

## Two Sublime Moments in “Tintern Abbey”

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An apparent structural anomaly of “Tintern Abbey” is that this poem does not converge to a single climax. The poem, which concludes the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, is divided into two climactic moments, both of which are characterized as “sublime.” The first climax, introduced in the poem’s second verse paragraph, is defined as an intensified stage of the beneficent sensations Wordsworth receives from his memory of the River Wye. Contemplating the recollected imagery of the riverine landscape, the poet first feels “sensations sweet” (28), which brings him “tranquil restoration” (31), and conducts him to “acts / Of kindness and love” (35-36). Then comes the climax: “Nor less, I trust, / I may have owed another gift, / Of aspect more sublime” (36-38). This sublime gift not only alleviates “the heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world” (40-41), but leads him to a mystical stage where he becomes “a living soul” (47), and sees into “the life of things” (50). The precise status of the second climax is harder to define, but it can be regarded as the highest stage of recognition attainable only after the poet has experienced the tragic side of human existence. Having deplored the loss of the “aching joys” (85) and “dizzy raptures” (86) of his past youth, Wordsworth begins to talk about “abundant recompense” for this loss, which turns out to be a new way of looking at Nature with a heightened awareness of “the still, sad music of humanity” (92). Then rather abruptly he brings in the second climactic passage: “And I have felt /

A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused" (94-97).

Those two high points of the poem have already been discussed from a number of viewpoints. Albert O. Wlecke's phenomenological reading, following the precedent of Geoffrey H. Hartman, uncovers in these climaxes the dynamics of consciousness characteristic of Wordsworth (20-46). Mary Jacobus interprets them as a reflection of Wordsworth's religio-philosophical position (127-30), representing the philosophical-reading school of Wordsworth criticism. More recently, Jerome J. McGann, in a "new historicist" reading, pays a closer attention to the poem's failure to relate itself to the contemporary social reality. He accuses the "Romantic Ideology" embedded in "Tintern Abbey," and in its two climactic moments in particular, claiming that this position allows the poem to enjoy the mystical "life of things," but it is only at the expense of facing the harshness of the historical circumstances surrounding the poem (85-88).

Interpretations vary as exemplified above; but even new historicist critics such as McGann would not object if we find a basic critical consensus in Jonathan Wordsworth's remark: "mystical experience, a loss of bodily awareness, and merging of the self into a total harmony that is love, or joy, or God" (3). Diverse as they are, those critical approaches, from traditional to new historicist, seem to share a common ground in this definition. However, by thus generalizing the significance of the poem's critical passages, this reading appears to leave an important issue unexplained: is it really appropriate to regard those passages merely as two expressions of one and the same kind of experience. Is it possible that Wordsworth was so naive as to repeat an identical concept in less than seventy lines? This doubt is further confirmed by the poem's generic category. In a note included in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth hesitantly confesses that he intended the poem as an ode, "with a hope that in the

transitions, and the impassioned music of versification, would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition" (*Lyrical Ballads* 357). With the adoption of this genre, "Tintern Abbey" is characterized by those "transitions," or dialectical reversals of argument which are a traditional feature of the odic form (Curran 76-77). Hence, each climax has its bathetic counter-movement in the immediately following verse paragraph: "If this / Be but a vain belief" (50-51), and "If I were not thus taught" (113). A significant implication of this generic feature is that there should be a dialectical progression of some sort between the first and the second climactic parts. In other words, they should not both have absolutely the same status. Perhaps the second should be an addition to, or a revision of, the first so as to sustain the poem's dialectical rhythm meaningfully.

In this paper I will attempt to establish intrinsic differences between the poem's first and second climactic passages and, by doing so, to describe a crucial turn in Wordsworth's poetics inscribed in the transition between those two climaxes. I will begin by discussing those two moments one by one in the light of Wordsworth's philosophical position in 1797 and 1798: "Tintern Abbey" was written at the closing stage of his collaboration with Coleridge, whose theory of the pantheist "One Life" helped to formulate Wordsworth's philosophy of nature. Then, I will argue that some elements in the second climax go beyond this position and indicate a direction towards a new poetics which closely resembles Immanuel Kant's transcendentalism. The key concept I will draw on in these discussions is the aesthetic term "the sublime." This concept is not only shared by both climactic passages, but actually forms a key to link Wordsworth's philosophical position to those of Coleridge and Kant. Further in the course of my argument, I will refer to two other texts from Wordsworth, a verse fragment dated 1798 and a fragmentary essay on the aesthetics of landscape. Both of them concerned with the poet's view on the sublime, they

will help to shed light on the new transcendentalist side of Wordsworth hinted at in "Tintern Abbey."

