

Poetry
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Lecture 35
William Wordsworth- 2

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Skiddaw Mountain

| | |
|--|-----|
| A tempting playmate whom we dearly loved. | 288 |
| Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child, | |
| In a small mill-race severed from his stream, | 290 |
| Made one long bathing of a summer's day; | |
| Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again | |
| Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured | |
| The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves | |
| Of yellow ragwort; or, when rock and hill, | 295 |
| The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height, | |
| Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone | |
| Beneath the sky, as if I had been born | |
| On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut | |
| Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport | 300 |
| A naked savage, in the thunder shower. | |



A key landmark of this lake district is the number of lakes plus some hills, and dales, rivers around this area. Wordsworth along with his friends used to walk around all these places and feel happy about the company of nature. So here in this passage, apart from looking at his response to river Derwent, we also see how he played in the landscape called Skiddaw Mountain.

Let us begin our reading.

A tempting playmate whom we dearly loved. 288

Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child

In a small mill race severed from his stream, 290

Made one long bathing of a summer's day.

Basked in the sun, and plunge and basked again,

Alternate on a summer's day, or scoured
 The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves
 Of yellow ragwort, or when rock can hill. 295
 The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
 Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone
 Beneath the sky, as if I had been born on Indian plains,
 And from my mother's hut
 Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport 300
 A Naked savage, in the thunder shower."

Wordsworth feels as if he was in naked savage, in his play with nature's lap. So, we can find that, he has been moving around from his mother's hut to different places in and around his house, and he enjoys the company of nature as a child.

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Sports: Stealing a Bird

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:
 Much favoured in my birth-place, and no less
 In that beloved Vale to which erelong 305
 We were transplanted;—there were we let loose
For sports of wider range.... Sometimes it befell
 In these night wanderings, that a strong desire
 O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird 320
 Which was the captive of another's toil
 Became my prey; and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps 325
 Almost as silent as the turf they trod.



Wordsworth plays, not only plays with the water, or with plants or with the locations around him, he also plays spoiling sport with birds and other small animals. So here we have the beginning of this outdoor game.

“Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear.
Much favoured in my birth place, and no less
In that beloved vale to which erelong 305
We were transplanted; there were we let loose
For sports of wider range...Sometimes it befell
In these night wanderings, that a strong desire
Overpowered my better reason, and the bird 320
Which was the captive of another’s toil
Became my prey. And when the deed was done,
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps 325
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.”

We understand Wordsworth’s responds to nature in this passage in much more detail, as we can see he wanted to learn something more about the natural surroundings. So, some kind of temptation he had to go around and steal the eggs from birds, and he felt unhappy about it because he heard among the solitary hills, low breathings coming after me and sounds of undistinguishable motion, probably to warn him that this was something wrong

that he should not do. That is why we have this idea of fostering a like by beauty and by fear. Nature has both beauty and fear. However, Wordsworth more often focuses on the beautiful benign side of nature.

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Sports: Plunderers

Nor less, when spring had warmed the cultured Vale,
Moved we as plunderers where the mother-bird
Had in high places built her lodge; though mean
Our object and inglorious, yet the end 330
Was not ignoble. Oh! when I have hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed) 335
Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds! 340



This outdoor game continues, not only just stealing from a bird's, a capti bird's eggs, here he does something more, he almost plunders, that is why, he uses the word plunder here:

“Nor less, when spring had warmed the cultured Vale,
Moved we as plunderers where the mother-bird
Had in high places built her lodge; though mean
Our object and inglorious, yet the end 330
Was not ignoble. Oh! when I have hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
And half- inch fissures in the slippery rock.
But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed)


Suspended by the blast that blew amain, 335
 Shouldering the naked crag, Oh, at that time,
 While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
 With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
 Blow through my ear! The sky seemed not a sky
 Of earth-and with what motion moved the clouds!" 340


We find Wordsworth hanging from a crag, being warned by the rushing wind and thought how nature would care for him during his act of plundering. The major lesson is very clear to us. Wordsworth is doing something which he ought not to do, but some for some pleasure he does it and so he learns out of this experience. 'I hung alone,' and there he learns a lot from, through this hanging alone.

