

## FORMS OF BEAUTY, LOOPS OF TIME: WORDSWORTH'S 'TINTERN ABBEY'

### I

'Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798'<sup>1</sup> (to give the poem its first, fashionably long and low-key, title, altered by one significant word for later editions), was first published as the concluding poem of the anonymous *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798. 'Tintern Abbey' (to accept the established but misleading short title; the picturesque ruins are nowhere mentioned, and 'a few miles above' may bear a more than geographical meaning)<sup>2</sup> has become an anthology piece. Like some other monuments in the history of English literature, it is a poem everybody has read but few are found reading; at least, reading closely. When it appeared, it must have seemed less imposing. Of the nine reviewers of the 1798 volume, only two commented upon it.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it was seen as less challenging than most of the other poems, the dramatic 'experiments' such as 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill' and 'The Thorn', which would, Wordsworth warned 'readers of superior judgment', lead them 'to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness'. It may have been thought of, simply, as in comparison conventional (rather than exploiting convention); and so not considered as both showing the purpose of the 'experiments' and, in its exploration of human continuity and love in nature and in time, balancing and opposing the theme of isolation from God's nature and mortal time in 'The Ancycnt Marinere', the volume's opening poem.

Even the two reviewers who did notice 'Tintern Abbey' did not regard it as a subtle and careful whole. Southey wrote, grandly but vaguely, 'In the whole range of English poetry, we scarcely recollect anything superior to a part of the following passage ...'. He quoted over forty lines, from 'And so I dare to hope ...' to '... Of all my moral being'. Presumably he did so in order to draw attention to the 'part', or apparent set piece (which many readers take to be the highth of Wordsworth's great argument), 'I have felt A presence ... And rolls through

<sup>1</sup> Quotations are from the 1798 text, as in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads 1798*, ed. W.J.B. Owen, Oxford, 1967, pp. 111-17. (The 1798 text has one line more than the later version usually printed, due to the contraction of ll. 13-15 in 1845.)

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth himself referred to 'the poem on the Wye', and 'On Revisiting the Wye'.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Mayo, 'The Contemporaneity of the *Lyrical Ballads*', in *Wordsworth: Lyrical Ballads* (Casebook series), ed. A.R. Jones and W. Tydeman, London, 1972, p. 85 (repr. from *PMLA*, LXIX, 1954).

all things'. Dr. Burney grumblingly acknowledged 'the reflections of no common mind' but thought the poem 'somewhat tintured with gloomy, narrow, and unsociable ideas of seclusion from the commerce of the world; as if men were born to live in woods and wilds, unconnected with each other'.<sup>4</sup> His anti-social, Rousseauesque reading suggests that Dr. Burney had jumped from early lines to the passage portraying youth's thoughtless response to 'The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood', ignoring the way the poem contains and qualifies such primitivism.

Different as the two reviews are, both support picturesque and 'romantic' responses to 'Tintern Abbey'. They show too what has been a persistent tendency, to isolate seeming 'key passages' and 'ideas' of the poem (and sometimes to couple them with aspects of its supposed history) in order to retain it within a familiar genre and an identifiable philosophy. This has led some criticism to simplification and distortion. It is only comparatively recently that the questions begged by Southey, Dr. Burney, and the seven silent reviewers – of the kind, or kinds, of poem 'Tintern Abbey' is, or involves; of its affinities with contemporary and 'transition' poetry; and of its place in the development of Wordsworth's earlier thought and art – have been taken up closely and together.

'Tintern Abbey' is still seen widely as a markedly different, suddenly inspired and hurriedly written postscript to the 1798 volume, bearing its own loosely attached and somewhat embarrassing postscript of compliment to Dorothy Wordsworth, 'My dear, dear Sister'. At the same time the major part of the poem is put forward as a convenient paradigm of either Wordsworth's 'nature worship' or of his submission to the conventions of the picturesque. Thus, his alleged feat of gestating the poem in his head while trudging fifty or more miles up and down the Wye valley with Dorothy in tow (and then, having jotted it down on the evening of his return to Bristol, never changing a line), evidence of the hurried and inspired writing, seems to have remained unquestioned. Indeed, it is held to support the claim, made in the later Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'; just as nature worship would appear an appropriate 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'.

Wordsworth of course recognised, and indeed drew attention to, the poem's differences from its companions in both language and kind. In the 1800 edition he added a note to explain that although it was not an ode, 'it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition'. (Coleridge underlined this years later in the *Biographia Literaria*, using phrases which seem to echo, and so endorse, Wordsworth's note.)<sup>5</sup> But none of this means that 'Tin-

<sup>4</sup> Passages from these reviews are given conveniently in Jones and Tydeman, *op. cit.*, although the Southey extract is a little misleading in that it does not show that he quotes at length.

<sup>5</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols., Oxford, 1907; I, 50-1, twice stresses the 'higher' style of 'Tintern Abbey', and at II, 6, it is distinguished as 'one of the two or three poems written in his own character, in the impassioned, lofty and sustained diction, which is characteristic of his genius'.

tern Abbey' is unrelated to the 1798 volume's concerns. It does not, however, sound like a description of an extempore production. The unlikelihood of such a feat of muscular aesthetics seems almost self-evident, once one bears in mind both the length and the complexity of the poem. (Nor can one think the walk would have met the condition of tranquillity, what with problems about a volume already in press, little or no money, and a trip to Germany to be managed.)

The evidence for the feat comes from circumstantial reconstructions which have followed on Wordsworth's own recollections from over forty years afterwards. In the notes dictated to Isabella Fenwick in 1842, he said the poem was 'composed' during the walk, and 'Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol. It was published almost immediately after ...'. Similarly, the Duke of Argyle reported in 1848 Wordsworth's remark that he had taken the four days of the walk to compose the poem, which was written in 1798.<sup>6</sup> Wordsworth's long term memory has been questioned in other matters, though, if not in this; and there is some evidence to suggest that over the years, he was confusing one walk with another he had taken a while earlier.<sup>7</sup> Certainly it is not true that nothing was ever altered after the poem was written down (which has been taken to be his meaning), for there were at least five detail alterations to the text, from the Errata included with the 1798 edition to the edition of 1845. Probably the most important of these alterations was to line 24, which read 'forms of beauty' up to 1827; the emphasis is weakened in the later 'beauteous forms'. What remains interesting in the recollections from the 1840s is that both accounts use the word 'compose', which may mean, simply, bring together. When Wordsworth modified the title, for publication from 1800 on, it was to 'Lines Composed ...'. What was thus composed had (I will suggest) been occupying his thoughts for some time. The conventional application of 'spontaneous overflow' overlooks this. (It is more likely, as has been argued recently,<sup>8</sup> that 'spontaneous' means 'voluntary', or 'without constraint', a meaning found in eighteenth century dictionaries, in Hobbes, and in Hume.) It overlooks, too, the Preface's important qualification: 'though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply'.<sup>9</sup>