In the first climax, Wordsworth's usage of the term "sublime" is uniquely unconventional. Wordsworth writes, "To them I may have owed another gift, / Of aspect more sublime" (37-38). What is extraordinary about these lines is that "them" refers back to "forms of beauty" (24), that Wordsworth seems to claim that his sublime sensation is not caused by something physically sublime, but by imagery described as beautiful. In the majority of eighteenth-century aesthetic theories, the sublime was regarded as strictly antithetical to the notion of beauty. This is most evident in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, arguably the most influential of all contemporary treatises on aesthetics.

Burke bases his psychology of sublimity on the negative kind of pleasure, or "delight," which accompanies the mental process in which a possibility of pain or danger is first imposed to the observing mind, then removed. Thus what is sublime in a Burkean sense is a terrible object which appears threatening, but does not quite do material harm to human existence. Defining the sublime, Burke remarks: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible . . . is a source of the *sublime*" (39, original emphasis). He then adds that the danger and pain should not "press too nearly . . . but at certain distances" (40), so as to guarantee the removal of pain. In contrast, beauty does not involve a complex psychological process as in the case of the sublime; beauty has nothing to do with negative elements such as pain or danger, but produces positively pleasurable feelings only. Beauty to Burke is "a name I shall apply to all such qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection and tenderness" (51). With those aesthetic formulations, it is no surprise that Burke's theory results in an antithetical distinction of

sublime and beautiful objects: according to *A Philosophical Enquiry*, a sublime thing must be vast, rugged, dark and obscure, while beauty lies in smallness, smoothness and delicacy.

In this light it is obvious that Wordsworth's treatment of the sublime is well beyond this formalistic distinction made in "the Age of Reason." For he appears to violate the traditional aesthetic categories without showing the slightest hint of conscious effort. We cannot, of course, say that Wordsworth was without precedent. It is certain that there was a current in the development of the eighteenth-century aesthetic thought that points towards this Wordsworthian sensibility. As Ernest Lee Tuveson has demonstrated, already at the beginning of the eighteenth century a peculiar kind of aesthetic sensibility was established: a sensibility that could intuit the infinite presence of God in external natural landscape, which was often large in scale, but ultimately finite (56-71). Hence sublimity, or a sense of awe inspired by God's unfathomable being, was perceivable in natural phenomena of a limited dimension. However, the next step forward to that bold statement in "Tintern Abbey" seems to be a big qualitative leap. To know the real significance of Wordsworth's radical new sense of sublimity, or sublimity in small, gentle or "beautiful" objects, we need to look at the immediate intellectual context for Wordsworth that led him to write this great meditative verse in mid-1798.

When we glance through Wordsworth's poetic achievement up through his middle years, we recognize that the period of his stay at Alfoxden in 1797 to 1798 formed a crucial moment in his poetry and poetics. Before that, as Mary Jacobus points out, he worked largely within traditional literary frameworks: *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* are certainly natural descriptions of a kind, but almost entirely indebted to the conventional loco-descriptive couplet form. Similarly, *Salisbury Plain* and *The Borderers* can be categorized as humanitarian protests in a gothic situation

(Jacobus 7). Even in *The Ruined Cottage* of mid-1797, where beautiful landscape surrounds the principal scene of action, there is nothing that shows nature's spiritual influence to the human mind (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Music of Humanity* 188). It was not until he got under Coleridge's strong influence in summer 1797 that Wordsworth as a Romantic nature poet began to emerge. Therefore, to obtain a proper insight into Wordsworth's sensibility, we should first go to the Coleridgean view of nature.

Coleridge's philosophy in the 1790s was centred on the concept which he later formulated as "one Life" (*Letters* 2. 459). This position is, as Jonathan Wordsworth argues, largely derived from Coleridge's religious allegiance to Unitarianism ("Introduction" 2). Because of its denial of Trinity and the resultant disallowance of divinity in Christ, Unitarianism carries a task to prove God's historical presence in the created world. A solution to this possible difficulty comes from a Pantheist doctrine that God is present in the natural world as a pervasive life-force, or energy. This position was exemplified in the late eighteenth century by Joseph Priestley, an influential Unitarian minister of the period. When Coleridge punningly calls himself a "Josephidite" (Ernest Hartley Coleridge 147) in a 1797 note to *Joan of Arc*, he declares his allegiance to this aspect of Unitarianism. Being a "Josephidite" means that he is a follower of Joseph Priestley, and that he believes in Joseph's fatherhood of Christ and hence in the Unitarian doctrine of Christ's humanity. The following invocation to God in *Destiny of Nations* is a clear indication of Coleridge's metaphysical thinking at that time:

Glory to Thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!  
 All-conscious Presence of the Universe!  
 Nature's vast ever-acting Energy! (459-61)

This all-pervasive life-force is the unifying principle of the whole

creation : "tis God / Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole" (*Religious Musings* 139-40). Thus, for the young Coleridge, the "One Life" is a comprehensive philosophical system that guarantees a unity in the apparent variety of the phenomenal world.

