In the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, we witness the realization of a type of emotional and imaginative literature that seems to have escaped from the constraining forces of sovereign reason. After the great upheaval caused by the transformation of industry, after the religious awakening of Methodism and Evangelicism, the decisive shock to thought comes with the French Revolution of 1789. In these thirty years emerges a cluster of poets who are said to have brought about a "Romantic revival". The label is actually only an attempt to show how their work differed from that of their predecessors. They all had a deep interest in nature, not as a centre of beautiful scenes but as an informing and spiritual influence on life. It seemed that these poets were turning to nature, frightened by the coming of industrialism. The declining strength of traditional religious belief appeared to be motivating these poets to develop a religion from the spirituality of their personal experiences.

English Romanticism can perhaps be best defined in terms of pure psychology. It is legitimate to date, as is often done, the beginning of a new age in literature from the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. English Romanticism, in itself, is the active reawakening, in the larger number of writers, of a creative impulse of a type formerly current, which for many years had tended to become rare, and almost to disappear; but which during the last fifty years had shown signs of a growing revival. The Romantic spirit can be defined as an accentuated predominance of emotional life, provoked or directed by the exercise of imaginative vision, and in its turn stimulating or directing such exercise. The new literature is fed by intense emotion coupled with an intense display of imagery. The "wonder" of the Romanticists is the enthralling discovery, the progressive lighting-up of an inner horizon which extends beyond the limits of clear consciousness. A feeling of nostalgic strangeness is essential to this literature, because consciousness is in quest of a certain mood which is a thing of the past. The Romantic poets look into themselves, seeking in their own lives for strange sensations.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was the oldest and most long-lived of the group. He was tenacious, indomitable and unsubmissive, carving his own way slowly to understanding of himself, and winning, in the end, the love and admiration of

readers by the penetrating beauty of his poems. Enthusiasm for the brotherhood of mankind played a significant part in his life. As a young man he seems to have had high hopes for humanity. He had been nurtured in the Lake District, where everything had led him to think well of man. The teaching of Rousseau and his own experience had convinced him that man was naturally good. In the French Revolution of 1789, he saw a great movement of human freedom. But the greatest moral shock appears to have come to him when England declared war on the young Republic. In the years that followed he had to endure an agony of spiritual disillusionment. He saw that the France of the young Buonaparte was following, not the vision of the liberties of man, but the path of Charlemagne. Partly under Burke's influence, he came to regard England as the protector of freedom against this new imperialism. For the best twenty-five years of Wordsworth's life England was at war and when peace came ultimately it found him a man from whom the uniqueness of his earliest experience had passed. Still, he followed his beliefs honestly to the end, and if he distrusted reform, one of his reasons lay in the fear that the England he loved, particularly rural England, would be destroyed by the hand of the rising industrialists.

Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth in Cumberland. His mother died when he was eight, his father when he was only thirteen. Like Coleridge, Wordsworth was denied the blessing of a happy home. He was sent to school at Hawkshead and lived in poverty at the cottage of a village dame, and had no intellectual company but found creative solace in his precious books and in personal freedom from restraint. In 1787 he went to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he found little to interest him. He became very solitary and appeared to be uncompanionable and morose. Actually, he was suffering from the "growing pains" of a poet. The year 1790 saw him making a tour through France to the Alps with a fellow student, travelling on foot like a pedlar. His *Descriptive Sketches* is a record of this tour. After leaving Cambridge, he settled in London for a time. As his patrimony had been spent on his education, and he was without a profession or any qualifications for a profession, he was in France again before the end of 1791. He remained there till the end of 1792, on the eve of the Reign of Terror.[1]

Literary historians tend to forget that Wordsworth actually lived in France during some of the most stirring scenes of the new

order. He became a convinced revolutionist, and was eager to join the Girondists. Had he done so his head might have fallen with those of Condorcet and Madame Roland. Wordsworth was removed from danger almost by luck. Actually he had fallen in love with Marie-Anne Vallon, daughter of a family still Royalist and Catholic. But there could be no recognized marriage between her and the irreligious, revolutionary foreigner without rank, position, present means or future prospects. Nevertheless, a daughter was born to them in December 1792. At the end of 1792 or early in 1793 Wordsworth came to England to publish his poems and find some means of living. Return was suddenly barred, for in February 1793 began the war which lasted till the short-lived peace of 1802. Wordsworth was cut off from personal communication with France for nine years.

It is perhaps most pertinent to note here how frequently certain pieces of good luck came to Wordsworth at critical moments. The war between England and France was instrumental in saving him from an unsuitable alliance. His return to England at the end of 1792 saved him from the guillotine in 1793. In 1795, when all his resources seemed exhausted and the life of a poet unattainable, salvation dropped in the form of a legacy of £900, left him by a young friend who believed that immediate relief might help him to live for poetry.

