

Timely Utterances:
Re-reading the Wordsworth of the 1805 *Prelude*

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Abstract

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My thesis explores how Wordsworth develops his poetic identity in ‘Growth of a Poet’s Mind’ in *The Prelude*. I argue that Wordsworth’s attempt to stabilize an identity in the mutability of time – in writing – results in a self precariously situated between past and present, speech and silence, for example. This thesis will examine how Wordsworth engages with time and language in his creation of ‘timely utterances’ about the self in *The Prelude* throughout the process of his writing. The identity Wordsworth seeks to stabilize in writing is not stabilizable because of ‘two consciousnesses’. However, Wordsworth projects a continuity of self by looking back to ‘a dark / Invisible workmanship’ in his childhood communion with nature, which generated the aspiration to ‘some philosophic Song’ that Wordsworth, now, still feels and acts upon. My thesis goes on to look at how Wordsworth, in the act of writing, tries to establish an identity as a poet in the very act of rising to the challenge of being a poet posed by the French Revolution. As a result, it is precisely such recognition of fragmentations and contradictions in his identity-formation that keeps Wordsworth’s writing moving forward and evolving into an epic poem for humanity. In the formulation and reformulation of self, Wordsworth comes to recognize that his self is subject to continual revisions of his poetic ‘self’ in *The Prelude*. The represented self of Wordsworth vanishes into language in his act of writing. But in the act of self-representation, Wordsworth protects his self from the ‘defacing’ power of language by locating the self in the silence left by ‘life’. Nevertheless, Wordsworth also recognizes the generative powers of language for poetically reconstructing the self as a ‘[prophet] of Nature’. However, a profound recognition of and restless dissatisfaction with the otherness of language locates the Wordsworth of *The Prelude* ‘midway’ between the construction of a coherent textual identity and the recognition of identifications that reach beyond textuality. One of these identifications is to be found in Wordsworth’s relation to Coleridge. Taking up the poetic project of prophesying hope to the humankind Coleridge assigned him, Wordsworth attempts to escape the contradiction between his own aims and those of Coleridge by using the recreative powers of language to recreate Coleridge and his project while recognizing his poetic obligation to Coleridge. Equally, in the act of rewriting a self, Wordsworth recognizes a sense of self perpetually subject to change and revision, and his relationship with Coleridge is valued for its power to stimulate such change. Wordsworth’s lifelong re-interpretation, re-evaluation and revision of his project constitute an identity that is perpetually shifting, evolving, self-transforming.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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The Author

Chia-Jung Lee graduated from National University of Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in 2004 with a First Bachelor's degree in Western Literature and Language. Then she was awarded Master of Arts degree in English Studies at The University of Manchester in 2005. Her MA dissertation mainly looked at Wordsworth's presentation of the natural landscape in his poetry, with particular attention to the sublime. Her PhD thesis is an extension and development of this dissertation, focusing on Wordsworth's identity-formation in *The Prelude*.

Introduction

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth seeks to establish a stable poetic identity for himself through the examination of recollected earlier selves. My thesis will describe how Wordsworth develops his poetic identity by attempting to stabilize it against but also within the mutability of time. I argue that the inherent contradictions involved in doing this – and doing it in language – force Wordsworth to situate this ‘stable’ self in what is highly unstable: to locate it ‘between’, for example, past and present, speech and silence, internality and externality, self-assertion and self-repression. I will examine Wordsworth’s attempts to inject ‘timely utterances’ into the lapse of time as a means of constructing – and stabilising – an identity for himself.¹ I will be especially interested in his inevitable failures to do so, and his poetic responses to these failures.

The issue of time, then, plays a key role in my examination of Wordsworth’s poetic utterances. In *The Prelude* there are transitions between a range of temporalities and these lead Wordsworth, again and again, to a sense of being ‘two consciousnesses’ – ‘conscious of myself / And of some other Being’ (II. 32, 32-33)². Such temporal overlayings produce expressions of uncertainty and doubt even about the poem’s central project, and push *The Prelude* into ambiguous visions of fragmented selfhood.³ Numerous studies well illustrate and usefully analyze the existence of temporal discrepancy in Wordsworth’s writing and how it baffles his use of language. For example, Paul de Man talks about Wordsworth’s ‘consciousness of temporality’ in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*; he points out that ‘The content of [past experience] is perhaps less important than the fact that [Wordsworth has] experienced it in its passing away, and that it thereby has contributed in an unmediated

¹ The title of my thesis quotes Geoffrey Hartman, and my argument owes a fundamental debt to Hartman. What my analysis will add here is a consideration of the ‘timeliness’ of this kind of utterance in *The Prelude*.

² William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, Mark L. Reed (ed.), vol. I (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). The quotations (with line numbers) of *The Prelude* in my thesis are from this version, unless otherwise stated.

³ On the idea of uncertainty and suspension in Wordsworth’s writing, this thesis is considerably indebted to Paul de Man’s ‘Time and History in Wordsworth’, *Diacritics*, 17:4 (Winter, 1987), 4-17.

way (that is, in the form of an act) to the constitution of our own consciousness of temporality'.⁴ My study attempts to go further than de Man in exploring how the various temporal standpoints within *The Prelude* shape not only Wordsworth's 'consciousness of temporality' but also his whole sense of identity, which, as a linguistic construction, partakes of and engages with both his poetic 'task' and existential 'lot' but is identical to neither.

Thinking of himself in the past, Wordsworth, however, finds 'something ... [that] fits [him] for the Poet's task' (VII. 53). My thesis asks: how, and how successfully, does Wordsworth establish a poetic identity for himself by locating this identity within the 'growth' of his mind as a poet? This is a matter both of mental 'expansion' within 'spots of time' (XI. 258) and of 'maturation' across time. I want particularly to look at the ways in which the poem builds an identity for Wordsworth in the second sense, tracing the 'growth' of Wordsworth's mind from childhood to adulthood. I will argue that this is not a question of acquiring a body of experience through time so much as resigning oneself to the mutability of time. It is this resignation to time's mutability that allows Wordsworth to infer continuity from his ongoing obsessive insistence on temporality and difference – to the extent that he can do this within *The Prelude*.

The phrase 'timely utterance' is from Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'⁵: 'To me along there came a thought of grief: / A timely utterance gave that thought relief, / And I again am strong' (22-24). Wordsworth describes an utterance that is so 'timely' as to give 'relief' and revive his strength. His own 'timely utterances' are 'speech act[s]' between 'vow and passionate wish'.⁶ My argument owes a fundamental debt to Geoffrey Hartman's seminal discussion of 'timely utterance' in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*. Hartman thinks that Wordsworth's 'utterance[s]' have to do with 'the sense of bond

⁴ Paul De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, London: Columbia UP, 1984), p. 50.

⁵ William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', in M. H. Abrams. et al. (eds.), 7th ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (London: Norton, 2000), pp. 240-42.

⁶ Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 156.

between mind and nature, of a responsiveness that overcomes the difference of speech and muteness, or articulate and inarticulate utterance'.⁷ Wordsworth manipulates his poetic utterances in such a way as to make them appear both timely and bonding. Through the poet's 'timely utterance', he hopes to regain his spiritual communion with nature and to reestablish a corresponding continuity between the utterances of his past self and the words of his present writing. This is Hartman's notion of 'word-wish', which, for him, 'may be useful for a future reflection on the relationship of wish, speech act, and text, especially when the text is poetic or visionary'.⁸ However, as Hartman goes on to state, this kind of 'timely utterance' articulates 'nothing but the voice of [its] wish'.⁹ My thesis will offer an examination of this kind of 'wish' which can never be fulfilled by a 'speech act', and that is constantly subverted by 'text' in *The Prelude*. As Hartman puts it, 'to utter things in a timely way is the ideal situation, of course; yet Wordsworth usually represents the ideal in its wishful or miscarried form'.¹⁰

On the other hand, my use of the phrase also differs from Hartman's. In particular, I take issue with Hartman's claims about Wordsworth's sustained idealism. In Wordsworth's writing, there is only his 'word-wish', rather than the voice of the past self, but he is acutely aware of this. Seeing the past self from a temporal distance, Wordsworth's utterances become distinct from those of that earlier, 'other Being'. As a result, his autobiographical writing uses words in such a way that an indistinct and inconsistent, but real, line exists between the voice of the poet and that of 'some other Being'. This temporality fragmentation confuses our reading of Wordsworth's identity formation while at the same time revealing the contradictory, but also 'timely', nature in his poetic utterances.

This thesis aims to investigate the way Wordsworth engages with the issues of time and

⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹ Geoffrey Hartman, 'Words, Wish, Worth: Wordsworth', in Harold Bloom et al. (eds.), *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 170.

¹⁰ *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 157.

language at key points in his incessant, ongoing writing and revision of ‘the story of [his] life’ (1805, I. 666) between the composition of the 1799 version of *The Prelude* and the production of the 1850 version of the text. While focusing to a large extent on the internal dynamics of the 1805 version of the poem, partly because it is in this version of *The Prelude* that Wordsworth most prominently makes this engagement time, language, and their relationship a central thematic concern in the poem,¹¹ and partly in order to demonstrate just how early in the poem’s composition this engagement became one of the poem’s dominant themes, the thesis also looks at the 1799 and 1850 texts of *The Prelude* and engages with Wordsworth’s manuscripts at other stages of his writing of the poem. In this way, I hope that my thesis will offer insights into the unresolved, and unresolvable, nature of Wordsworth’s thinking about time and language, as well as the fundamental importance of his engagement with time and language to the development of the poem throughout its evolution and how this engagement underpins and undermines the Wordsworth’s transformation of himself into a prophet of nature. It is Wordsworth’s engagement with time and language in *The Prelude* that made it a lifelong project.

I have chosen the multi-volume Cornell University Press edition as my primary text. Jack Stillinger praises this edition as ‘one of the most significant editing projects in Romantic literature’.¹² The Cornell Wordsworth presents full and accurate texts of every known *Prelude* manuscripts. According to Stillinger, the edition ‘embodies a concept of “no-fault” editing: the scholarly procedures are clearly explained, all necessary information concerning a text is given in one place or another in the appropriate volume, and special circumstances are plainly noted wherever they occur’.¹³ Moreover, Sally Bushell notes that ‘the concept of the contingent completion, occurring within the

¹¹ Stephen Gill points out that the 1805 text is ‘formally much more ambitious than the versions in two or five books, but more important, it is successfully ambitious’ (‘Introduction’, in Stephen Gill (ed.), *William Wordsworth’s The Prelude: a Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 1-42, p. 19).

¹² Jack Stillinger, *Romantic Complexity: Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 138.

¹³ *Ibid.*

compositional process, is highly significant for the editorial position adopted by the Cornell Series'.¹⁴ A number of the manuscripts and notebooks in the Cornell Series offer my study rich resources when it comes to Wordsworth's compositional drafts that show how the poet progresses and stops intermittently in the whole compositional history. More importantly, Bushell remarks that 'The critical and creative potential inherent in such editions has not been fully realised. The debate has remained largely focussed on editorial argument over the relative merits of different versions of a text, rather than on the development of *critical* approaches to the use of such material'.¹⁵ She stresses this point again by claiming: 'The process of composition itself, within, between and across the "complete" *Prelude* stages is largely ignored'.¹⁶ My study seeks to engage with such compositional draft materials in the Cornell Wordsworth in order to begin to explore how Wordsworth's continual revisionary practices resist any limiting of the poem to any of its different versions. The vitality of this great poem derives from Wordsworth's lifelong rewriting of an identity for his self and the dynamic interrelation between the various drafts composed at different stages of his life.

This thesis is situated both within critical debates about Wordsworth and *The Prelude* from deconstruction to new historicism¹⁷, and within ongoing debates about

¹⁴ Sally Bushell, *Text as Process: Creative Composition in Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Dickinson* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 78. She points out that 'for a writer such as Wordsworth there is no such thing as absolute completion: even a completed state is always contingent' (p. 79).

¹⁵ Sally Bushell, 'Reading below the Surface: Wordsworth and a Compositional Method', *Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 34 (2003), 9-13, 10.

¹⁶ Sally Bushell, 'Wordsworthian Composition: The Micro-Prelude', *Studies in Romanticism* 44 (2005), 399-421, 411.

¹⁷ Kenneth R. Johnston points out that 'Language, deconstructively interpreted, allows no crossing beyond itself, no recuperative return from fallen experience to redemptive reinterpretation' ('Introduction: the Spell of Wordsworth', in Kenneth R. Johnston et al. (eds.), *Romantic Revolutions*, pp. 3-7, p. 5). My thesis, while looking at Wordsworth's writing in the light of deconstructive reading, will also show how language functions positively in *The Prelude* to offer 'redemptive reinterpretation[s]' of some specific experiences. New Historicism emerged in the 1980s to criticize Romanticism's intentional and ideological evasion of history. One major New Historicist, Jerome McGann, famously says that 'The idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet' (Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: a Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.91). For new historicist critique of Wordsworth's poetry, see McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*; Marjorie Levinson's *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986); and Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 143- 144

autobiography as a genre.¹⁸ It will also examine Wordsworth's writing with reference to the philosophical backgrounds against which his writing works as well as some of the theoretical traditions through which he has, or might be, approached. Furthermore, I want to offer considerations of how Wordsworth's poetry of selfhood and imagination both relates to and resists the specific events immediately surrounding its composition – rather than just the mere philosophical questions of living in historical time.

This thesis will particularly explore the inter-related issues of time and language as these are developed in and by *The Prelude*. These issues have become an important aspect of the critical literature on Wordsworth. Critics from M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man, to Mary Jacobus have contributed fundamentally to our understanding of language, rhetoric, and temporality in Wordsworth. In the past decade, Andrew Bennett and Sally Bushell have offered in-depth insights into Wordsworth's writing and close textual analyses of Wordsworth's compositional history of *The Prelude*. My thesis can be read as building on, as well as departing from, the work of all these critics.

I approach Abrams' idea of 'an immanent teleology'¹⁹ in Wordsworth's autobiographical writing and Hartman's idea of 'timely utterance' through de Man's examination of 'the rhetoric of temporality'²⁰ in Wordsworth's poem. Wordsworth's writing of 'things past', as Abrams suggests in *Natural Supernaturalism*, creates 'a providential plot' and moves by a 'teleology'²¹ that has been 'immanent', inherent, and existent since the beginning of his autobiographical writing. This textual formation of 'an immanent teleology' builds on Wordsworth's 'timely utterance', which works as 'a speech

18 For example, Ashton Nichols' inspiring discussion of the Wordsworth of 1798-1805 in 'The Revolutionary "I": Wordsworth and the Politics of Self-Presentation', in Pauline Fletcher and John Murphy (eds.), *Wordsworth in Context* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1992), and Laura Marcus' talk about the 'retrospective' and 'non-immediate nature' of 'autobiographical self-awareness' in *Auto / Biographical Discourse: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994).

¹⁹ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 178.

²⁰ See de Man's *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 187-228.

²¹ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 76.

act that falls somewhere between vow and passionate wish'.²² In Hartman's view, Wordsworth's 'timely utterance' is fervent and ardent. 'Wordsworth's narrative can almost be said to begin with "an Ode, in passion utter'd" (1805, V, 97)'.²³ However, it is the rhetorical power of language that is challenged by de Man. De Man views Wordsworth's 'timely utterance' as a 'rhetoric of temporality' that seeks to re-link the present self-representation to past selves. At the same time, de Man sees in Wordsworth's 'providential plot' an 'authentically temporal predicament' and a desperate 'defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-knowledge'.²⁴ For de Man, 'the "now" of the poem is not an actual now' but 'the moment of death'.²⁵ With de Man in mind, this thesis wants to distance itself from Abrams and Hartman and the idea that *The Prelude* is driven primarily by faith or 'passionate wish', yet it also wants to offer a corrective of de Man. It will argue that Wordsworth's 'rhetoric of temporality' does not seek to hide from, or even to overcome, the 'negative [...] knowledge' of the self's 'authentically temporal predicament' but to engage with both that knowledge and temporality itself.

I will build on but also move forward from the insights of Abrams, Hartman, and de Man by further tracing and investigating the way Wordsworth develops an identity for his self in his obsessive textual engagement with time and language. In part I will do this by extending my analysis of *The Prelude* beyond the 1805 version of the poem to include not just the 1799 and 1850 versions of the poem but also Wordsworth's revisions of each of these. [This is a body of material that Abrams, Hartman, and de Man have not fully consulted.](#) My main argument here is that Wordsworth aims in creating the identity of a poet of sacred vision exactly out of his 'two consciousnesses' – not simply out of past consciousness nor out of the transcendence of this past consciousness now. In other words,

²² Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 157.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁴ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971), p. 208. De Man defines 'a truly temporal predicament' as 'the narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning, and [that] can find no escape from this spiral' (p. 222).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

Wordsworth's deepening 'consciousness of temporality' motivates him to build a new sense of self upon an intricate, complex, and dynamic interplay between various temporal moments in which his self lives in changeable relationships with the selves of other moments. In this relationship determined by the mutability of time, a continuous sense of self moving from past to present, rather than a stable 'timeless' self, is established through and in Wordsworth's use of language. I will suggest that it is Wordsworth's very awareness of the change brought by time (rather than providence) that drives what Abrams calls the 'plot' that forms Wordsworth as a 'poet-prophet'. Wordsworth does not seek a return to his earlier intimate bond with nature (as Hartman's idea of 'timely utterance' suggests) but rather aims at creating a self that is subject to change and development in time. In this sense, I also disagree with de Man's claim that Wordsworth attempts to counteract his 'temporal predicament' with a 'defensive strategy' and that he 'strives to conquer [time], or the relentless fall into death'.²⁶ I suggest that none of these readers sufficiently acknowledge the extent to which Wordsworth recognizes that his textual identity is to be created in the *ongoing* act of writing, and not through establishing some timeless relationship with his past selves or with nature.

Along with the issue of 'timeliness' in Wordsworth's 'timely utterance', my thesis looks at Wordsworth's understanding and use of language in the formation of his identity. My discussion here once again aims to build on but also move beyond the ideas of earlier readers, in this case those of de Man and Mary Jacobus. De Man famously claims that autobiography 'defaces' the self Wordsworth desires to inscribe in writing, and that 'death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament'.²⁷ In this 'linguistic predicament', de Man sees the 'apparently contradictory nature of paradoxes in which the movement of passing away curiously joins with a condition of remaining',²⁸ and claims that it is

²⁶ De Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', 9.

²⁷ De Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN*, 94:5, *Comparative Literature* (Dec. 1979), 919-30, 930.

²⁸ De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 56.

Wordsworth's language that tries to grasp this 'movement of passing away' in his writing of the past. Jacobus also sees in Wordsworth's writing the 'anxious relation between ... writing and salvation [of his self]',²⁹ while insisting that 'the language of books can only ever be the history of itself'.³⁰ Wordsworth's account of the 'growth' of his mind in language 'can only ever be the history' that is formed by language itself – and Wordsworth knows this. Jacobus calls Wordsworth's desire for a 'salvation' of and reconnection to his past self a 'Romantic fallacy of spontaneous lyric utterance'³¹ because the textual 'I' is always expressed through the otherness of language. Language is essentially atemporal. What this reading misses, however, is Wordsworth's profound awareness of and engagement with this 'otherness' of language, and it is this that the present thesis wants to foreground.

My discussion of Wordsworth's self-formation is indebted to Jacobus' idea that 'the self is not to be written out so easily, remaining obstinately lodged in the inter-text, midway between life and books. What results is less a web of meaning than an enmeshing of absences'.³² However, I will add to de Man and Jacobus' largely negative reading of Wordsworth's language by focusing on the positive use Wordsworth makes of the 'texture' midway between 'life and books' (III. 614). I will show in particular how Wordsworth communicates a sense of self in language precisely by signalling its absence from that language – by signalling what is absent. That is, I will show that Wordsworth's particular language does not simply 'deface' his own self, but also develops a productive sense of self oscillating between past and present, and between 'life and books'. This sense of self located midway between 'the movement of passing away' and the moment of writing, as I

²⁹ Mary Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', *ELH*. 46:4 (Winter, 1979), 618-44, 624.

³⁰ Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 158.

³¹ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 135 (my italics). Wordsworth's naming of infinitude is inscribed through 'death by writing' (Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 15). De Man also remarks that 'Poetic language ... is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as *an intent of consciousness*' (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 6, my italics).

³² Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 621.

will argue, allows us a more clear insight into Wordsworth's selfhood than either de Man or Jacobus allow.

I also want to go beyond, and complicate, de Man's exclusive focus on 'the process of becoming'³³, in which language itself counteracts and baffles Wordsworth's own subjectivity, by considering Wordsworth's textual self in relation to the manuscript drafts and revisions of *The Prelude*. I will examine 'the act and process of writing', through which Wordsworth records and exhibits his 'struggle and anguish',³⁴ his inner vexation at language's 'counter-spirit'³⁵. De Man's assertion that the writing subject 'contributes nothing of its own experience, sensations, sufferings, or consciousness'³⁶ neglects and undervalues the vital relationship between Wordsworth and his text that is exhibited by his constant revision of it. My reading will attempt a more thorough investigation of the way in which Wordsworth expresses his baffled thoughts about, and implicit resistance to, language in these revisions not just of his text's rhetoric but, more specifically, of the textual formation of an identity the text seeks to construct for its poet. In reading Wordsworth, Bushell draws our attention to Wordsworth's 'acts on the page and changes to the language [already written there]'.³⁷ She suggests that, to explore the way Wordsworth engages with language for 'the *purpose*' of communication, it is useful to 'consider Wordsworth's "compositional contradictions" at both a represented level in the completed work as well as in the underlying drafts'.³⁸ In addition, Andrew Bennett thinks that we should read poetry as 'a certain experience of the poet, a certain way, or certain effect, of "feeling"'.³⁹ In *Wordsworth Writing* Bennett states that 'the exemplary Wordsworth is Wordsworth in the act of composition, the writing poet', and that 'the

³³ Paul de Man, 'Process and Poetry (1956)', in Lindsay Waters (ed.), *Critical Writings, 1953-1978*, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 66 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 64-75, p. 65.

³⁴ Bushell, 'Reading below the Surface', 12.

³⁵ Frances Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977), p. 34.

³⁶ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, pp. 36, 270.

³⁷ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 55.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 100.

³⁹ Andrew Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 108.

composition of William Wordsworth, the composition of Wordsworth as he composes, in composing, is the haunt and main region of his song'.⁴⁰ My thesis takes one of its major cues from Bennett here, and aims at a greater understanding of Wordsworth's 'composition of Wordsworth as he composes'.

In the final section of the thesis, I will seek to add to the current scholarly discussions of Wordsworth's relationship to Coleridge by exploring how Wordsworth addresses his 'philosophic Song' (l. 230) to Coleridge throughout its compositional history. I will particularly examine the way Wordsworth, in facing-up to Coleridge's expectation of him, develops his autobiographical writing not only as 'a certain experience of the poet' but also for 'the purpose' of communication with the humankind. My study aims to highlight some of Coleridge's changing roles in Wordsworth's developing construction of his own poetic identity across time. As Susan Wolfson puts it, 'revision' is 'the very trope of autobiography',⁴¹ but in Wordsworth's case 'revision' is also 'the very trope' of his self-creation as an autobiographer, a creation presented and represented to Coleridge as Wordsworth's response to Coleridge's project for him, and revised again and again to accommodate, and reconcile, Wordsworth's determination to write a poem about his own private communion with nature and the philosophical poem of redemption for society that Coleridge originally asked of him.

However, talking about 'the exemplary Wordsworth' in 'the act of composition', Bennett also remarks that 'it is precisely Wordsworth's resistance to this conception of poetry as written – a resistance complicated by his fascination with ... the act and process of writing itself, and by the simple fact of writing, by his seemingly endless acts of writing – that productively skews his own poetry'.⁴² On the idea of 'resistance', Bennett goes further to suggest that 'it is in the gap between an ideal of poetry as a form of speech

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴¹ Susan Wolfson, 'Formal Charges', p. 104, quoted in Bennett's *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 219, note 14.

⁴² Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, pp. 4-5.

on the one hand and the notion that speech involves a “sad incompetence”, a fundamental, undeniable inadequacy of language to thought or conception or emotion [...] that writing may be said to emerge in Wordsworth’s poetics’.⁴³ Writing, with its ‘supplementary nature’⁴⁴, re-iterates, doubles, fragments, and replaces any original unrepresentable experience, and, with de Man and Bennett in mind, this thesis is interested in examining how Wordsworth, in his incessant ‘acts of writing’, engages with ‘the deferral and delay’ of a written text. It will show that this process of this self-composition is constantly troubled and haunted by the fact that the past self (the original experience) remains silent and unrepresentable.

On the other hand, Bushell states that it can often ‘feel as though’ Wordsworth’s creative process ‘depends on an internal rather than an external (textual) stimulus’, but also ‘as though creativity is somehow occurring outside the words in which it is uttered’.⁴⁵ This thesis will propose that we might go further and suggest, in Bushell’s terms, that in Wordsworth’s engagement with ‘the mystery of words’ (V. 621), the ‘internal’ is brought to operate *in relation to* ‘an external (textual) stimulus’, and that ‘creativity’ occurs *both* inside and outside ‘the words in which it is uttered’. My reading suggests that Wordsworth’s writing in fact makes use of the ‘destabilizing or discomposing qualities’⁴⁶ of writing to bring writing closer to the life of the self. This thesis will thus investigate, in other words, how Wordsworth, baffled by the other self in the textual ‘I’, experiments with ways of achieving a more immediate relationship between his own self and his self-representations than language might at first seem to make possible. Bennett states that ‘In Wordsworth, we can see ‘the complex, imbricated and conflicted relationship between invention and inscription’.⁴⁷ My discussion explores the interpretative possibilities opened-up by this claim by investigating how Wordsworth’s self-formation is developed

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.108.

⁴⁵ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.162.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.148.

as ‘a representation of [his] mind in the act of creation’,⁴⁸ resisting but also acknowledging and to some extent embracing the ‘counter-spirit’ of language. However, while Bennett asserts that ‘the “loss” of Wordsworth’s autobiographical poems may be conceived of as a loss of – a loss constituted by – writing’,⁴⁹ my own reading will suggest that Wordsworth uses precisely this sense of loss inherent to all writing to intimate the presence of the self lost, to communicate a self that exists in constantly changing relationships with a range of ‘external stimuli’, including language. For Wordsworth, our relationship with externality is constituted by exactly that ‘noncoincidence that constitutes subjectivity’ in writing,⁵⁰ so that writing, paradoxically, can and does represent self, though not through description.

In these discussions of the working of language in *The Prelude*, I will also be arguing against Hartman’s claims about ‘the unmediated vision’⁵¹ of the imagination in Wordsworth’s poem. I will offer an in-depth examination of the ways in which Wordsworth’s poetic presentations of nature and the imagination are in fact mediated by language’s power to label and differentiate. Hartman claims that ‘It is not Nature as such but Nature indistinguishably blended with Imagination which compels the poet’.⁵² I will suggest, rather, that the complexity with which Wordsworth’s language works problematizes his encounter with the ‘other’ self – the self textually represented as ‘the Soul, the Imagination’ (XIII. 65) – and that this self is therefore in a highly ambiguous relationship with nature. For Hartman, the world of sense is obscured in Wordsworth’s poem by the ‘usurpation’ of the imagination’s power in the Alps, which ‘transcend[ing] all single ways guides the traveller to itself’.⁵³ My reading suggests that the working of the imagination is in fact clothed in the ‘mystery of words’, and asserted and maintained by,

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.108.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.174.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.152.

⁵¹ This phrase comes from the title of Geoffrey Hartman’s book, *The Unmediated Vision: an Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

⁵² Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964), p. 67.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 612.

within and through the ‘progress’ of Wordsworth’s Song’. In other words, it is not the imagination’s power to usurp nature that manifests the imagination’s power in *The Prelude*, but rather Wordsworth’s textual representation of the imagination and the generative and usurping powers of language this representation relies on. The distinction Harman fails to make here is between the imagination as an ‘awful Power’ (1850, VI. 595)⁵⁴ and the imagination as a linguistically created entity. Making this distinction allows us to see that that Wordsworth’s understanding of the imagination is ultimately destabilized by the very fragmentation and discontinuity created by the language he employs to communicate it.

This leads directly back to the central claim of my thesis, namely that that it is Wordsworth’s continuous development – revision – of his poetic identity that Wordsworth eventually finds that identity, locating it in change and the flow of time, in the continual and continuing ‘growth’ of his mind. Here my reading of *The Prelude* differs sharply from New Historicist readings of Wordsworth, arguing that the New Historicist response to Wordsworth’s poem does not allow for a full understanding of its construction of an identity for the poet when he undergoes the significant transition between the experience and the recollection of the French Revolution. For example, Jerome McGann famously emphasizes the poet’s ideological evasion of history in *The Romantic Ideology*, but does so without considering the extent to which time changes Wordsworth’s relation to such events as the revolution in France.

McGann points out that Wordsworth’s poem is ‘the transformation of fact into idea, and of experience into ideology’.⁵⁵ McGann thinks that ‘the Romantic position’, epitomized by Wordsworth, is ‘that the poet operates at such levels of reality, and hence that poetry by its nature can transcend the conflicts and transiencies of this time and that place’.⁵⁶

However, my reading argues that Wordsworth writes his conflicting thoughts about the

⁵⁴ William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, W. J. B. Owen (ed.), (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). The quotations (with line numbers) of the 1850 text in my thesis are from this version, unless otherwise stated.

⁵⁵ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 90.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

self and its relation to history into the formation of his identity rather than displacing these conflicts with an ideology based on an ‘obsession’ with ‘restoring’ the ‘harmony’ and ‘unity’ of his childhood.⁵⁷ In other words, Wordsworth’s writing is more an exploration of ‘ideological contradictions’ than a ‘displacement’ of and retreat from them. McGann’s reading underestimates the poet’s ‘true voice of feeling’ (expressed through the subtlety of Wordsworth’s language) when he talks about the replacement of social and historical reality with ‘the landscape of [his] emotional needs’.⁵⁸

In addition, New Historicism criticizes Wordsworth’s vision as private, not social, but I will claim that Wordsworth’s act of writing also makes the private social through a commitment to being a poet for humankind. I will show that there is a more intricate relationship between the private and the social in Wordsworth’s language than readers such as McGann allow: the poet, as ‘a moral agent’ (VIII. 668), hopes to bring redemption to the social community. Nevertheless, he is also uncertain as to whether his own internal experience is sharable with and communicable to others. Wordsworth thus, once again, locates his identity in conflicting and evolving ideas about the self – in the hopeful aspiration to a social vision on the one hand; the fear that what he has to say has no relation to the social and humanity at large on the other.

Another new historicist, Marjorie Levinson, attempts to ‘explain the particular and particularly constrained manner in which Wordsworth sought figurally, mythically, or formally to resolve’ the ideological conflicts generated by the French Revolution.⁵⁹ My aim is to demonstrate that the poet constructs his own sense of self not by resolving such conflicts but by thinking about his own movement, in time, through the irreconcilable feelings between his experience before and after the French Revolution. I do not think that Wordsworth seeks to ‘de- and re- “figure the real”’ so much as to create a [sustainable](#)

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.87.

⁵⁹ Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), p. 3.

sense of self that is capable of directly facing fractured social reality. I will investigate how Wordsworth offers a positive response to the Revolution by establishing a connection between Revolution and nature, between historical ‘accidents’ and the redemptive possibilities of nature’s teaching. I will claim that the writing-up of his revolutionary experience helps to drive Wordsworth towards the lifelong engagement with the ongoing formation of his identity as a poet of nature that *The Prelude* became – precisely because that writing-up of experience, like the writing-up of so much else in the poem, constantly destabilizes the experience itself through the language Wordsworth uses to describe it, destabilizing the poet’s sense of identity with that language’s powers of fragmentation and discontinuity. It is, in the end, Wordsworth’s determination to incorporate into *The Prelude* all sorts of instabilities of self – and to think deeply about their causes – that spur his ongoing reflections on, and revisions of, his poetic self – reflections and revisions that go on right through to the 1850 version of the poem, and that ultimately define the poem as a (lifelong) project.

My thesis is divided into five Parts with one major theme in each. In each part, there are two interlinked chapters, in which I examine how Wordsworth, out of his very awareness of a fragmented identity in the mutability of time, attempts to develop and stabilize a sense of self by placing it between two opposing concepts: past and present, speech and silence, internality and externality, self-assertion and self-repression. The two chapters in each part adopt two different points of view towards Wordsworth’s sense of self as it appears between those opposed concepts. Thus the first two chapters, for example, present two different perspectives on how Wordsworth locates his sense of self between past and present; the fifth and sixth chapters present two different perspectives on Wordsworth’s sense of self as between speech and silence, and so forth.

In the following, I will provide an account of each individual Part, and of the difference and interrelation between the two chapters in each Part. The first part of the thesis,

‘Between Past and Present’, will focus on Wordsworth’s ‘fair seed-time’ (I. 306) in Book I of *The Prelude*. This section will ask: how do Wordsworth’s ‘two consciousnesses’ shape his ‘timely utterances’? Chapter One will describe the way in which time fractures Wordsworth’s consciousness and examine how he uses language to both fix and problematize his identity. This chapter will argue that the identity Wordsworth seeks to stabilize in writing is not stabilizable – his ‘two consciousnesses’ are further fractured by the non-identity of his ‘task’ as a poet and his suffering, outside writing, of his ‘lot’ (I. 264). The self formed through this consciousness of temporality is the focus of Chapter Two, which mainly looks at the way an ongoing ‘sense’ of self is formed by the wavering between past (recollected ‘lot’) and present (poetic ‘task’). In contrast to earlier critics’ account of Wordsworth’s negative view of language (which inscribes the ‘persistent indetermination’⁶⁰ of temporality), Chapter Two argues that Wordsworth builds and stabilizes a sense of self through his positive use of language. He projects a continuity of self by looking back to ‘a dark / Invisible workmanship’ in his childhood communion with nature, which generated the aspiration to ‘some philosophic Song’ while acknowledging that now this original aspiration has evolved into a new aspiration to social involvement (I. 352-53, 230). In this way, he can claim to retain his sense of a bond with nature through an interpretation of his experience of selfhood that uncovers a fostering in his awareness, now, of ‘two consciousnesses’. The building-up of Wordsworth’s identity is based upon a changeable relationship with his past and the mutability of time.

Part Two, built upon the arguments in Part One, is mainly concerned with the crucial years of Wordsworth’s experience of the French Revolution. Wordsworth’s complex feelings towards this historical event – the ‘revolution’ (X. 238) of his soul between his life before and after the Revolution – add further fragmentations of identity to be dealt with in his large project of self-identification and self-creation. This part of the thesis

⁶⁰ De Man, ‘Process and Poetry (1956)’, in Waters (ed.), *Critical Writings*, pp. 66-67.

approaches Wordsworth's writing of his revolutionary experience with an anti-new historicist reading. Chapter Three, echoing Wordsworth's anxiety about his identity – 'Was it for this?' (I. 272)⁶¹ – in Book I, focuses on his self-doubt in the aftermath of the French Revolution, which relentlessly undermined his bond with nature. In this chapter, I argue that Wordsworth tries to create and establish a new identity as a poet by facing (instead of escaping) the challenge to that identity posed by the Revolution. I will investigate how he establishes a continuity of private and public experience across the Revolution by aligning both his own early support for the Revolution and its failure to the lessons taught by nature. Wordsworth sees a connection between the might of nature and revolutionary fervour. In the act of writing, he re-establishes his identity as nature's self (X. 921) through his very experience of the revolutionary terror. However, here the challenge of being a poet becomes that of giving his writing of personal life (the 'growth' of his mind) a social scope ('our human Soul' (I. 435)).

Chapter Four looks at the way Wordsworth's language is destabilized and his sense of identification is fragmented in this attempt at self-recreation. In the shift from writing 'my Verse' to composing a 'philosophic Song' for humankind, he is trapped in a baffling tension between nature's self and the self of humanity. This tension is revealed in his ambiguous and inconsistent use of the words 'I' and 'we'. This chapter argues that, in these conflicting ideas about self, Wordsworth rethinks his understanding of language for a poetic project that develops into a continual formation of self. I will claim that it is precisely the recognition of fragmentations and contradictions in his act of self-identification that keeps Wordsworth's writing moving forward and transforms it into epic engagement with the problem of identity-formation, to which the Revolution first alerted Wordsworth, but which he then found to be replicated everywhere in man's existence – in his relationships to time, language, nature, other people and himself, past

⁶¹ See Hartman, "'Was it for this ...?': Wordsworth and the Birth of the Gods", in Kenneth R. Johnston et al. (eds.), *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), pp. 8-25, pp. 12-14.

and present. The uncertain fissures between past and present, where the imagination is ever active, are *The Prelude*'s greatest philosophical problem – but they also give the poem some of its greatest poetic opportunities.

