

Abstract

I see the presentation of a paper at this conference as the first part of what I hope will be a process culminating in an exhibition of work by WALK in collaboration with Prof. John Strachan (represented by his own poems and a text for a publication to be funded by the Universities of Sunderland and Northumbria) next; an exhibition that explores the manuscript texts held by Dove Cottage, and looks at ways of bringing them alive, helping a new audience find ways of seeing them afresh.

I will begin my talk by explaining why I think contemporary artists can do this – what we can 'bring to the table' that will add to the excellent work already done by scholars and educationalists. By the time of the conference, Prof. Brian Thompson will have finished a new sculpture, embedding text relating to William Wordsworth's Poem, The River Derwent, within layers of glass (as we discussed last week). I will talk about this work and explain how it, the manuscript, the writing and the finished glass-work enliven the process of reading the manuscript text, and I will also show photos of it being made.

I will then go on to talk about my own interest in this project. I am keen to explore in detail the manuscripts of the Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth and in particular, through her many walks, her phenomenological referencing of flora, fauna, weather and landscape. I have always admired Dorothy's approach to writing and I feel that my own work and the way I 'record' things seen, felt, heard and experienced is very much attuned to her way of responding to the world.

Prior to the conference, I would like to 'work with' copies of the original manuscripts as my key reference point as well as some information about how they were written and developed. I will then show how a contemporary artist like myself, working with colour and text could examine 'the textual, physical and emotional meanings' of Dorothy Wordsworth's manuscripts, highlighting 'the equal importance of textual analysis and the manuscript as artefact', thereby helping to create 'an understanding of a manuscript's emotional value to its contemporaries (for its content, but also as an object in itself)' and 'showing how a manuscript's physicality can be as significant'.

The tenor of my presentation will be very much that of a 'work or body of research in progress' – I aim to show the processes involved in my exploration of the manuscripts and discuss my methodology in mediating this research through my own artwork. Part of my overall approach will be to undertake a series of walks around Grasmere – walks that Dorothy would have made – since one of the (obvious) points I would want to make is that just as Dorothy's Journals begin with the 'direct experience', so too should our/my reading of them do so.