UNIT 4: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: "TINTERN ABBEY", "ODE: INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY"

UNIT STRUCTURE:

4.1 Learning Objectives

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit, you will be able to

- interpret the prescribed poems in terms of the different aspects
- identify and explain the different themes implicit in the poems.
- examine Wordsworth's poetic style
- discuss the poems in its nuanced totality

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit brings to you a reading of William Wordsworth's celebrated poem "Tintern Abbey". The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 symbolically marks the beginning of a new era in English literature called Romanticism. In this book, Wordsworth, along with his co-author Coleridge, published some lyrics and ballads that differed both thematically and technically from the Neo-classical poets of the earlier era. "Tintern Abbey", one of the longer poems published in this collection, exhibits some of the defining themes and philosophies of Wordsworth that construct the identity of Wordsworth as one of the greatest Romantic poets. Therefore, composed at a defining moment in the

history of English literature, the poem exhibits some of the basic attitudes of a new generation of English poets whom we call the Romantics. The other poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" also known as the Immortality Ode or Great Ode was completed in 1804, and published in *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807). The poem was completed in two parts. Wordsworth wrote the first four stanzas as part of a series of poems composed in 1802 about childhood. As you finish reading this unit, along with a reading of the poems, you will also get an opportunity of discussing the major themes and other important aspects of the poems prescribed.

4.3 READING THE POEMS

The following subsections shall help you to read the prescribed poems in some details.

4.3.1 The text of "Tintern Abbey"

Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798.

FIVE years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.— Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
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
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. 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!
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.
These beauteous form
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,

Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man’s life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—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
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.
If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro’ the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!
And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
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
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. 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,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. 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. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.
Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me here upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend; and 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,
My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; ’tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she 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 judgments, 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. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
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!

After a lapse of five years, Wordsworth revisits the river Wye and confronts the scenic beauty of the river and the valley whose youthful memory has been stored in his heart for the last five years. Once again, he sees the steep and lofty cliffs, the orchards, cottage gardens, pastoral farms, the hermit’s cottage and hears the murmur of the Wye. The memory of these beautiful forms of Nature have always been for him the source of inspiration, comfort and a place of refuge amidst the din and bustle of cities and towns. The absence of five years does not seem to have wiped out his memory of the earlier visit which he has profound spiritual effect on him.

The memory of these forms helps him transcend the “corporeal frame/ And even the motion of our human blood” and takes him to a kind of exalted mood to “become a living soul” where he can “see into the life of things.” It is a moment of illumination for him where he is equipped with the ability to perceive beyond the physical reality and see the inner life of things. Therefore, whenever he is oppressed by the mundane ‘joyless daylight’ and the ‘unprofitable’ preoccupations of life, he turns to his memory of the landscape in search of inspiration.

Now, as the poet stands again on the bank of the river, the memories of the landscape come to his mind and he compares them with his present observations. As he visualises his boyhood through his memory, he finds that a young boy’s delightful participation in outdoor life marked his response to the world of Nature. Five years ago, it was through his senses that he enjoyed Nature. As his love for Nature was untouched by intellectual interests, his spirit marvelled at the beautiful colours and forms of the woods and mountains, and the music in the birds’ songs and the river’s murmur. However, with his advanced age his perceptions and thoughts have matured; the continuous sufferings of mankind – ‘’The still, sad music of humanity’’ – have taught him a lot. Now Nature appears to him in a different light. In Nature, he realises the existence of an all-pervasive living spirit that connects everything together:

“… … 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 round the ocean and 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." (**Lines:** 95-114)

The poet's 'purest thoughts' are stimulated by the sensual reception of the world of Nature. Nature becomes "the nurse,/ The guide, the guardian of my (his) heart, and soul/ Of all my (his) moral being".