The third part of this thesis – ‘Between Speech and Silence’ – focuses on Wordsworth’s self-representation in Book V of *The Prelude*. This part will consider Wordsworth’s ‘textual self’ in the draft materials and revisions of this book of *The Prelude* in order to explore the vital relationship between Wordsworth and his text and to observe how he writes his complicated emotions into the whole process of composition. Chapter Five argues that Wordsworth’s represented self vanishes into language in his act of writing. Using language’s agency to represent his self, Wordsworth, engaged with ‘a deferral and delay ... identified with writing’, represents a self overwhelmed by the ‘loud’ ‘blast’ (V. 96) from writing itself and defaced by its substitutive figurations.

However, as I will argue in Chapter Six, in response to the failure of self-representation, Wordsworth transforms his vision of the ‘weak[ness]’ of ‘words’ (V. 185) into an opportunity for the working of language itself. In Wordsworth’s positive view of language, the ‘visionary power’ (V. 619) in the ‘mystery of words’ is capable of visioning at least the ‘presence’ of the represented self. Chapter Six will discuss how Wordsworth protects his self from the ‘defacing’ power of language exactly by locating the self in the silence left by ‘life’. He does this by situating his self-representation midway between speech and silence, acknowledging but resisting the working of ‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ in ‘the mystery of words’ (V. 622, 623, 621). Through his precisely inconsistent and opaque use of language, Wordsworth’s writing avoids the total ‘defacement’ of the ‘unrepresentable’ self in words. Moreover, this chapter will claim that Wordsworth comes to recognize that a new self can be developed in the act of writing that is based not on a timeless recovery of the past but on an imaginative rewriting of it. This nevertheless leads into the apocalypse of the imagination in Book VI, but also the transcendence of this by

the ‘mighty mind’ in Book XIII (69), which are the main concerns of Part Four.

In the fourth section of the thesis, I will examine Wordsworth’s poetic celebration of his mental powers, which are represented as existing between and combining internality and externality, between the mind and a textually constructed self projected on to the landscape. This part of the thesis will explore Wordsworth’s vision of nature and imagination through a critical engagement with Hartman’s reading. The structure of Part Four parallels those of Part One and Three, in which first I investigate how Wordsworth’s writing is destabilized and then discuss ways in which Wordsworth engages with this destabilization in further acts of self-recreation. Chapter Seven will argue that Wordsworth uses the generative and visioning powers of language to glorify his mind while subverting his own claims because of his negative view of language as ‘the sad incompetence of human speech’ (VI. 593). Chapter Eight then claims that in response to the negative usurping power of language, Wordsworth seeks to stabilize the writing of the self ‘midway’ between the construction of a coherent, external identity and the recognition of a self that exists beyond the reach of textuality. The ‘sad incompetence’ of language interferes at every stage with his glorification of the imagination. But, equally, the poet recognizes that the act of writing offers at least one way for the imagination to ‘lift up itself’ (VI. 525) within and through the ‘progress of [his] Song’. I will investigate Wordsworth’s rhetorical strategy of a ‘via negative’⁶², which hints at the self behind the ‘fabric’ of the text, but argue that we need to move beyond Hartman’s account of ‘*via naturaliter negativa*’⁶³ by observing the complexity with which Wordsworth’s language works to construct, but also problematize, his encounters with both nature and the imagination.

Part Five of the thesis – ‘Between Self-assertion and Self-repression’ – shows that one

⁶² D. J. Moores, *Mystical Discourse in Wordsworth and Whitman: a Transatlantic Bridge* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), p. 122.

⁶³ Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814*, p. 67.

of the identifications reaching beyond textuality that Wordsworth seek to recognize in *The Prelude* is his relation to Coleridge. Further complications in Wordsworth's identity-formation arise from the conflict between Coleridge's object for Wordsworth (to be a philosophic poet for humankind) and Wordsworth's private aim to be a poet fostered by, and describing a personal relationship to, nature. Chapter Nine argues that Wordsworth seeks to escape these contradictions by using the creative power of language to recreate Coleridge in the image of the Wordsworth created in *The Prelude* and to accommodate Coleridge's project within the 'Wordsworthian' project of self-creation. This chapter examines the way in which Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth's identity formation changes at specific moments in the poem and as the poem progresses and evolves.

Chapter Ten then argues that through his textual negotiations of and with Coleridge, Wordsworth realizes that a self is built on changeable relationships rooted in time, and that his project involves the constant rewriting and reinterpretation of self not just for himself but for others. This is, ultimately, Coleridge's role in Wordsworth's recreation of himself as a public poet. I will also observe, however, how Wordsworth, in revisiting 'the spots of time' in his own life, especially in his introspective project of self-formation in the wake of the French Revolution, comes to and engages with further doubts of the poem's worth as 'a shared experience' with the social community.⁶⁴ Continually questioning the very purpose and value of his own project, Wordsworth keeps rewriting and revising his sense of both within the poem, as well as his sense of the poet he feels himself to be, wants to be, and fears he might not be. In the end, such rewriting becomes the point of the poem and its greatest imaginative achievement.

⁶⁴ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 47.

Part One Between Past and Present

Chapter One

In this first section of the thesis, I will focus on Wordsworth's 'fair seed-time' in Book I of *The Prelude*, where he claims that 'Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe! ... from my first dawn / Of Childhood didst Thou intertwine for me / The passions that build up our human Soul, / ... With life and nature' (I. 429-38). The 'build[ing] up' of 'human Soul'¹ is the focus of Wordsworth's autobiographical writing, which mainly talks about the 'growth' of the poet's mind, and, importantly, intertwines both his own identify formation and the growing 'Soul' of all humankind. This statement seeks to establish a spiritual bond between the mind of man and 'presences of Nature' (I. 490) through the vision of 'Wisdom and Spirit of the universe' that Wordsworth claims to feel in the world.² With this poetic utterance, he intricately connects 'the passions' of 'our human Soul' with the natural world in order to establish 'a marriage-covenant with nature'.³ In this sense, as Hartman points out, "'Passion' seems to mean a passionate utterance"; 'Wordsworth's narrative can almost be said to begin with "an Ode, in passion utter'd" (1805, V, 97)'.⁴ Wordsworth's 'timely utterance' is fervent and ardent, 'as a speech act that falls somewhere between vow and passionate wish'.⁵ He aspires to 'some philosophic Song' that is uttered with 'meditations passionate from deep / Recesses in man's heart' (I. 230, 232-33). For Wordsworth, the word 'passions' means more than it semantically does; it functions as a creative power that is expected to carry out his 'passionate wish' and secure

¹ See *OED*'s definition of 'soul': 'a person's moral or emotional nature or sense of identity', in Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (eds.), 2nd ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, revised edition (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1690,

² In Geoffrey Hartman's view, 'timely utterance' creates 'the sense of a *bond* between mind and nature, of a *responsiveness* that overcomes the difference of speech and muteness, or articulate and inarticulate utterance. ... The capacity for "timely utterance" ... maintains the bond, and justifies the poetry' (Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 156).

³ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 157.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157. The title of my thesis quotes Hartman, and my argument owes a fundamental debt to his seminal discussion of it in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*. For a detailed explanation of the phrase 'timely utterance' from 'Ode to Intimations of Immortality', please read the introduction of my thesis, which discusses the phrase in relation to the context in which it is used by Wordsworth.

the intimate bond with nature in his identity formation as a poet. With ‘timely utterance’ such as ‘Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze’, Wordsworth can always feel ‘a corresponding mild creative breeze’ within himself (I. 1, 43).

Concerning Wordsworth’s ‘growth’ of the mind, M. H. Abrams observes that *The Prelude* ‘moves by an immanent teleology’, which ‘controls Wordsworth’s account and shapes it into a structure in which the protagonist is put forward as one who has been elected to play a special role in a providential plot’.⁶ Coupling Hartman’s idea of ‘timely utterance’ and Abrams’ reading of the poem, it can be said that Wordsworth develops his identity as a destined poet of nature in *The Prelude*. That is, Wordsworth’s ‘passionate utterance’ creates ‘a providential plot’ and moves by a ‘teleology’ (‘a supervening idea’⁷) that has been ‘immanent’, inherent, and existent since the beginning of his autobiographical writing.

However, in this chapter, I also want to show that it is temporality that is more intrinsic to the textual meaning that forms an identity for Wordsworth than ‘teleology’. In *The Prelude* there are transitions between a range of temporalities and these lead Wordsworth, again and again, to a sense of being ‘two consciousnesses’ – ‘conscious of myself / And of some other Being’ (II. 32, 32-33). Wordsworth has a contradictory vision of his past self, to which he is closely connected (‘those days’ ‘yet have such self-presence in my mind’), but from which he is also distanced by ‘wide’ ‘vacancy’ (II. 29-30, 28, 29). The instant of temporal transition between two discrete moments brings together but also separates Wordsworth’s writing self from his written self. This distance troubles Wordsworth’s poetic construction of his identity, in which he is at once himself now and the ‘some other Being’ he was. For example, describing past events ‘in the very words which [he has] here / Recorded’, he finds that his desire to ‘pour out’ the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful

⁶ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, pp. 178, 76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

feelings'⁸ is always subsumed into 'recollect[ion] in tranquility' and 'measur'd strains' (I. 58-59, 57). For Wordsworth, 'our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings'.⁹ Moreover, the 'corresponding mild creative breeze' that Wordsworth 'felt within' 'is become / A tempest' (I. 45-46). The 'two consciousnesses', in de Man's view, results in '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'.¹⁰ This 'defensive strategy' is 'the rhetoric of temporality'¹¹ that attempts to build a direct link between past and present selves, despite 'a conflict' inherent in the 'two consciousness' in *The Prelude*.

In this chapter, I will bring Abrams' idea of 'an immanent teleology' and Hartman's thoughts about 'timely utterance' into a dynamic dialogue with de Man's examination of 'the rhetoric of temporality' that characterises the rhetorical power of language in Wordsworth's autobiographical writing. With the central question of my thesis very much in mind – How does Wordsworth develop his poetic identity by attempting to stabilize it in the mutability of time? – this section will ask: how do Wordsworth's 'two consciousnesses' shape his 'timely utterance[s]'? In other words, how does Wordsworth's intensifying awareness of time relate to his self-formation as nature's poet? I want to examine Wordsworth's 'timely utterance' in order to see how it forms a union of his mind and nature, which thus qualifies him as an elected visionary poet of nature. To explore how this 'providential plot' works in *The Prelude*, I will also bring de Man's notion of the inherent 'temporal predicament' into my discussion here. De Man states that 'the key to an

⁸ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)', in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (London: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 648-668, p. 651.

⁹ Ibid. Stephen Gill points out that 'a poem which is both an exercise in mapping and an interrogation is a difficult one to grasp. ... it comes as a shock to discover ... that this effusion is not a spontaneous utterance introducing this poem, now, but the recollection of an outpouring in the past, which led nowhere' (*William Wordsworth: The Prelude* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 52). Also see Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 21.

¹⁰ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971), p. 208. De Man defines 'a truly temporal predicament' as 'the narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning, and [that] can find no escape from this spiral' (p. 222).

¹¹ See de Man's *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 187-228.

understanding of Wordsworth lies in the relationship between imagination and time, not in the relationship between imagination and nature'.¹² Nevertheless, I still want to hold on to the idea that the poet views himself as being fostered by nature and prepared 'for such a glorious work', though this work turns out to be 'honorable toil' – a work that is both admirable and difficult (I. 158, 654). 'Stand[ing] outside the events it qualifies', Wordsworth's poetic utterance becomes distinct from a 'Discourse of the Other'¹³ – the utterance of his past self – which he can never retrieve in writing. Yet it is not his present voice but the voice of the other that he is attempting to make heard. In this sense, 'the voice of [Wordsworth's] wish' ('vague longing' (I. 241)) may be 'consum[ed]' by itself.¹⁴ His 'two consciousnesses' are further fractured by the non-identity of the poet writing now and the past self he wants to write about. However, my discussion will show that Abrams' notion of 'teleology' is nevertheless 'immanent' in Wordsworth's poem,¹⁵ and that, despite De Man's compelling readings of Wordsworth, 'the key to an understanding of Wordsworth lies in the [changeable] relationship ... between imagination and nature'. What de Man usefully adds to our understanding of Wordsworth is the need to see this relationship as existing very much in time. Wordsworth's self-formation, developed in time, remains guided by a 'teleology' that is existent and operative in the 'growth' of his mind. According to *OED*, 'teleology' is 'the explanation of phenomena by the purpose they serve rather than by postulated causes'.¹⁶ In Wordsworth, the 'relationship' between 'imagination and nature' serves the 'purpose' of forming him as the poet writing in the service of nature for humankind. This chapter will therefore argue that, in *The Prelude*,

¹² Paul de Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', *Diacritics*, 17:4 (Winter, 1987), 4-17, 16. In de Man's view, Wordsworth 'could well be characterized as the romantic poet in which the separation of time from nature is expressed with the greatest thematic clarity. ... A certain form of narrative ... will have to adopt a much more intricate temporal movement than that of the natural cycle' (92).

¹³ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 161. According to Ferguson, in Wordsworth 'an education into selfhood involves disclosing the patterns of internal annexation of others which is the fundamental and inescapable mode of the affection' (*Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit*, p. 150).

¹⁴ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 113.

¹⁵ In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth 'encourages his audience to read prospectively, constantly looking forward to a conclusion ... - Wordsworth's status as a great poet, fostered by Nature' (Monique R. Morgan, 'Narrative Means to Lyric Ends in Wordsworth's *Prelude*', *Narratives*, 16:3 (October, 2008), 298-330, 299).

¹⁶ See *OED*'s definition of the word 'teleology', p. 1785.

Wordsworth is simultaneously interpreting his past experiences and developing a new self-understanding, now, through writing. Here I will build on but also [seek](#) to go beyond the insights of de Man, Hartman, Abrams by looking into the way Wordsworth develops an identity for his self in his close engagement with time and language. His writing reveals his deepening awareness of ‘two consciousnesses’ which motivate him to form a self living in changeable relationship with the selves in different moments rather than seeking a return to his innate bond with nature. In this sense, I want to show that Wordsworth’s writing is more a problematization of his identity-formation than what de Man calls a ‘defensive strategy’ against its ‘temporal predicament’. Wordsworth’s self is built upon an intricate, complex, and dynamic interplay of discrete temporal moments, in which a new sense of self is created during the very process of writing.

This chapter will in particular examine Wordsworth’s attempt to use recollections of childhood as a means of constructing – but also refraining from fixing – an identity for himself. It will seek to show how Wordsworth, far from seeing this as a ‘defensive strategy’ against, uses memory as a way of reconciling himself to time. Talking about his childhood in Book I of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth says that he, ‘coming from a house / Of bondage’, is ‘free, enfranchis’d’ (I. 6-7, 9). Looking for a ‘dwelling [that] shall receive’ him, he makes affirmative statements such as ‘I cannot miss my way’ with full ‘confidence’ in his ‘chosen tasks’ and ‘holy services’ (I. 11, 19, 67, 34, 63). Wordsworth’s experience within particular moments is presented in such a way as to make his spiritual path appear predetermined. But this is Wordsworth’s ‘self-conscious role-playing’; ‘each time the speaker calls himself a Poet, or invokes the name, the poem seems to call attention to his need *to use poetry to cement his identity*’.¹⁷ In the construction of his poetic identity, Wordsworth gives himself a name, ‘Poet’, and reinforces this self-imposed identity through his poetic rewriting of the past. In this ‘self-conscious role-playing’,

¹⁷ Jacqueline M. Labbe, ‘Smith, Wordsworth, and the Model of the Romantic Poet’, *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, issue 51 (Aug., 2008), my italics.

Wordsworth, in the reconstructions of memory, states that ‘Those recollected hours that have the charm / Of visionary things ... almost make our infancy itself / A visible scene’ (I. 660-64). Harold Bloom points out that “‘Memory’”, for Wordsworth, is a composite trope ... a composite defence, a defence against time, decay, the loss of divining power, and so finally a defence against death’.¹⁸ Bloom’s reading here agrees with de Man’s, of course, but I want to suggest instead that Wordsworth, in the tracing of past moments, is attempting self-creation rather than self-defence. He recreates a past in which there are, now, the ‘visionary things’ he seeks. He projects these things, now, into his own ‘Infancy’, demonstrating his power, in ‘maturer seasons’ to ‘impregnate and to elevate the mind’ with what his memory ‘call[s] ... forth’ in the act of writing poetry (I. 624, 625, 624). On the notion of ‘visionary things’ in Wordsworth’s childhood, Bennett points out that ‘In childhood the gleam was *visionary*, it was both vision and not vision, it was no more than a gleam, a brief manifestation of light – faint, intermittent enlightenment’.¹⁹ This ‘intermittent’ flashing of ‘gleam’ from ‘visionary things’ can be testified to by Wordsworth’s use of the word ‘almost’. Through the ‘visionary’ ‘gleam’, ‘our Infancy’ is ‘almost’, but never entirely, made ‘visible’. On the one hand, as Bennett suggests, ‘The poem is therefore about the loss of a light’.²⁰ I want to add that, on the other hand, with the word ‘almost’, Wordsworth simultaneously inserting ‘visionary things’ in his writing of the childhood, now, instead of seeking to make his past childhood ‘a visible scene’ (which, he recognizes, can never be possible in writing). The word ‘almost’ makes ‘our infancy’ suspended on the border when it is ‘almost’ made ‘visible’. ‘The charm / Of visionary things’ exists in ‘these hours’ ‘recollected’ now, while ‘our infancy’ remains ‘remotest Infancy’ (1850, I. 635).²¹ In this sense, the poem is not so much about ‘the loss

¹⁸ Harold Bloom, ‘The Scene of Instruction: “Tintern Abbey”’, in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Modern Critical Views: William Wordsworth* (New York: Chelsea House Publisher, 1985), pp. 113-135, p. 114.

¹⁹ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.164.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.164.

²¹ William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, W. J. B. Owen (ed.), (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). The quotations (with line numbers) of the 1850 text in my thesis are from this version, unless

of a light' as about the textual creation of light in the poet's present act of writing.

A timeless relationship with the past is only achievable in 'the linguistic moment in Wordsworth' (or, the 'speech act', in Hartman's words), in which 'verbalized transformation ... creates the realm of the imagination'.²² For instance, Wordsworth states that 'Fair seed-time had my soul' when 'much favor'd in [its] birthplace' (I. 306, 308). Even though, in looking back, he confesses that 'I cannot paint / What then I was' ('Tintern Abbey', 75-76),²³ he nevertheless claims he was 'a favor'd Being' (I. 365). Because 'favor'd', he was able to claim a 'filial bond' (II. 263) with the 'Wisdom and Spirit of the universe' and to glorify 'the holy life of music and of verse' (I. 54). However, I want to show that Wordsworth's poetic utterances are not means through which he reclaims his previous bond with nature (as de Man's 'the rhetoric of temporality' and Miller's 'the linguistic moment' suggest). The poet's utterances aim at self-recreation, in the present, at creating for the mature poet the identity of poet of sacred vision out of his baffling consciousness of split selves in different moments. Wordsworth looks at his previous self from a temporal distance. This position enables him to reconstruct a memory and to reinterpret his former experiences. In other words, Wordsworth's utterances about the past attempt to rewrite the previous moments in order that they might justify and explain as destiny his determination to be a poet. Even though the poet 'cannot paint / What then [he] was', he can 'paint' what he is *now* in the rewriting of his past experiences. Wordsworth states: 'My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows / Were then made for me; bond unknown to me / Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly, / A dedicated Spirit' (IV. 341-344). For Wordsworth, 'vows' were 'made for [him]'; though 'unknown', the 'bond' 'was given', so that he 'should be' a poet completely devoted to this sacred

otherwise stated.

²² J. Hillis Miller, *The Linguistic Moment: from Wordsworth to Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), pp. 77, 76. Also see Mary Jacobus' 'Apostrophe and Lyric Voice in *The Prelude*', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *William Wordsworth's The Prelude (Modern Critical Interpretations)* (New York: Chelsea House Publisher, 1986), pp. 145-59, p. 149.

²³ Wordsworth, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', in M. H. Abrams et al. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton Company, Inc., 2000), pp. 235-37.

‘bond’. The poet’s rewriting of the past ‘grants him the authority first to begin and then to continue his poetic task’.²⁴ With this ‘authority’, Wordsworth’s textual development of identity seems to be secure – ‘I cannot miss my way’. In the act of memory writing, he plants a ‘seed’ for his soul and waters it with his own wishful utterances.

Bennett is right in suggesting that ‘the exemplary Wordsworth is Wordsworth in the act of composition, the writing poet’, and that ‘the composition of William Wordsworth, the composition of Wordsworth as he composes, in composing, is the haunt and main region of his song’.²⁵ Wordsworth’s writing of the ‘growth’ of his mind is developed in his textual ‘composition’ of the self and his life experiences. It is Wordsworth, as ‘the writing poet’ (not as his previous self), who depicts the moments of his childhood. Equally, it is ‘the composition of Wordsworth’ (not a faithful description of any past moment) that his ‘song’ focuses on. In this ‘region of his song’, there are nevertheless complex layers of temporality hidden in the dialogue between past and present. On the one hand, Wordsworth, looking back to childhood, develops the ‘unimaginable’ prospective vocation for his past self by asserting ‘a providential plot’. This culminates in the present, as Wordsworth says: ‘Now I am free, enfranchis’d and at large, / May fix my habitation where I will’. However, as a poet who has undergone adult experiences of despair and doubt, Wordsworth finds that his confidence in the sacred vocation has been much undermined. He hesitates and doubts that ‘if such bold words accord / With any promises of human life’ (I. 27-27). The earlier feelings of blessing are fading in the passage of time, though the poet seeks to restore them with his ‘bold words’; these feelings become ‘obscure feeling representative / Of joys that were forgotten’ (I. 633-34). Wordsworth

²⁴ Bradford K. Mudge, ‘Song of Himself: Crisis and Selection in “The Prelude”, Books 1 and 7’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 27:1 (Spring, 1985), 1-24, 2. Accordingly, Mudge later states that ‘... the writer has to engineer a power relationship between his two textual representations. ... scenes of childhood, his recollected “spots of time”, become sources of imaginative strength which bolster the flagging confidence of the composing poet: a strategy of return to the distant but holy other keeps the poem in motion’ (‘The Politics of Autobiography in the “Biographia Literaria”’, *South Central Review*, 3:2 (Summer, 1986), 27-45, 29-30).

²⁵ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 6.

hopes that these feelings could be ‘allied to the affections’ (I. 640), but in his later revisions he changes the phrase to ‘fastened to the affections’ (1850, I. 612). This shift from ‘allied’ to ‘fastened’ indicates both his anxiety about and increasing awareness of the inability of his words to catch and maintain these earlier joyous feelings.

Though finding ‘the self-congratulation, the complete / Composure, and the happiness entire’, Wordsworth claims that ‘Speedily a longing in me rose, / To brace myself to some *determin’d aim*’ (I. 122-23, 124-25, my italics). But he also admits that ‘my hope has been that I ... / Might fix the wavering balance of my mind’ (I. 649-51). These statements manifest his eagerness and ‘passionate wish’ to secure and establish a ‘determin’d’ identity for himself. Yet all Wordsworth has to work with here is ‘the rhetorical power of language that can make it seem *as if* we could anticipate the unimaginable’.²⁶ In de Man’s view, Wordsworth’s attempt to use precisely this ‘rhetorical power of language’ to bridge the temporal distance between past, present, and even an ‘unimaginable’ future, is constantly counteracted by the inherent temporal disparity between past and present. A continuing sense of uncertainty surfaces when Wordsworth destabilizes the claims he has made with self-questioning (‘if I may trust myself’; ‘Yet should these hopes / Be vain’ (I. 39, 654-55)). However, rather than concentrating on the ‘rhetorical power of language’ at work here, I intend to focus on the sense of self formed in Wordsworth’s writing at this point. Wordsworth deliberately leaves the descriptions of his ‘vocation’ vague in such phrases as ‘some determin’d aim’ and ‘may fix my habitation where I will’. He hopes to freely develop a role for himself, but he does not yet define its ‘aim’ and ‘habitation’. Wordsworth strategically protects himself from the necessity of and responsibility for setting and achieving a specific aim for his life. ‘The rhetorical power of language’ in Wordsworth’s writing is not self-defensive. It does not seek to atemporally fix the poet’s identity to protect it from time. Wordsworth moves beyond de Man by creating an identity

²⁶ De Man, ‘Time and History in Wordsworth’, 10, my italics.

that is open-ended, subject to change and development – subject to time. Phrases such as ‘some determin’d aim’ and ‘may fix my habitations where I will’ do not set up a secure identity so much as drive the poet forward towards more self-discovery, and more self-creation; he must move forward in time to uncover his ‘determin’d aim’ and discover ‘where’ he ‘will’ fix his habitation.

In reading the ‘rhetorical power of language’, we should also read ‘the temporality of literary language as a language of interpretation’.²⁷ This ‘language of interpretation’ looks at past moments through temporal discrepancy rather than authentically reporting them. And I think that it is in this act of interpretation that Wordsworth develops new understanding of self. De Man famously claims that, for Wordsworth, ‘the illusion that continuity can be restored by an act of memory turns out to be merely another moment of *transition*’.²⁸ In *The Prelude*, narratives of memory can never uncover a straightforward path between past moments but always offer a series of ‘transition[s]’ between past moments. The transitional elements of temporal difference take on a major role in Wordsworth’s textual development of identity. Wordsworth, in looking back, comes to a new sense of self in his very awareness of the increasing distance between his self now and then – in direct confrontations with time. To address this issue, it is worthwhile to read de Man’s account of Wordsworth’s language in the following.

De Man remarks that

Wordsworth’s language tries to grasp this apparently contradictory nature in paradoxes in which the movement of passing away curiously joins with a condition of remaining, and a unity arises that lies at the very limit of comprehensible language.²⁹

²⁷ Paul de Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: the Gauss Seminar and Other Papers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), p. 24.

²⁸ De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 91. (my *italics*)

²⁹ Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, London: Columbia UP, 1984), p. 56. On Wordsworth’s language, Paul H. Fry says that ‘Where the imagination discloses unity, language signifies difference. For Wordsworth, the challenge then was to bend language out of its purposes and toward the purpose of poetry’ (*Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), p. 12). J. Robert Barth states that ‘Here is one of the central paradoxes of Wordsworth’s poetry: on the one hand, his

Wordsworth's poetic utterances, making narratives of past experiences, are also structured by the 'contradictory' 'join[ing]' of 'the movement of passing away' (the moments of the past) to 'a condition of remaining'. In de Man's view, Wordsworth desires to use the 'rhetorical power of language' to hold the forward-moving flow of time, so that a timeless relationship between different 'spots of time' could be formed in writing. However, these 'paradoxes' intensely perplex his writing. In this 'interpretation' and definition of an identity for the self now in relation to the self then, 'a unity arises' nevertheless 'at the very limit of comprehensible language'. This so-called 'unity', involving 'shades' of temporal 'difference' (III. 158), exists on the boundary between past moments and pushes Wordsworth to 'the very limit of comprehensible language'. I want to show that the richest meaning of Wordsworth's autobiographical writing derives from its location at the 'very limit' of language. The poet's self-formation in language, though not resting on a timeless relationship with his previous self, develops itself exactly in its interaction with this passing-away and changed self at the moment of writing. The poet himself remarks that 'Yet, I remember, ... the changeful earth, / And twice five seasons on my mind had stamp'd / The faces of the moving year' (I. 586-588). Wordsworth fixes the transition between moments within 'the moving year', which 'mov[es]' through 'the faces' of 'seasons'. Wordsworth's memory ('I remember') is formed by tying together the progressive movement of time by means of the 'remaining' 'faces' of 'seasons' which were 'stamp'd' on his 'mind'. But the writing of memory here forces Wordsworth to suggest that his identity was simply formed by 'the moving year' itself, not along a predestined path set in childhood that aimed him at becoming a poet. This is where my reading of Wordsworth departs from both Abrams' idea of 'a providential plot' and de

deep need to be in touch with the rhythms of time; on the other, his constant aspiration for the timeless. ... In *The Prelude* there is "the Growth of a Poet's Mind", and there are the seemingly timeless "spots of time". There is movement and there is stillness' (*Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious Imagination* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), p. 43).

Man's account of Wordsworth's language. Even though the poet fails to sustain his vision of his childhood self as a 'favor'd Being', he adopts a further strategy for forming himself as nature's poet in writing, now. A self, connected to but different from the early self, is being developed and created as he writes, in and by 'the moving year', to ultimately achieve 'some determin'd aim' of which the poet is as yet unaware.

The word 'stamp'd' is noticeable because Wordsworth uses the same word in questioning: 'why hath not the mind / Some element to stamp her image on ...'? On the word 'stamp', Bennett states:

The problem that Wordsworth addresses is ... the paradoxical conception of poetry as both a specific event, a kind of "stamping" that is tied to a particular time and place ... this now of writing, and at the same time, as it were, as occurring beyond any specific site or temporality, as going beyond its own moment of inscription, as being, potentially ... *permanent*.³⁰

Wordsworth's ambiguous use of the word 'stamp' to signify a registering of 'now of writing' and to reach a state of 'permanence' (for 'permanent' preservation of his thought) is one 'conception' of his autobiographical writing. However, the use of the word 'stamp'd' in 'the changeful earth, / And twice five seasons on my mind had stamp'd / The faces of the moving year' moves beyond Bennett's definition of this 'conception'. Here 'stamp' retains a sense of 'tying' and preserving (through the 'faces' 'stamp'd' on his 'mind'), but this sense is formed in 'the moving year', in the forward-moving flow of time. In Wordsworth's 'conception of poetry', 'a condition of remaining' always joins and oscillates with 'the movement of passing away'.

The 'movement of passing away' intensifies Wordsworth's 'consciousness of temporality'.³¹ It is worthwhile to look at the skating episode in Book I to see how Wordsworth illustrates the sense of physically experiencing past moments in their 'passing

³⁰ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.78.

³¹ De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 50.

away' affecting his present poetic utterances about the past. Here, Wordsworth says that

When we had given our bodies to the wind,
 And all the shadowy banks, on either side,
 Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
 The rapid line of motion; then at once
 Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
 Stopp'd short, yet still the solitary Cliffs
 Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had roll'd
 With visible motion her diurnal round;
 Behind me did they stretch in solemn train
 Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watch'd
 Till all was tranquil as [a dreamless sleep].³² (I. 480-90)

At first, the child wheels with 'the rapid line of motion' in the surrounding world. He is whirling with 'the wind / And all the shadowy banks' as if 'the earth had roll'd / With visible motion her diurnal round'. This symbolically relates to Wordsworth's idea that 'I might pursue this theme through every change / Of exercise and play, to which the year / Did summon us in its delightful round' (I. 502-04). His life pursuit is to be substantiated in a process during which the mutability of time brings to him 'every change / Of exercise and play'. In this skating episode, the boy and the surrounding images are presented as revolving with the earth's 'diurnal' and 'delightful round' in the transitory change of seasons. The word 'still' appears twice here, emphasising but also contradicting the never-ending regular 'diurnal round' of 'the earth'. He is whirling with the progressive movement of time that was reflected on the surrounding natural images. However, during the time when the world keeps 'sweeping', 'spinning', 'wheel[ing]', and 'roll[ing]', the boy stops abruptly ('at once').

When he stops, the world 'wheel[s] by [him]' without stopping. Even the 'banks', which are '*shadowy*', wheel like 'the earth' that 'roll'[s] with *visible* motion' (my italics). The movement of 'spinning' and 'wheeling' appears to be far more obvious in a dusky

³² See Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, p. 120.

background. The passing of time never stops. As Jonathan Wordsworth puts it, ‘The boy, however, stops; and, ceasing to co-operate bodily, creates the motion still within the mind’.³³ The moment when the boy stands still is also the moment when Wordsworth’s consciousness of time starts to intensify because he knows that ‘*yet still* the solitary Cliffs / Wheel[s] by me’ (my italics). This awareness of time projects upon ‘the solitary Cliffs’ ‘the motion still within the mind’. At this moment, the ‘Cliffs’ ‘behind [him]’ ‘stretch[es] in solemn train / Feebler and feebler’ ‘till all [is] tranquil as a dreamless sleep’. Wordsworth comes to realize that the previous moment has passed along with the rotation of earth (the ‘wheel[ing]’ of ‘the solitary Cliffs’ is getting ‘feebler and feebler’). Experiencing the past moments in their passing away, he finds that they cannot return to him – even in a ‘suspension of time’ when he ‘[stands] and watch’[es]’. All the past moments die into ‘a dreamless sleep’, never coming back again. Wordsworth here retrieves a past experience (the skating episode) through memory and defines his present self – the poet – as a self living in the ‘diurnal round’ of the earth. Wordsworth’s writing of self is neither ‘a defensive strategy that tries to hide from [the] negative self-knowledge’ of our ‘temporal predicament’ nor ‘a linguistic moment’ that creates a ‘realm of the imagination’. The poetic formation of self resides in the forward moving flow of time, developed by and through change and vicissitude, in the world we live. In this episode, the fading of the images into vagueness and tranquillity reminds the poet of the continual passing of his life, which has its everlasting root in time.

Wordsworth’s ‘two consciousnesses’ in the act of writing problematizes his relations to past, present, and even future selves. One episode from *The Prelude* well illustrates Wordsworth’s ambiguous vision of his self in temporal transition. The poet claims that he is

As one who hangs, down-bending from the side

³³ Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), p. 51.

Of a slow-moving Boat, upon the breast
 Of a still water, solacing himself
 With such discoveries as his eye can make,
 Beneath him, in the bottom of the deeps,
 Sees many beauteous sights, ...

....

Yet often is perplex'd, and cannot part
 The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
 Mountains and clouds, from that which is indeed
 The region, and the things which there abide
 In their true dwelling; now is cross'd by gleam
 Of his own image ...

...

- Such pleasant office have we long pursued
 Incumbent o'er the surface of past time
 With like success

(IV. 247-264)

The real past ('the naked recollection of that time') lies at the deep bottom of the water and is overshadowed by 'after-meditation' (III. 647, 649). The overlapping of 'the naked recollection of that time' and the things created by afterthoughts, of 'substance' and 'shadow', perplexes the poet's view of his past. Wordsworth's view of past moments 'now is cross'd by gleam / Of his own image'. At this meeting point between past and present, his view is 'cross'd by' a 'gleam' of his 'image', which, set at a distance from his self, itself remains dim and unclear. He cannot clearly see even his own 'image' but only 'gleams of half-extinguished thought' ('Tintern Abbey', 58). Even the 'I' of now has slipped away into a past the poet cannot access.³⁴ Wordsworth compares himself to 'one who hangs' on the border between past and present, and his retrospective view 'often is perplex'd'. The past lies 'in the bottom of the deeps', inaccessible and unrecoverable. However, Wordsworth also points out that the tracing of the past, 'incumbent o'er the surface of past time' (in contrast to 'the bottom of the deeps'), is 'pleasant'. Even though

³⁴ On this passage about the slow-moving boat, See Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 75, and Richard J. Onorato's 'The Fiction of the Self', in Bloom (ed.), *William Wordsworth's The Prelude*, pp. 109-23, p. 114.

no success is achieved in his attempt to see ‘the things which there abide / In their true dwelling’, the sight ‘o’er the surface of past time’ still gives him ‘like success’. In the fading of all past things (including his previous self), Wordsworth claims that he can still glimpse ‘his own image’. A hint of his past identity is detectable through the act of writing, even though the past is dying away. A ‘gleam’ of self-image glimmers on the border between past and present, between the ‘bottom’ and the ‘surface’ of past time. And Wordsworth’s writing here prepares us for something in the ‘pleasant office’ that he has long ‘pursued / Incumbent o’er the surface of past time’ – something new and different from the ‘substance’ and the ‘true dwelling’ of the past.

In Wordsworth’s increasing awareness of a temporal discordance between past and present, there develops ‘a strange half-absence’ of the self in memory, which is expressed with ‘a tone / Of weakness and indifference’, as if uttered by ‘some other Being’ (IV. 475, 475-76, II. 33). Like the discharged soldier in Book VI, Wordsworth, in search of his past, ‘remember[s] the importance of his theme / But feel[s] it no longer’ (IV. 477-78). David S. Miall suggests that ‘The question then arises as to how the registry of the self is to be elaborated, when memory provides only a partial and perhaps faulty record’; but, equally, as Wordsworth knows, ‘language itself is continually on the point of betraying [his] purpose’.³⁵ On the one hand, Wordsworth’s descriptions of his early days offer a ‘partial and perhaps faulty record’. In this ‘record’, there is ‘a strange half-absence’ of past events due to their ‘ghostly and unrepresentable presence’.³⁶ The voice of the past is like ‘sounds that are / The ghostly language of the ancient earth, / Or make their dim abode in distant winds’ (II. 327-29). The sound from the ‘ancient’ is ‘ghostly’ and disembodied, and its ‘abode’ is in the shadowy ‘winds’ of the distant past (rather than in writing). On the other hand, what is presented through writing is merely ‘representative’ of the past. The ‘*naked*’

³⁵ David S. Miall, ‘Wordsworth and *The Prelude*: the Problematics of Feeling’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 31 (1992), 233-253, 247.

