

Free essay on the concept of death in wordsworths tintern abbey

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



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While the medical description of death as a cessation of bodily functions that sustain life is rather simple, religious and philosophical traditions have extended their efforts to describe and experience the nature of death as a physical and spiritual event. All cultures in the world have been fascinated with the nature of death, and each culture has developed a set of beliefs related to death's connection with life, its connection to the soul's transition into the afterlife, and some religions have proposed the theory of reincarnation that considers death as a temporary event before the soul's next birth in the physical body. Although most cultures have dealt with the meaning and impact of death on human life, very few individuals have contemplated on the impact of death on personal development. Wordsworth is one of those individuals who were concerned with the connection of life and death. In his poem "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth describes how the impact of losing a loved person forever reflected on the development of his individuality by providing him more wisdom, deeper insights into the nature of life and death, and overcoming the fear of death.

“Tintern Abbey” is a poem that is focused on a life event that encouraged Wordsworth’s examination and appreciation of nature and the development of his wisdom. Wordsworth’s poem does not follow the traditional structure of stanzas. Instead, it is written as a blank verse and structured in paragraphs. Furthermore, it contains the elements of several poems, but the motivation behind writing the poem and insights on nature presented in the poem indicate that it is a conversation poem. The poem “Tintern Abbey” is relevant to several concepts because Wordsworth develops wisdom, faith, love, and understanding the concept of human mortality while remembering his sister, but all relevant concepts are based on her death in that poem. Wordsworth begins the poem by recalling her death and continues to reflect on all concepts he has developed since his sister’s death. “Five years have passed; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters!” (Wordsworth 1-2). Wordsworth compares the five previous summers to five long winters because he wants to express the difficulty of coping with the loss of a loved one over the period of five years. However, he expresses his personal growth immediately after that statement by explaining how he is once again able to perceive beauty in life.

Death provokes the strongest emotional reactions humans can experience, such as fear, anxiety, anger, depression, or helplessness. However, Wordsworth thinks that time and age as crucial factors that enabled him to overcome his loss and observe the subtle components of life. That is not correct because time itself does not contribute to self-development. Kübler-Ross explains that people who never overcome their negative emotions

caused by losing loved ones often develop psychiatric disorders (17). Rather than blaming death or nature for his sister's absence from the physical world, Wordsworth deals with his emotions and understands that nature is not responsible for her death, so he restores his personal tranquility and harmony, which enables him to experience a deeper joy in life.

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body, and become a living soul:

While with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things (Wordsworth 46-50).

Furthermore, Wordsworth gains the insight that life is dual in nature, and he comes at peace with the negative aspects of life.

For I have learned

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes

The still, sad music of humanity,

Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power

Just like life and death are connected, Wordsworth displays his maturation by pointing out his ability to observe both positive and negative aspects of life.

Rather than living in denial and desiring only positive things and positive outcomes, Wordsworth becomes a reasonable individual, who is still capable of experiencing the beauty of life, but he can also accept death and loss as undeniable and real parts of everybody's life.

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 (Wordsworth 94-100).

In those verses, Wordsworth describes his perception of the subtle spirit that is present in nature. "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things" (101-103). That experience transformed Wordsworth's emotional state and he considered himself "A worshipper of Nature, hither came with far deeper zeal / Of holier love" (153, 155-156). Although it is possible to correlate his experience to pantheism, there is a difference between a theoretical pantheist and practical pantheism. Pantheism would describe all things relevant to God because they cannot be conceived without God (Lloyd 40), but those viewpoints are usually theoretical frameworks people accept while Wordsworth describes the practical experience that led to the cognition of a higher presence in all things, including the minds of man.

Another possibility is to correlate Wordsworth's experience with existentialism. Kierkegaard, who is considered the founder of existentialism, argued that people give meaning to their own lives and it is each individual's responsibility to fulfill their lives with passion and sincerity (Watts 4).

Absurdism is similar to existentialism because it emphasizes the role of the

individual in deciding the way of dealing with the lack of meaning in life. Although absurdism claims that there is no meaning in life, and it even denies the existentialist viewpoint of giving life individual meaning, Camus explains that spiritual beliefs can decide on the outcome of dealing with the lack of meaning in life (31). The poem “Tintern Abbey” indicates that Camus decided to confront the crisis he experienced regarding the nature of life and death after his sister’s death by refining his awareness to find a deeper sense of life in his perceptions and becoming wise enough to understand that giving up on beauty in life is not the answer to overcoming negative emotions or negative aspects of life. Once again, after five years have passed since her death, Wordsworth still considers himself:

A lover of the meadows and the woods,

And mountains; and of all that we behold

.....

