



## LOVE AND DEATH IN WORDSWORTH'S "LUCY POEMS"

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Article Received:02/10/2020

Article Accepted: 28/10/2020

Published online:02/11/2020

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.8.4.77](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.8.4.77)

### Abstract

Different critics have different opinions about the identification of 'Lucy' in Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems". Some of them identify 'Lucy' with Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy while some with the poet's future wife, Mary Hutchinson, whereas some opine that 'Lucy' was the product of Wordsworth's imagination and there is no real existence of 'Lucy' on the real earth. But all of them unanimously agree that the "Lucy Poems" are about love and death of someone whom Wordsworth loved very much—either in reality or in his imagination. Throughout the "Lucy Poems" we find the presence of love which makes the poet eager to meet his beloved and makes him sad when he thinks about the death of Lucy. This proves that love and death, in their various forms, are the main subjects of the "Lucy Poems". In this paper we propose to analyze the "Lucy Poems" in order to trace the presence of love and death in their various forms. Our analysis of the poems will be based on the textual analysis of the poems and not about the poems.

Keywords: Analysis, Death, Identification, Love, Lucy.

If Wordsworth comes to life again, he will be surprised to know that he had composed a group of poems which are called "Lucy Poems". In other words even Wordsworth does not know about any group of his poems because he had never intended to put those poems in a group or sequence or give any name which he wrote when he was living in Germany for a short period of time during 1798 to 1800. It was only after his death in 1850 that some critics put those poems into a group due to the similarity of their themes and named them "Lucy Poems" because it was written about an unknown girl whom the poet called Lucy. Nobody knows anything about the identification of Lucy because Wordsworth never disclosed the identification of Lucy or gave any hint about her. He kept Lucy a secret. Critics have conjectured—from Wordsworth's sister—Dorothy, his would be wife

Mary Hutchinson to an imaginary girl in the imagination of the poet. So, I think, to ask the question "who is Lucy?" is absurd and useless as Geoffrey Durrant in his book, *William Wordsworth*, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.60 has rightly said, "there is no answer to this question except to say that it is irrelevant". But now the five poems written by Wordsworth, "Strange fits of Passion have I Known", "She dwelt among the un trodden ways", "I travelled among unknown Men", "Three years she grew in sun and shower", and "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal", are internationally known as "Lucy Poems".

Different critics like Kenneth Johnston etc. have different opinions regarding the Lucy poems but all of them unanimously agree that "Lucy Poems" are about love and death. "The 'Lucy poems'

convey the unrequited love of the speaker for a woman named Lucy. As the poems progress, we learn that she died young and inspired the speaker to write his elegiac verses about her." ([www.gradesaver.com/the-Lucy-Poems](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-Lucy-Poems)). The speaker of the poems, who is, of course, the poet himself, loves a girl named Lucy. In these poems the poet expresses his deep and passionate love for her. It seems that both of them are in great love and the poet always goes to meet his beloved. His horse knows the path of the beloved's cottage so well that he does not need any guidance. Because Lucy lives in a lonely and secluded place, she is unknown to the rest of the world. Lucy kept herself busy in domestic works. Their love affair was very happy. They had faith in each other. Lucy also behaved like a traditional beloved, always ready to tease the poet for his mood. But the sudden apprehension of her death makes the poet restless and he is shocked when she actually dies. Lucy's death deeply affects the poet's view of his native place, and the world in general. Thus we see that in these poems love and death go simultaneously side by side. The thought of his beloved, who also loves him passionately, makes the poet happy and eager to meet her as soon as possible. On the other hand, the premonition that she might die disturbs him and makes him restless and the actual death of Lucy is a kind of shock for the poet which deeply affects his life forever. Here we see that Lucy's lover is a typical traditional lover who has great love and care for his beloved. Spencer Hall, in his article, "Wordsworth's 'Lucy' Poems: Context and Meaning" has nicely described the lover as one who "represents a type of specifically and uncompromisingly human involvement in the world of process and change." As a true lover, he eagerly wants to meet his beloved, praises her innocence and compares her beauty with that of fresh flowers in June, takes vow not go outside of England not only because he loves his country very much but also because his beloved, Lucy, lives in England. When he is away from England, he is away from Lucy whom he misses a lot and the separation from Lucy is unbearable for him. It is true that the Lucy Poems deal with the dead and dying but they do not trace the difference between life and death. In fact our understanding of Lucy is based on the poet's

