A Poet!—He Hath Put His Heart to School

A poet!—He hath put his heart to school,
Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff
Which Art hath lodged within his hand—must laugh
By precept only, and shed tears by rule.

Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff,
And let the groveler sip his stagnant pool,
In fear that else, when Critics grave and cool
Have killed him, Scorn should write his epitaph.

How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?
Because the lovely little flower is free
Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold;
And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree
Comes not by casting in a formal mold,
But from its own divine vitality.

To My Sister

It is the first mild day of March:
Each minute sweeter than before,
The redbreast sings from the tall larch
That stands beside our door.

There is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.

My Sister! ('tis a wish of mine)
Now that our morning meal is done,
Make haste, your morning task resign;
Come forth and feel the sun.

Edward will come with you—and, pray,
Put on with speed your woodland dress,

1. Stung, as he tells us, by the cant use of the word “artistic” for poems better described as “artificial,” Wordsworth late in life reiterates the plea of his early Preface to Lyrical Ballads for “nature” and the free evolution of form, as opposed to “art” and rules.

1. “Composed in front of Alfoxden House.”

The larch mentioned in the first stanza was standing when I revisited the place in May, 1841, more than forty years after” (Wordsworth). The “Sister” is, of course, Dorothy, and “Edward” (named in line 13) is the boy Basil Montagu, then living with the Wordsworths.
And bring no book; for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

No joyless forms shall regulate
Our living calendar;
We from today, my Friend, will date
The opening of the year.

Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing;
From earth to man, from man to earth:
—It is the hour of feeling.

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason;
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

Some silent laws our hearts will make,
Which they shall long obey;
We for the year to come may take
Our temper from today.

And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
We'll frame the measure of our souls:
They shall be tuned to love.

Then come, my Sister! come, I pray,
With speed put on your woodland dress;
And bring no book: for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

The Green Linnet

Beneath these fruit-tree boughs that shed
Their snow-white blossoms on my head,
With brightest sunshine round me spread
Of spring's unclouded weather,
In this sequestered nook how sweet
To sit upon my orchard seat!
And birds and flowers once more to greet,
My last year's friends together.

One have I marked, the happiest guest
In all this covert of the blest:
Hail to thee, far above the rest
In joy of voice and pinion!

1. Coleridge used the last two stanzas to demonstrate Wordsworth’s “perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions.” The extent and particularity of this description, however, are rare in Wordsworth, despite his reputation as a “nature poet.”
Thou, Linnet! in thy green array,
Presiding Spirit here today,
Dost lead the revels of the May;
And this is thy dominion.

While birds, and butterflies, and flowers,
Make all one band of paramours,
Thou, ranging up and down the bowers,
Art sole in thy employment:
A Life, a Presence like the Air,
Scattering thy gladness without care,
Too blest with any one to pair;
Thyself thy own enjoyment.

Amid you tuft of hazel trees,
That twinkle to the gusty breeze,
Behold him perched in ecstasies,
Yet seeming still to hover;
There! where the flutter of his wings
Upon his back and body flings
Shadows and sunny glimmerings,
That cover him all over.

My dazzled sight he oft deceives,
A brother of the dancing leaves;
Then flits, and from the cottage eaves
Pours forth his song in gushes;
As if by that exulting strain
He mocked and treated with disdain
The voiceless Form he chose to feign,
While fluttering in the bushes.

Composed in the Valley near Dover, on the Day of Landing

Here, on our native soil, we breathe once more.
The cock that crows, the smoke that curls, that sound
Of bells—those boys who in yon meadow ground
In white-sleeved shirts are playing; and the roar
Of the waves breaking on the chalky shore—
All, all are English. Oft have I looked round
With joy in Kent’s green vales; but never found
Myself so satisfied in heart before.
Europe is yet in bonds; but let that pass,
Thought for another moment. Thou art free,
My Country! and ’tis joy enough and pride
For one hour’s perfect bliss, to tread the grass
Of England once again, and hear and see,  
With such a dear Companion¹ at my side.

August 30, 1802 1807

Composed by the Side of Grasmere Lake

Clouds, lingering yet, extend in solid bars  
Through the gray west; and lo! these waters, steeled  
By breezeless air to smoothest polish, yield  
A vivid repetition of the stars;  
Jove, Venus, and the ruddy crest of Mars¹  
Amid his fellows beauteously revealed  
At happy distance from earth's groaning field,  
Where ruthless mortals wage incessant wars.  
Is it a mirror?—or the nether Sphere²  
Opening to view the abyss in which she feeds  
Her own calm fires?—But list! a voice is near;  
Great Pan himself low-whispering through the reeds,  
"Be thankful, thou; for, if unholy deeds  
Ravage the world, tranquillity is here!"

