

Themes of Nature in "Tintern Abbey"

In the opening lines of the poem we are presented with a character reconnecting with a different environment. The place he is visiting is revitalizing. His presence there is familiar. Both mind and senses adjust to irregular surroundings. Together, these grant clarity to notions and ideas. Wordsworth is communicating renewal through nature: one that can even renew more than just a singular person.

Having spent a large portion of my childhood in an area that was quite remote from towns and cities, many of the ideas presented in this poem resonated with me. I have, at this point in my life, experienced both extremes. I spent a number of years growing up in Redding and then moved to larger cities such as San Francisco and Seattle. The differences between urban and rural living are significant and many. Fortunately, I feel that I benefit from a similar familiarity to nature that the speaker has in this poem. It does not take me long to adjust to quieter surroundings.

Many people are only accustomed to faster paced life. Unfortunately, the ability to exit that space is not something that a yearly camping trip can impart. It is something that must be experienced and learned.

Re: Strange

Wordsworth states in the lines below that for whatever reason he does not look on nature how he did in his youth...

To me this means only that the speaker was focusing more intently on his surroundings. By recalling fond memories a person would subsequently shut out many of the experiences of the present: looking for what used to be instead of what is currently.

...associates nature to the "sad music of humanity."

It is the experience of being in nature that reveals to him the "sad music of humanity." Perhaps he is choosing to recall memories of the normal pace of life instead of the pleasant times spent here in past days. This is what allows him to revive.

Re: Spiritual and Valuable

...all the primeval forest in England was gone...

This was something that crossed my mind after I finished reading the poem. But even in a sparsely populated area, there are usually little pockets of nature that exist in fullness. The speaker likely knew this too.

Interestingly, if most of us who claim to be nature lovers actually had to live entirely off the land by our own wits, we probably wouldn't be so into it anymore. Lions and tigers and bears... and wild mushrooms, oh my!

Re: Spiritual and Valuable

This is partially in response to Victoria's post too, but I must admit that I am a little confused by the comment you made about the speaker's relationship with nature being "unhealthy." The only clue I can find is where you say:

The speaker's relationship to nature may seem intimate, yet to me, it would seem that intimacy should be deeper; thinking about the person/thing often does not in and of itself make a relationship an "intimate" one. Benefiting highly from a relationship (as is apparent in the speaker's case) also does not make the relationship an intimate one.

Is this what you meant? That the relationship is more fantastic than it is real?

I'm curious because I tend to be of the opinion (and I've noticed that many others are too, when the subject is brought up) that being out of touch with nature is what is considered to be unhealthy—not the other way around. Also, while reading this poem, my impression is that this is one of the subjects Wordsworth discussed the most through his piece. Perhaps he left room for the speaker to have a wistful experience, but it seems to me that he traded this for a more honest and almost sorrowful one.