

EXCERPTS FROM THE “LYRICAL BALLADS” (1800) BY WORDSWORTH

I

The First Volume of these Poems has already been submitted to general perusal. It was published, **as an experiment** which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement **a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation**, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, **which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart**. [...]

For the sake of variety and from a consciousness of my own weakness I was induced to **request the assistance of a Friend**, who furnished me with the Poems of the *Ancient Mariner*, *the Foster-Mother's Tale*, *the Nightingale*, *the Dungeon*, and the Poem entitled *Love*. I should not, however, have requested this assistance, **had I not believed that the poems of my Friend** would in a great measure **have the same tendency as my own**, and that, though there would be found a difference, **there would be found no discordance in the colours of our style**; as our opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide. (pages 5-6)

II

[.....] The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to **make the incidents of common life interesting** by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: **chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate** ideas in a state of excitement. **Low and rustic life was generally chosen** because in that situation **the essential passions of the heart find a better soil** in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and **speak a plainer and more emphatic language**; because in that situation **our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity** and consequently may be **more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated**; because **the manners of rural life** germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly, because in that situation **the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature**. The language too of these men is adopted (**purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust**) because **such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived**; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being **less under the action of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions**. Accordingly such a language arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings **is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets**, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art in proportion **as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men**, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation.¹ (pages 7-8).

III

I cannot be insensible of the present outcry against the triviality and meanness both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions; and **I acknowledge that this defect where it exists**, is more dishonorable to the Writer's own character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation, though I should contend at the same time that it is far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences.

From such verses the Poems in these volumes will be found **distinguished at least by one mark of difference**, that **each of them has a worthy purpose**. Not that I mean to say, that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but I believe that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found **to carry along with them a purpose**. If

¹ It is worth while here to observe that the affecting parts of Chaucer are almost always expressed in language pure and universally intelligible even to this day.

in this opinion I am mistaken I can have little right to the name of a Poet. **For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings**; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are **modified and directed by our thoughts**, which are indeed **the representatives of all our past feelings**; and as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so **by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished**, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits **we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other**, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, **must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated**. (pages 8-9)

IV

I have said that **each of these poems has a purpose**. I have also informed my Reader what this purpose will be found principally to be: namely **to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement**. But speaking in less general language, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by **the great and simple affections of our nature**. This object I have endeavoured in these short essays to attain by various means; by **tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings**, as in the poems of the *Idiot Boy* and the *Mad Mother*; by **accompanying the last struggles of a human being at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society**, as in the *Poem of the Forsaken Indian*; by shewing, as in the Stanzas entitled *We Are Seven*, **the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion**; or by **displaying the strength of fraternal, or to speak more philosophically, of moral attachment when early associated with the great and beautiful objects of nature**, as in *The Brothers*; or, as in the *Incident of Simon Lee*, by **placing my Reader in the way of receiving from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them**. It has also been part of my general purpose to attempt **to sketch characters under the influence of less impassioned feelings**, as in the *Old Man Travelling*, *The Two Thieves*, &c. **characters of which the elements are simple, belonging rather to nature than to manners**, such as exist now and will probably always exist, and which from their constitution may be **distinctly and profitably contemplated**. I will not abuse the indulgence of my Reader by dwelling longer upon this subject; but it is proper that I should **mention one other circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day**; it is this, that **the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation** and not the action and situation to the feeling. My meaning will be rendered perfectly intelligible by referring my Reader to the Poems entitled *Poor Susan* and the *Childless Father*, particularly to the last Stanza of the latter Poem. (pages 9-10)

V

I have said that **Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings**: it takes its origin from **emotion recollected in tranquillity**: the emotion is contemplated till **by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears**, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and **does itself actually exist in the mind**. In this mood **successful composition generally begins**, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment. (pages 16-17)

POOR SUSAN

At the corner of Wood-Street, when day-light appears,
There's a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years:
Poor Susan has pass'd by the spot and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
Down which she so often has tripp'd with her pail,
And a single small cottage, a nest like a Jove's,
The only one dwelling on earth that she loves.

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 pass'd away from her eyes.

Poor Outcast! return—to receive thee once more
The house of thy Father will open its door,
And thou once again, in thy plain russet gown,
May'st hear the thrush sing from a tree of its own.

Tradução livre

Na esquina da Rua Wood, quando a luz do dia surge,
Há três anos um Tordo canta alto:
A Pobre Susan passou por ali e ouviu,
No silêncio da manhã, o canto do pássaro .

É uma nota de encantamento , o que é, então, que a aflige? Ela avista
Uma alta montanha, árvores,
Massas brilhantes de vapor que atravessam Lothbury lentamente,
E um rio que corre no fundo do vale de Cheapside .

E ela vê pastagens verdes no meio baixada
Que desceu tantas vezes com seu balde,
E um chalezinho, um ninho como o de Júpiter,
A única morada que ela ama na Terra.

Ela olha, e seu coração está no céu, mas todas essas imagens se desvanecem,
A neblina e o rio, a colina e a sombra;
A corrente não vai mais fluir , e a montanha não vai mais se erguer altiva,
E as cores sumirão da vista.

Pobre Pária ! Para receber-te uma vez mais
A casa de teu Pai vai abrir-te a porta,
E tu, uma vez mais , em teu vestido simples castanho-avermelhado,
Poderás ouvir o tordo cantar em uma árvore só dele.