

# All the Mighty World of Eye and Ear: The Epistemological Claims of Hearing and Seeing in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"

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In "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," William Wordsworth is primarily concerned with humans as moral beings. Writing on July 13, 1789, Wordsworth describes his view of the river Wye valley during a trip with his sister Dorothy Wordsworth in the poem. Wordsworth does not only describe the scene but also gives a personal testimony of how the memory of nature awakened him to a spiritual vision and a moral disposition. While he presumes that human beings ought to be moral, engaging in habitual acts of kindness and love, Wordsworth offers a different basis for morality than empiricist rationality. Wordsworth shows his epistemology in his careful description of hearing and seeing, senses which have both a physical and spiritual role. Scholars such as Carl Woodring argue that Wordsworth rejects a rational basis for his claims, and Harold Bloom shows Wordsworth's reliance on the sense of hearing rather than sight; I argue that these two interpretations are related. Through his treatment of hearing and seeing in Tintern Abbey,

Wordsworth appeals to an epistemology of faith, instead of reason, as the basis for a spiritual vision and moral action.

The poem presents three different views of a person's relationship to nature. The scene of the river Wye valley, meadows, woods, mountains, and "all we behold / From this green earth" are examples of nature.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, nature contrasts with spaces created by human beings such as "lonely rooms," towns, and cities (26, 27). The first view of nature, exemplified by Wordsworth's experience as a boy, is bodily and characterized by "coarser pleasures" and "glad animal movements" (74, 75). This relationship of the person to nature is completely physical, and nature has no power in the mind.

For Wordsworth, nature is not simply an external reality, but has power in the human soul through its impression on the mind. In contrast with the first view, the second view of nature recognizes its power in the mind. To the 23-year-old Wordsworth, visiting the Wye valley five years earlier than his present visit, nature was "an appetite, a feeling and a love" but nothing more (82). He writes, "Nature then... / To me was all in all," meaning that nature was "all" of reality in "all" things (74, 76). No further vision of reality beyond nature itself exists. However, this view of nature gives delight to the soul. At the end of poem, Wordsworth claims his sister Dorothy now experiences this view of nature, characterized by her wonder, pleasure, and joy. Addressing her he says, "[I] read / my former pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes" (123, 124). In this view, nature alone is enough to give a person pleasure.

However, to the mature Wordsworth, nature opens the mind to a spiritual vision of an underlying reality beyond the physical world. Wordsworth's third view of nature recognizes that the physical world leads a person to a spiritual vision of "the life of things" and the feeling of a "presence... far more deeply interfused" (50, 96-97). This spiritual reality

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1 William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, 13 July 1798," in *Romanticism*, 4th ed., ed. Duncan Wu (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 106-107. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

gives Wordsworth a knowledge of the interconnection of all things. Because he is able to see through the natural world to an underlying reality, the spiritual vision is "abundant recompense" to Wordsworth when nature ceases to delight him as it did before (91). Wordsworth references the second and third views of nature in his claim that nature leads "from joy to joy," or in other words, from the joy of the experience of nature as its own reality, to the joy of the mind's awakening to a deeper reality (129).

The spiritual reality can be seen by the mind because nature forms the mind through the perception of the senses. For Wordsworth, a person perceives nature through his senses and forms a mental image of the scene. Wordsworth uses the words "form," "inform," and "impress" to refer to nature throughout the poem, but in his advice to his sister Dorothy, the "thou" in the last stanza, he makes his argument of nature's power in the mind the most clearly. He writes that nature "can so inform / The mind that is within us, so impress / With quietness and beauty" (129-131). The form nature takes in the mind creates mental images, what Wordsworth calls "the picture of the mind" that can be recalled in memory (63). In contrast to the forms of nature are the "many shapes / Of joyless daylight," experienced by Wordsworth away from the Wye valley in the human-created environments of cities and towns (53, 54). These shapes exist simply within themselves with power to form the mind.

