INTRODUCTION

(i) William Wordsworth: His Life and Work

(ii) The Spirit of the Age: (a) Social Milieu (b) Literary Milieu

Introductory chapter is designed to discuss William Wordsworth, the poet and his major works along with social and literary ethos of the age. It also attempts to describe prevailing social and literary tendencies and ethos and traces the influences which played a vital role in making up the mind of the creative artist in the long course of his life. To achieve this end, the chapter is divided into two sections the first section presents an introduction to the poet and his works and the second section deals with the spirit of the age i.e. socio-cultural and literary milieu.

William Wordsworth, a pioneer of Romanticism (1770-1850) in English poetry ranks as one of the greatest lyric poets in the history of English literature. He was born on April 7, 1770, in Cockermouth, Cumberland, a small quiet market town in northwest England, on the edge of the Lake District. From the very beginning, he was associated with that region which he loved more than any other, and except for brief sojourns in Britain, Germany, and Italy, he never left his beloved Lake Country. He died in 1850 and was buried at Grasmere, Westmoreland, about twenty-five miles from his birthplace. His personal history was uneventful. He was born one of five children to a modest land lawyer. The poet was one year elder to his sister, Dorothy. She never married as she wanted to be the poet’s lifelong companion and informal biographer. Since, he had a self-stimulus personality and often showed such a violent temper that his mother was worried about his bright career and the fortunes of her other issues.
As for early education, after the death of his mother in 1779, Wordsworth and his elder brother were sent to the small, grammar school at Hawkshead, near Windermere for the study point of view. However, he was not an outstanding student, but among his more rustic class fellows, he seemed to have shone somewhat special. He read all Fielding’s works, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Gulliver’s Travels, The Tale of a Tub, etc. “However, it was not from books, but from his early associations with Nature that he was to find his real inspiration”.1 He lodged and boarded with a childless landlady, who seemed to have come in many ways to replace his lost mother in his affections. For years together, he regarded her cottage as home and took it a welcome relief from the establishments of his stern relatives. His father died in 1783, and the young poet became an orphan at thirteen. Before his adieu from this world, his father named his own brother and his wife's elder brother as joint guardians of the children, and it was to the latter that the four orphaned boys were sent. Unfortunately, their uncle turned hostile and insensitive toward them, never ceased to remind them of their poverty, and seemed even to have instigated the servants to neglect and abuse his charges. Thus the poet seems to have been particularly disliked by master and servant alike. As the poet grew older, he decided that he might be a lawyer. Accordingly, in October 1787, he left his uncle's home in Penrith and went to attend St. John's College, Cambridge. His apparent early enthusiasm for Cambridge was not long in turning to apathy. He found teachers and students shallow and the course of study insignificant. He openly proclaimed that he could not stand the regimentation .He did get entry to the circles of the gentry and intelligentsia at Cambridge. None of them accepted him in their company due to his poverty. During his vacations, he spent his time visiting his former landlady at Hawkshead and, with his sister Dorothy, covering some of Derbyshire and Yorkshire on foot. He and a schoolmate left on a three-month walking tour through France and on into the
Alps and got as far as Lakes Maggiore and Como. Here, he gathered the impressions which were to fix in his first volume of poems.

Wordsworth completed his graduation degree in 1791 and soon after made a visit to London. After a year of postgraduate work, he decided to go to France, where he desired to learn more of the language and customs of France with the intention to be a tutor. He stayed only four days in Paris before he moved on to Orléans to live among the natives. He shared lodgings with several members of the cavalry and probably through them was introduced to Paul Vallon, a clerk, and then to the latter's sister, Marie Anne ("Annette"). She was nearly four years older than the poet. Both were from different working fields, as she was a royalist and catholic and the poet was a self-styled ‘democrat’ and non-practicing protestant but even then the seed of love seems to have levelled all things. When she returned to her family home at Blois, farther South along the Loire, the poet went with her. In the spring, she announced that she was going to have a baby and that the poet was his father. In the meantime, he had been planning to return to England that spring (1792) to engage in some kind of literary activity or finally to take orders. The natural thing would have been for the two young people to marry, and from all indications, they were perfectly willing. The poet acknowledged the baby — a girl, Caroline — as his own at her baptism, but there were serious parental objections to nuptials. At Orleans and Blois, poet was plunged into the midst of the intrigue that surrounded the French Revolution (1789-99). At first, he was completely indifferent to the Revolution and its ideals. Gradually, however, he began to take himself as a patriot and spoke up for the revolutionary cause. While at Blois, he had the good fortune to meet Michael Beaupuy, a captain, whom he met possibly through the local revolutionary club which the young Englishman had just
joined. No other man except Samuel Taylor Coleridge had a great influence on Wordsworth.

On January 21, 1793, when King Louis XVI, was beheaded, Wordsworth was back in England. Though he was compelled to defend the French Reign of Terror outwardly, gradually his internal strong beliefs were altering, and he underwent a serious spiritual malaise, during which he seemed to be finally and completely without desire or design. As he describes in The Prelude X:

Oh, pity and shame! With those confederate
Powers!
Not in my single self alone I found,
But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
Change and subversion from that hour. (The Prelude, 265-68) 2

Now, none of his near and dear was with him; they took him an anarchist, as well as a disbeliever and an idler. His first volume of poems was commendable with the critics, when it came into notice. Nevertheless, None except Coleridge was struck by his early endeavors. In October 1793, Wordsworth tried once more to return to Paris. He found Blois cut off from Paris and once again returned to England. For years after, he had nightmares about what he had seen of the terrified panorama of the French Revolution. The poet and Dorothy got one of their most ardent wishes of living together fulfilled in September of 1795, that of living together when they let a house at Racedown, in Dorset, in southwest England. Wordsworth and Coleridge met in Bristol late in 1795 and corresponded thereafter. They did not become close friends until 1797. In collaboration, they planned a revolutionary volume with the intention that would change the course of English literature. The Lyrical Ballads came into light on September 1, 1798. The volume of Lyrical Ballads
contained several poems which have been justly blamed for triviality. It ended with Tintern Abbey which shows Wordsworth understanding what mattered most in himself. “It is not easy to assess Wordsworth’s ballads. They were aggressively and consciously modernistic, and they had the merits and some of them the still greater demerits of most aggressively and consciously modernistic poetry.” Initially, it was slow to win literary favour but gradually acquired its permanent significance as the turning point in English poetry. In 1802, the poet got married with his childhood friend, Mary Hutchinson. She bore him six children. In 1798, Wordsworth along with his sister and Coleridge moved to Germany. Coleridge moved to Ratzeburg while Wordsworth preferred to stay at Goslar. Here he devoted his time to learn German language from books and dictionaries and he wrote some of his best poems like ‘Ruth’, ‘Nutting’, ‘The poet’s Epitaph’, and the Lucy Poems’. Here he planned and began The Prelude. Coleridge’s absence, the isolation of his daily life in the little German city, the presence of Dorothy, herself a link with his earliest days, lack of books and outside interests, all alike combined to make his mind a more than usually clear mirror of his own experience.