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Moral Lessons

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
 Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
 In one society. How strange, that all 345
 The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
 Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
 Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
 And that a needful part, in making up
 The calm existence that is mine when I 350
 Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!





The lessons are codified in a few lines here, so we call it Moral Lessons:

“Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
 Like harmony in music; there is a dark

Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, make them cling together
In one society. How strange, that all 345
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part.
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I 350
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!"

As we said earlier, the moral lessons are beautiful brought up here within these few lines. Dust as we are, is the reference to the Bible, understanding that, we are all from the dust and we go back to the dust. And Wordsworth tells very clearly, there is a dark, inscrutable workmanship that reconciles discordant elements. And we can notice, how this passage reflects Coleridge's very definition of imagination and poetry, as reconciliation of opposites or discordant qualities, both beauty and fear, we have reconciled in this lesson from nature for Wordsworth.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:43)

Boat Scene -1



One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cave, its usual home. 360
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on; 365
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view 370



One of the most important scenes in prelude book 1 is this boat scene. We have three passages here, so we call it boats scene 1 and we will see how Wordsworth while rowing the boat in a lake alone, what he learns, we will understand.

One summer evening, (led by her) I found

A little boat tied to a willow tree,

Within a rocky cave, its usual home. 360

Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in

Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth

And trouble the pleasure, nor without the voice

Of mountain echoes did my boat move on,

Leaving behind her still, on either side, 365

Small circles, glittering idly in the moon,

Until they melted all into one track

Of sparkling light. But now, **like one who rows,**

Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point

With an unswerving line, I fixed my view.”

370

Taking the boat from the usual place, he moves on, he rows and he has fixed his eye on one particular place. And then will let us see, how he feels about this troubled pleasure and act of stealth. Wordsworth is aware of it, he is stealing, he is plundering, he is doing something morally wrong; he knows but he has some pleasure and he shares that pleasure with us.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:09)

Boat Scene - 2



Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnacle; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake, 375
And, as I rose upon the stroke, **my boat**
Went heaving through the water like a swan; †
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct, 380
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,



Here is boat scene 2.

Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,

The horizon's utmost boundary; far above

Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.

She was an elfin pinnacle; lustily

I dipped my oars into the silent lake.

375

And, as I rose upon the stroke, **my boat**

Went heaving through the water like a swan.

When, from behind that craggy steep, till then

The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,

As if with voluntary power instinct,

380

Upreared its head. I struck and stuck again,

And growing still in stature, the grim shape

Towered up between me and the stars, and still.

As we can see, Wordsworth is moving up towards his fixed point that is a craggy ridge. But he we learned that he has been responding to the natural caution or warning from the surrounding.

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Boat Scene - 3



For so it seemed, **with purpose of its own**
And measured motion **like a living thing,** 385
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water **stole my way**
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left **my bark,—**
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave 390
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude 395
Or blank desertion.



Now let us see boat scene 3.

“For so it seemed, **with purpose of its own**
And measured motion like a living thing, 385
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water **stole my way**
Back to the cover of the willow tree.
There in her morning- place I left **my bark,-**
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave 390
And serious mood. But after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim an undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts

There hung a darkness, call it solitude

395

Or blank desertion.”

Wordsworth understanding from nature, through these unknown modes of being is something excellent, something great. That is why Wordsworth has always been a source of inspiration for us. He shares with us some of the feelings we may have had ourselves when we stole something from others, or did something without the knowledge of others. So, he always thinks about this feeling of being alone, rowing the boat, in that particular location.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:21)

The Beatings of the Heart

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!

Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, not in vain 405

By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul;
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things— 410

With life and nature—purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. 415



We continue with this lesson. We call it Beatings of the Heart, which teach him some valuable lesson;

“Wisdom and spirit of the universe!

