



**PREFACE TO LYRICAL
BALLADS
-WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**

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OUTLINE

- Wordsworth: Life and Works
- Purpose of Lyrical Ballads
- What is poetry?
- What is a Poet?
- Subject of poetry
- Language of poetry
- Critique of contemporary poets



WORDSWORTH: LIFE



BORN

April 7, 1770
Cockermouth, England

DIED

April 23, 1850 (aged
80)
Westmorland, England

- Poet Laureate (1843-1850)



LIFE

- His father was a lawyer. Both Wordsworth's parents died before he was 15, and he and his four siblings were left in the care of different relatives.
- As a young man, Wordsworth developed a **love of nature**, a theme reflected in many of his poems.
- While studying at Cambridge University, Wordsworth spent a summer holiday on a **walking tour in Switzerland and France**.
- He became an enthusiast for the ideals of the French Revolution. He began to write poetry while he was at school, but none was published until 1793.



LIFE

- In 1795, Wordsworth received a legacy from a close relative and he and his sister Dorothy went to live in Dorset. Two years later they moved again, this time to Somerset, to live near the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was an admirer of Wordsworth's work. They collaborated on 'Lyrical Ballads', published in 1798. This collection of poems, mostly by Wordsworth but with Coleridge contributing 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', is generally taken to mark the beginning of the Romantic movement in English poetry. The poems were greeted with hostility by most critics.



LIFE

- In 1799, after a visit to Germany with Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy settled at Dove Cottage in Grasmere in the Lake District. Coleridge lived nearby with his family. Wordsworth's most famous poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' was written at Dove Cottage in 1804.
- In 1802, Wordsworth married a childhood friend, Mary Hutchinson. The next few years were personally difficult for Wordsworth. Two of his children died, his brother was drowned at sea and Dorothy suffered a mental breakdown. His political views underwent a transformation around the turn of the century, and he became increasingly conservative, disillusioned by events in France culminating in Napoleon Bonaparte taking power.



LIFE

- In 1813, Wordsworth moved from Grasmere to nearby Ambelside. He continued to write poetry, but it was never as great as his early works. After 1835, he wrote little more. In 1842, he was given a government pension and the following year became poet laureate. Wordsworth died on 23 April 1850 and was buried in Grasmere churchyard. His great autobiographical poem, 'The Prelude', which he had worked on since 1798, was published after his death.



NOTABLE WORKS

- “The World Is Too Much with Us”
- “The Prelude”
- “The Solitary Reaper”
- “Lyrical Ballads”
- “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”
- “The Excursion”
- “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey”
- “Michael”
- “Peter Bell”
- “The Recluse”
- **Lyrical Ballads (1798)** with Coleridge



THE PURPOSE

- The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was
- to **choose incidents and situations from common life**, and
- to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a **selection of language really used by men**;



**Preface to
Lyrical Ballads
(1800)**



THE PURPOSE

- and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain **colouring of imagination**, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way;
- and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations **interesting** by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, **the primary laws of our nature**: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.



WHAT IS POETRY?

- For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings:
- Poetry is the image of man and nature.
- Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.
- Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge--it is as immortal as the heart of man.



POETRY & PROCESS OF CREATION

- Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings:
- it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity:
- the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears,
- and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.



PROCESS OF CREATION

- In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on;
- but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.



WHAT IS A POET? TO WHOM DOES HE ADDRESS HIMSELF? AND WHAT LANGUAGE IS TO BE EXPECTED FROM HIM?

- He is a man speaking to men:
- a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility,
- more enthusiasm and tenderness,
- who has a greater knowledge of human nature,
- and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind;



WHAT IS A POET?

- a man pleased with his own passions and volitions (will/decision making),
- and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him;
- delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe,
- and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.



WHAT IS A POET?

- To these qualities he has added a disposition **to be affected more than other men by absent things** as if they were present;
- an **ability of conjuring up in himself passions**, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than any thing which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves;



WHAT IS A POET?

- whence, and from practice, he has acquired a **greater readiness and power in expressing** what he thinks and feels, and especially those **thoughts and feelings** which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him **without immediate external excitement.**



POET, BIOGRAPHER AND HISTORIAN

- The Poet writes under **one restriction** only, namely, that of the necessity of **giving immediate pleasure** to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him,
- **not** as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a Man.
- Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things;
- between this, and the **Biographer and Historian there are a thousand.**



WHAT IS A POET?

- **He is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying every where with him relationship and love.**
- In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the **Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society**, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.



WHAT THEN DOES THE POET?

- He considers man and the **objects** that surround him as **acting and re-acting upon each other**, so as to **produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure**;
- he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions which by habit become of the nature of intuitions;



WHAT THEN DOES THE POET?

- he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment.
- He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature.



WHAT THEN DOES THE POET?

- The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion.



SUBJECT OF POETRY

- **Low and rustic life** was generally chosen, because
- in that condition, the **essential passions** of the heart find a **better soil** in which they can **attain their maturity**, are **less under restraint**, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language;
- because in that condition of life our **elementary feelings** co-exist in a state of **greater simplicity**,



SUBJECT OF POETRY

- and, consequently, may be **more accurately contemplated**, and **more forcibly communicated**;
- because the **manners of rural life** germinate from those **elementary feelings**;
- and, from the necessary **character of rural occupations**, are **more easily comprehended**, and are **more durable**;
- and lastly, because in that condition **the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature**.



LANGUAGE OF POETRY

- The language, too, of these men is **adopted** (**purified** indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust)
- because such men hourly **communicate with the best objects** from which the **best part of language is originally derived;**



LANGUAGE OF POETRY

- and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being **less under the influence of social vanity** they **convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.**
- Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a **more permanent**, and a far **more philosophical** language,



LANGUAGE OF POETRY

- The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of the passions of men. How, then, can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly? It might be *proved* that it is impossible.



CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARY POETS

- than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art,
- in proportion as **they separate themselves from the sympathies of men**, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression,
- in order to furnish **food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites**, of their own creation.

- (**Fickle**-insincere, unreliable)



CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARY POETS

- outcry against the **triviality and meanness both of thought and language**, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions



HOW POEMS IN LB ARE DIFFERENT?

- Poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy *purpose*.



READER

- that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be **in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.**

