooth domestic operations also suggests that such habits are only as steady as the work that goes into forging them, and therefore already vulnerable to failure.

Such sensitivity to the fallibility of domestic care and routine is entangled with the very resolve that Wordsworth pledges in her letter to Marshall about her ambitions at Racedown. Whilst her confident 'perseverance' with training Molly Fisher at Dove Cottage and wish to instil her own firm rules performs a certain confidence in a Lockean model of habitual knowledge and action forged through 'practice' until it becomes settled, her writing also betrays the presence of insecurities. Committing her resolutions to paper was a way for Wordsworth to write herself into the position of capable caregiver in her letter to Marshall, yet in a way that also acknowledges worries about not being up to the task; she reveals a shaky confidence in how trustworthy or embedded her own 'inclinations' are, as well as in the applied resolve she claims to possess. Writing offers a space for Wordsworth not only to work through 'inclination' as something potentially fashioned rather than natural but also to hold her fears and possible failures in play instead of assuaging them completely, caught as she is between the need to lay plans 'distinctly' and a resignation to the notion that 'many things must depend upon unforeseen circumstances'.

[13] Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 143.

It should perhaps not be surprising that Wordsworth qualifies resolve with trepidation, given her frequent tendency to scupper her own plans. Whilst her acknowledgement of the conscious effort that goes into ensuring a household runs smoothly reveals an interest in the benefit and necessity of behaviours that can be acquired and mastered over time, some of her most forceful observations on the habitual are provoked by what she sees as irrevocable aspects of her own nature, especially in relation to the priority that writing is given amongst her other domestic tasks and daily activities. She refers frequently to her 'procrastinating' when apologising to correspondents about the lateness of own letters, for example. A letter to Jane Marshall from 1800 expresses her 'remorse for having neglected you so long', before confessing 'you know that I have always been an irregular correspondent, perpetually warring against habits of procrastination, and still submitting to them' (*EY*, p. 295). Elsewhere she describes her 'procrastinating temper' and 'procrastinating disposition' (*EY*, pp. 509, 519), both terms that cast Wordsworth's tendency to put things off as an irreducible part of her nature or constitution. Her 'habits of procrastination' are figured as deeply embedded and irresistible, so much so that she expresses elsewhere a wish for a form of sociability founded on people accepting each other in their irregular or undesirable habits rather than chastising each other for their failings and endeavouring to change. Writing to Marshall in 1797, for example, Wordsworth's reassuring response to her friend's late reply is offered as a way to let them both off the hook: 'We either have or ought to have a peculiar indulgence towards those faults which we ourselves are in the habit of committing' (*EY*, p. 180).

As a writer possessed of a keen sense of self-determination combined with a sharp interest in her own failings and limitations, Wordsworth captures the double nature of habit itself: her journals locate the point where will cannot overcome behaviour perceived as constitutionally embedded. Clare Carlisle characterises the 'century of discourse on habit' stretching from Joseph Butler's *The Analogy of Religion* (1736) to Felix Ravaisson's *Of Habit* (1838) as a developing articulation of 'habit's *pharmakon*-like duplicity'.[14] By this, she refers to the constant interplay between conscious activity and involuntary passivity that habit entails, and its consequent status as an at once highly beneficial and problematic aspect of human nature: 'Because actions are strengthened by repetition, habit increases the efficiency and accuracy of our movements – but this same strengthening can be a problem when we want to change habits that have become deeply entrenched'.[15] What Ravaisson eventually refers to as the 'double law' of habit – the recognition that if the habitual is unconscious and involuntary,

[14] Claire Carlisle, *On Habit* (London 2014) p. 30.
[15] Ibid., p. 31.

it also involves, to use William Wordsworth's term, the co-presence[16] of will or determination – is anticipated, as Carlisle navigates deftly, by ongoing debates in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy and religious thought about the moral purpose and psycho-physiological operation of habit (especially the writings of Butler, David Hume, and Xavier Bichat).[17] Yet beyond these intellectual arenas, I wish to suggest that Dorothy Wordsworth's writing reveals the value of everyday literary forms, such as the letter but especially the journal, to the understanding of how people lived with and reflected on habit's duplicity. She drew on this duplicity as an energy that shapes writing itself, and that writing can reconcile the subject to. It is, as I will explore in the following section, Wordsworth's endurance of the vagaries of bodily experience in the Grasmere journal that forges her especial appreciation of habit's double nature.

