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Meteorological Time in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Rydal Journal*

Amanda Ann Ricks Smith

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Meteorological Time in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Rydal Journal*

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This thesis deals with Dorothy Wordsworth's *Rydal Journal*, a journal written between 1824 and 1835, when Dorothy Wordsworth was between ages 53 and 64. The most interesting entries in the *Rydal Journal* include descriptions of William's political views, famous callers at Rydal Mount, church sermons Dorothy heard, books she was reading, and her relationships and correspondence with many friends and family members. In terms of structure, Dorothy's journal entries are generally quite similar over the eleven years of these volumes. Perhaps most strikingly, the vast majority begin with a record of the day's weather. Sometimes, she broadly outlines the entire day's weather (e.g., "Fine day—but still thundery" [11 July 1825]). Other times, she foregrounds the weather she woke up to or experienced in the morning (e.g., "Another fine morning—sun shines" [12 September 1826]). Regardless, throughout the entries, she intersperses events with the weather, as in this typical entry from 11 January 1827: "Very bright—Dora rides—Mrs. Arlow & 3 Norths call—I writ[in]g to Lady B. . . Lovely warm moonlight on snow—Long walk on Terrace." In this way, weather plays a central role in the *Rydal Journal*, for Dorothy employs weather as her primary measure of time.

In what follows, I will begin by offering a short history of timekeeping before and during the Wordsworths' lifetimes, focusing particularly on the degree to which tracking and standardizing minutes and hours was becoming commonplace in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From there, I will show how, in contrast to this trend toward mechanical timekeeping, Dorothy processed time primarily through natural and climatological cycles and events during the *Rydal Journal* years. Dorothy's apparent rejection of clock time seems to be related to her reliance on nature, for weather time was much more lyrical than mechanical time.

Keywords: Dorothy Wordsworth, *Rydal Journal*, Romantic time, Romantic weather

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Meteorological Time in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Rydal Journal*

In 1824, after years of rarely keeping a diary, Dorothy Wordsworth began a set of late-life volumes now collectively known as the *Rydal Journal*. In these fifteen notebooks, Dorothy narrated her life as an older, middle-class woman living with her famous brother, William, and his family. About halfway through these journals, in 1829, Dorothy began the mental and physical decline that continued for the rest of her life. While she kept documenting her days for six more years, she was largely debilitated thereafter. Finally, in 1855, she was, in Mary Wordsworth's words, "released after her gradual but *fitful* sinking" (352).

Even after three decades now of increased interest in Dorothy Wordsworth's writings, very few scholars have studied the still largely unpublished *Rydal Journal*. Two notable exceptions are Carl Ketcham, who in the 1980s completed a still unpublished partial transcription of the journal and published a related article in the *Wordsworth Circle*, and Pamela Woof, who has touched on the journal in several publications, including her recent essay on "Dorothy Wordsworth and Old Age." Still, the *Rydal Journal* remains overshadowed by Dorothy's much more famous *Grasmere Journal* of 1800-1803. This is undoubtedly in part owing to the relative lack of scholarly interest in William's and Dorothy's later years. Another likely reason, though, is that the *Rydal Journal* is quite illegible and difficult to interpret.¹ Dorothy's scribbled handwriting suggests that, in the early stages of dementia, she was writing less for posterity than for her own recollections, knowing that her memory was rapidly fading.

¹ Interestingly, Woof's transcriptions often differ from Ketcham's transcriptions, as the scrawled writing could be interpreted in various ways. For example, Ketcham transcribes one section of Dorothy's journal entry on 19 February 1834 as "Reading Quarterly" where Woof transcribes "Reading Quarles."

The most interesting entries in the *Rydal Journal* include descriptions of William's political views, famous callers at Rydal Mount, church sermons Dorothy heard, books she was reading, and her relationships and correspondence with many friends and family members. In terms of structure, Dorothy's journal entries are generally quite similar over the eleven years of these volumes. Perhaps most strikingly, the vast majority begin with a record of the day's weather. Sometimes, she broadly outlines the entire day's weather (e.g., "Fine day—but still thundery" [11 July 1825]). Other times, she foregrounds the weather she woke up to or experienced in the morning (e.g., "Another fine morning—sun shines" [12 September 1826]). Regardless, throughout the entries, she intersperses events with the weather, as in this typical entry from 11 January 1827: "Very bright—Dora rides—Mrs. Arlow & 3 Norths call—I writ[in]g to Lady B. . . Lovely warm moonlight on snow—Long walk on Terrace." In this way, weather plays a central role in the *Rydal Journal*, for Dorothy employed weather as her primary measure of time.

Dorothy's use of weather for measuring time is especially interesting considering newer scholarship on weather and time in Romantic-era cultures. In recent years, literature from the period on weather has generally been studied in terms of its relationship to modern climate change, its representation of cultural senses of Englishness, its relation to mediation and wartime, or its perspectives on individual and social relationships.² Alexandra Harris's *Weatherland*:

² Gidal surveys the varying opinions of Romantic poets in regards to climate change. Golinski discusses the Enlightenment era contributing to the "emerging consciousness of the British national climate" (6). Favret describes weather coming to be understood as a transnational rather than local system, which generated new thought habits. Wood analyzes the impact of the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora on world weather and the current effect of climate change on human affairs. Bate chronicles Romantic authors' connection with nature and people, arguing, for instance, that Keats sees a "direct correlation between the self's bond with the environment and the bonds between people who make up society" (440).

Writers and Artists Under English Skies is particularly useful to the essay at hand, as she traces how various English artists, from the Anglo-Saxon to the Victorian era, drew inspiration from weather. Of the Romantic era, Harris describes the notion of becoming moved by the weather: “the weather, this holy spirit, is not something to shut out. Nor, even, is it primarily to be looked at. It is to be felt; it is to be let into one’s body and one’s home” (231). Following the trend of inspired English artists that Harris notes, Dorothy was not only inspired by the weather but used her personal sense of the weather as an internalized time marker in her life. Building around this observation, this essay will trace how Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Rydal Journal* uses meteorological descriptions as a medium for processing her emotions about the events of her day, a metaphor for her experiences with aging, and a mnemonic device for specific days’ events. For Dorothy, weather time was much more expressive and lyrical than was sterile, objective clock time.

