

British Romantic Literature

Lesson: Wordsworth : The Poet And His Selected Poems

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Portrait of William Wordsworth by Benjamin Robert , en.wikipedia.org

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

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Historical Background (1790-1830)



[File:Rydal Mount, Lake District, Home of William Wordsworth.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rydal_Mount,_Lake_District,_Home_of_William_Wordsworth.jpg) - Wikimedia Commons

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The first half of the nineteenth century records the triumph of Romanticism in literature and of democracy in government. This age of popular government and of romantic literature celebrated the essential nobleness of common men and the value of the individual. The period between the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the English Reform Bill of 1832, was of tremendous political upheavals characterizing the age as the "the age of revolution". The French Revolution and the American commonwealth, as well as the establishment of a true democracy in England by the Reform Bill, were the inevitable results of ideas which literature had disseminated rapidly and widely. Burns's *Poems* and Thomas

Paine's *Rights of Man*, all proclaiming the dignity of common life and uttering the same passionate cry against every form of class or caste oppression were read by one and all.

The period under consideration begins in the latter half of the reign of George III and ends with the accession of Victoria in 1837. In 1783, King George recognized the independence of the United States of America unconsciously proclaiming the triumph of liberty which had been the ideal of English literature for more than a thousand years; though it was not till 1832, when the Reform Bill became the law of the land, and England fulfilled the dream of democracy upheld for centuries by her writers.

The following half century was one of great turmoil, yet of steady advance in English life. The storm center of the political unrest was the French Revolution. It was an uprising which proclaimed the natural rights of man and the abolition of class distinctions, leading to a multiplication of patriotic clubs and societies in England asserting the doctrine of Liberty, Equality & Fraternity, upheld by the Revolution. There were two sets of reaction against the revolution: the younger generation of England hailed the new French republic and offered it friendship whereas the older generation looked on with horror on the turmoil in France and,



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forced the two nations into war. Hostilities continued till 1815 ending in the destruction of Napoleon and the restoration of Bourbon Dynasty. Literary Historian Edward Albert observes that the elder writers of the period, with Wordsworth and Coleridge especially, hailed the new era with joy. Then, as the revolution took unexpected turns hope was replaced by disappointment, disillusionment, dejection and despair as particularly evident in the case of Wordsworth. Though, the younger writers as Leigh Hunt, Shelley and Keats still adhered to the principles of revolutionary doctrines the enthusiasm had waned.

The conclusion of the war between France and England led to economic nightmare in the form of low wages, unemployment and heavy taxation, finally culminating in the concession of the Reform Bill of 1832. The bill however did not lead to expected outcomes, and for the thinking minds the shroud of disappointment continued to envelop the spirit. The causes of the looming revolution were rooted in the economic nightmare.

By her invention in steel and machinery, and the carrying trade, England had become the workshop of the world. Where on the one hand her wealth had increased beyond the wildest dreams; the unequal distribution of that wealth had far reaching impacts. The invention of machinery had already thrown thousands of skilled hand workers out of employment; heavy duties were levied on corn and wheat in order to protect a few agriculturists, and bread rose to famine prices leading to starvation. It was a classic case of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer with nobles, landowners, manufacturers, and merchants living in increasing luxury and skilled laborers facing unemployment, wives and little children forced to work in mines and factories, where sixteen hours' labor was hardly enough to make ends meet.

Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* exercised an enormous influence in England. Smith wrote to uphold the doctrine that labor is the only source of a nation's wealth, and that any attempt to force labor into unnatural channels, or to prevent it by protective duties from freely obtaining the raw materials for its industry, is unjust and destructive. Paine was a passionate devotee of popular liberty. His *Rights of Man* published in London in 1791, was like one of Burns's lyric outcries against institutions which oppressed humanity. Coming so soon after the destruction of the Bastille, it added fuel to the flames kindled in England by the French Revolution.

The situation was brought under control when the long Continental war came to an end with Napoleon's overthrow at Waterloo, in 1815; and England, having gained enormously in

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prestige abroad, now turned to the work of reform at home. The reforms included the destruction of the African slave trade; the mitigation of horribly unjust laws that slotted poor debtors and petty criminals in the same class; the prevention of child labor; the concession to the freedom of the press; the extension of manhood suffrage; the abolition of restrictions against Catholics in Parliament along with the establishment of hundreds of popular schools; the crowning glory being proclamation for the emancipation of all slaves in all the colonies, in 1833. (Adapted from : J.Long, Chapter X- The Age of Romanticism ,ENGLISH LITERATURE - Project Gutenberg , www.gutenberg.org/files/10609/10609-h/10609-h.htm)





[John Constable's](https://en.wikipedia.org) *Dedham Vale* of 1802, en.wikipedia.org

Literary Background: Romanticism

When England began her mighty work of reform literature suddenly developed a new creative spirit as evident in the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and

in the prose of Scott, Jane Austen, Lamb, and De Quincey. Even as the old institutions seemed crumbling with the Bastille, Coleridge and Southey dreamt of an ideal commonwealth, in which the principles of More's *Utopia* should be put in practice and Wordsworth wrote, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven" ('The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at Its Commencement', 5-6).

Romanticism in English Literature can be said to have begun with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and S.T Coleridge. In the 'Preface' to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth described poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", a premise that can be read as the touchstone of romantic poetry. The Romantic movement was preceded by several related developments in the preceding century marked by the new appreciation of medieval romance from which the movement derived its name. The medieval romance was a tale or ballad boasting of chivalric adventure, individual heroism and exotic locales; it was also a contrast to the prevailing classical forms of literature with emphasis on contrived, formal elegance.

