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INTRODUCING WORDSWORTH TWO CENTURIES AFTER THE PUBLICATION OF *LYRICAL BALLADS*

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Abstract. *This paper is the introductory part of the book written in the attempt to introduce William Wordsworth to students of English language and literature two centuries after the year of the publication of **Lyrical Ballads** that is almost unanimously taken as the beginning of the English Romantic revival. Wordsworth's stature as the central figure of English Romanticism and father of modern poetry has been reconsidered in this paper according to the lasting appeal of his verse. His role of poet as prophet, guide and seer has been dealt with extensively in terms of his accomplishing the great task - to write his "song of humanity."*

The Great Romantics as a term covers two generations of Romantic poets. Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge belong to the older, Byron, Shelley and Keats to the younger. The older Romantics outlived the younger but their poetic careers had already ended when the younger began theirs. Blake used to be a problem for scholars for the fact he had lived and worked almost unknown during his lifetime. Since he is in some ways greater than the other Great Romantics he is rightly studied as one of them, and as the first, for chronological reasons. All modern anthologies and studies of English romanticism as a rule open with him.

All Great Romantics saw themselves as seers, guides and prophets but it was only Blake who was a consistent visionary. Interestingly, Byron, who, at least on the continent, epitomized the Romantic revival, would have never subscribed to the title, and Blake himself lived entirely outside the Movement, without exercising any influence whatsoever on his contemporaries. The only evidence that Wordsworth knew of Blake is a copy of Blake's *The Tyger* in one of his notebooks. Blake's imagination created visions, Wordsworth's was

for the most
 subservient strictly to the external things
 with which it communed

The Prelude

For Wordsworth there were

...spots of time
 Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
 A vivifying virtue

The Prelude

That does not mean that Wordsworth did not create visions. On the contrary. Examples are numerous - 'Michael', the 'Immortality Ode', to mention just two. The truth is, however, that the younger romantics were inspired by Wordsworth to write perhaps greater visions (Shelley's 'Mont Blanc'), certainly less dependent than Wordsworth's on the poet's relation to the external world.

By general consent, it is William Wordsworth who is the central figure of English romanticism. Even those who do not fall for his nature poetry or his system of thought do not object to the validity of this statement, for at least the mere fact that the *Lyrical Ballads*, the collection of poems that he published in collaboration with Coleridge in 1798, marked a literary departure with tradition and is a landmark. Its publication is regularly used as the beginning of the English Romantic Movement, while the Preface that Wordsworth added to the second edition in 1800 is regarded as its manifesto, the instrument of revolt.

Wordsworth the poet expressed the profoundest aspirations of English romanticism to which he devoted his whole life: to be the guide of his readers in a search of visionary experience and perception of nature. He is considered the English greatest nature poet although he thought of himself as a poet of man. In 'Home at Grasmere' he says:

The Mind of Man -
 My haunt, and the main region of my song

The lines from *The Prelude* add a new aspect to the above:

Above all, one thought
 Baffled my understanding. How men lived
 Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still
 Strangers, and not knowing each other's names.

Interestingly, many of his poems are about the poet himself, or as Harold Bloom, one of his best critics, says, 'Before Wordsworth poetry had a subject. After Wordsworth, its prevalent subject is the poet's own subjectivity'. As Wordsworth is 'a man speaking to men', well aware of his great task as a guide and prophet, he chooses the subjects which, as D.N.Smith put it, 'may not be the real subjects of his poems. The titles afford as a rule little clue to what the poems contain. Wordsworth does not value anything for itself so much as for what it can tell us of ourselves.'

Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, near the Lake District, where he went to Hawkshead Grammar School. His childhood was generally happy despite the early deaths

of his parents. His mother died when he was eight and father when he was twelve years old. The five parentless children were closely attached to each other. As a child he stored in his memory many imaginative experiences he had among lakes, hills, woods and streams. In his manhood they revived with such force that convinced him into the existence of "a mysterious bond" between man and nature. The vividness of these memories also appeared to him as evidence that "the child's vision penetrates the reality of things with a directness impossible in later life." On finishing school he went to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he spent three years, studying Newtonian Physics among other things. His slow and meditative mind did not find stimulus there and he graduated without distinguishing himself.