This connection between time and weather offers a counterbalance to most scholarship regarding time in the Romantic era, which has focused on the rise of modern science, the relationships between clock time, communications, transportation technologies, and literary forms, and the connections between time and political ideology.³ Rather than considering Romantic time in connection with large-scale systems and historical forces, I will align Romantic

³ Eichner views Romanticism as a “desperate rearguard action against the spirit and the implications of modern science” (8). Livesey discusses the problem with local identity in an era (between 1784 and 1847) where many major new roads were built connecting various localities. Tomalin has written extensively on themes relating to clock time: “Literature and Time,” explores clock time and narrative structure in the novels of Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne and the relationship between clock time and the appearance of poetical subgenres, “Pendulums and Prosody” discusses the changing perceptions of mechanism and organicism in the eighteenth century, characterizing the different theories of prosody; “The Most Perfect Instrument” details the various literary purposes of sundials during the Romantic period. Damkjaer argues that print culture profoundly influenced nineteenth-century conceptions of time, citing authors such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. Ledden looks at four authors (Tory Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, Helen Maria Williams, William Wordsworth, and John Keats) and their competing ideas about spatial, time, and political ideologies.

time and weather on the personal scale—a scale more in keeping with the enduring philosophical and literary convictions of the Wordsworth Circle. The personal turn comes not in ignorance of large historical trends but in reaction to them. In a moment when clock time was becoming increasingly dominant, Dorothy resisted it.

The personal connection between Romantic time and weather has been recently considered by scholars such as Elizabeth Weybright, whose 2017 article “The Everyday Soundscape: Sound and Mixed Aesthetic Modes in Dorothy Wordsworth’s Journals” considers and complicates Dorothy’s relationship to Romantic aesthetics. While Dorothy’s rendering of time is a secondary concern here, Weybright usefully notes how her journals use sound to “complicate dominant (visual) aesthetic categories of time, mixing aesthetic modes of the sublime and the beautiful, the strange and the ordinary, the arresting and the ambient” (328). This framing of sound, Weybright says, “both naturalizes the aesthetic and aestheticizes the everyday” (329). In the context of the essay at hand, we might replace Weybright’s “framing of sound” with “framing of chronology in terms of the weather” and garner the same conclusion. Certainly, framing Dorothy’s later journals in terms of the weather, as Weybright phrases it, “naturalizes the aesthetic and aestheticizes the everyday” (329).

By connecting Romantic time and weather discourse, we will more clearly see the connection between Dorothy’s everyday lived experience and her connection with nature. Carl Ketchum, perhaps thinking along these same lines, noted that Dorothy’s “awareness of the physical and psychological limitations imposed by the weather, with its violent shifts, its supposed close ties with matters of health, make it very much an actor in daily affairs, and always to be reckoned with” (4). This fleeting quotation, offered in passing in Ketchum’s publication about the *Rydal Journal*, pinpoints Dorothy’s implicit connection with the weather.

In what follows, I will expand on this insight, beginning with a short history of timekeeping before and during the Wordsworths' lifetimes, focusing particularly on the degree to which tracking and standardizing minutes and hours was becoming commonplace in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From there, I will show how, in contrast to this trend toward mechanical timekeeping, Dorothy processed time primarily through natural and climatological cycles and events during the *Rydal Journal* years. Dorothy's apparent rejection of clock time seems to be related to her reliance on nature, for weather time was much more lyrical than mechanical time.

History of Timekeeping: The Shift Toward Mechanical Timekeeping

When historians write about major shifts in the measurement of time during the nineteenth century, they almost invariably focus on the advent of "railway time" and the accompanying issues of railway punctuality, time standardization, and clock coordination.⁴ Because Dorothy's *Rydal Journal* slightly predates the railway, this essay will emphasize pre-railway time. Several scholars, most notably Stuart Sherman and Marjean D. Purinton, have written about time during the Enlightenment and the Romantic period, noting the changing consciousness of individuals in Britain. Sherman is a particularly important voice in these discussions, arguing as he does in *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (1997) that those living through the eighteenth century experienced fundamental shifts in how they processed time. Sherman notes the ascendant nationwide desire for marked time in the home and the textual practices that grew out of this desire, including daily

⁴ Schivelbusch, for instance, asserts that railroads deprived Britons of their local time. Dowson demonstrates the adjustment of local time to match London time. Bauman discusses how Britons were distrustful of the time standardization, as does Thompson, who argues that clocks were used for "cheatery and oppression." Garfield notes that many cities maintained clocks with two minute hands, one designating London time and the other designating local, older time.

installments in diaries, periodicals, daily newspapers, and diurnal essays. This shift in measuring time, according to Sherman, shows that the increasingly omnipresent “*Tick, Tick, Tick*” served as an instrument “not only of keeping time but of making and recognizing selves—what Raymond Williams might call a structure of feeling about time” (9). Time was being processed differently by many eighteenth-century Britons, partially because of these emerging textual practices, and this new process was shaping their collective identity.

Dorothy’s *Rydal Journal*, however, shows few signs of fitting this general societal pattern, despite its obvious role in recording time’s shape and passage. It hearkens back to the earliest known timekeeping methods by focalizing time primarily through the weather. Ancient Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks calculated time based on shadow-clocks, sundials, water-clocks, night dials, and sand-glasses. These devices were likewise used in the British Isles between the seventh and eleventh centuries. In fact, some water-clocks and sundials remain in existence at places like Bewcastle Cross in Cumberland and Kirkdale Church in Yorkshire. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, portable sundials were in wide use across Britain. With the invention of watches and domestic clocks at the end of the sixteenth century, however, many began using these devices (Ward 17-21). Initially imported from Holland, France, and Germany, the earliest domestic clocks were made in England after 1575 (Dawson, Drover, and Parkes 18). By the end of the seventeenth century, London clockmakers were leading the world in clock-making technique and workmanship (Dawson, Drover, and Parkes 46). In 1698, French traveler Henri Misson described London’s art of clockmaking as “so common here, and so much in Vogue, that almost every Body has a Watch, and but a few private Families are without [one]” (36-37).

