Wordsworth’s Poetical Theory

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It has been acknowledged by many critics that Wordsworth is one of the chief glories of English poetry and that he has exercised a greater, purer, healthier and more elevating influence than any other poet since Milton and Shakespeare. From the language generally used regarding this improvement, one would expect to be conscious of a great and sudden change in passing from eighteenth century to nineteenth century poetry. But not so. A great and worthy change did occur, but it was not easy, gradual transition; indeed a sort of quiet evolution of new things, not a sudden fierce upheaval and destruction of old things as worthless rubbish and a corresponding abnormal growth and triumphant reconstitution of new material. Nevertheless, because we cannot put our finger on the exact moment when it occurred, we must not, as is sometimes done, ignore the fact altogether. The queen Anne style of literature gradually disappeared. The prose writers were the chief literary agents of this...
transformation. Novelties and romantic
ism had educated the public taste
for new subjects and a new style; for
subjects with more varied and deep
human interests; and a style less con-
densed and elaborate but more free
and discursive. Poets' readers had had
no taste for this class of literature, but
now the public had become acquainted
with it and was prepared
for Scott and Wordsworth.

Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical
Ballads, in 1798, is a great landmark
in the history of poetry, because it a-
roused poets to a consciousness of the
change that had taken place and com-
pelled critics to define their position.
The Preface and the volume which ac-
companied it we will consider at
length, but let us first examine the
early poems written by him before the Ballads.

In these early poems we shall realize the
growth of his poetical style. The transition from the
politic style of his predecessors, notwithstanding the revolutionary nature of
his famous Preface. The growth of his
poetic style can better be traced in
these stanzas of the Prelude, which is
Wordsworth's poetic biography, because
in the Prelude it is the gradual growth
of his mind, of his feelings and of his
impassioned love for nature, which
is narrated, not still development of his
poetic art, if his aims and methods
as an artist; and it is these facts
which are interesting if we desire to view
him in his proper relation to his predecessor.

What then were the circumstances
which cooperated with untold genius
to make him the poet he was? The
Prelude answers: Nature—the moun-
tains and the mists, the leaping cat-
eracte and valleys where he lived in
his youth. Hear him describe his
feelings in the presence of nature in
his school—days at Hawkshead:

"I would walk alone

Under the quiet stars, and at that time
Hear the voice of Nature, if she were there, to
So breathe an elevated mood, by some
Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,

If the night was thick with coming stars,
Under some rock, listening to notes that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
Or catch their dim echoes in the distant winds.

Trust did I drink the visionary fires;
And dream not profitless those fleeting modes
Of shadowy extasies, not for this,
That they are destined to our future mind
And intellectual life; but that the soul,
Remembering not retains an obscure sense}
At possible sublimity, where to
Write growing faculties she does aspire,
With Faculties still growing feeling still
That whatever points they seize, they yet
Have something to pursue.

What now of keenly awakened the
poetic sensibilities to the glories and
beauties of Nature? What caused him
to enjoy walking and alone under the
stars? What feeling is expressed
in those things which
he said and felt? The Prelude is silent,

It merely chronicles his joy and rapture
in such scenes. When, however, we turn to
his early poems we can easily see his
descent from the preceding poets.

The "Evening Walk" and "Descriptive
Sketches" were published in 1793. Commenting
many years later on the conflict:

Add fronting the bright west gauze curtains
The darkening torches and leaves the finger line
the page; "This is feebly and imperfectly
expressed but the moment was
important in my poetical history, for I
date from it my consciousness of the
infinite variety of natural appearances,
which had hitherto eluded by the poets of
any age or century so far as I was act-
geduated with them; and I made a
resolution to supply, in some degree, the
deficiency. I could not at that time have been over fourteen years of age.
We thus find that mingled with this disinterested delight in the contemplation of nature was a youthful ambition and joy in having found an untried den.

Indeed, read almost any passage from these early poems and see how easy it is to detect his early poetical nature.

