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### **"Tintern Abbey" Recollected: Wordsworth's Architecture of Memory**

At the intersection of the theories put forth by Freud and Julia Kristeva, Romanticist Beth Lau has attempted to update the use of psychology in literary theory, distancing it from Freud while still remaining true to current trends in psychology.<sup>1</sup> It is to these new approaches to psychology, particularly to those of Julia Kristeva, that I turn in the present analysis of Wordsworth's well known "Tintern Abbey." The goal here is to examine the privilege of memory with hopes of opening avenues for more fruitful psychological discussions of Romantic poetry outside of Freud's hegemony. Moreover, the modern theoretical framework will be synthesized with the artistic ideology of Wordsworth's near contemporary, John Ruskin, in an evaluation of the poet's emerging architecture of memory in the poem. To the deeply entrenched student of Wordsworth's canonical work, it appears that the veneration of temporal experience, or historical record, is peculiarly subdued when compared with experience alone. What replaces and transcends these past experiences, for him, is afterthought and recollection of that experience. However, upon a closer look at "Tintern Abbey", we will begin to see that it is the memory of an event rather than the event itself that Wordsworth holds in high esteem. After the passage of time, memory is shown to allow the poet to appreciate nature, memory preserves history, memory replaces crude thoughts, and memory preserves the greater language of nature.

A few questions carry us through this analysis of what is likely Wordsworth's most anthologized poem. Most important of them: what is the relationship between memory and nature? The first and more commonly known part of the title, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," suggests obviously that the poet has composed the work while perched somewhere above the ruined Abbey in Wales.<sup>2</sup> However, it isn't until one reads the subtitle –

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<sup>1</sup>Lau, B. "Wordsworth and Current Memory Research." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (2002). 675-92.

<sup>2</sup>Wordsworth, W. "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798." *William Wordsworth: The Major Works* (2011). p 131-35. All references to lines in the poem are from this edition.

“on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798” – that a more profound idea is conveyed. The title of this work sets the reader up for a sense of recollection – inviting us in as participants and indeed beneficiaries, as I will later explore – that the poet repeats in this poem and in a host of later poems, culminating in what many claim signifies his greatest achievement, *The Prelude*.

When the art critic John Ruskin writes of memory as the “sixth lamp” and exemplar of architecture, he seems at first to anticipate Marjorie Levinson’s later view that the concept of nature is subordinate to its physicality.<sup>3</sup> With this, she questions the absence of the Abbey and the river in the text of the poem.<sup>4</sup> For her, this absence, beyond the overly specific title, helps to classify the poem as logo-descriptive. In their rebuttals of psychoanalysis, critics such as Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and others would seem to agree with her, offering that the textual absence of these monuments lends itself to an absence of origin (trace).<sup>5</sup> Levinson goes on to note that because of the specific logo-description given by the title, Wordsworth’s nature is not a transcendent, mysterious concept to which he must aspire; it is instead a physical landscape locked into the sequence of time and history. However, through the application of new psychological concepts, decades removed from Freud, it becomes clear that this absence of textual reference indeed invites a sense of mystery and transcendence that permeates the poetic text. It is precisely this supposed absence of the Abbey and the River Wye from the poem that allows the reader to understand Wordsworth’s primary concern, not for the structures as indicated by the title, but for the recollected, tranquil experiences of the force of nature. Through this investigation of memory, we can begin to discern whether or not the poem is truly about the physical Tintern Abbey.

The French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva understands that the formation of the subject depends on “abjecting that which could have been a chaos, expelling what is not me and what threatens me, even if that separation is never as complete as the past suggests it is” (Becker-Leckrone 142). Much of her psychoanalytic theory depends on the idea of some loss, whether

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<sup>3</sup>Ruskin, J. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture: Architecture and Painting* (1901).

<sup>4</sup>Levinson, M. “Insight and Oversight: Reading ‘Tintern Abbey’.” *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (1986). p 14-57. In her essay on the historical context of the poem, she documents and maps Wordsworth’s visits to the Wye valley and the ruined architecture of the Abbey.

