

### Paper 3, Module 3: Text

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#### (B) Description of Module

Item	Description of module
Subject Name	English literature
Paper name	Nineteenth Century English Literature
Module title	William Wordsworth
Module ID	MODULE O3
Pre-requisites	The reader is expected to have familiarity with the trends of the Romantic age and Major poets.
Objectives	To familiarize the reader with the poems and persona of William Wordsworth as a poet.
Key words	Romanticism, Nature poet, Prelude, Childhood, Lyrical Ballads, immortal

## MODULE 3: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

### 3.0 Learning Outcomes

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### 3.17 Self-assessment: Explain the excerpts

### 3.18 Self-assessment: Answer the questions.

### 3.19 Know More: Bibliography for Further Reading

### 3.20 Know More: You Tube Clippings on Wordsworth and His Poems

### **3.0. Learning Outcomes**

The students will go through the contents on William Wordsworth and his two poems ‘The Prelude I’ and ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’. A general introduction will help them in knowing about romanticism. As they go through the contents, they will come to know about Wordsworth and his attitude towards Nature, man and humanity. Exercises in the form of multiple choice questions and long questions will help them in assessing their knowledge. Meaningful lines will make them feel of the text of the two poems. Bibliography for further reading will motivate them to know more about William Wordsworth in detail.

### **3.1. Introduction**

The Nineteenth Century Literature bubbles with romanticism. When one talks of its poetry, the name of William Wordsworth flashes on the screen of the mind. The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 initiated the era of romanticism. The German critic Friedrich Schlegel said to have been the first to use the term *romantisch*. He used this term to describe a school of poets and writers opposed to the classic. Theodore Watts Dunton used the phrase “The Renaissance of Wonder” for romanticism. Victor Hugo defined it as “Liberalism in Literature.” For Pater, it became “an addition of strangeness to beauty.” Generally, the ingredients that make Romanticism as school include subjectivity, spontaneity, supernatural, melancholy, love of Nature, dignity and nobility of an individual, simplicity, a revolt against artificiality and the like. The poetry of William Wordsworth is replete with these characteristics of romanticism.

### **3.2. William Wordsworth: A Biographical Sketch**

William Wordsworth, who was born on April 7 1770 at Cockerthorpe, Cumberland, was the second of the five children of John Wordsworth and Anne Cookson. When he was only eight years old, his mother died. His relatives sent him to school at Hawkshead. He joined St. John’s College at the University of Cambridge in 1887. William Taylor was his teacher who inspired

him to compose poems. He had never been serious about his formal education. In Orlean, he fell in love with Marie Anne Vallon (Annette). It is said that he had a daughter Anne Caroline from her. French Revolution played a great role in shaping his personality. The Lake District always inspired him. With Coleridge and Robert Southey, he was known as a lake poet. He visited France and came in touch with a French statesman Michael Beaupuis. He sang the song with the determination of a revolutionist thus:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive  
But to be young was very heaven

The year 1798 proved to be a red-letter day in the history of English Poetry. It was because of the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth with his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge revolted against the pseudo-artificial diction of the neo-classical poets represented by Alexander Pope. The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* marked the beginning of the Romantic Movement. The *Lyrical Ballads* contained 23 poems—19 by Wordsworth and 4 by Coleridge. He added the famous ‘Preface’ to the second edition of 1800. An ‘Appendix on Poetic Diction’ was also added in the third edition of 1802. He penned more than 500 sonnets. His significant poems include: ‘The Excursion’, ‘The Prelude’, ‘The Rainbow’, ‘The World is Too Much With Us’, ‘The Daffodils’, ‘Lucy Poems’, ‘Peele Castle’, ‘Descriptive Sketches’, ‘Resolution and Independence’, ‘Peter Bell’, ‘Ruth’, ‘The Solitary Reaper’, ‘Tintern Abbey’, ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’, ‘The Rainbow’, ‘Ode to Duty’ and ‘Michael’. After the death of Robert Southey, he became the poet laureate. He breathed his last on April 23 1850 and was buried at Grasmere Churchyard.