interpretation. Lucy's death suggests that nature does not spare anyone. It makes to suffer to all, even those who loved her. According to H.W.Garrod, "The truth is, as I believe that between Lucy's perfection in Nature and her death there is, for Wordsworth, really no tragic antithesis at all." (Garrod, H.W. *The Profession of Poetry and other Lectures*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1929, p.83). The other critic, Hartman has linked the view of death and nature to art in general as he says, "Lucy, living, is clearly a guardian spirit, not of place but of all English places...while Lucy, dead, has all nature for her monument. The series is deeply humanized version of the death of Pan, a lament on the decay of English natural feeling. Wordsworth fears that the very spirit presiding over his poetry is ephemeral, and I think he refuses to distinguish between its death in him and its historical decline." (Hartman, Geoffrey *The Unremarkable*

Wordsworth, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p.43).

If we closely analyze the Lucy Poems we will find that almost in every poem the aspects of love and death are present in one or other form. In the very first poem of the series, 'Strange fits of Passion' the poet is talking about love and death. He expresses the depth of his love for his beloved and describes the fatal effect of his beloved's death on him. He loves his beloved so much that even the thought of her death makes him cry and his heart passes through a kind of agony which he names 'strange fits of passion' which he does not want to share with anyone but only with lovers because only a lover can understand the real feeling of the other lover:

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

Here we see that the word, "passion" has been used to define a disturbing apprehension of Lucy's death. Here it is death, not Lucy, which fills the poet with "passion". So we cannot interpret the word, "passion" with the poet's sexual desire for his beloved as some critics believe due to the close

proximity of "passion" and "lover" in this stanza. In fact, in the light of Christian mythology, the word has its origin in "suffering", especially the suffering of Christ on the cross and so it is closely related with life and death. As the poet has gone through a painful experience during the fits of passion, when he apprehend the death of Lucy, he does not want to disclose his experience because he thinks that by speaking of his premonition of Lucy's death he will make it happen.

In simple way we can say that as a traditional lover the poet says that his beloved was very beautiful:

When she I loved looked every day  
Fresh as a rose in June.

He was very much eager to meet her and so one evening he was going to meet her on his horse back. His horse was running fast on, "Those paths so dear to me". The moon is sinking throughout the journey. The poet is constantly looking at the moon. Suddenly the light of moon disappears behind Lucy's cottage. This disappearance of moon creates a kind of fear and panic in the poet. The disappearance of the moon is a symbol of Lucy's death which creates a moment of panic in poet which he describes as the strange fits of passion in the first line of the poem which reflects his conflicting emotions through the constant shifts in perspective and mood. The dramatic tone of the first stanza is contrasted with the subdued tone of the rest of the poem.

Thus we see the fear of death is present throughout the poem but the death is clear only in the last line of the poem. In this poem the moon has been used as a symbol of the beloved. As the poem progresses the moon sinks steadily and finally disappears behind Lucy's cottage. This sinking of the moon is the symbol of Lucy's death because the abrupt drop of the moon brings out the poet out of his dream and suddenly his thought turns towards the death which makes him very sad and he cries out with pain:

'O mercy! 'to myself I cried  
If Lucy should be dead !'

In the second poem, 'She dwelt Among Untrodden Ways' the poet describes Lucy's "growth, perfection and death" (Geoffrey Durrant, William Wordsworth, Cambridge University, 1969). Here the poet describes the place where Lucy lived. She lived in the close proximity with nature unknown to the people. The place was not visited by anybody. It was a hidden place from the eyes of the people and so a very few people, except her lover, the poet, knew about her life, thoughts and her beauty. She was an untouched beauty whom the poet loved very much. The poet says that she lived, "Beside the spring of Dove". She was living alone and unknown to the people and so she had "very few to love". She was very beautiful but, since she was living in the nature alone and hidden from the rest of the world, "...there were none to praise" her beauty and her youth. Thus we see that in this poem Lucy has been presented as a beautiful innocent girl who was untouched by the worldly lust.

