

# Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern



## POEM TEXT

1 Five years have past; five summers, with the length  
 2 Of five long winters! and again I hear  
 3 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs  
 4 With a soft inland murmur.—Once again  
 5 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
 6 That on a wild secluded scene impress  
 7 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
 8 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
 9 The day is come when I again repose  
 10 Here, under this dark sycamore, and view  
 11 These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,  
 12 Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,  
 13 Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves  
 14 'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see  
 15 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
 16 Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,  
 17 Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke  
 18 Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!  
 19 With some uncertain notice, as might seem  
 20 Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,  
 21 Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire  
 22 The Hermit sits alone.

23                               These beauteous forms,  
 24 Through a long absence, have not been to me  
 25 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:  
 26 But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
 27 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,  
 28 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
 29 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
 30 And passing even into my purer mind  
 31 With tranquil restoration:—feelings too  
 32 Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,  
 33 As have no slight or trivial influence  
 34 On that best portion of a good man's life,  
 35 His little, nameless, unremembered, acts  
 36 Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,  
 37 To them I may have owed another gift,  
 38 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,  
 39 In which the burthen of the mystery,  
 40 In which the heavy and the weary weight

41 Of all this unintelligible world,  
 42 Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,  
 43 In which the affections gently lead us on,—  
 44 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
 45 And even the motion of our human blood  
 46 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
 47 In body, and become a living soul:  
 48 While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 49 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
 50 We see into the life of things.

51   If this  
 52 Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—  
 53 In darkness and amid the many shapes  
 54 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir  
 55 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,  
 56 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—  
 57 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,  
 58 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,  
 59       How often has my spirit turned to thee!

60       And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,  
 61 With many recognitions dim and faint,  
 62 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,  
 63 The picture of the mind revives again:  
 64 While here I stand, not only with the sense  
 65 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
 66 That in this moment there is life and food  
 67 For future years. And so I dare to hope,  
 68 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first  
 69 I came among these hills; when like a roe  
 70 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides  
 71 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,  
 72 Wherever nature led: more like a man  
 73 Flying from something that he dreads, than one  
 74 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then  
 75 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days  
 76 And their glad animal movements all gone by)  
 77 To me was all in all.—I cannot paint  
 78 What then I was. The sounding cataract  
 79 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 80 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 81 Their colours and their forms, were then to me

82 An appetite; a feeling and a love,  
 83 That had no need of a remoter charm,  
 84 By thought supplied, not any interest  
 85 Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,  
 86 And all its aching joys are now no more,  
 87 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
 88 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts  
 89 Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
 90 Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
 91 To look on nature, not as in the hour  
 92 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
 93 The still sad music of humanity,  
 94 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
 95 To chasten and subdue.—And I have felt  
 96 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 97 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 98 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 99 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 100 And the round ocean and the living air,  
 101 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
 102 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 103 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 104 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
 105 A lover of the meadows and the woods  
 106 And mountains; and of all that we behold  
 107 From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
 108 Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,  
 109 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise  
 110 In nature and the language of the sense  
 111 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
 112 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
 113 Of all my moral being.

114 Nor perchance,  
 115 If I were not thus taught, should I the more  
 116 Suffer my genial spirits to decay:  
 117 For thou art with me here upon the banks  
 118 Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,  
 119 My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch  
 120 The language of my former heart, and read  
 121 My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
 122 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while  
 123 May I behold in thee what I was once,  
 124 My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,  
 125 Knowing that Nature never did betray  
 126 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,

127 Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
 128 From joy to joy: for she can so inform  
 129 The mind that is within us, so impress  
 130 With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 131 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 132 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 133 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 134 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 135 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 136 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
 137 Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon  
 138 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;  
 139 And let the misty mountain-winds be free  
 140 To blow against thee: and, in after years,  
 141 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured  
 142 Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind  
 143 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,  
 144 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place  
 145 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,  
 146 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,  
 147 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts  
 148 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,  
 149 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—  
 150 If I should be where I no more can hear  
 151 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams  
 152 Of past existence—wilt thou then forget  
 153 That on the banks of this delightful stream  
 154 We stood together; and that I, so long  
 155 A worshipper of Nature, hither came  
 156 Unwearied in that service: rather say  
 157 With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal  
 158 Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,  
 159 That after many wanderings, many years  
 160 Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,  
 161 And this green pastoral landscape, were to me  
 162 More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!



## SUMMARY

The speaker says it has been five years since he last visited this setting. That's five summers and five winters, which felt especially long. Now that he's back, he once again can enjoy the gentle sound of rivers and streams running down from the mountains. He again gets to marvel at the high and impressive cliffs. The sight of these cliffs within this remote, untouched setting puts him in a thoughtful, reflective mood. The cliffs

visually link this quiet landscape to the calm silence of the sky. The speaker comments on how, as in his last visit, he can sit underneath a shady sycamore tree and from there look down at the surrounding farmland in the valley, including at the gardens surrounding cottages and at the many clumps of trees within orchards. He notes that because of the time of year (mid-summer), the fruit on the trees is not yet ripe and the orchards are completely green, blending in with the surrounding trees. The lines of bushes that he can see are, from his vantage point, tiny and almost indistinguishable as deliberately planted rows, and the picturesque, rural farms also look almost completely green. In between the trees he sees circles of smoke drifting up silently, as though delivering some unknown message. He imagines that this smoke could be coming from wandering people living in the woods, or from the fire of a devoutly religious person living alone in a cave.

Even while the speaker was away from this beautiful landscape, he didn't forget it and could still picture it vividly. While surrounded by the noisiness and loneliness of urban settings, remembering the beauty of this place helped the speaker through difficult and tiring times, bringing him pleasant feelings within his body and mind. These memories helped him feel calm and restored, and even affected his actions, pushing him toward small, daily acts of goodness and care for other people. The speaker further thanks these memories for granting him an even more immense and awe-inspiring the gift: that wonderful, precious mood in which he felt free from the burdens of the unknown, and in which the heaviness of dealing with this often confusing, senseless world was lessened. In that calm, precious state of mind, the speaker could in a sense transcend the restrictions of his physical body, which would become totally still as the speaker became only his soul. In this state, he says, his vision became silent, calm, powerful, and with a feeling of equanimity and happiness he had insight into life itself.

The speaker goes on to offer the possibility that he simply imagined this experience, because it is something that he just wants to believe. He then rejects this possibility, however, commenting on how so many times, when unhappiness and the rush and stress of daily life have weighed heavily upon his heart, he has remembered this beautiful, landscape. Addressing the landscape directly, he says that within his mind or soul he has gone back to the woodlands of the Wye Valley for solace and comfort.

The speaker's memories are like shining lights that have been half snuffed out, becoming darker or hard to see. There is a kind of sadness or confusion in the speaker's thoughts as the landscape, so often remembered as a *picture* in his mind, is now seen again in *real life*. At the same time, being in this landscape gives him the sense that in addition to the happiness he's experiencing right now, he will also have happiness in the future from remembering this current visit. He hopes that this is true, even though he is different from how he was when he was

younger and first came here. His younger self was like a deer, jumping through the hills and alongside deep rivers and isolated streams alike, following nature. His younger self was someone running *away* from something that he feared, rather than running *toward* something he cared for. Even so, back then nature was everything to him, since he had already lost some of the less sophisticated happiness of his childhood. He can't express or showing the reader *exactly* how he used to be, though. As a younger man, the sound of a waterfall stuck with him, like a passion sticks with someone (perhaps painfully or frighteningly). Similarly, his younger self experienced the shapes and colors of the rock cliffs, the mountain, and the shade and darkness of the forest with a kind of hunger. The landscape filled the younger speaker with intense emotion and love, yet this experience was missing a deeper spiritual or intellectual aspect beyond what could physically be seen. The past is over, though, as are the emotional highs and lows of youth that were intense to the point of being painful or disorienting. The speaker isn't weakened by this loss and doesn't grieve it, however, because he has gained so much in exchange. Specifically, over time he has gained the ability to really *see* nature, not thoughtlessly as he did when he was younger, but with a full awareness of all the sadness and harmony that comes with being a human being. This awareness—this human music—is not jarring or unpleasant. Instead, it has a calming, maturing effect, helping the speaker grow out of his youthful intensity and naivety. Over time, the speaker has also come to experience a kind of force that is at once joyful and disturbing in the way that it broadens the scope of his thoughts. This force creates a profound, nearly overwhelming awareness of the way that everything is connected and part of a whole. This force, this sense of connection and unity, is present throughout the natural world and universe. It exists in the light of suns as they set, in the round ocean, the air, the blue sky, and in the human mind. This presence or force is a kind of power or living soul that makes all things possible, including the capacity for thought and everything that is thought about. This force is described as moving through everything in the universe with a motion similar to rolling waves. Because of all of this insight that he has gained, the speaker says, he loves the natural world, including the fields, forests, and mountains, and the equally powerful world of the human mind and human senses of sight and hearing, which, he says, work by half inventing and half observing the world. The speaker sees in nature and in the human senses what is most fundamental to his thinking and his best thoughts. He compares nature to a person or spiritual presence who nurtures, leads, and protects every part of him, including his heart, soul, and morality.

The speaker says that even if, by some chance, he *hadn't* learned all of this, he still would not allow himself to lose his positive outlook. Addressing his sister, the speaker says that this is because she is there with him in this landscape. Calling her his

closest friend, the speaker says that he sees and hears in her his former self, including the way he used to feel and understand things, and the pleasure and joy he used to experience. Celebrating this, the speaker expresses the hope that he will see his younger self in her longer so that she can experience this youthful happiness longer. He then offers a prayer for his sister's future. He compares nature to a woman who is faithful, and who cares most for leading people through life joyfully. The speaker says that nature can shape human minds so well, make such a strong impression of beauty and calm, and nurture such a higher level of thinking, that through these gifts people can withstand all the difficulties and immorality of daily life, including cruel words, unfair or quick judgments, condescension, selfishness, and empty or fake interactions. In fact, he says, with the gifts of nature people can withstand everything that is wearing or difficult in day-to-day existence. In doing so, they can uphold a positive outlook and belief in the goodness and blessedness of life. The speaker prays that nature will always stay with and help his sister; he hopes that when she is alone, she will experience moonlight, and that she will feel the presence of the soft or slightly rainy wind from the mountains. He goes on to imagine her when she is older, and her current youthful happiness has been moderated into a more muted or quiet outlook. Then, her mind will be like a spacious, lofty house for everything that is beautiful, and everything that is melodious and harmonious will live in only in her memories. He hopes that if, at that point, she experiences pain, or loneliness, or fear, she will joyfully remember him addressing her now, and that this memory will be healing. The speaker then goes on to imagine that at this future point he might have died and can no longer see or hear his sister. He says that even if this is the case, his sister will remember that they were together in this landscape. She won't forget, he says, that like a religious person he worshipped nature, and that he came to this setting out of this devotion. He describes his feeling for this place as not just ordinary love but as the stronger kind of devotional and sacred love. He says, finally, that his sister will remember, even after the passage of many years and traveling elsewhere, that this forest, these cliffs, and this whole living natural place were beloved to him, on their own terms but also because of what they will mean to her.

industrialization. The poem implicitly responds to the industrialization of society by suggesting that urban life is lonely and depleting, and that the natural world has the power to restore and nourish the human soul. So powerful is nature, the speaker argues, that even simple *memories* of time spent in such pristine landscapes can be healing.

The poem makes clear that urban life is difficult for the speaker, who uses words such as “din,” “lonely,” “dreary,” “evil,” and “selfish” to describe life in “towns and cities.” These descriptions suggest that daily life in these settings is noisy, isolating, tiring, and even immoral. Such environments—far from being nourishing or comforting—are emotionally and morally taxing for the speaker, and, the poem implies, for everyone who lives in them.

Despite this, the speaker suggests that time spent in nature has sustained and nourished him, and that it will continue to do so in the future. The speaker recalls how in “hours of weariness” he has remembered the time he spent in the poem's beautiful natural setting, and this has brought him “tranquil restoration.” This suggests that nature is so powerfully restorative that even the *memory* of it has the power to calm and nourish the human soul.

The speaker goes on to say that his current visit to this place will comfort him in years to come. This current visit gives him “present pleasure” as well as “life and food / For future years.” By describing this visit as “food,” the speaker suggests that in the future, remembering his time in this natural setting will nourish and support him. The mere thought of nature, the poem implies, is as restorative as actual food.

Finally, the speaker suggests that time in nature is replenishing not just for the speaker but for human beings in general. Addressing his sister, the speaker suggests that memories of this natural place are restorative not only for him, but for her as well. The speaker says that if, in the future, she experiences “solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,” remembering the time they spent together in this place will bring her “healing thoughts,” or comfort her.

The speaker also uses the plural first person (“we” and “us”), saying that thanks to the healing and restorative powers of nature, daily life in urban settings will never “prevail against us.” While the “we” here could be read as referring to the speaker and his sister, it can also be read as a more general “we,” including all humanity. The speaker's use of “thou” (“you”), while addressing his sister, also turns the poem outward to the reader. This use of “thou” suggests that the reader, too, will be comforted and restored by the natural world, and perhaps even by the presence of the natural world in the poem itself.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-22



## THEMES



### THE RESTORATIVE POWER OF NATURE

Before diving in, it's worth noting some context: Wordsworth wrote “Tintern Abbey” during the

Industrial Revolution, when rural areas throughout Europe were being transformed into centers of manufacturing and production. In the poem, the speaker visits a natural, rural place that he sees as preserved and intact, not yet altered by

- Lines 23-31
- Lines 31-52
- Lines 52-58
- Lines 58-59
- Lines 64-67
- Lines 67-113
- Lines 114-124
- Lines 125-135
- Lines 135-145
- Lines 146-154
- Lines 154-162



## AWE AND THE SUBLIME

The Romantic poets were interested in the overwhelming awe and wonder people can experience when encountering the boundlessness of the universe and the natural world. They believed that in experiencing this awe and wonder, one encounters something called the "Sublime"—basically, a sense of infinity and vastness that exceeds rationality or measurement.

This experience, the thinking goes, can be so overpowering that it can take people "beyond" themselves. In "Tintern Abbey," the speaker suggests that nature offers access to the Sublime. The immense awe that the speaker feels upon being in this natural setting grants him greater insight into the connection and unity between humanity, the natural world, and the universe. Such feelings, the poem argues, can even allow people to transcend their earthly bodies altogether.

As the speaker describes the natural world in the beginning of the poem, notice that he does so by describing *individual* parts of it. There's an image of a sycamore tree, of smoke rising from the woods, and of some hedges in the distance—yet the landscape is not captured in totality. This suggests that this setting is so vast, so overwhelming, that the speaker can, at first at least, grasp only disparate pieces of it.

At the same time, this sense of awe and wonder ultimately leads the speaker to observe a sense of unity within the natural world. Those hedges the speaker sees seem to blend together, for example. Later, describing his experience of a "sense sublime," the speaker takes this initial hint at the connectedness of nature further. He offers a vision of the sun, the ocean, the air, and the sky as integrated, as inherently connected parts of a whole.

This shift in the descriptions—from individual bits of nature to seeing these bits as connected parts of a vast whole—suggests that the speaker has undergone an internal shift. And the longer he spends in this natural place, the more he is able to fully encounter its awe and wonder—and in doing so to gain a kind of transcendent vision of the natural world. That is, the speaker cannot see the entirety of nature at once, but can

sense that everything he *does* see is linked to some far greater whole. This awareness, in turn, is part of what it feels like to experience the Sublime.

The speaker goes on to imply that by experiencing the Sublime, he is able to have greater insight into the workings of the universe. He says that in such moments, "We see into the life of things." The speaker suggests that *through* this experience of awe and wonder, and the "deep power of joy" that it brings, he can gain insight into *life itself*.

The poem also suggests that the speaker's experience of the Sublime is transcendent: his experience of the natural world has allowed him not just to be restored, but to move *beyond* his body altogether. The speaker says that through experiencing the Sublime in nature, "we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul." This suggests that his experience of awe and wonder at the natural world is so powerful that he can escape the confines of his physical body!

This sense of transcendence is echoed in the poem's ending, when the speaker imagines a time after he has died and describes how the landscape will still be present for his sister. In a way, this section of the poem could be read as though the speaker is in fact uttering it after he has died, when he has truly been "laid asleep in body." Importantly, this experience of transcendence doesn't seem to lead the speaker to depart from the setting, but to be *more* present within it, as the poem ends with him celebrating the landscape in all of its clear specificity.

### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 2-18
- Lines 23-25
- Lines 37-50
- Lines 95-104
- Lines 149-162



## PERCEPTION, CREATIVITY, AND THE IMAGINATION

Wordsworth and other Romantic poets thought a lot about the nature of the imagination, and especially, with the *poetic* imagination, or the ability to write and create poems. While "Tintern Abbey" celebrates nature as generally healing and restorative in an increasingly urban world, it also celebrates nature as inspiring and as crucial to *creativity*. The poem suggests that nature inspires creativity and creative reflection, and that the imagination works actively and dynamically in tandem with the natural world.

The title of the poem, of course, reveals the role of the natural world in its creation. Specifically, the Wye Valley inspired the poem. Taken more broadly, this suggests that the beauty of the natural world inspires creativity and the writing of poems.

The speaker goes on to depict the way that people are able to

actively observe and record the natural world. The speaker says that the human “eye, and ear” both “half create” and “perceive.” On the one hand, this suggests that while the human mind and imagination are connected to nature, they are also in a sense outside it: people have the ability to “perceive,” or observe, the natural world.

But the mind is described as not only perceiving nature, but also as “half creat[ing],” or *inventing*. In other words, the imagination works in a kind of back and forth between observing the world and creating it—interpreting what’s being observed, and perhaps turning those interpretations into art. The creative mind thus works actively and dynamically in relationship with nature.

Finally, the poem’s structure supports this sense of the dynamic between the imagination and the natural world. The poem shifts back and forth between describing the natural landscape and the speaker’s inner experience. These shifts suggest an active, constant movement between the natural world and the working of the speaker’s mind and imagination.