<sup>5</sup>In “Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image” (1970), Paul de Man writes, “The nostalgia for the object has become a nostalgia for an entity that could never by its nature become a particularized object” (76). Also, in “The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth” (1970), Frederick Pottle writes about the will of the Romantic poet and the function of the imagination to this end. Wordsworth, according to them, seeks to create a meaningful and satisfactory unity out of common perception and sensation which is to say, making sense out of nothingness.

it be through abjection or passive forgetting. Considering this, Wordsworth, who is both the poet and the narrator, seems to understand that he has experienced a loss of some definite experience and the reader catches him in the process of recollection. This is contradictory to the commentary by Levinson, Hartman, and de Man. David Bromwich, in "The French Revolution and 'Tintern Abbey,'" identifies the reader as somewhat of an eavesdropper into a conversation between the poet and himself during this process.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Wordsworth forces the reader into participation in his personal task of memorialization, whether we like it or not. Who is being memorialized? The image produced here seems to be that Wordsworth is seeking a way to repeat or relive his past (or passed) historical record.<sup>7</sup> Hartman, overlaying the deconstructive lens, argues that Wordsworth seeks to "re-animate a buried consciousness" (213). However, it is Kristeva who seems to be more in line with Wordsworth's perspective. From the first line of text throughout the rest of the poem, we find a poet who is not seeking to revive his past experience; we find one actively seeking to distance himself from a past state of mind. As it will be discussed later, this act of distancing allows the poet to subvert the goals of his poetic predecessors and align himself with spiritually transcendent figures such as the Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, at the start of the poem, we encounter the Wordsworth of 1798 – a man conscious of and content with his growth and maturity over a five-year absence from the Wye Valley and ruins of the Abbey.

By reading the poem as an architectural structure, we can begin to see that the opening lines of the "Tintern Abbey" inherit this frame of recollection and propel us into the mind and memory of the poet speaker:

– Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
Which on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (ll. 4-8)

The adverb "again" is repeated four times (this being the second) in the first stanza alone. With those four utterances, the poet uplifts and delights in the secondary experience over the original: again, he hears the waters; again, he beholds the cliffs; again, he sits beneath the

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<sup>6</sup>Bromwich, D. "The French Revolution and 'Tintern Abbey'." *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790's* (1998). p 70.

<sup>7</sup>Hutton, P. H. *History as an Art of Memory* (1993). p 19-20. Repetition is synonymous with imitation, which was the chief goal of poetry for the predecessors of the Romantics. The shift from repetition to the higher order of recollection is precisely what separates Wordsworth from poets such as Sidney, Spenser, and Pope.

sycamore tree; again, he sees the hedge-rows run wild. For example, with the second use of “again,” the speaker notes that this secondary experience invites or “impresses” a deeper sense of appreciation for these things in which he has experienced. The phrase “thoughts of more deep seclusion” in the seventh line conveys a dual meaning. Does the word *more* modify “deep” or “seclusion”? If we consider the first sense, then we can theorize a meaning of the phrase equated with “deeper seclusion.” If we, however, take the second sense, then we would understand this to connote “more seclusion,” or an additional amount of the seclusion than was already present. I prefer the first connotation because it implies an increased magnitude of quality and not just a measurement of quantity, and it also more accurately matches the tone of the surrounding lines. To this end, the poet informs us that it was this re-visit and re-collection that has allowed him to have a more potent experience with nature the second time around. Through this recollection via a secondary experience, he is able to “connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky,” which is something he, for reasons we shall soon examine, could not achieve five years prior.

In the Foreword to Hartman’s book, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, Donald G. Marshall separates Wordsworth from his predecessors and claims that in the Romantic period, “the chief poetic virtue was not metaphor or imagery, but the capacity to convey with utmost economy a meaning that was complex, yet clear and condensed” (xii). This seems to be a rephrasing of Wordsworth’s own philosophy that “Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men” (“Preface” 608). Marshall seems to understand that Wordsworth can only achieve this poetic virtue through maturity, for maturity brings a sense of awareness and self-reflection that allows the poet to convey complex sentiments in the ordinary language of men. The text excerpted above denotes the idea that Wordsworth does not seek to return to his past understanding and is content with his present experience as it allows him to witness nature in a “more deep seclusion.” The five-year passage of time has allowed the more reflective poet of 1798 to connect the landscape with the sky.

The fourth stanza of the poem is most representative of these claims.<sup>8</sup> It is here where Wordsworth’s speaker most explicitly reveals his reverence for memory, and it is here where I will explain my point at some length. In the stanzas prior, the speaker sets out to describe the conditions of his absence and forgetfulness while being away from the space above the Abbey.<sup>9</sup> It may be worthwhile here to note the positive function, according to psychoanalysis, of forgetting. Opposing Freud, Beth Lau reveals that, “a healthy, functioning individual is one who is in command of a coherent life story and sense of identity, even if that involves omissions or

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<sup>8</sup>ll. 59-112.

