

Psychological Aspects in The Prelude written by William Wordsworth

In his autobiographical poem "The Prelude" William Wordsworth relates how the main events of his life led to his spiritual development in order to become a poet. In the so-called Poetry of Nature this presupposes the influence of the direct and living experience of the objects and elements of the natural world. Wordsworth combines two fundamental elements in the poetic textualization of *The Prelude*. On one hand, there is the emotional expression of the inner effects aroused by the impression of the natural forms based on what might be conceived as a realistic representation, i.e. faithful to the empirical forms of human perception and regarding the subject's attention to the surrounding environment and the local colour. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth relates how the main events of his life - especially those linked to the contact with Nature - led to the growth of his mind. The speaker

*relates first the main events of childhood, boyhood and youth; then the main experiences lived through as an adult man. A deep problem emerges from the autobiographical structure of *The Prelude*. The dynamics of the poet's passionate look at Nature and the reverence paid to the worth of the external objects and the living events among them in relation to the spiritual growth of humankind reflect a faithful attempt to resist against the issues of the emerging modern life. Historically, Wordsworth lived during an age when he felt both poetry and life were menaced by the structure of the modern society as represented by the industrial modes of production and urban modes of living. The traditional forms of life had been threatened by the utilitarian worldview of capitalism, whereas Wordsworth saw the human subjectivity menaced by the objective worldview of the eighteenth century, by the mechanical, rationalized and analytical logic that spread out of the sciences in his time. In this sense, the life in big cities had been regarded as a threat for an organic conception of life. Ifor Evans*

gives an account of how the Romantic poets felt in that context: "It was as if, frightened by the coming of industrialism and the nightmare town of industry, they were turning to nature for protection. Or as if, with the declining strength of traditional religious beliefs, men were making a religion from the spirituality of their own experiences" The Prelude is motivated by Wordsworth's ultimate belief that something in Nature still remained immune from those pernicious influences - that the natural world continues organic, thus constituting a safe model for the human spirituality. In the periods of residence in Cambridge, London and France the poet rehearsed the sense of being distant from Nature and lost in the educational, social and political systems of the eighteenth century. Therefore, the speaker represents in the movement of return to his native land the healing power of Nature against the shocking experience of being thrown off the possibilities of continuing integrated in the organic world of Nature. Depicting his return to his original rural region in the Lake District and finding it

*in strong organic integration Wordsworth intends to show that Nature remains the best model for the integrity of human life in front of the threat of the idea of progress. The fact that Wordsworth sets his protagonist in a special relationship with Nature requires an account of his personal position in relation to the type of social and historical world in which he lived. That is why the narrative structure of autobiography formed a necessary pattern upon which to frame the subjective organization of experience. The development of the poet's consciousness can be related to the experience of shocks received in the course of personal, social and historical events. This justifies the revision of the influence of Nature on the formation of the poet's character and of the way the protagonist returned to a mode of life closer to Nature after the crisis provoked by the oppressive relationship with the social, political, economic and historical dimensions of the world. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth depicts the evolution in his conception of Nature from an elemental world of beautiful and sublime forms which foster his*

imagination by means of being haunted by fairy and archaic potencies during physical contact in childhood rambles and boyhood sports; to the visionary intuition of the transcendental source behind the living forms during youth; and, finally, to the passionate assertion of earth as the proper world of justice and happiness where man is to achieve perfection in life, where he would be able to realize both his virtue and liberty. To this last meaning, specially as regards the reference to the French Revolution, Wordsworth associates a sort of conception of Nature as a type of Spirit of the Age (Zeitgeist), a historical intelligence that determines and organizes the chain of social and political events similarly to Hegel's Dialectics. This famous and lengthy poem by Wordsworth is very definitely a psychological poem in that it focuses on the thoughts and feelings of the speaker and how they develop as he ages. It is very much a poem that is interested in internal processes of thoughts and emotions rather than any external events, and as such it provides a fascinating focus on how Wordsworth felt about nature and its

importance to his thinking and personality. Note, for example, the following quote, that is taken from a section in this poem where Wordsworth, in his advancing years, finds in nature a system of law and order that he feels is sadly lacking in humanity:

*O Soul of Nature! that, by laws divine
Sustained and governed, still dost overflow
With an impassioned life, what feeble ones
Walk on this earth!*

This quote is interesting because it reveals a lot about Wordsworth's psychology from how he sees nature. For him, nature is not just about inspiring man through its beauty, but also presents an ordered system that mankind desperately lacks, a system that man can submit himself to and be modelled by. This reveals some very interesting aspects of Wordsworth's character as he psychologically finds it easier to abandon himself to the rules of nature in his old age than trust in the law and order of human society. At each stage of this poem therefore there are

**The Prelude
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*fascinating psychological insights to be seen about
Wordsworth and his relationship with nature.*