

**MURSHIDABAD ADARSHA MAHAVIDYALAYA**  
**ACADEMIC YEAR-2023-24**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**  
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**Study materials provided to CLASS: 4<sup>TH</sup> SEM DATE: 11/08/2024**

**Topic of Discussion: Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"**

➤ **TINTERN ABBEY AS A LANDSCAPE POEM**

**MARKS-10/SEM-4.CC-9**

Wordsworth's "**Tintern Abbey**" is very often considered to be a typical landscape poem. Interesting to note that the poem presents both physical landscape and inner landscape.

The fundamental anchorage of the mystical vision lies in a sensual experience of nature, in particular of the emblematic landscape described in the first verse paragraph:

**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.**

Apart from this elusive touch of melancholy, the paragraph makes little reference to the sensations or sentiments that the landscape produces on him now. Only in the fourth of the five verse paragraphs will it become explicit that the pleasure of rediscovery is mixed with '**perplexity,**' due to his own diminished sensibility.

For the moment the note of melancholy is muted and of indeterminate significance. In general English meditative landscape poetry (Gray, Collins, Cowper, Thomson) has an elegiac aura, and the repeated 'again' serves here to project the landscape as a theme for meditation, so that we seek out spiritual resonances in its details. The phrase '**connect/The landscape with the quiet of the sky**' suggests that the landscape has a recollected quality, opening onto a transcendent calm. It will be taken up again in '**an eye made quiet by the power/Of harmony**' and '**impress/With quietness and beauty.**' The many recurring words in the poem weave a linked progression that anchors its highest mystical flights in the simplest initial sensations.

The run-on lines bring out the connectedness of everything in this landscape. The imagery begins to stream before the "**hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows**" passage occurs, which thereby reveals itself as continuing the flow set in motion. The image of the "**orchard-tufts,**" instead of remaining static and precise, streams to the vision of "**one green hue**" and streams further to "**groves and copses**".

The initial landscape is precisely structured by three acts of seeing: '**Once again/ Do I behold,**' '**I repose... and view,**' '**Once again, I see,**' introducing respectively the cliffs, the plots of cottage ground

and orchards, and the hedgerows, pastoral farms, and wreaths of smoke. In a sense the poet is *composing* the landscape, as a painter does. It is an exercise in the *picturesque*. The landscape is artfully composed; it has been recomposed in the poet's recollection during the five years of absence, and the present composition rehandles the original model in light of this **'picture of the mind.'**

Levinson claims that the **'hedgerows'** are signs of enclosure. The **"vagrant dwellers"** and the **"Hermit"** are a fanciful reminder of the human types most favoured by the picturesque artist.

Interestingly, David Bromwich says that **'Tintern Abbey'** is **'a poem about the adaptation of landscape to consciousness'**.

**"Tintern Abbey"** also presents the landscape of the mind. A **'landscape'** can be a painting, and the **'beauteous forms'** is more suggestive of artistic forms than of those of nature. The landscape as **'recollected in tranquility'** is contemplated rather as if it were a work of art, and is indeed recomposed by the poetic imagination. The poem is a precipitate of those five years of recollection as much as of the impact of the revisited scene; even the poem's eloquence and concentration, and the speed with which it was composed, may owe something to verbalizations accompanying those exercises in recollection. The beauteous forms produce three distinct effects, which too many critics conflate: first, **'sensations sweet'** effecting inner **'restoration'**; second, a moral influence lying below the threshold of conscious memory; third, the **'serene and blessed'** mystical mood. We may call these the restorative, the ethical, and the mystical impact of nature.

The **'sensations sweet'** have almost a feverish quality, stirring his pulses, quickening his heartbeat, but then they become calmer, gently settling in his mind. Almost erotically, the poet is first excited and then soothed by his impassioned re-imagining of the landscape in his mind. The phrase **'my purer mind'** is puzzling. The **"beauteous forms"** that produce the sensations and the **"purer mind"** that receives them occupy an existential priority, a unitary ground of being in which percipient and perceived emerge as variant aspects of each other.

The ethical effect of the landscape is harder to pin down, for it is the effect of pleasures that are not remembered and reimagined but that have left a mark on the character. The connection between the **'beauteous forms'** and this moral effect is a matter of faith: **'perhaps.'** And the **"blessed mood"** is the highest kind of inner landscape.