



Dorothy:
Writer,

Sister,

Friend

Oct 2021 - Summer 2022
Wordsworth Grasmere

O u r f r i e n d

D o r o t h y

reflections on
Dorothy and
friendship

Read the zine and feeling inspired?
Whether you've had a go at making a letter or want to
share your own thoughts about friendship, get in touch!

Feel free to tag us on social media.
We are Wordsworth Grasmere
on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Don't forget to use the hashtag

#OurFriendDorothy



"Female Friendship" by SC

Editor's Note:

I felt an immediate kinship with Dorothy Wordsworth when I learned she never married. Her multiple lifelong friendships instead of one 'significant other' resonated deeply. What would it mean to read Dorothy Wordsworth's writing from an aromantic asexual * perspective? A group of aromantic asexual individuals and I explored Dorothy's letters to friends and drew connections to the significance of our own friendships. Reading her truly felt like 'seeing a familiar face.'

The group created a display for the Dorothy: Writer, Sister, Friend exhibition at Wordsworth Grasmere. Additionally, we collaborated on this zine to further explore our own experiences in conversation with Dorothy's writings. The views contained in this zine are the views of the group members.

Our zine begins with a quote from biographer Ernest De Selincourt (1870-1943), who describes Dorothy as having a genius for friendship. The following pages celebrate this articulate, intentional, significant friendship alongside our own personal experiences.

* some definitions:

Aromantic

aro for short, refers to a person who experiences little to no romantic attraction to others.

Asexual

ace for short, refers to a person who experiences little to no sexual attraction to others.

Zine

(pronounced 'zeen') is taken from the term magazine or fanzine. A zine is an independently made publication with a lot of creative freedom.

A Note from the (Cover) Artist

To begin, thank you for picking up this Zine. All of us involved are pleased you are taking the time to look at our hard work. My contribution to this Zine is the cover, a painting of two women in front of a fireplace. This image is also featured in the Dorothy and Friendship Exhibit.

The Painting is called "Female Friendship." It depicts Dorothy Wordsworth and her close friend, Jane Pollard, spending a night beside a warm fire. It was inspired by a line from one of Dorothy's many letters to her dear friend.

"and if it should be cold and stormy, we shall see if female Friendship is not sufficiently powerful to rob the Blast of its cutting Edge."

It reminds me of those days where the weather changes suddenly, and hinders all your plans. On those soggy occasions, all that my friends and I need are a warm space and each other's company. We play games, share stories, have a warm drink, and laugh late into the night. That is the type of moment I think Dorothy was trying to convey in her letter, and I wanted to bring that moment to life.

Through her letters, we get a glimpse of who Dorothy was as a person. Her words convey such a passion, as only a poet could, with each page painting a picture in its own right. A vibrant individual like Dorothy Wordsworth just cannot be portrayed in this exhibit about friendship looking quietly reserved and proper. The moment of laughter between Dorothy and Jane portrayed in the painting represents the joy her friends brought into her life.

It was important to me to convey the platonic intimacy these women shared. Our group discussed the challenge of communication in a world so heavily focused on sexuality, and how limiting it felt when interacting with those we love. On the other hand, Dorothy seemed to have no such barriers in her letters. There was no romance, but it is still abundantly clear that Dorothy's friends meant the world to her.

When looking at the painting, it does have romantic overtones. Two individuals, silhouetted by a fireplace, the flames giving their features a soft and welcoming glow. It's late in the night, as the storm rages on, and they continue to enjoy each other's company. They are both having the best evening they've had in a long time. And yet, there is nothing romantic about the picture, everything suggests a cozy night with a friend. This is similar to the challenge of expressing asexual feelings with a sexualized language. To be able to say "I love you" to those most important to us, and have them understand how we mean it, would be sufficient to rob any blast of its cutting edge.

"she had a
GENIUS for
Friendship

and many of her
friendships
brought
her a
lasting
pleasure."

-Ernest De Selincourt

(biographer of Dorothy Wordsworth)

Dorothy's genius

by Samantha

Dorothy placed great importance on friendship and had multiple life-long friends.

& she showed "proof of affection" by informality in her letters to her closest friends.

& she was a very affectionate friend, unafraid to tell her friends what they meant to her.

