

ÖLÜMÜNÜN YÜZÜNCÜ YILDÖNÜMÜNDE

WORDSWORTH

- ÖZET -

Bu 23 Nisanda ölümünün yüzüncü yıldönümü anılan William Wordsworth İngiliz edebiyatının Shakespeare ile Milton'dan sonra en büyük şairidir. Avrupa edebiyatında *Romantisme* denen çığırı o açmıştır, İngiltere'nin şimalinde Göller Bölgesinde doğmuş, kasaba okullarında okumuştur. Sonra Cambridge Üniversitesine gitti. Orayı bitirdikten sonra da gidip Fransa'da kaldı. Heyecanlı bir hürriyetsever olduğu için Fransız İhtilâline çok yakınlık duyuyordu. Hattâ bir ara Girondin partisine katılacak kadar ateşliydi. Sonra *Terreur* onu hayal kırıklığına uğrattı. Memleketine döndü. Kız kardeşinin teşvikiyle bir köye çekilip kendini şiire verdi. Büyük bir destan yazmak istiyordu. Fakat daha önce, şairlik gücünü denemek üzere, düşüncesinin nasıl değiştiğini araştırıp anlatmaya karar verdi. *The Prelude - Ontürkü* adlı on dört kitaplık manzum hayat hikâyesi böylece meydana çıktı. Wordsworth en çok kısa lirik şiirleriyle tanınırsa da onu dünyanın sayılı büyük şairleri arasına sokan işte bu büyük felsefi şiirdir.

Bununla beraber, Wordsworth büyüklüğü ve tesiri nispetinde tanınmış değildir. Bunun sebepleri: Yirmisinden seksenine kadar altmış yıl boyunca yazdıklarının hemen sade şiir olması; mühim eserlerinin, fikir yükü ağır uzun şiirler halinde yazılması; ve bu şiirlerde İngiliz olan tarafın epeyce ağır basmasıdır. Şiirin, nesre ve oyuna nisbetle tercümeyle daha az elverişli düşmesi Wordsworth'ın yabancı memleketlerde tanınmasını önleyen engellerin başında gelir. Hele belli başlı şiirlerinin sekiz on bin mısrağı buluşu, ruh meselelerini ve insanlığın fikir macerasını tahlil eden felsefî bir edayla yazılışı onu daha çetin bir şair haline getiriyor. Ayrıca, sanatta bir ihtilâlcî tanınmasına rağmen, İngiliz milletinin ta sekizinci asırdan gelen duyuş ve düşünüş hususiyetini iyice benimseyerek yazışı onun ancak İngilizler için değerli bir şair olduğu zannını uyandırıyor.

Halbuki bu şairin en köklü hususiyetleri herkesin aşına çıkacağı beşerî hususiyetlerdir. Wordsworth insanın nasibi üzerinde derin derin düşünüyor; ruhun, sıhhatle gelişebilmek için kendini tabiatın şifali tesirine açık tutması lâzımgeldiğine inanıyor; tabiatın bu tesirinin hikmetini araştırırken de onun güzelliğine ve ululuğuna eriyor. Bu vasıflar da belli ediyor ki Wordsworth yalnız İngilizler için değil, her milletten okur için ehemmiyetli ve değerlidir. Hem belki de her zamandan çok dünyanın şu sıkıntılı günlerinde bütün insanlara büyük hizmeti dokunacak bir cihan şairidir.

WORDSWORTH
ON THE CENTENARY OF HIS DEATH

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it may be Shakespeare, first and foremost, who has given literary prominence to the 23rd of April in world literature. But there is another English poet who died on that very date a hundred years ago, and he is great enough to make the date important in his own right. There is not, unfortunately, sufficient material in the hands of his Turkish readers to judge properly the stature of this poet. But, in any case, he has been translated into no language to the extent he deserves. In considering the reasons for this lack of recognition of a literary figure who is without any doubt worthy of high praise, we may discover certain characteristics of his work which would justify such a recognition.

Wordsworth was born in 1770 in a Lake District town; educated in country schools and at Cambridge; and devoted his whole life to poetry thanks to a small legacy left by a college friend and to further help, public and private. He ranks today as the third great poet in a literature which is unrivalled for its poetic achievement among the great languages of the world. Nor is his greatness of that kind which M. Gide will allow to Hugo only with a deep sigh of regret. Wordsworth is great both on account of his work and of his influence, and there is no poet of any consequence since his day who could really ignore him.

