**William Wordsworth**



Born April 7, 1770(1770-04-07)

Cockermouth, England, UK

Died April 23, 1850 (aged 80)

Ambleside, England, UK

Occupation Poet

Literary movement Romanticism

William Wordsworth (April 7, 1770 – April 23, 1850) was a major English romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped launch the Romantic Age in English literature with their 1798 joint publication, Lyrical Ballads.

Wordsworth's masterpiece is generally considered to be The Prelude, an autobiographical poem of his early years which the poet revised and expanded a number of times. The work was posthumously titled and published, prior to which it was generally known as the poem "to Coleridge". Wordsworth was England's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850.

Early life and education

The second of five children born to John Wordsworth and Ann Cookson, William Wordsworth was born April 7, 1770 in Cockermouth in Cumberland—part of the scenic region in north-west England called the Lake District. His sister, the poet and diarist Dorothy Wordsworth, to whom he was close all his life, was born the following year. After the death of their mother in 1778, their father sent William to Hawkshead Grammar School and sent Dorothy to live with relatives in Yorkshire. She and William did not meet again for another nine years. His father died when he was 13.[1]

Wordsworth began attending St John's College, Cambridge in 1787, maintained by his maternal grandparents. He returned to Hawkshead for his first two summer holidays, and often spent later holidays on walking tours, visiting places famous for the beauty of their landscape. In 1790, he took a nearly 3000 mile walking tour of Europe, during which he toured the Alps extensively, and also visited nearby areas of France, Switzerland, and Italy. It is also said that he visited China to learn the language of the Samurai, but sources are inconclusive. The following year, he graduated from Cambridge without distinction. His youngest brother, Christopher, rose to be Master of Trinity College.[2]

Relationship with Annette Vallon

In November 1791, Wordsworth visited Revolutionary France and became enthralled with the Republican movement. He fell in love with a French woman, Annette Vallon, who in 1792 gave birth to their child, Caroline. Because of lack of money and Britain's tensions with France, he returned alone to England the next year.[3] The circumstances of his return and his subsequent behaviour raise doubts as to his declared wish to marry Annette but he supported her and his daughter as best he could in later life. During this period, he wrote his acclaimed "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free," recalling his seaside walk with his daughter, whom he had not seen for ten years. At the conception of this poem, he had never seen his daughter before. The occurring lines reveal his deep love for both child and mother. The Reign of Terror estranged him from the Republican movement, and war between France and Britain prevented him from seeing Annette and Caroline again for several years. There are also strong suggestions that Wordsworth may have been depressed and emotionally unsettled in the mid 1790s.

With the Peace of Amiens again allowing travel to France, in 1802 Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy visited Annette and Caroline in France and arrived at a mutually agreeable settlement regarding Wordsworth's obligations.[3]

First publication and Lyrical Ballads

In his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" which is called the 'manifest' of English Romantic criticism, Wordsworth calls his poems ' Experimental'. 1793 saw Wordsworth's first published poetry with the collections An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches. He received a legacy of £900 from Raisley Calvert in 1795 so that he could pursue writing poetry. That year, he also met Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Somerset. The two poets quickly developed a close friendship. In 1797, Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, moved to Alfoxton House, Somerset, just a few miles away from Coleridge's home in Nether Stowey. Together, Wordsworth and Coleridge (with insights from Dorothy) produced Lyrical Ballads (1798), an important work in the English Romantic movement. The volume had neither the name of Wordsworth nor Coleridge as the author. One of Wordsworth's most famous poems, "Tintern Abbey", was published in the work, along with Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The second edition, published in 1800, had only Wordsworth listed as the author, and included a preface to the poems, which was significantly augmented in the 1802 edition. This Preface to Lyrical Ballads is considered a central work of Romantic literary theory. In it, Wordsworth discusses what he sees as the elements of a new type of poetry, one based on the "real language of men" and which avoids the poetic diction of much eighteenth-century poetry. Here, Wordsworth also gives his famous definition of poetry askeets "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings from emotions recollected in tranquility." A fourth and final edition of Lyrical Ballads was published in 1805.

Germany and move to the Lake District

Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Coleridge then travelled to Germany in the autumn of 1798. While Coleridge was intellectually stimulated by the trip, its main effect on Wordsworth was to produce homesickness.[3] During the harsh winter of 1798–1799, Wordsworth lived with Dorothy in Goslar, and despite extreme stress and loneliness, he began work on an autobiographical piece later titled The Prelude. He also wrote a number of famous poems, including "the Lucy poems". He and his sister moved back to England, now to Dove Cottage in Grasmere in the Lake District, and this time with fellow poet Robert Southey nearby. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey came to be known as the "Lake Poets". Through this period, many of his poems revolve around themes of death, endurance, separation, and grief.

