

“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)



Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798

BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
 Of five long winters! and again I hear
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
 With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
 That on a wild secluded scene impress
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
 The day is come when I again repose
 Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
 These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
 Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
 Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
 'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
 Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
 Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
 Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
 With some uncertain notice, as might seem
 Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
 Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
 The Hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,
 Through a long absence, have not been to me
 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
 But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
 And passing even into my purer mind
 With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
 Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
 As have no slight or trivial influence
 On that best portion of a good man's life,
 His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
 Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
 To them I may have owed another gift,
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,

In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,—
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
 In darkness and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
 With many recognitions dim and faint,
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
 The picture of the mind revives again:
 While here I stand, not only with the sense
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
 That in this moment there is life and food
 For future years. And so I dare to hope,
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
 I came among these hills; when like a roe
 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
 Wherever nature led: more like a man
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
 And their glad animal movements all gone by)
 To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
 What then I was. The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite; a feeling and a love,
 That had no need of a remoter charm,
 By thought supplied, nor any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
 And all its aching joys are now no more,

And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
 Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still sad music of humanity,
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue.—And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

Nor perchance,
 If I were not thus taught, should I the more
 Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
 For thou art with me here upon the banks
 Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
 My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
 The language of my former heart, and read
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights
 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
 May I behold in thee what I was once,
 My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
 Knowing that Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb

Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

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