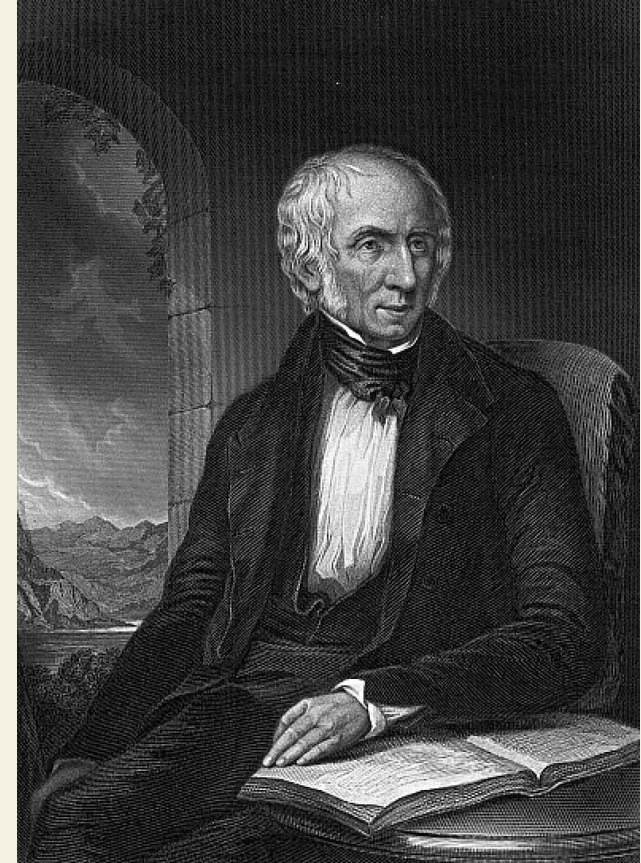


PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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- **William Wordsworth** (born April 7, 1770, Cockermouth, Cumberland, England – died April 23, 1850, Rydal Mount, Westmorland) .
- He was an English poet whose *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), written with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped launch the English Romantic movement.
- He began writing poetry as a young boy in grammar school, and before graduating from college he went on a walking tour of Europe, which deepened his love for nature and his sympathy for the common man: both major themes in his poetry.

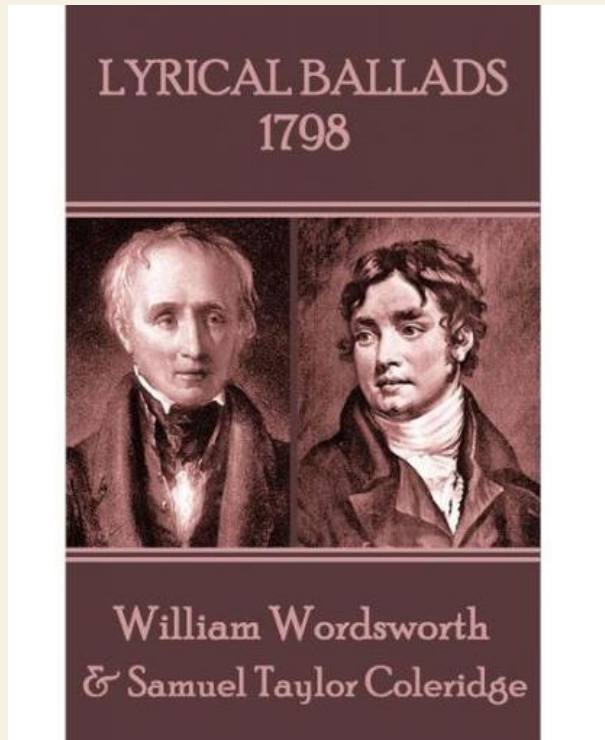


Wordsworth as a Poet



- One of the giants of English Poetry
- Plenty of inferior work written by him .
- His historical importance and his theories of poetry had a revolutionary effect.
- As a poet of Nature he found his greater inspiration in nature. His poetry offers an account of the interaction between man and nature, of the influences, emotions and sensations which arise from this contact.
- His main interest is the poet's response to a natural object.
- One of the most consistent concepts in his poetry is the idea that man and nature are inseparable.

