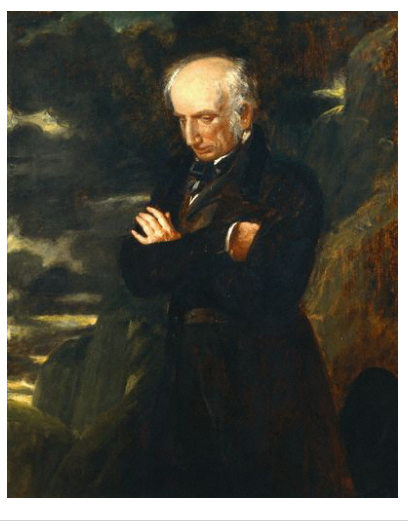


William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth	
	
Portrait of William Wordsworth by Benjamin Robert Haydon (National Portrait Gallery).	
Born	7 April 1770 Wordsworth House, Cockermouth, Kingdom of Great Britain
Died	23 April 1850 (aged 80) Cumberland, United Kingdom
Occupation	Poet
Alma mater	Cambridge University
Literary movement	Romanticism
Notable work(s)	<i>Lyrical Ballads</i> , <i>Poems in Two Volumes</i> , <i>The Excursion</i> , <i>The Prelude</i>

William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850) was a major English Romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with the 1798 joint publication *Lyrical Ballads*.

Wordsworth's magnum opus is generally considered to be *The Prelude*, a semiautobiographical poem of his early years which he revised and expanded a number of times. It was posthumously titled and published, prior to which it was generally known as "the poem to Coleridge". Wordsworth was Britain's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850.

Early life

The second of five children born to John Wordsworth and Ann Cookson, William Wordsworth was born on 7 April 1770 in Wordsworth House in Cockermouth, Cumberland^[1]—part of the scenic region in northwest England, the Lake District. His sister, the poet and diarist Dorothy Wordsworth, to whom he was close all his life, was born the following year, and the two were baptised together. They had three other siblings: Richard, the eldest, who became a lawyer; John, born after Dorothy, who went to sea and died in 1805 when the ship of which he was Master, the *Earl of Abergavenny*, was wrecked off the south coast of England; and Christopher, the youngest, who entered the Church and rose to be Master of Trinity College, Cambridge.^[2] Their father was a legal representative of James Lowther, 1st Earl of Lonsdale and, through his connections, lived in a large mansion in the small town. Wordsworth, as with his siblings, had little involvement with their father, and they would be distant from him until his death in 1783.^[3]

Wordsworth's father, although rarely present, taught him poetry, including that of Milton, Shakespeare and Spenser, in addition to allowing his son to rely on his own father's library. Along with spending time reading in Cockermouth, Wordsworth would also stay at his mother's parents' house in Penrith, Cumberland. At Penrith, Wordsworth was exposed to the moors. Wordsworth could not get along with his grandparents and his uncle, and his hostile interactions with them distressed him to the point of contemplating suicide.^[4]

After the death of their mother, in 1778, Wordsworth's father sent him to Hawkshead Grammar School in Lancashire (now in Cumbria) and Dorothy to live with relatives in Yorkshire; she and Wordsworth would not meet again for another nine years. Although Hawkshead was Wordsworth's first serious experience with education, he had been taught to read by his mother and had attended a tiny school of low quality in Cockermouth. After the Cockermouth school, he was sent to a school in Penrith for the children of upper-class families and taught by Ann Birkett, a woman who insisted on instilling in her students traditions that included pursuing both scholarly and local activities, especially the festivals around Easter, May Day, and Shrove Tuesday. Wordsworth was taught both the Bible and the *Spectator*, but little else. It was at the school that Wordsworth was to meet the Hutchinsons, including Mary, who would be his future wife.^[5]

Wordsworth made his debut as a writer in 1787 when he published a sonnet in *The European Magazine*. That same year he began attending St John's College, Cambridge, and received his B.A. degree in 1791.^[6] He returned to Hawkshead for his first two summer holidays, and often spent later holidays on walking tours, visiting places famous for the beauty of their landscape. In 1790, he took a walking tour of Europe, during which he toured the Alps extensively, and visited nearby areas of France, Switzerland, and Italy.

