

## WORDSWORTH'S "TINTERN ABBEY" AND THE TRADITION OF THE "HYMNAL" ODE<sup>1</sup>

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In Memoriam

### Abstract

Despite the claims for simplicity of language that Wordsworth articulated in the early years of his literary career, especially in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*—his pronounced difference from earlier (Neoclassical) poets, poetic practice, and the forms of poetry of the Augustans—he could not escape what Walter Jackson Bate long ago termed the "burden of the past". Wordsworth's indebtedness to his literary forbears is not only ideational but formal as well. The present article aims to examine Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and relate it to the tradition of the hymnal ode used so masterfully by William Collins in the mid-century, at the same time reconsidering the generic conceptualisation of the poem as an ode in all but name which in its structure and essence re-evokes mid-century hymnal odes but which is contextualised within Wordsworth's notion of emotional immediacy and simplicity.

Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* claims for "greater simplicity" and the representation of "elementary feelings"<sup>2</sup> without the "gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers"<sup>3</sup> are commonly taken to constitute the principal poetics of post-Augustan naturalness, emotional immediacy as well as the primitivist originality of Rousseauvian Romanticism. According to John F. Danby, Wordsworthian "simplicity is an invitation to a new intimacy, a new discipline, and a new complexity."<sup>4</sup> This complexity is represented not only in the ideology that Wordsworth's works advocate but also in the form that the poet chose to communicate ideas to his readers. In the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800, Wordsworth seemed to see the necessity to add an

<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Frederick Burwick for a critical reading of and helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth, "Preface," 60. The "Preface" will be cited from Michael Mason ed., *Lyrical Ballads* (London and New York: Longman, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth, "Preface," 59.

<sup>4</sup> John F. Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems 1797-1807* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 26.

explanatory note to "Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey. On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798"<sup>5</sup>: "I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode; but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition."

By negation Wordsworth introduces the generic form of the ode, and characterises it by means of its typical "transitions" as well as "the impassioned music of the versification." Wordsworth's familiarity with the "species of composition" of the ode reflects his reading of the major odes of the mid-century. In the "Preface" he commended Collins who, by Romantic poets, was universally associated with the ode and whose rare first edition of *Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* (1746) Wordsworth possessed.<sup>6</sup> In his 1793 "Remembrance of Collins" he imitated the poet's *Ode on the Death of Mr. Thomson*. Clearly, Wordsworth was aware of the (generic and ideational) distinctness of "Tintern Abbey"; at the same time, he utilised conventions that were used by Collins but modified them significantly in his poem so that – while giving voice to his cult of Nature – the classical Hellenism that inspired Collins was no longer discernible.

Collins's odes had not developed a "religion of nature"<sup>7</sup> as Wordsworth's poems did, but he embedded his personifications in a framework of myth that enabled him to build, in the form of the ode, a sublime setting in which his speakers invoked the central deities of the compositions.<sup>8</sup> While Collins invoked emanations of Goddess Natura, Wordsworth provided a personalised version of this all-comprising deity which was not defined in mythological terms.<sup>9</sup> Yet, even Wordsworth attributes a mysticism to Nature that Collins saw as an inherent aspect of his deities.

Wordsworth's association of his poem with the genre of the ode is unavoidable since the ode – most prominently since the mid-eighteenth century, and especially through the renewed interest in Longinus and John Dennis's treatise on the sublime – is a lyric genre that deals with the sublime, the superhuman, supernatural and the divine. Collins had already left behind the encomiastic function that seventeenth-century odes – especially music odes – had utilised, and Wordsworth does not revive this function, either. Kurt Schlüter demonstrated in *Die englische Ode: Studien zu ihrer Entwicklung unter Einfluß der antiken Hymne* that the structure of Collins's hymnal odes consisted of three distinct parts: (i) the initial invocation of the deity, (ii) the 'pars epica', a narrative part dedicated to providing information (mythological or contextual) on the deity and its importance for the speaker, and (iii) a petition, usually, for inspiration. Schlüter

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<sup>5</sup> "Tintern Abbey" will be cited from Michael Mason ed., *Lyrical Ballads* (London and New York: Longman, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> This copy is now in the Piermont Morgan Library, New York. Edward Gay Ainsworth Jr, *Poor Collins: His Life, His Art, and His Influence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1937), 256-59, has examined Wordsworth's interest in Collins. See also, Sandro Jung, "William Collins, Wordsworth and Coleridge," *ANQ*, 20 (2007).

