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The Commodification of Time in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"

KAREN HADLEY

Marjorie Levinson's influential historical materialist approach to William Wordsworth's "Lines: Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" addresses the sociohistorical dimensions of the poem, often to the exclusion of formal and aesthetic considerations. More recently, Thomas Pfau's pragmatic materialist approach addresses the social dimensions of Wordsworthian poetry, while dwelling also on its formal and aesthetic dimensions. Both materialist approaches address the poem in the context of the issue of time; neither approach, however, considers the issue of time from the perspective of materialism.

Contrary to what this might seem to indicate, compelling reasons exist for why the issue of time has relevance to the socioecononomic context in which the poem was written—given that the poem itself was first published in the same year as William Pitt's controversial tax on clocks and watches (1798–99), a tax imposed on a nascent industrial capitalist society increasingly reliant on the commodification of time as labor. Thus, my approach acknowledges the relevance of time as an issue both which addresses current materialist concerns, and which addresses the contemporary production of the poem. In this respect, I look beyond Levinson (who overlooks the materialist aspects of time to keep her sights on history) and Pfau (who somewhat uncharacteristically addresses the issue of time in exclusive relation to the poem's formal and aesthetic dimensions), to address both aesthetic and social concerns in the context of thinking about the time of "Tintern Abbey."2

Karen Hadley is an associate professor at the University of Louisville. This essay is part of a larger project that addresses the commodification of time in romantic period culture, and its influence on Wordsworthian autobiographical poetry.
In particular, I address the poem's "abundant recompense," which tradition and its critics have read alternatively as sublime, aesthetic contemplation, or as a blind "suppression of the social" (Levinson, p. 37). I claim that the poem's politics of time in fact suggest yet another alternative: that the text narrates the transformation of time into a commodity in which time "seems to come to be" formless, "measured duration." Where the poem's "abundant recompense" has been taken as the "happy detachment" of "enduring values" (Levinson, p. 48), I suggest it represents equally an unhappy mutation of modern historical experience: the impoverished standardization of the commodity form. Assuming the interrelation of text and context, and the causal relation between commodification and modernity, I suggest that "Tintern Abbey"'s politics of time in fact demonstrates the poet's historiographic consciousness of and engagement with modernity.

The romantic critical tradition has read Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" as a poem about aesthetic contemplation, and about the "personal myth" of memory as salvation. In this line of thinking, the poet's aesthetic contemplation entails both an objective focus on the natural setting of the Wye Valley, the Abbey's surroundings, and a subjective focus on perception and imagination, between what the "eye, and ear . . . half create, and what perceive" (lines 105–7). The poet's use of memory details a shift from past to present, from the loss of childhood's "glad animal movements" (line 74) to the "abundant recompense" of a mature imaginative sensibility. Likewise, it details another shift from present to future, a projected continuity wherein the poet's sister Dorothy represents for him a remembered existence even in his anticipatory absence; toward this end, the poem concludes in his final entreaty to her:

> with what healing thoughts
> Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
> And these my exhortations!
> (lines 144–6)

Famously reacting to this Arnoldian-inspired tradition, Levinson's "Insight and Oversight: Reading "Tintern Abbey"" seeks to move beyond the traditional binaries of mind and nature by introducing a third function, history. Where she asserts the pre-eminence of the historical, however, her valorization of history relies on key temporal distinctions, for example where she claims that the poet's "discontinuous, inauthentic present" (p. 37) signi-
fies two related forms of historical exclusion: the poet’s “blindness” concerning the “degree to which the subjective eye—the individual ‘I’—is constituted by its field of vision,” and, consequently, his “suppression of a historical consciousness” (p. 45). Because the poem’s narrator defines himself as such by exclusion (of the “light of sense” and of any “historical consciousness”), he cannot therefore conceive of himself as “anything other than a role,” or what for Levinson amounts to the “same thing,” as a “past and future projection” (p. 45). In short, the logic of the critical passage in question dictates that the poet’s “discontinuous, inauthentic present” translates into his role as “past and future projection” which translates, finally, into his “suppression of a historical consciousness.” Through this logic, Levinson implies a direct, necessary correlation between the poet’s valuation of temporal concerns and his devaluation of historical concerns, with temporality functioning as the ideological, aestheticized substitute for what otherwise presumably would be an authentic, historical consciousness.

