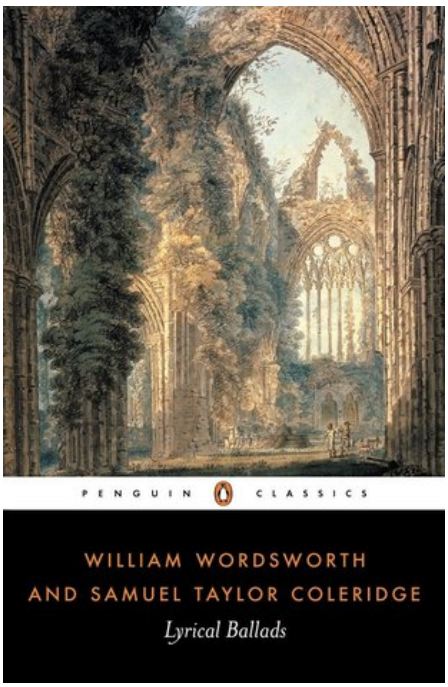

Lyrical Ballads

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The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure - William Wordsworth, from the Advertisment prefacing the original 1798 edition. When it was first published, Lyrical Ballads enraged the critics of the day: Wordsworth and Coleridge had given poetry a voice, one decidedly different to what had been voiced before.

For Wordsworth, as he so clearly stated in his celebrated preface to the 1800 edition (also reproduced here), the important thing was the emotion aroused by the poem, and not the poem itself. This acclaimed Routledge Classics edition offers the reader the opportunity to study the poems in their original contexts as they appeared to Coleridge's and Wordsworth's contemporaries, and includes some of their most famous poems, including Coleridge's Rime of the Ancyent Marinere.

Lyrical Ballads Details

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From Reader Review Lyrical Ballads for online ebook

Eliza says

Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet

The poetry equivalent of sinking into a hot bath and with Classic FM playing something wholesome for you in the background.

Becky says

If I continued with my theme of replacing books of the bible with works of poetry instead, I would use mostly Wadsworth to replace Proverbs. Many of these poems are cautionary tales encouraging kindness and empathy, and the rest are extolling the virtues of nature. No, going out into nature isn't one of the commandments, but it should have been, I think we would all be better for it. Wadsworth encourages "nature baths," a spiritual bathing in nature to cleanse the soul of the stresses of urban life. It's a recommendation all should heed.

Some of the particularly potent verses that I feel could be good replacements for the "O Heed you Mother" rhetoric of Proverbs:
One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man;
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Enough of science and of art;
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

O reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.

Bill Kerwin says

Small volumes of verse often start literary revolutions, and this little book published in 1798 is perhaps the most revolutionary of all, It not only brought England into the Romantic Movement, but also simplified English poetic diction, right up to the present day.

In 1800, Wordsworth would add the famous preface which defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" originating in "great emotion recollected in tranquility," but this influential definition provided a more sophisticated rationale for what was a simple experiment by two young poets. They used every day speech to create the most forceful poetic expressions possible by 1) telling realistic stories of humble English people, often in their own voices (Wordsworth) and 2) creating fantastic tales in the plain though archaic language of the the old English ballad (Coleridge). By so doing, they hoped to invigorate the pastoral, dignify the gothic, and create something new as well.

Wordsworth performs his task ably, endowing his simple people with full humanity, evoking our pity on their behalf. Occasionally, his poems are too long--"The Idiot Boy" comes immediately to mind--but, even at his "words-words" redundant worst, he gives--for the first time, I believe--poor country people a dignified human voice, thus preparing the way for Hardy and Steinbeck and many writers to come.

This first edition consists of nineteen poems by Wordsworth and four by Coleridge. This isn't as imbalanced as it may seem, for one of Coleridge's four poems is the impressive--and lengthy--"Rime of the Ancient Mariner." In this imitation ballad, Coleridge takes Chatterton's experiment in antiquarian forgery and transforms it into great literature. His archaic diction seems vivid and new, and allows his contemporary Romantic theme--the reverence for nature in all her wild variety--to speak with the authority of the ages.

"Mariner" and "Tintern Abbey" are undoubtedly the two greatest poems in this collection, but each and every poem is worth your time. If on occasion--particularly in Wordsworth--a phrase may strike you as trite and sentimental, remember that Wordsworth was the one who "made it new." The triteness, the sentimentality came after.

Bookdragon Sean says

Who wants a revolution?

Well Wordsworth and Coleridge certainly did. Their writing existed in the intellectual aftermath of the French revolution; thus, they tried to radicalise it and revolutionise it. With *Lyrical ballads* they, undoubtedly, changed the destiny of English literature. Granted, that’s a huge sweeping statement to make but, nevertheless, it is a true one.

