

P.G-II
SEM -II Unit I
THE PRELUDE-Book. I
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Dr. Vandana Singh
Assistant Professor
P.G Dept. of English
Maharaja College

Critically examine the Theme of William Wordsworth The Prelude.

Throughout Wordsworth's work, nature provides the ultimate good influence on the human mind. A good relationship with nature helps individuals connect to both the spiritual and the social worlds. As Wordsworth explains in *The Prelude*, a love of nature can lead to a love of humankind. The dominant thematic framework of Wordsworth's epic verse is what somewhat similar to the message conveyed at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. The central metaphor here is that one's journey through life is not a line emanating from point outward, but rather a circle that brings you back to where you started. The point taking a journey that only succeeds in bringing you around again to where you started is that without the experience gathered on the journey, you cannot fully appreciate that there's no place home.

Suffering

Though no one seems to be complaining in "*Preludes*," the inhabitants of the poem are all suffering. They live in a run-down city and their living situations are impoverished. But it's their souls that are really suffering, argues the speaker. Their souls are filled with sordid images and material preoccupations, and so they don't notice each other's humanity anymore. To the speaker, that's the true definition of suffering.

P.G-II
SEM -II Unit I
THE PRELUDE-Book. I
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Dr. Vandana Singh
Assistant Professor
P.G Dept. of English
Maharaja College

The speaker is trying to tell us that our souls suffering because of the quality of our lives.

Actually, our speaker seems to be suffering more than anyone else in the poem.

Time

"Preludes" jumps from night to morning to midday and then it makes an even bigger jump: back in time. No matter when the poem settles, the conclusion is the same: life has always been rough. You could set this poem forward or backwards 100 years, implies the speaker, and it wouldn't change much. Humanity will always face bleak times. It's just that some of them have more distractions than others.

Society and Class

"Preludes" takes place mostly in a city, one with a diverse economic classes. You have the people who are too poor to afford curling irons and the business people who don't have time to notice the rest of humanity. Neither class is portrayed as better than the other; the poor have souls filled with sordid images and the rich are too busy to pay attention to their own consciences. It's a lose-lose. In the end, we all face ethical struggles, and this poem suggests we are too busy (and filled with unsavory thoughts) to notice. The different classes portrayed in the poem may have different struggles, but neither seems to come out on top. Everybody hurts.

In the end, the business of daily life leaves everyone too busy to notice their conscience.

Imagination

Wordsworth writes in the concluding book of *The Prelude*, 1

"So also hath that intellectual Love, For they are each in each, and cannot stand Dividually". (xiv, 206-9).

The "intellectual Love" to which he here addresses himself is, in context, presented as the pinnacle of a graduated scale. At its base is the purely instinctual love that exists (in Wordsworth's example) between the lamb and its mother. Above it is the human love existing between man and woman. In literary terms, both, for Wordsworth, belong to a world of romance:

a "green bower" (xiv, 176) of gratified desire where the poet enjoys the perpetual ease of "spontaneous overflow." This world of romance residing in the poet's blood and heart during the period of "thoughtless youth" is momentarily revived by Wordsworth in the opening lines of *The Prelude* as he contemplates the "long months of ease and undisturbed delight" (1, 26) that await him in "a known Vale" (1, 72).

Committed, however, to some larger epic undertaking, Wordsworth cannot remain for long at ease there. However delightful it may be in the words of the 1805 version to "linger, lull'd and lost, and rapt away" (xiv, 159), such delight is, in the "severer interventions" (1, 355) of the poet's revising mind in the 1850 version, "pitiabile" (xiv, 180). And it is pitiable because, in celebrating the animal and human forms of love, the poet's joy falls short of its transcendent object.

P.G-II
SEM -II Unit I
THE PRELUDE-Book. I
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Dr. Vandana Singh
Assistant Professor
P.G Dept. of English
Maharaja College

*In the 1805 version, this transcendent object is the mind itself, described by Wordsworth as "the brooding Soul" (xiv, 165); in the 1850 version, it is externalized as the Hebrew-Christian God who, seated upon his throne, receives "heaven inspired" tribute "on the knees of prayer" and "the wings of praise" (xiv, 184-86). Whatever one thinks of the substitution of "the Almighty's Throne" (xiv, 187) for "the brooding Soul," the fact remains that Wordsworth's subject in *The Prelude* is the growth of his own poetic mind. Looking into it (almost as the *English Studies in Canada*, i, 4 (winter 1975) poet in "The Fall of Hyperion" looks into "the dark secret chamber of [Moneta's] skull" [i, 278]).*

Permeating Wordsworth's long poem are reminders from Wordsworth of the tremendous gift granted to human beings of the capacity to imagine and think creatively. The centerpiece of this theme occurs in the famous episode in Book 6 detailing the poet's disappointment with Mont Blanc, getting lost on the way and discovering that he and his companions had experienced what had been promised to be the sublime experience of crossing the Alps without even realizing they had done it. This moment of realization ignites Wordsworth's understanding of the power of imagination to create an experience of sublimity that cannot be recreated in the natural world.

The circularity of experience and the celebration of the imagination combine to underscore not just the unifying theme of the entire work, but to give the work its subtitle: "The Growth of a Poet's Mind."

P.G-II
SEM -II Unit I
THE PRELUDE-Book. I
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Dr. Vandana Singh
Assistant Professor
P.G Dept. of English
Maharaja College

Throughout is the recurrence by Wordsworth of his contention that he was born to become a poet, but that experience was required to fulfill that predetermined role. Thus, the structure is not chronological, but rather logically non-linear so that events which occurred in the past are capable of being understood and written about with a quality to the verse only after he has completed the circular journey bringing him back full circle to where he began. Raw passion having now been cultivated through experience; the poet can now use the power of imagination to transform everything into poetic expression.