Relationship with Annette Vallon

In November 1791, Wordsworth visited Revolutionary France and became enthralled with the Republican movement. He fell in love with a French woman, Annette Vallon, who in 1792 gave birth to their child, Caroline. Because of lack of money and Britain's tensions with France, he returned alone to England the next year.^[7] The circumstances of his return and his subsequent behaviour raise doubts as to his declared wish to marry Annette, but he supported her and his daughter as best he could in later life. The Reign of Terror estranged him from the Republican movement, and war between France and Britain prevented him from seeing Annette and Caroline again for several years.

With the Peace of Amiens again allowing travel to France, in 1802 Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, visited Annette and Caroline in Calais. The purpose of the visit was to pave the way for his forthcoming marriage to Mary Hutchinson.^[7] Afterwards he wrote the sonnet "*It is a beauteous evening, calm and free*" recalling a seaside walk with the 9 year old Caroline he had never seen prior to that visit. The sonnet is somewhat reserved but it is plain Wordsworth felt genuine affection for his daughter, as indeed did Mary who was anxious that Wordsworth should do more for Caroline should their circumstances improve. Her wish was granted at Caroline's marriage in 1816, when Wordsworth settled £30 annually on Caroline, a generous allowance (£1,360 purchasing power in year 2000 pounds sterling) that continued until 1835, when it was replaced by a capital settlement.^{[8][9]}

First publication and Lyrical Ballads

In his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", which is called the "manifesto" of English Romantic criticism, Wordsworth calls his poems "experimental." The year 1793 saw Wordsworth's first published poetry with the collections *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. He received a legacy of £900 from Raisley Calvert in 1795 so that he could pursue writing poetry. That year, he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Somerset. The two poets quickly developed a close friendship. In 1797, Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy moved to Alfoxton House, Somerset, just a few miles away from Coleridge's home in Nether Stowey. Together, Wordsworth and Coleridge (with insights from Dorothy) produced *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), an important work in the English Romantic movement. The volume gave neither Wordsworth's nor Coleridge's name as author. One of Wordsworth's most famous poems, "Tintern Abbey", was published in the work, along with Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The second edition, published in 1800, had only Wordsworth listed as the author, and included a preface to the poems, which was augmented significantly in the 1802 edition. This Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is considered a central work of Romantic literary theory. In it, Wordsworth discusses what he sees as the elements of a new type of poetry, one based on the "real language of men" and which avoids the poetic diction of much 18th-century poetry. Here, Wordsworth gives his famous definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." A fourth and final edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1805.



Wordsworth in 1798, about the time he began *The Prelude*.^[10]

The Borderers

From 1795 to 1797, he wrote his only play, *The Borderers*, a verse tragedy set during the reign of King Henry III of England when Englishmen of the north country were in conflict with Scottish rovers. Wordsworth attempted to get the play staged in November 1797, but it was rejected by Thomas Harris, manager of Covent Garden Theatre, who proclaimed it "impossible that the play should succeed in the representation". The rebuff was not received lightly by Wordsworth, and the play was not published until 1842, after substantial revision.^[11]

Germany and move to the Lake District

Wordsworth, Dorothy and Coleridge travelled to Germany in the autumn of 1798. While Coleridge was intellectually stimulated by the trip, its main effect on Wordsworth was to produce homesickness.^[7] During the harsh winter of 1798–99, Wordsworth lived with Dorothy in Goslar, and, despite extreme stress and loneliness, he began work on an autobiographical piece later titled *The Prelude*. He wrote a number of famous poems, including "The Lucy poems". He and his sister moved back to England, now to Dove Cottage in Grasmere in the Lake District, and this time with fellow poet Robert Southey nearby. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey came to be known as the "Lake Poets".^[12] Through this period, many of his poems revolve around themes of death, endurance, separation and grief.