Thus, Wordsworth’s life, as it is generally supposed to be, was full of ups and downs. In 1812, his two children died within a gap of few months. The first collected edition of his poems appeared in 1815; followed by five editions till 1850. A request enabled him to indulge his passion for travel, and he visited Europe. In 1829, His sister, Dorothy, who was highly-strung and began to be mentally ill; in 1835, she went completely mad. The later years of his career were peaceful. He had been provided a job in the civil service in 1813 and thereafter took the large house called Rydal Mount, near Grasmere, where he was to live the rest of his life. He diverted his attention toward conservatism from the very moment of Napoleon's rise to power, and later he vociferously
opposed many of the beneficial liberal measures of the time. He received
honorary degrees from Durham (1838) and Oxford (1839). In 1842, he resigned
his civil post and was awarded a pension. In the consecutive year, he was
appointed Poet Laureate, on the death of Southey. At the end of his life, he
earned much fame. The critics were stilled by his laureateship, and his verse
became quite popular with the burgeoning middle class. It was very fashionable
among the early Victorians to gather for group study of Wordsworth's poetry.
In 1850, the death of his beloved daughter Dora brought a depression from
which he could never recover. In the same year on April, 23, he took his last
breath.

William Wordsworth was a voluminous writer. His poetic span covers a
period of more than sixty years. So far as the bulk of poetry is concerned, few
can challenge comparison with him. He continued to write till the very end of
his life. His best poetry was produced during the decade 1797-1807. It has
been customary to divide Wordsworth’s poetic career into different parts,
accordingly as his powers were at their height or declining or totally wanting.
Herbert Read divides his period of creative activity into the following four
parts:

(i) The Early period:
This period starts before 1791. The best known poems of the period are the
‘Descriptive Sketches’ and ‘Evening Walk’.

(ii) The Period of Gloom: The second period is characterized as the period of
gloom between 1792 and 1797. In this period, his feeling of remorse and his
gloom find expression in the unsuccessful tragedy, The Borderer, Guilt and
Sorrow’ and ‘The Ruined Cottage’. The last mentioned poem later incorporated
into The Expression.
(iii) The Glorious Decade:

The glorious decade falls from 1797 to 1807, the decade in which the poet’s powers were at their zenith and in which he produced his best works. The Lyrical Ballads contained many admirable pieces, such as ‘Lines written in Early Spring’ Michael’, ‘Fountain’, etc, and ending with the Lines written Above Tintern Abbey’. To be more specific, the poet is credited with

1. Peter Bell’
2. ‘Lucy Poems’, ‘Nutting’ and ‘Ruth’
3. The Prelude or the account of the growth of a poet’s mind, commenced in 1799 and completed in 1805, though published only after his death in 1850. It runs into fourteen books and has universal significance and appeal.
4. ‘The Immortality Ode’ began in 1802 on the eve of his happy marriage and completed in 1805.
6. The Excursion, began about the year 1802 and published in 1814. It runs into nine books.
7. The Sonnets. Wordsworth was inspired to write sonnets on hearing the sonnets of Milton read out to him in 1801. He continued to write sonnets up to the end of his days and left behind him more than 500 pieces. The best of his sonnets are: ‘Sonnet on the Sonnet’, ‘Milton’, ‘Composed

(iv) The Period of Decline:

The period from 1808 to 1850 is poet’s period of decline. The old fire was gone but Wordsworth continued to write. To this period belong such pieces as: ‘Laodameia’, ‘Ecclesiastical Sketches’, ‘Sonnet on the Punishment of Death’, ‘Lines Written on the Death of Charles Lamb, ‘Effusion on the Death of James Hogg’, etc.

Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote Lyrical Ballads in collaboration with each other and got its first publication in 1798 which heralded an era of English Romantic Movement in literature. Most of the poems in the 1798 edition were written by Wordsworth, with Coleridge collaborating only four poems to the collection. His second edition came into existence in 1800, in which the poet included additional poems and a preface elaborating the pair’s avowed poetical principles. The Preface falls into two parts; in the first part he expands his treatment to poetry in general to show that the lyrical ballad did fall within the genus of poetry, and to prove, therefore, that it was a valid form of poetry. Another edition came into light in 1802 in which poet included an appendix titled Poetic Diction in which he expanded the ideas set forth in the Preface. Wordsworth, it appears, was never willing to play the role of a critic. He perhaps would never have written the Preface if he had not been urged to write it by his friend Coleridge, with whom he had worked out the theory of the Lyrical Ballads and collaborated in the composition of them.

Marjorie Latta Barstow, in her Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetic Diction, has a reference to a manuscript in the possession of Mr. T. Norton Longman in which a contemporary of Wordsworth records that the Preface was given to Coleridge after it was completed and corrected by him. Yet Coleridge, in 1817,
when he came to treat Wordsworth’s poetry and poetic theory, said that on certain points he did not agree with the theory of the Preface; he proceeds not only to criticize the theory, but also Wordsworth’s poetic composition, claiming quite pedantically that the theory was not carried out in the greater part of his poetry. Wordsworth and Coleridge strived for converting what they considered the priggish and complicated forms of 18th century English poetry. They brought poetry within the approach of the common men by drafting the verses in which using the regional language often used by common men. Further both put force on the use of living voice that the poor use to express their reality. Using this language also asserts the universality of human emotions. Even the title of the collection recalls rustic forms of art - the word "lyrical" links the poems with the ancient rustic bards and lends an air of spontaneity, while "ballads" are an oral mode of storytelling used by the common people. In the 'Advertisement' included in the 1798 edition, poet explained his poetical concept.

A series of poems is to be regarded as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to judge how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purpose of poetic pleasure. If the experiment with vernacular language was not enough for departure from the norm, the focus on simple, uneducated country people as the subject of poetry was a signal shift to modern literature. One of the main themes of "Lyrical Ballads" is the return to the original state of nature, in which people led a purer and more innocent existence. Wordsworth subscribed to Rousseau's belief that humanity was essentially good but was corrupted by the influence of society. This may be linked with the sentiments spreading through Europe just prior to the French Revolution. It taught the poet that every human being was intrinsically great, and capable of infinite development. He would not give up
his hopes for man till he had tested human nature in its elements. *The Daffodils* is a very remarkable lyric poem. It was inspired by an event on April 15, 1802, in which poet and his sister, Dorothy, came across a "long belt" of daffodils. Written at some time between 1804 and 1807 (in 1804 on poet's own account), it was first published in 1807 in *Poems in Two Volumes*, and a revised version was published in 1815. The inspiration for the poem came from a walk he took with his sister Dorothy around Glencoyne Bay, *Ullswater*, in the Lake District. Poet would draw on this to compose "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" in 1804. It was inspired by Dorothy's journal entry describing the walk.

