

# Understanding the Poem "Tintern Abbey"

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## Abstract

This article contains a review of the poem "Tintern Abbey" by William Wordsworth. Here is a brief of the poet William Wordsworth, analysis of the poem breaking it into 5 sections, most important thing to mark in this article is the stages of the development of Wordsworth's nature philosophy the construction of the poem, the poet's style are explained here.

## Introduction

One of the master pieces of Wordsworth's Nature poem is Tintern Abbey. Here we find the benevolence of nature in simple language, exquisite elaboration, engrossing delineation, lucid diction and what not for easy understanding. In short, Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" and his choice of poetic language as "the language of common people" are clearly evident in this poem. The poem gives a perfect picture of romantic poetry.

**About the poet, William Wordsworth:** Before delving into the poem, let's know in brief about the poet William Wordsworth. Wordsworth was a British Romantic poet who with Samuel Taylor Coleridge helped to launch the romantic age in English literature with their joint publication of lyrical ballads in 1798. He was born on 7th April 1770 at Cocker mouth, United Kingdom. His father's name was John Wordsworth who was an attorney and law agent to Sir James Lowther, who was a reach land owner and famous political figure. His mother's name was Ann Cookson. She was the daughter of a mercer at Penrith. Wordsworth was the second of the five children. Unfortunately he lost his mother when you are just 8 years old and his father some 5 years later, in 1783. Wordsworth was looked after by his relatives. At age eight, he was sent to Hawkshead Grammar School in the lake district. In 1787 he entered Saint John's College Cambridge. He proved to be an ordinary student March interested in his vacations among the hills then in his examinations. Wordsworth graduated in 1791 and he crossed over to France in late 1791. He felt much enthusiasm for the motto of the French revolution that were Liberty, equality and fraternity. He was on the verge of throwing his lot with the revolutionists, but a sudden tension of England and France forced him to return to England. Then in the wake of the French revolution, the excess of the reign of terror, shook his faith in the principles of the French revolution and threw him into a state of profound despondency. During this critical phase his sister Dorothy's influence kept the poet alive in him by directing his mind towards the sources of mental strength and joy which lie in nature and in human sympathy.

The first fruit of Wordsworth's genius were the Lyrical Ballads, a joint production with Coleridge and himself. "Lyrical Ballads" is a landmark in the history of English poetry for it heralds the dawn of the great Romantic movement. Wordsworth had larger share in this book and our present poem "Tintern Abbey" also

appeared in this book. In 1800 appeared some of his finest poems. Some of the finest poems are Michael, The old Cumberland Beggar, She Dwelt Among The Untrodden Ways, Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known, Nutting. "The Prelude" which is a record of the development of Wordsworth as a poet was completed in 1805 but it was published in 1850, after his death. The poem is divided into 14 books. "The Prelude" was intended to be a part of the larger philosophical work entitled "The Recluse" which was never completed. Another section of this larger philosophical work was "The Excursion" which was published in 1814.

In 1807 appeared his poems in two volumes which represent the finest flower of his genius. In everybody from that washer used he was seen at the height of his powers. Among these poems may be mentioned such lyrics as The Solitary Reaper, The Green Linnet, I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud, such philosophical poems, as Ode on Intimations of Immortality, Ode to Duty, Resolution and Independence and some sonnets.

Among his other poems mention may be made to "The White Doe of Rylstone(1815), Peter Bell(1819), the Waggoner (1819) and Yarrow Revisited and other poems(1835).

Wordsworth was allowed a yearly pension of 300 euro by the crown in 1842 and in 1843 after the death of Southey, he was made the poet laureate. This famous poet died on 23rd April, 1850 and with his death a bright star in the literary sky ceased to exist.

**About the poem "Tintern Abbey":**- the full title of the poem is "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798" and it is abbreviated as Tintern Abbey. About the poem Wordsworth said to his biographer Isabella Fenwick, "No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this". The poem appeared in the "Lyrical Ballads" published in 1798. It is a great reflective poem. The poet here refers to the stages of the development of his love of nature. He says that the memory of the scene, visited by him on the bank of the Wye river 5 years back, has not only been calming and restorative but also has aroused noticed sensations of pleasure, which have had their results in impulses of kindness and love. The poem also has historical significance. It is a clear evidence of a great change in English poetry. It expounds some of his leading views of nature which Wordsworth had developed with Coleridge and which were to form the basis of some of his important works. The poem contains his faith and is valuable as a statement of his nature philosophy in highly lyrical verse. The poet here is the spokesman of a new spirit in poetry, a fact fervently recognised by the poets of the next generations.