<sup>7</sup> H. W. Piper, *The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets* (London: The Athlone Press, 1962), 60.

<sup>8</sup> Gray, on the other hand, in his odes demonstrated encyclopaedic learning, annotation, as well as poetic diction, features that are irreconcilable with Wordsworth's aspiration to represent the language and sentiments of "common men."

<sup>9</sup> See Sandro Jung, "William Collins and 'Goddess Natura'," special issue on eighteenth-century poetry (2006, forthcoming).

considered the invocation as the most important part, since it established the relationship between speaker and deity; for that reason, he does not consider “Tintern Abbey” a hymnal ode, arguing that the “Art seiner [Wordsworth’s] Begegnungen mit dem Göttlichen ist wesentlich verschieden von dem Erlebnis der mythischen Schau, obwohl er sie gelegentlich mit den Worte *vision* bezeichnet.”<sup>10</sup> He concedes, however, that there are “in Wordsworths besonderer Weise, das Göttliche zu erleben, Züge, die mit der Darstellung in der bisher bekannten odischen Form in Spannung stehen.”<sup>11</sup> Groundbreaking though it was – and still the best history of the English ode – his study aimed to trace the history of the hymnal ode by means of concentrating on the major representatives. Recent research, as well as the revision of the poetic canon, reflects a new interest in those authors hitherto ignored or neglected. In that respect, it must be acknowledged that the hymnal ode lived on after the publication of Collins’s and Gray’s odes but that the strict formula that Schlüter introduced was at times translated into a tripartite structure of strophe – antistrophe – epode, while others applied a reductivist poetics and held that the hymnal invocation was the only essential component part of the ode.<sup>12</sup>

In Wordsworth’s use of the genre of the ode the Thou-I relationship of traditional hymnal odes in which the speaker depreciates his own identity by apostrophising the “Thou” is inverted into the Romantic constellation of I-Thou. There are brief invocations in “Tintern Abbey” of “sylvan Wye” which, however, are integrated in the long contemplative passages of recollection.

Wordsworth primarily used the ‘pars epica’ not to describe the deity but himself in order to put into context the lengthy recollections of the speaker’s experiences and sensations. One of the central topics for Wordsworth is that of recollection; the spontaneous response to the power of Nature that he may have felt when first visiting Tintern Abbey could have been uttered by means of a hymnal apostrophe; recollection, however, is a process that has already used the synthesising (inspiring) qualities that a successful petition would have conferred on him. Through his central emphasis on recollection, therefore, Harold Bloom argues, “Wordsworth so mystifies memory as to make it the one great myth of his antimythological poetry,”<sup>13</sup> thereby introducing mythic qualities that are inherent in the hymnal tradition. In that regard, “Tintern Abbey” “becomes more memory than spiritual or imaginative renovation.”<sup>14</sup> The poem adopts the epic features that Pindar’s Epinician odes possessed, as well as the modal correlations that were introduced in the long poem and will, later in Wordsworth’s career, be employed in *The Prelude*.<sup>15</sup> Unlike Pindar or Collins, however, Wordsworth does not represent

<sup>10</sup> Schlüter, *Die englische Ode: Studien zu ihrer Entwicklung unter Einfluß der antiken Hymne* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1964), 182.

<sup>11</sup> Schlüter, *Die englische Ode*, 181.

<sup>12</sup> See Sandro Jung, “Form versus Manner: The Pindaric Ode and the ‘Hymnal’ Tradition in the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” *LiLi: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* (2006), 21-39.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Bloom, “The Scene of Instruction: *Tintern Abbey*,” *Modern Critical Views: William Wordsworth*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishing, 1985), 113. See also, Stuart M. Sperry Jr., “From ‘Tintern Abbey’ to the ‘Intimations Ode’: Wordsworth and the Function of Memory,” *The Wordsworth Circle*, 1 (1970), 40-49.

<sup>14</sup> Bloom, “The Scene of Instruction,” 116.