In the second stanza of the poem the poet is praising the beauty of Lucy and compares the grace of Lucy with nature. The poet compares her with a beautiful flower and a shining star as he says:

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

The simple description of Lucy's beauty and the comparison with a single star alone in the sky symbolizes the poet's deep love for Lucy. Only a passionate lover can describe his beloved in such exaggerated way. The comparison made in this poem symbolizes Lucy as an embodiment of all beauty. The ordinary and simple words used in this poem only express and enhance the passionate feelings of love and grief. Since she lived alone and unknown, no one could know when Lucy died. Thus we see that love and death run side by side in this poem.

In the end of the poem, the poet has expressed Lucy's death with great sadness when he says, "But she is in her grave, and, oh," The typical exclamation, "The difference to me!" shows the assertion of the poet's deep love for Lucy. Two

remarkable things which we come to only at the end of the poem are that this poem is about Lucy and that she is already dead. The poem has been written in the past tense which shows that Lucy is already dead and it is only in the last stanza of the poem that we find the name of Lucy. It shows that like a typical lover, the poet is remembering his beloved and is mourning the death of his love. Throughout the poem, directly or indirectly, we feel the presence of love and death.

The same notes of love and death are found in the poem, "I travelled among Unknown men" but with a nostalgic note and at a personal level. The poem exhibits the poet's love for his country and takes a strong vow not to leave his country, England again in future. For this he has also some reasons. He feels alienated and strange in a foreign land and so he is home sick. Due to the extreme home sickness he takes a vow never to go out of his country:

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

The second reason which binds him with England is that his beloved, Lucy's memory is linked with England. To live away from England means for the poet, to live away from his beloved which is unbearable for the poet. Thus we see that for the poet England and Lucy are one and the same:

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

In this poem the poet is expressing his personal feelings for England. After visiting a foreign land he becomes a victim of nostalgia and a patriotic feeling occupies his heart. Living in a foreign land he realizes the importance of his country. Before that he did not realize how much he loved his country:

I travelled among unknown men,  
In lands beyond the sea;  
Nor, England! Did I know little then

What love I bore to thee.

Thus this poem is a realization of how much one loves his home country when he is away from it. Here Wordsworth tells us that he will not leave England again, "Nor will I quit thy shore/ A second time". This declaration shows the poet's realization that how dear his native land is to him.

In the second half of the poem the poet's love for Lucy and England is combined together and become one as he says, "...she I cherished turned wheel/ Beside an English fire." But in the final stanza of the poem the use of past tense indicates that Lucy is dead. Her death is also proved when the poet says:

The bowers where Lucy played;  
And thine too is the last green field  
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.

Here we see that the poet is pining for England he left behind him and is mourning the death of his beloved. Here we find the nostalgic and melancholic notes. Lucy is dead but her memory is refreshed through the poet's appreciation of the land where Lucy lived. In short we can say that his love for England is inspired by his love for Lucy. Thus we see that throughout the poem the theme of love and death is present like in other Lucy Poems. This poem basically focuses on death of Lucy but it also describes the poet's love for nature as well as England.

"Three Years she grew in Sun and Shower" is other 'Lucy Poem' which deals with the theme of love and death. The poem describes a rivalry between Nature and humanity. Lucy is so innocent, loving and beautiful that both Nature and human want to possess her. In this conflict of possession Nature emerges as a winner. Nature weds Lucy while human is left alone. It means Nature has adopted Lucy and she has mingled with Nature which means she has died. This proves the cruelty and power of Nature as Thomas Hardy has described Nature as a hostile force to human in his novels. In the poem Lucy has died while her lover is left alone only to mourn her death. Here we find the suffering of the narrator of the poem but unlike Hardy's

character he does not cry out against the Nature. He is a slow sufferer. He does not make any complaint against the Nature. It is true that we find sufferings in Wordsworth's poems. All the five 'Lucy Poems' are full of sufferings but those sufferings are suppressed under Wordsworth's love for Nature. He takes suffering as the rule of Nature. So, instead of grieving at the suffering Wordsworth bears it silently.