Yet Wordsworth is comparatively little known outside England. Even in his own country most people are unaware of the revolution he has made in their tastes, and of his true standing as poet. In spite of his eminence, he is the least known of English poets. While Shakespeare's and Milton's complete works were translated into French more than hundred years ago, Wordsworth's major work *The Prelude* has only recently been taken up (by Professör Cazamian) for translation.

Some grounds could be suggested, perhaps, for this lack of popularity from which Wordsworth has suffered down to our own day. To put them briefly: Wordsworth writes only poetry; his poems are often long and weighed down with philosophical thoughts; and in most of what he writes the English note is as considerable as the universal.

Indeed, ever since the days of Gutenberg, poetry has been giving up by degrees the object of entertaining communities at large, and

consequently has been divesting itself of its popular elements — the plainly narrative and dramatic. Thus a kind of poetry has been evolved through centuries which in its highest manifestations tends to become the universal geometry of thought expressed through the purely idiosyncratic medium of a language. It is inevitable in such a state of affairs that poets should become the least international of all artists. Granted that poetry had not reached that Valeryean stage in Wordsworth's day; still, he was one of the first poets, if not the first, to eliminate (in his best poetry) the occasional and the argumentative as extraneous matter, and not to resort to recognised stylistic devices for his effect.

Moreover, no great poet in modern times has devoted himself to poetry as exclusively as Wordsworth has done. Ariosto, Milton, Goethe all have tried their genius in other literary forms besides poetry; and they have chosen, for their great works, either the epic or the dramatic form, which makes those works more accessible in translation as well as in the original. Wordsworth's only prose work of any consequence* is his *Convention of Cintra* which is no more than a tract, however noteworthy it may be as a spirited defence of nationalism in Europe. In fact, excepting his abortive blank verse drama *The Borderers*, the bulk of his work consists of lyric poetry, and of epic verse which is of a very individual stamp. The most widely read of Wordsworth's poems are his short lyrics which express man's deep-felt emotions in the most unadorned of dictions. Those long, introspective poems which represent his peculiar genius best are much less known. It may not be inappropriate to consider these poems epics, not that they have any immediate resemblance to those long heroic poems that come down from the Middle Ages. Wordsworth did think of writing such a poem. He played for a time with the idea of making some folk tale or a historical figure the subject matter of his poem. But none moved him enough to find an utterance in song.

Then a wish
My last and favourite aspiration, mounts
With yearning toward some philosophic song
Of Truth that cherishes our daily life.
With meditations passionate from deep
Recesses in man's heart, immortal verse
Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre.

For Wordsworth must have felt that if an epic were to be written on the morrow of the French Revolution, the principle underlying it should be of a philosophical and universal kind. Not only did he

* His *Guide to the Lakes* (1810) is an admirable book in its own way, but it cannot be considered essentially a contribution to literature.

contemplate writing such a poem, but also decided to write it. However, before embarking on such a vast project, he sought to learn how far he was qualified for this mission. The outcome was his great work *The Prelude*. Blank verse, which Shakespeare's plays had made into the most notable of English verse-forms, was used for this long poem which consists of fourteen books amounting altogether to some 8000 lines. It is an "autobiographical poem,, giving the history of the "growth of a poet's mind,, from his childhood to the time when, as a young man of twenty-eight, he dedicates himself to poetry and sets out to write *The Prelude*.

In this great poem Wordsworth succeeds in telling his life story pruned of all its ephemeral incidents, with a profound understanding of nature and of man, and in a style that relies for its nobility on its sustained power of emotions and thoughts and not on any idiosyncratic diction, as the style of his master Milton did. His childhood in the Lake District; his school days; the world that he discovered in books; the French Revolution which coincided with his youth and would have made a Girondist out of him if it had not been for family interference; his disillusionment after the Terror; and his final sheltering in Nature and in Poetry — all these phases of his life are treated with great vision and insight in this poem, so that the progress of a poet's mind "fostered alike by beauty and by fear,, may be fully followed. And it must be acknowledged that to a poet who started, both in England and in Europe, the poetry of introspective individualism no form of poetry could be more appropriate than this personal, confessional kind of the epic.

