

24 The earliest poets, writes Wordsworth in this Appendix, used a language that was "daring, and figurative," inspired by powerful feelings and passions. Later poets, however, desiring to reproduce the effects of such language, adopted these figures of speech in a mechanical and automatic manner, applying them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection. Over time, the language of poetry was largely separated from that of "common life," the use of meter in poetry further deepening this chasm (PLB, 160–162). Wordsworth is indeed lamenting the woes caused by an earlier phase of industrial capitalism, a phase brought into being by "national events" such as the French Revolution and the ensuing wars between France and other nations, as well as the struggles of the bourgeoisie to gain political hegemony. While Wordsworth has acknowledged in the past that the ideals behind these historical tendencies may have been noble, he is now addressing their actual effects: the chief of these is the artificial stimulation of people's passions, the blunting of their imaginations, and the degradation of their moral sensibilities. Wordsworth sees "nature" as harboring the remedy for all of these effects, and he sees part of the poet's task as using nature to enlarge people's original, undistorted sensibilities. Wordsworth's suggestion that rural people speak a more "philosophical" language may have been influenced by the theories of Hartley and Joseph Priestley, who anticipated the formation of a philosophical language among humankind, a language that would be universal and accurate in its expression of human conceptions and emotions. Wordsworth's underlying aim is that the poet returns to the expression of permanent and fundamental human emotions, which are fostered by perpetual communion with nature. He regards both the human mind²⁸ and nature as possessed of "inherent and indestructible qualities" which have been clouded over and corrupted by recent historical transformations: a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The ideal held up in opposition to such "urbanity" is the artless simplicity of rural life: people living close to nature experience emotions in their fundamental, unadulterated state, emotions that are capable of clear expression. Such an ideal is of course not original to Wordsworth; the primitivistic theories of such eighteenth-century writers as Rousseau, William Duff, and James Beattie had already extolled the simple manners and passions of earlier peoples living in a state of nature. Hence, the "common life" that Wordsworth claims to portray is hardly the common life of modern industrial society; rather, it is the life of those on the periphery of such a social order, those whose lifestyles are the vestiges of a preindustrial, agricultural era. (PLB, 129, 131) Such a statement has perhaps even more pertinence in our world where the tendencies Wordsworth bemoans have reached an intensity beyond what he might have imagined: the mail coach and the telegraph, recent inventions in Wordsworth's memory, have been ousted by almost instantaneous means of communication and by far more powerful channels of blunting the human senses and imagination. But this is the very society produced by ostensibly democratic ideals.....