The first phase of the Romantic movement as seen in Germany was characterized by novelty in terms of content and style with emphasis on the mystical, the subconscious and the supernatural. The proponents of the phase included Holderlin, Goethe and Schelling. The second phase of the Romantic movement (1805-1830) was underscored by its attentiveness to national origins, imitation of native folklore, folk ballads and poetry, folk dance and music and the previously ignored medieval and Renaissance works as apparent in the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. It was in this phase that English Romantic poetry is seen reaching its zenith with the works of Keats, Byron and Shelley. A byproduct of the interest in the exotic, the far and the remote is the 'gothic, distinguished further by the supernatural as obvious in the works of Mary Shelley, C.R Maturin, Marquis de Sade, E.T.A Hoffman etc. By the 1820s the movement had spread throughout Europe represented by exploring the historical and cultural inheritance of individual nations and exceptional individuals, exemplified by the works of Thomas De Quincey, William Hazlitt and the Bronte sisters in England.

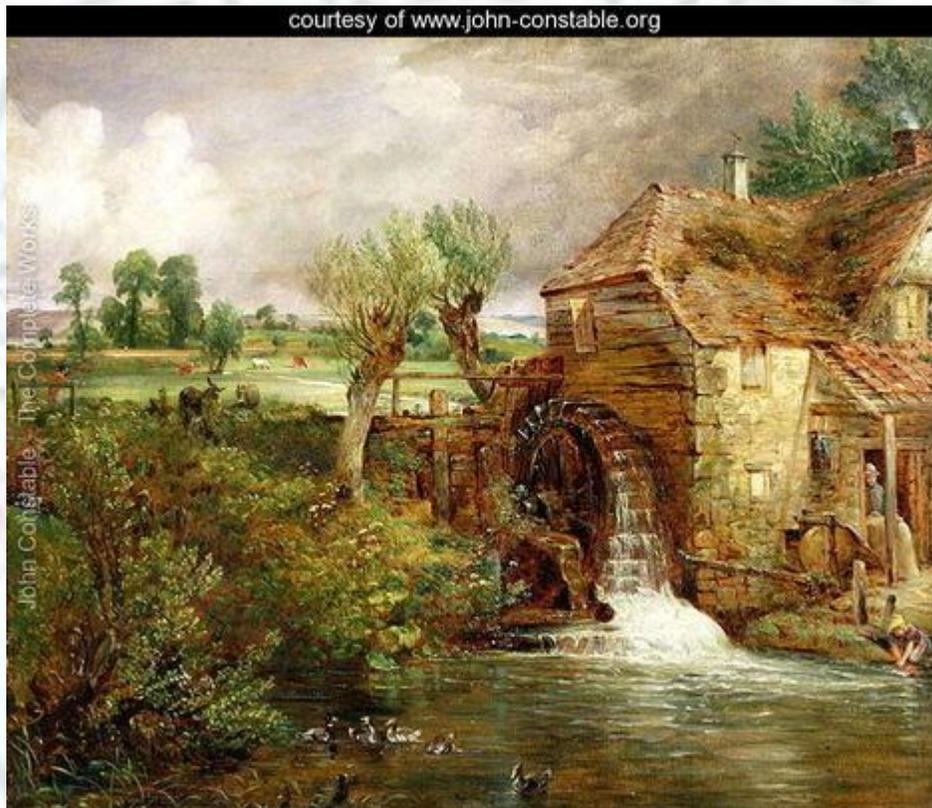


[John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821, Art of the United Kingdom - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

The essence of Romanticism was that literature must reflect all that is spontaneous and unaffected in nature and in man and reflect the same. Imagination, being elevated as the supreme faculty of mind, perceived as the ultimate creative power, helping to constitute reality, as much depended on perception. British literary critic Marilyn Butler (1981) cites M.H Abrams as echoing Schlegel's argument in his book *The Mirror and Lamp* (1953) when he argues about the difference between the Romantic writer and the eighteenth century writer.

Abrams maintains that whereas for the classicist the work of art resembles a mirror, passively mimetic reproducing reality as it is, for the Romantic it is more of a lamp reflecting images not of the outer world but the inner world of the poet. Art therefore becomes subjective and intuitive as opposed to rationalistic as seen earlier. Imagination was

thus extolled as the ultimate synthesizing faculty enabling the reconciliation of discordant elements in the world. The literary independence was expressed remarkably in "Kubla Khan" and "The Ancient Mariner," of Coleridge, etching two imaginative scenarios, one of the populous Orient, the other of the lonely sea. In Wordsworth this literary independence led him inward to the heart of common things investing the common life of nature and that of common men and women with much significance and goodness: "Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything."(Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.1:12-17)



Mill at Gillingham, Dorset, England, 1825-26 - John Constable - www.john-constable.org · Mill at Gillingham, Dorset, 1825-26

To the Romantics "Nature" meant many things: a healing power, a source of subject and image, a refuge from the artificial constructs of civilization, including artificial language; viewed as "organic," rather than, as in the scientific or rationalist view, as a system of "mechanical" laws, for Romanticism displaced the rationalist view of the universe as a machine with the analogue of an "organic" image, a living tree or mankind itself. The Romantics gave greater attention both to describing natural phenomena accurately and to

capturing "sensuous nuance". Symbolism and myth were given prominence seen as human aesthetic correlatives of the emblematic language of nature, offering a variety of suggestions in the attempt of expressing the inexpressible.

The Romantic age was also an age of poetry. The previous century, with its practical outlook on life, was largely one of prose; but now, as in the Elizabethan Age, the young enthusiasts turned naturally to poetry as manifest in the poetry of Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Moore, and Southey. Of its prose works, those of Scott alone have attained a very wide reading, though the essays of Charles Lamb and the novels of Jane Austen have slowly won for their authors a secure place in the history of our literature. It was during this period that woman assumed, for the first time, an important place in our literature permitted for the first time some slight chance of education and entry into the intellectual arena.