³⁶ Mary Jacobus, ‘Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream’, *ELH*, 46: 4 (Winter, 1979), 618-44, 620.

recollection of ‘that time’ is ‘unrepresentable’ by means of the clothing of language (my italics). Wordsworth himself says that these past scenes are ‘in their substantial lineaments / Depicted on the brain’ (I. 629-30), but when they are brought to his ‘Tale’, they turn out to be ‘unsubstantial’.

This impossibility of a faithful portrait of the self intensely problematizes not only any attempt to textually ‘regist[er]’ the self but also Wordsworth’s attempt to poetically construct a continuity of self from past to present. Looking back to his past, Wordsworth laments that

If my mind,
Remembering the sweet promise of the past,
Would gladly grapple with some noble theme,
Vain is her wish; where’er she turns she finds
Impediments from day to day renew’d’ (I. 138-42).

Wordsworth plants the seeds of promise into his past, now and retrospectively. Nevertheless, whenever his mind ‘turns’ to the ‘promise’, he also finds ‘impediments’ that lay a barrier to his aspiration for ‘some noble theme’.³⁷ His perplexed mind is detectable from his use of language. Reading this passage, we may ask what is ‘some noble theme’ and what ‘impediments’ Wordsworth finds. These are all expressions of uncertainty and confusion. Somehow this ‘never-failing principle of joy’ (II. 465) cannot be retained in his adulthood, and his ‘lofty speculations’ (II. 463) have no correspondence to ‘some noble theme’. The ‘promise’ is ‘of the past’, but not for the present.

Wordsworth’s textual development of an identity for himself is ‘threatened’, to use de Man’s words, ‘not by a historical process of becoming that acts on it from without, but from within the very process of becoming, ... by reason of the increasing difficulty of

³⁷ Concerning this ‘sweet promise of the past’, Wordsworth states that ‘sometimes, mistaking vainly, as I fear, / Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea’ (I. 177-78). He is anxious that this swelling of might he was endowed with in childhood may accomplish nothing in adulthood. Thus he uses the phrase ‘bold promise’ in the 1850 *Prelude*.

accomplishing the movement it assigns itself'.³⁸ Similarly, Bennett talks about this 'very process of becoming': 'the work of writing *itself* reveals the ungrounded constitution, the discomposure, of the writing subject, since it is precisely in writing that the noncoincidence that constitutes subjectivity is revealed or "experienced"'.³⁹ But we might add here that Wordsworth himself attempts to 'assign' his writing a 'movement' that leads directly from 'the sweet promise of the past' to his present identity-formation in order to form 'an imaginative confrontation between self and self-as-other'.⁴⁰ De Man's and Bennett's reading make Wordsworth too passive. In Wordsworth's writing, 'the noncoincidence that constitutes subjectivity' is not so much 'experienced' as being created. In the act of writing, this 'imaginative confrontation' is gradually set apart by Wordsworth's own increasing awareness of 'the persistent indetermination that is historical temporality'.⁴¹ It is Wordsworth's intense consciousness of time, not simply a quality inherent in his 'rhetoric of temporality', that leads to 'the persistent indetermination' of temporality in his autobiographical writing, in which any 'narrative' is truly a 'metaphor' for 'the moment'.⁴² 'Narrative' can never coincide with 'the moment', and Wordsworth's descriptions of his past experiences are merely 'metaphor[s]' for these previous moments. The real problem for Wordsworth is that he is all too aware of this fact – as he himself puts it, all his words are merely 'representatives of all our past feelings'.

Once this fractured temporality intrudes into the writing of the past, the poet's previous prospective vision of his role as a great poet confronts a 'world of uncertain retrospect'.⁴³ Looking back to past days, Wordsworth finds his sense of identity constantly baffled by

³⁸ De Man, 'Process and Poetry (1956)', in Waters (ed.), *Critical Writings, 1953-1978*, p. 65

³⁹ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.152.

⁴⁰ Albert O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 40.

⁴¹ De Man, *Critical Writings*, pp. 66-67.

⁴² De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven, New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), p. 68.

⁴³ Susan Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), p. 129.

‘unmanageable’ thoughts, which are his ‘lot’ (I. 150, 264). The crisis of doubt and despair he has experienced in adulthood keeps counteracting his thoughts of ‘visionary power’ and ‘one life’ with thoughts that are ‘difficult or impossible to manage, manipulate, or control’.⁴⁴ Wordsworth confesses that he ‘find[s] / Some imperfection in the chosen theme’ (I. 264-65). This is a ‘task’ that can never be carried out. (It is noticeable that the phrase, ‘chosen tasks’, is deleted in the 1850 version.) Whenever he desires to ‘shape out / Some Tale from [his] own heart’, ‘deadening admonitions will succeed’; and whenever he ‘takes heart again’, ‘immediately some hollow thought / [will] Hang like an interdict upon her hopes’ (I. 221-22, 226, 261, 262-63). The ‘holy services’ are now regarded as ‘a servile yoke’ (I. 114). Contradicting his former claim of being a poet of ‘prophecy’, now Wordsworth says: ‘what need of many words?’ (I. 60, 114).

Wordsworth’s recounting of memory is, as de Man also notes, ‘the quintessential historical act: that through which we become conscious of the divided character of our own being, and consequently, of the necessity of fulfilling it, of accomplishing it in time, instead of undergoing it in eternity’.⁴⁵ Wordsworth comes closest to this kind of consciousness of self in his awareness of ‘the divided character of our own being’ – the ‘two consciousnesses’ – in the ‘process of becoming’, in which mutability determines one’s identity. The play of temporality makes it incessantly impossible for language to negate time (in the name of ‘eternity’). Recollecting the early days in ‘the process of becoming’, Wordsworth realizes the increasing difficulty of using language to sustain his ‘heroic argument, / And genuine prowess’ (III. 182-83). Although de Man thinks that Wordsworth’s writing is ‘threatened’ by ‘a historical process of becoming that acts on it ... from within the very process of becoming’ (that is, from within the textual history of composition), I suggest that the poetic development of self in *The Prelude* remains guided by ‘an immanent teleology’ and that Wordsworth still endeavours to build and stabilize a

⁴⁴ See *OED*’s definition of the word ‘unmanageable’, p. 1929.

⁴⁵ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. lvi.

sense of self through his positive use of language. In other words, I want to trace and investigate Wordsworth's persistent effort in creating a continuous sense of self from past to present even though the process is involved with 'the persistent indetermination' of temporality that undermines the poetic identity he assigns himself.

My discussion of Wordsworth's deepening insight into his 'two consciousnesses' opposes Michael O'Neill's argument that Wordsworth develops, in fact, a 'staging of self-incomprehension'; O'Neill points out that, in this process of self-formation, 'the poem's self-consciousness shows itself ... in a baffled and yet artful awareness of not quite knowing what moves it to utterance'.⁴⁶ I think that Wordsworth, during the process of textual composition, comes to a clearer sense of his identity as a self destined for 'holy services' by taking a path that is more circuitous than that of a predetermined route leading directly from past to present. Wordsworth's 'timely' words (which 'create time'⁴⁷) come into interplay with his intensifying consciousness of time, resulting in the poetic utterances that are inevitably 'varied and inconsistent'.⁴⁸ His utterances waver between self-assertion and self-interrogation. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's 'self-consciousness' does know well 'what moves it to utterance' in his deliberate problematization of his relationship to various temporal selves. Instead of using 'the rhetoric of temporality', Wordsworth writes 'the persistent indetermination' of temporality into the poetic formation of his self, problematizing his relationship to past, present, and future. In this act of problematization, a new sense of self is gradually created, a self that exists exactly in a changeable, undetermined, relationship to the past and future. In this respect, Bennett's account of Wordsworth's writing fails to offer a full insight into Wordsworth's poetic formation of self. Bennett views 'the originary moment' in Wordsworth's text as 'a moment of

⁴⁶ Michael O'Neill, "'The Words he Uttered ...': A Rereading of Wordsworth", *Romanticism on the Net* 3 (Aug., 1996). He says that "'Staging" implies that this self-incomprehension is a rhetoric, an offshoot of the discourse of the sublime in which the self discovers its greatness in the act of finding that it is an enigma'.

⁴⁷ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, pp. 161.

⁴⁸ Earl R. Wasserman, 'The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge', in Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe (eds.), *Romanticism: Points of View*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 331-337, p. 337.

obscurity or ignorance, a blank'; he asserts that 'the "loss" of Wordsworth's autobiographical poems may be conceived of as a loss of – a loss constituted by – writing', and that 'writing, the act of writing, is precisely the loss that it – that writing – articulates, confronts and laments'.⁴⁹ But I want to suggest that Wordsworth's writing 'confronts' but does not 'lament' the 'loss constituted by writing'. Rather, the poet creates a presence of self from this sense of 'loss' in order to form a self that exists in a changeable relationship with the past self. In addition, Wordsworth's particular obscuration of the relationship between past and present protects him from any vulnerable claim of a timeless link with the lost and thus unrecoverable self. In Wordsworth's writing, an insight into self is certainly always gained at 'the very limit of comprehensible language', but this does not form an ambiguous unity of 'the movement of passing away' and 'a condition of remaining' so much as oscillating uncertainly and insecurely between them. The issue at stake is not 'a loss constituted – by writing' but a new self-understanding that emerges in the process of textual composition. Wordsworth is conscious that his writing is closely engaged with the changes brought by time. And this is the point of the next chapter: in this sense of uncertainty ('I cannot paint / What I then was') there is a 'strange half-absence' of both past (recollected 'lot') and present (prospective 'task') in which the sense of a self that is formed by, but distinct from, both begins to assert itself.

To further address the issues of problematization and Wordsworth's new understanding of self, I want to give some account of the question Wordsworth asks when interpreting the past – 'Was it for this?'. This (seemingly simple) question fundamentally addresses the poet's anxiety about his identity-identification throughout *The Prelude*,⁵⁰ and it is a question he can never answer. For Gill, this question is 'a self-admonition and self-reproach' – 'an astonishingly hesitant opening to a poem of epic scale'.⁵¹ Following

⁴⁹ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.174.

⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that the two-part *Prelude* Wordsworth wrote in 1798-99 starts with this question.

⁵¹ Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 58.

the ecstatic embrace of freedom and hope at the beginning of the poem, Wordsworth soon withdraws into doubts about his identity. In the text, Wordsworth does not give a specific idea of *what* 'it' 'was' 'for'. 'Was it for this' – was his childhood 'fair seed-time' for 'high objects' and 'enduring things' (I. 306, 437, 437)? When the stream of Derwent, 'with its steady cadence', 'tempering / Our human waywardness', was it 'not in vain' 'from my first dawn / Of Childhood' for Nature to 'intertwine for me / The passions that build up our human Soul' (I. 281, 281-82, 432, 433-34, 434-35)? Or, was nature's fostering of his childhood for his 'vain' 'wish' and 'despair' in adulthood?⁵² Do the past experiences exist only 'for' his present identity? Gill points out that this question 'draws attention to the poet as ... a self-dependent, creative being, awed by the possession of special powers, yet fearful of the responsibilities they entail. This is a poem about being, or becoming, a poet'.⁵³ But this 'becoming' is much in doubt for Wordsworth. If 'the sweet promise of the past' was 'for' his 'task', then it is Wordsworth's failure to fulfil this 'promise' because his 'mind' 'every hour / Turns recreant to her task' (I. 260-61). He admits that he is 'like a false steward who hath much received / And renders nothing back' (I. 271-72). In the changes that time brings, 'the *Eternity* of Thought', '*everlasting* motion', and '*enduring* things' (I. 430, 432, 437, my italics) are all put in question.⁵⁴ The question, 'Was it for this', remains to be answered because even the writing Wordsworth cannot give a definite answer.

Bennett suggests that Wordsworth's questioning ('Was it for this?') can be read as 'Was it for this compositional moment, this moment of compositional and inspirational failure,

⁵² Similarly, David P. Haney states that 'The narrative of the past, at this point consisting of the joy of childhood, is in a diachronically figural relation to the discursive present. The relationship is complicated by the poet's fear that the figural mechanism is ironic, that the figure of joyful childhood is "fulfilled" by its opposite, despair' ('The Emergence of the Autobiographical Figure in "The Prelude", Book I', in *Studies in Romanticism*, 20:1 (Spring, 1981), 33-63, 52).

⁵³ Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 58.

⁵⁴ De Man talks about 'the necessity of naming the eternal by means of an entity – language – that is immediately adequate to neither eternal nor temporal being'; 'What we call the process of becoming, then, becomes equivalent to a consciousness of the eternal as intention and not as existent' (*Critical Writings 1953-1978*, p. 67).

this writing now, was it for this composition, this composition of the poet, that the River Derwent (and Nature) composed me (as Poet), “composed my thoughts”?”⁵⁵ Bennett brings the idea of ‘this’ to ‘this compositional moment’ and even to ‘this composition of the poet’. With a series of words, ‘composition’, ‘compositional’, ‘composed’, Bennett draws our attention to Wordsworth’s main concern with the self formed in the very act of writing. The key point does not lie in the poet’s relationship with the past but in his textual composition and rewriting of the past; it is exactly this link between his sense of self and his writing about the past that is in doubt. With this question, ‘Was it for this’, Wordsworth not only interrogates his self-identification but also makes a strategic ‘suspension of that decision’⁵⁶ of an identity for his self. He tries not to give a definite answer in order to protect ‘the voice of his wish’ from being ‘consum[ed]’ by itself. As a writing poet looking back to ‘those recollected hours that have the charm / Of visionary things’, Wordsworth fears that his ‘great hopes’ will be overwhelmed by ‘the many feelings that oppress’d [his] heart’ (I. 660-61, 63, 134). Similarly, as ‘a man who would prepare / For such a glorious work’, he also finds that his ‘days are past / In contradiction’ (1805, I. 157-58; 1850, I. 237-38). In the 1850 *Prelude* Wordsworth changes his view of ‘a glorious work’ to that of ‘an arduous work’ (1850, I. 147). This self-interrogation (‘Was it for this’) intensifies and manipulates a sense of uncertainty in the poet’s relation to the past and his ongoing composition of an identity for himself. The word ‘hang’ appears many times in Book I, testifying to this precarious sense of unsteadiness. For example, in the slow-moving Boat episode, Wordsworth compares his self (who looks back to the previous selves) to ‘one who *hangs*, down-bending from the side / Of a slow-moving Boat’; in addition, he states

⁵⁵ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.157.

⁵⁶ Neither the narrated self nor the writing self of Wordsworth can give a definite answer to the question, ‘Was it for this?’. His uncertainty is testified by the fact that the poem remained unpublished at his death. Haney thinks that ‘this beginning gesture of the poet’s autobiography, with its need to balance or “syncopate” the identity and otherness of the past in relation to present self, requires a suspension of that decision. ... To give a “right” answer would presume a knowledge not only of the past, but also of the present “for” which that past exists’ (‘The Emergence of the Autobiographical Figure in “The Prelude”, Book I’, 50).

that ‘on the perilous ridge I *hung* alone’ and that ‘O’er my thoughts / There *hung* a darkness (1805, I. 347; 1850, I. 393-94, my italics). Wordsworth wants to ‘shape out / Some Tale from [his] own heart’, but he adds in the 1850 version that ‘the unsubstantial structure melts’ (I. 225). The ‘Tale’, though ‘more near akin / To [his] own passions and habitual thoughts (I. 221-22), remains unsubstantial and even dissolving in the lapse of time.

During the ‘process of becoming, ‘what ‘might be said will only be discovered through reflection upon and analysis of experience and *through writing [the experience] down*. The answer to the question is ... the poem itself, but what that poem will be remains ... unclear’.⁵⁷ While longing for a determined identity as a poet of nature in face of time and change, Wordsworth actively writes his uncertain and ambiguous relationship to the past into the poem itself. In the act of writing, Wordsworth recognizes the necessity of creating a self in relation to but different from his previous self. For example, he says:

That aught external to the living mind
Should have such mighty sway! yet so it was
A weight of Ages did at once descend
Upon my heart; no thought embodied, no
Distinct remembrances; but weight and power,
Power growing with the weight: alas! I feel
That I am trifling: ’twas a moment’s pause.
All that took place within me, came and went
As in a moment, and I only now
Remember that it was a thing divine. (VIII. 701-710)

This whole experience, ‘all that took place within me’, ‘came and went / As in a moment’, lasting only ‘a moment’s pause’. In Abrams’ view, ‘Wordsworth is a poet of the Moment’.⁵⁸ The moments of epiphany in *The Prelude*, such as the one in the Simplon Pass episode, the one on Mount Snowdon, and the one quoted here, though transient,

⁵⁷ Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 58.

⁵⁸ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 389.

constitute the source of spiritual power for Wordsworth. As Wordsworth says, ‘Of Genius, Power, / Creation, and Divinity itself / I have been speaking, for my theme has been / *What pass’d within me*’ (III. 171-74, my italics). In the quoted lines, though Wordsworth states that he experienced something ‘*external* to the living mind’, his focus is its momentary dynamic ‘sway’ ‘*within*’ his mind (my italics). It is a moment of heightened exultation but it is also a moment of most elusive experience, like ‘the flashing of a shield’ (I. 614). Thinking about this moment in the distant past, Wordsworth refrains from using language to name ‘what pass’d within’ him, which was merely ‘weight and power’ – ‘no thought embodied, no distinct remembrances’. A moment of the most vigorous feeling of a divine visit never lasts long, and *now* Wordsworth claims that he ‘remember[s] that it was a thing divine’. By referring to ‘all that took place within’ him as ‘a thing’ (‘yet with Time it dwells’ (1850, VIII. 558)), Wordsworth admits the inability of his words to name any past thing, which gives him ‘some hollow thought’ (I. 262). At the same time, his use of language also attempts to endow exactly this thought of hollowness with ‘divine’ power in order to safeguard his sacred vocation. In this passage, Wordsworth neither attempts a re-establishment of a bond with nature through ‘timely utterance’ nor seeks a return to the past through any ‘rhetoric of temporality’. The ‘mighty sway’ exerted within ‘the living mind’ happens ‘now’, at the moment of writing, making his mind seem ‘a thing divine’ even at a moment of failed recollection.

As de Man puts it, ‘a reappearing theme in this poet’ is ‘sequence’ – ‘the transformation of an echo language into a language of the imagination by way of the mediation of a poetic understanding of mutability’.⁵⁹ But this very ‘sequence’ from ‘an echo language’ to

⁵⁹ De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 54. He claims that ‘For Wordsworth, the relationships towards time have a priority over relationships toward nature; one finds, in his work, a persistent deepening of self-insight represented as a movement that begins in a contact with nature, then grows beyond nature to become a contact with time’ (‘Time and History in Wordsworth’, 16-17). In addition, see *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*, pp. 31, 33; ‘though time is always in motion, it is a motion that has a structure and therefore a meaning, and that only by staying within this structure of temporality and moving with it can one gain access to real insight’ (The quotations come from Barth’s *Romanticism and Transcendence*, p. 41).

‘a language of the imagination’ allows the poet a more clear insight into his selfhood than de Man allows. Although Hartman suggests that ‘The “spots of time” describe a trauma, a lesion in the fabric of time, or more precisely, the trouble this lesion produces’⁶⁰, neither Hartman nor de Man sufficiently acknowledge the extent to which Wordsworth is constantly aware that the identity he seeks to stabilize in writing must first be created in writing rather than by recovering his previous self in some timeless relationship with his present self. The self formed through this ‘understanding of mutability’ in *The Prelude* is the main concern of next chapter.

⁶⁰ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 171.

Chapter Two

Split between ‘two consciousnesses’, Wordsworth’s use of language problematizes the poetic formation of his self while seeking to stabilize it at the same time. This chapter sets out to examine Wordsworth’s engagement with temporal difference when he goes from private childhood communion with nature to adult experience of the social world. The adult Wordsworth, in the act of writing, seeks to build a link (in ‘a healthful state of association’¹) with the past when he, as ‘natural [being] in the strength of nature’ (III. 194), possessed ‘visionary power’. At the same time, his writing articulates his ambition to write ‘some philosophic Song / Of Truth that cherishes our daily life’ (I. 231-32) and that issues in social involvement. He says that ‘I essay’d / To give relief, began to deem myself / A moral agent, judging between good / And evil’ for the human community (VIII. 666-69). Between past and present, he endeavours to explore and maintain the relationship between his private intercourse with nature (‘the self-sufficing power of solitude’ (II. 78)) and his commitment to the social community (writing a prophetic poem for humankind when ‘call’d / To take a station among Men’ to ‘speak of things / Common to all’ (XIII. 325-26, VIII. 665-66)). Although he has an aspiration to ‘some philosophic Song / Of Truth’, once the French Revolution has led to his baffled awareness of the ‘wide’ ‘vacancy’ between past idealism and present reality, he is afraid that the ‘one life’ might not exist. The path leading from past to present, as the poet comes to recognize, is more a route involved with change and unsteadiness than ‘a providential plot’ with determined patterns for his life history.²

This chapter argues that, in response to the temporal fracturing of self into ‘two

¹ Wordsworth, ‘Preface (1802)’, p. 651.

² Abrams points out that there is ‘a principle which was invisibly operative from the beginning’ in *The Prelude*. ‘A supervising idea ... controls Wordsworth’s account and shapes it into a structure in which the protagonist is put forward as one who has been elected to play a special role in a providential plot. ... the exemplary poet-prophet who has been singled out, in a time “of hopes o’erthrown ... of dereliction and dismay”, to bring mankind tidings of comfort and joy’ (*Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 76). On this ‘supervising idea’ operative in Wordsworth’s poetry, also see de Man’s *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, p. 20.

consciousnesses', Wordsworth builds an identity for himself based on his own anxiety about change brought by time, which enables him to project an ongoing self that has its life in mutability rather than in some kind of sustained communion with nature conceived of as eternal. The act of memory locates Wordsworth in the passing of time and thus moves him forward in the development of his identity. Looking back to Abrams' account of 'a supervising idea' and 'a providential plot' in *The Prelude*, I suggest that it is Wordsworth's consciousness of temporality that drives this plot, rather than providence. In this sense, there is nothing predetermined in the plot except change, and it is through temporal change that Wordsworth endeavours to build his role as a 'poet-prophet'.

This chapter offers a reading of Wordsworth's negative and positive views of language as a tool of self-definition, against the prevailing critical view of Wordsworth's largely negative relationship to linguistic self-definition. In Hartman's view, Wordsworth's 'timely utterance[s]' in *The Prelude* are 'not only qualified by being timely; they are unified by being timely'; 'That is their essential quality, or the predicate pointing to a predicament'.³ As a result, Hartman thinks that 'The *untimely* is never far away'⁴ in Wordsworth's poetic utterances. In other words, 'timely utterance' in *The Prelude* maintains the bond between the mind and nature only through a sense of timelessness that 'unifie[s]' different temporal selves into a never-failing correspondence with nature. De Man, however, argues that it is not this bond with nature but 'the relationship between imagination and time' that is at stake in Wordsworth's writing. As de Man puts it, 'In Wordsworth, evocation of natural, childlike or apocalyptic state of unity with nature often acquires the curiously barren, dead-obsessed emptiness of nothing. The poetic imagination ... realizes this and thus encompasses source and death, origin and end within the space of its language, by means of complex temporal structurizations'.⁵ Both Hartman and de Man spot the temporal

³ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, pp. 156-57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵ De Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', 11.

‘predicament’ that is constantly at work in Wordsworth’s language. However, my reading of *The Prelude*, moving on from those provided by them, shows the dynamics existing within Wordsworth’s retrospective account of his communion with nature from childhood to adulthood. I want to show that the poet’s ‘evocation of natural, childlike or apocalyptic state of unity with nature’ by no means acquires the ‘dead-obsessed emptiness of nothing’ (or ‘a trauma, a lesion in the fabric of time’, in Hartman’s words) but stimulates his ongoing interpretation of his relationship to the past through these ‘complex temporal structurizations’.

I disagree with de Man’s statement that ‘The contact, the relationship with time, is, however, always a negative one, for the relationship between the self and time is necessarily mediated by death’.⁶ In my view, Wordsworth’s self-formation is not based upon a timeless uncovering of dead selves but built upon the forward-moving flow of time and the change it brings. Wordsworth’s ‘timely utterance’ is vital not in the sense of its ‘timely’ response to his ‘passionate wish’ but in the sense of its timeliness during the process of textual composition. The vitality of his autobiographical writing derives from the poet’s increasing awareness of temporal disparity between the past moment and the ‘now’ of the poem. On the idea of this ‘temporal disparity’, Bennett states that ‘rather than establishing a coherent self, writing ... may be said to have threatened any such resolution’ and that ‘acts of writing’ ‘both produce a poetic self and, at the same time, disturb any possibility of a coherent articulation of such a self’.⁷ In Bennett’s view, a discordance between ‘a coherent articulation of ... a self’ from past to present and a self constituted in writing is immanent in Wordsworth’s writing as a result of his ‘obscure sense of having lost something’ – the ‘knowledge’ of ‘an obscure loss’.⁸ However, I will claim that Wordsworth views language as a tool of self-definition that forms a self living

⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, pp.11-12.

⁸ Ibid., p.163.

in time rather than merely echoing ‘some other Being’ buried in the depth of time. Our relationship with time, for Wordsworth, is not always, or necessarily, ‘mediated by death’ (or by ‘an obscure loss’). It is also mediated by present and ongoing life that progresses exactly through the impossibility of any ‘coherent’ narrative of a self.

In his recollections of childhood Wordsworth senses a cosmic ‘workmanship’ bringing man and nature into ‘one society’. In the act of writing, Wordsworth creates in his childhood communion with nature something mysterious and obscure. The poet claims that:

The mind of man is fram’d even like the breath
And harmony of music. There is *a dark*
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them move
In one society. (I. 352-56, my italics)

Although ‘foster’d’ by nature in the ‘fair seed-time’ of ‘[his] soul’, he also states that there is ‘an auxiliary light / Com[ing] from [his] mind’ (II. 387-88), which is ‘fram’d even like the breath / And harmony of music’. Meanwhile, an external cosmic ‘workmanship’ ‘reconciles’ ‘the mind of Man’ to nature and forms them into ‘one society’. For Wordsworth, this mysterious ‘workmanship’ works as ‘unknown modes of being’ in his memory of childhood experience. In the stolen boat episode, ‘the huge Cliff / Rose up between [him] and the stars, and still, / With measur’d motion, like a living thing, / Strode after’ him (I. 410-13). After the spectacle of that night Wordsworth’s ‘brain / Work’d with a dim and undetermin’d sense / Of unknown modes of being’ (I. 419-21). He cannot vividly remember what he saw on the night but with senses of vagueness and fear. He felt as if being pursued by something ‘unknown’ and ‘dark’.

Discussing Wordsworth’s use of the word ‘sense’ in the phrase ‘a dim and undetermin’d sense’, William Empson points out that ‘There is a suggestion here from the pause at the end of the line that he had not merely a “feeling of” these unknown modes but something

like a new “sense” which was partly able to apprehend them – a new *kind* of sensing had appeared in his mind’.⁹ The unknown is mysterious, but not unknowable. In the act of writing, Wordsworth is turning the ‘obscure sense of having lost something’¹⁰ (‘a dim and undetermin’d sense / Of unknown modes of being’) into ‘a new *kind* of sensing’. He intends to express the possibility that a new understanding of these ‘unknown modes of being’ is being gradually formed in the growth of his mind across time, and that he is coming to know how they work in his mind, though this process of comprehension is still intermingled with perplexity and unsteadiness.

Wordsworth gradually develops ‘a new “sense”’ of this ‘invisible workmanship’ when stepping into adulthood. He states:

How Nature by extrinsic passion first
 Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand,
 And made me love them, may I well forget
 How other pleasures have been mine, and joys
 Of subtler origin; how I have felt,
 Not seldom, even in that tempestuous time,
 Those hallow’d and pure emotions of the sense
 Which seem, in their simplicity, to own
 An intellectual charm, that calm delight
 Which, if I err not, surely must belong
 To those first-born affinities that fit
 Our new existence to existing things,
 And, in our dawn of being, constitute
 The bond of union betwixt life and joy. (I. 573-85)

For Wordsworth, there are ‘pleasures’ other than those given by nature’s ‘beauteous forms or grand’. These ‘*other* pleasures’ give him ‘joys / Of *subtler* origin’ (my italics). They give a spiritual ‘charm’ to his retrospectively-viewed childhood experiences. Wordsworth’s utterances here are not, as Hartman suggests, aimed at a reconnection to

⁹ William Empson, ‘Sense in *The Prelude*’, in Stephen Gill et al. (eds.), *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, pp. 625-42, p. 626.

¹⁰ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 163.

‘the first-born affinities’ of his mind and nature in childhood. His writing here (‘may I well forget’, ‘how I have felt’) shows that it is only through the retrospective interpretation of the past that he comes to envisage ‘an intellectual charm’. This ‘charm’, evoked through the writing of memory, ‘surely must belong / To those first-born affinities’, the poet asserts now. Wordsworth is claiming to remember that, through the ‘workmanship’ going out outside him and the ‘auxiliary light’ from his own mind, these ‘affinities’ and ‘the bond of union’ are established.¹¹ But it is in the ‘recollecting’ of this that the poet experiences ‘joys / Of subtler origin’. It is also through the act of ‘recollecting’ that he is able to claim that ‘bond unknown to me / Was given, that I should be ... / A dedicated Spirit’ (IV. 342-44). This is Wordsworth’s most idealised utterance about his childhood – ‘if he err[s] not’. What is important here, however, is not the substance of the claim, but the act of claiming it in this present moment and in writing a poem. It is this act that gives him an identity as a poet. It is not the childhood gift of a bond that makes Wordsworth the poet he is; it is the adult claim, in a poem, to have been given the gift.

The French Revolution threatens this claim to a ‘bond of union’ by showing man breaking from nature and breaking society (through aggressive individualism and desire). In the aftermath of the Revolution, at a time of dismay, Wordsworth finds that his idea of ‘one society’ is vulnerable, indeed is confronted by the possibility that it is entirely illusionary. The violence of the revolutionists’ misdeeds and the disappointing outcome of the Revolution relentlessly attack Wordsworth’s faith in the human mind. It is noticeable that, in the 1850 version, ‘the immortal Spirit’ replaces ‘the mind of Man’ to ‘[grow] / Like harmony of music’ (1850, I. 340, 340-41). This indicates the adult Wordsworth’s diminishing confidence in ‘the mind of Man’ (‘dust as we are’ (1850, I. 340)), though he retained his faith in ‘the immortal Spirit’ of the universe. Even in 1805, he is viewing the

¹¹ It is noteworthy that Wordsworth contradicts his saying here (the mutual interaction between nature and the human mind) by attributing the ‘first-born affinities’ to ‘the gravitation, and the filial bond / *Of nature*, that connects him with the world’ (II. 263-64, my italics). This sense of incongruity in his writing reveals his inconsistent thoughts about nature, the mind, and the mysterious working of ‘workmanship’ (which enters his mind in order to reconcile it with nature).

task of composing ‘philosophic Song’ as an ‘awful burthen’ and finds that his ‘auxiliary’ ‘plastic power’ is ‘acting in a devious mood’ (I. 230, 235, II. 387, 381, 383).

If Wordsworth’s sense of the cosmic ‘workmanship’ is false, so is his ‘destiny’ as a poet – perhaps this is an illusion, too. On the one hand, the writing Wordsworth confesses: ‘My hope has been that I might fetch / Invigorating thoughts from former years’ (I. 649-50). In his mind, there remains a longing for spiritual communion with nature (‘If, mingling with the world, I am content / With my own modest pleasures, and have liv’d, / With God and Nature communing’ (II. 444-46)). He hopes that, through ‘invisible links’, the ‘workmanship’ may create a bond across time to connect his disparate selves because of its interfusing power. However, Wordsworth’s very consciousness of the difference between the self then (especially the pre-revolutionary self) and the self now fundamentally impacts his vision of childhood and its relationship to the construction of his present identity.¹²

Wordsworth counters this threat to his identity as a poet by recalling that nature fostered him not just through beauty, but also through fear. The idea of ‘fear’ relates to the ‘unknown modes of being’ that haunted and ‘strode after’ him in the stolen boat episode, for example. In the ‘fair seed-time’ of his ‘soul’, Wordsworth was ‘foster’d alike by beauty and by fear’ (I. 307). With ‘beauty’, nature ‘seek[s] him / With gentlest visitation’; however, in relation to ‘fear’, nature’s ‘ministry’ now appears to be ‘more palpable’ in his recollection of earlier days (I. 307, 367-68, 307, 371, 372). It is important to consider why Wordsworth particularly points out that nature’s fearful ‘interventions’ are ‘severer’ (I. 371) and more conspicuous when he looks back to his childhood now, after the events of the

¹² Concerning Wordsworth’s statement that ‘so wide appears / The vacancy between me and those days, / Which yet have such self-presence in my mind / That sometimes when I think of *them* I seem / Two consciousnesses’ (II. 28-32, my italics), the use of the word ‘it’ (instead of the word ‘them’ here) in the manuscript MS. A (DC MS. 52) is noteworthy. This indicates that he views his self now and the self then as oneness at first, though he acknowledges the difference between them in his later revision (William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. by Mark L. Reed, vol. II (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 516).

French Revolution.¹³

Concerning the contradiction of ‘beauty’ and ‘fear’, David B. Pirie suggests that ‘It signals a profoundly thoughtful attempt to expose the dream-like incongruities of those moments which Wordsworth most vividly remembers’.¹⁴ In the act of writing, Wordsworth is remembering ‘the dream-like incongruities’ of previous moments, but, unavoidably, remembering these involves changing them. His adulthood interpretation of them leads to ambivalent visions of his identity-formation now. Between past and present, ‘Much of [the poem’s] strength lies in its closeness to the dilemmas of experience, and neither in his feeling for the One Life nor in his brooding over the problems of perception could Wordsworth in the years 1804-5, when most of the poem was written, see that experience in the perspective it had for him in the winter of 1798/9’.¹⁵ The selves in various temporal moments drive Wordsworth to make different and even incongruous interpretations of the same experience. These various readings of the past are not only where ‘much of [the poem’s] strength lies’ but also stimulants that provoke further acts of imaginative self-formation. Ross Hamilton rightly remarks that the ‘Combined sensation of trouble and joy that accompanies the boy’s hunt and subsequent theft communicates his adult encounters with the slipperiness of human life. Nature’s moral system reveals the troubling outcome of acts undertaken from “a strong desire” that overpowers “better reason”’.¹⁶ The writing poet analyzes the past moments of his ‘boyish sports’, from an adult perspective that he seeks to link ‘the slipperiness of human life’ to ‘nature’s moral system’. By doing this, he can create a vision of childhood that can be brought to bear on his sense of ‘fear’ and despair in adulthood.

Nicholas Roe explains that:

¹³ See Hartman’s *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 3.

¹⁴ David B. Pirie, *William Wordsworth: The Poetry of Grandeur and of Tenderness* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 244.

¹⁵ Rolland Gaskell, *Wordsworth’s Poem of the Mind: an Essay on The Prelude* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1991), p. 57.

¹⁶ Ross Hamilton, ‘Deep History: Association and Natural Philosophy in Wordsworth’s Poetry’, *European Romantic Review*, 18:4 (2007), 459-81, 465.

In retrospect, childish experience offers an uncanny forecast of crises and disappointments known in later life. ... the formative memory of guilt associated with bird-trapping overlaps with Wordsworth's later involvement in the events of the French Revolution. The two memories are simultaneous, merged together to imply a pattern in childhood and adult life in which overweening expectation is self-deceiving, self-betrayed. And the ultimate cause of that betrayal is the tragic delinquency of human nature: the 'strong desire / Resistless' that overpowered the child, and which later became the destructive virtue of the French Revolution.¹⁷

Writing *The Prelude* as a recollection of his life, Wordsworth hopes to 'be defined' and 'interpreted' 'in relation to [particular] experiences that slip into the past'.¹⁸ In the narrative about the past, 'a condition of remaining', 'two memories' of childhood and of the Revolution are 'merged together'. And Wordsworth thinks that childhood experiences¹⁹ foreshadow the 'crises and disappointments' of 'later life', claiming that it does so through 'nature's moral system'. Moments of childhood and adulthood are 'merged' and interpreted by the writing poet. This interaction between 'the two memories' manifests the illusion of man's arrogant ambition and the wrongdoing of human deeds. This 'tragic delinquency of human nature' constitutes part of 'human life'. He comes to recognize that the communion with nature in past days not only plants in his mind idealism of 'one life' but also the idea of 'the tragic delinquency of human nature'. This is Wordsworth's way of being 'defined' and 'interpreted' 'in relation to' the past.

Wordsworth's definition of the past is closely related to his adulthood vision. That is, he comes to recognize what the past means to him only when he looks back in the moment of composition. Bennett points out that 'The difficulty involved in construing, in reading, Wordsworth's autobiographical poems ... is that they are structured around an obscurity

¹⁷ Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 152.

¹⁸ De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 50.

