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A Critical Study of Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey as a Healing Prayer

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Abstract

William Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798), commonly known as Tintern Abbey, is one of the most celebrated poems of English Romanticism. The poem is often interpreted as a spiritual meditation that elevates nature to the status of a sacred, healing force. Through this paper I want to discuss Tintern Abbey as a healing prayer—a poem filled with poetic utterance that combines the healing effects of gratitude, reflection, and intercession on human being. Wordsworth invokes nature as a divine presence that restores human consciousness, grants moral strength, and provides transcendental solace in times of despair. Tintern Abbey is a poem of self-disclosure. It does not follow the qualities of a traditional religious prayer, but it bears all the qualities of a prayer which include reverence, thanksgiving, memory and blessing. Tintern Abbey can be called a literary prayer that speaks in volumes to the universal human desire for connection, healing, and hope while also being in alignment with Romantic notions of natural spirituality through his own thoughts and his impassioned letter to his sister Dorothy. This paper examines the healing effect of Tintern Abbey different perspectives like Wordsworth's love and care for Dorothy, the serenity and blissfulness of the landscape, the hymns of thankfulness, spiritual effect of nature etc. This research presents Tintern Abbey as a timeless spiritual work, a healing prayer that still speaks to its readers who are looking for solace in their relationship with nature in different ways.

Key words: *Gratitude, Prayer, Healer, Spirituality, Meditation.*

Introduction

Wordsworth's passion for all aspects and objects of Nature is evident in most of his literary works. But he is not concerned with the sensuous manifestations of nature which give delight to his other counterparts rather he finds pleasure in the spiritual and healing effects of Nature. As Arthur Compton-Rickett writes in his book *A History of English Literature*, "It was Wordsworth's aim as a poet to seek for beauty in meadow, woodland, and the mountain top, and to interpret this beauty in spiritual terms." Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* was first published in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, with its focus on simplicity, nature, and human emotion. The main purpose of *Lyrical Ballads* was to shift poetry away from artificiality of Neo-classical

Age toward genuine human experience. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth presents his mature vision of nature and poetic philosophy. While the poem outwardly describes a physical setting—the ruins of the Abbey and the surrounding landscape—its deeper concern lies in nature’s profound influence on the human soul. Wordsworth himself said about Tintern Abbey, “No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days, with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it was written down till I reached Bristol.” Wordsworth treats nature as a sacred presence that grants serenity, inspiration, and moral direction. Structurally, the poem resembles prayer. It opens with remembrance, feelings of gratitude, contemplation, and ends with a blessing. In this sense, *Tintern Abbey* transcends not only description of scenery but also becomes a spiritual invocation that elevates the human mind toward communion with Nature. This prayer-like quality of this poem reflects the Romantic tendency of merging religious and aesthetic experiences into one for providing healing effects on human souls. For Wordsworth, nature embodied a divine essence—“a motion and a spirit that impels / All thinking things.” This paper examines *Tintern Abbey* as a healing prayer with different perspectives. These perspectives include Nature as a spiritual healer, as a hymn of gratitude, the serenity and piousness of the surrounding landscape, role of memory and imagination as prayerful practices, and Wordsworth’s protective attitude and prayer for his sister Dorothy. By weaving together Romantic thought, literary criticism, and theological insights, the study shows how Wordsworth creates a prayer that transcends religious boundaries, offering healing and solace to the modern reader.

Role of Nature as Spiritual Healer

It is *Tintern Abbey* where we see Wordsworth as a ‘worshipper of Nature’ and his romantic passion for Nature for the first time. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth gives us highly emotional descriptions of the effects of the outer world upon his own inner world. Believing in the restorative power of Nature he writes the opening lines of *Tintern Abbey*, and he recalls his return to the abbey after five years. The physical beauty of the scene is described in tranquil, prayer-like cadences: “The day comes when I again repose / Here, under this dark sycamore.” Yet Wordsworth immediately shifts his attention from the physical world to the spiritual, by describing that the memory of this place has provided him with healing effects during times of despair:

“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.”

