***Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802)***

William Wordsworth

The first Volume of these Poems has already been submitted to general perusal. It was published, as an experiment, which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavor to impart.

I had formed no very inaccurate estimate of the probable effect of those Poems: I flattered myself that they who should be pleased with them would read them with more than common pleasure: and, on the other band, I was well aware, that by those who should dislike them they would be read with more than common dislike. The result has differed from my expectation in this only, that I have pleased a greater number, than I ventured to hope I should please. xxx    For the sake of variety, and from a consciousness of my own weakness, I was induced to request the assistance of a Friend, who furnished me with the Poems of the ANCIENT MARINER, the FOSTER-MOTHER'S TALE:, the NIGHTINGALE, and the Poem entitled LOVE. I should not, however, have requested this assistance, had I not believed that the Poems of my Friend would in a great measure have the same tendency as my own, and that, though there would be found a difference, there would be found no discordance in the colours of our style; as our opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide.

Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these Poems from a belief, that, if the views with which they were  composed were indeed realized, a class of  Poetry would be produced, well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant in the multiplicity, and in the quality of its moral relations: and on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory, upon which the poems were written. But I was unwilling to undertake the task, because I knew that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of \*reasoning\* him into an approbation of these particular Poems: and I was still more unwilling to undertake the task, because, adequately to display my opinions, and fully to enforce my arguments, would require a space wholly disproportionate to the nature of a preface. For to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence, of which I believe it susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined, without pointing out, in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other and without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself. I have therefore altogether declined to enter regularly upon this defence; yet I am sensible, that there would be some impropriety in abruptly obtruding upon the Public, without a few words of introduction, Poems so materially different from those, upon which general approbation is at present bestowed.

It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only thus apprizes the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded. This exponent or symbol held forth by metrical language must in different eras of literature have excited very different expectations: for example, in the age of Catullus, Terence, and Lucretius and that of Statius or Claudian; and in our own country, in the age of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher, and that of Donne and Cowley, or Dryden, or Pope. I will not take upon me to determine the exact import of the promise which by the act of writing in verse an Author, in the present day, makes to his Reader; but I am certain, it will appear to many persons that I have not fulfilled the terms of an engagement thus voluntarily contracted. They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and aukwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to  assume that title. I hope therefore the Reader will not censure me, if I attempt to state what I have proposed to myself to perform; and also, (as far as the limits of a preface will permit) to explain some of the chief reasons which have determined me in the choice of my purpose: that at least he may be spared any unpleasant feeling of disappointment, and that I myself may be protected from the most dishonorable accusation which can be brought against an Author, namely, that of an indolence which prevents him from endeavouring to ascertain what is his duty, or, when his duty is ascertained, prevents him from performing it.

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real  defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is  originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity they  convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a  more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon  themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order  to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.

I cannot, however, be insensible of the present outcry against the triviality and meanness both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have  occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions; and I acknowledge, that this defect, where it exists, is more dishonorable to the Writer's own character than  false refinement or arbitrary innovation, though I should contend at the same time that it is far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences. From such verses the  Poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them bas a worthy purpose. Not that I mean to say, that I always  began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but I believe that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such  objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If in this opinion I am mistaken, I can have little right to the name of a  Poet. For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced  on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of  feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general  representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with  important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the  impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being  to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.

I have said that each of these poems has a purpose. I have also informed my Reader what this purpose will be found principally to be: namely to illustrate the manner  in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement. But, speaking in language somewhat more appropriate, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of  the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature. This object I have endeavoured in these short essays to attain by various means; by tracing  the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings, as in the poems of the IDIOT BOY and the MAD MOTHER; by accompanying the last struggles of  a human being, at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society, as in the Poem of the FORSAKEN INDIAN; by shewing, as in the Stanzas entitled  WE ARE SEVEN, the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion; or by displaying the  strength of fraternal, or to speak more philosophically, of moral attachment when early associated with the great and beautiful objects of nature, as in THE  BROTHERS; or, as in the Incident of SIMON LEE, by placing my Reader in the way of receiving from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary  impression than we are accustomed to receive from them. It has also been part of my general purpose to attempt to sketch characters under the influence of less  impassioned feelings, as in the TWO APRIL MORNINGS, THE FOUNTAIN, THE OLD MAN TRAVELLING, THE TWO THIEVES, &c. characters of which  the elements are simple, belonging rather to nature than to manners, such as exist now, and will probably always exist, and which from their constitution may be  distinctly and profitably contemplated. I will not abuse the indulgence of my Reader by dwelling longer upon this subject; but it is proper that I should mention one  other circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and  situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling. My meaning will be rendered perfectly intelligible by referring my Reader to the Poems entitled POOR  SUSAN and the CHILDLESS FATHER, particularly to the last Stanza of the latter Poem.

I will not suffer a sense of false modesty to prevent me from asserting, that I point my Reader's attention to this mark of distinction, far less for the sake of these  particular Poems than from the general importance of the subject. The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited without the  application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further  know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or  enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present  day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all  voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and  the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication  of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable  works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies,  and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse. When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the  feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonorable  melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent  objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible; and did I not further add to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil  will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success.

Having dwelt thus long on the subjects and aim of these Poems, I shall request the Reader's permission to apprize him of a few circumstances relating to their style, in  order, among other reasons, that I may not be censured for not having performed what I never attempted. The Reader will find that personifications of abstract ideas  rarely occur in these volumes; and, I hope, are utterly rejected as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. I have proposed to myself to  imitate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language.  They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but I have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a  mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription. I have wished to keep my Reader in the company of  flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him. I am, however, well aware that others who pursue a different track may interest him likewise; I do  not interfere with their claim, I only wish to prefer a different claim of my own. There will also be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction; I  have taken as much pains to avoid it as others ordinarily take to produce it; this I have done for the reason already alleged, to bring my language near to the language  of men, and further, because the pleasure which I have proposed to myself to impart is of a kind very different from that which is supposed by many persons to be  the proper object of poetry. I do not know how without being culpably particular I can give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which I wished these  poems to be written than by informing him that I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject, consequently, I hope that there is in these Poems little  falsehood of description, and that my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something I must have gained by this practice, as it is  friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense; but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from  father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. I have also thought it expedient to restrict myself still further, having abstained from the  use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets, till such feelings of disgust are connected with  them as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower.