Thus, in this poem, we see that at one side there are two lovers and the other side there is death. Amid the rivalry of lovers death wins the game. While Lucy is alive she is the beloved of human lover. But the Nature interferes and declares that:

This child I to myself will take;  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A lady of own.

Nature thinks that Lucy is too good for the earth. So, she must not be in human contact. After her death she will become the part of Nature where:

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

The human lover only mourns because he knows that death does not spare anyone as William Shakespeare, in his sonnets has said. In this way death separates Lucy from her human lover.

In this poem the relationship between Lucy and Nature has been depicted in a complex opposition images. The opposite images like "sun and shower", "law and impulse", "earth and heaven", "kindle and restrain", have been used to evoke the opposing forces inherent in nature. Although the poem begins with the narration of the poet yet the main speaker of this poem is Nature. Here Nature has been personified and speaks throughout much of verses. In this poem Lucy has been depicted as a three years child who becomes a matured woman within the period of three years

under the guidance of Nature. After possessing Lucy, Nature transforms her into an ideal woman who will always be in a close proximity of Nature far from the lustful love of human beings and who will carry a grace even in the stormiest of emotional circumstances. Once the Nature makes her a perfect and ideal woman, she steals her away from others through death.

The poem ends in grief but comforting words are also there. Although Lucy is dead, she is in close proximity of Nature living in "happy dell" where she is enjoying the life of "stately height". But the poet's love for Lucy is so deep that he cannot resist from mourning her death. He mourns the death of Lucy but he does not complain to anyone. But he exclaims:

How soon my Lucy's race was run!  
She died, and left to me  
This heath, this calm and quiet scene,  
The memory of what has been,  
And never more will be.

This shows how much he loved Lucy and her death is deeply felt by him. Lucy's death for him, is painful but he bears the pain because he has sweet memory of past of his beloved. Thus we see that the poem, from the beginning to the end, deals with the theme of love and death besides many other themes.

The last poem of The Lucy Poems is "A Slumber did My Spirit Seal". As the other Lucy Poems, this poem too focuses on the idealized love of Wordsworth for a girl named Lucy and the effect of her death on the lover. This is only poem in the group of The Lucy Poems in which Lucy's name is not mentioned. But through the pattern of theme and the narrative style we come to know that the poet is talking about Lucy who is no more in this world. In this poem, too, the poet as a lover laments on the pre-matured death of Lucy whom the poet loved very much. The poet was not ready for Lucy's death so, he is shocked at her death and loses his consciousness.

In this poem the poet realizes that, like other human beings, his beloved will also not be spared by

the ravages of time. The poet says till now his "spirit" was sealed off. He was sure that Lucy will not die. He had never sense that like others she will also die one day. So, he was not afraid of her death. He used to think that there will be no effect of age on Lucy. Her soul and body will never taste the death. So, he "had no human fears" because:

She seemed a thing that could not feel

The touch of Earthly years.

That is why he was not prepared for Lucy's death. But when he faces the reality he is shocked to know about the death of Lucy. Now his illusion that Lucy will not be affected by the death is completely shattered when Lucy dies in reality.

In the second stanza of the poem the poet speaks of the realization of this reality and admits that:

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

Here the poet accepts the reality of Lucy's death and in this way the reality of life in this world.

Now, after this incident, his eyes are opened and he has come into senses. Now Lucy has no movement. She has become silent. She can now neither here nor see because she is dead. After her death she has mingled with Nature as the Hindu mythology believes. She has become the victim of time. She has now mixed up with "rocks, and stones and trees". These natural things are the clear indication of Lucy's death.

Thus we see that, as in other Lucy Poems, in this poem, too, love and death have been dealt with in detail. The poet loves his beloved so much that he has forgotten that, as par the rule of Nature, she, too, will be affected by death.

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