

Unit-III - MODERN LITERATURE (1798 - 1832)

Poetry (For Detailed Study)

Wordsworth: Immortality Ode, Tintern Abbey

Wordsworth

William Wordsworth and his Poetry (1770-1850)

- ☑ William Wordsworth stands for two dominant ideas in poetry, **the poetry of nature and the poetry of simplicity.**
- ☑ As a young man he was **infected by the Revolutionary fever**, and **left his university of Cambridge to go to France and assist the new French Republic.**
- ☑ He narrowly escaped death at the hands of the people he wished to assist, and was compelled to seek safety in England.
- ☑ After some wandering in the country he at length **settled down in the Lake District of England**, near which, at Cockers mouth, he had been born.
- ☑ He is one among the Lake School of poets: William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, De Quincey, Christopher North, and Dorothy Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, Charles Lloyd, Hartley Coleridge, John Wilson, and Thomas De Quincey.
- ☑ In 1842 he was awarded a State pension, and on the death of Robert Southey (1843) **he was appointed Poet Laureate.**
- ☑ **Wordsworth's theory of poetical style**, as set out in **the preface to The Lyrical Ballads (1799)**. He expounds his doctrine: "Humble and rustic life was generally to be chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil ... and speak a plainer and more emphatic language."
 - His choice of subjects was humble and rustic life.
 - His style was to be the language really used by men.
 - E.g. "Lucy Gray" and "We are Seven"
 - Exception: "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" (elevated style)
- ☑ He wrote **The Lyrical Ballads (1799)**, in collaboration with his friend Coleridge. This book contains some of the most famous pieces, including **The Idiot Boy** and **Tintern Abbey.**
- ☑ Wordsworth published **Poems**, in 1807. It contains the majority of his best shorter poems, such as **Lucy Gray, Ruth, and Nutting.**
- ☑ **The Excursion (1814)**, is **the first portion of an enormous blank-verse poem**, the **subject** of Which was to be **his own education and mental development.** The complete poem was to be called **The Recluse.**
- ☑ In 1805 he had written **the Prelude** to this, but this part **was not published till after his death. The entire scheme was not completed.**

- ☑ Though much of the poem is dull and heavy, it contains many magnificent passages upon his observation of nature and the effect this had upon his growing consciousness.
- ☑ During the later years his poems are many, but the really good ones are few. Perhaps the best in is **Yarrow Revisited (1835)**

Four stages in Wordsworth's Poetic Development

❖ Wordsworth's poetic career consists of four periods.

❖ First Period :

- Wordsworth's early years were spent in solitude among the hills. The "ceaseless music" of Derwent filled his soul and gave him an unconscious foretaste of the calm – "That Nature breaths among the hills and groves."
- **In the Book I of The Prelude Wordsworth describes his feelings and impressions of his childhood.**
- He begins the Second Book of The Prelude with a description of the tumultuous joy and eagerness of boyhood in its sports among a rich and varied scenery. During his boyish days, nature was.

❖ Second Period :

- Then followed the period of senses, when the young poet drank in the beauty of nature with **the passion of a lover.**

❖ Third Period:

- This stage of "dizzy joys" and "aching raptures" came to an end with his experience of human sorrow and suffering in France. He had kept watch over "human mortality" and in his eyes nature now took on a "sober colouring". He heard "the still, sad music of humanity," and his love of nature became linked with the love of man. He found strength and force and beauty in the character of humble people. He saw into the depths of human souls

❖ Fourth Period:

- **The final stage was the period of the soul, when the poet's love of nature became reflective, mystical and spiritual.** He felt in Nature "a presence" that disturbed him with "the joy of elevated thoughts,"
- He now felt God in nature and its creations
- His Pantheism or Mysticism.

Immortality Ode

- ☑ *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (also known as *Ode, Immortality Ode* or *Great Ode*)

