



She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways

William Wordsworth

Intro.

She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways was written in 1798. This poem is Wordsworth's best known work from a series of five texts that form his "Lucy" series. In this series, Wordsworth examines an idealized and unrequited love for Lucy, a girl who has died young.

Intro.

The poem examines loneliness and loss, but also unrecognized beauty and dignity. It has three quatrains with simple language (mainly words of one syllable), and it has an ABAB rhyme scheme. Furthermore, the poem can be read as an elegiac poem, with graceful descriptions and a mourning tone.

Analysis

She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways is a representative of a Romantic poem. The poem celebrates a girl by associating her to nature with straightforward language and emphasizing on emotional expression.

The First Stanza

*She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love:*

analysis

The first stanza describes the area in which Lucy (“She”) lived. This rural scenery is described as a *locus amoenus*, an idealized beautiful place. From the first line, the lyrical voice refers to a “She”, his/her loved one that will later acquire a name (“Lucy”).

analysis

Notice how it is described that she “dwelt”, meaning that she lived there in the past. Although this rural scenery is described as idyllic and magnificent place (“among the untrodden ways/Beside the springs of Dove”), Lucy was alone and there was no one to praise her and to love her. The first line, which serves also as the title of the poem, suggests that Lucy lived both physically and spiritually unrevealed and distant.

The Second Stanza

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

Analysis

The second stanza focuses on nature. She is likened to “A violet by a mossy stone/ Half hidden from the eye” and to a fair star “when only one/Is shining in the sky”.

Analysis

These comparisons serve to exemplify Lucy as an embodiment of all beauty. Notice how her description is made by an economic use of words, as they depict Lucy's simplicity by using short, straightforward words. This word usage creates a meaningful and powerful poetry that emphasizes on passionate feelings of love and grief.

The Third Stanza

*She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!*

Analysis

The final stanza serves as an antithesis. The lyrical voice accentuates her isolation: “She lived unknown, and few could know/ When Lucy ceased to be;”. The poem follows a cyclical pattern. Notice how this stanza repeats the characterization of Lucy as distant and unknown (like in the first stanza). Moreover, this cycle is also related to the movement between growth and death.

This cyclical form conveys great dramatic intensity. Lucy's death is expressed with great sadness: "But she is in her grave, and, oh". Love is asserted by the lyrical voice's exclamation of difference ("The difference to me!"). The lyrical voice, dissimilarly from others, feels that he/she is unlike he/she was before because he/she could love her passionately, and that changed him/her.

analysis

This “difference” functions powerfully through understatement, and establishes a dramatic ending for the poem. Notice how, throughout the poem, the lyrical voice focuses on his experience and how Lucy affected him/her rather than his/her beloved one herself (this is another recurrent characteristic of the Romantic Movement).

Conclusive Remarks

- In this poem, Wordsworth carries the identification of the girl and the country even further. In this poem, he says that Lucy is 'a violet by a mossy stone'; she is 'a star'.
- He tells us nothing practical, nothing factual about her at all. Even the 'springs of Dove' that she dwelled beside are not a real place,
- All he tells us about Lucy in this poem is that she lived unknown, and that she is now late.