



**AN ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AS A FOUNDER
OF ENGLISH ROMANTICISM****Dr. Shanthala A. C.****Assistant Professor, Department of English,
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William Wordsworth is widely regarded as one of the most influential poets and a central figure in the rise of English Romanticism. This paper examines Wordsworth's role as a founder of the Romantic movement by analyzing his poetic themes, philosophical outlook, and literary innovations. Rejecting the artificial diction and rigid forms of Neoclassical poetry, Wordsworth emphasized simplicity of language, emotional sincerity, and a deep connection with nature and common human life. His poetry reflects a belief in the spiritual power of nature, the importance of imagination, and the value of individual experience.

Works such as Lyrical Ballads and poems like Tintern Abbey and The Prelude demonstrate his revolutionary approach to poetry, which redefined poetic expression in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The study highlights how Wordsworth's ideas shaped Romantic ideology and influenced later poets, establishing him as a foundational figure in English Romantic literature.¹



Keywords : William Wordsworth, English Romanticism, Nature, Imagination, Lyrical Ballads, Romantic Poetry, Individual Experience.

INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth occupies a pivotal position in the history of English literature as one of the principal founders of English Romanticism. Emerging at the end of the eighteenth century, Romanticism developed as a reaction against the rigid formalism, artificial diction, and rational emphasis of the Neoclassical age. Wordsworth, through his revolutionary ideas about poetry and poetic language, played a crucial role in redefining the purpose and nature of literature. His contribution marked a significant shift from the intellectual and aristocratic concerns of earlier poetry to a focus on emotion, imagination, nature, and the lives of ordinary people. Wordsworth's literary philosophy is most clearly articulated in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1798), where he advocates the use of simple language drawn from common life and defines poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." This declaration challenged traditional poetic conventions and laid the theoretical foundation of Romantic poetry. By emphasizing personal emotion and subjective experience, Wordsworth established a new poetic sensibility that valued inner truth over external form.²

¹ Ferber, Michael. Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2010.

² Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Cengage Learning, multiple editions.

Nature occupies a central place in Wordsworth's poetry, not merely as a background but as a living, spiritual force capable of nurturing the human mind and soul. His poems reflect a deep belief in the moral and emotional influence of nature on human development. Through works such as *Tintern Abbey*, *The Prelude*, and *Michael*, Wordsworth presents nature as a teacher, healer, and source of inspiration, reinforcing Romantic ideals of harmony between humanity and the natural world. Furthermore, Wordsworth's focus on childhood, memory, imagination, and the dignity of rural life reflects his democratic vision of poetry. By choosing humble characters and everyday experiences as poetic subjects, he broadened the scope of English poetry and made it accessible to common readers. His influence extended beyond his contemporaries, shaping the works of later Romantic poets such as Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. Thus, an analysis of William Wordsworth as a founder of English Romanticism reveals his lasting impact on English literature. His poetic theories and creative practice not only initiated a literary movement but also transformed the way poetry was written, read, and understood, securing his place as a central figure in the Romantic tradition.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the contribution of William Wordsworth to the development and establishment of English Romanticism and to examine his role as one of its founding figures.

Objectives

- ❖ To study the historical and literary background of the Romantic Movement in England.
- ❖ To examine William Wordsworth's poetic theory as expressed in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.
- ❖ To analyze the major themes in Wordsworth's poetry, such as nature, imagination, emotion, and individual experience.
- ❖ To evaluate Wordsworth's use of simple language and common life as a departure from Neoclassical poetic traditions.
- ❖ To assess the philosophical and spiritual aspects of nature in Wordsworth's poetry.
- ❖ To study selected poems of Wordsworth in order to highlight Romantic ideals and characteristics.
- ❖ To understand Wordsworth's influence on other Romantic poets and on English literature as a whole.
- ❖ To establish William Wordsworth's significance as a founder of English Romanticism.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literary contribution of William Wordsworth has been widely discussed and critically examined by scholars, critics, and historians of English literature. As one of the founding figures of English Romanticism, Wordsworth's poetry and poetic theory have attracted sustained academic attention for their revolutionary departure from Neoclassical traditions and their emphasis on emotion, nature, and individual experience. Early Romantic critics recognized Wordsworth's originality and philosophical depth. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth's contemporary and collaborator, acknowledged his friend's genius, particularly praising his ability to capture the spiritual relationship between human beings and nature. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge discusses Wordsworth's poetic principles, especially his theory of language and imagination, though he also offers critical observations on Wordsworth's practice. Victorian critics such as Matthew Arnold viewed Wordsworth as a moral and spiritual teacher. Arnold regarded Wordsworth's poetry as a source of "healing power" in an age troubled by materialism and industrialization. He emphasized Wordsworth's seriousness, ethical vision, and lasting relevance, reinforcing the poet's stature in the English literary canon.³