<sup>15</sup> See Sandro Jung, *The Poetic Fragment in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1660-1830* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

the history of heroes (Pindar) or the aretology of his personifications (Collins), but is more concerned with a desire to re-narrate his own history, the history of his mental and poetic growth. In doing so, the 'pars epica' in "Tintern Abbey" is transformed into an autobiographical recollection of his visit to the abbey while at the same time redefining the ode as a Romantic lyric genre that no longer requires the superior deity in order for the speaker to be granted the petition that is usually the subject of the apostrophe. Rather than seeing "Tintern Abbey" as a failed hymnal ode, it represents a decisive alternative to the mythological odes of the mid-century; Alastair Fowler, writing about genre, insists that generic "features are often characteristic through their absence."<sup>16</sup> And in Wordsworth's poem the striking absence of the invocational petition – the central address of the deity – is silently taken for granted and echoed in his mention of Nature as his personal guide, guardian and mother, functions that Collins (similarly, if more hesitantly) attributed to Goddess Natura in his odes.

The title mention of Wordsworth's "revisiting the banks of the Wye" indicates that his composition draws on the memory of a past visit and combines this – through imaginative synthesis – with his present visit to the abbey. The force of "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"<sup>17</sup> is translated into durable (and artful) form. His technique of recollecting and reconstructing the past through transforming a transient, unstable, and fragmented memory of past impressions into a lasting memory that functions as the backbone of Wordsworth's (moral) well-being and identity as a poet appears not to be based on a plan other than Wordsworth's immediate response to revisiting Tintern Abbey. It is, therefore, an impression of immediacy and spontaneity that he wants to create. Wordsworth's imagination does not merely recollect the past, but refines both the memory as well as the sensations first experienced. Although, as Mary Jacobus argues, the process of recollection concentrates the "beautifully controlled movement of the verse" with the "mood"<sup>18</sup> of "tranquil restoration," thereby assuming that Wordsworth only serves as mouthpiece of his imagination, she realises at the same time that this process of translating thoughts and memories into writing requires some ordering of ideas, associations, connectives and transitions which reflect the artistry of Wordsworth's poem. Michael Mason further helpfully reminds the reader that "Tintern Abbey" "was not written confronting the scene it describes or even 'composed' there. [...] The date furnished in the title confirms the Fenwick note, as this was the day on which Wordsworth returned with Dorothy from his walking tour of the summer of 1798."<sup>19</sup>

The "introspective recall" that is so central to Wordsworth's recollection of past experience is reflected in his "rhythms of thought – associative exploratory, fluctuating in and out of the present."<sup>20</sup> The poet uses the fragmentary and elusive qualities of the ode to bridge the conflict between original experience and recollected experience;

<sup>16</sup> Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 73.

<sup>17</sup> Wordsworth, "Preface," 62.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Mason ed., *Lyrical Ballads*, 205.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment*, 50.

this experience, through the process of poetic composition, becomes “durable” and “permanent.” Steven Knapp is certainly right, in that regard, that the necessity to order the elements of memorable experience that constitute the hymnal ‘pars epica’ can only be achieved through reflection, for “only in the tranquil perspective of a later moment can the unwarranted excitement of the original experience be recognised as an index of the mind’s transcendence through illusion of supernatural circumstances.”<sup>21</sup> Marshall Brown reads “Tintern Abbey” in terms of the poet’s construction of experiential and imaginative growth and, in his reading, traces “an interpretation of empiricism” in which “Wordsworth recomposes the genesis of his current maturity.”<sup>22</sup>

Wordsworth successfully creates the impression that the reader is tracing his progress over the five years that have elapsed since the poet’s last visit to the abbey. When Wordsworth visited Tintern Abbey for the first time, his perception of the environment was synchronic, focusing on the individual “spots of time.” In order to achieve coherence within the ‘pars epica’ of his odic composition he needs to synthesise these “spots of time” by means of an artificial sequence. The diachronic progress of the ‘pars epica’, however, need not necessarily be authentic or logical; rather, it makes use of transitions and digressions, elements so characteristic of the ode since Cowley and anticipates what F. W. Bateson, dealing with the later poetry of Wordsworth, discusses in terms of the egotistical sublime.<sup>23</sup> This Wordsworthian “emphasis on the special nature of art-activity,”<sup>24</sup> despite his centring on his own mental growth, is a prominent feature of Collins’s odes, too, where the speaker describes his quest in search of poetic inspiration to translate his creative energy into Coleridge’s “esemplastic power.”<sup>25</sup>