Thou soul that art the eternity of thought

That givest to forms and images a breath

And everlasting motion, not in vain


405

By day or starlight thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me.
The passions that build up our human soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things- 410
With the life and nature. Purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.” 415


In response to natural surroundings, and also our own actions, we learn something from the beatings of our own heart, Wordsworth calls it a grandeur in the beatings of the heart. These beatings have a purifying effect on Wordsworth and probably, we also have such a feeling in us from the caution or warning notes of nature. So, he learns wisdom and spirit from nature.

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Nature's Ministry



Ye Presences of **Nature in the sky** 465
And on the earth! Ye **Visions of the hills!**
And **Souls of lonely places!** can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry, when ye, through many a year
Haunting me thus among **my boyish sports,** 470
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills, ✎
Impressed, upon all forms, the characters
Of danger or desire; and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth,
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear, 475
Work like a sea?



Now, Wordsworth specifically attributes the quality of ministry, that is special care taken by nature to train him in understanding life.

“Ye presence **of nature in the sky,** 465

And on the earth! Ye **visions of the hills!**

And **souls of lonely places!** Can I think

A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed

Such ministry, when ye, though many a year

Haunting me thus among **my boyish sports,** 470

On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,

Impressed, upon all forms, the characters

Of danger or desire. And thus, did make

The surface of the universal earth,

With triumph and delight, with hope and fear, 475

Work like a sea?"

As you can see, the whole passage is in one question, he asks a question indicating the kind of lessons that he learns from the Ministry of Nature, the teaching of nature, from triumph and delight, from hope and fear. He is learning all about life. It, he compares his natural surroundings with the tempest of the sea, where we have this hope and fear of reaching the shore.

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Indoor Games

some, plebeian cards

Which Fate, beyond the promise of their birth, 525
Had dignified, and called to represent
The persons of departed potentates.
Oh, with what echoes on the board they fell!
Ironic diamonds,—clubs, hearts, diamonds, spades,
A congregation piteously akin! 530
Cheap matter offered they to boyish wit,
Those sooty knaves, precipitated down
With scoffs and taunts, like Vulcan out of heaven:
The paramount ace, a moon in her eclipse,
Queens gleaming through their splendour's last decay, 535
And monarchs surly at the wrongs sustained
By royal visages.



Apart from the outdoor games, Wordsworth also played some indoor games. Here we have an example of a game of cards.

“Some, plebeian cards

Which fate, beyond the promise of their birth, 525
Had dignified, and called to represent
The persons of departed potentates.
Oh, with what echoes on the board they fell!
Ironic diamonds- clubs, hearts, diamonds, spades.

A congregation piteously akin! 530

Cheap matter offered they to boyish wit,

Those sooty knaves, precipitated down

With scoffs and taunts, like Vulcan out of heaven.

The paramount ace, a moon in her Eclipse,

Queens gleaming through their splendour's last decay, 535

And monarchs surly at the wrongs sustained

By royal visages.”

In these card games, have certain pictures like this, clubs, hearts, diamond, spades and he calls them, a congregation piteously akin. And we have underlined certain words, plebeian, potentates, congregation, precipitated, paramount, even visages to reveal the fact that Wordsworth was not following his own rule of using the common language. These are Latinate words, words of Greek origin, which have a high diction which may not be suitable for a common rustic boy, but Wordsworth is using these words. Probably in his lifetime he understood, as he was editing and revising his poem, he found that certain words would be more appropriate here and he has used them. And through these games he learned something from life, about his own path in his life.

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Choice of Self as Theme



One end at least hath been attained; **my mind**
Hath been revived, and if this genial mood 640
Desert me not, forthwith shall be brought down
Through later years **the story of my life**.
The road lies plain before me;—'tis a theme
Single and of determined bounds; and hence ↗
I choose it rather at this time, than work 645
Of ampler or more varied argument,
Where I might be discomfited and lost:
And certain hopes are with me, that to thee
This labour will be welcome, honoured Friend! 649



After all these outdoor games and indoor games and the lessons that he has learned from nature, he specifies the theme that he has to deal with in this poem called the prelude.

“On one end at least hath been attained; **my mind**

Hath been revived. And if this genial mood

Desert me not, forthwith shall be brought down

Through later years **the story of my life**.