& She thought of her friends often and they were a comfort to her. She would see the moon on a walk and think of Catherine Clarkson; sit in a meadow and think of Jane Pollard; read a poem and think of Lady Beaumont.

& She was intentional about her friendships. She would address feelings; explain to Lady Beaumont the loss of her parents at a young age or address Jane's concern that she preferred Peggy Taylor's friendship. She would advocate for more communication; write to Catherine of her intention to "never again be so foolish" as to go months without writing letters.



Amatonormativity (n.)

the societal assumption that a central romantic relationship is the "normal", that it is a universal goal, and that it is superior to other types of relationship.

*"I am as heretical as yourself
in my opinions concerning
Love and Friendship"*

- Dorothy to Jane, 1793

*A friend for nature, a friend for you
and a friend of twilight wander hand in hand*

*Love to me comes beautifully
in ways some cannot understand.*

- Catriona

*"...I am very sure that Love will never
bind me closer to any human Being
than Friendship binds me to you"*

- Dorothy to Jane, 1793



*"You are the friend of
my childhood..."*

*You shared all my little
distresses and were the
partner of all my pleasures."*

- Dorothy to Jane, 1791

My trio - always been there, through good and bad -
for each other, for selflessness - what friends are for -

Like Dorothy, I find plain words don't always convey
how friendship feels - the right words don't exist in
our amatonormative language that expects to place
"love" next to "romance" so much of the time.

I can't write letters as articulate as Dorothy's, but
sometimes I use poetry instead.

- Catriona

*"No words can paint my affection and
friendship for you my Dear Girl."*

- Dorothy to Jane, 1788

I walk awaiting
My evening painting
A stroll through town
One more day down
They'd said I'd find
My hopeful mind
We talk sky blue
As good friends do.



Three is enough on a walk up the hill
There's so little time with the world turning still
We might break our promises, can't guarantee,
But time spent together is enough for us three

I ponder evening,
My sweet believing
In hope anew
As good friends do.

- Catriona

FRIENDSHIP

Ah! A brother by another mother!
Decades of confused hurt
digging to find a word
allowed

that captures
how I felt and still feel
as I did back on the school fields
of the heretical affections
driven underground

set to direct collision
to split apart his sister
of no blood tie.

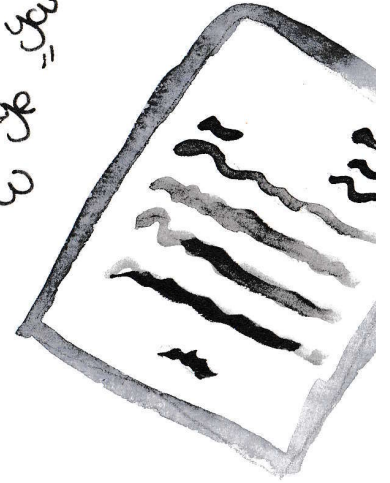
- Lianne

"I often wish, selfish as it may
appear to you, that you my dear Jane were
my sister, I think how happy we
should be!"

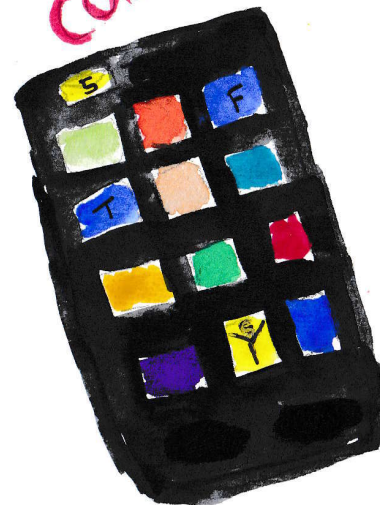
-DW

letter to Jane, 1788

"I found that one sheet of paper
would not contain half of what I
had to say to you;
I am sorry to charge you with double
postage"
-DW