Now, the poet has with him his young sister Dorothy, in whose eyes he can still see the sparkle of the pleasure that he used to experience at the same place five years ago. He has this firm conviction that Nature never betrays the heart that loves her. He believes that against all mundane and dreary intercourse of the day to day life, all evil thoughts, any rush judgment, all selfish preoccupations of men, Nature protects this cheerful faith of the human soul by leading the human life from joy to joy, and by filling the mind with quietness and beauty and nourishing it with lofty thoughts. Therefore, he asks his sister to maintain her kinship with nature all her life. He hopes that in moments of loneliness, fear and pain, she will look back to these delightful moments spent with her brother and the memory of these sweet impressions of Nature stored in her mind will comfort her. He hopes that in near or future, when the poet may not be with his sister, she will remember her brother and memory will take her to the moments when she was with him on the bank of the Wye. He hopes that she will remember him "so long a worshipper of Nature", whose heart is filled 'with warmer love' and 'with far deeper zeal of holier love'. Therefore, for Wordsworth, after many wanderings and many years of absence, the beauteous forms of the world of Nature appear more beautiful and more dearly just for themselves and for the reason that his sister is with him when he is in the midst of Nature.

The detailed description of the setting of this poem bears immense significance for the poet. Indeed, the very title of the poem bears reference to the time and place of his return visit and lets the reader know where he is positioned in the landscape that he is describing. He posits himself in a specific spot, a “few miles above” an abbey in the valley of the Wye so that he can have a broad perspective on the landscape he is going to describe. It is the middle of July, the day before Bastille Day and the poet has already asserted, “five years have past” since his last visit. The five years that the poet refers to are some of the most tumultuous years in the history of Europe as they are to the poet’s life too. The nostalgic, contemplative and reflective mood of the poet shows as if he has been longing to return to this spot above Tintern Abbey. Wordsworth’s detailed description of the scene - the sound of ‘rolling’ waters, the sublimity of the ‘steep and lofty cliffs,’ – appeal to the reader’s eyes and ears. Wordsworth’s first person narrative with repeated and emphatic use of the first person pronoun, ‘I’— ‘I hear/ These waters,’ ‘I behold,’—emphasises his personal engagement with the scene he is describing.

“Tintern Abbey” suggest three periods in the poet’s development: the crude boyish period of ‘glad animal movements,’ when Nature was merely unconsciously absorbed; the second period when Nature was to him all in all; and the third, the mature period. As he stands on the river after a lapse of five years, he confronts with the image of himself when in youth he used to fling himself into the delight in Nature.

“… … the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remote charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.” (**Lines:** 79-85)

However, with age and experience, that sensuous association with the natural world remains no more:

"… … That time is past,
All its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures." (**Lines:** 85-87)

However, the poet does get his compensation for this loss. He develops an understanding of the tragedy of humanity and realises the presence, in and around him, of an omnipresent, universal, Illimitable spirit of sublime grandeur that run through all lives. The poet has been intuitively aware of this sublime presence since his childhood.

"… … 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,
… … … … … … … … … …
… … And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with joy
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
… … … … … … … … … …
… … … … … … … … … …
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things. … …" (**Lines:** 90-105)

The poet realises that his boyhood intuition of this sublime spirit remains valid throughout ages. There is a difference in the first two verse paragraphs: the first paragraph presents the poet 'beholding' nature while the second paragraph shows him 'seeing' into 'the life of things'. This difference reflects an intellectual development from the surface to the essence. The poem records Wordsworth's discovery that the 'mighty world of eye and ear' cannot fully create the perception of the world but has the capability of lifting one to the experience of a higher and sublime reality.



LET US KNOW

In his Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth declared that good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." According to Wordsworth, poetry is not primarily a mirror of men in action, but the elements in the poet's own feelings. This doctrine went against the Neoclassical manipulations of the poetic elements. However, Wordsworth carefully qualified his radical doctrine by describing poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity," and by specifying that the poet's spontaneity is the result of a prior process of deep reflections over the previous thought and revision. Keats too wrote: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves of a tree, it had better not come at all." Coleridge, on the other hand, proclaimed that each poetic work is like a growing plant evolving according to its internal principles into its final organic form.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think that the background information is necessary for the understanding of "Tintern Abbey"? Elaborate.

Q 2: Why, according to you, time matters most in the poem?