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 (103-104, 107-112).

However, his experience cannot be classified as a spiritual belief because he did not choose to believe in any doctrine. His expressions were based on a personal experience during his visit to the Tintern Abbey, so it was an insight rather than a choice to follow an existing doctrine.

According to Einstein, God is a fictional character because religions are based on mythology rather than scientific explanations of the world (“Belief in God”). In the old times, people would unquestionably believe in God and every concept religion had to offer on death and the after-life because they wanted to relieve their pain and suffering caused by death (Kübler-Ross 28). However, Wordsworth’s experience cannot be explained as faith because he did not look for consolation. He admits his emotions of grief, solitude, pain, and fear, but understands the transience of all living things and the subtle presence of a higher force in life. While Einstein obviously considered science as the main mechanism that humans can use to understand God because he had spent the late years of his life searching for an equation that would enable him to read God’s thoughts, Wordsworth’s experience originated from his own solitude, dealing with negative emotions, and refining his perception of life and death.

At the end of “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth addresses his sister as if she were with him in nature and states “For thou art with me here upon the banks / Of this fair river” (115-116). While this could be regarded as an illusion or denial from one perspective, Wordsworth’s insights provided throughout the poem indicate that he had experienced that which many philosophers have debated over the centuries. For example, Socrates debated that the soul was immortal, and that its presence in the body was the only reason the body was alive, but even after the body ceased to exist, the soul could not admit death because it always brings life, and because life is the soul’s natural state of being, it cannot die (Plato 100c-104c). From that

viewpoint, it is possible to consider that Wordsworth is no longer afraid of death because he had developed a higher sense of perception that enables him a better understanding of the nature of life and death.

In contemporary society, medical practices strive to avoid death at all cost, but the denial of death is not a path to understanding and self-development (Kübler-Ross et al. 175). The death-denying society attempts to avoid reality by supporting the illusion that mastering science will allow people to gain mastery over death (Kübler-Ross et al. 179). However, it is not possible to overcome death completely because it is a natural occurrence that is bound to happen to every living being. Denying death and hoping for physical immortality does not contribute to the development of individuality because it suppresses various negative emotions that prolong grief and manifest as psychological disorders (Kübler-Ross 18). However, it is possible to notice that Wordsworth overcame his negative emotions by accepting them, and he used them to increase his wisdom and awareness on the central issues of life.

Wordsworth's description of his personal development is consistent with many models that suggest paths to developing practical wisdom. For example, it is apparent that Wordsworth has cultivated wisdom through practical experiences by contemplating on life, death, existential, and spiritual issues after his sister's death, and it is possible to achieve personal improvements only through developing practical skills in coping with those issues (Walsh 216). It is possible to notice that the development of wisdom impacted his emotional state and refining his awareness to the state of

perceiving a subtle presence in all things. Furthermore, wisdom allows people to make judgments rather than adhere to rules and blindly accept traditional concepts of life and death (Schwartz and Sharpe 387). It is obvious that Wordsworth developed wisdom because every part of the poem is based on self-expression rather than traditional religious teachings, so it is possible to conclude that Wordsworth has developed his individuality significantly during the five years after his sister's death.

It is not possible to separate life and death because everything that is alive must die eventually. However, people have always associated death with a painful and permanent loss that results in anxiety, suffering, and fear.

Wordsworth also experienced those emotions, and it took him five years to accept them and overcome them. In the poem "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth recalls his previous self and the "coarser pleasures of his boyish days" (74) that have passed, and he contrasts it to his current perspectives on life and death. People can develop individuality only when they develop virtues, such as practical wisdom, that enable them to possess their own viewpoints and become self-expressive. Because Wordsworth expresses his own feelings and perspectives in the poem "Tintern Abbey," he demonstrates a high degree of individuality. He can perceive both negative and positive qualities of life, and he is capable of overcoming the fear of death because he became aware of a subtle side of nature. Because he was able to cope with the loss of his sister, Wordsworth has developed wisdom and awareness that have enabled him to observe the world differently and have contributed to the development of his individuality.

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