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This book is the first to present Wordsworth's greatest poem in all three of its separate forms. It reprints, on facing pages, the version of "The Prelude" was completed in 1805, together with the much-revised work published after the poet's death in 1850. In addition the editors include the two-part version of the poem, composed 1798-99. Each of these poems has its distinctive qualities and values; to read them together provides an incomparable chance to observe a great poet composing and recomposing, through a long life, his major work.

The Prelude Details

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From Reader Review The Prelude for online ebook

Pewterbreath says

When people saw me reading this everyone would ask "Prelude to WHAT?" after seeing the lengthy poem. This is a hundreds of page long poem about Wordsworth's formative years--he worked on this until his death revising it every few years.

Has anyone ever said that Wordsworth writing an epic length poem about his youth could be viewed as somewhat. . .maybe. . .egocentric? All these stories are laid out to the reader with the express intention to be a lesson to she who reads it.

Actually it comes off as a sort of argument between old Wordsworth and young Wordsworth.

Young W: (long heartbreaking description of country life). . .and then I went to school.

Old W: And what a useless time that was! Kids sticking their noses in books--and half of them prigs at that! I sure was dumb to believe studying could get you anywhere. Kids these days would do a lot better wandering around nature like I did. But there LAZY and SHORT SIGHTED. All the energy is wasted on the young!

Young W: (Long pastoral with beautiful sunsets, walks in darkness ect. . .) And then I went to france.

Old W: AND NOTHING WAS MORE MISERABLE! NEVER TRUST A FRENCHMAN THEY ONLY GIVE YOU SYPHILLIS AND REIGNS OF TERROR. Those bastards sure had me fooled. . .ect. . .ect...ect...

Ok, so this is a bit exaggerated. But in any case Old Wordsworth wins. There are some georgeous parts though--whenever he gets in a story the language loosens up and there's a sense of beauty. I really enjoyed parts of it--but only parts. My first reaction was to think that it would do well to have a condensed version---but on second thought I wonder if I would've found them half as beautiful without the rest of the story to place them in. I don't know.

Sara says

As much as I respect this text (and I do, it should be read), I have always said from the moment I finished reading that Wordsworth here is like a child constantly kicking away the ball he keeps bending over to pick up.

Currently reading Brodsky and this line from his Less Than One essay really sums up Wordsworth's autobiographical quest and does it more justice than I've snarked for the last five or six years: *"As failures go, attempting to recall the past is like trying to grasp the meaning of existence. Both make one feel like a baby clutching at a basketball: one's palms keep sliding off."*

That's it. *The Prelude* summarised in one line.

Magda says

A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

Jonfaith says

**He cleared a passage for me, and the stream
In wholesome separation the two natures,
The one that feels, the other that observes.**

2.5 stars. This was a tandem read with ATJG. There were of bubbly moments of exhilaration but much too much clawing and climbing. Wordsworth embraces Nature embarks on a quest of Becoming.

Finding himself splattered and besmirched with stains of human folly, Wordsworth pursues the path which leads to an actualization-- one without an embrace of either shame or decadence . Not sure I find that interesting. After the mountain of Milton references, I thought homage is a generous act, though this struck me at times as a benediction.

Darran McLaughlin says

It took me a long time to read this. It's pretty clear what the constant stimulation of the digital age has done to my ability to concentrate and read epic poetry.

Wordsworth has always been my least favourite of the great sextet of English Romantic poets. I found his lyrical ballads to be a bit lachrymose, sentimental and prosey. However, I went to the Lake District for the first time a couple of weeks ago so I decided to read this as part of the whole experience. As it turns out it is great. This feels like the key text of Romanticism to me. It has all of the key themes and you can see how it fits into place amongst the other artistic revolutions taking place in this era. It intimately records Wordsworth responses to nature, demonstrating a pantheistic spirituality he later tones down in the revised 1850 edition. He shows us his joy and excitement at what appears to be the dawn of a new Democratic era in which all men are brothers following the French Revolution. The idea of writing an epic poem on the theme of your own autobiography is something I can't see happening before the Romantic era, and it is part of what makes it distinctly modern. Wordsworth shows us his childhood among the lakes, his youth, his University years, walking in the Alps and then living in France during the revolutionary period. His autobiographical insight and candour put me in mind of Rousseau's Confessions and the descriptive passages on scenery and landscape recall Caspar David Friedrich and J.M.W. Turner.

