

THE ANALYSIS OF “BOAT STEALING” EXTRACT FROM “THE PRELUDE” BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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Abstract. *The article analyzes one extract from the autobiographical poem “The Prelude” by a romantic writer William Wordsworth. For hundreds of years, poets and writers have written about mankind’s relationship with nature. While some believe that we have control over nature and can manipulate it to our advantage, others believe that we are at the mercy of nature, which is a powerful and terrifying force. Others, on the other hand, have seen man’s relationship with nature as one of serene tranquillity, which allows a man to gather himself and feel one with his environment.*

Key words: *nature, childhood, adulthood, peace, a boat, mountains, river, sky, stars, lake, water, darkness, day, night, beast, fear.*

Wordsworth gives two opposing concepts about nature in this poetic excerpt from The Prelude, leaving the reader to determine what nature means to him or herself. The context of this excerpt from The Prelude also sheds light on the speaker and the author. Wordsworth’s Prelude discusses his youthful ideas and the ways in which he has evolved and matured through time. This chapter begins with the speaker as a boy and discusses his sense of peace with nature. Then something happens that alters the speaker's attitude toward the world. This represents the boy coming of age and realizing the dangers of the world. ‘The Prelude (Extract)’ by William Wordsworth is a first-person account of the speaker, Wordsworth, sailing a small boat and musing on life and nature. The speaker opens the first section of this poem by describing how he came to a boat tethered to a tree by the lake. He untied it, climbed in, and pushed it into the water. He realized that he shouldn’t take the boat, but it also offered him pleasure. He observed natural features such as mountains and the river itself alongside the lake. He concentrated on a single mountain and rowed in its direction. It grew larger till it

climbed over him and obscured the heavens. He became terrified at the sight of it and the realization that it was following him.

In this excerpt from 'The Prelude,' Wordsworth engages with themes of nature, human interaction with nature, and childhood. Since 'The Prelude' is considered to be autobiographical in nature, Wordsworth spends the poem recounting his spiritual development from a youth to an adult. He recalls the significance of his youth and how lovely it was. This is something he believes is lost to some extent as one matures. Nature is undeniably one of the primary motivators in 'The Prelude.' Wordsworth connects with nature in this section as he describes rowing a boat. It is described in a maternal tone. He has a bond that feels familial and intimate. The Prelude (Extract)' by William Wordsworth is a forty-four-line section of the much larger narrative poem, The Prelude. It is written in blank verse. This means that the lines do not follow a specific rhyme scheme but they are structured with iambic pentameter. This refers to the number of syllables and the arrangement of the stresses in each line. With iambic pentameter, each line comprises five sets of two beats. The first of these is unstressed while the second is stressed. It is the most common metrical pattern in English verse. In 'The Prelude (Extract)' the poet makes use of numerous literary devices. These include but are not limited to personification, caesura, and enjambment. The latter is a formal device that occurs when a poet cuts off a sentence or phrase before its natural stopping point. It's used numerous times throughout 'The Prelude (Extract)' including in the transition between lines one and two and lines seventeen and eighteen. Caesurae are examples of pauses in lines, ones that are created with punctuation or meter. Line 34, for example, reads: "And serious mood; but after I had seen," while line 29 reads: "Strode after me." With trembling oars I turned." Personification is a type of figurative language in which the poet imbues non-human objects with human characteristics. For example, he recounts in the first lines being "led" by nature to the boat around the lake. Another wonderful example is the mountain's power over him at the end of the poem.

Lines 1-16

*One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
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;
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
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.*

The Prelude's first lines reflect the speaker's bond with "her" or nature. She brings him to a boat. As he rows out on the calm waters, led gently by Nature, it is clear that the speaker has a peaceful view of nature. As he rowed the boat, he could hear "mountain echoes" and saw "small circles glittering" as his boat caused ripples in the lake. He mentions the "sparkling light" reflected off the surface of the sea. While taking in all that nature has to offer at the time, the speaker concentrates his attention on his target. He has set out to reach a "craggy ridge." He looks up to "the horizon's utmost boundary" and sees "nothing but the stars and the grey sky." This is a serene and lovely depiction of nature and a boy's ability to interact with it.

Lines 17-20

*She was an elfin pinnacle; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;*

The boy's grasp of his own capacity to govern nature is revealed in these lines from The Prelude. Despite having a little boat, but a "elfin pinnacle," he was able to handle it and cut "through the water like a swan."

Lines 21-31

*When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
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,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;*

With these lines of *The Prelude*, there is a sudden shift in tone as the youngster confronts some form of beast that can only be characterized as “black and huge”. Whatever it was, it “upreared its head” and even though the speaker struck out at the beast, again and again, it proceeded to climb higher and grow bigger. It appeared to have a "purpose of its own" according to the speaker. He was "strode after" by the beast. The speaker was suddenly no longer having a pleasant interaction with nature. There was something to be really afraid about now. He turned his boat around and returned "with trembling ours." This alteration has a major influence on both reader and speaker. While the initial words establish an image of the speaker as one with nature, feeling immense delight in the tranquil waters, these lines signify an essential transformation. The speaker's experience here demonstrates that nature is not always man's friend. Nature is full with fascinating and scary creatures. Nature is no longer something to be admired, but something to be dreaded.

Lines 32-44

*There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
-And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
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
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.*

The final lines of *The Prelude* extract reveal the effect that this experience has had on the speaker. After having experienced an aspect of nature that horrified him, the speaker became aware that he was not in control of nature. He was not able to subdue it and use it to his pleasure. At times, he may be able to appreciate nature, but following this encounter, the speaker became aware that there are strange and evil things buried in nature, and that nature was something to be feared as much as loved. This signifies a turning moment for the youngster and reflects the maturity of his thinking. In some ways, he has transitioned from the carefree, fearless days of childhood to the realities of adulthood. This experience was a watershed moment in the boy's life. He no longer

felt safe no matter where he went. He was now acutely aware that danger awaited him at every step, and this realization "hung a darkness" over him and made him feel a "blank desertion." Things around him suddenly didn't seem so familiar. According to the speaker, what used to be "pleasant images of trees of sea or sky" were not only "huge and mighty forms that do not live." These ideas "bothered [his] dreams at night and stormed through his mind during the day." The speaker does not say whether he saw a real beast or if the sudden fear that gripped him caused him to imagine one. Either way, the effect was the same. The speaker suddenly feared when he had not feared before. This might indicate going from infancy to maturity. Many children feel safe in their parents' care and are unaware of the dangers of the world until an event or series of events awakens them to the reality that the world is a dangerous place. The speaker emphasizes this point in the shift that occurred in this excerpt. In a few short lines, he changed from a fearless, carefree boy to an adult who was aware of the dangers of the world he lived in. This discovery haunted him for the rest of his life, and he was never able to see the world through the eyes of a child again.

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