¹⁹ For example, in the stolen boat episode, the boy 'heard among the solitary hills / Low breathings coming after [him] (l. 329-30). This thought of 'fear' is interweaved with 'danger' and 'desire' (l. 498), which results in the boy's 'troubled pleasure'. The child has a sense of guilt because of his desire to steal the boat, while he was rowing the boat on the lake bathed in moonlight, he was delighted but he was also cautious that nature might snatch him and punish his behaviour.

now concerning an earlier sense of obscurity, an obscurity then. ... such a loss is itself the loss of a loss, or the loss of an obscure sense of something other'.²⁰ Nevertheless, my reading will suggest that Wordsworth's recollection of his childhood experience is not actually 'the loss of a loss' but his very recognition of such a loss. Wordsworth knows that 'the original moment' is in fact 'a moment of obscurity or ignorance, a blank'.²¹ Because of this, he can create something out of the 'blank' past by bringing his adulthood vision to bear on his writing of the past moments. His writing does not seek to adhere to a faithful description of 'the original moment' so much as to form an imaginative 'merging' of past and present. In other words, the poet attempts to retain his sense of being fostered as a poet by nature through an interpretation of his experiences that uncovers that fostering in his very awareness, now, of 'two consciousnesses'.

Hartman remarks that

The poet's initial memory still embraces [his past experience], but he is tempted to rest with the supervening memory as with a symbol. When he comes on that second, more internal image, he is forced to stop, to enter the solitude he then intuited, the 'I' rather than the 'we'. He dwells on that event to the point of slowing the narrative moment to a halt that parallels even now (some thirty years later) a moment in the past which prepared him for selfhood. ... a past that can modify and even reverse a present state of mind. ... the supervening memory remains within the frame of its matrix. ... instead of clearly breaking with the past, he conceives progress as the individual's greater participation in the past.²²

Retracing past days through memory, the poet intends to describe each moment with 'the supervening memory' ('a transcendental will'²³) that defines his role as a 'chosen' poet 'singled out' for 'holy services' (III. 82, I. 62, 63). This memory belongs to his own 'internal image', his 'solitude'. As Wordsworth says, 'I remember to have felt / Distinctly

²⁰ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.171.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.174.

²² Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 11.

²³ John F. McCarthy, 'The Conflict in Book I-II of The Prelude', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30:3 (1969), 370-85, 376.

manifested at this time' 'the gladsome air / Of my own private being, and no more'; he is homing-in on an 'individual happiness' in the past when he felt like 'a blessed Spirit' (IV. 222-23, 226-27, 230, 228). The 'supervening memory' is like 'a symbol' of his life, which is claimed to be blessed by 'the sweet promise' from the past. Wordsworth says that 'I was most rich, / I had a world about me, 'twas my own, / I made it; for it only liv'd to me' (III. 141-43). He is eager to demonstrate that he was most blessed when he lived in his own private world, and he doubts why he should 'speak of things / Common to all?' (VIII. 665-666). However, when he starts to engage with 'the "we"' in writing a 'philosophic Song', and when his personal sense of being formed 'a favor'd Being' becomes uncertain, Wordsworth needs to create some changes in his memory of previous personal experiences in order to build a connection between past and present ('a past that can modify and even reverse a present state of mind') and thus to stabilize his identity as a poet. But where [Hartman asserts](#) that 'the supervening memory remains within the frame of its matrix', I suggest instead that specific memories have been adapted by the poet to suit his 'present state of mind'. Memories do not remain within the 'frame' of their own 'matrix'. Wordsworth's early self plays a continuous role in his self-development, talking to him not about a possible restoration of the 'initial memory', but about the necessity of a changeable relationship to his past in the building-up of his identity. Equally, Hartman's idea that 'progress' is 'the individual's greater participation in the past' does not do justice to the complexity, and instability, of Wordsworth's formation of a poetic identity for himself.

Although Wordsworth hopes to 'fetch / Invigorating thoughts from former years', he recognizes that, going from past to present, he 'might' 'haply meet reproaches, too, whose power / May spur [him] on, in manhood now mature, / To honourable toil' (I. 649-650, 651, 652-53). Through the 'ministry' of 'fear', Nature 'admonished' him with 'the troubling outcome' of 'desire' but also, paradoxically, might motivate the adult

Wordsworth to continue with his poetic work. But Wordsworth does not talk about ‘progress’ here, just ‘honourable toil’. Wordsworth points out that both ‘gentlest visitation’ and ‘severe intervention’ from nature are ‘aiming at the self-same end’ (I. 369), but this end is not an ultimate destination but just is to spur him on to more ‘toil’. His poetic work is a work that is ‘honourable’ and worthy, but still ‘toil’.

Uncovering the ‘reproaches’ of the past also, of course, allows Wordsworth to recover his sense of both a cosmic workmanship building one society and his sense of being made a poet by nature. It does this by, first, aligning the Revolution to the ‘fear’ side of nature’s teaching – the violence has a ‘lesson’ for, and to help, society. Wordsworth states that ‘Presences of Nature’, ‘haunting me thus among my boyish sports’,

Impress’d upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire, and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear
Work like a sea. (I. 491, 496, 498-502)

The visitations of the nature that ‘favor’d’ him are described as ‘hauntings’. In childhood, nature sought him with ‘beauty’ but also troubled him with a sense of ‘fear’. In this world, there are ‘characters’ of human ‘desire’, and there may also be ones of ‘danger’. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Wordsworth sees in mankind’s fight for freedom and power ‘blind desires’ (IX. 365) accompanied by ‘characters / Of danger’. Such ‘Presences of Nature’ teach him that human life is not as stable as land, but as flowing, uneven, and turbulent as ‘a sea’. The ‘moral system’ of nature gives us an insight into our human nature. When Wordsworth ‘walk[s] alone / In storm and tempest’ (when ‘the night blackened with a coming storm’), he senses ‘power in sound’ and this power from nature’s fierce ministry enables him to ‘breathe an elevated mood’ and ‘drink the visionary power’ (1805, II. 321-22; 1850, II. 307; 1805, II. 305, 306, 312). Looking back to the past from the present, Wordsworth realizes that this ‘work[ing]’ of ‘human life’ shows a power that

resists the external working of ‘workmanship’. Real human life breaks away from the bond with nature that this ‘workmanship’ establishes. It is essentially made up of conflicting and ‘discordant’ ‘elements’ of ‘triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear’, and always has been. Part of Nature’s lesson is to show us precisely this.

Secondly, Wordsworth sees that nature revealed the potential for bad in him as a child (‘the formative memory of guilt’) by admonishing him for it (‘haunting’ him with the ‘ministry’ of ‘fear’). The French Revolution is the same human badness on a larger scale – and if nature can teach him not to be bad, it can teach mankind. The traumatic experiences in adulthood enable him to perceive the troubling aspect of ‘human life’. Wordsworth says:

But now there open’d on me *other thoughts*,
 Of change, congratulation, and regret,
 A *new-born feeling*. It spread far and wide;
 ...
 Whatever shadings of mortality
 Had fallen upon these objects heretofore
 Were *different* in kind; not tender: strong,
 Deep, gloomy were they and severe; the scatterings
 Of Childhood; and, moreover, had given way,
 In later youth, to beauty, and to love
 Enthusiastic, to delight and joy. (IV. 231-46, my italics)

‘Now’ ‘a new-born feeling’ emerges in his mind and brings to him a host of contradictory thoughts – the thoughts of shifting variations between change, accomplishments (self-appraisal), repentance, and despair. Amid these different thoughts, he finds that the ‘shadings of mortality’, which ‘had fallen upon these [present] objects’, ‘were different in kind’. In other words, it was after the ‘shadings of mortality’ ‘had fallen upon these objects’ that Wordsworth came to ‘a new-born feeling’ of their ‘differen[ce]’. In his retrospective view of them, surprisingly, these ‘shadings’ appear to be ‘strong, / Deep, gloomy’, and ‘severe’. They appear to be admonitions from the early days, in which

senses of desire and guilt foreshadow the terror and grief in adulthood. Now he finds that nature visited him with ‘such discipline, / Both pain and fear’ (I. 439-40). No ‘tender’ feeling of childhood remains but only the thought of ‘pain and fear’.

At the same time, Wordsworth remarks that ‘the scatterings / Of childhood’ ‘*had [already] given way*’ ‘to beauty, and to love / Enthusiastic, to delight and joy’ ‘in later youth’ (my italics). Harold Bloom states that ‘We mistake *The Prelude* ... if we seek to find a crisis, rather than the history of a crisis, within it. *The Prelude* is not a tragic poem but an autobiographical myth-making’.²⁴ Wordsworth’s writing of the past is ‘the [narrative] history of a crisis’ – a formulation of ‘myth’ that, in this passage, claims to have established the vision of ‘beauty’ and ‘love’ in Wordsworth’s ‘later youth’. In the quoted lines, memory works in the present to glorify Wordsworth’s identity ‘now’ (at the stage of ‘later youth’) with ‘delight and joy’. The lesson from nature in childhood not only admonished him of danger and fear but also brings ‘beauty’ and ‘love’ to him and mankind now.²⁵ However, I want to point out that this ‘autobiographical myth-making’ is not ‘a rediscovery of inner continuities’²⁶, as testified by Wordsworth’s phrases – ‘other thoughts’ and ‘a new-born feeling’. The ‘progress’ from past to present in Wordsworth’s autobiographical writing demonstrates a changeable relationship to his previous self. It is through these differences that the poet reclaims his role as a poet fostered by nature.

Wordsworth, in the act of writing, subtly weaves a link between past and present not through an uninterrupted route of ‘inner continuities’ but by following a path established exactly through temporal incongruity between various moments. I disagree to de Man’s idea that ‘what Wordsworth strives to conquer, on the relentless fall into death, is the

²⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1971), p. 143.

²⁵ This is like the time when Wordsworth says that ‘My own voice cheer’d me, and, far more, the mind’s / Internal echo of the imperfect sound; / To both I listen’d, drawing from them both / A cheerful confidence in things to come’ (I. 64-67).

²⁶ See Hartman’s *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 6.

time'.²⁷ The poet engages closely with time in his development of an identity for his self. With his new understanding of self as 'foster'd alike by beauty and by fear', Wordsworth reaffirms his identity as poet of Nature (and the imagination) by showing mankind nature's power to heal and teach in the change that time brings. For nature to do this, humanity must become receptive 'to nature' and it does this through the imagination. Wordsworth says that nature:

composed my thoughts
 To more than infant softness, giving me,
 Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
 A knowledge, a dim earnest of the calm
 Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves (I. 282-86)

Going from his private sojourning in the landscape to 'the fretful dwellings of mankind', Wordsworth suggests that nature is not only the formation of 'infant softness' but also the cultivation of 'a knowledge, a dim earnest' in his adulthood thoughts. Richard J. Onorato suggests that 'If these lines were composed on the way to Grasmere in 1799, then we have as early as that an indication of the unconscious intention to return through imagination to the past, for the journey to contentment is a return'.²⁸ However, in this passage, Wordsworth makes it clear that what nature gives him 'among the fretful dwellings of mankind' is '*more* than infant softness' (my italics), which indicates an ongoing route into adulthood rather than 'a return'. Traumatic and turbulent social experiences create in Wordsworth's mind senses of 'pain and fear', but they also drive him to a more mature and meditative reflection upon how real human life is working. His previous 'infant' sensuous contact with nature grows into a comprehensive understanding of nature as the one that endows him with 'a knowledge' of human nature.

'In this time / Of dereliction and dismay', Wordsworth states, 'I yet / Despair not of our

²⁷ De Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', 9.

²⁸ Richard J. Onorato, 'Metaphors of Beginning', in Gill et al. (eds.), *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, pp. 613-24, p. 617.

nature; but retain / ... a faith / That fails not, in all sorrow my support', because he recognizes that 'the blessing of my life, the gift is yours, / Ye mountains! thine, O Nature!' (II. 456-57, 457-60, 461-62). Through 'a knowledge, a dim earnest' given by nature, Wordsworth, wishfully, attempts to claim that he loses no hope in 'our nature' and retains 'a faith' that never fails. Now he says that he is absorbing this 'knowledge' – 'until we recognize / A grandeur in the beatings of the heart' (I. 441). This insight into the greatness and dignity of the human heart constitutes Wordsworth's 'philosophic Song'. And he is aware that, by writing this poem, he needs to show humankind how to maintain and work our imaginative power (an inner power that echoes the power of cosmic 'workmanship') in order to receive the healing effect of 'the calm / Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves'.

The plural form of the word 'beatings' is one key word here. This word indicates that 'a grandeur' in the human 'heart' comes to be 'recognize[d]' through stages of our life rather than through any distinct moment. Developing a 'philosophic Song' for humankind based on his life experience and nature's teaching, Wordsworth shows that

The seasons came,
 And every season to my notice brought
 A store of transitory qualities
 ... [but also]
 left a register
 Of permanent relations, else unknown,
 Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude
 More active, even, than 'best society'
 ... [and furthermore]
 And gentle agitations of the mind
 From manifold distinctions, difference
 Perceived in things where to the common eye
 No difference is; and hence, *from the same source*
 Sublimar joy. (II. 307-321, my italics)

In this passage, Wordsworth claims a sense of continuity – 'permanent relations' to 'the

same source' in his childhood – within 'transitory qualities' and 'manifold distinctions' of human life. As time goes by, memory leaves in his mind 'a store of transitory qualities' and 'stamp[s]' on his mind 'the faces of the moving year'. It is through these changeable and mutable qualities of temporality (not through his 'inner continuities' from past to present) that he comes to recognise 'a grandeur in the beatings of the heart' and 'a register / Of permanent relations'. The word 'relations' is important because it is reconnected to the 'affinities' created by the 'workmanship' that Wordsworth envisages in childhood. Through 'permanent relations', he seeks a connection with his 'sense' of cosmic workmanship. According to Nicholas Roe, 'his self-awareness was the melancholy lesson of revolution, although it generated his affirmative realization that the histories of personal and political dislocation may be reconciled in an imaginative continuity'.²⁹ 'An imaginative continuity' means a continuity of 'transitory qualities' built on the shared human capacity to imagine. In Wordsworth's view, the permanence of 'relations' among 'transitory qualities', 'register[ed]' in the mutability of time, links these 'qualities' to 'the same source' – the imagination ('my first creative sensibility' (II. 379)) – in his childhood. Hence, he is able to obtain 'sublimar joy', which evolves from 'the same source', the imagination that perceives 'first-born affinities' connecting him with the world.

This 'register' 'spake perpetual logic to [his] soul' (III. 165). It becomes clear that, in Wordsworth's view, the sense of continuity he is questing for is to be created within the 'transitory' moments, which make 'life, and change, and beauty, solitude / More active, even, than "best society"'. Wordsworth is aware that it is in the passing of time that he is able to keep his identity formation 'in progress' (and 'spur[red]' 'on' to 'honourable toil'). As Wordsworth says, 'I had an eye / Which in my strongest workings, evermore / Was looking for the shades of difference / As they lie hid in all exterior forms' (III. 156-59). These 'shades of difference', for Wordsworth, 'did bind my feelings, even as in a chain'

²⁹ Roe, *The Politics of Nature*, p. 152.

(III. 167). The ‘chain’ of ‘feelings’ is bound by ‘perpetual logic’ and built upon ‘permanent relations’ of ‘difference’ which relate to the ‘source’ of his life. In these ‘relations’ of ‘difference’, he, at the highest power of his inner ‘eye’, sees a continuity based on the basic ‘grandeur’ of all the various ‘beatings’ of the human ‘heart’. In this sense, my idea of Wordsworth’s ‘two consciousnesses’ differs from Bennett’s. Bennett claims that ‘It is the “self-presence” in his mind of those past days that yet gives Wordsworth a sense of vacancy, of a doubled and therefore split consciousness, a doubling caused by ... the radical absence of then’.³⁰ But I want to say that the ‘self-presence’ forever in Wordsworth’s mind not only haunts him with ‘the radical absence’ of ‘the original moment’ but also compels his ongoing writing of an imaginative interaction between past and present. In Wordsworth’s writing, the moments of the past do not have to be *present* to be connected to ‘the same source’ through ‘permanent relations’ because these ‘relations’ are built upon ‘a chain of feelings’ that exists exactly in the ‘difference’ of temporalities. The very disparity between past and present, instead of ‘giving’ the poet ‘a sense of vacancy’, motivates and stimulates his continual development of a self that lives in the mutability of time.

The ‘difference’ between multiple divisions of life constitutes ‘a chain’ of ‘feelings’. The process evolving from childhood vision of ‘affinities’ to adulthood experience of ‘life’ and ‘change’ moves in ‘gradation’, ‘lead[ing] on / To higher things, more naturally matur’d, / For permanent possession’ (III. 560, 560-62). Permanence, instead of being a pre-existing entity of eternity, is to be gradually unfolded through time. Elements of difference are enfolded in this sequence of various ‘feelings’ – in ‘all sentiments of grief, / Of exultation, fear and joy’ (II. 270-71). These ‘difference[s]’ are nevertheless in ‘permanent relations’ to ‘the same source’ – ‘the mind of man’ – and, more importantly, the imagination which is capable of both perceiving and conceiving ‘harmony’. Wordsworth’s

³⁰ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.167.

writing changes the inherent ‘temporal predicament’ (which de Man criticizes in reading Wordsworth’s ‘rhetoric of temporality’) into a dynamic interplay of temporalities through which ‘permanent relations’ are established and his sense of self is being gradually formed.

In the writing of memory, Wordsworth comes closest to a ‘stable sense of self’ – a self rests on change that time brings. Wordsworth says that ‘Even individual remembrances, / By working on the shapes before my eyes, / Became like vital functions of the soul’ (VIII. 787-789). For him, the ‘vital functions of the soul’ derive from the ‘individual remembrances’ that ‘[*work*] on the Shapes before [his] eyes’ now. The childhood ‘fair seed-time’ is the spiritual source of his ‘soul’, but the ‘vital functions of the soul’ are felt interaction between past (‘individual remembrances’) and present (‘the Shapes before my eyes’) – between ‘the act’ and ‘its interpretation’ in Wordsworth’s retrospective writing. Wordsworth realizes that the growth of his ‘soul’ is built in ‘life, and change, and beauty, solitude’. In this sense, his identity-formation moves beyond his childhood spiritual bond with nature to a close interaction with time. In the textual ‘process of becoming’, Wordsworth seeks to reconnect and reaffirm his communion with nature based upon the life experiences he has undergone. In Hartman’s view, ‘Time, in Wordsworth, is also language. ... The prophet utters time in its ambiguity: as the undesired mediation, which prevents fusion, but also destruction. It prevents fusion by intruding the voice of the poet, his troubled heart, his fear of or flight from “power”; it prevents destruction by ... personally mediating it’.³¹ However, my discussion suggests that Wordsworth’s language ‘prevents destruction’ by ‘intruding the voice of ... his troubled heart’. The poet’s writing brings incongruous elements of his life (such as hope and fear) into ‘permanent relations’ to ‘the same source’ in order to form a self ‘daily spread[ing] abroad / His being with a strength that cannot fail’ (IV. 160-61).

³¹ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 171.

To strengthen my point here, it is worthwhile to read one passage in Book I:

Ah me! that all
 The terrors, all the early miseries
 Regrets, vexation, lassitudes, that all
 The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd
 Into my mind, should ever have made up
 The calm existence that is mine when I
 Am worthy of myself. (I. 356-62)

The writing Wordsworth has a (more humanistic) interpretation of ‘one society’, an interpretation involving his adulthood (traumatic) experiences. Though past days are not reachable through an act of memory³², memory plays an important role in Wordsworth’s development of identity because in the re-composition of these past experiences he comes closer to consciousness of changes brought by time. Moving from ‘the story of my life’ to ‘some philosophic Song’, from a prophetic hope for humankind to a disheartened vision of ‘the fretful dwellings of mankind’, ‘Wordsworth composes himself – he becomes himself, becomes conscious, in an act of composition’.³³ Bennett refers to Wordsworth’s becoming conscious of the impossibility of ‘a coherent articulation of ... a self’ in face of his split and doubled selves. He remarks that Wordsworth’s autobiographical writing is about ‘a loss constituted by an obscure sense of something ... that has been lost’.³⁴ But I would add that the poet also ‘becomes conscious’ that his ‘nature’s outward coat / *Changed also*,

³² My study of Wordsworth’s memory disagrees with Christopher Salvesen’s idea of a unity of memory in Wordsworth’s writing. He thinks that Wordsworth’s ‘past ... is yet finally unified, the gap is closed, by memory, by Wordsworth’s self-awareness and a sense of bodily continuity’ (*The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth’s Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), p. 38). Salvesen’s statement is subverted by Derrida’s assertion that *The Prelude* is to be based on a ‘tropological structure’ that ‘underlies all cognition, including knowledge of self’; this structure implies ‘the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is, the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions’ (Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, p. 71).

³³ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 161. The issue of ‘becom[ing] conscious’ of self in *The Prelude* has been widely discussed. For example, McCarthy states that ‘The most fundamental movement of the poem is not the hero’s journey from childhood to manhood, but the narrator’s (and the poet’s) journey in the course of his narration from ignorance to self-understanding’ (‘The Conflict in Book I-II of *The Prelude*’, 373). David Ellis also remarks that ‘each memory, however much pleasure its recollection gives to Wordsworth, has a significant part to play in his idea of his own development’ (‘Autobiography and Reminiscence in the First Two Books of *The Prelude*’, *Critical Quarterly*, 22:1 (1980), 21-29, 26).

³⁴ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.167.

slowly and insensibly' (III. 218-19, my italics). We might interpret Wordsworth's 'obscure sense' of 'an obscure loss' (for example, his 'obscure feeling representative / Of joys that were forgotten') as his rhetorical strategy that seeks to 'obscure' the relationship between past and present. In this way, a self, formed at 'the very limit of comprehensible language', is developed in the changes brought by time; it is a self living in a changeable relationship with the past. Moreover, Wordsworth 'becomes conscious' that his present identity is 'made up' by the *interfusion* of different temporalities – 'all / The thoughts and feelings' of early days – through which he becomes 'worthy of [him]self'.

Reading Wordsworth's retrospective examination of earlier selves, I conclude that his poetic response to his failure to stabilize an identity for himself constitutes the most 'vital [function] of the soul'. In this response, he knows that there is hope from childhood but also recognizes the value of changes brought by time. His 'worthy' 'existence' is made up by both private and social experiences which he has undergone. I am in agreement with Jacobus' idea that it is 'the writing of the past', that 'writes [him]' and 'determines what [he] may become'.³⁵ As Laura Marcus puts it, 'To some extent, "Romantic autobiography" becomes the model of autobiography in general, in its development of self-consciousness, self-division and the impossibility of giving priority to "self" in the self-language relationship'.³⁶ *The Prelude* can be said to be an exemplary type of 'Romantic autobiography' because of its development of an identity based on the poet's continual self-becoming in the act of memory writing. Wordsworth's increasing awareness of 'self-division' ('two consciousnesses') motivates his desire to construct an articulation of an ongoing self formed in time. However, at the same time, as Bennett puts it, 'composition – writing – is itself, we might say, the originary trauma that grounds and ungrounds *The Prelude*'; 'It is ... exactly the physical, scriptural act, writing itself, that

³⁵ Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 127.

³⁶ Laura Marcus, *Auto / Biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), p. 203.

produces these disturbances'.³⁷ The 'problem of writing',³⁸ along with 'the impossibility of giving priority to "self" in the self-language relationship', needs to be 'formulated ... around the multiple moments, of composition, inscription, revision'.³⁹ And this leads into the larger discussion of Wordsworth's dynamic relationship to and understanding of language in the following chapters. In the writing of the past, Wordsworth reaffirms his task – his identity as a destined poet teaching humankind nature's lesson. But, at the same time, he is aware that his task to teach humankind to be imaginative and receptive to nature's teaching is urgently necessary, and not nearly complete. In Part Two of my thesis, I will go further to explore how Wordsworth attempts to claim that he is neither 'uselessly employ'd' nor 'misled' by the fostering nature in face of the French Revolution that challenges the growth of his mind (1805, I. 502; 1850, I. 613).

³⁷ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, pp. 142, 150.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.174.

Part Two Wordsworth and the French Revolution

Chapter Three

Part Two is mainly concerned with the pivotal years of Wordsworth's experience of the French Revolution.¹ Book X is the pivot of *The Prelude* – upon which the whole development of the poem turns. Here 'the feelings of my earlier life' (X. 924) and the 'impaired' and 'restored' imagination return, but these manifest themselves in very different ways from before, creating a rather different identity for the poet. Wordsworth's complex feelings towards this historical event – the 'revolution' of his soul between his life before and after the Revolution – add further fragmentations of identity to be dealt with in his large project of self-identification. In this Part of my thesis, I will show that Wordsworth's decision to write about and represent his revolutionary experience turns *The Prelude* into a lifelong work and destabilizes its language. The retrospective view of this nightmarish political event intensifies Wordsworth's doubts about his vocation as nature's poet and haunts his writing of the poem almost to the end. Chapter Three, echoing Wordsworth's anxiety about his identity – 'Was it for this?'² – in Book I (as discussed in Chapter Two), focuses on his self-doubt in the aftermath of the French Revolution, which relentlessly breaks his bond with nature. This chapter argues that Wordsworth tries to create and establish a new identity as a poet of nature in facing the challenge of being a poet posed by the Revolution. I will observe how the insight into the self as living in the change of time is related to Wordsworth's self-formation as nature's poet. First, I will look into the poet's use of language, which articulates his feeling of being 'wearied out with contraries' (X. 899). Then, I will go on to investigate how he creates a sanctuary from the

¹ *The Prelude* is 'dense with reference to historical events. ... the fall of the Bastille in 1789, or the outbreak of war between Britain and France in 1793, or the death of Robespierre in 1794, or the coronation of Napoleon as emperor ten years later, and it is references such as these that are the matrix in which the autobiographical poem is set' (Gill, 'Introduction', in Gill (ed.), *William Wordsworth's The Prelude: a Casebook*, p. 32).

² See Hartman, "'Was it for this ...?': Wordsworth and the Birth of the Gods", in Kenneth R. Johnston et al. (eds.), *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), pp. 8-25, pp. 12-14.

writing of his 'History' in order to establish a continuity of experience across the Revolution – by aligning both his early support for the Revolution and its failure to the lessons taught by nature. However, here the challenge of being a poet emerges in his writing of personal life (the 'growth' of his mind) with a social scope (of 'our human Soul'). This leads into the argument of Chapter Four that it is precisely such recognition of fragmentations and contradictions in his act of self-identification that keeps Wordsworth's writing moving forward and evolving into an epic engagement with, and exploration of, but no solution to, the problem of identity-formation.

Marilyn Butler says that 'Though [Romantic] writers are gifted with tongues to articulate the Spirit of the Age, they are also moulded by the age'.³ Wordsworth's autobiographical writing is closely related to his hope for, experience of, and response to the Revolution. In *The Prelude*, as is widely recognized, the revolution usurps not so much social change as Wordsworth's 'growth' of mind. Book X is less a plain narrative of social reality than a continuing development of his identity through his response to this significant historical event. M. H. Abrams points out that 'The great Romantic works were not written at the height of revolutionary hope but out of the experience of partial or total disenchantment with the revolutionary promise'.⁴ Wordsworth, looking back to his pre-revolutionary self, claims: 'How glorious! ... with a resolute mastery shaking off / The accidents of nature, time, and place, / That make up the weak being of the past, / Build social freedom on its only basis, / The freedom of the individual mind' (X. 819-25). However, his 'faith' in 'the revolutionary promise' is ultimately, as he admits, 'given to vanity and emptiness' (IX. 175), and relentlessly subverted by the tyrannical practices of the radical revolutionaries ('over-pressure of the times / And their disastrous issues' (XI.

³ Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), pp.8-10. As Kenneth R. Johnston also notes, 'By going into the French Revolution, Wordsworth's poem on the growth of his mind went, like all of European civilization, beyond existing models not only of society but also of human identity and self-definition' (*The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (London: W. W. Norton, 1998), p. 813).

⁴ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 335.

46-47)). In the aftermath of the Revolution, nothing is left but ‘the utter hollowness of what we name / The wealth of Nations’ that hush ‘the voice of Freedom’ and unsettle ‘public hope’ (XII. 79-80, IX. 931, 932).

Gill thinks that *The Prelude* is ‘a landmark in European literature because it records the coming into being of an individual consciousness at exactly the moment when European society was being tortured into extreme self-consciousness through the convulsion of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic war that followed’.⁵ It is my purpose here to look into the way Wordsworth builds and shapes his ‘individual consciousness’ when he represents such a moment of political upheaval and radical social change in the poem. In doing this, I will also engage with the large body of New Historicist criticism on Wordsworth’s attitude to the French Revolution.⁶ Jerome J. McGann reads Wordsworth’s ‘desperate need for a solution’ to his spiritual crisis as ‘the displacement of the problem inwardly’, and he states that ‘in that conceptualization Wordsworth imprison[s] his true voice of feeling within the bastille of his consciousness’.⁷ However, reading the poet’s ‘desperate need for a solution’ and his internal ‘consciousness’, I think that we shall also look into the poet’s use of language, which articulates ‘his true voice of feeling’ – the feeling that is ‘wearied out with contraries’. This ‘voice’ expresses, as Michael O’Neill puts it, ‘experience of profound moods’.⁸ Wordsworth’s writing is deeply problematized by the baffled and incompatible feelings produced by his revolutionary experience. McGann’s reading underestimates this ‘true voice of feeling’ while criticising the replacement of social and historical reality with ‘the landscape of Wordsworth’s emotional

⁵ Gill, *William Wordsworth*, p. 3.

⁶ New Historicism emerges as ‘a kind of system analysis’ (Marjorie Levinson et al., *Rethinking Historicism: Critical Readings in Romantic History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.20). ‘We dissolve the intrinsic-extrinsic distinctions felt to govern the old, historical scholarship so as to move beyond the peripheral, illustrative character of that exercise’ (See *Rethinking Historicism*, p. 55, note 4). New Historicism asserts that ‘Literature ... is a collective activity, powerfully conditioned by social forces’ (Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, pp.8-10).

⁷ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: a Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 91.

⁸ Michael O’Neill, “‘The Tears Shed or Unshed’”: Romantic Poetry and Questions of Biography’, in Arthur Bradley and Alan Rawes (eds.), *Romantic Biography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 1-17, p. 8.

needs'.⁹

Marjorie Levinson also argues that 'Wordsworth's most generalized presentations owed their pronounced ideality to some disturbing particular and to the need to *efface* or *elide* it'.¹⁰ There is 'displacement of ideological contradiction to [Wordsworth's poetry] where resolution could be imagined and implemented with some success'.¹¹ In general, New Historicists present Romantic works such as *The Prelude* as 'a sort of allegory by absence where the signified is indicated by an identifiable absented signifier'.¹² However, this 'signifier', even claimed as 'identifiable', cannot be specifically identified because Wordsworth, in the act of writing, problematizes the relationship between reality and his inward consciousness through his very contradictory thoughts about them. I want to argue against the New Historicist view of 'absence' and 'efface[ment]' in *The Prelude*. Wordsworth does endeavour to seek a 'resolution' of his spiritual crisis, but he does not do this through the 'displacement of ideological contradiction'. Rather, he writes his very conflicting thoughts about social turmoil and his own consciousness into the formation of his identity. The New Historicist response to Wordsworth's poem does not allow a full insight into his own construction of identity when he records such a significant transition between the experience and the recollection of the Revolution.

Looking back to the time when he first went into the French Revolution, Wordsworth sees the promising hope of universal change for humankind, particularly in its creed of freedom. The poet, 'who had been form'd / To thought and moral feeling' by 'God and Nature's single sovereignty', 'should ... hail / As best the government of equal rights / And individual worth' (IX. 243-44, 238, 245-49). At first, he was fascinated with the

⁹ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p.87.

¹⁰ Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, pp. 1-2. (my italics).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.9. On the idea of 'absence' here, McFarland states that 'The domain of presence is now characteristically compromised by the rush to the domain of absence, with the result that the new discourses of absence tend to forfeit the validations of relevance. ... it loses sight of the configuration and substitutes instead a self-referential structure of its own (Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton: UP, 1981), pp. 20-21, p. 32).

perfectibility of ‘human Reason’s naked self’ (X. 817). He aspired to ‘the proud workings of the soul, / And mountain liberty’ (IX. 241-42) which he believed would be fulfilled by the Revolution. As Wordsworth describes it, ‘the Plain of Liberty’ (X. 12) was unfolded in front of him at the beginning of the Revolution. ‘From his Throne / The King had fallen’; ‘*Robespierre was dead*’ – revolutionary idealism ‘should see the People having a strong hand / In making their own Laws, whence better days / To all mankind’ (X. 8-9, 535, IX. 532-4). The prospect of liberty and equality, which his ‘philosophic Song’ glorifies, would bring hope (‘better days’) to all human beings.

Wordsworth envisages in the Revolution’s idealism a hope that corresponds to his ‘philosophic Song’ for humankind but is also disillusioned by its straying ‘out of [its] right course’ (X. 639). In the writing of the Revolution, Wordsworth shows how his vehement aspiration for universal change (‘a new transition’ that ‘had assumed with joy/ The body and the venerable name / Of a Republic’ (X. 29, 29-31)) is discouraged by the oppressive violence of the revolutionaries. Wordsworth finds that ‘even when the public welfare is their aim’, the plans of revolutionaries are ‘without thought, or bottom’d on false thought / And false philosophy’ (XII. 75, 76-77). As the Revolution progressed, ‘the crimes of few / Spread into madness of the many, blasts / From hell came sanctified like airs from heaven’ (X. 312-14). As a result, Wordsworth calls his earlier idealist vision of the Revolution ‘juvenile errors’ (X. 637). His ‘juvenile’ faith has been totally destroyed by the dictatorship of revolutionaries (‘Will of One / Is law for all’ (IX. 504-5). The vehement revolutionary ‘passions’, sadly, fail to validate ‘better days’ for mankind because the French ‘become oppressors in their turn’, ‘chang[ing] a war of self-defence / For one of conquest, [and] losing sight of all / Which they had struggled for’ (X. 812, IX. 531, X. 792-4). The promising revolution becomes tyranny and violent invasion, trespassing on rather than fighting for the welfare of humankind.

McGann insists that Wordsworth’s poem ‘would lose all its force and character did it

not operate at an ideological level' – 'at the level of the mind's idea or the hearts' desire'; he thinks that 'the Romantic position ... is that the poet operates at such levels of reality, and hence that poetry by its nature can transcend the conflicts and transiencies of this time and that place'.¹³ McGann asserts that the textual criticism of Romanticism has uncritically absorbed the key self-representation of the Romantic writing and discounted the social and historical contexts¹⁴ of textual production. As he puts it, 'The [Romantic] poem generalizes ... all its conflicts, or rather resituates those conflicts out of a sociohistorical context and into an ideological one'.¹⁵ He says of this 'Romantic ideology' in Wordsworth's poem that when it 'deal[s] with Nature and Imagination, ... [it is] invoking a specific network of doctrinal material. Ecological Nature is the locus of what is stable and orderly, and it is related to Imagination as a set of vital hieroglyphs is related to an interpretive key'.¹⁶

However, my discussion opposes McGann's idea of 'the Romantic ideology' for two main reasons. First, it is exactly this 'ideology' that Wordsworth's poem doubts. The Revolution threatens Wordsworth's vision of the 'bond of union' ('those first-born affinities') in his childhood spiritual communion with nature by showing man breaking from nature and breaking society. His confidence in 'the individual mind' and its secure relation to nature becomes unstable when he sadly recognizes 'our animal wants and [...] necessities' (XII. 94). The poet admits that he is 'impair'd and changed / Much' because of the breakdown of his faith in man's inherent bond with nature. Looking back to the social turmoil at that time, Wordsworth, in the act of writing, shows how his belief in the 'stable and orderly' 'network' of Nature and Imagination becomes destabilized because of his intense awareness of the gradually enlarged distance between his childhood intimacy with

¹³ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁴ Levinson defines 'context' as 'the place of political realities and of the ideological pressure that organize this material into determinate sociopsychic experience' (as 'something closer to an "extrinsic" referential universe'). (*Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, p. 1).

¹⁵ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 89.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

nature and adulthood involvement in social community. Secondly, this doubt of his own private bond with nature also produces a sense of uncertainty about being a poet, so we should read the way Wordsworth writes his conflicting thoughts about the self into *The Prelude* instead of focusing on his ‘obsession with restoring’ the ‘harmony’ and ‘unity’ of his childhood.¹⁷ That is, in Wordsworth’s writing, there is no simple ‘return’ to private ideology and no safe ‘transcending’ of social reality but an ongoing development of self in constant engagement with a baffled awareness of the ‘forbidding’ aspects of the French Revolution (IX. 17). Through this political revolution the ‘growth’ of Wordsworth’s mind comes to a significant transition between past and present. His vision of self is ‘clouded’, and a conflicted self is presented between the ‘natural graciousness of mind’ then and ‘his own unquiet heart’ now (X. 917, XI. 19). This very consciousness of divided selves is testified to by his use of language, which articulates an unresolvable tension between past and present, private and social. Furthermore, for Wordsworth, his revolutionary experience impels the evolution of his identity-formation. As Nicholas Roe puts it, ‘at the deepest level, Wordsworth’s quest for the origin of his imaginative power was a fulfillment of revolutionary history’.¹⁸ Wordsworth’s imagination does not simply or straightforwardly operate ‘at an ideological level’ but stands ‘the test of [...] a trial’ through spiritual crisis when he moves towards what he calls the ‘highest truth’ of our life (XII. 62, III. 120). In the following, I will elucidate these anti-new historicist points in full depth.