'Taking scrupulous care of myself'

Wordsworth's confessions about her irregular letter-writing habits provoke attention to how writing, for her, demonstrated a perpetual 'warring' between conscious intention and wayward disposition. This struggle is sustained in her journal-writing, too. It could be tempting to read the journal as a form that might regulate one's habits of writing and attention as it encourages a daily practice of observation, yet, as Anne K. Mellor has argued, the journal and the diary are also forms which accommodate the coincidental contours of selfhood and the aesthetics of 'happenstance'.[18] If Wordsworth's first entry in the Grasmere journal strikes a similarity in tone and terms between her determined approach to household management and to her plan to start keeping a journal, it also sets in motion a tension between intention and outcome. Her statement that 'I resolved to write a journal [. . .] and I set about keeping my resolve', in its flickering between the past and continuous present tense, is sensitive not only to journal-keeping as an ongoing practice, but to the journal as involved with the continuous work needed to keep oneself in check. That this 'keeping' is an action one might 'set about' instead of achieve fully is telling of Wordsworth's sense of journal-writing as something that, like domestic care, might not always go to plan. Her entry in the Grasmere journal for 14 September 1800, for example, begins with her impressionistic blend of domestic routine, close bodily attention, and natural

[16] 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford 1974) i. 146.

[17] Carlisle's key sources here are Joseph Butler's *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), and Xavier Bichat's *Physiological Researches on Life and Death* (1799).

[18] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London 1993) p. 159.

observation: 'Made bread – a sore thumb from a cut – a lovely day – read Boswell in the house in the morning & after dinner under the bright yellow leaves of the orchard' (*GJ*, p. 24). However, there then follows a break in Wordsworth's recollection and a shift in register as she writes from a different point in time:

> Here I have long neglected my Journal. John came home in the evening after Jones left us. Jones returned again on the Friday the 19th September – Jones stayed with us till Friday, 26th September. Coleridge came on Tuesday 23rd & went home with Jones. Charles Lloyd called on Tuesday 23rd, & on Sunday 27th we drank tea & supped with him, & on that day heard of the Abergavennys arrival. While Jones was with us we had much rainy weather. (*GJ*, p. 22)

The passage continues to gather rushed details of events that have occurred between 14 September and 1 October, when the journal then resumes a more regular daily form. There are other moments in the journal that seem to betray similar moments of making up for lost time; a rush of entries between 26 and 30 October 1801, for example, rattles off swiftly for each date 'They went to Buttermere', 'drank tea at Mr Simpsons', 'The Clarksons came', 'Rain all day', 'Rain all day', as though Wordsworth is either dutifully filling the requirement to write something for each day without her usual enthusiasm and precision, or having to recall basic details to account for another lapse in her writing (*GJ*, p. 36).

It has been noted that Wordsworth would often write up sections of her journal in retrospect, and that this was not an unusual practice within the traditions her writing draws upon. Mary Ellen Bellanca's study of Wordsworth's inheritance of the natural historian's diary, exemplified in Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789), for example, traces how 'As other naturalists have done, Dorothy Wordsworth often wrote up her journal in chunks – not daily, but several days' or weeks' worth of entries at a time'.[19] An awareness of the lived irregularity of journal-keeping in the long eighteenth century is helpful when developing a sense of what the journal as a form has to do with habit; that it might, for example, invite erratic engagement as much as it does repetitive daily practice. Wordsworth's sense of her own process of catching up with the days in writing as a form of 'neglect' is certainly alert to forces other than dedicated intention at work in journal-keeping; it is framed as a lapse she has to acknowledge and make up for even if it is also just a part of her compositional

[19] Mary Ellen Bellanca, *Daybooks of Discovery: Nature Diaries in Britain 1770–1870* (Charlottesville, Va. 2007) p. 133.

rhythm. Just as habit has a duplicity, then, so, I would like to suggest, does the purpose of the Grasmere journal, in that it functions as both an *intentional* and an *attentional* form, shaped at once by the active will to make plans and by the abrogation of Wordsworth's self-control.