A century before William and Dorothy Wordsworth’s births, clock mechanics went through a golden age, with the 1658 development of the pendulum and the 1670 invention of the

anchor escapement (the mechanism which regularizes the pendulum's swing and allows the clock's wheels to advance by a fixed amount with each swing). By the early eighteenth century, both the pendulum and anchor escapement were in wide use. Based on the reports of one clockmaker in Wales, Samuel Roberts, retrofitting old clocks with pendulums and anchor escapements was common into the 1760s (Davies 72). Meanwhile, clock ownership increased in the eighteenth century. In the 1670s only 9% of probate inventories reveal clock ownership; in the 1720s, this number has increased to 34%; and in the 1740s, 40% of inventories included clocks (Cunningham 16). While pocket watch ownership records are more difficult to find than clock ownership, there were approximately fifty thousand watches being made in England for home consumption in the late eighteenth century (Cunningham 16). Measured time, whether by domestic clock or pocket watch, was becoming a key component of daily life.⁵

This spread of domestic clocks and watches precipitated a revolutionary shift in human consciousness. New time measurement technology imagined time, in Sherman's words, as "steady and continuous rather than intermittent" (35). This shift resulted in longer work hours that were dictated by the clock rather than the light of the day. On a regular basis, laborers in the early nineteenth century worked eleven-hour days, regardless of the season of the year (Voth 497). Little wonder that the adage "time is money" was popularized during this era (Franklin).

⁵ Watch owners were not only the wealthy. Increasingly, pocket watches were owned by members of every class, including amongst those of "very modest worth" (Cunningham 16). Numerous watch thefts are recorded in the Old Bailey Session Papers for men of all classes. In fact, "by 1756, working men [including farmers, day labourers, artisans and petty tradesman] accounted for half of the victims (excluding watchmakers) of watch theft" (Styles 46). Because watches were increasingly owned by members of every class—including farmers and common laborers—many people began measuring the time based on the ticking of their pocket watch rather than the natural processes that had for so long offered the time. Of course, there were still a significant number of people who did not own watches in Britain, particularly the poor who could not afford candlelight, necessitating work by the hours of the sun (Olsen 112). However, for many Britons, pocket watches became a daily necessity.

In short, the Wordsworths lived through the era when owning a clock became common in all classes, or, in the words of Alun Davies, when everyday Britons “became accustomed to time measurement by a clockwork mechanism and not by a moving shadow” (74). The new tendency to measure time based on clockwork regularity was reflected by the urge to subdivide time. As Kirstin Olsen states, “until the late seventeenth century, most clocks had only one hand—an hour hand—and the eighteenth century was the first to be dominated by two-handed clocks” (111). Rather than relying on public church clocks to chime the hour, these new clocks provided further subdivision by adding the minute hand, offering more precise timekeeping. Britons increasingly abandoned the ancient sundials, shadow clocks, and sand glasses and embraced more exact, mechanical timepieces.

Not surprisingly, the shift in consciousness attending this horological revolution is reflected in the patterns of nineteenth-century diary keeping. In her recent book, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary*, published in 2011, Renate Steinitz notes the preoccupation with time in nineteenth-century diaries, specifically how they produce “meaning by representing each day in a (theoretically endless) sequence of days” (20). Here “meaning accrues ... through the relation of days to themselves and each other, rather than in relation to external events” (20). For example, in Elizabeth Barrett’s journal entry for 4 August 1831, she records time almost compulsively: “Ordered the carriage at a quarter past 8,—& it was not ready until a quarter past 9 . . . Got to Malvern at ten . . . I went for a few minutes into the drawingroom, to recover the newspaper! . . . More than half an hour passed over the newspaper . . . After nearly 3 quarters of an hour, Mrs. Boyd advised me to go in to him . . . Got home at 8” (76-78). Barrett clearly depends upon clock time in structuring her day. Although some innovative, clock-owning journal keepers began following similar patterns in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, this practice became so widespread in the nineteenth century that Steinitz calls it “something of a constraint” (18).

Most diarists throughout the nineteenth century were obsessed with time in the structural organization of their journals. In Steinitz’s examples, writers believed their diary should include an entry for every single day. If there was nothing new to say, the diarists would just write the date with no accompanying entry, or, in some cases simply write the word “Nothing.” Either way, the days were important in relation to the other days. Common journaling formats emphasized the structural organization of the journals; usual formats included a week’s worth of daily spaces on a single page or two facing pages with a single line allotted to each day⁶ (Steinitz 67).

Emphasizing the Monotonous: Thoroughness in the *Rydal Journal*

Sherman’s emphasis on the “quotidian as series and structure” (22) and Steinitz’s on the “thoroughness of representation” (20) resonate with Dorothy’s journaling practices throughout the *Rydal Journal*. Dorothy is certainly thorough in her entries, and she frequently accentuates the monotonous—a fact that has frustrated some readers. Often, indeed, the more emotionally

⁶ Steinitz cites diarists from 1806 to 1885. Of course, 1806 is a very different time from 1885, but Steinitz is noting general nineteenth-century patterns rather than specific cultural moments. Additionally, Steinitz notes that the nineteenth-century commercial diary came directly from eighteenth-century almanacs and pocket diaries. “While their content remained similar,” Steinitz states, “the nineteenth century saw a vast expansion in their number and variety, as well as a systemization of their contents and forms, essentially transforming them into texts organized around the concept of organization” (63). During this period, diary sales continued climbing. Letts, a stationary store, published its first diary in 1812. By 1836, Letts offered twenty-eight different diary varieties, and by 1862, they offered fifty-five different varieties. Steinitz’s idea seems to intersect with Julia Carlson’s *Romantic Marks and Measures*, which examines Wordsworth’s poetry of print in the midst of topographic and typographic experimentation and change.

charged, exciting sequences are the least detailed sections of Dorothy's entries. For example, on 17 January 1825, Dorothy writes this almost telegraphic catalogue:

Sunny morning—yet slight showers—Opened Mr. Es window—Called at P. Kinsley's,⁷ Betty Dawsons—Old Woman fallen down stairs [—] After tea, beautifully bright—Miss J. Dowling calls—D. at Mr. North's—Wm & I walked to Ambleside—gentle Rain then—& a wet night—Letter from Sara [—] better news.

Of these events, seemingly the most remarkable is the old woman falling down the stairs. Yet Dorothy omits any details of the story, and we are left wondering about the particulars. Who was the old woman? Was she living at Betty Dawson's home, or perhaps Betty Dawson herself? What were the circumstances of the fall? Was the old woman hurt? Rather than plunging into the details of the story, Dorothy finishes her entry by describing the weather, her callers, and her letters.

