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# The Tantramar, Revisited yet Again: Charles G.D. Roberts's Agon with the Wordsworths

SERGIY YAKOVENKO

IN HIS 1983 ESSAY "Remembering It All Well: 'The Tantramar Revisited,'" Tracy Ware suggests that Charles G.D. Roberts's "The Tantramar Revisited" "has been more extensively and profitably studied than any other Confederation poem" (222). Like Ware, critics such as Tom Marshall and D.M.R. Bentley have noted its debt to the prototypical Romantic poem of return, William Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey." Both poems, Ware argues, present "a mental landscape" rather than an account of immediate observation. The major difference is that memory brings Wordsworth the benefit of returning "to a beloved setting without abandoning his other and more human concerns," whereas "Roberts' speaker receives less abundant recompense" and still "cannot resolve his two concerns, the social and the natural" (236-37). I want to revisit this question by asking what it would mean to think of the influence of "Tintern Abbey" in terms of negotiation rather than reception, reading "The Tantramar" as Roberts's personal response to the speaker in Wordsworth's poem, much like a remark or reply in a dialogue.

Roberts's response to the appeal of "Tintern Abbey" can be regarded in terms of "the rhetoric of temporality," as understood by Paul de Man in his essay of the same title, and thus can be subsumed under de Man's notion of allegory, which renounces the inevitable symbolic drive to merge or coincide with the original text because of the temporal distance between them. A mere chronological distance between the two texts becomes "temporal," or allegorical, precisely because "The Tantramar" is an overt reading, revision, or revisiting of "Tintern Abbey" and builds its aesthetics on the internal resistance that springs from reusing Wordsworth's motifs, images, and diction. The resistance of "The Tantramar" picks up the intimations suggested by hidden or repressed intentions of "Tintern Abbey" to preserve the symbolic

identification of self with nature, first by making nature the origin, “the anchor” of the speaker’s “purest thoughts” (line 110),<sup>1</sup> and then by projecting the qualities of this self-mystification onto the “voice” of the speaker’s sister (Dorothy). Although Roberts is anxious to make “The Tantramar” such a responsive “voice,” its allure is that it manages to become an *allegory* of that voice in which symbolic nostalgia for the eternal unity between nature and self is openly called “the darling illusion” (“Tantramar” 63). This radical shift is consistent with the change in “the dialectical relationship between subject and object” that de Man notices in Romantic thought: “[T]his dialectic is now located entirely in the temporal relationships that exist within a system of allegorical signs” (208).

In this view, “The Tantramar” as a reading of “Tintern Abbey” emphatically points to the relationship between self and nature that, according to de Man, is allegorical: “It becomes a conflict between a conception of the self seen in its authentically temporal predicament and a defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-knowledge” (208). In what follows, I show this conflict at work in Roberts’s allegory of “Tintern Abbey” by redefining two main concepts upon which the psychological approach bases its interpretation: memory and landscape. I argue that deployment of the temporal predicament in “The Tantramar” becomes possible because of a functional delimitation between the perceptible *landscape*, laid out around the speaker’s “vantage-ground” (11), and his *memory* of the *place* as an object of nostalgia. The speaker’s awareness of the distance between the two testifies to the allegorical, or temporal, quality of this distance, while his refusal to leave the vantage point serves as an allegory of the “defensive strategy,” which both “The Tantramar” and “Tintern Abbey” build around the motif of the return to a memorable natural object.

“The Tantramar” is full of signs of deliberate selection of themes and diction aimed to demonstrate, unequivocally, the poem’s close relationship with its predecessor. Both Bentley (27) and Ware note “three points” at which “Roberts clearly refers to ‘Tintern Abbey’” (236). Two of these points are undoubtedly relevant: the “rapture” with which Roberts’s speaker is “stung” by “the old-time stir” (i.e., the “sweetness” of his youth; “Tantramar” 59-60) is clearly related to Wordsworth’s “dizzy raptures” of the time past (“Lines” 86); Roberts’s reiteration of the phrase “now at this season” (33, 37, 39) echoes Wordsworth’s “at

this season" (12). The third point of reference — the "still, sad music of humanity" ("Lines" 92), by which both speakers are disturbed "in maturity" (Ware 236) — is conceptually right but does not find its equivalent in "The Tantramar" on the level of diction.