In 1804, William Wordsworth completed *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*’ and got its publication in Two Volumes in 1807. In 1802, with the first four stanzas written among a series of poems were composed about childhood. The first part of the poem was completed on 27th 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 seven 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*. In 1802, poems written by Wordsworth are based on his youth. The poet wrote these poems, inspired by his conversations with his sister, Dorothy, whom he was living with in the Lake District at the time. The poems, from *The Butterfly* ending *To the Cuckoo*, were all based on Wordsworth's recalling both the sensory and emotional experience of his childhood. From *To the Cuckoo*, he moved onto *The Rainbow*, both written on 26 March 1802, and then on to *Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. As he moves further from poem to poem, the
question arises in his mind and he also realizes that as a child, he once was able to see and observe an immortal presence within nature but as he is growing older, his divine and immortal power is fading away except in the few moments he was able to meditate on experiences found in poems like *To the Cuckoo*. While sitting at breakfast on March, 27, he began to compose the ode. He was able to write four stanzas that put forth the question about the faded image and ended, "Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

*Ode to Duty’* (1807) is a matchless poem of Wordsworth, in which it has been revealed that poet has a great concern with moral and ethical values and devotion to duty and integrity. It is an appeal to the principle of morality for guidance and support. In fact it is the ‘voice of God’ and the ‘Light of Truth’. It is the victory and law which overcomes empty terrors that are overawe. Indeed, ‘Duty, ‘the stern voice of God’ that sets us all free from all the vain temptations and calms the weary strife of frail humanity. It represents that as stern law giver, Duty does wear the most benignant grace of God. None of us is able to know anything as fair as the smile on Duty’s face. He pleads to duty to give unto him the spirit of self -sacrifice and the confidence of reason. In the light of truth, he prefers to live like the bondman of duty. While continuing to recognize the worth and beauty of the creed of joy and love, he feels that there must be the mandate of the stern power which preserves the stars in their courses and lays the law of sacrifice and self-restraint upon the soul of the individual. The voice of duty is stern but it is divinely beautiful,

‘*Nor know we anything so fair*  

*As is the smile upon thy face’* (43-44) 4

The mood and temper of the “Ode to Duty” is characteristic of much of Wordsworth's later work. According to poet's own statement, the “Ode to Duty” was modeled on *Thomas Gray's “Hymn to Adversity,”* which in turn
was imitated from *Horace's* "Ode to Fortune." The stanza is identical with that used by Gray, and there are resemblances in idea and phraseology.

‘The Solitary Reaper’ (1807) is one of the most famous poems of Wordsworth. The languages used by the reaper in song are inconceivable to the speaker; due to this his attention is free to focus on the tone, expressive beauty, and the blissful mood it creates in him. The poem functions to 'praise the beauty of music and its fluid expressive beauty, the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that Wordsworth identified at the heart of poetry. The poem chiefly dissertates the theme of poetry. Songs are poetry too, and that is apparent to Wordsworth. We can observe that he sees the girl as a poet because of the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). In it, poet emphasized that poetry should not count on artificial diction for its effort. Rather, it should be drafted in more ordinary language and simpler form so that it can be in the access of all classes of society and they might appreciate it. "The Solitary Reaper" exemplifies this belief. It is one of the most famous "solitaries" of Wordsworth. In it, solitary characters have been used to show how they are one with nature (See 'Old Man Travelling', 'There Was A Boy' and 'Nutting'), and this solitary is no different. The girl has been compared to nightingales and cuckoo birds in a positive light, as if, she is one of them, which shows her natural side. The "vale profound/ Is overflowing with the sound", 6 and this also shows that she and nature are sympathetic to each other. Other themes touched on are those of loss- "some natural sorrow, loss or pain", that has been, and may be again” 7 and imagination - the song takes Wordsworth to the corners of the world, from "Arabian sands" to the "farthest Hebrides". In the sonnet ‘The World Is Too Much with Us’ poet slates the world of the First Industrial Revolution for being absorbed in materialism and distancing itself from nature.
Little we see in nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! (3-4) 5

Composed in 1802, the poem was first published in Poems, In Two Volumes (1807). Like most Italian sonnets, its 14 lines are written in iambic pentameter. In the early 19th century, poet wrote several sonnets blasting what he perceived as the decadent material cynicism of the time. The sonnet is one of those works. It reflects his view that humanity must keep in touch with nature so that they can get progress spiritually. The rhyme scheme of this poem is abbaabba cdcdcd. This Italian sonnet uses the last six lines (sestet) to answer the first eight lines (octave). The first eight lines (octave) are the malady and the next six (sestet) is the remedy.

The Excursion: Being a portion of The Recluse, a poem is a long poem. It was first published in 1814. It was intended to be the second part of The Recluse, an unfinished larger work that was also meant to include The Prelude, Wordsworth's other long poem, which was eventually published posthumously. The exact dates of its composition are unknown, but the first manuscript generally dates as either September 1806 or December 1809. The poem is arranged into nine books: "The Wanderer"; "The Solitary"; "Despondency"; "Despondency Corrected"; "The Pastor"; "The Churchyard Among the Mountains"; "The Churchyard Among the Mountains, continued"; "The Parsonage"; "Discourse of the Wanderer, &c.". The first and second book introduces the characters of the Wanderer and the Solitary, respectively. The third and fourth book consists of a conversation between the Wanderer and the Solitary regarding the truth of Religion and the virtue of Mankind. The fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth book introduce the character of the Pastor and consist largely of the Pastor explaining the life stories of many of the townspeople who lie buried in the country-churchyard. In the final two books, all of the above
said characters travelling mentioned earlier to the Parsonage are introduced to the family of the Pastor, and eventually part ways.

_The Prelude_ is an autobiographical epic poem in blank verse intended as the introduction to the more philosophical _Recluse_, which poet never finished; _The Prelude_ is an extremely centered on his personal life. He began 'The Prelude in 1798 at the age of 28 and continued to work on it throughout his life. _It_ was eventually published posthumously in 1850 by Wordsworth's wife, Mary Wordsworth. He never gave it a title; he called it the "Poem (title not yet fixed upon) to Coleridge" and in his letters to Dorothy, Wordsworth referred to it as "the poem on the growth of my own mind." The poem was unknown to the general public until published three months after Wordsworth's death in 1850, its final name given to it by his widow Mary. The poem has been referred to as the first _psychological epic_.