The age produced a new type of novel with stories of supernatural terror. Anne Radcliffe (1764-1823) being one of the most successful writers of this school of exaggerated romance. Her novels, with their azure-eyed heroines, haunted castles, trapdoors, bandits, abductions, rescues in the nick of time, and a general medley of overwrought joys and horrors were immensely popular. The works of Jane Austen, with her charming descriptions of everyday life, and of Maria Edgeworth are also indelible. Two other women who attained a more or less lasting fame were Hannah More, poet, dramatist, and novelist, and Jane Porter along with Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay) and several other writers. In this age literary criticism became firmly established with the help of magazines as the *Edinburgh Review* (1802), *The Quarterly Review* (1808), *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817), the *Westminster Review* (1824), *The Spectator* (1828), *The Athenæum* (1828), and *Fraser's Magazine* (1830). (Adapted from:

'Romanticism', academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/rom.html)

biographical note

Literary historian J. Long(2004) suggests that to understand the life of the person who, in Tennyson's words, "uttered nothing base," it is well to read first *The Prelude*, which records the impressions made upon Wordsworth's mind from his earliest recollection until his full manhood, in 1805, when the poem was completed. Long reads a natural division in Wordsworth's life into four periods: that of childhood and youth, in the Cumberland Hills, from 1770 to 1787; followed by a period of uncertainty, of storm and stress, including his university life at Cambridge, his travels abroad, and his revolutionary experience, from 1787 to 1797; a short but significant period of finding himself and his work, from 1797 to 1799; and finally, a long period of retirement in the northern lake region, where he was born, and impressed considerably by nature so much so that her influence is reflected in all his poetry. When one has outlined these four periods he has told almost all that can be told of a life which is marked, not by events, but largely by spiritual experiences.

First Period: Born on April 7, 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumberland to John and Anne Wordsworth, William Wordsworth was the second of the five children in the Wordsworth family. His father, John Wordsworth was a law agent and rent collector for Lord Lonsdale

and provided the family with a decent lifestyle. After the death of Anne Wordsworth in 1778 young William was sent to a grammar school near Windermere followed by college education in St. John's College, Cambridge.

Always close to Nature, Wordsworth enjoyed hiking and during his summer vacation of 1788 explored the Cumberland county. In 1790 he went on a walking tour to France, Switzerland and Germany and in 1791, after graduation, trekked through Wales. Inspired by the French Revolution, the same year he went to France again only to come back in the following year - due to paucity of money- without his love, Annette Vallon and the daughter (Caroline) she bore him out of wedlock. Wordsworth was, however, unable to return to France for the next nine years due to the Anglo-French war followed by the reign of terror.

Second Period: The second period of Wordsworth's life began with his university course at Cambridge, in 1787. Cambridge was then a collection of sixteen colleges. Wordsworth joined St. John's College. His entrance to the college was secured by his maternal uncle Cookson who was one of the fifty fellows who ran it. According to Dale Anderson (2003) Cookson expected that Wordsworth who was an excellent student would follow his Uncle's example earning bachelor's degree with honors and winning one of the fellowships earmarked for students from Cumberland.

While a fellow Wordsworth, Cookson thought, would earn his master's degree and wait for a position in the Clergy, after which he would marry and settle down to a respectable life of a clergyman. But Wordsworth proved to be a very ordinary scholar reading what interested him rather than what was prescribed in the curriculum. He read plenty, the classical authors, Italian authors in the original, newer poets and novelists yet to be prescribed in the curriculum and major writers like Chaucer. Among his distractions were boating on the Cam river, reading newspapers in coffee houses and attending student parties. In *The Prelude* he wrote of his liking for enjoyment in this period: "[m]y heart/Was social and loved idleness and joy"(as cited by Anderson).

The third book of *The Prelude* provides a dispassionate account of student life, with its trivial occupations, its pleasures and general aimlessness. Wordsworth was motivated by a growing interest in the conflict in France; an interest in the parliament debates had further fuelled his interest in politics. The Revolution was also taking unexpected turns. Louis XVI had tried to escape from Paris, in an effort to join the armies of other counties assembled by other rulers interested in protecting the monarchy, but he was captured and brought

back to Paris. At this moment, the Revolution in favour of the rights of man greatly appealed to the young, idealistic Wordsworth.

Anderson finds similarities and parallels between France and England and that of Wordsworth's personal life. Both in France and England the revolutionaries were trying to tear down a social system of gross inequality in which the nobility and the clergy owned all the power and wealth. On the personal front, he and his family was also a victim as Lord Lowther had mistreated his family and was still withholding the money due to them. Wordsworth was also being pressurized into a career which did not interest him.

Wordsworth set off to France in November 1792 spending some time in Paris and then moving to New Orleans where he met the young Annette Vallon, twenty- five years of age, daughter of a surgeon, and against the Revolution. Despite her being a Protestant and her family committed to the King, Wordsworth grew close to Vallon. He followed her to Blois when she left Orleans. It was at this time that he also spent time with two French republicans: Michael Beaupuy and Henri Gregorie who persuaded him to believe that the old regime was indeed evil.

Recording the trek of the 1790 trek through Europe with Robert Jones Wordsworth now wrote his "Descriptive Sketches" describing his experiences. The trip was made amidst great turmoil in France with the Revolution having begun a year earlier. Louis XVI ruled but only in name and it was the National Assembly that wielded the real power. The poem reflects Wordsworth's thought process at the time beseeching God to end all evils prevalent due to monarchy.

As time passed things began getting difficult for Wordsworth on all fronts. Annette became pregnant, he was running out of money and the Revolution entered a bloody phase with a Parisian mob massacring the king's guards. The National Assembly announced the abolition of monarchy and a mob broke into prisons of Paris killing hundreds of people opposing the Revolution as well as innocents. The situation was getting difficult for members of the clergy as well as foreigners. Wordsworth was obliged to leave France primarily due to paucity of funds. In 1793 Wordsworth came out with his *Descriptive sketches* and his popularity grew with the publication of *Lyrical ballads in 1798*. With *Poems in Two Volumes* his popularity continued to rise and he was appreciated for his originality by one and all. Among the most appreciated and remembered poems were *Michael*, *The old Cumberland Beggar*, *She dwelt among the untrodden ways*, *Strange fits of passion have I known*, and *Nutting*.