Nowhere is the ongoing struggle between careful control and wayward lapse more apparent than in the Grasmere journal's observations of the mental and physical disorders and disruptions of Wordsworth and others, and in the approach she takes to caring for herself and those around her. She is a writer as immersed in habit, understood as one's bodily condition or constitution, as she is in the routines and experiences that might act upon that body. For Wordsworth especially, headaches, toothaches, bowel disturbances, and bouts of melancholy recur throughout the journal. Frequent episodes of illness and pain simultaneously structure and interrupt her day; they often occur after dinner, forcing her to retreat to bed until they pass. Take, for example, these entries between 26 July and 24 August 1800:

> *Saturday 25th* [*26th*].[20] Still hotter. I sate with W. in the orchard all morning & made my shoe. In the afternoon from excessive heat I was ill in the headach & toothache & went to bed – I was refreshed with washing myself after I got up. (*GJ*, p. 14)
> *Wednesday* [*30th*]. Gathered peas for Mrs Simpson – John & I walked up with them – very hot – Wm had intended going to Keswick. I was obliged to lie down after dinner from excessive heat & headach. The Evening excessively beautiful – a rich reflection of the moon, the moonlight clouds & the hills, & from the Rays gap a huge rainbow pillar. (*GJ*, p.15)
> *Sunday Morning 3rd*. I made pies & stuff'd the pike – baked a loaf. Headach after dinner – I lay down, a letter from Wm roused me, desiring us to go to Keswick. (*GJ* p. 16)
> *Saturday 22nd* [*23rd*]. [. . .] After dinner we walked to Ambleside – showery, went to see Mr Partridges house. Came home by Clappersgate. We had intended going by Rydale woods, but it was cold – I was not well, & tired, got tea immediately, & had a fire. (*GJ*, p. 18)
> *Sunday 23rd* [*24th*]. A fine cool pleasant breezy day walked in the wood in the morning. Mr Twining called. John walked up to Mr Simpsons in the evening. I staid at home & wrote to Mrs Rawson & my aunt Cookson – I was ill in the afternoon & lay down – got up restored by a sound sleep. (*GJ*, p. 18).

[20] Alternative dates in square brackets are cited directly from Pamela Woof's edition.

The writing in these passages seems at once to attest to the unexpected inconvenience of headaches and other maladies and to their strangely predictable regularity. These are retrospective orderings of experiences of pain and illness that, whilst they arrange the time and sequence of events neatly, also manage to capture aesthetically the disruption illness causes to Wordsworth's domestic routine. Her use of dashes especially both weaves the events of each day together into a consistent narrative *and* highlights moments of rupture where time has had to be taken out to lie down and recover; the writing inscribes a routine experience of habitual duplicity, in that she oscillates between intended activity and the passivity of succumbing to rest. To return to my unpacking of the word 'resolve' at the beginning of this essay, the word also carries medical inflections in circulation at the time Wordsworth was writing, referring to the relief or cure of a pathological process (such as the resolving of a fever or inflammation). These passages reveal this other form of resolve as integral to, and simultaneously undone by, the habitual task of journal-writing, as they enact a reparative resolution of each episode of illness at the same time as they unfold yet more in an iterative sequence. Each new day brings about the conditions for another headache, or toothache, or spell of ill health. The ongoing process of 'keeping' her resolve entails Wordsworth making room for her unruly constitutional habit as an irreducible part of her conscious habit of keeping a journal.

The somewhat passive observation of habitual bouts of illness throughout the Grasmere journal seems at odds with the prevailing medical culture that Wordsworth embraced. She was as attentive to the ailments of others as she was to her own, documenting symptoms suffered by William, his wife Mary, and Coleridge as well as the fleeting illnesses of many other acquaintances, visitors, and household staff. Her letters from around the time she was writing the Grasmere journal and living at Dove Cottage match the preoccupation with health and illness found in the journal itself, yet their quality of attention is different: they are often fixed on the idea of illness as something that has to be managed diligently by the sufferer and that can be relieved by 'regularity'. For example, Wordsworth wrote to her brothers Richard and John on Christmas Day 1802 that 'William and Mary are very well. I am quite recovered from my late illness and I hope to continue in good health by taking scrupulous care of myself' (*EY*, p. 380). Elsewhere she worries over Mary Hutchinson being 'so thin', imploring 'do not measure your exertions by your own self supposed ability, but put restrictions on yourself' (*EY*, p. 350), and expresses concerns about Coleridge, claiming 'I do believe that care and regularity would do much for him' (*EY*, p. 480). The vocabulary of management, restriction, 'scrupulous care' of the self, and regularity that dominates Wordsworth's practical

concern for her own health and that of others reveals her immersion in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century middle-class medical culture of regimen, a context that lends new significance to the Grasmere journal's negotiation of constitutional and writerly habits.