In his own lifetime, Wordsworth was first known through the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) in which S.T. Coleridge collaborated with *The Ancient Mariner*. The volume was an experiment, for Wordsworth was attempting to make verse out of the incidents of simple, rustic life in a language that was a selection from the phrases of ordinary speech. Coleridge in his poem was endeavouring to employ poetry to give credibility to the miraculous. The doctrine of *Lyrical Ballads* can be best described as an aesthetic application of sentimental democracy. Both the poets seem to be concerned with psychology. They make the human soul the centre of art.

Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, written between 1798 and 1805, is perhaps the greatest of poetical autobiographies. It shows how a unique experience could be brought within the reader's understanding by bold and imaginative language. *The Excursion* was not finished till 1814, although it includes passages composed as early as 1797. In fact, the years from 1798 to 1805 make up a period of plain living and high thinking for Wordsworth. To this period belongs all that is supremely great in his work. After a visit to Germany (1798-99) he settled in his native Lake district, and before the close of 1805 he had written the one book of *The*

Recluse, much of *The Excursion*, the whole of *The Prelude* and the best of his shorter poems and sonnets. The great *Immortality* ode was nearly completed. In 1802 he had married Mary Hutchinson in whom he found an inestimable blessing.

But soon trouble began to press upon his spirits. Coleridge, to whom the outpouring of *The Prelude* was addressed, was already sunk in opium and had forsaken his high calling. The world started going all wrong for Wordsworth. In France, a captive Pope had crowned an emperor in 1805 and at the beginning of the same year, Wordsworth's noble brother Captain John had gone down with his ship in the waters of the English Channel. So, Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty* (1805) is not the preaching of a moralist, but the utterance of a poet's resignation. His *Elegiac Stanzas* (1805) mourning the death of his brother shows that he is no longer the exuberant son of joy, but one who is merely resigned to the burden of living. After that year, Wordsworth seems to have changed considerably.

Yet it must be remembered that empty repetitions of the stock objection that nothing published after the volumes of *Poems* (1807) matters very much, should be regarded as uncritical. The absolute value of many later volumes is very great. If they appear to have not raised the rank of Wordsworth it was only because his rank was hardly capable of further exaltation. Such volumes as *The White Doe* (1815), *The Waggoner* (1819), *Peter Bell* (1819), *The River Duddon* (1820), *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent* (1822), and *Yarrow Revisited* (1835) are all priceless. One must also not be misled by enthusiastic assertions that Wordsworth is valuable as the "teacher" of this or that doctrine. The actual doctrine implied in the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality* is not as valuable as the exquisite poetic rendering of the poet's feeling about the change from youth to age.

Wordsworth's peculiar originality is to be sought in his expression of what nature meant to him. No one has ever surpassed him in the power of giving utterance to some of the most elementary, and, at the same time, obscure, sensations of man confronted by the eternal spectacle of nature. He is unique, too, when he puts man in a natural setting and makes him part of it, rather than the observer of it. Probably few poets can give more to the reader in the twentieth century than Wordsworth. His appeal is, in fact, to the mature mind. He can be rightly called the psychological poet *par excellence*, and by consciously shifting the domain of art into the realm of the implicit he has prepared the way for the supreme enrichment of modern literature.

Let Us Sum Up : ROMANTIC POETRY : WORDSWORTH

1. In the first thirty years of the nineteenth century – emotional and imaginative literature that has escaped from the constraining forces of sovereign reason.
2. A cluster of poets bringing about a Romantic Revival – had a deep interest in nature not as a centre of beautiful scenes but as an informing and spiritual influence on life.
3. The Romantic spirit – predominance of emotional life. "Wonder" – progressive lighting up of an inner horizon which extends beyond the limits of clear consciousness.
4. William Wordsworth (1770-1850) oldest and most long-lived of the group. Enthusiasm for the brotherhood of mankind.
5. Wordsworth first known through his *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) in which S.T. Coleridge collaborated. The volume – an experiment, for Wordsworth attempting to make verse out of the incidents of simple, rustic life in a language that was a selection from the phrases of ordinary speech.
6. His *The Prelude* (1798-1805) – perhaps the greatest of poetical autobiographies.
7. Wordsworth's originality – in his expression of what nature meant to him.
8. He is unique, too, when he puts man in a natural setting and makes him part of it.
9. Can be rightly called the psychological poet *par excellence*.
10. By consciously shifting the domain of art into the realm of the implicit he has paved the way for the enrichment of modern literature.