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REVIEW ARTICLE

A STUDY ON WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AS A NATURE POET

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A Study on William Wordsworth as a Nature Poet

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INTRODUCTION

As a poet of Nature, Wordsworth stands supreme. He is a worshipper of Nature, Nature's devotee or high-priest. His love of Nature was probably truer and tenderer, than that of any other English poet, before or since. Nature comes to occupy in his poem a separate or independent status and is not treated in a casual or passing manner as by poets before him. Wordsworth had a full-fledged philosophy, a new and original view of Nature. Three points in his creed of Nature may be noted:

(a) He conceived of Nature as a living Personality. He believed that there is a divine spirit pervading all the objects of Nature. This belief in a divine spirit pervading all the objects of Nature may be termed as mystical Pantheism and is fully expressed in *Tintern Abbey* and in several passages in Book II of *The Prelude*.

(b) Wordsworth believed that the company of Nature gives joy to the human heart and he looked upon Nature as exercising a healing influence on sorrow-stricken hearts.

(c) Above all, Wordsworth emphasized the moral influence of Nature. He spiritualised Nature and regarded her as a great moral teacher, as the best mother, guardian and nurse of man, and as an elevating influence. He believed that between man and Nature there is mutual consciousness, spiritual communion or 'mystic intercourse'. He initiates his readers into the secret of the soul's communion with Nature. According to him, human beings who grow up in the lap of Nature are perfect in every respect.

Wordsworth believed that we can learn more of man and of moral evil and good from Nature than from all the philosophies. In his eyes, "Nature is a teacher whose wisdom we can learn, and without which any human life is vain and incomplete." He believed in the education of man by Nature. In this he was somewhat influenced by Rousseau. This inter-relation of Nature and man is very important in considering Wordsworth's view of both.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Cazamian says that "To Wordsworth, Nature appears as a formative influence superior to any other, the educator of senses and mind alike, the sower in our hearts of the deep-laden seeds of our feelings and beliefs. It speaks to the child in the fleeting emotions of early years, and stirs the young poet to an ecstasy, the glow of which illuminates all his work and dies of his life."

Wordsworth's childhood had been spent in Nature's lap. A nurse both stern and kindly, she had planted seeds of sympathy and understanding in that growing mind. Natural scenes like the grassy Derwent river bank or the monster shape of the night-shrouded mountain played a "needful part" in the development of his mind. In *The Prelude*, he records dozens of these natural scenes, not for themselves but for what his mind could learn through.

Nature was "both law and impulse"; and in earth and heaven, in glade and bower, Wordsworth was conscious of a spirit which kindled and restrained. In a variety of exciting ways, which he did not understand, Nature intruded upon his escapades and pastimes, even when he was indoors, speaking "memorable things". He had not sought her; neither was he intellectually aware of her presence. She riveted his attention by stirring up sensations of fear or joy which were "organic", affecting him bodily as well as emotionally. With time the sensations were fixed indelibly in his memory. All the instances in Book I of *The Prelude* show a kind of primitive animism at work; the emotions and psychological disturbances affect external scenes in such a way that Nature seems to nurture "by beauty and by fear".

In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth traces the development of his love for Nature. In his boyhood Nature was simply a playground for him. At the second stage he began to love and seek Nature but he was attracted purely by its sensuous or aesthetic appeal. Finally his love for Nature acquired a spiritual and intellectual character, and he realized Nature's role as a teacher and educator.

In the *Immortality Ode* he tells us that as a boy his love for Nature was a thoughtless passion but that when he grew up, the objects of Nature took a sober colouring from his eyes and gave rise to profound

thoughts in his mind because he had witnessed the sufferings of humanity:

To me the meanest flower that blows can give

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

SPIRITUAL MEANING IN NATURAL OBJECTS

Compton Rickett rightly observes that Wordsworth is far less concerned with the sensuous manifestations than with the spiritual significance that he finds underlying these manifestations. To him the primrose and the daffodil are symbols to him of Nature's message to man. A sunrise for him is not a pageant of colour; it is a moment of spiritual consecration:

My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows

Were then made for me; bound unknown to me

Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,

A dedicated Spirit.

To combine his spiritual ecstasy with a poetic presentment of Nature is the constant aim of Wordsworth. It is the source of some of his greatest pieces, grand rhapsodies such as *Tintern Abbey*.

NATURE DESCRIPTIONS

Wordsworth is sensitive to every subtle change in the world about him. He can give delicate and subtle expression to the sheer sensuous delight of the world of Nature. He can feel the elemental joy of Spring:

It was an April morning, fresh and clear

The rivulet, delighting in its strength,

Ran with a young man's speed, and yet the voice

Of waters which the river had supplied

Was softened down into a vernal tone.

