
William Wordsworth's Prelude as an autobiographical poem- An overview

Dr. G. Kiran Kumar Reddy¹, Assistant Professor in English, RGM CET, Nandyal, Andhra Pradesh, India, E-Mail: kiran.mokshita@gmail.com, ORCID ID:0000-0002-1161-5698

Dr.B.Srikanth Reddy², Lecturer in English, RGUKT IIT, Iddipulapaya, Andhra Pradesh, India, E-Mail: srered@gmail.com, ORCID ID:0009-0004-9759-4761

Paper Received on 12-06-2024, Accepted on 15-07-2024
Published on 17-07-24; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.3.133

Abstract: Literature has broadened our indulgence with Nature and upgraded aesthetic sensibility to such an extent that as soon as we read the literary text, we form images of Nature in mind. The primary purpose of this paper is to access the qualities of autobiographical elements in words worth The Prelude poem. It is regarded as the portrayal of spiritual autobiography. This paper examines the growth of the poet's mind in this poem. It studies the inner life and emotional scenes of the poet's soul. Man has the freedom of creative choice, and action slowly gains momentum. Man alone is responsible for his upliftment. Wordsworth believed very strongly in individual identity, a ramification of humanism. As a poet and as a creative writer, Wordsworth attached importance to humanistic values. Wordsworth is a poet of the earth in the true sense of the word. Man's life is subject to emotions; he attempted to common fellow beings' lives in poems like The Excursion, The Prelude, etc. He regarded the commoner's life as the central theme of his poetry.

Keywords: Autobiography, Nature, self-evaluation.

Most critics claim that reading The Prelude is a big headache because the incidents referred to in the poem are biographical. In The Prelude, Wordsworth asserts that the purpose is to preserve the spirit of the past.

The Prelude of Wordsworth is a great and inspiring work. Prof. G. Hough calls it "one of the greatest reflective poems in the language. It is subtitled The Growth of a Poet's Mind. It may be considered an autobiographical poem, an epic, a philosophical poem, or a combination of all these three forms of poetry. Helen

Darbishire says: "The Prelude is a spiritual autobiography, the most interesting in our language." According to Ernest do Selincourt, "The Prelude has not merely a unity of design; it has something of epic structure. Wordsworth is a poet, the most original poet. Wordsworth's long poem, "The Prelude," is a glorious cathedral. It is unsurpassed in imaginative psychology and lyric fervor by anything of its kind in English poetry. The poem reveals that Wordsworth has an intense capacity for psychological self-exploration. It shows us the impact of beauty and fear on the growing personality of words' worth. Both joy and fear played a significant part in the mental and spiritual growth of words worth in the formative years of his boyhood. The great Romantic poet expresses his unflinching faith in the moralizing influence of Nature. He starts with the most soothing words:

" O, there is a blessing in this gentle breeze."

The poem has the sublimity of style, loftiness of theme, and a broad scope of epic action, though it needs to be improved in some other qualities of an epic.

Wordsworth is rightly called "the keenest-eyed of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in nature." Nature was, for him, the embodiment of the Divine spirit. He insists that Nature is the greatest of all teachers. He means that spiritual communion is possible between the indwelling soul of the universe and the soul of man, which is akin to it. We may constantly gain power, peace, and happiness through this communion.

Keats was right when he called words worth the Egoistical sublime. The Prelude is of special autobiographical significance. This great poem is like a premature document. It is a faithful record of his inner life. This long epic has the poet's words worth as its hero. It traces the development of Grasmere when his mind reached its full maturity. Abercrombie praises it as a story of the universal significance of which word worth's own experience is offered as a type. He calls it the modern epic. Book I of The Prelude tells us the process by which Nature molds Nature. It also shows how, through Nature, one can have a glimpse of the divine.

According to Pascal (1960), "Wordsworth is the first autobiographer to realize that each man constructs out of his world a unique framework of meaningful events and that the deepest purpose of autobiography is the account of a life as a projection of the real self on the world."