If in a Poem there should be found a series of lines, or even a single line, in which the language, though naturally arranged and according to the strict laws of metre,  does not differ from that of prose, there is a numerous class of critics, who, when they stumble upon these prosaisms as they call them, imagine that they have made a  notable discovery, and exult over the Poet as over a man ignorant of his own profession. Now these men would establish a canon of criticism which the Reader will  conclude he must utterly reject, if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes. And it would be a most easy task to prove to him, that not only the language of a large  portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose,  but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose, when prose is well written. The truth of this  assertion might be demonstrated by innumerable passages from almost all the poetical writings, even of Milton himself. I have not space for much quotation; but, to  illustrate the subject in a general manner, I will here adduce a short composition of Gray, who was at the head of those who by their reasonings have attempted to  widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic  diction.

  In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,

  And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire:

  The birds in vain their amorous descant join,

  These ears alas! for other notes repine;

*A different object do these eyes require;*

*My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;*

*And in my breast the imperfect joys expire;*

  Yet Morning smiles the busy race to cheer,

  And new-born pleasure brings to happier men;

  The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;

  To warm their little loves the birds complain.

*I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear*

*And weep the more because I weep in vain.*

    ("Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West" by Thomas Gray, 1742)

It will easily be perceived that the only part of this Sonnet which is of any value is the lines printed in Italics: it is equally obvious, that, except in the rhyme, and in the  use of the single word "fruitless" for fruitlessly, which is so far a defect, the language of these lines does in no respect differ from that of prose.

By the foregoing quotation I have shewn that the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry; and I have previously asserted that a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good Prose. I will go further. I do not doubt that it may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and,  accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connection sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred and almost  identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry [[NOTE](https://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html#note)] sheds no tears "such as Angels weep," but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial  Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.

If it be affirmed that rhyme and metrical arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction which overturns what I have been saying on the strict affinity of metrical  language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that the language of such Poetry as I am  recommending is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself  form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and, if metre  be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. What other distinction would we  have? Whence is it to come? And where is it to exist? Not, surely, where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters: it cannot be necessary here, either  for elevation of style, or any of its supposed ornaments: for, if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions  the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. I forbear to speak of an  incongruity which would shock the intelligent Reader, should the Poet interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests: it is  sufficient to say that such addition is unnecessary. And, surely, it is more probable that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will  have their due effect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate.

But, as the pleasure which I hope to give by the Poems I now present to the Reader must depend entirely on just notions upon this subject, and, as it is in itself of the  highest importance to our taste and moral feelings, I cannot content myself with these detached remarks. And if, in what I am about to say, it shall appear to some  that my labour is unnecessary, and that I am like a man fighting a battle without enemies, I would remind such persons, that, whatever may be the language outwardly  holden by men, a practical faith in the opinions which I am wishing to establish is almost unknown. If my conclusions are admitted, and carried as far as they must be  carried if admitted at all, our judgments concerning the works of the greatest Poets both ancient and modern will be far different from what they are at present, both  when we praise, and when we censure: and our moral feelings influencing, and influenced by these judgments will, I believe, be corrected and purified.

Taking up the subject, then, upon general grounds, I ask what is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is  to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater  knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions,  and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the  Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by  absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet  (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than any thing  which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves; whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness  and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in  him without immediate external excitement.

But, whatever portion of this faculty we may suppose even the greatest Poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt but that the language which it will suggest to him,  must, in liveliness and truth, fall far short of that which is uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of those passions, certain shadows of which the Poet  thus produces, or feels to be produced, in himself. However exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious, that, while he  describes and imitates passions, his situation is altogether slavish and mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering.  So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let  himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him, by a  consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. Here, then, he will apply the principle on which I have so much insisted, namely, that  of selection; on this he will depend for removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion; he will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to  elevate nature: and, the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be  compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth.

But it may be said by those who do not object to the general spirit of these remarks, that, as it is impossible for the Poet to produce upon all occasions language as  exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests, it is proper that he should consider himself as in the situation of a translator, who deems  himself justified when he substitutes excellences of another kind for those which are unattainable by him; and endeavours occasionally to surpass his original, in order  to make some amends for the general inferiority to which he feels that he must submit. But this would be to encourage idleness and unmanly despair. Further, it is the  language of men who speak of what they do not understand; who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will converse with us as gravely  about a taste for Poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for Rope-dancing, or Frontiniac or Sherry. Aristotle, I have been told, hath  said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external  testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives strength and divinity to the tribunal to which it appeals, and  receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature. The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and  of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet, who has an adequate notion of the dignity of his art. The Poet  writes under one restriction only, namely, that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected  from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing  between the Poet and the image of things; between this, and the Biographer and Historian there are a thousand.

Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgment of the beauty of  the universe, an acknowledgment the more sincere because it is not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love:  further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves.  We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathize with pain it will be found that the sympathy is  produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular  facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The Man of Science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and  disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels  that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge. What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him  as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as  contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions which by habit become of the nature of  intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding every where objects that immediately excite in him sympathies  which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment.

 To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which without any other discipline than that of our daily life we are fitted to take  delight, the Poet principally directs his attention. He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the  fairest and most interesting qualities of nature. And thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure which accompanies him through the whole course of his  studies, converses with general nature with affections akin to those, which, through labour and length of time, the Man of Science has raised up in himself, by  conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the objects of his studies. The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of Science is pleasure; but the  knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition,  slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow- beings. 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. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.  Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, "that he looks before and after." He is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder  and preserver, carrying every where with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite  of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread  over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are every where; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet  he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge--it is as immortal as the  heart of man. If the labours of men of Science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we  habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present, but he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of Science, not only in those general indirect  effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or  Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us,  and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective Sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and  suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called Science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and  blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.  It is not, then, to be supposed that any one, who holds that sublime notion of Poetry which I have attempted to convey, will break in upon the sanctity and truth of his  pictures by transitory and accidental ornaments, and endeavour to excite admiration of himself by arts, the necessity of which must manifestly depend upon the  assumed meanness of his subject.

 What I have thus far said applies to Poetry in general; but especially to those parts of composition where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters; and  upon this point it appears to have such weight that I will conclude, there are few persons, of good sense, who would not allow that the dramatic parts of composition  are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own, either peculiar to him as an individual  Poet, or belonging simply to Poets in general, to a body of men who, from the circumstance of their compositions being in metre, it is expected will employ a  particular language.