### **3.3 Why is Wordsworth a Romantic Poet?**

No doubt, Wordsworth began his poetic career in the classical tradition but soon he broke away from the neo-classical tradition of poetic composition. He revolted against “gaudiness and inane phraseology” employed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry (the Augustan Age), represented by Alexander Pope. Nature was the center of Wordsworth’s poetry. Man was not merely a member of society for him but an individual with a personality of his own. Imagination made him a

romantic poet of high order. His adoption of various lyric forms like the ode and sonnet, use of blank verse, distance from conventional subjects and manner became the solid bricks in constructing the structure of romanticism in his poetry.

Wordsworth gave more importance to feelings than thoughts. Nature became the chief source of wisdom. He always used to see a spiritual power in all the objects of Nature. He associated Pantheism with mysticism in his poetry. He followed the romantic tradition of glorifying childhood. Solitude and melancholy became passions with him. Subjectivity became the chief source of his poetry. For this he was tagged as “Egoist.” His poetry proved to be “Egotistical Sublime. “The portrayals of the ordinary incidents, ordinary people, and events of common life made him a realist. For him, peace and consolation were in the lap of Nature.

### **3.4 Wordsworth’s Limitations**

Wordsworth wrote much. He wrote even when he was not inspired. It resulted in the inequality of his work to the extent that most of his poetic pieces became prosaic, dull, flat and unreadable. His egotism emitted the adverse signals. He lacked lyrical faculty. Love in passion with passions was out of his range. What he liked was simplicity. He never voted for the complexities of human nature.

### **3.5 Wordsworth’s Contribution**

Wordsworth as a romantic poet is simple. His poetry has a soothing and restorative effect on the soul. But, it is really unfortunate that he is misunderstood for his simplicity and inferior quality of his poetry. He is praised as well as misunderstood. In his poems, he emerges as a teacher, who continues to deliver moral lessons to the readers even to the point of dullness. If he can pen ‘The World is Too Much Us’ and ‘The Solitary Reaper’ in simple language, he can also write the most difficult poems like ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’. Hence, he is misunderstood to the extent that he gives force to the theory of the two Wordsworths. But one thing is certain that his poetry appeals to the reader who cannot forget its lasting appeal of soothing soul with its treatment of Nature and Man on equal footing. His poetry

offers a message of hope, determination and persistence and recommends the ideal of simple living and high thinking. With the healing power of his poetry, Wordsworth proves himself great both as a teacher and a poet.

### **3.6 Significant Lines from *Preface to Lyrical Ballads***

1. Poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, and it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility.
2. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression, which is in the countenance of all science.
3. It may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.

### **3.7 Critics on William Wordsworth**

1. Wordsworth's best poetry at its best is "as inevitable as Nature herself." It might seem that Nature not only gave him the matter for his poem but also wrote his poem for him. Wordsworth's best poems have no style, only a "perfect plainness" befitting one who writes with this voice of Nature. "Nature herself seems, I say, to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power... (Matthew Arnold)
2. Wordsworth had his passion for Nature fixed in his blood. It was a necessity of his being like that of the mulberry leaf to the silkworm, and through his commerce with Nature did he love and breathe. (De Quincy)

3. And it was through Nature, thus ennobled by a semblance of passion and thought, that Wordsworth approached the spectacle of human life. Human life, indeed, is for him, at first, only an additional, accidental grace on an expressive landscape. When he thought of man, it was as in the presence and under the influence of these effective natural objects, and linked to them by many associations. (Pater)
4. Wordsworth achieves greatness because his private struggles towards psychic integration have a representative quality. The poems generalize themselves, as they are read, into the reactions of the human individual fighting for its spiritual survival in a society that seems to have no place for it. And this makes him, with Blake, the first specifically modern English poet. (F. W. Bateson)
5. I might say that these two Wordsworth were Man and Mask—not Youth and Age, not Energy and Decay, but rather Reality and Myth. (Herbert Read)
6. Wordsworth is a mountain, the most massive in that lofty range which is called the Romantic Revival. (J.C. Smith)