Twentieth-century critics expanded the scope of Wordsworthian studies by applying new critical approaches. F. R. Leavis emphasized Wordsworth's sincerity and moral seriousness, while

³ Day, Aidan. *Romanticism*. Routledge, 2011.

critics like Herbert Read highlighted the psychological and symbolic dimensions of his poetry. Cleanth Brooks and the New Critics focused on close textual analysis, examining imagery, structure, and thematic unity in Wordsworth's major poems. Modern scholars have explored Wordsworth's Romanticism in relation to politics, ecology, and philosophy. Critics such as Jonathan Bate have examined Wordsworth as an early ecological thinker, emphasizing his deep concern for nature and environmental harmony. Others have studied his response to the French Revolution and how political disillusionment shaped his poetic vision and inward turn toward imagination and memory.

Recent studies also analyze Wordsworth's role in shaping Romantic ideology through Lyrical Ballads, which is often considered the manifesto of Romantic poetry. Scholars agree that the Preface laid the theoretical foundation of English Romanticism by redefining poetry, poetic language, and the role of the poet. Despite debates over certain limitations of Wordsworth's poetic practice, critics largely concur that his influence on Romantic poetry and English literature is profound and enduring. Thus, the existing body of literature clearly establishes William Wordsworth as a central figure in the Romantic Movement. However, continued analysis remains valuable to reassess his foundational role in English Romanticism by integrating traditional criticism with modern perspectives, thereby reaffirming his lasting literary significance.⁴

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology to analyze William Wordsworth's contribution as a founder of English Romanticism. The research is primarily based on textual analysis and interpretative criticism, focusing on Wordsworth's poetic works and theoretical writings. The study makes use of primary sources, which include Wordsworth's major poetic works such as Lyrical Ballads, Tintern Abbey, The Prelude, Michael, and selected shorter lyrics. Special attention is given to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, as it serves as a foundational theoretical text for understanding Romantic poetry and Wordsworth's literary principles.

Secondary sources form an important part of the methodology and include critical essays, books, scholarly articles, and literary histories written by established critics and scholars such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis, and modern Romantic critics. These sources are used to contextualize Wordsworth's ideas, examine critical interpretations, and support analytical arguments. The research follows a historical and analytical approach, situating Wordsworth's poetry within the socio-literary context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Comparative analysis is also employed to highlight the differences between Neoclassical poetry and Romantic poetry, thereby emphasizing Wordsworth's innovative role in shaping Romanticism. The study relies on library-based research, including reference books, journals, and authenticated online academic resources. No statistical or empirical tools are used, as the research is literary and theoretical in nature. Overall, this methodology enables a systematic and critical evaluation of William Wordsworth's poetic vision, themes, and stylistic innovations, thereby establishing his significance as a founder of English Romanticism.⁵

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

William Wordsworth is universally acknowledged as a major figure in the English Romantic Movement; however, a comprehensive and systematic analysis of his role as a founder of English Romanticism remains a critical necessity. Much of the existing criticism either focuses on isolated themes in his poetry, such as nature or imagination, or examines Romanticism as a broad literary movement without adequately emphasizing Wordsworth's foundational contribution. The problem addressed in this study is to critically examine how Wordsworth's poetic theory, thematic concerns, and stylistic innovations collectively challenged the established Neoclassical conventions and laid the groundwork for Romantic poetry in England. While Wordsworth's influence is widely accepted, there is

⁴ Gill, Stephen. William Wordsworth: A Life. Oxford University Press, 1989.