- ☑ The *Ode* was begun in March, 1802, discontinued at the end of the fourth section, and finally completed in March, 1804.
- ☑ In the intervening period Wordsworth wrote the short poem ***My Heart Leaps up When I Behold, and Resolution and Independence***.
- ☑ The epigraph of the poem is taken from *My Heart Leaps up When I Behold*. Implicit in it is the idea of growth, and of the continuity of man.
- ☑ **The theme of the poem is the immortality of the human soul** of which one is aware in childhood but which fades from one's mind with growing years. The child's knowledge of immortality is based upon the memories of his life in heaven before his birth. This view forms the core of the poem.
- ☑ The long title of the poem clearly expresses the theme: **our knowledge of the soul's immortality is based on our memories of childhood when we still remembered our life in heaven.**
- ☑ It was completed in 1804 and published in *Poems, in Two Volumes (1807)*.
- ☑ The poem was completed in two parts, with the first four stanzas written among a series of poems composed in 1802 about childhood.
- ☑ The first part of the poem was completed on 27 March 1802 and a copy was provided to Wordsworth's friend and fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, **who responded with his own poem, *Dejection: An Ode*, in April.**
- ☑ The fourth stanza of the ode ends with a question, and Wordsworth was finally able to answer it with 7 additional stanzas completed in early 1804.
- ☑ It was **first printed as *Ode* in 1807**, and it was not until 1815 that it was edited and reworked to the version that is currently known, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*.
- ☑ The poem is an **irregular Pindaric ode in 11 stanzas that combines aspects of Coleridge's Conversation poems, the religious sentiments of the Bible and the works of Saint Augustine, and aspects of the elegiac and apocalyptic traditions.**
- ☑ **The ode contains 11 stanzas split into three movements:**
 - The first movement is four stanzas long and discusses the narrator's inability to see the divine glory of nature, the problem of the poem.
 - The first four stanzas also discuss death, and the loss of youth and innocence.
 - The second movement is four stanzas long and has a negative response to the problem. It describes how age causes man to lose sight of the divine
 - The third movement is three stanzas long and contains a positive response to the problem. The ode begins by contrasting the narrator's view of the world as a child and as a man, with what was once a life interconnected to the divine fading away. It express hope that the memory of the divine allow us to sympathize with our fellow man.
 - **The poem relies on the concept of Pre-existence**, the idea that the soul existed before the body, to connect children with the ability to witness the divine within nature.

- As children mature, they become more worldly and lose this divine vision, and **the ode reveals Wordsworth's understanding of psychological development** that is also found in his poems *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*.
 - **Wordsworth's praise of the child as the "best philosopher" was criticised by Coleridge** and became the source of later critical discussion.
- ☑ Modern critics sometimes have referred to Wordsworth's poem as the "**Great Ode**"
 - ☑ Contemporary reviews of the poem were mixed, with many reviewers attacking the work or, like Lord Byron, **dismissing the work without analysis**.
 - ☑ **The critics felt that Wordsworth's subject matter was too "low" and some felt that the emphasis on childhood was misplaced.** Among the Romantic poets, most praised various aspects of the poem however. By the Victorian period, most reviews of the ode were positive with only John Ruskin **taking a strong negative stance against the poem**.
- **The ode contains 11 stanzas.**
 - The ode begins by contrasting the narrator's view of the world as a child and as a man, with what was once a life interconnected to the divine fading away.
 - **In the second and third stanzas, the narrator describes his surroundings and various aspects of nature that he is no longer able to feel.** He feels as if he is separated from the rest of nature until he experiences a moment that brings about feelings of joy that are able to overcome his despair.
 - The joy in stanza III slowly fades again in stanza IV as the narrator feels like there is "something that is gone". As the stanza ends, the narrator asks two different questions to end the first movement of the poem. Though they appear to be similar, one asks where the visions are now ("Where is it now") while the other doesn't ("Whither is fled"), and they leave open the possibility that the visions could return.
 - **The second movement begins in stanza V by answering the question of stanza IV by describing a Platonic system of pre-existence.** The narrator explains how **humans start in an ideal world that slowly fades into a shadowy life.** Before the light fades away as the child matures, **the narrator emphasizes the greatness of the child experiencing the feelings.**
 - By the beginning of **stanza VIII, the child is described as a great individual,** and the stanza is **written in the form of a prayer that praises the attributes of children.**
 - The end of stanza VIII brings about the end of a second movement within the poem. **The glories of nature are only described as existing in the past,** and the child's understanding of morality is already causing them to lose what they once had.
 - The questions in Stanza IV are answered with **words of despair in the second movement,** but the third movement is filled with joy.
 - **Third Movement begins in Stanza IX.** It contains **a mixture of affirmation of life and faith** as it seemingly avoids discussing what is lost. The stanza **describes how a child is able to see what others do not see** because children do not comprehend mortality, and the **imagination allows an adult to intimate immortality and bond with his fellow man.**