At a larger level, the poem is something the speaker has made with his imagination, half through observing this natural landscape, and half through creating a form through which to express his experience. The poem as a whole, then, encompasses both the sense of the poetic imagination as inspired by nature, and the imagination working dynamically in relationship with the natural world.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-162



### TIME AND CHANGE

“Tintern Abbey” is a poem about nature, but it is also a poem about the speaker’s past, present, and future selves, and about time and change more broadly. Ultimately, the poem suggests that the passage of time leads to loss, but that it *also* leads to greater understanding of self and of the world.

Five years have passed since the speaker first visited this landscape, and he details how much he has changed in this time. Some terms the speaker uses to describe his former self are positive. He compares his younger self to a “roe” (a deer) who “bounded” through the landscape. This suggests that his younger self had a kind of freedom, energy, and spontaneity that the older speaker has lost.

At the same time, however, the speaker suggests that his younger self had a lot of growing up to do. He says that his younger self enjoyed “courser pleasures” and that even “bound[ing]” through the woods, he was “more like a man / Flying from something that he dreads.” This suggests that the speaker’s former self was unsophisticated and fearful, and that

he lacked the self-awareness the older speaker now possesses.

The speaker thus acknowledges what he has lost in growing older, but also celebrates the changes that have come with the passage of time. The speaker admits that in growing older, he has lost the “aching joys” and “dizzy raptures” that he once experienced, the naïve yet exciting emotional highs and lows of youth. Yet he also praises the “abundant recompense,” or compensation, for this loss. With time, the speaker has learned to “look on nature,” and to hear the “still sad music of humanity.” In other words, growing older has helped him to better see and appreciate the beauty of nature and to have greater knowledge of the world, with all of its sadness and human realities. Implicitly, the poem’s emphasis on self-reflection also suggests that the speaker has gained self-knowledge. He is now able to reflect on his past and present selves with insight and composure, rather than “flying,” or running away from, uncomfortable realities.

The speaker goes on to predict a similar pattern of loss, change, and growth for his younger sister, in whom he sees his former self and his “former pleasures.” The speaker predicts that with time, his sister’s “wild ecstasies shall be matured / Into a sober pleasure,” and her mind will be a “mansion for all lovely forms.” These descriptions suggest that the sister, too, will grow and change from her current youthful self. These changes involve loss—she will lose the earlier “ecstasies”—but also positive transformation, as her mind, like a mansion, will become spacious and elegant.

At a structural level, the poem enacts the passage of time and suggests that these experiences of loss, change and growth are part of a larger, natural pattern. The poem is structured around time: it begins with a reflection on the past, moves to reflections on the present, and then imagines the future. The poem thus enacts the pattern of change, loss, and growth that it describes. By including all of this within the larger, interwoven pattern of the poem, “Tintern Abbey” implicitly suggests that the change and loss individuals experience occurs within a larger scope—of the universe, and of time itself.

The landscape the speaker encounters seems constant and unchanging (it is described as the same as it was five years before), yet readers also know that landscapes *do* change; forests grow or are cut down; ecosystems develop and are altered by human activity; and the setting of the poem is radically different now than it was at the end of the 18th century. The landscape the speaker encounters, then, is precious partly because it *is* subject to change, if more slowly, and differently, than the changes individuals experience in their lives.

This implicit, larger change is present in the poem through the landscape the speaker inhabits. Just as the speaker experiences a sense of awe and wonder in encountering the interconnection and vastness of the natural world, then, the poem contextualizes the changes the speaker undergoes within

the broader passage of time in nature and the universe more broadly.

Finally, it is worth noting that while the poem enacts the passage of time it also, in a sense, “stops time,” preserving a single moment—that of the speaker’s visit with his sister to this place—within the poem itself.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-162



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-5

*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,*

The poem's title reveals that it has a very specific setting: the Wye Valley, on the Welsh side of the River Wye. The title also lets the reader know the context that has led to the poem: a walking tour that Wordsworth took with his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth, in the area. The title even establishes the exact date the poem was written (July 13, 1798)! The title thus grounds the poem in real, lived experience, almost as though it were a diary entry of the speaker.

Lines 1-5 continue to ground and orient the reader within the landscape and to reveal the speaker’s relationship to it. The speaker begins by saying that it's been five years since he last visited this spot. He emphasizes how long this time has felt to him by noting that each year has contained both a “summer” and “the length” of a “long” winter. This emphasis is heightened by the speaker’s use of [anaphora](#), as he recounts “Five years ... five summers ... five long winters.” This [repetition](#) establishes that the speaker visited this area before, while also implying that the speaker felt the weight of his absence palpably and repeatedly during that stretch of five years that he was away.

The opening lines go on to paint a lush visual and auditory picture of the scene, as the speaker notes the sound of rivers and streams flowing down from the mountains, as well as the sight of high, impressive cliffs that he recalls from his previous visit. The speaker once more uses anaphora for emphasis, in this case repeating “again” to remark on how he feels upon re-experiencing this landscape. Where the previous repetition of “five” heightened the reader’s sense of how the speaker experienced his time *away*, here the repetition of “again” heightens the reader’s sense of the restoration and completeness the speaker feels in *returning*. This repetition suggests that the speaker recalled these aspects of the landscape many times during his absence, and now experiences

a kind of relief in the setting, which is the same as he remembered it.

These opening lines also introduce adjectives important to the sense of the natural world within the poem. The streams and rivers are described as moving with a “soft inland murmur,” while the cliffs are “lofty.” These descriptions suggest that the landscape is, in some fundamental way, private and internally whole (the water moves “inland,” which recalls the word “inward,” and it “murmur[s],” or speaks, but quietly and not in a language known to humans). This sense of internal coherence is heightened by the subtle [consonance](#) of /r/ sounds in “rolling” and “murmur.” At the same time, the word “lofty” suggests that the cliffs are high—but also that the landscape conveys some truth that is elevated and higher than ordinary human thought.

Importantly, too, these lines establish the tense in which the poem is written, as the speaker records his current experiences in the present tense: “I hear ... I behold.” This use of present tense connects the reader to the speaker’s *immediate* experience, and also emphasizes the sense that the poem was composed within this very moment, as though the speaker’s words emerged spontaneously and organically upon coming back to this setting.

### LINES 6-8

*That on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.*

The speaker goes on to describe how the natural world can shape, heal, and restore the human mind and spirit. In lines 6-8, the speaker recounts how the cliffs he sees lead him to a calmer state of mind and lend a sense of the natural world as something integrated and whole. The sight of the cliffs, and the whole “secluded” scene, he says, “impress,” or shape, within his mind “deep,” or profound, thoughts of “seclusion.”

Here, the speaker introduces the idea that time spent in this natural setting has a powerful effect on his mind and inner world. The [repetition](#) of “secluded” and “seclusion” also suggests that by spending time in nature, in some fundamental way people can become, internally, more *like* nature. The secluded *scene* makes the *speaker* feel a sense of seclusion; he feels a kind of inner privacy or solitude that is removed from daily human influence. This idea is heightened by the [sibilance](#) of “secluded” and “seclusion” with “scene” and “impress,” which suggests that the quality of seclusion is inextricably connected to the scene (the landscape) as a whole. The sibilance of this section in general also adds a gentle, hushed tone to these lines that reflects the speaker's solitude and quiet contemplation.

The speaker goes on to say that the cliffs visually connect the land with the sky overhead. The sky is described as “quiet,” suggesting that it is both silent and calm. This adjective links the sky with the previous adjectives used for the landscape (“inland,” “murmur,” “lofty,” “wild,” “secluded”), all of which create

a sense of this setting as organically and internally whole, peaceful, private, untouched, and removed from human interference.

The cliffs also work here as a powerful [symbol](#) of integration and interconnection. They integrate and heal the speaker's inner world, as his thoughts become more profound and share the quality of "seclusion" with the landscape. They also vertically connect the land and the sky, suggesting that the natural world itself is integrated and whole.

### LINES 9-14

*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.*

The speaker complicates and deepens the sense of the natural setting as something unified, interconnected, and whole. In these lines, the speaker also introduces, for the first time, evidence of human presence within this natural landscape.

First, the speaker tells the reader that he can "again repose" under a "dark sycamore" tree and look out over the scene. The [repetition](#) of "again" connects these lines to the preceding lines and suggests that the speaker is sitting under the *same* tree and looking out at the *same* aspects of the landscape that he did five years ago.

From his seat under the tree, the speaker can look out over a landscape that is green and wild but that also includes indications of people living within it. The descriptions of "these plots of cottage-ground" and "orchard-tufts" suggest that the speaker is looking down at the scene within a valley. From his high vantage point, the trees of orchards look like small "tufts," like clumps of cotton or brushes.

Interestingly, while the speaker previously described the setting as secluded and wild, the nouns "cottage-ground" and "orchard-tufts" suggest that people live within this landscape—though they seem to do so in a way that is in harmony with nature. Their "cottage[s]," or small houses, are connected to the "ground" around them. And the speaker goes on to describe those cultivated "orchard[s]" as "clad in one green hue" so that they are almost impossible to distinguish from "groves and copses," or clusters of trees.

This [imagery](#) builds on and complicate the imagery that opened the poem. The scene is still described as natural, as wild and alive, yet the images of human activity (in which, notably, no people are actually seen!) seem to be in harmony with this landscape. This implicitly suggests that rural life, such as the kind lived by people farming within this setting, is closer to nature and to all of its positive attributes than is urban or city life.

These images also introduce an interesting tension between the singular and the plural. In lines 9-10, the speaker is a singular "I" seated beneath a single tree. Looking over the scene, though, he observes the plural "plots" of land and "orchard-tufts" cultivated by multiple human farmers. This shift to the plural suggests that with the introduction of human presence comes a kind of multiplicity that might implicitly be in tension with the unity of the natural world. Yet the poem goes on to resolve this tension, as the orchards are said to be "clad in one green hue." In other words, within this rural context, the green of nature unifies and brings together the possible multiplicity and even discord of human life. This sense of unity is heightened by the [consonance](#) of /k/ sounds in the lines, as the "cottage[s]" are sonically inked to "clad" and the "copses" of trees.

### LINES 14-22

*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.*

After the [repetition](#) of "Once again" at the end of line 14, the speaker further describes the indications of human presence that he can see in the valley below him. The "hedge-rows" that he sees are "hardly hedge-rows," and instead are simply "little lines / Of sportive green run wild." This suggests that the hedges people have grown almost merge with the natural, wild landscape, to the point that they don't even really count as human-made hedges! The cutesy, gentle [consonance](#) and [alliteration](#) of /l/ sounds in "little lines" suggests that they are diminutive and charming. The "pastoral farms," meanwhile, are "green to the very door," implying that the farms aren't dominating the landscape, but living *within* it.

Interestingly, the placement of the farms contrasts with the speaker's orientation to the scene as a whole. The farms are in the valley, on a horizontal plane, and are part of the landscape. The speaker, on the other hand, looks over this scene from a higher vantage point. The spatial relationship of the speaker to the valley implicitly shapes the poem's representation of the speaker—and, by extension, the poet. The speaker, the poem suggests, is a kind of privileged *observer*; he occupies a higher space than the landscape he observes, and he can record it in his poetry.

The stanza concludes with further [images](#) of human presence within the scene, this time a different kind of human presence than the "pastoral farms." The speaker notes "wreaths," or circles, of smoke rising from the forest. Again, this image

suggests that the speaker is above the scene and looking down upon it, since he is implicitly over both the forest and the smoke. But for the first time, the speaker here imagines the people who might live “among the trees” and send up the smoke, and wonders if they are “vagrant dwellers” or a “Hermit,” or religious person, living in solitude within a cave.

The phrase “vagrant dwellers” and the description that follows of the forest as “houseless,” is the first indication of a less-than-positive aspect of the landscape, as people living within a forest would be homeless. Yet the speaker’s description doesn’t suggest that the people he imagines are impoverished and suffering; rather, they are “vagrant” as though by choice, and they are said to be “dwellers in the houseless woods,” as though they are permanent inhabitants of the landscape.

Finally, the speaker imagines that the smoke might come, instead, from “some Hermit’s cave, where by his fire / The Hermit sits alone.” The description of the imagined Hermit is notable because it differs from the previous imaginings of people living here as farmers or “vagrant dwellers.” A Hermit lives in solitude by choice, in order to fulfill a life of religious devotion. The speaker’s placement of such a person within the scene deepens the sense, introduced earlier in the stanza, that this landscape lends itself to an inner life that is more “secluded,” “deep,” and “quiet.”

Notably, too, the smoke itself is described as “silent,” linking even this human presence to the “quiet” of the sky and of the scene as a whole. This sense of connection between the human presence and the landscape is increased by the [sibilance](#) of /s/ sounds in “smoke / sent up, in silence,” as the smoke, the act of sending it up, and its silent quality, are audibly connected—and connected, retroactively, to the entire “secluded scene.”

Finally, looking back throughout the entire first stanza, the speaker’s intense use of alliteration, [assonance](#), and consonance lends the lines a sense of delicacy and beauty that reflects the serene beauty of the landscape itself.

... 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!

Above, note the many soft /s/, /l/, /w/, /n/, /d/, and /r/ sounds, plus the /eez/ sound that links words like “these,” “wreaths,” and “trees.” The sounds of the lines make the poem itself feel unified and connected, just like the natural world it describes.

## LINES 23-29

*These beauteous forms,  
 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;*

Line 23 begins after the pause of a stanza break, but also after a kind of [caesura](#) mid-line. Since the last line of the first stanza ends halfway through its expected [iambic pentameter](#) (it contains only three iambic feet instead of five), the poem suggests that the line is “completed” in what is actually the *next* line, and the opening of stanza 2—line 23, which contains two iambs (two da-DUMs) and so completes the pentameter. See how, placed together, they essentially create one line of iambic pentameter (with “beauteous” scanned as having two syllables):

The **Hermit sits alone**. These **beauteous forms**,

The break in the middle of line 22 dramatizes and lengthens the pause between the two stanzas. At the same time, however, since the reader can implicitly read line 23 as *continuing* and *completing* line 22, the two stanzas feel like part of a single, unified, and ongoing thought or utterance.

The tension between these two effects—between the implied pause and then continuation of the line—could reflect a brief shift in the speaker’s thoughts, as he continues to speak but changes his focus and, to some degree, his rhetorical approach. Here, rather than simply being in the present and recording what he sees and imagines, the speaker recalls how remembering this landscape helped him in the past, during his time away.

The speaker begins the stanza by describing the aspects of the landscape he has just recounted as “beauteous forms.” The word “forms” suggests the shapes and impressions of the setting, but it is also an [allusion](#) to Platonic forms. These were considered to be the most essential and ideal versions of things encountered in everyday life. This allusion suggests that in encountering this natural place the speaker has encountered something more ideal, pure, and true than what he might see in his daily life.

The speaker develops this idea as he describes his time spent away from this natural place as “lonely” and “mid the din,” or noise, of “towns and cities.” The noisiness of these urban settings contrasts strongly with the quiet of the current scene, while “lonely” contrasts interestingly with the descriptions of “seclusion” in the natural world—with “seclusion” suggesting a kind of solitude that is isolated but not unpleasant, unlike loneliness.

Even while living within the urban world, the speaker suggests he could remember nature vividly (he was not “blind” to it) and that these memories helped him to feel better, bringing him “sensations sweet / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.” The [sibilance](#) of “sensations sweet” recalls that heard earlier in

the poem with the “secluded scene” and the “silence” of the “smoke,” suggesting that even while away, the speaker, in recalling the landscape, could access some fundamental quality of it.

Meanwhile, the [repetition](#) of “felt” and the parallel [syntax](#) of the two clauses (“Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart”) emphasizes that the speaker could *feel* this natural place in his body, even when he wasn’t physically there. The pulse of these lines suggests the pulse of blood moving from the heart and giving life to every part of the body.

### LINES 30-36

*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.*

Lines 30-36 continue the poem's abundant use of [consonance](#), [assonance](#), and other sound effects as the speaker describes the effect that remembering this setting has had on him.

For example, building on his description of the “sensations sweet” he experienced through remembering this landscape, the speaker says that these memories enabled his “passing even into [his] purer mind.” The [alliteration](#) of “passing” and “purer” lends the phrase a bright quality and connects the idea of purity with the verb “passing,” suggesting a kind of movement into this pure state. The /p/ sounds then pops up again and again throughout the following lines, in words like “pleasure” and “perhaps,” suggesting this joyful movement through the poem's sound itself.

After the [caesura](#) in the middle of line 31, which suggests a slight shift in thought after “restoration,” the speaker describes how thinking of this place has brought him “unremembered pleasure.” Here, the speaker suggests that he might not even remember all the exact ways these memories helped him, but he is sure that they did help him nonetheless.

These “unremembered” feelings, the speaker goes on to suggest, are those that influence and make possible “that best portion of a good man’s life,” including his small acts “of kindness and of love.” These acts are described as “little, nameless,” and “unremembered.” Yet the speaker emphasizes their importance and insists that they are what make up “the best portion” of someone’s life.

The speaker also indicates that memories of this landscape have made him more ethical and kinder to others. This sense of the profound, subtle nature of the landscape’s influence on the speaker is emphasized by the [enjambment](#) in “acts / Of kindness and of love,” which makes these lines stand out from the mostly [end-stopped lines](#) around them.

### LINES 36-47

*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:*

In the second part of line 36, the speaker starts to describe “another gift” that memories of this landscape have brought him—this one “of an aspect more sublime.” Where the previous lines emphasized acts of the speaker that were “unremembered” and unnamed because they were so small (“little” and “nameless”), here the speaker celebrates an experience that is so big, so profound that it is almost unnameable in its grandeur (this is essentially what the speaker means by calling this gift “more sublime”).

So what is this gift? A “blessed mood.” That is, remembering this natural place lifts the speaker's spirits and lightens the heavy “burthen” (or burden) “of the mystery” and “the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world.” The [alliteration](#) of /w/ sounds in “weary weight” and “world” helps to slow these lines down, making the reader almost labor through them as the speaker implicitly labors under this burden of the world before thoughts about nature help him feel better.

The speaker [repeats](#) the phrase “blessed mood” in line 41, emphasizing the sacred quality of this experience, while also adding the adjective “serene,” which contrasts strongly with the weariness of the preceding lines. That this mood is “blessed” imbues it with religious or spiritual connotations, something that has been bestowed upon the speaker by a greater force (in this case, by nature itself).