There are three versions of the poem: The 1799 _Prelude_, called the _Two-Part Prelude_, composed 1798-99, containing the first two parts of the later poem. The 1805 _Prelude_, was found and printed by. Ernest de Sélincourt in 1926, in 13 books. The 1850 _Prelude_, published shortly after Wordsworth's death, is in 14 books. _The Prelude_ was the product of a lifetime: for the last segment of his life, Wordsworth had been "polishing the style and qualifying some of its radical statements about the divine sufficiency of the human mind in its communion with nature".6The work is a poetic reflection on Wordsworth's own sense of his poetic vocation as it developed over the course of his career. But its focus and mood present a sharp fundamental fall away from the neoclassical and into the Romantic. While Milton in Paradise Lost rewrites God's creation and The Fall of Man to "justify the ways of God to man", the poet chooses his own mind and imagination as a subject worthy of epic.
(ii) The Spirit of the Age:

(a) The Social Milieu

The age of Wordsworth was an age of revolution in the field of poetry as well as in that of politics. In both these fields the age had started expressing its impatience of set provenance and traditions, the tyranny of rules and the bondage of traditions. From the French Revolution, the era realized a conscience of revolt asserting the dignity of the individual spirit and hollowness of the time-honored traditions which kept it in check. Thus both in the political and the poetic fields, the age learnt a lesson from the Revolution: the necessity of liberation-in the political field, from tyranny and social persecution; and in the poetic, from the bondage of law and authority. In other words, The French Revolution exerted a democratizing influence, both on politics and poetry.

Being inspired by the French Revolution, poets and politicians alike were poised for an attack on old, time-trusted values. It was only here and there that some conservative critics stuck to their genius and eyed all zeal for change and liberation with suspicion and distrust. Thus, for instance, Lord Jeffrey wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* that Poetry had something common with religion in that its standards had been fixed long ago by certain inspired writers whose authority it would be ever unlawful to call in question.

But such a conception of things did not represent the dominant spirit of the age which had come under the liberating influence of the French Revolution. It is perhaps quite relevant to point out here the idiocy of the belief that the new literary and political tendencies, which had a common origin and were almost contemporary with each other, always influenced a given person equally, strongly, that a person could not be a revolutionary in politics without being a revolutionary in literature, and *vice versa*. The talent of poetry must
work out its own salvation in man. Through laws and precept, it cannot be matured. But it can be developed by sensation and watchfulness in itself. Here, the poet has emphasized that without being engaged in literature of a certain country; no one can master the field of politics. We are not, of course, to imagine that the political and the literary movement necessarily met in the same person or that a man could not be an adherent to the one without sympathizing with the other.

For Wordsworth’s life, utilitarian ethics and political freedom were important concern. Wordsworth’s hopes, hopes in the people rather than in their leaders, took on a new lease of life, centered only by bitter scorn and indignation against the English political leaders who insisted on fighting what seemed the inevitable course of nature and justice. He writes in The Prelude:

“And in this way I wrought upon myself,
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,
To the whole city, ‘sleep no more’. (The Prelude, X, 85-87) 7

Scott, for example, was a romantic, but a Tory. Hazlitt, on the contrary, was a chartist in politics but was pleased to call himself an “aristocrat” in literature. Keats did not bother about the French Revolution, or even politics, at all. Wordsworth and Coleridge, the two real pioneers of the Romantic Movement in England, started as radicals and ended as tenacious Tories. It is wrong to take the French Revolution as a sudden coup unrelated to what had gone before it. In fact, the seeds of the Revolution had been sown long before they germinated in 1789. We can distinguish three clear phases of the French Revolution, which according to Compton-Rickett, are as follows:
The Doctrinaire phase—the age of Rousseau;
The Political phase—the age of Robespierre and Danton;
The Military phase—the age of Napoleon.”

All these three phases considerably influenced the Romantic Movement in England. Rousseau dominated the doctrinaire phase of the French Revolution. He brought about an intellectual and literary revolution in England by his teachings and philosophic views. He was, fundamentally regarded, a naturalist who gave the slogan “Return to Nature.” He revealed his faith in the simplicities of life and his incertitude of the sophistication of civilization which, according to him, had been curbing the natural (and good) man. He revived the cult of the “noble savage” untainted by the so-called culture. Social institutions were all reproved by him as so many chains. He raised his powerful voice against social and political tyranny and exhorted the downtrodden people to rise for liberation from virtual slavery and almost hereditary poverty imposed upon them by an unnatural political system which benefitted only a few. Rousseau’s primitivism, sentimentalism, and individualism had their impact on English thought and literature. In France, they prepared the climate for the Revolution. In the opinion of Legouis, Wordsworth is intellectually ‘a son of Rousseau’. Likewise, Harper also contends that Rousseau’s works have traces of influence on Wordsworth’s poetry.

A glimpse of Rousseau’s sentimental belief in the essential goodness of natural man and the significance of simplicity and even ignorance found a ready echo in Blake and, later, in Wordsworth and Coleridge. The affection of nature and the simplicities of village life and gullible folk found ample expression in their poetic works. Wordsworth’s devotion of nature was partly due to Rousseau’s influence. Rousseau’s intellectual influence touched first Godwin and, then through him, Shelley. Godwin in Political Justice embodied
a considerable part of Rousseauistic thought. Like him he raised his voice for justice and equality and expressed his belief in the essential goodness of man. Hazlitt in his essay ‘Spirit of Age’ writes that no work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated Enquiry concerning Political Justice. Throughout The Prelude, Godwin is nowhere mentioned by name, yet there are several lines, which indicate Godwin’s influence:

**With a resolute mastery shaking off**
**Infirmities of nature, time and place**
**Build social upon personal liberty. (The Prelude, B. XI, 238-40) 8**

With the fall of the Bastille, the political phase of the Revolution, started and sent a wave of thrill to each young heart in Europe. Wordsworth became crazy for joy, and along with him, Southey and Coleridge caught the general contagion. All of them expressed themselves in pulsating words. The emergence of Napoleon and reign of terror dashed the exultation of the romantic poets to pieces. Due to this, such excitement and fervor were not destined to continue for long. The beginning of the war between France and England completed their disillusionment, and Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, who had started as wild radicals, ended as well-domesticated Tories. The latter romantics dubbed them as renegades who had let down the cause of the Revolution. Wordsworth, in particular, had to suffer much criticism down to the days of Robert Browning who wrote a derogatory remark on him describing him as “the lost leader.” The Lyrical Ballads is the best output of this influence and the epoch-making work in collaboration with Coleridge. In this reference Palgrave has stated that: “The *Lyrical Ballads* (1978) was a trumpet that heralded the dawn of a new era by making the prophecy that poetry, an unlimited and illimitable art of expressing man’s inner and deep-
seated joys and sorrows would not be fettered by the narrow and rigid bonds of artificial conventions and make-believe formalism.”9 He revisited the land of his imagination in 1790 and 1791. But, with the Reign of Terror and the emergence of Napoleon, his youthful fervor came to an end. This rude shock kindled in him the affection towards nature. Thus Wordsworth had to face mental and spiritual crises, and though he recovered himself finally yet he could not remove the scar marked on him by the revolution. Though he ultimately became a Tory, yet he continued believing in the dignity of man, and consequently, he applied his poetic talent to the commonest objects and the lowest people. It is a praiseworthy thing that the best poetic work of Wordsworth got its final shape during the period of his revolutionary fervor.