A model of preventative medicine, regimen formed a large part of the landscape of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century healthcare, where 'routine private maintenance' was encouraged to disseminate the responsibility for well-being beyond the 'curative function of the physician'.[21] Popular health manuals such as William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1774) appealed to the independent management of one's own health and to the principles of regimen (rooted in the holistic regulation and balance of the six 'non-naturals', namely air, diet, exercise, sleep, evacuations, and the emotions or passions)[22] as the essential bedrock of mental and physical well-being. The Wordsworths were, as Brittany Pladek has shown, typical middle-class subjects in their knowledge and practice of health regimen, with Dorothy especially referring to Buchan's domestic manual in her correspondence.[23] It was also through Coleridge, and his relationship to the radical medical and political culture in Bristol in the 1790s, that the Wordsworths had a connection to Thomas Beddoes, whose treatise *Hygeia* (1801–2) was published at the same time as Dorothy was writing her Grasmere journal. Described by George C. Grinnell as showcasing 'the importance of domestic observation for medical perception', [24] Beddoes and his work must have been appealing to the member of the Wordsworth family most invested in giving good domestic care, and Wordsworth's correspondence with Catherine Clarkson (wife of the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson) shows that she had access to Beddoes's medical advice. In 1804, for example, Wordsworth thanks Clarkson for seeking advice and a prescription from Beddoes on her behalf, declaring that she 'shall attend scrupulously to Dr Beddoes's advice respecting Diet, and take the medicine regularly' (*EY*, p. 461). Writing elsewhere in the wake of a bout of recent symptoms including 'sickness, violent head-ache, yellow and pale looks [. . .] with pain in the Bowels, thirst, and want of appetite', Wordsworth seeks to know how best to prepare herself for future episodes and to 'learn

[21] Ginnie Smith, 'Prescribing the Rules of Health: Self-Help and Advice in the Late Eighteenth Century', in Roy Porter (ed.), *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society* (Cambridge 1985) pp. 249–82.

[22] See ibid., p. 257.

[23] Brittany Pladek, 'Soothing Thoughts: William Wordsworth and the Poetry of Relief', in *The Poetics of Palliation: Romantic Literary Therapy, 1790–1850* (Liverpool 2019) pp. 96–128.

[24] George C. Grinnell, *The Age of Hypochondria: Interpreting Romantic Health and Illness* (Basingstoke 2010) p. 43.

from Dr Beddoes what is proper to be done when I am attacked again' (*EY*, pp. 444–5). Although Wordsworth is appealing to Beddoes's medical authority and knowledge in these letters, something of the spirit of self-management that he sought to instil in *Hygeia* is also present in her wish for advice to follow scrupulously at home.

Yet, as we have seen, Wordsworth's eagerness for prescription and advice does not translate simply onto the quality of attention to mental and physical complaints she takes up in the Grasmere journal. If health regimen is taken as another lively site of reflection on what is at stake in cultivating habits in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture, then it serves as an important context for how the journal, as a chronicle of domestic life and care, is also reconciled to the inevitable relinquishing of control that accompanies being an embodied subject. The opening essay of *Hygeia* laments that 'nothing beyond a casual thought [. . .] has been allotted to that which is doubtless the most important object in mortal life – HABITUAL WELL-BEING'.[25] Beddoes' use of 'habitual' here is alive to both its senses as the bodily 'habit' or constitution, and the regular, habitual attention to that constitution that regimen and preventative medicine aims to instil. Similarly, all of the essays across *Hygeia*'s three volumes are framed as a 'means of avoiding habitual sickliness', framing this advice as that which helps its readers not only to avoid bodily illness, but also to prevent such illness from becoming a routine part of daily life. A gap emerges here between domestic health regimen and the realities of corporeal life at Dove Cottage. Indeed, what is the journal if not a scrupulous record of 'habitual sickliness', in both senses of that phrase, rather than an account of its prevention? Anxieties about the unhealthiness of writing routines being forged at Dove Cottage constellate Wordsworth's thinking about habit as something at once cultivated and submitted to, and which – seeking to consider the singularity of Wordsworth's treatment of habit in relation to her brother's writings – the journal might better be able to tolerate and contain than more comparably bounded forms, such as the lyric poem.

'He resolved to do better'

Wordsworth's retrospective accounts are written so often after events of sickness, or pain, or exhaustion, as though her project is merely to notice these occurrences as they happen rather than to prevent them in the first place. Much of the energy of her writing is driven by the vagaries of bodily habit rather than an enforcement of regimented routine. And if good health regimen is based on the principles of regulation, then the

[25] Thomas Beddoes, *Hygeia: or Essays Moral and Medical on the Causes Affecting the Personal State of our Middling and Affluent Classes*, 3 vols. (Bristol 1801–2) i. 16.