In 1794 he was reunited with his sister Dorothy who was his companion and friend till her mental decline in 1830s. In 1795 he met Coleridge and there developed a strong tie between the trio.

Third Period: Between 1797-1798 both the friends met nearly daily to discuss their ideas on poetry. It is assumed that in 1797 the new Romantic movement in English literature assumed definite form. Wordsworth and Coleridge retired to the Quantock Hills, Somerset, arriving at the deliberate purpose to make literature "adapted to interest mankind permanently," which, they declared, classic poetry could never do. Wordsworth's sister Dorothy, was their silent partner, while they worked together on what would come out as *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798.

In their partnership Coleridge was to take up the "supernatural, or at least romantic"; while Wordsworth was "to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday ... by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." The two poems of the volume, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge's masterpiece, and "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," expressing Wordsworth's poetical creed, reflect the spirit of their work. (Long 2004)

Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems was also conceptualized in this period and was in print in 1798. Wordsworth wrote a large share of the collection, nineteen poems. From March to May 1798, Wordsworth wrote almost 1500 lines of poetry based on stories from books read or heard. The most notable of these poems was "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey".

The poem, like many originated in a walk. This walk was to the ruins of Tintern Abbey, a former monastery in Southern Wales. It was in this year that they also made a trip to Germany following which Wordsworth settled near Grasmere in his dearly loved Lake District. The cottage that they moved in is now known famously as the 'Dove Cottage'. Wordsworth began his work on the new edition of *Lyrical ballads* which was to include his Lucy and Matthew poems.



Countryside landscapes, Lake District, photo by: J, used under Creative Commons License.

Fourth Period: The second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* came out in 1801. This time it was not published anonymously but had Wordsworth's name. An addition made to the second edition was a preface explaining the theory of poetry represented by the poems. The treatise underscored the new movement in poetry that had been ushered in: Romanticism. It discussed the elements of poetry that were characterized by new subject and language. The elevated language and style of the neo-classical poetry was to be replaced by "language really used by men", and the subject of the poems were to be "incidents and situations from common life".

He stated his theory definitely and at length in a preface to the second edition of 'Lyrical Ballads,' published in 1800, a discussion which includes incidentally some of the finest general critical interpretation ever made of the nature and meaning of poetry. Wordsworth declared: 1. Since the purpose of poetry is to present the essential emotions of men, persons in humble and rustic life are generally the fittest subjects for treatment in it, because their natures and manners are simple and more genuine than those of other men, and are kept so by constant contact with the beauty and serenity of Nature. 2. Not only should artificial poetic diction (like that of the eighteenth century) be rejected, but the language of poetry should be a selection from that of ordinary people in real life, only purified of its vulgarities and heightened so as to appeal to the imagination. (In this last modification lies the justification of rime.) There neither is nor can be any *essential* difference between the language of prose and that of poetry. (Robert Huntington Fletcher, A History of English Literature)

For more click on the link below:

[William Wordsworth - A History of English Literature](http://www.classiclit.about.com), **classiclit.about.com**

In 1802 after the declaration of the Peace of Amiens Wordsworth and Dorothy visited France to meet Annette and Caroline. Wordsworth now wanted to marry Mary Hutchinson who he had grown close to. He also felt that his relation with Annette Vallon needed to be resolved. It is indicated by literary historians that Wordsworth communicated to Vallon that she could harbor no hopes of marrying him, and provided Caroline with a settled sum each year once he became financially comfortable. Thereafter Wordsworth came back to England and married Mary Hutchinson. He also came into inheritance owed by Lord Lonsdale since the death of John Wordsworth in 1783.



W. Crowbent, 1907, *Portrait of Dorothy Wordsworth*, depicting her later in life, (drawing from a photograph). en.wikipedia.org



en.wikipedia.org

Wordsworth completed *The Prelude* in 1805 but the record of his development as a poet that ran into fourteen books was published only in 1850 after his death as he thought it was unprecedented for a poet to dwell so much upon himself unless put in an appropriate context. *The Prelude* was thus intended to be a part of a broader philosophical work titled

The Recluse, a work divided into three parts, which unfortunately could not be completed due to failing inspiration. *The Excursion* was another section of this work though it was published in 1814.

Wordsworth had five children with Mary Hutchinson. He underwent a phase of emotional upheaval with the death of his brother in 1805 and the estrangement from Coleridge in 1810 followed by the death of his children Catherine and Thomas in 1812. In the year 1828 Wordsworth and Coleridge reconciled and toured the Rhineland together .In 1838 Durham and Oxford University conferred upon him the honorary Doctor of Civil Law degree.

The family reached financial security with Wordsworth's securing a position as Distributor of Stamps in Westmorland. Though Wordsworth continued to write but in the period between 1820-1850 he published little except the volumes, *Yarrow Revisited* in 1831 and *The Borderers* in 1842. In 1850 he suffered an attack of pleurisy confining him to bed for a month. He died on April 13, 1850. *The Prelude* was published in the same year.