For a means of perceiving "One Life," Coleridge adopted George Berkeley's theory that the natural world is a continuous symbolic revelation of the divine mind (Jacobus 66). When annotating the verse paragraph that includes a Berkeleian statement, "Life is a vision shadowy of Truth" (*Religious Musings* 414), Coleridge pronounces his direct debt to this eighteenth-century philosopher: "This paragraph is intelligible to those, who, like the Author, believe and feel the sublime system of Berkeley" (*Poems* 91). As Berkeley himself claims, in this philosophical system natural phenomena are equivalent to God's symbolic language: "the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of Nature" (61-62). This notion permeates Coleridge's thought of the mid-1790s and onward. He rephrases this statement of Berkeley in *Destiny of Nations*: "all that meets the bodily sense I deem / Symbolical, one almighty alphabet" (18-19); and in a 1795 lecture he asserts, "We see our God everywhere — the Universe in the most literal Sense is his written Language" ("Theological Lectures" 339). This Berkeleian symbolic nature, fused with the Priestleyan notion of all-pervasive God, finds its finest expression in "Frost at Midnight": "The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in himself" (59-62).

For Coleridge, the highest human achievement is to be integrated into the divine system of the universe. This ultimate stage for the human soul is attained when "by exclusive Consciousness of God / All self-annihilated it shall make / God its identity" (*Religious Musings* 48-50). Here the key to this attainment is a full understanding of the Berkeleian symbolic

language of nature. This divine stage, being unapproachable by a mere blind faith, can only be achieved through a profound recognition that human beings are an organic part of the unified universal order of God: “’tis sublime of man, / Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves / Parts and proportions of one wond’rous whole” (*Religious Musings* 135-37). Grandiose as it may sound, Coleridge’s terminology in these lines is entirely appropriate. As we have discussed, the term “sublimity” has come to have an implication that the human mind can perceive divine attributes in external nature, provided that the perceived object is massive enough to invoke a sense of religious awe. The primary meaning of Coleridge’s usage of “sublime” is “spiritually highest”; but just as the eighteenth-century aesthetic tradition did, he takes a correct advantage of this aesthetic term to signify a human perception of the godhead through the natural world. His only and important break with the tradition is that he does not require any physical largeness in the perceived object. The universe may be a vast, “wond’rous whole,” but all that human beings are expected to do is to recognize themselves to be an integral part of the divine order of the natural world. With due respect for Coleridge’s terminology, I would call this spiritual stage, so central to his philosophical position in the 1790s, “Coleridgean sublimity.”

There is one further important aspect in the Coleridgean sublime: its capacity for moral amelioration. Next to the lines from *Religious Musings* just quoted, Coleridge adds an important passage: “This [recognizing the human part in the divine order] fraternises man, this constitutes / Our charities and bearings” (138-39). This may be too obvious a conclusion; if we achieve the highest possible spiritual stage, it is only natural that we become the best possible in morality, too. However, what should be noted is that in Coleridge’s system human beings are morally improved only if they learn to read the divine language in nature, in other words, if they



expose themselves to symbolic messages from nature. Hence, Coleridge stresses the importance of moral effects of natural scenery more than its aesthetic beauty. He writes to George Dyer in 1795: "The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties, are of little Consequence compared with the Moral Effect of these pleasures — beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible" (*Letters* 154).

That Coleridge's correspondent was Dyer is not without significance. According to Nicholas Roe's documentation, Dyer, a close friend to Coleridge and a sharer of the same political radicalism, was also moving towards the philosophy of the "One Life" at this time. His *Dissertation on Benevolence* of 1795 argues for the moral effect of the creation, showing striking resemblances to Coleridge's thought (Roe 30-31):

The GOOD MAN from the appearances of nature derives tender affections, generous principles, and humane conduct. From the glowing and variegated scenes around him he derives something which warms his heart, and throws a smile over his countenance. . . . The good man thus acquires universal tenderness. (*Dissertation* 19, quoted in Roe 31)

The only difference from Coleridge is that whereas Coleridge stresses the necessitarian mechanical processes, Dyer places more emphasis on the universal benevolent principle, or "universal tenderness" that speaks through nature (Roe 30). In this subtle difference, as well as in the common views the two men share, an important development lies: a possibility of symbiosis between sublimity and tenderness is implied in their philosophical views. I have already discussed the peculiar coexistence of sublimity, beauty and kindness in "Tintern Abbey." In the light of our present argument, Wordsworth did not present there a mere idiosyncrasy; the way to this philosophical blank verse had already been foreshadowed by the

Coleridgean sublimity and Dyer's formulation on universal benevolence.