The narrated time (*erzählte Zeit*) of “Tintern Abbey” comprises five years, which are alternately termed “Five years” and “five summers,” relating again to Wordsworth’s personal growth from a rationalist to a devotee of Nature who perceives and understands even time only by means of reference to the seasons and natural change. While the deity-personifications that are used in the hymnal odes of Collins had been part of the mythological machinery for thousands of years, Wordsworth’s experience is not embedded within the mythological context of antiquity but in that of the myth of Nature and his desire to be to her prophet. Importantly, and that is further difference to Collins, “Wordsworth adds another dimension to the dimensions of space and the dimension of time, for he presents the scene to us as interpenetrated with human feeling.”<sup>26</sup> Rather than providing a linear progression of time in the ‘pars epica’, however, the poet’s dealing with time appears to be circular, for as Charles Sherry observes, “the landscape remembered in bitter times in the city is a restorative; it is a source of freedom from the harshness of life, not that it enables him to escape it, but that it prevents him from succumbing to

<sup>21</sup> Steven Knapp, *Personification and Sublime. Milton to Coleridge* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1985), 108.

<sup>22</sup> Marshall Brown, “Romanticism and Enlightenment,” *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 40.

<sup>23</sup> F. W. Bateson, *Wordsworth: A Re-Interpretation* (London, Longmans, 1954, 1965), 150-53.

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1983), 36.

<sup>25</sup> See Sandro Jung, “Post-Augustan Nature in William Collins’s *Ode to Evening* (1746),” *Philologia*, 3 (2005), 97-106.

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Durrant, *Wordsworth and the Great System: A Study of Wordsworth’s Poetic Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 88.

it."<sup>27</sup> Yet, even after his (imaginative) return to Tintern Abbey through the fictionalised permanence of the completed 'pars epica' Wordsworth will he have to return home, for his life does not end with the end of the poem. Unlike Collins's speaker, Wordsworth's does not inhabit the environment that Collins's deities do; it may, therefore, be argued that they and their spirituality permeate the landscape, whereas Wordsworth – through the association of "Tintern Abbey" with the hymnal ode tradition – hopes to gain the sense of permanence for which Collins's speaker strives continuously. Collins, however, aims to achieve a union with the emanations of Goddess Natura while Wordsworth, through his recollective capacity, is self-contained and reworks external impressions internally.

The sublime, frequently considered as the prerequisite and defining feature of the ode, is representationally reflected in Wordsworth's descriptions of the natural environment at the abbey, that is, the "steep and lofty cliffs" (l. 5) which appear to be implanted into this "wild secluded scene" (l. 6). Wordsworth hopes that in this solitude of sublimity he will be able to find the "absolute essence of truth and feeling."<sup>28</sup> In that respect, Wordsworth, as William Hazlitt suggested, "takes the simplest elements of nature and of the human mind, the mere abstract condition inseparable from our being, and tries to compound a new system of poetry from them."<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the need for Wordsworth to find a place of "more deep seclusion" (l. 7), he aims to conquer his anxiety. Paradoxically, seclusion and solitude enable him to hold communion with Nature as well as relieve his anxiety and fear of forgetting. Drawing on the images of the "Immortality" ode he suggests that it is through recollection that he can bring back impressions and feelings long forgotten. The "utter nakedness" of forgetfulness and its disintegrating characteristics are counteracted by his self-assertive act of recollection. In that regard, Bernard Groom comprehends "Tintern Abbey" as "a panoramic vision of the power of the remembered landscape working under the surface in a mind perplexed with five years of inward conflict; and, by implication, a record of the creative instinct triumphing over the forces of disintegration."<sup>30</sup> In other words, Wordsworth's speaker in his hymn on Nature and his account of his own growth resolves (at least temporarily) the "threat of a loss of vitality and happiness" that Michael Mason considers as the "groundwork"<sup>31</sup> of "Tintern Abbey."