That Levinson’s argument can be viewed in this way, as an inverse dynamic between temporality and history, suggests a double irony in her position: on the one hand that in her effort to move beyond the traditional critical binaries of mind and nature, she has succeeded only in (super)inscribing another binary, time and history. On the other hand, and as an implication of the discussion above, Levinson infers that reference to the history of the period necessitates reference to issues around the reformulation of time during the period. I will argue here that just such a correlation between history and time in fact does suggest a more integrated reading of the poem: integrated, that is, through the historical role of time in the period’s emergence of industrial capitalism.

Like Levinson (and a decade later), Pfau indicates the value of historical context to a reading of Wordsworth’s poetry; unlike Levinson’s historical materialism, however, his pragmatic materialism values both historical and temporal concerns. In *Wordsworth’s Profession: Form, Class, and the Logic of Early Romantic Cultural Production*, Pfau explains how the “quintessentially ‘modern’ autonomy” of the Wordsworthian lyric emerges at just the historical moment—the late eighteenth century—when empirical description in the form of the picturesque is sublated into the “domain of aesthetic interest” (p. 115). This sublation, what in effect amounts to the rise of the modern aesthetic, entails a Wordsworthian reorientation toward “subjective affect,” and con-
sequently, the “emergence of temporality as a significant condition in the production of lyric meaning” (Pfau, p. 114). In particular, Pfau identifies “Tintern Abbey” as a lyric production that aligns its “intrinsic formal features and its propositional social character around the continuum of time” (p. 114). And yet in Pfau’s account, these fundamental insights—that temporality emerges as a condition of the production of the late-eighteenth-century lyric, and that both formal and social character of “Tintern Abbey” are aligned around the continuum of time—are left unrelated to temporal aspects of the poem’s social character, such as the changing perceptions of historical time in a period of rising industrialism. In light of the period’s reconceptualization of time in accommodating industrialized labor, what follows explores what it might mean for the poem’s “continuum of time” (in Pfau’s terms) to align its “formal” with its social character—in particular for its temporal modalities to be reflected in the social context of the poem’s production.

Of particular interest here, the commodification of time was a central economic development of the industrial revolution, because, as Anthony Giddens explains, it alone served as the “underlying connecting link between the massive expansion of the commodity form in the production of goods, on the one hand, and the commodification of labour (as labour-power) on the other.”9 The symbol of the commodification, and synchronization, of labour was the clock. Clocks and watches, because they signified “public, objectified time,” were therefore the “very expression of the commodification of time.”10 Thus the debate over the tax on clocks and watches reached a head “at the exact moment when the industrial revolution demanded a greater synchronization of labour.”11 In this respect, increasing demands for production peaked around the figure of the clock, as seen in the debate over Pitt’s tax, and the demands for greater labor synchronization.

Where Wordsworthian lyric composition reflects an enterprising middle class, I argue that temporal figuring in the poem reflects the commodity culture forming the base for the rise of capitalism. In other words, the motive behind the Wordsworthian lyric paradigm of aestheticized subjectivity is not entirely, as the poet might have us believe, an “essential sympathy,” but equally a “deep-seated, often compulsive cultural productivity” (Pfau, p. 115). From this perspective, the motive behind late-eighteenth-century Wordsworthian lyric composition can be seen to resemble that behind the increasing industrial use of clocks and watches:
where widespread industrial use of the clock emerged at that time as a sign of temporal commodification (E. P. Thompson, Giddens), the modern lyric emerged as a sign of aesthetic commodification (Pfau). By this logic, temporality became a constitutive factor in aestheticized lyric production at the same historical moment that commodified time became a constitutive factor in the rise of industrial production.

Given the contemporary relevance of time as an issue in relation to both aesthetic and social concerns (and the critical disjunction in ideas about time and history), I posit that the evolving economy of commodified time is figured in the temporal structure of the Wordsworthian lyric, here “Tintern Abbey.” In determining the structure of commodified time in capitalist societies, I look to Giddens, who posits a “double existence” as the “predicating quality of every commodity”: “Time as lived time, as the substance of the lived experience of durée of Being, [with capitalism] becomes accompanied by the separated dimension of time as pure or ‘formless duration.’ With the expansion of capitalism, this is what time seems to come to be, just as money seems to be the universal standard of value of all things.”2 Here, where commodified time serves as the “underlying constitutive component of both goods and labour” in a capitalist society, Giddens understands it to take on a “double existence” between the experiential substance of “lived time,” and the “separated dimension” of commodified time. By Giddens’s model, commodity culture thus produces a doubling of experience, in which the “separate dimension” becomes a “universal standard,” marked by its temporal character of “pure” durativity, or “duration.”