As for the view that the poem chiefly exemplifies nature worship, spontaneous or not, it is worth quoting here Wordsworth's rejoinder to a lady who praised the poet's worship of nature to a mutual friend. He replied sternly, 'A passionate

<sup>6</sup> *Poetical Works*, 5 vols., ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire, rev. ed. Oxford, 1952-59, II, 517. Cp. Owen, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Little, '“Tintern Abbey” and Llyswen Farm', *The Wordsworth Circle*, VIII (1977), i, 80-82.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Magnuson, 'Wordsworth and Spontaneity', in *The Evidence of the Imagination*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, Michael C. Jay, and Betty T. Bennett, New York, 1978, pp. 101-18.

<sup>9</sup> *Poetical Works*, II, 387-8.

expression, uttered incautiously in the poem upon the Wye, has led her into this mistake'.<sup>10</sup>

In the attempt to keep 'Tintern Abbey' within familiar literary and philosophical bounds, the body of critical discussion has settled into recognisable, sometimes overlapping, positions. Some readers, focussing on Southey's 'part', have taken the spontaneous, lyrical-inspirationist position, seeing the poem as Wordsworth's dedication to nature (rather than to the 'still, sad music of humanity') and soaring, as one judgment has it, to a 'eucharistic pantheism'. Others, noting features of the first verse paragraph, see the landscape contemplated as a *paysage moralisé*, and the poem as an exercise in the related picturesque, topographical, or prospect modes; its literary lineage going back to the large number of such poems in the eighteenth century, and its nature defined by such touchstones as Pope's *Windsor Forest*, Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, and (with more relevance, surely) Cowper's *The Task*.

Such positions seem to have located, in turn, the terms of the occasional adverse criticism. It has been suggested disapprovingly that the landscape is naturalistic, lacking in relationship between object and emotion, even 'inert'. It has been said too, apparently following at a little distance after Dr. Burney, that the poem suffers from the 'sad perplexity' it names; that it is at a distance from reality ('Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken From half of human fate' again), and that it defies probability and contains concessions to irrationality. Behind each of these stern reservations the curious student will find lurking the vocabulary of a particular critical school.

It is only in comparatively recent discussions that the poem's place among what Abrams has called the 'greater Romantic lyrics' and its structural – or better, tactical – relationship to the later eighteenth century meditative-confessional poem, to Coleridge's so-called 'conversation poems' (it has even been claimed as Coleridge's major work), and to contemporary magazine poetry, has been explored, interestingly although not I think fully. And it is only recently that 'Tintern Abbey' has been compared in detail with Wordsworth's other major work (despite the fashion of calling it a *Prelude* in miniature), to discover its deep concern with the nature of love 'in relationship either with one's surroundings, or with another human being'.<sup>11</sup>

In that last comment, it is the alternative which is unsettling. Other positions I have characterised briefly are more clearly in conflict; one feels that what Gérard called, a few years ago, a 'whirlpool of interpretive contradiction' has not been stilled.<sup>12</sup> In the remainder of this paper I wish to take up the discussion in two ways; neither in itself wholly new, but together perhaps reaching a little way towards critical resolution. The first is to sketch in considerations to show that the

<sup>10</sup> *Letters: the Middle Years*, 2 vols. rev. ed. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, Oxford, 1969, 1970, II, 188. (The offending lady was Patty Smith.)

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity*, London, 1969, pp. 257-8.

<sup>12</sup> A. Gérard, *English Romantic Poetry*, London and California, 1968, p. 94.

poem was not merely not 'spontaneous' (in the senses both of unrelated to literary convention, and of extempore) but that it drew positively upon its literary context. 'Tintern Abbey' is a poem of imitation in that strong sense. But it should be related also, not only to Wordsworth's other major work of the period, but to his notebook jottings, including in particular some fragments of blank verse written in the earlier months of 1798. The poem was turning and taking shape in his mind for some months, and possibly longer, before being 'composed' into its 1798 form; he had thought 'long and deeply'.

Second, and principally, I offer a reading of the poem as a whole (rather than of variously preferred passages) which values but places the spontaneity of 'thoughtless youth'. The prospect which opens out from the first verse paragraph becomes one of time as well as place. The 'forms of beauty' of the landscape become 'the language of the sense', speaking of awareness of man, in nature and in time. It is only when Wordsworth fears, and loses touch with, this 'organic sensibility', that the poem falters; and at one point is flawed in a way which all but separates its 'philosophical' assertion from its achievement as poetry.

## II

The general manner and the scenes of the poems of *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798 had popular precedents in the magazine verse of the 1790s which would have been familiar to Wordsworth and to some of his readers, as Mayo has shown convincingly. He brings together an impressive list of poems superficially similar to 'Tintern Abbey', from title on. Among his examples are 'Verses Written on Visiting the Ruins of Dunkeswell-Abbey, in Devonshire, by Miss Hunt', from the *Edinburgh Magazine* in 1793, and 'Sonnet Written in Tintern Abbey, Monmouthshire', from the *European Magazine* in 1796 (both of which prompt reflection on the exactness of Wordsworth's title). One cannot resist adding another title given, 'An Evening's Reflection on the Universe, in a Walk on the Seashore', from the *Literary Magazine and British Review* in 1790. Mayo remarks:

Although ['Tintern Abbey'], with its particular set of values and methods of expression, must surely be recognised as a seminal poem in the literary revolution which is traced to 1798, it must have seemed in its day far from revolutionary .... Regarded solely in terms of the modes of eighteenth-century topographical poetry, surely 'Tintern Abbey' is one of the most conventional poems in the whole volume.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Mayo, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6 and 113-14.

Abrams has given further examples of such verse from the 1720s on, although of course in these cases the similarities are looser.<sup>14</sup> To these, another contemporary example should be added, which has recently been noted by Hunt.<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Smith's long topographical blank verse poem *The Emigrants* (1793) has as the scene of Book I, 'On the Cliffs to the Eastward of the town of Bright-helmstone in Sussex. TIME, a morning in November 1792'. Book II takes its prospect from 'on an Eminence' of the South Downs the following April. As with Wordsworth's full title and some of the titles Mayo lists, cumbrousness seems to have been accepted as a proper and fashionable price for exactly specified points of departure in time and place. Such specification is important in 'Tintern Abbey'. Charlotte Smith's poem shows a number of verbal anticipations which are pointed out by Hunt (although perhaps not all are as close as he suggests) and a superficially similar, although of course much longer, reflective movement. More importantly the poem has, as Hunt suggests, the Wordsworthian assumption that the personal experience of the poet is inherently worth communicating.

