It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder – everlastingly.

Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,
And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

**Background to the poem**

In 1791, the young Wordsworth travelled to France, where he met and had an affair with Annette Vallon. He returned to England the following year, but Annette was already pregnant with his child at that stage. War broke out between England and France, and Wordsworth was unable to go back to see his baby daughter. In 1802 Wordsworth returned at last to France to meet his daughter, Caroline, for the first time. They walked together on the beach in Calais, and that meeting was the inspiration for this poem. Later that year, Wordsworth married a childhood friend, Mary Hutchinson, with whom he went on to have five children.

**Analysis**

The poem opens with a description of the evening. It is a peaceful, calm, beautiful (beauteous) time, as the father and daughter watch the sun setting over the sea. Wordsworth always loved such serene times, as they allowed him to reflect on the spiritual world as well as appreciating the beauty of nature. He feels "free" because he can, in this place and at this time, forget the concerns of the wider world, and lose
himself in the moment. He feels that this is a "holy" time, and that he should spend it in reverent thought. Wordsworth, though not an atheist, was not religious in the strict sense of the word. He felt that nature offered us a chance to see something of the divine, or the "Presence" which exists beyond our understanding. This sonnet is full of religious references which can be taken as a reflection of the poet's spiritual relationship with nature.

The soft "s" sounds and the assonance in these opening lines: "holy", "adoration" add to the mood of reverential silence and peace. Suddenly, there is a shift as the poet tells us to "Listen!" This surprising exclamation is followed by a description of the waves which are "like thunder". The silence is broken, and the noise makes Wordsworth think that the "mighty Being" is awake. Is it God, or nature, or a combination of the two? We are not told. It is safe to assume that Wordsworth means the force which drives everything, regardless of its name. It may be God to some people, but that is not important here.

In the sestet (final six lines), the poet addresses his daughter affectionately, "Dear Child!". He repeats the word "dear", showing his love for the little girl. She is not moved to spiritual thought by the scene, but Wordsworth does not love her any the less for this. She is untouched by "solemn thought", which is hardly surprising, given that she is nine years of age. However, her response is no "less divine". Children are close to God, or whatever "mighty Being" exists, simply because of their innocence.
And in the frosty season, when the sun
Was set, and visible for many a mile
The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,
I heeded not their summons: happy time
It was indeed for all of us – for me
It was a time of rapture! Clear and loud
The village clock tolled six, - I wheeled about
Proud and exulting like an untired horse
That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,
We hissed along the polished ice in games
Confederate, imitative of the chase
And woodland pleasures, - the resounding horn,
The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle; with the din,
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.
Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed,
Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me - even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebleer, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

The Prelude, 1799; Book I, ls 452-489

**Background to the poem**

This poem is taken from the much longer work, "The Prelude". In "The Prelude", Wordsworth explores the events in his life from childhood to adulthood, and looks at the way in which they made him the man he became.

**Analysis**

The poem opens with a description of a perfect winter wonderland. It is "the frosty season" and the sun has set. The only lights are those of the cottage windows, shining through "the twilight gloom". They may call to some, but Wordsworth ignores their summons. This is a time of joy for the young boy and his friends, but there is a sense that Wordsworth somehow appreciates it even more than his companions. "- for me / It was a time of rapture!" The run-on lines add to this sense of excitement and freedom that the poet felt during this "happy time".

Wordsworth likens himself to a horse in the eighth line, a comparison reinforced by his description of the skaters as being "shod with steel". The repeated "s" sounds in the line "We hissed along the polished ice" bring the scene to life for us. The children are also compared to a pack of hounds chasing a hare. The verbs used in this section of the poem are very dynamic: "wheeled", "hissed" and "flew", and their use, as well as the comparison between the poet and an "untired horse" add to the sense of energy and vigour in the poem. It is easy to imagine the children's pleasure and excitement as they skate about in the dark, and Wordsworth's effective use of language allows us to share in the skaters' delight and excitement.

As the children skate on, they shout with glee. "So through the darkness and the cold we flew, / And not a voice was idle." The noise echoes off the surrounding cliffs, and the "precipices rang aloud". Wordsworth's depiction of the sounds in this poem is
wonderful. The simile describing the echoes is particularly striking. The landscape "Tinkled like iron" as the children played. The use of the word "tinkle" suggests Christmas bells, perhaps, or any other cheerful, happy sound.

The echoes which come back from the distant hills are sad and "alien". The "melanacholy" may seem out of place when describing children's games, but the Romantic poets believed that sad music was the most beautiful. The mention of "melancholy" also lends the poem an air of mystery, and perhaps they foreshadow the emotions of the adult poet as he thinks back to those times which he cannot revisit. Time passes, and nothing will ever be the same again.

