

PREFACE

In the extract from the Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* regarded as the manifesto of English Romanticism, Wordsworth expressed a new concept of poetry, which emphasized the authenticity of rustic life, the use of simple language, and the importance of emotions and imagination.

Subject of poetry: poetry was to deal with "situation and incidents from common life". The best subject to write about were therefore "humble rustic life" and simple people living in countryside (not in town), since they were in close contact with nature, and their "elementary feelings" and habits were more likely to be understood, communicated and sympathized with.

Language: the poems were to be written as far as possible in "a selection of language really used by men", that is to say as far away as possible from "poetic diction" and as near as possible to the simple "language of men", though purified of any disagreeable or disgusting expression.

Role of imagination: imagination was to play a very important role, which Wordsworth identified with its capacity of "colouring", that is to say of modifying the objects observed, so as to "present them in an unusual aspect". In other words, it awoke and sharpened a special intuition or insight, which enabled the poet to perceive and see things the ordinary mind is usually blind to, the eyes of the soul seeing farther and deeper than the eyes of the mind.

Poetry as memory: though the poet describes natural and simple objects and quiet landscape, he does not look at them with the realism of cold, objective observation, but sees everything through the eyes of memory, which recollects emotions already lost and half-extinguished thoughts. Since poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", such feelings are not immediate, but originate from "emotion recollected in tranquillity", recreated by the subjectivity of memory; it is not original emotion, but **past feelings contemplated and reorganized**.

Task of the poet: though equal to the rest of men in quality, the Poet stands apart from them because of his higher degree of sensibility and imaginative capacity: he "possessed of more than usual organic sensibility" and has also "thought long and deeply". He is therefore the best suited to get at the very essence of things and communicate them in a simple, unelaborated language. Moreover, he is also a moral teacher, whose task is to purify men's emotions through the "description of such objects as strongly excite those feelings".