Wordsworth had planned to write his *magnum opus* on completing *The Prelude*, and the relation between the two works was to be that of a gothic church to its ante-chapel. But the main body of that gothic structure, *The Recluse*, "containing views of Man, Nature, and Society,, which was to be in three parts, was never completed. Only the second part came out in 1814 in the form of a long narrative poem like *The Prelude* (though not equal to it in power) under the title, *The Excursion*. As to *The Prelude*, Wordsworth would not let it be published in his lifetime. Yet his constant revision of it to his dying day proves the importance he attached to that poem which is virtually his poetic and spiritual testament, no less than his life story.

" He sees nothing but himself and the universe ,, says Hazlitt. That criticism coming from a brilliant critic for whom Wordsworth was a blind spot, is in itself a recognition of Wordsworth's genius. It is not to be denied that he was overbearingly self-reliant. The more explicit censure of another great contemporary, Keats, is not to be gainsaid: Wordsworth was prone to "the whims of an Egotist., But it is also undeniably true that he introduced, by *The Prelude*, that sus-

tained self-analysis into poetry which is the hallmark of Romanticism. Now, the leading and proper evaluation of such poetry is arduous — even for those who, disagreeing with Poe, have faith in it; while its translation, though more rewarding than the translation of purely lyrical poetry, would require greater stamina.

Besides its unusual form and contents, there is a certain Englishness engrained in Wordsworth's poetry which makes it seem less European than, for instance, his younger contemporary Byron's poetry. For one thing, as he sets it out in his Preface to the second edition (1800) of the *Lyrical Ballads*, he believes that poetry should derive both its subject matter and its language from what is most simple and elemental in life. And, for this end, not the people of "the vast city,, but those who live in the country should be observed. "Because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language. ,, The language, too, of such men has a more enduring quality because of its constant reference to our elementary feelings and to the beautiful and permanent forms in nature. Thus, of his own choice, Wordsworth makes his poetry that of rural England. Not in the sense, however, of a regional poet like Barnes, for instance, who can be little appreciated by those who are not familiar with the idiom and atmosphere of his particular locality. In Wordsworth's poetry that "common life,, of the English countryside is given in its essentials, and wherever we may go those essentials are the same in the lives of men who fight against or cooperate with the forces of nature, and they will therefore give rise to similar feelings and passions throughout the world. Thus, wherever the basic relationship of man and the soil is food for contemplation, there Wordsworth should be a welcome poet.

The "Englishness,, of Wordsworth should be sought, I think, in another aspect of his poetry rather than in his insistence (observed more in theory than in practice) on "common life,, and "common people,, being the only worthy theme of poetry. That characteristic of his poems is something of a poetic tradition which he inherits from the past. For, although Wordsworth was considered an iconoclastic modern in his own time and the leader of a new school of poetry, he seems to us now more inevitable in the tradition of English poetry than many defenders of tradition. He is so not only in virtue of his condemning the poetry of the eighteenth century for its subservience to social and literary formalism, for its excessive admiration of the classics; but also for seeking his own masters beyond that century, among those older poets Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and even Chaucer, whom he calls "select Spirits. ,, And in their work he takes special note of what is English: he admires their individualism, their

protestantism, their humanity — qualities which become the salient features of his own poetry.

There is still another quality which both distinguishes Wordsworth's poetry and at the same time links it up with the great heritage of England; it is his deep feeling for nature which he reveals in his poems. The propensity of the Englishman to retire from the turmoil of life and to meditate over his fate face to face with the elements of nature is revealed from as far back as the eighth century *Seafarer*, down to the contemporary effusions of *Ossian*. In Wordsworth nature is the principal theme. For his poetry, from beginning to end, witnesses to his faith in the wisdom and spirit of the universe which impress on man his sense of the sublime and the beautiful.

It is writing with such a faith that makes Wordsworth an English poet, a philosophical poet, one that is not much read, still less translated, and little understood. But for those in our time who are sick and weary of the materialism and mad race of machinery in which men seem to squander away all the humanity and wisdom they have inherited from the past, Wordsworth would be a balm with restorative power that is almost unique. Indeed, both for his English and for his foreign readers the real significance of this hundredth anniversary of his death lies in what Arnold called "Wordsworth's healing power.,,