

Synthesis of "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"

The extract is taken from Preface to Lyrical Ballads which is generally considered the manifesto of Romanticism.

It is a text of literary criticism where William Wordsworth explains what the new form of poetry should be like.

In the text he says that the object, the aim of poetry should be to make the incidents of common life interesting.

Poetry should deal with situations from simple rustic life and this should be transfigured by imagination.

The reason for his preference for humble life follows from the assumptions that men are better when closer to nature because they are far from artificialities of civilizations, because the feelings of country people develop without restraint, are uncomplicated, lasting and influenced by nature.

Poetry should use familiar simple language "the language really used by men" because humble country people live in communion with the object from which language originated and voices their feelings in a more immediate, forceful way.

Wordsworth explains in his preface that Coleridge and he were trying to leave behind the specialised, formal language of the 18th century poetry.

He maintains that his poems are experimental attempts to get to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a sense of vivid sensation.

Together with the other Romantic writers he wanted to draw upon the expressive power of ordinary speech instead of relying on automatically upon artificial "uniquely poetic way of using language". But he did not naively believe that language of poetry could have a direct imitative of the language of the men in the streets or the workers in field.

He says that the real language of men must be selected by the poem, that must be fitted to metrical arrangement and it must be taken from men in a vivid sensation.

Real language on the one hand and its selection and transformations by the poet's mind and craft on the other.

What really interested Wordsworth and other romantic writers is not nature for its own sake, but nature as it affects the human mind and its personalities.

In the Romantic writer it's the relation between the mind and the natural word that is the central focus.

Wordsworth's definition of poetry confirms the emphasis on subjective emotions and personal experiences "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".