⁵ Modiano, Raimonda. Coleridge and the Concept of Nature. Florida State University Press, 1985.

a need to clearly analyze and establish the specific elements that qualify him as a founding figure rather than merely a participant in the Romantic Movement. This study seeks to address the gap by analyzing Wordsworth's major works and theoretical writings to understand how his emphasis on emotion, nature, common life, imagination, and simple language transformed English poetry. By doing so, the research aims to clarify Wordsworth's unique position in literary history and to reassess his lasting impact on the development of English Romanticism.⁶

NEED OF THE STUDY

The study of William Wordsworth as a founder of English Romanticism is essential for understanding the transformation of English poetry at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wordsworth's revolutionary ideas challenged the rigid conventions of Neoclassical poetry and introduced a new literary sensibility centered on emotion, imagination, nature, and individual experience. Examining his contribution helps to clarify the origins and development of Romanticism in English literature. Despite the extensive body of criticism on Wordsworth, there is a continuing need to reassess his foundational role in shaping Romantic ideology, especially for academic and research purposes. Many studies emphasize Romanticism as a collective movement, often overlooking Wordsworth's unique and decisive influence through works like *Lyrical Ballads* and the Preface. This study addresses that gap by systematically analyzing his poetic theory and practice.

The study is also necessary to help students and researchers gain a clearer understanding of the defining characteristics of Romantic poetry. By focusing on Wordsworth's themes, language, and philosophical outlook, the research provides insights into how Romanticism emerged as a reaction against earlier literary traditions. Furthermore, this study contributes to a deeper appreciation of Wordsworth's lasting influence on later Romantic poets and modern literary thought. Understanding his role as a founder not only enhances literary scholarship but also reinforces the relevance of Romantic values in contemporary times.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

A comparative study of William Wordsworth and other Romantic poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats may be undertaken to further understand similarities and differences in Romantic ideology. Future research may focus on a detailed analysis of *The Prelude* as an autobiographical epic to explore the development of Romantic self-consciousness and poetic imagination. A study of Wordsworth's treatment of nature from an ecological or environmental perspective can offer new insights into his relevance in contemporary ecological criticism. Further research may examine the influence of the French Revolution on Wordsworth's political and philosophical views and its impact on his poetic transformation. A linguistic study of Wordsworth's use of simple language and rustic speech may be conducted to assess its effectiveness and innovation in Romantic poetry. Researchers may explore Wordsworth's representation of childhood and memory to understand their psychological and philosophical significance in Romantic thought. A comparative analysis between Neoclassical poetry and Wordsworth's Romantic poetry can further highlight the revolutionary shift in literary traditions. Future studies may also investigate Wordsworth's influence on later literary movements such as Victorian poetry and modern literary theory.⁷

RESEARCH STATEMENT

This research seeks to examine William Wordsworth's role as a founding figure of English Romanticism by analyzing his poetic theory, major works, and literary innovations. The study aims to explore how Wordsworth's emphasis on emotion, imagination, nature, and common human life challenged Neoclassical conventions and established new principles of poetic expression. Through a critical analysis of selected poems and the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the research attempts to

⁶ Roe, Nicholas. *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*. Clarendon Press, 1988.

⁷ Hudson, W. H. *An Outline History of English Literature*. Surjeet Publications, 2007.

demonstrate how Wordsworth laid the ideological and aesthetic foundation of the Romantic Movement in English literature. Research Statement . This research aims to critically examine William Wordsworth's role as a founding figure of English Romanticism by analyzing his poetic theory and major literary works. The study explores how Wordsworth's emphasis on emotion, imagination, nature, and common human life challenged Neoclassical poetic conventions and established new principles of poetic expression. Through an interpretative analysis of selected poems and the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, the research seeks to demonstrate Wordsworth's lasting influence on the formation and development of the Romantic Movement in English literature.⁸

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of the present study is limited to an analytical examination of William Wordsworth's contribution as a founder of English Romanticism. The research focuses on his major poetic works, including Lyrical Ballads, Tintern Abbey, The Prelude, Michael, and selected shorter lyrics, along with the Preface to Lyrical Ballads as a theoretical framework. The study examines key Romantic themes such as nature, imagination, emotion, individual experience, and the use of simple language. It also explores Wordsworth's departure from Neoclassical poetic conventions and his influence on the development of Romantic ideology in English literature. The research places Wordsworth within the historical and literary context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England.