The road lies plain before me;- ‘its a theme

Single and of determined bounds; and hence

I choose it rather at this time, than work

Of ampler or more varied argument,

Where I might be discomfited and lost.

And certain hopes are with me, that to thee

This labour will be welcome, honoured friend!”

That friend is, of course, Coleridge. Wordsworth has finally settled down on the story of my life, that is his own life for this theme, for the theme of his poem, this epic poem to his friend Coleridge. The road lies plain before him, that is also an echo from Milton's Paradise Lost, this we have mentioned as an allusion.

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Thematic Contrast



- Child and Adult
- Radiance and Dullness
- Savage and Civilized
- Soul and Body
- Joy and Sadness
- Solitary and Communal
- Motion and Stillness
- Nature and Culture
- Immortality & Mortality
- Concord and Discord
- Fearless and Fearful
- Feeling and Thought
- Kindness and Hatred
- Presence and Absence
- Danger and Safety
- Beauty and Ugliness
- Memory and Oblivion
- Attainment and Failure



We can see a number of contrasts, thematically. Child and adult; this poem is written by the adult, remembering his past childhood, nostalgically. Radiance and dullness, savage and civilized, soul and body, joy and sadness, solitary and communal, motion and stillness, nature and culture, immortality and mortality, concord and discord, fearless and fearful, feeling and thought, kindness and hatred, presence and absence.

As we can see the whole poem is about presence and absence, whatever is absent he is making present in his poem, his mother, his past experiences everything he makes present to us. Danger and safety, beauty and ugliness, memory and oblivion, attainment and failure. Specifically, Wordsworth talks about this choice of theme for his achievement, which might not give him discomfort and lead to failure. He wants to ensure success in writing his epic.

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Poetic Devices



- **Hyperbaton:** there were we let loose (306)
- **Allusion:** Dust as we are (341); Bible
- **Apostrophe:** Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
- **Assonance:** The leafless trees and every icy crag (442)
- **Onomatopoeia:** Tinkled like iron (443)
- **Simile:** Pull at her rein like an impetuous courser (497)
- **Simile:** Bliss ... like a tempest (585-86)
- **Alliteration:** With fond and feeble tongue a tedious tale (622)
- **Allusion:** The road lies plain before me. (643)
reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*



There are a number of poetic devices we can see in this poem, particularly in these selected passages. One example for hyperbaton that we have is, 'there were we let loose,' in 306. This can be rewritten as 'we were let loose there.' The allusion we discussed earlier is, 'dust as we are,' this has a biblical reference to mean that human beings are from the earth and they go back to the earth.

Apostrophe is common here, he addresses his friend and also wisdom and spirit of the universe, something abstract, but he addresses as if wisdom is there in front of him. Assonance we have an example here, 'the leafless trees and every icy crag.' Onomatopoeia also we have here in this example, 'tinkle like iron,' in line number 443. The sound we can hear. Simile, is found in this line from 497. 'Pull at her rein like an impetuous courser,' Courser is a swift horse or a bird. In this case, actually, Wordsworth also played with his friends took a horse and went into the forest, into the woods and had some games. We have simile in 'bliss... like a tempest,' in line numbers 585 and 86.

Alliteration we have in line number 622, 'with fond and feeble tongue, a tedious tale,' two examples F sound and T sound we have in this line. Again, the last one is allusion to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* ends with the two characters; human characters, Adam and Eve going out of the paradise going into the earth. So, they see the

road before them to the earth. Similarly, Wordsworth is able to see the road ahead of him to complete his epic.

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Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter



Blank verse: Unrhymed iambic pentameter

Alliteration: (627)

May spur me on, in manhood now mature

Assonance and Alliteration: 637-638

And almost make remotest infancy

A visible scene, on which the sun is shining?

Caesura, Enjambment and End-stop lines: 481-484

We were | a noi | sy crew; | the sun | in heaven

Beheld | not vales | more beau | tiful | than ours;

Nor saw | a band | in ha | ppiness | and joy

Richer, | or wor | thier of | the ground | they trod.