The loose, free style works well over the course of an epic poem, and you could see Wordsworth as the beginning of a tradition that would lead towards Walt Whitman, Kerouac and Ginsberg. The exploration of autobiographical, psychological themes would also eventually lead to the likes of Proust.

I think our age would really benefit from a resurgence of Romanticism, but I don't see that happening any time soon.

Kelly Danahy says

I'm afraid I absolutely deplore Wordsworth. As his name would imply, he is a man of many words. WAY TOO MANY WORDS. He loses his reader his 13 BOOKS of verse semi-autobiography. What could have been an interesting and intriguing work turned into a lengthy, diluted, contrived, mess. I completely blame his friend Coleridge for encouraging him in any way. Please avoid at all costs.

Alan says

First read over a half-century ago, but chosen now by chance after two M.C. Beaton mysteries: unexpectedly linked by fuel. At Scottish home fires, and in Wordsworth's childhood two centuries ago, "we pursued / Our home amusements by the warm peat-fire." (Book I, end) Also as in Beaton, rural labor teaches ethics that the city may not; here, young Wordy* rows, races against his fellows on a lake toward an island with the remains of a chapel; "In such a race/ So ended, disappointment could be none,/... We rested in the shade, all pleased alike, / Conquered and conqueror. Thus pride of strength,/ And the vain-glory of superior skill, were tempered."** (Book II).

Before finding his epic subject of self-development, the poet searches "some old / Romantic tale by Milton left unsung; / More often turning to some gentle place / Within the groves of Chivalry." Or, "How Mithridates northward passed..." or "some high-souled man,/ Unnamed among the chronicles of kings, / Suffered in silence for Truth's sake...."

Like Rousseau's Confessions, this poet's whole project illustrates his line, "The child is father of the man," which becomes Freud's analysis a century later.

The most famous page in the whole Prelude comes midway in Book I, where the young oarsman-poet takes "A little boat tied to a willow tree / Within a rocky cove..." and admits "It was an act of stealth." As he rows out, fixing his eye on a craggy ridge to the rear, "a huge peak, black and huge... Upreared its head..." For many days he felt that spectacle, "Of unknown modes of being," of the power behind, within Nature, quite beyond "the mean and vulgar works of man." And might I add, no Englishman can know "mean and vulgar works" equal to American malls or what Russians Ilf and Petrov called in the 50's, "one-storied America."

Behind the poem also lies social reform, when seeing a "hunger-bitten girl" tied to a heifer, "that poverty / Abject as this would in a little while / Be found no more" (Bk IX). And this did happen in 19C America, though such poverty--now post-industrial--has returned, massively. Of his residence at Cambridge and in London, he wonders "how men lived / Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still/ Strangers, not knowing each the other's name." (Bk VII)

He writes about fifteen years after, though publishing six decades later his 1792 French Revolution sojourn and amour with Annette Vallon producing daughter Caroline. He admits he's "untaught ..by books / To reason well of polity or law"...though then "on every tongue,/ natural rights and civil" (Bk IX) Of his French love, "I wept not then,-- but tears have dimmed my sight, / In memory of the farewells of that time, / Domestic severings, female fortitude / At dearest separation...." He returned to London because England had declared war on France, though the temporary move became much more.

In Book Two he recalls renting a horse, riding to a disused Abbey (maybe Tintern) and even riding their horses down the chantry, "in uncouth race," "and that single wren / Which one day sang so sweetly in the

nave.” G Sample says in *Bird Songs and Calls of Britain* “in the latter half of the year, the wrens may be the only birds singing... like the real owners of the wood.” I recall hearing a couple wrens near the North River in Islington, startlingly copious song, as much as the Skylark, and easier to imitate (closer to diatonic scale).

Wordsworth recalls growing up (in 1780s) with little food in Cockermouth, overlooking the Derwent; the kids played games 'til after dark, "A rude mass / Of native rock, left midway in the square of our small market village, was the goal / Or centre of these sports..." (Bk II, start). He doesn't say exactly what he played, but later he rented a horse and rode through an Abbey--maybe down in Tintern Abbey. Most of his writing is about Nature and Solitude, so these town-centered games—Tag? Bowlywicket? Handball?--were a surprise.

* Oops—just a glancing diminutive, not worthy of the poet's Reader, whom he calls “Friend”--in Book VI, his Friend is Coleridge. The poet knows his Friend will not think “that I have lengthened out / With fond and feeble tongue a tedious tale” (Bk I, end).