Q 3: What is Wordsworth's definition of poetry? How did Keats and Coleridge conceive the idea of poetry?

1.3.2 Major Themes in "Tintern Abbey":

The major themes of the poem "Tintern Abbey" can be studied under the following headings.

Autobiographical Interest:

As you have finished reading the poem, you must have noticed that through the poet's response to the outward world of nature, the poem traces the poet's inward journey to the

realization of the self. Like *The Prelude*, "Tintern Abbey" is a kind of self-revelation of the poet. Because of its connection to the real incidents and emotions of the poet's life, the poem is difficult to understand without the details of its occasion and the personal information of the poet. To understand the poem, we have to pay attention to Wordsworth, his sister Dorothy, and the intellectual, aesthetic and emotional relations between them. The poem is an intimate revelation of one's emotional and philosophical experiences and associations of life; and for Wordsworth such a revelation can be possible only to his sister with whom he shared a deep emotional and intellectual relationship. The poem marks the important transitional moment of a man's (also Wordsworth's) journey from childhood playfulness to the spiritual and intellectual pursuits of maturity.

Nature and Man:

"Tintern Abbey" is one of the first poems of Wordsworth that can avail him the tag "worshipper of Nature". Most of his early poems show his first hand experience of the country life with all its spontaneity, hardships, and the beauty of its natural surroundings. However, in "Tintern Abbey" the poet, for the first time, gives a passionate account of the effect of the outer world upon his inner self. The different stages of his intellectual and spiritual development as a man are intimately connected to his understanding of the outer world of Nature. The "beauteous forms" of Nature recollected "mid the din of towns and cities" in the "hours of weariness" brings to the poet "sensations sweet felt in the blood, and felt along the heart". Here, Wordsworth takes recourse to the dominant philosophical ideas of sensationalism and associationism. The senses absorb sensations, which then get transformed into feelings. The feelings leave their impression in the mind by purifying and elevating it to the 'blessed spiritual' mood. It is the conceptualization of the 'blessed spiritual' mood availed through Nature that marks Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature as distinct from that of others.

Nature has remained a decisive influence in all the three stages of his life that Wordsworth describes in this poem. Of the three stages of the poet’s life, the first is the boyhood days of pure physical sensations -”the coarser pleasure of my boyish days, and their glad animal movements”. The second stage is the adolescent or early youth when Nature was “all in all” and its colours, forms and phenomena “a passion”, “an appetite” for the young lover boy. This stage is marked by the feverish, passionate, unreflecting and sensuous absorption of Nature. The third and last stage is the stage of maturity; it is a stage of thought and meditation and of mystic realization of ‘a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused”. It is the mystical understanding of the character of the universe that marks this stage of maturity. It is a vision into the all-pervading spirit of Nature based on grand unity and harmony. It is this moment of spiritual enlightenment that wipes out all the coarse pleasures of childhood and the passionate sensuous appetite of the “thoughtless youth” and comes to the realization of “The still, sad music of humanity”.

Wordsworth correlated the tragedy or ‘sad music’ of humanity with his vision of Nature. This correlation makes them melt, and blend into a supreme harmony. This harmony helps the poet to feel “a presence that disturbs him” with joys of “elevated thought”. He realises the existence of “a presence” that encompasses both the outer and the inner world – “the round ocean”, “the living air”, “the blue sky” and “the mind of man”. Because of this sense of harmony, human sufferings and tragedies lose their sharp edges. The harmony between life with its reality and the all-encompassing presence of Nature creates music - ‘sad’ and ‘still’- in the poet’s mind. In the matured life, the experience widens with the intimate knowledge of human evil and suffering. The “dizzy raptures” of the “thoughtless youth” vanishes as the poet tries to integrate his old love for Nature by looking at it more thoughtfully. He discovers a vaster harmony in the vision of Nature, which takes in “the still, sad music of humanity”.