We have rhyme scheme, rhythm and meter and all that here. In the case of rhyme scheme, we have to understand that this poem is written in blank verse, so it is unrhymed iambic pentameter. Alliteration, one more example we have here, ‘May spur me on, in manhood now mature,’ m sound is repeatedly use. There we can see this sound, these two, alliteration and assonance they are called figures of sound, so we can say some rhyming effect through repetition of sounds happens here.

For assonance and alliteration, we have, ‘And almost make remotest infancy, a visible scene on which the sun is shining?’ Scene, sun, shining, we have visible the ‘sa’ sound is found in this line. Earlier also we have ‘sa’ sound, almost sun. Next, we have the example for caesura, that is a pause, Enjambment; continuation of line from previous line to the next line and end stop lines, that is the line stopping at the end.

And we have given cansion, this is iambic pentameter.

“We were a noisy crew that sun in heaven

Behold not vales more beautiful than ours.

Nor saw a band in happiness and joy,

Richer or worthier or of the ground they trod.”

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Overall Impression

- Wordsworth perceives nature, e.g. River, Lake, as a playmate as well as a mentor teaching him and his friends lessons in living joyfully and communally.
- Stealing, plundering and using others' things do come with pleasure and moral instructions, shaping the poet to grow from an innocent child to a wise man.
- The poet is able to feel and articulate the rhythm of nature thus: “A grandeur in the beatings of the heart,” which gives peace and harmony to him.
- The indoor games too provide pleasure to children and shape their sensibility in appreciating beauty.
- With the renewed spirit, Wordsworth decides to write a poem on “the story of my life” for Coleridge.



On the whole, we can have an impression as follows. Wordsworth perceives nature, that is river, lake, everything around him as a playmate, as well as a mentor, teaching him and his friends lessons in living joyfully and communally. Stealing, plundering and using things of others do come with pleasure, and more instructions also come to him to shape the poet to grow from an innocent child to a wise man.

The poet is able to feel and articulate the rhythm of nature. Thus, in a memorable line like this, ‘a grandeur in the beatings of the heart,’ which gives peace and harmony to him. The indoor games to provide pleasure to children and shape their sensibility appreciating the game of life. With the renewed spirit, Wordsworth decides to write a poem, that is a epic poem on the story of his own life for his friend Coleridge.

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An Epic Poem



- **Invocation:** Prayer to the gentle breeze (1)
- **Statement of Theme:** the story of my life (642)
- **Epic Simile:** William Wallace like a wild flower
- **Supernaturalism:** River, Hill, Lake, (Nature)
- **In medias res:** the poet's escape from London
- **Descent to Hell/ Journey/ Quest:**
Wordsworth explores Mind and Nature
- **Heroic Characters:** Wordsworth and Coleridge, Nature
- **Books:** 14



We can consider this poem an epic poem. These are certain features that we normally find in an epic, invocation, statement of theme, epic simile, supernaturalism, in medias res, descend to hell, our journey, our quest, heroic characters, and books; the whole point being divided into number of books. In the case of invocation, we see that Wordsworth is praying to the gentle breeze to inspire him to write this poem. Whole of nature actually becomes an inspiration for Wordsworth.

He states, the theme of his poem as his own story, the story of my life. We find some epic similes in this poem, one memorable epic simile, we saw is this, William Wallace, the knight, who fought for the freedom of Scotland. His name and fame spread like wild flower, to the entire country, everywhere. His name was flowering, and people are able to remember William Wallace, for his act of bravery and heroism in bringing freedom, independence to Scottish people. Then we have this supernaturalism in the sense of these rivers, hills, lakes, all other things, taking on certain shapes, to caution Wordsworth to learn certain lessons in which is right, which is wrong, which is good, which is not good.

Then we have this in medias res, the poem begins suddenly, it does not have any kind of beginning, it just starts, Wordsworth starts his journey from one place to another, that is to Grasmere, actually he has escaped from London, from this oppressive feeling he has escaped, that is where he feels a sense of freedom. And then we do not have anything like

descent to hell, but we have a journey or a quest, quest for a great achievement in English poetry. So, we have this quest or journey, as Wordsworth explores nature and also his own mind to come up with a poem for his friend.