Take for example the following:

"Once man, entirely free, alone and wild,
Was blest as free for he was nature's child.
The, all power that he had disdain'd,
Walk'd more restraining and by more restrain'd
Confess'd no law but what his reason taught,
And all he wished, and wished but what he ought.
As man in his primeval form array'd
The image of his glorious fire displayed,
Even so the faithful nature guarded, here
The traces of primeval man appear;
The simple dignity no form defeat;
The eye subtilk and purly live grace;
The plan of love, of truth above the lord,
Thus took the prize, and neglect his power,

This pounds with all force, but in a manner admirable. There can be no doubt that Pope was Wordsworth's model. The effort of his balance and condensed expression is evident although it is not executed with nearly
the perfection and terseness of the
Popes's couplets. So we might select
a great number of passages in his
earlier works and recognize Pope,
Goldsmith or other predecessors as his
models.

Wordsworth published the Lyrical
Ballads in 1798, and when these are
read alone, apart from his other poems,
it is easy to understand why such a
host of derision arose against them,
as well as why they impressed so deeply
those who were not repelled by their
strangeness. In time, Wordsworth pre-
sented his personality and it was markedly
different from any that had ever been
presented & littled to. His humor was of
a strange kind, his seriousness was found
in strange places, and both were yet more
strangely intermixed. Subjects which the
public considered too vulgar and com-
mon for poetry, were treated so pathetically
and so grotesquely as to cause people to
debug at the attempt to moral their tender
feelings. There was, however, one point
in the volume, at least, in which a
fresh and beautiful theme was handled
with much force and feeling that even
the most determined critics could not
remain insensible to its presence in
English literature— The beautiful line
written at Tintern Abbey. "If all had been like this, the acknowledge-
ment of his greatness would have been immediate. It is characteristic of the
 loftiest side of Wordsworth's genius. In
it, he strove for the first time, the
verse which was to draw all men after
him.

It will be observed, however, that
both rhythm and feeling expressed are developments
from the gentle Cowper. His early ten-
dency to imitate Pope had ceased as
he realized that of all the insipid
verses, which the imitators of that
poet produced mere poetry, there was
no need to try in writing poetry at all.

Cowper, Burns and Klopstock had been
leaders in a reaction which asserted that
poetry depends on emotion and not on
polite; that it consists precisely
in those things which rigid imitators
lack. There was, however, a fire and
majesty in Wordsworth's lines for which
no code in verse in those poets.
Wordsworth's torch was kindled at Cowper's
tender light and as poetry meant to
him the expression of the core deep
and tender feelings, he rebelled a-
gainst rhetoric and unreality.

What then particularly aroused
Wordsworth in rebellion against the canons of criticism generally accepted in his time was undoubtedly the style of diction that they considered indefensible to line poetry. Wordsworth held that the indispensable feature of poetry was that its object should be to develop the mind, free it from custom, and to reveal those truths which could not be perceived without the meditation of the poet. The poet as he describes him is a man exalted, regarding more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him, and hence qualified to act as an interpreter of nature. He held that the subject of poetry should be drawn from objects and incidents of every day life, and that the language should as far as possible resemble the language of the people. This theory struck his strongly marked protest against the old poetic forms. He had heard Darwin's "Botanic Garden" ardently admired, which he knew to be without poet. He saw that the mode of poetry expressed employed by all other poets of his generation as well as Darwin was false and gaudy and in looking back at the earlier poetry of the Elegy he found the genii of the same diction in Pope
and Johnson. Instead of reasoning that the defect might spring from the natural corruption of some true principle of art, he inferred that it arose from a false idea of composition consciously adopted by the poet. And being of a combative nature, his violent dislikes led him to agree that true poetry should be composed on a system exactly opposite to the style, which he condemned.

We now turn to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, which contains his poetical theory and a defence of his views. Comparatively few at the present day have actually read and studied Wordsworth's famous Preface, although it is continually referred to as a revolutionary proclamation against the established taste of the eighteenth century. For one, who has read Wordsworth's original Preface, hundreds have read Coleridge's brilliant criticism. Now while Coleridge's criticism of his friend's theory proceeded avowedly on the assumption that Wordsworth had been rightly interpreted; yet we cannot help the feeling that it was not so treated. Although some claim that Wordsworth's Preface had little influence on poetry, yet this little, if little it is, is of
great importance and it is desirable on account of this influence, as well as the celebrity of the affair, that Wordsworth's exact position should be made clear.