1807 1819

Afterthought¹

I thought of thee,² my partner and my guide,  
As being passed away.—Vain sympathies!  
For, backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,  
I see what was, and is, and will abide;  
Still glides the Stream, and shall forever glide;  
The Form remains, the Function never dies;  
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,  
We Men, who in our morn of youth defied  
The elements, must vanish—be it so!  
Enough, if something from our hands have power  
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;  
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,  
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendant dower,³  
We feel that we are greater than we know.

1820

1. Dorothy Wordsworth.  
2. Roman god of war.  
3. The earth, region below the sphere of the moon.  
4. The last in the sonnet sequence The River Duddon, which traces the course of the river from its source in the Lake Country to its terminus in the Irish Sea. The description of the course of a river, combined with the incidental meditations which the changing scene evokes, had been a common poetic formula in the "local poems" of the 18th century, but Wordsworth employs it here for a memorable statement of one of his reiterated topics: the flow of water as an emblem of permanence in change.  
5. I.e., the river.  
Yew Trees

There is a Yew Tree, pride of Lorton Vale,
Which to this day stands single, in the midst
Of its own darkness, as it stood of yore:
Not loath to furnish weapons for the bands
Of Umfraville or Percy ere they marched
To Scotland’s heaths; or those that crossed the sea
And drew their sounding bows at Azincour,
Perhaps at earlier Crecy, or Poictiers.
Of vast circumference and gloom profound
This solitary Tree! a living thing
Produced too slowly ever to decay;
Of form and aspect too magnificent
To be destroyed. But worthier still of note
Are those fraternal Four of Borrowdale,
Joined in one solemn and capacious grove;
Huge trunks! and each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwined fibers serpentine
Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved;
Nor uninformed with Phantasy, and looks
That threaten the profane—a pillared shade,
Upon whose grassless floor of red-brown hue,
By sheddings from the pining umbrage tinged
Perennially—beneath whose sable roof
Of boughs, as if for festal purpose decked
With un rejoicing berries—ghostly Shapes
May meet at noontide; Fear and trembling Hope,
Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton
And Time the Shadow—there to celebrate,
As in a natural temple scattered o’er
United worship; or in mute repose
To lie, and listen to the mountain flood
Murmuring from Glaramara’s inmost caves.

ca. 1803

The Two April Mornings

We walked along, while bright and red
Uprose the morning sun;
And Matthew stopped, he looked, and said,
“The will of God be done!”

1. An evergreen tree; its wood was used for the bows which won the English victories mentioned in the poem, in the late medieval wars against Scotland and France. In the *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XXII. Coleridge cited lines 13 ff. as a prime example of the faculty of imagination, in which Wordsworth “stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own.”

2. Foliage that casts a shade.

3. Mountain rising from Borrowdale valley, in the Lake Country.

1. In this poem and another called *Matthew*, both written in 1799, the central figure is named after a onetime schoolmaster at Hawkshead School, which Wordsworth attended.
A village schoolmaster was he,
With hair of glittering grey;
As blithe a man as you could see
On a spring holiday.

And on that morning, through the grass,
And by the steaming rills,°
We travelled merrily, to pass
A day among the hills.

“Our work,” said I, “was well begun,
Then, from thy breast what thought,
Beneath so beautiful a sun,
So sad a sigh has brought?”

A second time did Matthew stop;
And fixing still his eye
Upon the eastern mountain-top,
To me he made reply:

“Yon cloud with that long purple cleft
Brings fresh into my mind
A day like this which I have left
Full thirty years behind.

“And just above yon slope of corn
Such colours, and no other,
Were in the sky, that April morn,
Of this the very brother.

“With rod and line I sued the sport
Which that sweet season gave,
And, to the church-yard come, stopped short
Beside my daughter’s grave.

“Nine summers had she scarcely seen,
The pride of all the vale;
And then she sang;—she would have been
A very nightingale.

“Six feet in earth my Emma lay;
And yet I loved her more,
For so it seemed, than till that day
I e’er had loved before.

“And, turning from her grave, I met,
Beside the churchyard yew,
A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet
With points of morning dew.

“A basket on her head she bare;
Her brow was smooth and white:
To see a child so very fair,
It was a pure delight!
“No fountain from its rocky cave
E’er tripped with foot so free;
She seemed as happy as a wave
That dances on the sea.

“There came from me a sigh of pain
Which I could ill confine;
I looked at her, and looked again:
And did not wish her mine!"