While often willfully excluding key details, Dorothy's entries can be remarkably inclusive of seemingly trivial events she deems important. Most notably, in the roughly 950 surviving manuscript pages of the *Rydal Journal*, Dorothy ritualistically and laboriously describes the same weather, the same visitors, and the same events. As Ketchum bemoaned, “we find her tirelessly noting the fiftieth call by the same neighbor” (4).

The very style of Dorothy's writing in the *Rydal Journal* (particularly in her later years) suggests that she is writing to *remember* rather than to *be remembered*. Dorothy generally writes in fragments. As Woof notes, “there is scarcely a full sentence in 1831” (“Old Age” 157). On 5

⁷ In these quotations, I am leaving the *Rydal Journal* (which was largely unpunctuated) unchanged. Dorothy rarely uses any punctuation apart from dashes to separate her ideas. The comma in this entry is of note, then, for it is one of the few commas that Dorothy uses in the *Rydal Journal*.

August 1825, Dorothy writes in her typically fragmented style: “—the same—Sara H[utchinson] arrives—& Mr. Parrish. John goes to the Balloon.” In this entry, and many like it, Dorothy indicates events but writes no explanation nor description (she never again mentions the mysterious Balloon). Because Dorothy knows what “the Balloon” is, she does not explain nor describe. In this instance, as well as many others in her later years, she jots down memory aids rather than elaborating long descriptions.

Sherman and Steinitz note general patterns of diarists which might account for some of Dorothy’s journaling patterns. But many of her other habits clearly fall outside of the norms they describe. For instance, Dorothy’s entries do not always follow the daily installment pattern described by Sherman. In fact, there were years when she wrote sporadically, such as 1832, when she penned only 26 entries. Neither do her journals follow the organized patterns (e.g., a single line allotted to each day, a week’s worth of daily spaces on one page, etc.) chronicled by Steinitz. Dorothy writes where she wants on the page and in which direction she chooses, rather than following an organized layout (see Figure 1). Of course, this could perhaps be because Dorothy was not using pre-printed journal books. Still, Dorothy’s scribbled handwriting and messy organization suggest she likely would not have followed a pre-printed journal book if she had owned one.

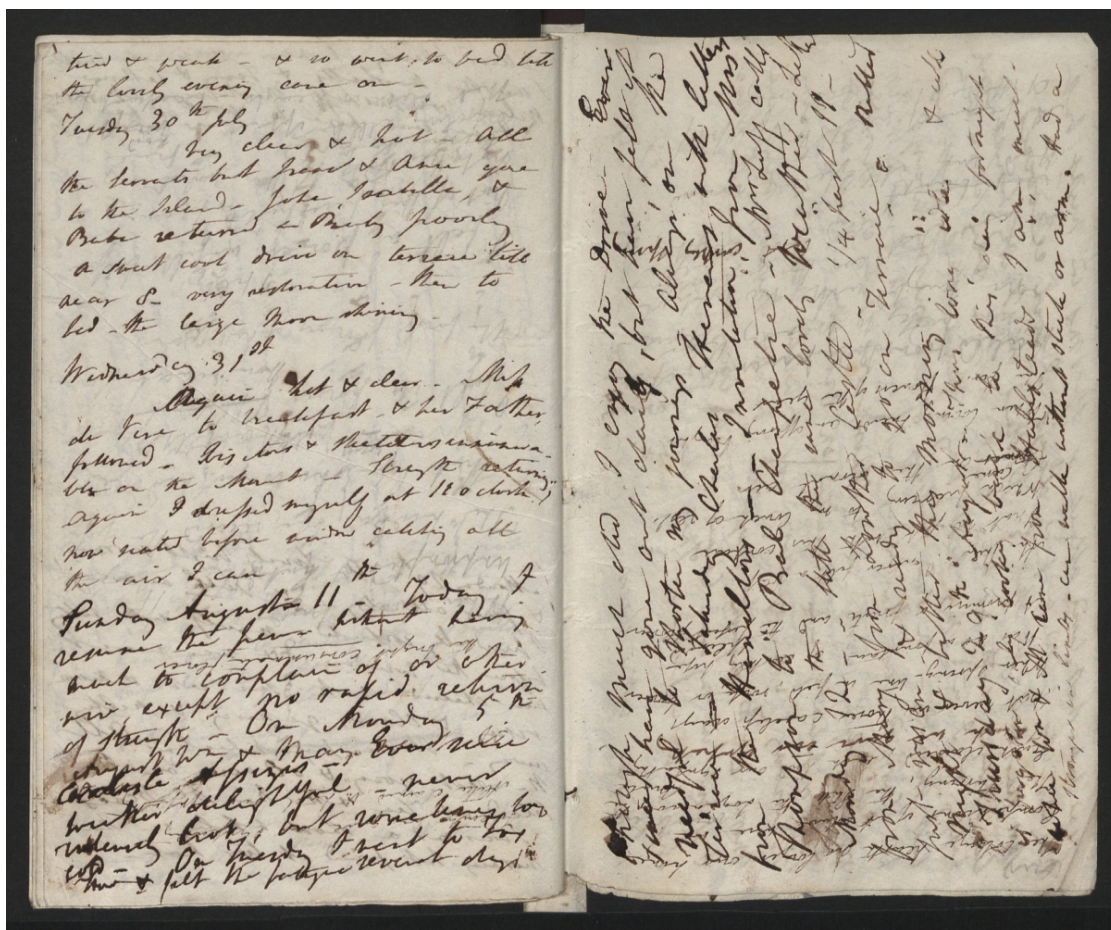


Figure 1 An example of Dorothy's often-illegible handwriting and cross-writing in the Rydal Journal. Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust

Resisting Mechanical Time

The most notable difference, however, between Dorothy's journal entries and standard practices described by historians of the genre is her reluctance to organize her entries, and by extension her life, according to clock time. Unlike Elizabeth Barrett and countless other contemporary diarists, Dorothy rarely mentions precise hours of the day, which is all the more noteworthy since we know the Wordsworths owned watches and likely had other clocks in the home. Dorothy's *Grasmere Journal* entry on 23 March 1802 describes an operative watch: "The fire flutters & the watch ticks I hear nothing else save the Breathings of my Beloved" (82). Mary Wordsworth, on 6 December 1806, describes William's annoyance that his plaguy watch "is still

in the rascally Watch-maker's hands" (*Letters* 2: 4), and William describes being gifted a gold watch on 22 July 1810 (*Letters* 2: 25). Even more significantly in terms of this essay's chronology, in the *Rydal Journal*, Dorothy describes calling on a "Watch-maker" on 18 October 1826, presumably to repair or purchase a watch. We also suspect (although we cannot be sure) that the Wordsworths owned the grandfather clock which was bought from the Rydal Mount Sale after William died in 1850. Beyond this, with Rydal Mount being just up the hill from the local parish church, the Wordsworths would surely have heard the chimes of the Rydal Church bells ringing the hours after it opened on 25 December 1824 ("The Church").⁸

