



# Migration from Innocence to Experience in William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Sohrab Sepehri's "Water's Footsteps"

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**Abstract:** William Wordsworth, English poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Sohrab Sepehri, contemporary Persian poet, would definitely belong to two diverse ages, cultures and traditions. In the case of poetry, notwithstanding all of their discrepancies in discourse, they have worked on a quasi-framework. In this study, Sepehri's "Water's Footsteps" – /SedAye PAye Ab/ – and Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" are inspected comparatively by seeking the significant influxes of 'mother nature' in order to find out the points of similarity and diversity in their voices by representing a nature-based migration from innocence to experience.

**Keywords:** Tintern Abbey, Water's Footsteps, Mother Nature, Migration

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## 1. Introduction

This research as a comparative study is an attempt to scrutinize the similarities of content in two selected sample poems. The base of this comparison is Sepehri's poem "Water's Footsteps" [1] - in Persian: /SedAye PAye Ab/ - and Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" [2]. The aim of selecting these two poems as the samples of this study is to best mirror a comparison of two diverse cultures and nationalities and show a path in the way the two manifest the equalities and contrasts of poets' viewpoints in a journey from innocence to experience which is a pivotal facet in Romantic era. These two poems which are among the poets' most distinguished works and the best representatives of their attitudes, are different in case of format and number of stanzas. "Tintern Abbey" consists of 159 lines and "Water's Footsteps" in 367 lines. It has no specific format and only because of the number of lines, it could be called a long poem. Although the lines of each stanza are not equal, Wordsworth's poem is an ode. The poem is unrhymed and among the most beautiful poems of English literatures in its type.

In the following discussion, firstly a summary of the two poems is presented, secondly discuss overview their structure and language, finally, there is a descriptive comparison of their content.

## 2. Water's Footsteps

"Water's Footsteps" is divided into three parts. The first part which starts with "*I am a native of Kashan, Time is not so bad to me*" the poet explains his life in the present time. In the second part, the poet explains about his childhood "*Life then was a line of light and doll*" and his youth "*Gradually the baby tiptoed away in the alleys of dragonflies; I went as to the party thrown by the world*".

In this part, the poet describes his visions of compoment in depth. In the third part which starts with "*I'm a native of Kashan but, my hometown is not Kashan*", the poet rejoins the present time and ends up his poetry with three questions and one conclusion. The questions are:

How am I to live? That begins with "*In this house I feel closer to the moist obscurity of grass*";

What is life? Starting with "*Life is a pleasant custom, Life wears wings as wide as death*";

How to live? "*One must wash eyes, look differently to things*"

And he finally gets to the conclusion: "*It is not our business to fathom the mystery of rose, Perhaps our business is to float within the magic of the rose*".

### 3. Tintern Abbey

In *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth (both the speaker and the poet) has a deep connection with nature and its ability to provide Wordsworth a shelter away from "the heavy and weary weight of this unintelligible world". Wordsworth emphasizes the alienation he feels from the rest of society and exalts himself to a level above the common man who inhabits an unreflective world. Society is not accepting of those going against the grain and is fonder of those willing to adapt to society rather than those who are willing to examine it. [3] The poet might feel as though the world is not appreciative of their exalted qualities and therefore feels as though they need to separate themselves from that society. While secluded, a poet is able to reflect on society and find solace in nature. Wordsworth notes that in his earlier and innocent years, he felt "more like a man flying from something he dreaded, than one who sought the thing he loved". Now, however he realizes that nature not only provides him a place to get away from society but also provides him with "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused... 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".

### 4. Structure and Language

Both Sepehri's and Wordsworth's poetry are similar to each other in case of structure since they both talk about a journey; a journey from nature and returning to nature. In "Water's Footsteps" the poet travels from present to past and from past to present retelling his experiences and mystical visions from nature. Sepehri finds the pleasure of nature at the moment while Wordsworth does not limit this pleasure to the present time. He sees natural symbols and keeps an outfit of them for the future in order to find happiness with the help of his imagination and remembering nature in times of grief and sadness. The structure Wordsworth poetry is what M. H. Abrams calls "the greater Romantic lyric" and it includes three parts: the poet is standing in a place, describing there; the poet gets into a question and the poet gets to a decision. The hero in Wordsworth poetry is the same traveler which is represented in almost all romantic poems. A hero, who unlike an epic hero, is a man of emotion rather than a man of action, views the nature in his emotional journey and whatever he sees affects his emotion and feelings. The aim of this journey is poet's getting to know the world's spirit, knowing the secret of nature, the experience of being one with the spirit of the universe and perceiving the very sacred light which is shed upon all universe. [4]

Both poets had the opportunity of being so close to nature in their childhood but their relation with nature had been based on emotion rather than wisdom. Both poets point to these delightful emotions, but their naïve experiences of nature in their childhood, despite of different interpretations, are so close to each other.

