Several thoughts danced through my head as I read these journals; they were not intended for public consumption, they become more engaging as one reads on, they are a most honest portrait of both William and Dorothy, and they seem bizarrely void of genuine emotion. The last one struck me the most while reading. As I went along with her day by day through her routine, I kept hoping Dorothy would open up about some deeper emotions she was experiencing. The only moment I felt the candidness I desired from her was the moment she awaited William and Mary to return from their marriage. However, it was such a quick glimpse, I felt as though there must be more somewhere. It is also difficult to determine the exact reason (or reasons) she felt the anxiety she did—nothing is exclusively said. Of course, I kept reminding myself that these writings are not meant to be read by someone who does not know the inner circumstances evoking such feelings. Nevertheless, I so desperately want to know. (Perhaps, there is a novel there…) Dorothy’s journal writings are very different from the other autobiographical writings we have encountered. As opposed to Rousseau’s writings, she is not setting out to create a confessional atmosphere filled with charming anecdotes and well written prose. Although her text is not badly written, it does leave a lot for the reader to “fill in.” Yet, this makes it appear more honest and trustworthy. It does not feel as though Dorothy has a hidden agenda—which a writer as brilliant as Rousseau most likely had. I think
Dorothy’s honesty, despite some of its mundanity, is appealing and appropriate for autobiographical writing. Even though she did not set out to write an autobiography, her writing has drawn portraits—hers and Williams—that satisfy the autobiographic aesthetic. It makes one wonder about intention—a tricky subject to maneuver, I know. Nevertheless, if a work that is not intended as an autobiography ends up being one, is not the entire question of intention put into question? It makes intention seem irrelevant to the work itself. The work becomes something of its own, despite its author’s intended purpose for writing it.

That is one of the things that is so fascinating about these journals, they have unintentionally become portraits of William Wordsworth and one of his muses—for I cannot help but see Dorothy as instrumental to his work. Not to mention, their value in showing us an honest portrayal of his writing process—his pains and his victories. I think there is no doubt Dorothy was a major influence on her brother and his appropriation of some of her prose for his poems attests to that fact. Which moves me onto the adoration between the two—I often felt as though Dorothy were describing a lover when she would talk about William. Her attachment to him seems so deep and beyond fraternal—I have two brothers, whom I love dearly, but I cannot imagine feeling so intensely and intimately about either of them. She calls him her beloved, she waits in desperate anxiety for his arrival, she writes her life around his. It is obvious from the journal that William is the moon, literally. If one looks at how often Dorothy writes about the moon and how prevalent it is in her view of the landscape—it is the centerpiece of most of her descriptions of scenes in nature—one can make an association between it and William because he, too, seems to be the centerpiece of her perspective on life. Moreover,
thinking on our last discussion in class, on Wordsworth as the moon in his description of
the sight at Snowdon, I started to make a connection between these two—him and the
moon—in her writings. Of course, with Dorothy’s writings, any connections we make
have to be taken for subconscious ones on her part, for there could not have been
conscious intentions in her writing. Her journal is not a carefully constructed, edited, and
fabricated work of prose. It is a stream-of-consciousness detailing of her life. One can
assume she was merely expressing honest experience and emotion as it occurred at the
time (I assume she would not be so explicit about her bowels and headaches if her writing
were meant for the greater public).

I have plenty to say about this work; I have not even touched on the intensity of
her ability to detail things to a tee—her memory of people and places seems photographic
at times. I read the journals all in one sitting and became very engaged in her and her
simple life. It feels as though there is so much to say about her attachment to and
influence on one of the master romantic poets, as well as her own poetic abilities and
sensibilities (denied and undeveloped for some reason). Dorothy’s writing raises so many
questions about the nature of autobiographical writing and its influence in general, but in
a way that is quite different from Rousseau, Wordsworth, or even St. Augustine.