Research Journal Of English (RJOE)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF)Vol-9, Issue-3,2024
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

The poem opens on a note of joy. Wordsworth feels happy to breathe the pure and fresh air of the country. It brings him mental peace. He remembers how uneasy and oppressive he felt in the city, like a stranger in an inhospitable home. He compares the joy he feels in his newfound freedom to that of a prisoner released from prison. He scribbles freely in a reflective and reminiscent mood: he is now free. "Free as a bird to settle where I will."

He allows himself to think and plan for his future days. He looks forward to a long period of serene happiness. He is so carefree at heart that he is content to be guided by the spirit that animates Nature. The nature legacy left to him by his friend Risley Calvert has set him free from the necessity of earning his own living. A happy breeze fans his cheek as Wordsworth goes on his journey. He feels the stirring of creative energy within him. He has a keen urge to compose some sublime poem. Some old Romantic themes by Milton left unsung, an epic of chivalry and knight-errantry in the manner of Spenser, and some philosophic songs of his invention come to his mind quickly. However, they are rejected one after another. The poet still needs to have the necessary confidence for a sublime poem. He is baffled. Such is the severe 'Moral crisis' from which he suffered during the early years of his settlement at Racedown. He was saved from it only by the affectionate care of his sister Dorothy and later on by the company of Coleridge.

The inspiring preacher of Nature gives a natural account of his childhood and early boyhood. He describes his favorite sports and pasties like bathing in the river, basking in the sun, bird-nesting, bird-catching, kite flying, rowing, and angling. This is the picture of a happy, sociable, and well-adjusted boy with a natural love for outdoor life and sports. Even in his childhood, while engaged in sports, Wordsworth felt the subtle influence of Nature, which nurtured his imagination and thrilled his soul. He says that the clear stream, with its murmur, lulls him into rest. He will take up his home beneath Green Grove:

"The earth is before me".
He is with a heart full of joy.

His animal love of Nature began Nature into a mystical and spiritual love. Beauty and fear played an essential part in the growth of his soul. He writes:

Research Journal Of English (RJOE)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF)Vol-9, Issue-3,2024
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

"Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear." (301-302) Part I

When he did something which he considered wrong. Nature acted like an outward embodiment of his conscience and made him realize his guilt; never did a boy spend a healthier and happier school time than Wordsworth:

" We ran a boisterous course; the year span round
With a giddy motion".

The poet frankly confesses his sins. Once, he stole a boat to have a row on a lake. There was a grim, black, and huge peak in the background. As the boy rode, he felt that an unearthly shape "strode after me." His soul was fostered also through fear. His spiritual faculties were quickened. Here is the memorable statement of his creed:

"Wisdom and spirit of the universe!
Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,
The givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion."

While still a boy at school, he could commune with this spirit of Nature:

"In Nature, such inner course was mine;
Mine was in the fields both day and night,
And by the waters, all the summer long."

In such communication, his own senses were half that of the creators. They imparted to external things a dream and a glory that never was on land or sea.

The Prelude or The Growth of a Poet's Mind is a faithful record of the poet's inner life and is in itself a little epic, of which the poet himself is the hero. He says
" I yearn towards some philosophic song.
Of truth that cherishes our daily life."

In very much the manner of Milton, Wordsworth also examines a number of subjects and gives them up one by one. Thus "The Prelude" originated. Its poet regarded it merely as an introduction or preparation for a more ambitious work to be called "The Prelude". However, the introduction did not remain merely an introduction but grew in Wordsworth's hands into a mighty poem in fourteen books with the poet Wordsworth as its central figure.

In the words of Liden Berger, he claims that The Prelude is illustrated "Spiritual frugality of William Wordsworth and a handsome anticipation of the modern concept of autobiography."