Just before the final examination he went on a walking tour of the Alps. The following year he went to France again, spent some time in Paris, Orleans and Blois, where he met and fell in love with Annette Vallon. In France he was brought into contact with revolutionary ideas and grew enthusiastic about the Revolution. In *The Prelude* he sings:

O pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
 For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
 Upon our side, us who were strong in love!
 Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
 But to be young was very Heaven!

The disappointment with events in France, notably, the reign of terror under Robespierre, and the declaration of war between England and France, shut him off from France and the communication with Annette. The desertion of Annette, who gave birth to a daughter Caroline, and the disillusionment with the Revolution seem to have been the cause of a deep depression into which he had sunk on his return. That was a restless and unhappy period of his life. He began to emerge from this spiritual crisis and emotional conflicts due to the perceptive companionship of his sister Dorothy, who was to be his constant companion for the rest of his life. A legacy relieved him of financial burdens. After a tour of England, with sojourns in a few towns and a longer stay in the Lake District, he and his sister Dorothy settled at Racedown, Dorset, in 1795, while Coleridge moved close to them in 1797. The reunion with Dorothy and the stimulating friendship of Coleridge helped him recover from despondency. In *The Prelude* he says that Dorothy 'preserved' him as a poet, while Coleridge 'regulated' his soul. The Wordsworths enjoyed the society of Coleridge, while Coleridge admired them both. He considered Wordsworth the greatest poet of the age and spoke of himself as 'a little man by his side.' The judgment was based on *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* (1793). Coleridge, with conversations teeming with spirit and a knowledge of Hartleian associational psychology on the one hand, and Dorothy with her devotion and an eye for detail on the other, helped Wordsworth regain self-confidence and change his pity for the poor into genuine sympathy, which was to grow soon into a close identification with them. His sympathies for the common man, his hopes and fears, suffering and fortitude remained the substance of his poetry. From Hartley he learned that human knowledge originates for the most part in perceptions made by the five senses. It became clear to him how emotions may have moral value and how from earliest childhood we learn to associate certain sights, sounds and tastes with pleasant or painful feelings. This made him cast aside the supernatural and made for himself a naturally revealed religion. He recognized:

In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

'Tintern Abbey'

The two poets had many interests in common, although their casts of mind were entirely different. Nevertheless, both believed that external objects can have an enduring influence on the growing mind. To both men Dorothy's sensitive response to the tiny details of natural beauty was a source of great delight. She reminded Wordsworth of his childhood and boyhood, the time of child' visions. His debts are in the lines of 'Tintern Abbey'

... in thy voice I catch
 The language of my former heart, and read
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights
 Of thy wild eyes.

Wordsworth remembered with new force the visionary experiences of his youth when he also responded to the external world with excitement and ecstasy.

During long talks and walks Wordsworth and Coleridge worked out a theory of poetry. The result was the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), the real climax of this crucial period of Wordsworth's life, the time of his intense poetic activity. Years later Coleridge described their original plan:

During the first year Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry: the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination... In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*: in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief, for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural 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: an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

Wordsworth is making his reader look at the lives and the tragedies of his own subjects with an eye so fresh that an experience may be so disturbing as to appear analogous to the supernatural. The first and the last poems of the collection - 'Tables Turned' and 'Tintern Abbey'- better than other poems speak of watching and receiving.

In 'Tintern Abbey', the most important poem that Wordsworth contributed to the collection, he set forth his faith in nature, and his belief in 'one life', the belief that there is no division between God and nature. God and nature are literally one in the sense in which man and nature are one. This doctrine supplied him the name 'pantheist'. Actually, Wordsworth called himself a worshipper of nature, which suggests that he felt an urgent

need for the recovery of its sacredness, the recognition of the presence of the divine spirit in it. Nature through its beautiful objects, through its effects on the perceiver, strengthens his character, teaches him morals and enables him 'to see into the life of things.' A physical sight is thus transformed into a spiritual one, providing the perceiver with an insight into 'the spiritual governance of the universe.' The spirit, by communing with the forms of nature, humanizes our attitudes toward man. The effects of the external world are not the same at various age levels though: childhood is a time of sensation, youth one of emotion, and manhood one of thought or reflection. Although there is description in the poem, it is not much about landscape as about the effects on the perceiving mind, so that the poem is obviously about 'the effects of memory, time and landscape upon the human heart.'