Here, Wordsworth recalls the healing power of Nature through memory of older days. The poet revisits the Wye after a long gap of five years, but he feels that such a long absence does not seem to have faded out his memories related with these beautiful forms of Nature. These forms of Nature have been a constant source of comfort to him and have restored him during his stay amid the noise of towns and cities. Just as prayer provides solace and feelings of peace to worshippers when they are away from a sacred space, the memories of Tintern Abbey provides the same kind of healing effects to Wordsworth when he is away from the wye. He views nature as an active force which works as a healer of human tiredness and a bringer of peace amid life’s turbulence in the peoples’ lives. For the poet, this healing touches both his mind as well as the spirit too. Wordsworth feels that the beauty of the landscape not only calms down his thoughts but also works as stimulus for him to his kind and empathetic deeds. he feels a deep connection to an eternal presence—“a motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things.” This experience resembles mystical prayer, a state of communion with the Divine. In this way, poet clearly declares the reality of his life that whenever he feels oppressed by the meaningless business of the world, he takes shelter in the ever-sustaining and ever-calming memories of the beautiful landscapes of the Wye.

A Hymn of Gratitude

Like a traditional prayer of thanksgiving, *Tintern Abbey* expresses deep gratitude. Wordsworth acknowledges the blessings he has received from nature, recognizing its role in shaping his moral and emotional life. He thanks nature for providing “tranquil restoration,” for tempering his passions, and for fostering in him a sense of humility and reverence. In a particularly prayer-like passage, he declares:

“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,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.”

As the main theme of the poem is the poet's relationship with Nature and his indebtedness to her, so we can say that most parts of Wordsworth as a poet of Nature comes from Tintern Abbey where he recounts the various ways of Nature in influencing him and bringing peace and tranquility of mind even in his most noisy days of the city life. Here, Wordsworth offers an inventory of gratitude that resembles a litany of praise. Nature works for the poet in many ways: as an anchor, as a nurse, as a guide, a guardian of morality and spirituality. The tone of this poem is devotional with all the effects of a psalm to the natural world. This poem works as a hymn of gratitude which reflects Romanticism's reconstruction of religion. For Wordsworth, divine presence is not confined to church rituals or doctrines only but is found in the living landscape of Nature. For the poet gratitude to nature becomes an act of worship, an acknowledgment of the sacredness and divinity embedded in the world.

The Sacredness of Landscape

The serenity and calming effect of the Wye valley help the poet to heal inwardly as well as outwardly. The poem begins by carefully sketching physical features of the Wye Valley. He highlights the “steep and lofty cliffs,” the orchards and hedgerows, the pastoral farms, and the winding river that gives the valley its charm. The cottages, half-hidden in the greenery, add to the picturesque quality of the setting, harmonizing human life with the wildness of nature. This interplay between the cultivated and the untamed reflects a central Romantic theme of blending humanity with nature in mutual dependence. The natural imagery is presented with remarkable calmness. Wordsworth avoids dramatic or sublime descriptions of violent storms or terrifying

mountains, focusing instead on a quiet, pastoral charm. The landscape appears serene, harmonious, and timeless, conveying a sense of permanence that comforts the poet.

What makes this landscape particularly significant for Wordsworth is not merely its visual beauty but its lasting presence in memory. He recalls that in the five years since his first visit, the memory of this scenery has brought him solace in moments of "lonely rooms, and 'mid the din / Of towns and cities." This suggests that the landscape is not bound by geography or time but exists as a mental refuge. The remembered landscape becomes a source of "tranquil restoration" for the poet. It allows him to rise above the weariness and moral corruption of urban life. Thus, the Wye Valley serves not only as a physical location but also as a spiritual landscape preserved in the imagination.