COMMUNICATION



Txt not limited,
inst msgr
is 3, but
shrtnd in value

whre r u,
costs 2 much of ur
time

ur so cl, but
far

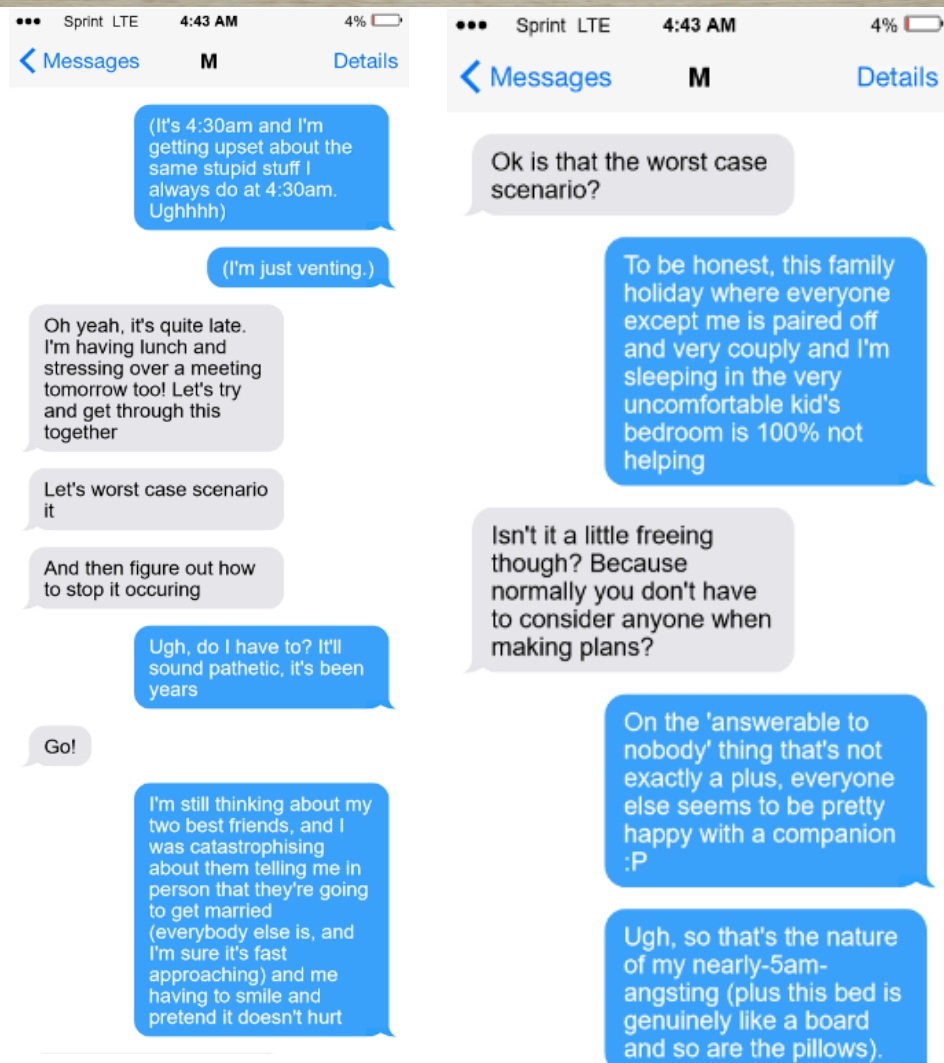
- Lianne

I wonder if Dorothy ever had late-night thoughts and worries like mine? Would her imaginary midnight conversations to Jane Pollard in 1793 have at times looked like my messages to my friend on the other side of the world?

- Bryony

"I write to inform you that I have obtained my Uncle's consent to my visiting my dear Friends at Halifax and that after the month of August nothing but a call from Mr. Griffith will be necessary to make me fly to you...I look forward to meeting again the Friend of my Childhood, the companion of my pleasures...Oh Jane! with what Transport shall I embrace you! My dear Friend we shall live over again those Days, and we shall anticipate future joys, domestic felicity, Peace and retirement...What thousands of things shall we have to say to each other! Our midnight conversations will then not be imaginary ones..."

DW to Jane, Jun. 1793



For me, the informality that Dorothy's letters contain is what makes them a joy to read. In these excerpts from letters to Jane Pollard (1788) and Lady Beaumont (1804), you can see how relaxed she is. She also claims Jane as being like a sibling – something I do with multiple friends of mine.