(Adapted from: William Wordsworth: Biography - The Victorian Web, www.victorianweb.org/previctorian/ww/bio.html)

Wordsworth's Biographical Time-line

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1770	Wordsworth is born in the Lake District.
1778	Wordsworth's mother dies.
1779	Wordsworth is sent away to boarding school in Hawkshead.
1783	His father dies.
1787	Wordsworth attends St. John's College, Cambridge, where he is an indifferent student.
1791	Graduates from Cambridge.
1791	Travels to France, where he meets Annette Vallon with whom he has a daughter, Caroline.
1795	Wordsworth comes into an inheritance of nine hundred

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	pounds sterling.
1797	Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy move to Alfoxden House, close to Coleridge's home.
1798	Coleridge, William and Dorothy Wordsworth travel to Germany. Wordsworth is unhappy.
1798	<i>Lyrical Ballads</i> - a collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge - is published.
1799	The Wordsworths return to England, and settle in Grasmere, in a house called Dove Cottage.
1802	The war between England and France ends, and Wordsworth goes to France to meet his daughter Caroline.

<p>1802</p>	<p>Wordsworth marries Mary Hutchinson. They have been friends since childhood. Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, lives with the couple.</p>
<p>1843</p>	<p>Wordsworth is named Poet Laureate. He is reluctant to accept the honour, claiming he is too old, but the Prime Minister persuades him. Wordsworth becomes the only Poet Laureate to write no official poetry</p>
<p>1850</p>	<p>Wordsworth dies of pleurisy. A few months after his death, his wife publishes <i>The Prelude</i>.</p>

Adapted from: www.aofesnotes.com/leaving-cert/ordinary.../Wordsworth%20HL.pdf

Wordsworth's Treatment Of Nature

The Romantic Movement had for its political background the French Revolution and the developing Industrial Revolution in England that changed the physical appearance and the social structure of the country, with new notions of psychology and philosophy adding to the turmoil. The era of a complete break from the past had crept in silently and it was the Romantic poets who first took on the cudgels of change, refusing to adhere to the earlier eighteenth century view that it was the polite society that made men capable of civilized achievements. It was also a time when areas of imagination and sensibility also started getting explored.

Wordsworth can be read in the light of Ecocriticism. [Ecocriticism has been defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty 1996). According to Ursula K. Heise , Ecocriticism “analyzes the ways in which literature represents the human relation to nature at particular moments of history, what values are assigned to nature and why, and how perceptions of the natural shape literary tropes and genres. In turn, it examines how such literary figures contribute to shaping social and cultural attitudes toward the environment” (Heise, 1999).]

Wordsworth not only explores the idea of nature and the non-human world as an integral part of the human world but also celebrates the harmonizing, rejuvenating and regenerating features of the natural world. His works become more relevant for ‘Green Reading’ as he also gives an insight into the background of the economical changes, effecting the topography of England, hinting about the shift in the religious sentiments during the time, and its effect on humans; taking them farther away from the “present” embodied in Nature, into the realm of the “here after”. Basil Willey (1960) observes that Wordsworth’s poetic ideas especially his leanings toward Nature can be traced to the deistic tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The emotion of the ‘numinous’ formerly associated with super nature, had become attached to nature herself and by the end of the eighteenth century the divinity, the sacredness of nature was, to those affected by this tradition, almost a first datum of consciousness.

For Wordsworth nature becomes more of a living being than an inanimate object of admiration. Pulling it from the background to the very focus of relationship, Nature for Wordsworth acts more like a friend and companion. Wordsworth’s philosophy of Nature sees humans not severed from Nature but as her integral part. In his poem ‘Intimations of Immortality from Recollection of Early Childhood’ (1807) Wordsworth sees childhood as a

phase in which humans are extremely sensitive to all natural influences, an epitome of gladness and beauty of the world.

The kinship with Nature and with God, which glorifies childhood ought to extend throughout the human life and ennoble it as it does in the childhood. In 'Tintern Abbey' also Wordsworth shares the same message. He suggests a special relationship between himself and Nature. In the extant draft of *The Prelude*, probably written in 1799-1800 he writes: "Ah not in vain, ye Beings of the hills,\And ye that walk the woods and open heaths\By moon or starlight, thus from my first dawn\Of childhood, did ye love to intertwine\The passions that buildup our human soul,\Not with mean and vulgar works of Man,\But with high objects, with eternal things,\With life and nature, purifying thus\The elements of feeling and of thought,\And sanctifying, by such discipline,\Both pain and fear, until we recognize\A grandeur in the beatings of the heart" [Book I, 428-441, (1799-1805)].



[John Constable](#) depicting a rural scene in his painting on river Stour between the English counties of Suffolk and Essex, U.K, [The Hay Wain](#), 1821, [Art of the United Kingdom - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

In poems like 'Tintern Abbey', 'The Rainbow', 'Ode to Duty' and 'Intimations to Immortality' Wordsworth's views on Nature become more pronounced. Wordsworth believes that the crowded life of cities tend to weaken and pervert the element of humanity characterizing the humans, therefore a return to the natural and simple way of life is the only remedy to deal with human sadness and despair. The natural instincts and pleasures of childhood are the true touchstones of happiness in this life. Unlike the ephemeral, artificial pleasures that wither away with time, these natural, simple pleasures of life remain a permanent means for everlasting happiness.

It is the simple life of the common man with tales of toil and love that for Wordsworth become the only subject for permanent literary interest. To this natural philosophy of man Wordsworth adds a religious dimension by believing that in every natural object there is a reflection of the divine spirit. Nature is everywhere transfused with this spirit and so are humans. Nature appeals to humans through this very spirit that imbues human life with an everlasting continuity. In 'A Slumber did my Spirit Seal', emphasizing the point, he says for Lucy: "She seemed a thing that could not feel\ The touch of earthly years\ No motion has she now, no force\ She neither hears nor sees\ Rolled round in earth's diurnal course\ With rocks, and stones, and trees." (A Slumber did my Spirit Seal by William Wordsworth : The Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org)

Wordsworth's treatment of Nature was both unique and original. Till now Nature had been treated as a mere background for the interplay of human passions and emotions or as an object of beauty, but for Wordsworth Nature was not a mere landscape but a living, organic entity with a personality and a life of its own. It was his aim to interpret and give expression to this indwelling spirit. He sought to reveal the invisible spirit behind Nature's beauty and illuminate her sustaining influence on the spirit of man.

