

PREFACE TO THE LYRICAL BALLADS

Dr. Deepali Sharma
Dept. Of English
Durga Mahavidyalaya
Raipur.(C.G.).

MCQs :

1. Wordsworth was born in 1770
2. He belongs to Romantic age
3. French Revolution affected Wordsworth very deeply
4. Lyrical Ballads was published in 1798
5. Wordsworth and Coleridge published Preface to the Lyrical Ballads
6. The first edition of lyrical ballads consisted of twenty three poems , nineteen by Wordsworth and four by Coleridge
7. To the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads was added the Lucy poems
8. Period of French Revolution was 1789 – 1793
9. Coleridge declared that the Preface was “half a child of my own brain “
10. Wordsworth is against the “gaudiness and inane phraseology “ of contemporary poets
11. The poet is a man speaking to men

12. All good poetry is the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings “
13. Poetry takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility
14. The first edition of the Lyrical Ballads was an experiment
15. Poetry is the most philosophic of all writings
16. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge
17. The end of poetry is to produce excitement with an over balance of pleasure.
18. Wordsworth has avoided the use of personification of abstract ideas in his poems.
19. His purpose has been to imitate, as far as possible, the language really used by men
20. There is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition
21. Poetry is the image of man and nature
22. Poetry is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science
23. A poet looks before and after
24. There are four stages in the process of poetic creation – observation, recollection, contemplation and imaginative excitement
25. Wordsworth died in 1850.

WORDSWORTH AS A ROMANTIC CRITIC

William Wordsworth was primarily a poet but still he has given us a most comprehensive critical document in the form of the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads'. It has an epoch-making significance. It strikes a new note in the history of English literary criticism.

It is the manifesto of the Romantic Movement. It gave a new direction, consciousness and programme to English Romanticism.

THEMES OF POETRY: 'The Preface' marks a revolution in matter of selection of subject for the purpose of poetry. Here Wordsworth has discarded the Neo-classical approach. His approach is romantic. He advocates that the theme of poetry should be drawn from simple and rustic life

The poet should choose incidents and situations from common life. According to Wordsworth in this rustic and humble life the fundamental passions of the heart develop smoothly and grow harmoniously. They are not controlled by

the fastidious rules of the so-called society. Thus the real subject matter of poetry is to be found in the primary affections.

LANGUAGE OF POETRY: Wordsworth's theory of poetic language is protest against the pseudo classical theory of poetic diction. This protest was against pedantry and affectation; and it is based on an appeal to the primitive, the passionate, and the natural spoken word. He stresses the communicative power of poetry.

He advocates the use of the language of the rustic and humble people for the purpose of poetry. According to him the language of the rustic is capable of being poetic. It is because the rustic and humble people convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Thus such language is more permanent and more philosophical. In short, Wordsworth advocates for the use of the language really spoken by men.

CONCEPT OF POETRY: Wordsworth's Preface explains his concept of poetry. His concept has newness. Wordsworth has rejected the intellectual aspect of the origin of poetry. For the first time, he emphasised the role of emotions. According to him, 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility.' Poetry springs from the soul of man. As has been well said, 'the clear spring of poetry must flow freely and spontaneously. It can't be made to flow through artificially laid pipes. Poetry is born not in the mind but in the heart overflowing with feeling'.

Thus poetry is the product of feeling, mood and temperament. According to Wordsworth there are four stages of the process of poetic creation. These stages are observation, recollection, contemplation and imaginative excitement. The poet observes certain objects of nature. It excites in him certain emotions. He carries those emotions in his heart. Later on he recollects those emotions in the moments of tranquility, contemplates upon them and as a result poetic creation takes shape.

USE OF METRE: William Wordsworth advocates the use of metre in poetry. But he condemns poetic diction. Metre brings uniformity whereas poetic diction is capricious. Metre contributes to the pleasure of poetry. It can give pleasure even without the use of poetic diction, even when the language is simple and naked. It has a restraining and tempering effect on the flow of emotion and passion. It tempers and softens the painful. It imparts passion to the words, and so increases emotional intensity.

Thus Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" is a manifesto of the English Romantic Movement. It has emphasised the value of a simpler and more natural language. By advocating simplicity in the theme, he succeeded in enlarging the range of English poetry. He emphasised the true nature of poetry as an expression of emotion and passion. He brought about a revolution in the theory of poetry. Wordsworth's contribution as a romantic critic is that he emphasises novelty, experiment, liberty, spontaneity, inspiration and imagination.

WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF POETRY

Wordsworth holds that by the very act of writing a poet undertakes 1) to fulfill the expectations of his readers. These expectations vary from age to age. At times, as a result of conscious effort, it is possible for the poet to alter them. This precisely is what he and Coleridge have attempted to do in Lyrical Ballads. Lyrical Ballads attempts to bring about a revolution in the areas of both content and form. The content of the poems is rooted in the everyday life of ordinary people. The form is a selection of the language of common social intercourse. Wordsworth holds, and this conviction lies at the core of Wordsworthian poetic theory, that this is how it should be in the case of all true poetry.

But by just fulfilling these two conditions a piece of verse cannot become good poetry. The Poet has to ensure that strong emotions are associated with the subjects of his poems and he can do that only through long habits of meditation. At the same time the piece should not be artificially composed, it should be an inspired creation. Thus poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings that take its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. It evokes in the reader the original emotions of the poet. The use of metre distinguishes poetry from prose. But beyond that Wordsworth is unable to identify any basic difference. The objectives of verse and prose are identical; they use the very same medium; emotion and passion are the life-blood of both.

A poet, according to Wordsworth, is a man speaking to men. He is very much a common man who thinks and feels like all other common men. But he is endowed with a more than common power of imagination and articulation. He speaks to other men and also for other men. The language and situation of his poetry should go together. The aim of poetry is universal truth. It should represent nature and man with the conviction of truth. The poet must endeavour to give immediate pleasure to the reader by appealing to the humanity within him. The poet's obligation to give pleasure is an affirmation of the value and validity of human life. Wordsworth declares that genuine passion is always the ultimate source of true poetry. In all cultures and languages classical poets worked under the influence of genuine passion generated by real life events. Being stimulated by genuine passion their language was highly metaphorical and daringly innovative. In succeeding ages even, when not genuinely moved, the same figurative language came to be employed. Thus a poetic diction was produced which took the language of poetry away from the real language of men turning the poetry into life less verbiage. At such points in history a special, conscious effort is required to take the language of poetry back to the people. This is what Lyrical Ballads has attempted to do

WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF POETIC DICTION

The term diction refers to the kind of words, phrases, sentences, and sometimes figurative language that constitute any work of literature. When it comes to poetry writing, the question related to the diction always arises. The question of diction is considered as primary because the feelings of the poet must be easily conceived by the readers. The poets of all ages have used distinctive poetic diction

Wordsworth's prime concern was to denounce such superficial and over-embellished language. Wordsworth's aim was to write poetry which symbolizes the life in its simple and rustic state. The poetry, for Wordsworth, must be like the part of daily life speech. It should be written in such language that anyone who wants to read it could comprehend it easily. Wordsworth believes that all such ornamented poetry cloaks the genuine and passionate feelings of the poets. He only justifies the use of an embellished language of

poetry when it is naturally suggested by the feelings or the subject matter of the poetry. The poetry, for Wordsworth, is the expression of natural feelings and these feelings cannot be communicated with the help of fake and version of upper-class speech but with the actual speech of “humble and rustic life”.

He defines poetic diction as a language of common men. It is not the language of the poet as a class but the language of mankind. It is the simple expression of pure passions by men living close to nature. The poetic language is the natural language; therefore, it must be spontaneous and instinctive. The real poetic diction, in the view of the Wordsworth, is the natural overflow of the feelings, therefore, it is immune to the deliberate decoration of the language.

Wordsworth also attributes the quality of giving pleasure to the natural poetic diction. It must not contain any vulgarity and disgusting element. The poet must, through his language, elevate the nature and human feelings.

SUMMARY OF PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS

“Preface to Lyrical Ballads” is an essay by the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth. In 1798 Wordsworth wrote, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poetry collection Lyrical Ballads. Believing that the poems were so novel in theme and style that they required some explanation, Wordsworth wrote a prefatory essay to accompany the second edition of the poems in 1800; he then expanded the essay for the third edition of 1802.

The “Preface” is often considered a manifesto of the Romantic movement in English literature. Wordsworth explains his intention in his poems to express incidents from everyday life in everyday language and imbued with poetic sentiment. He defines poetry as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (13) and the poet as “a man speaking to men” (8). Because poetry speaks of universal human emotions, it should use diction that is natural rather than artificial and self-consciously literary. Thus, Wordsworth sets himself apart from classicist poets who addressed an elite audience in language that was tied to formal rules. Wordsworth argues that poetry and prose should be close in style and that the aim of poetry should be to imitate nature and inspire emotion in the reader in a way that emphasizes pleasure. In the final part of

the essay, Wordsworth outlines the procedure whereby a poet may observe the world around them and compose poetry through deep reflection on their experiences.