- The children on the shore represent the adult narrator's recollection of childhood, and the recollection allows for an intimation of returning to that mental state.
- In stanza XI, the **imagination allows one to know that there are limits to the world**, but it also allows for a return to a state of sympathy with the world lacking any questions or concerns.
- **The poem concludes with an affirmation** that, though changed by time, **the narrator is able to be the same person he once was**.
- ❖ The poem is mainly *autobiographical and reminiscent of the poet's past life*. The radiance and glory of Nature, which he declares as having seen in his childhood, was a part of his own personal experience, while he also felt the unreality of the outward objects to which he refers in the ninth stanza.
- ❖ The ode is Wordsworth's pictorial gift or *image-making power may be noticed in this poem*. He gives vivid pictures of the rainbow, the rose, the moon shining in a cloudless sky, the star-light falling on waters, the children collecting fresh flowers, the babe leaping on his mother's arm, etc. Wordsworth was a keen worshipper of Nature.
- ❖ The ode is not written in the language Wordsworth regularly used in his poetry. Its tone is high and stately. Wordsworth thought his subject so important that he treated it in what was for him an unusual manner, and for it he fashioned his own high style.
- ❖ Although the ode contains a metaphysical doctrine, yet there is in it a *deep and sincere personal emotion which gives it a lyrical character*.
- ❖ The sober close of this great ode has been compared to the close of a splendid evening. In other words, the reflective mood of the poet deepens in the last stanza.

Tintern Abbey

- ❖ In the **summer of 1798** Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, walking from Alfoxden to Bristol, visited the beautiful ruins of Tintern Abbey, located on the **Wye River in Monmouthshire, Wordsworth had been there in 1793**, and in this poem **he records his impression after a five-year absence**.
- ❖ The poem sums up Wordsworth's creed of the ministering power of nature (especially through the function of memory) and the development of his appreciation of nature from childhood to maturity,
- ❖ Tintern Abbey is a key poem to any understanding of Wordsworth's nature philosophy.
- ❖ The title, *Lines Written (or Composed) a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798*, is often abbreviated simply to *Tintern Abbey*, although that building does not appear within the poem.
- ❖ It was written by William Wordsworth after a walking tour with his sister in this section of the Welsh Borders. The description of his encounters with the countryside on the banks of the River Wye grows into an outline of his general philosophy. There has been considerable

debate about why evidence of the human presence in the landscape has been downplayed and in what way the poem fits within the 18th century loco-descriptive genre.

- ✦ The poem has its roots in Wordsworth's personal history. He had previously visited the area as a troubled twenty-three-year-old in August 1793.
- ✦ The poem is written in tightly-structured decasyllabic blank verse and comprises verse-paragraphs rather than stanzas.
- ✦ Categorizing the poem is difficult, as it contains some elements of the ode and of the dramatic monologue.
- ✦ In the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth noted: "**I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principle requisites of that species of composition.**"
- ✦ The apostrophe at its beginning is reminiscent of the 18th century landscape-poem, but it is now agreed that the best designation of the work would be the conversation poem, which is an organic development of the loco-descriptive.
- ✦ The silent listener in this case is Wordsworth's sister Dorothy, who is addressed in the poem's final section.
- ✦ Transcending the nature poetry written before that date, it employs a much more intellectual and philosophical engagement with the **subject that verges on Pantheism.**
- ✦ Wordsworth has expressed his intense faith in nature.
- ✦ There is Wordsworth's realization of God in nature. He got sensuous delight in it and it is all in all to him.
- ✦ Tintern Abbey impressed him most when he had first visited this place. He has again come to the same place where there are lofty cliffs, the plots of cottage ground, orchards groves and copses. He is glad to see again hedgerows, sportive wood, pastoral farms and green doors. This lonely place, the banks of the river and rolling waters from their mountain springs present a beautiful panoramic light. The solitary place reminds the poet of vagrant dwellers and hermits' cave.

- ✧ The poem is in **five sections.**
- ✧ The **first section establishes the setting for the meditation.** But **it emphasizes the passage of time: five years have passed, five summers, five long winters...** But when the poet is back to this place of natural beauty and serenity, it is still essentially the same.
- ✧ The poem opens with a slow, dragging rhythm and **the repetition of the word 'five' all designed to emphasize the weight of time which has separated the poet from this scene.** The following lines develop a clear, visual picture of the scene. The view presented is a blend of wildness and order. He can see the entirely natural cliffs and waterfalls; he can see the hedges around the fields of the people; and he can see wreaths of smoke probably coming from some hermits making fire in their cave hermitages. These images evoke not only a pure nature as one might expect, they evoke a life of the common people in harmony with the nature.

