

## Wordsworth's Literary Precedents: Derivation and the Enduring Power of Imagination

William Wordsworth developed a comprehensive theory of poetry, in part, due to a request from Samuel Taylor Coleridge to write such a theory, and in part to act as an explanatory introduction to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* met with mixed reviews, and was criticized for its use of everyday language and characters, natural settings, and incidents drawn from daily life.

Wordsworth believed that the *Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads* was an original expression of the art of poetry, and that his work, and the work of Coleridge represented a break from the Neo-Classical tradition epitomized by Dryden and Pope and commented upon by Dr. Johnson. Commenting on Wordsworth's belief in the original nature of the work, S.M. Parrish notes that "whether or not they were innovative [Wordsworth's ideas on poetry], they appear to have been regarded as such by Wordsworth, who repeatedly cited their divergence from popular styles" (85).

Despite Wordsworth's belief in the original nature of his poetic practice, I will argue that both he and Coleridge were influenced by eighteenth-century poetic theory, primarily that of Dr. Johnson, and that they were also influenced by the work appearing in several of the poetry magazines in the late eighteenth century. I will then attempt to demonstrate that Wordsworth's poetic theory, while being derivative in certain respects, was unique in its use of dramatic form, characterization, narrative technique, use of the imagination and natural themes, and that it was the combination of these themes and techniques that makes Wordsworth's poetry so enduring.

Wordsworth, in the Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815, defined poetry as a metrical arrangement of the “real language of men in a state of vivid excitement and in a manner intended to give pleasure to the reader” (939). He wished to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to make these incidents interesting by “tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature” (791). He believed that the language of rustic men and women “has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived” (791). Wordsworth thought that rustic life provided a moral backdrop that was untainted from vanity and social convention, and therefore, that rustic personages spoke “a far more philosophical language, that than which is frequently substituted for it by Poets” (791).

For Wordsworth, poetry was not merely a pleasurable experience shared between author and reader; while he acknowledges that pleasure is one of the aims of poetry, he believed that good poetry must also have a moral purpose. In one of the most famous passages from the *Preface*, Wordsworth notes that reflection is necessary to poetic construction, and that by constantly focusing the mind on important subjects, the poet can convey his best thoughts to his readers, who will then benefit from them.

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover *what is really important to men*, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly

and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, *that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.* (791) (Italics mine)

Wordsworth continues in his definition of poetry to reject personification as “an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose” (Page 792). This passage is often cited as one of Wordsworth’s objections to the poetry of the Neo-Classicalists, which was often characterized by excessive use of personification as well as use of an elevated and affected language.

The use of nature and natural settings is addressed in the *Preface* as a means of emphasizing man’s reliance on sensation. Wordsworth believed that scenes of nature were common to all men, and that the poet, writing as a man speaking the common language of men, was obliged to write about the sensations evoked by nature.

Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and with the appearances of the visible universe; with storms and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. *These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them.* (795-6). (Italics mine)

According to Wordsworth, the scenes which he witnessed are recollected in tranquility, and are reproduced, with almost the same force as when first witnessed, upon re-reading. He further believed that the reader could also experience the same sets of emotions and feelings as those experienced by the author.

Having defined his notions of poetry in the *Preface*, Wordsworth added some additional musings on the art of poetry in the *Appendix to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads*. In the *Appendix*, he stated that originally, poets of all nations wrote from passion that was real and unaffected, and that gradually, as this style of writing began to

be admired, other people chose to write in an elevated, poetic style. This re-affirmation of a dislike of affected language, first developed in the *Preface*, is a primary reason that he rejected the writings of the Neo-Classical poets, and he singled-out the poetry of Dryden and Pope as examples of an affected style.

In a controversial passage in the *Appendix*, he remarks that for works of imagination and sentiment, there is no essential difference between works of poetry and prose works:

...namely, that in works of *imagination and sentiment*, for of these only have I been treating, in proportion as ideas and feelings are valuable, whether the composition be in prose or in verse, *they require and exact one and the same language*, Meter is but adventitious to composition, and the phraseology for which that passport is necessary, even where it might be graceful at all, will be little valued by the judicious. (800) (Italics mine)

In the *Preface to the Third Edition of the Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth attempted to clarify his notions of the use of imagination in the writing of poetry. He believed that imagination was not merely the art of reproducing or copying something that the poet observed, but that the mind operated with the material presented to it, and somehow transformed this material into a poetic composition. In attempting to describe this transformative power of the imagination, Wordsworth writes that

the Imagination also shapes and *creates*; and how? By innumerable processes; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number, - alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers. ( 804)

In the *Essay Supplementary to the Third Edition of Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth completes his formal discourse on poetic theory by noting that the “appropriate business of poetry ...is to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear: not as they exist by themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses, and to the passions” (807). This

passage is a further refinement of his definition of imagination, and establishes Wordsworth's notion that a poet should not be a mere reporter of events, but that the poet should see to the heart of things as "they appear," or should be.