Where Giddens marks “separated,” commodified time (“pure or ‘formless duration’”) as distinct from “lived time,” he is employing an aspectual distinction. Aspect, like tense, is a linguistic category of the verb, but where tense is used to refer to location in time, aspect is used to refer to the internal, temporal contour of this location, the perception of time at any given historical moment. A version of the same aspectual distinction is employed by Pfau to explain the late-eighteenth-century separation of economic and aesthetic virtue: to compensate for the “lesion of discontinuity inflicted on the middle-class unconscious by its own economic productivity and prosperity” (Pfau, p. 380), we learn, Wordsworth pledges “authentic and durable cultural meanings to an audience made uncertain of its cultural identity.”13 Pfau’s pragmatic explanation of the motive behind Wordsworthian lyric composition provides a poetic context for Giddens’s distinction,
to the extent that the “lesion of discontinuity” marking the “lived experience” (Giddens) of the middle class, is compensated for by the poet’s “durable cultural meanings” (Pfau), or his “separated dimension” (Giddens), with which he provides for his audience a version of “duration” (Giddens). Similarly, where Susan J. Wolfson distinguishes temporally between the poem’s “figures of discontinuity” and its author’s attempted “restoration” of “continuity,” her account employs a version of the same aspectual distinction.14 Where critical accounts of Wordsworth engage this aspectual distinction, I argue that they do so because they reflect the same distinction as it exists in his poetic texts and in their sociocultural context: in sum, recent critical representations of “Tintern Abbey” reflect the temporal structuring of the poem, because both reflect the double structure of commodified time.

Giddens’s insight into the “double existence” of commodified time revises our critical understanding of the historical time of “Tintern Abbey” to reflect the “double existence” of the commodity. Pfau’s historical account has indicated what I would argue are the same two temporal (aspectually distinguished) modes of experience in the poem, and yet his account—following the tradition—posits these modes as forming a “calculus,” or discontinuity, between “past” and “present,” between temporally separate subjects, “remembered” and “remembering” (Pfau, pp. 135, 137). However, Giddens’s observation about the structure of capitalist time prompts us to see this same dynamic operating in the poem not only between past and present, as Pfau and the tradition have represented it, but also simultaneously, between opposing realms of commodified time that exist for the bourgeois subject.15 This in mind, we can expand our understanding of the poem to include not only a transhistorical dynamic between the poet’s “remembered” and “remembering” selves, but also a wholly contemporary, modern dynamic between “lived” and “commodified” versions of the present self.16 An awareness of how the temporal economy of emerging capitalism comes to reflect the “double existence” of the commodity reveals the temporal modalities of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” to be forming also a present tense dynamic, one which functions within the temporal modalities of modernity.

Where they formulate the temporal economy of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” linguistically, Julian Boyd and Zelda Boyd provide a useful starting point for this convergence of issues. In particular, their work “The Perfect of Experience” points to the present
perfect in the poetic text, indicating two ways in which it is used to represent the poet’s experience of time: “‘tensually’ as two distinct points on a time-line (past tense, present tense) or aspectually as constituent parts of the same event which extends to the present moment and in which I am still involved.”17 Observing that there are isolatable phases in the poem in which the present perfect is the dominant verb form, they suggest that the poet’s central preoccupations about time and loss are figured into the tension between uses of the present perfect and of the past tense.18 By their analysis, the past tense lines of the poem (“Though changed . . . no doubt, from what I was when first / I came . . . when like a roe / I bounded”; “nature then . . . / To me was all in all.—I cannot paint / What then I was” [lines 66–8, 72, 75–6; emphasis added]) detail the irretrievability “not only of that time, but also of the sensations themselves.” The lines in the present perfect (“other gifts / Have followed,” “I have learned,” and, most importantly, “I have felt / A presence . . . a sense sublime” [lines 86–7, 88, 93–5; emphasis added]), in contrast, detail the “continued significance” of the effects of past experience, and the continuity of these effects on into a “redemptive” future.19 Boyd and Boyd’s discussion, then, advocates a loss-recovery schematization of the poem, where “loss” is signified by the simple past tense and “recovery” by the present perfect. In their analysis, the overall tone of the poem is redemptive, since the poet’s use of the past tense (signifying loss, dissociation, discontinuity) is so often followed by his use of the present perfect (signifying recovery, duration, self-continuity).