The dialogic structure that is indicated formally through the invocation and the petition is alluded to at the beginning of the poem where Wordsworth uses an interjective opening which, as is later revealed through his address of the Wye, is addressed to the river rather than being what Bateson understands as a "reverie."<sup>32</sup> As in the case of Collins who used metonymy frequently, Wordsworth conceives of the Wye as an emanation of the force of Nature. In that respect the repetition of "once again" (l. 4) in line 14 emphasises the personal relationship of the speaker with Nature. The paratactical syntax employs "again" several times to depict the speaker's unchangeable delight

<sup>27</sup> Charles Sherry, *Wordsworth's Poetry of Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 98.

<sup>28</sup> Hazlitt, "The Spirit of the Age," 86.

<sup>29</sup> Hazlitt, "The Spirit of the Age," 87.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Groom, *The Unity of Wordsworth's Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 33.

<sup>31</sup> Mason, ed., *Lyrical Ballads*, 206.

<sup>32</sup> Bateson is not aware of the generic association that "Tintern Abbey" has with the hymnal tradition,

at beholding again what he had already seen five years before.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the scene that Wordsworth is so eager to establish in terms of the picturesque is not real, but derives from those images that he has stored in his memory and which are then combined and perfected by his imagination.

Thomas de Quincey, focusing on the central importance of Nature for Wordsworth and the poet's association of Nature with universal memory, observes that Wordsworth existed only "through his commerce with nature."<sup>34</sup> In the imaginatively conjured environment of Tintern Abbey, the speaker is able to experience "long months of ease and undisturbed delight"<sup>35</sup> which in reality were originally – that is on the occasion of his actual visit – no more than a "few passing moments."<sup>36</sup> His measuring of time is influenced by his emotions and is therefore imaginatively prolonged. Rather than embedding his narrative within the mythical 'pars epica' of Collins's odes, the mythological machinery becomes unimportant and is replaced by Wordsworth's authority to evoke (and create) a world of memory, thereby achieving what Collins's speakers did not.<sup>37</sup> The internalisation of memories and their metamorphosing recollection are seen as ways out of the dilemma of cultural progressivism. Pessimistically, however, Wordsworth is aware that he will ultimately have to return to society and to adopt his social function again. Mark Foster comments on the metaphor of the hermit that the poet assumes in his imaginative "reveries" and remarks that the hermit "represents not simply transcendence or any achieved realisation, but rather an ideal of decisive action and coherent relation,"<sup>38</sup> a harmony that Wordsworth attempts to establish through his response to Nature; his speaking authority, as has already been indicated, ought therefore to be understood as his version of the fulfilment that Collins gained (in uncertain terms) through his invocations.

The recollection of memories and the translations of them into "reveries" enable Wordsworth to experience "sensations sweet" (l. 27)<sup>39</sup>. In that regard, recollective introspection produces a pleasing and soothing effect on him, which he feels "in the blood" but also "along the heart" (l. 28). The memory of these scenes has become essential to his being:

These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye. (ll. 22-24)

especially as he considers them poem in terms of a monologue. See Bateson, *Wordsworth*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> See Eudo C. Mason, "Wordsworth: Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," *Versdichtung der englischen Romantik: Interpretationen*, ed. Teut Andreas Riese and Dieter Riesner (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1968), 131.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas de Quincey, "Essays on Wordsworth," *Wordsworth. Poetry and Prose. With Essays by Coleridge, Hazlitt, de Quincey*, ed. David Nichol Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 40.

<sup>35</sup> Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Bk. I, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: The Early Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 403.

<sup>37</sup> On the importance of memory in the hymnal ode, see Sandro Jung, "Some Notes on William Mason and His Use of the 'Hymnal' Ode," *Studia Neophilologica*, 76:2 (2004), 176-81.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Foster, "Tintern Abbey and Wordsworth's Scene of Writing," *Studies in Romanticism*, 25:1 (1986), 85.

<sup>39</sup> For the notion of sweetness, see Sandro Jung, "'Sweetness' in the Poetry of William Collins," *English Language Notes*, 41:3 (2003), 36-43.