Wordsworth's intimacy with Coleridge in 1797 and 1798 is well known; but he was also acquainted with George Dyer since spring 1795 (Roe 32). Considering that the three men shared similar radical political attitudes and were probably in the same political circles, it is reasonable to assume that Wordsworth was influenced by both Dyer and Coleridge. Indeed, in the first climactic passage of "Tintern Abbey," there are conspicuous traces of their influence. Dyer's shadow, in particular, looms behind the humanitarian elements in that passage. Wordsworth first declares that he owes to "forms of beauty" (24) "sensations sweet" (28), which give him "tranquil restoration" (31) in his weary hours; then he claims that "forms of beauty" have a moral effect on him:

. . . feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,  
As may have had no trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life;  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love. (31-36)

Coleridge's presence is visible in Wordsworth's claim that beautiful images of nature have a moral effect on the human mind: "beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible" (Coleridge, *Letters* 154). But it is Dyer's concept of universal benevolence that is strongly suggested in the wording of those lines. As Dyer stresses "tender affection, generous principles, and humane conduct" (Roe 31), so Wordsworth is unusually assertive in "unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love," lines that would otherwise sound absurdly hackneyed and overbearingly didactic. In addition, we should note a possible borrowing from Dyer.

Dyer calls the person who receives moral lessons from natural scenery as "the GOOD MAN" (Roe 31) in his *Dissertation*; I would suggest that his echo might be heard in Wordsworth's "a good man's life." This might be a mere coincidence; but, again, Wordsworth's phrase would merely sound a product of childish vocabulary if we do not suppose some philosophical system behind the poet's word choice.

A hint of the grander side of the "One Life" philosophy is seen in the spiritual ascending of sensations. Those "sensations sweet," derived from beautiful imagery, are first felt largely physiologically: "Felt in the blood and felt along the heart"; but then they enter a higher level: "passing into my purer mind" (30). "Purer" in this context clearly means "non-material." Sensations, initially engendered by stimuli from nature, pass the physical phase of the blood, then come to the heart, which slightly implies spirituality in its secondary meaning of the seat of non-material feelings; and these sensations eventually attain the spiritual stage, "the purer mind," almost transcending the physical. This process is preliminary, however. It is in the next fifteen lines on "aspect more sublime" (38) that a complete spiritual ascent is achieved, and the "One Life" shines forth.

In this fully sublime phase the tendency to transcend the physical is prevalent. Beautiful nature's other dispensation, "Another gift, / Of aspect more sublime" (37-38), is characterized as a mental state from the very beginning: "that serene and blessed mood / In which the affections gently lead us on" (42-43). Dyer's shadow is perceivable, but this time the sublime claim of Coleridge is prominent, for the human mind is explicitly described to free from the seat of its physical existence:

. . . 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. (44-47)

Just as Coleridge maintains that to recognize his proper place in the universal order of God is "sublime of man," so Wordsworth refers to a similar higher recognition accompanying this spiritual ascent:

While, with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things. (48-50)

In his own undogmatic way, Wordsworth translates Coleridge's "One Life" into a more human act of seeing "into the life of things." Here Wordsworth assimilates his friend's religio-philosophical beliefs, and at the same moment completes the development of the sublime aesthetics. For he pushes the logic of the eighteenth-century sublime to an extreme, and displaces the locus of the sublime, or the sense of awe-inspiring God, from the immense in nature to the small and gentle, or the realm of the beautiful, which has long been taken as antithetical to the sublime. In this respect, Coleridge's Christian faith was an indispensable factor not only for the emergence of the nature poet Wordsworth, but for the historical development of aesthetics.

To a large extent this Coleridgean reading applies to the second climactic moment, too. As I have stated earlier, with the ambiguous "And" (94) as the only conjunctive to its preceding lines, the second sublime moment is introduced a little too abruptly. But in this case, too, Wordsworth probably insists on the beneficent role of natural imagery as he does in the first sublime passage. He, for one, prefaces this second climax by mentioning his mature attitude to nature: "I have learned / Too look on Nature not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes /

The still, sad music of humanity" (89-92). And he concludes the sublime moment with reassurance of his invariable reliance on nature: "Therefore am I still / A lover of the meadows and the woods / And mountains, and of all that we behold / From this green earth" (103-6). Thus, except for the new element concerning the tragic side of human existence in "still, sad music of humanity," Wordsworth in the second climax restates the same Coleridgean tenet: the human mind can be raised to the highest stage by exposing itself to the symbolic language of nature. The essence of this sublime stage is concentrated in these ten lines:

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. (94-103)