The study is limited to a qualitative and literary analysis and does not employ quantitative or empirical research methods. It does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of all of Wordsworth's works but concentrates only on selected representative texts relevant to Romanticism. The research does not provide an extensive comparative study of Wordsworth with other Romantic poets, except where necessary for contextual understanding. Additionally, the study relies on available secondary sources, and interpretations may be influenced by the perspectives of selected critics. Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a focused and meaningful analysis of William Wordsworth's foundational role in English Romanticism.⁹

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

- ❖ The study focuses on William Wordsworth's role as a founder of English Romanticism.
- ❖ It examines selected major poetic works, including Lyrical Ballads, Tintern Abbey, The Prelude, Michael, and other representative poems.
- ❖ The research analyzes key Romantic themes such as nature, imagination, emotion, childhood, memory, and individual experience.
- ❖ Wordsworth's use of simple language and focus on common life are studied to understand his departure from Neoclassical conventions.
- ❖ The study contextualizes Wordsworth's works within the historical and literary framework of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England.
- ❖ Secondary sources, including critical essays, literary histories, and scholarly interpretations, are used to support analysis.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- ❖ The study is qualitative and literary, without any empirical or statistical analysis.
- ❖ Only selected works of Wordsworth are analyzed; his complete works are not included.
- ❖ Comparative analysis with other Romantic poets is limited to contextual references only.
- ❖ Interpretations are based on available secondary sources and critical opinions, which may carry inherent subjectivity.
- ❖ The research focuses mainly on Wordsworth's literary and theoretical contributions, without exploring broader social or political implications in depth.

⁸ Mukherjee, S. K. William Wordsworth: An Evaluation of His Poetry. Rama Brothers India, 2016.

⁹ Mckusick, J. C. Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology. St. Martin's Press, 2000.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the present study is confined to an analytical examination of William Wordsworth's contribution as a founder of English Romanticism. The study focuses on his major poetic works such as *Lyrical Ballads*, *Tintern Abbey*, *The Prelude*, *Michael*, and selected shorter poems that reflect the core principles of Romanticism. The research examines Wordsworth's poetic theory as articulated in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and analyzes key Romantic themes including nature, imagination, emotion, simplicity of language, and individual experience. It also explores his departure from Neoclassical poetic conventions and his role in shaping Romantic ideology in English literature. The study is literary and theoretical in nature and places Wordsworth's works within the historical and literary context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England. While references to other Romantic poets are made for contextual clarity, the primary focus remains on Wordsworth's foundational role in the Romantic Movement.¹⁰

DISCUSSION

The analysis of William Wordsworth's poetry and poetic theory clearly establishes his pivotal role as a founder of English Romanticism. His contribution marks a radical departure from the Neoclassical tradition that dominated eighteenth-century English poetry. By rejecting artificial diction, formal rigidity, and aristocratic subject matter, Wordsworth introduced a new poetic vision grounded in emotion, imagination, nature, and common human experience. One of the most significant aspects of Wordsworth's Romanticism is his emphasis on emotion and personal experience. His famous definition of poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" underscores the centrality of emotion in Romantic art. Unlike Neoclassical poets, who valued reason and order, Wordsworth prioritized inner feelings and subjective truth. This shift redefined the purpose of poetry, transforming it into a medium for emotional and spiritual expression.