- ☞ **The second section begins with the meditation.** The poet now realizes that these 'beauteous' forms have always been with him, deep-seated in his mind, wherever he went. This vision has been "Felt in the blood, and felt alone the heart" that is. It has affected his whole being. They were not absent from his mind like form the mind of a man born blind. In hours of weariness, frustration and anxiety, these things of nature used to make him feel sweet sensations in his very blood, and he used to feel it at the level of the impulse (heart) rather than in his waking consciousness and through reasoning. From this point onward Wordsworth begins to consider the sublime of nature, and his mystical awareness becomes clear. Wordsworth's idea was that human beings are naturally uncorrupted.
- ☞ **The poet studies nature with open eyes and imaginative mind.** He has been the lover of nature form the core of his heart, and with purer mind. He feels a sensation of love for nature in his blood. He feels high pleasure and deep power of joy in natural objects. The beatings of his heart are full of the fire of nature's love. **He concentrates attention to Sylvan Wye – a majestic and worth seeing river.** He is reminded of the pictures of the past visit and ponders over his future years. On his first visit to this place he bounded over the mountains by the sides of the deep rivers and the lovely streams. In the past the soundings haunted him like a passion. The tall rock, the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood were then to him like an appetite. But that time is gone now. In nature he finds the sad music of humanity.
- ☞ **The third section contains a kind of doubt;** the poet is probably reflecting the reader's possible doubts so that he can go on to justify how he is right and what he means. He doubts, for just a moment, whether this thought about the influence of the nature is vain, but he can't go on. He exclaims: "yet, oh! How often, amid the joyless daylight, fretful and unprofitable fever of the world have I turned to thee (nature)" for inspiration and peace of mind. **He thanks the 'Sylvan Wye' for the everlasting influence it has imprinted on his mind;** his spirit has very often turned to this river for inspiration when he was losing the peace of mind or the path and meaning of life. **The river here becomes the symbol of spirituality.**
- ☞ Though the poet has become **serious and perplexed in the fourth section the nature gives him courage and spirit enough to stand there with a sense of delight and pleasure.** This is so typical of Wordsworth that it seems he can't write poetry without recounting his personal experiences, especially those of his childhood. Here he also begins from the earliest of his days! It was first the coarse pleasures in his 'boyish days', which have all gone by now. "That time is past and all its aching joys are now no more, and all its dizzy raptures". But the poet does not mourn for them; he doesn't even grumble about their loss. Clearly, he has gained something in return: "other gifts have followed; for such loss... for I have learnt to look on nature, not as in the hour of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity". This is a philosophic statement about maturing, about the development of personality, and of the poetic or philosophic mind as well. So now the poet is able to feel a joy of elevated thought, a sense sublime, and far more deeply interfused. He feels a sense of sublime and the working of a supreme power in the light of the setting sun, in round oceans and in the blue sky. **He is of opinion that a motion and a spirit impel all thinking things.**

Therefore Wordsworth claims that he is a lover of the meadows and of all which we see from this green earth.

☞ **Nature is a nurse, a guide and the guardian of his heart and soul.** The poet comes to one important conclusion: for all the formative influences, he is now consciously in love with the nature. He has become a thoughtful lover of the meadows, the woods and the mountains.

Though his ears and eyes seem to create the other half of all these sensations, the nature is the actual source of these sublime thoughts.

☞ **The fifth and last section** continues with the same meditation from where **the poet addresses his younger sister Dorothy**, whom **he blesses and gives advice about what he has learnt.** He says that he can hear the voice of his own youth when he hears her speak, the language of his former heart; he can also **“read my former pleasure in the soothing lights of thy wild eyes’**. He is excited to look at his own youthful image in her. He says that nature has never betrayed his heart and that is why they had been living from joy to joy.

☞ **Nature can impress the mind with quietness and beauty, and feed it lofty thoughts, that no evil tongues of the human society can corrupt their hearts with any amount of contact with it.**

☞ The poet then **begins to address the moon in his reverie, and to ask the nature to bestow his sister with their blessings.** Let the moon shine on her solitary walk, and let the mountain winds blow their breeze on her. When the present youthful ecstasies are over, as they did with him, **let her mind become the palace of the lovely forms and thought about the nature, so that she can enjoy and understand life and overcome the vexations of living in a harsh human society.** The conclusion to the poem takes us almost cyclically, back to a physical view of the ‘steep woods’, ‘lofty cliffs’ and ‘green pastoral landscape’ in which the meditation of the poem is happening.

☞ The poet has expressed **his honest and natural feelings to Nature’s Superiority.**