### **3.8 The Prelude: A Critique**

The Prelude is Wordsworth's most revealing and personal poem in blank verse. The poet started composing it in 1799 and continued to pen it throughout his life. He never gave it a title though he called it a "Poem to Coleridge." It was published in 1850 after his death and the present title *The Prelude* was given by his wife Mary. His friend Coleridge inspired him to pen a philosophical poem, which would have his views of Man, Nature, and Society with the title *The Recluse* that never came into reality. *The Prelude* was intended as the introduction to the philosophical poem *The Recluse*.

*The Prelude* with 14 books is Wordsworth's most ambitious poem, fused with the spirit of Romanticism. Being personal in nature, it records the growth of a poet's mind. Hence, the poem is also known as "Growth of A Poet's Mind." It focuses on how the poet is made during the course of time. It is better known as the poetical autobiography, which explores the poet's soul's progress through the process of self-discovery. It traces how he makes his progress right from Paganism to Pantheism. It also reveals his love for man and finally this love culminates in the love of Nature. It is not the autobiography in the traditional sense. An attempt to trace out the chronological account of the poet's life will be futile.

The poem records Wordsworth's growth in love for Nature. Happy early childhood, troubles faced in the later childhood, the visionary experiences which he experienced as a child, the description of his education at Hawkeshead and at Cambridge, his love and illusion for the French Revolution, Spiritual Crisis, mental balance, and finally his firm faith in humanity are some shades which are beautifully presented on the canvas of *The Prelude*.

The poet is much influenced by Nature who disciplined him through beauty and fear. The feeling of fear is best demonstrated in the stolen boat episode. *The Prelude I* is full of episodes like bathing, bird catching, sailing boat, card playing that, more or less, make him feel the presence of Nature in one form or the other. These episodes, somewhere, reveal the growing line on the map of the poet's mind. Somehow, Nature teaches him that there is an essential unity in all the objects. Though he gets the physical pleasure or organic pleasure out of the external forms of Nature, he succeeds in developing this pleasure into a mystical experience.

*The Prelude* though possesses epic characteristics, is not an epic in traditional sense. It does not focus on the outward happenings in the life of the poet but throws light on the growth that occurs out of changes within the mind. The poem reveals the poet's love for Nature and his growth in this love through various stages. There is one thread that binds the fourteen books into one. This one thread is the poet. He reveals the growth of his mind in the course of his life. The poet himself is the hero who employs imagination as a technique that makes the poem satisfying from the angle of the reader who is himself possessed with the power of imagination. Hence, the



poem saves itself from being tagged as “vain” as the experiences of the poet with Nature are also more or less same everywhere.

*The Prelude* demonstrates Wordsworth’s sincerity in feelings and expressions. The style is simple and lucid and the poet has avoided the use of far-fetched conceits and rhetorical devices. He has taken his images and figures from the world of Nature. In a real sense, the poem *The Prelude* is Wordsworth’s greatest achievement. For Bateson, this poem “can only be called subjective autobiography. It is written, as it were, from the inside outwards.”

### 3.9 Critics on Prelude

1. *The Prelude* represents the height of Wordsworth’s poetic achievement in one direction. It is a long poem, and a great poem, conveying high meditation on a basis of personal experience. It has a unity of design, which depends upon the essential integrity of its subject. That subject is not ‘My Life’ but ‘The Making of a Poet’. (Helen Darbishire)
2. *The Prelude*, undoubtedly, places before us Wordsworth—the revolutionary; Wordsworth—the man; Wordsworth—the poet: and finally Wordsworth—the high priest of Nature. (Herbert Read)
3. The first two Books of *The Prelude* reach the highest level of spiritual autobiography and touch now and then the highest levels of English poetry by simply recording with perfect fidelity whatever in it bore upon the growth of his own mind. (Herford)

### 3.10 The Prelude Book I: Development of Thought

In the autumn of 1795, Wordsworth’s happiness knows no bound when he leaves London for Racedown in Dorsetshire where he gets him settled with his sister Dorothy. He feels as free as a bird and can go where he likes. He feels relaxed because he has now come from unnatural

life to natural life. He feels a soothing personality in the breeze, which inspires his soul for the fresh and original creativity. He recalls Coleridge who always encouraged him to pen a high philosophical poem *The Recluse*. Now, he realizes that he is inspired within and, so, can compose poems spontaneously. He is charged with poetic zeal internally and externally. He is sure that he is a chosen spirit and can compose poems of sublime order.