Some less ambiguous points of reference include the title itself: as Susan Wolfson testifies, by 1800, before the formal title "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" was established, Wordsworth's "shorthand [had been] 'Poem on Revisiting the Wye'" (186), which pushes "revisiting" from the obscurity of the less-remembered subtitle into the open and makes the connection with Roberts's "revisited" more prominent. There is also an obvious similarity between the starting lines of "The Tantramar" and "Tintern Abbey," to which no anthology introduction to "The Tantramar" fails to point: "Summers and summers have come, and gone with the flight of the swallow; / Sunshine and thunder have been, storm, and winter, and frost . . ." ("Tantramar" 1-2) and "Five years have passed; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters!" ("Lines" 1-2). References to their respective *genii loci*, to which both speakers return, suggest a further landscape correspondence: "— Once again / Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs" ("Lines" 4-5); "Only in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change!" ("Tantramar" 8). Although the colour green is absent from Wordsworth's cliffs (which would naturally turn cliffs into hills), it appears three times in the first stanza, merging and reconciling human and wild landscapes:

Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb  
The wild green landscape. Once again I see  
. . . these pastoral farms  
Green to the very door. . . ("Lines" 14-18)

Later in the poem, Wordsworth reinforces the comforting and consoling features of the greenness by reaffirming that his speaker is "still / A lover" of "mountains; and of all that we behold / From this green earth" (103-06), and mentioning at the end of the poem "these steep woods and lofty cliffs, / And this green pastoral landscape" (158-59). Even though Wordsworth's landscape portrayal does not include the sea (a major part of the Tantramar scenery), a reference to "the round ocean" does appear later in "Tintern Abbey" when the speaker's "elevated thoughts" yield "a sense sublime" (96). Mountain winds, meadows,

orchards, and sunsets (“setting suns” in Wordsworth’s poem; 98), while common in any landscape poetry, overwhelm the reader with similarities in diction, by which Roberts makes allusions to Wordsworth overt, obviously beyond mere fascination or crude emulation, and these similarities create the necessary allegorical distance.

These textual echoes do not exhaust the motifs’ functions in Roberts’s poem. After the initial lines of both poems, in which the speakers designate the time spans and embrace the first symbolic objects of their nostalgic landscapes, it is easy to discern their mutual themes: the peaceful unity of human and wild landscapes, the change in each place, and the pervasive tranquility, signifying or *symbolizing* the acclaimed Romantic unity of mind and nature (de Man 199). Irrespective of the biographical circumstances of the poems, both initially place their speakers at lonely vantage points where they are alone with the landscapes and their reveries. The “Here, from my vantage-ground, I can see” of “The Tantramar” (11) corresponds with “The day is come when I again repose / Here, under this dark sycamore, and view” of “Tintern Abbey” (9-10). Interestingly, the introduction of the observation point in each poem follows the first presentation of the wild landscape: “Only in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change! / Here where the road that has climbed from the inland valleys and woodlands, / Dips from the hill-tops down, straight to the base of the hills” (“Tantramar” 8-10). Wordsworth, in the corresponding lines, accentuates the sense of seclusion, which makes his speaker’s later address to the “dear Friend” (Dorothy) all the more unexpected:

Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
Which on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion. . . . (“Lines” 4-7)

Each poet places his speaker in a wild landscape as if to divert his sight to its human counterpart. Having reposed under the sycamore, Wordsworth’s speaker views “These plots of cottage ground, these orchard-tufts” (11), while, from his “vantage-ground,” Roberts’s speaker “can see the scattering houses, / Stained with time, set warm in orchards, meadows, and wheat” (11-12).

David Jackel takes the image of stained houses as a hint of mutability in the landscape, which, he assumes, demonstrates the speaker’s

ironic failure to recognize that, admired and craved specifically for its sense of permanence, the landscape touched by time is deprived of the charm with which the speaker invests it (49). Without going into detail about the unlikelihood of such an ironic stance (Ware refutes Jackel's argument), I would argue that, in his stained houses and wind-swept slopes (the latter another of Jackel's examples), Roberts remains faithful to the Romantic sense of the picturesque. William Gilpin, regarded by Wordsworth and other Romantic poets as the leading authority on this topic (Heffernan 616), maintained in his essay "On Picturesque Beauty" (1792) that "*smoothness*," "tho right, and as it should be in nature, offends the picture" and suggested turning "from a *smooth* building" to "a *rough* ruin," "plant[ing] the rugged oaks instead of flowering shrubs," and overall "us[ing] the mallet, instead of the chissel [sic]" (7-8). Even if stained houses are not an image of change in the landscape, change in the speakers is a key point in both poems.