The influence of the French Revolution on Coleridge and Southey was of the same thing as in the case of poet’s youthful opulence at the rising of the masses ending in disillusion and disappointment with the Reign of Terror. But after this disappointment, Wordsworth and Coleridge ensued different track in search of an anodyne. Whereas Wordsworth found mollification in the lap of Nature, Coleridge sought to propitiate his discontent with abstract philosophy and intellectual idealism. Failing to receive the joy and fervor from Nature which he desired, Coleridge took interest in metaphysics and claimed his almost full attention.

When Shelley began to use his pen in the field of writing, the French Revolution had already become, a historical incident. However, the glimpse of the Revolution can vigorously be seen in his poetry. After his peculiar way he overlooked physical realities, and was attracted by abstractions only. Compton-Rickett states in this regard:

“Ideas inspired him, not episodes; so he drank in the doctrines of Godwin, and ignored the tragic perplexities of the actual situation.”10 In all his
distinguished poetical works such as *The Revolt of Islam*, *Queen Mab*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and the incomparable *Ode to the West Wind*, breathes a sentience of revolution and impatient of all curbs and keenly desirous of the liberation of man from all kinds of fetters-political, social, and even moral. In hierarchy of values, Shelly chose love and liberty in the form of two deities, and in his fervor of both he comes very near the Rousseauistic sect. The French Revolution could not get success in the implementation of its three battle cry “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.” But Shelley always speculated ahead a real Revolution which would decontaminate all wrongs once and for all. Change in the interest of the generation in the middle Ages was one of the hallmarks of the Romantic Movement in England, as in the rest of Europe. The romantics criticized of intellectualism, artificial civilization, and harsh vapid reality and a desire to get rid of them, they sought decampment into regions and states of beings where they could be away from that environment. It is this love of the remote, the strange, and the mysterious which induced Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and Scott in the Middle Ages.
Neoclassical literature was written between 1660 and 1798. This time period is broken down into three parts: the Restoration period, the Augustan period, and the Age of Johnson. Writers of the Neoclassical period tried to imitate the style of the Romans and Greeks. Thus the combination of the terms 'neo,' which means 'new,' and 'classical,' as it was in the days of the Roman and Greek classics. This was also the era of The Enlightenment, which emphasized logic and reason. It was preceded by The Renaissance and followed by the Romantic era. In fact, the Neoclassical period ended in 1798 with Wordsworth’s publication of the Romantic 'Lyrical Ballads'.

Romanticism is generally described as anti-classicism and classicism is defined as anti-romanticism. Therefore, understanding the Neoclassical era helps us better understand its literature. This was a time of comfort in England. People would meet at coffee houses to chat about politics, among other topics, and sometimes drink a new, warm beverage made of chocolate. It was also the beginning of the British tradition of drinking afternoon tea. It was the starting point of the middle class and because of that, more people were literate. People were much interested in appearances, but not necessarily in being genuine. Men and women commonly wore wigs, and being clever and witty was in vogue. Having good manners and doing the right thing, particularly in public, was essential. It was a time, of British political upheaval also as eight monarchs took the throne.

Neoclassical literature is characterized by order, accuracy, and structure. In direct opposition to Renaissance attitudes, where man was seen as basically good, the neoclassical writers portrayed him as inherently flawed. They emphasized restraint, self-control, and common sense. This was a time when conservatism flourished in both politics and literature. It saw the birth of a new
literary movement: Neoclassicism or Rationalism. This movement was greatly influenced by the ideas of John Locke and Isaac Newton. The impact of Newton is clearly seen in The Epitaph written by Alexander Pope: “Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in night; God said, ‘Let Newton be! ‘And all was light’.

In his *Principia Mathematica* the scientist showed that the universe was governed by mechanical principles and exact laws rather than by divine ones as it was believed before. He left little place for God and we may say that he destroyed the traditional religious view of the world making God subject to the laws of science. Newton was elected President of the *Royal Society*, an association of learned man who wanted to promote scientific studies and to try new methods of experiment. Thanks to the research, new discoveries that religion seemed unable to explain, were made and *Science* became the new authority. It was believed that science and reason would have improved man’s condition turning him into a social being that would conform to the rules of civilized life. *Reason*, the most important man’s ability, enabled him not only to think but also to act correctly. Man, the only living creature to have it, became important for his power of observation more than for his power of feelings. Reason became the criterion of everything: what could be justified by reason was right and what could not be justified or proved by reason was false and rejected.

Everything was regulated by reason. People were attracted by a ‘reasoned Nature’, as the one we can find in parks or gardens, a nature that reflected order and harmony. To follow nature meant to represent the world as it was, to obey reason. Rationalism, stressing out the importance of reason and observation, started the beginning of the scientific thought and freed man from ignorance. Enlightenment thinkers mostly tended to atheism. They believed that principles should only be accepted on the basis of reason and not
on the authority of sacred texts and tradition. In this Age of reason both
government and the king had to justify themselves rationally. The belief that
the king ruled by Divine Right was questioned. The king and the government,
were ruled by the agreement of the people, by contract which they had to
respect.

Neoclassicism provided the basis for the Augustan school of writing
which dominated the 18\textsuperscript{th} century literature. The period was greatly affected by
the \textit{French Revolution}, \textit{the American Revolution and the Industrial Revolution}. They provided literature with new themes which began to develop side by side
with the old ones. First of all, there was a new interest towards the poor and the
children, who lived at the margin of society during the Augustan Age. Satire
and realism were respectively replaced by sentimentalism and imagination,
paving the way to the flourishing of Romanticism. The Age preserved its main
features with its emphasis on reason, precision, order, clarity and harmony, but
some other features appeared in opposition to them: for instance interest in
country life, new way of seeing Nature, different role of Art, new themes based
on feelings and so on.

Poetry was no longer concerned with “wit” but with simple feelings and
nature. Poetry was pervaded by a melancholic tone and was often associated
with meditation on Death. This kind of poetry was remembered as \textit{Graveyard
Poetry}. The poets of the \textit{Graveyard Group} were melancholic and seek for
solitude. Their thoughts were directed towards Death, or the fear of Death,
suicide and graves. The settings of their poems were often medieval ruins,
caverns, coffins and skeletons. The most important poet of the group was
\textit{Thomas Gray} and his most famous poem was \textit{Elegy Written in a Country
Churchyard}, based on the concept of the levelling power of Death. The
\textit{Graveyard poets} influenced the \textit{Gothic Novel} and the \textit{Ossian Poetry} which
became very popular literary form especially among those who were unsatisfied with classical novel and poetry and looked for *Gothicism*, a mixture of both medieval features (ruins, ancient castle and so on) and supernatural. Both poems and novels of this kind were melodramatic, full of horrors and supernatural and set in a medieval context. The most famous Gothic Novels were *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *The Castle of Otranto* by Walpole.

