William Wordsworth

2. Life

- Born in **Cockermouth** in Cumberland in **1770**.

- His father, a lawyer, taught him **poetry** and allowed him access to his **library**.

- 1791: B. A. Degree at **St John’s College**, Cambridge.

Wordworth’s House in Cockermouth, Cumberland
2. Life

- In 1791 he travelled to Revolutionary France and was fascinated by the Republican movement.

- In 1792 he had a daughter, Caroline, from a French aristocratic woman, Annette Vallon.
2. Life

- The **Reign of Terror** led him to become estranged to the Republic, and the **war** between England and France caused him to **return to England**.
2. Life

- In 1795 he developed a close friendship with **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, with whom he collaborated in the 1797-1799 period to write *Lyrical Ballads*.

- In 1843 he became the **Poet Laureate**.

- He died in **1850**.
3. Main works

- *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (1798).


- *Poems*, in Two Volumes (1807).

- *The Excursion* (1814).

- *The Prelude* (1850).
4. The object of poetry

From the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

“The principal object [...] was to choose incidents and situations from common life [...] to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them [...] the primary laws of our nature”.

William Wordsworth
5. The language of poetry

From the Preface to Lyrical Ballads

“...The language [...] of these men is adopted [...] because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived.”

“ [...] and because, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.”
6. Who is the poet?

From the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

“What is a poet? [...] He is a man speaking to men: a man [...] endued with more lively sensibility who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind”.

William Wordsworth
7. What is poetry?

From the Preface to Lyrical Ballads

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind”.

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8. Poetic composition

From the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads*

“In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion (...) from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment”.
9. The poetic process

Poet → Sensory experience → Emotion → Memory = Recollection In Tranquillity

Object → Emotion

Reader → Poem → Kindred emotion
10. Man and nature

- Man and nature are **inseparable**.

- **Pantheistic view** of nature: it is the seat of the spirit of the universe.

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- Nature **comforts** man in sorrow, it is a **source of joy** and pleasure, it teaches man to love, to act in a moral way.
11. The senses and memory

- Wordsworth exploited the **sensibility of the eye and ear** to perceive the beauty of nature.

- He believed that the **moral character develops during childhood** → influence of David Hartley (1705-1757).
The sensations caused by physical experience lead to simple thoughts.

These simple thoughts later combine into complex and organised ideas.

Memory is a major force in the process of growth.
12. The poet’s task

The poet = a teacher

- Shows men how to understand their feelings and improve their moral being.
- Draws attention to the ordinary things of life where the deepest emotions are to be found.
13. Wordsworth’s style

- Abandoned 18th-century poetic diction.
- Almost always used blank verse.
- Proved skilful at verse forms such as sonnets, odes, ballads and lyrics.