Unlike Wordsworth, who incorporates the maturing of his self into the picture of the landscape, Roberts meticulously takes care not to invest his landscape with "[h]ands of chance and change" (5), which have marred the speaker's other beloved objects. This deliberate eviction of change from the observable landscape exemplifies the Romantic idea of "a subject that had," in de Man's words, "to borrow from the outside world a temporal stability which it lacked within itself." Moreover, it exacerbates this idea to the extent of "allegorizing," in de Man's understanding of the term, the "symbolic language, based on the close interpenetration between observation and passion" (200). Contrary to Wordsworth's poem, in Roberts's poem both change and passion remain outside the landscape and are reserved almost exclusively for the realm of memory, intentionally separated from the landscape by the speaker's "vantage-ground."

Wordsworth's unquenchable desire for the object, which Roberts elsewhere describes as a "contemplative wisdom which seemed to Wordsworth the message of the scene which moved him" ("Poetry" 280), yields — at the moment of present observation — an orderly amalgam of the recollections of his boyish days, matured into "the joy / Of elevated thoughts" ("Lines" 95-96), and the anticipated preservation of these passions in his sister. Even if his "present pleasure" (64) might be construed as the pleasure of recognition, as though in a reversed Aristotelian mimesis, the stress on "this moment," conceiving "life and

food / For future years” (65-66), invests the object of his current perception with a new function — to procure for the future memories as a source of consolation. Yet Wordsworth’s speaker “dare[s] to hope” only because of the change that occurred in him: “And so I dare to hope / Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first / I came among these hills” (66-68).

In “The Tantramar,” by contrast, the speaker never admits directly that the change has happened to his inner self. The word *change* occurs twice in the poem, at the beginning and at the end, thus framing the description of the static nostalgic object with an unsettling interference of time. This is the opening:

Summers and summers have come, and gone with the flight of the  
swallow;  
Sunshine and thunder have been, storm, and winter, and frost;  
Many and many a sorrow has all but died from remembrance,  
Many a dream of joy fall’n in the shadow of pain.  
Hands of chance and change have marred, or moulded, or broken,  
Busy with spirit or flesh, all I most have adored;  
Even the bosom of Earth is strewn with heavier shadows, —  
Only in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change! (1-8)

To make his point about Roberts’s “projecting his own grief onto the landscape,” Ware maintains that “it should now be obvious that even the opening lines present a mental landscape” (229). If this were true, then the last line of the quoted portion — the exclamation that, contrary to changes that have occurred outside the landscape, there has been no change in the “green hills” — needs to be read as a highly ironic statement and thus contradictory to the tone of the poem. Obviously, there are not two mental landscapes — one that is “marred, or moulded, or broken” and one that has not changed. Moreover, there is no description of the landscape prior to the line “Only in these green hills. . . .” What comes before this line, along with the ensuing landscape portrayal, is a complex metaphor of the passage of time. The elements of the metaphor do not, at least yet, cast their shadows on the nostalgic object, and Ware’s paraphrase of one of Roberts’s lines, supposed to demonstrate the projection of the speaker’s “own grief onto the landscape,” is a little too wishful: “By calling pain ‘the shadow’ of joy, the speaker points to the inextricable union of the two qualities” (229). The line “Many a

dream of joy . . . ” just offsets the previous line, which together annihilate each other for the sake of poetic parallelism or equilibrium: on the one hand, almost all sorrow has been forgotten; on the other, dreams of joy have also “fall’n in the shadow of pain.” Standing for the vicious circle of human grief and joy, those two lines, in their turn, offset the initial two lines of the poem, in which the same sense of the passage of time is rendered through the images of natural cycles and of opposing, and therefore mutually balancing, natural forces: summers versus winters, sunshine versus storm, and so on. Contrary to Wordsworth’s speaker, who explicitly acknowledges that he is “changed, no doubt, from what I was” (67), the speaker of “The Tantramar” blames “[h]ands of chance and change” for marring, moulding, or breaking “all I most have adored” yet not for marring himself.