He saw Nature not only an attractive arrangement of form and colour but alive and sentient with a life of its own permeated and pervaded by an omnipresent spirit. Wordsworth believed that between the spirit of Nature and the mind of man, there was prearranged harmony that enabled Nature to communicate its own thoughts to man, and man to reflect upon them until absolute union between them was established.

He also saw Nature as an entity he could take recourse to when fatigued by the artificial life of city. Having escaped from the city (London) to the "prison walls" of which he was

confined for a long time, Wordsworth a "discontented sojourner" feels elated to return to the country side where he truly belongs. He rejoices on reaching the country side, his elation obvious in these lines: "Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze\That blows from the green fields and the clouds\And from the sky; it beats against my cheek\And seems half conscious of the joy it gives\O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend! \A captive greets thee, coming from a house\Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free\A prison where he hath been long immured" (*The Prelude*, Book I, 1-8).



As a boy, Wordsworth was a passionate nut gatherer. In the poem 'Nutting' he recounts the strange experience that befell him. On a beautiful day Wordsworth went to the forest in search of nuts. He roamed over 'pathless rocks', 'through beds of matted fern' and 'tangled

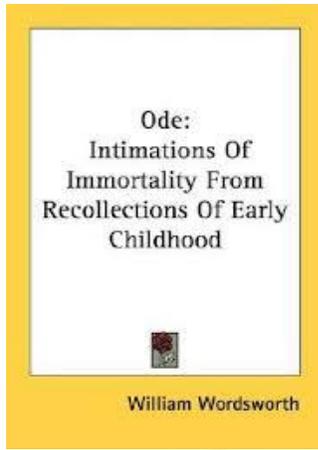
thickets' when the unsullied beauty of a virgin spot entranced him. It was an obscure spot, unseen by human eye with small waterfalls adding to the charm. For some time Wordsworth sat under a tree, calmly contemplating the beauty of the scene. Then the beauty was ravaged and while he was exulting in the results of the merciless ravage, he realized with a shock that he had 'inflicted injury upon the life that was all about him'. Wordsworth felt the reproof of the silent trees and the sky, therefore he warns the other travelers to walk through the woods gently 'for there is a spirit in the woods'. To Wordsworth these symbols of Nature deserve the importance and the respect, which the humans hold for others.

The poem, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', was written in 1803 when Wordsworth was at the height of his poetic powers, and yet was conscious of its gradual decline. He found that the source of his inspiration was drying up, that his 'visionary experiences' were becoming less and less frequent, and the freshness of inspiration that he had found in Nature was slowly ebbing.

When he was a child Wordsworth saw Nature clothed in radiant splendour but such a, "Celestial light" that he saw enveloping his muse was slowly losing its vitality. The fact that Nature was losing some sheen for Wordsworth was like losing his muse; he was deeply stirred. In the year 1798, Wordsworth revisited the Wye after a lapse of five years. The renewed presence of an often remembered scene excites and makes him acutely conscious of a change in attitude towards Nature. For a lover of Nature like Wordsworth these five years of separation from Tintern seem very tedious and he feels overjoyed on returning. His happiness is evident in the poem and reflect his love for Nature.

In the poem 'Leech-Gatherer or Resolution and Independence' the "sky-lark warbling in the sky" instills Wordsworth with so much happiness that he compares himself to a playful "hare". The nonhuman becomes such a persona of happiness that Wordsworth prefers himself transformed in to a nonhuman too, "[A]nd I be thought me of the playful hare." Wordsworth draws important lessons from the hardships faced by common people like the leech gatherer who despite the difficulties they face muster up courage from deep within themselves and deal with life as it comes.

Ode: Intimations Of Immortality From Recollections Of Early Childhood



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The Earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can
see no more.

- Wordsworth, Ode on Intimations
of Immortality

Wordsworth's Ode on Intimations of Immortality or Immortality Ode was completed in 1804 and was published in *Poems, in Two Volumes* in the year 1807. In irregular Pindaric ode, it is written in eleven variable stanzas with variable rhyme schemes in iambic lines with two to five stressed syllables. The rhyme varies falling into alternate lines, couplets, sometimes occurring within a single line. The poem was completed in two parts with the first four stanzas composed in 1802 about childhood. On the completion of the first part of the poem he handed a copy to Coleridge who as a response came up with, 'Dejection: An Ode'.

The fourth stanza of the Ode ends with a question which Wordsworth was finally able to answer with the additional seven stanzas completed in early 1804. First printed in 1807, it was in 1815 that it was edited and came to its current version. Regarding the subject of the Ode Wordsworth wrote to Catherine Clarkson in January, 1815: " This poem rests entirely upon two recollections of childhood, one that is splendour in the objects of sense which is

passed away, and the other an indisposition to bend to the law of death as sapplyng to our own particular case.”(Sengupta and Cama 2008:173). The feelings of loss are evident in the first two stanzas, a loss that has not been recompensed. The feeling is made more poignant in the fourth stanza when the poet asks,“ Whither is fled the visionary gleam?/Where is it now, the glory and the dream?”.

The three movements that the poem can be split into describe concerns about lost vision, age causing man to lose sight of the divine and the hope that the memory of the divine allowing sympathy with others. The poem uses the concept of pre-existence, the idea that the soul existed before the body and the human mind in its childhood state remembers some glimpses of the pre natal state. The idea is utilised to convey the message that with maturity humans lose the ability to witness the divine in nature (Wikipedia).