Wordsworth, in the beginning of an introduction to the Preface of the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads, says: "It (that is the former edition) was published as an experiment, which I hoped might be of some use to ascertain how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement, a selection of the real language of men in all states of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure, and the quantity of pleasure, may be imparted, which a poet may reasonably endeavor to impart." He also says, in way of apology for the theory, which he knew shelter the very stated in the first edition; "Several of my friends are anxious for the success of this frame, from a belief, that if the views with which they here composed were realized, a class of poetry would be produced, which would interest mankind permanently and not unimportant in the quality and the multiplicity of its moral relations. And on this account, they have advised me to prefix a preface of defence of this theory, upon which the words are written."
If the first edition of the "Ballads" had incensed the critics, the second simply fanned their wrath into flames. There was no longer any doubt but that Wordsworth had intentionally written "The Idiot Boy," "Goody Blake and Peter Bell" in the manner in which they existed. They could no longer regard them as simple, yet flagrant mistakes, for Wordsworth himself declared that he had intended to write them just as they were and now that he should try to defend them, was beyond endurance. Nevertheless, if Wordsworth had omitted the Preface and called out about a hundred lines from the more trivial places, the new departure would have been received gladly.

Let us now direct our attention to the theory itself. Wordsworth said at the very beginning of it: "The principle object then proposed in these poems," (Epicure Balls) "was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them throughout as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men and at the same time to throw over them a certain coloring of the imagination whereby ordinary things may be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further and above all to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them blemish but not ostentatiously the
primary laws of our nature; chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. "It has generally been supposed that by the language deserted as being "really used by men," Wordsworth meant colloquial language and above all for poetical purposes the language of the rustic, and inasmuch as the vocabulary of the peasant class is limited, the thought has been derided as prosaic. But in reality Wordsworth did not mean to propose any thing so absurd, although he did say that:"

"Humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart found a better soil in which they can maintain their maturity, are less under restraint and speak a pleasanter and more emphatic language; hence in that condition of life our elementary feelings can exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequence may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated, because the manners of rural life generate from those elementary feelings and from necessary character of rural occupation and are more easily comprehended and are more durable; and lastly, because, in that condition the passions of man are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language of two thirds men has been adopted..."
(purified indeed from what appears to be its real defect, from all rational and lasting causes of dislike and disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the real objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because from their rank in society and the narrow circle of their intercourse being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions with simplicity and unadorned expression."

There can be no doubt but that this part of Wordsworth's theory as generally understood is restrained, and that it could not but be expected that it would be the recipient of much ridicule. Wordsworth did not, however, demand that all poetry should be constructed from such material as indeed in his words he rather insisted, that any learned. It was not the language of the peasant as such any more than the language of the country or philosopher as such, which seemed admirable to him; it was the permanent and passionate speech of man wherever he is found which he sought after; and in the speech of the common people Wordsworth believed there was more such stuff to be retained and less matter to be rejected as belonging to merely local or occasional usages. Still in the speech of uneducated and artificial refinement and purely no one can doubt the truth of
Wordworth's views on this phase of the subject.

However, Wordsworth may have failed to convey his precise meaning on this subject, yet it cannot be truthfully said that his practice and theory are not in agreement with his words rightly interpreted. Of me of the present day, there are few characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry more refreshing when we return to it from contemporary riddles than its simplicity and yet its entire freedom from all appearance of condescension. Wordsworth never studied the persons nor repeats the phrases of the shepherd, of the village schoolmaster, of the college matron, or of the peasant patriarchal with an air of sentiment or humorous superiority but always with genuine sympathy.

This part of Wordsworth's theory may then be regarded as being unaided only in expression in meaning. If, however, any reader will not regard it at all, he must remember, to do Wordsworth justice, that he did not propose to me rare incidents without a coloring of imagination, and that the life and the words were to be a selection metrically arranged; the selection to be dictated by the feeling to be expressed, and the feeling to be dictated by the poet's sensibility.