The result of the experience of "sensations sweet" is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" which, he notes in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*,

takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till [...] the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself exist in the mind.<sup>40</sup>

His "purer mind" (l. 29), that is, the place where all impressions and sensations are collected, collated and imaginatively purified, becomes the instrument of "tranquil restoration"; despite its epistemological inaccuracy, this recollected result of "tranquil restoration" – with its central component of the imagination – "reveals an important kind of truth."<sup>41</sup> Wordsworth, in that regard, confesses that he owes "this blessed Mood" (l. 37) to Nature who helps him to cope with "the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" (ll. 39-40). In other words, sublimation of mundane life is effected by means of imaginative processes. It is this form of mental (imaginative) escapism that has helped the speaker to withstand the "fever of the world."

In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth's speaker poetically argues for Nature's ability to calm and soothe the human mind by providing the necessary impressive stimuli that are, in turn, reworked by the poet's imagination. It is these stimuli that reveal "amongst fields and mountains a substitute religion"<sup>42</sup> to Wordsworth. Nature possesses a therapeutic character and assists Wordsworth in softening his *Zivilisations-Klaustrophobie*.<sup>43</sup> Nature's goodness is expressed in her "healing thoughts / Of tender joy" (ll. 144-45) which act like a balm on the poet's strained sensibility. As a "worshipper of Nature" (l. 152) Wordsworth is confident that Nature will not forget him to whom "these steep woods and lofty cliffs / And this green landscape [are] / More dear, both for themselves and for thy [Nature's] sake!" (ll. 157-59). This confidence and trust in Nature satisfy the poet "that he can get all the wisdom he needs from the world of nature as revealed by the senses."<sup>44</sup>

Nature, Wordsworth notes, is the "anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (ll. 109-11). Nature is no longer assigned the role of a superior being (as Collins did to Goddess Natura) but is seen as part of Wordsworth, finding an emanation in Dorothy Wordsworth. He defines Nature by means of attributes that would usually have formed part of the aratological description of the deity in the hymnal ode but appropriates them to his own mental growth. The speaker understands the spirit of Nature as omnipresent and identifies it in the character of a companion who advises him on how to lead his life. In the poem it becomes less and less possible to know whom he is addressing: Logically, in line 114 he would still be addressing Nature; contextually, however, it can be inferred

<sup>40</sup> Wordsworth, "Preface," 62.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background. Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950), 272.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Heinz Göller, "Die geistige Entwicklung Wordsworths," *Die neueren Sprachen*, 12 (1963), 343.

<sup>44</sup> Durrant, *Wordsworth and the Great System*, 104. See also Fritz Willy Schulze ed., *W. Wordsworth / S.T. Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads. Historisch-kritisch herausgegeben von F.W. Schulze* (Halle/Saale: Niemeyer, 1952), 26-27.



that he invokes Dorothy, creating a deliberate ambiguity that can similarly be found in Collins's odes. This is an instance of what Bateson comprehended as the "concessions to irrationality" and the "logical contradictions" of the poem.<sup>45</sup> The closeness of his relationship with this companion (Dorothy – but, grammatically, also Nature) is expressed in his emphatic interjection "my dearest Friend, / My dear, dear Friend" (ll. 115-16), an address that is reminiscent of the hymnal address, despite Wordsworth's breaking down of all differences of status by collapsing the mythological and unreachably divine character of Nature and by approximating his own existence to that of his "guardian" and "guide." The hitherto public odic character of "Tintern Abbey" is here inverted, too, by his turning to his sister and announces Wordsworth's shift "to a more private poetry."<sup>46</sup> The interjective "Oh" then establishes without doubt that he is now addressing his sister, revealing that "prayer" (l. 121) will be rewarded by Nature, as "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (ll. 122-23). In short,

[Nature] can so inform  
 The mind that is within us, so impress  
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold is full of blessings. (ll. 125-33)

With the aid of Nature, Wordsworth's memory reconstructs and newly creates "all sweet sounds and harmonies" (l. 142). Nature, too, "will undertake to teach the speaker to prevent the destruction and forgetfulness of his recollections."<sup>47</sup> Or, in Susan C. Meisenfelder's words, "Nature taught him not by offering platitudinous moral systems but by guiding perception, eliciting feelings, by teaching him 'to see, to think, and feel'."<sup>48</sup> Then, that is, in the 1790s, "the exercise of his imagination was primarily a source of pleasure, mingled with a melancholy awareness that what was imagined had to remain a dream, a fancy of nothingness."<sup>49</sup> Reaching poetic maturity, however, the poet has succeeded in capturing the impressions of the past imaginatively and turned them into permanent and lasting reminders of the happiness he used to experience in his communion with Nature. With maturity Wordsworth has realised the true importance of memory and the imagination:

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,

<sup>45</sup> Bateson, *Wordsworth*, 141, 142.