The Divine Effect of Memory and Imagination as Prayer

Since Tintern Abbey has been called a poem of self-disclosure, memory and imagination plays a very significant role in it and to understand it completely, attention must be paid to Wordsworth and his feelings for his sister Dorothy. Robert Langbaum in his book *The Poetry of Experience* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1957) acknowledges, "The poem is...about the dissociation of sensibility from thought and their reintegration. Having had to abandon his childhood intuitions for the sake of thought, and having had abandon thought when he would recover (as in his last visit) an emotional response to nature, the poet has now managed to bind his days together, to see in his childhood intuitions the origin of his moral ideas and to find both in his unified response to external scene." Therefore, Wordsworth is still, despite the evolution of his thought, a 'lover of the meadows and the woods', being 'well pleased to recognize; he concludes in the final lines of the main section of the poem,

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 moral being.

With biographical point of view, the poem is very important, because it stands as the poet's own testimony to the changes in his feelings and in his outlook since he first visited Wye five years ago. In this connection F.W. Bateson observes: "In terms of Wordsworth's mental

evolution the importance of 'Tintern Abbey' is that it records his discovery that 'the mighty world of eye and ear' is half created in the process of perception. The discovery had implications that have not always been realized." In this poem memory and imagination work as healing agents which gives solace and comfort to the poet.

A Prayer for Dorothy

Tintern Abbey is personal in feeling, but unlike Lucy poems, it is quite openly and specifically clear about who it is personal about. It clearly addresses Wordsworth's sister Dorothy as 'my dear, dear sister'. Indeed, Tintern Abbey is Wordsworth's poem to Dorothy in the same way as The Prelude is his poem to Coleridge.

"It is no accident that 'Tintern Abbey' ends with the famous tribute to Dorothy Wordsworth. In this 'dear, dear Sister' Wordsworth seemed to have found the resolution of his psychological contradictions. She was his link with humanity, the one human being from whom he had no secrets or reservations, and she was also at this time at just the same stage of ecstatic connoisseurship of natural beauty that he looked back to so regretfully in his own adolescences:

in thy voice i catch

The language of my former heart...

Through this prayer-like blessing Wordsworth tells Dorothy the healing power of memory associated with Nature. Further he elaborates that his prayer is not only for her comfort but also for her spiritual growth.

Critical Perspectives

Scholars have long debated the religious dimension of *Tintern Abbey*. Some see it as a secular meditation, others as a substitute for traditional Christianity. Yet most agree that the poem carries a spiritual intensity that resembles prayer. M.H. Abrams, in *Natural Supernaturalism*, argues that Romanticism reinterprets religious structures into secular or natural forms. Wordsworth's prayer to nature is one such reinterpretation. Geoffrey Hartman also observes that Wordsworth sacralizes the natural world, creating a "religion of the imagination." From an eco-critical perspective, *Tintern Abbey* may be seen as an early articulation of ecological spirituality. By treating nature as sacred, Wordsworth anticipates modern environmental ethics, which view the natural world not as a resource to exploit but as a sacred reality to revere and

protect. The poem thus functions not only as a personal prayer but also as a collective call to honor the healing power of the earth.

Conclusion

Tintern Abbey is a landmark in English poetry because it elevates personal experience into universal meditation. Read as a healing prayer, the poem embodies all the essential qualities of prayer: reverence, thanksgiving, reflection, and blessing. Through this poem, Wordsworth gives us a clear indication of the healing effects of nature. He further says that we should not focus to pray or seek God in Church or any other religious places but we should focus on the Divine presence manifested through the various forms of nature. *Tintern Abbey* reminds us that nature remains a constant source of healing, solace, and spiritual renewal and its effect is not just as a poem about a place but as a poem with transcendent features of a prayer for wholeness with effects of hymn of healing. It becomes a constant reminder to human beings that nature remains forever humanity's truest and most intimate spiritual companion.

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