Within this mood, the speaker goes on to say, “the breath of this corporeal frame”—that is, the speaker's body—“And even the motion of our human blood” becomes “suspended” until “we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul.” Here, the speaker describes how through remembering time spent in the natural world, he has experienced a form of transcendence, becoming free of the “weight” of the world and even of his own body. The “blood,” which he described previously as feeling and experiencing the “sensations sweet” of the memories, is here “suspended,” or paused in its movement. Breathing, too, is temporarily stopped, and the speaker himself is “laid asleep.” This [imagery](#) creates a sense of absolute stillness even as it describes an experience of transformation, as the speaker becomes “a living soul.”

The sound of the poem becomes more fluent and calmer here as well, especially through the [sibilance](#) and soft /th/, /f/, and /l/ sounds that weave through these lines.

### LINES 48-50

*While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.*

The closing lines of the stanza are charged in their meaning and sound. In this state of the sublime, this blessed mood, the speaker says, “with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things.” As the speaker describes this pinnacle of his experience, in which he has been able to gain insight “into the life of all things,” the poem regains some of its use of [repetition](#), but it does so in a transformed way.

These lines maintain the emphasis on long, open vowel sounds, indicating the openness and profundity of the speaker’s experience. Yet they repeat the word “quiet” from earlier in the poem—previously used to describe the sky—and, more closely together, the word “power,” as the speaker suggests that he has gained a kind of power that is not the power of ordinary humans but one more deeper and joyful, a kind of power of vision and understanding. These words connect the speaker in this state to the landscape he previously described, with its silent, calm sky and the powerful impression of its high cliffs.

The last line of the stanza stands apart and is emphasized by its departure from [iambic](#) pentameter (it contains just four feet instead of five) and by its words that are nearly all monosyllabic. The line is profoundly simple in its music, and also in its meaning, as the speaker doesn’t elaborate on what he sees, but simply states that he sees “into” the “life of things,” or into life itself. In a sense, then, the line enacts the speaker’s experience, in all of its clarity and depth that at the same time defies interpretation.

Notably, the second stanza as a whole is divided into two long sentences, the first extending from line 23 to midway through line 36, the second from line 36 to the end of the stanza at line 50. Where the first sentence described the subtle, almost “unremembered” impact of the landscape on the speaker, as memories of it made him kinder and more loving, the second describes this profound experience of the “sublime” in which the speaker, rather than being more grounded as a human being within the human world, has transcended his body and the world altogether. That the stanza is almost evenly divided into these two sentences suggests that the speaker finds equal value in both experiences: the humble experience of those “nameless” acts of kindness, and the profound, transcendent experience of the sublime.

### LINES 51-56

*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—*

Lines 51-56 mark the beginning of the shortest stanza in the poem. Like the poem’s first stanza break, the break before this stanza also includes a large white space—a kind of mid-line [caesura](#)—in which the pentameter of the line at the end of the preceding stanza is metrically “completed” in the first line of the following one. In this case, line 50 contained just four [iambic](#) feet (remember that each iamb has two beats in a da-DUM pattern), leaving one metrical foot (one da-DUM) for line 51: “If this.” Take the two lines together and it is essentially a regular line of iambic pentameter with a pause in the middle (after “things”):

We see into the life of things. If this

This break marks a shift in the speaker’s thinking. In this case, the speaker reflects on the transcendent experience he has just described and poses the possibility that it was just a “vain belief”—or something he believed he experienced only because he wanted to. He then responds to this possibility. Referring to his time spent away from this natural place—and implicitly in urban settings—he comments on “how oft” (or often) he “turned” in spirit to the landscape. That is, he thought about nature a lot while living in the city.

The speaker clearly has some negative feelings towards urban life, describing his time spent away from nature as time in “darkness and amid the many shapes / Of joyless daylight.” This reference to the “shapes” of urban settings recalls and contrasts with the “beautiful forms” of the natural landscape and their earlier [allusion](#) to Platonic, ideal forms.

Meanwhile, the [consonance](#) of /l/ sounds in “joyless daylight” and the cluster of /f/, /r/, and /t/ sounds (as well as /l/ sounds) in “fretful stir / Unprofitable, and the fever of the world” create a sense of the urban settings the speaker has inhabited as crowded, almost claustrophobic. This sense of claustrophobia is heightened by the [alliteration](#) of /f/ sounds in “fretful” and “fever.” Altogether, the city seems like a very overwhelming place indeed—nothing like the vast, pleasant natural landscape.

Finally, the speaker’s remark that these daily experiences have “hung upon the beatings of [his] heart” recalls and builds upon the earlier [imagery](#) of the weight of the world, as well as the relief that remembering the landscape brought the speaker, with its “sensations sweet ... felt along the heart.” In a sense, then, the speaker seems to be going back over his earlier remarks, and his earlier experiences, to prove to himself that he did not imagine the transcendent experience he has just described—that it was not simply “but a vain belief.”

## LINES 57-59

*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!*

The last three lines of the stanza introduce the poem's first use of [apostrophe](#), or direct address to a thing or being that is not expected to reply. In this case, the speaker addresses the "sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer thro' the woods." This address is striking in several ways:

- By using "thee" and "thou" (old-fashioned words meaning "you") for the landscape, the speaker implicitly [personifies](#) it.
- Importantly, the speaker addresses the "sylvan" (or wooded) Wye (valley) but also specifically addresses "Thou wanderer thro' the woods," saying, "How often has my spirit turned to thee!" This suggests that the speaker addresses the woods and valley *themselves*, but *also* a kind of "wanderer" or spirit that he sees as inhabiting the valley or moving "thro' the woods." In other words, he seems to be talking to nature itself and to some being within nature.
- The closing line of the stanza, in which the speaker reiterates that his spirit has "turned to thee," suggests that the speaker's spirit finds a kind of kinship or camaraderie in the spirit he addresses, the one that lives within or is embodied by the landscape.

The speaker repeats the phrase "how oft," meaning how often, at the starts of lines 52 and 57 to note how many times he has "turned to," or recalled/thought about, the landscape. This [anaphora](#) underscores just how much the speaker relies on nature when he is in need of a pick-me-up of sorts. The speaker also repeats "turned to thee" in lines 57 and 59, emphasizing this experience of returning and going back to nature in spirit, if not physically.

The poem registers the turn toward direct address (its apostrophe to nature and this "wanderer") in its sounds. The soft [sibilance](#) of "spirit" and "sylvan" recalls the "secluded scene" of the opening stanza, and the [alliterative](#) /w/ sounds in "Wye," "wanderer," and "woods" again create a sensation of unity. This, in turn, illustrates the internal shift that can take place in "turning to" the beauty of the natural world.

Finally, the stanza ends with a line that is perfect in its [iambic pentameter](#):

How often has my spirit turned to thee!

Where the previous stanza ended with incomplete metrical lines, this one ends with a complete one. This sense of completion emphasizes the speaker's reply to his own doubt, bringing that doubt into a kind of resolution.

## LINES 60-67

*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.*

The fourth stanza returns the speaker and the reader to the "now" of the speaker's *present* visit to this landscape. Having reflected on his time away, the speaker uses a [metaphor](#) to describe how those recollections and thoughts seem to him now, at this moment: they are "half-extinguished," like candles or flames, and are "dim and faint" (again, like fading light) in the face of the present reality, when with "somewhat of a sad perplexity / The picture of the mind revives again."

This [imagery](#) is both simple and complex. The speaker seems to suggest that in seeing the *actual* landscape, his recollections of the past now are "dim" (or less vivid or compelling) compared to the reality before him. Yet these "remembrances" seem to include both his thoughts of his time away in "towns and cities" as well as his recollections (while he was away) of the place itself. That "picture" that he carried in his mind now "revives," or comes back to life, "again" as the speaker finds himself within this natural place.

The speaker doesn't exactly explain, either, what he means by the "sad perplexity" he experiences in returning. Is the landscape *different* from how he remembered it? Or is the sadness and slight confusion an experience brought about by returning to a place he had experienced as a much younger self? These lines suggest that the speaker experiences a kind of dissonance and even disorientation in reconciling his memories and his past self with his present experience, as that "picture," no longer a picture, is an actual landscape all around him.

That the picture "revives" suggests that, no matter how much the landscape comforted the speaker while he was away, there is some fundamental way in which it can only be truly real and alive to him when he is within it. These lines introduce a sense of melancholy and uncertainty into the poem.

Even so, the speaker goes on to celebrate that while being here, he experiences both "present pleasure" and "pleasing thoughts / That in this moment there is life and food / For future years." In other words, despite the difference he might experience between his memories and the present landscape (and the implicit difference between the actual landscape and the remembered one), this present visit will sustain him in the future, just as his past visit did. It is as though he is taking a big gulp of nature that fills him up now and that will keep him full for some time going forward (because he can remember it).

The speaker seems to resolve the moment of "sad perplexity"

as, present within the landscape, he experiences its comfort and knows that he will carry it with him when he leaves. This sense of resolution is registered in the lines musically, with the [alliteration](#) of “present pleasure” and “pleasing,” as well as the [consonance](#) in “life,” “food,” and “for future.” These sound clusters connect the meanings of the words, so that the *present* is linked to *pleasure*, and *life* and *food* (figuratively, generally sustenance or fulfillment) are present in the *future*.

The speaker’s comparison of his present visit to “food” for his future self is interesting in several ways.

- First, he suggests that this natural setting is so profoundly restorative that it will continue to sustain him when he leaves.
- At the same time, food is something that can be depleted; eventually, the [metaphor](#) implicitly suggests, the speaker will “run out” of food and need to return.
- This suggests that the natural world is fundamental and necessary to human life and existence, just as food is, but also that people need to *revisit* the natural world in order to sustain themselves physically and spiritually.

#### LINES 67-74

*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.*

“And so I dare to hope,” the speaker goes on, meaning that he hopes that this current visit will sustain him going forward just as the past one did, despite the fact that he has “changed, no doubt,” from when he “first ... came among these hills.” In other words, he hopes that this visit will be as restorative as the last one, even though he is profoundly different now than he was five years ago, the last time he was here. He then goes on to describe exactly what he was like back then.

The speaker compares his younger self to a “roe” (a kind of deer), who:

*... bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides  
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,  
Wherever nature led.*

Notably, this is the first place in the poem where the speaker uses [similes](#). This use of figurative language follows the [metaphors](#) that come just before (in which the speaker implicitly compared his thoughts to “half-extinguished” flames, and the memories of this landscape to food). Here, the

figurative language becomes more direct, as the *implicit* metaphors change to the more *explicitly* comparative similes. These comparisons are interesting in several ways:

- First, by using similes, the speaker suggests that he can’t describe his past self directly. This could be taken to mean that the speaker’s past self might not have been as fully actualized as his present self, since he must rely on the poetic device of a simile to describe how he once was.
- What the speaker compares his past self to is also important. He says that his young self was “like a roe,” meaning that he once was like an animal that would *live within* this landscape, not only visit and observe it. This suggests that the speaker’s younger self may have in some way been more in harmony with the natural world, a sense reinforced when the speaker notes that he “bounded ... Wherever nature led.”

At the same time, the speaker goes on to compare his younger self to “a man / Flying from something that he dreads.” Interestingly, the speaker says that his younger self (who was a man) was “like a man.” While the speaker qualifies this by noting that he is talking about a particular *type* of man—one fleeing from something he feared instead of actively seeking out what he loved—the comparison still subtly suggests that the speaker’s former self wasn’t *truly* “a man,” only *like* one. Following as it does from the previous simile of the roe deer, this also creates a kind of double simile, in which the speaker’s former self is compared to a deer, who is then compared to a man. This doubling creates a sense of the speaker’s younger self as inhabiting some ambiguous state, neither fully an animal-self nor fully an adult person.

The [assonance](#) of long /o/ sounds in “hope” and “roe” connects the two words, suggesting that the speaker’s younger self had hope, even if he was in some ways lost or fearful. The [internal rhyme](#) of “led” and “dreads” complicate this sense, as they suggest that the speaker’s younger self both followed nature yet dreaded something that he was fleeing. These sound echoes and internal rhymes imply that the younger self was in some way trapped or enclosed within himself and his experience.

The speaker then shifts out of this sense of entrapment in line 74, with the phrase “Who sought the thing he loved.” As “loved,” in contrast to “dreads,” has no internal rhyme in the lines before, the speaker suggests that this movement to “love” is a kind of movement forward, and that the speaker eventually transformed in this direction.

#### LINES 74-80

*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,*

The speaker continues to describe his former self. First, through the use of a [parenthetical](#), he reveals that even five years ago he had *already* lost some qualities of his childhood. Interestingly, the parenthetical is the longest part of the sentence, creating an extended pause the reader must traverse between the beginning of the sentence (“For nature then”) and its conclusion (“To me was all in all”).

What the speaker says within the parenthetical is also striking. He remarks that even five years before, the “coarser pleasures of [his] boyish days / And their glad animal movements [were] all gone by.” The speaker’s use of the word “coarse” is notable, since “coarse” can mean rough in texture but also in manner or behavior; essentially, it means that the speaker’s childhood pleasures were unsophisticated.

He then goes on to say that the “glad animal movements” of his boyhood were already “gone by.” This remark is intriguing, following as it does from the speaker’s previous description of his younger self as a deer. If the speaker had, five years ago, already lost his “glad animal movements” of childhood, then how was he still like a deer? Was there some animal quality that he lost gradually over time? Or was it the simplicity and gladness that he had already lost? The speaker’s remark builds on but also complicates, in an unresolved way, his previous comparison.

At the same time, in building into the poem an awareness that even at a younger age, the speaker had already outgrown some of his childhood energy and innocence, the parenthetical creates the sense that the speaker’s experience of loss, change, and growth as he gets older is and has been ongoing. Though small in relationship to the entire poem, then, the parenthetical works powerfully to suggest that the time frames the speaker evokes—past, present, and future—extend beyond the bounds of the poem and even beyond what he includes. It implies a sense of the infinite, which is important to the poem as a whole, as the speaker encounters the vastness and beauty of nature.

At the end of the sentence, the speaker describes nature to his former self as “all in all.” This [repetition](#) seems self-fulfilling, suggesting that nature was everything to him. At the same time, this phrase it also defies interpretation or translation, since the “all” is explained only through its repetition, “all.” The speaker seems to comment on this difficulty of interpretation or description when he goes on to say, comparing his words to visual art, “I cannot paint / What then I was.”

Instead, he goes on to describe how the landscape seemed to him then. “The sounding cataract,” or booming waterfall, “Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock, / The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood.” These [images](#) can be connected to

images earlier in the poem—the “sounding cataract” and “tall rock” evoke the sound of water and the cliffs mentioned earlier, while the “mountain” was previously mentioned as the source of the rivers and streams, and the “deep and gloomy wood” was present in the “trees” and “woods” of the opening stanza.

Yet the past landscape is described as somewhat creepy. A cataract is a waterfall, but it is also a condition in which the eye becomes clouded, obstructing light. It is described here as “haunt[ing]” the speaker, with the [simile](#) “like a passion.” The rock is “tall” and perhaps intimidating. The “deep and gloomy wood” is similarly oppressive. In these images, then, the speaker implicitly describes how he used to be, by showing how he used to relate to the landscape: with a kind of fear or sense of it as overpowering.

### LINES 81-95

*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, not 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 recompense. 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.*

Lines 81-85 build on the descriptions of the speaker’s younger self. By transitioning from the specific, discrete descriptions of the “rock” and “mountain” and “wood” to the general “colours” and “forms” of the landscape, the speaker echoes his previous use of the phrase “beauteous forms” to describe the landscape, and its [allusion](#) to the ideal forms in Platonic thought.

At the same time, this shift indicates the changes the speaker himself has undergone: he now can see the aspects of the landscape not as he saw them then (specific, discrete elements) but as integrated and whole. He also, the poem implicitly suggests, has gained insight into his former self, by being able to describe not only how he felt previously but also what these feelings *meant*.

Specifically, the speaker says that the landscape was to him then an “appetite; a feeling and a love.” The word “appetite” recalls his comparison of the place to “food” for future years, yet it also suggests something less sophisticated or “coars[er]” in the speaker’s previous relationship to the natural world—as something he hungered for, yet perhaps did not fully appreciate. And indeed, the speaker goes on to say that his previous “feeling” for the setting “had no need of a remoter

charm / By thought supplied." In other words, the speaker's younger self didn't (or perhaps couldn't) truly think about his experience and gain pleasure from this thought.

Similarly, he says, his former self had no "interest / Unborrowed from the eye"—suggesting that the younger speaker was more connected to his *senses* than his *intellect*, or than his more deeply spiritual self and consciousness. The speaker suggests that with the passage of time he has grown in spiritual and intellectual ways, since he now, implicitly, does have that "need of a remoter charm," or of more elevated thought that allows him to truly appreciate the beauty of this setting.

Indeed, that "time is past," the speaker insists after the pause of a [caesura](#) in the middle of line 85, which conveys on a formal level that passage of time. As a younger man, the speaker's life was exciting but also stressful, an idea conveyed by the [oxymoron](#) of "aching"—or painful—"joys" and "dizzy raptures," or feelings so intense that they made the speaker feel disoriented and unstable.

Essentially, the speaker has mellowed out a bit over the past five years, yet he does not "mourn" for the lost intensity of his youth. Growing up brings its own "other gifts," he insists, that more than make up for (offer "Abundant recompense") the "loss" of youthful exuberance.

So what has the speaker gained? Again, it's the ability to "look on nature"—to really *appreciate* it in a way that he was not able to as a "thoughtless youth." This doesn't mean he now looks at the world through rose-colored glasses; he makes clear that he's not overly optimistic or naive. Both in the past and now he can often hear the "still sad music of humanity"—meaning he recognizes the difficulties and loneliness of being a human being—but he no longer finds that [metaphorical](#) "music" to be "harsh nor grating." Instead, he appreciates the full extent of human experience and doesn't run away from its ups nor its downs—the latter of which he's realized have the "ample power / To chasten and subdue"—that is, to lessen and calm the "aching" and dizziness mentioned earlier. It seems getting older has some benefits!

## LINES 95-101

—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 dash in the middle of line 95 creates another [caesura](#), another pause, and then the speaker transitions to describing an experience that is a kind of climax of the stanza and even the poem as a whole. "And I have felt," the speaker begins, recalling the "I have learned" of line 90. This echo suggests that each of the speaker's insights and experiences has grown and

developed from what came before. In this case, his learning to "look on nature" and hear "the still sad music of humanity" has led, he goes on to explain, to a profound experience of insight and understanding.