In fact, more than just relying on clocks, the Wordsworths also showed some fascination with them. After receiving a cuckoo clock in April 1840, Mary wrote to Isabella Fenwick that "no children were ever more delighted with a new toy" as the Wordsworths were with this gift.⁹ Mary also described Dorothy's relationship to the clock: "Dear Miss Wordsworth was seated before [the clock] upon the top of the stairs the other day—and when the bird had performed its office, and the little door flopped to, I thought she would have dropped from her chair, she laughed so heartily at the sudden exit of the little Mimic" (242).

Given the strong evidence that the Wordsworths not only owned clocks but relied upon them, it is quite intriguing that Dorothy continued using natural processes to measure the time rather than using the available clock time. She implicitly rejected or at least bracketed and

⁸ Presumably the Rydal church bells rang hourly, for Howard M. Jenkins describes in the *Friends' Intelligencer* for August 1899 glancing at the bell tower when "a bell within sounded twice,—making me wonder for an instant whether the sexton was warning me of intrusion . . . and in a moment it occurred to me that the clock had simply, and very nearly at the right time, struck two" (664).

⁹ After the years that Dorothy wrote the *Rydal Journal*, Isabella Fenwick gave the Wordsworths a new cuckoo clock. While this clock was not on Rydal Mount during the years of the *Rydal Journal*, the Wordsworth's fascination with the clock rules out any likelihood that the Wordsworths were Luddites when it came to time technology.

subordinated clock time, despite the presence of clocks in the Wordsworth home. There could be many reasons for this rejection, but the most likely stems from Dorothy's connection with nature and natural processes and her association of those things with her most meaningful routines and relationships.

Of course, Dorothy's intimate connection with nature has been well documented. Scholars have noted Dorothy's dependence on and joy in nature as well as the "perfect healing," "needed stability," and the enchantment she found there (Worthen 220; Woof, *Wonders* 56, 142). Even Dorothy's contemporaries described her in terms of nature, including Coleridge's famous observation that she was "watchful in minute observation of nature" and De Quincey's remark that Dorothy "was the very wildest (in the sense of the most natural) person I have ever known" (qtd. in Levin 236; 365). Years later, Virginia Woolf described Dorothy's relationship to William and nature as a version of the trinity, observing that "Nature and Dorothy had grown together in perfect sympathy" (169). Each of these commentators and contemporaries include nature as part of Dorothy's biography, for Dorothy and nature were uniquely and intimately connected. Perhaps this connection was part of the reason why Dorothy favored weather time as opposed to mechanical time. Clock time, for Dorothy, lacked the affective and perhaps archetypal power of measuring life by the weather.

The Frosting of Mind: Using Weather to Describe Emotions

Lake District weather, as Wordsworth described it, is especially potent: "The country is, indeed, subject to much bad weather. . . . Days of unsettled weather, with partial showers, are frequent; but the showers, darkening or brightening as they fly from hill to hill" (*Guide* 50).¹⁰

¹⁰ In Mary Wordsworth's letters to Edward Quillinan on 26 Oct 1824, she describes the extremes of the Lake District weather in an account of a Rydal storm: "John (who I am sorry to say weighs 13 stone) was taken off his feet and lifted, by his own account, a yard from the ground!" (119).

The Lake District, on average, annually receives 2,061 mm of precipitation, with one of its towns, Seathwaite, averaging 3,552 mm annually, making it the wettest inhabited place in England (“Climate”). Notoriously soggy London, by contrast, receives only 754 mm of precipitation annually, or roughly one-third as much as the Lakes (“Average Monthly Snow and Rainfall”). On average, there are 200 wet days per year in the Lake District, compared with 164 annual wet days in London (“Monthly Rainy Days”).

The affective power of Lake District weather is potent throughout the *Rydal Journal*, for Dorothy frequently uses weather to describe her emotions. For instance, in the entry for 24 December 1834, she employs weather as a metaphor, describing the day as “bright as summer,” “lovely,” and “delightful.” Confirming Dorothy’s sunny disposition, Mary Wordsworth writes on 27 December 1834 that Dorothy is “cheering,” soothed by the pleasant weather and by nature (135-136). Mary writes directly of Dorothy’s joyfulness and contentment; Dorothy writes the same thing, but instead of describing her personal happiness, she projects her state of mind onto the weather. This is her longstanding habit.

Dorothy’s adjective use mirrors her state of mind throughout the *Rydal Journals*. Her descriptions of frost in particular provide insight into her mental state. One January day, she wrote of the “gloomy frost” (24 January 1825). The very next day, she noted the “sunshine frost” (25 January 1825). Dorothy repeatedly used strange adjectives to describe frost, for just a month earlier, on 23 December 1824, she spoke of “keen frost” on a day when William is expected (and on the day before her birthday): “Sudden keen frost—very bright—Wm. expected—Ambleside with Julia Dora Mr. Barber’s.” She described “hard frost” when she goes “through the village of Hell” (24 August 1826), and “sharp frost” on a day when she feels neglected: “Dark, rainy morning—but walk on Terrace at night both Wm—& tea at Mr. Robers—John & Lov—wrote to

Lady Flannel felt—finished [--] All this week neglected—A sharp frost came on at the end of it & continued with snow on the ground lite Sunday morning” (18 January 1827). The frost embodies her inner state. Although a few descriptions of hard frost do appear on days where Dorothy’s mood was pleasant, these entries are few and far between. The vast majority of entries seem to use frost as a symbol for Dorothy’s mood, echoing Harris’s notion that “inner weather creates outer weather; we find the external image of the thing we need to express” (13). These entries, when viewed in connection with each other, show that Dorothy’s descriptions are reflections of her current mood.

