A William Wordsworth’s Treatment of Nature: An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT

“William Wordsworth is known as a priest of nature. He has treated nature with a sense of great love and affection with all its manifestation. He has explored spiritual aspects of nature and exhibited a fine appreciation of nature and he is a true adorer of nature’s beauty including all its original forms as birds, trees, rivers, mountains, rocks etc. that is why he has gone a step further than other poets of nature. He has a true sense of magical appeal to his eyes and touch to natural scenes all around the beautiful world. However, his contribution to the poetry of nature does not lies in the fact that he has given accurate and closely observed pictures of nature, but in fact, he has reached on the highest touch of its spiritual glory and called it a true guide and teacher of men. Thus the present aims at to highlight William Wordsworth as a priest of nature based on analytical studies of his poems.”

KEYWORDS: Spirituality, Nature, Mankind, Humanity, Manifestations, Optimism.

INTRODUCTION:

William Wordsworth is a true poet of nature and like all other poets of nature his treatment of nature is different from them. P.B. Shelly is the only poet whose attitude towards nature approaches nearest to Wordsworth. He, unlike their contemporaries, intellectualized nature. He is not merely poet of nature, but also a prophet of nature. But there is a great difference between these two. Wordsworth’s nature is ‘both law and impulse’ while with P.B. Shelley, it is ‘impulse’ alone. Nature in Wordsworth’s poetry is not regarded as a background for his pictures of men nor as more reflecting feeling of man, but rather as a wonderful power around us calming and influencing our souls. Slogan of all romantic poets is back to nature, love to nature. This love to nature leads to love to mankind.

However, an essential Wordsworthian features of his treatment of nature inverses spirituality in his poetry. Wordsworth insists that through contact with nature the heart is exalted and made happy. Such happiness and exaltation is moral and in such a moral condition the heart can do no wrong. Wordsworthian nature and Wordsworthian man appear profoundly akin. For him, nature is a living entity. The indwelling spirit in nature imparts its own consciousness to all objects of nature. The influence of nature on man is the noblest part of Wordsworth’s teaching in poetry. Nature is the best educator and she is ever interested in man and tries to impress human mind. Throughout his life Wordsworth remained a true interpreter of nature to humanity. He became the worshipper of nature, her true priest and a revealer of her harmony to humanity. Wordsworth was essentially the poet of nature and his vision of human life was concerned by his appreciation of nature. It was the love of nature that led him to the love to humanity.
Thus, Wordsworth found some meaning in human life, if human beings lived in close proximity to nature. His emphasis was on simplicity and intimate contact with nature. He thought that moral elevation and spiritual edification of man is not possible in the monotonous life of towns and cities, but man could realize his essential humanity and his spiritual elevation by leading a life of primal simplicity in constant communion with nature. It would seem that Wordsworth’s love of nature leads to love of humanity. Therefore, Wordsworth’s poetry is characterized by a restrained yet undaunted optimism. He holds that life, despite its manifold evils is yet good and worth living. The evils themselves are stepping-stones to good. Man is not alone in the world, nor alone in his suffering, because God is always and everywhere present to protect and support him. Theme of the influence of nature on man is the noblest part of Wordsworth’s teaching in poetry, and that is the theme of ‘The Prelude – I’.

This book deals with his childhood and school time in many ways. The connection between Wordsworth’s poetry and his personal experience is of the closest kind, and he undertook the writing of ‘The Prelude’ in a mood of self-examination. There is no other work in English language where the early joy and wonder, the passionate, solemn, awestricken delight of the simple experiences of boyhood are more sympathetically and more graphically described. From his works we learn how Wordsworth received the education of nature. Addressing the Derwent, the poet says:

“Didst thou beauteous stream, 
makesceless music through night and day, 
whichcomposed my thoughts. 
O more than infant softness, giving me, 
among fretful dwellings of mankind, 
a foretaste, a dins earnest, of the calm 
that nature breathes among the hells and groves.”¹

‘The Prelude’ is a guide book for understanding comprehensively the unbroken relationship between human life and nature, without which life to Wordsworth was no life. The book ‘Prelude VIII’ describes the love of nature leading to love of man. It signifies that love of nature leads the poet to love of man. In the book ‘Prelude XIII’, we find how during his wandering on from day to day he came across humble and rustic people, poor or unfortunate and sometimes even across errant and idiots. An intense sympathy for such human beings would well up in his soul and he would realize the dignity of man as man. So the poet tells us:

“Of these, said I shall be my song; of these, 
if future years mature me for the task, 
will I record the praises, making verse 
Deal boldly with substantial things; in truth 
and sanctity of passion, speaking of these, 
that justice may be done, obeisance paid where it is due.”²