It is not, then, in the dramatic parts of composition that we look for this distinction of language; but still it may be proper and necessary where the Poet speaks to us  in his own person and character. To this I answer: by referring my Reader to the description which I have before given of a Poet. Among the qualities which I have  enumerated as principally conducting to form a Poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree. The sum of what I have there said is, that  the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing  such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of  men. And with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations  of the elements and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sun-shine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and  kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as  they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them. The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of the passions of men. How, then, can his language  differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly? It might be proved that it is impossible. But supposing that this were not the  case, the Poet might then be allowed to use a peculiar language, when expressing his feelings for his own gratification, or that of men like himself. But Poets do not  write for Poets alone, but for men. Unless therefore we are advocates for that admiration which depends upon ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing  what we do not understand, the Poet must descend from this supposed height, and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men  express themselves. To this it may be added, that while he is only selecting from the real language of men, or, which amounts to the same thing, composing accurately  in the spirit of such selection, he is treading upon safe ground, and we know what we are to expect from him. Our feelings are the same with respect to metre; for, as  it may be proper to remind the Reader, the distinction of metre is regular and uniform, and not like that which is produced by what is usually called poetic diction,  arbitrary, and subject to infinite caprices upon which no calculation whatever can be made. In the one case, the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet respecting  what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion, whereas, in the other, the metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly  submit because they are certain, and because no interference is made by them with the passion but such as the concurring testimony of ages has shewn to heighten  and improve the pleasure which coexists with it.

It will now be proper to answer an obvious question, namely, why, professing these opinions, have I written in verse? To this, in addition to such answer as is  included in what I have already said, I reply in the first place, because, however I may have restricted myself, there is still left open to me what confessedly  constitutes the most valuable object of all writing whether in prose or verse, the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their  occupations, and the entire world of nature, from which I am at liberty to supply myself with endless combinations of forms and imagery. Now, supposing for a  moment that whatever is interesting in these objects may be as vividly described in prose, why am I to be condemned, if to such description I have endeavoured to  superadd the charm which, by the consent of all nations, is acknowledged to exist in metrical language? To this, by such as are unconvinced by what I have already  said, it may be answered, that a very small part of the pleasure given by Poetry depends upon the metre, and that it is injudicious to write in metre, unless it be  accompanied with the other artificial distinctions of style with which metre is usually accompanied, and that by such deviation more will be lost from the shock which  will be thereby given to the Reader's associations, than will be counterbalanced by any pleasure which he can derive from the general power of numbers. In answer  to those who still contend for the necessity of accompanying metre with certain appropriate colours of style in order to the accomplishment of its appropriate end,  and who also, in my opinion, greatly under-rate the power of metre in itself, it might perhaps, as far as relates to these Poems, have been almost sufficient to observe,  that poems are extant, written upon more humble subjects, and in a more naked and simple style than I have aimed at, which poems have continued to give pleasure  from generation to generation. Now, if nakedness and simplicity be a defect, the fact here mentioned affords a strong presumption that poems somewhat less naked  and simple are capable of affording pleasure at the present day; and, what I wished chiefly to attempt, at present, was to justify myself for having written under the  impression of this belief.

But I might point out various causes why, when the style is manly, and the subject of some importance, words metrically arranged will long continue to impart such a pleasure to mankind as he who is sensible of the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart. The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure. Now, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind; ideas and feelings do not in that state succeed each other in accustomed order. But, if the words by which this excitement is produced are in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. This is unquestionably true, and hence, though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose. The metre of the old Ballads is very artless; yet they contain many passages which would illustrate this opinion, and, I hope, if the following Poems be attentively perused, similar instances will be found in them. This opinion may be further illustrated by appealing to the Reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the re-perusal of the distressful parts of Clarissa Harlowe, or the Gamester. While Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us as pathetic beyond the bounds of pleasure an effect which, in a much greater degree than might at first be imagined, is to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement. On the other hand (what it must be allowed will much more frequently happen) if the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion, and inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement, then, (unless the Poet's choice of his metre has been grossly injudicious) in the feelings of pleasure which the Reader bas been accustomed to connect with metre in general, and in the feeling, whether chearful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of metre, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words, and to effect the complex end which the Poet proposes to himself.

If I had undertaken a systematic defence of the theory upon which these poems are written, it would have been my duty to develope the various causes upon which the pleasure received from metrical language depends. Among the chief of these causes is to be reckoned a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the Arts the object of accurate reflection; I mean the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it take their origin: It is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings. It would not have been a useless employment to have applied this principle to the consideration of metre, and to have shewn that metre is hence enabled to afford much pleasure, and to have pointed out in what manner that pleasure is produced. But my limits will not permit me to enter upon this subject, and I must content myself with a general summary.

I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment. Now, if Nature be thus cautious in preserving in a state of enjoyment a being thus employed, the Poet ought to profit by the lesson thus held forth to him, and ought especially to take care, that whatever passions he communicates to his Reader, those passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure. Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which bas been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely, all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling, which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. This effect is always produced in pathetic and impassioned poetry; while, in lighter compositions, the ease and gracefulness with which the Poet manages his numbers are themselves confessedly a principal source of the gratification of the Reader. I might perhaps include all which it is necessary to say upon this subject by affirming, what few persons will deny, that, of two descriptions, either of passions, manners, or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times where the prose is read once. We see that Pope by the power of verse alone, has contrived to render the plainest common sense interesting, and even frequently to invest it with the appearance of passion. In consequence of these convictions I related in metre the Tale of GOODY BLAKE and HARRY GILL, which is one of the rudest of this collection. I wished to draw attention to the truth that the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous. The truth is an important one; the fact (for it is a fact) is a valuable illustration of it. And I have the satisfaction of knowing that it has been communicated to many hundreds of people who would never have heard of it, had it not been narrated as a Ballad, and in a more impressive metre than is usual in Ballads.

Having thus explained a few of the reasons why I have written in verse, and why I have chosen subjects from common life, and endeavoured to bring my language near to the real language of men, if I have been too minute in pleading my own cause, I have at the same time been treating a subject of general interest; and it is for this reason that I request the Reader's permission to add a few words with reference solely to these particular poems, and to some defects which will probably be found in them. I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses I may have written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself. Hence I have no doubt, that, in some instances, feelings even of the ludicrous may be given to my Readers by expressions which appeared to me tender and pathetic. Such faulty expressions, were I convinced they were faulty at present, and that they must necessarily continue to be so, I would willingly take all reasonable pains to correct. But it is dangerous to make these alterations on the simple authority of a few individuals, or even of certain classes of men; for where the understanding of an Author is not convinced, or his feelings altered, this cannot be done without great injury to himself: for his own feelings are his stay and support, and, if he sets them aside in one instance, he may be induced to repeat this act till his mind loses all confidence in itself, and becomes utterly debilitated. To this it may be added, that the Reader ought never to forget that he is himself exposed to the same errors as the Poet, and perhaps in a much greater degree: for there can be no presumption in saying, that it is not probable he will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other; and above all, since he is so much less interested in the subject, he may decide lightly and carelessly.