The speaker goes on to say that what he has felt is a "presence that disturbs [him] with the joy / Of elevated thoughts." "Disturbs" here does not mean frightens or unnerves, but rather that this presence shakes the speaker out of his funk. This presence seems to have its own energy and agency—perhaps like the implicit spirit, being, or presence that he suggested inhabited the "sylvan Wye."

The phrase "elevated thoughts" contrasts with the speaker's description of his former self as "thoughtless," while "elevated" recalls the loftiness of the cliffs within the natural setting the speaker is looking at. The speaker then describes this presence as "a sense sublime," recalling his use of the word "sublime" back in stanza 2—when he described the experience that led him to a transcendent state.

In this case, the speaker goes on to suggest that this "sublime" experience—brought about by the passage of time and the insight and wisdom he has gained—has led him to not only transcend his body (as he previously described) but also to have insight into a kind of profound connection between all things. Through this presence, he says, he has gained a "sense ... Of something far more deeply interfused." This "something," which the speaker describes as profoundly interconnected, "dwell[s]" in:

... the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:

The speaker doesn't just *tell* the reader that he has gained insight into a kind of interconnection and wholeness in the natural world. He offers a vision of this interconnection and wholeness. Using [polysyndeton](#) and [parataxis](#) to link the images together, and to suggest that each is of equal importance and is equally inhabited by this "presence," the speaker describes the natural world in its entirety, including the sun or "suns," the ocean, the air, the sky, and—importantly— the human mind.

This vision is remarkable on its own, in its integration and completeness. It is also remarkable within the poem, as it demonstrates the shift the speaker has undergone. Elsewhere, the speaker describes the natural setting by describing elements of it (the sound of water, the high cliffs, the woods). Here, the speaker describes not only this natural setting, but the *entire world*, in a single utterance. It's as though his point of view has shifted; he is no longer smaller than the cliffs, looking up at them, but as though able to view everything at once, from within the world and outside it at the same time.

The individual descriptions of each element of the world are

also notable. Where the previous descriptions of the landscape were described with some degree of complexity and specificity (the “orchard-tufts,” for example, or the “cataract” of water), here the [imagery](#) is remarkably simple, with each noun accompanied by a single modifying word or phrase:

- The suns are “setting.”
- The ocean is “round.”
- The air is “living.”
- The sky is “blue.”
- The “mind” belongs to “man.”

Importantly, too, the speaker doesn’t only describe how these things *appear*; he seems to have gained that insight he noted earlier “unborrowed from the eye,” and can now have insight into the actual nature of things, seeing the ocean as “round” or complete and surrounding the globe, and the air itself as alive.

### LINES 102-104

*A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.*

The speaker concludes this vision by describing this “something” that dwells in all the natural world and human consciousness. The speaker again imbues this presence with agency. His description of it as a kind of “spirit” connects it to the speaker’s own spirit, evoked earlier in the poem, as well as the spirit implicitly present in the Wye valley, which the speaker addressed as “thou.” This presence or spirit, he says, “impels” or makes possible “all” things, both those who think and all that is thought about.

The speaker’s [anaphoric](#) repetition of “all” here is striking, following as it does from his previous usage of the word. Earlier, he had said that nature was to his younger self “all in all.” This description suggested that nature was, to his previous self, a kind of totalizing experience, but also, in certain way, opaque or unknowable—since the phrase itself is circular and defies clear interpretation or explanation. Later, he acknowledged that he had lost “all” the “aching joys” of his previous life, and “all its dizzy raptures.”

The word “all” in these earlier lines indicated what was “all” or everything to the speaker then; yet in describing this vision he has had, the speaker seems to have gained insight into another meaning of “all,” one that extends beyond his own experience to include the “all” of the world and the universe.

The /l/ sound, meanwhile, in “rolls,” as the speaker describes the movement of this presence, is [consonant](#) with the /l/ sound in “all,” suggesting that the presence moves or “rolls” through all things with life and agency, but also, in a certain sense, *is* all, or everything.

### LINES 104-113

*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.*

Having gained this insight and this vision into a fundamental kind of connectedness in the world and universe, the speaker concludes he loves all parts of the natural world that human beings can “behold” from anywhere on “this green earth.” He loves meadows, woods, the mountains—all of it!

The use of [polysyndeton](#) to connect the images (“the meadows” and “the woods” and “mountains” and “all that we behold / From this green earth”) aligns these aspects of the natural world, and the speaker’s immediate setting, with the grander vision of the “setting suns, / And the round ocean and the living air, / And the blue sky.” Implicitly, the speaker says, these immediate aspects of his surroundings, and of this landscape, are connected to the rest of the world by the presence he just described, that “interfuse[s]” them or connects them; this connection is registered in the conjunction “and.”

Similarly, the speaker sustains his use of the word “all” here, suggesting that even when he doesn’t inhabit the state that allows him more elevated or transcendent insight, he loves the “all” of the natural world because of the greater “all” that it contains and implies—the infiniteness of nature and the universe.

The speaker doesn’t just love every part of nature; he also loves the human senses of sight and hearing, as well as their capacity to both observe and “half create.” This is a strange phrase; how can you “half create” something? Perhaps the speaker is saying that he loves being able to perceive—to look at the world—through his eyes, and also recognizes that as an individual, he has a hand in creating, in interpreting, everything he takes in through his eyes and ears. This emphasizes his connection to the natural world, that he, too, is part of this big web of interconnection.

The speaker closes this stanza by praising both nature and “the language of the sense,” or human senses. He does so in some interesting ways:

- First, the speaker uses a [metaphor](#), saying that nature and the senses are an “anchor” or grounding and foundation for his “purest thoughts.”
- He then goes on to [personify](#) what lives within nature and the senses as a “nurse,” “guide,” and “guardian” of

his heart. In other words, nature and the senses, and the presence that lives within them, nourish and take care of his “heart,” lead him, and protect him.

- Finally, he says that the natural world and the “language of the sense” are actually the “soul” of his “moral being.” This suggests that nature and the senses are in a way, *his own soul*, or that his soul is *part* of them. Most importantly, they are also said to be the “soul” of his “moral being,” or of his morality, which is often considered to be a uniquely human trait.

The speaker’s [anaphora](#) of “the” here is notable, particularly as it follows from the repeated use of “and” in the lines before. “And” suggests plurality and multiplicity, even as, in this stanza, it implicitly links and connects all different pieces of the natural world and universe together. “The,” by contrast, suggests singularity and oneness. Nature and the human senses, the speaker suggests, which are one and the same within the interconnecting spirit or presence he has witnessed, are singular in their power to nurture, protect, and lead him. What he seems to be saying, then, is that what is truly the guide or guardian of his heart is this unifying power, this underlying presence that makes all living things possible and “rolls through all things.”

### LINES 114-116

*Nor perchance,  
If I were not thus taught, should I the more  
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:*

Line 113 ended halfway through its [iambic](#) pentameter, containing three complete feet and half of a fourth. The fourth foot, and the rest of the pentameter, are completed in line 114, at the beginning of the next stanza. Taken as a single line, they'd be scanned as:

Of all my moral being, Nor perchance,

In a way, this break in the line echoes and recalls the stanza break between the first two stanzas, which likewise divided the pentameter of the previous line almost exactly in half, to be completed in the following line and following stanza. Here, the effect of the caesura is heightened by introducing a stanza break not only mid-pentameter but mid-foot; the unstressed second syllable of “being” finds its stressed counterpart in “Nor,” but only *after* the reader traverses the pause and white space in between stanzas.

This stanza break and metrical divided between two lines has effects that, as in the break between the first two stanzas, work in tension with one another.

- First, the increased white space gives the reader a greater sense of pause, as the speaker shifts more dramatically from one rhetorical mode to another (in

this case, shifting from an apparent dramatic monologue to a direct address to his sister).

- At the same time, because the pentameter (and a foot within the pentameter) are only completed in line 114, at the start of the fifth stanza, the reader can interpret these stanzas as being implicitly connected. The pause, then, slows the reader down but *also* propels the reader forward to reach the next line.

The opening lines of this final stanza also work as a kind of transition to the poem’s final movement. The speaker reflects on what he has just said about having learned to see nature as his guide and protector. Referencing this, he says that even if he *hadn’t* been “taught” through his experiences to love and appreciate nature, he wouldn’t let his good spirits “decay” or fall apart.

The speaker’s use of the word “decay” is interesting, here, given the poem’s emphasis on the natural setting as well as the progression of time. Everything living, and in the natural world, does eventually “decay.” Here, the speaker uses a word that often refers to natural decomposition to essentially refute it, saying that his good spirits—perhaps like the “spirit” he has said runs through all of life and nature, which is eternal and infinite—*won’t* decay.

### LINES 117-122

*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.*

The speaker goes on to explain that he wouldn’t let his good spirits “decay” because he isn’t alone in this setting but is there with his sister. In fact, William Wordsworth undertook this walking tour with his sister, Dorothy, who was one year younger than he was.

As the speaker addresses his sister directly, the poem returns the speaker and the reader to his immediate setting and his immediate moment—the banks of the River Wye, in July 1798. These lines also shift the mode of the poem outward. Up to this point, the poem could be read as a dramatic [monologue](#): the speaker addressing himself, or the reader, about the landscape and his experiences. The exception to this is in the third stanza, when the speaker addressed the Wye valley in [apostrophe](#) as “thou.”

Here, the reader realizes, perhaps for the first time, that the speaker isn’t alone “upon the banks” of the river. His sister has been with him the whole time. This turn to direct address, then, has the effect of making the reader look back over the poem as a whole differently: the reader now can understand the poem as a whole as part of a conversation, a single utterance,

addressed, within the moment of the poem, to the speaker's sister.

The speaker says that his sister is his “dearest Friend, / My dear, dear Friend,” the [repetition](#) emphasizing the speaker's feeling as well as the unique position of confidant that the sister holds. The speaker then goes on to describe his sister, saying “in thy voice I catch / The language of my former heart, and read / My former pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes.”

Several aspects of this description are notable. First, it is worth noting that the speaker seems to only see in his sister only those things that he recognizes in himself. She is not viewed as a separate person with her own agency, feelings, and experiences. The speaker emphasizes this by his repetition of the phrase “my former,” implying that when he looks at her, he sees only a younger version of himself. The speaker also uses words to describe his sister that he has used, in previous places in the poem, to describe his own experiences:

- He says he sees in her his “former heart,” and “former pleasures,” recalling his earlier use of the words “heart” and “pleasures” to describe himself.
- He also describes the “shooting lights” in her eyes as “wild,” implicitly connecting her eyes to the “wild” natural scene and to his earlier, animal-like self.
- Meanwhile, the image of the “lights” recalls the previous stanza, in which the speaker described his “gleams of half-extinguished thoughts.”

It is also notable that the figure of the sister works here as a kind of synthesis of many of the elements introduced in the poem up to this point. She, like the speaker, is present within the setting, and she represents his former self (and by extension, his past visit to this landscape). She is also described in terms of her “heart,” “pleasures,” and “wild eyes,” words used previously in disparate moments of the poem: the speaker described his “heart” in stanza 2 and his “pleasures” in stanza 4. He described the landscape as “wild” in the first stanza of the poem and invoked the human sense of sight in the second part of the fourth stanza.

Repeating as they do through the poem, these words and images become a kind of internal vocabulary for the poem and the speaker, a vocabulary that is brought together and unified in the figure of the sister. Finally, by representing the speaker's past self, the sister also serves as a kind of synthesis of time, embodying the speaker's past in the present.

## LINES 122-131

*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,*

The speaker goes on to celebrate all that he sees in his sister and being able to see his “former heart” in her, saying, “yet a little while / May I behold in thee what I was once, / My dear, dear Sister!” The [repetition](#) of “dear” in these lines connects them to the lines earlier in the stanza, and the capitalization of “Sister” connects it visually to “Friend,” endowing both with importance and emphasis.

This turn to the sister, the first feminine presence in the poem, seems to lead to another shift, as the speaker goes on to [personify](#) nature itself as a woman. He begins a “prayer,” that will develop over much of the stanza, for nature to protect and help his sister as it has helped him.

The capitalization of “Nature” here (the first place in the poem that it has been capitalized) also connects it to the words “Sister” and “Friend.” Notably, too, the speaker's personification of nature envisions it as a woman who fits traditional gender norms: she is faithful (not “betray[ing] / The heart that loved her”) as a wife would be expected to be; and it is her “privilege” or honor to attend to the speaker and “lead” him from “joy to joy.” The speaker expresses the hope that nature will likewise attend to and lead his sister in “this our life.” The phrase “joy to joy,” meanwhile, recalls the speaker's account of his own development, from the “aching joys” of his younger self to the “joy / Of elevated thoughts” that he has experienced in maturity.

The speaker continues to build on this celebration and gendered personification of “Nature,” saying that “she can so inform / The mind that is within us, so impress / With quietness and beauty, and so feed / With lofty thoughts.” Just as the earlier description of the sister brought together words previously used for the speaker's own experience, this description of the personified “Nature” uses words used earlier for the landscape and for nature as a whole. The word “impress” recalls the speaker's use of the word in the first stanza, when he said that the “cliffs” within the “wild secluded scene impress / Thoughts of more deep seclusion.” Similarly, the cliffs were described as “lofty,” a word repeated here to describe human thought. The sky, in the opening stanza, was described as “quiet,” and the scene as a whole was recalled in terms of its “beauteous forms.”

In a sense, the speaker's repetition of these words works to emphasize his argument, as he brings up qualities in the natural world that he has already listed within the poem and uses this as a basis for his hope that his sister will have a similar experience of nature. Meanwhile, the opening lines of the stanza have implicitly connected the figure of the “Sister” with the feminine “Nature,” in their gendered qualities (they are both

viewed as faithful, quiet, patient, helpful, and nurturing), and in the capitalization of the words used for each. In a sense, both the sister and personified nature here work as unifying figures, just as the “presence” the speaker described earlier in the poem was unifying.

### LINES 131-137

*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.*

In lines 131-137, the speaker goes on to celebrate the power of this unifying quality, and the power of nature, to protect him (and, he hopes, his sister) from the difficulties of daily life in urban environments. Because of all of these gifts that nature brings, he says, “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.”

These descriptions of daily urban life are the most specific in the poem up to this point, as the speaker recounts particular types of interactions that he has encountered: cruelty and cruel language; unfair judgments; selfishness and contempt; and falsity. The fact that the speaker finally lists these qualities of daily urban life with this degree of specificity suggests that nature has, in fact, strengthened and fortified him: he can now turn toward the rest of the world with precision and clarity.

Several aspects of this list recall and contrast with the speaker's past descriptions of nature as kind, nourishing, and pure. Where the speaker said nature is the “soul / Of all [his] moral being,” daily life in urban settings is clearly, from these descriptions, immoral. Meanwhile, the [sibilance](#) of /s/ sounds in “sneers” and “selfish” echo, but strongly contrast with, words such as “seclusion” and “serene” earlier in the poem.

The [consonance](#) of /d/ sounds in “dreary” and “daily,” meanwhile, links the meanings of the two words together while recalling the earlier consonance in “mid the din,” which the speaker used to describe the noisiness of “towns and cities.” Finally, the [repetition](#) of “nor” to link these phrases together recalls, and contrasts with, the word “and” used previously to indicate the interconnection and unity of the natural world.

The speaker goes on to say that, thanks to nature, none of this “Shall e'er prevail against us,” or overpower either him or his sister, “or disturb / Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold / Is full of blessings.” Here, the words “behold” and “blessings” recall their earlier usage in the poem, when the speaker celebrated that he could “again ... behold” the cliffs in the landscape, and when he described the mood he experienced, from remembering this landscape, as “blessed.” This repetition

works to emphasize the speaker's certainty; he has experienced these “blessings,” he implicitly says, and trusts that he will continue to do so, and that his sister will, as well.

### LINES 137-142

*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;*

Having celebrated the power of nature to protect the speaker and his sister from all the difficulties and immorality of daily life, the speaker expresses the hope that nature will continue to be present with his sister and help her even when he's no longer around. In expressing this wish, he again uses words and phrases that recall earlier moments in the poem.

“Therefore let the moon / Shine on thee in they solitary walk,” the speaker says, “And let the misty mountain-winds be free / To blow against thee.” Although the moon hasn't yet been present in the poem, it is implicitly present within the whole natural scene and in the image of the “setting suns” in stanza 4. The moon as an image has traditionally been associated with femininity, so its presence here in relationship to the speaker's sister seems to fit with this stanza's conception of both nature and the sister as synthesizing feminine presences.

Meanwhile, the compound “mountain-winds” recalls the “mountain-springs” the speaker noticed at the beginning of the poem, as well as the other compounds in the opening stanza (“hedge-rows,” “cottage-ground,” and “orchard-tufts”). These words indicate a sense of playfulness on the part of the speaker, even as they work to connect two disparate elements together into a single image, conveying at the level of these phrases a sense of interconnection or “interfus[ing]” in the natural world.

The [alliteration](#) of /m/ sounds in “moon,” “misty,” and “mountain” similarly connects these images together, and creates a sense of softness and gentleness within the lines, suggesting that nature will be similarly soft and gentle in its care for the speaker's sister.

The speaker then goes on to imagine “after years,” when his sister has grown older and “these wild ecstasies shall be matured / Into a sober pleasure.” Here, the speaker imagines that the sister will go through a similar process of growth and maturation that he has undergone, as his description of her “wild ecstasies” recalls his descriptions of his younger self, and the phrase “sober pleasure” recalls his description of the “still sad music of humanity” that had “ample power / To chasten and subdue” the speaker's own mindset and inner world. The speaker thus conceptualizes his own process of aging as, implicitly, a universal one, since it is also a process, he says, that his sister will go through.

## LINES 142-149

*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!*

Interestingly, the speaker then goes on to describe the transformation his sister will undergo with a [metaphor](#) and [image](#) that haven't appeared in the poem up to this point. He says that her "mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms," and that her "memory [will] be as a dwelling-place / For all sweet sounds and harmonies."