**Would that the Trumpster had learned basic (rural) ethics, to temper his excruciating vain-glory.

PS I read in Carlos Baker's edition, Holt Rhinehart, 1961.

PPS I've visited Wordsworth's Dove Cottage in Grasmere many decades ago, and a decade ago, his rented Alfoxden, with Coleridge's nearby in Nether Stowey, Somerset (at least, W's is).

Adam says

Turns out I like *The Prelude* a lot. But I still wouldn't invite Wordsworth to a party at my place.

Sadegh Maleki says

Romantic poetry, especially Wordsworth's poetry, is really beautiful. It takes u to the depth of ur experience of the nature and of the self. Roots of Heideggerian phenomenology, especially in the works of his disciple Wolfgang Iser, and Pre-Freudian theory of human development can be seen in this book. I undoubtedly recommend anyone to read this masterpiece and to ponder over it.

Bettie? says

blurbs - William Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude* is arguably the most important piece of poetic writing in our language. Recorded in Wordsworth's home in Grasmere, Cumbria, Wordsworth looks back over events in his early life .

Wordsworth believed that poetry should be written in the natural language of common speech, and in that way it was revolutionary in its time.

Parts of the poem are famous, with lines quoted often such as the description of the young Wordsworth

stealing a boat. Other parts are more introspective. The young poet leaves Grasmere to go to University in Cambridge, and is homesick. Wordsworth grapples with his political feelings - travelling to France at the time of the French revolution. He enjoys the hustle and bustle of London, and is euphoric when crossing the Alps. All the time this poem is accessible, bursting with colour and description, full of gripping storytelling.

The Prelude is read by Sir Ian McKellen with specially composed music by John Harle, performed by John Harle on Saxophone and Neill MacColl on guitar.

The Prelude is directed in Manchester by Susan Roberts.

Judy says

Now I know a number of my friends are going to consider I have completely “lost it” or gone over to the other side. But.

Truely I have just spent the most amazing period of hours listening absolutely rapt as the entire work was read to me by Nicholas Farrell as narrator.

I get it

I don't know what it is I get, but I get it.

Just please don't ask me to define it. But those hours of listening to this amazing flow of words has taken me to a while other place

Eddie Watkins says

I have read and loved *The Prelude*, but that was years ago, and as I now reread the copy I once read I decided to get this copy instead and get real geeky about it.

Rachel Ann Brickner says

I finally finished *The Prelude* for the first time through, but I will be reading it again for class in the next few weeks. I'm hoping a second reading will be helpful and give me a greater appreciation for the poem. I really disliked reading this poem because of the blank verse and its long, complicated sentences until Book XI of the 1805 version. I read the last three Books this evening and they gave me a greater appreciation for Wordsworth's project than I initially had. The last three Books really attempt to explain why he wanted to write *The Prelude* and what he was hoping to achieve. I realize that there are moments of this kind of revelation throughout the entire poem, but it is not as prevalent as it is in the last three Books. I feel like I can't really talk about Wordsworth critically because the poem is so complicated and I haven't quite established a vocabulary to discuss it yet, but I'm hoping that the outside reading I plan to do will help me with this. However, I can say as far as content goes, I really appreciate Wordsworth's all encompassing faith in humanity, and his belief that man can render anything as beautiful even in the most dismal of times; reflection allows us to find meaning and beauty in everything.

Lesliemae says

Why did it take me so long to come to this book? Wordsworth has been looming large my entire English Literature life, and I've just outright avoided him. 7 years into my degree, I finally read *The Prelude* and I was astonished and charmed. I loved the first two books, felt liberated by the third - I actually cried realizing that others have experienced the things I've never spoken about - and then. THEN. I came to Book 13, to the end of book 13 - and my imagination got on board, left nature and exalted in the beauty of the mind.

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason and by truth; what we have loved
Others will love, and we may teach them how:
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.

I will read this poem for the rest of my life. Of that I'm sure.

Meaghan says

I love this edition. The facing-page versions of both 1805 and 1850 are so handy and useful, making it so easy to see how one publication differed from the other. Like so many others I imagine, I'm in love with the 1805 version. Still, I was glad to have the 1850 immediately next to the 1805, in order to make that distinction for myself. I had read the 1805 this past summer and am now reading it again more closely. It's clear to me that this work was/is of major importance. If anything could indicate proof of the divine in Nature, it's Wordsworth's *Prelude*. "Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze..."