The Platonic concept of “anamnesis” or “ recollection” acts as a major trope in the poem where the human mind through conscious recollection is capable of remembering some eternal truths, the power of recollection, however diminishing with time leading to a feeling of dejection. The importance of the child is underscored in having been invested with that divine power which is lost with the passage of time. Alec King postulates that the poem is about two childhoods, the visible and the invisible. He believes that it is for understanding the mysterious nature of childhood that Wordsworth ‘invented’ the myth of pre-existence (Cowell 93). He argues that the entrance of the soul into human life is but an interlude in its immortal life. At this time it is exiled from its divine home retaining in its initial years memories of its home and its divine existence. The vision is dulled with time leading to a feeling of loss.As opposed to this ‘invisible’ child is the ‘visible’ one that can be seen in the daily activities and play of children.

The poem, however, does not end on a note of dejection as the adult is now blessed with a perception that has grown out of loss, thus he is able to appreciate the world better in all its beauty.The timely intervention here comes from nature herself who helps the narrator find the lost vision in her glory. It is due to the realization of what he has gained through nature makes the narrator claim: “ [T]o me the meanest flower that blows can give/Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears”.

Neil Heims observes that for Wordsworth the poet is the legislator who discovers and sets down the laws of nature, and guides us by his poetry to a subtle sensitivity, allowing

knowledge and coformation from others. This is done through the special understanding that is a part of the poet's faculties that in turn has an influence on the understanding and affection of others, helping them perceive the unity of creation. But this faculty diminishes with time, as we grow older. "By binding together perception and perceiver, Wordsworth sought to retrieve and restore this vision. Experiencing the unity of world of Nature and of consciousness not only indicates the organic connection of all things in Nature but also suggests to Wordsworth Soul's immortality." (Heims 2003:64)

In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines
warm,
And the babe leaps up on his
mother's arm:—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
—But there's a tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have look'd
upon,
Both of them speak of something
that is gone:
The pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the
dream?
- Wordsworth, Ode on
Intimations of Immortality



There are other views also regarding the interpretation of the poem. Critic Marjorie Levinson, however, believes that the Ode is not about childhood but an allegorical meditation on the failure of the French Revolution. She argues that it was the signing of Peace of Amiens that occasioned the poem. The ode, being a formal choice for a poem marking a national event, highlighted the dejection that washed over the poet ; a result of his expectations out of a Revolution that went all awry in terms of its objectives as well as execution. Earlier Nature was seen as Goddess of the revolution, its driving force signifying human fulfillment in time. During this time the common was seen as sublime, the individual feeling was that of being a part of a vast human family. The pastoral community as etched in stanzas three and four

represent an era that is gone, the narration implying the human cognitive debility the result of political disillusionment (Levinson 1986: 295-296).

Wordsworth writes, "But there's a Tree, of many, one/ A single Field which I have looked upon/ Both of them speak of something that is gone." Levinson observes that by associating the Tree and Field with the emblems and events of a glorious and irrecoverable era the narrator indicates his failure to liberate the pastoral memory from its political context. The "Tree" signifies the "Tree of Liberty" and the "field", " Champ de Mars" of France.

The comment of David Daiches becomes pertinent here when he says that it took Wordsworth his unhappiness to see his own country proclaim war against France, his disillusion with the course taken by the French Revolution, the rationalism and the humanitarianism of William Godwin's *Political Justice*, to find a compensating philosophy. His subsequent discovery of Godwin's rational scorn for the fundamental human relationships rendered his philosophy barren and unacceptable and he entered a period of despair and confusion from which he was rescued by the influence of his sister Dorothy and his friend Coleridge. Daiches continues about Wordsworth, "it took all this to take stock of his basic ideas and ambitions and in doing so work out a view of poetry which develop fully his poetic genius. It was a view which depended on the relation of the poet to the external world of man and nature." (1990:880)

Tintern Abbey



Tintern Abbey viewed from the far (English) bank of the [River Wye](https://en.wikipedia.org), en.wikipedia.org

In darkness and amid the many
shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the
fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the
world,
Have hung upon the beatings of
my heart--
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to
thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro'
the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to
thee!

-Wordsworth, "Lines
Composed a Few Miles Above
Tintern Abbey"



Tintern Abbey , en.wikipedia.org

Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey On Revisiting The Banks Of The Wye During A Tour, 13 July 1798

"Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (often abbreviated to "Tintern Abbey", or simply "Lines") is a poem by William Wordsworth. Tintern Abbey is located in the southern Welsh county of Monmouthshire, and was abandoned in 1536. The poem stands out for Wordsworth's descriptions of the banks of the River Wye and outlines his general philosophies on nature. The poem's full title, as given in *Lyrical Ballads*, is "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798". (en.wikipedia.org)

In July 1793, Wordsworth along with his sister Dorothy took a walking tour from Salisbury to Tintern Abbey. Wordsworth was visiting Tintern Abbey after a gap of five years. In the first visit to Wye he was facing the challenge of seeing his country go to war against France. The war had a dual impact on him as it not only challenged his loyalty to his homeland and his sympathies for the French Republicans, but also would weaken his ties with his love, Annette Vallon and their daughter, Catherine. It was in this state of conflict and apprehension that he visited the Wye in 1793.

"Tintern Abbey", was conceived during the walk when Wordsworth was visiting the ruins of Tintern Abbey. Written in blank verse the poem recounts Wordsworth's childhood memories regarding his relationship with nature when he was in complete communion with her. Though with the passing years the nature of relationship has changed but the memory of that which existed earlier still has the power of enthusing and energizing the poet; the presence of his sister, Dorothy reiterating his youthful image of himself, "My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch/The language of my former heart, and read/ My former pleasures in the shooting lights/Of thy wild eyes..." (116-119).