In the *Lyrical Ballads*, whatever the subject of particular poems, Wordsworth is actually examining himself, exploring his own self, and describing the means how he recovered his serenity of mind. His return to the study of nature meant, in fact, a break with tradition, both in manner and substance. The small happenings of country life, the doings and feelings of humble people and the use of a language 'really used by men', procured a path to his reader's heart. Of the *Lyrical Ballads* Northrop Frye says that "man first finds his identity in his relation with nature, which is a better teacher than books... One finds one's lost identity with nature in moments of feeling in which one is penetrated by the sense of nature's 'huge and mighty forms'." 'Tintern Abbey' is an excellent introduction to his poetic approach and many of his ideas that were to be fully developed in *the Prelude*, which he began in the same year.

The poem 'Home at Grasmere', from which we quoted at the beginning, was written in 1798, but published in 1814 as part of the long poem *The Excursion*. The poem itself brings before the reader the poet's programme in its full comprehensiveness, revealing all his ambitions without concealing the echoes of the great master Milton. His aim is to give utterance to his 'affecting thoughts' on Man, on Nature and on Human Life. With Wordsworth affection always means emotion and the phrase 'affecting thoughts' points to the integrity of thought and feeling, which is a feature that makes a significant difference from 18th century descriptive poetry as well as his own *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk*, in which feeling and thought are in different 'compartments.' He finds himself equipped to sing

Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love and Hope,
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
Of blessed consolations in distress;
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
Of joy in widest commonalty spread;

His central concern is the interaction between the individual mind and the external world, for which he will use words 'which speak of nothing more than what we are.' Nevertheless, for such a task to accomplish he turns for help:

Descend, prophetic spirit! That inspirest
The human soul of universal earth,
Dreaming on things to come; and dost possess
A metropolitan temple in the hearts
Of mighty Poets

The implication is clear - only a poet prophet can fulfill the task with confidence.

After the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* the Wordsworths and Coleridge decided to go to Germany to learn the language and earn money by translation. The Wordsworths spent the coldest winter of the century at Goslar, where William wrote a small cycle of lyrics, known as the 'Lucy' poems. Coleridge stayed in Germany to read German philosophy while Dorothy and William returned to the Lake District and settled at Dove Cottage, Grasmere. J. R. Watson speaks of the return as 'a decisive step' because "It indicated the poet's unqualified acceptance of the high office, and it may be compared to a religious commitment to a divine call. From henceforth Wordsworth was to live out consciously the life of a dedicated spirit, prophet, teacher: and because his teaching and prophecy were based on his own experience, and that experience was so accidentally and peculiarly central to the discontents of modern industrial society."

In his 'Lucy' poems Wordsworth comes closest to love lyric. The name Lucy appears in all of them but the fourth ('A Slumber...'). The last one, 'Lucy Gray', differs from the rest for it is explicitly about solitude and is closest in form and matter to folk ballad. The poems sing of love and pain of loss. The speculations who 'Lucy' might be seem irrelevant, for one's pleasure of reading does not depend on the name. Lucy is a common name in England and there are three rivers of the name Dove in England, so that a search for a biographical counterpart is entirely unnecessary. In no other poems does Wordsworth reach his ideal of the simplicity of language characteristic of folk ballads. Their elegiac and contemplative character along with the solitariness and the relation to nature as the poet's main concerns make these poems both emphatically 'romantic' and typically Wordsworth's.

Lucy, as a child of nature, becomes a symbol of natural beauty, unites the transience of a flower with the light of a star,

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

and ends as part of the universe,

Rolled round in earth, diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

In 1800, again in close touch with Coleridge, Wordsworth prepared the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, enlarged to include 'Michael' and the 'Lucy' poems among other poems. For this edition Wordsworth wrote the famous Preface.

With 'Michael' Wordsworth pays his debt to pastoralism and creates the myth of natural man and a symbol of fortitude. Fortitude was his favourite word and the virtue he most admired in men. The poem has the subtitle 'a pastoral', which indicates that it is part of that tradition in style and subject. The poem is a record of pastoral life and the poet's honest admiration of it. Details are chosen to convey the dignity and grandeur of that life, embodied in the character of Michael, who with his rugged health, strong will, independent mind, intimacy with the countryside and domestic feelings personifies its virtues. At the opening the shepherd Michael is over eighty but still 'stout of heart, and strong of limb'.