The Prelude might be an autobiography, but it is an autobiography of epic significance, sweep, and stature. It has all the essential features of an epic. (i) The Prelude is characterized by length. It has a central figure, the poet. It is the story of his mind. It describes how his mind was educated and developed under the influence of Nature. Their Nature literary adventures in an epic, but in The Prelude, the adventures are of the mind and the soul. There is conflict, but the conflict is not physical and external; it is rather internal and spiritual. In other words, The Prelude does not have the warlike nature of nature; the spiritual conflict and the adventures of the spiritual are the very basis of Wordsworth's epic.

The epic unity in this poem is provided through out, by the personality of the poet. There is also epic variety, sweep and range. This variety is provided by the countless digressions and episodes that the poet has introduced. There are the digressions of the stolen boat, card-playing etc.

The poem does not lack epic significance and universality. Abercrombie rightly points out that "The Prelude is not a story of the growth and education of a particular poet, but of the poetic temperament and as such has universal implications. It reveals how the soul of a great poet is formed and developed under various influences, especially the influence of Nature. Another quality is the element of the supernatural. It is produced by Wordsworth's mystic experiences. When he goes for a joy ride in a stolen boat, he is intensely conscious of the fact that some huge mishappen form is following him with rapid strides. It is as if supernatural agencies keep watch over the growing boy, keep him from harm, and foster his soul through a

Research Journal Of English (RJOE)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF)Vol-9, Issue-3,2024
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

ministry of fear. The boy's mystic visions, his visions of divine beauty and glory, add further to the supernatural element in the poem.

“The Prelude ‘ has also the lofty utterance of an epic. Ample use is made of epic style. Here is a fine example of the figurative style with a metaphorical tinge couched in literary flair and pep from the poem Wordsworth:

“Stood alone
Beneath the sky as if I had been born
On Indian plains and from my mother's
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport,
A naked savage in the thunder shower.”

The scenes of his boyish adventures have been described by the poet in the lofty manner of an epic –hero describing the scene of his heroic adventures:

“ The sands of Westmoreland, the creeks and Bays
Of Oumbria’s rocky limits, they can tell
How when the sea threw off this evening shade.”

The diction used is lofty and dignified throughout the poem. Frequent use is made of periphrasis, personification, latinisms, etc., for the purpose. The poem is replete with eloquence.

The French Revolution stirred republican sympathies in Wordsworth. Responding to it, he wrote:

“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven.”

Wordsworth found the same republicanism in Nature – libe Nature Equality and Fraternity.

Thus, words worth passing his boyhood amidst natural and elemental surroundings and the hilly haunts.

Research Journal Of English (RJOE)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF)Vol-9, Issue-3,2024
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

There he did a lot of climbing, boating, fishing and skating. He was a hardy and sensitive boy. "The Prelude reveals that he had his full share of the raptures of physical joy he derived from such carefree, enjoyable pastimes. Intense intuition coupled with indefatigable observation of Natural objects; the would-be poet of Nature felt Nature supremely thrilling impulses of a deeper kind.

The power of the hills was on him. The music was in his ears. Light and darkness wove their spells for him: The Prelude is a stimulating poem in inspired blank verse. It deals with the process of growth and evolution of the poet's personality. It is a record of the education of the poet's heart, mind, and soul under diverse influences in the lap of Nature.

Conclusion:

Nature Words worth's description of Prelude poem projects nostalgia towards Nature. Its Nature evolves around the natural phenomenon and autobiographical elements. Its pictorial quality of the poem is a feast for eyes and everlasting one in English poetry.

References:

- Lindenberger, H (1964), on Wordsworth's Prelude, Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press.
Pascal, R.(1960), Design and truth in autobiography, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

How to cite this article?

Dr. G. Kiran Kumar Reddy & Dr.B.Srikanth Reddy,“ William Wordsworth's Prelude as an autobiographical poem- An overview ” Research Journal Of English (RJOE)9(3),PP:126-133,2024, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.3.133