

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION BEGINS

Link to Literature

Poet William Wordsworth was a major figure of the romantic period. Known for his love of nature, Wordsworth often depicted the sights and sounds of the English countryside where he spent much of his adult life. However, Wordsworth was very aware of the sweeping social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, including the explosive growth of cities. Like others of his day, he was uneasy about these changes and expressed this feeling in many of his works. ♦ *As you read, think about what it would be like to experience the changes Wordsworth describes. Then, on a separate piece of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

From “The Excursion” by William Wordsworth

. . . Meanwhile, at social Industry’s command
How quick, how vast an increase. From the
 germ
Of some poor hamlet, rapidly produced
Here a huge town, continuous and
 compact
Hiding the face of earth for
 leagues—and there,
Where not a habitation stood
 before,
Abodes of men irregularly massed
Like trees in forests,—spread
 through spacious tracts.
O’er which the smoke of unremit-
 ting fires
Hangs permanent, and plentiful as
 wreaths
Of vapour glittering in the morning sun.
And, wheresoe’er the traveller turns his steps
He sees the barren wilderness erased,
Or disappearing; triumph that proclaims
How much the mild Directress of the plough
Owes to alliance with these new-born arts!



William Wordsworth,
about 1819

—Hence is the wide sea peopled—hence the
 shores
Of Britain are resorted to by ships
Freighted from every climate of the world
With the world’s choicest produce.
Hence that sum
Of keels that rest within her
crowded ports
Or ride at anchor in her sounds and
 bays;
That animating spectacle of sails
That, through her inland regions, to
 and fro
Pass with the respirations of the
 tide,
Perpetual, multitudinous! . . .
. . . I grieve, when on the darker side
Of this great change I look; and
 there behold
Such outrage done to nature as compels
The indignant power to justify herself;
Yea, to avenge her violated rights.
For England’s bane.

Source: “The Excursion,” by William Wordsworth (republished by Woodstock Books, 1991).

Questions to Think About

1. In the first half of the piece, what are Wordsworth’s feelings about the growth of cities?
2. How does Wordsworth describe England’s ports?
3. **Make Inferences** How does Wordsworth view the changes taking place in England? Does he think they are all negative? Support your answer with examples from the poem.