Another instance of Dorothy’s adjectives mirroring her mood occurs on 9 May 1825, when she describes “light air:” “Very bright & clear—light air—Mr. Pearson called. . . [illegible section] All the week neglected Diary—Only one wet day—Books arranged etc.” Although she may have felt the variance in air density due to temperature or elevation, this phrase, “light air,” is more likely used as a way to portray her bright and easy state of mind, as contrasted with the heavy rain that comes on and “confines all day” (7 October 1825). We may conjecture, based on Dorothy’s previous use of weather to depict her illness, that she was feeling agile and sprightly on 9 May. Operating under the assumption that Dorothy’s adjectives are not describing nature only, we gain understanding into her feelings about her physical and mental ailments. She had lived in the Lake District for her entire life and was used to wet days and the soggy climate. She was not obsessed with weather because she was unused to the weather; rather, she was describing weather to describe her own feelings.

In the *Rydal Journals*, Dorothy’s projection of herself into weather stems not only from her occasional sadness or depression but also from aging and progressive illness. Rather than complaining or exulting about her emotional state, Dorothy projects her condition into her

journal by describing weather. The words she chooses to describe the weather have less to do with the climate outside her home than with the climate inside Dorothy's mind.

Dorothy's growing physical and mental limitations are abundantly clear in later sections of the *Rydal Journal*. In April 1835, Dorothy's penultimate journal entry (Figure 2) reflects her inner depression: "Weather weaker body Frosty night over—snow gone" (19 April 1835). Here, Dorothy describes the weather, and herself, as being "weaker." The unpunctuated syntax blends her nouns and adjectives—weather/body, weaker/Frosty—in a bleak, impressionistic equation. She can feel herself deteriorating, and she uses the weather to expose her own emotions about her physical limitations and perhaps even about what is "gone." Three years earlier, on 5 May 1832, William had worried her death might be imminent, writing, "My Sister, the only one I ever had, & who has lived with me for the last 35 years, is now in so weak & alarming a state of health that I could not quit home, except under absolute necessity" (3: 520). Now she was worse still. Dorothy's physical body was weak, and she described the weather's "weaker" condition to capture her own physical restriction and decline (though ironically she would live twenty years longer, outlasting William despite her long illness).

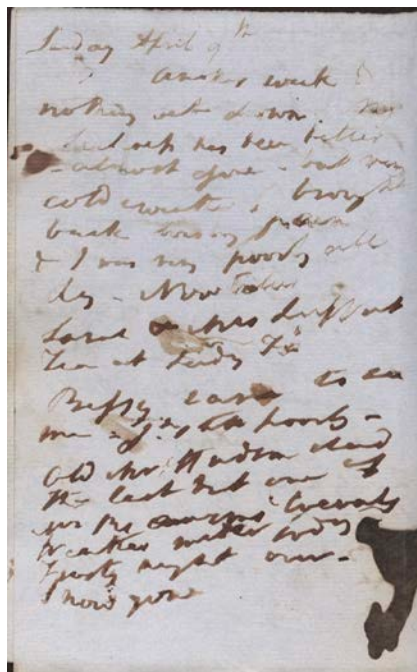


Figure 2 Dorothy's penultimate journal entry from April 1835. This entry, both in her description of the weather and in her messy handwriting, evidence her rapid decline. Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust.

Weather as Metaphor for Illness

Dorothy's projection of herself onto the weather belongs to a long history of writers metaphorically using meteorology for health or illness. Weather, an appropriate metaphor for illness, is often seen through its effect on other things. A decade after the *Rydal Journal*, Emily Brontë noted of the wind at *Wuthering Heights*, "one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun" (Brontë 2). Similarly, we do not see illness itself but rather its symptoms and effects. Dorothy never named her illness specifically in her journals. Rather, she named the symptoms—darkness, blankness, haziness—in much the same way that Brontë described the wind by its effect on the firs and the thorns. Weather is a fitting metaphor for illness, for neither can be seen without its effects.

Earlier authors likewise used weather in connection with illness. William Shakespeare's *King Lear* joins the elements by connecting the storm tempest to his mental tempest: "Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm / Invades us to the skin. . . the tempest in my mind" (3.4.6-12). Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1883 novel *Mount Royal* connects weather and illness when Leonard asks Mrs. Tregonell, "What, old lady, are you under the weather?" (145). The phrase "under the weather," used by Braddon, was in usage beginning in 1827 and was synonymous with feeling indisposed or not quite well ("Weather, n2f). This phrase was used for much of Dorothy's lifetime and functioned in writing throughout the nineteenth century. Additionally, the word "cold" signifying virus-born sickness (one is sick with a cold) was used from 1338, whereas the word "cold" signifying a lowness of temperature began being used in 1150, only 200 years before ("Cold, n5b"; "Cold, n1a). Finally, the thermometer—used to measure outside temperature and human body temperature—began to be generally used in the eighteenth century (Pearce). It would seem that there was, for at least four hundred years before Dorothy's birth, a clear linguistic and scientific connection between weather and illness.

Weather also works as a metaphor for illness in its place in Judeo-Christian history. The Bible indicates that variable weather was one of the effects of the Fall of Adam. Prior to the fall, "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth" (*Authorized King James Bible*, Genesis 2:5-6). We also understand death and illness as part of the Fall, for after Eve partakes of the fruit, God commands Adam and Eve, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). Thus, variable weather, mortal frailty, and illness were elements introduced into the fallen world. This weather/illness connection runs throughout the Bible: the Lord tells Moses that He will cause a "small dust in all the land of Egypt" that will cause a "boil breaking forth

with blains upon man” (Exodus 9:9). In Luke, Christ proclaims that, in the last days, there will be tempests in “divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven” (Luke 21:11). And the Book of Revelations foretells the “leaves of the tree” will be for the “healing of the nations,” and all physical infirmities will cease (Revelation 22:1-3). In all of these cases and many others, the sacred writers assert a link between the weather and physical infirmity. While perhaps the weather/illness metaphor was employed unconsciously by Dorothy, it is beautiful in its resonance and implications.