Behind *The Emigrants*, and similar poems, lies Cowper's *The Task* (1785), often a much more relaxed and personal poem than Hunt and others have allowed in making the comparison. *The Task*, which can be mined richly for Coleridge's 'conversation poems', seems to me to have contributed significantly to Wordsworth. Book I, in particular, anticipates both the diction and the assured personal voice of 'Tintern Abbey' in certain passages. There is a modulation, which both Wordsworth and Coleridge would have appreciated, from the self-mocking mannerism of 'The Sofa suits The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb, Though on a Sofa, may I never feel', to a direct and detailed response to the natural world:

For I have loved the rural walk through lanes  
Of grassy swarth, close cropt by nibbling sheep,  
And skirted thick with intertexture firm  
Of thorny boughs; have lov'd the rural walk  
O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,  
E'er since a truant boy I pass'd my bounds  
T' enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames;  
And still remember, nor without regret  
Of hours that sorrow since has much endear'd,  
How oft, my slice of pocket store consum'd,  
Still hung'ring, pennyless and far from home,

<sup>14</sup> M.H. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. F.W. Hilles and H. Bloom, London and New York, 1965. (Abrams refers to R.A. Aubin, *Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England*, New York, 1936, and E.R. Wasserman, 'Nature Moralized: the Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century', *ELH*, XX, 39-76, in his discussion.)

<sup>15</sup> Bishop C. Hunt, Jr., 'Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith', *The Wordsworth Circle*, I (1970), iii, 85-103.

I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws,  
 On blushing crabs, or berries, that emboss  
 The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere.

This should not be dismissed as tame Wordsworth. Run-on lines like 'intertexture firm Of thorny boughs' and 'berries, that emboss The bramble', are Wordsworthian locutions and precisions. The passage looks to the dizzier feelings of 'The coarser pleasures of my boyish days, And their glad animal movements', recalled across 'hours of weariness'. Memory of what is past, not 'without regret Of hours [of] sorrow', or with regret for what has intervened, is part of 'Tintern Abbey'. And closely following in Cowper are lines which relate to the last verse paragraph of 'Tintern Abbey', the prayer to Dorothy, and enable us to appreciate its place in the whole poem. They must be quoted at length.

And witness, dear companion of my walks,  
 Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive  
 Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure such as love,  
 Confirm'd by long experience of thy worth  
 And well-tried virtues, could alone inspire –  
 Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.  
 Thou know'st my praise of nature most sincere,  
 And that my raptures are not conjur'd up  
 To serve occasions of poetic pomp,  
 But genuine, and art partner of them all.  
 How oft upon yon eminence our pace  
 Has slacken'd to a pause, and we have borne  
 The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
 While admiration, feeding at the eye,  
 And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.  
 Thence with what pleasure have we just discern'd  
 The distant plough slow moving, and beside  
 His lab'ring team, that swerv'd not from the track,  
 The sturdy swain diminish'd to a boy!  
 Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain  
 Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkl'd o'er,  
 Conducts the eye along its sinuous course  
 Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,  
 Stand, never overlook'd, our fav'rite elms,  
 That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;  
 While far beyond, and overthwart the stream  
 That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,  
 The sloping land recedes into the clouds;

Displaying on its varied side the grace  
 Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tow'r,  
 Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
 Just undulates upon the list'ning ear,  
 Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.  
 Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,  
 Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
 Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years.<sup>16</sup>

Here is the 'dear, dear Sister' with whom Wordsworth 'stood together', whose long love shares in the unbetraying love of nature; nature which, unadorned with what Cowper would call 'poetic pomp', leads to love of man in harmony with a landscape 'More dear ... for thy sake'. The closing lines of 'Tintern Abbey' return to the opening prospect of hedgerows, groves, wooded land, and wreathes of smoke, all of which are in Cowper; return to these 'forms of beauty' which in Cowper's words 'survive ... the scrutiny of years', and in Wordsworth's sustain in absence and hold 'life and food For future years'. Wordsworth's use of the 'feeding' image is anticipated too in Cowper's 'admiration, feeding at the eye And still unsated'. And his 'lofty cliffs ... quiet of the sky' is foreshadowed by 'The sloping land recedes into the clouds'.

There are similar anticipations elsewhere in Book I of *The Task*; a cottage quite hidden in the woods which leads to dreams of tranquillity away from the jarring noises of the town; enclosures marked by hedges (which are distinguished from conventional prospects); a picture of London which, though closer perhaps to the London of the *Prelude*, still lies behind the 'fretful stir Unprofitable, and the fever of the world'. And elsewhere in *The Task* are suggestions of a 'presence' immanent in sun, sea, sky, and the mind of man (although for more timorous Cowper, presented as a more orthodox God).

Cowper had his reservations; at the end, he preferred to return to his sofa, fire, and pet hare. But he knew of the 'shifts and turns'<sup>17</sup> that poetry could deploy, and which Wordsworth and Coleridge would have found in him. Wordsworth thought Cowper one of the 'two great authors [the other was Burns] who, together with Percy's *Reliques*, had 'powerfully counteracted the mischievous influence of [Erasmus] Darwin's dazzling manner', and had kept his imagination free from extravagance. Cowper was one of his favourite poets because 'passionately fond of natural objects'.<sup>18</sup> Coleridge expressed similar praise.

Whether or not the influence of Cowper was as direct as the lines I have quoted would indicate, or whether it was mediated through Cowper's followers among

<sup>16</sup> *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. H.S. Milford, London, 1911, I, 106-22, 144-79. (The debt of 'Frost at Midnight' to IV, 267-98 is quite well known.)

<sup>17</sup> *The Task*, II, 285 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: a Biography*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1957 and 1965; I, *The Early Years*, pp. 74 and 100.



the poets listed by Mayo and others, cannot, I suppose, be answered absolutely. In any case it was surely from Coleridge that Wordsworth learned to renew and exploit the meditative landscape convention, to shape his material to the rhythmic movements of the searching mind. (In comparison, Cowper's 'shifts and turns' remain artfully and delightfully staged manoeuvres.) Indeed, Wordsworth went further in this way than Coleridge, in the sense that the expansions and returns in space and time in 'Tintern Abbey' are more complex.