He thinks of a place where he may live. Many thoughts strike his mind but all of them are discarded. Ultimately he decides and reaches there after a pleasant journey of three days. On his way to this chosen place, he takes rest amidst the beautiful sights and sounds of Nature. He feels that he will be able to complete a work of undying fame. Inspiration plays upon his soul as the wind plays upon the Aeolian harp. But, the very next moment he realizes that his soul fails to compose harmoniously to the tune of the wind of inspiration. When he settles down at Racedown, he wishes to make himself ready for some plan. He plans to get a new store of knowledge or longs for rescuing the old stock of knowledge from the total oblivion. He thinks that he will translate all those vague fancies and longings that were somewhere moving in his mind for many years. He is confident that he will be able to create a noble and glorious work of art. But, at the very next moment, he feels a bit disappointed. Obstacles obstruct his way whenever he attempts to materialize his plan. Even then, he is not disheartened. For the time being he leaves the idea of composing a poem of lofty theme and decides to continue composing short and simple poems.

In moments of extreme passion for poetry, he thinks of the theme for his sublime composition. He introspects himself, investigates his mind and finds that he is fit for the task of composing a great epic. He is well equipped with primary gifts and other resources like forms and images. Now, he thinks of a suitable theme. He finds themes in abundance but none of them strikes him to be a suitable choice. He makes a list of such themes. First, he thinks of writing on some old romantic tales, which Milton would not sing. Milton is his ideal. Other subjects that strike him are chivalry, warlike deeds of medieval knights, achievements of heroes like Mithridates, Odin, Sertorius, Dominique de Gourgues, Gustavas, Wallace. The more he thinks of themes, the more he feels unsatisfied.

Now he thinks of composing a philosophical poem, which may deal with some universal truth—the truth that may prove to be a touchstone of strength and sustenance for life. It will certainly be a sublime poem replete with melodious notes. But, at the very next moment, he gives up this idea. He fails to make a clear choice due to either lack of confidence or his contradictory thoughts, which create confusion. He thinks of enjoying the sights of Nature for his sensuous pleasure. He feels that he has been given much but he has not done anything, which may be noble. His condition is like a manger that, in spite of having been provided much, has not done anything that may be known as real service.

Then, the poet comes to his childhood after meditating over the sublime themes and contradictory thoughts. He recollects various experiences, which he felt in his childhood. The childhood experiences, which he passed in harmony near the river Derwent, have made him of what he is and contributed much to the growth of his mind.

The poet addresses the river Derwent with love and affection. He recalls his love for Nature at his birthplace Cockermouth even when he was a five-year-old child. He also recalls his love for Nature at Hawkshead in the valley of Esthwaite. This is the place where his family shifted when he was only 10 years old. He recalls how he used to bathe and dive in the river Derwent or run swiftly in the sandy fields. He recalls how he, sometimes, used to feel himself to be a Red Indian boy—the boy who, in a playful mood, had just run away from his mother's hut. At Hawkshead, he recalls how he used to catch woodcocks over the high hill and hold a bird caught in the snare of some other person. But, after such unfair activities, he used to feel guilty and realized that there was someone who was following his footsteps with low breathing.

Then, he recalls how he used to look for bird nests to rob them of their eggs. Sometimes he used to have “hung above the raven's nest by knots of grass.” At such times, he would feel mystery in strange utterance of the dry wind, the unusual sky and mystery in the movements of the clouds.