Perhaps weather is the perfect metaphor for Dorothy’s aging process, for the progression of her illness was as variable as the weather. In some journal entries, Dorothy is obviously feeling both physically and mentally capable. Elsewhere, her mental deterioration is abundantly clear. Her last journal entry, for example, is mistakenly dated 14 November 1815 rather than 1835, perhaps indicating only a tired or careless hand but possibly suggesting her slipping mental state (see Figure 3). The Lake District weather—unpredictable and often unpleasant—served as an ideal way for Dorothy to measure her life, for her illness was likewise unpredictable and unpleasant. Dorothy’s illness could change day by day. For instance, on 17 March 1834, Dorothy complained, “My Bowels ticklish & appetite not good.” The following day, she wrote, “appetite improved, & well this morning!” She repeats her description of being “well” on 19 March, but on 20 March she was “not well in forenoon” and remained ill the following day. Her illness was changing constantly, often in coordination with the Lake District weather.

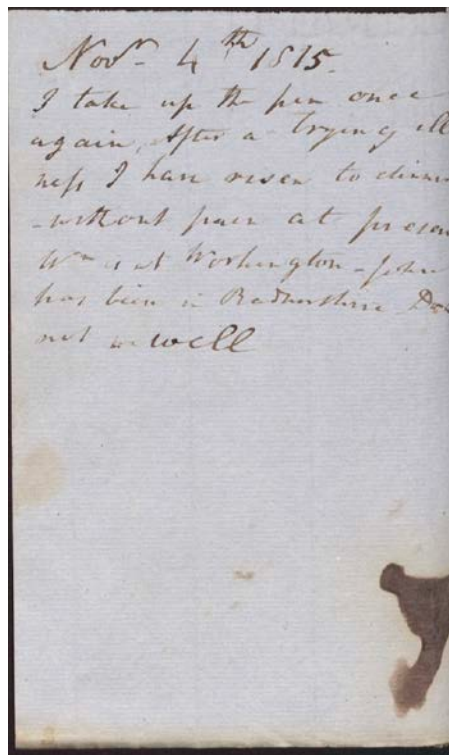


Figure 3 Dorothy's misdated final journal entry. Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust.

On Thursday, 22 January 1835, Dorothy returned to the journal after a 13-day gap to record unusually depressing events, again, symbolically describing her emotions using the weather. She records how Mr. Fleming (the curate of Rydal) passed away, Dora (Dorothy's niece) remained ill, Dorothy's own weak body "suffered severely," Mary (Dorothy's sister-in-law) had "one of her worst colds," and James (the Wordsworth's gardener and handyman) had rheumatism. Metaphorically describing her emotions, she depicts the weather as "very trying" and notes how "the frosty air has taken up all characters and hues—dazzling sunshine [--] dark haze—& a blankness over all that was not white" (22 January 1835). The weather here is taking on the characteristics of Dorothy: on her good days, there is dazzling sunshine. On her bad days, there is a dark haze, description that is perhaps more telling when we remember that Dorothy's dementia had almost fully set in by this point. Her body and mind were changing, and Dorothy

used weather to measure this passage of time and, sadly, the passage of her mind into the full stages of dementia. There was a “dark haze” and a “blankness” over her mind, just as she described the “dark haze” and “blankness” over the frosty air.

This physical deterioration began in April 1829, when Dorothy was in Whitwick, Leicestershire, helping her nephew John settle into his first curacy (Woof, “Old Age” 156). She suddenly became very ill, and William wrote of the “heavy influenza cold,” “internal inflammation,” and “48 hours [of] excruciating torture” that Dorothy experienced. He described Dorothy as being “so very weak that she cannot stand and can scarcely speak” (*Letters* 3: 63) and remarked on “the shock” that the illness was “to our poor hearts.” “Were she to depart,” he wrote, “the Phasis of my Moon would be robbed of light to a degree that I have not the courage to think of” (*Letters* 3: 69). This was the first of a long series of illnesses that Dorothy would endure over her remaining 26 years. Of course, Dorothy could not have known that this particular illness was going to permanently change her life. Still, she could almost certainly feel a change from the younger self who climbed fells and walked miles per day.

This illness, contracted in April, is reflected in her journal entries. On Wednesday, 8 April 1829, she used weather as a metaphor for her illness: “Very ill & so confined for several days—W—arrives . . . The wind is changed to South & West after [illegible] blowing from North or East—with frost snow, sleet & hail—& heavy various.” In this entry, the wind is making a significant change from the earlier norm. Rather than blowing as previously, it shifts to the south and west. We know that Dorothy’s life was changing because of her illness at Whitwick, and she used weather to demonstrate this change. She equated herself with nature as she depicted the grand shift in her life, using the winds of change as her metaphor, which ultimately allows her to feel her place within life (which, to Dorothy, was within nature).

Quarrelling with Herself: Complicated Nature in Dorothy's Later Years

In short, Dorothy's employment of weather as a metaphor for her illness reflects her complicated relationship with nature in her later years. We know from the *Grasmere Journal* that Dorothy was predisposed to "quarrel with herself," and thus, in her later years, her natural reaction was to quarrel with nature in the same way she quarreled with herself (1). The *Rydal Journal* depicts a conflicted relationship between Dorothy and nature: a relationship of healing and crippling, of love and resentment. At times, she shows signs of her former self, wanting to believe in the healing power of nature. Speaking of Dorothy's earlier Grasmere diaries, Lucy Newlyn identifies "an important *therapeutic* dimension to her journal, for it traced the tranquilizing influence of nature on her spirit during periods of sadness or anxiety" (141). In her later years, Dorothy only occasionally retains this sense, as in entries noting how "my own companion Robin cheared my bedroom with its slender subdued peeping" (3 February 1835); "my hoarseness etc. passing away. The air improves" (8 February 1835); and "Mary Fisher & flowers—My mind much relieved & the whole house pleased that I have again walked with A[nne] and J[ane]'s—no change! & this is a comfort" (18 February 1835).

On many other occasions, however, Dorothy saw nature as anything but therapeutic. In fact, she often blamed nature directly for her illness: "The cold has affected my bowels" (9 March 1835); "A cold day—I felt inwardly" (23 February 1835); "The weather has been very trying—Frost, snow Hail—wind. . . . My weak body has yielded to all changes" (22 January 1835). Dorothy's impression that weather was causing her illness was shared by her family members. Mary Wordsworth, for instance, wrote on 27 December 1834 that the family "could not trace the cause of this [severe bilious] attack to any other source than the changeableness of the weather" (135).