<sup>9</sup>ll. 24-58

deviations from the historical record" (682).<sup>10</sup> In this, Lau seems to support Kristeva's account of the active, effective functioning of the mind to abject thoughts that are contrary to the present self identity. Harold Bloom, on the other hand, follows Freud in claiming that the memory is passive and therefore accepts memory as a type of constantly repressing repository.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, we will continue to see how Wordsworth fits the diagnosis of a healthy, functioning individual in that he is not passively seeking to store and restore history; he is actively using memory to reveal his new self-identity by omitting that which doesn't fit into his present state of mind.

In the fourth stanza, Wordsworth illustrates this active function of memory. Note the repetition of words and phrases in the following lines that are analogous to the word "memory" – *thought, picture, mind, recognition* – which invite us to understand that the poet's chief concern is not of some static landscape, as historicism would have us believe. The poet begins to construct the fourth stanza:

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: (ll. 59-62)

Here, Wordsworth, the architect of poetry, most brilliantly employs his virtuoso to make the reader think that his "picture of the mind" is prone to melancholy and less significant than the primary experience. In this perspective, it would seem that Wordsworth is in line with Freud and needs psychoanalysis to cure his neurosis. Line 62 serves as the end of the clause beginning in line 52, and the beginning of a new thought ending on line 66. This, of course is a brilliant example of Wordsworthian enjambment, an architectural feature of poetry, and the trick is played on the reader, who haphazardly assumes that the false sense of melancholy ensues from these first four lines and into the rest of the poem. It would seem that Wordsworth's use of enjambment signals despair, but in fact, it has the greater purpose of anticipating those next three lines that will completely subvert this melancholic language.

The historian, Patrick Hutton, in a comparison of Freud and Wordsworth, makes note of the role of forgetting in human psychology. He writes, "[f]orgetting rather than remembering is what we wish to do because it is easier to live with a screen of fantasies about what our lives

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<sup>10</sup>Freud equates memory loss with neurosis and that lost truths are only repressed and can be unlocked in their original form at any time (i.e. Freudian slip). See also: Marcus, Steven. "Some Representations of Childhood in Wordsworth's Poetry." *Opening Texts* (1985). p 11.

<sup>11</sup>Weele, M. V. "The Contest of Memory in 'Tintern Abbey'." *Nineteenth Century Literature* (1995). p 6-26.

have been than with the reality" (67). Although Lau's theory contradicts Freud on the idea of memory loss, Kristeva's ideology seems to support this active role of memory screening, for Wordsworth claims to be perplexed by his half-extinguished thoughts or fading memory. What the poet may or may not fully understand is that his mind is actively expelling, or abjecting those past experiences which fail to coincide with the self-identity he has created over the past five years and will seek to henceforth maintain. Jacques Laçan's psychoanalysis may support the idea that Wordsworth's perplexity comes from his entering into the Symbolic Order, and recognizes, after a five year hiatus, that he is a part of a greater system of language from which he cannot break. In this vein, Wordsworth's current experience overlooking Tintern Abbey is a manifestation of the mirror stage.<sup>12</sup> However, this Freudian approach fails because Wordsworth, as we are beginning to see, does not dwell on the solemnity of a lost historical record. He is, as Kristeva implies, engaged in the active abjection of those "many recognitions dim and faint" which don't fit his present self.

This enjambment, furthermore, provides the poetic *volta* in which the poet uses concludes one thought and initiates its antithesis. In other words, the "picture of the mind" serves to revive again both the feelings of sadness and perplexity in the above lines as well as the optimism in the lines that follow. Memories seem to serve a similar function in their ability to convey both negative and positive recollections. The poet uses solemn diction to blend one thought into the next, just as he uses the structure of enjambment to blend one line into the next. This is how, I suggest, memory functions in a more positive sense:

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. (ll. 62-66)

In this second half of the enjambment, it becomes difficult to ignore the colon placed at the end of line 62. In one sense, this line of concern ends one thought, but the colon suggests a continuation, or in another sense, a beginning. If the clause preceding the colon implies pessimism, then the clause following the colon offers a strikingly different, optimistic one. The "picture of the mind" is the memory of the space that serves to undermine the sadness and perplexity of the first four lines and draws out the positivity of the next four. Juxtaposed with the syntax of the first four lines, if the "picture of the mind" is the subject of the thought, then what follows in the second set of lines allows for a new object. The verb "revives" conveys the active quality of memory for which Kristeva has argued. Wordsworth's goal in reviving is not for,

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<sup>12</sup> Lacan, J. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Ecrits: A Selection*, (2006). p 3-9.

as Hutton has said, repetition of history.<sup>13</sup> He, instead, portrays himself in a more synthetic role as did Shakespeare when writing historical tragedies. In other words, when Wordsworth revives, he creates a new interpretation of a history since passed, and in order to do this, he seeks to distance himself from the boy he was five years prior.<sup>14</sup> He understands and cherishes the fact that he is wiser and more mature and can appreciate the majesty of nature in a way that is communicable, not just for Poets, but for men.