To summarize, then, Boyd and Boyd identify the familiar Wordsworthian dynamic between loss and redemption, and suggest that the dynamic can be understood by way of the verb forms in the poem, wherein the past tense signifies loss, and the present perfect signifies the poet’s gain, or redemption. In this respect, their account of the poem runs parallel to tradition, to the extent that both indicate the loss-gain dynamic as the central dynamic of the poem. Traditional accounts have long identified such a dynamic in the poem, but clearly Boyd and Boyd’s account goes further toward revealing how the temporal modalities of such a choice are structured within the verb forms of the poem. I would add that the same temporal modalities, the poem’s politics of time, spell out the consequences of this choice: that where less and less of the poem comes to be concerned with loss or remembrance of that loss and more and more of it with the extensionality of abstract “enduring values,” the poet’s acceptance of the
perfect as compensation for loss of the “now” functions as a substitution of living remembrance for abstract continuity.

An implication of Boyd and Boyd’s account is that the perfect is associated with the sublime in the poem, where the function of both is to suggest redemption or recovery in the face of loss. In both the poet’s uses here of the term “sublime,” the perfect not only introduces it within the same sentence, but at least two more instances of the perfect exist in the fifteen or so lines preceding; moreover, following the first appearance of the term, the perfect appears three more times within the next twenty lines. In close proximity to these two instances of the Wordsworthian sublime in the poem, are two instances of the pure deictic adverb, the “now.” The “now” has an important role in the poem, I argue, because it serves as antithesis to the sublime: if the sublime, that is, signifies compensation for the loss of the “coarser pleasures” of “boyish days” (line 73), then the poem’s “now” signifies just the opposite, a living acknowledgement of that loss, wherein childhood’s “aching joys are now no more” (line 84).

And yet in both cases where the “now” accompanies or appears in proximity to the sublime, the association between the two suggests a contingency, in the first case by modification (it comes burdened with “gleams of half-extinguished thought,” “recognitions dim and faint,” and “somewhat of a sad perplexity” [lines 58–60], and within the same sentence is sublimated to “future years” [line 65]), in the second case by negation (“That time is past, / And all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this / Faint I” [lines 83–6]). This contingency within both sequences of the “now” and the sublime in the poem (lines 35–58, 83–95), I argue, is mediated syntactically by the perfect. Where the function of the perfect is to mediate between the sublime and the now, the effect thereof (if the perfect works to contest or dilute the disruptive status of the “now”) is only to amplify the effect of contingency where, for example, in the first instance, the “now” appears as an extension of the perfect (in the lines both preceding and following), and in the second the perfect compensates for any lasting, disruptive effects of the “now.” I suggest that this negotiation of present tense modalities takes place around the temporalities of modernity, and thereby raises the stakes of a text that has traditionally been interpreted as the poet’s willful escape into transcendence.

My conclusion considers the poem’s final sequence, in which the poet addresses his sister Dorothy. This sequence ends in a temporal structuring resembling the present perfect identified
above. And yet, as the poem concludes, the use of the structure suggests extensionality not only back into the past, but forward into the future. Coming out of the perfect of the lines preceding it (“I have felt” [line 93]), the segment begins in the present tense (“Therefore am I still” [line 102]; “For thou art with me here” [line 114]), and soon moves forward into the future (“these wild ecstasies shall be matured” [line 138]; “thy mind / Shall be a mansion” [lines 139–40]). My reading is supported by Wolfson’s prose paraphrase of the passage, wherein Dorothy’s “future mind becomes a screen upon which the effect of the present can be staged as if it were already a memory”; here, Wolfson posits a psychoanalytic metaphor of projection, in which the poet’s present is projected through the lens of an anticipated future (“with what healing thoughts / Of tender joy wilt thou remember me”). In this characteristic instance of the future tense, where the poet “preordains healing thoughts with the force of present assertion,” the moment of speech corresponds with the (present) moment of composition.

As the poem moves into its final lines, the tense remains in the future, but the narrative moment of speech takes on an altered temporal perspective: “wilt thou then forget / That . . . We stood together,” “that I . . . came,” and that “these steep woods and lofty cliffs . . . were to me / More dear” (lines 149–51, 151–2, 157–9, emphasis added). In these lines, what has been the present moment in the poem suddenly shifts to the past tense, and the moment of speech shifts to the future; the effect of this shift is that with Dorothy’s future self, we are now with the poet looking back on what continues to be the present moment of composition. The poet stretches the present up into the future to create the aspectual extension we encountered earlier with the present perfect; here, the poem’s temporal structuring maps a form of the future perfect. As in his previous use of the same aspectual component, the poet refers to present and future as coincident, by way of a linguistic bridge formed through the operation of the perfect.

