

Show your acquaintance with the poem “Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” by William Wordsworth.

(B.A.English Subsidiary, Part-1,Paper-1)

'A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal' is the greatest of the Lucy poems composed by William Wordsworth and probably one of the greatest in the English language. This brief elegy on Lucy belongs to that group of exquisite lyrics, which are collectively known as 'Lucy' poems. The keynote of this poem is immortality. In only eight lines, Wordsworth conveys, with absolute conviction, intensity and compression, the whole of the human situation posed in 'Three Years She Grew', and the whole of the concept of Lucy as integrated with nature.

In the first line, he refers to a 'slumber' which sealed his spirit. Wordsworth refers to sleep and slumber when he is thinking of something quite different to the normal meaning of these terms; at times he seems to mean a spiritual peace, but here equally he seems to mean an unawareness and this is reinforced by the second line—'I had no human fears'. The next two lines explain that Lucy had seemed to him a 'thing' that could not be touched by the passing of time, 'The touch of earthly years.'

The second stanza is a contrast to the first, in that the poet now shows how Lucy was touched by time and death and now lacks 'motion' and 'force', both ideas associated with positive human action. Now she 'neither hears nor sees'; all those special marks of humanity are gone. That is, Lucy has been absorbed into nature. She is now one with the rocks, stones and trees and part of the greater pattern of the universe.

The poem possesses an absolute simplicity of tone, style, rhythm and rhyme. The diction, likewise, is simple, except for the word 'diurnal', which contrasts with those around it and helps to lay stress on the heavy, blow-like rhythm of

the final line, where both the finality of the poet's loss and the totality of Lucy's absorption are reinforced by the rhythm.

In this poem the girl Lucy has reached the farthest point of disembodiment. She is not even a violet or a star; she is nothing as tangible or visible even as those two inhuman objects. The poem does not say that she had died; there is no factual statement of the kind. She is defined wholly by negatives; that is, we do not know who she was or what she was, only that she is no longer. She is nothing; she sees nothing, she hears nothing, she cannot herself move, she is beyond time, unchangeable, eternal. And yet, at the same time, she does move; she is not motionless, she moves with the movement of the whole world, as it turns in space, and this movement she almost seems to feel—certainly the poet feels it for her. The poem does not even say that she is in grave, though this is what one tends to assume. Perhaps she, like the poet, is in a trance. For he too is in 'a slumber', carried beyond ordinary 'human fears'; he has no regrets, no anxieties, and he feels himself turning slowly, as though he has lost his own strength and his own right to action, as though he has become a rock or a stone or a tree.

And yet, at the same time, trance is not like death. We do not feel that the poet and Lucy are as dead as stones; the effect of the poem is to make us feel that stones and trees are alive, and that the daily turning of the earth is a positive, living movement, not a mere mechanical rotation. This highly complex notion, characteristic of Wordsworth's attitude to the natural world, is expressed with an amazing power and with a complete absence of any philosophical or intellectual argument.

The poem has perfect unity. Every word in it is extremely simple and indeed common, with one interesting exception 'diurnal' which is the only word in the poem with more than two syllables. It is the only literary word in the piece, and it is used with great care and effect. The heavy rolling of its syllables suggests the rolling of the earth, as the more usual word 'daily' could never have done, and its very unexpectedness adds immeasurably to the weight and gravity of the poem. Wordsworth does not overdo it; a poem full of words like 'diurnal' would be merely pedantic and artificial, but the use of one such word, accompanied by the bare dignity of 'rocks and stones and trees', is extraordinarily musical and suggestive. In his sparing, careful use of such

long and rhythmic words. Wordsworth, at his best is with Shakespeare. The combination of sound and sense is a sign of the greatest poetry.

The genesis of these poems has still remained a mystery. We do not know who this Lucy Grey was. The question of whether Lucy Grey was a real girl, or she was the creation of the poet's fancy. This poem is an elegy on Lucy. In this poem he speaks about the exquisite charm, beauty, vitality, and gaiety of Lucy who was 'Nature's darling'. Wordsworth, whether genuinely or imaginatively, loved this girl very much. She was the source of great joy and inspiration to the poet and it is through Lucy that he makes Nature speak of herself.

The poet says that when Lucy was living, he was so lovely, fresh and full of vitality that he could never for a moment think that she will ever die. Her personality used to work like a drug on the poet's mind and the girl used to appear to him immortal. Her charm and loveliness was enough to devoid him of his reason.

A slumber or sleep or state of unawareness sealed off the poet's spirits, kept him, in other words, from a normal awareness of the realities of life. In this state of unawareness, he had no human fears. What he means by human fears is suggested in the last two lines of the first stanza; the use of the colon after fears indicates that the clause that follows will amplify or explain the preceding clause. Lucy seemed to be someone who could never grow old. The poet, then, had none of the fears that human beings have about the possible death of their loved ones: he had no human fears. But the line also means that he had no fears about his beloved as a human being, the word human being ambiguously used in the second line. The effect of the ambiguity is twofold: the poet's not having any of the fears that human beings normally have made his love impressively enveloping and all engrossing; and the poet's having no fears for his beloved as a human being enables us to see her as the poet sees her—as a being who transcends the ravages of time, a being so perfect that the poet need have no fears for her. But in the second stanza, Lucy is dead: she has no motion and no force; she does not hear nor does she see. She has become an inanimate part of the earth as she is rolled around with rocks, stones, and trees in the daily revolution of the earth. Much of the impact of the poem depends on the shocking contrast between Lucy in the first stanza—a being of eternal youth—and the dead

Lucy of the second stanza. Compressed into eight short lines is a concept of love that has the power to take a lover beyond the confines of reality until he sees his beloved as perfect and immortal. There is also the shock of realizing that despite his love the beloved is subject to death—is, indeed, now merely like rocks and stones and trees—without a will, without power, lost in the daily turning of the globe.

The word slumber has the connotations of a light, pleasant steep; it differs from sleep in that its very lightness removes any suggestion of death with which sleep is often enough equated. Were the poet to have said that a sleep sealed his spirit, the suggestion of death might have been too powerful to counteract in subsequent lines. His spirit, his consciousness of reality, however, is sealed or shut off from reality by a light and pleasant sleep in which he has no human fears. The initial connotations, then, are not of death, but of the entirely pleasant state of slumber untroubled by fears of any kind. The absence of fear is emphasized by the metrical structure of the second line: 'I had no human fears.'

Similarly, Lucy seemed a thing; normally, we use the word thing to describe an inanimate object, but here it is used to describe so animate an object that it is immune to the touch of earthly years: it cannot die since it will not grow old. In the second stanza, the whole irony of the diction of the first stanza becomes apparent. Death is the essence of the second stanza, and the merest suggestion of it in the first line of the poem becomes a dominant reality in the second stanza. In the second stanza, Lucy has indeed become a thing—a thing of no motion, no force. Subtly, then, the two stanzas, though dealing with two sharply contrasted ideas—the first with the intense kind of love and the second with death—are nevertheless linked through the diction of the first stanza which foreshadows on a secondary level the content of the second stanza.

The fourfold negation of life for Lucy in the second stanza----she has no motion, no force, no sight, no hearing—not only serves to emphasize more strongly Lucy's death, but it also suggests the total impact of the knowledge of Lucy's death on the poet. It is as though he can grasp the whole meaning of death only part by part: grasping the whole all at once would be overwhelming. The last two lines of the poem emphasize again the complete lack of animation that characterizes death: Lucy is equated with rocks and