Wordsworth leaves his friends and finds a quiet spot away from the "tumultuous throng" where he can skate around in peace. It is significant that Wordsworth feels the need to leave his companions. He retires to a "silent bay" and spends time alone. This emphasis on solitude and isolation, and on the need for peace and time to allow the poet to contemplate the natural world is a feature of Romantic poetry. The poet is not like the other children; already he has a keener appreciation of the natural world.

The description of the children as having "given our bodies to the wind" is a powerful onw. They are out of control, and have surrendered themselves to the speed and the exhilaration of skating. When he takes a break, the dizzy youngster feels an awareness of the earth turning on her "diurnal round".

The mood of the poem changes in the last lines. After all the excitement of the skating, Wordsworth takes a moment to stand and watch the beauty of the "shadowy banks on either side". He feels as if the earth is spinning because he has been whirling around on his skates, but there is also a hint here that time passes and that, although the boy might not be aware of it, life is transient. As he stands there, he experiences a feeling of utmost tranquillity. "I stood and watched / Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep."
She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways

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

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

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

Background to the poem

This short poem is one of five "Lucy poems" composed between 1798 and 1801, when Wordsworth was in Germany. Critics have long argued over the identity of the mysterious "Lucy". Some say she is simply an idealised version of perfect English womanhood, others say she is based on his sister Dorothy, and others think she is simply a literary device. It seems unlikely that "Lucy" is based on Dorothy Wordsworth, because Dorothy lived to a ripe old age. There is, however, the possibility that "Lucy" (I will not apostrophise her from this point on) was based on the poet's musings on the possible loss of his beloved sister. Wordsworth sent the poems to his friend, Coleridge, who later wrote, "Some months ago Wordsworth transmitted to me a most sublime Epitaph. Whether it had any reality, I cannot say. Most probably, in some gloomier moment he had fancied the moment in which his sister might die." Coleridge was Wordsworth's friend, and if he was unsure of the origins of Lucy, then we are unlikely to find the truth now, some one hundred and sixty years after the poet's death.

Those who believe Lucy was a real person have gone to great trouble over the years in an effort to find mention of someone of that name in the registers of births and
deaths in the Lake District, but to no avail. They argue that Wordsworth based most of his poetry on real people and places, and so would be unlikely to simply create a fictitious character on whom to base this series of poems. Their searches have yielded no evidence thus far, and it seems that the identity of Lucy must remain a mystery.

It has been argued that Lucy is based on Rousseau's "Émile", the story of a hypothetical boy who is raised in the countryside and learns to reason by suffering the consequences of his actions, while at the same time being guided by an understanding tutor. Such a natural upbringing, Rousseau believed, was more beneficial than the education offered by a sophisticated society.

Wordsworth himself was often questioned on the issue, but refused to comment. The poems were not written as part of a series, and it was only after Wordsworth's death that they were gathered together and treated as a group. The theories continue to abound, and nobody is any closer to establishing a concrete truth, it seems. Perhaps the identity of the "Maid" is unimportant. By creating Lucy, Wordsworth could meditate on certain philosophical ideas and further explore the nature of man, and that is a more important legacy than the argument over whether or not the girl actually existed.

**Analysis**

In the first stanza, Wordsworth describes Lucy as having lived in an isolated place, where the paths, or "ways" were not walked upon. There is, of course, a paradox here. If nobody walks on a path, then it does not exist. Paths are created by people walking on them. One interpretation of this would be to say that Wordsworth is simply stressing that the area is quiet and almost untouched by man. However, as there are a number of other contradictions in the poem, it is probably wise to look at them a little more closely and see if there is a unifying thread or any sort of explanation. One way to look at it is to say that perhaps Wordsworth's use of contradictions gives the poem a dream-like quality. The poem does not need to be true, or even credible, to be powerful. (The "springs of Dove" are not real, for example.) We know it cannot be factual, but that does not take from the central message, which is the perfection of this "fair maid", or the idea of her, and the poet's sense of loss at her passing. The tone appears mournful, and we may be inclined to pity this "Maid" who lived and died, seemingly unnoticed.

The paradoxes continue in the last two lines of this quatrain. The poet says that there
was nobody to praise the girl, and "very few" to love her. Again, we have to wonder how this can be? If there were even a few people to love her, then they would have praised her, surely? Or is Wordsworth saying that in this quiet, rural place, and in this simple way of life, there was no overt praise, no public praise? Is he contrasting it with the more sophisticated, but less sincere, city life in which public recognition is often more important than true worth? This is an idea we can easily relate to, if we think of our world of reality TV and the ten seconds of fame afforded to all sorts of people who have actually achieved very little of note. Gaudy, cheap fame and fortune may be the "praise" to which Wordsworth is referring here.