Coleridge understands the words of Wordsworth as purporting that the poet alike...
for poetry in general consists altogether in lan-
guage taken from the mouths of men in
real life, language which actually
constitutes the natural conversation of men un-
der the influence of natural feeling. But as in
verse these, the disposition is not natural.

First the Preface was not a statement of a
general theory of poetry but a plan with
which certain poems had been composed at
the instance of certain friends. Coleridge
appears to declare that Wordsworth meant to
take his language from the most degraded
classes, from the ignorant and untaught
laborers as it were; and even compare the
language of Wordsworth seemingly advocated
both as to thought and expression, to that of
the brute creation. Coleridge, however, does
not view Wordsworth rightly. All Wordsworth
meant by his praise of rustic language was
to point out its simplicity and not its
lack of polish and culture. Simplicity
alone was what he admired in it and
he admired it whether found in philosopher
or in a rustic. It is worth while to ob-
serve that the most effective parts of
Chaucer and
Spenser as well as
other great poets are al-
most always expressed in pure, simple,
intelligible language and it matters not whether
it is the simplicity of a Plato or a noble-

minded rustic, it is simplicity still and
is the character for which Wordsworth argued.
The wished the language to be such that not only the educated but all classes could be interested and profited by it; and surely the simplicity that can do this, so long as it is not vulgar and trivial, is a commendable feature and not a defect. Who could desire that the leader of English poetry should be full of classical allusions and rhetorical technicalities? Who would not rather read these poems, say to a pure, simple, lovely maiden such as we can see around us, with the unassuming manners of Lucy, than the most learned treatise to Philemon, the daughter of Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, and Teseus? Who is there that would rather have a speech such as that of the scenes dear to him in the language he himself would have used than to hear him praise Mt. Parnassus or the river Phasis in language above his comprehension? This is the simplicity for which Wordsworth was striving in opposition to the learned and gorgeous diction of his predecessors.

Wordsworth did not, however, sanction vulgarity or looseness of expression. He was Wordsworth himself reply to such a charge from Coleridge: "I cannot, however, be insensitive to the present outcry against the triviality and meaness of language and
thought, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical composition, and I acknowledge that this defect, where it exists, is more dismaying to the writer's character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation. From such verse the reader in this volume (Lyrical Ballads) will be found distinguished at least by one mark — difference that each of them has a 'worthy purpose.' Whether Wordsworth always succeeded in removing triviality from his poems, either by a worthy purpose or otherwise, we will discuss later.

We must now discuss this particular phase of Wordsworth's theory with a quotation from his Preface: "Wordsworth's distinction was a war with pomp and precision, and a display of the majesty of simple feelings and humble hearts."

This preference for rustic or simple language was but a part of his theory. The main thesis of his Preface was that poetry had a special language distinct from that of ordinary life or prose; in other words, that the language of passion, of fervent feeling is the same whether written in verse or prose; that it is possible and proper to write poetry without using other words than what would be found in the best prose. Speaking of his style as shown in the Lyrical
Ballads he says: "The reader will find that personification, abstract ideas, rarely occur in these volumes, and are utterly rejected as an ordinary device to elevate the style and to elevate it alone prove. X X X X X

There will always be found in these volumes little 3 what is usually called poetic diction. X X X X X 4 in a form that should be found a series 7 lines, or even a single line, in which language, through naturally arranged, and according to strict laws of meter, does not differ from that 7 verse, there is a mischance class of critics who, when they chime upon these prosaisms, de civil call them, imagine that they have made a notable discovery and exhibit on the Post as no a more ignorant 7 lie prosaism. Now these men would establish a canon 7 criterion which the reader will conclude he must utterly reject, if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes. And it would be a more easy task to prove to him that not only the language of a large portion 7 of the good verse, being the most elevated character, must properly, expect with reference to the meter, in no respect differ from that 7 good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best prose will be found to be strictly the language of
prose, when prose is well written."