Not only does a person's perception of nature form the mind, but the mind also imprints its own thoughts on the mental scenes. In the first few sentences of the "Tintern Abby," Wordsworth describes the "steep and lofty cliffs, / Which on a wild and secluded scene impress / thoughts of more deep seclusion" (5-7). While it may seem that he speaks of what he perceives in the Wye valley, Wordsworth actually speaks of the image of nature created within his own mind. The physical cliffs impress thoughts of seclusion on the image of the natural scene already within the mind of a person who sees it; the thoughts of a person looking at the cliffs do not make the physical cliffs more secluded. Geoffrey Hartman argues, "It is the cliffs that cause the scene to appear more secluded, it is the thoughts that are by nature more secluded even than the scene, but the suggestion persists that the cliffs and the scene have, by the very fact of entering the

mind, caused a deepening there.”<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth simultaneously feels in himself the seclusion of the cliffs from the scene in his mind, while he also projects seclusion on this scene. In the rest of the stanza, Wordsworth continues to imprint his thoughts on the mental scene. He is the one who sees the connection of the landscape with the sky, that the orchards do not disturb the wild landscape, and that the hedgerows are hardly there and are wild (6-7, 14-15, 16-17). The vagrants and the hermit most clearly “seem” to be in the scene, but in fact are mentally placed there by Wordsworth who sees the objective reality of the smoke, but not the people themselves. James A. W. Heffernan writes, “Neither the vagrants nor the hermit can be seen at all; their presence can only be guessed—uncertainly inferred—from the wreaths of smoke.”<sup>3</sup> Heffernan may overstate the uncertainty of the vagrants (perhaps Wordsworth does not guess, but knows they are there, as Kenneth Johnston implies), but the point that their presence is inferred, not seen in the landscape itself, is indisputable.<sup>4</sup>

Nature and mind together are the origin of the moral vision in a person. Wordsworth writes that he is a “lover” of what his senses, specifically the “mighty world / Of eye, and ear,” “half create, / and what perceive” (105-110). Wordsworth’s senses perceive nature and half-create the mental picture in the mind, but the mind finishes its creation. Writing on the Romantic view of nature, Woodring says, “Value lies in an interrelationship with the object, in response to it, in an artist’s treatment of it, seldom if ever in the artist alone but not in the object itself.”<sup>5</sup> By itself, physical nature is unable to change a human being because it must act upon a person’s mind. Similarly, the mind cannot be formed without

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2 Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 22.

3 James A Heffernan, “Wordsworth and Landscape” in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 623.

4 Kenneth R. Johnston, “The Politics of ‘Tintern Abbey’” in *Recent Romantic Revisionary Poetry Criticism*, ed. Karl Kroeber and Gene W. Ruoff (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 128.

5 Carl Woodring, “The New Sublimity in ‘Tintern Abbey,’” in *The Evidence of the Imagination: Studies and Interactions between Life and Art in English Romantic Literature*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, Michael C. Jaye, and Betty T. Bennett, (New York City: New York University Press, 1978), 87.

nature. Both physical nature and the mind are needed for the mental image of nature which is the basis for memory and the spiritual vision.

After the senses form an image of nature within the mind, the memory of these images awakens the person to see the spiritual reality. Wordsworth writes that the “forms of beauty” (the memory of nature) brings him into a state in which the body and the physical senses are “laid asleep” so that the soul becomes alive to a spiritual or imaginative vision (46). Wordsworth’s description of the awakening of the soul inverts the Genesis creation myth. In Genesis’s account, God forms the body of man which comes alive through the breath of God, and “man became a living soul.”<sup>6</sup> In Wordsworth’s account, the body of the person is “laid asleep” and the “breath of this corporal frame... [is] almost suspended” so that the person “become[s] a living soul” (44, 46-47). Since the spiritual vision is only in the mind, not the physical world, only the awakened soul can see “the life of things” (50). The awakening of the soul requires disengagement from the physical world and the body.

The spiritual vision creates in a person a disposition which changes his view of the physical world. Wordsworth describes two mental scenes of the Wye Valley: the first scene is current visit to the Wye and the second is his former visit to the same place. Wordsworth compares the current scene with his earlier picture of the Wye which, according to Heffernan, is “painted not on any canvas but only in the poet’s memory, were he alone can see, study, and interpret it.”<sup>7</sup> Wordsworth’s change in disposition between his earlier visit to the Wye and his current one is obvious. At his earlier visit, he was “like a man / Flying from something he dreads,” and the sound of the Wye is a “cataract” that “haunts like a passion,” a response to the disposition of an impassioned viewer (72-73, 79-80). The mature Wordsworth is not passionate but calm. Wordsworth’s experience has chastened and subdued him, and now the Wye is a “sweet inland murmur” (4). Both these descriptions are of the same physical scene, but the inner description is different because of the change in Wordsworth’s disposition.