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth talks about ‘an inner falling-off’ (IV. 270) in the Books before the Book of the French Revolution. This feeling essentially corresponds to his ‘confounded’ ‘heart’ which ‘had been turn’d aside / From Nature by external accidents’ in Book X (887, 885, 885-86). This turning away from nature perplexes Wordsworth’s vision of his childhood and gives him a sense of guilt. As Bromwich points out, Wordsworth

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁸ Nicholas Roe, ‘Revising the Revolution: history and imagination in *The Prelude*, 1799, 1805, 1850’, in Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (eds.), *Romantic Revisions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992). pp. 92-93.

‘himself has turned about twice: once in going to France and once in coming back’.¹⁹ Here I want to talk about Wordsworth’s guilty sense of being unfaithful to nature even in ‘going to France’. He knows that he has played ‘an ingrate’s part’ (V. 172) when he first involves himself in the Revolution (‘the blame is ours not Nature’s’ (X. 429)). For Wordsworth, nature ‘early tutor’d [him] / To look with feelings of fraternal love’, so that he has ‘felt / Distinctly manifested at this time / A dawning ... A human-heartedness about my love’ (XII. 49-50, IV. 222-25). Nature has cultivated his ‘patriotic and domestic love’ (II. 195) since childhood. As he says it, ‘*first* I look’d / At Man through objects that were great and fair, / ... And thus / Was founded a sure safeguard and defence / Against the weight of meanness, selfish cares’ (VIII. 450-54, my italics). But, later on, he also remarks that ‘now there open’d on me other thoughts, / Of change, congratulation, and regret, / A *new-born feeling*’ (IV. 231-33, my italics). His feeling of human love starts to change in the mutability of time; however, this change is of both ‘congratulation’ and ‘regret’. By going into France, Wordsworth entrusts his hope to ‘the proud workings of the soul’ and thought of the mind as ‘the very faculty of truth’ (IV. 298). In the aftermath of the Revolution, his previous visions of man as ‘great frame of breathing elements’ and of ‘the heart of Man’ as ‘a district on all sides / The fragrance breathing of humanity’ all become a disappointed view of man as ‘a senseless Idol’ (IV. 303, VIII. 150, 150-151, IV. 304).²⁰ Claire Colebrook suggests that ‘It is this relational model’ of ‘a compensation and a justification for a retreat from political and historical concerns’ which ‘will be challenged by new historicism’.²¹ But I want to claim that Wordsworth’s writing of his revolutionary experience is more an exploration of his troubled heart when he once goes astray from nature’s guidance than a longing for a retreat from political disillusionment. Wordsworth

¹⁹ David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth’s Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 88 (my italics).

²⁰ It is noticeable that the sentence ‘the heart of Man, a district on all sides / The fragrance breathing of humanity’ is deleted in the 1850 version.

²¹ Claire Colebrook, *New Literary Histories: New Historicism and Contemporary Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997), p. 23.

confesses that ‘being brought more near / As I was *now*, to guilt and wretchedness, / I trembled, thought of human life at times / With an indefinite terror and dismay’ (VIII. 657-60, my italics). The ‘confession of man’s weakness’ puts Wordsworth’s heart in ‘entire decay’ (VII. 255, X. 965).

This conflicting sense of ‘contraries’ is most conspicuous when Wordsworth talks about the time when ‘the strength of Britain was put forth / In league with the confederated Host’ (X. 229-30). ‘With open war / Britain opposed the Liberties of France’ (X. 758-59). This is one significant stage not only in the time of the French Revolution but also in the poet’s ‘growth’ of the mind. Wordsworth remarks that:

no shock
 Given to my moral nature had I known
 Down to that very moment; neither lapse
 Nor turn of sentiment that might be nam’d
 A revolution save at this one time,
 All else was progress on the self-same path
 On which with a diversity of pace
 I had been travelling; this a stride at once
 Into another region. (X. 233-41)

The fact that Britain leagues against France gives Wordsworth a deep moral shock. Wordsworth’s use of words here testifies to the poet’s idea of this crucial ‘revolution’ in his life, such as ‘shock’, ‘save at this one time’, ‘a stride at once / Into another region’. For Wordsworth, the early ‘lapse [and] turn of sentiment’ and ‘diversity of pace’ in his life ‘all else [were] progress on the self-same path’, except this ‘shock’ to his ‘moral nature’ in the Revolution, which leads his ‘pace’ to ‘a stride’ into a completely different realm.²² With

²² Reading lines 393-7 in Book XI, Hartman questions that ‘Is Wordsworth’s revolution then after all but another stage of his “progress on the self-same path” rather than “a stride once / Into another region” – in other words, no revolution at all? (Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 48). I would say that, in the revolution of his soul, Wordsworth’s writing of his revolutionary self has stepped ‘into another region’, though he insists on ‘progress[ing] on the self-same path’ in the forward moving flow of time. In Wordsworth’s recollection of his revolutionary experience, a fundamentally different identity is being established because of the awful lot he has undergone.

the decision to writing about the Revolution, Wordsworth views his pre-revolutionary self as ‘look[ing] for good by light / Of rational experience’ ‘in the spirit of past aims’ (X. 570-71, 572), while claiming that, in the aftermath of the ‘revolution, his ‘sentiments’ are changed into ‘their opposites’, and that ‘a way was opened for mistakes / And false conclusions of the intellect’ (X. 762, 764, 765-66). Sadly, ‘the immediate proof of principles no more / Could be entrusted’ and ‘sentiments / Could through my understanding’s natural growth / No longer justify themselves through faith / Of inward consciousness’ (X. 781-82, 784-87).²³ He feels as if ‘cut off ... / From all the sources of [his] former strength’ (XI. 77-78) – the ‘strength’ endowed by his early interaction with nature. However, it is also this textual representation of the ‘revolution’ of his self that spurs Wordsworth’s ongoing writing of his life. Instead of a ‘retreat’ into his ‘inward consciousness’, as suggested by New Historicism, Wordsworth steps ‘into another region’ with ‘a stride at once’.

At beginning of Book IX, Wordsworth describes the writing of his life

As oftentimes a River, it might seem,
 Yielding in part to old remembrances,
 Part sway’d by fear to tread an onward road
 That leads direct to the devouring sea
 ...
 so have we long time
 Made motions retrograde, in like pursuit
 Detain’d. But now we start afresh; I feel
 An impulse to precipitate my Verse;
 Fair greetings to this shapeless eagerness,
 Whene’er it comes! needful in works so long,
 Thrice needful to the argument which now
 Awaits us; Oh! How much unlike the past!
 One which though bright the promise, will be found

²³ In retrospect, Wordsworth calls ‘the immediate proof of principles’ ‘wild theories’ (X. 774). This refers to his former belief in and subjection to Godwinian principles. For a discussion of Wordsworth’s Godwinism, see the note on ‘wild theories’ in Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Ernest de Selincourt and Stephen Gill (eds.), pp. 305-8.

Ere far we shall advance, ungenial, hard
 To treat of, and forbidding in itself. (IX. 1-17)

Wordsworth, in recalling the French Revolution, comes to the next stage of his autobiographical writing. At this point, a line is drawn between the ‘old remembrances’ of his pre-revolutionary life and the memory of revolutionary experience. For Wordsworth, these ‘old remembrances’ restrain him from moving forward in his writing (‘we [have] long time / Made motions retrograde, in like pursuit / *Detain’d*’, my italics). But now he insists that, rather than ‘mak[ing] motions retrograde’, he ‘shall advance’ – ‘leaving old ones dry’. As the poet exclaims: ‘now we start afresh; I feel / An impulse to precipitate my Verse. / Fair greetings to this shapeless eagerness’. He has an ‘eagerness’ to write, ‘to tread an onward road’ forward past memories of the revolutionary times (when he was facing ‘change and subversion’ (X. 233)). In his mind, there is suddenly a wish impelling and urging him to ‘precipitate [his] Verse’ – to move beyond his personal experience of the Revolution – ‘with courage, and new hope risen on our toil’ (1850, IX. 18). His composition of poetry is accelerated with ‘eagerness’ for ‘the argument which now / Awaits us’ – the ‘argument’ for the ‘great ends of Liberty and Power’ (XI. 184). Now he is keen to write a poem on this ‘argument’, which drives him to exclaim: ‘How much unlike the past!’. However, Wordsworth also points out that ‘The argument which now / Awaits us, ... though bright the promise, will be found / ... ungenial, hard / To treat of, and forbidding in itself’. This stage of writing wears a stern and frightening appearance, and Wordsworth finds it ‘hard / To treat of’ in his ‘Verse’. Although he has ‘eagerness’ to deal with ‘the argument’, the ‘eagerness’ is ‘shapeless’. The use of the word ‘shapeless’ obscures his idea of what to write in dealing with the ‘argument’. The writing of the revolutionary experience, for Wordsworth, is a welcome but doubtful and painful process. This ambiguous view of his writing is noticeable in a later revision to this passage (MS. A, 207⁵):

the
an impulse to precipitate ~~my~~ Verse (IX. 10)

The replacement of ‘my’ with ‘the’ suggests Wordsworth’s recognition of a widening distance between his own inner mind and the ‘Verse’ through which he seeks to express his feelings. Now his language only articulates the feeling that is ‘wearied out with contraries’ when he starts to write his revolutionary experience. In the writing of self-formation, Wordsworth creates the problem of ‘contraries’ in his thoughts. His childhood ‘passion’ for nature and its gift, though ‘fervent as it was, / Ha[s] suffer’d change’ (XI. 37-38). For instance, in Book III he talks about the ennobling reciprocity between his feelings and the outward world (‘To every natural form ... / I gave a moral life, I saw them feel, / Or link’d them to some feeling’); this culminates in his vision of ‘one Presence, and the Life / Of the great whole’ (III. 124-27, 130-31). The vision of ‘one life’ is unsettled when Wordsworth engages with the writing of the revolution turmoil. The phrase ‘one Presence’ is even removed from the 1850 *Prelude*. In the act of writing, Wordsworth is trapped in a conflicting tension between ‘my Verse’ (which articulates his spiritual bond with nature) and ‘the Verse’ (which involves the other changeable and unpredictable accidents in adulthood). He recognizes that the ‘Verse’ he composes is no longer merely his personal verse of ‘inner subjectivity’. Rather, it represents a conflicted self between social harshness and his aspiration to an inward spiritual communion with nature.

Instead of looking back, Wordsworth recognizes that his identity is to be formed in his ‘Verse’ along ‘an onward road’ in the flow of time. I will examine how Wordsworth creates a self with such a contradictory and ambiguous view in his recollection of the revolutionary self – while attempting to stabilize a sense of self at the same time. In Book X, Wordsworth acknowledges that he is ‘much’ ‘changed’. Intensely baffled by uncertainty about his own vocation as a poet, Wordsworth also endeavours to qualify his

self as ‘a clouded, not a waning moon’. Wordsworth says that:

though impair’d and changed
 Much, as it seem’d, I was no further changed
 Than as a clouded, not a waning moon. (X. 915-7)

First, recollecting the experience he has undergone during this historical event, the poet admits that he is ‘impair’d and changed / *Much*’ (my italics). His present afflicted self is ‘much’ ‘changed’ (but not fundamentally changed) and separated from the past self. Then, he also rescues his self from being totally ‘impair’d’ by describing himself as ‘a clouded, not a waning moon’. By comparing himself to a ‘clouded’ ‘moon’, Wordsworth indicates that the essence of his self remains bright because his own ‘soul’ remains ‘the holiest that I knew of’ (X. 380). *Despite all, the poet keeps the faith in his ‘soul’*. Although there is ‘utter loss of hope itself’, he believes he still has ‘things to hope for’ (XI. 6, 7).

Wordsworth states:

I was left alone,
 Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.
 The props of my affections were remov’d,
 And yet the building stood, as if sustain’d
 By its own spirit! (II. 292-96)

In this passage, he symbolically expresses his sense of loss when he feels as if he has been deserted by the world – ‘the props of [his] affections’. ‘The visible world’ he beholds becomes bewildering and confusing (he is ‘seeking’ it, but not ‘knowing why’ because of his ‘clouded’ vision). ‘Yet the building’ – he himself – still ‘[stands], *as if sustain’d / By its own spirit!*’ (my italics). Wordsworth is here building up to ‘restoration’, suggesting he was ‘sustain’d’ by exactly the human spirit the Revolution seems to condemn. Thus, asserting that his self is not ‘waning’, Wordsworth refuses to think of himself as becoming frail and eventually doomed to vanish. It is noteworthy that he erases the phrase ‘the heart

in such entire decay' in MS. A (287^r), which suggests his reluctance to acknowledge and specify his state of mind at that time. The interplay of the words 'impair'd', 'changed', 'clouded', and 'waning' perplexes our idea of his self. Wordsworth's use of language deliberately confuses matters so that we are left uncertain whether the poet is changed or not. In the act of writing, he is holding back from deciding on a role for himself in writing such a conflicted self.²⁴

Similarly, Wordsworth tries to avoid getting locked in his feeling of being 'wearied out with contraries' by refraining from giving a specific 'name' to his 'sensations'. When the 'voice of Freedom' has faded, Wordsworth says that he is much 'confounded' by the drastic change from hope to fear. He states that 'It was a grief, / Grief call it not, 'twas anything but that, / A conflict of sensations without name' (X. 263-65). Wordsworth names his disappointment at the Revolution 'a grief', but it is interesting to note that he immediately follows this with 'Grief call it not'. For him, no 'name' can be adopted to express his present state of mind, which is described as 'a conflict of sensations without name'.²⁵ The complex feelings caused by this particular experience of the Revolution perplex Wordsworth's thinking about his self – a self trapped in opposing and incompatible feelings. As a result, by telling us that he is both 'changed / Much' and 'no further changed', and that he cannot name the 'conflict of sensations' in his mind, Wordsworth is rhetorically hiding his awareness of a self hanging on the precarious edge of 'waning'.

Wordsworth's use of the word 'clouded' nevertheless hinders his desire to seek

²⁴ In Book X, Wordsworth gives an account of different identities that do not seem to fit together well. Sometimes he regards himself as 'an insignificant Stranger, and obscure, / Mean as I was', sometimes he is 'a Poet only to myself, / to Men Useless, and even, beloved Friend! a soul / To thee unknown', and sometimes he takes on the role of 'an independent intellect' (X. 130-31, 197-201, 829).

²⁵ An example of this 'conflict of sensations' is the change from Wordsworth's Jacobin ideology of his early radical fervour ('Yet would I willingly have taken up / A service at this time for cause so great / However dangerous' (X. 134-36)) to his later 'solitary shades' of detachment ('Should to the breast of Nature have gone back / With all my resolutions, all my hopes' (X. 197-98)). Nicholas Roe points out that 'These were turbulent, unsettled, exciting times in Britain when the threat of revolution and a French invasion seemed likely to provoke the violent reaction of a "British Terror". And Wordsworth was at the heart of it all, keeping company with the most controversial radical thinkers and "Jacobin" activists of the day' ('Politics, History, and Wordsworth's Poems', *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, pp. 196-212, pp. 198-9).

restoration for himself. With this word, he shows that his sense of self does not primarily operate ‘at an ideological level’ because any ideological vision of self is already bedimmed by harsh social reality, and it is this dimming that is the focus of attention here. The very ‘clouded’ vision defines Wordsworth’s ongoing thought about identity when he sees change at work in the formation of his self. My discussion of Wordsworth’s identity-formation here moves beyond Levinson’s object that seeks merely to ‘explain the particular and particularly constrained manner in which Wordsworth sought figurally, mythically, or formally to resolve those conflicts’ of the revolutionary mind.²⁶ My purpose is to investigate how the poet constructs his own sense of self not by resolving but by confronting exactly these irreconcilable feelings between his experience before and after the French Revolution. By defining his self as being ‘clouded’ and not ‘waning’, Wordsworth is writing in the service of a self-reinvention and reclaims his vocation as a poet. However, on what grounds is this claim based? This question will be addressed and explored in the following paragraphs, which focus on Wordsworth’s reaffirmation of his role as a poet of nature in creating new visions of the self and the world.

Incessantly troubled by his problematic vision of the French Revolution and even of his own identity, Wordsworth remarks that:

I lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
 Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
 Yield up moral questions in despair. (X. 897-900)

His belief in the inherent moral nature of human beings is much diminished; ‘despair’ replaces ‘conviction’ and passion gives place to ‘sick[ness]’. ‘Wearied out’ with overwhelming depression, he recalls how he has lost enthusiasm for revolutionary idealism. He states that he no longer trusts the creeds of equality and liberty and is not

²⁶ Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, p. 3.

willing to explore ‘moral questions’ any more. At the same time, by describing this illness, Wordsworth attempts to present his discovery of the cure. That cure is to be gained in rewriting his crisis, so that he can claim to discover his role ‘now’ as poet. Creatively writing and developing a role for himself, Wordsworth attempts to fulfil his commitment to being a poet for humankind by taking on a new role – that of a ‘moral agent’, conveying a message to humankind that, despite recent historical evidence, ‘evidence divine’ still ‘proclaim’d to [man] that ... with desires heroic and firm sense, / A spirit thoroughly faithful to itself, / Unquenchable, unsleeping, undismay’d, / Was as an instinct among men’ (X. 144, 145-49). No ‘self’ ‘replace[s] the landscape as the poetic subject’ and no ‘celebratory representation of ... private life’ ‘annihilate[s]’ the actual ‘social world’.²⁷ In the rewriting of his revolutionary experience, Wordsworth tells us how to keep our ‘human nature’ ‘faithful to itself’ ‘under worst trials’ – in such a conflict between reality and one’s ‘inward consciousness’ (X. 447, 447, 448, 787). However, it is difficult to sustain this belief – even for the poet himself. As we can see in Wordsworth’s later revisions (MS. A, 251^r)²⁸:

~~... with desires heroic and firm sense,—~~
~~A spirit thoroughly faithful to itself,—~~
~~Unquenchable, unsleeping, undismay’d,~~
~~Unquenchable, unsleeping, undismay’d,~~
~~Was as an instinct among men~~ (X. 145-49)

This act of obliteration intensifies Wordsworth’s baffled thoughts about the human spirit. He is not presenting a resolution so much as revealing his anxiety about the sustainability of human nature in facing these ‘worst trials’. In the 1850 version of the poem, he even thinks of man as ‘born / Of dust and Kindred to the worm’ (VIII. 487-88). He is uncertain and even doubtful about the ‘unquenchable’ nature of our mind, although he attempts to

²⁷ Ibid., pp.47-8.

²⁸ See Wordsworth, *The Thirteen Book Prelude*, Vol. II, note for lines 146-149, p. 845.

claim this in the representation of such social turmoil that challenges his trust in the human mind.

In the act of adopting a new identity as a poet, Wordsworth states that ‘From these bitter truths I must return / To my own History’ (X. 657-58). He believes that a cure for this wretched society can be sought in his own ‘History’, or, to be more precise, in his writing of this ‘History’ that results in Wordsworth ‘the poet’. Wordsworth indicates that the poetic account of his life is the only place (which ‘I must return / To’) where he can begin to comprehend ‘the unreasoning progress of the world’ (V. 384). McGann states that Wordsworth has ‘the feeling that the condition of harmony has to be *returned to*, that the idea of *unity* has to be recovered or reborn’.²⁹ But, as I have been trying to show, this return to his ‘own History’ is by no means a return to his ‘ideology’ of nature and imagination. Developing ‘my own History’, Wordsworth leaves his ‘past aims’.³⁰ As Wordsworth says, ‘my likings and my loves / Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry’ (X. 769-70). Witnessing the revolutionaries’ radical change from ‘self-defence’ to ‘conquest’, Wordsworth states:

juvenile errors are my theme,
 What in those days thro’ Britain was perform’d
 To turn all judgments out of their right course;
 But this is passion over-near ourselves,
 Reality too close and too intense,
 And mingled up with something in my mind,
 Of scorn and condemnation personal,
 That would profane the sanctity of verse. (X. 637-44)

Wordsworth, finding his youthful fascination with revolutionary hope immature and even erroneous, recognizes that his previous ‘ideology’ of ‘the sweet promise of the past’ must undergo change. The revolutionary ‘passion’ and ‘reality’ of that time overwhelmingly

²⁹ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 40.

³⁰ In the *1850 Prelude*, the sentence ‘revived the feelings of my earlier life’ (X. 924) is removed.

press upon the writing poet. It seems on the surface that Wordsworth seeks to leave them out of his poem in case they ‘profane the sanctity of verse’. In other words, he attempts to keep the thoughts that only baffle – ‘scorn and condemnation personal’ – away from his writing. However, his writing neither elides nor replaces the painful reality. Wordsworth’s language intricately problematizes the relationship between ‘reality’ and ‘my mind’ with the word ‘something’.³¹ As Wordsworth puts it, there is ‘something’ ‘in [his] mind’, ‘mingled up with’ ‘passion over-near ourselves’ and ‘reality too close and too intense’. Trapped between an attitude of ‘condemnation’ and the desire to escape from it, Wordsworth intentionally uses the word ‘something’ to hold ‘condemnation’ at bay without disappearing that ‘reality’. In this way, he could also safeguard ‘the sanctity of verse’ from being ‘profane[d]’ by habits of mind that are ‘out of their right course’ – by being deliberately vague about them. And, in doing so, Wordsworth creates a new poetic identity for himself with a new kind of ‘verse’. That is, he tries to establish an identity as a poet in the very act of rising to the challenge of being a poet when he decides to write about ‘reality too close and too intense’ – by creating a sanctuary from it.

My discussion of Wordsworth’s turn to ‘my own History’ and aspiration to ‘the sanctity of verse’ then differs very significantly from the New Historicist reading. McGann points out that Wordsworth’s poem is ‘the transformation of fact into idea, and of experience into ideology’; Wordsworth ‘occupies [the social evils] at the level of consciousness’.³² Yet these statements neglect the subtlety of Wordsworth’s language, such as the use of ‘something’ discussed above. In addition, as mentioned, Wordsworth recognizes that the ‘Verse’ he composes is not under the control of his consciousness. He fully sees that ‘the sanctity of verse’ is merely idealism because his writing keeps being haunted by ‘reality too close and intense’. In other words, ‘the sanctity of verse’ can never be that of *his*

³¹ My idea of ‘problematization’ here opposes the New Historicist focus on ‘the way in which social forces produce such *boundaries* between reality and text’ (Colebrook, *New Literary Theories*, p. 24, my italics).

³² McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 90.

‘verse’. The textual representation of the Revolution has further changed Wordsworth’s attitude to writing autobiographical verse. Going from ‘my Verse’ to a ‘philosophic Song’ for humankind, Wordsworth’s generic shift from one kind of poetic priority to another reveals his struggle with the textual building of an identity for himself. A conflict between Wordsworth’s inner subjectivity and his public engagement with human society exists in his self-formation as a poet prophesying hope of redemption for the entire human community. I will discuss the impact of Wordsworth’s revolutionary experience on his understanding of language in greater depth in Chapter Four. It is worthwhile recalling Abrams’ statement that ‘Throughout *The Prelude* there is a double story being told – a story of Wordsworth’s life in the world and a correlative story of his life in nature’.³³ In the act of writing, Wordsworth challenges ‘his overarching myth of the interaction between mind and nature’³⁴ by confronting it with the writing of his revolutionary experience within. He recognizes that a separation between ‘life in the world’ and ‘life in nature’ is illegitimate. As a result, Wordsworth’s writing of a new identity for himself is trapped between the ‘reality’ of ‘the world’ and the ‘sanctity’ of ‘my History’, and his vision of consolation (given by his private communion with nature) is incessantly haunted by doubts about the separation of self and humanity. The seeming irreconcilability between – yet inseparability of – life in nature and life in society is the focus of my next chapter, which investigates the way Wordsworth engages with the contradictory relationship between his communion with nature and the reality he faces in social community.³⁵

Wordsworth ‘start[s] fresh’ the writing of his self from his present, post-Revolution perspective on the ‘revolution’ of his self produced by the Revolution. In order to stabilize a sense of self now, in the face of his nightmarish memories, Wordsworth tries to establish

³³ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 96.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See Ralph Pite’s discussion about nature and society in Wordsworth’s writing, ‘Wordsworth and the Natural World’, in Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, pp. 180-95, p. 181. Also see John Williams’ *Wordsworth: Romantic Poetry and Revolution Politics* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989), p. 5.

a continuity of experience across the Revolution – by aligning both his early support for the Revolution and its failure to the lessons taught by nature. In other words, Wordsworth presents this period of crisis as one ‘stage’ of the much larger education recounted by *The Prelude*. Hartman says that ‘Wordsworth’s turn to nature means that an answer to his question has to come from that source. Experientially but also conceptually it was a necessary move’.³⁶ I want to add that this turn to nature and ‘my own History’, though ‘a necessary move’, is by no means an escape from political disillusionment. McGann claims that ‘The idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet.’³⁷ But this statement undervalues the ‘profound moods’ involved in Wordsworth’s engagement with both social and private life. The turn to nature stimulates the poet’s reflection upon his changeable self from childhood to adulthood experiences and drives him to a lifelong engagement with the ongoing and never ceasing formation of his identity as a poet of nature in *The Prelude*.

‘Remembrances and dim admonishments’ (X. 69) ensue in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The word ‘admonishments’ relates directly back to the ‘admonitions’ from nature discussed in Chapter Two. He thinks that, in his childhood, nature admonished him for the potential for bad in human beings. Wordsworth says that ‘a strong desire / O’erpower’d my better reason’ in the stolen boat episode of Book I, for example (I. 326-27). This experience was ‘an act of stealth / And troubled pleasure’ (I. 389-90). And the French Revolution is the same human wickedness on a larger scale. The writing poet now, looking back to the time when he was nature-haunted by ‘a living thing’ striding after him, realizes how nature ‘interwine[s] for [him] / The passions that build up our human Soul’. Writing with a vision of humanity in adulthood, Wordsworth envisages in nature the ‘Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe’ (I. 429) that ‘sanctif[ies]’ our human nature by ‘*such discipline, / Both pain and fear*’ – ‘until we recognize / A grandeur in the beatings of the

³⁶ Hartman, ““Was it for this ...?””, p. 20.

³⁷ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p.91.

heart' ((I. 440-42, my italics). This 'discipline' of nature makes 'the surface of the universal earth / With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear / Work like a sea'. Now Wordsworth sees that 'beauty ... / Hath terror in it' (XIII. 225-26). The interfusing power reconnects everything – beauty and fear – to its origin; Wordsworth knows and claims that receiving 'reproaches' for his own past behaviour 'may spur [him] on' not only to recover but also to develop his sense of being made a poet (for humankind) by nature 'in manhood now mature'.

Wordsworth remarks that 'From my pleasant station [I] was cut off, / And toss'd about in whirlwinds' (X. 257-58). He recalls how he was relentlessly drawn away from his past self in 'a confused and tumultuous process' through his revolutionary experience.³⁸ This transition between his past and present selves is so abrupt and disordering that even he cannot control his own self, which seemed to be 'toss'd about in whirlwinds'. The previous 'pleasant station' ('the gladsome image in my memory' (X. 994)) becomes inaccessible. However, 'being yet an image in my mind', it 'mock[s] me under such a strange reverse' (X. 464, 465). Wordsworth insists that a connection and continuity exist, despite everything.

The word 'whirlwinds' is noteworthy. As Johnston puts it, "'whirlwind" is a naturalistic word weighted with political significance for Wordsworth'.³⁹ With this word, Wordsworth skilfully aligns the force of the Revolution with the power of nature in order to suggest that redemptive possibilities ('vernal promises' (I. 50)) are still operative. The power of nature is at work in 'whirlwinds' and 'a long-lived storm of great events' (1850, XI. 373). Nature does not work only as a transcendental power but exerts its might within the revolutionary fervour – even when everything is out of its 'certain course'. The revolutionary zeal itself throws up images 'in my mind' that draw that mind back to nature. Within revolutionary chaos the imagination is still at work, and the connection with nature

³⁸ *OED's* definition of the word 'whirlwind', p. 2007.

³⁹ Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth*, p. 393.

still active, if buried or obscured. Recollecting his experience of this social change, Wordsworth is simultaneously reframing and rewriting it. He states that:

amid the awe
 Of unintelligible chastisement,
 I felt a kind of sympathy with power,
 Motions rais'd up within me, nevertheless,
 Which had relationship to highest things.
 Wild blasts of music thus did find their way
 Into the midst of terrible events,
 So that worst tempests might be listen'd to:
 Then was the truth received into my heart,
 That under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
 Grievs bitterest of ourselves or of our Kind,
 If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
 Honour which could not else have been, a faith
 An elevation, and a sanctity,
 If new strength be not given, or old restored
 The blame is ours not Nature's. (X. 414-29)

The whole passage is Wordsworth's writing of his *positive* response to the Revolution. It is in the terror of 'unintelligible chastisement' that Wordsworth feels 'a kind of sympathy with power' – a 'power' that is like, and related to, nature's power. Representing the dreadful 'awe' of the Revolution in the poem, Wordsworth claims that he can feel 'motions rais'd up' within him that have 'relationship to highest things'. He seems to envisage something promising in revolutionary 'chastisement', which has a power similar to nature's power of 'admonitions'. He received this 'ministry' of nature in childhood, but now he comes to recognize its operation in adulthood. Wordsworth's recognition of 'power' now foreshadows the question he puts in the 1850 *Prelude*: 'Motions not treacherous or profane, else why / Within the folds of no ungentle breast / Their dread vibration to this hour prolonged?' (X. 458-60). It is 'the wild blasts of music' that enable him to '[listen] to' 'worst tempests' in 'the midst of terrible events' and thus to receive

‘truth’ into his ‘heart’.⁴⁰ The words ‘blasts’ and ‘tempests’ are important here because they strengthen the connection between Revolution and nature. In this way, Wordsworth leaves the ‘reasonings false’ and ‘false imagination’ of his revolutionary self behind (not through a retreat into his childhood communion with nature but through the fierce power of Revolution) to claim an intuitive sympathy with ‘highest things’, ‘the truth’, ‘an elevation, and a sanctity’. In this sense, I disagree with Levinson’s statement that Wordsworth’s writing, which suggests that ‘our greatest power, clearest amplitude, was in a past we can barely recall, much less recover, is to set a regressive ideal for mankind’.⁴¹ Wordsworth’s sense of ‘fear’ becomes ‘ennobling [and] venerable’ (X. 399) through his very experience of the revolutionary terror – not through the ‘past’. The revolutionary power turns out to be a version of the sublime (‘in the order of sublimest laws’ (X. 413)) – good in itself but turned bad by ‘our’ fault. The problem is the division between humankind and nature. The poet confesses, ‘if new strength be not given, or old restored / The blame is ours not Nature’s’. Wordsworth attributes the ‘heaviest sorrow earth can bring’ and ‘griefs bitterest of ourselves or of our Kind’ to a humanity inspired by, but forgetful of, nature. Forgetting nature, we human beings cut ourselves from ‘an elevation, and a sanctity’.

In his attempt to establish a continuity between experiences across the revolutionary period, Wordsworth claims that nature stays the same while man changes. As he says, nature:

Holds up before the mind, intoxicate
 With present objects and the busy dance
 Of things that pass away, a temperate shew
 Of objects that endure. (XII. 33-36)

In writing about his life experiences, Wordsworth sees his self trapped between an

⁴⁰ See Roe’s *The Politics of Nature* for a discussion of Wordsworth’s ‘shadow or phantom story’, p. 116.

⁴¹ Levinson, *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems*, p. 95.

‘intoxicat[ion]’ with ‘present objects’ and ‘the busy dance / Of things that pass away’. The lapse of time is too ‘busy’ to be captured. However, in contrast, nature ‘holds up before the mind’ ‘a *temperate* show / Of objects that *endure*’ (my italics) – a ‘show’ that is mild, moderate, and permanent. The ‘objects’ of this ‘show’ ‘endure’ despite the ‘dance’ of temporalities. Nature holds some things steady, while everything else ‘dance[s]’.

In order to build a link with these ‘endur[ing]’ ‘objects’ of nature, Wordsworth seeks to sustain his ‘nature’s self’ through ‘an elevation’ endowed by nature – in the act of writing.

He points out that:

Nature’s self, by human love
 Assisted, through the weary labyrinth
 Conducted me again to open day,
 Revived the feelings of my earlier life,
 Gave me that strength, and knowledge full of peace,
 Enlarged, and never more to be disturb’d,
 Which through the steps of our degeneracy,
 All degradation of this age, hath still
 Upheld me, and upholds me at this day
 In the catastrophe. (X. 921-30)

With a series of words – ‘assisted’, ‘conducted’, ‘revived’, ‘enlarged’, and ‘upheld’ – Wordsworth intends to claim that his bond with nature remains sustained by nature. Despite his dismayed vision of the social turmoil, Wordsworth also retains his faith in the inherent responsiveness to nature of the human spirit – ‘the holiest that I knew of [was] my own soul’. In Book XI, he says that he is upheld by an ‘efficacious spirit’ in the ‘spots of time’ in which ‘we have the deepest feeling that the mind / Is lord and master’ (XI. 269, 258, 271-72). This glorification of the mind emerges from Wordsworth’s new understanding of the human mind. For Wordsworth, the mind is ‘lord and master’ only when it achieves ‘genuine Liberty’ – when one has ‘his whole life long / Preserved,

enlarged', never 'tamper[ing] with [himself] from private aims' (XIII. 122, 120-21, 132).⁴² Wordsworth's self can only be sustained when he retains his bond with and faith in nature, even when suffering from 'the tragic delinquency of human nature'. Levinson suggests that Wordsworth tends to 'de- and re- "figure the real"', so that [he] may restore continuity to a socially and psychically fractured existence'.⁴³ However, I do not think that Wordsworth seeks to 'de- and re- "figure the real"' so much as to create a self capable of sustaining his role as a poet of nature (with 'unimpaired' and 'unabat[ed]' confidence (1805, X. 580; 1850, VII. 10) when directly facing fractured social reality. While seeking spiritual restoration from the past, Wordsworth believes that 'a blow ... in mature age, / Would but have touch'd the judgment struck more deep / Into sensations near the heart' (X. 771-3). Nature continues, at all times, to redeem. And he claims that his adulthood experience of revolutionary terror, paradoxically, gives him 'more deep' access into 'sensations near the heart'.

It is only through the 'pain and fear' generated by such straying from nature that 'we recognize / A grandeur in the beatings of the heart'. By thus aligning lessons learnt from the Revolution to those taught by nature, Wordsworth can glorify the 'grandeur' of the human mind that is receptive to these lessons while maintaining, but also evolving, his 'prophetic' role as a poet of nature. The Poet, as 'Nature's self', has a responsibility to 'teach' humankind things as 'Nature teaches' (which are 'beyond the reach of human will or power') through and within 'such [an] eclipse' of humanity's power (V. 230, 231, 231, XI. 98, 96). This formation of 'Nature's self' does not transcend social history 'at an ideological level' but builds on Wordsworth's very experience of revolutionary terror. This experience re-links him back to the admonishing and fostering power of nature. In doing so, he takes on the role of a Prophet of Nature, writing in the service of nature's power.

⁴² See Richard Stang's 'The False Dawn: A Study of the Opening of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*', *ELH*, 33:1 (Mar., 1966), 53-65, 60.

⁴³ Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, p. 5.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Wordsworth returns to nature – but with a different and humbler mind. He exclaims:

Oh! Soul of Nature! that dost overflow
 With passion and with life, what feeble men
 Walk on this earth! how feeble have I been
 When Thou wert in thy strength! (XI. 146-49)

Nature never changes when Wordsworth suffers from his spiritual crisis. Between the experience and the recollection of the Revolution, his sense of self in relation to nature moves from a sense of betrayal, through regret, to humility. First he was travelling ‘among the ways of Nature’; then he ‘lost sight of it, bewilder’d and engulf’d’; later on he once again gives it ‘greeting’, ‘as it rose once more / With strength’; ‘and lastly, from its progress have we drawn / The feeling of life endless, the one thought / By which we live, Infinity and God’ (XIII. 177, 178, 179, 179-80, 182-84). When the poet gives nature ‘greeting’, he knows that ‘humility and lowliness’ are prerequisites to being ‘Nature’s inmate’ (XI. 210, 214). The poet, searching for a true sense of self, realizes that he must be submissive to nature’s strength and give something back to fulfil the promise it gives him. ‘I am *lost*, but see / In simple childhood something of the base / On which thy greatness stands, but this I feel, / That from thyself it is that *thou must give*, / Else never canst receive’ (XI. 330-34, my italics). The poet’s visionary power is based upon his childhood, but he needs to ‘give’, now, in order to ‘receive’ that power when he is ‘lost’.