The word "forms" used earlier in the poem, links the sister's future consciousness to the speaker's current one, since he appreciates the "beauteous forms"—implicitly the ideal Platonic forms—of the landscape. Meanwhile, the "sweet sounds," with the [sibilance](#) of /s/ sounds, recalls other /s/ sounds in the poem, especially the words "secluded scene" and "serene," while also evoking the "music of humanity" that the speaker says he has heard. "Harmonies" also conveys this sense of music as well as a kind of equilibrium and balance, suggesting that the sister, too, will recognize the intrinsic harmony and interconnection within nature. Finally, the idea of the sister's memory as a "dwelling-place" recalls the speaker's description of the "sublime" as "dwelling" in all the natural world.

What sets this description apart is the speaker's description of his sister's future mind as a "mansion." For much of the poem, the speaker has juxtaposed nature and rural life (in which the only houses described are "cottages") with the negative attributes of daily life in urban "towns and cities." Here, for the first time, he imagines that his sister's mind will become not closer to nature, exactly, but rather gain the refinement and spaciousness of a house owned by the very wealthy, which might be on a rural estate, but could also be within a city.

This image conveys a sense of physical space and architecture, envisioning the sister's mind as an actual place. But it also works interestingly within the gendered terms of the poem; in keeping within her expected gender roles, the sister, this image implicitly suggests, will inhabit not a "wild," outdoor space, but a domestic, interior, one—however, it is a domestic space that is sufficiently "lofty" to fit within the framework of the poem as a whole.

The speaker goes on to say that when his sister has reached this age and this state of maturity, if "solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief / Should be [her] portion," she will remember the speaker and his "exhortations" with "healing thoughts / Of tender joy." The monosyllabic words in the list ("fear," "pain," "grief") imbue these lines with steady rhythm and emphasis. Meanwhile, the

linking word "or" subtly recalls the earlier linking words of "and" and "nor." In this case, the repetition of "or" emphasizes that no matter what the sister goes through, she will be able to recall this memory and be comforted by it. In a sense, then, the projected memory of this current conversation works as a kind of imagined resolution for the sister's possible disparate and emotionally dissonant experiences.

Finally, "portion" and "exhortation" create a sound echo and slight [internal rhyme](#), suggesting that the speaker's "exhortations," or what he is saying now, is the inevitable musical reply to whatever his sister's "portion," or experience, might be.

## LINES 149-158

*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.*

In lines 149-158, the speaker builds on this vision of the future, imagining an even more distant future when he will have died and "be where [he] no more can hear" his sister's voice, or "catch from [her] wild eyes these gleams / Of past existence." The speaker's repeated description of his sister's eyes as "wild" reiterates his earlier use of the descriptor for himself and his sister; it also aligns her with the wildness of the natural landscape. Meanwhile, the "gleams" he describes in her eyes evoke the "gleams of half-extinguished thought" that he mentioned previously, in that instance referring to his own thoughts and memories.

By repeating these images, here, the speaker subtly suggests that even after he has died, he will continue to be present, in a way, within his sister. The speaker emphasizes this by saying that his sister won't "forget / That on the banks of this delightful stream / We stood together." In other words, the speaker says, this memory of their time in this place, and of the speaker himself, will remain intact within the sister's mind.

After this, and notably, the speaker describes himself for the first time in the poem as a "worshipper" who came to this natural place in a kind of "service." He says that his sister won't forget 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." The speaker's description of himself as "unwearied" contrasts with the earlier description of the "weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world," suggesting that in "worshipp[ing]" nature, the speaker has overcome this weariness.

Most importantly, this description of the speaker imbues the moment and landscape of the poem, and the speaker himself, with a kind of religious or sacred quality, reinforcing the sense that he has been “blessed” by the natural world. He compares himself, here, to a kind of religious pilgrim, traveling to a holy site out of a sense of devotion, religious “zeal” and “holier love” that is implicitly more elevated and “pure” than human love.

In a sense, the poem comes full circle here to the image of the “Hermit” in the opening stanza, as though, over the course of the poem, the speaker has come to hold a similarly devotional and blessed status through his devotion to nature.

This imagining of a distant future also accomplishes something else in the poem, working in a kind of parallel way to the parenthetical, in stanza 4, when the speaker remembered his “boyish days” long before his visit five years prior. Where that parenthetical built into the poem a sense of the past beyond the recent past, here the speaker’s vision invokes a sense of the future beyond the immediate or even near future. By recalling his early childhood, and imagining a time after he has died, the speaker thus subtly evokes a sense of an entire lifespan, and implicitly, the infinity that extends in either direction around the lifespan of a single human being.

## LINES 158-162

*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!*

The closing lines of the poem conclude the speaker’s address to his sister, and restore the speaker, his sister, and his reader to the present moment and landscape.

The closing description of the landscape here is both familiar and new. It repeats the earlier [images](#) of the woods and the “lofty cliffs,” here transposing the word “steep” (previously used for the cliffs) for the woods themselves, to suggest a steep wooded embankment. It also repeats the word “pastoral,” used previously for the farms, and invokes, again, the color green that in the first stanza the speaker said “clad” the orchards and covered the ground around the “farms ... to the very door.”

At the same time, the simplicity and broad strokes with which the speaker describes the landscape here recall more closely the description of the transcendent vision he had of nature as a whole, with its “round ocean and ... living air, / And ... blue sky.” In a sense, this closing image of the immediate landscape is both grounded and transcendent, suggesting that the speaker has integrated his visionary experience and his present reality.

The speaker closes by saying to his sister that she won’t forget that all of these aspects of the landscape “were to me / More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!” The word “dear” recalls the speaker’s earlier description of his sister as his “dear

dear friend,” aligning his feeling for the setting and for her.

Finally, where in much of the poem the speaker has described the landscape in terms of how it has helped him and what he has felt within it, here he seems, almost, to step out of the scene, saying that what makes the setting “more dear” to him is the land itself and what it will mean to his sister.

This shift at the end suggests that, through the process of growth, change, and experience that the poem has described, the speaker has undergone an internal shift into yet another way of being, in which he loves this landscape on its own terms and because of how it will help others. There is a sense, almost, of the speaker fading away here, at the poem’s ending, almost as though he has become, through the course of his poem (and implicitly the course of his life) the kind of “living soul” that he described.



## SYMBOLS



### THE HERMIT

At the end of the first stanza, the speaker imagines that the smoke he sees rising from the trees could be from “some Hermit's cave, where by his fire / The Hermit sits alone.”

Hermits are, traditionally, religious people, who choose to live in isolation (often in remote places) in order to devote themselves more fully to their religious and spiritual practice. Here, the Hermit can be thought of as a broader [symbol](#) of spiritual life and of discarding the trappings of daily, mundane existence. By placing a Hermit within this scene, the speaker implicitly suggests that this natural setting, and the natural world in general, makes a more spiritual life possible.

#### Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 21-22:** “Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire / The Hermit sits alone.”



### THE MANSION

The poem introduces another [symbol](#) when referring to the speaker's sister's mind as a “mansion.” While this is a [metaphor](#) (her mind is compared to a spacious and beautiful physical place), it is also highly symbolic, since mansions are, of course, symbols of wealth and privilege. This symbol thus works to align some other terms of the poem—in which particular kinds of human thought are described as “lofty” and “elevated”—with an image of literal higher social status and standing. This symbol also stands in for domestic interiors that are refined; it suggests that the sister will likewise be “properly” (according to norms of gender and class) domestic.

**Where this symbol appears in the poem:**

- **Lines 142-143:** “when thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,”

**POETIC DEVICES****ALLUSION**

“Tintern Abbey” has two main [allusions](#). First, the title references Tintern Abbey, an abbey (home for nuns or monks) that was built in the early 12th century by Walter de Clare near the village of Tintern, in Wales. Nowhere in the poem does the speaker actually describe the abbey, so its presence in the title functions mainly as an allusion to the abbey and what it represents.

Abandoned in the 16th century during the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, the ruins of Tintern Abbey later became a [symbol](#) of English history and the subject of many representations in British Romantic writing and art. In a sense, it symbolized to the Romantics an earlier way of life in England, one that was picturesque and secluded from the intrusions of society and urbanity, and many visitors came through the area in the late 18th century to view and record the ruins. As part of the title, the allusion to the abbey works to establish the literal setting of the poem while also connecting the setting to the more secluded, spiritual way of life that the abbey represented.

A second important allusion in “Tintern Abbey” is the reference to “forms” that appears in three places in the poem:

1. At the beginning of the second stanza, when the speaker says that during his absence the “beauteous forms” of the landscape “have not been to [him] / As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye”;
2. In stanza 4, when he says that to his younger self “[the] colours and ... forms” of the landscape were “[a]n appetite; a feeling and a love,”
3. And near the end of the poem, when he imagines his sister’s future mind as a “mansion for all lovely forms.”

In all of these places in the poem, “forms” describes the shapes and impressions of the landscape, but it is also an allusion to Platonic forms. Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher, argued that for everything people encounter day to day, there are ideal, essential forms. For example, while there are many chairs in the physical world, there is an “ideal form” of a chair from which all of these actual chairs are derived. The physical derivations are, Plato argued, only imitations of the true and ultimate forms.

By alluding to Plato’s forms, the poem elevates the landscape to this idealized state. At the same time, the allusion aligns the thinking of the speaker and his praise of the landscape with

classical thought, which is also considered the origin of Western art and writing. This imbues the poem with a sense of grandeur and authority.

**Where Allusion appears in the poem:**

- **Line 23:** “These beauteous forms”
- **Lines 81-82:** “Their colours and their forms, were then to me / An appetite”
- **Lines 142-143:** “when thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms”

**ANAPHORA**

[Anaphora](#) helps to create rhythm, emphasis, and a sense of patterning throughout the poem. For example, much of the opening stanza is structure through anaphora. “Five” repeats three times in the opening two lines, as the speaker remarks on the length of time that has passed since he last visited this setting: “Five years have past,” the poem begins, “five summers, with the length / of five long winters!” (While the third of these repetitions isn’t actually at the start of a clause and thus not technically anaphora, it still echoes the previous anaphora.) Even while emphasizing how long this absence has felt to the speaker, this repetition of “five” also propels the reader into the poem and creates a sense of an underlying energy governing the speaker’s thoughts.

This use of anaphora is extended throughout the stanza, with the speaker’s repetition of the phrase “Once again” at the start to sentences in lines 4 and 14. In both of these cases, the phrase appears after a [caesura](#). It works to bridge the pause of the caesura and create a sense of building, ongoing momentum. It also enacts what the speaker describes, as he comments on each element of the landscape he recalls and can again enjoy with renewed energy and celebration.

A second important moment in the poem when anaphora appears is in the fourth stanza, when the speaker reflects on what he has lost in growing older, and what he has gained in maturity. First, in lines 86 and 87, the anaphoric “And all its ...” emphasizes what the speaker has lost, as he remarks that the “aching joys” and “dizzy raptures” of his youth are “now no more.” The anaphora suggests that the speaker feels the full extent of what he has lost, as the phrase “And all” suggests that what has been lost is an entire way of being:

... —That time is past,  
And all its aching joys are now no more,  
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this

This anaphora then works to set the stage for the more extended anaphora later in the stanza. Take the repetition of “And” at the start of clauses here, which is also an example of polysyndeton:

And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:

Later the speaker repeats "the" when describing what nature is to him:

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul

The heightened use of anaphora in this part of the stanza, in which the anaphoric words appear increasingly often and in closer clusters, helps to convey the speaker's meaning; as he describes a vision of the universe as inherently interconnected, the language of the poem enacts this interconnection through its heightened patterning and repetition.

#### Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Five," "five"
- **Line 2:** "five"
- **Line 4:** "Once again"
- **Line 14:** "Once again"
- **Line 29:** "Felt," "felt"
- **Line 39:** "In which the"
- **Line 40:** "In which the"
- **Line 43:** "In which the"
- **Line 52:** "how oft"
- **Line 57:** "How oft"
- **Line 59:** "How often"
- **Line 86:** "And all its"
- **Line 87:** "And all its"
- **Line 100:** "And"
- **Line 101:** "And," "and"
- **Line 106:** "of all"
- **Line 107:** "of all"
- **Line 111:** "The," "the"
- **Line 112:** "The," "the"
- **Line 113:** "Of all"
- **Line 137:** "Therefore let the"
- **Line 139:** "And let the"

#### APOSTROPHE

The most notable place where [apostrophe](#) appears in "Tintern Abbey" is in the shortest stanza of the poem, stanza 3, when the speaker addresses the landscape directly:

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!

The apostrophe here has several striking effects. First, it represents an important shift in the poem.

- Up to this point, the speaker has described the landscape in the third person. He has explained how the landscape has helped him during his absence, with his memories of it restoring him and comforting him. The speaker emphasizes this experience of restoration by describing how his spirit "turned" toward the landscape while he was away, creating an image of physical turning, a kind of orientation in space, toward the natural setting.

At the same time, the speaker now addresses the setting as though it is its own spiritual being with agency.

- First, he addresses the "sylvan Wye," or the wooded Wye Valley, as "thee."
- He then goes on to address "thou wanderer thro' the woods," suggesting that what he is addressing is a spirit or spiritual being that *inhabits* the landscape. This apostrophe works to implicitly identify the speaker's spirit with the "wanderer" that lives within the natural setting. It helps to create the sense that nature is not inanimate or truly separate from the speaker, but deeply connected to him, with its own force, power, and lasting influence.

The speaker's address to his sister at the end of the poem could also be considered a moment of apostrophe. Here, too, the speaker addresses a "thou" who he considers a spiritual support and friend. The reader realizes for the first time that the sister has been present with the speaker all along, and that the entire poem, in fact, could be read as addressed to her.

The sister remains quiet. She seems to be present in the scene, observing and enjoying it, with an experience of joy and wonder at the landscape that mirrors the speaker's past self. Yet there is nothing in the speaker's address that suggests that he expects his sister to reply. In a way, then, like the "wanderer" in the "sylvan Wye," she is a kind of quiet or silent interlocutor, a presence of spiritual kinship that reinforces and reifies the speaker's experience.

#### Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 57-59:** "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!"
- **Lines 118-119:** "thou my dearest Friend, / My dear, dear Friend"
- **Line 124:** "My dear, dear Sister!"

#### CAESURA

[Caesurae](#) play an important role in the poem, and we've highlighted some striking moments here.

In considering the use of caesura in the poem, it is worth noting

that many of the sentences in “Tintern Abbey” are quite long. The opening sentence of the second stanza, for example, covers 14 lines! Within these long sentences, the speaker begins with an initial idea, modifies it, and then builds on it, as one would in actual speech. For example, at the start of stanza 2, he comments on the “beauteous forms” of the landscape. This leads him to comment on how remembering the landscape helped him feel comforted during his landscape, which then leads him to remark on how this comfort and pleasure ultimately led him to acts of kindness in his everyday life. The sentences, then, enact the speaker’s thinking on the page.

At the same time, the sentences employ caesurae to pace the speaker’s thinking and his speech. For instance, in the sentence just described, colons appear twice in the middle of lines (lines 31 and 32):

With tranquil restoration:—feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,

The speaker also uses a dash-line (a common form of caesura in the poem) after the colon in line 31 to give the pause even *more* emphasis. Softer pauses in the form of commas also appear in lines 24, 26, 27, and 29 (all of which we’ve marked in the poem).

Throughout the poem, these pauses give the reader a chance to stop and really consider what the speaker has just said. They give the poem a sense of internal pacing and rhythm, as though the sentences are developing organically but also in a measured, patterned way. In a sense, then, they reflect the sense of symmetry, organic growth, and inherent patterning and harmony in nature that the poem describes. Finally, they help to create the sense that the speaker is thinking and speaking in real time within the poem, as the caesurae often register shifts in the speaker’s thoughts.

A second, more dramatic form of caesura (in a very broad sense of the term) occurs in the stanza breaks between stanzas 1 and 2, 2 and 3, and 4 and 5. This perhaps isn’t technically caesura, given that the pause is between lines rather than within them, but notice how the final line of each of these stanzas is essential cut in half. In all these stanza breaks, the last line of the preceding stanza ends midway through its [iambic](#) pentameter, and the poem’s metrical scheme is only completed in opening line of the stanza that follows. Take lines 113-114. There is a stanza break between these two lines, but read together they create a complete line of iambic pentameter:

Of all my moral being. // Nor perchance,

This creates a heightened pause, as the reader must then traverse the white space of the stanza break to reach the completion of the pentameter, which, at the start of the new stanza, also signals a new realm of thought that the speaker is exploring. At the same time, while visibly dividing the stanzas in

prominent ways, and signaling shifts in the speaker’s thought, these caesurae also work to *link* the stanzas, and the speaker’s thoughts, together. Since the meter of the poem creates an expectation of pentameter throughout, the reader must at some level read the lines at these stanza breaks as combined into a single line. The caesurae, then, work as bridges and connections as much as pauses and interruptions.

#### Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 24:** “,”
- **Line 26:** “,” “,”
- **Line 27:** “,”
- **Line 28:** “,”
- **Line 29:** “,”
- **Line 31:** “:—”
- **Line 32:** “:.”

## CONSONANCE

“Tintern Abbey” contains many moments of [consonance](#), some striking examples of which we’ve marked in this guide. Consonance works alongside moments of [alliteration](#) and [sibilance](#) as well. Altogether, these clusters of sounds work to add emphasis to various ideas and make the poem sound musical and lyrical. They also link words together at the level of their sound and meaning.

For instance, the first stanza contains multiple moments of hard /k/ sounds, such as with “cliffs,” “cottage-ground,” “clad,” “copses,” “cave,” “secluded,” “seclusion,” “sky,” and “dark sycamore.” The hard /k/ sound requires a kind of active enunciation; it seems to assert the physicality and tangible presence of all of these images the speaker describes. At the same time, the sound occurring throughout the stanza connects these different, disparate images together, so that they are all understood as part of one integral scene.

This first stanza is simply brimming with consonance, [assonance](#), alliteration, and sibilance which, taken together, make the speaker’s description of the landscape sound intensely beautiful. For an illustrative example, note the density of sound in lines 3-8, which return again and again to humming /m/ and /n/ sounds, gentle /l/, /f/, and /s/ sounds, and popping /k/ sounds:

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 poem is filled with rich language that evokes the richness of this imagery, which is tranquil and calming yet also invigorating

for the speaker.