Wordsworth, after making the above statement, quotes a passage from Gray, who, in all men, believed in a separate poetic diction and shows that a large part of it even differs in no respect from prose. Going further, he then makes the statement which gives so much offense to Coleridge: "It may be safely affirmed that there is no such essential difference between language of prose and rhetorical composition." Are these views correct? Surely you say the order and selection of words and construction of sentences are different. Coleridge argues that there is, as if Wordsworth had denied it; although it is most explicitly clear from the context that when he said there was no essential difference between the language of prose and poetry, he meant as regards words plain and figurative, and not the structure and order of words or as Coleridge says "the ordaince of words". Coleridge says "Words with me are ordinal," i.e., he was uttering a truism and interpreting Wordsworth's in this way. The friendly critic has no difficulty in finding that neither in his own poetry nor in any poetry is the style identical with that of prose. Although Coleridge
could not turn with piecemeal regard to any
Wordsworth with stating a truth, he thought-
lessly charged him with a greater fault,
manly stated, stating an absurdity. But
strange to say, it is the language which one
Wordsworth himself realized for he says:
"And if in what I am about to say, it
shall appear that I am like a man fighting a battle
without any
enemies, and I purpose only to remind
that whatever is the language, I hold, by
men, a practical faith in the
opinion which I am wishing to establish, it
almost unknown."

"The true question," says Coleridge,
"must be whether there are not modes of
expression, a construction and an order of
sentences which are in their fit and natural
places in a serious novel composition, but
would be disproportionate and heterogeneous
in metrical poetry: and vice versa whether
in the language of serious verse there may
not be an arrangement of words and of
sentences and stanzas and selection of (what
are called) figures of speech, both as to their
kind, their frequency and their occasion
which in a subject of equal weight, would
wreck ruses and alibis in correct and man-
ly prose. I contend that in both cases
the usefulness of each for the other pr-
Gravely will and ought to exist." Coleridge immediately after making this statement proceeds through one or two more pages to argue this view, "fighting a battle without enemies," although theribbed Wordsworth to be one; for it is impossible for anyone with such ordinary intelligence, who reads Wordsworth's Preface with care, and who grapples with his stiff and condensed exposition and interprets it with reference to the controversy in which it was incident, without feeling that he never thought of denying what Coleridge so minutely refuted against him. Such a reader is compelled to feel that Wordsworth abstained from insisting upon the difference between prose and poetry in point of arrangement only because he regarded it as a Truculence, that when he speaks of there being no essential difference between the language of prose and poetry, he was referring to the words only. His language continually implies that he fully realized the distinction between prose and poetry as emphasized by Coleridge and the wonder is how he could have been so misunderstood. He discusses at length why it is that meter adds to the reader's pleasure and develops in brief, the very theory of origin and effect of meter that Coleridge advances. "Various Chords" says he, "might be struck out without
out why, when the style is mainly and the subject has some importance, words metrically arranged will long continue to impart a pleasure to mankind." He later speaks of the "continual and regular impulses of surprise" which result from the metrical arrangement. "Wardsworth near an essay in 1770 states that the poetic order of words, while it is not necessarily the prose order, although he contended it might be and yet lose none of the charm of poetry. Wordsworth has certainly proven this idea in some of his loveliest poems— in "The Solitary Reaper" and the poem to Suck, especially. The fact that Coleridge labored most assiduously to establish against Wordsworth was that there are figures of speech which would be in place in prose and out of place in "correct" and mainly prose." But even here Coleridge was battling an imaginary enemy for Wordsworth did not drop even this in his Preface although he did not with sufficient care regard himself as \[\ldots\]
is selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and varied and abound with metaphors and figures. But no "foreign splendor" should be interwoven with what the passions naturally suggest and what the passions are of a mild and temperate. What Wordsworth then wished to establish, as is clearly seen in the simple truths that what is false and unreal, affected, bombast or unnatural in prose is not the less so in poetry. If the statements of Wordsworth in his Preface had not been sufficiently explicit, his comments on the passage from Gray should have been sufficient to show that what he really objected to was the habitual employment of certain conventional figures of speech which had dropped out of prose style and had come to be regarded as the exclusive colors of poetic diction. There are no greater errors in Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction.