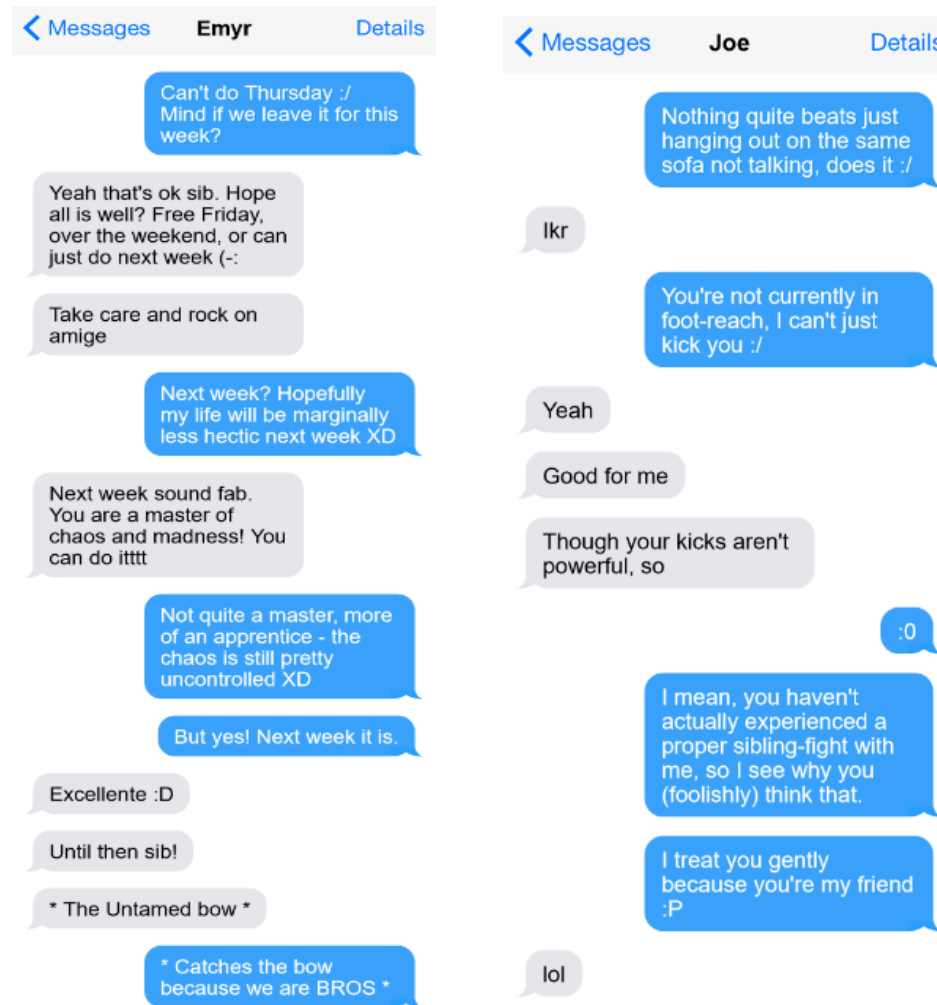
-Bryony

"I have taken two very shabby pieces of paper but I have not any more by me, to you however I need make [no] apology either for the writing or materials which [are] both shocking."

DW to Jane, Jan. 1788

"These are nursery tales—I will ask you to excuse them—I only prattle in this way to those I love and who I believe love me and those I love."