‘Giv[ing]’, Wordsworth fulfils his commitment to being a poet by re-establishing a link between nature and his own mind. In this way, he reaffirms his identity as the poet of nature by showing mankind nature’s power to heal and teach. For nature to do this, humanity must become receptive to nature through the imagination. In Wordsworth’s view, ‘the power / Of living Nature’ is ‘mighty indeed, [and] supreme’ while the imagination is ‘the main essential Power’ that brings forth the power of nature to its full length – ‘the

great ends of Liberty and Power' (V. 166-67, 166, XIII. 289, XI. 184). These 'mysteries of passion' (XI.84), Wordsworth believes, 'have made, / And shall continue evermore to make, (In spite of all that Reason hath perform'd / And shall perform to exalt and to refine) / One brotherhood of all the human race' (XI. 84, 84-88). 'One brotherhood', an extension of his childhood vision of 'one life' with a larger social scope, is to be accomplished through human passion and imagination rather than through 'Reason'. At this stage, the imagination 'found / An element that pleased her, tried her strength, / Among new objects, simplified, arranged, / Impregnated [his] knowledge' in its evolving from past to present; and 'the result was elevating thoughts / Of human nature' (VIII. 797-800, 801-02). But Wordsworth also recognizes that this evolving path is 'in the main ... more circuitous' (VI. 680) because of the changes and trial that come to 'tr[y]' the 'strength' of his imagination. McGann criticizes 'the supreme illusion of the trans-historical privilege of poetry and imagination'.⁴⁴ But he fails to notice the change that time brings to the imagination in Wordsworth's writing of self. Wordsworth's imagination gains its growth not as a transcendental entity but as a changeable power deeply influenced by its historical context.

Writing a self subject to change and mutability, Wordsworth comes to a new conviction of nature's power, a new recognition of the imagination's strength, and even a new vision of man that exists in interrelation with the natural world. Wordsworth claims that he has

Convictions still more strong than heretofore
 Not only that the inner frame is good,
 And graciously composed, but that no less
 Nature through all conditions hath a power
 To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
 The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
 Grandeur upon the very humblest face
 Of human life. (XII. 279-86)

Contrary to his earlier saying that he 'lost / All feeling of conviction', now his

⁴⁴ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 136.

‘convictions’ are ‘more strong than heretofore’. Firstly, ‘the inner frame’ of man is ‘good’. As he says it, ‘Thus moderated, thus composed, I found / Once more in Man an object of delight, / Of pure imagination, and of love’ (XII. 53-55). Secondly, the power of nature ‘consecrate[s]’ human beings and even ‘the very humblest face / Of human life’. It is noticeable that Wordsworth here says nature ‘hath a power / To consecrate’ ‘through *all conditions*’ (my italics). This statement subverts McGann’s criticism that, in Wordsworth, ‘the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in *a variety of idealized locations*’⁴⁵. Wordsworth does not seek idealized human circumstances or locations; rather, he claims that the power of nature blesses human life both in days of peace and happiness and in such a sorrowful moment of revolutionary terror. This power can only help society when we are imaginatively receptive to nature’s teaching – ‘if we have eyes to see’. With firmer ‘convictions’, Wordsworth claims that ‘Nature [brought] again that wiser mood / More deeply re-established in my soul’. To further confirm and enhance this belief, he makes a repetitive use of the word ‘hence’: ‘hence religion, faith, / ... Hence cheerfulness in every act of life, / Hence truth in moral judgement and delight / That fails not in the external universe’; ‘Hence, when call’d / To take a station among Men, the step / Was easier, the transition more secure, / More profitable’ (XIII. 111-19, 325-28). Wordsworth in the 1805 *Prelude* hopes that ‘Time *would soon* set all things right’, but asserts in the 1850 *Prelude* that ‘Time *was ready to* set all things right’ (1805, X. 777; 1850, XI. 192, my italics). The poet once again finds in nature a never-failing hope and establishes a more secure identity for himself as a poet of nature – now as one that writes for humankind.

Abrams proposes that Wordsworth ‘justifies these experiences’ ‘as bearing *a part* ... in making him a man, in making him a poet, and in making him exactly the kind of man and poet he was’.⁴⁶ On the issue of ‘myth’, Levinson also suggests that ‘Wordsworth’s myth

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 1 (my italics).

⁴⁶ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 96 (my italics).

of the soul, a pragmatic narrative never assimilated into his thinking, situates his grief over the failure of the Revolution and the invalidation of its ideology within a vision so vast and impersonal as to “disappear” that pain’.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, I want to say that this ‘myth’ cannot entirely “disappear” that pain’, and that Wordsworth’s writing constantly reveals the forever haunting presence of ‘reality’. He confesses that he is baffled by ‘a brain confounded, and a sense, / Of treachery and desertion in the place’ (X. 378-9). This conflicted and wretched self manifested by the text is overlooked by McGann, who thinks that ‘between 1793 and 1798 Wordsworth lost the world *merely* to gain his own immortal soul’.⁴⁸ The experience of the French Revolution makes Wordsworth bewildered and completely confused. With the decision to write about the Revolution, he comes to realize all that he has experienced is ‘truth painful to record!’ (X. 259). This dismay is further intensified in the 1850 version with the addition of the word ‘most’: ‘truth most painful to record!’ (1850, X. 284). In this sense, it is the feeling of being ‘weariest out with contraries’ and the desire to grow beyond this feeling that move Wordsworth forward in the writing of his life.

In conclusion, in the representation of the French Revolution, Wordsworth envisages a fundamental revolution of his self and the possibility of self-creation in his act of self-identification. Wordsworth regards himself as ‘a favor’d Being’ in nature, his revolutionary self as ‘an independent Intellect’ (X. 829), but his post-revolutionary self as ‘a meditative, oft a suffering Man’ (XIII. 126). Wordsworth resorts to the writing of ‘my own History’ to create an identity for himself in order to counter self-doubt. Poetically framing this ‘History’, Wordsworth presents (instead of ‘escapes’) the conflicts between human wickedness and the inherent goodness in human nature as ‘complimentary’ ‘primary and secondary facets of self-knowledge’, fostered by nature.⁴⁹ Then he creates a

⁴⁷ Levinson, *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems*, p. 98.

⁴⁸ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 88 (my italics).

⁴⁹ Williams, *Wordsworth*, p. 107.

new self that is submissive to change and mutability. This changeable self, assuming the role of a prophetic poet of nature, is not only receptive to nature's power and teaching but also brings this divine power to the social world through the power of the imagination, in order to help and save society. Nevertheless, it is also the textual invention of self that reveals Wordsworth's ambivalent and uncertain sense of identity, which is troubled by and situated in an unresolved tension between nature and the human world. In the writing of self, 'intense' 'reality' and 'painful' 'truth' disturb the poet's own 'unquiet heart'. These anxieties (about being a poet), never resolved by the poem, haunt it almost to the end.

Chapter Four

Building on the arguments of Chapter Three, and through a further close analysis of Wordsworth's 'timely utterances' about self-revitalization in response to the French Revolution, utterances about time past but produced later and often in the present tense, this chapter aims to argue that it is the fracturing of an earlier, naive sense of coherent identity produced by Wordsworth's experience of the French Revolution that simultaneously makes *The Prelude* possible and makes its project – the formation of a sustainable and stable identity for the poet – impossible. Wordsworth's writing of the pivotal years of the French Revolution very much influence Wordsworth's consciousness of self. Wordsworth's response to the anxieties generated by the Revolution also involves re-writing his revolutionary experience. This leads into further fragmentation and multiplicity of identification, especially in the conflict between contradictory ideas of 'liberty' as a creed of nature, and 'individualism', which divides man from nature. Wordsworth endeavours to maintain his identity as a poet of nature by creating a new role for himself as a prophetic poet of nature writing for humankind. This effort is constantly discouraged by his increasing consciousness of divided selves, to which the Revolution first alerts Wordsworth, but which he then finds to be replicated everywhere in man's existence – in his relationships to time, language, nature, other people and himself, past and present. In this chapter, I will show that Wordsworth's sense of his poetic project changes in response to the writing of the revolutionary experience and that he is thus forced to rethink his own understanding of the language for any poetic project that comes upon his continual formation of self. And this leads into a larger discussion of Wordsworth's understanding of how language works in his poetic project, which I will discuss in subsequent chapters. In other words, I will look at the question of language by examining how Wordsworth works on his self-composition through language.

For Wordsworth, going into the French Revolution is 'a stride at once / Into another

region'. This is a 'stride' that disrupts the (naively) supposed stable growth of his mind. Wordsworth has firm trust in the heart of man when first involved in the Revolution. 'Ascending now / To such [social] community', Wordsworth 'look[s] for universal things' and 'highest truth' (III. 119-20, 110, 120). His revolutionary self, obsessed with revolutionary ardour, strives for 'the universal reason of mankind' (VI. 476). Wordsworth says that he 'could almost / Have pray'd' that, with 'reason', the human spirit could be 'made / Worthy of liberty' (X. 117-18, 118, 118-19). This is his vision of the promising hope that might have been brought to the human world by the revolution of society.

'The human Reason's naked self' is 'the object of [the Revolution's] fervour' (X. 817, 818). But he later remarks that 'I [pursue] / A higher nature, [wish] that Man should start / Out of the worm-like state in which he is, / And spread abroad the wings of Liberty' (X. 834-7). In his view, human souls are 'worthy of liberty', but they were entrapped in a 'worm-like state'. He is sad to find that 'good men, on every side fall off we know not how, / To selfishness, *disguis'd* in gentle names / Of peace, quiet, and domestic love' (II. 451-54, my italics). In the textual representation of his revolutionary experience, Wordsworth talks about how his reasoning judgement is bewildered, and how his confidence in the inherent goodness of human nature is unsettled by its 'disguis[ing]' nature of hypocrisy ('Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence / For one of conquest' (X. 792-93)).

Perplexed by his aspiration to 'Liberty' and disappointed by his view of 'the individual mind' (and its 'blind desires' (IX. 365)), Wordsworth tries to understand the errors of the Revolution when he looks back to his revolutionary experience. He spots the problem not in the Revolution itself but in the way mankind makes it go wrong. In Wordsworth's view, aggressive individualism divides man from nature. Accordingly, he also sees in his revolutionary experience his own crisis as a turning from nature. In the act of writing, Wordsworth intends to explain to Coleridge how he has committed 'a wrong so harsh' (IX.

476):

Time may come
 When some dramatic Story may afford
 Shapes livelier to convey to thee, my Friend,
 What then I learn'd, or think I learn'd of truth.
 And the errors into which I was betray'd
 By present objects, and by reasonings false
 From the beginning, inasmuch as drawn
 Out of a heart which had been turn'd aside
 From nature by external accidents,
 And which was thus confounded more and more,
 Misguiding and misguided. (X. 878-88)

Through 'shapes livelier' offered by 'some dramatic Story', Wordsworth hopes that his friend can recognize 'the errors' into which he is '*betray'd*' (my italics) by 'present objects' and by 'reasoning false'. This 'reasoning' misleads him into 'errors' because 'the events / [Seem] nothing out of nature's certain course' (IX. 252-53). Wordsworth 'presents himself as "lured" into France (IX. 34), over-confident in his capacity to understand the course of history, and "enchanted" by revolutionary illusions'.¹ As Wordsworth confesses, his 'heart' has been 'turn'd aside / From nature by external accidents'. The 'present objects' and 'external accidents' distract his heart from his own nature's self and even his 'reasoning', which results in 'a brain confounded, and a sense, / Of treachery and desertion'. Wordsworth's statement here clearly shows the impracticability of Levinson's research method (which seeks to 'reproduce [Wordsworth's] universe of objects considered *as* projects, and the historically specific conditions of his apprehension and representation of that universe) because the poet himself has already done so.² In the poem, the representation of 'the historically specific conditions' (rather than being displaced) comes to usurp upon Wordsworth's 'apprehension' of the world and breaks his

¹ Richard Gravil, "'Some Other Being": Wordsworth in "The Prelude"', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 19 (1989), 127-43, 127.

² Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, p. 10.

bond with nature by ‘accidents’ that are ‘out of nature’s certain course’. In this disrupted course, ‘some dramatic Story’ replaces ‘my Verse’ to narrate Wordsworth’s revolutionary experience, and ‘external accidents’ interfere and threaten his previous personal vision of the ‘fair seed-time’. In the 1805 text, he states that he feels ‘in the place / The holiest that I knew of – my own soul’; in the 1850 text, he feels ‘in the last place of refuge, my own soul’ (1805, X. 379-80; 1850, X. 415). This revision of ‘the holiest’ ‘place’ to ‘refuge’ shows Wordsworth’s diminishing confidence in his soul, though he still desperately claims his belief in his own soul, which may save him from the political tumult.

Richard Gravil suggests that ‘Wordsworth is so bold to look on painful things that it becomes harder ... to avoid the impression that ... one of Wordsworth’s consciousnesses is concerned to present himself as *prey to delusion*’.³ While I agree with this statement, my discussion here does not support Gravil’s idea that Wordsworth is ‘anxious to present Coleridge with an image of one whose loyalty to the revolution ... is, as a form of natural piety, a matter of self-congratulation’.⁴ Wordsworth’s saying that he has ‘been turn’d aside / From nature by external accidents’ situates his revolutionary self at a distance from ‘natural piety’. In addition, the poet’s representation of his revolution experience is by no means ‘a matter of self-congratulation’. Rather, it leads to a more fragmented selfhood, which makes his sense of identity falter between past and present. Here I also disagree with Gill’s oversimplified proposition that ‘He [is] “misguiding and misguided,” because his reasonings [are] “false / From the beginning”’.⁵ Wordsworth himself makes it clear that he is ‘betray’d’ into ‘the errors’ ‘inasmuch as drawn / Out of a heart which ha[s] been *turn’d aside / From nature by external accidents*’ (my italics). These changes and ‘accidents’ in his revolutionary experience draw Wordsworth away from his nature’s self, which is ‘misguided’ and ‘sacrificed’, ‘cut off’ ‘from all the sources of [its] former

³ Gravil, ““Some Other Being””, 127, my italics.

⁴ Ibid., 127-8.

⁵ Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 36.

strength' (X. 843, XI. 77, 78). Here we can see that New Historicism's overemphasis on the poet's elision of and escape from the social reality⁶ overlooks the complexity with which Wordsworth develops his sense of self in relation to the Revolution. While Levinson argues that 'the extreme disinterest evinced by these [Romantic] works indicates their resumption of those problematic themes at the level of image and of metaphysics, precisely because they were deadlocked at the practical level',⁷ I intend to claim that it is those political 'accidents' that motivate Wordsworth's ongoing formulation and reformulation of his own poetic identity. The poet's representation of this historical event turns *The Prelude* into his lifelong engagement with the formation of his identity precisely because it constantly destabilizes the language through which he seeks to achieve this identity formation with a sense of fragmentation and discontinuity. In other words, Wordsworth himself constantly subverts the claim of 'metaphysics' by his own use of language.

It is important to note the non-presence of the Revolution in the first version of *The Prelude*. Jonathan Wordsworth points out that 'The two-Part *Prelude* of 1798-9 ... is one of Wordsworth's most optimistic poems' and that 'The final implications of 1799 are that childhood and adolescence lead forward to a period of fuller awareness'.⁸ According to J. R. MacGillivray, the two-Part *Prelude* has 'a much more unified theme and a much stronger sense of formal structure'; 'The time covered is restricted to childhood and school days only. The single theme is the awakening of the imagination'.⁹ These statements point to a stable and continuous 'growth' of the poet's mind from his childhood to adolescence, in which there is visionary imagination 'wakening' to the blessing of nature. Wordsworth's adulthood experience of the Revolution, however, cannot be kept out of the poem,

⁶ Levinson states that 'Wordsworth cancels the social less by explicit denial and / or misrepresentation than by allowing no scope for its operation' (*Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, p. 38).

⁷ Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, p. 5.

⁸ Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision*, p. 235.

⁹ J. R. MacGillivray, 'The Three Forms of *The Prelude*', 1964, quoted in 'Composition and Texts: The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799', in Gill et al. (eds.), *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, pp. 512-15, 512.

relentlessly disrupting the two-part *Prelude*'s sense of continuity and spurring ongoing reflections on, and revisions of, his poetic self in the face of such a fracture between past and present - reflections and revisions that go on right through to the 1850 version of the poem. This pivotal event fundamentally threatens Wordsworth's spiritual bond with nature. This crisis, in Johnston's view, 'opens the gap it must leap over' and 'provid[es] the plot [*The Prelude*] must resolve in order to reach its conclusion'.¹⁰ Similarly, Jonathan Wordsworth thinks that, through this 'Fall', Wordsworth 'states categorically that a mind protected, or supported, by memories of primal vision contains within itself a redemptive principle which the world of experience cannot seriously effect'.¹¹ Nevertheless, my discussion opposes these notions of 'conclusion', 'leap[ing] over' the 'gap', and 'memories of primal vision'. Wordsworth's adulthood vision of the world takes in a wider public dimension that constantly interacts with his private consciousness and resists any closure within 'the plot' of his identity-formation. Wordsworth states that he was:

perplex'd and sought
 To accomplish the transition by such means
 As did not lie in nature, sacrificed
 The exactness of a comprehensive mind
 To scrupulous and microscopic views
 That furnish'd out materials for a work
 Of false imagination, placed beyond
 The limits of experience and of truth. (X. 841-48)

During the process of political revolution and social change, Wordsworth is 'perplex'd' and 'confounded' because the comprehensive visions of nature and 'the spirit of the place' (XI. 163) he has claimed give way to 'views' that are too rigorous, constrained, and rigidly attentive to details. The work of 'false imagination', existing outside the boundary of 'the exactness of a comprehensive mind' and nature's course, is 'placed beyond / The limits of

¹⁰ Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth*, p. 463.

¹¹ Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision*, p. 244.

experience and of truth'. Looking back to his revolution experience, Wordsworth knows that he is distracted because the 'transition' is 'accomplish[ed]' 'by such means / As did *not* lie in nature' (my italics). The revolutionary obsession of 'human Reason's naked self' 'cloud[s]' and problematizes the poet's vision of the 'mysteries of passion' that connect him to nature and its 'moral power' (XI. 162). At the same time, the 'plac[ing] beyond / The limits of experience and of truth' and straying from 'nature' also bring Wordsworth's writing of himself beyond his childhood communion with nature and correspondence with his own private world. Here I disagree with McGann's suggestion that 'The very belief that transcendental categories can provide a permanent ground for culture becomes ... ideological formation – another illusion raised up to hold back an awareness of the contradictions inherent in contemporary social structures and the relations they support'.¹² I think that Wordsworth's self-formation progresses within this change of time ('beyond the limits' of 'truth') rather than being built on 'a permanent ground' of timeless 'transcendental categories'.

Nevertheless, Wordsworth's language is incessantly baffled by his very conflicted consciousness of his sustained 'nature's self' on the one hand and his broken bond with nature in the Revolution on the other. His writing about the revolutionary experience greatly impacts and problematizes his use of language, especially in the writing of 'I' and 'we'. Ian Baucom points out that 'the use of the word "our" (in "our degeneracy") and "this age" (rather than "my age") indicate that while Wordsworth is recalling a time of personal crisis and recovery, he is also generalizing from his experience, depersonalizing it, and offering to his readers a lesson in how they might collectively survive the "degeneracy" of "this age"'.¹³ The shift from 'my' to 'our' shows the 'generaliz[ation]' and 'depersonaliz[ation]' of Wordsworth's experience. However, I think that the poet does

¹² McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 134.

¹³ Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), p. 32.

more than this. He also intends to contrast general and personal experiences by the phrases ‘our degeneracy’ and ‘hath still / Upheld *me*’ (my italics). With ‘timely utterance’, only the self seems to be privileged, sustained and stabilized in ‘the weary labyrinth’ leading from past to present – not society. New Historicism criticizes Wordsworth’s vision as private, not social; for example, Levinson finds that Wordsworth’s representation of the world ‘resides in its originary function: to transfer ideologically *possessed* material from public to private domain’.¹⁴ But I think that his act of writing also makes the private social because of his commitment to being a poet for humankind (except that he never published *The Prelude*). Wordsworth uses ‘I’ rather than ‘we’ in the sentence ‘when I / Am worthy of myself’. He appears to attribute the vision of ‘sublimer joy’ to his own personal experience while he focuses on the ‘build[ing] up’ of ‘our human soul’ in *The Prelude*. Hartman points out that Wordsworth tends to ‘enter the solitude he then intuited, the “I” rather than the “we”’.¹⁵ I want to add that there is a more intricate relationship between the private and the social in Wordsworth’s language. The poet, as ‘a moral agent’, hopes to bring redemption to the social community, but he is also uncertain as to whether his own internal experience is sharable with and communicable to others. This uncertainty is revealed through his ambiguous and inconsistent use of the words ‘I’ and ‘we’. Wordsworth tends to replace ‘I’ with ‘we’ in the 1850 *Prelude*. For example, ‘How could *I* believe’ in the 1805 version of the poem becomes ‘How might *we* believe’ (1805, X. 627; 1850, XI. 44), ‘no few / Of *my* opinions had been just’ is revised as ‘no few / Of *our* opinions had been just’ (1805, X. 630-31; 1850, XI. 47-48), and ‘Now do I feel how *I* have been deceived’ is replaced by ‘now do I feel how *all men* are deceived’ (1805, IX. 173; 1850, IX. 170) (my italics). However, Wordsworth’s doubts remain hidden within his attempt to make his personal vision public. This is evident in his emphasis on the word ‘may’ in the sentence ‘my trust / In what we *may* become’ (1850, VIII. 650). He has ‘trust’,

¹⁴ Levinson, *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems*, p. 83.

¹⁵ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 11.

but he cannot be confident in talking about ‘what we *may* become’. His uncertainty is further revealed through his anxious hope that his ‘willing audience fail not’ (1850, XI. 349).

In the shift from writing ‘my Verse’ to composing a ‘philosophic Song’ for humankind, Wordsworth’s struggle with the textual building of an identity for himself manifests itself at the level of Wordsworth’s use of language. A conflict between ‘I’ and ‘we’ is part of his self-formation as a poet prophesying hope of redemption for all human community, but we can see in Wordsworth’s text that his writing about the French Revolution changes his attitude to language itself. Wordsworth has an ambiguous view of his poetic formation of self in *The Prelude*. On the one hand, his writing aspires to ‘the sanctity of verse’ that is not ‘profane[d]’ by social reality. On the other hand, Wordsworth is also aware that, to write a ‘philosophic Song’, his words need to engage with social community. In this ‘Song’, the social ‘accidents’ ‘shall blend / Their modulation with these vocal streams’ (1850, XIV. 145-46). The ‘vocal streams’ of Wordsworth’s ‘Song’ cannot exist without the ‘accidents’ (which are ‘out of nature’s certain course’). The imagination, represented through ‘harmonious words’ (1850, VIII. 369), comes across a trial of its ‘strength’ in confronting the wider social and historical world.

In Book I, Wordsworth says with confidence that he ‘will forthwith bring down ... the story of [his] life’; ‘... ’tis a theme / Single and of determined bounds’ (I. 666, 668-69). Nevertheless, in Book X Wordsworth calls this story of his life ‘my toilsome songs’ (X. 514); the road of ‘single and of determined bounds’ he chooses is actually an ‘intricate and difficult path’, as written in the 1850 text (XIV. 33). The poet shows his doubt about his childhood vision of his chosen path in the aftermath of the Revolution, but as his sense of the poetic project changes in response to the representation of the events in France, he, in the act of writing, presents how he rethinks his own understanding of the language any poetic project relies upon. The sentence ‘one tutored thus, who had been formed / To

thought and moral feeling in the way / This story hath described' (IX. 244-46) is removed in the 1850 text. This act of removal clearly suggests that Wordsworth comes to doubt whether his poem has actually 'described' the growth of his mind along this 'difficult path'. Uncertain whether 'the way / This story hath described' does correspond to his personal growth, he begins to feel he needs 'colours and words that are unknown to man' to 'paint' the fostering history of his life (XI. 309, 310). As we can see in the 1799 version of *The Prelude*, very early on Wordsworth is expressing his 'fears / Of breaking in upon the unity / Of this my argument' (1799, I. 252-54)¹⁶. That 'unity' of 'argument' is relentlessly subverted by his writing of the revolutionary experience: in the 1850 text, for example, Wordsworth simply erases the phrase 'the life / Of all things and the mighty unity' (XIII. 253-55) that can be still found in the 1805 version. Having experienced social turmoil and political upheaval, Wordsworth loses his confidence in the human mind, but he also loses his belief in language's capacity to 'describe' to others his experience of the 'one life'. Wordsworth aspires to the creation of a poetic 'sanctuary' (X. 677), but recognizes that this is merely idealism: such a task would require 'words ... unknown to man'.

Concerning Wordsworth's effort to maintain his 'nature's self' in face of such a spiritual trial, Nicholas Roe says that 'In Wordsworth's poems written from 1798, nature and imagination are linked with a human vision of society as a counter to historical dereliction and spiritual atrophy'; Roe calls this Wordsworth's 'imaginative commitment to humanity'.¹⁷ David Ellis says that 'The "fact" [a critic] deals with [this 'imaginative commitment] is not the historical truth of Wordsworth's life but the state of mind of the poet as he looks back and tries to impose order and pattern on his experience. That at least is what the verse can be thought to represent'.¹⁸ What is at stake here is 'the state of mind

¹⁶ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1798-1799*, Stephen Parrish (ed.), (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). The quotations (with line numbers) of the 1799 text in my thesis are from this version, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁷ Roe, *The Politics of Nature*, p. 153.

¹⁸ David Ellis, 'Wordsworth's Revolutionary Youth: How We Read *The Prelude*?', *Critical Quarterly*, 19:4 (December, 1977), 59-67, 66.

of the poet' when he attempts to 'impose order and pattern on his [previous] experience' 'beneath / The breath of great events'. On the one hand, recollecting his revolutionary experience, he 'is *half pleased*' when he sees 'things that are amiss' because it will be '*such joy* to see them disappear' (X. 734, 734, 735, my italics). The poet at this moment is said to be in full control of 'the place'. He seems to be the lord, 'convok[ing]' everything 'pleasant' 'to suit [his] ends'. Wordsworth seeks to recreate the things he beholds according to his preference. On the other hand, this 'timely utterance' about his experience may also be 'taken as a comment on what he does to the word itself'.¹⁹ Wordsworth manipulates his utterances in such a way that words represent things to 'suit [his] ends'. In this sense, 'timely utterance' becomes 'wishful utterance'. Gravil suggests that 'the possibility constantly presents itself that ... the imaginative self, which usurps, by a species of reaction, upon the recollecting poet, may be in some sense "truer" than the one it has left behind'.²⁰ The distinction between the past self and 'the imaginative self' represented in Wordsworth's memory is so ambiguous that even the poet himself seems to be writing a 'fancied' self as a 'truer' self in his 'remould[ing]' of the past. Equally, Jacobus points out that 'Wordsworth's confrontation with the text of history is in any case necessarily a moment of imagination projection or construction, a reading from and of the present of *The Prelude*'.²¹ However, through a close examination of the poet's 'timely utterance' about his 'imaginative self' as a self 'commit[ted] to humanity', we also will find that 'what the verse can be thought to represent' is his 'endless dreams / Of sickliness, disjoining, joining things / Without the light of knowledge' (VIII. 608-10). Rewriting his revolutionary experience, Wordsworth finds in his 'commitment to humanity' 'things' seemingly combined but also disconnected at the same time, which is the main concern of the following paragraphs.²²

¹⁹ Ellen Douglass Leyburn, 'Recurrent Words in *The Prelude*', *ELH*, 16:4 (Dec., 1949), 284-98, 291.

²⁰ Gravil, "'Some Other Being'", p. 129.

²¹ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 88.

²² In this sense, I want to go further to uncover the inherent contradictions in Wordsworth's rewriting of his

First, Wordsworth sees in his ‘fancied’ self only a ‘half-existence’ of his true self situated midway between ‘restored’ strength and ‘new strength given’. However, when Wordsworth attempts to ‘overbridge’ ‘the “Two consciousnesses” of past and present’ (in order to rebuild his bond with nature), ‘writing simultaneously brings that “other being” into alien half-existence and makes the split manageable’; Wordsworth ‘inscribes both temporal alterity and an origin’.²³ Even so, in this reintegration of different temporal selves, though the temporal gap is ‘manageable’, the self inscribed is still only an ‘alien half-existence’ of ‘some other being’. In this sense, the ‘manageable’ gap always remains a ‘split’. Between his life before and after the Revolution, Wordsworth sees himself ‘parted as by a gulph, / From him who had been’ (XI. 59-60) while attempting a rewriting of the past. This ‘gulph’ situates his self ‘now’ at a distance from the self ‘then’. One example testifies to the disturbing ‘half-existence’ of his true self in Wordsworth’s writing of his imaginative self. The poet states that he has

play’d with times,
 (I speak of private business of the thought)
 And accidents as children do with cards,
 Or as a Man, who, when his house is built,
 A frame lock’d up in wood and stone, doth still,
 In impotence of mind, by his fire-side
 Rebuild it to his liking. (VI. 299-305)

The rewriting of his past is like ‘play[ing] with times’ and ‘rebuilding [them] to his liking’. As Wordsworth describes it, ‘I had a world about me; ’twas my own, / I made it; for it only liv’d to me’ (III. 142-43). But, at the same time, the fact is that ‘his house is built’ and ‘lock’d up’. That is, he has already experienced the life of his past, which was unchangeable and fixed in the past. When the poet seeks to manage that past experience,

life rather than being merely contented with reading his ‘recover[ing] an integrity which ... is represented as a level higher than the initial unity ... [and] resolves ... the problem of how to justify the human experience of pain and loss and suffering’ (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 77).

²³ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 148.

his effort persists but his mind is actually ‘impoten[t]’. I will be discussing this temporal difference between past and present selves in greater depth in Chapters Five and Six.

Secondly, and more importantly, Wordsworth also sees in his ‘endless dreams / Of sickness, disjoining, joining things’ a baffling tension between nature’s self and the self of humanity (which has been set apart from nature). Wordsworth knows that he can create an identity (only) by writing, but doing this fulfils at one level and challenges at another. Wordsworth’s writing of a new identity for himself is based on the inner life of the individual (‘my theme / No other than the very heart of man’ (XII. 239-40), yet, in the act of writing, what this excludes (‘reality too close and too intense’) creeps in to haunt the ‘sanctity’ of self. Writing a poem to fulfil his ‘imaginative commitment to humanity’, the poet claims that he is writing something social while in fact he is talking about something personal (‘I speak of private business of the thought’) – and with a sense of guilt. Nevertheless, based upon the claim of his ‘restored’ imagination, Wordsworth remarks that

the genius of *the Poet* hence
 May boldly take his way among mankind
 Wherever Nature leads, that he hath stood
 By Nature’s side among the men of old,
 And so shall stand forever. (XII. 294-98, my italics)

He, ‘the Poet’, ‘may boldly’ go into the human community by following the guidance of ‘Nature’, which matures and restores his ‘growth’ of mind with its power and ‘admonitions’. Nature, forever representing a stable base of the poet’s inward vision, gives him assurance of his identity as a prophetic poet for humankind. Yet the ambivalent juxtaposition of the words ‘may boldly’ is noteworthy. The poet’s ‘bold[ness]’ is unsettled by the sense of ambiguity in the word ‘may’. He ‘may’ ‘boldly take his way among mankind’: *can*, perhaps, or perhaps just might, *possibly*. In addition, Wordsworth says that ‘he hath stood / By Nature’s side among the men of old’. He ‘hath’ done so and ‘so shall stand forever’. The word ‘shall’ has two implications. On the one hand, this word suggests

an identity in commitment. Wordsworth thinks that he 'shall' stand by 'Nature's side' as a '[Prophet] of Nature'. On the other hand, the word 'shall' is tinged with a sense of tentativeness. Rather than the word 'will', the word he chooses here is 'shall'; in the future he is determined to ('shall') 'stand' 'by Nature's side' 'forever', though he is not confident enough to be certain that he 'will' be able to do so. Writing, though creating an identity for Wordsworth, can neither escape from the existent social 'reality' nor be in control of whatever will happen in 'the froward chaos of futurity' (V. 372). Wordsworth, though seeking to invent an identity for himself in autobiographical writing, hesitates to build into his words ideas of definiteness and certainty.

One more example of Wordsworth's ambiguous writing comes from his idea of 'the world / Of all of us' in Book X. 'Not uselessly employ'd' by nature, Wordsworth claims that 'I sought / For good in the familiar face of life / And built thereon my hopes of good to come' (XII. 66-68). The 'hopes of good to come', Wordsworth insists, are to be sought 'in the very world which is the world / Of all of us, the place on which, in the end / We find our happiness, or not at all' (X. 725-27). His hope for the welfare of all humankind is based upon 'the familiar face of life' – 'the very world which is the world / Of all of us'. But one question ensues: what does Wordsworth mean by 'world' here? He seems to keep this deliberately vague. Whether the world is to be sought in society or in nature is uncertain. Does this world belong to his private communion with nature? Wordsworth talks about 'one sweet Vale whither my steps should turn' in Book I; he says that 'some work / Of glory [is] there forthwith to be begun, / Perhaps, too, there perform'd' (I. 82, 85-87). Is the 'Vale' the place where he 'built thereon [his] hopes of good to come'? If so, is this world, in which there are 'imperishable thoughts' of his 'hopes', communicable to the public and reconcilable with the social 'reality'? Given this sense of ambiguity, Wordsworth's idea of consolation ('my hopes of good to come') is troubled by the doubts about this 'world'. And here a new sense of the difficulty emerges – the challenge of being

a poet under these circumstances and of writing a new self. Wordsworth locates his identity in conflicting ideas about self – in the hopeful aspiration to a social vision but also in the fear that those ideas are wrong in relation to the social and humanity.

Writing a poem of redemption for humankind, Wordsworth thinks of himself ‘as becom[ing] a man who would prepare / For such a glorious work’ ‘beneath / The breath of great events’ (I. 157-58, X. 943-44). Inventing a new identity for himself as a prophetic poet of nature, he intends to build a link between nature and society by identifying the objects of nature as ‘a genuine counterpart’ and ‘softening mirror’ of ‘the moral world’. It is claimed that the natural world is interrelated with human society precisely through this reflection of ‘the moral world’ (also defined as ‘a consoling mirror’²⁴), which, as Wordsworth hopes, will ‘[soften]’ the harsh reality of the human life.²⁵ With these claims, Wordsworth ‘look[s] for universal things’ and has ‘universal’ ‘hopes’ (X. 945, 944), but he also contradictorily says that he ‘speak[s] of private ... thought’. ‘Such a glorious work’ wavers between ‘individual happiness’ on the one hand and ‘the deformities of crowded life’, ‘the conflicts of substantial life’, on the other (IV. 230, VIII. 465, III. 559). To put it more precisely, Wordsworth’s self in nature is always at odds with ‘his own unquiet heart’ in ‘the uneasy world’, and his use of words constantly reveals an uncertain sense of the hope he claims to feel.²⁶ He doubts whether ‘such bold word accord / With any promises of human life’ (I. 26-27) or he can only speak to Coleridge ‘in private talk’ (X. 372).

With this contradictory thought about private discourse and its message to the ‘substantial’ life of society in mind, Wordsworth states that:

²⁴ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 8.

²⁵ See Keith Hanley’s “‘A Poet’s History’”, p. 55. Hanley remarks that ‘nature ... will always prevail over the necessary crises of differentiated subjectivity – political disillusionment and private guilt’.

²⁶ Here I disagree with Hartman’s idea that Wordsworth’s ‘cure’, which has ‘a remedial and creative component’, is also ‘a cure beyond forgetfulness’ (‘Wordsworth and Metapsychology’ in Alexander Regier and Stefan H. Uhlig (eds.), *Wordsworth’s Poetic Theory: Knowledge, Language, Experience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 195-202, pp. 196-97).

I took the knife in hand
 And stopping not at parts less sensitive,
 Endeavoured with my best of skill to probe
 The living body of society
 Even to the heart: I push'd without remorse
 My speculations forward; yea, set foot
 On Nature's holiest places. (X. 872-78)

In this passage, Wordsworth shows the radical agony of the revolution controversy. With the decision to write about the Revolution, he is desperately seeking to find something problematic or some weakness hidden in 'the living body of society' with 'the knife'. Striving to 'probe' 'the living body of society' – 'even to the heart' – Wordsworth 'push[es] without remorse / [His] speculations forward'. He desires to get a clear idea of what happens to society 'with [his] best of skill', but the action he takes is relentless dissection and he is doing this 'without remorse'. Meanwhile, he also stands on 'Nature's holiest places', which gives 'an impression of violation, and therefore of implied guilt'.²⁷ These statements describe an attempt at overpowering control over both society and nature. Wordsworth presents himself as a surgeon who seeks to dissect and spot the problems of society, but trespasses on nature's sacred and inviolable places at the same time. While 'push[ing]' his 'speculations forward' 'to the heart' of society, he has been unfaithful to nature. He recognizes that his intellectual endeavour here is wrong because his heart has been 'turn'd aside / From Nature'. I think Gill is right when he says that Wordsworth remorselessly dissects this world as a result of 'the agony of a man who, probing the living body of society, was actually using the knife against himself'.²⁸ The trigger of Wordsworth's rage and emotional turbulence is essentially his doubt about his 'speculations' and 'reasonings'. These acts of mind themselves are the result of having been turned aside from nature. The poet's view of himself as a visionary poet of nature is

²⁷ Ellis, 'Wordsworth's revolutionary youth', 65.