His bodily frame had been from youth to age
 Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
 Intense and frugal, apt for all affairs,
 And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
 And watchful more than ordinary men.
 Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
 Of blasts of every tone.

The unfinished sheepfold, the central object and the thing on which the covenant was made between Michael and his son Luke, is the symbol of failure of hope. Michael is compelled by financial needs to send his son to a kinsman, but before his departure Michael requests that the boy lay a corner-stone for a new sheepfold. Luke is at first successful then fails and flees to a remote country. Michael is defeated by the failure of his son, the victim of a corrupt society. The sheepfold remains unfinished and Michael is seen sitting beside it unable to 'lift a single stone'. The story of Michael's life with its pathos assumes the cathartic character of great tragedies and the poem ends with 'a vision of utter loss':

There by the Sheep-fold, sometimes was he seen
 Sitting alone, or with his faithful Dog,
 Then old, beside him, lying at his feet.
 The length of full seven years, from time to time,
 He at the building of his Sheep-fold wrought,
 And left the work unfinished when he died.
 Three years, or little more, did Isabel
 Survive her husband: at her death the estate
 Was sold, and went into a stranger's hand.
 The Cottage which was named The EVENING STAR
 Is gone - the ploughshare has been through the ground
 On which it stood; great changes have been wrought
 In all the neighbourhood: - yet the oak is left
 That grew beside their door; and the remains
 Of the unfinished Sheep-fold may be seen
 Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Ghyll.

The story about a deep concern for human values is told, the tragedy is put into the past as part of history - one more tale about endurance and grief, loss, frailty and love.

For the 1798 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth wrote an advertisement, advising his readers to consider "the majority of the poems as experiments"; for the second he wrote the notorious Preface and for the third (1802) he added an appendix on 'poetic diction'. The Preface is rightly called the most important single document in the history of English criticism. As an introduction to the *Lyrical Ballads* it has frequently been met with resentment, although every discussion of Wordsworth's poetry is full of references to that document. Readers often complain that the attitudes from it are not always applicable. The Preface is important, above all, for the views of the function and scope of poetry, the role of the poet, the creative process and the language of poetry, as well as the serious tone with which these views are presented. The reader may dislike

either the author's self-protectiveness or his self-confidence, which sometimes verges on arrogance, but he always appreciates the opinion that "the great value of poetry is that it permits the sharing of experience, the communication of truths 'carried alive into the heart by passion'". In a word, the subject of the Preface is what poetry communicates and how it does it.

In the paragraph that opens with "The principal object..." Wordsworth tells us that for the *Lyrical Ballads* he chose "incidents and situations from common life", intending to make the interesting "by tracing in them...the primary laws of our nature." For that purpose "low and rustic life was generally chosen", implying that rural life and village communities show human nature in a pure state. The passage in which he tries to answer the question 'what is a poet?' brings a conception of the poet as a 'man speaking to men'. The abilities that set him apart are a livelier sensibility and a greater knowledge of the world, which enable him to communicate the experiences he shares with others. A more intense awareness of the external world is the privilege he must not keep to himself. That awareness is here another name for the poetic imagination, which transforms all experience into something richer than any real experience.

The statement that 'all good poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' occurs twice in the Preface and suggests that the poetic creation is an intense mental and emotional activity. When he adds that "poetry takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity", Wordsworth tells us that the creative process begins in the calm of his room when he remembers a past experience. The word 'spontaneous' may be misleading. A dictionary would say that it means a process 'that cannot be begun at will and that once begun it is to some extent self-directing'. I am inclined to accept the view 'that a poet is a man who has trained his senses and his imagination that he responds spontaneously and almost automatically to an experience which for other men might be meaningless. The main objection to this definition of poetic creation comes from those who cannot apply it to all Wordsworth's poetry, let alone all poetry.

His definitions of poetry as 'the image of man and nature', or that it is 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge', or that it is 'the first and last of all knowledge; it is as immortal as the heart of man' are both romantic and in the vein of traditional 'apologies' of poetry. Wordsworth believed that poetry, like science, should reveal general truths, particularly truths about human nature. Since for him there is no difference between the 'truth' of the man of science and the 'truth' of the poet, it means that in their common pursuit they use only different methods. Scientists and poets are not opposites or enemies, they are allies whose task is the same but use different means to achieve it:

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.

