

“WORDS’ WORTH ON NATURE” AN ESSAY ON WORDSWORTH’S NATURE

V. Ravinder

Asst.Professor,
KITS warangal.
Research Scholar of PhD
K.L.University

All lovers of English Literature who loves *nature* and also nature of Wordsworth know that ‘*Wordsworth is a poet of nature*’. This is only a superficial view of cursory readers. The implications of Nature of Wordsworth are deep and of far-reaching significance. It is true that he seeks beauty in the meadows, woodlands, valleys and mountain-tops; the green grass-carpeted meadows, the river-crossed valleys and snow-clad mountain-tops do and did fascinate him as much as they enchanted other poets of Nature. But Wordsworth’s attitude to them is very different. Two things, Nature and Man, attracted him very much and hence his poems are about them only but they are painted in their sad, serene moods.

Nature have very little appeal for him, of course they could delight others like Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. While Shelley intellectualizes Nature and Keats is content to see her sensuous beauty, Wordsworth spiritualizes her, apprehending far inner significance for him. The primrose and the daffodil are more than mere flowers; they convey a message to man. The Prime (prim) rose is a short-lived one that comes before the rose; it speaks therefore of the short life of man on earth. The daffodils grow in clusters and man has to be gregarious, living in amity with others. The primrose path of dalliance also leads to early death. So they are symbolic of Nature’s message to him. The mountain-torrents look grand to him because he can link them with the beauty of a young girl’s face or the glory of a floating cloud. The sunrise is to him a spiritual consecration of the day to man.

Wordsworth is not interested in the outward manifestation of external beauty of nature; her bewildering profusion of flowers and fruits does not take him off his feet; her teeming concrete life, her conundrums and riddles and above all her magical appeal to the eye and the ear and to the sense of touch do not touch his soul. He does appreciate them with his senses but their inner meaning is there for his ever-alert soul. The sound of the whizzing winds, the rustling leaves, the babbling brooks and the coo-coo of the cuckoo do have an appeal to his ear and mind; but the sounds carry a very different meaning for his soul which apprehends their sadness. All these in the forest make discordant sounds and yet he tries to detect the harmony underlying discord, namely, a “central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation”. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats were all poets of Nature; but in their attitude to her, how much they differ from one another! Unlike other poets and hence, their apprehension of Nature is set to transcendental music. Wordsworth is not merely a poet of Nature but also a Prophet of Nature.

Coleridge had his eyes always lifted to the skies and was said to be hungering for Heaven, he could only sympathize with the spiritualization of Nature of Wordsworth, as Nature could make

a fervent appeal to him and through the senses only. At a later time when opium had spoilt his intellect as well as imaginative powers, he wrote Deject on, an Ode, in which he says very assertively that man gives Nature her beauty and Nature of her own has no beauty at all.

“O Lady, we receive but what we give
 And in our life alone dear Nature live:
 Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud”.

Wordsworth finds “peace” at the heart of things though there may be discordant notes struck by them and confusion may result out of it. His mood is contemplative. There’s no variety, light and shade in Wordsworth’s poetry; but instead one can find in it depth and intensity and penetrating power. In him one finds “spiritual ecstasy”; he is mystical and poetical, and that is his aim. Such mystical powers have produced the finest lines in Tintern Abbey’. He is a moralist when all things are said and done. He is often didactic in his attitude towards life (as in ‘Laodamia’) it is only sometimes he gives delicate touches to the beauty of Nature. He loves the objects of Nature sensuously also, with his eyes, sense of touch and sound. Whelp he does not look beyond the objects, he is on a par with Romantic poets; mysticism comes in when he looks beyond and through them. “He can actualize with fine clarity all the little graces and charms of a summer day”.

Wordsworth is more a poet the ear than of the eye. These lines below illustrate how he feels the sense of things. Thought and feeling are proportionately and finely fused.

“The winds that would be howling at all hours
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers.”
 “To lie and listen to the mountain flood
 Murmuring from Glaramarka’s inmost caves.”

