

**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"**

- **Sublimity in Wordsworth's Poem "Tintern Abbey"**
- **Theme of the Sublime**

**10 marks/sem-4/cc-9**

In his famous poem entitled **“Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting The Banks Of The Wye During A Tour. July 13, 1798,”** Wordsworth synthesizes all his new and revolutionary concepts about poetry. As a result, we will analyze it from the perspective of our knowledge on the discussion about the Sublime.

Now, the Sublime is a term that has been defined vaguely and specifically, structurally and chaotically, since the first to the seventeenth century. Immanuel Kant’s exposition on the term sublime in his **Critique of Judgment** is the most sophisticated exploration of the topic until that point and one that is mostly related to psychological and epistemological studies rather than Literature *per se*.

In this sense, we can say that William Wordsworth coins a new pseudo-definition of the Sublime, which can be concluded from his argument on various aspects of poetry, present in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

Now, in the poem itself, we can visualize a priori a 160-line poem of iambic pentameter blank verse. We must now here recall that the most important aspect of poetry on Wordsworth's vision is the topic itself, despite the fact that language and its devices can enhance the reader's experience. As a topic, the poet ought to choose "low and rustic life" since **"the manners of rural life . . . are the most easily comprehended and are more durable"**, and because of that his language should resemble that of everyday life. Moreover, the same title of the poem is common in the sense of an experience that is habitually done; in this case, go to the banks of a river.

But the crucial turning point that differentiates the common life vision in this experience and the poet's is a special sensibility that enables him to rescue it and make it beautiful, through the words that describe Man and Nature. In that definition, we can find notions and concepts that are not clearly stated as such, but that obviously refer to the previous definitions of the Sublime, as well as new ideas whose obvious origin is the **"first and one of the most lasting apologies for the Romantic Movement in poetry"** (Richter).

An additional feature of the first verses is that we can get an overall perception of greatness, of vastness, closely related to the notion of sublimity present in Burke's essay. Even more, we will encounter in future lines a description that can be associated to Burke's concepts of desirable darkness, as can be read in

**"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.”**

On the other hand, the poem presents features that can be related to Longinus’ vision on the Sublime, which is produced by elevated thoughts and it is an elevation of the soul (ékta<sup>s</sup>is) in the audience; an opinion that is shared with Wordsworth his state of **“please many and please long”** by providing **“just representation of Nature”** and in the poem itself literally, with the lines referred to **“I have felt / A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused”**.

In comparison, Kant’s vision of the sublime, in relation to the parallel and synchronic attraction and repulsion of the Reason, is encountered in **Tintern Abbey**. In the **Preface** Wordsworth discusses the poem’s purpose by saying that it is to **“illustrate the ideas and concepts, associated in a state of excitement . . . and the flux and reflux of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our Nature.”** Obviously, Wordsworth’s vision on the subject is clearly focused on what creates this effect rather than the how the effect is created, present in Kant. In **“Tintern Abbey”** we can find lines such as **“And what perceive; well pleased to recognize / In nature and the language of the sense”**, an issue that connects what is present in Nature –one of Kant’s sources of the Sublime– and the language of Reason, Kant’s device for the expression of the sublimity.