<sup>46</sup> Bateson, *Wordsworth*, 145.

<sup>47</sup> See Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background*, 272, 277.

<sup>48</sup> Susan C. Meisenfelder, *Wordsworth's Informed Reader: Structure and Experience in His Poetry* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1988), 9.

<sup>49</sup> Christiansen, *Romantic Affinities*, 150.

Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. (ll. 88-93)

The dialectic of inevitable change and conjured permanence is central to "Tintern Abbey." Max Byrd, in that respect, speaks of the speaker's "shifting identities"<sup>50</sup> and refers to his personal and artistic development. In a hymnal sense, what Willey terms the "divinization of Nature"<sup>51</sup> results in the poet comprehending Nature both as divine and his muse. There is no distinction between Nature's divinity and her functions as guardian and companion any more, and this marks the poet's innovation within the hymnal tradition. Through his address of Nature, Wordsworth looks for ways of "how to reestablish that parallel permanence, how to be reabsorbed into steady interdependence."<sup>52</sup> His imaginative reworking of the past "is not so much recollected as created, as a speculative refuge from the pressure to realise oneself in poetry."<sup>53</sup>

Fred V. Randel argues that "Tintern Abbey" "is about living among ruins."<sup>54</sup> Wordsworth was living among the ruins of the awareness that his (actual) past was irreparably lost to him. He was eager to construct a state of mind which had not yet "establish[ed] an identity separate from the world around"<sup>55</sup> it. In the process, he wanted to rid his mind of the awareness that he is a "prisoner of mortality."<sup>56</sup> Referring to what Willey called the "divinization of Nature," Marjorie Levinson argues that one of the central points why Wordsworth may have decided to avoid writing specifically about Tintern Abbey in the poem may have been his wish to exclude religious, and more precisely Christian thought, from his poem.<sup>57</sup> Levinson does not realise that, notwithstanding Wordsworth's resistance to call his poem "ode," he was in fact using and inverting some elements such as the invocation and the 'pars epica' that Kurt Schlüter regarded as essential in the hymnal ode. That he did not adhere to the poetic practice of Collins can be explained with his different concerns: he was not a poet in search of a mythic gift of vision, but – possessed of Fancy – he succeeded in constructing that for which Collins (vainly) apostrophised deities such as Eve and Simplicity. Wordsworth was deeply rooted in the literary traditions of the eighteenth century, but he saw the need for generic experimentation to differentiate his voice from those of his predecessors. The hymnal tradition could still be used by a variety of Romantics such as Mary Robinson, Keats and Shelley but they had a classicist agenda rather than advocating the views of a "worshipper of Nature" (l. 152).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Byrd, "Metamorphosis and *Tintern Abbey*: Two Notes," 26.

<sup>51</sup> Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background*, 253.

<sup>52</sup> Byrd, "Metamorphosis and *Tintern Abbey*: Two Notes," 30.

<sup>53</sup> Foster, "Tintern Abbey and Wordsworth's Scene of Writing," 88.

<sup>54</sup> Fred V. Randel, "The Betrayals of *Tintern Abbey*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 32:3 (1993), 379–97.

<sup>55</sup> A.S. Byatt, *Unruly Times. Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Times* (London: Vintage, 1997), 162.

<sup>56</sup> Byatt, *Unruly Times*, 163.

<sup>57</sup> See Marjorie Levinson, 'Insight and Oversight: Reading *Tintern Abbey*', *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 15.

<sup>58</sup> See Sandro Jung, "Some Notes on the Hellenism of Mary Robinson's Odes," *Eighteenth-Century Women*, 3 (2002), 185–97.