

***Lyrical Ballads* Role Cards**

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Reader 1

You are a periodical editor brought up during the Neoclassical period. You believe that a poet's role is to explore highbrow sentiments and ideas in elevated language. You think there is a special language for poetry, different from the language of everyday speech.

Reader 2

You are a landowner concerned that England will experience a revolution like that of America and France. You believe in monarchy, the aristocracy and a hierarchical society.

Reader 3

You are a radical preacher who supported the French Revolution and its ideals but is disillusioned both by the tyranny which has resulted and in the British government's repressive reaction.

Reader 4

You live in the countryside. Your father kept sheep on the village common. You fought in the army against France. On your return you discovered that the common land has been enclosed.

Reader 5

You are a tradesman from London. You believe that all men should have a say in who runs the country. Although you have not read Paine's *Rights of Man* you have heard it spoken about at a meeting of the London Corresponding Society and have listened to some of the revolutionary songs published in the broadside ballads.

Wordsworth (1798)

'The majority of the poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of the conversation in the middle and lower classes is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. ...It will perhaps appear to [readers of superior judgement] that wishing to avoid the prevalent fault of the day, the author has sometimes descended too low and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity. It is apprehended, that the more conversant the reader is with our elder writers, and with those in modern times who have been the most successful in painting modern manners and passions, the fewer complaints of this kind he will have to make.'

Coleridge

According to William Hazlitt in his recollections of the Lake Poets Coleridge “said the Lyrical Ballads were an experiment about to be tried by him and Wordsworth, to see how far the public taste would endure poetry written in a more natural and simple style than had hitherto been attempted; totally discarding the artifices of poetic diction, and making use only of such words as had probably been common in the ordinary language since the days of Henry II.’