David Bromwich also claims that memory must be “initially baffling” if we are to feel its force.<sup>15</sup> This helps to explain Wordsworth’s sense of perplexity at the beginning of this stanza (and indeed at the beginning of the poem) as well as his sense of optimism toward the end of it. The memory functions to illuminate not just how he feels in the moment, but how he will recall the moment of pleasure in the future. This memory, the poet claims, will nourish him for the rest of his life. He understands that there is some degree of value in the previous experience now lost to history, but his perplexed state comes at the crossroads of trying to separate those experiences that are healthy to his present state from those which are harmful. In doing so, he believes that this new “emotion recollected in tranquility”, or memory, will stand the test of time (“Preface” 611). The poet understands that it is the “picture of the mind” that will live on forever, but he had to be perplexed by it at first in order for him to feel the force of nature. Once this happens, Wordsworth will be able to reflect and recollect with more appreciation. “Tintern Abbey shapes up to be the poet’s first major attempt at recollection and reconstruction as he shifts from perplexed to optimistic within the structure of the text.

Further into the fourth stanza, Wordsworth seems to convey a much deeper point, essential to my argument for the significance of memory over historical record. Leading up to this point, the speaker attempts to describe his previous experience in nature but has trouble. He seems bewildered by the task of reviving. Mark Edmundson writes that the former self must “die when the poet encounters the antipathies and promises of discourse” (107). Though Edmundson here is referring to *The Prelude*, he offers an enticing perspective on the growing distance between Wordsworth’s present self and past self in “Tintern Abbey.” Bromwich takes this same idea further in a comparison of *Macbeth* and Wordsworth’s drama *The Borderers*: “the impulse to kill comes from outside the poet” and that “the poet feels guilty as if the impulse is self-originating” (72). These external conditions include anything from the fact that

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<sup>13</sup>Hutton, P. H. p xxi.

<sup>14</sup>Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953). p 53-56. In the chapter on the emotional aspect of poetry, Abrams claims that Wordsworth is a man who is “habitually impelled to create where he does not find them.”

<sup>15</sup>Bromwich, D. “Historical Catastrophe and Personal Memory.” *Disowned by Memory* (1998). p 149.



his initial visit to Tintern in 1793 immediately followed a perplexing return from France, and that in the five-year gap, he experienced a satisfactory life in the city only to return to the Wye on the eve of Bastille Day, 1798.<sup>16</sup> These historical factors help to explain how Wordsworth's identity could have changed but does the 1798 Wordsworth we encounter in "Tintern Abbey" seek to sever the connection he has with his former self? Kristeva gives the appropriate answer, given the text, in that Wordsworth only seeks to abject those experiences he deems unsuitable to his present identity. In such a sense, he seeks to partially sever his connection with his 1793 self.

Further into the stanza, Wordsworth seeks to explain this former self before surrendering to his loss of memory:

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. (ll. 73-77)

There are several forces at work in these short lines of Wordsworth's poetic architecture. First, by removing the parenthetical clause, we are left with the statement: "For nature then/... /to me was all in all." The lack of punctuation allows us to separate the clause into several distinct statements. It could be read as everything I needed, I found in nature; nature, previously, was everything to me; nature, as a result, was everything to me; and to me, nature, then, was only what I saw before my eyes. Although the other interpretations may be fruitful for discussion, the latter statement is most relevant to the present argument. Here, the emphasis is placed, not on "then", but on the phrase "all in all", which is what semiotics might call an empty signifier. In other words, the speaker acknowledges that when he was a boy, he took nature at face value and could not (or at least chose not to) look beyond its surface and think deeply about its majesty. Evidence for this notion is supported in the passage in lines 77-84, where he states that, as a boy, he could not look beyond his eyes and see what charms nature had in store. Freudian analysis calls this the "pre-Oedipal" or "infantile stage" of development, where the child is in a state of pre-awareness.<sup>17</sup> Bloom writes in accordance with Freud, that, "the young child has an organic sense that combines seeing and hearing" (135). In other words, the Wordsworth of 1793 senses nature but is unaware of its transcendent force, thus he has not developed, as Marshall puts it, the chief poetic virtue that Wordsworth understands by the time

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<sup>16</sup>Bromwich, D. p 77. He discusses how the significance of this date, the French Revolution, and Wordsworth's lost relationship in France help to explain the poet's perplexity with recollection at the time.