The Oxford Anthology says that "the informing idea of Wordsworth's theory of poetry, as of his practice, is that poetry has the power to prevent and reverse modern man's alienation, his estrangement from himself, from his fellow men, and from the universe. To the enforcement of this idea and to the explication of the particular means by which the poet realizes it, the Preface is devoted."

In 1802 Wordsworth wrote 'Resolution and Independence', one of his best 'crisis

lyrics'. The original title 'The Leech-Gatherer' did not satisfy him and he changed it for the title that explicitly states the theme of the poem. On a serene spring morning, after a stormy night, in a state of dejection amid fertile nature, reflecting on his happy childhood and the short lives of two poets who died young, Chatterton and Burns, the poet encounters the leech-gatherer:

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace,
 A leading from above, a something given,
 Yet it befell that, in this lonely place,
 When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,
 Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
 I saw a Man before me unawares:
 The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

The old man 'as a huge stone' appears to him as part of Nature, or the universe, sent by Providence. The dignity and stateliness of his speech, his endurance and strange appearance are taken as admonition by the poet:

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
 But now his voice to me was like a stream
 Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
 And the whole body of the man did seem
 Like one whom I had met in a dream;
 Or like a man from some far region sent,
 To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

The leech-gatherer's answer to the poet's central question: 'How is it that you live, and what is it you do?', that he still perseveres in gathering leeches although 'they have dwindled long by slow decay', thus gaining an honest maintenance, is a step further in the process of transformation of 'a decrepit old man so firm in mind' into a visionary figure. For the poet he is a symbol of fortitude and a spiritual messenger, for us he becomes a mythic figure.

In 1802 Wordsworth is again in the Lake District, after a visit to Calais where he had gone with Dorothy to see Annette and Caroline. That same year he married Mary Hutchinson. Now, among English lakes and mountainsides, with which he had as a child formed an intimate relationship and felt as though he had been taken by nature's hand, he recollects childhood visions, their splendour and glory and interprets those recollections as intimations of immortality. He writes the first four stanzas of the 'Immortality' Ode. The poem is neither about mortality nor immortality. Lionel Trilling's observation that it is about 'growing up' and not about 'growing old' is generally accepted as absolutely correct as is its three part structure. The first four stanzas, written in 1802, are made up of images of light and sound, of glorious visions a child experiences. He remembers them in utter vividness, almost with exaltation. Yet he ends the fourth stanza with the question:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
 Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

The glory that irradiates in childhood is gone and it is about loss that the poet sings. It

is a lament or even anguish, or simply the first four stanzas are about the awareness of the lost power of imagination. In the next four stanzas(v-ix), written with the rest of the poem by 1804, the poet tries to explain the loss, the departure from that radiance:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But He
 Beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
 The youth who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid;
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.

The inner light is fading, the imagination is vanishing. The bulk of this part of the poem is devoted to the child, 'a mighty prophet, blest seer'.

The last three stanzas(ix-xi) sing of what is gained. That gain can be understood as comfort or consolation or even abundant recompense for what is lost - the philosophic mind, that replaces the light of the imagination. The joy the poet now sings of is not the same joy as before. It is the joy from something that remains or something that is remembered. 'Obstinate questionings' and 'vanishings' are those intimations of immortality, and we still live by

...those first affections,
 Those shadowy recollections,
 Which, be they what they may
 Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
 Are yet the master light of of all our seeing;

After examining all the sources of intimations of immortality he moves away completely from the sense of loss and turns to hopefulness:

Though nothing can bring back the hour
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
 We will grieve not, rather find
 Strength in what remains behind;
 In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering;
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.

and concludes the poem with memorable lines, going back to the human heart, the core of his song of humanity, to joy that is deeper than sorrow, completing thus one of the

greatest poems in English:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

"When he wrote the Ode", Maurice Bowra says, "Wordsworth believed that nature would continue to inspire him...But what mattered most in him was gone - the creative imagination which carried him beyond the bounds of space and time into some vast order of things, where, in almost losing his individuality, he saw in impassioned vision the power which sustains the universe and gives meaning to life. And when he lost this, it was not long before he lost his secondary but hardly less remarkable gift of feeling himself so close to nature that in its presence he was able to understand the tenderer movements of the human heart and to enter into full sympathy with them."(*The Romantic Imagination*)