Furthermore, those with a spiritual vision see their social situation differently and respond with moral action to their fellow human beings. Wordsworth’s exhortation to Dorothy while she is looking at the Wye is

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6 Gen. 2:7 (KJV).

7 Heffernan, “Wordsworth and Landscape,” 623.

that this view of nature will give her strength against the “dreary intercourse of daily life” which is the indifference and slights of individuals toward each other (135). Instead of being affected by the dreariness of life, Wordsworth writes that it will not “prevail against us, or disturb / Our cheerful faith that all which we behold / Is full of blessings” (136-138). The person who has been formed by a spiritual vision will see a blessed life because of his disposition. He has changed, not necessarily his outward circumstances. Furthermore, the disposition which arises from the spiritual vision will lead to moral action. Johnson argues in his work “The Politics of ‘Tintern Abbey’” that “in its own cultural context, the poem enacts a process whereby a fashionable intellectual pastime—the cultivation of picturesque views—becomes transcendently important, precisely by virtue of not being an escapist pleasure, but a socially responsible one.”<sup>8</sup> In Wordsworth’s experience, “feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure” influence the “best portion of a good man’s life, / His little nameless unremembered acts / Of kindness and love” (31, 33-35). Just as the greatest evil is a life elicited by “evil tongues,” “rash judgements,” “sneers,” and “greeting where no kindness is,” so the greatest good is daily life lived with “kindness and love” (132-134). Both responses come from the person’s disposition which arises from a moral vision.

Therefore, the purpose of a person’s enjoyment of nature is ethical, to learn how to act morally toward other human beings. Johnston argues that “each of the poem’s five verse paragraphs contain strong language of social responsibility that lends value to Wordsworth’s enjoyment of landscape.”<sup>9</sup> Wordsworth does credit nature as the basis for his moral being. He writes that he is

well-pleased to recognize  
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. (110–5)

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8 Johnston, “The Politics of ‘Tintern Abbey,’” 124.

9 Ibid.

Nature and the language of the senses direct a person in the right way of seeing the world, offering a moral solution to evil.

Because Wordsworth posits a deeper reality beyond the physical world, he also suggests an epistemology in which a person knows this reality by faith not reason. Woodring argues that Wordsworth does not give a rational account for his claims in "Tintern Abbey." He writes, "In his greatest philosophical passages Wordsworth is metaphysically, and even epistemologically, the most elusive of poets. Why he concealed and even blurred the academic sources and rational explanations of his thought is debatable; that he did so is indisputable."<sup>10</sup> Bloom argues more specifically that the primacy of hearing and lack of reasoning is evidence of Wordsworth's fear of writing based on anxiety of influence from previous poets, mostly Milton.<sup>11</sup> Bloom claims, "There is a struggle in 'Tintern Abbey' between voicing and marking, in which Wordsworth wants to rely upon voice and the memory of voice, and somewhat fears relying on sight and the memory of sight."<sup>12</sup> Both scholars have crucial interpretative insight, but neither follows through to conclude that Wordsworth makes a case for accepting the spiritual vision on faith by his depiction of hearing and seeing. In contrast to Bloom and in answer to Woodring, the role of hearing as prior to seeing in Wordsworth's spiritual vision is a claim that a person sees the spiritual vision not by reason or empiricism, but by a religious-like faith.

In perceiving the natural world, the eye and ear work together, yet Wordsworth intentionally describes sounds before appearance in three parallel descriptions of the Wye valley. Wordsworth first hears the "inland murmur" of the Wye, then "beholds" the cliffs in his present experience of nature (4, 5). When recalling his earlier memory of the scene, he specifically rejects an appeal to the eye, "I cannot paint / What I was then," before remembering "the sounding cataract" and then describing the "tall rock" (78-80). Lastly, in his address to Dorothy, who is now looking at the scene, Wordsworth first hears her voice and then sees "the shooting lights / Of [her] wild eyes" (120-123). Although both senses work together, Wordsworth deliberately and consistently describes hearing before sight. The only exception to this is in Wordsworth's promise to

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10 Woodring, "The New Sublimity in 'Tintern Abbey,'" 97.

11 Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 76.

12 Ibid.

Dorothy that when her view of nature matures, her mind will hold the forms of nature, and her memory its sounds (143-146). Perhaps this switching of the senses is a result of his wish for her in the future instead of a present description.