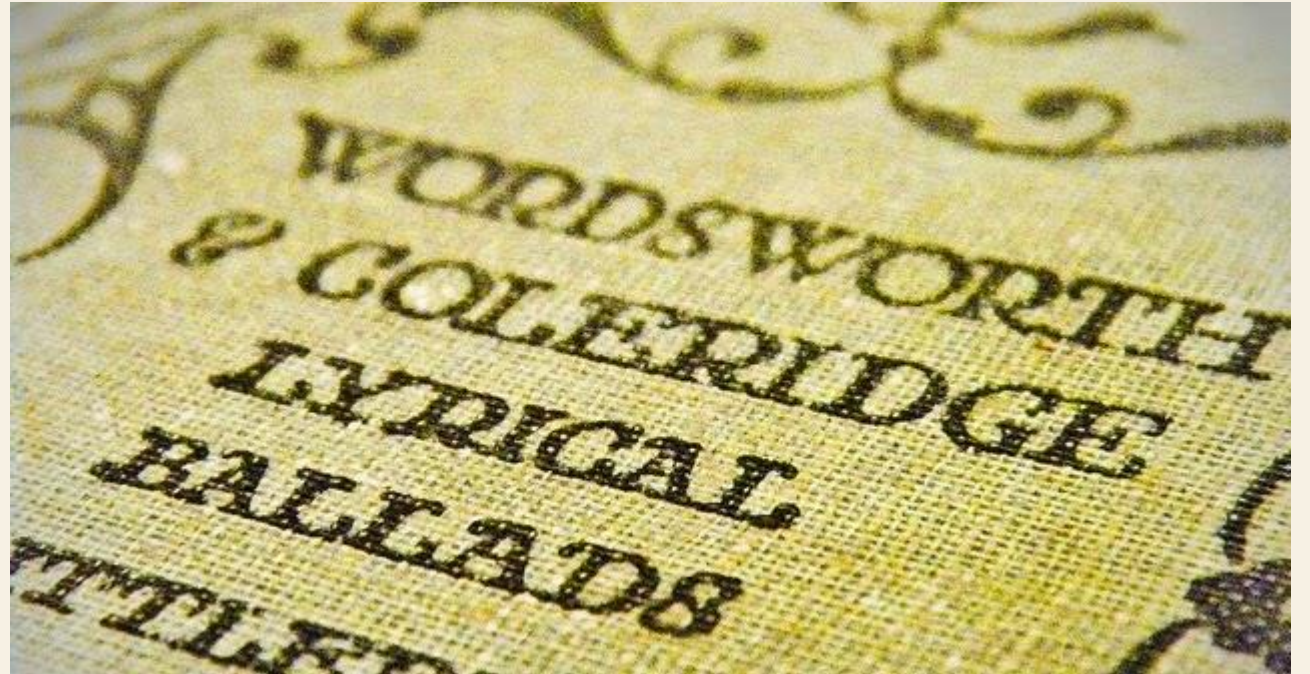
Wordsworth and Coleridge



- The Lyrical Ballads was a volume of poems which was issued anonymously by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798. The two had met in 1795 and there was a mutual recognition of genius.
- Both poets believed that verse stripped of high literary contrivance and written in the language of the lower and middle classes could express the fundamentals of human nature.
- The first volume of 1798 was published with a short 'Foreward'. The second edition was published in 1800 with many new poems added, and a much longer and more detailed Preface.
- It was revised and expanded in 1802 with significant additions about the definition of the poet and the universality and value of poetry.

Preface to Lyrical Ballads

- It is a text of literary criticism.
- It is also considered as the Manifesto of English Romantic movement.
- It deals with:
 - The definition of poetry
 - The features of a poet.
 - The language of poetry
 - The subject matter of poetry



The Definition of Poetry



- From a consideration of the language of poetry Wordsworth is led to a consideration of the poetic art itself. But here, too he is not quite clear in his assertions. To begin with, he defines good poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'
- It originated from emotions recollected in tranquility. Its ultimate goal is pleasure.
 - It is based on experience.
- Wordsworth believed that intuition, not reason, should guide the poet.
- Inspiration should come from the direct experience of the senses.
- Wordsworth exploited especially the sensibility of the eye and ear.