No longer would poetry be the lofty language of the elites, a means for the bourgeoisie to demonstrate their intellect; it would now be the language of the common man: it would exist in a natural form, simple, basic even, so that that everybody could understand it and appreciate its beauty. Whist the two were not the first to start writing in such a way, Blake came much earlier on with his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, though they were the first to actually set down what they were trying to do, to explain it and provide a critique of what they were actually doing rather than just doing it.

This work is brave and experimental and it would help to create a new class of poetry. Poetry, above all things, should have a purpose; it should aim to present human emotion and experience in a clear and considerate way. It's not about who has the best diction or control over metrical forms: it's about whom can portray life and human nature with the most honesty, at least, according to the preface Wordsworth added to the second edition. It's really worth considering whist reading how many of these goals to two actually achieved.

Compare this work to something written by Shakespeare, Pope or Milton and you will clearly see the difference in complexity. The style of this poetry is far more accessible and easier to understand, but, that being said, would you have agreed if you were a common man in the early nineteenth century? Possibly not. The educated would have appreciated what was happening here, but the uneducated would not have even been able to read it never mind afford a copy. And that's why they are "Lyrical Ballads." Again, like Blake's work, many of these poems were meant to be read aloud and as such would have been easy to memorise and understand upon hearing them; thus, in a way, the two poets achieved their goals.

Coleridge's Nightingale

Lyrical ballads is undeniably one sided. Wordsworth wrote most of the poems in here, though Coleridge contributed, arguably, one of the best poems written in the English language: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. I didn't want to talk about that here though, I've already reviewed it separately so here's the next best one he included:

The Nightingale
And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,
'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!
A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!
In Nature there is nothing melancholy.

I like it so much because it is so deeply personal. Just like Wordsworth, Coleridge explicitly voices his opinion on the beauty of nature and life; he also mocks those "venerable" poets who try to emulate these ideas but fail to do so; they are inexperienced and don't speak with a voice that is one with nature. They write from the deplorable ball room, and spend their lives in theatres; yet, they attempt to write poetry about nature. Coleridge was one of the Lakers, a poet who wrote in the Lake District from a voice of first-hand experience, so he was a little bit of an expert. I could fell the sarcasm and annoyance oozing out of his words, but also a sense of literary superiority. Coleridge clearly felt like his voice was prominent in these matters:

My Friend, and thou, our Sister! we have learnt
A different lore: we may not thus profane
Nature's sweet voices, always full of love
And joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music!

You could call these words arrogance, but I think his ego is deserved. And, if you haven't already guessed, the Nightingale is clearly Coleridge. Well, he and the other early romantic poets; they make up the flock. I love the symbolism here; he suggests because he was one with nature, he could express it perfectly in his poems. He and his friends could provoke each other's songs and make them sweeter in the process. It's a quaint image, and perhaps alludes to how he and Wordsworth improved each other's art.

Wordsworth's Wonderers

Wordsworth's poems are not quite as varied as Coleridge's. After reading many the lines between each become blurred as he often repeats similar themes and ideas. Sometimes he takes an old poem, and uses it to make a new one by expanding upon the ideas and depicting it in a more artful way. He would do this often, and here "Old man Travelling" felt like a very early version of "The Old Cumberland Beggar."

Both poems depict an aged wonderer, someone who exits in nature and is vitalised by it. He roams through the landscape seemingly unaffected by the troubles of the world and mortality. But that is a lie. Under the surface, as Wordsworth reveals, is a constant preoccupation with death. It will never escape us not matter how far we may wonder. The two exist together and as such behind the surface of the wonderers is knowledge of their eventual demise or the demise of their loved ones:

Old man Travelling

"The little hedge-row birds,
That peck along the road, regard him not.
He travels on, and in his face, his step,
His gait, is one expression; every limb,
His look and bending figure, all bespeak
A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought—He is insensibly subdued
To settled quiet: he is one by whom
All effort seems forgotten, one to whom
Long patience has such mild composure given,
That patience now doth seem a thing, of which
He hath no need. He is by nature led
To peace so perfect, that the young behold
With envy, what the old man hardly feels.
—I asked him whither he was bound, and what
The object of his journey; he replied
"Sir! I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital."

The old man's reply ushers in a sudden change of tone; it's almost shocking and abrupt, but read the poem again and you will see the subtlety. The poem is simple, more so than Coleridge's, but is also extremely effective at what it does.

These two men changed poetry forever with this; they helped to make popular a model that would eventually

be adapted by later generations. This poetry is a true pleasure to read.