DW to Lady Beaumont, Sep. 1804



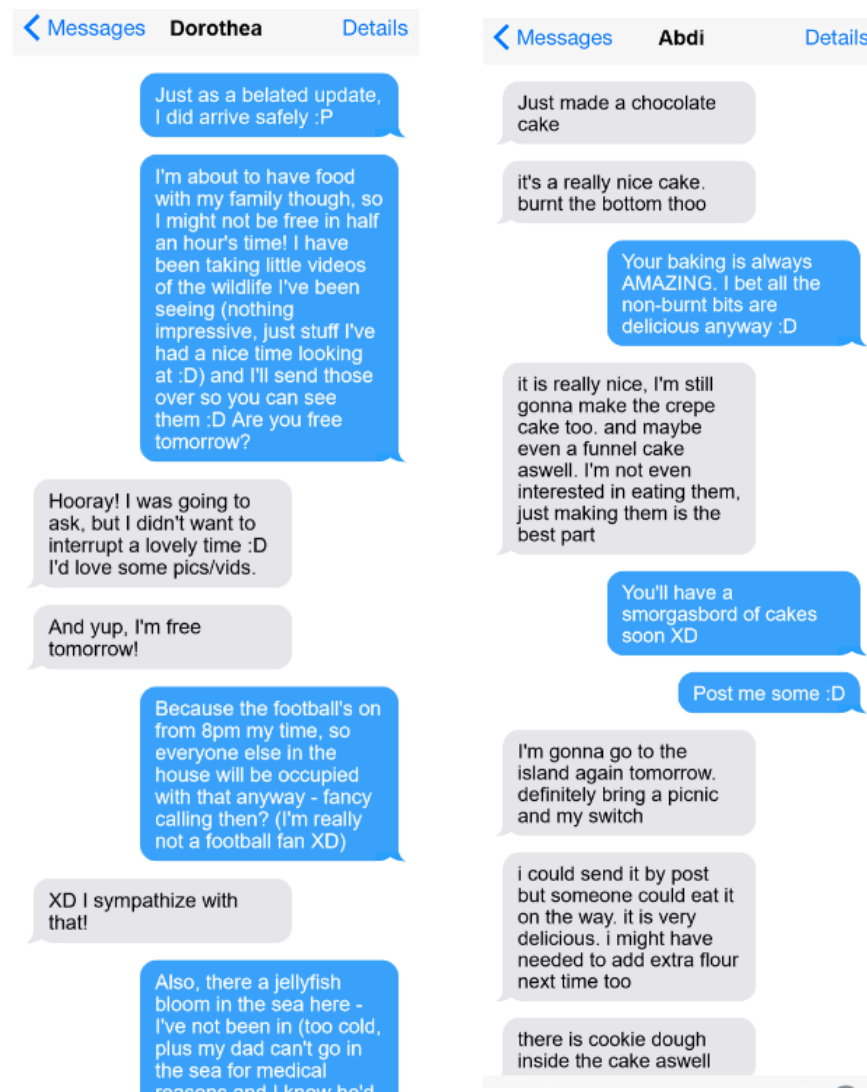
"The evening is a lovely one, and I have strolled into a neighbouring meadow where I am enjoying the melody of Birds and the busy sounds of a fine summer's evening, while my eye is gratified by a smiling prospect of cultivated fields richly wooded, our own church, and the parsonage house. But oh how imperfect is my pleasure! I am alone; why are not you seated with me? and my dear William why is not he here also? I could almost fancy that I see you both near me. I have chosen a bank where I have room to spare for a resting-place for each of you. I hear you point out a spot where, if we could erect a little cottage and call it our own we should be the happiest of human beings...

My dear friend I trust that ere long you will be, without the aid of imagination, the companion of my walks;"

Dorothy to Jane, July 1793

While undoubtedly a lot less poetic than her writings to Jane (1793), the feeling of wanting to share something of beauty with a friend still hold true whenever you are.