Addressing critical use of the future perfect (“future anterior”) with reference to the young Karl Marx, Louis Althusser has observed that reading the present through the lens of the future in this way works to collapse any material difference between two given tenses. I suggest, finally, that the perfect (present and future tenses) in “Tintern Abbey” functions in much the same way; with this understanding, Boyd and Boyd’s dialectic between past and present perfect could be restructured as a wholly present
dynamic, in which the past tense sense of loss or dissociation is always already embedded in the present sense of present perfect experience. As such, the poem can plausibly be understood as a temporal dynamic between two dimensions of the present experience of time, on much the same model as Giddens’s present tense dynamic of commodified time. As is characteristic of commodified time, the perfect temporal modalities of "Tintern Abbey" suggest a version of Walter Benjamin’s “crisis” of modernity, in which the poet abandons the “shore of historical experience” for the “frozen waste of abstraction.”

In this respect the poet may seem to take on an uncanny resemblance to Levinson’s poet, whose “oversight,” it may be remembered, is sublimated to “insight.” And yet I would argue that the text itself, much as in Benjamin’s discussion of modernity and historicism, does not entirely take leave of the present, but rather narrates the danger of falling victim to amnesia “about the present.” This may seem a refined distinction, but in fact it is what allows for a “now” in the poem—albeit, as I have argued, a contested “now.” The continued existence of the “now” is what allows us to read this poetic text as a present time narrative of modernity’s Faustian trade off, in which the logical conclusion of the abstract commodity form is the destruction of tradition. And again, “Tintern Abbey”’s temporally contingent “now” ensures that the poem formulates semantically the trade off Levinson has claimed to be accessible only semiotically.

The temporal fluidity of “Tintern Abbey,” its marked shifts between tense and aspect, between past and future by way of the present, has led to a number of critical observations that hint at the substitutability of past and future in the poem: Thomas Weiskel, for example, has remarked that the poet “often seems to be reading the past as if it were the future and the future as if it were the past,” and Geoffrey Hartman that Wordsworth’s “poetry looks back in order to look forward the better.” Alternatively, and as a form of redemption from the uncertainty of temporal dissociation and dissolution, Wolfson’s poet offers the present moment: “As a counterpoise to the flow of time and the dissolution of confidence, his argument ‘answers’ unspoken questions about the very nature of the self in time—questions of memory, of expectation, of death—by willfully delivering the present moment from the flux into which it constantly threatens to disintegrate.” In this respect, Wolfson’s critical perspective is consistent with Pfau’s: both accounts posit a self in present time struggling for deliverance from what Wolfson calls “flux” or “flow,” and
what Pfau calls "dissociated subjectivity" (Pfau, p. 136). The poem's thematic content, then, and the specific historical situation in which the poet as newly professionalizing bourgeois subject negotiates the dissociated temporal modalities of modern industrial capitalism, dictate that a pervasive sense of flux be endemic to both the poem and its criticism.

NOTES


2 In observing the relevance of time to the history of the period, James Chandler has noted how a number of commentators as diverse as Friedrich Meinecke, R. G. Collingwood, Georg Lukács, Hannah Arendt, Louis Althusser, Reinhart Koselleck, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, J. G. A. Pocock, Hans Blumenberg, Tzvetan Todorov, and Benedict Anderson locate a "fundamental change in the recognition and representation of historical time in a time that is either called 'Romantic' or dated to a period (roughly 1770–1830) that we otherwise associate with the advent of Romanticism in its early (i.e., British) phase" (England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998], p. 101). Chandler suggests that the very reconceptualization of time during that "time-in-which" inevitably makes for a further complication in these accounts," adding however that this further complication "is not often addressed and seldom even acknowledged in these histories of historiography" (p. 101). Accounts such as these suggest that we revalue late-eighteenth-century historical time as a key instance of romantic historical materialism.


6 In turn, some of the more vehement responses to Levinson have reinscribed the initial binary: M. H. Abrams and Helen Vendler, for example, have seen in Levinson's discussion an ideological overreading which—Althusserian style—diagnoses the poem's "allegory by absence," its "negative ideal," so that the critic can import her own positive ideal, the sociohistorical; in response, they reassert the poet's lyric or aesthetic over his historical, subjectivity. See Abrams, "On Political Readings of Lyrical
Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”


Where Pfau’s account of the poem links cultural productivity to temporality, it indicates what is for this argument a crucial aporia of Levinson’s discussion. Thus, where she endorses semiotic reference to the “history” behind the poetic text, Levinson could be seen to suppress the very condition of the production of its lyric meaning, its temporality.