Mary's suspicion makes sense in the context of a moment when many scientists began studying the influence of atmosphere on human health. Today, we may understand Dorothy's depression through stretches of dark, wet days in terms of Seasonal Affective Disorder. During her time, scientists were developing instruments such as the eudiometer to measure the breathability of air and noting that dull or damp weather could have a depressing effect on the population. Meanwhile, writers such as Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and Thomas Short (1790-1872) "saw atmospheric susceptibility as a general loss of mental autonomy" (Golinski 139). Dorothy's family—and she herself—understandably had mixed feelings about the weather as her mind and body continued declining.

Where Dorothy generally found delight in nature during the period of the *Grasmere Journal*, her relationship with nature was more complex throughout the *Rydal Journal*, for she obviously had complicated feelings towards getting older and feebler. Her time was no longer spent outdoors, working or dancing among daffodils. She no longer wrote detailed, enraptured descriptions of sights encountered in long walks. Rather, she spent her time within a confined room that contained a blazing fire, even through the summer. Her pictures of nature were, for the most part, views from a window. In her aged state, Dorothy missed the pleasures that accompanied her younger self, for she was certainly not the woman who walked for tens of miles per day without a second thought. Weather, then, became a way for her to describe these emotions about the passing of time: some days moved by more slowly than others.

Weather as Memory Aid: Voluntary and Forced Reflection

The final way that Dorothy uses weather is as a reminder (whether through voluntary or forced reflection) of past events throughout the *Rydal Journal*. This function of weather as memory keeper is a typical function of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diaries. In his

Shepherd's Calendar of 1819, for instance, James Hogg describes storms as “the red lines in the shepherd’s manual—the remembrances of years and ages that are past—the tablets of memory by which the ages of his children, the time of his ancestors, and the rise and downfall of families, are invariably ascertained” (75). In fact, it seems that weather serves as a memory keeper throughout diaries across the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Brian Dobbs, a diary historian, observes,

the journal fundamentally arises out of a desire to capture a moment or a day of time which would otherwise be lost; lost to the diarist in later life, and to posterity. . . the diarist has his [or her] journal as an *aide memoire* and souvenir rolled into one. The souvenir or the photograph can help us imperfectly to recall an occasion, a full diary entry enables us to relive it. Not only does the entry tell us what we did, it tells us how we felt about the action. (8).

Dorothy seems to recall events based on the accompanying weather event in the same way that others in this passage recall events based on a souvenir or photograph. On 9 January 1835, for instance, she writes: “Lovely day at Grasmere—clear and bright—Silvery Fogs on Rydal hills etc—Wm Green preached—After Rydal Church at Mr. Robinsons & walk on Terrace—clear there—Fogs below reminded me of [illegible].” In this example, she sees fog—a weather event—that reminds her of a previous place or event in her life. As Woof points out, Dorothy “was always a person who remembered and revisited,” and certainly nature was a way to aid her recollections (“Old Age” 158). Nature, in many cases, facilitated Dorothy’s reflection.

This spontaneous activity of memory is reminiscent of William’s “spots of time,” the formative moments (often from childhood) that somehow shaped one’s consciousness. These spots of time have, according to James P. Davis, “come to be viewed as an organizing principle

with nearly infinite flexibility, describing and reenacting the most significant moments in *The Prelude*.” This function of the spots of time—reenactment—was, according to Davis, “quite congenial in [William’s] retrospective habits of mind” (65). Something similar can be said of Dorothy. For both siblings, memory often came from accidental reminiscences through nature rather than deliberate recollection.

While weather often brought back beautiful and joyous memories, it also occasionally brought distressing ones. On 27 December 1834, Dorothy recorded a memory sparked by the rain: “On Sunday Evening Decr. 30th Wm. came to me rejoiced to hear thickly pattering rain after so long a pause—I could not but feel a touch of sympathy with him in remembrance of many a moist tramp; but shd. have been better pleased with bright moon & stars & our late splendid evengs & mornngs.” In this almost elegiac recollection (captured in one of the few Rydal journal periods when her writing was longer and less fragmented), Dorothy maintains an inner conflict between what nature forces her to remember and what she wishes she could feel.

Nature recollections are occasionally distressing for Dorothy; still, these recollections often trigger beautiful and reflective musings, particularly during holidays or other significant dates. For example, on New Year’s Day of 1835, she wrote: “Never surely in the 63 years that I have lived can there have been such brilliant New-years & Christmas days—Such Xmas days (two or 3) I recollect—One especially when we sate on the side of Nab Fell to sun & rest ourselves, coming from Grasmere Church.” Here, the memory of Christmas is prompted by the beautiful sunshine and her restful experience on Nab Fell. These retrospective musings are common, according to Huff, throughout other nineteenth-century diaries, where such entries facilitate “self-evaluation and reflection” (xvi). Dorothy, in this New Year’s entry, is recalling past experiences that provide reflection and restfulness.

Clock Time and Nature: Revising Scholarship

Most current diary scholarship focuses on how the increasingly ritualized, daily nature of nineteenth-century diary keeping reflected the new horological consciousness, but, as this essay has argued, Dorothy Wordsworth's *Rydal Journal* complicates this argument. At a moment when the tyranny of the clock became standard, Dorothy stubbornly measured time based on the variable and imprecise Lake District weather rather than the precise ticking of the clock. As discussed throughout this paper, this journal measures the time based on the weather rather than on clockwork, using weather to describe Dorothy's emotions, as a metaphor for her illness, and as a memory aid. Beautiful, affective weather, for Dorothy, was much more descriptive and fertile than was scientific, sterilized clock time.

Many scholars have discussed the watch as a revolutionary Romantic object, discussing how, in the Romantic era, "people became preoccupied with spending time wisely, wasting time, and time on task" (Purinton 47). Dorothy, here, becomes an anomaly, for she was not especially preoccupied with any of these pursuits. The *Rydal Journal* therefore revises our sense of Romantic timekeeping and Romantic diaries.

For scholars of Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism more generally, the *Rydal Journal* also complicates the general tendency to classify her as an unwavering, immutable lover of nature. As this essay has shown, the *Rydal Journal* offers a version of Dorothy Wordsworth that is rarely found in the scholarly record, frequently juxtaposing reveries on nature with passages reflecting darker attitudes towards the natural world around her and its impact on her physical decline. Sustained study of the *Rydal Journal* therefore offers another reminder about the dangers of offering sweeping generalizations about William and Dorothy Wordsworth based

entirely on the “Great Decade,” as Dorothy’s relationship with nature in particular was far from constant across her eight decades.

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