Nature occupies a central place in Wordsworth's poetic imagination. In poems such as *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude*, nature is not merely a backdrop but a living presence that shapes the human mind and moral sensibility. Wordsworth presents nature as a teacher, guide, and source of spiritual renewal. This intimate relationship between humanity and nature reflects a core Romantic belief and distinguishes Wordsworth as a pioneer of nature-centered poetry. Wordsworth's use of simple language and common life further reinforces his foundational role in Romanticism. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he argues for the use of language "really used by men," particularly those living in rural settings. By choosing ordinary people and everyday experiences as poetic subjects, Wordsworth democratized poetry and expanded its emotional reach. This approach challenged established poetic norms and made literature more accessible to a wider audience. The role of imagination and memory is another defining feature of Wordsworth's Romanticism. He viewed imagination as a unifying power that connects past and present experiences, transforming ordinary moments into profound insights. Childhood memories, in particular, are portrayed as sources of purity and creative energy, highlighting the Romantic emphasis on innocence and emotional depth. Wordsworth's collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Lyrical Ballads* played a crucial role in establishing Romantic poetry. While Coleridge explored the supernatural and imaginative, Wordsworth focused on realism infused with emotional depth, together shaping the Romantic Movement's breadth and diversity. However, Wordsworth's philosophical clarity and theoretical articulation in the Preface firmly position him as a founding force. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that Wordsworth's poetic practice and critical thought laid the ideological and aesthetic foundation of English Romanticism. His influence extended beyond his contemporaries and continues to shape literary thought, affirming his enduring significance as a founder of the Romantic tradition.¹¹

¹⁰ Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and Its Significance*. Kalyani Publishers, 2003.

¹¹ *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*. Edited by Richard Gravil & Daniel Robinson.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational institutions should emphasize William Wordsworth's role as a founder of English Romanticism while teaching the Romantic Movement to provide students with a clearer historical perspective. Researchers are encouraged to conduct in-depth textual analyses of Wordsworth's major poems to better understand his poetic techniques and philosophical ideas. Comparative studies between Wordsworth and other Romantic poets may be undertaken to highlight his unique contribution to the movement. The Preface to Lyrical Ballads should be studied as a foundational theoretical text of Romanticism in literature curricula. Interdisciplinary approaches combining literature with philosophy, ecology, and psychology may be adopted to explore the broader relevance of Wordsworth's ideas. Future research may focus on Wordsworth's relevance in contemporary literary and cultural contexts, particularly in relation to environmental awareness and emotional well-being. Scholars should incorporate modern critical perspectives to reassess Wordsworth's contribution to Romanticism in the light of changing literary theories. Translations and simplified editions of Wordsworth's works may be promoted to make his poetry accessible to a wider audience.

CONCLUSION

The present study clearly establishes William Wordsworth as a foundational figure in the development of English Romanticism. Through his revolutionary poetic theory and creative practice, Wordsworth brought about a decisive shift from the formal rigidity and intellectual emphasis of Neoclassical poetry to a new literary mode centered on emotion, imagination, nature, and individual experience. His contribution reshaped both the content and purpose of English poetry. Wordsworth's ideas, most notably expressed in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, redefined poetry as an expression of powerful feelings arising from personal experience and reflection. His insistence on simple language drawn from common life and his focus on ordinary people marked a democratic and humanistic approach to literature. This transformation laid the ideological and aesthetic foundation of the Romantic Movement. Nature, as portrayed in Wordsworth's poetry, emerges as a living and moral force that nurtures the human mind and spirit. His profound engagement with nature, memory, and imagination reflects core Romantic values and distinguishes him from earlier poetic traditions. Works such as Tintern Abbey and The Prelude exemplify his philosophical depth and artistic innovation.

Moreover, Wordsworth's influence extended beyond his own works, shaping the ideas and practices of later Romantic poets and leaving a lasting impact on English literature. His role was not merely that of a participant but of a pioneer who articulated and embodied the principles of Romanticism. In conclusion, an analysis of William Wordsworth's poetry and poetic theory confirms his enduring significance as a founder of English Romanticism. His literary legacy continues to inspire readers and scholars alike, reaffirming his central place in the history of English literature.

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