These “[h]ands” appear again at the end of “The Tantramar,” where the speaker withholds his impulse to abandon his “vantage-ground” and to “go down to the marshland” (61). To understand their function in relation to Wordsworth, we need to consider the whole final stanza:

Yet, as I sit and watch, this present peace of the landscape, —  
 Stranded boats, these reels empty and idle, the hush,  
 One grey hawk slow-wheeling above yon cluster of haystacks, —  
 More than the old-time stir this stillness welcomes me home.  
 Ah, the old-time stir, how once it stung me with rapture, —  
 Old-time sweetness, the winds freighted with honey and salt!  
 Yet will I stay my steps and not go down to the marshland, —  
 Muse and recall far off, rather remember than see, —  
 Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion,  
 Spy at their task even here the hands of chance and change. (55-64)

Having reviewed other interpretations of this closing stanza (Jackel; Marshall; Strong), and skilfully meandering between concession and rebuttal, Ware offers an all-encompassing and convincing reading of it. The initial lines of this stanza, following the more detailed description of “the old-time stir” as the source of “sweetness” and “rapture,” presented in the previous stanza, suggest an alien and melancholic mood by the diction, which contrasts sharply with the remembered dynamic of the active community of fishers. The “[s]tranded boats” and “reels empty and idle” are clearly juxtaposed with the scene from the speaker’s memory:



Well I remember it all. The salt, raw scent of the margin;  
 While, with men at the windlass, groaned each reel, and the net,  
 Surging in ponderous lengths, uprose and coiled in its station;  
 Then each man to his home, — well I remember it all! (51-54)

The speaker's longing for the raptures of the "[o]ld-time sweetness" cannot find satisfaction in the reality of the physical and tangible "marshland," just below the "vantage-ground," because the speaker dares not go down, suspecting that he would find the visualized and well-remembered scene marred by "chance and change." Ware concurs with Jackel that the end of the poem unequivocally points to the real source of the change — "the speaker himself" (Ware 231) — yet disagrees that the speaker's "illusion that life on the marshes is unaffected by change is not merely . . . the product of distance, nor (as Strong argues) a demonstration of man's psychic 'need for illusion as well as reality.' It is truly a 'darling' illusion, the offspring, as the speaker recognises, of his own wishful imagination" (Jackel 50). Ware regards this explanation as a failure to account for the speaker's realization of the illusion and his seemingly paradoxical refusal to revisit the marshlands: "If, as Jackel argues, the speaker has already recognized his alienation, how would closer contact with the Tantramar be disruptive? How could it further dispel his illusion, already recognized as 'wishful'? And why does the speaker suddenly revert to his fear of 'chance and change?'" (232). Looking for the most probable answers to his own questions, Ware favours Strong's reference to "a universal nostalgic experience, while simultaneously retaining a critical perspective on nostalgia itself" (232). As Strong writes,

It is part of the dialectical and dramatic action of the poem that, even having remembered and imagined the forces of "chance and change" at work in the landscape of his youth, the speaker of "The Tantramar Revisited" should wish, in the final analysis, to preserve the "distance that lends enchantment" to the marshland, to observe only the pleasing outlines and not the disturbing details of the scene, and to preserve intact, if only for a renewal of the psychic interaction between the memory and the remembered, the "darling illusion" that there is a corner of past space where there is "no change." (34)

When we contrast the above arguments, however, it might appear that there are fewer differences than they assume, for there is no rule that

prohibits the individual and “wishful” from being reflections of the universal and illusive.

Whatever the intricacies of the speaker’s psychology, the previous interpreters of “The Tantramar” seem to have ignored the fact that, when the speaker refuses to descend to the marshland, he is not so much afraid of losing the landscape of his illusion as he is reluctant to leave the landscape in general. The “old-time stir” can hardly qualify as a landscape; it is more a remembered impression or sensation. The word *landscape* does show up in the first line of the last stanza, seemingly subduing the rest of the poem under its expressive spell, but as such the landscape is opposed to “the old-time stir” because the function of the landscape is to harbour stillness: “More than the old-time stir this stillness welcomes me home” (58). As established earlier, the description of the landscape in “The Tantramar” begins right after the passage of time and the works of “chance and change” are introduced in the first stanza. The landscape from the beginning is opposed to the concept of change and remains so until the end: from “no change” “in these green hills” (8) to “this present peace of the landscape” (55), the landscape is a constant source of “stillness” sought by the speaker who is afflicted by “the hands of chance and change.”

