William Wordsworth's

LINES WRITTEN A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY

from

Lyrical Ballads

[London: J. & A. Arch, 1798]

LINES

WRITTEN A FEW MILES ABOVE

TINTERN ABBEY,

ON REVISITING THE BANKS OF THE WYE DURING

A TOUR,

July 13, 1798.

=====

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 sweet inland murmur.*—Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,

Which 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 10

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,

Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,

Among the woods and copses lose themselves,

Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb

The wild green landscape. 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 wreathes of smoke

Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,

With some uncertain notice, as might seem, 20

Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,

Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire

The hermit sits alone.

Though absent long,

These forms of beauty 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 30

With tranquil restoration:—feelings too

Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,

As may have had no 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 40

Of all this unintelligible world

Is lighten'd:—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. 50

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,

In darkness, and amid the many shapes

Of joyless day-light; 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 through the wood

How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguish'd though[t,]

With many recognitions dim and faint, 60

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, 70

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 80

An appetite: a feeling and a love,

That had no need of a remoter charm,

By thought supplied, or 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 recompence. For I have learned

To look on nature, not as in the hour 90

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, 100

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 recognize

In nature and the language of the sense,

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, 110

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 120

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, 130
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our chearful 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 140
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 150

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. 160

Footnotes.

[4] * The river is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern.

[107] * This line has a close resemblance to an admirable line of Young, the exact expression of which I cannot recollect.

Wordsworth's Poetical Works Summary and Analysis of "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"

Full Title: "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey; On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798"

"Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" was written in July of 1798 and published as the last poem of *Lyrical Ballads*, also in 1798. At the age of twenty-three (in August of 1793), Wordsworth had visited the desolate abbey alone. In 1798 he returned to the

same place with his beloved sister, Dorothy Wordsworth, who was a year younger. Dorothy is referred to as "Friend" throughout the poem.
Often the poem is simply called "Tintern Abbey." The abbreviated title is effective for clarity's sake, but it is also misleading, as the poem does not actually take place in the abbey. Wordsworth begins his poem by telling the reader that it has been five years since he has been to this place a few miles from the abbey. He describes the "Steep and lofty cliffs," the "wild secluded scene," the "quiet of the sky," the "dark sycamore" he sits under, the trees of the orchard, and the "pastoral farms" with "wreaths of smoke" billowing from their chimneys.

In the second stanza Wordsworth tells his readers that his first visit to this place gave him "sensations sweet" when he was in the "lonely rooms" of the city. He intimates that these "feelings... / Of unremembered pleasure" may have helped him to be a better person, perhaps simply by putting him in a better mood than he would have been in otherwise:

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

Wordsworth goes on to suggest his spiritual relationship with nature, which he believes will be a part of him until he dies:

Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,

And even the motion of our human blood

Almost suspended, we are laid sleep

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.

In the third stanza, he begins to consider what it would mean if his belief in his connection to nature were misguided, but stops short. Seeming not to care whether the connection is valid or not, he describes the many benefits that his memories nature give him. At the end of the stanza he addresses the Wye River: "How oft, in spirit, have I returned to thee / O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods, / How often has my spirit returned to thee!"

In the fourth stanza, Wordsworth begins by explaining the pleasure he feels at being back in the place that has given him so much joy over the years. He is also glad because he knows that this new memory will give him future happiness: "in this moment there is life and food / for future years." He goes on to explain how differently he experienced nature five years ago, when he first came to explore the area. During his first visit he was full of energy:

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.

Wordsworth quickly sets his current self apart from the way he was five years ago, saying, "That time is past." At first, however, he seems almost melancholy about the change: "And all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy raptures." Over the past five years, he has developed a new approach to nature:

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.

As a more sophisticated and wiser person with a better understanding of the sad disconnection of humanity, Wordsworth feels a deeper and more intelligent relationship with nature:

And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused...

Wordsworth is "still / A lover of the meadows and the woods," but has lost some of his gleeful exuberance. Instead, he views nature as the "anchor of [his] purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / of all my moral being."

In the fifth and last stanza, Wordsworth addresses his sister Dorothy, calling her both "Sister" and "dear Friend." Through her eyes, Wordsworth can see the wild vitality he had when he first visited this place, and this image of himself gives him new life. It is apparent at this point in the poem that Wordsworth has been speaking to his sister throughout. Dorothy serves the same role as nature, reminding Wordsworth of what he once was:

...in thy voice I catch

The language of my former heart, and read

My former pleasure 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!

