

The prelude – william wordsworth

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Fardad Hajirostami Guilty Conscience In his poem, “ The Prelude”, William Wordsworth relives a childhood epiphany that alters his perception of nature. Wordsworth describes this experience of his through his voyage in a boat which later dramatically turns into a nightmarish journey. Through use of suspenseful diction, dramatic personification, and descriptive syntax, Wordsworth vividly illustrates his perception of nature and how he views it with certain trepidation after he encounters a “ towering” and horrific figure.

The opening lines of the poem immediately personify nature as having a feministic quality. When Wordsworth stumbles upon a boat and unloosens its chain, he describes this incident as an “ act of stealth and troubled pleasure”. Wordsworth in a way foreshadows possible dangers that are lurking in the near future due to his guilty conscience. This guilty conscience can also be interpreted as a consequence of the sexual seduction of nature and the boat as suggested by the author’s syntax and tone.

The author’s mentioning of the boat as “ an elfin pinnacle” and the description of how he “ lustily ... dipped [his] oars into the silent lake” confirm the author’s premature and lascivious tendencies. Wordsworth’s attitude towards the relationship that he shares with the boat also infers a sense of egotism and overconfidence. He describes himself as “ one who rows, proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point with an unswerving line,” with a “ fixed” view. Wordsworth’s syntax and his choice of the words “ fixed”, “ chosen” and “ unswerving” all further develop and emphasize his haughty youthful character.

Later in the poem, when Wordsworth witnesses a monstrous black figure appearing on the horizon that seemed to acquire an “ utmost boundary”, a

sudden shift in tone and diction takes place. The author's seemingly control of nature and his sexual dominance is abruptly stolen away from him due to a symbolic black figure that in a way represents Wordsworth's guilty conscience and childhood illusions. In addition, the author has lost his composure and "proud skill" in the way he paddles away with "trembling oars". The incidence of this daemon figure completely transforms

Wordsworth's tranquil and lustful relationship with nature into a dreadful and outlandish one. Wordsworth's earlier intimacy with nature transforms to "solitude" and "blank desertion". The author's perception of nature contrasts with that of the Romantics. The "familiar shapes" are no longer prevalent and "no pleasant images of trees" or "colors of green fields" linger in the author's conscience. The author's anticipation of possible dangers that seemed inevitable due to the suspenseful nature of the poem did not compare to the extent of such an episode.

A key distinction between the author's perceptions of nature earlier and later in the poem arises in the extent in which he personifies it. Initially, nature was illustrated as possessing an inert quality and a mere existence. This connotation suggested that he controlled nature's way and determined its fate. Later, however, this earlier notion of his is altered once "a huge peak, black and huge" appears on the horizon. The "voluntary power instinct" of the figure implies that it has acquired unnatural and humanistic qualities and thus haunted the author's dreams.

Wordsworth's description of nature can be interpreted as Wordsworth's childhood sexual fantasies with feminine figures while the black figure symbolically represents religious condemnation of his society at the time.

The morals and customs of the society in which Wordsworth lived in presumably disdained the sexual desires of the youths. Consequently, Wordsworth unconsciously fears the black figure and interprets it as a force that has come to punish his unfitting and lustful behavior.