²⁸ Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 36.

undermined by reasoning and abstract philosophy. These are ‘false teaching, sadder proof / Of immaturity’ (1850, X. 215-16). ‘Setting foot / On Nature’s holiest places’, Wordsworth places his faith in ‘one paramount mind’ of man, ‘the proud workings of the soul’, and ‘the holiest’ ‘soul’ (X. 179, IX. 241, X. 380). Though he longs for a returning to nature (he ‘should to the breast of Nature have gone back / With all [his] resolutions, all [his] hopes’ (X. 197-98)), he is also aware that he, as well as mankind, has betrayed nature.²⁹ This contradictory view of his (and man’s) relationship to nature directly echoes his persistent doubt about his poetic vocation – ‘was it for this?’.

Can the teaching of nature be brought to human beings – be universally applicable as ‘things common to all’? More importantly, Wordsworth is disappointed to find that his vision of hope for humankind may, after all, be nothing but private things inscribed in ‘a written paper’ (VII. 614). In Book VII he talks about a single blind Beggar, ‘upon his Chest / Wearing a written paper, to explain / The story of the Man, and who he was’ (VII. 613-15). This paper represents the man and, furthermore, ‘the utmost that we know, / Both of ourselves and of the universe’ (VII. 619-20). The paper appears to be echoing Wordsworth’s own ‘philosophic Song / Of truth’, which not only talks about the ‘growth’ of his mind (in its close interaction of nature) but also advances to ‘highest truth’ for humankind. However, man, ‘Creature divine’, turns out to be ‘sightless’, ‘unmoving’, and ‘fixed’ (X. 388, VII. 622, 621, 622). Even though the poet endeavours to insert the spirit of human life into his ‘written paper’, his writing (about ‘Nature, Man, and Society’) might communicate no more of his own internal experience than the beggar’s note does his, an internal experience that remains lifeless, unsharable and incommunicable. The poet no longer considers himself as ‘a moral agent’ of nature ‘essay[ing]’ ‘to give relief’; instead, he is ‘led / Gravely to ponder’ (1850, VIII. 519-20) our human nature. He doubts his

²⁹ Wordsworth deletes the sentence ‘I still / At all times had a solid world / Of images about me’ in the 1850 *Prelude*. The world of imagination becomes unsubstantial because of the daily enlarged distance between his mind and nature. Meanwhile, out of his fear of this broken bond with nature, he also removes the sentence ‘I ... set foot / On Nature’s holiest places’ in the later revision in order to show that he has not actually betrayed nature.

claimed identity as ‘a moral agent’ and even the ability of his words to ‘give relief’. In the end, Wordsworth inscribes in his writing a profound sense of the division between past and present, nature and humanity.

In this chapter I mainly argue that it is exactly Wordsworth’s intensifying awareness of his conflicted selves that turns *The Prelude* into a lifelong work, and that this very awareness changes his sense of writing verse and of his particular project in the poem. This chapter is ultimately suggesting that *The Prelude*, then, evolves into an epic engagement with the problems of identity-formation, which, far from solving those problems, incessantly destabilizes Wordsworth’s writing of self – in relation to time, other people, and the working of language.

In the rewriting of his crucial revolutionary experience, Wordsworth shows himself grappling with the problem of identity-formation, the problem not only of himself but also of all human beings. The poet has a profound sense of the problem, but can never find a solution to it. To use John Rieder’s words, ‘the climax’ of Wordsworth’s revolution experience is ‘the poem’s oscillation between epic ambitions and lyrical self-construction on the one hand, and between progressively wider, more threatening social contexts and recuperative, private meditations on the other’.³⁰ Whenever Wordsworth intends to offer ‘timely utterances’ about his experience of the revolution, the recalled self is ‘remould[ed]’ to ‘suit [his] ends’, which is the poet’s ‘defensive reconstruction’³¹ of self. In rewriting a self, Wordsworth remarks that ‘My likings and my loves / Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry’. He views his past self as ‘a green leaf on the blessed tree’, but later this ‘blessed tree’ is regarded as an ‘ancient tower’ (1805, X. 254, 254; 1850, X. 279). Looking back, Wordsworth says that ‘life with me, / As far as memory can look, is full / Of ... **beneficent** influence. (XI. 276-78), but this statement is removed in the 1850 text. Instead

³⁰ John Rieder, *Counterrevolutionary Turn: Community, Virtue, and Vision in the 1790s* (London: Associate UP, 1997), p. 19.

³¹ Ibid.

of recalling past moments, the poet thinks that 'If future years mature me for the task, / Will I record the praises, making verse / Deal boldly with substantial things (XII. 232-34). The transition from 'old' to 'new' makes a continual development of his identity possible but also makes a stable and coherent identity impossible because the 'old' selves are already 'dry'. This transition through Wordsworth's writing of the French Revolution fundamentally changes and baffles his use of language. This part of my thesis is mainly concerned with the troubling tension between 'I' and 'we' in Wordsworth's rewriting of his revolutionary experience. Here the poet's 'recuperative, private meditations' – his 'confessional self-understanding'³² – are in constant interaction with 'social contexts'. The words Wordsworth uses reveal an uncertainty as to whether his writing is 'communicable' or 'lifeless'. His involvement in public life threatens his private communion with nature but also spurs an ongoing development of self living as part of human society. A series of words in Book X – 'confound', 'misguided', and 'obscurities' – define Wordsworth's increasingly perplexed vision of identity but also testify to the fact that he comes closer to his ultimate understanding of self, a self subject to continual revisions of his poetic 'self' in *The Prelude*. It is precisely such fragmentations, multiplicities, and contradictions that keep Wordsworth's writing moving forward, by giving it a challenge it can never overcome but which it insists on meeting – as a worthy, perhaps the most worthy, challenge to any poet.

³² Ibid.

Part Three Between Speech and Silence

Chapter Five

This section focuses on Book V of *The Prelude*, and this chapter will read the way Wordsworth composes Book V of *The Prelude* as a series of fictional epitaphs to himself. The experience of the French Revolution greatly impacts Wordsworth's consciousness of self, especially in its division between the past self 'hidden in its endless home / Among the depths of time' (V. 197-98)¹ and the self inscribed in his autobiographical writing. This section of the thesis returns from reading of *The Prelude* in its social and historical context to an examination of Wordsworth's self-composition through language. Book V rewrites Wordsworth's past self into figures that he can reread as instancing his understanding 'now'. In other words, by talking of his past self in the writing of memory, Wordsworth is actually writing a 'Tale' (a fiction) of his previous life. In this fiction, the figures are Wordsworth's self-representations, and so not identical to Wordsworth himself. As discussed in Part One of my thesis, while Wordsworth might desire to bring the past back to life through a present act of writing, his poetic utterances are essentially and fundamentally not the utterances of the past self they describe. This chapter will go on to show that Wordsworth is unable, and knows full well that he is unable, to achieve full communion with his self through autobiographical writing precisely because that self is located in the silence left by 'life' and not in the language left by 'books'.² Writing fictional selves as projections of his own self in Book V,³ Wordsworth is also aware that

¹ The quotations (with line numbers) of *The Prelude* in Part Three of my thesis are from Book V (1805), unless otherwise stated.

² Jacobus remarks that 'Books become spots of time, recuperating memory into consciousness, creating an inter-space between past and present which bridges the gulf between the divided consciousness of the adult'; but 'what does seem worth exploring is the troubling status of both books and writing in a poem which enlists them to "enshrine the spirit of the past/ For future restoration"...'; ('Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 640). On this problematic conscious approximation of two selves in different moments, see William H. Galperin, 'Authority and Deconstruction in Book V of *The Prelude*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 26:4 (Autumn, 1986), 613-631, 627.

³ Several studies think that these fictional figures in Book V of *The Prelude* are actually projections of Wordsworth's self. For example, Galperin says that 'Through the Arab dream, Wordsworth – the resisting writer – depicts himself, "the Poet", for what he is: a crazed, deluded wanderer implicated in a mythic or representational structure that is uncompletable' ('Authority and Deconstruction in Book V of *The Prelude*',

the working of ‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ in language itself (622, 623) immediately excludes his subjectivity by determining the absence behind the ‘I’ of his writing. In this sense, this chapter mainly argues that the represented self of Wordsworth vanishes behind the language of his act of autobiographical writing.

On the issue of Wordsworth’s self-composition, Bennett remarks that ‘his topic is, above all, the way in which the poet, the man, is composed by, composed in, poetic composition, in writing. ...Wordsworth, Wordsworth especially in writing, *is* his own exemplary moment’.⁴ Bennett goes on to state that ‘In recent decades critics have tended to complicate the idea of autobiography in relation to *The Prelude* by considering ways in which the poem not only represents the poet but also in some way forms and informs that subjectivity’.⁵ Wordsworth ‘composed by’ and ‘in’ writing is the focus of this chapter. However, in this very ‘self-composition’, Wordsworth’s ‘two consciousnesses’ complicates Bennett’s idea that ‘Wordsworth goes beyond the self just by remaining with himself’ in his poetry.⁶ The ‘subjectivity’ formed in Wordsworth’s self-representation is highly unstable because of its ambiguous status as both ‘remaining with himself’ and ‘some other Being’. The self represented in Wordsworth’s writing is a fictional Wordsworth, but this fictional self-representation forms the very subjectivity it purports to represent. Wordsworth’s does not ‘remain[...] with himself’; he (re)creates himself.

I start with Wordsworth’s engagement with the double-bind of language. For any kind of ‘commerce of [one’s] nature with itself’ (18), and to give any kind of record of one’s memory, Wordsworth needs to resort to writing and books. He cannot present himself without putting (him)self into writing, yet as soon as he tries, the attempt is overwhelmed by language’s own agency, which ‘skirts the hollowness of becoming a counter-spirit’.⁷ The ‘I’ of writing is always different from the writing subject – as well as being different

621).

⁴ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.141.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷ Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-spirit*, p. 34.

from the subject of autobiographical writing. Indeed there is always absence behind every 'I' because language forgets all the past – and present – selves that use it. All that is possible is a 'register' of the bare fact that past events occurred:

That portion of my Story I shall leave
 There register'd: whatever else there be
 Of power or pleasure, sown or foster'd thus,
 Peculiar to myself, let that remain
 Where it lies hidden in its endless home
 Among the depths of time. (193-98)

Past days – 'that portion of my story' – can never come back to or for the present through writing. Wordsworth's childhood 'fair seed-time' is 'peculiar to [him]self' alone. It is not shared with others through language or with language. Wordsworth recognizes that his personal childhood experiences 'remains' irredeemably in the past, never recoverable in any present act of writing.

Indeed, de Man claims that Wordsworth writes 'a tombstone large enough to hold the entire *Prelude*',⁸ and that Wordsworth's autobiographical writing is a 'tombstone' (symbolized by 'the Grave' (422) in Book V, for example) for his past self – 'someone who no longer lives'.⁹ Language itself predetermines the absence of the writing subject from 'I' in autobiographical writing. Even worse, even the existence of every written self is unpreservable, doomed to the slow physical decay of books themselves. For Wordsworth, a book, 'a volume in [his] hand', is a 'poor earthly casket of immortal Verse!' (163, 164). Writing 'things worthy of unconquerable life' to permanently preserve his memory, Wordsworth says that 'yet we feel, we cannot chuse but feel / That [books] must perish' (20-21).

⁸ De Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', 9. Laura Marcus says that 'For de Man, the predicament of the autobiographer is that ... in the act of self-figuration (autobiographical composition) the biographical self is displaced by a trope: it is "disfigured" and in the process "dies", so that literary self-representation becomes for de Man the creation of a kind of epitaph' (*Auto / Biographical Discourses*, p. 208).

⁹ De Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', 9.

Wordsworth's writing of self-representation is constantly involved with his very perplexed thinking about language and books. The double-bind of language keeps him asking: 'Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad / [my mind's] spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?' (47-48). On the one hand, gifted with 'such powers' as 'a soul sublime' (40), the mind seeks to 'lodge in shrines' that consecrate her 'spirit'. On the other hand, to Wordsworth's disappointment, these 'shrines' are essentially perishable and 'frail' books – 'earthly casket[s]'. Moreover, his mind, unable to find 'some element to stamp her image on / In nature somewhat nearer to her own' (45-46), can at least merely find 'material and mortal "lodgings"',¹⁰ rather than an eternal abode, in which to rest. Represented through books of language, the mind is destabilized. Desperately, the poet goes on to ask 'wherefore should I speak, / Why call upon a few weak words to say / What is already written in the hearts / Of all that breathe!' (184-87). He thinks that 'words' are 'weak' and that 'letter[s]' are 'dead' (VIII. 432). Bushell suggests that, for Wordsworth, 'the act of writing is secondary to feeling'; she views *The Prelude* as 'a poem that values its own creation, but not the medium through which it finds expression'.¹¹ 'A few weak words' cannot adequately and faithfully articulate the meaning the poet seeks to express.

On Wordsworth's notion about 'weak words', it is useful to look at de Man's claim that the 'language of tropes ... is indeed like the body, which is like its garments, the veil of the soul as the garment is the sheltering veil of the body'.¹² This relationship between language and 'the unknown' is like that between 'the body' and 'the soul'; the latter, in writing, is 'veil[ed]', buried deep beneath 'the body' and 'the garment', as an 'unrepresentable presence'.¹³ The 'soul' cannot be incarnated but only covered by the body. Language takes on the role of a 'sheltering veil', 'a clothing', rather than 'an incarnation' of whatever is represented by it. In this sense, 'words' are 'weak', unable to

¹⁰ Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 78).

¹¹ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 104.

¹² De Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', 930.

¹³ Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 620.

say ‘what is already written in the hearts’. Yet the writing poet solaces himself with the idea that he, blessed by ‘a wiser Spirit’ (385), is still able to keep up an interaction with something internal – beyond time – through which he can build a direct relationship with his past self. This past self, he wants to believe, is fulfilling the ‘promise’ of the past by becoming a visionary poet.

Although Wordsworth desires to build his autobiography on ‘things worthy of unconquerable life’ (19) (so that his memory can be preserved forever in writing), these ‘things can only be clothed in language, not incarnated by it, because they are ‘incommunicable’ and lie beyond ‘the reach of words’.¹⁴ For Wordsworth, language functions as ‘an ill gift’, ‘poisoned vestments’, and even ‘a counter-spirit’.¹⁵ In writing, ‘the immortal being’, the ‘wiser Spirit’, ‘no more shall’ be ‘cloath’d / In human language’ (V. 22, 385, 23, III. 241-42). Language, then, ‘becomes only a medium, a conduit through which meaning and self move, but not in which they reside’.¹⁶ Language is only a ‘lodge’ for ‘meaning and self’. In writing, whatever is represented is given a verbal form but its (‘unrepresentable’) essence is ‘cloath’d’ and covered.

Two critics, Bennett and Bushell, also devote substantial discussions to Wordsworth’s perplexed view of writing. Bushell points out that ‘the spontaneous ideal is bound up with orality’. And this leads to Wordsworth’s ‘double consciousness’ of ‘the self-division of language as spoken and written discourse’.¹⁷ Similarly, Bennett states that ‘poetry displaces apparent immediacy (the immediacy of speech) in favour of a deferral and delay that can be identified with writing’; he goes further to suggest that ‘it is precisely

¹⁴ On the idea of eternity in writing, Miller remarks that ‘Such eternities exist in the signs for them. They are eternities generated paradoxically out of finitude. Eternity is a self-sustaining temporal structure build by language over the abyss of death’ (*The Linguistic Moment*, p. 104).

¹⁵ Wordsworth remarks that ‘If words be not ... an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely they will prove an ill gift; such a one as those poisoned vestment. ... Language ... is a counter-spirit’ (‘Essay upon Epitaphs’, in W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (eds.), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 3 volumes, 2: 84 (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1974)). Also see Ferguson’s *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-spirit*, p. 34.; and Kathleen M. Wheeler’s *Romanticism, Pragmatism, and Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 126.

¹⁶ Mudge, ‘The Politics of Autobiography in the “Biographia Literaria”’, 36.

¹⁷ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 101.

Wordsworth's resistance to this conception of poetry as written – a resistance complicated by his fascination with ... the act and process of writing itself, and by the simple fact of writing, by his seemingly endless acts of writing – that productively skews his own poetry'.¹⁸ In this respect, Bushell also remarks that the 'various elements of [Wordsworth's] own compositional method take part in a process of "misremembrance" which distorts the "truth" to a greater or lesser degree'.¹⁹ These statements add to de Man's account of 'language of tropes' in Wordsworth's writing a more in-depth discussion of the conflicting but inseparable relationship between 'the immediacy of speech' and 'the [degraded] supplementary nature of the poetic text'.²⁰ With de Man, Bennett and Bushell in mind, I will examine how Wordsworth, in his incessant 'acts of writing', both attempts a more immediate relationship with his past self through a 'spoken' 'discourse' and engages with the representation of that past self in 'the deferral and delay' of a 'written' text. Furthermore, I will show that this process of self-composition is complicated and haunted by the fact that the past self (the original experience) remains silent and unrepresentable. As Bennett puts it, 'Wordsworth's writing ... is determined and at the same time unsettled by his sense that it is precisely writing that gives worth to words'.²¹ The words of Wordsworth's text are uttered by his writing – not by the voice of the past self he seeks to inscribe in his words.

Wordsworth's baffled thoughts about language are still haunting the poem in 1850: 'The sovereign Intellect / Who through that bodily Image hath diffused, / As *might* appear to the eye of fleeting Time, / A deathless Spirit' (1850, V. 15-18, my italics). The longing for 'a deathless spirit' is undermined by the phrase 'as might appear to'. The idealism of immortality becomes uncertain. Here a link is built between 'human language', 'the speaking *face* of earth and heaven', and 'that *bodily Image*' (III. 242, V. 12, 15, my italics).

¹⁸ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹ Sally Bushell, 'Wordsworthian Composition: The Micro-Prelude', *Studies in Romanticism* 44 (2005), 399-421, 417.

²⁰ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.108.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.45.

It is only through these ‘faces’ of the landscape that the being of immortality can be represented, ‘diffused’, and ‘cloath’d’ at once. The idea of ‘a deathless spirit’ is repeatedly counteracted by ‘the [bodily] eye of fleeting time’. Wordsworth’s intensifying anxiety about ‘fleeting time’ drives him to revise the phrase ‘things worthy of unconquerable life’ to ‘things that aspire to unconquerable life’ (1850, V. 20). This change from ‘worthy of’ to ‘aspire to’ indicates his painful acknowledgement of mortality brought by the passing of time.

In de Man’s view, ‘the language of tropes’ entombs Wordsworth’s self in writing. He thinks that ‘the “now” of the poem is not an actual now, which is that of the moment of death’.²² ‘It is therefore not *a priori* certain that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language’.²³ However, my own discussion moves beyond de Man’s exclusive focus on ‘language’ *per se* (which prescribes the ‘death’ of any self inscribed in writing) to the dynamic play at work in Wordsworth’s particular language, rooted as it is in his ‘fascination with’ ‘the act and process of writing itself’. I will show that the working of Wordsworth’s language doesn’t simply ‘deface’ Wordsworth’s own self, as de Man suggests, but also allows at least a sense of self to be glimpsed midway between speech and silence. That is, I want to trace Wordsworth’s acknowledgement and negotiation of the double-bind of language in Book V, through the figures of the Arab, the Boy of Winander, and the drowned Man. Moreover, I will seek to complicate de Man’s reading of Wordsworth by considering Wordsworth’s ‘textual self’ in relation to the draft materials and revisions of *The Prelude*, which de Man ignores. I want to examine how Wordsworth develops his sense of self not only at particular stages of writing but also during his incessant revision and reworking. As Bushell puts it, ‘If one were to read only the final product of this draft material in the published text then much of the struggle and

²² De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 225.

²³ De Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), p. 11.

anguish which the manuscripts contain would be lost'.²⁴ My approach aims to look more closely at how Wordsworth gradually forms and engages with his view of language.

For de Man, the writing subject 'contributes nothing of its own experience, sensations, sufferings, or consciousness'; 'Text' is produced only through 'the randomness of language'.²⁵ But I think that de Man's account very much undervalues the vital, ever-changing relationship between Wordsworth and his text, or, we might say, between self and 'non-self'²⁶, made manifest by the composition of *The Prelude*. In reading Wordsworth, we should devote more attention to his 'acts on the page and changes to the language' already written there.²⁷ Through these 'acts' and 'changes', we can read what Wordsworth presents as 'written in the heart' (rather than as 'written' in 'weak words'). As Bennett says, 'the manuscripts' 'reveal the poet writing down ...in a complex and multilayered act that includes what we might call mental composition as just one element in the process'.²⁸ Wordsworth's writing of self does something more than what is determined merely by 'the randomness of language'. In reading Wordsworth's poetic formation of himself, it is important to consider 'the value of "a compositional method"'²⁹ in *The Prelude*. Here we depart from de Man's rhetorical reading of Wordsworth's language, attempting a more thorough investigation of the way in which Wordsworth develops his textual self through, and attempts to write his complicated emotions into, the whole process of composition.

Wordsworth's self, as represented in writing, is an echo and an anticipation of things other than itself because the self that Wordsworth seeks to inscribe lies outside language

²⁴ Bushell, 'Reading below the Surface', 12.

²⁵ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, pp. 36, 270.

²⁶ De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 207.

²⁷ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 55.

²⁸ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.12.

²⁹ Bushell, *Text as Process*. Bushell states that 'The manuscript also gives an example of the way in which life and art interact; the way in which creativity can be stimulated by deep personal distress, and distress can be gradually modulated through the process of composition' ('Reading Below the Surface', 12). Susan Wolfson 'comments on poetic composition as producing "revision as the enactment as well as the report" of process of recollection, interpretation, and so on ... "revision is not just compositional; it is the very trope of autobiography"' ('Formal Charges', p. 104, quoted in Bennett's *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 219, note 14).

and cannot be incorporated into language. His past selves pass ‘into Phantoms’ as he writes. However, this chapter will show that the stories of these figures in Book V focus on a space between speech and silence in which the present moment of writing recollection is nevertheless haunted by precisely these ‘Phantoms’ of the past. Indeed, in the dream of the Arab there is in the seashell an echo that awaits ‘destruction’ by ‘deluge’ (98, 99), while in the Boy of Winander passage, when the ‘echoes’ from the owls cease, there are ‘pauses of deep silence’ that anticipate the boy’s death (402, 405). The past may leave only silence, but it is a silence that can speak of the very fact of our mortality.

Wordsworth presents his longing for an ‘immortal Verse’ (164) and the desire for his ‘salvation’ in writing through the dream of the Arab. In the 1805 version of the poem, Wordsworth identifies his own fear (of the destined perishing of his thoughts in earthly mortal books) as that of his friend, who ‘yielded to kindred hauntings’ (55). ‘On Poetry, and geometry Truth, / The knowledge that *endures*, upon these two, / And their high privilege of *lasting life*, / Exempt from all internal injury, / [His friend] mused’ (64-68, my italics). Humankind’s high thoughts are worthy of eternal life. However, in these intellectual assets the poet’s ‘sadness finds its fuel’ (10) precisely because they can only be preserved by books – ‘poor earthly casket’.

Wordsworth expresses this ‘haunting’ of life by the fact of mortality. In this dream, Wordsworth’s friend comes across an Arab who is eager to bury his ‘twofold treasure’ – ‘a Stone’ and ‘a Shell’ (120, 80). These both, ‘to give it in the language of the Dream’, are believed to be ‘Books’ (87, 103).³⁰ Here, Wordsworth devotes more description to the Book of the Shell, claiming that it is ‘of a surpassing brightness’ and ‘something of more

³⁰ Numerous studies have talked about ‘the Stone’ and ‘the Shell’ in the Arab dream. For example, see Theresa M. Kelley’s ‘Spirit and Geometric Form: the Stone and the Shell in Wordsworth’s Arab Dream’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 22:4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1982), 563-582, esp. 565-578; she suggests that ‘Unlike the closed surface of the stone, the shell is an open-ended geometric spiral whose developing form requires a cooperation between natural processes and the exact ratio of geometrical progression’ (565). Also see Paul H. Fry, ‘Clearings in the Way: Non-Epiphany in Wordsworth’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 31:1 (Spring, 1992), 3-19, 13; Hartman’s *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 167; and Hamilton’s ‘Deep History: Association and Natural Philosophy in Wordsworth’s Poetry’, 473.

worth' (81, 90). Wordsworth's friend hears from the shell

an unknown Tongue,
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
A loud, prophetic blast of harmony,
An Ode, in passion utter'd, which foretold
Destruction to the Children of the Earth,
By deluge now at hand. (94-99)

Wordsworth does not point out what the Book of the Shell is. But it can be inferred that the shell refers to the book of poetry, as that upon which his friend ponders. Moreover, Wordsworth says that the voice from the shell is a 'song', 'an Ode, in passion utter'd' (100, 97), which corresponds to Wordsworth's own 'philosophic Song'. The shell, unlike the unchanging and fixed geometric formulae (represented through the Book of Stone, 'Euclid's Elements' (88)), is about organic life, 'growth', in time. In the 1850 text, the voices from the shell take on a humanistic quality – 'with power / To exhilarate the Spirit, and to soothe, / Through every clime, the heart of human kind' (1850, V. 108-109). In this sense, it can be said that Wordsworth here tries to make the dream appear as if his mind finds 'some element' in nature (the Shell) to 'stamp her image on'. However, when the dreamer 'hold[s] [the Shell] to [his] ear' (93), he finds that the voice from the shell is, curiously, in 'an unknown Tongue'. The 'Tongue' is 'unknown' but not unknowable, as Wordsworth says that 'yet I understand, articulate sounds'³¹. The Book of the Shell speaks a language ('Tongue') that expresses 'the unknown'.

Bennett suggests that 'it is in the gap between an ideal of poetry as a form of speech on the one hand and the notion that speech involves a "sad incompetence", a fundamental, undeniable inadequacy of language to thought or conception or emotion on the other hand,

³¹ On the sounds from the shell in the Arab dream, see J. Hillis Miller, 'The Still Heart: Poetic Dorm in Wordsworth', *New Literary History*, 2:2, Form and Its Alternatives (Winter, 1971), 297-310, 302; Andrzej Warminski, 'Missed Crossing: Wordsworth's Apocalypses', *MLN*, 99:5, Comparative Literature (Dec., 1984), 983-1006, 1004-5.

that writing may be said to emerge in Wordsworth's poetics'.³² We can see in the above quoted passage Wordsworth's ambiguous engagement with 'the immediacy of speech' and 'the "other" of speech'³³ – writing. On the one hand, the poet aspires to a spoken discourse that is 'in passion utter'd' and 'flow[ing] [his] thoughts / In a pure stream of words fresh from the heart' (1850, VIII. 466-67). He uses a series of words to signify 'a form of speech' (which is heard rather than being read) – 'hear', 'articulate sounds', 'uttered'³⁴, and 'foretold'. At the same time, in contrast, this 'Tongue' being heard is also described as written words because the 'Tongue' is 'unknown' and inscribed in the Book of the Shell. The voice from the Shell, though 'in passion utter'd', assumes its 'sad incompetence', 'inadequacy', to articulate the 'passion' and the 'unknown'. However, intriguingly, Wordsworth simultaneously makes the 'unknown' knowable as 'articulate sounds' as if 'creativity is somehow occurring outside the words in which it is uttered'³⁵ – as if there is 'a pure stream of words' flowing 'fresh from the heart' rather seeking to inscribe that heart in writing.

The listener hears an 'unknown' language made up of 'articulate sounds'. Warminski here suggests that 'to hear an echo ... is not to hear it but to *read* an inscription, an articulate sound ... what it reads is literally pro-phetic, "pre-speaking", the speaking that precedes speech, unhearable, unknowable ("in an unknown tongue")'.³⁶ But what the listener hears and reads is actually a 'Tongue' that is 'articulate' and verbalized. It is 'speech' itself – the speech that 'involves a "sad incompetence", a fundamental, undeniable inadequacy of language to thought or conception or emotion'. Once 'articulate[d]', the unknown is fragmented into multiplied 'sounds'. The 'sounds' from the seashell are, on the one hand, 'a joy, a consolation, and a hope', and on the other hand, 'voices more than all the winds' (109, 108). These 'voices' are 'articulat[ing]' and

³² Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, pp. 4-5.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁴ See *OED*'s definition of 'utter'; utter² *verb*: make (a sound) with one's voice.

³⁵ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 101.

³⁶ Warminski, 'Missed Crossing', 1004-5.

‘fore[telling]’ forthcoming ‘destruction’, ‘which ... I understand’, as Wordsworth says. In this sense, the ‘Tongue’ is knowable. There is ‘deluge’ bursting from the shell along with ‘a loud, prophetic blast’, which brings ‘destruction to the Children of the Earth’ (99, 96, 98). Miller says that ‘The forms of articulated speech or melody make the unworded blast of the original word available by turning it into definite tones or speech, and at the same time they limit it, transform it, obscure it, veil it over, traduce it by translating it’.³⁷ In this respect, Pyle points out that ‘the deluge issues not from nature but from *myth*; it is a deluge that exists only “as it is *writing*”, as it is inscribed in the voices of the shell’.³⁸ The multiplied ‘sounds’ from the shell have already ‘deface[d]’ and transfigured ‘the original word’ – ‘pure Word’ (1850, V. 224) – which is ‘unworded’ and ‘unknown’. Then, mysteriously, they ‘translat[e]’ and ‘traduce’ the ‘unknown’ with a ‘blast’ that prophecies the coming of ‘deluge’. Wordsworth claims that ‘the Mind of man / is fram’d even like the breath / And harmony of music’. Yet once ‘the Mind’ is inscribed in writing, it is overwhelmed by ‘a loud prophetic blast’ from language. This ‘blast’ not only subverts the idea of ‘harmony’ but also ‘for[tells] / Destruction’ to Wordsworth’s self ‘by deluge now at hand’. His sense of identity is endangered once the ‘articulate’ ‘Tongue’ from the Book of Shell predicts the vanishing of his self into ‘the ‘deluge’ that ‘exists only “as it is writing”’.

The voices from the shell predict the inevitable drowning of books along with one’s intellectual history. This ‘articulate’ prediction of ‘destruction’ is further confirmed by the Arab, who says ‘that all [is] true; that [is] even so / As ha[s] been spoken; and that he himself / [is] going then to bury those two Books’ (101-103). These Books (of the Stone and the Shell) are to be destroyed and the Arab who desperately seeks to preserve them is chased by ‘the fleet waters of the drowning world’ (136). The images of ‘fleet waters’ and ‘deluge’ are symbols of destruction that threaten to annihilate whatever the Arab – and the

³⁷ Miller, ‘The Still Heart’, 302.

³⁸ Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination*, p. 81 (my italics).

writing poet – desperately seek to preserve. The devouring deluge here is a mixed metaphor. It is a metaphor for language, which comes with the ‘originating death’ and ‘ghostly presences’³⁹ of ‘the original word’. It also symbolizes the forward-moving flow of time that lays ‘the deepest sleep’ upon everything in the past (IV. 157).⁴⁰ The ‘haunts in former days’ baffle Wordsworth’s writing now. Moreover, the deluge stands for the imagination embedded in ‘the language of the Dream’ that substitutes for whatever is inscribed in writing. For example, the stone and the shell, the ‘twofold treasure’ of the Arab, are believed to be books. The dreamer has ‘a perfect faith in all that pass’d’ (114). The subtle relationship between faith and fancy can be noted in the 1850 manuscript of Book V:

ieved
 bel{e he
~~he fancied~~ that ^ himself
 Was sitting there in the wide wilderness. [MS. A, 93^r]

In ‘the world of Sleep’, the dreamer ‘hath such strong entrancement overcome’ that he ‘believes’ everything he ‘fancies’ (1850, V. 142, 164). Wordsworth particularly deletes the phrase ‘strange as it may seem’ in his revision (~~“strange as it may seem~~ [MS. A, 95^r]) to enforce his belief. But nothing inscribed in ‘the language of the Dream’ can be vividly and faithfully represented in language, only endlessly replaced and defaced by other substitutive images.

Wordsworth’s writing of the Arab’s eagerness to bury his treasures is, as Jacobus points out, ‘just this precariousness, this anxious relation between ... writing and salvation’ – ‘Will I be saved if I write? Will my writing survive? ... all writing expresses a demand that can never be satisfied’.⁴¹ The Arab dream symbolically conveys Wordsworth’s (unsuccessful) experience of seeking ‘salvation’ in his act of writing. The result of this

³⁹ Jacobus, ‘Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream’, 628.

⁴⁰ See Jonathan Wordsworth’s *The Borders of Vision*, p. 198.

⁴¹ Jacobus, ‘Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream’, 624.

the owls. The interplay of ‘mimic hootings’, ‘long haloos’, and ‘echoes loud’, constitutes a harmonious interaction. As it seems, the echoes from the owls are ‘responsive’ ‘echoes’ of something more than the boy’s own voice. When the owls ‘shout again’ ‘across the watery Vale’, the ‘echoes’ are ‘redoubled and redoubled’, infinitely repeating the previous echo and the echo that is even earlier. The voices of the boy and the owls have been multiplied and fragmented again and again into ‘concourse wild’ through the owls’ shouting. This redoubling of voices is identified with Wordsworth’s act of writing, which, in its ‘supplementary nature’, reiterates, doubles, and replaces, any spoken discourse and original unrepresentable experience.

The boy’s voice and the echoes from the owls are ‘the conceptual pairs of fragment and totality, poem and meaning’.⁴⁴ Wordsworth’s writing of his previous harmonious relationship with nature (projected onto that of the Boy of Winander) is to ‘*mirror a missing totality*’, which means that ‘the totality is inverted into a fragment’; ‘the fragmented mirror-images “each mis-shape the other”’.⁴⁵ Echoing the voice of his earlier self, Wordsworth’s writing ‘*mirror[s]*’ rather than literally articulating the ‘totality’ of his past selves. His recalling of the past is engaged with and even absorbed into a ‘fragmented mirror-image’, which ‘mis-shape[s]’, disfigures, and fragmentizes whatever is to be represented. In this sense, Wordsworth’s understanding of his self through autobiographical writing becomes fragmentary and even ‘mis-shape[d]’. The echoes from the owls were ‘concourse wild’. Shouting, ‘echoes’, ‘haloos’, and ‘screams’ are all in an interplay of incessant commotion and ‘din’. Ambiguously, Wordsworth also uses the words ‘mirth’ and ‘jocund’ in writing about these ‘redoubled’ voices. This contradiction between ‘mirth’ and ‘din’ is written into the ‘concourse’ of the owls, forming a further fragmentation of the ‘concourse’.

⁴⁴ Timothy Bahti, ‘Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” and the Fragment of Romanticism’, *MLN*, 96:5, Comparative Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, Dec., 1981), 1035-1050, 1046.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Following the noisy and loud compound of ‘echoes’, ‘pauses of deep silence’ start to encompass the whole scene. As Wordsworth describes it,

when it chanced
 That pauses of deep silence mock’d his skill,
 Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents, or the visible scene
 Would enter unawares into his mind
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv’d
 Into the bosom of the steady Lake. (404-13)

The ‘concourse wild’ falls into silence along with the earlier voice from the boy. Intermissions of ‘deep silence’ emerge to exert its power. Interestingly, Wordsworth states that this ‘silence’ ‘mock[s] [the boy’s] skill’; this skill is even ironically qualified as ‘his best skill’ in the 1850 text. The voices have all faded into silence while the boy is looking for new echoes responding to his own voice. Talking about the ‘silence’ here, Jacobus remarks that Wordsworth ‘uses his writing to still the din that threatens when “voice” becomes plural (voices) and to confine proliferation when singleness splits into uncontrolled redoubling’⁴⁶. However, I want to suggest that, rather than ‘still[ing] the din’, Wordsworth’s writing skilfully brings the ‘silence’ and ‘plural (voices)’ into a substitutive play. As Wordsworth depicts it, earlier, there are ‘echoes loud / Redoubled and redoubled’. Then, there are ‘pauses of deep silence’, and ‘sometimes, *in* that silence, *while* he hung / Listening’, ‘the voice / Of mountain torrents’ has been ‘carried far into his heart’ (my italics). By writing about such ‘pauses of deep silence’, Wordsworth is attempting to show that, in Bennett’s words, the moment of ‘silence’, of the lost past, can be ‘experienced only in and as the loss, the difference, of writing’.⁴⁷ While it is true that the moment of

⁴⁶ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.168.

‘silence’ can be ‘experienced only in and as the loss, the difference, of writing’, it can be experienced as this, and to this extent. The ‘silence’ in Wordsworth’s writing is not used to ‘confine proliferation’ but to show that the fact of the past, and the fact of its pastness, can still be communicated, even if the past in itself cannot. A sense of ‘the lost past’, of the loss of the past, can be felt and ‘experienced’ in the ‘redoubl[ing]’ voices of writing.