Marriage and children

In 1802, Lowther's heir, William Lowther, 1st Earl of Lonsdale, paid the £4,000 debt owed to Wordsworth's father incurred through Lowther's failure to pay his aide.^[13] It was this repayment that afforded Wordsworth the financial means to marry, and on October 4, following his visit with Dorothy to France to arrange matters with Annette, Wordsworth married a childhood friend, Mary Hutchinson.^[7] Dorothy continued to live with the couple and grew close to Mary. The following year, Mary gave birth to the first of five children, three of whom predeceased William and Mary:

- John Wordsworth (18 June 1803 – 1875). Married four times:
 1. Isabella Curwen (d. 1848) had six children: Jane, Henry, William, John, Charles and Edward.
 2. Helen Ross (d. 1854). No children
 3. Mary Ann Dolan (d. after 1858) had one daughter Dora (b. 1858).
 4. Mary Gamble. No children
- Dora Wordsworth (16 August 1804 – 9 July 1847). Married Edward Quillinan in 1843.
- Thomas Wordsworth (15 June 1806 – 1 December 1812).
- Catherine Wordsworth (6 September 1808 – 4 June 1812).
- William "Willy" Wordsworth (12 May 1810 – 1883). Married Fanny Graham and had four children: Mary Louisa, William, Reginald, Gordon.

Autobiographical work and Poems in Two Volumes

Wordsworth had for years been making plans to write a long philosophical poem in three parts, which he intended to call *The Recluse*. He had in 1798–99 started an autobiographical poem, which he never named but called the "poem to Coleridge", which would serve as an appendix to *The Recluse*. In 1804, he began expanding this autobiographical work, having decided to make it a prologue rather than an appendix to the larger work he planned. By 1805, he had completed it, but refused to publish such a personal work until he had completed the whole of *The Recluse*. The death of his brother John, in 1805, affected him strongly.

The source of Wordsworth's philosophical allegiances as articulated in *The Prelude* and in such shorter works as "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey" has been the source of much critical debate. While it had long been supposed that Wordsworth relied chiefly on Coleridge for philosophical guidance, more recent scholarship has suggested that Wordsworth's ideas may have been formed years before he and Coleridge became friends in the mid-1790s. While in Revolutionary Paris in 1792, the 22-year-old Wordsworth made the acquaintance of the mysterious traveller John "Walking" Stewart (1747–1822),^[14] who was nearing the end of a thirty-years' peregrination from Madras, India, through Persia and Arabia, across Africa and all of Europe, and up through the fledgling United States. By the time of their association, Stewart had published an ambitious work of original materialist philosophy entitled *The Apocalypse of Nature* (London, 1791), to which many of Wordsworth's philosophical sentiments are likely indebted.

In 1807, his *Poems in Two Volumes* were published, including "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood". Up to this point Wordsworth was known publicly only for *Lyrical Ballads*, and he hoped this collection would cement his reputation. Its reception was lukewarm, however. For a time (starting in 1810), Wordsworth and Coleridge were estranged over the latter's opium addiction.^[7] Two of his children, Thomas and Catherine, died in 1812. The following year, he received an appointment as Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland, and the £400 per year income from the post made him financially secure. His family, including Dorothy, moved to Rydal Mount, Ambleside (between Grasmere and Rydal Water) in 1813, where he spent the rest of his life.^[7]

The Prospectus

In 1814 he published *The Excursion* as the second part of the three-part *The Recluse*. He had not completed the first and third parts, and never would. He did, however, write a poetic Prospectus to "The Recluse" in which he lays out the structure and intent of the poem. The Prospectus contains some of Wordsworth's most famous lines on the relation between the human mind and nature:

My voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:--and how exquisitely, too,
Theme this but little heard of among Men,
The external World is fitted to the Mind.