The Excursion, Wordsworth's long philosophical poem was published in 1814, seven years after *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807). Into *The Excursion* he incorporated *The Ruined Cottage* (tale of Margaret), the poem he had written in 1798. The poem was greatly admired by Coleridge and it is a secret why he refused to publish it earlier and as a separate piece, against Coleridge's insistence. The tale of Margaret is told to the poet by the Wanderer, the poet's friend. They are at the site of a ruined cottage, once the home of Margaret, her husband Robert and their two children. Robert, the breadwinner, is forced by bad harvests to leave home never to return. One of the two children dies and the other is sent away as a parish orphan. Margaret lives on all alone in utter wretchedness, overwhelmed by grief and sorrow, without ever leaving the cottage in case her husband Robert returns. Harold Bloom's comment that Margaret 'is destroyed by excess of hope, and not of sorrow' is further developed in his *Western Canon*: "Margaret... dies early of her goodness, of the power of her hope, which is the best part of her, and which is nurtured by her memory of goodness, of her life with her husband and children before disaster came... Her perpetual will to hope for his return becomes the destructive passion that destroys her and her household." The ruined cottage as a symbol of destruction stands in direct correspondence with the slow decay of its only dweller:

Meanwhile her poor hut
 Sunk to decay; for he was gone, whose hand
 At the first nippings of October frost
 Closed up each chink, and with fresh bands of straw
 Chequered the green-grown thatch. And so she lived
 Through the long winter, reckless and alone,
 Till this reft house, by frost, and thaw, and rain,
 Was sapped; and when she slept, the nightly damps
 Did chill her breast, and in the stormy day
 Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind
 Even at the side of her own fire. Yet still
 She loved this wretched spot, nor would for worlds
 Have parted hence; and still that length of road,
 And this rude bench, one torturing hope endeared,

Fast rooted at her heart. And here, my friend,
 In sickness she remained; and here she died,
 Last human tenant of these ruined walls.

Harold Bloom concludes his comment: ".. the terrible pathos of Margaret, a peasant woman wholly humane and lovable, who is destroyed by her powers of memory and hope; these are matters available to every human consciousness in every age, regardless of gender, race, social class, ideology."

Another scholar, Jonathan Wordsworth, ends his essay on the poem: " It shows in Wordsworth a humanity, an insight in emotions not his own, that is wholly convincing - places him, perhaps unexpectedly among the very few great English tragic writers."

The Prelude, begun in 1798, was finished in 1805, then revised and published in 1850, after the poet's death. It is dedicated to Coleridge, who was, at the time when the epic was begun, the most profound influence. Coleridge's physical and mental closeness seems to have been a compelling force which triggered Wordsworth's creative capacity. Throughout the poem he is addressed as Friend, but he remains an absent auditor. *The Prelude* is a long autobiographical poem on 'the growth of a poet's mind'. It is not an open account of Wordsworth's, personal life; it actually deals with his poetic personality and is a record not of outward events but a record of his mind, 'the origin and progress of his powers and his progression towards a love for humanity.' He closely examines what Nature, Man and Poetry mean to him, calling *The Prelude* 'a poem of my poetical education' and seeing himself as a traveller.

A Traveller I am,
 And all my tale is of myself; even so,
 So be it, if the pure in heart delight
 To follow me; and Thou, O honor'd Friend!
 Who in my thoughts art ever at my side,
 Uphold, as heretofore, my fainting steps.

M.H.Abrams, in his essay "Wordsworth's Long Journey Home" reads the poem as a circuitous journey which starts and ends at Grasmere. "Its chief episodes", says Abrams, "after the period of childhood are Wordsworth's wanderings through the English countryside, the Alps, Italy, France and Wales - literal journeys through actual places which modulate easily into symbolic landscapes traversed by a metaphorical wayfarer." Many parallels with *Paradise Lost* and even with Dante's *Divine Comedy* are established, but the originality and uniqueness of the poem are generally recognized. For Harold Bloom it is an internalized romance with the poet as quester on "a journey seeking a remembered world." Wordsworth, the poet prophet, as he thinks of himself, continually speaks in two voices, the 'I' then and the 'I' now, "seeking the elements of continuity between his two disparate selves, conducts a persistent exploration of the nature and significance of memory, of his power to sustain freshness of sensation and his 'first creative sensibility', against the deadening effect of habit and analysis, and of manifestations of the enduring and the eternal within the realm of change and time" (Abrams).