The features of a Poet

Wordsworth identifies three main characteristics of a poet:

- First, he is **exceptionally sensitive 'endued with more than lively sensibility and a comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind.'** This enables him not only to feel that which happens to him personally but also to experience which happens to others.
- Secondly, he is **'a man speaking to men,'** that is to say, poetry is not mere self-indulgence and that the poet is a social being with a responsibility. A great poet ought to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions, to render their feelings more sane, pure and permanent.
- Thirdly, the poet is endowed with **an extraordinarily strong imagination** so that he is affected by absent things as if they were present. Wordsworth sees the poet as a man who being possessed of more than usual sensibility has also thought long and deeply. The good poet needs to weld the two qualities of thought and feeling. The one will not work without the other.

The process of poetic composition

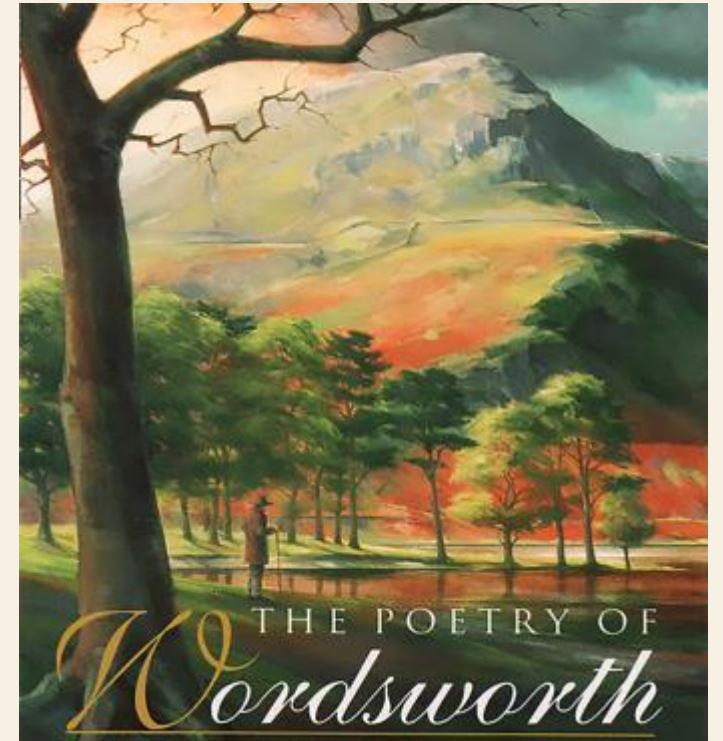
There are four stages in the process of poetic creation:

(observation, recollection , contemplation and imaginative excitement).

- At the first stage, **the poet observes** some object, situation or phenomena of nature. However, the poetic expression does not take place at that very moment. Rather the observations are stored in the poet's heart.
- Next, in moments of tranquility, the poet **recollects** those emotions excited by the objects, situations or phenomena.
- Then, he **contemplates** on these emotions.
- Consequently, after contemplation, there comes the gradual **revival** of the "*emotion kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation.*" Thus the poet is once again in a similar emotional excitement to what he experienced when he first saw the object.
- Thus at the moment of creation, the tranquility is replaced by spontaneous emotional excitement of powerful feelings.

The Language Of Poetry

- The poet should use a selection of language really used by men.
- The language has to be familiar, plain and simple.
- The poet should convey feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions
- The language of low classes should be purified from defects and disgusts



Poetic Diction

- The 'Preface' to the Lyrical Ballads puts forward Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction which has occasioned a lot of controversy ever since it was first elaborated.
- The crux of the theory is the seminal Romantic view that poetic style is organic and not prescriptive. There should be a correlation between the creative language and the form that is given to it.
- Since every poet's mode of experience is peculiar to him, it will find expression in a style appropriate to it.
- This principle, Wordsworth found, was violated by those of his predecessors who stuck to a general poetic diction characterised by known stylistic devices and figures of speech.
- The earliest poets wrote naturally, feeling powerfully, in a figurative language. Their decadent successors, in the neo-classical age, however, took their style as an infallible model and imitated it artificially.
- Wordsworth rejected the artificial and stagnant poetic diction both in theory and practice and asserted to use the real language of men and that too the language of the rustics.