Coleridge's characteristic poems in this mode go back at least to late 1795, to 'Shurton Bars',<sup>19</sup> and possibly earlier. These poems employ like images, often trivial in themselves and apparently associatively prompted one by another, which are structured into a poetic whole by the controlling imagination. Seemingly idle connections made by the relaxed consciousness are brought into unity. Thus there are the various points of light in 'Shurton Bars'; the apparently random sounds of the wind-harp in 'The Eolian Harp' (1796); the arched profile of the bower, and other arching images, leading to the over-arching sky at the end, in 'This Lime Tree Bower' (1797); the fleck of soot or 'stranger' in 'Frost at Midnight' (1798); the bird-song in 'The Nightingale' (1798). In 'Tintern Abbey' the musing mind is more self-conscious, and the unifying imagery, quietly developed from the opening landscape, less insistently casual.

From Coleridge Wordsworth absorbed too (although this may be in some ways less important), phrases, and facets of ideas. There are obvious resemblances between

The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself

from 'Frost at Midnight', and 'the language of the sense' and the less sure or precise 'presence ... far more deeply interfused' of 'Tintern Abbey'. But the idea of Omnipresence occurs from the earliest version of 'The Aeolian Harp' through to the elevated lines of 'This Lime Tree Bower':

all doth seem  
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues  
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes  
Spirits perceive his presence.

Common to Coleridge's various formulations of this is the idea of harmony in the creation, uniting man with man; 'This Lime Tree Bower' ends, 'No sound

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Little, ' "Shurton Bars": Coleridge's first Conversation Poem?', *Southern Review*, II (1966), ii, 137-49.

is dissonant which tells of life'. Such harmony, rather than a divinity, yields the informing and unifying images of 'Tintern Abbey'.

To turn now to aspects of Wordsworth's own closely preceding poetry: 'Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree', 'Old Man Travelling', and 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' are poems of 1795-7 which show a working towards 'Tintern Abbey' both in the relaxed movement of the blank verse and the reverence for man absorbed in, speaking with, nature. Passages of 'The Ruined Cottage' (the work which grew out of 'Salisbury Plain' and became in time the first book of *The Excursion*) show similar anticipations. In the version of March 1798 (that is, MS B of *The Excursion*), the Pedlar as a child did not fail 'To feed [his] appetite' upon 'all things which the rolling seasons brought', and sat 'in the hollow depths of naked crags'. Although as a child he did not feel 'the pure joy of love ... flowing from the universal face Of earth and sky', the 'power of nature' prepared him for that 'lesson deep'; a lesson which one 'Whom nature, by whatever means, has taught To feel intensely, cannot but receive'.<sup>20</sup> The whole passage seems to be a projection upon the Pedlar figure of what a few months later was to be expressed by the personal voice in the 'Tintern Abbey' meditation upon 'what I was, when first I came among these hills'. In a possible conclusion to 'The Ruined Cottage' (later made part of Book IV of *The Excursion*), Wordsworth remarked in his own voice, 'Not useless do I deem These quiet sympathies with things that hold An inarticulate language'; they lead the poet so that 'he cannot chuse But seek for objects of a kindred love In fellow-natures, and a kindred joy'. A little later, by contemplating 'these forms In the relations which they bear to man .... weariness will cease .... All things shall speak of man, and we shall read Our duties in all forms'.<sup>21</sup> Even such brief quotation shows the central concerns of 'Tintern Abbey' sketched out; the relation between the 'forms of beauty' of man in nature, and 'the language of the sense'.

There is a connected fragment which seems to have preceded the MS D version of *The Pedlar* and was later absorbed into the two-part *Prelude* of 1799 (and so into the 1805 and 1850 texts). It appears in the surviving pages of the Alfoxden Notebook, which Wordsworth was using late January – early March 1798.<sup>22</sup> The fragment contains 'the ghostly language of the ancient earth', valued beyond 'the intellectual life' for its persisting 'obscure sense Of possible sublimity'; again, 'the language of the sense'. Elsewhere in the Alfoxden Notebook (and one cannot resist speculation about what the pages torn from it may have contained) are passages evidently related to 'Tintern Abbey', some used later in the longer poems. One passage emphasises '... sympathy With nature in her forms inanimate'. Another, apparently relatively late, is:

<sup>20</sup> *Poetical Works*, V, 381-3 (Notes), ll. 94-118 passim.

<sup>21</sup> *Poetical Works*, V, 400-01, ll. 1-11, 24-37 passim.

<sup>22</sup> Michael C. Jaye, 'William Wordsworth's Alfoxden Notebook: 1798', in *The Evidence of the Imagination*, pp. 42-85, gives a full account of the Notebook and transcriptions from it.

I lived without the knowledge that I lived  
 Then by those beauteous forms brought back again  
 To lose myself again as if my life  
 Did ebb and flow with a strange mystery

One remarks 'beauteous forms', and the emphatic 'again', repeated in 'Tintern Abbey' in the opening lines.

Some other fragmentary lines should be noted, these written on the verso of a loose sheet bearing a draft of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and pre-dating 'Tintern Abbey' (although perhaps not as early as 1795, as de Selincourt has suggested):

Yet once again do I behold the forms  
 Of these huge mountains, and yet once again,  
 Standing beneath these elms, I hear thy voice,  
 Beloved Derwent, that peculiar voice  
 Heard in the stillness of the evening air,  
 Half-heard and half-created.<sup>23</sup>

Exchange huge mountains for steep and lofty cliffs, elms for dark sycamore, Derwent for Wye, and one has the opening lines of 'Tintern Abbey', with their carefully specified point of view, their stillness, the 'forms', and the calculated repetition. The last line holds the echo of Young's *Night Thoughts* used, and noted, later in the poem.

### III

'Tintern Abbey' begins in the manner, almost ostentatiously with the formula, of the prospect. From the elevation, the literally heightened perspective the early lines (and the title) imply, 'Once again Do I behold ...'. The landscape observed, the fields, orchards, and woods spread below, seemingly inhabited only by gypsies or by a hermit, does at first correspond to the picturesque expectation. It has been suggested, by F.W. Bateson, that the hermit, a stock figure of the picturesque prospect, acts in the poem as a kind of guarantee of the genre's aesthetic and non-documentary qualities.<sup>24</sup> Bateson's partial perception of the figure's significance as a genre convention has been pursued embarrassingly by other critics. Hartman sees the Hermit as prophesying the 'flood of a new revelation ... an image of transcendence, who 'sits fixed by his fire, the symbol probably, for the pure or imageless vision'. He is 'an image of the "sole self"', and of 'secret power or deepest solitude', referring us to the Ancient of Days and to the Apocalypse

<sup>23</sup> *Poetical Works*, V, 340, 479.

