



THE EARLY INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED WORDSWORTH' S POETIC CREED

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Introduction

Studies of Romantic poetry are attracted to themes including nature, nurse, mother, spirituality, youth versus age, patriotism, and the individual. One topic to which they are particularly drawn that consistently arises in works by William Wordsworth, Samuel T. Coleridge, John Keats, and other poets of the Romantic era is the imagination. This subject matter is unique in that it varies significantly both in poetry and in literary criticism. Paul de Man notes that the Romantics conceptualize the imagination as less strictly defined or “formal” than do eighteenth century writers, who focus predominantly on the external world and the associative powers of the imagination. Wordsworth was one of the Romantic poets most intent on interpreting, defining, and exploring the imagination. Terrence Allan Hoagwood writes that in Wordsworth’ s preface to Lyrical Ballads the poet intends to link “thought-forms” with “material forms” of daily living; that is, Wordsworth connects the world of real objects to the inner workings of his mind. In the 1850 version of The Prelude Wordsworth laments that language cannot fully incorporate the idea of the imagination, which he adds is named only “Through sad incompetence of human speech” (1850). Wordsworth’ s concept of the imagination, which was key to his understanding of the world and of poetry, changed throughout his life. The imagination is particularly important in Wordsworth’ s most famous work, the epic, multi-book poem, The Prelude. He originally wrote the poem in two parts in 1799, and then between 1804 and 1805 he rewrote and reworked it into thirteen books, though he never published this version. Three months after Wordsworth’ s death in 1850, his wife published his last transcript of the poem, which had grown to fourteen books. The imagination is a central theme in every version and nearly every book of The Prelude. At times the poet directly refers to “the Imagination” as a power that Wordsworth the character can identify, but in other instances it is a power that the poet can only recognize upon reflection. There are also moments in which the imagination alters Wordsworth’ s reality, even if he does not directly name it “the imagination.” Considering how significant the imagination was to Wordsworth, it is unsurprising that it has remained a central issue for critics who study his greatest work; and given how Wordsworth himself grappled with the concept, it is perhaps also unsurprising that critics’ notions of the imagination have not been consistent. Throughout this study it is examined how critical approaches to the imagination in Wordsworth’ s Prelude have changed over time, both in terms of where critics have placed their focus and in terms of

methodology. I will look at three different schools of criticism: post structuralism, historicism, and the most recent wave of criticism, as yet undefined as a particular school. Each school of criticism handles the imagination in *The Prelude* in a unique way. Post structuralism, the earliest of the three schools it studies, concentrates on textual evidence and on the nature of language. The main topics of poststructuralist analysis of *The Prelude* are reference, allegory, the arbitrariness of language, and signifiers and signs. Post structuralism maintains that the meaning of the text can be found in the text and in the specific linguistic choices of the author. Historicist critics, however, begin to look outside the text. They use history and biography to inform their arguments and to question how to situate the poem within its epoch. As a result, their arguments about the imagination look decidedly different from their predecessors' arguments. Recent critics have a less definable approach at this time, but they are united in that their concept of the imagination is constantly evolving. Using Wordsworth's imagination as a lens, one can see how much broader critical approaches have become with the shifting focuses of different theories. And as they explore the imagination, scholars elucidate their modes of inquiry and exemplify the novel aspects of their schools.

STUDYING THE LIFE OF William Wordsworth, 1770– 1850, for many readers the high priest and master spirit of what has come to be called the Romantic Movement in England, the promulgator of many of its central tenets, a poet who wrote steadily from his earliest school days at Hawkshead to his final years as the Squire of Rydal Mount a career of some sixty, even seventy years! The idea boggles the mind, quite properly, not just because of the enormity of the task, but also because two major biographers have, relatively recently, achieved a degree of success in the ways they handled that task.