Wordsworth's treatment of Nature in this poem also throws important light on the Romantic poet's anti-Neoclassic attitude towards human sensibility. Reacting against the theoretical reduction of Man and Nature into a mechanical field of activity, determined by causality and universal rules, the Romantic poets tried to insert life into Nature and reconstruct Man as a creative being. "Tintern Abbey" celebrates that creative genius of men achieved through the working of the imaginative mind.

Use of Memory:

Memory plays a very important role in the poet's self-exploration as recorded in the poem. As far as autobiographical details of the poem are concerned, through memory, the poem honestly presents an important fact of human condition. The poem tells a story of natural growth that tests the soul of the man (the poet) and confronts him with life as it is. The mind of the poet, lost in the worldly affairs, goes back through memory to a time when Nature provided direct pleasure, when it could unify itself with Nature. It is only through memory that the mind revives that reality and revisits that faith that once gave courage and inspiration. During his five years' absence from the valley, the tranquil environments of Tintern Abbey have remained a constant present with the poet, stored in his memory as the "beauteous forms". When Wordsworth had been troubled with the ways of the 'unintelligible world,' remembering nature had not only brought him peace but had also given him insight "into the life of things." Through an act of memory, specifically through reflecting upon natural scenes, Wordsworth discovers a spirit that connects all life. Memory helps the poet to arrive at a deeper understanding of life in communion with nature.

Wordsworth and Imagination:

For Wordsworth, imagination is the most important gift that a poet can have. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth associate the

idea of creativity with imagination as they distinguish imagination from fancy. Wordsworth agrees with Coleridge that the creative faculty of imagination resembles that of God. It is this divine faculty through which a child can fashion his own little words; and poets retain this faculty even in maturity. Wordsworth differs from Coleridge in his conception of the relation between imagination and the external world. For Wordsworth, the external world has an independent- existence: it is not dead but living with a soul distinct from that of man. Imagination must be subservient to the external world. Man's task is to enter into communion with this soul of the external world. Imagination is the means through which man can attain this communion and understand the oneness of things.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the major themes of the poem "Tintern Abbey"?

Q 5: Memory plays a pivotal role in the poem. Explain.

Q 6: How did Wordsworth visualise the relation between man and nature?

Q 7: In what ways does Wordsworth differ from Coleridge while projecting his ideas on Imagination?

Q 8: What are the three stages of the poet's life?

4.3.2 "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"

[http://www.sparknotes.com]

The child is father of the man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.
(Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up")

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day.
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose,
The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where’er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor’s sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong:
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay;
Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every Beast keep holiday;—
Thou Child of Joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts,
thou happy Shepherd-boy.

Ye blessèd creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.
Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling
On every side,
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother’s arm:—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
—But there’s a Tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone;
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;

At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a Mother’s mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years’ Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where ‘mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother’s kisses,
With light upon him from his father’s eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learn{e}d art
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part;
Filling from time to time his “humorous stage”
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That Life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul’s immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read’st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o’er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being’s height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That Nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise

But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor’s sound!
We in thought will join your throng,
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.
And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

In stanza I, the speaker of the poem states that there was a time when all of nature seemed dreamlike to him, “apparelled in celestial light.” However, that that time is past as expressed in the lines: “the things I have seen I can see no more.” In stanza II, the speaker says that he still sees the rainbow, and that the rose is still lovely, the moon looks around the sky with delight, and both starlight and sunshine are beautiful. However, the speaker does reiterate that the past glory is no longer to be found on the earth.

In stanza III, the speaker expressed that he was stricken with a thought of grief, while listening to the birds singing in the springtime or watching the lambs leaping and playing in the lap of nature. However, the sound of the waterfalls, the echoes of the mountains, and the sound of the breeze restored him his strength. In addition, he declares that his grief and sorrow will no longer affect the joy of the season. He urges a shepherd boy to shout and play around him. In stanza IV, he addresses nature’s creatures, and says that his heart participates in their joyful festivals. He states that it would be wrong to feel sad on such a beautiful May morning, when children play and laugh among the flowers. Nevertheless, a tree and a field that he looks upon make him think of “something that is gone,” and a pansy at his feet does the same. He asks what has happened to “the visionary gleam”: “Where is it now, the glory and the dream?”