<sup>17</sup>Freud, S. "The Infantile Sexuality." *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (2010). For Lacan, who identifies himself as a Freudian, this is called *jouissance* and antecedes the mirror stage and the Symbolic Order (Lacan 3-9).



he writes his "Preface" to the poetry in 1802.

By reinserting the parenthetical clause into the verse, this idea begins to make even more sense as he claims that his childhood was filled with "coarser pleasures" – things crude and trivial. If we have trouble defining "coarse," Wordsworth simply reinforces the idea in the following line where he compares his childhood mentality to "glad animal movements," which all together seems to signify a childhood of somewhat unrefined bliss. He recognizes that he, as a boy, was less concerned with the more civilized behavior or of seeking out that which he loved and was instead more concerned with the more adolescent flying from that which he dreaded.<sup>18</sup> This all serves to support his contention that he is only to appreciate his present surroundings through the phenomenon of memory and the passage of time, since he did not understand the depth of his environment as a child. Bloom continues his earlier point on development and writes that "the man gains an intimation of immortality, of his renewed continuity with the young child, by hearing a still, sad music as he sees a soberer coloring in Nature" (135). In other words, it is only after the passage of time that Wordsworth can begin to recollect and refine these "coarser pleasures" and "half-extinguished thoughts."

Furthermore, the final two lines of the above excerpt demonstrate yet a greater concept. He claims that in the present moment, he "cannot paint /What then I was" (76-77). On one hand, this seems to be a continuation of the previous commentary on his "boyish days."<sup>19</sup> If we consider this, then the speaker evokes some facet of *ars poetica* in acknowledging the inadequacy of his own words to convey that which he once felt as a child. This, of course, assumes that the word "paint" is defined in the traditional poetic sense of "adorning or representing on a surface."<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, we can equate the word "paint" with the earlier term that the poet uses in this stanza, "picture of the mind." As such, this clause conveys the fact that the poet can no longer fully remember (create/represent in his mind) what he once knew and thought about nature.

Bromwich writes that "Tintern Abbey" is a poem about "the peace and rest that one can know only by a sublimation of remembered terror" (73). Considering his present views on his past – that he was unable to yield to the force of nature – it makes sense that he, in his more

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<sup>18</sup>He first came to this place "more like a man/ Flying from something that he dreads, than one/ Who sought the thing he loved." (lines 71-73). I will return to this passage later in the essay.

<sup>19</sup>Lacan notes that once a child experiences selfhood through the mirror stage and enters into the Symbolic order, the state of *jouissance* is forever lost (Lacan 3-9). Kristeva claims that the notion of self is constantly changing and abjecting thus making this primordial self impossible to return to. (Becker-Leckrone 137).

<sup>20</sup>"Paint." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

refined, reflective stature, might begin to (purposefully) forget those things. It is no secret that people naturally forget things over the passage of time, and both Bromwich and Kristeva take memory loss as a more active process of abjection. We cannot be sure that Wordsworth recognizes his 1793 experience as terrifying, but we can understand that he recognizes it as something inferior and unnecessary to his present state of “peace and rest.” Beth Lau, on the side of current psychology, claims that forgetting is natural to a healthy lifestyle (682). The poet’s sudden case of amnesia to painting what he once was forces us to revisit the early lines in this stanza to re-evaluate the object of his diction. We can now understand that those “gleams of half-extinguished thought” and “recognitions dim and faint” may have not necessarily referred to the past experience as a whole, but to his cognizant, active forgetting (abjection) of a coarser past self that carries with it the weight of “sad perplexity.” Perhaps the year 1793 reminds him, as Bromwich hints, of his then raw feelings toward his experience in France – something which he finds comparatively useless and worthy of abjection to his current state of mind.<sup>21</sup> The term “perplexity”, from early in the stanza, now seems to anticipate the oxymoronic terms that the poet later uses to describe his former self and experience: “coarser pleasures,” “glad animal,” “Haunted me like a passion,” “aching joys,” and “dizzy raptures.” Therefore, the poet speaker seeks to brush away those crude realities and oxymoronic perplexities of the boyish days or simply replace them with deeper, more refined thoughts and memories that come only through the passage of time.

The second half of this long fourth stanza continues to illuminate the poet’s attitude toward memory. However, where he spent the first half explaining his childhood, he will now describe his feelings since the passage of time.<sup>22</sup> This will serve to illuminate the point of transcendence that memory’s architecture is something eternal and organic. Kristeva notes that the initial experiences of child developmental are but steps “along a path toward higher consciousness and a more autonomously sustained selfhood” (Becker-Leckrone 145). Dismissing the lamentations on his past, Wordsworth begins his thought:

Not for this  
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts  
Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,  
Abundant recompence (ll. 86-89).