If we look at the first stanza again, then, we can view it as a contrast between the public and the private worlds. There is no public acknowledgement, no lavish praise, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. The innocent, gentle life of the countryside is held up as something pure and beautiful. This reading changes the tone slightly. From being a sorrowful description of someone who died, seemingly unloved, we can now see that Lucy's life was one of peace and simplicity. Wordsworth values these aspects of rural life, and Lucy is an example of perfection and beauty. She may be Wordsworth's muse: an embodiment of all that is ideal and natural.

In the second stanza, Wordsworth tells us more about the enigmatic Lucy. She is compared to "A violet by a mossy stone / Half hidden from the eye!" The metaphor comparing the girl to a violet is an interesting one. It tells of her shy beauty, but there is more to it than that. Violets play an important role in many myths and legends. They are associated with love, death, humility and mourning. They appear in stories from Ancient Greece, European folktales and Christian tales of saints. There are several accounts of violets springing up on the graves of saints and virgins. It is likely that Wordsworth would have been well aware of all these associations, and they strengthen the idea of Lucy as someone who was pure and natural, as well as emphasising the poet's sense of loss at her passing.

The last two lines of the second stanza offer a contrast to this idea of Lucy as a shy, simple girl. She is compared to a star "shining in the sky." Interestingly, this star is said to shine when no others do. The brightest stars (actually planets – Venus or Jupiter, depending on the time of year) are visible before any others. Lucy's solitary nature and individuality is highlighted here. She shines brightly on her own, before the other stars appear. We may imagine that they are all similar and that none stands out from the others. But Lucy does. She may not shine in the places others do, or at the times others do, but she is unique. This reinforces the idea that Lucy is someone who shines brightly in her own sphere. Her world exists beyond "the untrodden
ways", or busy, urban life. Others may need public praise and acknowledgement, but Lucy is a treasure in her world. She is not concerned with, or obsessed by fame. Those who know where to look – whether it is in the shelter of a stone, or in the sky at a time when no stars may be expected to shine – can see and appreciate her beauty and radiance. She does not need to push herself forward in order to be admired by such people.

There is also the possibility that Wordsworth is saying that only a poet is capable of praising Lucy. Her loveliness may go unnoticed by the people around her, but he is able to express his appreciation of her.

The third stanza deals with the poet's reaction to Lucy's passing. She "lived unknown", so it might be expected that she would die unknown too. And indeed, according to Wordsworth, few knew that she had "ceased to be". However, her death affected him profoundly. His exclamation, "and oh, the difference to me!" is powerful and heartfelt. The simplicity of the language and the words left unsaid add to the idea of the poet's anguish. I am reminded of Robert Frost's restrained yet powerful exclamation, "But the hand!" in "Out, Out -". Sometimes it is in the words not spoken that the poet best conveys his emotion. We are compelled to use our imagination to provide the missing words, and this involvement can only add to our appreciation of the depth of feeling. Wordsworth does not need to tell us in detail how heartfelt his sorrow is. We see in in the emphatic way he describes the loss of Lucy. He is profoundly moved and keenly feels the loss of this young girl.

As with every poem by Wordsworth on the Leaving Cert course, this poem celebrates the wonder and beauty of nature. Lucy is praised for her connection to nature, and for her distance from the public, urban world. She is a child of nature, and she is worthy of love for that reason, even if others cannot see her worth.

If we argue that Lucy is an embodiment of the poetic muse, then why does Wordsworth allow her to die in this poem? He seems to be the only one who appreciates her beauty, and perhaps that is why, to the wider world, she appears to die. They may not care, but the "difference" to Wordsworth is profound. The poet may be commenting on the shallowness of public life, in which worth is judged by fame. Few knew or loved Lucy, but her loss deeply affected Wordsworth.

Wordsworth wrote this poem shortly after he had bought and read a book of British ballads. This poem is written in ballad form, with an ABAB rhyme-scheme. The language is simple, as befits a poem about a simple, natural girl. Ballads are written
in a narrative style, and this is no exception. As with most ballads, the style is
dramatic and there is an otherworldly quality to the poem. The paradoxical nature of
the first and second stanzas seem to hint that the girl in question is somehow ethereal
and exists outside of our world. Although the language is simple, the poem is not.
Wordsworth creates a sense of mystery not only by his reference to a girl who seems
untracable, but also by his use of paradoxes. This seemingly straightforward ballad
makes us think.

Wordsworth uses assonance and alliteration to great effect in this short ballad. The
repeated broad vowel sounds throughout add to the mournful tone and the sense of
mystery in the poem. The sibilance in each stanza brings to mind both Lucy's
gentleness and the poet's wistful longing for her.