By the time of the publication of the third edition, the *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as the balance of Wordsworth's poetry, was beginning to be accepted by the public. In a telling comment to the *Essay Supplementary*, Wordsworth remarked that every great author has the "task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so it has been, so will it continue to be" (814). Along the same lines, Wordsworth defined genius as "...the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe: or, if that be not allowed, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown" (815).

Writing nearly twenty years after the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge offered his own views on poetic theory in his work *Biographia Literaria*. While Coleridge was critical of much of Wordsworth's theory on poetry, the two poets shared similar beliefs in several areas, notably the general structure of the *Lyrical Ballads*; the requirement that poetry be pleasurable to the reader; Wordsworth's use of common language as an experiment in some of the poems; and finally, a requirement that the poet use his imagination to infuse scenes with poetic power.

In discussing the format of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge notes that

...our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature.

The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. (524-5)

In the preceding paragraph, we are made aware of the general format of the work, where Coleridge was to write about supernatural subjects with the intent of making them seem real. Coleridge elaborates on Wordsworth's contribution to the work by saying that "For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves"(517).

Not only does Coleridge mention the framework of the *Lyrical Ballads* in these excerpts, he also introduces the theme of the "modifying colors of the imagination." For Coleridge, like Wordsworth, the imagination combines elements of the poet's senses with the cognitive powers of the mind to transform a sensory object into poetry. Coleridge describes this transformative power of the imagination in great detail.

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, *each into each by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination.* This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control (*laxis effertur hebenis*) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; *and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature;* the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. (524-5) (Italics mine)

Finally, in discussing the language and characters employed by Wordsworth, Coleridge indicates that “In this form the Lyrical Ballads were published; and were presented by him, as an *experiment*, whether subjects, which from their nature rejected the usual ornaments and extra-colloquial style of poems in general, might not be so managed in the language of ordinary life as to produce the pleasurable interest, which it is the peculiar business of poetry to impart” (518). In this excerpt, Coleridge states that Wordsworth intended to use colloquial language as an experiment, which was designed to induce a pleasurable sensation in the mind of the reader. Coleridge believed, however, that Wordsworth carried the experiment too far, and later tried to attribute “the extension of this style to poetry of all kinds, and to reject as vicious and indefensible all phrases and forms of style that were not included in what he...called the language of *real* life” (518-9).

Having discussed Wordsworth’s theory of poetry, and added clarifying comments from Coleridge, we can now compare the theories developed in the *Lyrical Ballads* with those of Dr. Johnson, the foremost literary critic of the Neo-Classical age. In the *Life of Milton*, Johnson states early in the biography that poetry “is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason” ( 117). Johnson’s comment sounds remarkably like the theories of both Wordsworth and Coleridge regarding the requirement that poetry produce a pleasurable response in the mind of the reader. Continuing the discussion of the requirement for poetry to be pleasurable, Johnson says a little later in Milton’s biography that “since the end of poetry is pleasure, that cannot be unpoetical with which all are pleased” (121).

Johnson had specific ideas on the use of natural settings in poetry, and commented that Milton, in *The Paradise Lost*, does not evoke a true view of nature: “But his images and descriptions of the scenes or operations of Nature do not seem to be always copied from original form, nor have the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation. He saw Nature, as Dryden expresses it, *through the spectacle of books*; and on most occasions calls learning to his assistance” (123). This comment by Johnson lends credence to Wordsworth’s criticism of Neo-Classical poets as being more concerned with form, and less concerned with substance and feeling in poetry. As Wordsworth maintains in his theory of poetry, the poet uses images of nature to impart feeling and sensation to his reader.