In 1802, after returning from his trip to France with Dorothy to visit Annette and Caroline, Wordsworth received the inheritance owed by Lord Lonsdale since John Wordsworth's death in 1783. Later that year, he married a childhood friend, Mary Hutchinson.[3] Dorothy continued to live with the couple and grew close to Mary. The following year, Mary gave birth to the first of five children.

John Wordsworth - June 18th 1803 - 1875. Married four times: 1) Isabella Curwen (d. 1848)had six children: Jane, Henry, William, John, Charles and Edward. 2) Helen Ross (d. 1854) no issue. 3) Mary Ann Dolan (d. after 1856) had 1 daughter Dora (b.1858). 4) Mary Gamble. no issue

Dora Wordsworth - August 16th 1804 - July 9th 1847. She married Edward Quillinan

Thomas Wordsworth - June 15th 1806 - December 1st 1812

Catherine Wordsworth - September 6th 1808 - June 4th 1812

William "Willy" Wordsworth - May 12th 1810 - 1883. He married Fanny Graham and had four children: Mary Louisa, William, Reginald and Gordon.

Autobiographical work and Poems in Two Volumes

Wordsworth had for years been making plans to write a long philosophical poem in three parts, which he intended to call The Recluse. He had in 1798–99 started an autobiographical poem, which he never named but called the "poem to Coleridge", which would serve as an appendix to The Recluse. In 1804 he began expanding this autobiographical work, having decided to make it a prologue rather than an appendix to the larger work he planned. By 1805, he had completed it, but refused to publish such a personal work until he had completed the whole of The Recluse. The death of his brother, John, in 1805 affected him strongly.

The source of Wordsworth's philosophical allegiances as articulated in The Prelude and in such shorter works as "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey" has been the source of much critical debate. While it had long been supposed that Wordsworth relied chiefly on Coleridge for philosophical guidance, more recent scholarship has suggested that Wordsworth's ideas may have been formed years before he and Coleridge became friends in the mid 1790s. While in Revolutionary Paris in 1792, the twenty-two year old Wordsworth made the acquaintance of the mysterious traveller John "Walking" Stewart (1747-1822),[4] who was nearing the end of a thirty-years' peregrination from Madras, India, through Persia and Arabia, across Africa and all of Europe, and up through the fledgling United States. By the time of their association, Stewart had published an ambitious work of original materialist philosophy entitled The Apocalypse of Nature (London, 1791), to which many of Wordsworth's philosophical sentiments are likely indebted.

In 1807, his Poems in Two Volumes were published, including "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood". Up to this point Wordsworth was known publicly only for Lyrical Ballads, and he hoped this collection would cement his reputation. Its reception was lukewarm, however. For a time (starting in 1810), Wordsworth and Coleridge were estranged over the latter's opium addiction.[3] Two of his children, Thomas and Catherine, died in 1812. The following year, he received an appointment as Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland, and the £400 per year income from the post made him financially secure. His family, including Dorothy, moved to Rydal Mount, Ambleside (between Grasmere and Rydal Water) in 1813, where he spent the rest of his life.[3]

**The Prospectus**

In 1814 he published The Excursion as the second part of the three-part The Recluse. He had not completed the first and third parts, and never would complete them. However, he did write a poetic Prospectus to "The Recluse" in which he lays out the structure and intent of the poem. The Prospectus contains some of Wordsworth's most famous lines on the relation between the human mind and nature:

My voice proclaims

How exquisitely the individual Mind

(And the progressive powers perhaps no less

Of the whole species) to the external World

Is fitted:--and how exquisitely, too,

Theme this but little heard of among Men,

The external World is fitted to the Mind . . .

Some modern critics recognise a decline in his works beginning around the mid-1810s. But this decline was perhaps more a change in his lifestyle and beliefs, since most of the issues that characterise his early poetry (loss, death, endurance, separation, abandonment) were resolved in his writings. But, by 1820 he enjoyed the success accompanying a reversal in the contemporary critical opinion of his earlier works. By 1828, Wordsworth had become fully reconciled to Coleridge, and the two toured the Rhineland together that year.[3] Dorothy suffered from a severe illness in 1829 that rendered her an invalid for the remainder of her life. In 1835, Wordsworth gave Annette and Caroline the money they needed for support.

**The Poet Laureate and other honours**

Wordsworth received an honorary Doctor of Civil Law degree in 1838 from Durham University, and the same honour from Oxford University the next year.[3] In 1842 the government awarded him a civil list pension amounting to £300 a year. With the death in 1843 of Robert Southey, Wordsworth became the Poet Laureate. When his daughter, Dora, died in 1847, his production of poetry came to a standstill.

Death

William Wordsworth died of pneumonia on the 23rd April 1850 and was buried at St. Oswald's church in Grasmere. His widow Mary published his lengthy autobiographical "poem to Coleridge" as The Prelude several months after his death. Though this failed to arouse great interest in 1850, it has since come to be recognised as his masterpiece.