

Wordsworth's Nature of Perception and His Reflection in Elegiac Stanzas

3/5/2019



Picture source:

www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-we've-helped-buy/artwork/5340/peele-castle-in-a-storm

As one of the most renowned Romanticists in Britain, William Wordsworth illustrated his thoughts through the diction of the common, as well as the description of nature in stylized languages. Oftentimes Wordsworth could find a unique perspective different from common people as he wanders in the wild and leads readers to realize his understanding by building stages from what he sees and what he feels to what he reflects. A similar process of writing could be found in his *Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm*, Painted by Sir George Beaumont. Wordsworth asserts that the nature of perception could affect people's perspective by introducing his view of the Peele Castle when he lived inside in contrast with his perspective after his brother's death as well as his friend drew the picture.

To begin with, since William Wordsworth always uses a tone of talking to his companion while writing the poem, it is important to acknowledge the background information of this poem to understand how Wordsworth comes to his two different perspectives on the same castle. The first time Wordsworth spent time in Peele Castle was during the Autumn of 1794 while on his way to visit his cousin. By that time Wordsworth has finished his journey around Europe and preparing for the wedding of one of his friends with his sister Dorothy. It is also worth noticing that Wordsworth has not yet met Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who helped him launch the Romantic age. By the first time, Wordsworth lived in Peele Castle, his perspective towards the Peele Castle has not yet been affected by his Romantic ideology. Since Wordsworth started the Romantic age, he began to acknowledge the sublimity of nature, just as other Romanticists did. In 1805, one of his little brothers, who served as a captain employed by the East India Company, died in a storm on his ship. One year later, Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth's wealthy friend, drew a painting of the Peele Castle which depicted the castle standing in the storm, with a shipwreck nearby. Probably affected by the sad memory of his brother's death triggered by the shipwreck portrayed in the painting, Wordsworth shows his astonishment towards the painting in his *Elegiac Stanzas* composed.

Wordsworth believes that people's perspective shifts when they live through different things in their lives as he shifts his perspective on the castle after his brother's death. From the beginning to stanza ten, the castle was a quiet place for Wordsworth. The speaker applies vivid imagery and appeals to emotions to illustrate how wonderful he thought the castle is to him. In his depiction, the Peele Castle was an "Elysian" place to him, and he believes he felt the "Nature's breathing life" presented to him. Since when Wordsworth first lived in this castle, he was on his way to visit his cousin, and his impression of the castle was a perfect one. However, several years later, Wordsworth believes the portrayal of the Peele Castle is a "pageantry of fear." The word "pageantry" means a display of elaboration, and its use in stanza 12 of the *Elegiac Stanzas* matches the definition with the sublime nature that is usually found in a Romantic poem. Used to describe a garnished demonstration, "pageantry" carries a dramatic and luxurious tone. By presenting the castle in a picture as a detailed description of fear, the word underscores the painter's perspective that the castle is filled with horror and

darkness. To emphasize that the painter is illustrating his feelings in the picture, the speaker uses the word “passionate” in the first line of stanza 12 to depict the process of painting. Providing a general feeling of passion at first, then explaining the feeling of “pageantry” of the painting comprehensively compel the enthusiasm of the painter for the castle. The work is not only a “passionate” drawing but also a “pageantry” of human’s fear of facing the sublime nature. Moreover, “pageantry” is embedded within the last part of a set of parallel sentences, which audibly brings it to the peak of sublime describes from viewing the picture.

Wordsworth also shows his reflection on his two different perspectives. Wordsworth claims his different perspectives viewing the castle mark his growth. After he describes his original perspective, he said that he was amazed by Sir George Beaumont’s way of painting. As he saw the painting, he claims all the past impressions are an “illusion” that he was fond of. Wordsworth suddenly changed the tone of the entire poem after he shifted his perspective toward the castle. He also believes that he has “submitted to a new control,” to say he was deeply impressed by Sir George Beaumont’s painting of the same castle he lived in before and he has changed the view of the castle from a good impression to a “deep distress.” About the background, Wordsworth means that he was affected by his brother’s death. The shipwreck portrayed in the painting reminds him of his brother’s death, and as he saw a shipwreck next to the castle he once loves, his perspective on the castle also changed from love to distress. The last three stanzas show Wordsworth’s reflection on his changing of perspective. Though he likes the beauty of the castle, he is also impressed that Sir George Beaumont could paint it to be “sublime.” Wordsworth sees the Peele Castle that stands in terrible weather like “the lightning, the fierce wind, the trampling waves” as a representation of bravery. His elysian impression of the castle has gone and he believes his experience in the castle before was “blind.”

In conclusion, Wordsworth suggests we welcome different perspectives so that we could see an object comprehensively. As we grow and encounter various accidents in our life, we may change our view on one particular object from good to bad. We should welcome such differences and always be open to new ideas.