

The World is Too Much With Us

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

About the Author

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850), born in the Lake District, was the son of an attorney. He was educated first at Penrith and then at Hawkshead Grammar school. He joined St. John's College, Cambridge in 1787. Wordsworth describes the different periods of his life vividly in his work, 'The Prelude'.

In 1795, after receiving a legacy, Wordsworth lived with his sister Dorothy, first in Dorset and then at Alfoxden, close to his friend and fellow poet, Coleridge. During this period Wordsworth wrote many of his greatest poems. In the winter of 1798–99 he visited Germany with his sister Dorothy and Coleridge. Wordsworth and Coleridge published a collection of poems called the *Lyrical Ballads* and in 1800 came out with the second edition of the same. The poems of the collection were markedly different from those of Wordsworth's predecessors and belonged to the genre of Romantic poetry. Idealism, escapism, a return to God and to nature were some of the themes that characterised this kind of poetry. This publication was followed, by the publication of *Poems in Two Volumes*, in 1807, which included the poems, 'Resolution and Independence' and 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'.

About the Poem

Today Wordsworth's poetry remains widely read. His poetry's almost universal appeal is perhaps best explained by Wordsworth's own words on the role, for him, of poetry: what he called 'the most philosophical of all writing' whose object is 'truth...carried alive into the heart by passion.'

'The World is Too Much With Us' is one of his most popular sonnets. It is meditative, and lays stress on going back to nature. Here the poet laments the evils of materialism, which have made man insensitive towards the beauty of nature. The poet expresses distaste for contemporary civilisation and praises the primitive religion of nature worship.

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;
 So might I standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

Glossary

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| The world is too much with us: | We are too busy running after material pleasures/successes. |
| A sordid boon: | material pleasures are tainted pleasures, hence 'a sordid boon' |

Pagan suckled
in a creed
out worn:
lea (poetic):
forlorn:
Proteus:

Wordsworth would rather be a pagan, practising a primitive religion and living perfectly in harmony with nature.

an open area of land covered in grass
lonely and unhappy

In Greek mythology Proteus was a sea-god endowed with the gift of prophesy.

Triton:

Triton was a Greek god who could pacify the stormy, restless waves of the sea by blowing his horn.

Understanding the Text