

“Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” by William Wordsworth



“Tintern Abbey”

- Final poem in the original collection of *Lyrical Ballads*
- Written in purposefully plain, proselike language, an effect enhanced by the rhymeless lines of **blank verse** [unrhymed iambic pentameter]
- Embodies the principles Wordsworth explains in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*—it is a **meditative poem** on the power of nature to bring amelioration of the soul through the spontaneous overflow of emotion recollected in tranquility

“Tintern Abbey”

- Stanza 1, description of the River Wye in the present, laden with emotion
- Stanza 2, reflection on the five years between his visits to the area, reaching to the sublime, 35–49.
- Stanza 3, brief doubt and the comfort he derived from the memory
- Stanza 4, difference between nature of his youth and now; “abundant recompense” or recognition of the sublime beauty of the universe
- Stanza 5, turns to Dorothy and projects her experience to be like his own.

“Tintern Abbey”

Lines 66ff. contain Wordsworth’s famed description of the three stages of his growing up, defined in terms of his evolving relations to the natural scene:

- ① the young boy’s purely physical responsiveness (lines 73–74)
- ② the post-adolescent’s aching, dizzy, and equivocal passions—a love that is more like dread (lines 67–72, 75–85: this was his state of mind on the occasion of his first visit)
- ③ his present state (lines 85ff.), in which for the first time he adds thought to sense

Worshipper of Nature

- Wordsworth infuses the language of the poem with sacred terms, even labeling himself in line 152 a “worshipper of Nature.”
- His poetry becomes a service to nature, a prayer, a hymn of praise.
- See the second stanza, lines 35–49, in which he describes how the pleasure of recalling the “beauteous forms” of the river Wye leads him to “that blessed mood, / In which the burthen of the mystery ... Is lightened.”
- Here and in the passage that follows Wordsworth attributes tremendous spiritual power to the perception of nature’s beauty.

Worshipper of Nature

- In the third stanza, he contrasts his thoughtless engagement in nature as a youth with the sober joys of his present, adult consciousness, and in lines 88–111 he identifies the spiritual core of his current appreciation of nature.
- In this view, where Wordsworth becomes the high priest of nature, Dorothy in the final stanza is his acolyte.
- Examine the way the poem attempts to figure the religious power of nature as a respite from the inevitable pains and ills of human experience.

Time and Consciousness

- Wordsworth's poetry centered on the memories of emotions spurred by an event or image—the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility.
- “Tintern Abbey” exemplifies this precisely, and it highlights the poet's process of recollection by staging the poem in different periods of the poet's consciousness.
- It begins in the present but immediately hearkens back five years.
- The second stanza focuses on the pleasure of memory and the production of “unremembered pleasures.”

Time and Consciousness

- Examine the way that Wordsworth figures memory as both an important resource and a dwindling power, and finally why he wants Dorothy to become his storehouse of memories.

Dorothy Wordsworth

- Examine Wordsworth's representation of his "dearest Friend" in the final stanza.
- What role does he create for Dorothy? In what ways is this role informed by gender?
- Dorothy has a conspicuous presence in the poem as the poet's companion in the landscape, as a means of mirroring his emotional satisfaction in the worship of nature, as his hope for future regeneration, as his memory when memory will fail him.
- She represents both his supplement and his lack, and Wordsworth's description of her is notably ambivalent.

Sources

- Stephen Greenblatt, general editor, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, 9th ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 2012. (Slide 4)
- *Teaching with the Norton Anthology of English Literature: A Guide for Instructors*, 9th ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 2012. (Slides 2, 3, 5–9)