<sup>24</sup> F.W. Bateson, *Wordsworth: a Re-interpretation*, rev. ed. 1956, p. 141.

of St. John.<sup>25</sup> Bloom, acknowledging the vogue but psychologising it absurdly, thinks '... the Hermit stands, through the fixation of a primal repression, for the blind contemplative Milton of the great invocation ... the Miltonic solitary of *Il Penseroso*'.<sup>26</sup> With critical insights of such magnitude offered, it is unfortunate that in what Wordsworth wrote, neither gypsy nor hermit is present in the scene.

In the first verse paragraph, Wordsworth is playing a sophisticated and serious game; evoking the prospect, the stock figures of the picturesque, in order to over-pass them (as the poem's title names, then carefully dissociates itself from, the picturesque ruins and their genre implication). The occasion is a revisiting, introduced with the intimacy of Coleridgean 'conversational' repetition. (Tennyson, missing this, regretted the lack of 'literary instinct' in the word 'again' occurring four times in the first fourteen lines.)<sup>27</sup> The intervening time is indicated first objectively – 'Five years have passed ...' – and then, intimating its weary and unproductive length, subjectively – '... five summers, with the length Of five long winters'. This implies not only five years in which each winter has seemed long, but that each summer has itself been as a long winter; five years have been as ten winters. It is this gap between present and past which has been spanned and made bearable by memory of what is again before ear and eye.

Springs, fountains, rivers, are powerfully suggestive romantic images. Implications of restoration and inarticulate communication lie quietly in the hearing of 'These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs With a sweet inland murmur'. It has been remarked that much of the drafted material in the Alfoxden Notebook is to do with recognition of the power of natural sound. One notes too, that 'sweet' may apply equally to the sound and to the waters; that is, the water is fresh, not salt – perhaps a scarcely conscious rejoinder to the Mariner's experience of 'Water, water everywhere, Nor any drop to drink'. (Wordsworth's matter of factness compelled him to add the footnote making clear that the river above Tintern is not tidal.) So with the eye, beholding again 'these steep and lofty cliffs' which on the conventional 'wild secluded scene impress Thoughts of more deep seclusion'. This is a seclusion in contrast with that of the intervening years; not the gloomy loneliness conjured up by Dr. Burney, but a seclusion in which (to glance ahead) man has his undisturbed and undisturbing place.

As so often in Wordsworth's major poetry, the strength and individuality of the image rests upon the verb. Here, 'impress' carries the implication of nature's power to stamp deeper meaning upon itself and upon the implied observer. It is characteristic of Wordsworth to charge apparently neutral words in this way with unresolved significance, leading us to what follows for resolution. Thus the force of the image extends to the next main verb: in '... more deep seclusion;

<sup>25</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision*, New Haven and London, 1954, pp. 33-35, and *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, New Haven and London, 1964, pp. 28, 175.

<sup>26</sup> Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens*, New Haven and London, 1976, pp. 70-71.

<sup>27</sup> *Tennyson: a Memoir by his Son*, London, 1899, p. 475.

and connect 'The landscape with the quiet of the sky', we are to ask if it is the 'I' of two lines before, or the cliffs which impress, which is the grammatical subject of 'connect'. The effect is reinforced by the positioning, at the end of their lines, of both verbs; the instinctive line-end pauses make us feel momentarily that the verbs are intransitive, so that their objects in the following run-on lines are subtly underlined in the consciousness.

In such ways the poet's awareness and the power of nature are already brought into significant and ambiguous relationship; and this relationship is strengthened again by the juxtaposition of 'quiet of the sky' and 'I again repose'.

The vantage point of seclusion and connection, restoration and repose, is only now located more precisely in time and space; as precisely as at the opening of a Coleridge conversation poem. As if against the ten winters away, and the lonely seclusion of the city yet to be named; and with both verbs at line-ends again; 'The day is come when I again repose Here, under this dark sycamore, and view ...'<sup>28</sup> The view of repose is from darkness into light. The precision alerts us that the view is not to be of misty grandeur but in sharp focus. Appropriately, the lines completing the verse paragraph take on a sharper, more confidently inquiring, movement. Danby's objection has already been noted briefly: that Wordsworth was unable to 'utilise'[sic] the landscape detail as did Coleridge; 'The itemising ... is strangely inert ... scarcely central to the mood and matter of the poem, scarcely in fact relevant. The smoke indeed leads to a larger irrelevance: the jejune and idle association of [the hermit's cave]'.<sup>29</sup> This is to misread, if in the opposite direction to Hartman and Bloom; these lines shape the main matter of the poem. As 'the picture of the mind revives again', the 'forms of beauty' which have relieved hours and winters of weariness emerge again into actuality, to confirm the sustenance they have given through the imaginative memory; emerge, because the landscape in its significance appears to be composed as it is traversed by the meditative, feeding eye. The 'forms' are those shaped by a nature inhabited by man but not subdued or ordered by him according to either literary or agricultural convention. Man here functions as nature and is absorbed by it; nature, as man. They connect, as do landscape and sky, in quiet harmony:

and view

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

<sup>28</sup> The point is suggested by remarks in John Jones, *Wordsworth: The Egotistical Sublime*, London, 1954, p. 93.

<sup>29</sup> J.F. Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth*, London, 1960, p. 97. See my note 42 below.

Green to the very door; and wreathes 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.

This, with all its detail, is far from mere itemising. The steady development of the run-on lines and the continuities their movement implies, the sureness gained from the modifying phrases, the unobtrusive control which never distracts the eye from the mind's object but allows the passage to come to rest on a word, 'alone', which all through has been worked against; all of this gives authority to the unity the imagery holds. The plots and orchards imply cottagers and orchardists. The orchards, both by foreshortening perspective from the view from above and because the 'unripe fruits' are still green, are reduced to 'tufts' (of grass). Plots and orchards 'lose themselves', are not discernible from, the woods and copses of uncultivated nature. The 'green and simple hue' of the one, the 'wild green landscape' of the other, are held together by their distributed verb phrase, 'Nor ... disturb', itself looking back to the poet's verb, 'repose' (and disturbance, were there any, we would tend to associate with man rather than with the appearances of nature). The hedgerows which irregularly separate the orchards and plots and must have been set by man, are indistinguishable from 'little lines Of sportive wood run wild' (and 'wild', repeated from 'wild green landscape', recalls the impression of deeper seclusion upon the 'wild secluded scene'). The 'farms', 'pastoral' in both the primary sense and in the extended sense of caring (the adjective recurs at the end of the poem with 'for thy sake') are 'green to the very door', continuous with undisturbed nature. The 'wreathes of smoke' are 'Sent up' from the farms 'in silence', the phrases applying equally to the implied inhabitants and to the smoke itself. 'Wreathes' associates itself with the flowers of this green landscape, and holds a sense of dignified celebration.

