



REVERENCE FOR NATURE: PANTHEISM IN WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S TINTERN ABBEY

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Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of pantheism in William Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey." Through a close analysis of the text, this paper examines how Wordsworth portrays nature as a divine presence, intricately woven into the fabric of the universe. Drawing on pantheistic philosophy, the paper delves into the speaker's profound spiritual connection with the natural world, emphasizing themes of divine immanence, unity of existence, and reverence for nature. By analyzing key passages from the poem, the paper highlights Wordsworth's depiction of nature as a source of spiritual inspiration, solace, and renewal for the speaker. Furthermore, the paper explores the implications of the pantheistic worldview in "Tintern Abbey," including its implications for understanding the relationship between humanity and the natural world, and its broader philosophical and theological implications. Through this analysis, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of Wordsworth's poetic vision and the enduring relevance of pantheistic themes in literature.

Keywords

Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey, Pantheism, Nature, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

William Wordsworth was one of the founders of English Romanticism and one of its most central figures and important intellects. He is remembered as a poet of spiritual and epistemological speculation, a poet concerned with the human relationship to nature, and a fierce advocate of using common people's vocabulary and speech patterns in poetry. The son of John and Ann Cookson Wordsworth, William Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770, in Cockermouth, Cumberland, located in the Lake District of England: an area that would become closely associated with Wordsworth for over two centuries after his death. He began writing poetry as a young boy in grammar school, and before graduating from college he went on a walking tour of Europe, which deepened his love for nature and his sympathy for the common man: both major themes in his poetry. Wordsworth is best known for *Lyrical Ballads*, cowritten with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and *The Prelude*, a Romantic epic poem chronicling the "growth of a poet's mind." (Poetry Foundation).

Romanticism was an artistic and intellectual movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century. For most of the Western world, it was at its peak from approximately 1800 to 1850. (Wikipedia) The movement emphasized intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. It granted a new importance to experiences of sympathy, awe, wonder, and terror, in part by naturalizing such emotions as responses to the 'beautiful' and the 'sublime'. The paper will focus on fruitful discussion as follow.



Pantheism the doctrine in which the universe conceived as a whole is God and, conversely, that there is no God but the combined substance, forces, and laws are manifested in the existing universe. (Britannica) Pantheism is a belief that reality is identical with divinity, or that all things compose an all-encompassing, inherent god. In ancient Greek religion and mythology, Pan is the god of wild, shepherds and folks, nature of mountain wilds, music and companion of the nymphs.

Tintern Abbey: Tintern Abbey was founded on 9 May 1131 by Walter de Clare, Lord of Chepstow. It is situated adjacent to the village of Tintern in Monmouthshire, on the Welsh bank of the River Wye, which at this location forms the border between Monmouthshire in Wales and Gloucestershire in England. It was the first Cistercian foundation in Wales, and only the second in Britain (after Waverley Abbey). The abbey fell into ruin after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century. Its remains have been celebrated in poetry and painting from the 18th century onwards. (Wikipedia) The poem by Wordsworth is written out of the experiences of a walking tour that he shared with his sister Dorothy, in June of 1798 which can be seen from the title of the poem. Title of poem is long and prosaic which gives the time and location. ‘Tintern Abbey’ stands as a quintessential work of Romantic literature, celebrated for its profound exploration of nature and the human spirit. Central to the poem's thematic tapestry is the concept of pantheism, a philosophical and religious perspective that views the natural world as imbued with divine presence. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth portrays nature not merely as a backdrop to human existence, but as a living, breathing entity it is intimately connected to the spiritual and emotional experiences of the speaker. Through its exploration of pantheism in Wordsworth's poetry, this paper contributes to a broader conversation about the relationship between humanity, nature, and the divine in literature and philosophy.