Johnson, like Wordsworth, believed that poetry should be more than mere pleasure, that it should impart a moral quality to the reader, as well. Johnson states that the first work of the poet “is to find a *moral*, which his fable is afterwards to illustrate and establish. . . . To convey this moral, there must be a fable, a narration artfully constructed, so as to excite curiosity, and surprise expectation” (118). Johnson, in a later passage, talks about the requirement for a moral purpose in poetry, while at the same time discussing the task of the poet to combine the elements of a poem in an harmonious whole

which he must improve and exalt by a nobler art, must animate by dramatic energy, and diversify by retrospection and anticipation; *morality must teach him the exact bounds, and different shades, of vice and virtue*; from policy, and the practice of life, he has to learn the discriminations of character, and the tendency of the passions, either single or combined; and physiology must supply him with illustrations and images. *To put these materials to poetical use, is required an imagination capable of painting nature, and realizing fiction*. Nor is he yet a poet till he has attained the whole extension of his language, distinguished all the delicacies of phrase, and all the colours of words, and learned to adjust their

different sounds to all the varieties of metrical modulation. (117-118). (Italics mine)

In the preceding paragraph we also gain insight into Johnson's notion of imagination. To Dr. Johnson, imagination is necessary to combine the various sensory inputs which the poet experiences into an harmonious whole, through the use of the cognitive abilities of the poet. Once again, this idea of imagination as a transformative power bears a striking similarity to the views held by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

In defining a poem, Johnson indicates that meter is necessary and that "...it is however, by the music of meter that poetry has been discriminated in all languages; and *in languages melodiously constructed with a due proportion of long and short syllables, meter is sufficient* (133). (Italics mine) It is important to note that Johnson does not require that a poem have a rhyme scheme, which is also a view espoused by Wordsworth, and repudiated by Coleridge in one of his most famous objections to Wordsworth's theory of poetry.

In his *Life of Pope*, Johnson traces the development of poetry from its earliest practitioners to the present age. He says that "Thus it will be found, in the progress of learning, that in all nations the first writers are simple, and that every age improves in elegance. One refinement always makes way for another..." ( 320). This sentiment is remarkably similar to that of Wordsworth when he says in the *Appendix 1802*, that:

The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring, and figurative. In succeeding times, Poets, and Men ambitious of the fame of Poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. ( 799)

Finally, Johnson says that in Pope's works "are exhibited, in a very high degree, the two most engaging powers of an author. New things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new" (316). This statement is similar to that made by Wordsworth when he was defining the quality of greatness in a poet as "the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe: or, if that be not allowed, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown" ( 815).

Based on these observations, we can see that Wordsworth and Coleridge were influenced, to some extent, by the Neo-Classical theories of poetry developed by Dr. Johnson. The most significant of the Johnsonian influences were the notion that poetry should produce a pleasurable sensation in the mind of the reader, convey a moral lesson, accurately depict natural settings, and use the imaginative powers of the poet to achieve an harmonious combination of poetic elements.

The second part of the argument of this paper was to demonstrate that Wordsworth and Coleridge made use of a number of poetic conventions appearing in poems which were published in the literary magazines of the late eighteenth century. The primary source for this argument is Robert Mayo's author of "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," makes this argument most effectively.

As Mayo suggests in his paper, the *Lyrical Ballads* were similar in form, subject matter, and content, to many of the poems appearing in the poetry magazines circulated in the latter portion of the eighteenth century. Mayo further contends that readers of the *Lyrical Ballads* were familiar with the literary styles employed by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and that the chief difference between the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* and

poems appearing in such literary journals as *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *The European Magazine*, and *The Monthly Magazine* was in terms of artistic merit and not content, as the following quotation illustrates:

The vast proportion of this verse [that is, verse appearing in the literary magazines] is hopelessly mediocre, and deservedly forgotten, except that it provides the best available chart for the shifting currents of popular taste. Through it we can partly understand the ground swell of popular favor which helped to raise the *Lyrical Ballads* to eminence in spite of hostile criticism from the Edinburgh reviewer and others. (488)

The themes developed in the poems which appeared in the literary magazines, and which were subsequently taken up by Wordsworth and Coleridge, include those of simplicity, rural or pastoral settings, humanitarianism, the role of nature, and sentimental morality. Mayo contends that by the time that Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote the *Lyrical Ballads*, such themes were not unusual, and that they were becoming commonplace in poetry:

But the more one reads the popular poetry of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the more he is likely to feel that the really surprising feature of these poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* (as well as of many of the others) – *apart from sheer literary excellence* – is their intense fulfillment of an already stale convention, and not their discovery of an interest in rivers, valleys, groves, lakes and mountains, flowers and budding trees, the changing seasons, sunsets, and freshness of the morning, and the songs of birds. *This fact is a commonplace.* (491) (Italics mine)

Turning to the form of poetry appearing in the literary magazines, Mayo notes that the ballad, pastoral, complaint, fragment and sketch were all popular forms which were used by authors during the late eighteenth century: “Ballads, complaints and plaintive tales, fragments, fables and anecdotes, songs and pastorals, sketches, effusions and reflective poems, and occasional pieces of various kinds – these were common coin in the poetry departments in the years previous to 1798” (507).