The poet becomes philosophical in attitude and feels that all the human beings are made of dust. Soul remains immortal. This soul develops like a melody of music. This melody

harmonizes different tones. Nature also harmonizes various opposite elements and brings them together in order to create harmony. Such is the mysterious power of Nature. He is indebted to Nature for providing peace and serenity to his soul, particularly during the early formative period of his life. No doubt, he has experienced worries and weariness in life but under the influence of Nature, all the discordant elements are fused into such harmony as helps in fostering the growth of his soul leading him into a peaceful and calm mood. Nature, sometimes, becomes mild and sometimes severe with the noble aim of disciplining him.

The poet recalls the boating episode which, for him was “an act of stealth / and troubled pleasure.” This episode also demonstrates how Nature fosters the poet’s soul through fear. One summer evening he unties the chain of a little boat and pushes it away from the shore without taking the permission of its owner. It is an act of theft. While moving he hears echoes from the mountains’ sides. To his wonder he sees a huge and black peak, which seems to rear its head like a living being. Though he continues to row over the calm lake, he feels the presence of the awful peak, which seems to be standing in between him and the stars. The peak is not the simple peak but seems to be taking the shape of a creature that follows him with some design. Hence, he turns the boat and leaves it at the place from where he stole and moves towards home silently. This very sight haunts him through its mysterious forms. His mind becomes a clean slate—clean of all known objects and sights. What he remembers is the only huge powerful forms and shapes, which continue to haunt him.

Then, he describes his companionship with the objects of Nature in the early days of his life. He is thankful to the “Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe” which has shaped his relationship between his human feelings and the objects of Nature. This communion with Nature has resulted in sublime thoughts and passions, which finally enable him to recognize the loftiness in the throbbing of the human heart.

He recalls his experience of skating on ice with his friends. The leafless trees and the nearby hills echo the sound of their moving skates. Sometimes he would make him separate from his companions to chase the reflection of a star in the ice. While moving round and round in circle, he used to stop suddenly. When he stops, the rocks seem to be moving. The earth seems to

be revolving with a visible motion. Such experiences create a sense of awe in the heart of the poet who feels the presence of superior power. Nature trains him and disciplines his powers and passions through the ministry of pleasure and fear.

He can never forget the natural surroundings. He recalls the games that he used to play with his friends. Even in his mature years, he loves to see the bowers of hazel trees with snowy-white flowers. He loves to see the paper-kite flying high among the clouds or going downward due to the force of the wind. He also likes the humble cottages, which seem to be beautiful. These are the cottages where he used to play games like Loo or Whist, a card game. He remembers how he used to feel disturbance because of the yelling sound that came from hills and meadows.

No doubt, in his earlier years, the poet enjoys pleasures out of the sensuous beauty of Nature. He also mentions the pleasures and joys of subtler origin. In his early days, he used to feel serene pleasure, which is an outcome of the early sympathies or inborn instincts and impulses. These sympathies or inborn instincts and impulses form the harmonious basis for this existing material life. He recalls the moments of his communion with the Eternal Beauty of the Universe when he was just a boy of ten. He used to take sensuous pleasure out of the glorious objects of Nature. He would often stand and gaze the sea in the moonlight in order to suck beauty and pleasure.

He sees the flashes of momentary visions of divine beauty even in the midst of sensuous pleasures. The earth reminds him of his divine origin and the visions of the divine life. The sights that remained hidden at the subconscious level will inspire his soul in his mature years. The memories of such objects imprint a sublime effect on his mind. Such remember able things and scenes are very dear to him as some invisible bonds with his primary affections and impulses closely tie them.

He addresses Coleridge in an apologetic mood. He asks him to forgive him and longs for his sympathies for him if he finds his story tedious or finds him a failure in not revealing fully. He cannot help remembering and thinking of the early days of his childhood. The recollection of

the childhood days will not only refresh his thoughts but restore a kind of balance and discipline to his mind also. These memories of childhood have a dream-like enchantment. He believes that if his genial mood does not desert him, he will trace out the story of his life. No doubt, it requires much labour but it will be welcome to his friend Coleridge.