In the next stanza, the speaker proclaims that human life is merely “a sleep and a forgetting”—that is they dwell in a purer, more glorious realm before they are born on earth. “Heaven,” he says, “lies about us in our infancy!” As children, we still retain some memory of that place, which causes our experience of the earth to be suffused with its magic—but as the baby passes through boyhood and young adulthood and then into manhood, he sees that magic dying. In stanza VI, the speaker says that the pleasures unique to earth conspire to help men forget the “glories” of the past.

In the seventh stanza, the speaker beholds a six-year-old boy and imagines his life, and the love his parents feel for him. He sees the boy playing with some imitated fragment of adult life, “some little plan or chart,” imitating “a wedding or a festival” or “a mourning or a funeral.” The speaker then imagines that all human life is a similar imitation. In the next stanza, the speaker addresses the child as though he were a mighty prophet of a lost truth, and rhetorically asks him why, when he has access to the glories of his origins, and to the pure experience of nature, he still hurries toward an adult life of custom and “earthly freight.” In stanza IX, the speaker experiences a surge of joy at the thought that his memories of childhood will always grant him a kind of access to that lost world of instinct, innocence, and exploration. Then in stanza X, bolstered by this joy, he urges the birds to sing, and all other creatures to participate in “the gladness of the May.” He says that though he has lost some part of the glory of nature and of experience, he will take solace in “primal sympathy,” in memory, and in the fact that the years bring a mature consciousness—”a philosophic mind.”

In the final stanza, the speaker says that this mind—which stems from a consciousness of mortality, as opposed to the child’s feeling of immortality—enables him to love nature and natural beauty all the more, for each of nature’s objects can stir him to thought, and even the simplest flower blowing in the wind can raise in him “thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

Wordsworth in the “Immortality Ode” consciously makes the speaker compromise with the joyous atmosphere of nature around him. This is important for a poet whose consciousness is so habitually absorbed with the unity nature. With a view to expressing his grief, which is a result of his inability to experience the May morning, as he would have in childhood, the poetic persona attempts to enter wilfully into a state of cheerfulness. However, he is able to find real happiness only after realising the

fact that “the philosophic mind” has given him the ability to understand nature in deeper and more human terms, which will guide him for the rest of his life. This is very much in tune with his other poem “Tintern Abbey”. But, whereas in the previous poem Wordsworth made himself joyful as a ‘worshipper of nature’ and referred to the “music of humanity” only briefly; in the “Immortality Ode” he explicitly proposes that this music is the remedy for his mature grief.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is unique about Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode”?

4.4 WORDSWORTH’S POETIC STYLE

Wordsworth wrote “Tintern Abbey” this poem in tightly structured blank verse, and the poem consists of verse-paragraphs rather than stanzas. They are mostly in iambic pentameter. It is almost difficult to categorise the poem, as it contains elements of the ode, the dramatic monologue and the conversation poem. In the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth noted: “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 principle requisites of that species of composition.” At its beginning, it may well be dubbed an 18th Century “landscape-poem”, but it is commonly agreed that the best designation would be “the conversation poem”. In lines 1–24, the natural beauty of the Wye (which he first visited in 1793; second visit occurred in 1798) fills the poet with a sense of “tranquile restoration”. From lines 88–111, after contemplating the few changes in the scenery since his last visit, Wordsworth is overcome with “a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns”. In the final lines from 114-160, Wordsworth addresses his sister Dorothy, who did not accompany him

on his original visit to the abbey, and perceives in the delight she shows at the resplendence and serenity of their environs a poignant echo of his former self.