Again, Wordsworth is far less dogmatic than his mentor-friend; nevertheless an implication of the "One Life" is recognizable in Wordsworth's effort to grasp a mystical being: "a presence," "a sense sublime / Of something," and "a motion and a spirit." With all certainty, then, as I have claimed for the first sublime moment, this passage can be called an expression of the Coleridgean sublimity, the ultimate form of the eighteenth-century sublime. There is corroborative evidence for this argument: the essence of the passage can be a direct debt to Coleridge (Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* 193). The impressive descriptions of the

divine being: "a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused" and "A motion and a spirit that . . . rolls through all things" are possibly borrowed from Coleridge's *Religious Musings*: "And ye [spirits] of plastic power, that interfus'd / Roll thro' the grosser and material mass / In organizing surge! Holies of God!" (423-25). As I have pointed out, Wordsworth the nature poet was largely a product of the intellectual activity in his adulthood, dating back only to summer 1797, when he started intimate friendship with Coleridge. The nature mysticism in "Tintern Abbey" is probably the most sophisticated expression of Wordsworth's cultivated sensibility, which was not necessarily innate in him, but was recently established on his friend's religious convictions.

However, this second sublime moment includes another important feature, which cannot be explained away solely by the Coleridgean philosophy. That climax has a distinct tone of elusiveness; and this distinguishes it both from the first climax and from Coleridge's statements related to the "One Life." There are presumably several contributory factors to this vague elusive feeling. First, it is apparent that Wordsworth does not regard the sublimity in the second moment as a given, or something naturally falling into his possession. He places an implicit emphasis on the conscious effort involved in acquiring that high stage of recognition: "I have learned / To look on Nature" (89-90). This feature slightly shifts the focus of the passage from the "One Life" itself to the process of achieving it; by doing so, the second climax tends to foreground the subjective, psychological side that accompanies this sublime moment. This argument has a support from Wordsworth's rather awkward treatment of the divine "presence" (95). The gift obtained from external nature is first referred to as "presence," then, two lines later, rather vaguely as "something" (97); clearly he is struggling to point at the true identity of this divine presence. In addition, this time Wordsworth does not straightforwardly call "something" as

nature's gift, but puts it into a phrasal construction: "a sense sublime / Of something" (96-97). Obviously, the semantic core of this phrase is not "something," but the subjective word "sense." Wordsworth's logic here highlights the psychological process of intuition, rather at the expense of the object of that intuition, or the divine "something."

This foregrounding of the mental process, and the resultant tone of elusiveness concerning the external reality, are also present in the next few lines describing the pervasiveness of the "One Life." There, in spite of the strong presence of "something," Wordsworth's consciousness appears to lose orientation and wander. In an attempt to locate "something," Wordsworth names for its possible dwelling places "the light of setting suns," "the round ocean, and the living air," and "the blue sky." This indeterminacy of focus is not necessarily attributable to the omnipresent nature of "something"; for the effect of these lines is not a sense of static pervasiveness but, more appropriately, a dynamic shift of focus of the poet's mind. In pursuit of the divine "something," the poet's consciousness shifts unstably over indefinite directions: the sun, ocean, air, and sky, until it finds its resting place in "the mind of man." This dynamism is the opposite both of the tranquil state in the first climax, "that serene and blessed mood" (42), and of Coleridge's static vision, "'tis sublime of man . . . to know ourselves / Parts and proportions of one wond'rous whole" (*Religious Musings* 135-37). In the second climax of "Tintern Abbey," therefore, Wordsworth is creating a new kind of sublimity, "a sense sublime" which has its ultimate locus in the poet's subjective realm of consciousness. That his attention is eventually drawn to "the mind of man" reflects this introspective direction he is assuming.

The internalizing tendency in "Tintern Abbey" has already been pointed out by critics. F. W. Bateson, for instance, pays special attention to the lines, "the mighty world / Of eye and ear, both what they half-create, / And

what perceive" (106-8), and defines the creative role of subjectivity implied in these lines as an important discovery in Wordsworth's mental evolution (Bateson 141). Jonathan Wordsworth emphasizes the function of memory, and finds the main characteristic of this poem in "the extraordinary claim that images of Nature within the mind can lead to a mystical perception of God" ("Introduction" 6). In a similar vein, Mary Jacobus points out that the poem represents a shift from nature to the individual mind, attributing this shift to the increasing importance of memory for Wordsworth (22). In addition to these discussions, Carl Woodring offers a reading specifically concerned with the internalization of sublimity. With a critical ingenuity, he interprets "a motion and a spirit" and the next two and half lines to refer to the poet's mental state. He claims that those three lines should be read as subordinate to the preceding phrase "in the mind of man," that "a motion and a spirit" rolling through all the universe is within the mind, and represents "a reflection of the supposedly external world, of objects, and of other minds thinking objects, in the mind of the perceiver" (Woodring 96). He then concludes "The life abroad is the life within; the sublimity is from within" (96). My argument, while agreeing with the conclusion of these past studies, is meant to present a different route of demonstration, focusing specially on the two-fold nature of the second sublime moment.

