

Hello students.

Today I will be covering the second part of Unit One of the Paper-Literary Criticism in which I will discuss the ***Preface to the Lyrical Ballads***.

In this particular segment, I will discuss poetic diction, which is the major theme of ***The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads***. We will also cover who is a poet as explained by William Wordsworth. We will discuss the process of poetic creation. We will look into the function of poetry as stated by William Wordsworth. And finally I will make comments on the value and significance of the ***Preface***. At the end of this module you will be able to understand the purpose for which Wordsworth wrote the ***Preface***. You will also be able to understand the rise and development of Romantic poetry and to develop a critical mindset that will help you to identify and explain critical concepts.

The first topic that I will deal with is the major theme that William Wordsworth discussed in his ***Preface***, and that is poetic diction. This theme has dominated the ***Preface*** and William Wordsworth pursues this theme consistently. What we find is that he tries to explain that the poetry of the Romantic Age was different from the poetry of the neoclassical age because the language that he used in his poetry was the language of the common people. In the case of the poetry of the Neo Classicists. The language was artificial. He also states that the language of poetry should be simple and should be as near as possible to everyday speech. It is for this reason that he chooses the themes from humble and rustic life because he felt that the rustics live very close to nature and through them we would get an expression of things that really existed in life.

William Wordsworth, however, states that in his poetry he makes use of a selection of language really spoken by man. The reason why he does this is to rid the language that is really spoken by men of coarseness, and make it more appealing to the ear.

In the ***Lyrical Ballads***, what we find is that the poet makes use of imagination so that the things and the persons that he describes are looked upon as something which is familiar and yet new.

William Wordsworth was totally against the use of figurative language, unless it arose naturally from speech. He stated that figurative language, like the use of personification, similes and metaphors did not arise naturally in speech. However, the same could be used where, if at the height of emotion, one expressed their views by making use of figurative language. Surprisingly, he also advocated the use of meter. He stated that the use of meter added pleasure to the poetry and kept in check the emotions. He went on to say that there was no major difference between prose and poetry.

Another theme of the ***Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*** is Wordsworth's description of 'What is the poet?' According to Wordsworth, the poet has a social function to perform, he writes because he wants to communicate to others. He states that the poet is a man speaking to men. Now while he is one amongst men, he differs from the others not in nature, but in the degree of the gifts that he possesses. What he states is that the poet is endowed with certain gifts and this enables him to be able to write poetry.

According to him, the poet has a more lively sensibility and therefore he is able to react to the outside impressions in a very vivid manner and express these impressions in his poetry. He also states that the poet has a greater degree of imaginative power than others, and that is why he is able to write poetry. According to William Wordsworth, the poet has a much more comprehensive soul than others, and as a result he has a greater knowledge of human nature and is able to have insights into the feelings and expressions of others. The poet, he says, possesses the faculties of observation and judgment. These faculties are very often absent in others. The poet has a keen insight and is able to judge what is right and wrong. He also states that the foremost function of a poet is to be a teacher. Every reader, he says, who reads his poetry, would become wiser because through his poetry, they would be able to learn many lessons of life.

In the ***Preface to the Lyrical Ballads***, William Wordsworth also discusses the process of poetic creation. Here we have the famous definition that he gives of poetry. He states that “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling which takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility.” When we examine this definition, we feel that two opposite things are mentioned on the one hand, the poet speaks about spontaneity and, on the other hand, he speaks about emotion recollected in tranquility. However, he goes a little further to explain the creative process which he states goes through four stages.

In the first stage, what we find is that he recollects a particular scene that he has come across in the past. It may be a scene that he had come across a few years ago, a few months ago, or even a few days ago. On recollection of the scene, he begins to meditate on it and he meditates for a period of time until we find that he is able to recreate the scene that he had come across in the past. So what we find then in the third stage of the poetic creative process is recrudescence, wherein the poet is able to again bring back the emotions and feelings that he experienced when he first came across that scene or that particular person. However, he now gets rid of all unnecessary details. After this he then composes the poem. So we see that the creative process involves recollection, contemplation, recrudescence and composition.

In the ***Preface***, we find that William Wordsworth also discusses the function of poetry. He states that the main function of poetry is to impart pleasure. And this can be done because poetry is able to please, to move and to transport, and thus when the reader goes through the poem he emerges saner and purer than before due to the moral lessons that are taught. He also states that the major function of poetry is to add to our knowledge. However, he is not speaking about knowledge in the sense that the Neo Classicists spoke. He states that the truths of poetry result from inner enlightenment as they are universal, general and not particular as in the case of the truths that are expressed in science or the truth that is expressed in philosophy, which make an appeal to a very few people. In the case of the truths of poetry, since they of a general nature, they make an appeal to a much larger public.

Now what is the value of the ***Preface***? The ***Preface*** is considered an important document in the history of English Criticism because it gives an insight into the nature, the scope, and the function of poetry and the creative process. This was something that had never been done before, and it is for this reason that

today, the ***Preface to the Lyrical Ballads***, is considered an Unofficial Manifesto of the Romantic movement.

The ***Preface*** also had a lot of criticism that is levelled against it. It is often been stated that considering that the ***Preface*** is an Introduction, it is much too lengthy. It has also been stated that William Wordsworth exaggerates a great deal, and there are many contradictions in the ***Preface***. He also tends to become very philosophical and therefore the ***Preface*** would be difficult for the layman to read. It is also been stated that the ***Preface*** lacks clarity.

Thank you.