In style, "Tintern Abbey" does not conform to the norms of a lyric or a ballad. Its main reason lies in the use of the poetic language. The poem does not maintain Wordsworth's resolution on the selection of diction for poetry that he expressed in the ambitious "Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*". His language is not that of the "middle and lower classes of the society". The day to day language of the farmers and shepherds in Cumberland did not include words like 'sublime', 'ecstasy', 'interfused', 'genial', and phrases like 'half-extinguished thoughts', 'tranquil restoration', 'abundant recompense' etc. Going against his own propositions, the poet employs an elevated diction far removed from his ideal adobe. His syntax too appears to be more complicated and removed from ordinary usage of the language. The poem exhibits a congregation of long, involved sentences impregnated with lofty thoughts. This aspect of the poet's artistry, which can be termed to some extent as 'Miltonic', occupies much of his later works like *The Prelude*, *The Excursion* etc. The long sentences consisting of elevated words combined through complicated syntax can never make the poem what the poet calls the poetry of the people. Rather, this style can help us to penetrate into that domain of the poet's artistry where he was the most spontaneous and comfortable but never formally admitted it. "Tintern Abbey" is written in a low-toned but impassioned blank verse. The poet uses a double-exposure technique to give it a dramatic life. The poet has juxtaposed two widely separate periods in such a way that the reader is immediately confronted with the dramatic growth in the intellectual and spiritual life of the poet. The development of argument in the poem is conditioned by the distinctions of the two times. It works like two photographs of the same person taken at the same setting at two widely differing periods. Such contrast highlights the change and the growth or development becomes distinct.

Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode", on the other hand, is written in eleven variable ode stanzas with variable rhyme schemes, in iambic lines. The rhymes occasionally alternate lines, occasionally fall in couplets, and occasionally occur within a single line (as in "But yet I *know,* where'er I *go*" in the second stanza). The structure of poem is also unique. Unlike his characteristically fluid, naturally spoken monologues, the Ode is written in a lilting, songlike cadence with frequent shifts in rhyme scheme and rhythm. Further, rather than progressively sticking to a single idea from the beginning to the end, the poem jumps from idea to idea. The poem's metaphors and images shift from the register of lost childhood to that of the philosophic mind. When the poetic persona is in grief, the poem offers joyous, pastoral nature images, frequently personified, such as the lambs dancing, the moon looking around her in the sky etc. But when the poet attains the mature philosophic mind, he begins to employ far more subtle descriptions of nature. Here, the poet, rather than cheerfully imposing humanity upon natural objects, draws human characteristics out of their natural presences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: What are the most noteworthy elements of Wordsworth's poetic style?

Q 11: In style, "Tintern Abbey" does not conform to the norms of a lyric or a ballad. Why?



3.4 LET US SUM UP

From this unit you have learnt that the poem "Tintern Abbey" is often viewed as Wordsworth's first great declaration as a nature poet that the memory of one's attachment with nature in childhood works upon one's mind even in adulthood. In his youth, the poet was oblivious to his

relationship with the woods and the river. Now, after five years, he suddenly gets aware of everything that his memory of the scenes has to offer him. Thus, the background of the poem shows that “Tintern Abbey” went towards establishing a new intellectual outlook called Romanticism against the prevailing climate of the Enlightenment. Whereas, “Tintern Abbey” is Wordsworth’s first great statement about the action of childhood memories of nature upon the adult mind, “Ode on Intimations of Immortality” is his mature response to his subject. The poem makes explicit Wordsworth’s belief that life on earth is a dim shadow of an earlier, purer existence, dimly recalled in childhood and then forgotten in the process of growing up. This has been best expressed in the lines in stanza V: “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.../Not in entire forgetfulness,/And not in utter nakedness, /But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home...”



4.6 FURTHER READING

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Sengupta, Debjani and Cama, Shernaz, et al. (2004). *Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge*. Delhi: Worldview Publications.

WEB RESOURCES:

http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/wordsworth/section3/page/2/



4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: The poem is based on real life experience… …the title itself demands attention to the occasion and time of the composition… …the difference caused by a certain amount of time plays an important role… …detailed topographical description hints at the poet's personal engagement with the scene… …the poem is addressed to a person intimately related to the poet… …this personal relation conditions the mode of self revelation.