This new subjectivity-based sublimity is not an isolated phenomenon found only in "Tintern Abbey"; it comes up in other literary texts written by Wordsworth over the years. In winter 1798, about half a year before writing "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth drafted a blank verse passage in a working notebook now known as "The Alfoxden Notebook." These lines, probably intended for *The Pedlar*, include another instance of the "sense sublime." Curiously, this earlier poetry already presents a more complete version of that new sublimity:



the soul

Remembering how she felt but what she felt  
 Remembering not retains an obscure sense  
 Of possible sublimity at which her [ ]  
 With growing faculties she [doth] aspire  
 With facul[ties] still growing, feeling still  
 That whatsoever point they Gain, There still  
 Is something to pursue.

("Alfoxden Notebook" 118 and 119, my spelling emendation)

This fragment shows the same introspective tendency and dynamism of consciousness as we have seen in "Tintern Abbey." The adjectives linked to "sublimity," "obscure" and "possible," give rise to a similar elusive tone to that of the *Lyrical Ballads* poem. That the locus of sublimity is displaced to the internal realm of subjectivity is indicated in two characteristics of this fragment. First, as in the case of "Tintern Abbey," the construction concerning sublimity, "an obscure sense / Of possible sublimity," has its semantic core in "sense," a word partaking of subjectivity. Secondly, sublimity in this fragment is closely connected with memory, another essentially subjective element.

More importantly, in their depiction of the working of memory, these fragmentary lines set forth the psychological mechanism of the new sublimity. The soul can no longer retrieve "what she felt," or the past experience in its entirety; yet in a vague recollection of the past emotional intensity, or "how she felt," the soul feels the potentiality of the sublime. This curious formulation still retains an eighteenth-century legacy, in that obscurity, linked to sublimity in that fragment, is also named by Burke as one of the principal causes of the sublime (58-59). Yet Wordsworth's innovation is nonetheless remarkable: in this blank verse he established a subjective mechanism that enables the mind's infinite exaltation. In a sublime state,

the mind aspires to the past emotional intensity that can be perceived only vaguely through memory; the mind must necessarily augment its subordinate faculties in pursuit of this elusive recollection. But since this is ultimately unattainable, the mind is obliged to continue augmenting its faculties infinitely. Thus, in its eternal act of aspiration, the human mind can realize its own ever-growing grandeur, or its infinite potentiality. Sublimity is within; it resides in the mind's eternal pursuit of something indefinite, something that has lost its material specificity in the process of recollection, but can trigger the mind's quest for the infinite. This is surely an extreme, nonetheless logical extension of the "sense sublime" in "Tintern Abbey." Although apparently steeped in the Coleridgean metaphysical thought, in its vague elusive tone and introspective character, "Tintern Abbey," too, may go beyond the religious doctrine of the "One Life," and show an infinite potentiality residing within the human mind.

That Alfoxden fragment was written in the middle of the year-long period when Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth was at its height, even stronger than when he wrote "Tintern Abbey." My earlier discussion has demonstrated that Wordsworth's nature worship is largely a product of Coleridge's Unitarian doctrine; but, as is evident from this verse fragment, his individuality had already asserted itself even right under the shadow of Coleridge. Lucy Newlyn argues that Wordsworth's poetry from early 1798 already shows his implicit intention to revise Coleridge's philosophical principles for his own poetic purposes (32-56). In the careful wordings of "sense sublime / Of something" and "an obscure sense / Of possible sublimity," we, too, find ample evidence of Wordsworth's poetic independence from his mentor friend.

Years later, Wordsworth formulated this new sublimity in a theoretical essay on the aesthetic perception of natural landscape. In "The Sublime and the Beautiful," a fragment of a supplementary essay to *The Guide through*

*the District of the Lakes*, the psychological process of the "obscure sense / Of possible sublimity" is almost paraphrased (Jaye 66). Taking an analytical approach this time, Wordsworth defines the sublime by breaking it down into two different categories. Those two sides are essentially related, but I would focus on the first of the two since this category is more immediately relevant to the sublime process described in "The Alfoxden Notebook." Wordsworth delineates the psychology of the sublime as follows: "Power awakens the sublime . . . when it rouses us to a sympathetic energy and calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining — yet so that it participates force which is acting upon it" (354). A strong echo from "The Alfoxden Notebook" becomes evident if this prose piece is put side by side with that verse fragment: "With growing faculties she [doth] aspire . . . feeling still / That whatsoever point they Gain, There still / Is something to pursue." In the same manner with these Alfoxden lines, in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" the locus of sublimity is not in external nature, but in the internal sphere of subjectivity. For it is obvious that in that prose exposition, too, sublimity is described as residing in a mental process, or in the mind's effort of reaching for something unattainable. The mind fails to grasp what it reaches for; yet through this very act of pursuing, it comes to share the "force" or "power" in the object of its aspiration; hence a sense of sublimity is engendered in the consciousness.