Some modern critics avoid weasel words and recognise a decline in his works beginning around the mid-1810s. But this decline was perhaps more a change in his lifestyle and beliefs, since most of the issues that characterise his early poetry (loss, death, endurance, separation and abandonment) were resolved in his writings. But, by 1820, he enjoyed the success accompanying a reversal in the contemporary critical opinion of his earlier works. Following the death of his friend the painter William Green in 1823, Wordsworth mended relations with Coleridge.^[15] The two were fully reconciled by 1828, when they toured the Rhineland together.^[7] Dorothy suffered from a severe illness in 1829 that rendered her an invalid for the remainder of her life. In 1835, Wordsworth gave Annette and Caroline the money they needed for support.

The Poet Laureate and other honours

Wordsworth received an honorary Doctor of Civil Law degree in 1838 from Durham University, and the same honour from Oxford University the next year.^[7] In 1842 the government awarded him a civil list pension amounting to £300 a year. With the death in 1843 of Robert Southey, Wordsworth became the Poet Laureate. He initially refused the honour, saying he was too old, but accepted when Prime Minister Robert Peel assured him "you shall have nothing required of you" (he became the only laureate to write no official poetry). When his daughter, Dora, died in 1847, his production of poetry came to a standstill.

Death

William Wordsworth died by re-aggravating a case of pleurisy on 23 April 1850, and was buried at St. Oswald's church in Grasmere. His widow Mary published his lengthy autobiographical "poem to Coleridge" as *The Prelude* several months after his death. Though this failed to arouse great interest in 1850, it has since come to be recognised as his masterpiece.

Major works

- *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (1798)
 - "Simon Lee"
 - "We are Seven"
 - "Lines Written in Early Spring"
 - "Expostulation and Reply"
 - "The Tables Turned"
 - "The Thorn"
 - "Lines Composed A Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"
- *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems* (1800)
 - Preface to the Lyrical Ballads
 - "Strange fits of passion have I known"^[16]
 - "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways"^[16]
 - "Three years she grew"^[16]
 - "A Slumber Did my Spirit Seal"^[16]
 - "I travelled among unknown men"^[16]
 - "Lucy Gray"
 - "The Two April Mornings"
 - "Nutting"
 - "The Ruined Cottage"
 - "Michael"
 - "The Kitten At Play"
- *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807)
 - "Resolution and Independence"
 - "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" Also known as "Daffodils"
 - "My Heart Leaps Up"
 - "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"
 - "Ode to Duty"
 - "The Solitary Reaper"
 - "Elegiac Stanzas"
 - "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802"
 - "London, 1802"
 - "The World Is Too Much with Us"
- *Guide to the Lakes* (1810)
- " To the Cuckoo "
- *The Excursion* (1814)
- *Laodamia* (1815, 1845)



Gravestone of William Wordsworth, Grasmere, Cumbria

- *The Prelude* (1850)

Further reading

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- Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, Oxford University Press, 1989 ISBN 978-0192827470
- Emma Mason, *The Cambridge Introduction to William Wordsworth* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) ^[17]
- Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth, A Biography: The Early Years, 1770-1803 v. 1*, Oxford University Press, 1957 ISBN 978-0198115656
- Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Later Years, 1803-1850 v. 2*, Oxford University Press, 1965 ISBN 978-0198116172
- M.R. Tewari, *One Interior Life—A Study of the Nature of Wordsworth's Poetic Experience*, (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd, 1983)
- *Report to Wordsworth*, Written by Boey Kim Cheng, as a direct reference to his poems *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* and *The World is too Much with us*