Roberts’s speaker has much in common with Wordsworth’s speaker from the mountain scenes of *The Prelude*, who represents, in de Man’s words, the Romantic “self”: because it is “caught up entirely within mutability, . . . the temptation exists, then, for the self to borrow, so to speak, the temporal stability that it lacks from nature” (197). In one of the two passages from “Tintern Abbey” that correspond with Roberts’s “chance and change,” the word *stir* is employed to convey “The dreary intercourse of daily life” (132), which in “The Tantramar” is the source of “heavier shadows” rather than of “[o]ld-time sweetness,” but nevertheless in both poems “stir” is juxtaposed with the “stillness” (Roberts) or the “tranquility” (Wordsworth) that Wordsworth contrasts to alienated scenes:

Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir  
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,  
 Have hung upon the beating of the heart,  
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee  
 O sylvan Wye! (“Lines” 53-57)

Yet, if anything, against the strong parallels in language and imagery between “Tintern Abbey” and “The Tantramar,” this difference in application of the word *stir* is disturbing. In “Frost at Midnight” — the poem that chronologically precedes “Tintern Abbey” by just a few months, which has similar motifs and might well have inspired Wordsworth — Coleridge uses the word *stir* in the same sense as Roberts. Having also given himself to the pleasurable recollections of his youth, Coleridge’s speaker recalls the “music” of “the old church-tower” bells:

From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,  
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me  
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear  
Most like articulate sounds of things to come! (30-33)

This passage uncannily resembles the “Tintern Abbey” speaker’s “wild ecstasies” and Dorothy’s “wild eyes,” in which the speaker “reads” (and prophesies that he will read in the future) his “former pleasures” (“Lines” 119), but its nostalgic tone anticipates Roberts’s “Ah the old-time stir, how once it stung me with rapture” in “The Tantramar,” in which we almost expect to hear Coleridge’s “But O! How oft, / How oft at school” (23-24). Without sharing the immediate settings of Wordsworth’s and Roberts’s poems, Coleridge’s midnight cottage fulfills a similar function as a proper place for “meditation” — “solitude” and “extreme silentness” (5, 10). Even the outside “hush of nature” (17) has all the landscape ingredients of “The Tantramar” and “Tintern Abbey”: “Sea, and hill, and wood” (11). At work in all three poems is the “strategy” that de Man recognizes in Coleridge — the strategy “by means of which nature is brought down to a human level while escaping from ‘the unimaginable touch of time’” (197). Only “The Tantramar,” however, elevates this device to the level of demonstrative overttness that escapes the symbolic merging of subject and object: the landscape here is the holder of the stillness, which, in its turn, harbours meditation, and the speaker deliberately preserves his allegorical distance because he is aware of the boundaries of the landscape.

American art writer Lucy Lippard points to an important difference between “landscape” as “place at a distance, visual rather than sensual, seen rather than felt in all its affective power,” and “place,” imbued “with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke” (8). According to this delimitation, in

"The Tantramar" the description of the landscape precedes the description of the place. The speaker's "vantage-ground" allows the sight to slide from "the inland valleys and woodlands" to "the scattering houses," "orchards," and "meadows" and from the meadows' "seaward border" (17) to "the tides vexing the Westmoreland shores" (18). Of course, this landscape portrayal is subject to poetic convention, including the topographical English poetry of the eighteenth century, and arguably there are details that might not be visible from one vantage point, but those supplemented details have their sources in the knowledge of geography rather than in memory because memory is occupied mostly by sensual experience, which pertains more to "place" than to "landscape." Evocation of landscape as "place at a distance" (Lippard) is reinforced in "The Tantramar" by the phrase "[m]iles on miles"; the outbound appellations "slopes outspread," "outlying heights," and "miles outrolled"; and the inclusion of geographical names such as Westmoreland, Cumberland Point, and Minudie (18-25), which again suggest knowledge rather than memory. Wind as a part of the landscape portrayal by no means refers to the sensual: it either stems from the speaker's knowledge, as in "Wind-swept all day, blown by the south-east wind" (14), or represents a visual but distant margin, as in "Miles on miles of green, barred by the hurtling gusts" (24). Roberts's geographical concreteness in regard to the landscape viewed from his speaker's vantage point thus presents an opposition to Wordsworth's half-created and half-perceived, internalized landscape, whose significance is never divorced from the speaker's awareness of his changing self. As de Man notes, "in observing the development of even as geographically concrete a poet as Wordsworth, the significance of the locale can extend so far as to include a meaning that is no longer circumscribed by the literal horizon of a given place" (206). In this view, Ware's diagnosis that "Roberts' imagery implies his own inability to imagine a static landscape" (234) seems to be right in reference to the remembered place but not to the known and perceptible landscape. The landscape is to be nothing but static.