How to deal with a writer whose career moves from the age of Johnson to the age of Victoria; who writes from adolescence to old age, from a period of youthful radicalism to middle-aged moderates to later-life conservatism; whose emotional range at least on the surface develops from early optimism about the possibilities of human nature, when a young and free and healthy imagination can explore and find meaning in the beauties of nature, to later periods of deep anxiety and even profound doubt about the power of mind as it confronts the claims of the great world beyond? How, without the burden of preconception or a fixed mode of critical discourse, to find, or perhaps not to find, the sense of a life, of certain persisting concerns, dominant themes and images in descriptive and narrative poems like *An Evening Walk*, *Descriptive Sketches*, and *Guilt and Sorrow: Incidents Upon Salisbury Plain*; rustic ballads like “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” “Simon Lee,” “We Are Seven,” and others; poems of the interior life extending from *Tintern Abbey* and the epic-autobiographical *Prelude*; the wonderfully varied poems of his two volumes (1807), *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* and *Ode to Duty*; sonnets ranging from the more personal “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge” to the more public “The world is too much with us,” still other forms like those of “The Solitary Reaper,” “Elegiac Stanzas,” and the “Celandine” poems; later work as different as the narrative-dramatic *Excursion* and the massive poetic-historical *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*; and still later work like *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems*; and even later efforts extending to the year of his death.

As early as 1851, of course, Wordsworth's nephew Christopher, with the propriety of an admiring relative, undertook a “biographical commentary on the poet's works.” In which he writes of visiting Rydal Mount in 1847 and discussing with his uncle the general subject of the

lives of departed poets. Wordsworth provided his nephew “ with a brief sketch of the most prominent circumstances in his life” and actually dictated autobiographical memoranda.

The biographical work of Émile Legouis brought this crucial episode to light, as, in his chronology of events surrounding Wordsworth's days in France, he recounts hearing from Thomas Hutchinson “ a well-established tradition in the Coleridge family that William Wordsworth, during his stay in France, had by a young French lady a son, who afterwards visited him at Rydal Mount,” a matter not included in Legouis's *Early Life of Wordsworth*, but later told to George Harper, an early and important Wordsworth biographer. There are useful specialized biographies and biographical studies of the poet Ernest De Selincourt's *The Early Wordsworth*; Willard Sperry's *Wordsworth's Anti-Climax*; Russell Noyes's *William Wordsworth*, recently updated by John Hayden; W. W. Douglas's *Wordsworth: The Construction of a Personality*; Natalie Bober's *William Wordsworth: The Wandering Poet*; Hunter Davies's *William Wordsworth: A Biography*; Robert Gittings and Jo Manton's *Dorothy Wordsworth*; William Heath's *Wordsworth and Coleridge: A Study of Their Literary Relations in 1801– 1802*; and others.

Then there are, of course, certain continuing central questions that seem obvious and perhaps old-fashioned and yet, in our preoccupation with the complex and the novel, we push aside a little too easily. Is there a discernible shape to this poet's life and work, a consistency that ties together the early, later, and late? Are there really two Wordsworth : the passionate, radical poet of nature and imagination of the first forty years, and the patriarchal, didactic Tory humanist of the last forty? Is Wordsworth a continuation of the English poetic tradition with perhaps a more fully developed sense of landscape, a sharper image of the poet as a private figure of strong feeling, and a greater need to find a subject matter and language more faithful to the comings and goings of real men and women? Or does he represent a major break with tradition, a poet with a new sensibility, private and eager to explore the ebb and flow of the inner life unencumbered by the forces, prejudices, and intimidations of society and committed to the individual's discovery of value in a milieu that has lost faith in the medieval-Renaissance religious outlook and the smug scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment?

The Early Influences that Shaped Wordsworth Becoming a Poet: Education and Early Poems

Wordsworth has gone from us-and ye.

Ah, way ye feel his voice as we!

He too upon a wintry clime

Had fallen – on this iron time

Of doubts, disputes, distraction, fear.

He found as when the age had bound

Our souls in its benumbing round;

He spoke, and lose our heart in tear .

*He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth;
Smiles broke from us and we had ease.*

- Arnold

William Wordsworth was born at Cocker mouth, Cumberland in the lake district, on April 4, 1770. His father was John Wordsworth, Sir James Lawther's attorney – at – law. William was the boy of violent and moody temper. His mother once said that he is – “ the only one of her five children about whose she was anxious, William; and he would be remarkable either be good or for evil”

However, he lost his mother when he was of eight years. The death of his mother made it difficult for his father to manage the young family. William and his brothers were sent to board of Hawkshead village and attend the local grammar school. Hawkshead's headmaster encouraged Wordsworth's obvious interest of poetry, lending him anthologies of eighteenth-century poetry.