In these writings, Wordsworth is entering a radically new stage in the history of sensibility. Both the Alfoxden verse fragment and that theoretical prose piece had basic assumptions in common with transcendentalist philosophy recently formulated in Germany. Eve Walsh Stoddard claims that the sublimity described in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" has its German counterpart in Immanuel Kant's theory of the sublime: in particular, Kant's concept of the mathematical sublime has a close resemblance

with the new Wordsworthian sublimity we have been discussing (Stoddard 34). Kant's mathematical sublimity, according to Stoddard, is a process in which the mind is forced back on itself by a failed perception of external magnitude (34). Initially, the mind is seemingly defeated by the vastness in nature:

In the immeasurableness of nature and the incompetence of our faculty for adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its *realm*, we found our own limitation. (Kant 111, original emphasis)

Immediately following this phase, however, the mind feels exaltation in the discovery that the ideas of infinity, originally inspired by vast natural objects, cannot be perceived in external nature, that such ideas can only exist in the internal realm of subjectivity:

But with this [incompetence of our sensory faculty] we also found in our rational faculty another non-sensuous standard, one which has that infinity itself under it as unit, and in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and so found in our minds a pre-eminence over nature even in its immeasurability. (111)

Therefore, by inspiring ideas of vastness and infinity in the mind, natural objects, themselves of limited dimensions, reveal the infinitude of the mind and its capacity for independence from sensory knowledge.

Although, strictly speaking, Kant's system involves a complex mechanism of sense perception, imagination and the higher faculty of reason, its fundamental structure is exactly the same as Wordsworth's new sublimity. The poet's "obscure sense / Of possible sublimity" lies in the mind's infinite

growth in its pursuit of something unattainable. Kant's mathematical sublime, too, consists in the mind's failure to comprehend an external object, and in the resultant infinite exaltation of the mind. In this paradoxical formulation, Kant, like Wordsworth, discloses the existence of "a supersensory substrate . . . which is great beyond every standard of sense" (104), and firmly locates the sublime in the subjective working of the mind: "instead of the object, it is rather the cast of the mind in appreciating it that we have to estimate as sublime" (104).

Wordsworth in his later years denied any direct knowledge of German philosophy (Stoddard 32); despite that, the congruity between Kant and him that we have described is indisputable. They independently redefined the concept of sublimity; and in these separate redefinitions, they equally located the seat of infinity inside the mind's supersensory realm. As Wordsworth remarks in *The Prelude* of 1805, the ultimate destination for humanity, or "Our destiny, our nature, and our home" (6. 539) is "with infinitude" (6. 540); and this infinitude is another name for the mind's sublime act of eternal aspiration, or "hope that can never die, / Effort, and expectation, and desire, / And something evermore about to be" (6. 541-42).

Thus far, we have seen the lineage of the new sublimity in "Tintern Abbey," through the Alfoxden fragment and "The Sublime and the Beautiful," till we observed its conceptual correspondence with Kant's transcendental idealism. We have discussed, too, that this internalized sublimity silently declared Wordsworth's independence from Coleridge's dominant influence. In the Alfoxden period of 1797-98, Wordsworth's new sublimity should certainly have contradicted Coleridge's theory of the "One Life." This should be a logical consequence, because participation in the divine order, the highest human achievement in the Coleridgean philosophy, would only have been thwarted by the prominent role of subjectivity in the Wordsworthian sublime. Indeed, in *Religious Musings*, the ultimate stage

for the human soul can be attained only when, "by exclusive Consciousness of God / All self-annihilated" (48-49), the human soul makes "God it's identity" (50); whereas a degraded form of human existence is defined as an extreme of subjectivism: "Feeling himself, his own low Self the whole" (166).