Grasmere journal is more often than not a record of poor habits and routinised failure – an important qualification to the smoothness of habituation that others have registered in its pages. The Wordsworths frequently go to bed late and rise at inconsistent times of day, for example, as Adela Pinch notes in her foregrounding of the Grasmere journal's arrangement around 'the rhythms of a life in which somatic and emotional currents pull one up and down'.[26] But perhaps their biggest oversight in relation to the maintenance of habitual well-being is their constant overworking. Beddoes warns in the fourth essay in the first volume of *Hygeia* that well-being and successful study alike are founded on a principle of healthy variation: 'when the understanding is kept in constant but various exercise, and never overstrained or glutted by excess of the same study, progress will be much more rapid in this and every other line'.[27] Yet Wordsworth is regularly witness to, and complicit in, her brother's overstrained attention to and singular focus on poetic composition. Take, for example, this passage from an entry for 26 January 1802:

> William had tired himself with working – he resolved to do better. We received a letter from Mary by Fletcher with an account of C's arrival in London – I wrote to Mary before bed-time. We sate nicely together & talked by the fire till we were both tired, for Wm wrote out part of his poem & endeavoured to alter it, & so made himself ill. I copied out the rest for him. We went late to bed. (*GJ*, p. 58)

This passage is a striking example of how Wordsworth is caught between the corrective approach to bad habits that conscious regimen might instil and a resignation to the irregularity that imaginative labour and poetic production introduces to domestic rule. There is an indeterminacy to William's resolve especially that is highly suggestive in relation to the kind of fallible will I have been suggesting guides Dorothy's writerly and domestic intentions. If we read William's resolve to 'do better' as a determination to improve his poetic work, then the passage unfolds as a fairly straightforward account of the regrettable yet inevitable illness that follows an intense bout of concentration when he was already tired to begin with. However, the passage becomes coloured slightly differently if we read William's resolve as a will to get a better handle on his habits of overwork – an interpretative possibility given the ambiguity of Wordsworth's sentence. In this case, her entry tracks the failure of that resolve almost as soon as it is made – the very same day sees William continue to compose and 'alter' his

[26] Adela Pinch, 'Wordsworth in Bed', *La Questione Romantica*, 3/2 (2011) pp. 129–45: 130.

[27] Beddoes, *Hygeia*, i. 88.

poem, as though it were an involuntary compulsion he cannot resist, and Wordsworth's observational tone barely flickers at recording this lapse, smoothing it instead into the sequential run-down of the day. It is as though William and Dorothy suspect that the imaginative work of producing poetry can only occur in their failure to regulate their habits; consequently, Dorothy's care is not one that strives to instil preventative rules of regimen (although she is acutely aware of the consequences of not doing so), but instead forges adaptive routines that perpetually accommodate a lived experience of irregularity.

A pattern of composition and exhaustion recurs throughout the Grasmere journal, but especially around the process of William writing one of his most famous poetic meditations on the ostensible power of resolution to guard against unmanageable and painful feelings. 'The Leech-gatherer' (later published in 1807 as 'Resolution and Independence') occupies William 'incessantly' (*GJ*, p. 97) from the moment he starts composing it in May 1802, and Wordsworth tracks closely the effects his working habits have on her brother's health: 'feeling himself strong, he fell to work at the Leech gatherer – he wrote hard at it till dinner time, then he gave over tired to death'; 'William worked at the Leech gatherer almost incessantly from morning till tea-time [...] I was oppressed & sick at heart for he wearied himself to death'; 'William is still at work though it is past 10 o clock – he will be tired out I am sure' (*GJ*, pp. 97–8). The importance of Wordsworth's journal as the source material for 'Resolution and Independence' has been discussed at length, inspired as it was by her description of her encounter with a leech-gatherer in October 1800, who divulged how his physical pain and injury, as well as a scarcity of leeches, had interrupted his trade (*GJ*, pp. 23–4). Yet the poem's difficult journey to realisation, and the way in which its composition causes exhaustion and physical and emotional sickness for both William and Dorothy that continually scuppers the prescribed ideal of healthy working habits, resonates much more profoundly with the Grasmere journal's organisation around the wayward nature of resolution as a whole. The poem itself dramatises a tussle between intense feeling and determined will; indeed, the speaker's quest to bear his own emotional experience and the threat of 'dejection' that must ever accompany the presence of 'delight', and the instructive example of the 'Old Man' who has managed to weather his physically and emotionally 'hazardous and wearisome' life in order to forge 'so firm a mind' have much in common with the resolve that frames Wordsworth's journal from its very beginning.[28] Matthew Bevis observes that 'Resolution