Critics constantly refer to *The Prelude* in their interpretations of Wordsworth's poems, making use of his concepts, such as 'spots of time', to elucidate their meaning:

There are in our existence spots of time,
 That with distinct pre-eminence retain
 A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
 By false opinion and contentious thought,
 Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
 In trivial occupations, and the round
 Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
 Are nourished and invisibly repaired;

'Spots of time' are those moments of our lives when we experience a sort of revelation which enables us to grasp the significance of what we have perceived. For Wordsworth this also means being able to get from the experience an extraordinary personal insight, or when we recollect them in times of hopelessness and weariness will relieve us and sustain.

The Prelude is above all an analysis of the growth of Wordsworth's own poetic genius during his childhood and youth, it is about the lessons he owed to Nature, his first teacher:

... This only let me add,
 From heart-experience, and in humblest sense
 Of modesty, that he, who in his youth
 A daily wanderer among woods and fields
 With living Nature hath been intimate,
 Not only in that raw unpractised time
 Is stirred to extasy, as others are,
 By glittering verse; but further, doth receive,
 In measure only dealt to himself,
 Knowledge and increase of enduring joy
 From the great Nature that exists in works
 Of mighty Poets.

Wordsworth's belief in the power of nature to 'raise the mind from the trivialities of life' brought him to the belief that nature can bring man to contact with 'life's essentials'. His best poems, written during his 'great decade' (1797-1807) are all about "the struggle of the mind to come to terms with the situation of man", to regain that 'blessed mood' in which "the human mind irradiates and transforms the world which it perceives, giving life and meaning to what be essentially dead." It is the poetic power which stirs the reader's imagination and cleanses his 'doors of perception', rescuing thus both the poet and the reader from 'the visionary dreariness' of a life without joy. Wordsworth's powerful imagination gave shape to his beliefs and turned them into poetic myth. When the imagination began to fail him, and this process was no longer possible, he settled into a conventional Anglicanism.

Here what Matthew Arnold, the great Victorian critic, responsible for the phrase 'great decade' said about Wordsworth's poetry:

"Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case

after case, he shows us this joy and renders it so as to make us share it. The source of joy from which he thus draws is the truest and most unfailing source of joy accessible to man. It is also accessible universally. Wordsworth brings us word, therefore - according to his own strong characteristic line - he brings us word 'of joy in widest commonality spread'. Here is an immense advantage for a poet. Wordsworth tells us of what all seek, and tells of it at its truest and best source, and yet a source where all may go and draw from it."

Wordsworth was a conscious artist, well aware of what he was doing as a rebel against 'contemporary literary fashions'. "As a poet", says Bloom, "Wordsworth sought to create the taste by which he could be appreciated, for no central writer - not even Dante - was so determined to universalize his own highly individual temperament. Wordsworth's spirit was so open to both human and natural otherness, as perhaps no other poet's was, before or since."

The list of poets that he influenced is very long, which makes you think that had not it been for him English literature would have taken a different course. According to Bloom, Wordsworth invented modern or democratic poetry and opened the door to the Democratic Age that "mourns and values human beings."

It is true that Wordsworth's poems illuminate each other and that they 'make a system', but it is also true that each poem is an 'individual act of mind' and ought to be understood individually. To this end I have made a selection of poems with a hope to make the reader fully enjoy them through understanding.

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UVODENJE WORDSWORTA DVESTA GODINA POSLE OBJAVLJIVANJA LIRSKIH BALADA

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*Ovaj rad je uvodni deo knjige napisane kao pokušaj da se predstavi Wordsworth studentima engleskog jezika i književnosti dvesta godina posle objavljivanja **Lirskih balada**, što se jednostavno uzima kao početak engleskog romantizma. U radu se razmatra Wordsworthova pojava kao centralne figure engleskog romantizma i začetnika moderne poezije u skladu sa trajnom lepotom i svežinom njegovog stiha. Njegovo shvatanje uloge pesnika kao proroka, vodiča i vizionara posmatrano je preko njegovog uspeha da obavi veliki zadatak i napise svoju "song of humanity."*