The smoke 'might seem' (to some readers) to give 'uncertain notice' of gypsies or of a hermit, in houseless woods or a cave, but it is not so; here there are cottages and farms, orchardists and farmers, their presence the more certain because they are present through continuous implication. Picturesque ornaments and guarantees are tempting errors, evoked only to be dismissed against the sure forms of man in harmony with nature.

The image is one which stayed in Wordsworth's mind, and turns up in one draft for the *Prelude*, dated to 1804, in the more direct version of 'Smoke breathing up by day from cottage trees'.<sup>30</sup> There is no need to 'explain' the smoke by referring to the charcoal-burners mentioned in Gilpin's *Tour of the Wye*, even assuming

<sup>30</sup> *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, New York and London, 1979, p. 505; rejected draft for Book VIII (1805), l. 225.

Wordsworth had read the *Tour*, as Moorman does;<sup>31</sup> indeed, it is hard to imagine Wordsworth walking with such a guidebook in either his hand or his head.

If a literary definition of the scene were to be insisted upon, one might look past the vocabulary of eighteenth century landscape convention to the older idea of the *locus amoenus*, the features of which all seem to be present, recalling the faith of the *Prelude* in a regained Eden here on earth and found through the mind of man. But Wordsworth's 1798 term is enough: 'forms of beauty'.

That expression marks the opening of the second verse paragraph, with its return to the meditative mind of the involved poet. The quiet ambiguity here too – 'absent' may refer to both poet and valley – introduces the movement back in time to the wintry years. Then, the forms were not 'as is a landscape to a blind man's eye'; that is, did not exist so overpoweringly in the memory as to blind the poet to consciousness of the city. (Perhaps it is here that we should sense Milton, although as an image evoked but not accepted; but one remembers too the blind beggar of the London scenes of the *Prelude*, wearing his bitter label.)<sup>32</sup> The 'lonely rooms' and 'din of towns and cities', their dinning loneliness in contrast to the deeper seclusion and wreathed silence of harmony, are recorded precisely. The held 'picture of the mind' was not just day-dreaming, trivial escape from the city's reality. Rather, something has been 'owed' to these forms: and again, the verb works strongly (there is a sense in which the revisiting is a repayment of that debt). There have been:

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.

'Sweet' and 'tranquil' recall the 'sweet inland murmur' of the restoring waters, and the 'quiet of the sky'. But now the whole complex of response is subtly taken in to the being. Expected usage would seem to require (as, one suspects, many readers have taken the line to be), 'Felt along ... felt in ...'. As it stands, the line accumulates an unusual power: 'in the blood' suggests a restorative force as lifegiving as the flow of the blood; 'along the heart' gives the sense of the inner landscape possessing the extension and solidity of the external world.<sup>33</sup> The 'forms of beauty' pass, as from bloodstream to heart, so to the 'purer mind' (which becomes the 'living soul' towards which this movement of the poem is developing).

<sup>31</sup> Moorman, I, 402 and n.

<sup>32</sup> *The Prelude* (1805), VII, 608-23.

<sup>33</sup> Cp. De Quincey's comment on '... a gentle shock of mild surprise Has carried far into his heart the voice Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene Would enter unawares into his mind ...' ('There Was a Boy', ll. 19-22, *Poetical Works*, II, 206): '... the very expression "far" by which space and its infinities are attributed to the human heart, to its capacity of re-echoing the sublimity of nature, has always struck me as with a flash of sublime revelation'. *Literary Reminiscences*, London, 1874, p. 317. (I owe the comparison to Jones, p. 93.)

'Pleasure' goes with such sensations, as associationist psychology would teach. But here, as later in the poem, and as elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry and in the Preface, the word carries a stronger sense of a satisfaction connected with goodness (a use which still survives in north country speech). This pleasure is 'unremembered' not in the sense of unrecalled from the visit of five years before but of being without comparison in its influence upon the cumulation of small 'acts' which together make up the continuity of the moral life, each such action 'unremembered' in the different sense of being individually unmemorable. But beyond this daily obligation there is another debt (the pronoun referring still to 'forms of beauty'): 'To them I may have owed another gift, Of aspect more sublime ...'. 'Owed ... gift' is a reinforcing paradox. At the end of the eighteenth century 'sublime' still bore a complex of meanings of vastness, grandeur, a transcending of the senses, and was in aesthetic distinction from beauty, which implied contained form. Wordsworth's meaning is not so much that this 'gift' was somehow greater than those of restoration and moral influence; rather, that it was of appearance, 'aspect more sublime' in its transcending the weary, 'unintelligible world' of town and city to lift and 'lighten' the 'burthen of [its] mystery'. Still, the gift is owed to imaginative memory of the view from darkness into light. Wordsworth was concerned with continuity between experience of the 'forms of beauty' and intimations of 'the one Life within us and abroad'.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, 'the affections gently lead us on' to that 'blessed', or visionary, mood of serenity,

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.

Such a passing through the senses occurs through Wordsworth's major poetry, from the vision of the idiot boy in *Lyrical Ballads* to the Simplon Pass and Ascent of Snowdon passages of the *Prelude*.<sup>35</sup> The body is 'laid asleep' (at the opening of the poem the verb was 'repose', followed by 'Nor ... disturb') in near suspension of its functions; the lines look back to 'blood ... heart ... purer mind'. The harmony and joy, earlier implied and now named with their power, which belong to the 'forms of beauty', quieten the eye for vision. 'Harmony' opposes itself to the 'din' of the 'unintelligible world', as 'joy' counters 'weary'.

The movement of the lines slows, through the running-on and the damping

<sup>34</sup> Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp', l. 26, *Poems*, ed. John Beer, London, 1973, p. 52.

<sup>35</sup> *The Prelude* (1805), VI, 488-548, XIII, 1-119.



down of stresses, until they are themselves 'almost suspended' at the heavy colon. There is then an energy gain, until the passage comes to rest on 'the life of things', held in balance with 'living soul'. The living soul within the stilled body; the life of things at the heart of forms of beauty; powers within and without come together.

The closure of the verse paragraph, with its implied progression from bodily seeing ('Once again Do I behold ... view ... see') to a 'seeing into' in imaginative memory ('not ... a blind man's eye'), and its deliberately neutral and assured 'things', avoids any metaphysical pretension or ponderousness while holding substantial authority. Its attainment has been through the personal voice of the poetry, not through some explicit philosophy, pantheistic or otherwise.

