

Preface to Lyrical Ballads Summary

Writer: William Wordsworth | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Wordsworth's Purpose of Writing the Preface: William Wordsworth wrote the “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” to explain the goals behind the poems he and Samuel Taylor Coleridge included in the collection. He wanted to introduce a new kind of poetry that focused on ordinary life, real language, and true emotions. Wordsworth believed that the poets of his time had moved away from the real purpose of poetry. Their works were full of artificial language and grand subjects. In contrast, Wordsworth wanted poetry to be more connected to everyday people and their emotions. The Preface acts like a guide for readers to understand his unique style and vision of poetry. He also tried to defend himself against the criticism that his poetry was too simple or unpoetic.

Common Life and Common People: Wordsworth strongly believed that the best poetry comes from ordinary life. He chose subjects from humble and rustic life because he felt that the emotions of common people are more natural and honest. Rural life is not full of pride or artificial manners. People in villages are closer to nature and face real joys and real sorrows. Their passions are deep, and their language is simple. These people, like farmers and shepherds, do not hide their feelings. So, it is easier for poets to find true human emotions in them. Wordsworth believed that by writing about common life, a poet could reveal the universal truths of human nature. He became a mouthpiece for the plebeians, the common people.

Simple Language: Wordsworth rejected the use of complex and decorative language in poetry. He said that earlier poets used difficult and fancy words that made poetry hard to understand. This kind of language may look beautiful, but it is far from the genuine feelings of real people. Wordsworth believed that true emotions are best expressed in plain, natural words. That is why he used the real language of common people in his poems. He did remove some bad or vulgar words, but he kept the speech honest and close to real life. He said this kind of language is more lasting and more philosophical than the false poetic diction used by many poets.

Emotion and Reflection: Wordsworth gave a new and powerful definition of poetry. He said, ***“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.”*** This means that poetry often begins with strong

emotions. But the poet does not write in the middle of excitement. He remembers the emotion later in a calm and quiet state. Then he reflects on it and writes poetry. This process mixes feeling with thought. So, poetry is not just emotion or just thought. It is a careful combination of both. The poet must feel deeply and think deeply. Then, the poetry becomes honest, powerful, and meaningful.

Function and Character of a Poet: According to Wordsworth, a poet is not only a writer but also a special kind of person. He is “a man speaking to men,” but he has more sensitivity and deeper understanding than ordinary people. A poet feels emotions more strongly and observes the world more closely. He also has the power to express these feelings clearly. Wordsworth says a poet has a more comprehensive soul. He sees connections between human life and nature. A poet does not write for himself or for other poets. He writes for all human beings. He helps people feel, think, and understand more deeply. The poet has a social duty to enlighten and purify human emotions.

Wordsworth's View on Poetic Diction: Wordsworth attacked the traditional idea of poetic diction. He explained that many poets used a special kind of language just because they were writing poetry. This language included artificial words, old phrases, and high-sounding expressions that no one used in real life. Wordsworth said that this habit made poetry fake and disconnected from truth. He believed that real poetry should not depend on mechanical figures or fancy vocabulary. He wanted to use language that was simple and close to the way people speak every day. This, he said, would help readers feel the true emotions behind the words. He wanted to remove the gap between poetry and life.

The Role of Metre: Though Wordsworth used everyday language, he still chose to write in metre. Some people asked why he did that if his goal was to be simple. Wordsworth said that metre adds a special charm to poetry. It gives order and pleasure to the reading experience. He explained that metre helps control strong emotions. When the subject of a poem is emotionally charged or painful, the rhythm of the metre makes it easier for the reader to appreciate it. Metre also gives a sense of familiarity and regularity. Wordsworth argued that even if the poem has powerful feelings, the gentle structure of metre balances it. So, metre is not against natural language but helps to present it more beautifully.

Pleasure through Truth and Nature: Wordsworth believed that the main aim of poetry is to give pleasure. But this pleasure should come from truth and nature, not from lies or decorations. He did not want to please readers with fantasy, jokes, or grand stories. Instead, he thought that true beauty lies in simple things—in nature and human life. A good poem should evoke in readers feelings of joy, sympathy, and love. Even if the subject is sad, the overall

feeling should be one of emotional richness. This kind of poetry touches the heart and improves the mind. It brings us closer to the truth and to each other. It makes us better human beings.

The Poet's Social Responsibility: Wordsworth wrote during a time of great social and political change. People were becoming more interested in big cities, news, and entertainment. They were losing touch with nature and deep emotions. Wordsworth believed that poetry had the power to fight against this problem. He said that poets should help people feel again. They should show the beauty of simple life and nature. The poet's job is to help people think and feel more deeply. He believed that good poetry can make society better by reminding people of their shared humanity. In this way, a poet becomes a moral guide for his time.

The Historical Importance of the Preface: "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" is one of the most important texts in English literature. It started a new movement called Romanticism. This movement changed the way people wrote and read poetry. Before Wordsworth, poetry was reserved for the upper class and adhered to strict rules. After Wordsworth, poetry became more personal, emotional, and simple. His ideas about subject matter, language, and the role of the poet opened the door for many great Romantic poets. His Preface became like a declaration or manifesto of a new age in poetry. Even today, it is read as a powerful statement about the true nature of poetry and its purpose in human life.