Sibilance, a specific form of consonance, also occurs notably in the poem. The speaker notes the "soft" sound of water moving from "springs," describes the landscape as a "secluded scene," sits beneath a "sycamore" and describes the cliffs as "steep" and the hedge-rows as "sportive," while the "wreaths of smoke" are "sent up, in silence." Sibilance creates a quiet, hushed tone suggestive of the speaker's awe and reverence for nature all throughout the poem.

This sibilance is continued in the second stanza, when he remarks that memories of the landscape have brought him "sensations sweet." /S/ sounds then recur throughout the poem with similar meanings, in such words and phrases as "spirit," "sylvan," "still sad," "sense sublime," "setting suns," "sober," "sweet sounds," and "solitude." At the level of music, then, this notable sibilance connects the elements of the landscape together, and connects the landscape with the feelings it has imparted on the speaker.

Another striking moment of thick consonance comes with lines 101 to 106, as the speaker describes the "presence" or force that moves through and connects everything in the universe. Note the intense repetition of /m/, /l/, /d/, /ng/, and /th/ (both voiced and not) sounds here:

... 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

The intensity of sound reflects the speaker's point that all things are connected; the words themselves here are connected, closely linked by their shared consonance (and assonance of /aw/ and short /i/ sounds!).

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "rolling," "from," "mountain," "springs"
- **Line 4:** "soft," "inland," "murmur," "Once," "again"
- **Line 5:** "Do," "behold," "steep," "and," "lofty," "cliffs"
- **Line 6:** "on," "wild," "secluded," "scene," "impress"
- **Line 7:** "more," "deep," "seclusion," "and," "connect"
- **Line 8:** "landscape," "quiet," "sky"
- **Line 10:** "dark," "sycamore"
- **Line 11:** "cottage"
- **Line 13:** "clad"
- **Line 14:** "copses"
- **Line 16:** "sportive"
- **Line 17:** "smoke"
- **Line 18:** "Sent," "silence"
- **Line 26:** "mid," "din"

- **Line 28:** "weariness," "sensations sweet"
- **Line 57:** "spirit"
- **Line 58:** "sylvan"
- **Line 59:** "spirit"
- **Line 93:** "still sad," "music," "humanity"
- **Line 94:** "harsh," "ample power"
- **Line 96:** "presence"
- **Line 97:** "sense sublime"
- **Line 98:** "something," "deeply"
- **Line 99:** "dwelling," "setting suns"
- **Line 101:** "sky," "and," "the," "mind," "man"
- **Line 102:** "motion," "and," "spirit," "that," "impels"
- **Line 103:** "All," "t," "hinking things," "all," "all," "thought"
- **Line 104:** "And," "rolls through all things," "Therefore," "am," "still"
- **Line 105:** "lover," "the," "meadows," "and," "the," "woods"
- **Line 106:** "And," "mountains," "and," "all," "that," "behold"
- **Line 142:** "sober"
- **Line 145:** "sweet sound"
- **Line 146:** "solitude"
- **Line 148:** "wilt"
- **Line 151:** "wild"
- **Line 152:** "wilt"
- **Line 155:** "worshipper"
- **Line 156:** "Unwearied"
- **Line 157:** "warmer"
- **Line 158:** "wilt"
- **Line 159:** "wanderings"
- **Line 160:** "woods"

#### ASSONANCE

Like [consonance](#), [assonance](#) works throughout "Tintern Abbey" to create a high level of music and patterning in the poem, and to connect words together at the level of their sound and meaning. This is a poem that simply *sounds* poetic, which makes sense when considering that the speaker is trying to capture the beauty and wonder of nature in language. We've marked some striking moments of assonance in this guide.

For example, in the opening stanza the speaker says:

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.

Here, the long /ee/ sound in "these steep" repeats in "scene" and "deep," connecting the setting to this sense of internal depth and profundity, as well as to a kind of dazzling height and elevation. Meanwhile, the short /eh/ sound in "impress" recurs in the "connect," linking together these two actions attributed to the landscape (it can "impress" thoughts and "connect" disparate elements together). The /aw/ and long /i/ sounds

repeat through assonance as well, altogether creating a lyrical and musical description of the natural world.

Later, in stanza 2, the speaker describes what he has experienced “mid the din” of “towns and cities.” In strong contrast to the peacefulness he experiences within the natural landscape, the speaker describes these urban settings as “lonely” and says that he has felt “weariness” while within them. The short /i/ sounds in “mid,” “din,” and “cities” connect the urban settings of cities to the sense of “din” or “noise” as well as the feeling of being “[a]mid” this noise, unable to escape it.

Assonance occurs again, with an opposite effect, in stanza 4, when the speaker comments on his “sense / Of present pleasure” in the landscape. Here, rather than heightening the sense of “din” and claustrophobia experienced within cities, the short /eh/ sounds work to emphasize the speaker’s sense of immediate happiness, as though he relishes not only the experience but the act of describing it, taking pleasure in the music of the words. Later, the long /i/ sounds in “lights / of thy wild eyes” simply draws emphasis to the phrase and, in turn, to the bright, untamed eyes of the speaker’s sister.

Finally, assonance also works to connect words together and even integrate what have previously been disparate images in the poem. Near the poem’s ending, the speaker comments on the “gleams” in his sister’s eyes and says that she won’t forget “That on the banks of this delightful stream / We stood together.” The word “gleams” appeared previously in the poem to describe the speaker’s own recollections and thoughts, “half-extinguished.” Here, the “gleams” of those thoughts reappear in a way that is integrated, through assonance, with the current landscape and the “stream” within it.

#### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** “behold,” “these,” “steep,” “lofty”
- **Line 6:** “secluded,” “scene,” “impress”
- **Line 7:** “deep,” “seclusion,” “connect”
- **Line 8:** “quiet,” “sky”
- **Line 12:** “fruits”
- **Line 13:** “hue,” “lose”
- **Line 26:** “mid,” “din”
- **Line 27:** “cities”
- **Line 63:** “mind revives”
- **Line 64:** “While,” “I,” “sense”
- **Line 65:** “present,” “pleasure”
- **Line 67:** “so,” “hope”
- **Line 68:** “no,” “what,” “was”
- **Line 69:** “among,” “like,” “roe”
- **Line 70:** “I,” “bounded,” “o’er,” “mountains,” “by,” “sides”
- **Line 71:** “deep,” “lonely,” “streams”
- **Line 72:** “Wherever,” “led”
- **Line 73:** “dreads”
- **Line 102:** “impels”

- **Line 103:** “thinking things”
- **Line 109:** “perceive,” “pleased”
- **Line 110:** “nature,” “language”
- **Line 111:** “anchor,” “purest,” “nurse”
- **Line 121:** “lights”
- **Line 122:** “thy wild eyes”
- **Line 124:** “make”
- **Line 125:** “Nature,” “betray”
- **Line 128:** “inform”
- **Line 129:** “is,” “within,” “impress”
- **Line 130:** “With,” “quietness”
- **Line 131:** “lofty thoughts”
- **Line 132:** “selfish men”
- **Line 151:** “thy wild eyes,” “these,” “gleams”
- **Line 153:** “stream”

## PERSONIFICATION

The speaker of “Tintern Abbey” both subtly and directly [personifies](#) the landscape of the poem and nature as a whole. In doing so, he emphasizes the poem’s argument that nature is a presence that actively heals and comforts, and that restores the human soul.

The first, subtle instance of personification appears in the opening stanza, when the speaker describes the orchards as “clad in one green hue.” “Clad” means “dressed” or “clothed,” so the speaker’s description imagines the orchards as “dressed” in the green “fabric” of summer. The description playfully personifies the orchards—as well as the natural forces and season that actively “clad” them.

Later in the poem, the speaker’s personification of the landscape becomes more overt. In stanza 3, the speaker addresses the Wye valley as “thou” and “wanderer thro’ the woods.” This direct address implicitly personifies the landscape, since the speaker addresses it as “thou” (“you”) and also suggests that there is a spirit or being who “wander[s]” through the setting as a whole.

In both of these instances, the speaker’s use of personification emphasizes his feeling for and identification with the landscape. Personified as someone who could be clothed, and as a “thou” who, like the speaker, wanders through the woods, the natural setting seems close in its essence to the speaker himself.

The speaker goes on to make this personification more direct, while also subtly changing it. In the fifth stanza, when the speaker addresses his sister, he describes “Nature” as a whole as a woman who “never did betray / The heart that loved her,” who finds it “her privilege” to lead the speaker and his sister “from joy to joy,” and who “can so inform / The mind that is within us, so impress / With quietness and beauty” that people can withstand even the difficulties and immorality of daily, urban life. This direct personification of nature moves the earlier, subtler instances of personification to their culmination.

The speaker imagines the natural world as a being and presence with agency and will, suggesting that it can actively care for and guide people and even spiritually protect them. This personification, then, works to reinforce one of the poem's primary arguments, as it suggests that nature can restore, heal, and protect the human soul.

At the same time, the speaker's gendering of nature in this moment is notable. These personifying descriptions envision nature as a woman who fits traditional gender norms, in that she is quiet, beautiful, faithful, and attendant to the male speaker. In a sense then, while celebrating nature, this gendered personification also establishes an implicit power dynamic, in which nature is envisioned as fundamentally subservient, with her primary role to support the male consciousness within the poem.

#### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-14:** "these orchard-tufts, / Which at this season, with their unripe fruits, / Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves / 'Mid groves and copses."
- **Lines 57-59:** "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!"
- **Lines 125-131:** "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,"

## SIMILE

Notably, much of "Tintern Abbey" avoids the use of [similes](#) and figurative language altogether. In keeping with the Romantic goal of making poetry more accessible, and closer to ordinary human speech, most of the poem describes the landscape and the speaker's experiences in ways that are literal, if complex in meaning. This gives the poem a quality of sincerity and directness.

It is striking, then, when similes appear in the fourth stanza, in the context of the speaker describing his younger self. Three similes appear close to each other:

- First the speaker says his younger self was "like a roe" deer who "bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides / Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams / Wherever nature led."
- He then goes on to say that this young self was "more like a man / Flying from something that he dreads, / than one / Who sought the thing he loved."
- Finally, he says that at the time the "sounding cataract / Haunted [him] like a passion."

Since these similes are among the only instances of figurative

language in the poem, their appearance is meaningful. They suggest that, in a way, the speaker can't describe his younger self and his earlier experience directly, a sense reinforced when the speaker seems to pause mid-description, and exclaim, "I cannot paint / What then I was."

This difficulty to depict the younger self suggests there was some quality in the speaker's young self that defies clear or literal description. At the same time, it contributes to the sense that the speaker has undergone a fundamental internal change. Before, the younger speaker could only be described through similes and could only view the landscape through a simile. Now, though, he can understand both himself and the natural world in simpler, more direct ways.

The layering of similes within this passage is also striking. First the speaker compares his young self to a deer; he then says that this young self/deer was "like a man." Of course, the speaker goes on to specify that his younger self was like a certain *kind* of man (one fleeing something he feared rather than going toward something he loved). Yet on a first reading, the reader could understand this to mean that the speaker's younger self was only *like* a man, not yet truly a man. This reading is reinforced by the depiction of the younger self as animal-like.

Meanwhile, the description of the "cataract," or waterfall, haunting the younger speaker "like a passion" suggests that the younger self only experienced the landscape as a reflection of his own internal experience, the "passion" or emotional intensity that he felt. Now, however, the poem suggests—as it moves out of its use of similes to the speaker's descriptions of his present experience—the speaker can see the landscape, and himself, as they truly are.

#### Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 69-72:** "when like a roe / I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides / Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams, / Wherever nature led:"
- **Lines 72-74:** "like a man / Flying from something that he dreads, than one / Who sought the thing he loved."
- **Lines 78-79:** "The sounding cataract / Haunted me like a passion:"

## ENJAMBMENT

"Tintern Abbey" maintains a sense of energy and momentum over its 162 lines partly by building variation into its sentences and line endings. Many of the lines are [end-stopped](#), creating pauses for the reader and a chance to take in and reflect on what the speaker has said. However, the poem also uses [enjambment](#) in many moments for increased emphasis.

For example, the poem includes an enjambment at the end of line 31 ("Feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure") and line 35 ("acts / Of kindness and of love"). In both cases, the enjambment pushes the reader forward over the line break to

reach the end of the phrase. This forward momentum suggests that the lines are overflowing with feeling and meaning.

Another notable instance of enjambment occurs at the beginning of stanza 3. In this case, the first line of the stanza is only two words: “If this.” The speaker then goes on to wonder whether the transcendent experience he has just recounted is simply a “vain belief.” Here, the enjambment after “If this” heightens and sharpens this sense of uncertainty and doubt, leaving the reader suspended in the question before the stanza goes on to reply to it.

The speaker also uses enjambment when describing his former self. Apparently interrupting his own thoughts and his own speech, he remarks, midway through the stanza, “I cannot paint / What then I was.” This sentence, which is remarkably short within the context of other sentences in the poem, stands out and contributes to the sense that the speaker is thinking, speaking, and working his way through his own thoughts, on the page. The enjambment intensifies this impression, as it seems to enact the speaker’s difficulty in speaking and describing his earlier experience.

Notably, these last two instances of enjambment occur at moments in the poem in which the speaker seems, in a sense, to interrupt himself, introducing some note of uncertainty or difficulty.

Finally, the poem uses enjambment in certain places to enact what it describes. For example, in stanza 4, the speaker describes a “motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things.” Here, the sharp enjambment after “impels” actively impels the reader forward over the line ending, to reach the sentence and its inevitable conclusion.

#### Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** “length / Of”
- **Lines 2-3:** “hear / These”
- **Lines 3-4:** “mountain-springs / With”
- **Lines 4-5:** “again / Do”
- **Lines 6-7:** “impress / Thoughts”
- **Lines 7-8:** “connect / The”
- **Lines 9-10:** “repose / Here”
- **Lines 10-11:** “view / These”
- **Lines 13-14:** “themselves / 'Mid”
- **Lines 15-16:** “lines / Of”
- **Lines 17-18:** “smoke / Sent”
- **Lines 19-20:** “seem / Of”
- **Lines 21-22:** “fire / The”
- **Lines 24-25:** “me / As”
- **Lines 26-27:** “din / Of”
- **Lines 30-31:** “mind / With”
- **Lines 31-32:** “too / Of”
- **Lines 33-34:** “influence / On”

- **Lines 35-36:** “acts / Of”
- **Lines 40-41:** “weight / Of”
- **Lines 45-46:** “blood / Almost”
- **Lines 46-47:** “asleep / In”
- **Lines 48-49:** “power / Of”
- **Lines 51-52:** “this / Be”
- **Lines 53-54:** “shapes / Of”
- **Lines 54-55:** “stir / Unprofitable”
- **Lines 64-65:** “sense / Of”
- **Lines 65-66:** “thoughts / That”
- **Lines 66-67:** “food / For”
- **Lines 68-69:** “first / I”
- **Lines 69-70:** “roe / I”
- **Lines 70-71:** “sides / Of”
- **Lines 72-73:** “man / Flying”
- **Lines 73-74:** “one / Who”
- **Lines 74-75:** “then / (The”
- **Lines 77-78:** “paint / What”
- **Lines 78-79:** “cataract / Haunted”
- **Lines 81-82:** “me / An”
- **Lines 84-85:** “interest / Unborrowed”
- **Lines 87-88:** “this / Faint”
- **Lines 88-89:** “gifts / Have”
- **Lines 90-91:** “learned / To”
- **Lines 91-92:** “hour / Of”
- **Lines 92-93:** “oftentimes / The”
- **Lines 94-95:** “power / To”
- **Lines 95-96:** “felt / A”
- **Lines 96-97:** “joy / Of”
- **Lines 97-98:** “sublime / Of”
- **Lines 102-103:** “impels / All”
- **Lines 104-105:** “still / A”
- **Lines 106-107:** “behold / From”
- **Lines 107-108:** “world / Of”
- **Lines 109-110:** “recognise / In”
- **Lines 110-111:** “sense / The”
- **Lines 112-113:** “soul / Of”
- **Lines 115-116:** “more / Suffer”
- **Lines 117-118:** “banks / Of”
- **Lines 119-120:** “catch / The”
- **Lines 120-121:** “read / My”
- **Lines 121-122:** “lights / Of”
- **Lines 122-123:** “while / May”
- **Lines 125-126:** “betray / The”
- **Lines 127-128:** “lead / From”
- **Lines 128-129:** “inform / The”
- **Lines 129-130:** “impress / With”
- **Lines 130-131:** “feed / With”
- **Lines 133-134:** “all / The”
- **Lines 135-136:** “disturb / Our”
- **Lines 136-137:** “behold / Is”
- **Lines 137-138:** “moon / Shine”
- **Lines 139-140:** “free / To”

- **Lines 141-142:** "matured / Into"
- **Lines 142-143:** "mind / Shall"
- **Lines 144-145:** "dwelling-place / For"
- **Lines 147-148:** "thoughts / Of"
- **Lines 150-151:** "hear / Thy"
- **Lines 151-152:** "gleams / Of"
- **Lines 152-153:** "forget / That"
- **Lines 153-154:** "stream / We"
- **Lines 154-155:** "long / A"
- **Lines 155-156:** "came / Unwearied"
- **Lines 156-157:** "say / With"
- **Lines 157-158:** "zeal / Of"
- **Lines 159-160:** "years / Of"
- **Lines 161-162:** "me / More"

## END-STOPPED LINE

[End-stopped lines](#) appear throughout "Tintern Abbey." Most often, lines are end-stopped with some kind of punctuation, whether commas, colons, semi-colons, or dash-lines. In some cases, the ending of a line coincides with the ending of a full clause.

These end-stopped lines have several effects. First, they help to slow down the pace with which the reader moves through the poem, generating pauses. They also signal shifts in the speaker's thoughts, both subtle and dramatic. Importantly, too, they create a sense of the speaker's thinking as measured, paced, and fluent—even as the poem's frequent [enjambment](#) pulls the reader forward.

For example, in stanza 4, when the speaker describes his vision of the natural world as inherently interconnected and whole, the poem uses end-stopped lines to pace his description:

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:

The end-stops in these lines create stability and even pacing, and imbue the speaker's descriptions with authority and confidence.