Long as I have detained my Reader, I hope he will permit me to caution him against a mode of false criticism which has been applied to Poetry in which the language closely resembles that of life and nature. Such verses have been triumphed over in parodies of which Dr. Johnson's Stanza is a fair specimen.

"I put my hat upon my bead,

And walk'd into the Strand,

And there I met another man

Whose hat was in his hand."

Immediately under these lines I will place one of the most justly admired stanzas of the "Babes in the Wood."

"These pretty Babes with hand in hand

Went wandering up and down;

But never more they saw the Man

Approaching from the Town."

In both these stanzas the words, and the order of the words, in no respect differ from the most unimpassioned conversation. There are words in both, for example, "the Strand," and "the Town," connected with none but the most familiar ideas; yet the one stanza we admit as admirable, and the other as a fair example of the superlatively contemptible. Whence arises this difference? Not from the metre, not from the language, not from the order of the words; but the matter expressed in Dr. Johnson's stanza is contemptible. The proper method of treating trivial and simple verses to which Dr. Johnson's stanza would be a fair parallelism is not to say, this is a bad kind of poetry, or this is not poetry; but this wants sense; it is neither interesting in itself, nor can lead to any thing interesting; the images neither originate in that same state of feeling which arises out of thought, nor can excite thought or feeling in the Reader. This is the only sensible manner of dealing with such verses: Why trouble yourself about the species till you have previously decided upon the genus? Why take pains to prove that an Ape is not a Newton when it is self-evident that he is not a man?

I have one request to make of my Reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others. How common is it to hear a person say, "I myself do not object to this style of composition or this or that expression, but to such and such classes of people it will appear mean or ludicrous." This mode of criticism, so destructive of all sound unadulterated judgment, is almost universal: I have therefore to request, that the Reader would abide independently by his own feelings, and that if he finds himself affected he would not suffer such conjectures to interfere with his pleasure.

If an Author by any single composition has impressed us with respect for his talents, it is useful to consider this as affording a presumption, that, on other occasions where we have been displeased, he nevertheless may not have written ill or absurdly; and, further, to give him so much credit for this one composition as may induce us to review what has displeased us with more care than we should otherwise have bestowed upon it. This is not only an act of justice, but in our decisions upon poetry especially, may conduce in a high degree to the improvement of our own taste: for an accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned, not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced Reader from judging for himself, (I have already said that I wish him to judge for himself;) but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest, that, if Poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgment may be erroneous; and that in many cases it necessarily will be so.

I know that nothing would have so effectually contributed to further the end which I have in view as to have shewn of what kind the pleasure is, and how that pleasure is produced, which is confessedly produced by metrical composition essentially different from that which I have here endeavoured to recommend: for the Reader will say that he has been pleased by such composition; and what can I do more for him? The power of any art is limited; and he will suspect, that, if I propose to furnish him with new friends, it is only upon condition of his abandoning his old friends. Besides, as I have said, the Reader is himself conscious of the pleasure which he has received from such composition, composition to which he has peculiarly attached the endearing name of Poetry; and all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honorable bigotry for the objects which have long continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased. There is a host of arguments in these feelings; and I should be the less able to combat them successfully, as I am willing to allow, that, in order entirely to enjoy the Poetry which I am recommending, it would be necessary to give up much of what is ordinarily enjoyed. But, would my limits have permitted me to point out how this pleasure is produced, I might have removed many obstacles, and assisted my Reader in perceiving that the powers of language are not so limited as he may suppose; and that it is possible that poetry may give other enjoyments, of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature. This part of my subject I have not altogether neglected; but it bas been less my present aim to prove, that the interest excited by some other kinds of poetry is less vivid, and less worthy of the nobler powers of the mind, than to offer reasons for presuming, that, if the object which I have proposed to myself were adequately attained, a species of poetry would be produced, which is genuine poetry; in its nature well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations.

From what has been said, and from a perusal of the Poems, the Reader will be able clearly to perceive the object which I have proposed to myself: he will determine how far I have attained this object; and, what is a much more important question, whether it be worth attaining; and upon the decision of these two questions will rest my claim to the approbation of the public.

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NOTES

Wordsworth's Note: I here use the word "Poetry" (though against my own judgment) as opposed to the word Prose, and synonymous with metrical composition. But  much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact,  or Science. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre; nor is this, in truth, a strict antithesis; because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose,  that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable[[Return to Text]](https://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html#anchor)

***Appendix of 1802, on Poetic Diction***

As perhaps I have no right to expect from a Reader of an introduction to a volume of Poems that attentive perusal without which it is impossible, imperfectly as I have been compelled to express my meaning, that what I have said in the Preface should throughout be fully understood, I am the more anxious to give an exact notion of the sense in which I use the phrase poetic diction; and for this purpose I will here add a few words concerning the origin of the phraseology which I have condemned under that name. The earliest Poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring and figurative. In succeeding times, Poets, and men ambitious of the fame of Poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect, without having the same animating passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of those figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and ideas with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men in any situation. The Reader or Hearer of this distorted language found himself in a perturbed and unusual state of mind: when affected by the genuine language of passion he had been in a perturbed and unusual state of mind also: in both cases he was willing that his common judgment and understanding should be laid asleep, and he had no instinctive and infallible perception of the true to make him reject the false; the one served as a passport for the other. The agitation and confusion of mind were in both cases delightful, and no wonder if he confounded the one with the other, and believed them both to be produced by the same, or similar causes. Besides, the Poet spoke to him in the character of a man to be looked up to, a man of genius and authority. Thus, and from a variety of other causes, this distorted language was received with admiration; and Poets, it is probable, who had before contented themselves for the most part with misapplying only expressions which at first had been dictated by real passion, carried the abuse still further, and introduced phrases composed apparently in the spirit of the original figurative language of passion, yet altogether of their own invention, and distinguished by various degrees of wanton deviation from good sense and nature.

