

Dorothy Wordsworth

Xin Yun Cui, Simon Fraser University

Dorothy Wordsworth was born on Christmas Day, 1771, at Cockermouth in Cumberland, England. As was the custom for females in England, Dorothy received no formal education but studied French and arithmetic at home. Much to her aunt and grandparents' dismay, Dorothy grew up to be a vivacious, "unladylike" young woman. She loved nature and often "rambl[ed] about the country on foot" with her brother William Wordsworth. In 1795, the two moved into a cottage in Grasmere, later known as Dove Cottage. There, Dorothy produced many life journals and poems. Travel, nature, and familial love are common themes in her works. She had travelled both within Britain and to countries on the European continent, including Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. She recorded her experience in her travelling journals, including *Journal of a Tour on the Continent* and *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland*.

Dorothy never got married and had children of her own, but she was deeply involved in the care of William's children. Her poem "Loving and Liking: Irregular Verses Addressed to A Child" was first published in 1832 by her brother William in *Poems Founded on the Affections*. In "Loving and Liking," the speaker addresses an unnamed child, reprimanding them for using the word "love" colloquially instead of attending to its proper religious and Romantic meanings. It is worth noting that there exists a Dove-Cottage manuscript of the poem (copied in Dorothy's handwriting) with different phrasings and word choices. It is possible that Dorothy edited the poem herself before its first publication, but it is also likely for William to have edited it for her, since Dorothy was never confident in her abilities as a poet. The poem is presented here in its first published form in 1832 because the Dove-Cottage manuscript has lacunae.

Some of Dorothy's famous correspondents include Mary Ann Lamb and Samuel Talor Coleridge. She passed away in 1885.

Further Reading

Levin, Susan, and Robert Ready, "Unpublished Poems from Dorothy Wordsworth's Commonplace Book," *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol.9, no. 1, 1978, pp. 33-44, doi:10.1086/TWC24039633.

References

Moorman, Mary. *William Wordsworth: A Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1956.

“Loving and Liking: Irregular Verses, Addressed to a
Child”³⁰

There’s more in words than I can teach:
 Yet listen, Child!—I would not preach;
 But only give some plain directions
 To guide your speech and your affections.
 Say not you love a roasted fowl, 5
 But you may love a screaming owl,
 And, if you can, the unwieldy toad
 That crawls from his secure abode³¹
 Within the mossy garden wall
 When evening dews begin to fall. 10
 Oh mark the beauty of his eye:
 What wonders in that circle lie!
 So clear, so bright, our fathers said
 He wears a jewel in his head³²!
 And when, upon some showery day, 15
 Into a path or public way
 A frog leaps out from bordering grass,
 Startling the timid as they pass,
 Do you observe him, and endeavour
 To take the intruder into favour; 20
 Learning from him to find a reason
 For a light heart in a dull season.

³⁰ Published by her brother William Wordsworth in 1832 in collection *Poems Founded on the Affections*, which is the copytext here.

³¹ Place of residence.

³² Referencing English folklore that toadstones are grown from the head of toads.

And you may love him in the pool,
 That is for him a happy school,
 In which he swims as taught by nature, 25
 Fit pattern for a human creature,
 Glancing amid the water bright,
 And sending upward sparkling light.

Nor blush if o'er your heart be stealing
 A love for things that have no feeling: 30
 The spring's first rose by you espied³³,
 May fill your breast with joyful pride;
 And you may love the strawberry-flower,
 And love the strawberry in its bower;
 But when the fruit, so often praised 35
 For beauty, to your lip is raised,
 Say not you love the delicate treat,
 But like it, enjoy it, and thankfully eat.

Long may you love your pensioner³⁴ mouse,
 Though one of a tribe that torment the house: 40
 Nor dislike for her cruel sport the cat,
 Deadly foe both of mouse and rat;
 Remember she follows the law of her kind,
 And Instinct is neither wayward nor blind.
 Then think of her beautiful gliding form, 45

³³ Caught sight of.

³⁴ A person who collects retirement pensions, meaning someone who lives off the charity of others.

Her tread that would scarcely crush a worm,
 And her soothing song by the winter fire,
 Soft as the dying throb of the lyre.³⁵

I would not circumscribe your love:
 It may soar with the eagle and brood³⁶ with the dove, 50
 May pierce the earth with the patient mole,
 Or track the hedgehog to his hole.
 Loving and liking are the solace of life,
 Rock the cradle of joy, smooth the death-bed of strife.
 You love your father and your mother, 55
 Your grown-up³⁷ and your baby brother;
 You love your sister, and your friends,
 And countless blessings which God sends:³⁸
 And while these right affections play,
 You live each moment of your day; 60
 They lead you on to full content,
 And likings fresh and innocent,
 That store the mind, the memory feed,
 And prompt to many a gentle deed:
 But likings come, and pass away; 65
 'Tis love that remains till our latest day:
 Our heavenward guide is holy love,
 And will be our bliss with saints above.

³⁵ Stringed instrument from ancient Greece; symbol of poetry.

³⁶ To incubate or, figuratively, to cherish under wings

³⁷ Grown-up brother.

³⁸ Considering Dorothy's relationship with William's children, we may suspect that this poem addresses one of them. However, the biggest age gap between them is seven years, making it impossible for one of them to have a "grown-up brother" when they are still a child.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

© Xin Yun Cui, 2020

Available from:

<http://monographs.lib.sfu.ca/index.php/sfulibrary/catalog/book/81>