In this way, for Wordsworth, only nature can reveal to us fundamental truths. This is spiritualization of nature. Here Wordsworth, undoubtedly, considers nature as, original and unique. ‘Tintern Abbey’ poem is one of the nineteen poems that Wordsworth contributed to Lyrical Ballads. This poem may be regarded as a record of the poets growth or of his spiritual development. It states in clear words the gradual development in Wordsworth’s attitude towards nature. We learn from the poem a number of things connected with his life. He saw in nature the revelation of the divine law and felt the divine presence pervading in nature and the mind of man. We don’t understand the meaning and purpose of the world. But a worshipper of nature understands the mystery. He understands the meaning of the world, not by head but by heart. He remarks:

“The heart loved her: it is her privilege, 
through all the years of this our life, to lead 
from joy to joy: for she can so inform 
the mind that is within us, so impress.”³

Furthermore, William Wordsworth emphasized the moral influence of nature. He spiritualized nature and regarded her as a great moral teacher, as the best mother, guardian and nurse of man, as an elevating influence. He believed that between man and nature there is a spiritual intercourse. “The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse / the guide, the guardian of my heart / and soul of all my moral being.”⁴
Wordsworth’s poems of ‘Lyrical Ballads’ fall into two groups i.e.(i) those radiant with joy, and celebrating nature’s holy plan and (ii) those which interpreting the humanity, fell what man has made of man. In this poem, Wordsworth says that the flowers, leaves, buds etc. enjoy themselves in nature, but man has become a stranger to this joy. He says:

“If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be nature’s holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?”

Further, in the poem ‘The world is too much with us’ Wordsworth deplores the extreme materialism and spiritual degradation of his times. Men are actuated only by economic motives. They have become too materialistic. People are too much engrossed in the pursuit of wealth and pleasure and waste their energies. They have given themselves up, heart and soul, to the pursuit of material prosperity. Their mind is so much obsessed with material gain that they fail to appreciate the beauties of nature. He remarked:

“The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste
our powers. Little we see in nature that is ours;
we have given our hearts away a sordid boon!”

However, for his poetic work, the poet would rather be a pagan with his keen sensitiveness to the mysteries and beauties of nature than lead the modern pseudo-enlightened life of materialism. In a word, he prefers paganism to excessive materialism. Wordsworth’s love of nature was boundless. A profound religious feeling pervades in all his nature poetry. Nature was for him the embodiment of the divine spirit and when he insists that nature is the greatest of all teachers, he means that between the in-dwelling soul of the universe and the soul of man, spiritual communion is possible. He further remarked:

“Great God! I’d rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outward;
So might I standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn.”

‘To a Skylark’ poem so characteristic of the genius of Wordsworth opens with a description of the peculiar characteristics of the bird. It soars high up in the sky and keeps singing there but its age and heart are with its nest on the ground. It can drop down into that nest at will. He says:

“Ethereal minstrel! Pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where care abound?
Or while the wings aspire, as heart and eye
Both with the nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst cast down into at will”.

In this poem, the character of the bird (skylark) is distinguished from that of other birds. Skylark soars beyond the last point of vision and yet the song reaches the bosom of the plain and thrills all hearers. The song is prompted by the bird’s love for its mate and its young ones which remain on the earth. Other birds sing only in the spring time, but the skylark sings all the year round. This is a heart beating poem how Wordsworth has related a bird to humanity or our common life. He writes:

“A privacy of glorious light is thine,
whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
of harmony, with instinct more divine,
type of the wise who soar, but never roam;
to the kindred points of heaven and home!”

The Poem ‘Daffodils’ is not as imaginary poem but based on actual formation and experience. Wordsworth fills joy in every creation of nature. He regards nature guide source of enjoyment. For him, nature gives pleasure and solace in man’s life. Once poet was wandering aimlessly like a patch of cloud floating in the sky over hills and valleys. All of sudden he saw a large numbers of daffodils by the side of lake growing under the trees. They were of golden colour and were waving and dancing in the air. In solitude, when the mind is undisturbed by outward things, old
memories revive. Hence, when the memory of that sight appeared to the poet, he derived from it the same pleasure which he had enjoyed when he had actually seen it. He remarked,

“In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils”.10

CONCLUSION:
To conclude we can say that Wordsworth has rightfully been called by the critics and readers alike, the high priest of nature, the harbinger of nature or the worshipper of nature, as no other poet has understood nature as Wordsworth does. His treatment of nature is original and unique. To Wordsworth nature is not inanimate. Nature is a living and organic unity with a life and personality of its own for which he lives and dies. Therefore, his treatment of nature is immortal in the history of poetic work in England and other countries of the world. Actually, his treatment of nature is different from other poets of nature.

REFERENCES:
2. Ibid, pp. 128-29.
7. ibid, ‘The World is too much With Us’, pp. 9-12.