These lines are eerily reminiscent of the biblical paradox present in Paul’s Epistle to the

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<sup>21</sup>Bromwich, D. p77.

<sup>22</sup>ll. 86-112.

Philippians which predates both Wordsworth's poetry and Kristeva's psychological analysis:<sup>23</sup>

(7) But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ," (Philippians 3:7-8, KJV).

In the excerpt from the poem, Wordsworth seems to evoke biblical language in order to convey the point that he does not regret his inability to return to his past, or to repeat it. His 1793 self is but a step on the path to a higher consciousness, according to Kristeva. The poet understands that where he is presently and what he will gain is greater than that he has lost. Paul's biblical argument therefore anticipates modern psychoanalysis while disavowing Hartman and de Man's deconstructive criticism that there is no loss because there is no origin from which one can lose.<sup>24</sup> But, what exactly has Wordsworth lost over the five-year span? What has he forsaken in order to gain this deeper sense of self and purpose, higher consciousness, and "abundant recompense"? He knows that he is becoming a victim to time as he is getting older and his memory is fragmented, as he notes in lines 59-62. The writer Hugh Davies once wrote that Wordsworth had begun to condemn his former "picturesque phase" (246). In this distancing and loss, he is thus unable to experience nature as a child would but instead of lamenting this fact the poet, like Paul, takes pleasure in the thought of some abundant reward awaiting him. What then is this reward that he is to gain? Wordsworth seems to find solace in his recollections, via the passage of time, and believes them to be worth more than any lost historical experience. Those lost records of time were experienced at a time in which, as I have stated, he was unaware of the force of nature. Those experiences occurred in a state of psychological pre-awareness. For Paul, the reward gained in the acceptance of Christ outweighs those things he has lost and furthermore makes them seem trivial, like dung, or shall we say, "coarser pleasures."<sup>25</sup> For Wordsworth, the conscious reward of refined recollections that suit his present state outweighs the loss or abjection of 1793, his boyish days.

The end of stanza four (ll. 103-112) deserves another look. In this passage, there is a

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<sup>23</sup>I have included the King James text here as it was certainly available to Wordsworth in 1798 and for the purposes of a comparison with the excerpted verse of "Tintern Abbey."

<sup>24</sup>See Hartman, G. *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (1987). p 28; de Man, Paul. "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" (1970); Mileur, J-P. "Allegory and Irony: 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' Re-Examined" (1986).

<sup>25</sup>Lines 94-103 seem to convey – in a Christ-like rapture – the power of nature, now that time has passed and he has sacrificed dwelling on his temporal experiences, to envelope the poet and impel "All thinking things, all objects of all thought,/ And rolls through all things." This is reminiscent of the more vague "For nature then/.../To me was all in all." Whereas the latter statement, as I noted, seemed like an empty signifier, the statement in lines 102-103 are full of signification. They embody the concept that the passage of time reveals much to the depth of the mind.

discussion of the senses that includes the description of nature's language. Wordsworth, in these lines, claims that he is still as much a lover of nature as he has ever been, but that he now can perceive nature with all of the senses, not just those of the eyes and ears. Simple observation, he claims, can only "half-create" an experience.<sup>26</sup> As Lau points out, "a person's present state of mind shapes [memories] that combine both past and present" (677). Wordsworth seems to understand that simple repetition, as Hutton calls it, only partially creates an experience. Hutton further elucidates, "The world of perception grasped with the outward eye is transfigured by the inward eye, which leads the mind into deeper contact with the forms of nature" (57). This inward eye represents the active memory, or recollection, for which Hutton claims Wordsworth's work is most representative. Without memory and the active process of abjection, as Kristeva would say, one can only experience nature with the outward eye, which is incomplete and seeks repetition. The complete experience only comes to the Wordsworth of 1798, who looks on nature with an inward eye, that is to say, with refinement and recollection.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Wordsworth notes in these lines that it takes a deeper meditation and appreciation for the "language of the sense" in order to fully awaken one's self in nature. One cannot understand the language of sense with the outward eye, as we shall soon examine. This anticipates the first section of the fifth and final stanza of the poem, where the poet explains the benefits of meditating on Nature and allowing it to "inform" one's self.<sup>28</sup>

There remains much in the text that would support the claims being made here, but a passage closer to the end seems to be most useful to the point being made. In the verses from Philippians, Paul is not only hopeful for the present reward he felt he could gain from the acceptance of Christ but for some *future* gift that would exceed all expectations and pleasures past and present. Wordsworth follows the same logic. Here, as the poet speaks to his sister about the ability of nature to affect the mind, he finally uses the term "memory":

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; (ll. 138-143)

This passage seems to converse with the lines from stanza four, in which the poet recollected his thoughts of his former self. However, here he seems to be, like Paul, looking forward to the

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<sup>26</sup>Line 107: "Of eye and ear, both what they half-create."