How distinctly these are Wordsworthian! It is the sound that is dominant with him and not the pictorial beauty for the English Literature eye. Shelley would have been delighted to dwell upon the prismatic effect of the sunshine upon the waters. It is colour and beauty that attract Shelley; Wordsworth is attracted by sound only. He has moved from the eye to the ear.

Sound and silence attract him more than beauty and joy. These lines clearly show what Wordsworth has to say about Nature.

“It is a beautiful evening calm and free,
 The holy time is quiet as a nun,
 Breathless with adoration, the broad sun
 Is sinking down, in its tranquility.”

Wordsworth, the thinker, comes first and then only Wordsworth, the painter of Nature and human life, arrives. “He strives to realize the peace at the heart of things and of the joy that comes from peace”.

Occasionally he can feast the eye of the reader also:
 “The beauty of the star-shaped shadow thrown
 On the smooth surface of the naked stone”.

It is the witchery of the sound that appeals to us. If the reader thinks of the appeal to the eye that a poet can make, there are umpteen poets in England who can make a better appeal than Wordsworth. But, when it comes to symbolism of a sound, he is supreme. No other poet could have written:

“A voice so thrilling never was heard
 In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
 Breaking the silence of the seas,

Among the farthest Hebrides”

Wordsworth attitude towards Man is the same as his attitude towards Nature. In his description of Nature, he passes from the concrete to the abstract. But in his attitude towards human beings, he ignores mankind and attaches himself to men. Herein one finds Shakespeare who loves individuals (and hence is great), and Wordsworth who loves rustics only (and hence is less great). Matthew Arnold is one such poet who talks of humanity in general and not of individuals. Wordsworth records the sad story of Laodamia and Michael and we are very pleased with his delineation of character. Shelley also is supposed to be a lover of mankind and freedom-fighter but he does not show his love of individuals. Prometheus Unbound is not about a human being; The Cloud and The Skylark have no relation with man. This speaks of Shelley's apathy towards man, though he loved all in general!

Since Wordsworth came earlier in contact with Nature than he did with Man, it is through Nature's eyes that he looks at the life of man and hence lays stress upon the primal qualities in which Man and Nature find harmony. That is why he is able to transfer his love to shepherds and simple dales men and later to the ordinary men and women with their ordinary joys and sorrows. He cannot deal with the complex minds and souls of individuals.

His narrative poem Michael is purely a picture of rural life. Michael is a shepherd and has worked hard from boyhood days to old age on the farm; it is his own farm. He finds it difficult to make both ends meet at home and hence decides to send his son to London to make his living there and to remit some amount to his parents also. The rural picture is idealized by the poet. In contrast to it, is London life with its fraud and deceit, debauchery and drunkenness. The boy unfortunately falls a prey to vicious habits, loses everything and is finally deported for a crime. Only the Cornerstone Michael had lifted to build a sheep-cote on the farm remains; there is a heap of stones lying there unused. When will the boy come and assist his father? No longer will he come back and the land has passed on into the hands of a creditor and Michael is dead. It is a tragic story of a simple man and a simple life. How touching and moving it is! It is here that the real and the ideal meet and blend and the humdrum is spiritualized. The revolutionary zeal is no longer on him in his maturer years and he is more than content to teach a moral only as in the story of Laodamia or Resolution and Independence.

In Laodamia fleshly passion is censured of Laodamia for her dead husband, Protesilaus, who now appears before her in the shape of a shadow only, led by Hermes and the poet preaches 'morality', namely, 'self-control'. In The Leech-gatherer, he preaches independence though the job is hazardous, namely, trapping leeches by stretching one's legs into the waters for leeches to stick and suck blood. He would take them to the doctors for sale.

Wordsworth had done much for the tillers of the soil earlier than Dickens who launched the scheme of reform. In some of his poems, he talks of the tender homeliness of their lives, their undaunted freedom and rugged sincerity. Since he lived with the peasants and in the countryside he could learn about the simple joys and sorrows of their life. He admires them and loves them, and hence he is able to portray them faithfully. Though he does not portray the complex passions of man, he is quite powerful in his portrayal of simple feelings and issues. In the rural areas, he does not find the intrusion of artificial conventions on rural life. Of course, rural life is coarse, unrefined and sometimes petty also; but the poet finds other strong aspects in it: namely, strength, endurance, unaffected simplicity, courage and hope. Thus, he winnows away the baser elements until he finds the pure grain.