Giddens, p. 130.

Qtd. in Giddens, p. 118; Karl Marx, Grundrisse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 140; Marx, Capital, 3 vols. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 1:329–40. For this reason, Giddens approvingly quotes Lewis Mumford’s point that it is not the steam engine (increasingly used in industry after its invention in 1765), but rather the clock—because it ensured the “even flow of energy,” and made possible “regular production and a standardised product” in industry—which should be regarded as the “epitome of capitalist industrialism” (p. 133).


Giddens, pp. 130–1.

Pfau characterizes this sense of “durable cultural meaning” as a “prolonged attempt” to “reconcile a hypostatized natural, unself-conscious, au-
tonomous sensibility—only 'remembered' as irretrievably past—and an ur-
ban, professionalized, dissociated subjectivity incapable of determining the
epistemological relationship that it maintains with the former” (p. 136).

issues a critical call to action: to explore “the way a poet such as Wordsworth
contests and fractures from within the illusions he constructs” (p. 432). We
need to account more fully for what has been seen by the new historicism as
Wordsworth’s “poetics of displacement,” the assumption that lyric poetic figu-
ration displaces the historical contexts in which it is written. See David
Simpson, Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement
(New York: Methuen, 1987). Where the Wordsworth of the new historicists
seeks to avoid gaps in the fabric of thought, or society, Wolfson’s interro-
gative poet “compels his poetry to retain and represent the fissures, gaps, and
outright contradictions” with which the poet contends (“Questioning ‘The
Romantic Ideology,’” p. 435).

15 Chandler notes the tensions between (and within) the ways in which
Koselleck and Anderson employ these terms: Koselleck posits a new “ho-
mogenization of experience” (Chandler p. 104, qtg. Koselleck, p. 253) for the
decades around 1800, while Anderson, despite the apparent internal prob-
lems of his account, appears to approach Giddens’s “double existence” where
he suggests that the “homogeneity of experience” (Chandler, p. 104) charac-
teristic of the modern nation-state is closely associated with “pure temporal
succession” (qtd. in Chandler p. 104). See Koselleck, Futures Past: On the
Semantics of Historical Time, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge MA: MIT Press,
1985); and Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and

16 Out of deference to Giddens, who rejects the terms “diachronic” and
“synchronous” (p. 17), I employ here the terms “trans-historical” and “contem-
porary.”

17 Julian Boyd and Zelda Boyd, “The Perfect of Experience,” SIR 16, 1

18 As Boyd and Boyd explain in “The Perfect of Experience,” the present
perfect is constituted by a form of the auxiliary “have” plus the past parti-
ciple of any verb, i.e., “she has gone,” “they have thought.” It is logical, by
their analysis, that Wordsworth should make use of this form, since: “(1) the
present perfect in English involves subtle aspectual distinctions which make
it an almost inevitable form to use when talking of separation and connec-
tion, the past-as-having-passed, the quasi-presence of the past, the affective
potentialities of past occurrences, the assimilation of habitual experience,
and (2) Wordsworth consistently makes use of the possibilities of this form,
not surprisingly since the present perfect comes so close in meaning to many
of his central preoccupations” (p. 3).


20 Wolfson, The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Inter-

21 Ibid.


23 Peter Osborne, The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde (Lon-
is reflected in entities such as mechanized, industrial labor, warfare, the jostling of the crowd, and most importantly here, the standardization of time in historicism, yielding a "decisive mutation of historical experience" (Osborne, pp. 136, 114).

24 Osborne, p. 140.
27 Wolfson, Questioning Presence, p. 70.
28 Ibid.
29 William Galperin gestures briefly toward a similar temporal perspective on "Tintern Abbey," but his logic, if I have it correctly, carries him to a wholly different conclusion. He argues that the poet's years of absence have made "forgetfulness—unmemory—a more potent faculty than memory can hope to be," and that his return to the Wye is (therefore) "more spatial than temporal" (Revision and Authority in Wordsworth: The Interpretation of a Career [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989], pp. 84, 81). Because this "more spatial" conclusion has little apparent impact on his overall account, and because Galperin states elsewhere (p. 89 n. 16) that Wolfson's commentary on more general theoretical grounds "parallels" his own, this intriguing speculation shall be set aside.