The Subject matter of Poetry

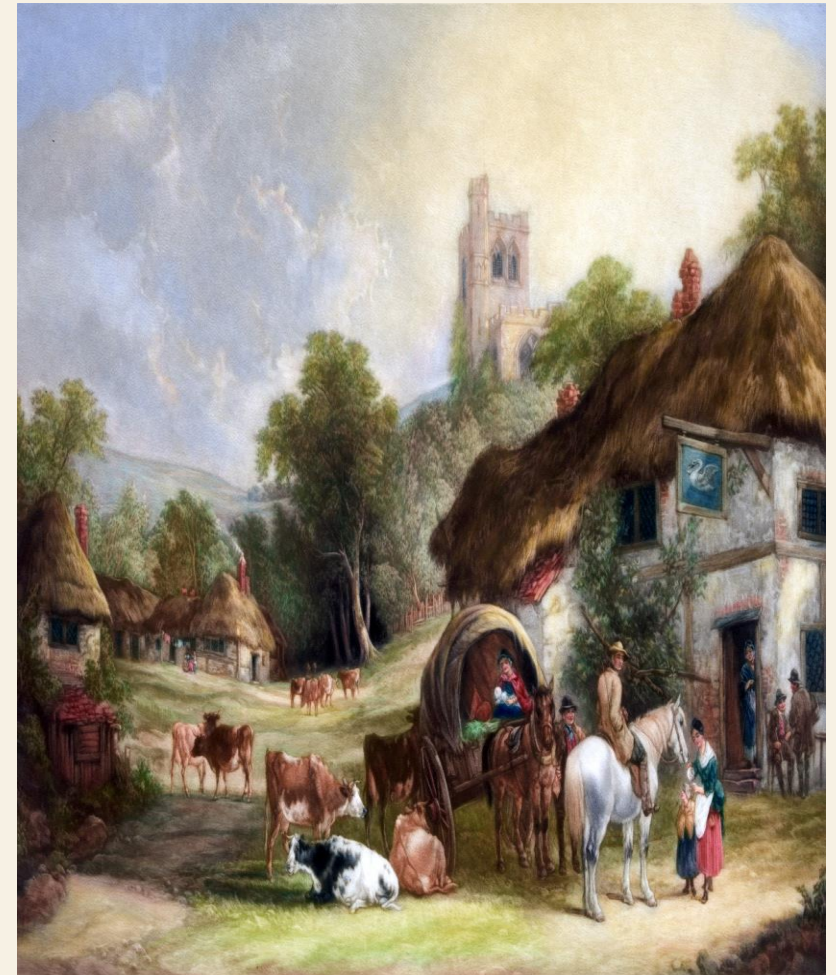
The poet chooses to relate and to describe incidents and situations from common life

Everything expressed implies the use of imagination.

Interest is added by tracing events and situations in the way people associate ideas in a state of excitement.

Low and rustic life is chosen

Poetry should present ordinary things in an unusual aspect.



Coleridge's views on Wordsworth's Theory of Diction

- Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* is an exposition and evaluation of Wordsworth's poetry. To him Wordsworth was the greatest poet of the age. He may not place him, as did Keats, only next to Shakespeare but after Shakespeare and Milton he considered him to be the third great poet of English .
- According to Coleridge, Wordsworth was fully justified in his criticism of the artificiality of a poetic diction but he disagrees with Wordsworth's view that the language of poetry should be 'the language of natural conversation of men.
- First, that in any sense this rule is applicable only to certain classes of poetry;
- secondly, that even to these classes it is not except in such a sense, as hath never by any one been denied or doubted;
- and lastly, that as far as, and in that degree in which it is practicable, yet as a rule it is useless if not injurious, and, therefore, either need not, or ought not to be practised.
- The only difference is between the mode of comprehension of rustic and an educated is that for the rustic all facts are insulated whereas the educated man sees their multital connections. Besides, as Coleridge points out in a different content.
- Wordsworth relies on a certain degree of education in his rustic; if only 'by constant reading of the Bible in the King James version.'

Conclusion

To the 'people', Wordsworth felt that he was responsible and attuned his calling as a poet to the demands of this responsibility. In a letter he wrote:

Every great poet is a teacher. I wish either to be considered a teacher or as nothing.

Poetry, he thought, was one of the most potent weapons of refinement and regeneration for mankind. This constitutes one of the most seminal strands of the theme of the 'Preface'. If a reader of poetry, believes Wordsworth he 'must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated through the study of poetry'.

Poetry, from this point of view, is the finest fruit and flower of human knowledge. It is the image of man and nature. The first and last of all knowledge; it is an immortal as the heart of man. And the poet is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love.



Thank You!