He can take an equally keen pleasure in the tranquil lake:

The calm

And dead still water lay upon my mind

Even with a weight of pleasure

A brief study of his pictures of Nature reveals his peculiar power in actualising sound and its converse, silence.

Being the poet of the ear and of the eye, he is exquisitely felicitous. No other poet could have written:

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard

In springtime from the cuckoo-bird,

Breaking the silence of the seas

Among the farthest Hebrides.

Unlike most descriptive poets who are satisfied if they achieve a static pictorial effect, Wordsworth can direct his eye and ear and touch to conveying a sense of the energy and movement behind the workings of the natural world. "Goings on" was a favourite word he applied to Nature. But he is not interested in mere Nature description.

Wordsworth records his own feelings with reference to the objects which stimulate him and call forth the description. His unique apprehension of Nature was determined by his peculiar sense-endowment. His eye was at once far-reaching and penetrating. He looked through the visible scene to what he calls its "ideal truth". He pored over objects till he fastened their images on his brain and brooded on these in memory till they acquired the liveliness of dreams. He had a keen ear too for all natural sounds, the calls of beasts and birds, and the sounds of winds and waters; and he composed thousands of lines wandering by the side of a stream. But he was not richly endowed in the less intellectual senses of touch, taste and temperature.

CONCLUSION:

Wordsworth's attitude to Nature can be clearly differentiated from that of the other great poets of Nature. He did not prefer the wild and stormy aspects of Nature like Byron, or the shifting and changeable aspects of Nature and the scenery of the sea and sky like Shelley, or the purely sensuous in Nature like Keats. It was his special characteristic to concern himself, not with the strange and remote aspects of the earth, and sky, but Nature in her ordinary, familiar, everyday moods. He did not recognize the ugly side of Nature 'red in tooth and claw' as Tennyson did. Wordsworth stressed upon the moral influence of Nature and the need of man's spiritual discourse with her.

Wordsworth is a worshiper of Nature. His love of Nature is tender and truer than any other English poets. There is a separate status of Nature in his poems. He believed that there is a divine spirit in nature. He believed that the company of nature gives joy to the human heart and he looked upon nature as a healing force. Above all, he regarded her as a great moral preacher. He believed that there is a link between man and nature. In his eyes, "Nature is a teacher whose wisdom we can learn if we will and without which any human life is vain and incomplete. "He believed in the education of man by nature. "Sweet is the lore which Nature brings

Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things

We murder to dissect." He has mystical sense of life in natural things.

Wordsworth is concerned with the spiritual significance of nature. It has its message for man. The primrose and the daffodils are the symbols to give nature's message to man. A sunrise to him is a moment of spiritual consecration. The poet says sweetly in his poem "The Tables Turned": " Come forth into the light of things,

Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,

Our minds and hearts to bless—

Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,

Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood

May teach you more of man,

Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;

Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--

We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;"

Close up those barren leaves;

Come forth, and bring with you a heart

That watches and receives."

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Wordsworth is renowned as the poet of nature. The primary concern of his poems is to appreciate the sublime beauty of Nature, to search for the union between the mind and Nature, and to acquire aspiring insights by embracing Nature. He does not simply depict an accurate picture of the pleasant environment; instead, he emphasizes the interaction

and union of man with Nature. The out-in-out pattern extensively exemplified in Wordsworth's poems demonstrates the interaction between the outer environment and the inner mind. Among his illuminating poems, Lines Written in Early Spring introduces his fundamental attitude towards Nature. Union with Nature drives away the sad thoughts in his mind and his happiness conspicuously comes from living close to Nature. In addition, Wordsworth perceives human beings as part of Nature. The old man in Resolution and Independence and the shepherd in Michael merge themselves into Nature and become part of it.

In Lines composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth explores the effects of memory, time, and the landscape upon the human heart. Nature is like nutrition to him as it always supports him:

While here I stand, not only with the sense

Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts

That in this moment there is life and food

For future years

He is passionately in love with Nature as the beauteous forms are to him as An appetite; a feeling and a love. Though his despair and suffering in the materialistic city has changed his perception, the interchange between the mind and Nature still produces striking impacts to him. After a five-year absence from Nature, his passionate affection for Nature is deepened and Nature becomes dearer to him. In the poem, the most important role of Nature is manifested explicitly:

In nature and the language of the sense,

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,

The guide, the guardian of thy heart, and soul

Of all my moral being. (lines 108-111)

These lines constitute an excellent epigraph for the role of Nature in Wordsworth's poetry. His affection for Nature is not merely for its aesthetic attractions, but also for its ability to guide, support, and inspire.

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