After the Restoration in 1660, when Charles II came to the throne, there was a complete repudiation of the Puritan ideals and way of living. In English literature the period from 1660 to 1700 is called the period of Restoration, because monarchy was restored in England, and Charles II, the son of Charles I who had been defeated and beheaded, came back to England from his exile in France and became the king. The Age of Dryden was the dominating and most representative literary figure of the Age. As the Puritans who were previously controlling the country, and were supervising her literary and moral and social standards, were finally defeated, a reaction was launched against whatever they held sacred. All restraints and discipline were thrown to the winds, and a wave of licentiousness and frivolity swept the country. Charles II and his followers, who had enjoyed a gay life in France during their exile, did their best to introduce that type of foppery and looseness in England also. They renounced old ideals and demanded that English poetry and drama should follow the style to which they had become accustomed in the gaiety of Paris. Instead of having Shakespeare and the Elizabethans as their models, the poets and dramatists of the Restoration period began to imitate French writers and specially their vices.

The result was that the old Elizabethan spirit with its patriotism, its love of adventure and romance, its creative vigor, and the Puritan spirit with its moral discipline and love of liberty, became things of the past. For a time in poetry, drama and prose nothing was produced which could compare satisfactorily with
the great achievement of the Elizabethans, of Milton, and even of minor writers of the Puritan age. But then the writers of the period began to evolve something that was characteristic of the times and they made two important contributions to English literature in the form of realism and a tendency to preciseness.

In the beginning realism took an ugly shape, because the writers painted the real pictures of the corrupt society and court. They were more concerned with vices rather than with virtues. The result was a coarse and inferior type of literature. Later this tendency to realism became more wholesome, and the writers tried to portray realistically human life as they found it—its good as well as bad side, its internal as well as external shape. Restoration period emphasized directness and simplicity of expression and counteracted the tendency of exaggeration and extravagance which was encouraged during the Elizabethan and the Puritan ages. Under the influence of French writers, the Restoration writers gave emphasis to reasoning rather than romantic fancy, and evolved an exact, precise way of writing, consisting of short, clear-cut sentences without any unnecessary word. The Royal Society, which was established during this period enjoined on all its members to use ‘a close, naked, natural way of speaking and writing, as near the mathematical plainness as they can.’ Dryden accepted this rule for his prose, and for his poetry adopted the easiest type of verse—form—the heroic couplet. Under his guidance, the English writers evolved a style—precise, formal and elegant—which is called the classical style, and which dominated English literature for more than a century.

The original Augustan Age was the brilliant literary period of Virgil, Horace and Ovid under the Roman emperor Augustus. The eighteenth century in English literature has been called the ‘Augustan Age’, ‘the Neoclassical Age’, and ‘the Age of Reason’. The term ‘the Augustan Age’ comes from the self-conscious imitation of the original Augustan writers, Virgil and Horace, by
other the writers of the period. Specifically, the Augustan Age was the period after the Restoration era to the death of Alexander Pope (1690-1744).

The major writers of the age were Pope and John Dryden in poetry, and Jonathan Swift and Joseph Addison in prose. Dryden forms the link between Restoration and Augustan literature. Although he wrote comedies in the Restoration vein, his verse satires were highly admired by the generation of poets who followed him, and his writings on literature were very much in a neoclassical spirit. But more than any other it is the name of Alexander Pope which is associated with the epoch known as the Augustan Age, despite the fact that other writers such as Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe had a more lasting influence. This is partly a result of the politics of naming inherent in literary history. Many of the early forms of prose narrative common at this time did not fit into a literary era which defined itself as neoclassic. The literature of this period which confirmed to Pope’s aesthetic principles is distinguished by its striving for harmony and precision, its urbanity, and its imitation of classical models such as Homer, Cicero, Virgil and Horace, for example in the work of the minor poet Matthew Prior. In verse, the tight heroic couplet was common, and in prose essay and satire were the predominant forms. But its representatives were the defining voices in literary circles, and as a result it is often some aspect of ‘neoclassicism’ which is used to describe the era.

The works of Dryden, Pope, Swift, Addison and John Gay, as well as many of their contemporaries, exhibit qualities of order, clarity, and stylistic decorum that were formulated in the major critical documents of the age: Dryden’s An Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), and Pope’s Essay on Criticism 1711). These works, forming the basis for modern English literary Criticism, insist that ‘nature’ is the true model and standard of writing. This ‘nature’ of the Augustans, however, was not the wild, spiritual nature the romantic poets
would later idealize, but nature as derived from classical theory: a rational and comprehensible moral; order in the universe, demonstrating God’s providential design. The literary circle around Pope considered Homer prominent among ancient poets in his descriptions of nature, and concluded in a circuitous feat of logic that the writer who ‘imitates’ Homer is also describing nature. From this follows the rules inductively based on the classics that Pope articulated in his Essay on Criticism:

“Those rules of old discovered, not devised, Are nature still, but nature methodized.” 12

In the literary scene of the early eighteenth century were the two periodical publications by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, The Tattler (1709-11), and The Spectator (1711-12). Both writers are ranked among the minor masters of English prose style and credited with raising the general cultural level of the English middle classes. A typical representative of the post-Restoration mood, Steele was a zealous crusader for morality, and his stated purpose in The Tattler was "to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality." With The Spectator, Addison added a further purpose: to introduce the middle-class public to recent developments in philosophy and literature and thus to educate their tastes. The essays are discussions of current events, literature, and gossip often written in a highly ironic and refined style. Addison and Steele helped to popularize the philosophy of John Locke and promote the literary reputation of John Milton, among others. Although these publications each only ran two years, the influence that Addison and Steele had on their contemporaries was enormous, and their essays often amounted to a popularization of the ideas circulating among the intellectuals of the age. With these wide-spread and influential publications, the literary circle revolving around Addison, Steele, Swift and Pope was practically able to dictate the
accepted taste in literature during the Augustan Age. In one of his essays for The Spectator, for example, Addison criticized the metaphysical poets for their ambiguity and lack of clear ideas, a critical stance which remained influential until the twentieth century.

A large part of Pope's work belongs to this last category, which exemplifies the artificiality of neoclassicism more thoroughly than does any other literary form of the period. In his satires and verse epistles, Pope takes on the role of an English Horace, adopting the Roman poet's informal candor and conversational tone, and applying the standards of the original Augustan Age to his own time. Pope also translated the Iliad and the Odyssey, and, after concluding this demanding task, he embarked on The Dunciad (1728), a biting literary satire.

One of the most well-known mock epic works in prose from this period is Jonathan Swift's The Battle of the Books (1704), in which the old battle between the ancient and the modern writers is fought out in a library between The Bee and The Spider. Although not a mock epic, the satiric impulse is also the driving force behind Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726), one of the masterpieces of the period. Swift is recognized as a master of understated irony, and his name has become practically synonymous with the type of satire in which outrageous statements are offered in a straight-faced manner.