Wordsworth and Coleridge utilized the forms of ballad, pastoral, fragment, sketch and complaint in the poems comprising the *Lyrical Ballads*. As Mayo notes, many critics tend to ascribe the invention of the “lyrical ballad” to Wordsworth and Coleridge, but that:

The more one reads the minor poetry of the magazines from 1788 to 1798, the more it is impossible to escape the impression that the concept of the “lyrical ballad” does not represent a significant innovation in 1798, nor as a term is it particularly appropriate to the contents of this volume of poems. (511)

Finally, Mayo contends that the “revolutionary” quality of the *Lyrical Ballads* is overrated and misapplied by many critics, noting that:

...but by and large it may be affirmed that whatever the claims which have since been made for them, the *Lyrical Ballads*, on the surface at any rate, do not exhibit revolutionary or even surprising prosodic tendencies. On the whole the two poets appear to have been satisfied to adopt meters which were current in their own day. (516) (Italics mine)

We have seen that Wordsworth and Coleridge adopted portions of their poetic theory from Neo-Classical foundations, and that many of the themes and forms of poetry that appeared in the *Lyrical Ballads* had their origins in poems published in the literary magazines of the latter portion of the eighteenth century. To a certain extent, every poet or author adopts or modifies conventions, themes, and forms developed in an earlier era. Certainly, the same is true of Wordsworth and Coleridge. But does the fact that they modified or adopted earlier forms, themes, and theory diminish their work? Similarly, although they made use of earlier theory, are we ready to consign them to the fate of mere imitators of earlier trends? The answer to both questions is an unqualified NO.

Maxfield Parrish, in his work "Dramatic Technique in the Lyrical Ballads," argues that Wordsworth's real contribution to lyric poetry was the use of dramatic form, characterization, and narrative technique: “At one level, of course, the experiments did

involve poetic diction. But at a deeper level they were, I think, *experiments in dramatic form, in characterization, and in narrative technique.*” (86) (Italics mine)

Parrish goes on to argue that the ballad form allowed Wordsworth to explore psychological depth of character through the development of a narrative technique that he honed through readings of contemporary ballads. “But Wordsworth’s experiments in dramatic and narrative technique seem to have been greatly stimulated in the later nineties, and the course of his poetic development altered, by his reading of ballad literature” (86).

The implication of the preceding paragraph is that rather than being a mere imitator of other ballad forms, Wordsworth adapted the ballad to suit his own objectives, which were to offer a psychological insight into the inner workings and feelings of his characters. Commenting on Wordsworth’s intent to portray the feelings of his characters, Parrish remarks that:

Whether the feeling belonged to a wholly invented character, to a colloquial voice assumed by the poet – or even, as in “Simon Lee” and some of the shorter pieces in ballad stanzas, to the poet himself – it was, I suggest, a distinctive and original feature of these experiments in ballad form. (94)

But the use of narrative technique, characterization, and dramatic form, while lending itself to a development of character that is in some ways richer and more insightful than earlier poets, does not fully explain the continuing popularity and influence of the *Lyrical Ballads*. There must be some other explanation that gives credence to the enduring quality of the work. In his paper “The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth,” Frederick Pottle postulates that Wordsworth’s real genius lie in his ability to recall objects from memory, and then to overlay them with the “coloring of imagination.” Pottle maintains that Wordsworth’s unique use of imagination arose from

an ability to group objects together and to eliminate everything that is extraneous or superfluous, allowing him to display the “essence” of the object in his poems.

Wordsworth does this by reflecting on the objects he wishes to write about in tranquility, and to refine the image he is thinking about until he is satisfied that he had captured its “essence.” Pottle notes that Wordsworth does not start with the general, to arrive at the particular, but “rather he starts with the particular, and ratifies it until he arrives at its meaning” (15- 16).

This habit of reacting to sensation, and then refining the sensation in later, contemplative reflection, is one of the tenets of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry and is elaborated in the *Preface to Third Edition of the Lyrical Ballads*, as follows:

Imagination, in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of the following Poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws. (803)

James Heffernan, in his book *Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination*, maintains that imagination is the defining characteristic of Wordsworth’s poetry, and is his real contribution to poetic theory and the source of the enduring appeal of his work.