### 3.11 Excerpts from *The Prelude: Book I*

(1)

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up  
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:

(2)

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music; there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society. How strange, that all  
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,  
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused  
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,  
And that a needful part, in making up  
The calm existence that is mine when I  
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!  
Thanks to the means which Nature designed to employ

(3)

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, not in vain  
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn  
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me  
The passions that build up our human soul;  
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,  
But with high objects, with enduring things—  
With life and nature, purifying thus  
The elements of feeling and of thought,  
And sanctifying, by such discipline,  
Both pain and fear, until we recognize  
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

### **3.12 Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood**

#### **A Critique**

William Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' is the most discussed and celebrated poem. William Wordsworth began it in early 1802, completed it in 1806 and got it published in 1807 as 'Ode' in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807). Later, he edited it and got it published with its full title 'Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' with an epigraph in *Poems* (1815). It is an irregular Pindaric ode. The length of its stanzas varies. Its narration seems to be in the style of an interior monologue. It contains 11 stanzas along with a three line epigraph from his poem 'My heart leaps up when I behold' (also known as 'The Rainbow').

The Child is the father of the Man  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety  
(The Rainbow)

In the first four stanzas, the poet raises questions regarding the loss of celestial light and in the consequent stanzas he answers to the questions in the form of compensation of the

philosophic mind. It has become a personal document, which reveals the record of spiritual crisis that the poet faced, and also equally well it demonstrates how he got over the crisis by gaining a mature vision and a positive human attitude. The poem is criticized as well as praised to the extent that it has become the most significant poem. For Emerson, it is “the high watermark of poetry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”

As it is clear from its title, it is about the immortality of soul—the soul, of which a human being is aware in his childhood but begins to forget as he grows up. The child is conscious of his immortality because he recalls the memories or reminiscences of heaven from where he has come. The child comes in this world with the reminiscences of his life in heaven. This is the idea, which Henry Vaughan penned in his poem ‘The Retreat.’

Wordsworth begins the poem with a feeling of loss—loss of a divine glory, which he used to have when he was a child. He recalls the time when meadow, grove, stream, the earth and even every common sight seemed to be clothed in celestial light. Now, he fails to see the celestial light as he has grown up. He loves Nature and her objects like rainbow, rose, moonlight, and sunshine. But, in them, he fails to see the divine glory, which he used to see in the past.

When he thinks of the loss of celestial light, he becomes sad. But, soon, he realizes that he should not ruin the gay season of spring when Nature seems to be so beautiful. He has no right to be unhappy when all the objects of Nature are in joyful mood and every beast seems to have a holiday with the feeling of May. No sooner does he think so than he is reminded of the departed glory. He sees a tree and a single field, which seems to be speaking of something that has gone. He is so sad that he asks:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Now the poet explains the loss of celestial light with the help of the doctrine of reminiscence. Our birth in this world is a sleep in the other world. The poet believes that we come from heaven but as soon as we come, we begin to forget our home from where we come.



The immortal soul is a star, which rises in this world but sets in heaven. The rising of our soul has its setting somewhere else—heaven. He also believes that we do not come utterly naked but with celestial light. In our childhood, we have the memories of heavenly life. We see all the objects of Nature with this celestial light. But, as the child grows up and becomes worldly, he begins to forget. The world proves to be a prison for his soul. He, stills sees the glory. Even when he turns to be a youth, he sees the glimpses of heaven. As this man moves farther from heaven, his memories start becoming dimmer. Even, at this stage, he adores Nature. But, when this youth turns into man and comes in the grip of this world, all the memories of heaven begin to disappear. The light of heaven is not seen anymore. The only light that he sees is the light of this world. Earth plays the role of a foster mother who makes man forget his real home i.e. heaven by providing various delights and pleasures.