Here is Sepehri's description of childhood:

*Our garden stood on the shadowy side of wisdom  
Our garden was the interweaving point of feeling and plants  
Our garden was the point where looks Cage and Mirror met  
Our garden was perhaps an arc of the green circle of happiness  
On that day I was munching the unripe fruit of God in my sleep  
I drank water not philosophically  
I picked up mulberries not scientifically  
As soon as the pomegranate cracked hands turned to jets of desire  
As soon as the lark sung, the chest burnt from delight  
now and then loneliness rubbed its face against the windowpane  
desire would come and put its arms around the sense's neck  
thought played  
Like looked like a vernal rainfall, a plane tree full of starlings  
Life then was a line of light and doll  
An armful of liberty  
Life then was a pond of music  
Gradually the baby tiptoed away in the alleys of dragonflies  
I packed my things and went to a town of light thoughts  
My heart with the alienation of dragonflies  
I went as to the party thrown by the world*

As it is seen from the lines, the poet finds childhood a beautiful time full of pleasure. We could conclude from his visual descriptions of this part that poet's relation with childhood world is that of senses: *a plane tree full of starlings, a line of light and doll, a pond of music, a singing of lark, cracking of pomegranate*; not that of wisdom: *On that day I was munching the unripe fruit of God in my sleep, I drank water not philosophically, I picked up mulberries not scientifically*. Although the town of childhood for the poet is "a town of light thoughts", he is depressed for leaving it. He goes "to the party thrown by the world" in order to have a more complete understanding of nature.

Considering Wordsworth's description of childhood and his relation with nature in order to find the similarities beyond different phrases and images, the reader is faced with the lines:

*I came among these hills; when like a roe  
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides  
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,  
Wherever nature led: more like a man  
Flying from something that he dreads, than one  
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then  
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,  
And their glad animal movements all gone by)*

Both poets also point to those years of being far from nature. Wordsworth briefly gets across them: "in lonely rooms", "and 'mid the din of towns and cities", "in hours of weariness". Poet's experience of the times being far from

nature is life's sad experiences in town's dark situation and breaking the ideals of French revolution [5]. Sepehri dedicates 123 lines of his poetry to describing his visions through these compartments and tell whatever he has seen in a poetic language. This part of Sepehri's poem seems scarce and prosaic since the images are often much abstract and farfetched and the relation between concepts are not easily grasped from the poem itself. However, its former and latter parts are considered as the most beautiful, impressive and poetic verses of Sepehri and even contemporary Persian poetry in the case of language and meaning:

*The downpour of young vine from the wall*  
*The rain of dewdrops over the sleep's bridge*  
*The leap of joy from the swamp of death*  
*The passage of accident from behind word*  
*The battle of a hole with the pleasing light*  
*The battle of a stair against the long leg of sun*  
*The battle of solitude with a song*  
*The beautiful battle of pears against an empty basket*

Wordsworth and Sepehri's poetry are similar to each other in case of vocabulary and syntax. These two poems, in their two language traditions, are considered as deliberate attempts in simplifying the language of poetry. In Sepehri's, the words are almost one or two syllables and are selected from common and simple language words. The sentences are also short. The poet, though attempting to keep the rhythm along the poem, the ordering pillars of poem are very natural and so close to that of colloquial language. Sepehri made the language of poetry as simple as possible and expanded Indian style of imagination widespread. [6]

Simple inspired language of speech is a revolution that Romanticists created in the language of poetry and made the complicated language of poetry, which was under the influence of Milton for one century, close to colloquial language or in Wordsworth's definition, to "people's natural language". However, the language of "Tintern Abbey" which is from two centuries ago does not seem as a natural and simple language to contemporary reader.

Yet, by language of poetry, if it is meant to be discourse, and not vocabulary and syntax, Wordsworth and Sepehri's poetry belong to two distinctive traditions. Discourse here means two things: One is the use of metaphor and the other is making relation with sentences for a better understanding of the poem. For the first one, there seem a few metaphors in Wordsworth poetry:

*"The anchor of my purest thoughts"* and *"Thy memory be as a dwelling-place"*

But Sepehri's poetry is full of metaphors:

*"The rose is my Kiblah/ My Black Stone is light of the garden/ Life then was a line of light and doll/ an armful of liberty/ Life then was a pond of music"*.

About the relation between sentences, Wordsworth poetry is completely different from Sepehri. In Wordsworth's, the language of narration or description is direct and precise and the relation of sentences is made with the help of "Logic". The poem is the description of poet's real experiences; i.e. expressing his observations and also the philosophical

answers which are given without the use of metaphors. But in Sepehri's, the relation is in a way that the reader does not find any definite or logical meaning; rather the meaning is based on the readers emotional answers to invisible hints of the poem. In frequent cases, metaphorical sentences are put together in a way that the meaning could not be grasped by each line but by making a connection with all together.

## 5. The Poems' Content

The most significant aspect of similarity of these two poems is their viewpoint toward nature. Sepehri's poem is praising nature in case of poetic content.