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- [3] Moorman 1968 pp. 5–7.
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- [5] Moorman 1968:15–18.
- [7] (<http://www.victorianweb.org/previctorian/ww/bio.html>) Everett, Glenn, "William Wordsworth: Biography" Web page at *The Victorian Web* Web site, accessed 7 January 2007
- [8] Gill (1989) pp. 208, 299
- [10] " The Cornell Wordsworth Collection (<http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/collections/wordsworth.html>)". Cornell University. Retrieved on 13 February 2009.
- [11] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 132-3.
- [12] See: *Recollections of the Lake Poets*.
- [13] Moorman 1968 p. 8
- [14] Kelly Grovier, "Dream Walker: A Wordsworth Mystery Solved", *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 February 2007
- [15] *Gentlemans Magazine* Sylvanus Urban- 1823
- [16] M. H. Abrams, editor of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period*, writes of these five poems: "This and the four following pieces are often grouped by editors as the 'Lucy poems,' even though 'A slumber did my spirit seal' does not identify the 'she' who is the subject of that poem. All but the last were written in 1799, while Wordsworth and his sister were in Germany, and homesick. There has been diligent speculation about the identity of Lucy, but it remains speculation. The one certainty is that she is not the girl of Wordsworth's 'Lucy Gray'" (Abrams 2000).

External links

General information and biographical sketches

- Internet archive of Volume 1 of Christopher Wordsworth's 1851 biography (<http://archive.org/details/memoirswilliamw00unkngoog>)
- Internet archive of Volume 2 of Christopher Wordsworth's 1851 biography (<http://archive.org/details/memoirsofwilliam02word2>)
- Biography and Works (<http://www.online-literature.com/wordsworth>)
- Works by or about William Wordsworth (<http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n79-6595>) in libraries (WorldCat catalog)
- *Romanticon: Wordsworth's Corpus Reflects the Growth of a Conservative's Mind* (http://www.city-journal.org/2009/19_3_wordsworth.html); City Journal, Summer 2009
- Short biographical sketch by Glenn Everett (<http://www.victorianweb.org/previctorian/ww/bio.html>)

- *Wordsworth's hidden arguments* (http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/article2779499.ece): an article in the TLS (<http://www.the-tls.co.uk>) by Dan Jacobson, 31 October 2007
- Wordsworth's links with Claines, Worcester (<http://www.clainesfriends.org.uk/wordsworth.html>)
- Wordsworth and the Lake District (http://www.english-lakes.com/william_wordsworth.html)
- Wordsworth's Grave (<http://www.poetsgraves.co.uk/wordsworth.htm>)
- The Wordsworth Trust (<http://www.wordsworth.org.uk>)
- Romantic Circles: Editions & articles on Wordsworth and other authors of the Romantic period (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>)
- Hawkshead Grammar School Museum (<http://www.hawksheadgrammar.org.uk>)
- Portraits of William Wordsworth (<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?LinkID=mp04931>) at the National Portrait Gallery, London
- Archival material relating to William Wordsworth (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/searches/subjectView.asp?ID=P31227>) listed at the UK National Archives

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Wordsworth's works

- Works by William Wordsworth (<http://www.bartleby.com/145/wordchrono.html>) at Bartleby.com (HTML)
- Works by William Wordsworth (<http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=creator:william+wordsworth-contributor:gutenberg+AND+mediatype:texts>) at Internet Archive (scanned books original editions color illustrated)
- Works by William Wordsworth (http://www.gutenberg.org/author/William_Wordsworth) at Project Gutenberg (plain text and HTML)
- Poems by William Wordsworth (http://www.blackcatpoems.com/w/william_wordsworth.html)
- Selected Poems by W. Wordsworth (http://www.poetseers.org/the_romantics/william_wordsworth/library)
- Selected Works at Poetry Index (http://www.poetry-index.net/WilliamWordsworth_/Index.html)
- Biography and Works (<http://www.online-literature.com/wordsworth>)
- Poetry Archive: 166 poems of William Wordsworth (<http://www.sanjeev.net/poetry/wordsworth-william/index.html>)
- To Toussaint Louverture – poem by William Wordsworth (http://thelouvertureproject.org/wiki/index.php?title=To_Toussaint_Louverture_-_poem_by_Wordsworth)
- Extensive Information on Wordsworth's Poem, *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* (<http://www.thetalisman.org.uk/tintern/index.htm>)
- Britain Unlimited's page on William Wordsworth (<http://www.britainunlimited.com/Biogs/wordsworth.htm>)
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Court offices		
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