



William Wordsworth

April 7, 1770 – April 23, 1850

- Major figure in the first generation of English Romantic poets.
- 1770 - born in Cockermouth in the Lake District;
- most of his life was spent in the Lake District;
- 1850 - died in Ambleside in the same region;
- 1791 – visited France;
- initially attracted by the revolutionary movement.
- deeply disappointed by the revolution became more and more conservative.

- 1797 - beginning of a literary friendship with Coleridge which leads to ...
- the planning of the “Lyrical Ballads” published anonymously in 1798.
- This work, considered one of the most famous documents of literary criticism in English literature, was so successful that...
- a second edition appeared in 1800 with a preface by Wordsworth, where he explained his poetical theory.

Subject matter of poetry

- In his preface to the second edition of the “Lyrical Ballads” Wordsworth said that :
 1. *Poetry should deal with:*
 - a. everyday situations and incidents;
 - b. ordinary people, especially humble rural people;
 - c. homely (=simple) objects called by their ordinary names;
- The reason for this choice is in the fact that **men are better when closer to nature** and far from the artificialities of civilization.

The poet's imagination

- Everyday life should be transfigured by the poet's imagination, whose function is that of ...
- conferring a new splendour on external, ordinary things so as to make them more attractive and interesting.
- In particular, Wordsworth said that the aim of poetry was *“to throw over the incidents and situations of common life a certain colouring of imagination whereby (= by means of which) *ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way*”*.

The language of poetry

- The language should be:

- ✓ familiar;

- ✓ simple;

- ✓ that of ordinary people;

because humble, country people

- ... live in communion with the objects from which language originates;
- express their feelings in a more immediate, forceful and effective way.

The poet's identity

- The poet is
- ... not a man in an ivory tower, isolated and separated from other men;
- ... a man among other men who writes about things which interest mankind;
- but also a man gifted with special powers:
 - a greater sensibility which enables him to see the beauty of nature and respond to it more deeply;
 - the ability to express his thoughts and feelings more clearly and effectively;
 - the capacity to penetrate the heart, the essence of things.

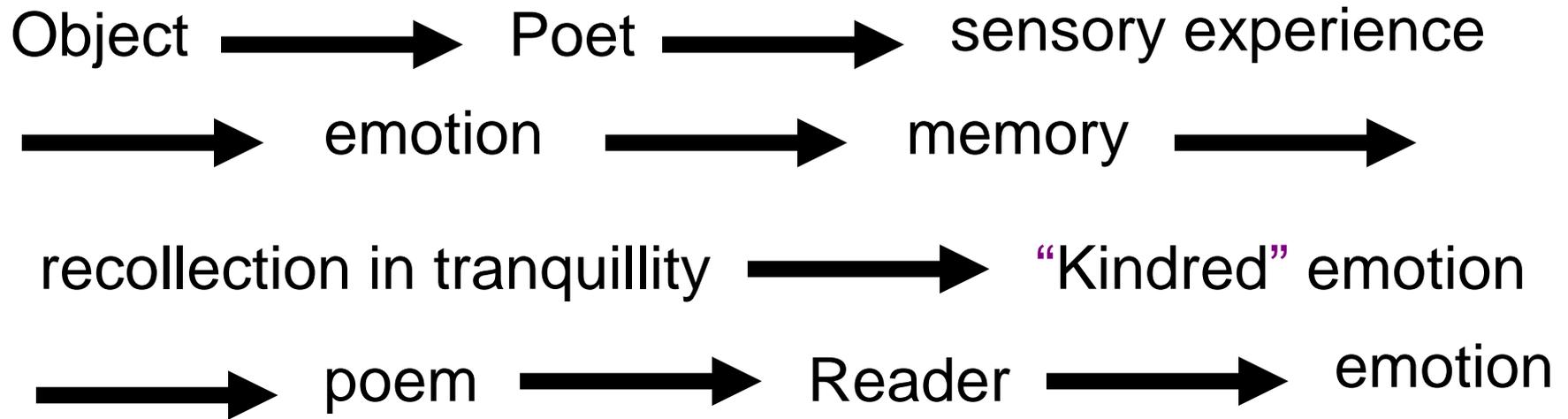
The Poet' task

- His task is ...
- ... to reveal the beauty of familiar sights;
- ... to teach men how to enter in communion with Nature;
- ... to show them how to understand their feelings and how to improve their moral being.

The Creative act of Poetry

- According to Wordsworth, poetry is
- a natural expression of feelings and originates from emotions recollected in tranquillity;
- this means that the poet produces poetry on recollecting certain emotions previously experienced;
- A good example of such a process is the poem “Daffodils”.
- In this poem, in fact, we find the poet lying in tranquillity on his couch at home and recollecting the emotions of joy and happiness he felt at the sight of a host of golden daffodils in the Lake District.
- This process could be described as follows:
 1. the poet recollects in tranquillity an emotion he felt during a past experience;
 2. the act of recollecting arouses a new emotion in the poet, “kindred” (= similar) to the first one;
 3. this new emotion urges the poet to write a poem which will be read by someone thus producing a third emotion in them.

The Creative act of Poetry



Wordsworth's main themes

- **Children and childhood**
- During the Enlightenment children were **not valued** for what they were – irrational and spontaneous beings – but for what they might become as adults – i.e. human beings characterized by rationality and willing to accept all social conventions and rules.
- This was the consequence of the great emphasis the society of that time placed on **Reason**.
- **Jan Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)**, a French philosopher and writer, instead, developed a **completely reversed vision of childhood**.
- He believed that **man is good by nature but corrupted by society** and, accordingly, **childhood is the most important period of man's life** because this phase of human life is **closer to “the ideal state of nature”** and therefore **the least corrupt**.
- Wordsworth, like all Romantic poets, knew Rousseau's ideas and was influenced by his theories.
- Wordsworth, in fact, thought that :
- **Childhood is when man is closest to God and can perceive God in the natural beauty of the world** around him.

Wordsworth's main themes

- **Nature** is seen by Wordsworth as:
- **the countryside as opposed to the town.**
- In fact the landscape the poet describes in his poems is mainly rural and solitary, and even when he describes urban settings like in the poem "*Composed upon Westminster Bridge*", the words the poet uses are those typically used to refer to a natural setting. In other words, London in this poem becomes part of nature itself and is even more beautiful than "valley, rock and hill".
- **Source of feelings.**
- His poems are full of words that emphasize the joy aroused at the sight of particular scenes such as a host of golden daffodils or a solitary girl working and singing alone in the Highlands.
- **Active Force**
- A goddess which manifests herself in the wild isolated countryside.
- the expression of God who is everywhere and, therefore, can be found everywhere.
- the evidence of a wonderful mysterious power which permeates universe and deserves religious reverence and love.