Now, the poet presents the picture of the child who attempts to imitate the actions of his elders. While presenting the childhood, he keeps Hartley Coleridge, six years old son of Coleridge in his mind. The child arranges the toys according to some design that he has acquired. He keeps on changing the theme of his design. Sometimes, it is wedding ceremony, sometimes it is festival or sometimes it is a funeral. He utters words and phrases related to the theme, which engages him. He will fit “his tongue to the dialogues of business, love, or strife.” But, soon, he will forget these themes and shift his interest to another subject. He is an actor who plays different roles.

The poet believes that the child knows certain truths, which remain unknown to the grownup people. The grown up people pass their lifetime in discovering those truths, which a child knows. The child knows about Heaven from where he has come. He is quite conscious of the immortality of his soul. He is aware of his pre-natal existence in heaven. While glorifying, he calls the child a philosopher, an eye among the blind, a mighty prophet, a seer etc. The poet asks him not to imitate the actions of his elders because these actions are going to be a part of his life. The customs of life in the form of social conventions will come to him with “a weight”, which will be “heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!”

The poet is thankful to the memories of childhood. The thought of childhood is worthy to be blessed. But, he does not glorify the thought of childhood because of its sense of freedom, happiness, simple faith and newborn hopes. He glorifies it because of doubts or obstinate questionings, which he used to feel in his childhood about the reality of objects of the physical world. In his childhood, he often had fits of dreaminess. He also had vague perception that there was a world of spirit beyond this physical world. He used to have high instincts, which remained above human nature.

Now, the vague memories of life in heaven have proved to be the guiding light of his existence. They have illumined all his experiences in life. These are the memories, which sustain, feed and nurse a man. They also make him feel that here in this world life is simply a brief interval between past life and future life in heaven. These are certain truths that a child knows. He believes that no one can destroy these truths. He is happy when he thinks that even in his mature years, a man in calm moments can realize that he has come from heaven, the real home.

The poet reconciles himself to the loss of celestial light or divine glory. No doubt his loss is great but the compensation that he has got is even greater. What he has got is mature vision and human attitude. He has become more sympathetic than ever. He has faith in a life after death and, above all, he has developed a philosophic mind. His loss has resulted in his gains. He feels calm and peace. His love for Nature has got more depth than ever. Now the most ordinary objects of Nature have deeper meanings for him. He feels that even the meanest flower can provide him so deep thoughts that even tears fail to express.

This poem is an ode, which is a lyric with its characteristics like addressing form, dignified style, intense feelings and sincerity of tone. It reveals Wordsworth himself and, hence, is leveled in the category of revealing “Egotistical Sublime.” Its first four stanzas raise questions, which are about the loss—the loss of celestial light or divine glory. The next four stanzas offer his response to the questions in the doctrine of reminiscence. The last three stanzas offer a ray of hope in the form of the human values as a compensation of the loss.

The poem is the most celebrated as well as the most controversial one. The poet glorifies the childhood. The child may be pure and innocent, as he is not caught in the net of worldly pleasures. But, to consider him “the best philosopher”, “seer blest” and “eye among the blind” is too much and none can believe it to be true on any logical ground. The poet has presented the doubts of the child about the reality of the material world. But, these doubts may be personal experiences of the poet as a child but not the universal ones as it is not the case with every child. He sees the child as pure and attempts to see him in the light of the doctrine of reminiscence. That is why the child sees a divine glory and has faith in the immortality of soul. But the grown up man lives in doubts and fails to trace the divine glory.

The poem gives a sudden jerk after the first four stanzas as it takes a new direction. It seems to be out of harmony with the spirit of true Nature. It fails to continue its unity, which comes to an end due to too much emphasis on the idea of pre-existence. It does not follow the parameters of simple diction. A common man cannot understand it easily. That is why T.S. Eliot criticized Wordsworth for not following his own theory of poetic diction in this poem. No doubt, it begins in loss but concludes in gain. The gain is in the poet’s vision, which is an outcome of human heart and its tenderness, joys and tears. Towards the end of the poem, the poet succeeds in developing an association not only between man and Nature but between man and man. And this is what counts. It is true that this Ode is replete with the ideas, which remain incredible for a common man. But the poet has attempted to generalize his personal experiences. To a great extent, he has succeeded in his attempt. In real sense, this Ode has become a journey—the journey that leads to the final goal of achieving a mature vision, a philosophic mind and a human heart. Indeed, this Ode ranks among the best poems of Wordsworth for whom it has become a kind of spiritual autobiography.