Wordsworth then shares his deepest hope: that in the future, the power of nature and the memories of himself will stay with Dorothy. He is implying that he will die before she does (even though she is only a year younger), and hopes that in her memory he will be kept alive:

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!

Even as Wordsworth thinks about dying, he is given new strength and vitality at the thought that his sister will remember him. He describes the setting vigorously:

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...

At the end of the poem, Wordsworth combines their current setting with his sister's future memory of the moment. He is satisfied knowing that she will also carry the place, the moment, and the memory with her:

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.

Analysis

Published in 1798 in *Lyrical Ballads*, this poem is widely considered to be one of Wordsworth's masterpieces. It is a complex poem, addressing memory, mortality, faith in nature, and familial love. The poem's structure is similarly complex, making use of the freedom of blank verse (no rhyming) as well as the measured rhythm of iambic pentameter (with a few notable exceptions). The flow of the writing has been described as that of waves, accelerating only to stop in the middle of a line (caesura). The repetition of sounds and words adds to the ebb and flow of the language, appropriately speaking to the ebb and flow of the poet's memories.

Divided into five stanzas of different lengths, the poem begins in the present moment, describing the natural setting. Wordsworth emphasizes the act of returning by making extensive use of repetition: "Five years have passed; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters! and again I hear / These waters..." He also uses the phrase "once again" twice, both times in the middle of a line, breaking the flow of the text. It is in this manner that the reader is introduced to the natural beauty of the Wye River area.

In the second stanza, Wordsworth departs from the present moment to describe how his memories of the scene inspired and sustained him over the past five years. Life away from nature is described as being "in lonely rooms, and mid the din / Of towns and cities." Meanwhile, nature is described with almost religious fervor: Wordsworth uses words such as "sublime," "blessed," and "serene." Wordsworth refers to a "blessed mood" twice, emphasizing his spiritual relationship with nature. Interestingly, while Wordsworth uses many words related to spirituality and religion in this poem, he never refers to God or Christianity. It seems that nature is playing that role in this poem, especially at the end of the second stanza, when Wordsworth describes a sort of transcendent moment:

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.

Nature, it seems, offers humankind ("we") a kind of insight ("We see into the life of things") in the face of mortality ("we are laid asleep"). Wordsworth lays emphasis on the last line by making it only eight syllables (four iambs) long, as opposed to ten.

In the third stanza, Wordsworth returns to the present and acknowledges that his faith might be in "vain," but reiterates how important his memories of this landscape have been to him, addressing the river directly: "O sylvan Wye!" As in many of his other poems, Wordsworth personifies natural forms or nature as a whole by addressing them directly (apostrophe).

Wordsworth seems to value this period of his life, and remembers it with a somewhat nostalgic air, although he admits that in this simpler time ("The coarser pleasures of my boyish days"), he was not so sophisticated as he is now. In the present, he is weighed down by more serious thoughts. He alludes to a loss of faith and a sense of disheartenment. This transition is widely believed to refer to Wordsworth's changing attitude towards the French Revolution. Having visited France at the height of the Revolution, Wordsworth was inspired by the ideals of the Republican movement. Their emphasis on the value of the individual, imagination, and liberty inspired him and filled him with a sense of optimism. By 1798, however, Wordsworth was already losing faith in the movement, as it had by then degenerated into widespread violence. Meanwhile, as France and Britain entered the conflict,

Wordsworth was prevented from seeing his family in France and lost his faith in humanity's capacity for harmony. Wordsworth turns to nature to find the peace he cannot find in civilization.

Wordsworth goes on to describe a spirit or a being connected with nature that elevates his understanding of the world:

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 thought,

And rolls through all things.

This "presence" could refer to God or some spiritual consciousness, or it could simply refer to the unified presence of the natural world. In the interconnectedness of nature, Wordsworth finds the sublime harmony that he cannot find in humankind, and for this reason he approaches nature with an almost religious fervor:

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 recognize

In nature and the language of the sense,

The anchor of my purest thoughts...