The reception of the first edition of the ballads had received, together with Wordsworth's paradoxical and antagonistic nature, caused him to express these simple views in terms which partook of the nature of a polemic and which were received as such. He told the public with lofty anger and indignation but
possibly with too much aridity, that
its taste was corrupt and that if they
wished to enjoy his verse, they must
give up their unnatural proclivities of
vile... All this was protracted by litt
open proseisms of these Pictographic
Carried the war into the enemies
country with the angry retort: "Cleanse
yourself of your folly by guessing
meaningless contrivances. You are
able to enjoy my proseisms."
We must now notice briefly what in
one way is a minor feature; Wardsworth's
theory (and yet in another way is a greater
feature in his writing) namely his choice
of subject and his method of developing his
proseisms. This portion of his theory was
just 10wards to defend himself against the
charge of triviality and insigneance. It is
necessary to notice this briefly else, as Ward
worth himself said, his poetry cannot be
thoroughly enjoyed unless you follow
the course of his imagination in developing
it. Were he not to do this, his theory would
offer the relief of mere incident and
subject in his Ballads. Wardsworth
replied, all the feeling therein develope,
give importance to the action and
Situation and the action and gesticulation to the feeling." Inasmuch as Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, the poet's business is to study the manner in which my associate ideas in a state of excitement, and in proportion as the succession of ideas in his poetry obeys these natural laws of association, his feeling is real poetry. But in as much as the poet is bound to study the manner in which my associate ideas in a state of excitement, and as he can do this only in his own mind, he must study how his imagination is affected by events within his own experience. Again in as much as not every image that the excite mind conjures up is necessarily poetic, the poet must select and modify them for a particular purpose that it giving immediate pleasure. The poet's choice of what his imagination evolves being thus restricted, should be proceed in choosing his subject and incident. Wordsworth asserted, that in as much as "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility, the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility is dis-appears and the emotion,kindred to that which was before the subject com
temptation is gradually produced and does itself actually exist in the mind."

The different elements in this "kindred" feeling of "emotion" and the original one
is as I understand from the context
that from the later the personal elements
are taken out. We might call it and all feeling
that are not pleasingable, has been removed
by an unconscious process.

These facts concerning the evolution
of Wordsworth's poems explain the strength
as well as the imperfections of Wordsworth's
poetry. He wrote chiefly for himself and
without much regard to the effect to
be produced on his readers. When his feel-
ings were satisfied by the work of his indig-
nation, he had little solicitude about com-
municating the same satisfaction to others.

In as much as his life was that of a sol-
itary student moving within a narrow circle
of interests, it cannot be expected that all
his interests should interest everyone; if this, he was aware but it did not in-
fluence his practice for he says: "I am
sensible that my associations must have
some time been particular instead of gen-
eral, and that consequently, giving to
things a false importance. I shan't con-
tinue to work upon unworthy subjects
hence I have no doubt that in
some instances feelings even if the
Ludicrous, may be given to my readers by expressions which appeared to me tedious and unnatural.

Having discussed the theory of Wordsworth, it now remains for us to observe the workings of the theory in his poems. It is necessary to remark, at once, however, that from a very superficial study of the theory itself, and from a very much more thorough study of Coleridge's brilliant criticism, most students of poetry usually charge the poet with a great inconsistency between his theory and his practice. Believing that the interpretation of Wordsworth's theory which I have given is more in accordance with his views than the majority of such interpretations, I shall take the stand that Wordsworth in most of the main, at least, is consistent in practice with his theory, and that many of the faults found in the lyrical ballads are not attributable to his theory so much as to his youthfulness.

Among the effects of his youthfulness, I would name the often mistaken judgment in determining important incidents, too great an indulgence and exuberance to conventionality, at times too great a delight in mischievous, and too conscious a view of his
our duty as a part of reforming the public taste. As you say truly, Canto and Sheik wrote their work before the age of Wordsworth was when the lyrical Ballads appeared. All true enough, but neither had a great philosophy of the world. They wrote music: Wordsworth was to be a philosopher and his philosophy was forming itself into a grand whole during the first thirty years of his life.