Aware of the power of Nature, and especially that of the Wye, Wordsworth realized that as his previous visit had sustained him in his times of troubles so will this one enrich him with beautiful memories. The intensity of childhood experience gives memory the importance it has in Wordsworth's poetry as by recollection it is still possible to regain a glimmer of what was lost with the erstwhile childhood. The recognition of the previous connection as shared by an individual earlier and as reflected in another has the power to bring back the childhood experiences. Wordsworth was part of such an experience when he saw reflected in his sister the same enjoyment of the natural scenes that once he shared with nature. "Beholding in her what he once was, even though he has moved away from it, keeps alive in him some of the power of sympathy he ascribes to the child and, links him with the oneness of creation and eternity." (Heims 2003:64).

"Modern tourism was relatively new at this time. Neoclassic writers who urged that poets and others should "follow nature" were talking about universal law and order, the system of things, or human nature; they were decidedly not thinking about outdoors nature, which was generally condemned as something opposed to civilized life — in the forms of mountains, oceans, and great rivers, a deviation from the regularity of creation and, for people faced with crossing them, a serious impediment to travel. Mainstream eighteenth-century poets did occasionally write about nature, but almost always for purposes of moral

allegory: the "nature" of Pope's *Windsor Forest* symbolizes order and harmony in the universe, and wise readers are enjoined to regulate their lives accordingly.

The mid- and late-eighteenth-century development of sensitiveness to nature and one's physical surroundings was at least partly owing not to the attractiveness of nature itself but to the rise of interest in landscape painting..."

For more click at the source here:

The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Age: Topic 1: Overview, www.wwnorton.com



The poem can be divided into four parts. In the first part Wordsworth is seen visiting the Wye for the second time beholding all the familiar sights, but where he finds his attitude to it altered, "...Once again/ Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs/ That on a wild/secluded, scene impress/Thoughts of a more deep seclusion..."(4-7).

In the second part he acknowledges his debt to this beautiful landscape that sustained him in his troubled times in the cities, away from the nature's pristine beauty. It has also helped him become aware of life and reality above the quotidian. "In darkness and amid the many shapes/of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir/Unprofitable, and the fever of the world/Have hung upon the beatings of my heart-/How oft, in spirit have I turned to thee".

In the third part, his relationship with nature is recorded; how as a boy he enjoyed nature, giving into a meditative stage where he loved her for her own sake; followed by mystical insights where he could see the whole universe pervaded by a single spirit, united.

It is in the fourth part of the poem that he turns to his sister, mirrored in her his former self. Mary Jacobus observes of "Tintern Abbey" that it is a poem "that completes the shift from nature to the individual; the poet's attitude to an unchanging landscape becomes a way of measuring the change that has taken place within."(Sengupta & Cama 2008:260). Jacobus opines that memory allows the poet to experience the essential continuity of the changing self and belief allows him to experience the dimension of one life; in this process of growth landscape becomes a point of reference to chart the growth of a poet's mind.

The transition from boyhood to maturity is also seen in 'Tintern Abbey' when Wordsworth recounts the recompense, which Nature has allowed him for his loss of the exuberance and raptures of youth. The period between his two visits has been one of disappointment and disillusionment, but it has expanded his vision. Now no longer ignorant of the sorrows of humanity, he sees in Nature the revelation of the Divine law, which governs the universe. The sight of human suffering does not produce harsh feelings in him for now he is aware of a presence that causes both sorrow and joy and creates balance and harmony.

Though the period between his two visits has been one of disappointment and disillusionment, it has expanded his vision. Now no longer ignorant of the sorrows of humanity, he sees in Nature the revelation of the Divine law, which governs the universe. The sight of human suffering does not produce harsh feelings in him for now he is aware of a presence that causes both sorrow and joy and creates balance and harmony, "[F]or I have learned \To look on nature, not as in the hour\Of thoughtless youth; but hearing often times\The still, sad music of humanity\...\ A motion and a spirit that impels\ All thinking things, all objects of all thought\And rolls through all things." ('Tintern Abbey', 90-103)

"Tintern Abbey" acts as bridge linking the purely autobiographical poems with that of humanity. Nature, according to Wordsworth, is to embrace not only inanimate nature but human nature also. The dichotomy between the mental and material worlds was to Wordsworth antipathetic and he frequently attempted in his verse a general statement on the basis of their unity (Winkler 1972:168).

The poem has ecocritical dimensions. Dana Phillips observes, "By insisting that nature writing can continue to do what lyric poetry can no longer do and what transcendentalism could never do, at least according to Benjamin and Rahv, ecocriticism has emphasized not only the stubbornly traditional character of the form but its more therapeutic aspects as well. For instance, Frank Stewart observes that nature writers "seek to make our minds and our hearts whole again. When we look at nature, they believe, we are looking mainly at ourselves." (2003:204)

I would like to sum up Wordsworth's momentousness by citing Jonathan Bate *vis- a- vis* Kate Rigby. Arguing against the charges of New Critics and Deconstructionists that Romanticism really valorizes human imagination and language, not nature, and that the ideological function and romantic imagination of the pastoral was to disguise the exploitative nature of contemporary social relations, Jonathan Bate, as observed by Kate Rigby, 'repositions Wordsworth in a tradition of environmental consciousness' through which human well-being is understood to be coordinate with the ecological health of the land and Romantic nature poetry takes on an ambivalent position to the earlier pastoral writing, 'functioning simultaneously as[its] continuation and critique'(2002:155).

...And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. - I cannot paint
What then I was. ...That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,

-Wordsworth, "Lines

Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"

- **Find a link to the J-stor essay, "Dorothy Wordsworth's Return to Tintern Abbey By James Soderholm": http://l-adam-mekler.com/soderholm_dww_tintern_abbey_response.pdf-adam-mekler.com**

Audio & Video Clips: 'Tintern Abbey'

- **<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/william-wordsworth-lines-tintern-abbey/1516.html>**

Audio& Video Clips : 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'

- www.youtube.com **Ode: Intimations of Immortality by William Wordsworth, Symphony No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 78: I. Poco adagio" by Camille Saint-Saens**

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