

English Criticism and William Wordsworth

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Abstract: This article examines the critical perspectives on William Wordsworth's poetry, a central figure in the Romantic movement. It explores how Wordsworth's focus on nature, imagination, and human experience has been interpreted and critiqued by notable critics, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, and T.S. Eliot. The article highlights Wordsworth's influence on English literature, his key concepts, and notable works, providing a comprehensive overview of his poetry and its enduring impact.

This article examines William Wordsworth's foundational contribution to English literary criticism, primarily through his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1800/1802). It explores his revolutionary shift toward romanticism, focusing on his advocacy for common language, rustic subject matter, and poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" recollected in tranquility.

Key Words: Monumental, Romantic age, Pivotal, Lyrical ballads, Therapeutic, Prelude, Neoclassical, Tranquility, Ornate, Perspectives, Intellectual rigor

I.INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth (1770–1850) was a monumental English Romantic poet celebrated as the "Poet of Nature" for his profound connection to the natural world and focus on emotional, everyday life. He helped launch the Romantic Age in English literature and served as Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850. William Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770, in Cockerthorpe, Cumberland, England. He is widely recognized as a pivotal figure in the Romantic movement in English literature. He co-authored the influential *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, marking the beginning of the Romantic Age. Wordsworth is known as a nature poet who believed in its spiritual, therapeutic power, often writing about the English Lake District.

His famous poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (often known as "Daffodils") highlights his deep

appreciation for nature. His work emphasized using simple, ordinary language to depict everyday life and emotions. The *Prelude*, a largely autobiographical poem, is considered his masterpiece and was published after his death. He was named Poet Laureate of Britain in 1843, a position he held until his death. He was closely associated with fellow poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. He died on April 23, 1850, leaving behind a lasting legacy that redefined English poetry. William Wordsworth is a cornerstone of English Romanticism whose critical work, primarily in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, revolutionized literature by challenging 18th-century neoclassical conventions. He argued that poetry should focus on ordinary incidents and rustic life, aiming to find the "primary laws of our nature" in simple settings.

Critics note his shift away from artificial poetic diction toward the "real language of men," which was revolutionary but also contentious. Wordsworth defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," prioritizing emotion over the formal structure emphasized by previous generations. He stressed that a poet is "a man speaking to men," bridging the gap between artistic creation and common human experience. However, Wordsworth's theories faced significant opposition, most famously from his collaborator, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge argued that the language of rustic life is unsuitable for poetry and that there is an essential difference between prose and metrical language. While Wordsworth aimed for simplicity, critics argued his best poetry often departed from his own strict rules, adopting a much more elevated style.

Critics, including Francis Jeffrey, frequently criticized Wordsworth for his "vulgar" subject matter, arguing that ordinary life was not always worthy of high poetry. Wordsworth was accused of egotism, particularly in *The Prelude*, where his focus on

personal subjective experience was viewed by some as excessive. Despite this, his emphasis on "emotion recollected in tranquility" offered a new psychological framework for understanding poetic creation. His rejection of ornate, stylized language helped define modern poetry, encouraging a return to emotional authenticity. Some critics saw his work as politically "dangerous" for valuing the lives of the poor and rejecting the refined tastes of the elite. Taylor & Francis Online Taylor & Francis "imagination" was central to his work, viewed not just as fancy, but as a "mighty scheme of truth" that reveals spiritual reality. Later in his career, he was criticized for abandoning his youthful radicalism, becoming a conservative, established figure.

Nevertheless, his role as a critic is hailed for shifting the focus from the form of poetry to its substance and social impact. His work profoundly changed English literary criticism by elevating the importance of inward reflection and nature as a source of truth. Coleridge's critique, however, remains influential, highlighting the tension between theory and artistic practice in Wordsworth's works.

In summary, Wordsworth is criticized for his rigidity in theory, but praised for his revolutionary impact on poetic language and emotional expression. literariness.org literariness. William Wordsworth, a prominent figure in the Romantic movement, has been a subject of extensive critical analysis in English literature.

This article explores the various facets of Wordsworth's work and the critical perspectives that have shaped his reputation as a poet. Romanticism and Wordsworth's Poetry Wordsworth's poetry is characterized by its focus on nature, imagination, and the human experience. His works, such as "Lyrical Ballads" and "The Prelude," showcase his ability to capture the beauty and power of nature, influencing the development of Romanticism. Critical Perspectives Coleridge's Influence: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth's contemporary and friend, praised his poetry for its "spontaneity of emotion" and "originality of thought." Coleridge's own critical work, "Biographia Literaria," provides valuable insights into Wordsworth's poetic principles.

Victorian Criticism: Critics like Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin admired Wordsworth's poetry for its moral seriousness and philosophical depth. However, they also criticized his supposed lack of objectivity

and his focus on personal emotions. Modernist Criticism: T.S. Eliot and other modernist poets criticized Wordsworth's poetry for its perceived sentimentalism and lack of intellectual rigor. However, critics like F.R. Leavis defended Wordsworth's poetry, highlighting its complexity and nuance.

Key Concepts Nature and Imagination: Wordsworth's poetry explores the relationship between nature and the human imagination, highlighting the role of imagination in shaping our understanding of the world. The Sublime: Wordsworth's poetry often features moments of sublime experience, where the individual is overwhelmed by the power and beauty of nature. Influence and Legacy Wordsworth's poetry has influenced numerous writers and poets, including John Keats, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman. His focus on nature and the human experience continues to inspire writers and readers today. Notable Works "Lyrical Ballads" (1798) "The Prelude" (1850) "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807)

II. KEY ASPECTS ADDRESSED IN THE ANALYSIS INCLUDE

Literary Revolution: Wordsworth's rejection of 18th-century artificial poetic diction in favor of simple, emotional expression.

The Poet's Role: A high conception of the poet as a "man speaking to men," who connects deeply with nature.

Nature and Ecocriticism: An examination of his poems as an early form of ecological thinking, portraying nature as a primary teacher.

Theoretical Impact: The Preface is analyzed as a seminal manifesto that, while not a systematic theory, redefined the standards of poetic creation.

Psychological Depth: Interpretation of his work as an engagement with consciousness and memory, rather than merely passive description.

The article demonstrates how Wordsworth shifted the focus of English poetry from objective, urban

description to subjective, emotional, and nature-centered experience.

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