Ans to Q No 2: The poem is written after five years of the actual experience… …the poet hopes that in moments of loneliness, fear and pain, his sister Dorothy will remember the delightful moments spent with her brother years ago… …he also hopes that if, in future, he is not with his sister Dorothy, the memory of these sweet impressions of Nature stored in her mind will comfort her

Ans to Q No 3: Wordsworth declared that good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"… … Keats too wrote: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves of a tree, it had better not come at all"… …Coleridge, on the other hand, tried to proclaim that each poem is like a growing plant evolving according to its internal principles into its final organic form.

Ans to Q No 4: Autobiographical Interest… …Nature and Man… …Use of Memory… … Wordsworth and Imagination

Ans to Q No 5: Memory helps the poet to explore his self… …the mind of the poet, lost in the worldly affairs, goes back through memory to a time when Nature provided direct pleasure… …so it is only

through memory that the mind revives that reality and revisits that faith that once gave courage and inspiration.

Ans to Q No 6: In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth calls himself the "worshipper of Nature"… …Nature has remained a decisive influence in all the three stages of his life… …Wordsworth correlates the tragedy of humanity with his vision of Nature… …he arrives at a vision in which Nature's presence and human misery are brought to a concord so that to bring together the outer world and the inner world of mind.

Ans to Q No 7: Wordsworth agrees with Coleridge on the creative faculty of imagination… …but also differs from Coleridge in his conception of the relation between imagination and the external world… … For Wordsworth, the external world has an independent-existence and Imagination must be subservient to the external world.

Ans to Q No 8: The first is the boyhood days of pure physical sensations… …the second stage is the adolescence or early youth when Nature was "all in all"… …the third and last stage is the stage of maturity as it is a stage of thought and meditation and of mystic realization of 'a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused".

Ans to Q No 9: Wordsworth in the "Immortality Ode" consciously makes the speaker compromise with the joyous atmosphere of nature around him… …to express his grief, the speaker attempts to enter wilfully into a state of cheerfulness… …but, he is able to find real happiness only after realising the fact that "the philosophic mind" has given him the ability to understand nature in deeper and more human terms which will guide him for the rest of his life.

Ans to Q No 10: The poem is written in tightly-structured blank verse… … use of iambic pentameter… …but it is also difficult to categorise the poem, as it contains elements of the ode, the dramatic monologue and the conversation poem… …but the poet also

employs an elevated diction far removed from his own propositions to use a language of everyday use… …this style can help us to penetrate into that domain of the poet’s artistry where he was the most spontaneous and comfortable but never formally admitted it.

Ans to Q No 11: Because, “Tintern Abbey” does not maintain the selection of diction that he expressed in “Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*”… …the day to day language of the farmers and shepherds in Cumberland did not include words like ‘sublime’, ‘ecstasy’, ‘interfused’, ‘genial’… …going against his own propositions, Wordsworth employs an elevated diction far removed from his ideal adobe.



4.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Comment on Wordsworth’s philosophy of Nature. How is Nature connected to the development of the human mind and spirituality? Attempt an analysis from your reading of “Tintern Abbey” and “Immortality Ode”

Q 2: Write a note on the autobiographical elements in Wordsworth’s nature poems such as “Tintern Abbey” and “Immortality Ode”.

Q 3: How for Wordsworth are memory and imagination connected to one’s intellectual and spiritual development? Attempt a discussion with reference to “Tintern Abbey”.

Q 4: How do you evaluate poems like “Tintern Abbey” and “Immortality Ode” in the context of English Romanticism? Where do you locate its position among the cultural environment of this particular period? Discuss in terms of the major Romantic themes of the period.

Q 5: Write a critical appreciation of “Tintern Abbey” and “Immortality Ode” with particular emphasis on the three stages of the poet’s life.

Q 6: In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth made himself joyful as a 'worshipper of nature' and referred to the "music of humanity", but in the "Immortality Ode" he explicitly proposes that this music is the remedy for his mature grief. Discuss.

Q 7: Do you find in the Wordsworth's nature poems any reference to the socio-political upheaval of Wordsworth's Europe? Try to situate the poems in its socio-political and cultural background and discuss Wordsworth's possible reaction to it.

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