**Summary of the poem Tintern Abbey:**- the poem "Tintern Abbey" consists of 159 lines which can be divided into five sections, as shown below -

- i) Lines 01 - 02
- ii) Lines 03 - 22
- iii) Lines 23 - 56

iv) Lines 57 - 110

V) Lines 111 - 159

let's analyse the poem-

i) The first two lines state clearly that the poet has written the poem after his second visit to the bank of the Wye river. The lines go as-

"Five years have past; five summers, with the length of five long winters! and again I hear".

ii) In the next section the poet describes the scene visited by him. He says that he was thrilled with joyous excitement to see the river waves and the lofty cliffs that seem to connect the green Earth with the tranquil sky. The beauty and serenity of the landscape and the Woods on the hill-sides fill his mind with lofty thoughts. He also saw the plots of cottage grounds, the hedge rows, the pastoral forms, curling smoke rising from among the trees with a distant view of some gypsy tents or of some hermit's cave where by his fire the hermit sits alone.

iii) Lines 23rd to 56th bring out the impression that the landscape had on the poet after his first visit to the scene. He says that the recollection of the beautiful scene had given him get peace of mind in noisy towns and cities. The scene would often come back in his memory and exercise a three fold influence on his sensuous, moral and spiritual life. The heavy and very burden of the world of men ceased to exercise any painful pressure on him.

iv) the fourth section describes the development of Wordsworth's nature philosophy over the years. The first stage in the development of his attitude to nature was marked by a simple delight in freedom and open air. He found pleasure in roaming about in the midst of nature. He wandered wherever nature led him. He got delight in walking, bathing, basking and leaping in the lap of nature. His wanderings in the midst nature is described as 'animal movements' and the pleasure he enjoyed is called coarse pleasure'.

At the second stage his love of nature was purely physical. Nature then appealed to his senses. The external appearances of nature began to fill him with delight. He experienced an aching joy and dizzy rapture in his contact with nature. It was the outward, external and sensual beauty of nature that gave him joy and gladdened his heart.

The second stage of aching joys and dizzy raptures also came to an end. What happened was that his love of nature turned into a kind of religious love. His love of nature became linked with the love of man. He found music in the natural objects. In a way he felt homeliness in nature. He burst out in a different tone-

"..... 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,"

In the final stage, Wordsworth views nature as a philosopher. The poet now move on to a more reflective, moral and philosophic pleasure of maturity. His soul now sees the soul of nature. He perceives a divine presence in nature, which we call mystical pantheism. Nature is now the anchor of his thoughts. It is the guide and guardian of his emotions. It is the soul of his moral being. the poet says that nature is -

"The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul of all my model being."

V) In the last part of the poem Wordsworth pays a glowing tribute to his sister Dorothy. He says to Dorothy, "Nature never did betray the heart that lover her". He advises her to submit herself completed to naturally influences because nature has a purifying ennobling and elevating effect on man and leads him from joy to joy. He calls himself a worshipper of nature and urges Dorothy to developed an intimacy with nature because the sweet memories of the intimacy with nature will be a comfort to her in the misfortunes and troubles of life. Wordsworth here stresses the educated value of the intimacy with nature when one passes through mental depression.

**Construction:** The poem is a super creation of William Wordsworth and its shows his mastery over language. The poem contains a stream of warm poetic feelings whose flow is spontaneous. The imagery of the poem consist of striking vision. It presents the picture before the mind. The poem is written in blank verse. The the metre in the longest lines is iambic pentameter. The verses are highly rhythmic, but marked by a variety of harmonious rhythms. The combination of blank verse and rhythm is an exquisite creation of Wordsworth. The use ordinary words, simple style keeps the readers engaged till the end.

### Conclusion

So, the poem "Tintern Abbey" presents before the reader an exquisite experience of William Wordsworth that he had 5 years back and after 5 years. It seems the scene is before us. Most important of all, the development of Wordsworth's mind expressed here in four stages is the experience every man gets throughout in his life. His address to dorothy is the experience one gets in the midst of nature. The construction of the poem, the use of blank verse, rhythm, diction etc. touch the heart of every people. It bears a clear evidence as to why the publication of "Lyrical Ballads" is taken by many as the beginning of Romanticism in English Literature.

### References

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