It is indeed true that the language of the earliest Poets was felt to differ materially from ordinary language, because it was the language of extraordinary occasions; but it was really spoken by men, language which the Poet himself had uttered when he had been affected by the events which he described, or which he had heard uttered by those around him. To this language it is probable that metre of some sort or other was early superadded. This separated the genuine language of Poetry still further from common life, so that whoever read or heard the poems of these earliest Poets felt himself moved in a way in which he had not been accustomed to be moved in real life, and by causes manifestly different from those which acted upon him in real life. This was the great temptation to all the corruptions which have followed: under the protection of this feeling succeeding Poets constructed a phraseology which had one thing, it is true, in common with the genuine language of poetry, namely, that it was not heard in ordinary conversation; that it was unusual. But the first Poets, as I have said, spoke a language which though unusual, was still the language of men. This circumstance, however, was disregarded by their successors; they found that they could please by easier means: they became proud of a language which they themselves had invented, and which was uttered only by themselves; and, with the spirit of a fraternity, they arrogated it to themselves as their own. In process of time metre became a symbol or promise of this unusual language, and whoever took upon him to write in metre, according as be possessed more or less of true poetic genius, introduced less or more of this adulterated phraseology into his compositions, and the true and the false became so inseparably interwoven that the taste of men was gradually perverted; and this language was received as a natural language; and, at length, by the influence of books upon men, did to a certain degree really become so. Abuses of this kind were imported from one nation to another, and with the progress of refinement this diction became daily more and more corrupt, thrusting out of sight the plain humanities of nature by a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas.

It would be highly interesting to point out the causes of the pleasure given by this extravagant and absurd language; but this is not the place; it depends upon a great variety of causes, but upon none perhaps more than its influence in impressing a notion of the peculiarity and exaltation of the Poet's character, and in flattering the Reader's self-love by bringing him nearer to a sympathy with that character; an effect which is accomplished by unsettling ordinary habits of thinking, and thus assisting the Reader to approach to that perturbed and dizzy state of mind in which if he does not find himself, he imagines that he is balked of a peculiar enjoyment which poetry can, and ought to bestow.

The sonnet which I have quoted from Gray, in the Preface, except the lines printed in Italics, consists of little else but this diction, though not of the worst kind; and indeed, if I may be permitted to say so, it is far too common in the best writers, both antient and modern. Perhaps I can in no way, by positive example, more easily give my Reader a notion of what I mean by the phrase poetic diction than by referring him to a comparison between the metrical paraphrases which we have of passages in the old and new Testament, and those passages as they exist in our common Translation. See Pope's "Messiah' throughout, Prior's "Did sweeter sounds adorn my flowing tongue," &c. &c. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels," &c. &c. See 1st Corinthians, Chapter 13th. By way of immediate example, take the following of Dr. Johnson.

"Turn on the prudent Ant thy heedless eyes,

Observe her labours, Sluggard, and be wise;

No stern command, no monitory voice,

Prescribes her duties, or directs her choice;

Yet timely provident she hastes away,

To snatch the blessings of a plenteous day;

When fruitful Summer loads the teeming plain,

She crops the harvest and she stores the grain.

How long, shall sloth usurp thy useless hours,

Unnerve thy vigour, and enchain thy powers?

While artful shades thy downy couch enclose,

And soft solicitation courts repose,

Amidst the drowsy charms of dull delight,

Year chases year with unremitted flight,

Till want now following, fraudulent and slow,

Shall spring to seize thee, like an ambushed foe."

[The Ant]

From this hubbub of words pass to the original, "Go to the Ant, thou Sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, 0 Sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an armed man." Proverbs, chap. 6th.

One more quotation and I have done. It is from Cowper's verses supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk.

"Religion! what treasure untold

Resides in that heavenly word!

More precious than silver and gold,

Or all that this earth can afford.

But the sound of the church-going bell

These valleys and rocks never heard

Ne'er sigh'd at the sound of a knell,

Or smil'd when a sabbath appear'd.

Ye winds, that have made me your sport,

Convey to this desolate shore

Some cordial endearing report

Of a land I must visit no more.

My Friends, do they now and then send

A wish or a thought after me?

0 tell me I yet have a friend

Though a friend I am never to see."

I have quoted this passage as an instance of three different styles of composition. The first four lines are poorly expressed; some Critics would call the language prosaic; the fact is, it would be bad prose, so bad, that it is scarcely worse in metre. The epithet "church-going" applied to a bell, and that by so chaste a writer as Cowper, is an instance of the strange abuses which Poets have introduced into their language till they and their Readers take them as matters of course, if they do not single them out expressly as objects of admiration. The two lines "Ne'er sigh'd at the sound," &c. are, in my opinion, an instance of the language of passion wrested from its proper use, and, from the mere circumstance of the composition being in metre, applied upon an occasion that does not justify such violent expressions, and I should condemn the passage, though perhaps few Readers will agree with me, as vicious poetic diction. The last stanza is throughout admirably expressed: it would be equally good whether in prose or verse, except that the Reader has an exquisite pleasure in seeing such natural Ianguage so naturally connected with metre. The beauty of this stanza tempts me here to add a sentiment which ought to be the pervading spirit of a system, detached parts of which have been imperfectly explained in the Preface, namely, that in proportion as ideas and feelings are valuable, whether the composition be in prose or in verse, they require and exact one and the same language.

## Preface to Lyrical Ballads Summary

In the preface to Lyrical Ballads, William Wordsworth outlines his theory of poetry. He argues that literary devices such as personification make it difficult for writers to communicate effectively.

* Wordsworth outlines his principles for the composition of lyrical ballads. He asserts that poetry must concern itself primarily with nature and human experience.
* Wordsworth's inspiration for writing lyrical ballads is that they emphasize the status of poetry as a form of art. He intends to enlighten his readers as to the depths of human emotion.
* Wordsworth argues that good poetry doesn't have to be overly complicated or ornamental in order to capture readers' imaginations.

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## Summary

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### Introduction

Lyrical Ballads is a collection of poetry by [William Wordsworth](https://www.enotes.com/topics/william-wordsworth?en_action=content_body_click&en_label=%2Ftopics%2Fpreface&en_category=internal_campaign) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge that was originally published in 1798. Wordsworth’s preface to this collection was composed for its second edition, published in 1801, and expanded for its third edition in 1802; in it, he outlines and justifies his poetic choices and beliefs. Lyrical Ballads is considered by many to be the beginning of the Romantic movement in literature, and the preface describes and demonstrates many of the characteristics of Romantic poetry.

### Summary

In the beginning of his preface to Lyrical Ballads, William Wordsworth explains the purpose behind the collection of poems: it was an “experiment” to determine whether poetry written in “the real language of men” could be successful. He was surprised, he notes, when he found that more readers like the poems than dislike them, as they are significantly different than any other poetry circulating at the time. Before the publication of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth and his friends believed that if the project was a success, a new genre of poetry might be established. Having thus explained the general purpose of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth expresses his fear that in writing a preface, he will unduly influence readers into liking his poems. Wordsworth readily admits that the poetry in this collection might not be viewed as poetry at all, because it is so vastly different from what readers have come to expect from poetry.