[28] William Wordsworth, 'Resolution and Independence', in *Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford 1984) pp. 260–4, ll. 24–145.

and Independence' is less a poem about reparative closure or learning by powerful example than it is an enactment of 'the force and fragility of the resolution [. . .] One suspects, too, that the resolution will keep needing to be retaken. The conviction of the last couplet [. . .] seems liable to unravel at any moment'.[29]

If the poem's ending carries the suspicion of fallibility, as Bevis has it, expressed in the speaker's ostensibly confident pledge to fortify himself against his own fears ('"God," said I, "be my help and stay secure; | I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor"', ll. 146–7), this might well speak too, then, to the fragile convictions of its writer as William cannot help himself from succumbing to his apparently unhealthy tendency to overwork. Yet as the chronicler of these lapses in resolve, it is Dorothy who is, I think, able to shape a more capacious form that can reconcile the subject to their inevitability. In its daily accretions of experience and non-prescriptive acceptance of bodily and writerly disruptions, the Grasmere journal bears witness to the making and breaking of resolutions not only as habitual, but as integral to the duality of a habituated life. Indeed, comparisons of the encounter with the leech-gatherer in Wordsworth's journal and William's poetic rendering of this experience are telling of differing sensibilities. Robert A. Brinkley especially highlights how the firmness of the leech-gatherer's conviction in 'Resolution and Independence' is a revision of Wordsworth's recollection of meeting him in the Grasmere journal: 'Dorothy's old man is a beggar, too weak to pursue his former occupation [. . .] Wordsworth's Leech-gatherer continues to climb the fells in search of a reward he rarely finds'.[30] Turning the journal account, which recounts without sentimentality the leech-gatherer's acceptance of his physical limitations ('he had not strength for it', *GJ*, p. 24), into a lyric product therefore recruits it perhaps to a less wavering form of resolve than the journal is willing and able to accommodate. Brinkley's reading of the poem as a project of self-assurance on William's part, where '*The Leech-Gatherer*, after all, represents Wordsworth's ability to comfort himself [. . .] To "think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor" is an alternative for the poet to thinking about himself and the anxieties of writing'[31], is sustained by the backdrop of fret and failed resolve that the journal records. Indeed, Wordsworth seems less vexed by the so-called 'anxieties of writing' than William, not because her writerly projects are less important, but because she flourishes in a form that can

[29] Matthew Bevis, *Wordsworth's Fun* (Chicago 2019) p. 130.

[30] Robert A. Brinkley, 'The Leech-Gatherer Revisited', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 16/2 (1985) pp. 98–105: 101.

[31] Ibid., p. 101.

explore a looser model of autonomous subjectivity than the Romantic lyric poem, documenting in the journal's attentional mode the inevitable ebb and flow of her conscious and unconscious habits.

There is a pleasing symmetry to the Grasmere journal, in that one of its final entries echoes the first. Wordsworth's account of 11 January 1803 paints a peaceful image of domestic and creative activity in the wake of William's marriage to Mary Hutchinson:

> Since Tea Mary has been down stairs copying out Italian poems for Stuart – Wm has been working beside me, & here ends this imperfect summary. I will take a nice Calais Book & *will* for the future write regularly &, if I can legibly, so much for this my resolution on Tuesday night, January 11th 1803. (*GJ*, p. 137)

What makes this entry so compelling is not only its reiteration of the resolve that colours the beginning of the journal, but how this stands as another testament to Wordsworth's acknowledgement of its inherent duplicity. Fixing her resolution to a specific day and time has the dual effect of the optimism of a fresh start ('from now on, I *will* write more regularly') and the suspicion that her determination will not last the night. Such suspicions are confirmed when, only two entries later, the journal breaks off entirely on Monday, 17 January, and is not resumed. Geoffrey Hartman described William Wordsworth's 'greater lyrics' as poems of 'self-confrontation'.[32] Yet Dorothy Wordsworth's detailed observations of the mental, physical, and emotional fluctuations that make up life at Dove Cottage show that the journal and its domestic preoccupations can be a vital form of self-confrontation, too, as well as of self-surrender – a place where writing is free to both hold oneself to account and to register one's habitual failings in equal measure.

[32] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1781–1814* (New Haven 1964) p. 272.