

Literature Insights
General Editor: Charles Moseley

*William Wordsworth:
'Lyrical Ballads' (1798)
with some poems of 1800*

Richard Gravil

*'...Men who
do not wear
fine cloaths
can feel
deeply'*

PUBLICATION DATA

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Poems treated in this insight

‘We are seven’

‘Anecdote for fathers’

‘Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the lake of Esthwaite, on a desolate part of the shore, yet commanding a beautiful prospect’

‘Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed’

‘Lines written in Early Spring’

‘Expostulation and Reply’

‘The Tables Turned’

‘The Female Vagrant’

‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’

‘The Last of the Flock’

‘The Mad Mother’

‘The Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman’

‘The Convict’

‘Old Man travelling’

‘Simon Lee’

‘The Idiot Boy’

‘The Thorn’

‘Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey’

‘Hart-leap Well’

‘There was a boy’

‘Nutting’

The Lucy Poems

‘The Brothers’

‘Michael’

Part 1: Life, Times, Themes

1.1 General Introduction

William Hazlitt (1778-1830), the leading literary critic of the Romantic era, wrote about Wordsworth's style (in *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825) that:

It is one of the innovations of the time. It partakes of and is carried along with the revolutionary movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His muse ... is a levelling one.... it takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature [i.e. what is natural, including human nature] is always interesting ... without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp ... to set it off. Hence the unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in the Lyrical Ballads. Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understand them.

This is by no means a favourably prejudiced account: by 1825 Hazlitt and Wordsworth were political opponents. But he had met Wordsworth in 1798, while visiting the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and he gave in his famous essay 'My first Acquaintance with Poets' one of the most vivid accounts of the poet.

The next day Wordsworth arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed ...in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge in his gait, not unlike his own Peter Bell. There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eyes (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance) an intense high narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn stately expression of the rest of his face He sat down and talked very freely and naturally, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, and a strong tincture of the Northern burr, like the crust on wine.