Pantheism in Tintern Abbey: *Tintern Abbey* is a prime example of nature worship in Wordsworth's poetry, where the natural world is depicted as divine, providing spiritual sustenance and guidance to the speaker. Pantheistic ideas and most importantly the belief that God is equal to the universe, its physical matter, and the forces that govern it are found in the ancient books of Hinduism, in the works of many Greek philosophers, and later works of philosophy and religion over the centuries. Much modern New Age spirituality is pantheistic. But most Christian thinkers reject pantheism because it makes God too impersonal, doesn't allow for any difference between the creation and the creator, and doesn't seem to allow humans to make meaningful moral choices. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the adjective ‘pantheist’ was given by the Irish Deist John Toland in the book *Socinianism Truly Stated* (1705). The noun “pantheism” was first used in 1709 by one of Toland's opponents. The term “panentheism” appeared much later, in 1828.

Influence of Spinoza on Wordsworth: Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza was infamous for his sometimes-inscrutable variety of pantheism, in which God no longer sits outside Nature, but effectively is Nature, inextricable from it. Though Spinoza's life preceded English Romanticism by more than a century, his concept of a pantheistic universe and the influence of nature on life are prevalent in English Romanticism. Spinoza, made way for the Romantic Movement to spread to England through the pantheism controversy of 1785 and the rise of German romanticism. The biographer Jonathan Bate suggests that Wordsworth must have learned of Spinoza from the erudite and voluble Coleridge, but that he probably never read the “Ethics” himself. There is a clear importance put on the effect of nature on human emotions and the absence of free will in “Tintern Abbey,” for example, Wordsworth describes how “a motion and a spirit. . . rolls through all things”. Similarly, Spinoza, in “The Ethics”, claims that there is only one “sole substance”. The intellectual background of English Romanticism as we know it today is heavily influenced, if not



created, by Spinoza. Spinoza's philosophy, articulated in works like "Ethics," views nature and God as synonymous. He argues that universe is governed by nature and that everything, including human beings, is an expression of God's infinite and immutable essence. However, Spinoza's conception of God is impersonal and abstract, devoid of anthropomorphic attributes. Wordsworth emphasizes the role of human agency and free will in shaping one's relationship with nature. Spinoza's philosophy denies the existence of free will as traditionally understood. According to Spinoza, human actions are determined by nature, and individuals have no ultimate control over their destinies.

Influence of French Revolution: William Wordsworth was born in 1770, before the French Revolution. French Revolution acted as a trigger, which made people feel that monarchy was not absolute. People started to fight for their rights and started to believe in the concept of equality and liberty. So, it freed the European mind of age-old traditions and that happened in the year 1789. French Revolution had impact on the thought of British people, especially on Wordsworth. He believed and experienced in the struggle of revolution, but he also witnessed the massacre and bloodshed it brought with it. "...Like a man Flying from something that he dreads" Interpretation of these lines might lead to the feeling of horror and terror that Wordsworth had felt while he was involved in the French Revolution. The traumatic events which took him to escape in nature the first time he visited the Tintern Abbey where he found seclusion far more welcoming and peaceful than depressing. **Meaning of Nature:** Nature is an inherent character or constitution, particularly of the ecosphere or the universe as a whole. In this general sense nature refers to the laws, elements and phenomena of the physical world, including life. Although humans are part of nature, human activity or humans are often described as at times at odds, or outright separate and even superior to nature. For most of the time in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth seems to be discussing this natural scene around Tintern Abbey and telling what it has meant to him and what it can be expected to give. But when Wordsworth uses the word Nature, he means more than just rivers, trees, rocks, mountains, crags, lakes, and so on. He means all these things certainly, but more importantly he means a power, a force, a dynamic principle that animates, that moulds with plastic might the physical furnishings of the universe.