In this key passage, Wordsworth outlines his understanding of consciousness. Like other Romantic poets, Wordsworth imagines that consciousness is built out of subjective, sensory experience. What he hears and sees ("of all that we behold... / of all the mighty world/ Of eye

and ear") creates his perceptions and his consciousness ("both what they half-create, / And what perceive"). The "language of the sense"--his sensory experiences--are the building blocks of this consciousness ("The anchor of my purest thoughts"). Thus, he relies on his experience of nature for both consciousness and "all [his] moral being."

In the last stanza, Wordsworth returns to the present to address his sister Dorothy, and explains that like his memory of this natural place, her presence offers a kind of continuity in his life. Although he experiences anxiety about his own mortality, the idea that Dorothy will remember him and remember this moment after his death comforts him. Dorothy offers continuity because Wordsworth sees himself in her (Dorothy was also a poet and the two spent a great deal of time together), literally seeing his "former pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes." Wordsworth sees that Dorothy experiences the Wye with the same enthusiasm as he did five years earlier. Moving into a discussion of the future, he hopes that Dorothy's memories of this landscape will sustain her in sad times the way they sustained him, and offers up a "prayer" that this will be the case:

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...

Again, Wordsworth addresses nature with a sort of spiritual faith without actually citing God or religion. Instead, he focuses entirely on nature and on Dorothy.

In the last lines of the poem, Wordsworth creates a sort of pact between Dorothy, the natural environment, and himself, as if trying to establish and capture the memory of this precise moment forever:

Nor wilt though 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.

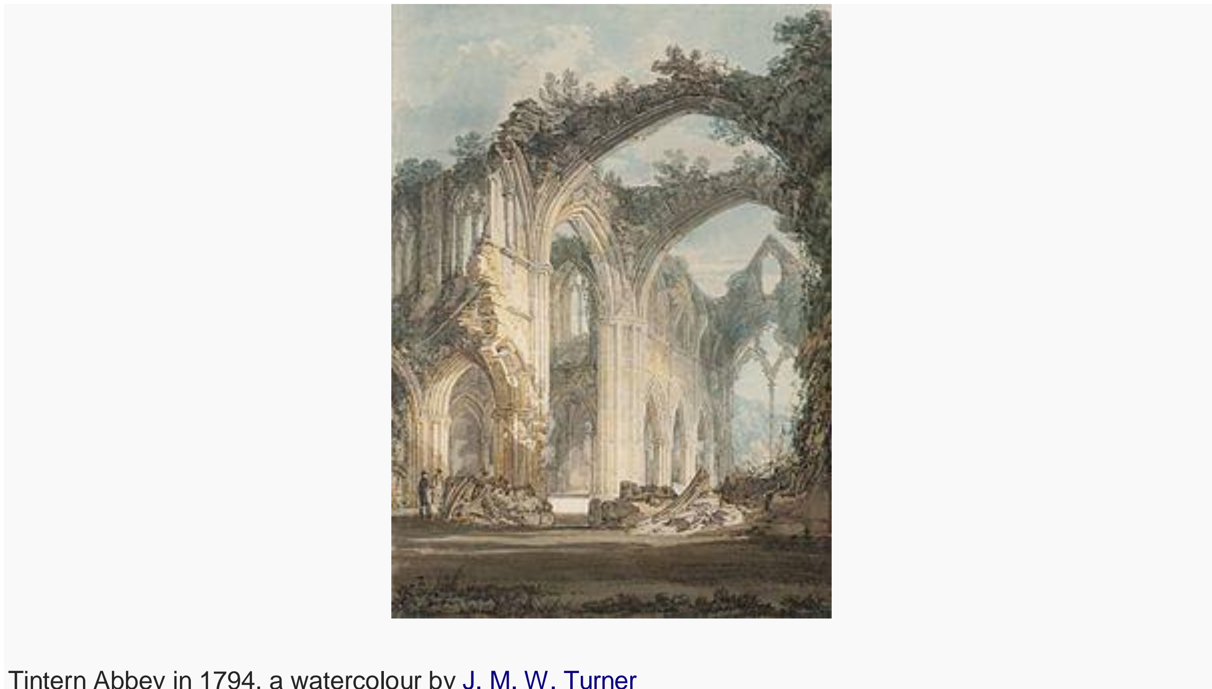
With these words, Wordsworth creates a beautiful illustration of the mechanics of memory. Not only does he want to remember this moment in this beautiful landscape, but he also wants Dorothy to remember how much he loved it, and how much more he loved it because he knew that she would remember it too. Thus, nature is not only an object of beauty and the subject of memories, but also the catalyst for a beautiful, harmonious relationship between two people, and their memories of that relationship. This falls in line with Wordsworth's

belief that nature is a source of inspiration and harmony that can elevate human existence to the level of the sublime in a way that civilization cannot.