<sup>27</sup>Frederick Pottle also discusses the inward eye as the mental image and "the bliss of solitude" (280).

<sup>28</sup>ll. 126-135.

future rather than dwelling in the past. Due to the passage of time – both the passage of five years since the last visit and the passage of time from the beginning of the poem – Wordsworth is no longer perplexed by his past temporal experiences and now appears at peace with the sobering pleasure of maturity.

Building on his commentary in lines 126-135, where he invites nature to inform the mind and meditation, opening up his inward eye, Wordsworth expresses the notion that memory is the “dwelling-place” of the experience of nature. Michael Vander Weele quotes Bloom when he writes, “the mansion is a touch like a museum, and the dwelling-place a kind of tape- or record-library” (16). This line of thought follows Freud who, as I have stated previously, identifies memory essentially as a store house of past experiences, continuously repressing the truth. Current psychology challenges this idea of an “immutable, comprehensive, objective memory” in claiming that the healthy individual maintains an organic and active memory.<sup>29</sup> In this way, we can begin to see Wordsworth as understanding memory as something eternal.

To this end, there also seems to be a distinction between the words “mind” and “memory” in the structure of the text. The former connotes temporality and the latter connotes something more lasting by comparison. Only a generation after Wordsworth, the critic, Ruskin named memory the “sixth lamp” of architecture and noting the capacity of architecture to commemorate. To paraphrase him, architecture is only as good as the memory of it and memory needs an architectural apparatus.<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth, in his poetry, seems to agree with Ruskin that there is some connection between architecture and memory, the physical and the organic, but he stops short of simply equating the two. The mind, as a biological organ, withers and dies with time – as does a mansion. The memory, on the other hand, has the potential to outlast time – it is simply a dwelling-place, which seems to be a more vaguely defined space than a mansion. Furthermore, Wordsworth’s image of the mind as a mansion for “lovely forms” most clearly employs the architectural language later used by Ruskin. By comparison, the memory is place where “all sweet sounds and harmonies” are held. The language the poet uses here is not architectural yet is all the more vital and invites us to revisit the “language of sense” in line 109. The only language free from the structure of language, as Wordsworth likely believes judging from his other works, is music.<sup>31</sup> As sound and harmony are facets of nature’s language, what the poet explains to his sister in this passage is that the experience of nature dwells, or can be felt, only in the memory. The mind, and its temporal lobes, is prisoner to time; therefore, the memory is privileged as it alone preserves

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<sup>29</sup>Lau, B. p 676.

<sup>30</sup>Ruskin, J. p 189 -213. Also quoted in Christine Lai’s discussion of memory and architecture in Romantic poetry (p 224).

<sup>31</sup>Wordsworth, W. “Power of Music.” *William Wordsworth: The Major Works* (2011). p 323.

sounds and harmonies – the language of nature – for all time.

This seems to defy the laws of science and psychology. How does memory last forever? How does it practically function to preserve the language of nature and the temporal experience? Wordsworth provides answers to these very questions in the last section of the final stanza of his poem when he wonders how his sister will remember him. Quite literally, he challenges her to preserve his memory and does so by asking her if he will honor him by remembering that he brought her to this space in an attempt to guide her through nature in the way that he never was.<sup>32</sup> He doesn't wait for her answer, and writes:

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. (ll. 156-160)

In order for the history to be preserved, the memory must be active and actively passed on. Hartman writes of Wordsworth's fear of becoming "spiritually blind to nature", which conveys the point that he needs his memory to live on.<sup>33</sup> Wordsworth understands his own mortality, but he also sees history as an art of memory, as Hutton claims. In his attempt to use her to experience his lost sense of self vicariously, then by her memory of him –indeed the poem itself – he and his experience with nature will be immortalized. Ruskin writes, "for it is in becoming memorial or monumental that a true perfection is attained" (192). Memory, then, serves the active role to preserve and commemorate. For Ruskin, this goal is only achieved through the surrogate of architecture. For Wordsworth, it seems that another person must be there to perform the act of remembering. Dorothy, in this sense, is the architecture. We could go so far as to argue that the poem itself, read by you and me, is the monument for which his memory will be preserved. In either case, Wordsworth and Ruskin both contend that there needs to be a physical "mind" functioning as a mansion that will contain and preserve the memory. This does not, however, place the temporal mind in a higher regard, for it is simply a vessel for which the cherished memory is held before it must be transported to another mind. The poet, in relating the experience to his sister, seeks to endow her with his memory and recollection, for the sake of both of them. This is how memories are eternal – through translation. Through her mind, as

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<sup>32</sup>Harold Bloom, David Bromwich, and Douglas Wilson (*The Romantic Dream*) all seem to agree on the role of Dorothy as a replacement to Wordsworth lost former self. Bromwich takes this a step further to claim that Wordsworth robs her of her innocence by forcing his mature recollections onto her.