Heffernan maintains that Wordsworth originally de-emphasized the creative or imaginative power of the author, and sought instead to capture an almost intuitive insight into feelings, as the following excerpt demonstrates.

The poet, he insists, must not interfere with the gush of natural feeling, for a prudently selected subject will automatically generate passionate effusions of richly figurative language. ...Depending only on the principle of selection, he will refrain from embellishing the speech of instinct and impulse, realizing as he does so that “no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be [comparable] with...the emanations of reality and truth.” (42-3)

Wordsworth's reaction against the conscious use of imagination is seen by Heffernan as a form of rejection of Neo-Classical formalism, and an affirmation of Wordsworth's belief that poetry should be written in the language of common men. As Wordsworth developed, both as a poet and a theorist, his notions regarding the imagination began to alter. By degrees, Wordsworth began to believe that feelings served to stimulate the imagination, and that the poet should not actively seek to suppress his imaginative powers.

As his ideas on the creative power of the imagination began to mature, Wordsworth saw in nature a "mentor, guide and stimulus, [which] acts to purify the feelings," (64) and provides man with a mirror of reality. Not only does nature provide a touchstone for reality, but it is especially suited to interact with the mind of man to produce a collaboration between man and nature:

What we have here is a concerted act. The response awakened by impulse in an imaginative mind makes possible a collaboration: nature, impotent without "the poetic voice/That hourly speaks within us" (Poetical Works, III, 264), becomes articulate through the mind and heart of man. (67-8)

This mirroring of nature and the mind of man is viewed by Wordsworth not only as a form of collaboration, but as a process which yields insight into a man's deepest feelings: "Nature renders back to him his deepest self, so that what he sees is a vital analogy between the energies within him and the energies without" (96-97). This insight into man's deepest feelings leads Wordsworth to form a notion of a corresponding "power" in nature that is akin to human imagination: "Yet one thing is clear. Wordsworth definitely finds in nature evidence for the existence of a "Power" which behaves like the human imagination" (105).

It is this combination of the imaginative power in man with the “Power” found in nature that is Wordsworth’s unique contribution to poetry. Wordsworth, through his use of imagination, is able to forge a relationship between the glory of the natural order and the glory of the human spirit. The discovery of a relationship between nature and mankind is achieved in stages. As a child, we are able to discern a connection between nature and man, but the connection gradually diminishes, and we undergo a separation from the natural world. It is only by consciously reflecting on natural phenomena in quiet moments that we are able to re-establish this natural connection.

The poet speaks of this progress toward knowledge, forgetting and remembrance in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.”

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and freshness of a dream. . . .

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
The soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting.  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home: . . .  
O joy! That in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive!  
The thought of our past years in me doth breed  
Perpetual benediction. . . .

What though the radiance that was once so bright  
Be now forever taken from my sight.  
Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower,  
We will grieve not, rather find strength

In what remains behind. . . . (520-525)

It is the purpose of the imagination to provide man with a connection to that “other” which is ever at the periphery of his vision; a connection that is established in the quiet, somber moments of reflection that occur when we recollect the vivid impressions of our brightest days. Wordsworth’s use of imagination, combined with the novel use of dramatic form, intensely realized characterization, and narrative technique produced a poetic form that was uniquely immediate and accessible. It is this immediacy and accessibility, combined with Wordsworth’s imaginative powers, that earn the poet his enduring popularity.

## Bibliography

Coleridge, S. T. (1950). The Portable Coleridge. New York, The Penguin Group.

Johnson, S. (1973). Milton. Lives of the Poets. London, Oxford University Press.  
**1, 2:**

Mayo, R. (1954). "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads." PMLA **69**(3): 486-522.

Parrish, S. M. (1959). "Dramatic Technique in the Lyrical Ballads." PMLA **74**(1): 85-97.

Pottle, F.A. (1985). "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth." Modern Critical Reviews: William Wordsworth. H. Bloom. New York, Chelsea House Publishers: 9-21.

Sheats, P. D. (1982). Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, 1800; Appendix, 1802; Preface to the Edition of 1815; Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815. The Poetical Works of Wordsworth. Boston, Houghton Mifflin: 939.

Wordsworth, W. (2002). Selected Poetry of William Wordsworth. New York, The Modern Library.