Encourage to try his own hand at writing verse, Wordsworth attempted a piece about a favorite seat under an ancient yew tree at Earthwaite : Lines left upon a seat in a yew- tree' (published later as his first poem of Lyrical Ballads). Unfortunately after five years his father died. The domestic problem separated him from his neurotic sister Dorothy, who was very important person in his life.

With the help of his two uncles Wordsworth continued his study at Cambridge University. As writer Wordsworth made his debut in 1787 when his sonnet published in the European Magazine. In the same year he entered St. John's college, Cambridge, from where he took his B.A. in 1791. During a summer vacation in 1790, Wordsworth went on a walking tour through revolutionary France. He also traveled in Switzerland.

When he returned to France in 1792. On his second journey in France Wordsworth had an affair with a French girl Annette Vallon, a daughter of a barber surgeon, by whom he had an illegitimate daughter Anne Caroline. In 1795 he met with Coleridge Wordsworth's financial situation became better in 1795 when he received a legacy and was able to settle at Rydal, Dorset with his sister Dorothy, who was a very important person in his life.

About 1798 he started to write a large and philosophical autobiographical poem, completed in 1805 and published posthumously in 1850 under the title The Prelude.

Wordsworth's path breaking works were produced between 1797 and 1808.

Wordsworth's Gramere period ended in 1813 when he moved to Rydalmount, Ambleside, where he spent the rest of his life. In 1814, appeared the Excursion about which Jaffrey said, “ This will never do.” Yet Keats thought it, “ Once of the three things to rejoice at in this age.”

But a general decline of poetic powers was witnessed in 1822 by the Ecclesiastical sonnets and the memorials of a trout on the continent. Coleridge and Wordsworth had both owed much to each other their friendship in 1797 and 1798.²

Wordsworth revolutionized the subject matter of poetry of classics by exploring apparently insignificant ‘ incidents and situations from common life, expressed in the unaffected speech of unsophisticated country folk. Throughout his poetry we find frequent use of ‘ solitude’ , ‘ single’ , ‘ alone’ , ‘ I’ and ‘ oneself’ . The single figure who embodies the consoling spirit of a lonely landscape we will illustrated in much words as ‘ The Solitary Reaper’ , ‘ Lucy Gray’ , the ‘ Old cumber and Beggar’ and the ‘ Leech-Gathrer’ in Resolution and Independence.

Wordsworth complained that poets, from Dryden (1631-1700) to Pope (1688-1744), had rarely described natural objects with any accurate observation. Wordsworth saw the natural world as a stimulus for thinking about the emotional response is generated within him. It was man’ s growing awareness of a inner, religious awareness of a inner, religious response to nature that interested Wordsworth, (not simply the physical ‘ rocks, and stones, and trees’)

In 1787, Wordsworth entered St. John’ s College, Cambridge. He found academic study uninteresting and spent much of his time either reading for pleasure or rambling in the France; Wordsworth was excited by the idealistic principles of the French Revolution. When he returned to France in 1792, Wordsworth became much involved, emotionally and politically, with the ordinary citizen’ great struggle for individual liberty. The increasingly violent course of events in France and its war with Britain, however, were to leave Wordsworth disillusioned: ‘ Frenchmen had changed a war of self defense/for one of Conquest, losing sight of all/which they had struggled for.’

Reunited with the beloved sister Dorothy, they rented property in Dorset and then in Somerset. Dorothy’ s acute observation of, and delight in, the natural world stirred William’ s memories of their childhood and his own love of nature. ‘ She gave me eyes, she gave me ears, he acknowledged.

A second major influence on words worth soon appeared. The great contemporary poet and philosopher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) lived close by the and frequently visited the Wordsworth.

Cazamian Says:

The second part of Wordsworth’ s career reveals as inspiration on the wane, a didactic purpose that grows too prominent ; a petty concern for an orthodox fidelity to order.³

Wordsworth was appointed official distributor of stamps for west more land from the age of 50 his creative began to decline, but tree female assistance took care of him, and filled his life with admiration. Wordsworth abandoned his radical faith and became a patriotic, Conservative public man. In 1843 he succeeded Robert Southgey (1774-1843) as England’ s poet Laureate. Wordsworth died on April 23, 1850 of pleurisy, an infection of the lung cavity. In the years of his death, his widow published the Prelude completed already by 1805. It was a part of huge work, The Recluse which Wordsworth an Coleridge had planned together over 50 years ago. The

subject was to be life in general. Suggesting about Wordsworth' s children Davies Hunter writes:

His daughter Dora died of tuberculoses in 1847, but his two remaining sons Johan and Willy, both marries and had children, as did his illegitimate daughter Caloline, so there are still direct descendants of William' s around toda. No signs of any more poets in the family though. I guess one' s enough.⁴

Selected works of Wordsworth :

1. Selected Poems :-

A. Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood.

1. My Heart Leaps up
2. To a Butterfly
3. The Sparrows Nest
4. Lucy Gray

B. Poems on the Naming of Places

- To Joanna
- Wordsworth' s park
- Point Rush Judgement

C. Poems of Imagination

1. There was a Boy
2. To the Cuckoo
3. A night piece
4. Yew trees
5. Nutting
6. A perfect woman
7. The nightingale
8. Lucy' s memory
9. The love for the dead

D. Poems of Sentiments and Reflection

1. Sentiment and Reflection
2. To my sister
3. A poet' s Epitaph

E. Epitaphs and Elegiac pieces

1. Elegiac Stanzas

F. Lyrical Ballads 1778

Brief Description of Wordsworth' s Selected works:

Lyrical Ballads:-

Wordsworth' s Preface to Lyrical Ballads was an extra ordinary and revolutionary manifesto to justify his new kind of poetry. Ballads and lyrics had been long regarded as district genre. Wordsworth combined the ballad' s narrative form with the lyrics' emotional content, placing

his emphasis on the latter (second mention of two people or things). He himself wrote 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 of ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangements a selection of the real language of men in state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may rationally endeavor to impart.⁵

The Runied Cottage:-

Afterwards incorporated in Book I of the excursion; it is the tragic story of the poor Margret whose husband had been forced to enlist and who waits for him years after years, while her cottage goes to ruin and dies in it. It is sheer tragedy; yet the effect is not flat despair. A torturing hope endears the cottage to Margret. The style is simple, though not with the aggressive simplicity of the Lyrical Ballads.

Guild and Sorrow:-

It is a remarkable poem revealing Wordsworth's state of mind at the time. Two victims of social injustice meet in darkness, one of sailor who defrauded of his prize money, has robbed and murdered a traveler, the other a female vagrant whose soldier husband and children have all died in the west Indies. The poem is written in the Spenserian stanza; the style is much plainer than that of two earlier poems.

Prelude:-

Wordsworth and Dorothy were passionately attached to each other. Dorothy's letters make their mutual love known to us and let us into depths of Wordsworth's nature. Dorothy had not, of course, his grasp of mind or his poetic power, but her sensitiveness to nature was quite as keen as his and her disposition resembled his 'with sunshine added to daylight.' "Wordsworth was in all things fortunate, but in nothing more fortunate in this, that so unique a companion should have been ready to devote herself to him with an affection wholly free from egotism or Jealousy."⁶

Hypothesis

Analysis of Wordsworth's Poetical Works Themes on Nature "Come forth into the light of things, Let Nature be your Teacher." No discussion on Wordsworth would be complete without mention of nature. Nature and its connection to humanity makes an appearance in the vast majority of Wordsworth's poetry, often holding a poem's focus, and has become the cornerstone of the Romantic Movement primarily because of him. For Wordsworth, nature is a kind of religion in which he has the utmost faith. Nature fills two major roles in Wordsworth's poetry:

1. Even though it is intensely beautiful and peaceful, nature often causes Wordsworth to feel melancholy or sad. This is usually because, even as he relishes in his connection with nature, he worries about the rest of humanity, most of who live in cities completely apart from nature. Wordsworth wonders how they could possibly revive their spirits. In the end, however, he often

decides that it is wrong to be sad while in nature: "A poet could not but be gay, / In such jocund company."

2. Nature also gives Wordsworth hope for the future. From past experience Wordsworth knows that spending time in nature is a gift to his future self, because later, when he is alone, tired and frustrated in the busy, dirty city, he will be able to look back on a field of daffodils he once spent time in and be happy again.

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