

Name:

William Wordsworth

1770–1850

William Wordsworth was a defining member of the English Romantic Movement which greatly influenced the American Transcendental Movement. Like other Romantics and Transcendentalists, Wordsworth's personality and poetry were deeply influenced by his love of nature, especially by the sights and scenes of the Lake Country, in which he spent most of his mature life. A profoundly earnest and sincere thinker, he displayed a high seriousness tempered with tenderness and a love of simplicity.

Wordsworth was born and grew up in the Lake District, the beautiful area of mountains, lakes and streams near the Scottish border in northwest England. The natural beauty of the area was a major source of inspiration for Wordsworth throughout his life. A lively though sometimes moody boy, he loved to spend his free time roaming about the countryside and getting to know the country people who lived there.

Wordsworth's parents died when he was young, and, when it was time for him to go to college, he had enough inheritance to go to Cambridge University. College, however, didn't suit Wordsworth. He was most interested in pursuing his poetry.

In 1795, one of Wordsworth's friends died and left him a large sum of money, allowing Wordsworth to live freely and write poetry. He moved out to a small cottage in southwest England where he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These two men were a poetry powerhouse. They inspired each other's work and in 1798 they jointly published *Lyrical Ballads*. The duo believed that poetry should be a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and intense "emotion recollected in tranquillity." In this publication was the sonnet "The World Is Too Much With Us" which captures Wordsworth's appreciation of nature.



The World Is Too Much With Us

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.--Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn; (1)
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea, (2)
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus (3) rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton (4) blow his wreathed horn.

Notes: (1) Brought up in an outdated religion, (2) meadow, (3) Greek sea god capable of taking many shapes, (4) another sea god, often depicted as trumpeting on a shell

Questions

1. What is the speaker's tone/attitude in this poem?
2. What type of picture does the speaker paint of the world in the first 4 lines?
3. In line 4, the speaker states, "We have given our hearts away." What have people given their hearts away to?
4. The next three lines contain some vivid imagery. What pictures does he describe? What feelings do these images create?
5. What's the speaker say about humanity's relationship with nature and our hearts in lines 8 and 9a?
6. What extreme wish does the speaker make in the final lines of this poem?
7. Is this poem's message still valid for today? Why or why not? Do you see others at PR giving their "hearts" away to the "world" and material things? In what ways?
8. How can we find a healthy balance between our involvement in this fast-paced society and connection with nature?