Lucy Newlyn points out an intriguing pattern in Wordsworth's occasional releases of literary creativity. Every time Coleridge makes a departure from him, Wordsworth seems to get an increased sense of confidence and inner power (Newlyn 172). Wordsworth no doubt appreciated Coleridge's contribution, and his adoption of the "One Life" was by no means insincere. Yet, it is quite likely that, from time to time, Coleridge's dogmatic influence was unconsciously felt by Wordsworth as stifling for his unique creativity. In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth's philosophical system is immersed in Coleridge's Unitarian doctrine all but completely; the first climactic moment, centred on "another gift, / Of aspect more sublime" (37-38), is unquestionably a product of this position. Nevertheless, in a subtler way, he intersperses the second climax with elements which hint at both his reservation to that Coleridgean philosophy and a new direction towards the internalization of the sublime. The composition of "Tintern Abbey" occurred not merely during Wordsworth's temporary separation from Coleridge, but, more importantly, marked the end of the two poets' period of close collaboration. In retrospect, the introspective turn suggested in that poem reflected a decisive new step forward for Wordsworth; once their joint work for *Lyrical Ballads* was over, he proceeded to a largely unprecedented literary project, an exploration of the dynamic growth of his private self, or the autobiographical *Prelude*. In the second sublime moment of "Tintern Abbey," the birth of the modern poet Wordsworth was quietly prefigured.

The courses Wordsworth and Coleridge took after their days at Alfoxden give an interesting conclusion to my discussion. I have asserted that

"Tintern Abbey" reflected a nascent literary independence of those two poets; but it is also true that they, through separate routes, eventually came to very similar philosophical positions. Literary history tells us that after 1801 Coleridge converted to the Kantian metaphysics even more explicitly than Wordsworth. Guided by this school of German philosophy, he, too, was to begin a theoretical exploration of the internal realm of consciousness. It is this new subjectivism of Coleridge that finally produced his famous definition of "the primary imagination" in *Biographia Literaria*: "The primary IMAGINATION I hold . . . as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (304). Coleridge in this passage puts forward a view that, inside its subjective realm, the human mind partakes of the divine act of creation. In the same fashion as Wordsworth does in "Tintern Abbey" and that Alfoxden fragment, Coleridge holds that a god-like, sublime potentiality is inherent in the human mind. This document illustrates an all too familiar, yet still significant fact in literary history, that, with differences and conflicts between them, those two poets were proponents of the same intellectual movement of Romanticism. If strictly defined, their literary cooperation was effectively over after the brief Alfoxden year; nevertheless in a deeper, more fundamental sense, they remained friends and "joint labourers."

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## Synopsis

## Two Sublime Moments in "Tintern Abbey"

By Ichiro Koguchi

One of the odd features of William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" is that this poem has two climactic points. Those two climaxes, both centred on the aesthetic concept of sublimity, have been regarded as expressions of the same kind of mystical experience. This view, however, fails to account each passage's independent significance expected from the poem's dialectic structure. In this paper I attempt to establish intrinsic differences between the poem's first and second climax, and, by doing so, to describe a crucial turn in Wordsworth's poetics inscribed in the transition between those two passages. I specially focus on the poem's usage of the term "sublime." In "Tintern Abbey" and other related writings of Wordsworth, this concept forms an important key to explicate the poet's philosophical shift from the older pantheist doctrine to a new subjectivism close to Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism.

The first climactic lines of the poem are a direct product of Wordsworth's collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1797 and 1798. At that time, Coleridge held a pantheist view that the universe was filled with a divine presence called "One Life," and he claimed that the highest human achievement, or "sublime of man," was to fuse into the divine order by recognizing this pervading presence. When Wordsworth describes his "sublime" experience in the first climax of "Tintern Abbey," he inherits Coleridge's doctrine. This passage's central line, "seeing into the life of things," is his own version of the Coleridgean sublime, or the recognition of the pantheist "One Life."

The second climax appears to be a repetition of the first. However, in describing the divine presence, "something far more deeply interfused," Wordsworth subtly shifts his focus from the "One Life" itself to the psychological process of attaining this pervading presence. In this shift, he ascribes sublimity to the mental state rather than to the perceived presence. The phrasal construc-

tion of "sense sublime" in the second climax illustrates the internalized locus for the new Wordsworthian sublimity. This new development is also found in other writings of Wordsworth: a verse fragment written at Alfoxden in 1798 adumbrates the psychological mechanism of the new sublimity; and this mechanism is further elaborated in a fragmentary essay, "The Sublime and the Beautiful."

Wordsworth's redefinition of sublimity marks the birth of a radically new sensibility. The psychological mechanism of sublimity described in Wordsworth's writings has a close resemblance with Immanuel Kant's conception of the sublime in his philosophical system. Delineating the processes that produce sublime feelings in the mind, Kant, too, locates the seat of sublimity inside the human mind. Wordsworth was not directly indebted to Kant, but this coincidence shows that Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" was taking up a new subjectivist position that shared important features with Kant's transcendental idealism. As well known, Coleridge, too, later in his life converted to the Kantian philosophy and came to theorize on the creative roles of human consciousness. As early as in 1798, Wordsworth already embodied a later development of the Romantic literary theory.