The third verse paragraph opens with abrupt unease, rhetorical awkwardness. 'If this be but a vain belief ...' points disconcertingly to a gap between philosophical doubt and the sureness of the poetic intelligence. The mannerism of 'How oft, in spirit ...' and 'O sylvan Wye!', nervously echoed, betrays an embarrassed self-consciousness retreating to an apparently safer diction. But the essential continuity of the poem is held through 'the fever of the world' and 'the beatings of my heart', which connect with earlier images ('fever' and 'unintelligible' relate). More confident reflection follows as the poem moves from self-doubt, to return first to the present and then to loop, in the Coleridgean patterning of time of 'Frost at Midnight', between present and future, present and more distant past, and past, present, and future. In 'And now ... The picture of the mind revives again', the dependent phrases held within this confidence give the feeling that the actuality contemplated from 'under this dark sycamore' is slowly being confirmed as identical to the inner landscape 'felt along the heart' (rather than, as one might suppose in the usual processes of memory, the remembered being recognised as accurate). There is the sense of emerging again in the present, with the verb 'revives' releasing the body 'laid asleep'. 'Picture' associates with 'forms of beauty' to reinforce the idea of the harmonious whole yielding both 'present pleasure' (in the word's full sense) and sustenance for the future as for the past. Thoughts 'half-extinguished' are rekindled to 'pleasing thoughts That in this moment there is life and food For future years'. Now the whole process which has made bearable the city's hell is recognised as before it was not, and earlier still did not even impinge upon the consciousness whose development the poem is tracking.

In boyhood, Nature fed an 'appetite' for 'coarser pleasures' that had 'no need of a remoter charm, By thought supplied'; nor 'any interest Unborrowed from the eye'. The youth's energetic fears, excitements, 'dizzy raptures', seem almost to escape deeper nature than to pursue it (as the boy in the borrowed boat at night flees the pursuing mountains, in the *Prelude*).<sup>36</sup> The imagery is strikingly, immediately visual, whereas in the nearer past the remembered landscape was not

<sup>36</sup> *The Prelude* (1805), I, 372-426.

'as to a blind man's eye', and the moment of vision a 'seeing into'. Through such linking images of sight, as through images of feeding on nature, the progression to awareness is traced. It is a learned awareness. Rapturous worship of nature alone, as 'all in all' and without harmony between man and nature, is inadequate, and fades. But, as the *Prelude* was also to recognise, there comes

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,  
 Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
 To chasten and subdue.

'Learned' completes a line sonorous with maturity. The 'music of humanity' relates to 'power Of harmony', and so back to the 'forms of beauty' of man absorbed in nature. Its stillness (the paradox of 'still music' makes us pause) is not that of Keats's Grecian Urn but of the quiet and repose of earlier in the poem. 'Sad' is not opposed to pleasure – 'pleasing thoughts' – but has the meaning of sober, mature (as at the end of 'The Ancyent Marinere'); these are the words applied to Dorothy towards the end of the poem. 'Not harsh nor grating' opposes 'the din Of towns and cities'. What is chastened and subdued is not the hope dared towards the beginning of the verse paragraph for future strength, but the thoughtlessness of believing in nature alone.

Again, these lines have nothing to do with overt philosophising. Those who seek a philosophical prop, Wordsworth among them as well as Southey, locate it in the lines which follow, too often quoted out of their context as focal proof of Wordsworth's pantheism:

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.

'I have learned ... the still, sad music' and 'I have felt A presence' are meant to go together in apposition, drawing together their objects – even the verbs seem to have been exchanged from their expected places. But they do not. There is nothing in these lines that is felt, and there has been nothing in the poem to make possible feelings, or learnings, like these. Whether or not the lines are philosophi-

cally respectable, then or now (and I do not believe they were or are), they come near to disrupting the poem, and at the least are a major flaw at its centre.

The problem is not, at bottom, the vagueness of the assertions, although there is vagueness. What is more deeply interfused than, or with, what? What are we to understand about a spirit that at the same time impels and rolls through even one thing?<sup>37</sup> These and others are proper questions if we are being presented with a sudden philosophical credo (even though smuggled in with 'I have felt ...'). The real problem, though, is that the authority of the personal, experiential voice has gone. The lines are out of key. The attempt at grand rationalisation where the power of reason is not relevant to the power of experience lifts – or drops – the passage clean out of the poem. And against the rest of the poem, not only do the assertions appear muddled but the images carrying them become garish. The experience of humanity in nature, which has risen above deliberately invoked literary convention, now has been abandoned for would-be philosophical convention. A feeling of sublimity is one thing (and that 'aspect' has already been accepted); the assertion of a corresponding presence is quite another. The forms of beauty are not in setting suns; the music of humanity is not the music of the spheres. One must agree with Arnold's acute comment about Wordsworth (although Arnold's mind was more on *The Excursion*): 'His poetry is the reality, his philosophy ... is the illusion'.<sup>38</sup> Coleridge's remark (as quoted, rather angrily, by Helen Darbishire) about the passage was more direct; he thought that here was an expression 'in language but not in sense or purpose' of a particular doctrine.<sup>39</sup> Coleridge, the real philosopher of the two poets, succeeds in the comparable passages in 'Frost at Midnight' and 'This Lime Tree Bower' because the 'doctrine' does not drown out the personal voice. One longs for some textual scholar to demonstrate that Wordsworth's passage was inserted by a printer's devil.

One might guess that Wordsworth himself was uneasy; first about the achievement of the poem, because he felt the need to prop it up in this way; and then about the prop, because quickly he modulates to a return to the self:

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, ...

The force of the 'Therefore' comes not from what has immediately preceded but from the substantial world of the opening of the poem, which these images recall.

<sup>37</sup> Cp. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, London, 1961 (Percegrine rev. ed.), p. 152 ff.

<sup>38</sup> 'Wordsworth'; *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. A. Dwight Culler, Boston, 1961, p. 341.

<sup>39</sup> Helen Darbishire, *Wordsworth*, Oxford, 1950, pp. 137-8.

Similarly the continuation, '... both what they half-create, And what perceive'<sup>40</sup> is not to be seen as a disguised gesture towards an idealist epistemology but as a pointer to Wordsworth's concern with what is called in the *Prelude* the 'ennobling interchange' between man and nature. He is (with that north country weight of the word)

... well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, ...