The heroic characters, or as we have noted, three; one is Wordsworth that is a main hero, and his friend is equally though absent, equally a great hero. And these two are great poets in England, or in English poetry, as you know. And nature is the most heroic character that we have in Wordsworth's almost all poems. And these books have been divided into 14 books. The whole of the Prelude has been divided into 14 books, something like cantos we have, to get a shape of this epic poem.

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An Autobiographical Poem

Theme: the story of my life (l: 642)

Book 1 – **Childhood and School-Time** (649 lines)

Book 2 – School-Time (479)

Book 3 – Cambridge, Book 4 – Summer Vacation

Book 5 – Books, Book 6 – Cambridge and the Alps

Book 7 – London, Book 8 – Nature and Love of Man

Book 9, 10, 11 – France

Book 12 and 13 – Imagination and Taste

Book 14 – Conclusion – **Epiphany**

the emblem of a **mind**

That feeds upon **infinity**, that broods

Over **the dark abyss**, intent to hear

Its voices issuing forth to silent light

In **one continuous stream**. (Bk 14: 70-74)



This is certainly an autobiographical poem as it deals with the life of Wordsworth, all the events that happened in his life or he met with whatever experience he had in different locations. In book 1 and 2, we have his own childhood and school time experiences. And in book 3, his education in Cambridge, and in book 4 his summer vacation, in book 5, all his readings. And then in book 6, his experience in Cambridge and his journey to the Alps. And in book 7, he talks about his life in London. And in book 8, in general, he talks about nature and the love of man. We have to understand that Wordsworth was fascinated by the revolutionary spirit of France, so he visited France. And so, we have three books dealing with his experience in France. Book 12, and 13 deal with imagination and taste in

general. And the last book is a conclusion where we have an epiphany. There we have a few lines Lets read them now:

“The emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light,
In one continuous stream,”

That one continuous stream of light, stream of water, stream of river, stream of knowledge, stream of experience, is what we find in Wordsworth being connected with the rest of humanity, the whole of universe. Therefore, we can consider this poem an autobiographical poem.

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A Philosophical Reading, Bk 1 & 2 Mook (2006)



- Wordsworth starts writing about ordinary events of his life but finds no serious purpose behind them initially but then he discovers a purpose in course of time.
- Nature teaches him the value of the everyday and helps him find the childhood teleology – **the pursuit of nature for nature's sake** like a scientist to understand human beings and natural phenomena.



We have an interesting case of a philosophical reading by one critic called Mook. According to Mook, Wordsworth starts writing about ordinary events of his life, but finds no serious purpose behind them initially, but then, he discovers a purpose in course of time as he discusses, as he explores, he finds some meaning at the end. Nature teaches

him the value of the everyday and helps him find the childhood teleology- the pursuit of nature for nature sake, like a scientist, to understand human beings and natural phenomena. We have to remember that Wordsworth wanted actually poets to learn something from science and contribute to more knowledge of human beings. So, Wordsworth himself does this in his own poem, to understand nature and also human beings.

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Summary



- *The Prelude*, Book I
- Selected Passages, 288-649
- Outdoor Games
- Moral Lessons
- Boat Scene
- Nature's Ministry
- Indoor Games
- Choice of Self as Theme
- Analysis
- An Epic Poem
- An Autobiographical Poem
- A Philosophical Reading



In summary, we can say that the *Prelude*, book 1 is an autobiographical poem. We have discussed the selected passages dealing with outdoor games, indoor games, where we have boat scene and moral lessons. We have to note that, nature has this specific aim of educating Wordsworth. It is not just the entertainment; nature educates Wordsworth and we participate in that education.

At the end, we find that Wordsworth is able to choose a theme for his poetry, his epic. And we find that this is an epic poem, where we find some autobiographical elements with certain philosophical bent. Because what is ordinary becomes extraordinary. Whatever Wordsworth explores, gives him some grand theme to write his own epic in English.

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Some references are here, if you like you can read at least one or two, particularly the one on, "The Everyday and the Teleological Time Conflict," this will be useful for all of you. Thank you.