Neoclassicism was not the only literary movement at this time, however. Two schools in poetry rejected many of the precepts of decorum advocated by the neoclassical writers and anticipated several of the themes of Romanticism. The so-called nature poets, for example, treated nature not as an ordered pastoral backdrop, but rather as a grand and sometimes even forbidding entity. They tended to individualize the experience of nature and shun a methodized approach. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, was a rural poet in
an urban era, and the poems of Miscellany Poems by a Lady (1713) were often observations of nature, largely free of neoclassical conventions. Her contemporaries regarded her as little more than a female wit, but she was highly praised by the Romantic poets, particularly William Wordsworth. A further influential poet of this school was James Thomas, whose poetical work The Seasons, which appeared in separate volumes from 1726 to 1730 and beginning with winter, was the most popular verse of the century. In his treatment of nature, he diverged from the neoclassical writers in many important ways: through sweeping vistas and specific details in contrast to circumscribed, generalized landscapes; exuberance instead of balance; and a fascination with the supernatural and the mysterious, no name just a few.

This was followed by the major concern of the poets of the Graveyard School. Foremost among them was Edward Young, whose early verses were in the Augustan tradition. In his most famous work, however, The Complaint: or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality (1742-1745), the melancholy meditations against a backdrop of tombs and death indicate a major departure from the conventions and convictions of the preceding generation. While the neoclassicists regarded melancholia as a weakness, the pervasive mood of The Complaint is a sentimental and pensive contemplation of loss. It was nearly as successful as Thomas's The Seasons, and was translated into a number of major European languages. The Age of Johnson, often referred to as ‘The Age of Sensibility’, is the period in English literature that ranged from the middle of the eighteenth century until 1798. The Age of Johnson, was followed by the Romantic Period in 1798 with the publication of Lyrical Ballads by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

In the Age of Johnson, writers focused on the qualities of intellect, reason, balance, and order. Notable publications of the Age of Johnson include
Burke’s A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), Johnson’s The Rambler (1750-52), and Goldsmith’s The Vicar of Wakefield (1766). One of Johnson’s most lasting legacies is his Dictionary of the English Language (1755). While this huge undertaking of Johnson’s was neither the first dictionary in existence, nor exceptionally unique, it was the most used and admired until the appearance of the Oxford English Dictionary in 1928. One of Johnson’s most fervently held beliefs was that the language of the people should be used in literature, and that a writer should avoid using grammar and vocabulary that did not appeal to the common reader. Johnson’s age is considered to be the last of the neoclassical eras, while writers in the latter period are famed with an anticipation of the Romantic Period with their focus on the individual and imagination.

Thomas Gray (1716-71), a great scholar produced but little poetry, but what he wrote is not only exquisite in quality, but also curiously interesting as a kind of epitome of the changes which were coming over the literature of his time. Among his first poetic effort was a poem on The Alliance of Education and Government, belonging to the Augustan school and written in the closed couplet. Gray never succeeded in finishing it. His first publication was the ode On a Distant Prospect of Eton College written in 1742 and published anonymously by Dossley in 1747. The Elegy written in a country Churchyard was published by Dossley in 1751, when it quickly went through fifteen editions and was often pirated. With this a great change appears, and many features make it historically very important. There is, first, the use of nature, which, though employed only as a background, is still handed with felicity and sympathy. There, is next, the churchyard scene, the twilight atmosphere and the brooding melancholy of the poem, which at once connect it with one side of the romantic movement— the development of the distinctive romantic mood.
Finally, in the tender feeling shown for the rude forefathers of the hamlet’ that are written in; short and simple annals of the poor’, we see poetry, under the influence of the spreading democratic spirit. Thus, despite the poet’s continuous use of the Augustan trick of personification and capital letters, the elegy marks a stage, for the growth of odes, The Progress of Poesy and The Bard, are filled with a new conception of the poet as an inspired singer rather than an accomplished artist – in the terms of the eighteenth century, while the short poems on northern and Celtic themes, like The Fatal Sisters and The Descent of Odin, take their place in the history of the revival of the romantic poet.

Since beginning, Gray displayed through his poetic weapon the elements of the intuitive, the emotional, and the naturally metaphysical. These elements are departed from the established tenets of adherence to order, reason, and revealed wisdom characteristic of English Neoclassical literature. In addition, Gray introduced a disquieting element that later influenced the poetry of Romantics Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley: the idea of terror as an adjunct of the sublime. While Gray's poetical subjects and themes anticipate the concerns of Romanticism, his language and his use of intricate and precise metrical patterns link him with the neoclassical tradition. In fact, Gray's own remark to West that "the language of the age is never the language of poetry" helped to fuel a critical debate in the nineteenth century concerning Gray's originality and his sources of inspiration. Through his exaltation of the imagination as the source of creativity, he has showed innovations in subject matter and fused a new life into traditional forms. That is why; today he is viewed as a transitional poet. Aside from his influence on the development of English Romanticism, Gray is primarily remembered for the "Elegy," a work greatly regarded as an exquisite meditation on mortality.
Collin's work is as thin in bulk as Gray's-it does not extend beyond 1500 lines. He combines in himself the neoclassic and romantic elements, though he is not without a specific manner which is all his own. On the one hand, he provides numerous examples of poetic diction at its worst, and, on the other, he delights in the highly romantic world of shadows and the supernatural. His Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands foreshadows the world in which Coleridge delighted. He is chiefly known for his odes. To Liberty and the one mentioned above are the lengthiest of Collins' odes, but he is at his best in shorter flights. He is exquisite when he eschews poetic diction without losing his delightful singing quality. Referring to Collins, Swinburne maintains that in "purity of music" and "clarity of style" there is "no parallel in English verse from the death of Marvell to the birth of William Blake."