“Love had to be found in huts where poor men lie,

His daily teachers had been woods and rills
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lovely hills .

In this stanza, ‘emotion is recollected in tranquility’ and the poet is rid of all petty cares of life and hence has a fine vision of human life. The dismissal of the petty cares of life will ensure a clear vision of human life and that’s the poet’s view. One has to climb the heights of contemplation to reach a clearer view of life.

He draws the picture of a pitiable Cumberland beggar and enlists our sympathy on behalf of the leech-gatherer. They are placed against a noble background of landscape and cloudscape until they are dignified by the spacious beauty of the earth. According to him, the further we travel from nature, the paltrier we become. In the sonnet, ‘The World Is Too Much With Us’, he says that we would certainly be better people if we stayed with goddesses and angles in woods and streams than if we were in towns with people of materialistic pursuits. Men in town live in terms of accumulation of wealth and enjoyment of pleasures. He would rather be a peasant than such a townsman! But men and women become significant people, only when they are sanctified by Nature’s touch.

Now let us examine his manner of poetic composition:

The genres are narrative, lyrical, elegiac and the sonnet.

He has achieved distinction in each of these genres. His narrative poetry takes the form of ballad or heroic meter. His ballad has simple force and tenderness unparalleled in contemporary poetry. At times simplicity also lapses into triviality. His narrative powers are strong and many. He enjoys the gift of simple directness and direct simplicity. Yet he shows himself more interested in spiritual crises rather than in physical. Sometimes he meditates instead of recording a progress in the story. He loves to moralize and spiritualize more than merely narrate events as in ‘Laodamia ‘.

Wordsworth has breathed new life into Elizabethan lyrics; his themes have been rural life; they have inspired him to lofty ideas on life. The poems, ‘Three Years She Grew’, ‘She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways’, ‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’, reveal this.

Though Wordsworth had admiration for Milton, he could never imitate him for he was quite individualistic. Yet there is a deplorable inequality of style in his poems. Sometimes he descends to pathos and puerility. It is also true that he has no sense of humor. His grandeur or style and puerility can be attributed to his poetic theory. Words are selected in the common parlance of humble men and rustic life. Yet he had to throw imagination over them. Rustic speech also has been purged of all particular conventions; diction then is merely bald and prosaic. Poetry is different from mere rustic speech. But in many of his poems, he has discarded his theory of composition and allowed his imagination and intellect to work upon the themes. His Natural Diction is the Grand Manner. When his imagination is at play, his style is superb. Poetic style should be simple and sincere as the language of everyday life.

Since his imagination has been subtle and grand, he ignores. Often his theory of poetic composition. His theories in the lyrical ballads are thrown into the dustbin.

Compton Rickett says, His natural diction is the grand manner, resonant with stately beauty and it is only when uninspired or in the mistaken outburst of conscious endeavor that he jars upon us with his flat and foolish speech. His theory has been quite an unsound one and wrong unto him, if he had practiced it through his poetic career”.

His sonnets have been the best of his literary productions: Milton, Thou Shouldst be Living at this Hour! It is a Beautiful Evening! The world is Too Much with Us. They are the finest products

of his imaginative mind. These sonnets have come down to us permanently and carry undying meaning for us and have a history behind them.

His elegiac poems are *The Tintern Abbey* and *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. In them, he mourns the loss of something which he cannot gain back however much he may try. The rhythmic felicities of these odes cannot be underestimated. The cumulative effect of these elegies is ecstatic.

Wordsworth's poems have a sedative influence on readers for they soothe and tranquilise the agitated minds of modern men. J.S. Mill observed that on reading Wordsworth's odes, he could feel better and happier and quieter.

Carlyle speaks well of Wordsworth's 'Veracious Strength', the enduring quality of his work. Glimpses of truth he gives that would never perish.

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