Trevor says

The copy of this that I have, and have just finished reading, is a reprint of the first edition of 1798. It has no notes, other than those presented by the authors themselves, and the book probably suffers for this. I probably should have gotten hold of a version that had a good introduction – but too late now.

There are two poems in this collection that I have read before – *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* and *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey*. There is a reason why these are the most famous poems from this collection, I think they are clearly the best poems in the collection and the only ones I would choose to read again.

Some of the other poems are very ‘dramatic’ – *The Thorn* for example and *The Mad Mother* both on the theme of seduced women driven mad by abandoned lovers who leave them pregnant – but the themes seem quaint. I also felt the images were perhaps a little too ‘easy’. Not something I could ever say about the images in *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* .

There is a self-confidence in Coleridge’s Rime that really marks it out as something special compared with many of the other poems here. The idea of an old man stopping you on your way to a wedding and you stopping to listen to the point of missing the wedding tells you that the story being told is going to have to be one worth listening to. I don’t think there is any threat of someone missing a wedding to finish hearing the ballad of *The Idiot Boy*. The images of killing the albatross with a cross-bow, of wearing the bird like a cross around the sailor’s neck, of all of the crew dying of thirst while surrounded by literally an ocean of water, or the dead sailors, come back to life, raising their right-arms aflame as torches – these are not the sorts of images that are easy to forget.

I had hoped I would enjoy the other poems in this collection nearly as much as I’ve always enjoyed the *Rime* and *Tintern Abbey* – but I found the others rather dull, to be honest. I do understand that this collection holds a very important place in the history of poetry, it being the first work of the Romantic Movement. All the same, I found poems like *Expostulation and Reply* and even *Lines left upon a seat* too keen to make a point – and that point being that idol reflection on nature is an unequivocal good. To me, this point – no matter how right – just wasn’t really enough to sustain my interest. However, I have to concede that much the same point is being made in *Tintern Abbey* and yet that poem never bothers me at all.

Adam says

I feel like an asshole, at this point, for not being able to "get" Wordsworth. Every couple of years I read Wordsworth again and there's some very bright, very compassionate, very distinguished-type person who makes beautiful, eloquent arguments in these poems' favour. But I still really just couldn't give less of a shit. I don't know. While I respect Wordsworth, there's a strange personal-type bias I have against the guy. It's a bit more like "I really wouldn't invite this dude to a party at my place." He's a bit dull. Byron, on the other hand. Coleridge. Keats. Mary Shelley probably the most distinguished guest, but only if she left ol' Perce at home. She would provide the sane and sensible, but thoroughly fucked up and entertaining counterpoint to

Byron's wanton molestation of other guests, to Keats' mumbling about the beauty of my old 'Oriental' bookcase or whatever, to Coleridge all junked out on the couch.

I'm starting on *The Prelude* again, though, and it's pretty great. I don't even know why I didn't like it a couple years ago. So things might be changing, after all.

I think I've now accomplished my goal of writing the least insightful review of *Lyrical Ballads* known to humankind. But there it is.

Alison says

Meh meh meh I’m Wordsworth I speak for the noble peasant meh meh meh

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Emily says

Very enjoyable, once I got into it. I think it's fair to say the poems improved as the book went on, perhaps because the later ones were written later when the poets themselves had developed. Wordsworth's Preface was very interesting, in which he states his intention to write "in the ordinary language of men" rather than fanciful "poetic diction", that is to say overblown language and dead metaphors. Sometimes he had great success in this; other times, less so. Wordsworth is criticised for being too egotistical and sometimes this was certainly the case, but other times I loved to read his heartfelt description of English landscapes, specifically the dales and hills of shepherds. 'Poor Susan' tells of a country girl forced to live in a city for work:

"She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade;
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes."

Wordsworth writes also of the transcendental power of nature:

"Up the brook
I roamed in the confusion of my heart,
Alive to all things and forgetting all."
(from 'It was an April morning')

"[on a riverbank] that blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened; that serene and blessed mood
In which the affections gently lead us on
Until, the breath of this our corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;

While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things."
(from Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey)

Especially when he was not writing in verse (as in Tintern Abbey), his grasp of iambic pentameter reminded me strongly of Shakespeare. Quite remarkable.

As for Coleridge, despite the ostensible joint authorship of 'Lyrical Ballads' only four of the poems were his. None of them stood out for me, which was disappointing as after my love of 'What if you slept' (as quoted in the preface to Stiefvater's The Dream Thieves!) and 'Kubla Khan'; I was especially expecting to enjoy The Ancient Mariner, but didn't. However, I'd like to pursue both these poets further!

Holly says

I actually really enjoyed this poems more than I thought I would. Especially Tintern Abbey (a beautiful poem).

