

Tintern Abbey by William Wordsworth: Summary and Critical Analysis

The poem Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey is generally known as Tintern Abbey written in 1798 by the father of Romanticism William Wordsworth. Tintern Abbey is one of the triumphs of Wordsworth's genius. It may be called a condensed spiritual autobiography of the poet. It deals with the subjective experiences of the poet, and traces the growth of his mind through different periods of his life. Nature and its influence on the poet in various stages forms the main theme of the poem. The poem deals with the influence of Nature on the boy, the growing youth, and the man. The poet has expressed his tender feeling towards nature.

He has specially recollected his poetic idea of Tintern Abbey where he had gone first time in 1793. This is his second visit to this place. Wordsworth has expressed his intense faith in nature.

There is Wordsworth's realization of God in nature. He got sensuous delight in it and it is all in all to him. Tintern Abbey impressed him most when he had first visited this place. He has again come to the same place where there are lofty cliffs, the plots of cottage ground, orchards groves and copses. He is glad to see again hedgerows, sportive wood, pastoral farms and green doors. This lonely place, the banks of the river and rolling waters from the mountain springs present a beautiful panoramic light. The solitary place reminds the poet of vagrant dwellers and hermits' cave.

The poem is in five sections. The first section establishes the setting for the meditation. But it emphasizes the passage of time: five years have passed, five summers, five long winters... But when the poet is back to this place of natural beauty and serenity, it is still essentially the same. The poem opens with a slow, dragging rhythm and the repetition of the word 'five' all designed to emphasize the weight of time which has separated the poet from this scene. The following lines develop a clear, visual picture of the scene. The view presented is a blend of wildness and order. He can see the entirely natural cliffs and waterfalls; he can see the hedges around the fields of the people; and he can see wreaths of smoke probably coming from some hermits making fire in their cave hermitages. These images evoke not only a pure nature as one might expect, they evoke a life of the common people in harmony with the nature.

The second section begins with the meditation. The poet now realizes that these 'beauteous' forms have always been with him, deep-seated in his mind, wherever he went. This vision has been "Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" that is. It has affected his whole being. They were not absent from his mind like form the mind of a man born blind. In hours of weariness, frustration and anxiety, these things of nature used to make him feel sweet sensations in his very blood, and he used to feel it at the level of the impulse (heart) rather than in his waking consciousness and through reasoning. From this point onward Wordsworth begins to consider the sublime of nature, and his mystical awareness becomes clear. Wordsworth's idea was that human beings are naturally uncorrupted.

The poet studies nature with open eyes and imaginative mind. He has been the lover of nature from the core of his heart, and with purer mind. He feels a sensation of love for nature in his blood. He feels high pleasure and deep power of joy in natural objects. The beatings of his heart are full of the fire of nature's love. He concentrates attention to Sylvan Wye – a majestic and worth seeing river. He is

reminded of the pictures of the past visit and ponders over his future years. On his first visit to this place he bounded over the mountains by the sides of the deep rivers and the lovely streams. In the past the soundings haunted him like a passion. The tall rock, the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood were then to him like an appetite. But that time is gone now. In nature he finds the sad music of humanity.

The third section contains a kind of doubt; the poet is probably reflecting the reader's possible doubts so that he can go on to justify how he is right and what he means. He doubts, for just a moment, whether this thought about the influence of the nature is vain, but he can't go on. He exclaims: "yet, oh! How often, amid the joyless daylight, fretful and unprofitable fever of the world have I turned to thee (nature)" for inspiration and peace of mind. He thanks the 'Sylvan Wye' for the everlasting influence it has imprinted on his mind; his spirit has very often turned to this river for inspiration when he was losing the peace of mind or the path and meaning of life. The river here becomes the symbol of spirituality.

Though the poet has become serious and perplexed in the fourth section the nature gives him courage and spirit enough to stand there with a sense of delight and pleasure. This is so typical of Wordsworth that it seems he can't write poetry without recounting his personal experiences, especially those of his childhood. Here he also begins from the earliest of his days! It was first the coarse pleasures in his 'boyish days', which have all gone by now. "That time is past and all its aching joys are now no more, and all its dizzy raptures". But the poet does not mourn for them; he doesn't even grumble about their loss. Clearly, he has gained something in return: "other gifts have followed; for such loss... for I have learnt to look on nature, not as in the hour of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity". This is a philosophic statement about maturing, about the development of personality, and of the poetic or philosophic mind as well. So now the poet is able to feel a joy of elevated thought, a sense sublime, and far more deeply interfused. He feels a sense of sublime and the working of a supreme power in the light of the setting sun, in round oceans and in the blue sky. He is of opinion that a motion and a spirit impel all thinking things. Therefore Wordsworth claims that he is a lover of the meadows and of all which we see from this green earth. Nature is a nurse, a guide and the guardian of his heart and soul. The poet comes to one important conclusion: for all the formative influences, he is now consciously in love with the nature. He has become a thoughtful lover of the meadows, the woods and the mountains. Though his ears and eyes seem to create the other half of all these sensations, the nature is the actual source of these sublime thoughts.

The fifth and last section continues with the same meditation from where the poet addresses his younger sister Dorothy, whom he blesses and gives advice about what he has learnt. He says that he can hear the voice of his own youth when he hears her speak, the language of his former heart; he can also "read my former pleasure in the soothing lights of thy wild eyes'. He is excited to look at his own youthful image in her. He says that nature has never betrayed his heart and that is why they had been living from joy to joy. Nature can impress the mind with quietness and beauty, and feed it lofty thoughts, that no evil tongues of the human society can corrupt their hearts with any amount of contact with it.

The poet then begins to address the moon in his reverie, and to ask the nature to bestow his sister

with their blessings. Let the moon shine on her solitary walk, and let the mountain winds blow their breeze on her. When the present youthful ecstasies are over, as they did with him, let her mind become the palace of the lovely forms and thought about the nature, so that she can enjoy and understand life and overcome the vexations of living in a harsh human society. The conclusion to the poem takes us almost cyclically, back to a physical view of the 'steep woods', 'lofty cliffs' and 'green pastoral landscape' in which the meditation of the poem is happening.

The poet has expressed his honest and natural feelings to Nature's Superiority. The language is so simple and lucid that one is not tired of reading it again and again. The sweetness of style touches the heart of a reader. The medium of this poem is neither ballad nor lyric but an elevated blank verse. The blank verse that is used in it is low-toned, familiar, and moves with sureness, serenity and inevitable ease. It has the quiet pulse, suggestive of 'central peace', which is felt in all his great poetry. This is the beauty of Wordsworth's language.