What Roberts's speaker has a hard time imagining in terms of landscape is place. Place as a dear and memorable object in "The Tantramar" emerges slowly and precisely at the point where the description of the landscape loses its prescriptive distance. Its cue in the middle of the second stanza is the twofold "nearer": "Nearer a white sail shines across the water, and nearer / Still are the slim, grey masts of fishing boats dry

on the flats” (27-28). With the change of focus, the memory of place takes over the descriptive discourse in the next line — “Ah, how well I remember those wide red flats, above tidemark” (29) — and “well I remember” is repeated three times thereafter. Up to the beginning of the third stanza, the Wordsworthian “[n]ow at this season” (also reiterated three times) prepares the ground for the dynamic description of the place in the future tense, in motion, and in the progress of day and night; this description occupies the bulk of the third stanza, infusing the detached landscape portrayed in the first part of the poem:

Near about sunset the crane will journey homeward above them;  
 Round them, under the moon, all the calm night long,  
 Winnowing soft grey wings of marsh-owls wander and wander,  
 Now to the broad, lit marsh, now to the dusk of the dike.  
 Soon, thro' their dew-wet frames, in the live keen freshness of morning,  
 Out of the teeth of the dawn blows back the awakening wind.  
 (41-46)

Phrases such as “calm night,” “freshness of morning,” and “dew-wet frames” further develop the sensual focus of the speaker, who descends from his vantage point of sight and knowledge of the landscape first to the nearness of “fishing boats” and “upland barns” (28, 34) and then to his remembered tactile sensations. The image of the wind also changes its function: it is not the geographical “south-east wind,” which blows on “the broad bright slopes outspread to southward and eastward” (13-14), as it was in the previous landscape description, but “the awakening wind.” This change of sensual focus reaches its acme in the fifth stanza, the shortest and emotionally most intense, notably framed by the double “I remember it all.” Here the elements of landscape disappear entirely: the first line presents a sense of smell, “The salt, raw scent of the margin,” and the rest is a memorable snapshot of the speaker’s unity with fishers in what appears as a physical, bodily metaphor of their mutual enterprise: “While, with men at the windlass, groaned each reel, and the net, / Surging in ponderous lengths, uprose and coiled in its station” (51-53). The beginning of the sixth stanza, the last, is in sharp opposition to this image of rapture. The speaker soberly returns to his present time and his “vantage-ground,” and naturally the landscape comes back as well: “Yet, as I sit and watch, this present peace of the landscape” (55). The immobility and quiet of the landscape are underscored by

“Stranded boats, these reels empty and idle, the hush,” while the programmatic distance of the landscape is rendered by the metaphor of the speaker’s vantage point: “One grey hawk slow-wheeling above yon cluster of haystacks” (56-57). The emotions of the fifth stanza are recapitulated in the sixth stanza by “the old-time stir” that “stung” the speaker “with rapture” and by the “Old-time sweetness, the winds freighted with honey and salt!” (59-60). Not only does the “scent” reappear here, tying together the raptures described in the fourth and fifth stanzas (meadow and sea, respectively), but the wind is reaffirmed in its “place” rather than “landscape” quality. However, it is the sobering quality of the landscape, epitomized in the word *stillness*, that gives the speaker an awareness that what he remembers well is just a “darling illusion.”