-Bryony



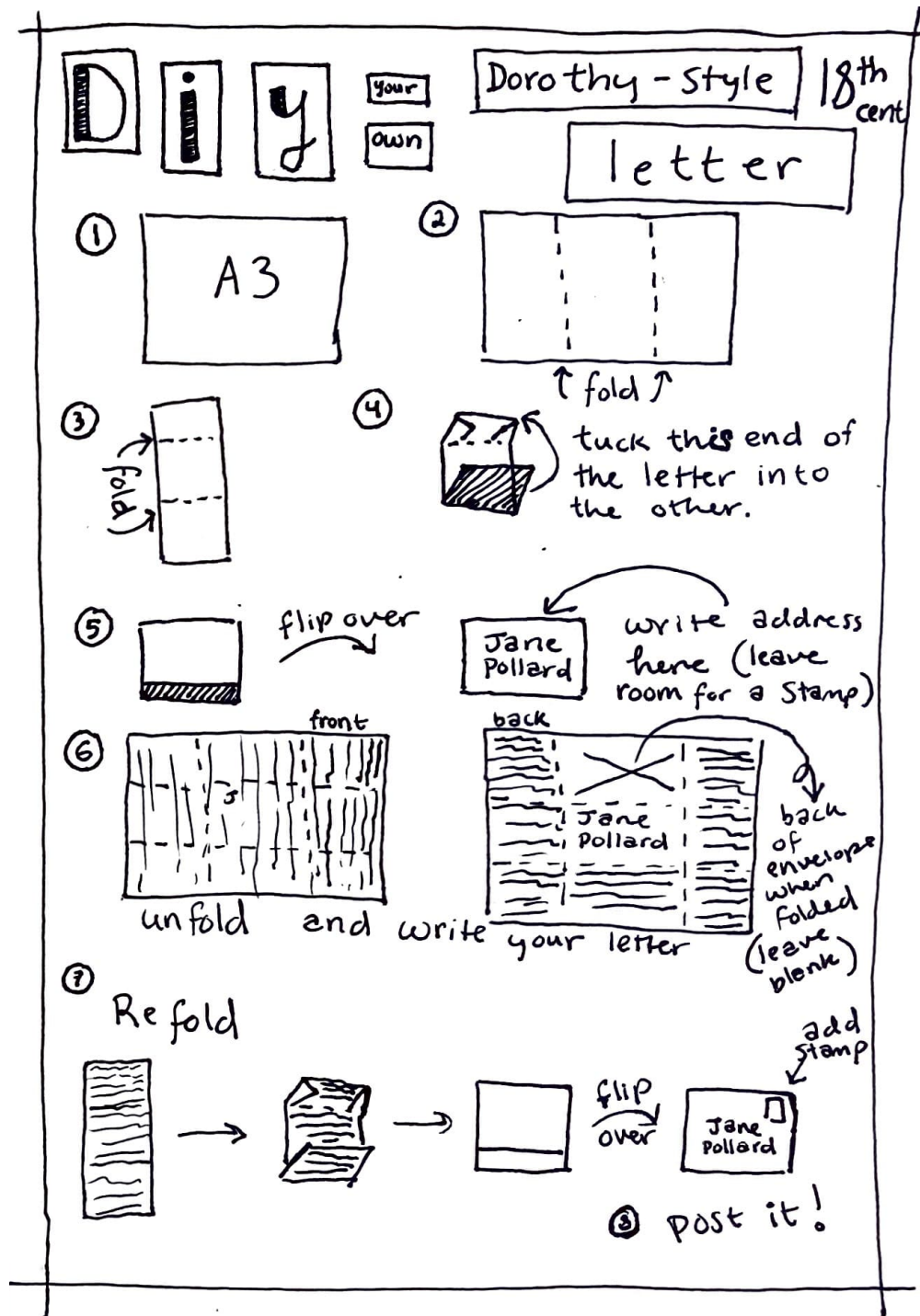
Dear Dorothy,

I, too, love writing letters to my friends. For me, there's an intimacy in accepting any imperfections and producing a tangible thing. I feel connected by the process: I find a moment, engage with the paper, and guide the ink into letters, into words, into complete thoughts. I fold ~~the letter~~ ^{my message}, creasing it into three dimensions.

Then, I put it in the mail to be collected by the post person. It changes hands I don't know how many times before it is deposited with a particular friend however far away. The movement of this process is expansive, transforming the intimate crafting of the letter into a broad-reaching spectacle. You wrote to Lady Beaumont once that writing her brought her nearer to you and you to her. Reading your letters has made me feel similarly about you, so I wanted to write you a letter in return. Friendships are my dearest relationships and I don't take them lightly. I think we are similar in this respect. Your 'genius for friendship' is still having an impact over two hundred years later. I've learned a lot from you.

your friend,

Sandra

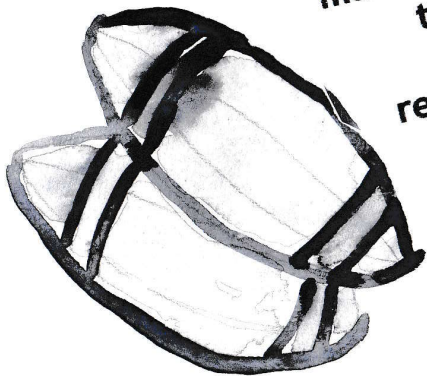


BROTHER

Lifted in admiration
he's my big brother
and supportive column
that I followed.

My best,
most reliable
friend
when all others
disappointed.

Bonding through touch
rugby, and local football
matches was sibling time
that moved on
without me
replaced by a wife.