Although the poem is often referred to simply as "Tintern Abbey," this is misleading because the poem is actually located "a few miles" away! At the time the poem was written, Tintern Abbey was already just the ruins of a gothic cathedral--a stone shell with no roof, carpeted with grass. Although it is a romantic image, it is not the subject of the poem.

Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Tintern Abbey in 1794, a watercolour by J. M. W. Turner

The title, ***Lines Written*** *(or* ***Composed****)* ***a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey****, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798*, is often abbreviated simply to *Tintern Abbey*, although that building does not appear within the poem. It was written by William Wordsworth after a walking tour with his sister in this section of the Welsh Borders. The description of his encounters with the countryside on the banks of the River Wye grows into an outline of his general philosophy. There has been considerable debate about why evidence of the human presence in the landscape has been downplayed and in what way the poem fits within the 18th century loco-descriptive genre.

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Background[edit]

The poem has its roots in Wordsworth's personal history. He had previously visited the area as a troubled twenty-three-year-old in August 1793. Since then he had matured and his seminal poetical relationship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge had begun. Wordsworth claimed to have composed the poem entirely in his head, beginning it upon leaving Tintern and not jotting down so much as a line until he reached Bristol, by which time it had just reached mental completion. Although the *Lyrical Ballads* upon which the two friends had been working was by then already in publication, he was so pleased with what he had just written that he had it inserted at the eleventh hour as the concluding poem. Scholars generally agree that it is apt, for the poem represents the climax of Wordsworth's first great period of creative output and prefigures much of the distinctively Wordsworthian verse that was to follow.[1]

The poem is written in tightly-structured decasyllabic blank verse and comprises verse-paragraphs rather than stanzas. Categorising the poem is difficult, as it contains some elements of the ode and of the dramatic monologue. In the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth noted: "I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principle requisites of that species of composition." The apostrophe at its beginning is reminiscent of the 18th century landscape-poem, but it is now agreed that the best designation of the work would be the conversation poem, which is an organic development of the loco-descriptive.[2] The silent listener in this case is Wordsworth's sister Dorothy, who is addressed in the poem's final section. Transcending the nature poetry written before that date, it employs a much more intellectual and philosophical engagement with the subject that verges on Pantheism.[3]

Outline of themes[edit]

The poem's tripartite division encompasses a contextual scene-setting, a developing theorisation of the significance of his experience of the landscape, and a final confirmatory address to the implied listener.

Lines 1–49

Revisiting the natural beauty of the Wye after five years fills the poet with a sense of "tranquil restoration". He recognises in the landscape something which had been so internalised as to become the basis for out of the body experience.

Lines 49-111

In "thoughtless youth" the poet had rushed enthusiastically about the landscape and it is only now that he realises the power such scenery has continued to have upon him, even when not physically present there. He identifies in it "a sense sublime/ Of something far more deeply interfused,/ Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns" (lines 95–97) and the immanence of "A motion and a spirit, that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of all thought,/ And rolls through all things" (lines 100–103). With this insight he finds in nature "The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/ The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/ Of all my moral being" (lines 108–111).

Lines 111-159

The third movement of the poem is addressed to his sister Dorothy, "my dearest Friend,/ My dear, dear Friend," as a sharer in this vision and in the conviction that "all which we behold is full of blessings". It is this that will continue to create a lasting bond between them.