Notably, end-stopped lines in the poem also have the effect they do because of the tension between the end-stops and instances of enjambment. For example, the above sentence concludes:

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

In this instance, the sequence of end-stopped lines builds to this crucial moment of enjambment, after "impels," as the poem

enacts what it describes, propelling the reader forward. The sentence then seems to stabilize itself in the line that follows, with the end-stop after "thought."

Finally, since end-stopped lines with full stops are rare in the poem, their occurrence is also striking. Line endings coincide with sentence endings in three places in the opening stanza: in line 8 ("The landscape with the quiet of the sky."), line 18 ("Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!"), and at the end of the stanza. The other stanzas each only contain one full-stopped line, each occurring at the end of each stanza. At the beginning of the poem, these full stops create the sense of the speaker pausing and then beginning again, as he moves into the rhythm and momentum of the poem. At the ends of the stanzas, the full stops create a more dramatic pause, and signal more prominent shifts in the speaker's thinking and focus.

As a whole, it is notable that even with its end-stopped lines, by minimizing the use of full-stops within stanzas the poem maintains a strong sense of forward momentum throughout. Within each stanza the speaker's thinking and speech builds to a kind of crescendo, and the stanzas work together to create a pattern in the poem as a whole. That sense of "impel[ling]" forward movement, then, is enacted in the poem, as the sentences and stanzas are sustained internally, and as one logically leads to the next.

### Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "sky."
- **Line 11:** "orchard-tufts,"
- **Line 12:** "fruits,"
- **Line 16:** "farms,"
- **Line 18:** "trees!"
- **Line 20:** "woods,"
- **Line 22:** "alone."
- **Line 23:** "forms,"
- **Line 25:** "eye."
- **Line 27:** "them,"
- **Line 28:** "sweet,"
- **Line 29:** "heart;"
- **Line 32:** "perhaps,"
- **Line 34:** "life,"
- **Line 36:** "trust,"
- **Line 37:** "gift,"
- **Line 38:** "mood,"
- **Line 39:** "mystery,"
- **Line 41:** "world,"
- **Line 42:** "mood,"
- **Line 43:** "on,—"
- **Line 44:** "frame"
- **Line 47:** "soul:"
- **Line 49:** "joy,"
- **Line 50:** "things."
- **Line 52:** "oft—"

- **Line 55:** “world,”
- **Line 56:** “heart—”
- **Line 57:** “thee,”
- **Line 58:** “woods,”
- **Line 59:** “thee!”
- **Line 60:** “thought,”
- **Line 61:** “faint,”
- **Line 62:** “perplexity,”
- **Line 63:** “again:”
- **Line 67:** “hope,”
- **Line 71:** “streams,”
- **Line 79:** “rock,”
- **Line 80:** “wood,”
- **Line 82:** “love,”
- **Line 83:** “charm,”
- **Line 85:** “past,”
- **Line 86:** “more,”
- **Line 89:** “believe,”
- **Line 93:** “humanity,”
- **Line 98:** “interfused,”
- **Line 99:** “suns,”
- **Line 100:** “air,”
- **Line 101:** “man:”
- **Line 103:** “thought,”
- **Line 105:** “woods”
- **Line 108:** “create,”
- **Line 111:** “nurse,”
- **Line 113:** “being,”
- **Line 114:** “perchance,”
- **Line 116:** “decay:”
- **Line 118:** “Friend,”
- **Line 123:** “once,”
- **Line 124:** “make,”
- **Line 126:** “privilege,”
- **Line 131:** “tongues,”
- **Line 132:** “men,”
- **Line 134:** “life,”
- **Line 138:** “walk;”
- **Line 140:** “years,”
- **Line 145:** “then,”
- **Line 146:** “grief,”
- **Line 148:** “me,”
- **Line 149:** “perchance—”
- **Line 158:** “forget,”
- **Line 160:** “cliffs,”
- **Line 162:** “sake!”

## JUXTAPOSITION

“Tintern Abbey” uses moments of [juxtaposition](#) to emphasize the beauty, peacefulness, and constancy of the natural world.

Throughout the poem, the speaker juxtaposes the comfort he experiences in nature with the “din” and difficulty of urban

settings. While the natural world is described in positive terms that emphasize its softness, beauty, quietness, and healing power, urban settings are described in negative terms: they make the speaker “weary,” and “lonely,” and people act immorally within them. This juxtaposition reflects Wordsworth’s belief that society and urban life are essentially corrupting to the human soul, and that nature is restorative. Within the poem, this juxtaposition emphasizes the healing attributes of nature, and also implicitly suggests that returning to nature is not only positive but necessary if people are to retain their humanity and goodness.

The poem also juxtaposes the growth and change the speaker undergoes—from his past self, to his present self, to his projected future and even his death—with the constancy of the landscape. The speaker’s repetition of “again” in the first stanza, as he remarks on elements of the landscape that he recalls from his last visit, heightens this sense of constancy, suggesting that even with the pain of loss and change, people can find comfort in the familiarity and lasting qualities of the natural world.

### Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-18:** “and / I hear / These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs / With a / inland murmur.— / 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 / of the sky. / The day is come when I / 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. / 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!”
- **Line 2:** “again”
- **Line 4:** “soft,” “Once again”
- **Line 8:** “quiet”
- **Line 9:** “again”
- **Line 14:** “Once again”
- **Lines 26-28:** “But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din / Of towns and cities, I have owed to them, / In hours of weariness,”
- **Lines 53-56:** “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—”
- **Lines 68-113:** “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, not 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 recompense. 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.”

- **Lines 128-135:** “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,”
- **Lines 140-142:** “and, in after years, / When these wild ecstasies shall be matured / Into a sober pleasure;”

## IMAGERY

Much of “Tintern Abbey” is built upon its [imagery](#). The poem incorporates vivid sensory images throughout, from the specific images of the landscape that the speaker celebrates at the poem’s opening—the “lofty cliffs,” “dark sycamore,” and “pastoral farms / green to the very door”—to the images of how he experienced the landscape in the past, to his transcendent vision of the natural world as complete, integrated and whole. These images become, in a sense, a kind of vocabulary for the speaker’s reflections.

A significant part of the poem’s meaning can be traced in how its imagery develops and changes. At the beginning of the poem, for example, the speaker describes specific aspects of

the landscape. The images of the “soft inland murmur” of the water, the cliffs, the sycamore tree, the “orchard-tufts,” the “hedge-rows,” and the other vivid elements recounted here are all concrete and particular. It is clear to the reader that the speaker is returning to one distinct familiar landscape, the attributes of which he recalls and celebrates in all their specificity.

Later, then, it is striking when the speaker describes his previous experience of the landscape in different ways. To his younger self, he says in stanza 4, the “sounding cataract” was “haunt[ing]” and the woods were “deep and gloomy.” These images convey not a different landscape but a difference in how the speaker’s younger self saw the landscape, implicitly conveying a sense of fear. At the level of the images, then, the poem shows how the speaker has grown and changed; he now is no longer afraid of the landscape, but only celebrates and cherishes it.

A second notable change within the poem’s imagery occurs when the speaker describes the vision he had of the natural world as whole and inherently interconnected. Toward the end of the fourth stanza, he says that he has “felt / A presence ... 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.” These images both correspond with and differ from the speaker’s opening descriptions of the immediate landscape. While the sky, air, sun, and water (in the form of a river) are present within the speaker’s immediate setting, here the elements of the natural world are described in simpler ways, and ways that convey not one particular aspect of a setting, but nature as a whole. Here, then, the shift in the poem’s imagery shows the transcendent experience the speaker has undergone. He no longer describes the landscape through its particular, separate elements, but can envision it as integrated and complete.

At the ending of the poem, the speaker seems to return to his original descriptions of the landscape, celebrating the specific “steep woods and lofty cliffs.” Yet the poem, and the speaker, has changed through what came in between. The poem’s ending suggests that the speaker can now enjoy this one particular landscape all the more, because of the insight, vision, and maturity that he has gained.

### Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** “These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs / With a soft inland murmur.”
- **Line 5:** “steep and lofty cliffs,”
- **Lines 10-18:** “under this / and view / These plots of / these / Which at this season, with their unripe fruits, / Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves / 'Mid / Once again I see / These / hardly hedge-rows, little lines / Of sportive wood run wild: these / Green to the very

door; and wreaths of smoke / Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!"

- **Line 10:** "dark sycamore,"
- **Line 11:** "cottage-ground,," "orchard-tufts,"
- **Line 14:** "groves and copses."
- **Line 15:** "hedge-rows,"
- **Line 16:** "pastoral farms,"
- **Lines 78-80:** "The sounding cataract / Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock, / The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,"
- **Lines 99-101:** "the light of setting suns, / And the round ocean and the living air, / And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:"
- **Lines 104-107:** "Therefore am I still / A lover of the meadows and the woods / And mountains; and of all that we behold / From this green earth;"
- **Lines 160-161:** " these steep woods and lofty cliffs, / And this green pastoral landscape,"

## POLYSYNDETON

[Polysyndeton](#) works within the poem to emphasize the interconnected quality of the natural world, and the ways in which this interconnection also exists in human life. It appears most notably in the speaker's description of his vision of the natural world, and the "presence" that lives within it, in stanza 4. The speaker says in lines 100-107:

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; ...

Here, the speaker describes where this sublime presence "dwell[s]." In doing so, he creates a list, linked together by the conjunction "and.": Polysyndeton works, in these lines, to enact what the poem describes. As the speaker conveys a vision of the interconnectedness of nature and the universe, the syntax connects these elements of nature and the universe with [parataxis](#) and a repeated conjunction.

Later, the speaker echoes this use of polysyndeton with the repetition of "nor" and "or" in the last stanza:

Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,

And:

If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,

In these moments, the speaker is saying that because of the healing power of nature, all the difficult things in daily life won't "prevail" against the speaker and his sister; he links these difficulties together with the conjunction "nor." Similarly, he says that if in the future his sister experiences "solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief" she will still be comforted by remembering this visit to this landscape. These later instances of polysyndeton recall and contrast with its first iteration. Implicitly, they suggest that the "and" that connects all things in nature is more powerful than the immorality of daily, urban life, and can protect people against whatever they might encounter.

### Where Polysyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Line 86:** "And"
- **Line 87:** "And"
- **Line 100:** "And," "and"
- **Line 101:** "And," "and"
- **Line 105:** "and"
- **Line 106:** "And," "and"
- **Line 132:** "nor"
- **Line 133:** "Nor," "nor"
- **Line 146:** "or," "or," "or"

## ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) works alongside [consonance](#), [assonance](#), and [sibilance](#) to lend the poem its intensely musical tone. Sometimes, alliteration simply makes the poem sound good. But alliteration also draws implicit connects between some words and phrases in the poem. For example, the /w/ sounds of line 58 link the presence/spirit that the speaker perceives to nature itself (the "woods"):

O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,

For another example, take the alliteration /m/ sounds in the final stanza when the speaker talks about his sister's future:

... when thy mind  
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,  
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place  
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies;

This sound connects the sister's "mind," her consciousness, and "memory" to this metaphorical mansion. The /s/ alliteration of "sweet sounds" then gives that phrase a hushed, gentle quality.

Similarly, in the second stanza, the speaker describes the "weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world." The alliteration of /w/ sounds here links the concept of the world to both its weight and the weariness of one who must bear it. It also slows the reader down, creating a sense of having to labor through

the lines.

### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “length”
- **Line 2:** “long”
- **Line 5:** “steep,” “cliffs”
- **Line 6:** “secluded scene”
- **Line 7:** “seclusion,” “connect”
- **Line 8:** “quiet,” “sky”
- **Line 15:** “hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows,” “little lines”
- **Line 17:** “smoke”
- **Line 18:** “Sent,” “silence”
- **Line 19:** “some,” “seem”
- **Line 28:** “sensations sweet”
- **Line 30:** “passing,” “purer”
- **Line 32:** “pleasure,” “perhaps”
- **Line 34:** “portion”
- **Line 38:** “blessed”
- **Line 39:** “burthen”
- **Line 40:** “weary weight”
- **Line 41:** “world”
- **Line 47:** “body,” “become”
- **Line 52:** “Be but,” “belief”
- **Line 54:** “fretful”
- **Line 55:** “fever”
- **Line 56:** “Have hung,” “heart”
- **Line 57:** “How”
- **Line 58:** “Wye,” “wanderer,” “woods”
- **Line 62:** “somewhat,” “sad,” “perplexity”
- **Line 63:** “picture”
- **Line 64:** “stand,” “sense”
- **Line 65:** “present pleasure,” “pleasing”
- **Lines 66-67:** “food / For future”
- **Line 72:** “more,” “man”
- **Line 83:** “no need”
- **Line 88:** “nor mourn nor murmur”
- **Line 90:** “learned”
- **Line 91:** “look”
- **Line 92:** “hearing”
- **Line 93:** “still sad,” “humanity”
- **Line 94:** “harsh”
- **Line 97:** “sense sublime”
- **Line 98:** “something”
- **Line 101:** “mind,” “man”
- **Line 102:** “motion”
- **Line 103:** “thinking things,” “thought”
- **Line 104:** “through,” “things,” “Therefore”
- **Line 105:** “meadows”
- **Line 106:** “mountains”
- **Line 109:** “perceive,” “pleased”
- **Line 112:** “guide,” “guardian”
- **Line 116:** “Suffer,” “spirits”
- **Line 122:** “wild,” “while”

- **Line 123:** “what,” “was once”
- **Line 125:** “Knowing,” “Nature never”
- **Line 132:** “sneers,” “selfish”
- **Line 139:** “misty mountain”
- **Line 142:** “mind”
- **Line 143:** “mansion”
- **Line 144:** “memory”
- **Line 145:** “sweet sounds”



## VOCABULARY

**Tintern Abbey** () - Tintern Abbey is an abbey (a building that houses monks or nuns) founded in 1131, near the village of Tintern, in Monmouthshire, Wales. The abbey was abandoned in the 16th century, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, when England converted to Protestantism. Its ruins remain on the Welsh side of the River Wye (which creates a border between Wales and England). The ruins of the abbey have been the subject of numerous visual representations by British artists, notably by the British Romantic artists J.M. Turner and Samuel Palmer.

**Murmur** (Line 4) - A low, quiet sound that is continuous yet difficult to make out. Here the word refers to the steady hum of the water flowing down through the mountain streams.

**Behold** (Line 5, Line 106, Line 123, Line 136) - To “behold” means, literally, “to see,” and especially to see something grand or impressive. It has religious connotations, as it appears in the Bible, in reference to “beholding” something sacred or holy.

**Lofty** (Line 5, Line 131, Line 160) - The word “lofty” can be used both in terms of physical appearance—it means that something is tall, high, or impressive—and to describe a person’s manner or bearing, suggesting that someone is aloof or proud. Both words are important in the poem, as the speaker describes the cliffs as “lofty,” and also uses the word to describe more “elevated” forms of human thought.

**Seclusion** (Line 6, Line 7) - “Seclusion” refers to the state of being private or removed from other people; it also refers to a private or sheltered place. It is similar to the meaning of solitude, but without the negative connotations of loneliness.

**Sycamore** (Line 10) - A Sycamore is a type of tree, large and sturdy with broad leaves.

**Orchard-tufts** (Line 11) - The compound word “orchard-tufts” refers to how the tops of trees in an orchard look when seen from a great distance and from overhead. An orchard is a cultivated group of fruit trees; a tuft is literally a cluster of fibers (organic or man-made) that grow together from a shared base.

**Clad** (Line 13) - “Clad” means, literally, “dressed” or “clothed.” In the poem, this word subtly [personifies](#) the orchards, as they are

said to be “clad in one green hue.”

**Groves and copses** (Line 14) - Both “groves” and “copses” refer to small groups of trees growing close together.

**Pastoral** (Line 16) - “Pastoral” is both an adjective and a noun. As an adjective, it refers to rural life, and to anything rural or rustic; it can also refer specifically to shepherding or the care for sheep and cattle. As a noun, it refers to a work of art or literature that represents rural life, especially in an idealized way. Both meanings are relevant in “Tintern Abbey” as the speaker describes farms that are pastoral, or rural, but also sees them as embodying a kind of charming simplicity.

**Vagrant** (Line 20) - To be a vagrant means that one is homeless and lacks regular employment. Due to this instability, a vagrant must travel in search of shelter, income, and food. Within the poem, the speaker imagines that vagrants live in the “houseless woods.” This may be a reference to actual people who were living in a condition of vagrancy in this area at the time of the poem’s composition; historical research has shown that many people impoverished and displaced by war traveled through this region looking for work at the end of the 18th century. “Vagrant” can be both a noun and an adjective.

**Hermit** (Line 21, Line 22) - A hermit is someone who lives in a remote area, apart from the rest of society, usually to devote him or herself to religious or spiritual practice.

**Forms** (Line 23, Line 81, Line 143) - “Forms” can mean, literally, the visual and physical shapes of things. Within the poem, however, the word “forms” is also a possible [allusion](#) to the forms of Platonic thought, in which all things in everyday life are said to have an ideal, essential form that they are derived from. These Platonic forms were thought to only be seen or understood within the spiritual realm. Within the poem, the speaker identifies the natural landscape with these ideal, essential forms.

**Oft** (Line 26, Line 52, Line 57) - “Oft” is an archaic form of “often.”

**Pure** (Line 30, Line 111) - “Pure” means, literally, to be free of contamination. However, it is also a word that has accrued multiple charged meanings through its use in religious terminology—in which one might be said to “pure” or “impure” in soul or actions. Within the poem, all of these meanings of the word are relevant. The natural landscape is viewed as “pure” in that it is separate from and untouched (or “uncontaminated”) by human interference. The speaker also says that the landscape helps him move into his “purer mind,” implicitly suggesting that this mindset is spiritually superior.

**Sublime** (Line 38, Line 97) - If something is “sublime,” it means that it is so grand, overwhelming, or beautiful that it inspires awe and wonder. The sublime is an important concept within Romanticism. Many Romantics believed that, in encountering the vastness of nature and the universe, one can have an experience of infinity that is almost overpowering. They

believed that in encountering this and experiencing this sense of the infinite, one encounters the sublime. Different writers and thinkers have had different specific ideas about the sublime; Wordsworth believed that people could achieve Enlightenment, or a kind of complete understanding and insight, through experiencing it.