Romanticism isn't really my favourite area of poetry, but this definitely makes me want to explore more of Wordsworth's work!

Hoda Marmar says

Very well written, but the themes were not interesting to me, so the rating is completely subjective.

Zoe Stewart (yerabooknerdzoe) says

I honestly don't know how to rate this. I've just spent an entire semester talking about this book, so I know these poems quite well. That being said, this is not something I would ever pick up just for fun. I don't particularly like poetry, but I have developed a certain appreciation for this collection.

Ann Klefstad says

Of course these are wonderful. If only he'd died a little younger, like a good lyric poet . . .

Alyssa says

I'm not giving this four stars because I really liked it. I'm giving it four stars because it disturbed me, which may seem odd, but if one of literature's goals is to comfort the distressed and distress the comfortable (and I think it is), then the poems in this book have succeeded.

I'm passionate about my area of study. Nothing makes me happier than digging into literature the way I do as an English major. But there are still risks in the academic approach, as Wordsworth reminds us in some of the most haunting words I've ever read:

"Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;
--We murder to dissect."

Again, I love what I do. I love analysis, I love the cerebral. But sometimes, "dissecting" the books I read takes away something sacred. Wordsworth reminded me of that. He forced me to examine my underlying beliefs, which everyone ought to do now and again.

Cecilia ❄?? says

I give this small collection of poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge **3,5 stars**. A few of the poems were a bit tedious and long for my taste but some really captured feelings and thoughts in a beautiful way. On the whole, I preferred Wordsworth's poems over Colderidge's, mainly because the latter used a more advanced and superior language which (in my case) distanced the reader from both the writer and what he was trying to say. My favorites from this collection are *We Are Seven*, *The Thorn* and *The Last of the Flock*. *We Are Seven* because of its meaning, *The Last of the Flock* earns a place in this category as well. And I really liked *The Thorn* because of the poignant and beautiful way it was written in.

I'll definitely read more of Wordsworth in the future and think that this short collection of both his and Coleridge's poems was a great start.

We Are Seven and *The Thorn* can both be found at Poetry Foundation, (but *The Thorn* was a bit too long to include here).

> **We Are Seven**
> **by William Wordsworth**
> *———A simple Child,*
> *That lightly draws its breath,*
> *And feels its life in every limb,*
> *What should it know of death?*
>
> *I met a little cottage Girl:*
> *She was eight years old, she said;*
> *Her hair was thick with many a curl*
> *That clustered round her head.*
>
> *She had a rustic, woodland air,*
> *And she was wildly clad:*
> *Her eyes were fair, and very fair;*
> *—Her beauty made me glad.*
>
> *“Sisters and brothers, little Maid,*

How many may you be?”
“How many? Seven in all,” she said,
And wondering looked at me.

“And where are they? I pray you tell.”
She answered, “Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.”

“You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be.”

Then did the little Maid reply,
“Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree.”

“You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then ye are only five.”

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
The little Maid replied,
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,
And they are side by side.

“My stockings there I often knit,
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them.

“And often after sun-set, Sir,
When it is light and fair,
I take my little porringer,
And eat my supper there.

“The first that died was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain;
And then she went away.

“So in the church-yard she was laid;
And, when the grass was dry,
Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

“And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side.”

“How many are you, then,” said I,
“If they two are in heaven?”
Quick was the little Maid’s reply,
“O Master! we are seven.”

“But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven!”
’Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, “Nay, we are seven!”

David Powell says

Here's the deal. I love the English Romantic Period, and I love Wordsworth. But like some of my past love affairs in which I was always able to find a flaw in my beloved and still manage to overlook it, I know that Wordsworth is flawed, but "my heart still leaps up" with his poetry. The flaws? Well he was egocentric it seems; he was best in his earlier works; and he unabashedly loved nature. As to the last flaw, who doesn't, but, like the some of his American romantic contemporaries, he overlooks the fact that nature is brutal--as Tennyson referred to it "red in tooth and claw." But when I walk in the woods, I don't hear the screams of predator upon prey, and I love it too. Back to Wordsworth: He was remarkably skilled and, for the most part, adhered to his principle that poetry should be written "in the language used by men." Thus it was always easy for me to teach Wordsworth to kids because he didn't seem pretentious like Milton, and he stirred up beautiful images of nature which kids like too. Better yet, Wordsworth was always able to stir up a few thoughts among my adolescent charges. So, as I explained that the line "the child is father of the man" means that how we are shaped in our childhood determines a lot of what we become as adults, I hope that Wordsworth has had something to do in shaping the thoughts of all of those to whom I had the pleasure to teach his poetry. I close with this stanza from "The Tables Turned":

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can."