Is this illusion not enough for the speaker of “The Tantramar”? In his psycho-biographical approach, Ware maintains that, unlike Wordsworth, who can exercise a safe and happy comeback to his beloved spot of nature “without abandoning his other and more human concerns, . . . Roberts, at this point in his career, cannot resolve his two concerns, the social and the natural” (236-37). Also searching for Wordsworthian antecedents of Roberts’s images, Ware is credited with finding the source of “chance and change” in the seventh canto of Wordsworth’s poem “The White Doe of Rylstone” (1808). In fact, the phrase first appears in the fourth canto, where it designates a blind force driving the Nortons to captivity:

But quick the turns of chance and change,  
And knowledge has a narrow range;  
Whence idle fears, and needless pain,  
And wishes blind, and efforts vain. (1119-22)

The words *turns*, *pain*, and *vain* suggest the “[h]ands of chance and change” immediately following the description of the passage of time at the beginning of “The Tantramar.” The second use of the phrase, “through many a thought / Of chance and change, that hath been brought / To the subjection of a holy, / Though stern and rigorous, melancholy!” (“White Doe” 1594-97), only confirms Roberts’s reference to Wordsworth by repeating, close to “chance and change,” the form of the poetic-archaic plural (in Wordsworth “many a thought”): “[m]any and many a sorrow” and “[m]any a dream.” The heroine of “The White Doe,” Emily, one time resembles more the speaker of “The Tantramar,”

another time more the speaker of "Tintern Abbey." Coming to terms with the cruel vicissitudes of her family's fate and her own, Emily appears to be "a joyless human Being" who "sits alone" on "a primrose bank, her throne / Of quietness" (1580, 1583-84) — evoking a stance similar to Roberts's melancholic stillness. In accord with the speaker of "The Tantramar," who, before returning to his beloved spot of youth, has endured the "hands of chance and change," in "The White Doe" Emily "*hath* wandered, long and far," and "*hath* roamed in trouble and in grief" (1611, 1613). Like the speakers of both "The Tantramar" and "Tintern Abbey," Emily "dares to seek a haven / Among her native wilds of Craven" (1617-18), yet her position in the landscape does not have the quality of Roberts's vantage point: like so many of Wordsworth's meditative speakers, Emily sits "beneath a moulded tree" (1632) (comparable to "I repose / Here, under this dark sycamore, and view" in "Tintern Abbey" [9-10]). Attended by the spirit of the valley, "the sylvan Doe" in "The White Doe" (1669), a functional equivalent of "sylvan Wye" in "Tintern Abbey," Emily regains the landscape of her memory in a manner parallel to that of the speaker of "Tintern Abbey," who sees the "dizzy raptures" of his youth in the "wild eyes" of his "dear Sister" (120, 122). Emily, "ranging through the wasted groves, / Received the memory of old loves, / Undisturbed and undistrest" ("White Doe" 1753-55). Comparing the resolutions of Emily and Roberts's speaker, Ware states that, unlike the heroine of "The White Doe," "Roberts' speaker submits to a melancholia that, while rigorous, is not holy" and that he "can see only the 'hands of chance and change'" (236). In fact, Emily abandons "stern and rigorous melancholy" only to gain "[m]ild, and grateful, melancholy" ("White Doe" 1758), which, at a closer look, is not much different from Roberts's "darling illusion." Her melancholy is "[n]ot the sunless gloom or unenlightened, / But by tender fancies brightened" (1759-60). Moreover, Roberts's speaker, though undoubtedly haunted by those "hands of chance and change," chooses not to look at them and remains in the realm of his fancies.

Having established that the moods of "The White Doe" and "The Tantramar" have more in common than might appear, I nevertheless agree with Ware that an irreconcilable split between the natural and the social in Roberts's speaker is the underlying motif of "The Tantramar" and its primary difference from "Tintern Abbey." One might doubt, however, the exhaustiveness and finality of a psychological interpreta-