Wordsworth’s writing in Lyrical Ballads differs from that of his contemporaries because of its comparatively simple language and topics. The topics Wordsworth and Coleridge chose to write about in this collection generally concern the “low and rustic life.” They attempted to write about these topics in the “language really used by men”—though with “a certain colouring of imagination” and a link back to “the primary laws of our nature” in order to make them interesting. Wordsworth and Coleridge elected to use the language of the common man because the simplicity of that language allows for greater accuracy in conveying emotion: their language is “simple and unelaborated,” and thus “a far more philosophical language.” Many of Wordsworth’s contemporaries, in their excessively complicated [diction](https://www.enotes.com/topics/literary-terms/complete-index/diction?en_action=content_body_click&en_label=%2Ftopics%2Fpreface&en_category=internal_campaign), literary devices, and topics, “separate themselves from the sympathies of men”—which, Wordsworth implies, renders their poetry inferior.

Wordsworth argues that his poems, unlike others of the time period, contain purpose. Here, he famously declares that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and that the only valuable poems are those that are the product of careful contemplation. Wordsworth states that his purpose is “to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement”: that is, to illuminate the reactions of the mind that are caused by nature and events in life. The poems of his contemporaries, he claims, are written in such a way as to provide instant gratification; Wordsworth hopes that this literary movement (neoclassicism) and its “evil[s]” will soon be overthrown.

### The Relationship Between Poetry and Prose

Many poets and critics of Wordsworth’s time believe that poetry and prose should differ not only in structure but also in language. “Prosaisms,” or instances where the language in a poem resembles that of prose, lead some critics to condemn poets as “ignorant of [their] own profession.” However, Wordsworth argues that

the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry; and . . . a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good Prose.

Art enthusiasts are quick to point out the similarities between poetry and painting but hesitate to compare poetry and prose, believing that the two forms of literature should be more distinct. Wordsworth contends that while poetry and painting are described as “sisters,” the relationship between poetry and prose is even closer, as they “both speak by and to the same organs.”

If readers hope to derive any enjoyment from his poems, Wordsworth believes they will need to abandon the idea that poetry and prose must differ significantly in language. In his opinion, poetry ought to be written in conversational [diction](https://www.enotes.com/topics/literary-terms/complete-index/diction?en_action=content_body_click&en_label=%2Ftopics%2Fpreface&en_category=internal_campaign) in order to bring the most pleasure, and it should address commonplace situations. Though simplistic diction and everyday topics are more commonly associated with prose, this is the ideology with which Wordsworth has approached poetry while writing Lyrical Ballads. He hopes that the results of his “experiment” will be a new movement of “genuine” poetry.

### The Nature and Role of the Poet

The poet, according to Wordsworth, is someone who has the ability to feel emotions more deeply and express them more accurately than others around him. In addition to this, he can “conjur[e] up in himself passions” in order to reflect upon and write about his own emotions as well as those of others. An essential responsibility of the...

Preface to Lyrical Ballads Analysis

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In order to better understand the views Wordsworth expresses in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* it is helpful to be familiar with Wordsworth’s long autobiographical poem, *The* *Prelude.* In this work, published after his death, Wordsworth describes his genesis as a poet as well as the life experiences that shaped the ideology of poetry that he expresses in the preface. As a child growing up in the Lake District, Wordsworth was particularly sensitive to nature and loved wandering outside by himself or with a few companions. He often felt deeply moved by his experiences in the natural world; many of his poems, such as “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” reveal a deep affection for nature that shaped his poetry. For instance, his love for nature guided him in choosing topics for his poems: in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth reveals that part of the reason he chose to write about the topics of “the common man” was because

in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.

While his love for nature led him to poetry, Wordsworth’s experiences in France during the French Revolution shaped his poetic style and ambitions. The Revolution inspired in him a deep enthusiasm for the ideals of equality, brotherhood, and liberty that animated the revolutionaries; these ideals, in turn, inspired the focus on the lower social classes that would characterize his poetry. While he hoped to encourage greater harmony between the social classes in romanticizing the life of common men, Wordsworth also found their “low and rustic” life to be the ideal subject for poetry, as he explains in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. He writes that he chose this topic because

in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated . . .

Wordsworth and Coleridge not only emphasized the life of the average person in their poems but also sought to imitate the “language really used by men.” In all of this, the two poets set themselves the ambitious goal of changing the subject matter and style of English poetry, and setting in motion a new movement of literature—a movement toward “genuine poetry” that “give[s] other enjoyments, of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature” than that of their neoclassicist contemporaries.

Wordsworth’s prediction that he and Coleridge would begin a new movement with *Lyrical Ballads* was, in some respects, correct:...

## Quotes

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

In this quote, Wordsworth explains the key difference between his poems in Lyrical Ballads and those of his contemporaries. He directly challenges the school of Augustan poetry that focuses on the deeds of great men, especially those from classical literature: with his poetry, he aims to cast the “common” life in a positive light in order to raise sympathy for people of lower classes. Additionally, Wordsworth rejects using an exalted poetic language or [diction](https://www.enotes.com/topics/literary-terms/complete-index/diction?en_action=content_body_click&en_label=%2Ftopics%2Fpreface&en_category=internal_campaign). While many critics of his day felt that the diction used in poetry should be more elevated than that of prose, Wordsworth argues that the simpler language once reserved for prose can—and should—be used in poetry as well.

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

In this famous quote, Wordsworth analyzes the process of poetic creation: the poet recalls and reflects upon an emotion until he begins to feel that emotion, and in that state, he begins to write. Wordsworth goes on to warn that the emotion recalled should bring pleasure to both the poet and the reader, and that no matter what other emotions are expressed in the poet’s writing, there should be an “overbalance of pleasure.” The value Wordsworth places on emotion throughout the preface reflects the emphasis he and other writers would place on emotion over reason and truth in the Romantic movement.

[The poet] considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature.

From a young age, Wordsworth loved and was fascinated by nature and human interaction with it; the emotional solace humans can derive from nature is a principal theme of many of his poems. This quote comes from a passage in which Wordsworth reflects upon the nature and vocation of the poet. He compares the poet to the “Man of Science,” noting that while the scientist’s pleasure...

(The entire section is 642 words.)

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## Preface to Lyrical Ballads Homework Help Questions

* [What are the main features of Wordsworth's "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-are-the-main-features-of-wordsworth-s-376604?en_action=hh-question_click&en_label=topics_related_hh_questions&en_category=internal_campaign)

I think that one of the main features of Wordsworth's Preface is to outline his fundamental beliefs about the nature and construction of poetry.  This consists of analyzing three distinct features...