**Burthen** (Line 39) - “Burthen” is an archaic spelling of “burden,” meaning a heavy load that one must carry.

**Unintelligible** (Line 41) - “Unintelligible” means something that can’t be understood or deciphered.

**Corporeal** (Line 44) - “Corporeal” means of or related to the physical body.

**Fretful** (Line 54) - To be “fretful” means to worry.

**Sylvan** (Line 58) - “Sylvan” is an adjective that means an area is wooded or covered in forest.

**Wye** (Line 58) - The “Wye” of the poem’s title refers both to the Wye Valley and the River Wye, which are located at the border between Wales and England, and also where the ruins of Tintern Abbey are.

**Roe** (Line 69) - A roe is a species of deer in Europe. Roe deer are fairly small and can live in cold climates.

**Coarser** (Line 75) - “Coarser,” like “lofty,” can refer both to a physical quality and to a quality of conduct or behavior in a person. As a physical quality, it means something is rough, as in coarse fabric. In describing behaviors or as an attribute of a person, it means that the person is unsophisticated or uneducated.

**Cataract** (Line 78) - A cataract is a waterfall or any strong overflow of water. It also refers to an eye condition in which the lens of the eye becomes clouded, obstructing light. Both meanings are present in interesting ways in the poem, as the speaker references the sound of the cataract in the landscape, invoking the sound of rushing water. Yet he also does so at a moment when he is describing his younger self as running through the landscape, apparently without inner clarity or direction.

**Recompense** (Line 90) - “Recompense” means, literally, repayment. It is a word that evokes trade and commerce, though within the poem the speaker refers to the “recompense” he has received in terms of his spiritual and internal growth.

**Chasten** (Line 95) - To “chasten” means to discipline or moderate or quiet, as in a child who is talking too loudly being “chastened.” It also carries within it the word “chaste,” which in religious terms is considered a positive attribute (usually associated with women) in which one is humble, self-contained, and obedient.

**Subdue** (Line 95) - To “subdue” means to make quiet or bring under control. If someone is subdued, this means that they might not express emotion or strong feelings.

**Interfused** (Line 98) - To “interfuse” means to bring two or more things together into one. The word “fuse” refers to the process by which through extreme heat metals and other elements can be merged together.

**Perceive** (Line 109) - To “perceive” means “to see” or to take in through the senses. It also conveys a sense of understanding or grasping an underlying concept or idea.

**Genial** (Line 116) - “Genial” means pleasant, friendly, mild and cheerful.

**Prevail** (Line 135) - To “prevail” means to overcome or overpower, especially in the context of battle or struggle.

**Mansion** (Line 143) - A very large and impressive house.

**Wilt** (Line 148, Line 152, Line 158) - “Wilt” is an archaic term that is the second-person singular form of “will.” When the speaker says “wilt thou remember me,” this means, “you will remember me.”

**Exhortations** (Line 149) - “Exhortations” are statements addressed to someone to strongly encourage or urge them to behave in a certain way—usually a way that is considered good and admirable. The word appears in the Bible in the disciples exhorting others to follow the ways of Christ.

**Hither** (Line 155) - “Hither” is both an adjective and an adverb. As an adverb, it means “to or toward” a place that is “here” (by the person speaking). As an adjective, it refers to something situated near the person who is speaking. When the speaker says that he “hither came,” this means that he “came here.”

**Zeal** (Line 157) - To have “zeal” means to have great enthusiasm and energy for something. The word appears in the Bible; in a religious sense, someone who is “zealous” is someone who is intensely devoted to God.

different intervals in the conversation—not according to some externally imposed time frame or pattern, but according to the organic and natural pauses that arise between units of thought and speech. In a sense, then, the poem creates a form that reflects the organic and varied “forms” or shapes of the natural world, and the natural progressions of human thought.

The poem also works in several modes, notably as an [ode](#), a dramatic [monologue](#), and a conversation poem:

- An ode is a poem praising a given subject; “Tintern Abbey” can be read as an ode because the poem as a whole praises the natural world.
- A dramatic monologue is a form of in which the speaker reflects on his or her experiences and thoughts dramatically, and apparently to him or herself. Much of “Tintern Abbey” reflects this form, however toward the end of the poem it becomes clear that the poem is actually (or also) a conversation poem.
- This last term is one used specifically to describe a group of poems by Wordsworth and his friend, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In a conversation poem, the speaker addresses someone close to him or her in a way that is both informal and serious.

“Tintern Abbey” is a conversation poem in that it becomes clear, by the last stanza, that the speaker has actually been addressing his sister within the setting, apparently at the moment of the poem's composition. Thus, the poem can be read as a kind of transcription of an actual conversation or an actual utterance, emphasizing the poem's natural, immediate quality.

## METER

“Tintern Abbey” is written in blank verse, a.k.a. unrhymed [iambic pentameter](#). Each line has 10 syllables, which are divided into 5 metrical feet known as iambs. Each iamb contains an unstressed syllable followed by a **stressed** syllable. For example, line 1 reads:

Five years have **past**; five summers, **with** the length

The poem's use of blank verse has several effects. First, emerging out of a poetic tradition in which strict adherence to meter was the norm, blank verse was seen at the time “Tintern Abbey” was written as a more fluid, natural, and free way of writing poems.

- This is because, while a poem in blank verse adheres to a metrical pattern, it doesn't adhere to the *rhyming* element traditionally associated with that pattern.
- Wordsworth was interested in writing poems closer to ordinary human speech, so by discarding the



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

“Tintern Abbey” has 162 lines broken up into five stanzas of varying lengths:

1. The first is 22 lines long;
2. The second 28 lines long;
3. The third 9 lines long;
4. The fourth 54 lines long;
5. And the fifth 49 lines long.

The poem utilizes what are called verse paragraphs, in which each stanza functions similarly to a “paragraph,” containing a single thought.

Within the poem, this works to express the sense that the speaker is actually speaking to the reader and to his sister. The stanzas vary in length just as, in speaking, one might pause at

element of rhyme, the poem sounds and feels almost conversational, as though the speaker is addressing the reader directly.

- In fact, within the poem the speaker addresses his sister, so the mode of conversation and human speech is important to both the poem's form and its meaning.

At the same time, the poem's use of iambic pentameter lifts it out of a truly colloquial or conversational mode into the realm of the [lyric](#), which is associated with music. It also aligns the poem with a classical tradition of tightly structured, metrical poetry, and gives the poem a sense of symmetry and grandeur—important to its themes of the harmony and grandeur of the natural world.

Importantly, too, iambic pentameter is considered a kind of rising rhythm, since each foot shifts from an unstressed syllable to the more pronounced, emphasized, **stressed** syllable. This rhythm enacts the sense of hopeful progression within the poem, as the speaker describes how the passage of time has given him—and will give his sister—increased insight, awareness, and appreciation of beauty.

The poem also includes some important divergences from its meter. For example, line 34 contains clusters of stressed syllables rather than iambs:

On **that best portion** of a good man's life,

This divergent meter makes the line stand out in the poem, while implicitly praising the simplicity and morality of a "good man's life."

Elsewhere, the divergences are more subtle but equally powerful. For example, line 49 reads:

Of **harmony**, and the **deep power** of joy,

The cluster of stresses at the end of this line emphasizes the power of the "joy" the speaker evokes. Also, coming as it does at a moment in the poem in which the speaker describes moving out of his ordinary state of mind (and even his body) in a transcendent experience, this line registers a similar shift at the level of the poem's rhythms. Just as the speaker escapes the confines of his own body, the line leaves behind the received pattern and meter of the body of the poem, to arrive at a different kind of music.

Finally, the poem introduces variation into its metrical pattern by splitting the pentameter of some lines across two lines and two stanzas. Stanzas 1, 2, and 4 all end with a line that is metrically incomplete in its pentameter; the pentameter is then "completed" in the following line and the following stanza.

Take lines 50-51, between which is a stanza break:

We see **into the life** of things.

If this

Taken together, this creates a complete line of iambic pentameter.

These disruptions register as pauses in the speaker's thoughts, but at the same time emphasize the poem's underlying music and pattern, since the reader, accustomed to the meter of the preceding lines, automatically reads on to reach the truncated lines' metrical conclusion. Implicitly, this aspect of the poem suggests that its underlying music, like the harmony in the natural world that it describes, is powerful enough to withstand disruptions and divergences and even gaps of space or time within the speaker's, and the reader's experience.

## RHYME SCHEME

"Tintern Abbey" is written in [blank verse](#), meaning that it has no fixed [rhyme scheme](#). This absence of a traditional rhyme scheme is important to the poem, as Wordsworth was interested in writing poems closer to ordinary speech—which, of course, doesn't typically rhyme!

At the same time, the poem sound echoes and some [slant rhymes](#) to create a sense of musicality. For example, the short /i/ sound in the "springs" of line 3 is echoed in the short /i/ of "cliffs" in line 5. Similarly, the short /e/ sound of "impress" in line 6 repeats in the next line with "connect." While these are not full [end rhymes](#), they do create a *suggestion* of rhyme and a sense that the poem is working in accordance with some kind of larger pattern.

There are also some places in the poem where the line endings are even closer to full rhyme or, indeed, are fully rhyming. For example, in stanza four, "hour" in line 91 finds a full rhyme in line 94, with "power." Then, at the end of the poem, "gleams" in line 151 almost completely rhymes with "stream" in line 153, except for the /s/ sound at the end. These moments of complete and almost complete rhyme give these lines and their meanings greater emphasis within the poem.

Finally, the poem uses [assonance](#) and [consonance](#) throughout to create an intricate pattern of sound repetition. In a sense, then, the poem alludes to a kind of larger pattern of rhyme and music even as it reads, line by line, as more natural and varied, as though it is actual human speech.



## SPEAKER

"Tintern Abbey" doesn't specifically identify the poem's speaker by name, age, or gender. At the same time, there are several elements of the poem that suggest the speaker of the poem is the poet, or rather, a crafted representation of the poet, William Wordsworth.

First, the title, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July

13, 1798,” connects the poem to specific biographical details about the poet. William Wordsworth did, in fact, go on a walking tour of the Wye Valley with his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth, in July 1798.

The speaker then remarks that five years have gone by since he last visited this setting. Wordsworth had previously visited the area five years before, when he was 23. Later in the poem, the speaker addresses his younger sister. Historical context suggests that this sister can be read as the poet’s sister, Dorothy, who was one year younger than her brother.

Other clues suggest that the speaker is male, and young (or young enough to go on a walking tour of this valley) but not as young as he once was. The speaker’s descriptions of outgrowing some of his youthful energy fit as a representation of the twenty-seven-year-old poet. Later in the poem, the speaker’s descriptions of nature as a kind of ideal feminine figure, who nurtures and cares for the speaker, reinforces the sense of the speaker as a man articulating norms of gender that were standard for his time.

Finally, while a strong argument can be made that the speaker of the poem is closely identified with Wordsworth, it is also worth noting that the speaker is a particular *representation* of the poet. What the speaker sees, feels, and says within the poem are still all aspects of a self and sensibility crafted on the page. In this case, the speaker of the poem might be understood as a kind of mythical version of the poet, a romanticized version of the human poet, that is based upon Wordsworth but still exists independently.



## SETTING

There are several settings, and several ways to understand setting, within “Tintern Abbey.” The most obvious setting is the one the title establishes: the Wye Valley, on the banks of the River Wye, in Wales. This area is home to the ruins of Tintern Abbey, built in 1131 and abandoned in the 16th century when England converted to Protestantism under Henry VIII. Interestingly, although the Abbey is mentioned in the title, nowhere in the poem does the speaker actually describe it, focusing instead on the natural attributes of the surrounding landscape. In a way, the poem as a whole is entirely *about* this setting, as it explores how a beautiful natural landscape can rejuvenate and restore the human soul.

At the same time, the poem incorporates other settings, which are juxtaposed with the beauty of this natural place. The speaker recalls time spent in urban towns and cities, and through his descriptions makes these settings palpable and present. He also imagines a time in the future when his sister may live alone in an unknown setting, yet within her mind will continue to be able to return to this one.

It is also worth noting that the setting of “Tintern Abbey” is a

particular, crafted representation of the actual landscape of the Wye Valley at the end of the 18th century. Historical research has shown that this area was visibly industrialized; someone visiting would have heard the activity of an ironworks and seen a river polluted with iron and copper ore. The speaker leaves these industrial elements out of his descriptions, instead presenting the landscape as wild and untouched. Thus, the setting of “Tintern Abbey” is both the actual Wye Valley and an imaginative version of it—as the speaker says within the poem, “half create[d]” and half “perceive[d].”



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

Wordsworth wrote “Tintern Abbey” in 1798 and included it as the final poem in the collection *Lyrical Ballads*— a landmark collection of poems published with his friend and fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, that same year. In fact, Wordsworth is said to have so valued “Tintern Abbey” that he halted the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, which was already in process, to be able to include the poem as its final piece.

*Lyrical Ballads* as a collection is now considered to have signaled the beginning of the British Romantic movement in literature. Wordsworth and Coleridge sought to challenge what they saw as the elitist, detached, and pretentious forms of 18th-century poetry in England; they wanted to create poetry that was closer to ordinary human speech and could be read and appreciated by ordinary people. As part of this, in their poems they emphasized rural life and the natural world, which they saw as restorative and the answer to the corrupting influences of society.

In their thinking, they drew on the work of the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasized the value of the individual human being, and whose writings helped to influence the French Revolution. These tenants became the central guiding principles of Romanticism, a movement that sought to emphasize the beauty, purity, and grandeur of the natural world and value human experience up to that point excluded from “high art,” including rural life and working-class realities.

On its own terms, and as part of a collection that established the beginning of the Romantic Movement, “Tintern Abbey” has had a lasting influence on British and American literature. Its views of nature and of rural life as restorative, and its implicit view of the poet as an inspired, privileged observer, have continued to shape approaches to poetry and literary criticism well into the 20th century and even today.

While Wordsworth himself is seen as being influenced by the philosopher William Godwin, the writings of Rousseau, and his friend Coleridge, a less acknowledged but crucially important literary influence can be found in his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth—the “dear, dear sister” of the poem. Dorothy, too,

was a writer, though she primarily wrote in journals, notably what are now known as the *Grasmere Journals*. Her writing is striking for its observation and precise detail, and scholarship has found that Wordsworth drew on her writing for many of his own poems. For example, his poems "[Beggars](#)" and "[I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud](#)" use images and phrases from Dorothy's journals, without attribution. Many modern scholars now see Dorothy as an unacknowledged collaborator in Wordsworth's work.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two historical movements are important to understanding "Tintern Abbey" and Romanticism as a whole: the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution.

Beginning in 1789, the French Revolution involved the uprising of the French working class and poor against the monarchy and the system of monarchical power. It brought with it a vision of true democracy, in which each person would have equal rights and the power to participate in governance. By 1798, at the time "Tintern Abbey" was written, France had seen the rise of the Paris Commune and the Reign of Terror, and by 1804 Napoleon would declare himself Emperor, overturning the principles of liberty and freedom that had guided the original uprising. Yet the French Revolution had a lasting change on the European political landscape. It signaled the beginning of the end of absolute monarchies as a system of governance in Western Europe, and ushered in republics and liberal democracies as political systems.

These democratic values were important to Romanticism. In turning away from art that only represented bourgeois and wealthy ways of life, these writers and artists, including Wordsworth, sought to celebrate the human life and dignity of those who had conventionally been disregarded, including people living in rural settings and the working poor.

Secondly, "Tintern Abbey" was written during the Industrial Revolution, a time when rural areas throughout Europe were being transformed into centers of industrial production. In emphasizing the natural world and rural life in their poems, the Romantic poets, including Wordsworth, expressed their resistance to these industrial changes. They viewed nature and life in rural settings as more simple and pure than urban life and urban society, and they shared with Rousseau the belief that society is essentially corrupting to the human spirit. Within the poem, the speaker sees the Wye Valley as a place that is still pure, untouched, and intact. He celebrates the restorative power of this landscape, and implicitly seeks to preserve it.

Interestingly, despite the poem's juxtaposition of the pure, untouched landscape of the Wye Valley and industrial settings, recent scholarship has found that the setting of the poem was actually, at the time the poem was written, significantly industrialized. A visitor to the Wye Valley at the time would have seen an ironworks in the area, and the River Wye was

polluted and rust colored from iron and copper ore. Workers at the ironworks actually lived within the ruins of the abbey.

Meanwhile, scholars have suggested that the "wreaths of smoke" the speaker sees within the poem were likely smoke from the ironworks, and that the people he describes as "vagrant dwellers" were people who, within the area at the time, were displaced and impoverished by war. Arguably, the speaker erases this evidence of industrialization and local suffering in order to make the landscape fit into the poem's philosophical and aesthetic worldview.



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [Visual Depiction of Tintern Abbey](#) – View an 1835 visual depiction of Tintern Abbey by the British artist Samuel Palmer. Like Wordsworth's poem, this depiction removes evidence of the local people and industry in the area, presenting a Romantic vision of the ruins of the abbey within a natural landscape. (<http://interactive.britishart.yale.edu/art-in-focus-wales/190/tintern-abbey>)
- [Biography of William Wordsworth](#) – Learn more about Wordsworth's life and work via the Poetry Foundation. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth>)
- [Facsimile of Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals](#) – View a facsimile of two pages from Dorothy Wordsworth's journals, and read about an example of how Wordsworth used her imagery and writing in his poems. (<https://www.euromanticism.org/two-pages-from-dorothy-wordsworths-grasmere-journal/>)
- [British Romanticism](#) – Read more about the British Romantic movement at the Poetry Foundation website. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/152982/an-introduction-to-british-romanticism>)
- [Essay about "Tintern Abbey" and Facsimile Images of Lyrical Ballads](#) – Read an article about the poem and view facsimile images of the original Lyrical Ballads, at the British Library. (<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-tintern-abbey>)

### LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM WORDSWORTH POEMS

- [Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802](#)
- [I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud](#)
- [London, 1802](#)
- [My Heart Leaps Up](#)
- [She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways](#)
- [The Solitary Reaper](#)
- [The World Is Too Much With Us](#)



## HOW TO CITE

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### CHICAGO MANUAL

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