### **3.13 Critics on Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood**

1. There are passages in the ‘Immortal Ode’, which have less than usual command of rhythm and ability to make a line stand by itself, as if he were not quite sure how to use

the liberties at his disposal. But these are unimportant. The whole has a capacious sweep, and the form suits the majestic subject with which Wordsworth deals... There are moments when we suspect Wordsworth of trying to say more than he means, or of losing himself in an unaccustomed and not always convincing grandeur... But perhaps the crisis was more severe than he realized. (C.M. Bowra)

2. Both formally and in the history of its composition the poem is divided into two main parts. The first part of the Ode, consisting of four stanzas, states an optical phenomenon and asks a question about it. The second part, consisting of seven stanzas, answers that question and is itself divided into two parts, of which the first is despairing, the second hopeful. (Lionel Trilling)

### 3.14 Excerpts from Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

(1)

The sunshine is a glorious birth,  
But yet I know, where'er I go,  
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.  
But there's a Tree, of many, one,  
A single Field which I have looked upon,  
Both of them speak of something that is gone;  
The Pansy at my feet  
Doth the same tale repeat:  
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

(2)

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended ;  
At length the Man perceives it die away  
And fade into the light of common day.

(3)

The little Actor cons another part;  
Falling from time to time his "humorous stage"  
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age.  
That Life brings with her in her equipage;  
As if his whole vocation  
Were endless imitations.

(4)

Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep  
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,  
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,  
Haunted forever by the eternal mind,--  
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!  
On whom those truths do rest,  
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,

(5)

O joy! that in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive!  
The thought of our past years in me doth breed  
Perpetual benediction

(6)

We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death  
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

(7)

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

### 3.15 Let Us Sum Up

Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) initiated the era of romanticism. Wordsworth's poetry has all the ingredients of Romanticism including subjectivity, spontaneity, love of supernatural, love of Nature, melancholy, dignity and nobility of an individual, simplicity, a revolt against artificiality and the like. His poetry has a soothing and restorative effect on the soul. It offers a message of hope, determination and persistence. It recommends the ideal of simple living and high thinking.

*The Prelude* in 14 books is the most revealing and personal poem in blank verse. Though Wordsworth started composing it in 1799 and continued to pen it throughout his life, it was published in 1850 after his death. It is also known as "Growth of a Poet's Mind." "It proves to be a poetical autobiography which explores the progress of the poet's soul through the process of self-discovery.

*The Prelude I* is full of episodes like bathing, bird catching, sailing boat, card-playing which more or less make the poet feel the presence of Nature in one form or other. He recalls the moments of his communion with the Eternal Beauty of the Universe when he was only ten years old. He sees the flashes of momentary visions of divine beauty even in the midst of sensuous pleasures. He addresses Coleridge in an apologetic mood and asks him to forgive him if he finds his story tedious. He believes that if his genial mood does not desert him, he will trace out the story of his life.

Wordsworth began 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' in early 1802, completed it in 1806 and got it published in 1807 as 'Ode' in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807). The poem is about the immortality of soul—the soul, of which a human being is aware in his childhood but begins to forget as he grows up. The poet calls the child a philosopher, an eye among the blind, a mighty prophet, a seer etc.

'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' gives a sudden jerk after the first four stanzas. It fails to continue its unity, which comes to an end due to too much emphasis on the idea of pre-existence. To consider a child "the best philosopher", "seer blest" and "eye among the blind" is too much. It is not a poem for a common reader. It does not follow the parameters of simple diction. But, this poem is appreciated as well. It is, for Emerson, "high watermark of English poetry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century." It has become a journey—the journey that leads to the final goal of achieving a mature vision, a philosophic mind and a human heart.