* [What is the main concept in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" by William Wordsworth?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-main-concept-preface-lyrical-ballads-by-356289?en_action=hh-question_click&en_label=topics_related_hh_questions&en_category=internal_campaign)

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth wanted to express his theory of poetry. The Preface is therefore a justification of that theory and of the themes and styles of the poems in Lyrical...

* [What does William Wordsworth argue in his preface to Lyrical Ballads?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/please-could-you-give-me-brief-summary-wordsworths-372372?en_action=hh-question_click&en_label=topics_related_hh_questions&en_category=internal_campaign)

Wordsworth makes several crucial points about poetry in his preface to Lyrical Ballads. He suggests that the most authentic poetry is that which engages with everyday experience, particularly in...

* [How does William Wordsworth link imagination to poetry in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-william-wordsworth-link-imagination-poetry-his-734524?en_action=hh-question_click&en_label=topics_related_hh_questions&en_category=internal_campaign)

Lyrical Ballads was first published in 1798. Co-authors William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge broke a lot of new ground and created a quite revolutionary text. Before what is termed the...

* ["Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge; IT IS AS IMMORTAL AS THE HEART OF MAN." What...](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/poetry-first-last-all-knowledge-immoral-heart-man-379009?en_action=hh-question_click&en_label=topics_related_hh_questions&en_category=internal_campaign)

In "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth argues that poetry is more closely united with the universal truth of human experience than with any other discipline (subject). He contrasts this truth...

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What is the main concept in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" by William Wordsworth?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-main-concept-preface-lyrical-ballads-by-356289)

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth wanted to express his theory of poetry. The Preface is therefore a justification of that theory and of the themes and styles of the poems in Lyrical...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What are the main features of Wordsworth's "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-are-the-main-features-of-wordsworth-s-376604)

I think that one of the main features of Wordsworth's Preface is to outline his fundamental beliefs about the nature and construction of poetry. This consists of analyzing three distinct features...

4 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What is Wordsworth's theory of poetry?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-is-wordsworth-s-theory-of-poetry-629198)

In the first statement of the 1802 edition, Wordsworth says the poems in Lyrical Ballads are an experiment of "fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of...

3 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Wordsworth Preface To Lyrical Ballads Main Points](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/please-could-you-give-me-brief-summary-wordsworths-372372)

Wordsworth makes several crucial points about poetry in his preface to Lyrical Ballads. He suggests that the most authentic poetry is that which engages with everyday experience, particularly in...

2 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Discuss Wordsworth's views on poetic diction in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads".](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/discuss-wordsworth-views-poetic-diction-379007)

Essentially, Wordsworth denied that there should be such a thing as a diction specific to poetry. He thought that artifical poetic diction used by many writers obscured the sentiment and feeling...

2 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Discuss Wordsworth's theory of poetry as propounded by him in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads."](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/discuss-wordsworths-theory-poetry-propounded-by-277652)

William Wordsworth in his “Preface” to the Lyrical Ballads, outlines a theory of poetry that involves a number of different assumptions, including the following: Pleasure in poetry results, in...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

["Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge; IT IS AS IMMORTAL AS THE HEART OF MAN." What implication did you find in Wordsworth's conception of poetry in this quote from "Preface to Lyrical Ballads?"  Give answer in detail.](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/poetry-first-last-all-knowledge-immoral-heart-man-379009)

In "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth argues that poetry is more closely united with the universal truth of human experience than with any other discipline (subject). He contrasts this truth...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What are some ideas about poets and poetry proposed by William Wordsworth in his "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads (1802)?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/discuss-wordsworths-theory-poetry-propounded-by-273380)

In his "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads (1802), William Wordsworth lays out many of the ideas often associated with Romanticism in English poetry. Among those ideas are the following: an emphasis...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Discuss Wordsworth's theory of poetic composition with reference to his "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads.](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/discuss-wordsworth-s-theory-of-poetic-composition-379008)

Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads was a manifesto for a new approach to poetry. Arguing that the expression of "essential passions" ought to be the goal of poetry, he sought to do so by...

2 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[How does William Wordsworth link imagination to poetry in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-william-wordsworth-link-imagination-poetry-his-734524)

Lyrical Ballads was first published in 1798. Co-authors William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge broke a lot of new ground and created a quite revolutionary text. Before what is termed the...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Would you concider Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads the manifesto of the romantic movement?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/would-you-concider-words-worths-preface-lyrical-381496)

To a great extent, I believe that the Preface to Lyrical Ballads does operate as a type of manifesto, or declaration, as to the purpose of Romanticism. Wordsworth understood clearly that the...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[How does Wordsworth describe the language he claims to have selected for his poems?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-does-wordsworth-describe-language-he-claims-383507)

Wordsworth claims that modern poets have lost sight of what should be the real purpose of all poetry. He thinks that poetry ought to excite the emotions and the imaginations of readers, and that it...

2 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[How does Wordsworth describe or define the ideal poet in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-does-wordsworth-describe-define-an-ideal-poet-359776)

First, it should be observed that Wordsworth is basically justifying the contents of Lyrical Ballads in the Preface. He assumes that many readers will find the poems either excessively informal or...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Explain with reference to William Wordsworth's theory of language: "Poetry sheds no tears such as angels weep, but natural and human tears she can boast of no celestial choir that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose, the same human...](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/explain-reference-william-wordsworths-theory-1409184)

In answering this question it's important to understand the context in which Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote Lyrical Ballads. At that time, in the late eighteenth century, English poetry was...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What is Wordsworth's contribution as a critic of culture?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-wordsworths-contribution-critic-culture-438254)

Wordsworth's primay contribution as a critic of culture in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads is to question blind convention and conformity in the production of literature. When Wordsworth...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Describe Wordsworth's theory of poetry as explained in the preface to Lyrical Ballads.](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/write-comprehensive-note-wordsworth-s-theory-379098)

Wordsworth's theory of poetry as explained in his preface to Lyrical Ballads is based on several propositions. Poetry, Wordsworth argued, ought to arouse strong, profound feelings in the reader....

