
“Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont” is one of the poems in the section “Epitaphs and Elegiac Pieces” (pages 206-07). “Elegiac Stanzas” is Wordsworth’s famous elegy that commemorates not only the loss of his brother, but also the loss of his youthful belief in the holiness of Nature.

Wordsworth’s close friend, the painter and generous patron of the arts, Sir George Beaumont, R.A., (1753 – 1827), inspired “Elegiac Stanzas” with his painting of a moldering, medieval castle keep being buffeted by a night storm, overlooking a vessel at risk in a raging sea. The painting, inserted below, caused Wordsworth to meditate upon the contrast of his youthful vision of the sea as a safe and sacred place with his present awareness that the sea, and by extension, nature, is truly amoral. Wordsworth stages an Aristotelian scene of recognition and reversal to extinguish the poetic “gleam / The light that never was on sea or land,” which now he sees to be literally so. The poet addresses the old castle in Beaumont’s painting: