



Tintern Abbey

William Wordsworth
Lyrical Ballads
(1798)

Tintern Abbey, located in the valley of the river Wye, in Wales, was founded by Cistercian monks in 1131. The Abbey was destroyed at the time of Henry VIII (1491-1547) and its ruins became very popular in the late 18th century. Wordsworth visited its ruins for the first time when he was twenty-three, and returned there with his sister Dorothy five years later. Written in blank verse, the poem is Wordsworth's first major autobiographical work and it expresses some of his central ideas about nature, perception and spiritual growth, and the working of memory which produces continuity between past and present, and hope for the future.

*Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,
on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798*

- Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland¹ murmur. – Once again
5 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs²,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
10 Here, under this dark sycamore³, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts⁴,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue⁵, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses⁶. Once again I see
15 These hedge-rows, hardly⁷ hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive⁸ wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice⁹, as might seem
20 Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's¹⁰ cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

- 1 inland. Interno, dell'entroterra.
2 steep and lofty cliffs. Rupi ripide ed elevate.
3 sycamore. Acero.
4 orchard-tufts. Ciuffi degli alberi da frutto.
5 in one green hue. Di un colore verde.
6 'Mid ... copses. Tra boschetti e sottobosco.
7 hardly. A malapena.
8 sportive. Capriccioso.
9 notice. Lett.: annuncio; qui: segno.
10 some Hermit's. Di qualche eremita.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the excerpt from the poem and match the highlighted words with their Italian translation.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1 acerbi | 6 ornati |
| 2 fonti | 7 appartata |
| 3 grotta | 8 appezzamenti |
| 4 anelli | 9 siepi |
| 5 vedo | 10 abitatori erranti |



> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ again and say

- 1 what occasion the poet is describing;
- 2 when the poet had visited the place for the first time;
- 3 what kind of scene he sees;
- 4 whether there is any human presence;
- 5 what the atmosphere is like.

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

3 ANSWER the following questions.

- 1 Are the lines end-stopped? What device is often used by the poet? What is its effect?
- 2 How is the scene perceived by the poet?
- 3 Circle the words and phrases that make these lines a fine piece of pastoral description.
- 4 Is the emphasis on the scene itself or on what it means to Wordsworth? Find evidence in the poem.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
25 But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din¹¹
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them¹²
In hours of weariness¹³, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
30 With tranquil restoration: – feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence¹⁴
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
35 Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust¹⁵,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood¹⁶
In which the burthen¹⁷ of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
40 Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened¹⁸: – that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on, –
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
45 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.

11 **din.** Frastuono.

12 **I have owed to them.** Sono stato loro debitore di.

13 **weariness.** Stanchezza.

14 **such ... influence.** Tali, forse, da aver avuto un'influenza non banale.

15 **I trust.** Credo.

16 **that blessed mood.** Quello stato d'animo beato.

17 **burthen.** Peso, fardello.

18 **lightened.** Alleggerito (e, al tempo stesso, illuminato).



COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

4 READ lines 22-49 and answer the following questions.

- 1 Where has the poet spent the last five years?
- 2 How did he feel?
- 3 What has the memory of the beautiful forms of nature been to Wordsworth in the past five years?
- 4 What other gift have they brought to him?

COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

5 FIND the lines where nature is presented as

- 1 a comforter.
- 2 a guide to moral growth.
- 3 a doorway into a state of visionary trance-like insight.

What poetic faculty is introduced in lines 47-49?

If this

50 Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft –
 In darkness and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable¹⁹, and the fever of the world,
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart –

55 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
 O sylvan Wye²⁰! thou wanderer²¹ through the woods,
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!
 And now, with gleams²² of half-extinguished thought,
 With many recognitions dim and faint²³,

60 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
 The picture of the mind revives again:
 While here I stand, not only with the sense
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
 That in this moment there is life and food

65 For future years. And so I dare²⁴ to hope,
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
 I came among these hills; when like a roe²⁵
 I bounded o'er the mountains²⁶, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,

70 Wherever nature led: more like a man
 Flying from something that he dreads²⁷ than one
 Who sought²⁸ the thing he loved. For nature then
 (The coarser²⁹ pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad animal movements all gone by)

75 To me was all in all. – I cannot paint³⁰
 What then I was. The sounding cataract³¹
 Haunted me³² like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me

80 An appetite; a feeling and a love,
 That had no need of a remoter charm³³,
 By thought supplied³⁴, nor any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye³⁵. –

19 **fretful ... Unprofitable.** L'agitarsi stizzito e vano.

20 **Wye.** Fiume del Galles e dell'Inghilterra, famoso per la bellezza del paesaggio circostante.

21 **thou wanderer.** Tu vagabondo (*thou* è forma arcaica).

22 **gleams.** Balenii.

23 **recognitions ... faint.** Ricordi confusi e vaghi.

24 **I dare.** Oso.

25 **roe.** Capriolo.

26 **I bounded o'er the mountains.** Saltavo per le montagne.

27 **Flying ... dreads.** Che fugge da qualcosa di cui ha timore.

28 **sought.** Cercasse.

29 **coarser.** Più rozzi.

30 **paint.** Dipingere; *qui*: descrivere, rappresentare.

31 **The sounding cataract.** La cascata risonante.

32 **Haunted me.** Mi assillava, ossessionava.

33 **charm.** Fascino.

34 **supplied.** Fornito.

35 **Unborrowed from the eye.** Che non fosse prestato dall'occhio.



> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT**6 READ** lines 49-83 and do the following activities.

- 1 Explain the contrast presented by the poet in lines 49-57.
- 2 What is the poet's hope in lines 58-65?
- 3 What phases of the poet's life are dealt with in lines 66-83?
- 4 What experiences of his life does the poet remember?

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT**7 FOCUS** on the alliteration of /f/ and /h/ in lines 49-57. What do these sounds try to reproduce?**8 FIND** the lines where the poet emphasises the importance of memory.**9 LOOK** for the similes in lines 65-83. Analyse their terms. How has the poet's approach to nature changed through the years?**10 TRY** to explain what the poet means when he says that 'nature then ... To me was all in all'. What did his perception of nature in his boyish years exclude?

That time is past,
And all its aching³⁶ joys are now no more,
85 And all its dizzy³⁷ raptures. Not for this
Faint I³⁸, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
90 Of thoughtless youth³⁹; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue⁴⁰. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
95 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused⁴¹,
Whose dwelling⁴² is the light of setting⁴³ suns;
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
100 A motion and a spirit, that impels⁴⁴
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through⁴⁵ all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows⁴⁶ and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
105 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, – both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
110 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. [...]

36 **aching**. Lancinanti.

37 **dizzy**. Vertiginosi.

38 **Faint I**. Mi sgomento, vengo meno.

39 **in the hour ... youth**. Al tempo della giovinezza spensierata.

40 **Nor ... subdue**. Né aspra né stridente benché ampiamente capace di calmare e dominare (le passioni).

41 **interfused**. Infuso.

42 **dwelling**. Dimora.

43 **setting**. Al tramonto.

44 **that impels**. Che muove, spinge.

45 **And rolls through**. E percorre.

46 **meadows**. Prati.



➤ **COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT**

11 READ lines 83-111 and explain

- 1 what phase of Wordsworth's attitude to nature is introduced here;
- 2 what he has lost;
- 3 what he has gained in return;
- 4 what he has learned to unite.

➤ **COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT**

12 CIRCLE the words referring to the 'presence' that the poet feels. Where is it located? What kind of view is this?

13 UNDERLINE the phrases used by Wordsworth to refer to himself.

14 SUM up Wordsworth's clearest statements about the relationship between man and nature (lines 107-111).

15 THINK of the language of the poem (you may focus on lines 93-102 as an example) and say if it is consistent with the choice of the language of poetry stated in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*.

➤ **COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE AGE**

16 WRITE 200 words on the following topic. '*Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* is one of the great English nature poems. However, it is also Wordsworth's attempt to put forward his philosophy about the relationship between man and nature. Discuss Wordsworth's treatment of the subject.'