If I have rightly interpreted Wordsworth's theory of art not but say that his practice was in harmony with it, very seldom do we find a poem which is not simple both in thought, language and expression. "Sebottaea," which is perhaps the farthest removed from his theory, yet contains a simplicity of feeling and expression. We can discover that none of conventional forms or figurative language used simply to enable the production to be called a poem. These figures and forms, he used, were a demand of his own emotions not of the critics of the age. Indeed, that his view is correct is shown by the fact that those of his poems which are most appreciated, conform most exactly to his theory rightly in...
interpret. I take the poems, which reveal "Lucy"—she of whom Nature would make a lady of her own—the little girl among intrusive ways beside the springs of life—the most refined, yet the most simple of all poetry.

Whether she was a real person or only an imagination, no one can tell; but that the little casket of gems in which her gentle name is inscribed is as pure and divine as the plans themselves even to Mr. Alcott's can say. Here the poet purely arrives at his aim of producing the highest effect by the simplest means. I am reading it, I am filled with a penetrating tenderness and either of hope or passion for she is dead before me so much as here.

By the side of "Lucy" stands "Matthew"—the schoolmaster whose name on a village tablet calls forth the poet's tenderest exclamation:

"Those cool of God's holy earthy mould:
Those happy feet: and can it be
That those two words—glittering gold
Is all that must recall "Matthew"?"

"The April Morning" and "The Fountain" are so beautiful and simple that the mere thought of them is like a strain of music. The suggestion of a noble
human creation, "A man of Wilt," one whose very tears were like the light of the dew of gladness" yet by whom the "still and serious thought" was felt with such profound intensity that no one else in so short a time could have given. If Wordsworth had written not more, he alone would have insured him immortality.

Indeed as Wordsworth insinuated, so simple was the motive that unless the poet taken by inspiration was deeply moved, the thought would be caught up with it and translated as the himself was, you are left to feel that there is no much to do about me. As an instance of this, I could cite that most perfect poem, "The Solitary Reaper" - a simple outpouring thought - a sublime simple emotion in beautiful language. Some say he never thought of his poetry in it that be that as it may, no poem he wrote is more in harmony with it. I call his great poem the "Ade to Duty." Observe what a splendor of imagination he invests in it. To what height of fancy does he lift the simple feeling? These poems as well as many others are written in exact conformance to his
I do not believe, however, that he tried to harmonize them to his theory but rather that they are the unconscious workings of the theory. When he tried to make the poems conform to the letter of his theory, he had such poems as “Peter Bell,” “Harry Gill,” and “Simon Lee.” Although these poems are generally selected as illustrating his theory, they do not; they are rather the extreme of a not yet fully developed theory and of a mistaken judgment.

It is evident that Wordsworth was at first only in part conscious of his deeper instinctive tendencies in writing the lyrical ballads. It is evident that he only gradually discovered his full purpose. For he the first indeed, he had a crude notion of this theory. Lyric diction but the expression of this theory was modified as he devised his own practice as is shown by the change in the different editions of the Preface to the lyrical ballads.

There can be no doubt but that to begin a poem like “We are Seven” as it began in the first edition, “A little Child” dear mother time” adds triviality; again there can be no doubt but that the speech of a lower class household but like one of those, which women use to
Wash their clothes," is ridiculous but Wordsworth did not then realize the fact or he would have applied this one instance for he opposes both the trivial and the ridiculous in his theory. That the message was in reality purposely introduced instead of accidentally, I cannot believe. The same is true of "Idiot Boy," "Gusty Blope," and "Harry Gill." His theory in these poems was correct but in his attempt to observe it he unconsciously carried it to the extreme.

In his attempt in "Idiot Boy" to demonstrate that the feeling of Betty Fry for her lost boy were as deep and

tragical as if as worthy of elevation as that of a queen, he did realize that the choice of the colloquial familiarity of treatment produced a peculiarity rather than a permanent meaning and that the absolute insignificance of the incident and the attempt to give grace and dignity to the story destroyed completely its effect as an exposition of nature.

After a complete study of Wordsworth's poetical theory, we are led to believe that he gradually generally conformed to this theory when rightly understood and that these poems, which have
were generally regarded as conforming to his theory, did not; but rather are mistaken judgments and unconscious extremes, while the rest of his poems agree with his theory and dictate him as the most important literary influence of the age.
Wordsworth's Poetical Theory.

C. E. Wallace

Graduating Thesis

1878