Wordsworth describes what is heard before what is seen because of hearing's metaphysical role to awaken the soul to see the spiritual vision. For Wordsworth, becoming aware of the spiritual vision is the body's sleeping and the soul's awakening: "We are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul" (46, 47). At the same time that a person's awareness transitions from the physical sensations of the body to the soul's perception, from physical nature to the spiritual vision, the senses take on different roles. Wordsworth writes, "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). The eye in this passage is a synecdoche for the physical senses; it is a part of the body that represents all bodily senses. Physical perception is made quiet to allow for the awakening of the soul which occurs through hearing. The chiasmus of sight and sound in this passage illustrates the difference between the types of vision in the work. The passage switches between the eye (sight) that is "made quiet" (sound) by harmony (sound) so that "we see" (sight) (48-50). Physical sight is dulled by a harmony of the spiritual reality metaphorically heard by the soul of the person. The sense of hearing makes a bridge from the bodily perception of the physical world to the soul's awakening to a spiritual vision. On either side of the "bridge" of hearing, are two different visions: the first a literal perception of the natural world and the second a spiritual "vision" or rather, a spiritual knowing, of an underlying reality.

Hearing bridges the physical and metaphysical senses because of the power of hearing to inspire feeling in the soul. Wordsworth writes that to his 23-year-old self, "The sounding cataract / Haunted me like a passion" (Wordsworth 79-80). Just as hearing the waterfall created a feeling, "a passion," in Wordsworth's soul, so does hearing metaphysical sound create a feeling as well. Wordsworth writes,

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,  
Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power



To chasten and subdue. (90-96)

This passage reads that Wordsworth does not “look” but hears a metaphysical reality of the music of humanity which has power to create feeling in his soul, “to chasten and subdue” it, much like the physical hearing of the waterfall created passion. In fact, his next words are “And I have / felt a presence” (96-97). Both physically and metaphysically, hearing leads to feeling; consequently, these two senses are continuous. The only difference is that the ear hears physical reality while the soul hears spiritual reality.

Wordsworth does not use the word “feeling” to describe a physical sense of touch, but impressions of the soul and heart which lead to moral knowledge. This first use of the word “feeling,” that of the delight of nature, relates to a person’s moral action toward fellow human beings. Wordsworth writes that he has owed to the memories of nature “sensations sweet felt in the blood, and felt along the heart” and “feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure” (29, 31, 32). These feelings have a moral consequence because they “have had no trivial influence / On that best portion of a good man’s life, / His little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love” (Wordsworth 32-35). For the mature Wordsworth, however, feeling does not arise from nature but spiritual reality. Wordsworth, describing at time when his soul awakened to the spiritual reality, writes “I have felt / A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused” (Wordsworth 96-99). When Wordsworth uses the word “feeling” to describe sensing an underlying presence, he claims that feeling is a way of knowing. Consequently, hearing awakens the soul to both see “the life of things” and feel “a presence”; in other words, hearing enables the soul to know things through a spiritual vision and through feelings (Wordsworth 50, 96).

While on the physical level the eye works with the ear to perceive the world, on the metaphysical level the eye depends on the ear for spiritual vision. Physical sight gives a person the ability to see, but it also blinds him because it is bound to the physical world and cannot help the mind transcend to the deeper reality that exists beyond physical sight. Wordsworth has experienced “lonely rooms,” “the din / Of towns and cities,” and “darkness,” “shapes of joyless daylight,” “the fretful stir” and “the fever of the world” (26-27, 53-55). Against the “weary weight” of this

world, hearing grasps the suffering cry of humanity and its “still, sad music” (94, 41). Hearing is not blinded by the reality of this world. Commenting on *The Prelude*, another work by Wordsworth, Heffernan argues,

Sound played a key part in liberating [Wordsworth] from what he called the “tyranny” of the eye (*Prelude* (1805), XI. 179). Writing elsewhere of his adolescence, he remembers having felt on starlit nights “what’er there is of power in sound / To breathe and elevated mood, by form / Or image unprofaned” (*Prel*-13, II. 324-6).<sup>13</sup>