'The language of the sense' is a further crucial phrase, to be taken almost literally; for there is to Wordsworth a kind of language shaped by the 'forms of beauty'. It is this which poetry is to embody in, to translate into almost, what the *Prelude* explores as 'the mystery of words ... the turnings intricate of Verse';<sup>41</sup> although in both poems it does not come from nature 'all in all'. Rather it is the 'music of humanity' set out by cliffs and sky but also the inhabitants of orchards and cottage plots and farms. That is why it is 'The anchor of my purest thoughts', the first noun imaging a firm bonding to a real world and the adjective looking back through the poem to the context of 'purer mind'. To me, these lines are more powerful and direct than the string of pious nouns rounding off the verse paragraph ('nurse', 'guide', 'guardian'), which are further examples of Wordsworth's nervous need to gloss what should be left alone.

The remaining part of 'Tintern Abbey', the so-called postscript or prayer for his sister, has been found widely to be a generous but misplaced tribute. While one refers for convenience to 'Dorothy', she is of course here as a poetic persona for loved beings (as, indeed, 'I' stands for all those of 'more than usual organic sensibility'). The paragraph does open with the unfortunate suggestion that if he had not been 'thus taught', her instruction would be an acceptable second best; and some lines may be over stated or over indulgent. But there are two points to make. As we realise that the poet throughout has not been the conventional solitary observer ('For thou art with me, here ...'), we accept more readily that the paragraph is a natural continuation of the poem's development. The possibility of close human relationships within nature, implicit in the opening landscape, is now out in the open. (It may indeed have been this possibility which brought to Wordsworth's memory the lines from Book I of *The Task* discussed above.) So too, is the realisation that what has been learned through experience ('For I have learned To look on nature ...') can be taught through love. Second, the 'prayer' is, in keeping with this realisation, a careful expansion of the poem's temporal structure. By tracing Dorothy's growing awareness, Wordsworth will retrace and confirm his own.

<sup>40</sup> Wordsworth notes a 'close resemblance' to a line from Young. The resemblance, located for Wordsworth by Barron Field, is to *Night Thoughts*, vi, 424.

<sup>41</sup> *The Prelude* (1805), V, 619-29.

The 'prayer' bears a similar kind of relationship to the whole poem as the prayer for the infant Hartley Coleridge at the end of 'Frost at Midnight' bears to that poem. Both poems unifyingly come full circle to return us to the present of the opening lines, now still more deeply understood. There is one difference; while the Coleridge poem describes one loop in time to encompass past, present, and future, in 'Tintern Abbey' there are two such loops, carefully overlapping and finally coinciding.<sup>42</sup>

The Dorothy of the poem is now as Wordsworth was in the further past of 'thoughtless youth':

... 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 ...

when the forms of beauty had not yet been felt along the heart, and pleasures were 'dizzy raptures'. Her 'wild eyes' need 'no remoter charm of thought ... Unborrowed from the eye'. He knows now, that nature will not 'betray The heart that loved her'.<sup>43</sup> In Dorothy's immediate future, corresponding to his closer past of weary absence, she will learn this. Approaching his present, she will be led 'From joy to joy'; that is, to 'the deep power of joy', the 'power of harmony' which enables us to 'see into the life of things'. Nature will

... so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts ...

The lines, with their echoing verbs, cast back through the poem in a kind of shorthand of imagery of the poet's progression of awareness. 'Inform' is 'I have learned ...'; 'impress ... lofty thoughts' is the 'lofty cliffs' which could 'impress Thoughts of more deep seclusion'; 'feed' recalls the difference between unthinking 'appetite' and 'life and food for future years'; 'the mind within' is 'the purer mind ...'; 'quietness and beauty' takes in 'forms of beauty' and 'the eye made quiet ...'.

So sustained through 'the dreary intercourse of daily life' ('the din Of towns and cities'), Dorothy will find 'in after years' (the poet's, and poem's, present), when 'wild ecstasies' ['dizzy raptures'] shall be matured Into a sober pleasure', that her mind

Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,  
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place  
For all sweet sounds and harmonies ...

<sup>42</sup> I owe this perception to Danby, p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> Cp. Coleridge, 'This Lime Tree Bower', ll. 59-64, *Poems*, p. 120.

I am not sure if in these lines we are meant to hear distant echoes of the 23rd Psalm and of St. John's Gospel,<sup>44</sup> which in a prayer would not be irrelevant; but Wordsworth's retentive verbal memory sometimes played unexpected tricks on him, as with the line half remembered from Young. Clearly, though, we are reminded again of 'forms of beauty' and 'the power of harmony'. It should be remarked, though, that Dorothy is not to be offered the sublimity of 'something far more deeply interfused'; either because such vision is reserved for poet-philosophers or (as I like to think) because of Wordsworth's instinctive distrust, at this point, of that elevated passage.

Finally, after some gloomy anticipations of death which are both coy and unnecessary (perhaps unconsciously prompted by St. John), and after the 'worshipper of Nature' phrase which was 'uttered incautiously', the poem is brought round from the coincidence of their two projected futures to their common present and to the opening landscape. In its close 'Tintern Abbey' recalls that landscape, and its restorative power in absence, with full awareness that 'more deep seclusion' is not solitude. It is, rather, to do with human love sustained by nature:

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.

#### IV

'Tintern Abbey' is a major Romantic poem which exploits, and moves beyond, familiar conventions. It falters, in perhaps three places, from nervousness about its own achievement, and at its centre thrusts at the reader a confused and irrelevant philosophy. But read as a whole, rather than represented by favoured extracts, the flaws are contained by the poem's concern with the possibilities available to man at one with nature. The poem does not present a ritual of nature worship but a process of learning and joy. In the common sense of the word, it is not inspired; nor is it a hurriedly written 'overflow', but rather the product of long and deep thought and unusual sensibility. That sensibility, which is to 'the life of things' and 'the language of the sense', is steadily aware of the 'forms of beauty' which hold humanity's sober music. It values Wordsworth's paradise regained, which has never been lost; 'the paradise Where I was reared', where

<sup>44</sup> Psalm 23 has its guide to 'green pastures' and 'still waters', and through the 'valley of the shadow of death', too. John, xiv, 22.

The elements, and seasons in their change,  
Do find their dearest fellow-labourer there  
The heart of man – a district on all sides  
The fragrance breathing of humanity ...

Even from childhood, the poem has realised,

the common haunts of the green earth  
With the ordinary human interests  
Which they embosom – all without regard  
As both may seem – are fastening on the heart  
Insensibly, each with the other's help,  
So that we love, not knowing that we love,  
And feel, not knowing whence our feeling comes.  
Such league have these two principles of joy  
In our affections.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *The Prelude* (1805), VIII, 148-51, 166-74.