The Abbey and the Sacred Landscape: Tintern Abbey is a prosaic word, Abbey is a religious place. Tintern Abbey during 1798 had turned into a ruin. So technically it was not a place where Christians went to worship. At that time looking through the paintings it can be understood that it was a place which was very much assimilated with natural surroundings, so it had become an extension of nature. Tintern Abbey loses its connection with human civilization and becomes more connected with ambient nature. In the first few lines, Wordsworth paints a beautiful painting through the imagery of 'steep and lofty cliffs', 'cottage-ground' and 'orchard-tufts'; the smell of 'unripe fruit', 'smoke' and sound of river Wye. He describes the sound as a soft almost whisper-like, which gives water human like quality. His pantheistic views are represented through the element of life which he feels in the nature objects like river and the mountain springs, there is something divine about the way in which water is making the sound. He is looking at the scenery from above the valley which gives him panoramic view and in a sense scene from past and present are merging together like 'green hue' are 'lose themselves' as boundary line between different trees is blurred like paint where artist deliberately blurred the line of the horizon and mix up the colour which gives impression of wholeness. So the nature is uncorrected by the human interference, boundaries like hedge-rows don't show separation,

...Once again I see These hedge-rows,
hardly hedge-rows, little lines



Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke Sent up,
in silence, from among the trees! (Wordsworth)

There is no demarcation between the cottages where human beings and land surrounding them. So green has kind of run up to their door, there's a connection established between nature and humanity. So ruin of the Tintern Abbey overgrown with moss and greenery which now have become a part of nature is a sacred land for pantheist like Wordsworth and others like him.

Nurturing power of nature: Wordsworth lost his mother when he was seven year old and his father when he was thirteen, upon which he was sent off by guardian uncle to a grammar school at Hawkshead, a village in the heart of the Lake District. The natural scenery of the English lakes could nurture, as Wordsworth would later testify in the line,

“Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her;” (Wordsworth)

In these lines, Wordsworth describes a spiritual presence within nature that transcends human understanding. This presence, which he perceives as pervasive and all-encompassing, serves as a guiding force, much like a mother's wisdom and intuition. William Wordsworth metaphorically depicts nature as a nurturing and maternal figure, akin to a mother which can be further seen from his use of pronoun “Her” for nature. Wordsworth portrays nature as a moral teacher like a mother who guides little children to become better person, guiding individuals towards a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships with others, including family members. “On that best portion of a good man's life, His little, nameless, unremembered, acts Of kindness and of love.” Throughout the poem, Wordsworth reflects on his own moral growth and the impact of nature on his character. He suggests that his connection to the natural world has instilled in him a sense of empathy, compassion, and moral responsibility. It is nature who better connects him with his sister Dorothy after long separation in their childhood.

To conclude, in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," William Wordsworth presents a compelling portrayal of nature worship and pantheism, inviting readers to contemplate the profound spiritual significance of the natural world. Through vivid imagery, introspective reflections, and philosophical insights, Wordsworth explores the interconnectedness of humanity and nature, emphasizing the transformative power of nature on the human spirit. The poem serves as a testament to Wordsworth's reverence for the natural world, depicting nature as a sacred presence that evokes feelings of awe, wonder, and spiritual connection. Wordsworth's description of the landscape surrounding Tintern Abbey as a place of solace and inspiration underscores the idea of nature as a sanctuary for the soul, a source of solace and spiritual renewal. Furthermore, Wordsworth's pantheistic beliefs are evident in his portrayal of nature as a divine presence that permeates all aspects of existence. He describes nature as imbued with a sublime and transcendent quality, suggesting that the entire universe is suffused with a spiritual essence that inspires reverence and wonder. Through his exploration of nature worship and pantheism in "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth challenges conventional religious doctrines and invites readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world. By highlighting the beauty, harmony, and interconnectedness of nature, Wordsworth encourages a deeper appreciation for the sacredness of the natural world and the profound spiritual truths it embodies. In conclusion, *Tintern Abbey* stands as a powerful testament to Wordsworth's philosophy of nature worship and pantheism, offering readers a glimpse into the poet's profound reverence for the natural world and his belief in



its inherent divinity. Through his lyrical prose and contemplative reflections, Wordsworth invites readers to embrace a deeper spiritual connection with nature, recognizing it as a source of wisdom, inspiration, and transcendent beauty.

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