"Sepehri's praising of nature has something in common with praising of nature in European Romanticism (e.g. from Rousseau to Andre Gide) in itself. But its roots are being fed from a deeper theme and that is Eastern mysticism. But apparently it is more affected by far east (China and Japan) rather than Islamic and Persian mysticism". [7]

"Sepehri is primarily a Romantic poet... nature in Romanticists' works is pictured as a temple and becomes a beaker for looking at the image of beloved meaning to be the manifestation of God in any piece of the world". [8]

The above mentioned quotes are true but more true is to say that Sepehri's poetry and generally the poems of Romantics especially that of Wordsworth's and more particularly Tintern Abbey are composed in the framework of old theory of self-unity. Wordsworth is a theorist poet [9]. He and his friend Coleridge composed Lyrical Ballads which is known as the Romantic statement in the UK. To Wordsworth, nature and solitary reflection exist as essentials for happiness and self-exploration. Although in his earlier years he may have regarded nature highly because it provided him an escape from an unkind world, he now reveres nature as a much more spiritual entity from which he draws strength in order to return to society. He even goes so far as to say that he is *"a worshipper of Nature"*. He acclaims nature to be a kind of deity or god to whom he pays homage. Nature allows poets solitude and comforts the poet with its beauty, because of these qualities; Wordsworth acclaims nature to be a spiritual entity which he can rely on to provide him comfort from an unkind society.

However, whenever he cannot be in nature, he has a memory of nature and its divine powers and he is able to channel *"that serene and blessed mood, ... until the breath of this corporeal frame, and even the motion of our human blood almost suspended, we are laid asleep in body and become a living soul... (and we are able to) see into the life of things"*. Again, Wordsworth solidifies the idea of solitude that the poet feels because even when integrated into society, he still channels himself away from the dreary and mundane city life to reflect on the serenity and blessedness of being in nature. He is able to see greater truths through his solitary reflection. Wordsworth again states, *"how oft, in darkness, and amid the many shapes of joyless day-light; 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 nature)*". He sees nature as a symbol of god whom he praises as he calls upon his memory of nature to help him gather strength to get through each day [10]. It is no coincidence then that Tintern Abbey has religious connotations in that it is his Promised Land and hub of spirituality. He venerates nature both in his ability to call on nature through his memory and nature's ability to provide him comfort and a home away from the harshness of society.

Through his reflection and solitude, the poet is able to articulate profound truths into which he then translates to language for the common man to enjoy and in which to take pleasure. Wordsworth states that a poet should use common language so as to better bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs". Wordsworth believes that poetry is meant for all men and women to enjoy and should reflect qualities and experiences that are common among all people. By translating his sublime experiences to the common man, the poet is able to be reconnected to humanity. Although feeling isolated because of his more distinguished qualities, the poet is able to unite with human nature through his time in nature and reflection and impart the truths and thoughts that come to him during his time of reflection in a way that all men and women can appreciate. In this case, he tries to convey the power of nature and its divine qualities and separate people from the materialistic and superficial society in which they are immersed and can easily get lost.

Towards the end of "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth addresses his sister Dorothy, whom he relates to as similar to his younger self who only saw nature as a way of escaping reality. Dorothy becomes a symbol for society, for as Wordsworth is trying to convey his ideas to Dorothy, he is also trying to convey his beliefs to the public. He still perceives Dorothy to be less mature than he, saying, "*may I behold in thee what I was once*". He tries to tell Dorothy of the intrinsic values that nature can provide for her, and tries to convert her to his religion. Although he perceives both Dorothy and society to be inferior to his exalted qualities, he still attempts to teach them about the relaxing and restoring qualities of nature. Although originally Wordsworth describes society as a negative body that he needs to escape from, he now realizes that he can educate that society and, as a result, is reconnected to that society.

Sepehri at the endings of poem expresses the viewpoint towards nature as the source of beauty and sublime, association of life and death, the unity between creator and creature and the distinction between two types of witness-witnessing the reality and witnessing beyond reality:

*Life is repeated wetting/Life is swimming in the pond of present ... Let's not step on the law of meadow... Let's not abuse moonshine if we suffer from fever... And let's not fear death/Death is not the end of pigeon... Let's not ask what breeze, what nights enjoyed our forefathers enjoyed.*

## 6. Conclusion

Wordsworth and Sepehri are both poets of nature; however, unlike other poets of nature, they do not suffice with describing and praising beauties of nature. On the one hand, Wordsworth describes beauties of nature in his first letters but after that, he leaves them and gets to their influences on his mind. His description of nature helps him prepare his mind to pay attention to the effects that those beauties had been made upon his mind. This is what Northrop Frye calls 'internalizing the reality' [11] and what the researcher in this study connotes as a migration from innocence to experience. In Frye's opinion, the goal of a poet is to bring into realization the unworldly power that is beyond senses and reality via a kind of experience. Sepehri on the other hand is as much sank in nature that has become the one and mingled with it and explains the whole with regards to essence of nature and measures everything regarding to their being close to or far from nature. He starts his journey by walking through the nature –innocence- and goes ahead by expressing his experiences during his way into nature. Signs of apprehension and conservativeness are observable in course of such a migration.

Such a migration is a supreme achievement by the hands of the poets themselves as an entity in finalizing their perceptions of an eternal life through a step-by-step journey which is garnished by a delicate purity as an emblem of distinguished Romantic poetries. Such a concept is profoundly recognized by the very notion of *sublime* as the ultimate goal of a purely Romantic person.

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