Now moving in the direction of Wordsworth’s immediate predecessors, those particularly whose works he is known to have read and even owned and the poet’s contemporaries with whom he had some association through reading or acquaintance or both. With Wordsworth, Coleridge and Scott- some more important poets were born in their decade, or earlier, that is before 1780. According to chronological order, they are as follows; William Listle Bowles (1762-1850); Samuel Roger (1763-1855); James Hogg (1770-1835); Robert Southey (1774-1843); Walter Savage Lander (1775-1864); Thomas Cambell (1777-1844) and Thomas Moore (1779-1852). Though little known today, ‘Bowles’ deserves a word of kindly recognition, because his sonnets ‘written chiefly in Picturesque spots during a journey’, as the title page says, and first published in 1789, helped the growth of a love of nature in poetry in the years immediately preceding the Lyrical Ballads. Coleridge testified to the great influence they had upon him when he read them as a youth and they were much admired also by Wordsworth. Rogers, who was a successful banker as well as a
poet, lived well on in to the Victorian age, yet remained practically untouched by the spirit of the Revolution and by the new movements in literature of which he witnessed the rise and triumph. His ‘Pleasures of Memory’ (1792) is written in the orthodox closed couplet and in the correct Augustan Style and though his guide book poem Italy 1882 is in Blank Verse. Southey deserves a somewhat fuller notice. Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, he fell as a youth under the spell of the Revolution, and gave vent to the most violent radical ideas and to his impatience of all the evils that are done under the Sun in an Epic, Joan of Arc (written 1793, published 1796), a drama Wat Tyler (1794) and a number of minor poems. Landor wrote poetry all through his long life, his first volume appearing in 1795, his last in 1863; but he gained an ‘audience fit though few’, he never became popular. He may be described as a classic writing in a romantic age, but his classicism was of the genuine Greek kind, and had nothing in common with the pseudo-classicism of the eighteenth century. Whether he deals with classic themes, as in his Hellenics, or with romantic, as in Gebir, he writes in the same restrained, severe, and sculpturesque manner. Campbell’s case was different. His early work shows little sign of rupture with the Augustan tradition in thought or form. His Pleasures of Hope (1799)—a much better thing than Roger’s Pleasures of Memory—belongs in matter and style, to the outgoing school, and, like Theodoric many years later, is written in the closed couplet. But beneath the conventional surface of its diction there is a good deal of revolutionary feeling. Later, Campbell reflected the new poetical influences of his time, and in Gertrude of Wyoming, he is almost romantic.

A careful examination of Wordsworth’s poetry shows that some of his doctrines bear the Platonic stamp. According to Plato’s scheme, the universe is not only a rational universe, but God himself is eternal reason. The following lines, from The Prelude show this Platonic scheme:
Wisdom and spirit of the universe;  
Thou soul that art the eternity of thought.  
That giv’st to forms and images a breath  
And everlasting motion. (The Prelude I, 401-04) 13

Plato maintained that reason is one with spiritual love. Likewise, Wordsworth maintains that imagination and intellectual love are identical with ‘reason in her most exalted mood’. In the same way, Wordsworth also believed in Plato’s concept of a soul of the world. About the influence of Plato on Wordsworth, Melvin Rader observes:

“Wordsworth is in vital accord with Plato in his ‘Intimation of Immortality’. Not only did he make use, in the famous Ode, of the Platonic ‘recollection of pre-existence, but the entire poem follows the Phaedo in emphasizing the ‘high instincts’ by which our ‘moral Nature’ appears a pensioner upon the immortal elements of mind.”14

Wordsworth was a voracious reader. Books were the best source of his intellectual strength. His wide reading brought him in intimacy with a number of philosophers and thinkers who influenced his outlook in one way or other. The poets who influenced him most in later years were Cambridge men, and in The Prelude, Book III, he recalls some of their names. As the poet writes about Spenser.

Sweet Spenser. Moving through his clouded heaven. With the moon’s beauty and the moon’s soft pace. (The Prelude III, 283-84) 15

Wordsworth was highly influenced by Milton. In fact, Milton was his great idol. We may not find Miltonic loftiness but Miltonic purity is found in The Prelude and several other poems of Wordsworth. While describing the purpose of The Prelude, he says:
May my life

Express the image of a better time,

More wise desires and simpler manners. (The Recluse part I 855-57) 16

Rousseau’s works have traces of influence on Wordsworth’s poetry. Consequently, in his ‘Descriptive Sketches’ and the ‘Letter to the Bishop of Liandaff’, Wordsworth uses the language of Rousseau to express his radical sentiments. It shows that Wordsworth was familiar with Rousseau. In ‘The Convention of Cintra’ and The Borderers’, he mentions philosopher by name. The influence of Rousseau is also seen in Wordsworth’s preference for the rustic as against the urban. The introspective preoccupation with time and memory in Rousseau’s confessions and Reveries of a Solitary Walker foreshadows Wordsworth’s time consciousness in The Prelude. Wordsworth had deep veneration for Newton whose discoveries Wordsworth looked upon as ‘the Grandest ever known’. This is Newton’s conception of subtle spirits and active principles in Nature which seems to be echoed in a passage of one of his book, The Excursion, in which he affirms that ‘To every form of being is assigned…..An active Principle’. 17

Wordsworth must have come under the influence of Kant through Coleridge. He came to have an acquaintance with the doctrines of Kant during his conversations with Coleridge. The following lines of Wordsworth’s ‘Ode to Duty’ echo with the Kantian philosophy:

Stern Lawgiver! Yet thou dost wear
The God head’s most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads. (41-46) 18

Berkeley has also left an impact on Wordsworth. He was impressed by one of his doctrines that we see God in the same way that we see a man. In Berkeley’s Alciphron, the sense of sacredness, which had traditionally been associated with the supernatural, became attached to nature itself. To express the influence of Berkeley on Wordsworth, Melvin Rader writes:

“In combining, a sensationalist theory of knowledge with an immanent theism Berkeley may have contributed substantially to Wordsworth’s religion of nature. Whether the poet ever carefully studied Berkely’s works at first hand is immaterial, since, Coleridge must have conveyed their import to him in conversations.” 19

As Pope is our greatest poet of the town and of artificial life, so is Wordsworth, our greatest poet of the country and of natural life. As an interpreter of nature, he still holds the first place unchallenged. His love of nature was boundless; his knowledge of nature was equal to his love. He wrote always with his eye ‘steadily fixed upon his object’; nothing was too small to escape his attention; and his controlling purpose was to render with absolute fidelity what he had seen. He has been called, and rightly, ‘the keenest eye of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in nature’ and it has justly been said that in all his description ‘every touch is true, not the copying of a literary phrase, but the result of direct observation’. In addition to love, knowledge, and fidelity, there is the profound religious feeling in his nature poetry.

As he shows us again and again in Tintern Abbey, and the Ode on the Intimations of Immortality, nature was for him the embodiment of the Divine Spirit; and when he insists that nature is the greatest of all teachers, he means that between the indwelling Soul of the universe and the soul of man, which is
akin to it, spiritual communion is possible through which we may gain constantly power, peace, and happiness. However, while, Wordsworth is essentially the poet of nature, he is not the less the poet of man and in what he writes about human life, his greatness as a moralist is especially apparent. This greatness results largely from his firm hold upon the central facts of conduct and duty, and his abiding sense of the supremacy of the moral law.

To conclude, here endeavor is made to depict Wordsworth’s life and works and to discover the social and literary milieu. It reveals scenario of French Revolution, several movements and various social literary ups and down and changes of the society. Thus we can say that William Wordsworth is a major poet in English literature. He is probably the greatest poet of Nature and a great thinker in the world. He enjoys the reputation of a prolific poet who conceded thoughts and ideas from many sources and he accepted them freely to his own various purposes. Although many political and philosophical thinkers exerted their influences on his ideas yet he was far too great to be enslaved to any political or philosophical movement. Moreover, his own experience of life and journey was by far the most important source of his ideas.
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