<sup>33</sup>Hartman, G. "Words, Wish, Worth." *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (1987). p 95.

a vessel for the memory, the music of nature and his own poetry will be preserved to provide "life and food for future years."<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the bulk of this study, I, like Wordsworth, have neglected the inclusion of the ruined Abbey and the River Wye. However, I have made an effort to acknowledge Wordsworth as an architect of poetry, which anticipates what I will now explain. Returning to Levinson's earlier concern about the overly specific title and the eerie absence of the Abbey and the River Wye from the text of the poem, this last section of the fifth stanza along with Ruskin's point about memory and architecture helps to clear the atmosphere. Is this poem really about the ruined Abbey and the river? According to Ruskin, it is the memory of these semi-organic structures that allows for their immortality. Music, like a sweet stream of organic sounds and harmonies, flows like a river and never stops until it empties into another body of water and into another one after that. It is the "language of sense" that functions much like memory – constantly updating, eroding (by way of abjection) in order to ensure coherence. Thus, we can begin to see the River Wye in the poem after all. It is filled with and embodied by the language of the sense that anchors his purest thoughts.<sup>35</sup> The Abbey sneaks its way into the poem as well. It seems that both Ruskin and Wordsworth understand that it is the memory of architecture that allow for its presence and its endurance. The Abbey, therefore, is only as real as the poet's experience of it within nature. The poem itself is a memorial to the Abbey in ruin. The Abbey that Wordsworth witnessed in 1798 was most certainly in ruin. To him, it seemed like the physical manifestation of something needing recollection. Just as Wordsworth understands his own maturity and seeks recollection after five years, the Abbey in ruins has reached its prime and is becoming one with nature again. Like the poet, it also requires recollection in order to achieve immortality, and the only way to do that is through the "sixth lamp" of memory. Where Wordsworth depends on Dorothy for immortality, we can start to conclude that the Abbey depends on the poem itself.

Ruskin, who died just after Freud published his first major work, seems to lend support the more modern trends in psychological analysis as recorded by Lau and theorized by Kristeva. When he writes that "it is in becoming memorial" that architecture gains its perfection, the focus is on the active state of "becoming." Ruskin agrees that memory is an active, rather than a passive force, and the act of remembering is more vital than a historical record. It is the act of remembering that allows for the Wordsworth of 1798 to properly appreciate and appropriate the force of nature that he experiences. Over the course of the poem, he has evolved from

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<sup>34</sup>Ll. 65-66.

<sup>35</sup>ll.109-110.



seeking the simple repetition of events and experiences into the act of remembering or recollecting. In his acknowledgement of loss and his abjecting of thoughts that do not factor into his present sense of self, the current Wordsworth has developed into a healthy, functioning individual. In his acknowledgement of loss, Wordsworth himself has shown to counter the later deconstructionists. However, in his loss, the poet does not simply follow Freud and seek to uncover repressed thoughts. Like Ruskin, he anticipates the more current trends in psychology that support the more romantic concept of recollection and not repetition.

When we encounter Wordsworth at the beginning of the poem, he seems concerned with how he presently understands nature in comparison to his former “boyish” self. However, we grow with him and the more romantic Wordsworth with whom we end up with is more like the Apostle Paul and more concerned with his future reward. It is in this transcendence where we witness a more mature poet, who is dedicated to memorialization, with an intimation of immortality. Whether his memory is passed by way of his sister or through the poem itself, he understands that memory is only worth as much as its endurance and its agency to evolve over time. The poem has endured for over two hundred years, passing on from reader to reader, accepting and abjecting interpretation along the way. It bears witness to the force of nature in a way that speaks not just to poets, but to the common man, who too may be able to experience the force of nature through the architecture of memory. Before *The Prelude* and the *Intimations Ode*, in “Tintern Abbey” we get a raw glimpse of a poet who acts as an architect of memory, seeking to preserve perfection for all eternity, so long as someone is able to pass it on. In this sense, perhaps the sixth lamp-wielding Wordsworth may just be the architect for whom Ruskin always hoped.

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