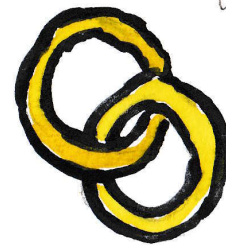


- Lianne

SISTER

"When my brother William was
married to Mary Hutchinson...
William had parted from me upstairs.
I gave him the wedding ring -
with how deep a blessing!

I took it from my forefinger where I had
worn it the whole of the night before -
he slipped it again onto my finger and
blessed me fervently. "
- DW



Grasmere Journal, 4 Oct. 1802

A Sister's Tragedy

"I have long loved Mary Hutchinson as a Sister, and she is equally attached to me... you will guess that I look forward with perfect happiness to this Connection between us, but happy as I am, I half dread that concentration of all tender feelings, past, present, and future which will come upon me on the wedding morning." - Dorothy to Jane, 1802

Dorothy Wordsworth was very close with her brother William and his wife Mary. Despite this, Dorothy had trouble accepting that her brother was getting married. This hit very close to home, and reminded me of the current relationship I have with my sister.

As kids, we were inseparable, sometimes literally. Even now, living in different cities, we do whatever it takes to stay close. We had late night calls full of laughter, and went on trips to explore the world. But we both have different goals in life when it comes to relationships. I was excited to see my sister so happy when she met someone, and I think he's a great guy. But despite my joy for both of them, I miss my sister. The connection we had built over our entire lives had suddenly changed. Our late night calls became quick catch ups before dinner and trips became harder to schedule. It almost felt like I'd been demoted.

But that wasn't what happened. She wanted a connection, to find someone she could rely on and support. That was her goal, she wanted to find a romantic love, and she did. On the other hand, my goal has always been to be there for the ones I love, and be a part of their lives. Which I am. It's just a little bittersweet some times.



- SC

Asexuality is **NOTHING** New

by SC



Artemis goddess of the Hunt, Moon, and Maidenhood. The Greek writers wrote of her refusal to wed, and the consequences of those who made advances. Hunters would abstain from sex prior to the hunt as a form of ritual purity, because of this Artemis was seen as the Ideal Hunter. This all led her to become the guardian of anyone who defied Aphrodite, goddess of Love and Passion. She may have protected...

Sir Isaac Newton

A Physicist, Mathematician, Astronomer, Theologian, and Author. Many historians have argued that he just didn't have the time amidst his discoveries. But Voltaire (philosopher) said Isaac Newton "was never sensible to any passion, was not subject to the common frailties of man kind."



Emily Brontë

The famed author of Wuthering Heights, very little is known about the shy, reclusive sister. However, her choice not to seek out marriage during an era when it was viewed as necessary to survival, has suggested to many she had little or no interest in love.



Sherlock Holmes

The world's greatest detective may be a work of fiction, but his legacy cannot be denied. Every month, readers of *The Strand Magazine* were exposed to a character who has "never loved." Throughout 56 short stories and four novels, there are many instances where love are discussed. In Sherlock Holmes own words:

"Women have seldom been an attraction to me, for my brain has always governed my heart."



Nikola Tesla

An inventor, electrical engineer, mechanical engineer, and futurist. Tesla's first love was his work.

"I do not think there is any thrill that can go through the human heart like that felt by the inventor as he sees some creation of the brain unfolding to success. Such emotions make a man forget food, sleep, friends, love, everything."



AND THIS ZINE'S AUTHORS

Dorothy Wordsworth was not the first to have no interest in love, and WE won't be the last. We're not the stuff of legends or tortured geniuses, or even English writers. But new or old, the Asexual community is made up of amazing and interesting people.



acknowledgments

Project Contributors:

Ari, Bryony, Catriona, Katrina, Lianne, Samantha, SC

Special thanks to:

Hannah Catterall for working with our group, her expert coordination, and creative insight.

Jeff Cowton and Melissa Mitchell for their guidance and support throughout this process.

Further Reading

On aSexuality →
www.asexuality.org

On aRomanticism →
www.aromanticism.org



On Dorothy

→ *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals* by Dorothy Wordsworth, edited Pamela Woolf

→ *The Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth: a Selection*, edited by Alan G. Hill
→ Wordsworth.org.uk/blog