In contrast with *The Prelude*, there is no teaching of the “tyranny of the eye” in “Tintern Abbey,” but rather an emphasis on the ear and an argument that the power of seeing is secondary to hearing. Bloom’s discussion of the primacy of sound in “Tintern Abbey” is helpful here. He writes, “To ‘hear’ goes back to an Indo-European root (ken) which means to pay attention, watch, observe, beware, guard against, as well as to list. To ‘see’ goes back to a root (sekw) that means to perceive. To hear is thus also, etymologically, to see, but to see is not necessarily to hear.”<sup>14</sup> Wordsworth may have been unaware of the etymological roots of hearing and seeing, yet his use of these senses is compatible with Bloom’s description. Hearing includes a knowledge that sight does not have because of its power to inspire feeling. In the spiritual reality, hearing is more powerful than sight because it reaches beyond the physical reality of what it is seen, and it is the sense which spiritual sight must rely on.

The relationship of hearing and sight in the poem asks the reader to accept the spiritual vision on faith. At odds with empiricist philosophers of the 1700s who argued for a philosophy based only on reality known by sense perception, Wordsworth argues that individuals can know spiritual reality. In describing empiricist philosophers, Woodring writes, “Philosophers after Locke had gone on to say that objects depend on the observer not only for sound and color, taste and smell, but also for any knowable mass and weight and shape, that the human mind know only its own perceptions, never the object itself.”<sup>15</sup> Wordsworth’s response in “Tintern Abbey” to empiricist philosophers is not an outright rejection of empiricism, but a demonstration that a person

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13 Heffernan, “Wordsworth and Landscape,” 624.

14 Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, 59.

15 Woodring, “The New Sublimity in ‘Tintern Abbey,’” 88.

can have knowledge beyond the physical world. In using the senses of sight and hearing metaphorically, Wordsworth challenges empiricist philosophy on its own terms. He innovatively uses the very senses that the empiricists rely on, albeit, in a non-literal sense, as the basis for his argument for a reality beyond the physical world. Therefore, since sight stands in for physical perception in "Tintern Abbey," it also indirectly shows the limits of reason based solely on sense perception. The sense of hearing shows a deeper power of the human soul to know more than can be based in human perception. This knowledge of the spiritual reality is not directly known through the perception of the physical senses or through rational thought but is a type of faith because a person must first believe what he hears of this reality in order to see it.

The knowledge that a person receives through faith is not incompatible with rational thought based in sense perception, but it is not based on reason. Rational thought is limited in its comprehension. It is unable to understand the "unintelligible world" (41). The definition of "world" is the entire physical world, including nature and cities as well as human experience. Its unintelligibility relates to the limits of reason because reason is the faculty of the mind that seeks to understand human experience and sense perception. "Seeing into the life of things" does not make the world intelligible in a rational sense, but it "lightens" the burden by giving a perspective of the underlying reality (50). The metaphor of lightening a burden means that a sense of a whole is found in the spiritual vision even while the world known by the intellect is still unintelligible.

In contrast with the "unintelligible world" is the "mighty world / Of eye and ear," which surpasses the limits of reason (108-109). This mighty world is the spiritual reality created in the mind through the perception of the natural world. The world of the mind surpasses reason by awakening the person to a deeper unity and reality underpinning all things, and faith in the spiritual vision surpasses reason which rests only on the physical senses.

Therefore, for Wordsworth, moral action toward human beings is based in feeling, not reason. The world of reason alone may cause a person to lose his moral sense. In an analysis of *The Prelude* which is also relevant to "Tintern Abbey," Jonathan Roberts writes, "In Wordsworth's view, the status granted to reason had come to look increasingly likely to discredit other aspects of human experience such as empathy, solidarity, and

feeling.”<sup>16</sup> He further argues, “The priority granted to reason and judgement over other human faculties (particularly the emotions) leads to analytical cold-heartedness, scornfulness, and unfeelingness.”<sup>17</sup> Wordsworth’s project is not only to widen the basis of knowledge from reason to faith, but also to address the direct harm that knowledge based only on reason does to the person’s moral being. The spiritual world of the eye and ear has a place for moral feeling that reason lacks. When the mind is formed by the perception of nature, its knowledge is not that of the material world, but “sensations,” “feelings,” and the “blessed mood” which change the person’s habit and perception. Wordsworth writes that he has owed to the memories of nature “sensations sweet felt in the blood, and felt along the heart” and “feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure” (29, 31, 32). These feelings have a moral consequence because they “have had no trivial influence / On that best portion of a good man’s life, / His little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love” (Wordsworth 32-35). For the mature Wordsworth, feeling arises from the deeper vision of spiritual reality that follows from awakening to that reality.