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Critically analyze "I wandered lonely as a cloud" according to Wordsworth's own criteria for poetry as described in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." Does it have the desired effect?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/critically-analyse-daffodils-wandered-lonely-cloud-510153)

William Wordsworth's poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud" is one of the best examples of the principles that he presents in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." In the Preface, Wordsworth states that...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Define what poetry means to Wordsworth. This poet may have certain assumptions about poetry, especially the role of imagination in creating poetry; but the main aspect is to focus on the meaning of poetry for this writer. The definition should...](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/define-what-poetry-means-to-wordsworth-this-poet-1895217)

In his Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth labors over the meaning behind poetry and how it relates to humanity at large. He believes that it is intrinsic in poetry to exclude some individuals...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Could you give me, please, a brief summary to Wordsworth's Preface To Lyrical Ballads that defines Wordsworth's idea of the poet, poetry and poetic language?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/could-you-give-me-please-brief-summary-wordsworths-372554)

While Wordsworth is not setting out a complete poetic defense wherein he defines his aesthetic ("I have therefore altogether declined to enter regularly upon this defence"), it is true that in the...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[In the poem “The Tables Turned,” Wordsworth says, “One impulse from a vernal wood; / May teach you more of man; / Of moral evil and good, / Than all the sages can” (21–24). This is an interesting idea; that individuals should look to nature in...](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/in-the-poem-the-tables-turned-wordsworth-says-one-2285619)

I would absolutely agree with the idea that we feel happier and more contented when we spend more time in nature—or the "vernal wood" as Wordsworth says—and this argument is certainly not unique to...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What, according to Wordsworth, is "the great spring of the activity of our minds" in "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads"?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-according-to-wordsworth-is-the-great-spring-2181406)

In the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" Wordsworth discusses the pleasure we receive from the deployment of regular metrical language in a poem. This is Wordsworth's way of reassuring his readers that...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Discuss Wordsworth's theory of poetry as propounded by him in his preface?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/discuss-wordsworths-theory-poetry-propounded-by-274454)

Wordsworth's famous quotation about the creation of poetry, states that poetry cannot be created at the moment that the poet encounters it. Often this encounter is so intense, he feels he must...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Define what poetry means to Wordsworth. This poet may have certain assumptions about poetry, especially the role of imagination in creating poetry; but the main aspect is to focus on the meaning of poetry for this writer. The definition should...](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/define-what-poetry-means-to-wordsworth-this-poet-1895999)

Wordsworth makes many claims about the nature of poetry as an art form in the preface to his book Lyrical Ballads. To Wordsworth, poetry must be reflective of the experience of common people and is...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What new idea about poetry was expressed in Wordsworth's preface to Lyrical Ballads?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-new-idea-do-you-find-about-poetry-wordsworth-379097)

Wordsworth's preface to Lyrical Ballads suggested a new approach to poetry, one which sought to expose the reader to authentic human emotion, which Wordsworth thought should be the goal of good...

2 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[How does Samuel Johnson  affirm William Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads in The Rambler? Comparing only the following text from The Rambler by Johnson to the Preface of Lyrical Ballads by Wordsworth: "The task of an author is, either to...](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-does-samuel-johnson-affirm-william-wordsworths-359714)

Samuel Johnson had a neo classical style and it was thus peculiar that he found an affinity with Wordsworth's Romanticism.However, the simplicity that he found in Wordsworth who believed that the...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[With reference to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, why do you think Wordsworth consider poetry and science opposed to each other?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/why-do-you-think-wordsworth-consider-poetry-377970)

I think that Wordsworth's most significant belief in suggesting that there exists an incompatibility between science and poetry was as a response to the Age of Reason's approach to poetic...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Is there any difference between Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction and theory of poetic composition.](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/there-any-difference-between-wordsworths-theory-446124)

Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1800) is one of, if not the, most important statements of the Romantic Period poets about how poetry should be composed and what its subjects should be....

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[How might one analyse Preface to Lyrical Ballads by William Wordsworth?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-might-one-analyse-preface-lyrical-ballads-by-445642)

I think that one approach that can be taken in analyzing Wordsworth's Preface is to examine how he is able to articulate the theoretical foundations to Romanticism within it. This becomes one of...

2 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Wordsworth's preface to Lyrical Ballads is one of the major theoretical position papers of the Romantic movement. What is Wordsworth's purpose?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/preface-lyrical-ballads-384797)

Wordsworth viewed Lyrical Ballads (a collection of poems by Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge) as a manifesto for a new style of poetry. His preface, which has become at least as famous as the...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[William Wordsworth, like many of his peers, was excited about the French Revolution and the freedom that it promised to humanity. His hopes about the revolution were soon dashed; however, the possibilities of freedom opened other avenues for him....](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/william-wordsworth-like-many-of-his-peers-was-2275873)

Like many of his contemporaries, William Wordsworth’s concerns for humanity included the loss of a love of nature, the inherent inequality of life in England, and the perceived failures of the...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What hope did worthword's friends hold for the success of Lyrical Ballads?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-hope-did-worthword-s-friends-hold-for-the-1899663)

Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems was published in 1798. It was written by both William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who were great friends and colleagues. As the poets themselves...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Examine Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction.](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/critically-examine-wordsworths-theory-poetic-379095)

Wordsworth took a unique approach to poetic diction. Essentially, he argued in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads that poetic diction should be no different than that used in prose, or even in everyday...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Please comment about the main claims in Thomas Pfau's essay "‘Elementary Feelings’ and ‘Distorted Language’: The Pragmatics of Culture in Wordsworth's ‘Preface to Lyrical Ballads.’”](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/would-like-review-with-comments-about-main-claims-560418)

Thomas Pfau is the Alice Mary Baldwin Professor of English & Professor and Chair of German and Director of Graduate Studies of the Carolina-Duke Program in German at Duke. The main focus of his...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Which view did you prefer and why? William Wordsworth in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads or Coleridge in Biographia Literaria?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/which-one-did-you-like-his-views-most-why-william-461117)

Personally I find the writings of Coleridge more compelling than those of Wordsworth in these two texts. This is because Coleridge explores the claims of Wordsworth and successfully and...

1 Educator Answer

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[What are the main claims of Part I of “‘Elementary Feelings’ and ‘Distorted Language’: The Pragmatics of Culture in Wordsworth's ‘Preface to Lyrical Ballads’” by Thomas Pfau (1993)?](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-claims-part-i-elementary-feelings-distorted-560829)

Background (from Pfau's introduction): Most scholars have heretofore thought Wordsworth's text (his Preface, that is) as "marked by internal tensions, inconsistencies, discontinuous argument, and a...

3 Educator Answers

* **PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

[Please summarize the second topic, Topic II, of a critical article by Thomas Pfau about Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads. The Pfau essay is “‘Elementary Feelings’ and ‘Distorted Language’: The Pragmatics of Culture in Wordsworth's ‘Preface...](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/summarize-second-topic-topic-ii-critical-article-t-560832)

In Section II, Pfau examines Wordsworth's concept of the "essence" of human nature, where that essence is found, and analyzes Wordsworth's use of that concept. As Pfau notes, in Wordsworth's view,...