Literary and aesthetic context[edit]

Having internalised the landscape, Wordsworth claimed now "to see into the life of things" (line 50) and, so enabled, to hear "oftentimes/ The still sad music of humanity" (92-3), but recent critics have used close readings of the poem to

question such assertions. For example, Marjorie Levinson views him “as managing to see into the life of things only ‘by narrowing and skewing his field of vision’ and by excluding ‘certain conflictual sights and meanings’”.[4] Part of her contention was that he had suppressed mention of the heavy industrial activity in the area, although it has since been argued that the “wreaths of smoke”, playfully interpreted by Wordsworth as possible evidence “of some Hermit’s cave” upslope, in fact acknowledges the presence of the local ironworks, or of charcoal burning, or of a paper works.[5]

A print by Thomas Hearne of the "Iron Forge at Tintern" (1795)

Another contribution to the debate has been Crystal Lake’s study of other poems written after a visit to Tintern Abbey, particularly those from about the same time as Wordsworth’s. Noting not just the absence of direct engagement on his part with “the still sad music of humanity” in its present industrial manifestation, but also of its past evidence in the ruins of the abbey itself, she concludes that this “confirms Marjorie Levinson‘s well-known argument that the local politics of the Monmouthshire landscape require erasure if Wordsworth’s poem is to advance its aesthetic agenda.”[6]

The poems concerned include the following:

- 1745. Rev. Dr. Syned Davies, Epistle IV “Describing a Voyage to Tintern Abbey, in Monmouthshire, from Whitminster in Gloucestershire”
- About 1790. Rev. Duncomb Davis, “Poetical description of Tintern Abbey”
- 1790s. Edmund Gardner, “Sonnet written in Tintern Abbey”
- 1796. Edward Jerningham, “Tintern Abbey” [7]
- About 1800. Rev. Luke Booker, “Original sonnet composed on leaving Tintern Abbey and proceeding with a party of friends down the River Wye to Chepstow”

As the boat carrying Syned Davies neared Tintern Abbey, he noted the presence of “naked quarries” before passing to the ruins, bathed in evening light and blending into the natural surroundings to give a sense of “pleasurable sadness”.[8] The poem by Davies more or less set the emotional tone for the poems to come and brackets past and present human traces far more directly than does Wordsworth. His fellow clergyman Duncomb Davis, being from the area, goes into more detail. After a historical deviation, he returns to the present, where

… now no bell calls monks to morning prayer,
Daws only chant their early matins there,
Black forges smoke, and noisy hammers beat
Where sooty Cyclops puffing, drink and sweat,

following this with a description of the smelting process and a reflection that the present is more virtuous than the past. He anticipates Wordsworth by drawing a

moral lesson from the scene, in his case noting the ivy-swathed ruin and exhorting,

Fix deep the bright exemplar in thy heart:
To friendship's sacred call with joy attend,
Cling, like the ivy, round a falling friend.[9]

Similar reflections appear in the two contemporary sonnets. For Edmund Gardner, "Man's but a temple of a shorter date",[10] while Luke Booker, embarking at sunset, hopes to sail as peacefully to the "eternal Ocean" at death.[11] The action of Wordsworth's poem therefore takes place in an already established moral landscape. Its retrospective mood draws on a particularly 18th century emotional sensibility also found in Edward Jerningham's description of the ruins, with their natural adornments of moss and 'flow'rets', and reflected in J. M. W. Turner's watercolour of them. Wordsworth's preference in his poem is for the broader picture rather than human detail, but otherwise it fits seamlessly within its contemporary literary and aesthetic context.

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1. **Jump up^** Arthur Beatty, *William Wordsworth, his doctrine and art in their historical relations*, University of Wisconsin Studies #17, 1922, p.64
2. **Jump up^** J. Robert Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious*, University of Missouri, 2003, p.79
3. **Jump up^** Geoffrey Durrant, p. 24.
4. **Jump up^** James Castell, "Wordsworth and the 'Life of Things'" in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, OUP 2015, p.740
5. **Jump up^** Dr Dewey Hall, *Romantic Naturalists, Early Environmentalists: An Ecocritical Study*, Ashgate Publishing 2014, pp.124-8
6. **Jump up^** Crystal B. Lake, "The Life of Things at Tintern Abbey", *Review of English Studies* (2012)pp.444-465
7. **Jump up^** *Poems and Plays*, Vol.2, p.135
8. **Jump up^** Google Books
9. **Jump up^** Quoted in Heath's guide to Tintern Abbey
10. **Jump up^** The sonnet originally appeared pseudonymously, accompanying a similarly moralising sonnet on the Severn in *The European Magazine* vol.30, p.119
11. **Jump up^** Booker's sonnet appeared in Charles Heath's guide to Tintern Abbey

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- Durrant, Geoffrey. *William Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969)