Wordsworth uses tentative language in “Tintern Abbey” to show the uncertainty of knowing the truth of the ideas he proposes. Roberts suggests that “the vague depictions of existential anxiety in ‘Lines’ [“Tintern Abbey”] and ‘Intimations’ correspond to the equally vague notions of religious vision.”<sup>18</sup> Wordsworth’s language is tentative because his spiritual vision is one of faith and is not as certain as empiricist or rational knowledge. Wordsworth says his explanation of the spiritual vision is possibly a “vain belief” (52). He writes that he “would believe” he has received “recompense” for his original view of nature five years earlier (90, 91). Compared with the logic of reason, knowledge based on feelings is uncertain because feelings are fluid, their mood is subject to memory which becomes “dim and faint,” and the knowledge of the underlying reality, the “life of things,” is not clearly defined (61, 50). The uncertainty of Wordsworth’s argument corresponds to his hesitant language. For the mind that sees “the life of things” and feels a presence

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16 Jonathan Roberts, “Wordsworth on Religious Experience” in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 697.

17 Ibid., 698.

18 Ibid., 700.

“more deeply interfused,” there is no certainty that there is an objective “life of things” or presence outside of the person’s own mind (50, 99). Wordsworth does not say that this vision and presence are not objective reality, but he can only point to his belief, not rational certainty, that they do exist.

Wordsworth uses his own experience, not a rational explanation, to support his claims about nature, the senses, and the awakening of the human soul. The power of this testimony is the recollection of his own memory of the Wye during a time of sorrow. Wordsworth writes,

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,  
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,  
Oh sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,  
How often has my spirit turned to thee! (52-59)

Wordsworth interrupts his self-doubt (“If this / Be but a vain belief”) with a confession of his own experience of memory and its sustaining power in the sorrow he has faced in life. Wordsworth writes of his experience in “Tintern Abbey” because it supports his claim. Hartman argues, “The very reason why Wordsworth feels free to use his own individual experience... is that this same experience is considered by him as a matter of fact.”<sup>19</sup> Although this experience is personal to Wordsworth himself, he knows it is has happened, and he can confront his own disbelief with his memory of past experience.

Because an intensely personal experience can be shared with others as a testimony, Wordsworth uses his experience in the poem to share with others his evidence for his moral vision. His testimony is not his personal memory of the Wye, but his recalling of memory in a time of sorrow, a condition that others will face as well and have a similar need for comfort. Wordsworth’s address to Dorothy shows how his poem can help others obtain their own spiritual vision. Wordsworth recasts his poem as knowledge that will sustain her in the future. He writes that to

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19 Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision*, 7.

the mature Dorothy of the future, "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!" (147-150). Interestingly, Wordsworth does not direct Dorothy to what will be her memory of the Wye valley, as Wordsworth did in his own testimony, but to his poetic exhortations that will sustain her through the sorrow of future life. This is Wordsworth as poet; Dorothy's memory of his poetry is equivalent to his memory of nature, which gives sweet sensations that sustain the soul and allow for the moral vision. Therefore, Wordsworth implies that there is a metaphysical dimension to his poem that helps a person achieve a spiritual vision. However, Wordsworth's audience is wider than just Dorothy. A person who hears Wordsworth's moral vision and his testimony in his poem and awakens his soul to the spiritual and moral vision does exactly what Wordsworth advocates; he accepts the moral vision on faith because he bases his sight of the moral vision on his metaphorical hearing of Wordsworth's poem.

Wordsworth's claim is that the image of physical nature received through the physical senses creates a world within the mind, and this awakens the soul to the spiritual vision. The purpose of the spiritual vision is to transform the person through a moral vision of one's fellow man, and to create a disposition in the person to act morally to fellow human beings. It is the sense of hearing that opens the person to the spiritual vision and enables spiritual sight. Metaphysically, hearing is prior to sight, and the dependence of sight on hearing invokes faith as the epistemological basis for Wordsworth's description of the moral vision. This project is not antithetical to reason or empiricist knowledge, but it expands knowledge and is grounded in Wordsworth's experience. "Tintern Abbey" itself invites the reader to hear and accept the moral vision through Wordsworth's explanation and testimony. "Open your ears" may be Wordsworth's first exhortation to his reader, for from that all else will follow.

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