tion of "The Tantramar." Considering how many allusions to "Tintern Abbey" and other works by Wordsworth "The Tantramar" contains, its metapoetical literariness unequivocally points to an agon with the great Romantic. "Well I remember it all," says the speaker, and according to Harold Bloom, "Memory is the mother of poetry for Wordsworth" (*Visionary* 145). Wordsworth himself famously stated that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" ("Preface" 611), and Roberts painstakingly adheres to this definition in "The Tantramar." As I have established, the descriptive part of the poem is divided into landscape as a detached prospect of sight and place as a receptacle of memorable sensations and emotions, the function of the former becoming the evocation of the latter. Through the "present peace of the landscape," Roberts's speaker achieves "stillness," or Wordsworth's "tranquility," and only in this state is he able and willing to "[m]use and recall far off, rather remember than see" (63), because his youthful recollections, not mere geographical knowledge of the landscape, are primarily the senses of touch and smell but not sight. On close inspection, it appears that the landscape of "The Tantramar" is pure vision — it simply does not contain sounds. The point, of course, is not Roberts's metaphorical deafness: his other poems, even from the same volume, *In Divers Tones*, are crowded with appeals to the reader's sense of hearing. Where "Tintern Abbey" begins with "and again I hear / These waters" (2-3), the soundscape of "The Tantramar" emerges only in the conclusion and entirely in an apophatic form of "hush" and "stillness." In contrast, Wordsworth's tranquility is never solely based upon sight, and his observation point under the sycamore is not as beneficial as Roberts's "vantage-ground." As Bloom maintains, "Wordsworth wants to rely upon voice and the memory of voice, and somewhat fears relying upon sight and the memory of sight" (*Poetry* 76). The voice that Wordsworth's speaker relies on in catching up with the language of his "boyish days" is not, however, his own but his sister's ("and in thy voice I catch / The language of my former heart" ["Lines" 117-18]), and by this transfer, in Bloom's words, he "introjects the past, projects the future except as a world for Dorothy, and utterly destroys the present moment, the living time in which he no longer stands" (*Poetry* 78). In "The Tantramar," Roberts repairs the deficiency of sight, as does Dorothy in "Thoughts on My Sick-Bed" when she reports to her brother that



I trod the hills again, —

No prisoner in this lonely room,  
I *saw* the green Banks of the Wye,  
Recalling thy prophetic words,  
Bard, Brother, Friend from infancy!

No need of motion, or of strength,  
Or even the breathing air:  
— I thought of Nature's loveliest scenes;  
And with Memory I was there. (44-52)

Was Dorothy aware that she had fulfilled only half of the agenda prophesied for her by her brother? She carried out the sight part of the prophecy (“thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms”) but not the hearing one: “Thy memory be as a dwelling-place / For all sweet sounds and harmonies” (“Lines” 140-43); so did Roberts. He also “trod the hills” and figuratively “*saw*” the greens of the Wye-Tantramar; he also “thought of Nature’s loveliest scenes” and, to be sure, was there “with Memory.” If “The Tantramar” is an allegory of “Tintern Abbey” and Roberts himself is an allegory of Dorothy, then where is the allegory’s programmatic distance that, contrary to the symbol’s tendency toward identification, arises “in relation to its origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide,” “establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference” (de Man 207)? First, this distance is an overt evocation of the Wordsworths in “The Tantramar.” Second, perhaps Roberts, before Bloom, realized that “Tintern Abbey” is “not as much a myth of memory as it is a utilization of memory as a lie against time” (*Poetry* 79). In any event, it is safe to assume that the allegorical difference between “The Tantramar” and its “original” is in the reliable “hands of chance and change.”

Wordsworth’s repressed distrust of memory as a warranty for the continuity of his speaker’s self, represented in “Tintern Abbey” by the symbolic transference of the qualities of both memory and self to his sister, annihilates even the “abundant recompense” “of elevated thoughts” and of “a sense sublime” (89, 96), which he believes he acquired after the loss of his youthful “aching joys” (85). Maybe this is why Roberts, in his *reading* of the English poet (indeed, his poem could as well have been titled “Wordsworth, Revisited”), does not even pretend to seek a similar recompense. His speaker is not so much interested in a recon-

ciliation of his present self with the loss of the “[o]ld-time sweetness” as he is anxious to become the voice of Dorothy, testifying both to the perpetuation of memory and to its deficiency, and accepting, on her behalf, Wordsworth’s wishful appeal to the “dear” friend: “If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief / Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts / Of tender joy wilt thou remember me” (“Lines” 144-46). As much as Roberts’s “well I remember it all” is a symbolic moment of empathy with Wordsworth’s “dizzy raptures,” his accentuated awareness of the boundary between the perceived landscape and the recalled place is his psychological recompense, which not only benefits from Wordsworth’s vulnerability but also satisfies his formula of poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquility.” Roberts’s landscape is the harbour of tranquility, a reliable “vantage-ground” for the memories of his youthful joy, and the sobering consciousness of their fragility is a testimony to literariness, celebrated in “The Tantramar” as a cure for melancholy. Through his allegorical intimacy with the Wordsworths, their poetic dialogues, aesthetic definitions, and conceptualizations of nature and memory, Roberts implies that poetry itself is the underlying motif of “The Tantramar.”

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All citations from “Tintern Abbey” and “Tantramar Revisited” are keyed to line number.

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