In the ‘pauses of deep silence’, the boy ‘hung / Listening’. This act of hanging is symbolic of the suspension between voice and silence in Book V, which reveals an unstable sense of self in Wordsworth’s loss of his earlier intimate relationship with nature. Wordsworth revises ‘pauses of deep silence’ to ‘a lengthened pause / Of silence’ in the 1850 version (V. 381-82). This stress on the prolonged pause intensifies the sense of unsteadiness, which baffles the desire for a reconnection with nature. Surprisingly, what ensue are a series of discordances and contradictions. For example, Wordsworth’s description is intensely ambiguous: ‘a gentle shock of mild surprize’. The words ‘shock’ and ‘surprize’ are accompanied by moderate words, ‘gentle’ and ‘mild’. These pairs of incongruous words are simultaneously balancing and counteracting each other. ‘Listening’, the boy does hear a voice, but this is the voice from ‘mountain torrents’ rather than from the owls. An immanent power is at work ‘in’ the ‘deep’ and ‘lengthened’ ‘silence’, and now it comes out with overwhelming ‘torrents’ that intruded their ‘voice’ *far into* [the boy’s] heart’ (my italics). ‘The voice / Of mountain torrents’, like the ‘voices more than all the wind’ from the seashell in the Arab dream, is ‘always doubling of self, and more often a multiplication or alienation’.⁴⁸ The ‘image’ of self, ‘stamp[ed]’ on ‘some element’ in nature (‘mountain torrents’), is repeatedly multiplied and fragmented.

At the moment of ‘hanging’, ‘the voice of mountain torrents’ and ‘solemn imagery’ start to exert their power within the boy’s inner mind to such an extent that the boy himself becomes one with them. That is, he becomes the echo he seeks to hear when he ‘h[a]ng[s]

⁴⁸ Jacobus, ‘Apostrophe and Lyric Voice in *The Prelude*’, p. 152.

/ Listening'. 'The [outward] visible scene' 'enter[s] unawares into his mind'. Equally, 'the voice / Of mountain torrents' is 'carried far into his heart'. Moreover, the boy, hanging, is passive to the working of the surroundings, whose 'solemn imagery' – a host of sombre and gloomy images – is embedded in 'his mind'. Along with this interfusion of external voices, imagery, and the boy's mind, 'that uncertain Heaven' is 'receiv'd / Into the bosom of the steady Lake'. Senses of doubt and uncertainty come to interfere in and unsettle the calmness and steadiness that lie in the 'bosom' of the 'Lake' (and in the boy's mind). Here it is worthwhile to read one passage from the draft of MS. A in which Wordsworth says that:

A glad preamble to this Verse{[?] I sang
 with fervour irresistable
 Aloud , ~~in Dythyrambic fervor, deep~~
 — [—?—]
 But s/hort-liv'd uproar, like a torrent sent
 Out /of the bowls of a bursting cloud ... [MS. A, 143']

His 'fervour' is overwhelmingly 'irresistable'. The poet 's[i]ng[s]' this vehement passion 'aloud', but the 'fervour' is also a 'preamble' to 'this Verse'. It is a song and will be composed as a 'Verse' (even though the poet seems to hesitate about using the word 'Verse'). The 'uproar' of his passion is nevertheless 'short-liv'd' (and no longer 'deep') because it is being embodied in 'Verse'. At the same time, 'a torrent', echoing 'the voice / Of mountain torrents' in the Boy of Winander passage, usurps his exalted emotion when it is compared to his glad 'uproar'. The 'torrent' coming from 'a bursting cloud' is symbolically related to the 'blast' from language. Wordsworth here makes a complex and problematic interaction between his 'glad preamble', 'this Verse', and an external 'torrent'. In doing this, he implicitly expresses his fear that his own voice may be suspended and consumed by the 'torrent', which prefigures the embodiment of this voice in 'the speaking face' of nature and eventually in 'this Verse'.

Looking at the above manuscript, we can see that de Man's assertion is misleading. De Man thinks that the writing subject 'contributes nothing of its own experience, sensations, sufferings, or consciousness' because 'Text' is produced only through 'the randomness of language'.⁴⁹ But my reading suggests that there is actually something more than this 'contribute[d]' in Wordsworth's writing of 'a glad preamble' – in particular, Wordsworth's baffled thoughts about language during the process of his composition, and especially his implicit resistance to 'verse' with the phrase 'I sang / Aloud'. Bushell says that 'Wordsworth's very anxiety' with 'an assertion of mental and oral *over* written creativity suggests that he recognizes the "awful" power of words, holding "above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts".⁵⁰ We can also see Wordsworth's anxiety with 'the "awful" power' of 'verse' in another compositional process. In the 1805 text, Wordsworth states that he is 'being vers'd / In living Nature' (VI. 118-19). In MS. A, the text is revised as follows:

being versed
 possessed
 In living Nature, I had there a guide
~~Which open'd frequently my eyes, else shut.~~ [MS. A 119^f]

It is uncertain whether the poet deletes the last two lines first or inserts the word 'possessed' first. But the erasure suggests doubt about the ability of his 'verse' to hold communion with 'living Nature' and even to follow the 'guid[ance]' of Nature, while this doubt is only further enforced by Wordsworth's intention to replace 'versed' with 'possessed'. The word 'versed' is even removed in the 1850 text, where he states that he has '*scanned*, / Not heedlessly, the laws, and *watched* the forms / Of nature' (1850, VI. 100-101, my italics). The reading of Wordsworth's 'acts on the page and changes to the

⁴⁹ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, pp. 36, 270.

⁵⁰ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 101.

language' in these texts enables us to move beyond de Man's incomplete reading of Wordsworth. As Bennett puts it, 'poetry is a certain experience of the poet, a certain way, or certain effect, of "feeling"'.⁵¹ We can see the poet's struggle with the words ('versed', 'possessed', 'scanned', and 'watched') in presenting his 'own experience, sensations, sufferings, or consciousness'; his writing does not entirely succumb to 'the randomness of language' in the textual presentation of his interaction with nature.

It is worth exploring the moment of hanging more fully because it is symbolic of Wordsworth's autobiographical self hanging between speech and silence throughout *The Prelude*. Here I am indebted to de Man's famous analyses of the word 'hang'. He says that:

At the moment when the analogical correspondence with nature no longer asserts itself, we discover that the earth under our feet is not the stable base in which we can believe ourselves to be anchored. It is as if the solidity of earth were suddenly pulled away from under our feet and that we were left 'hanging' from the sky instead of standing on the ground.⁵²

'Hanging', the boy loses his 'correspondence with nature' while the 'concourse' of the owls falls into silence. He can find neither 'stable base' to set his feet on nor 'anchor' with which to secure himself. For de Man, this 'experience' 'hits as a sudden feeling of dizziness, a falling or a threat of falling, a *vertige* of which there are many examples in Wordsworth'.⁵³ But De Man's reading of this passage as a whole is partial. As Wordsworth makes clear in the Boy of Winander passage, the feeling of 'dizziness' and even of 'falling' is further strengthened by the intrusion of powers external to his mind. The boy nearly loses his sense of identity when 'the voice / Of mountain torrents' is 'carried *far into* his heart' and 'the visible scene' 'enter[s] unawares *into* his mind' (my

⁵¹ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 108.

⁵² De Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', 7.

⁵³ Ibid. De Man remarks that 'A full-fledged theory of metaphor as suspended meaning, as loss and restoration of the principle of analogy beyond sensory experience, can be elaborated on the basis of Wordsworth's use of "hangs"' (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 89).

italics). De Man is only partly right in saying that, at this moment of hanging, there is ‘a movement of [the boy’s] consciousness ... into a world in which our mind knows itself to be in an endlessly precarious state of suspension: above an earth, the stability of which it cannot participate it, and beneath a heaven that has rejected it’.⁵⁴ There is, of course, an outward movement of the boy’s consciousness, as he attends to the sounds around him. But the boy’s consciousness is then overwhelmed by the nightmarish intrusion of the external world that ‘enter[s]’ him.

Thus it is not enough to say with Fry that ‘The silence, characteristic of Wordsworth, is the ontological equivalent of death, of being dead’.⁵⁵ The moment of silence certainly haunts Wordsworth with an anxiety about the preservation of his represented self. Between voice and silence, there is a clear anticipation of coming death. The echo from the past self keeps disturbing Wordsworth’s writing like a phantom, predicting the forthcoming vanishing of self into language. As David P. Haney remarks, writing is involved in ‘the temporality of a very human language whose meaning is in turn grounded in ... death’, and Wordsworth is very conscious of this as he writes:⁵⁶ the boy ‘h[a]ng[s] / Listening’ and loses the correspondent bond with nature and with his own identity, which is ‘a prefiguration of his death’⁵⁷, and, ultimately, he is ‘taken from his Mates, and die[s]’ (414). This death of Wordsworth’s self-representation, again, testifies to his failed quest for the salvation of his own self in autobiographical writing. And Wordsworth says that he ‘oftentimes / A full half-hour together’ stands ‘mute – looking at the Grave in which he lies’ (420-21, 422). In de Man’s view, Wordsworth is ‘reflecting on his own death which lies, of course, in the future and can only be anticipated’.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is not

⁵⁴ De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 54.

⁵⁵ Fry, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are*, p. 129.

⁵⁶ David P. Haney, ‘Incarnation and the Autobiographical Exit: Wordsworth’s “The Prelude”, Books IX-XIII (1805)’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 29:4 (Winter, 1990), 523-54, 540.

⁵⁷ De Man, ‘Time and History in Wordsworth’, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9. On discussions about the symbolic death of the boy, see Galperin’s ‘Authority and Deconstruction’, 625; Andrzej Warminski, ‘Missed Crossing’, 993; Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-spirit*, p. 249.

Wordsworth's own death but the death of his childhood that he is meditating on. Some examples from the text show Wordsworth's implicit identification of the boy with his own self in childhood. He says that the mates of the boy are 'a race of young Ones like to those / With whom [he] herded!' (432-33). In addition, the boy of Winander, who died 'ere he was full ten years old', is at a similar age to the boy Wordsworth himself is recalling, 'a Child not nine years old' (415, 474). The poet, 'looking at' the boy's 'grave', is actually reading the epitaph of a self that is already dead in the far past. To simply equate silence and death in Wordsworth, as many critics have done, is a simplification.

Hartman's discussion of the Boy of Winander episode gets us closer to its complexity than de Man's:

There is a medium ... the mature poet, certainly, cannot look in an unmediated, unshadowed way at childhood experience. The medium is *human time*, at once mortifying and bonding, in short, traumatic; but it might also be identified with *nature, history, or language*. ... He sees through a glass darkly; the medium enables knowledge while deflecting a more direct – traumatic or apocalyptic – vision that is always incipient.⁵⁹

My own discussion of this episode focuses on 'language' as the 'medium' through which Wordsworth attempts to reach a direct communion with his earlier self. Ambiguously, this 'medium' 'enables knowledge', while the 'knowledge' thus gained changes and 'deflect[s]' its object. As Wordsworth says, the boy's loss of his previous bond with nature is a kind of 'knowledge' that is 'purchas'd with the loss of power!' (449). The key point is that Wordsworth 'sees' his self 'through a glass darkly'. In other words, he looks at his self through the 'transparent veil' of words (626). By autobiographically writing a self that views his past self from a distance, Wordsworth comes to a confrontation with a sense of self, a voiceless self. The textual 'I' produced to represent this voiceless self is 'reborn out

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Hartman, 'Reading: *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment*', in Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson (eds.), *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), pp. 29-44, p. 37.

of the grave of childhood identity' but turns 'past experiences into a text'⁶⁰ – a text which at once 'veil[s]' and dims any 'incipient' 'vision' of the self. As Ashton Nichols puts it, 'The epitaphic self is now entombed in words on a page'.⁶¹ But Hartman's use of the word 'deflect' better describes the poet's retrospective vision of his past than Nichols' word 'reflect'. For Nichols, 'This new grave' – 'words on a page' – 'is still able to reflect the past, just like the mirroring waters of a still silent lake',⁶² but, as the Boy of Winander episode shows, 'that uncertain Heaven' that is received into 'the steady Lake' also disfigures it. In Fry's words, between silence and voice Wordsworth realises that 'a relationship of mutuality – the responsiveness of the owls, the reflection of a living face in the water – has been severed'⁶³ by the 'deflecting' power of language.

De Man is helpful on the word 'deflection', defining it as 'any slight bias of even unintended error', and describes this as 'the rhetorical basis of language'; 'deflection is then conceived as a dialectical subversion of the consistent link between sign and meaning that operates within grammatical patterns'.⁶⁴ The working of 'deflection' destabilizes the steady relationship between 'sign and meaning' as a result of 'the randomness of language', and this leads to Wordsworth's conflicting consciousness of his doubled selves split between speech and silence. 'The meaning-content of language remains part of an open directedness'.⁶⁵ The 'link' between 'sign and meaning' becomes undecidable, thus no fixed correspondence can be made between the self-representation in writing and Wordsworth's own self. His textual representation of self is situated in a complex link of figurative substitutions, between literalness and metaphor. It is the ambiguousness of representation that is most strongly manifested in 'the drowned Man' passage.

⁶⁰ Ashton Nichols, 'The Revolutionary "I": Wordsworth and the Politics of Self-Presentation', in Pauline Fletcher and John Murphy (eds.), *Wordsworth in Context* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1992), pp. 75-76.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁶³ Fry, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are*, p. 131.

⁶⁴ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 8. 'Language is itself the result of purely rhetorical tricks and devices. ... "Language is rhetoric, for it only intends to convey a doxa (opinion), not an episteme (truth)"' (p. 105, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich: Musarion Verlage, 1922), 5:300).

⁶⁵ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 55.

At the beginning of this episode, Wordsworth says that

Twilight was coming on; yet through the gloom,
I saw distinctly on the opposite Shore
A heap of garments; left, as I suppos'd,
By one who there was bathing: long I watch'd,
But no one own'd them: meanwhile the calm Lake
Grew dark, with all the shadows on its breast. (459-64)

The boy Wordsworth sees ‘a heap of garments’ on the shore. Amid ‘the breathless stillness’ (466), the only change that takes place comes from ‘the calm Lake’, which ‘gr[ows] dark, with all the shadows in its breast’. Something mysterious and shadowy is seemingly at work beneath the lake. Then later the boy realizes that these ‘garments’ are ‘left’ by the dead man. The boy Wordsworth witnesses a figure of death, a deadly corpse: ‘the dead Man, ’mid that beauteous scene ... bolt upright / Rose with his ghastly face; a spectre shape / Of terror even!’ (470-73).⁶⁶ These ‘unclaimed garments’, then, are ‘telling a plain Tale’ (467) – the ‘Tale’ saying that this man is already drowned. These clothes, like words, do convey meaning. In this light, the ‘garments’ are compared to words, and the drowned man himself is linked to textual representation. In addition, when Wordsworth points out that ‘no one own[s] [the garments]’, he implicitly refers to the ‘undecidable’ nature of the referential function of language.⁶⁷ It also becomes clear that what was immanently at work in ‘the calm Lake’ might be the same ‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ that are at play in ‘the mystery of words’ (622, 623, 621). Words of books, ‘garments’ of language, tell ‘a plain Tale’ – and, ultimately, it is the tale of death.

⁶⁶ For a critical debate about the 1805 and 1850 versions of the drowned man’s ‘ghastly face’, see Ashton Nichols and Susan J. Wolfson, ‘The Drowned Man of Esthwaite’, *PMLA*, 100:2 (Mar., 1985), 234-236.

⁶⁷ On the referential function of language, Derrida points out that ‘There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language’ (*Of Grammatology*, p. 7). In this respect, Niall Lucy states that ‘The claim that there is nothing outside of the text is an acknowledgement simply that you could never get to a point where something no longer referred to something else; there is nothing outside of context’ (*A Derrida Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 143). Andrzej Warminski also says that ‘De Man is quite ready to acknowledge language’s ability to create meaning, contingent meaning, in context, in use’, see ‘Response’, *Diacritics*, 17:4 (Winter, 1987), 46-48.

The comparison of ‘garments’ to words and the link between the drowned man and a figure of textual representation are more fully established when it comes to Wordsworth’s statement that:

yet no vulgar fear,
 Young as I was, a Child not nine years old,
 Possess’d me; for my inner eye had seen
 Such sights before, among the shining streams
 Of Fairy Land, the Forests of Romance:
 Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
 With decoration and ideal grace;
 A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
 Of Grecian Arts, and purest Poesy. (473-81)

Seeing a literal corpse does not give him a sense of ‘vulgar fear’ because his ‘inner eye’ has beheld ‘such sights’ of death ‘before’ when reading fairy tales. ‘The dead Man’ is at once a figure written in books and the literal corpse in front of him. The sight of one real man who is literally drowned and the reading of ‘such sights’ in tales of ‘Romance’ overlap with each other while making indistinct the line between reality and fiction, ‘betwixt life and books’. The undecidability and ‘deflection’ of language lodges the self ‘in what [the man] is not’ (296).

Cynthia Chase gives a detailed analysis of this figurative substitution of a literal appearance with a poetic figure. She remarks that the episode of the drowned man can be interpreted as

a disruption of the specular structure of figuration: the effaced figure, or the dead letter, fractures the surface of the space that places sign and meaning. What emerges and breaks the liquid mirror of mimetic or metaphoric reflection is a disfigured face – itself a broken surface. ... Language ordinarily covers up the effects of effaced figuration; it erases the effacement of figure. In this text, the cover is cancelled and the erased effacement reinscribed, in an act of disfiguration.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Cynthia Chase, ‘The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Rhetorical Reading in Book V of *The Prelude*’, *SIR* 18 (1979), 547-65, 556. On ‘the effaced figure’ in writing, de Man notes that ‘Death is a

The drowned Man's 'ghastly face', assimilated into the tales the boy Wordsworth has read, is the 'effaced figure' 'reinscribed' in 'the dead letter'. The 'ghastly face' of the man turns out to be a 'disfigured face' – a 'face' erased and re-produced by language. Yet that language remains haunted by an echo of the 'effaced figure'. While books of language may well, to use Chase's words, 'ordinarily cover up the effects of effaced figuration', Wordsworth's text does nothing to deny the fact that it has inscribed 'effaced figuration' through its act of representation. Rather, Wordsworth acknowledges the fact that the 'specular structure of figuration' is always disrupted, 'the cover' always 'cancelled', the link between 'sign and meaning', signifier and signified, reality and metaphor, always highly unstable.

Wordsworth seeks to negotiate his way out of the undecidability of language by saying that the dead man is 'hallow[ed]' by the 'spirit' coming from 'the Forests of Romance'. By explicitly evoking 'a spirit' from books, Wordsworth welcomes the transformation of 'vulgar fear' into 'decoration and ideal grace'. Wordsworth enlivens the images 'of terror' inscribed by 'dead letters' (including his own self-representation) through seeing a corresponding sight of them in books, where they are consecrated by 'a spirit' from 'Grecian Arts and purest Poesy'. He suggests that the very act of representation through writing might itself be 'hallow[ed]' by a transcendental spirit coming from books. That is, he wishes that 'images, and sentiments, and words, / And everything with which we had to do / In that delicious world of poesy, / Kept holiday; a never-ending show, / With music, incense, festival and flowers!' (603-07). This is a wish 'for something loftier, more adorn'd, / Than is the common aspect, daily garb / Of human life' (599-601) – and it is exactly language that supplies and creates the 'something loftier'.

Concerning the drowned man episode, Susan Wolfson points out that 'The interesting

displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores' ('Autobiography as De-facement', 930).

question ... is why [Wordsworth] feels compelled to make such a claim [of consecrated self-representation in books] and what sort of effect this claim has in the context of its surrounding verse'.⁶⁹ This is indeed an intriguing question, and I want to go further to examine how the claim Wordsworth makes in this episode relates not only to 'the context of its surrounding verse' but also to the drafts of different versions of *The Prelude* and the ongoing evolution of the poem. It is important to note that, as many critics have noticed,⁷⁰ the drowned man episode is included in the two-part *Prelude* with a succeeding passage not included in the other versions:

I might advert
 To numerous accidents in flood or field,
 Quarry or moor, or 'mid the winter snows,
 Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
 Of rural history that impressed my mind
 With images to which in following years
 Far other feelings were attached – with forms
 That yet exist with independent life
 And, like their archetypes, know no decay. (1799, I. 279-87)

The encounter with the dead man, one of 'numerous accidents' and 'tragic facts', will be mediated by and integrated with 'far other feelings' in the passage of time. The original scenes ('archetypes') become 'images' left in the poet's memory. These 'images', removed from their 'archetypes' through temporal distance, 'yet exist with independent life' and 'know no decay' (my italics). The drowned man episode in the 1799 version of the poem precedes 'the spots of time' passage, expressing not the literal sight of 'his ghastly face' but the lasting impression of this sight in the poet's mind through different stages of his life. The terror of the sight exists within 'a chain' of 'feelings' through time, possessing the 'independent life' of the imaginative world where there is 'no decay'. The passage quoted

⁶⁹ Nichols and Wolfson, 'The Drowned Man of Esthwaite', 236.

⁷⁰ For example, see Jonathan Wordsworth's *The Borders of Vision*, p. 53; Bennett's *Wordsworth Writing*, pp. 157-58.

such beneficent influence /
~~This fructifying ^ influence — At a time~~ [MS. Z, 12^r]

Again, if we look at this manuscript we can see that de Man's reading is incomplete when he states that 'literature [cannot be] a reliable source of information about anything but its own language'.⁷² De Man's exclusive focus on the working of language *per se* neglects the poem's ability to record Wordsworth's inner vexation and bafflement at language's power to usurp and replace 'moments worth of all gratitude' ('spots of time') with its own creations. As we can see, the erased lines show a (failed) attempt to preserve one specific moment of the past and make it 'present' for the reader. However, that 'one particular scene', as Wordsworth himself knows, is actually 'hidden from all search', lying silently in the past. It is no longer 'vivid' and 'present'. The inaccessibility of that particular moment haunts Wordsworth to such an extent that he oscillates back and forth between 'as far as memory can look back' and 'now present to my memory'. The former moments are fading away, exerting neither 'deep animation' nor 'fructifying influence' (which is creative rather than being merely 'beneficent'). At the end, all that is left in our reading of this passage appears to be Wordsworth's endlessly frustrated longing for the past: 'at a time', 'at a time',

This chapter has followed Wordsworth's unwinding of the relationship between speech, silence, and death in Book V of *The Prelude*. Through the figures of the Arab (who was doomed by the 'prophetic blast' from the Book of the Shell), the Boy of Winander (who fell into death after he lost his previous correspondence with the natural world), and the drowned Man (who rose up with his 'ghastly face'), Wordsworth explores the ways in which the self vanishes into any language used to represent it. As de Man claims, Wordsworth writes 'a tombstone large enough to hold the entire *Prelude*'. However, where de Man says 'death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament',⁷³ in fact

⁷² De Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), p. 11.

⁷³ De Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', 930.

Wordsworth, out of his very consciousness of such ‘linguistic predicament’, develops a productive sense of self oscillating between past and present, speech and silence, at ‘the very limit of comprehensible language’. Wordsworth remarks that he ‘ha[s] felt / A reverence for a Being thus employ’d’ and thinks that in the deed of the Arab ‘reason did lie couch’d’ (149-50, 152). He is empathetic with the Arab who strives to save the things his ‘heart holds dear’ (155). Additionally, the appearance of the Arab is described as ‘an uncouth Shape’ (1850, V. 75), like the ‘uncouth shape’ of the soldier in Book IV (403). In Book IV, Wordsworth implicitly identifies with the soldier, who ‘remember[s] the importance of his theme / But feeling it no longer’ (IV. 477-78). Wordsworth problematizes his relationship to the dreamer in the Arab dream as well. In the 1805 version, the dreamer is said to be his friend,⁷⁴ but in the 1850 manuscript the dream is written in the first person, as if spoken by the poet himself. Moreover, ‘in an early manuscript version of [the boy of Winander passage] Wordsworth uses the first-person pronoun. The experience he describes [is] thus apparently his own’.⁷⁵ This manuscript is MS. JJ, in which Wordsworth is the Boy who hangs midway between speech and silence.

Bennett remarks that ‘Such memorialisation [of the self by inscribing one’s identity into the memory of others] may threaten that identity since it risks dissolving the ineradicable difference of self and other’.⁷⁶ But Wordsworth’s writing suggests that a rich and productive sense of ambiguity is created by an identification with, but intentional distinction from, these fictional others. For example, Wordsworth projects his self upon the Arab, saying that ‘I, methinks, / *Could share* that Maniac’s anxiousness, could go / Upon *like* errand’ (159-61, my italics). In the act of self-representation, Wordsworth skilfully locates his real self at a distance from his fictions – indeed from his own words –

⁷⁴ It is suggested that Wordsworth did have a friend who may have told him of such a dream. This idea comes from David Chandler’s ‘Robert Southey and *The Prelude*’s Arab Dream’, *The Review of English Studies* (May, 2003), 203-219. But some critics also interpret the dream as that of Wordsworth’s. For instance, J. Robert Barth points out that ‘... the Dream of the Arab ... is here presented as the *poet’s* dream’ (*Romanticism and Transcendence*, p. 31).

⁷⁵ *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, note 5, p. 343

⁷⁶ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 101.

thereby attempting to save at least something of himself from the mortality brought by language: he is not the Arab, even if he cannot say what he is. He is the one who stands 'mute', looking at the Boy's grave 'a full half-hour together'; he is also the spectator who 'half an hour ... watch[es]' (1799, I. 270) the drowned Man. In this sense, an identification with his 'unrepresentable' past self is still possible because the writing poet withdraws that self from the overwhelming power of language by locating it instead in the silence left by 'life'. This seeming impossibility is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Six

This chapter will show how, in Wordsworth's autobiographical writing, 'darkness' and 'shadowy things' in 'the mystery of words' facilitate rather than hinder the construction of a poetic identity. Haunted by the idea of 'weak words', Wordsworth's language is inevitably metaphorical, and his autobiographical writing can only create a 'face' for a representation of his life. But, in response to this failure of self-representation in writing, he also claims that he somehow can retain, in the act of writing, something of the 'texture' of at least a sense of self that exists 'midway betwixt life and books' (III. 614) even as his past passes 'into Phantoms' as he writes. I argue that Wordsworth locates his self in the silence left by 'life' in order to protect it from being 'defaced' by language. The self, represented through Wordsworth's writing, is a voiceless self, a 'sense' of self. Its local habitation is 'midway betwixt' speech and silence – drawn forth by the act of writing about it, but never caught by or in that writing. As such, its existence can be inferred from speech, but never articulated by speech – nor shared through poetry.

I am indebted to Jacobus' idea that 'the self is not to be written out so easily, remaining obstinately lodged in the inter-text, midway between life and books. What results is less a web of meaning than an enmeshing of absences'.¹ However, my discussion focuses on the positive aspect of this 'texture' midway between 'life and books'. In other words, I will explore how Wordsworth attempts to accommodate a sense of his self in the act of self-representation. On the notion of 'an enmeshing of absence', de Man famously claims that 'Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause'.² He thinks that autobiographical writing 'deface[s]' the self it attempts to represent with the 'deflection' of language. However, while de Man is concerned about the damage and

¹ Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 621.

² De Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', 930. He says that, in Wordsworth's autobiographical writing, 'the signature of a single subject [is] no longer folded back upon itself in mirror-like self-understanding. ... The study of autobiography is caught in this double motion, the necessity to escape from the tropology of the subject and the equally inevitable reinscription of this necessity within a specular mode of cognition' (923).

‘defacement’ of ‘the mind’ that is caused by the working of language, I want to say that Wordsworth transforms the failure of representation in his writing into an opportunity for the working of language itself. By intricately situating his self midway between speech and silence, Wordsworth is able to get a sense of self into language. I will show that this claim rests on Wordsworth’s obscuration of the extent of metaphorical representation involved in his inconsistent, contradictory, and opaque assertions about language. In doing this, I will also be looking at the material drafts of *The Prelude* in order to explore, to use Bushell’s words, ‘whether such knowledge of the poem’s compositional history undermines the *critical* reading of the published text’.³ I want to suggest that such knowledge certainly challenges, without entirely undermining, de Man’s particular ‘reading of the published text’.

Wordsworth talks about ‘the mystery of words’ in the tracing of memory. He says that he

in measure only dealt out to himself,
 Receive[s] enduring touches of deep joy
 From the great Nature that exists in works
 Of mighty Poets. Visionary Power
 Attends upon the motions of the winds
 Embodied in the mystery of words.
 There darkness makes abode, and all the host
 Of shadowy things do work their changes there,
 As in a mansion like their proper home: -
 Even forms and substances are circumfus’d
 By that transparent veil with light divine;
 And through the turnings intricate of Verse,
 Present themselves as objects recognis’d,
 In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own. (616-29)

Wordsworth receives ‘enduring touches of deep joy’ from a ‘great Nature’ that has its ‘exist[ence]’ in the works of ‘mighty Poets’. That is, he comes into contact with a ‘great

³ Bushell, ‘Reading below the Surface’, 10.

Nature' through the poetic verse, which gives 'enduring touches of deep joy'. Wordsworth goes on to say: 'Visionary Power / Attends upon the motions of the winds / Embodied in the mystery of words'. First, with an inner 'corresponding mild creative breeze' (I. 43), 'an auxiliary light' in his mind, Wordsworth envisages 'visionary Power'. The 'Power' seemingly corresponds to the 'imagination' in Book VI, 'which Wordsworth calls a "Power" (VI. 527), the means of apprehending the Presences in nature, of holding such intercourse'.⁴ The imaginative 'workmanship' has a 'Power' that interfuses everything and brings the mind and nature into 'one society'. Then, as Wordsworth puts it, this 'Power' 'attends upon the motions of the winds / Embodied in the mystery of words'. In this reciprocal communion between inside and outside, a sense of ambiguity emerges in Wordsworth's writing. With the phrase, 'embodied in the mystery of words', it is unclear whether the thing getting embodied is 'visionary Power', 'the motions of the winds', or both. I want to suggest that it is both, because the 'visionary Power / *Attends upon* the motions of the winds' (my italics), imaginatively cooperating and interacting with 'the motions of the winds'. They are both '*embodied*' in words and '*exist[ing]*' in poetic works (my italics). However, being linked to and 'embodied' in 'words', 'visionary Power' becomes different from the 'Power' of the imagination that Wordsworth thinks he senses in nature.

In MS. A (113^f), 'visionary Power'

[?mighty]

Attends ~~upon~~ the motions of the winds.

In the 1850 text, 'Visionary Power / Attends the motions of the viewless winds' (V. 597-98). The status of 'the winds' is clearly in doubt for Wordsworth. The 'winds' may be 'mighty', but they are also 'viewless'. It complicates matters more if we read these sentences with Wordsworth's idea that the sounds from the Book of the Shell are 'voices

⁴ Ellen Douglass Leyburn, 'Recurrent Words in *The Prelude*', in W. J. Harvey and Richard Gravil (eds.), *Wordsworth: The Prelude* (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 116-32, p. 129.

more than all the winds'. The poet attempts to encompass 'the motions of the winds' in the 'voices' of language, but the inherent difference between the external 'winds' and words makes his writing inconsistent. In the 1850 version, the 'winds' are described as 'viewless' so that Wordsworth's writing can make them 'embodied' in its 'mystery'. Wordsworth's act of revision moves beyond de Man's single concern with language. I agree with Bushell's suggestion that we, as readers, should examine 'an interplay of intended (planned) and unintended (spontaneous / unwilled) meaning'.⁵ My discussion will particularly focus on the 'interplay' within 'the mystery of words' itself. With the word 'viewless', Wordsworth appears to attempt an embodiment of the 'winds' (which are no longer 'mighty' 'winds') in his writing while implicitly acknowledging the 'viewless[ness]' of language in its act of representation. In Wordsworth, we can see 'the complex, imbricated and conflicted relationship between invention and inscription'.⁶ My discussion will add to this idea by investigating how Wordsworth's self-formation is developed as 'a representation of [his] mind in the act of creation',⁷ resisting but also acknowledging the 'counter-spirit' of language.

In the act of writing, Wordsworth attempts to catch the 'presence' of 'visionary Power' and 'the motions of the winds', but 'the mystery of words' starts to exert its power precisely at the moment of 'embodi[ment]' (representation). It is surprising to note that Wordsworth uses two seemingly contradictory words ('embodied' and 'mystery') at the same time. What is 'embodied' in language is immediately obscured by its mysterious working, becoming 'deface[d]', vague and nearly incomprehensible. In 'the mystery of words', 'there darkness makes abode, and all the host / Of shadowy things do work their changes there, / As in a mansion like their proper home'.⁸ 'Darkness' and 'shadowy

⁵ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 55.

⁶ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.148.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.108.

⁸ 'The gap between word and thing, once opened, proved Wordsworth's richest source of meaning – "all the host/ Of shadowy things do work their changes there"' (Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 619).

things' take up their residence in 'words': language is the dwelling-place of 'darkness' and 'shadowy things'. Equally, books of language, though 'frail' 'shrines', are where the mind of the poet '*lodge[s]*' (48, my italics). This contrast between 'proper home' and 'frail' 'lodge' shows the unstable status of the mind when it is represented in words, which are the 'proper home' of 'darkness' and 'shadowy things'. In 'the mystery of words' 'all the host / Of shadowy things *do work* their *changes* there' (my italics). These 'changes' work on and obscure everything that is 'embodied' in 'words'. Yet, as Wordsworth claims, the 'works / Of mighty Poets' still give 'enduring touches of deep joy'.

Wordsworth thinks that a 'visionary Power' – a power capable of visioning – is to be found '*in the mystery of words*' (my italics). It is this 'mystery', a 'mystery' created by the text, that endows words themselves with 'a living spirit'.⁹ In addition, at the moment of 'embodi[ment]', 'forms and substances are also circumfus'd / By that 'transparent veil [of words] with light divine'. Barth thinks that this 'light comes only out of darkness. ... There is a "wiser Spirit", a "living Presence", that stands above nature and art and reveals itself to mankind through them. This spirit ... is the source of human hope'.¹⁰ The supreme being 'reveals itself to mankind' through the 'nature and art' that '[exist] in works / Of mighty Poets', in which 'darkness' and 'shadowing things' are at work. While Barth devotes his discussion to the 'hope' that 'light' brings, my focus is mainly on the way 'darkness' affects the representation of this divine spirit in Wordsworth's writing. Jacobus refers to this interaction between 'darkness' and 'visionary Power' as an 'anxious relation between presentation and vision'.¹¹ She points out that 'The deadening of a text already slowed by its solemn rhythms allows us, paradoxically, to endow it with a living spirit – lodged in the interstices of the web, behind the veil, as a ghostly and unrepresentable presence'.¹² With 'the deadening of a text' (in its failure of representation), the text can be

⁹ Ibid., 620.

¹⁰ Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence*, pp. 39-40.

¹¹ Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 620.

¹² Ibid. Jacobus analyses 'the veil of poetry', saying that 'As always, Wordsworth's straining of language to

endowed with ‘a living spirit’ and a ‘mystery’ is created by words. This ‘spirit’, according to Jacobus, is ‘lodged in the interstices of the web’ woven by ‘the turnings intricate of Verse’. Its ‘Power’ can be felt and perceived by the imagination. However, I want to say that there is also a ‘living spirit’, a ‘visionary Power’, ‘endowed’ *in* ‘the veil’ (‘embodied in the mystery of words’) rather than working as the ‘unrepresentable’ ‘spirit’ ‘behind the veil’. Moreover, it is through the ‘transparent veil’ of words ‘with light divine’ that the ‘objects’ to be represented become a ‘presence’ that can be felt in the working of language. In other words, the imaginative ‘Power’ of cosmic ‘workmanship’ Wordsworth senses in nature, when ‘embodied’ in words, becomes ‘unrepresentable’ because of its existence outside language. However, a sense of this ‘Power’ can still be felt through the action of ‘shadowy things’ and a ‘power’ capable of visioning in ‘the mystery of words’.

Language has a ‘divine’ power, its own ‘great Nature’, that is like the power of the imagination, like the ‘something more deeply interfused’ that runs through everything in ‘Tintern Abbey’. But by describing language’s ‘Power’ as ‘visionary’, as a ‘Power’, as ‘the great Nature’ of ‘the works / Of mighty Poets’, Wordsworth implicitly suggests that the power to be perceived in ‘the motions of the winds’, the power to be perceived in the imagination, and the power to be seen in language might all be, in fact, the same ‘visionary Power’ and ‘light divine’. Bushell states it can often ‘feel as though’ Wordsworth’s creative process ‘depends on an internal rather than an external (textual) stimulus’, but also ‘as though creativity is somehow occurring outside the words in which it is uttered’.¹³ We might go further and suggest, in Bushell’s terms, that in Wordsworth’s engagement with ‘the mystery of words’, the ‘internal’ is brought to operate *in relation to* ‘an external (textual) stimulus’, and that ‘creativity’ occurs both *inside* and *outside* ‘the words in which it is uttered’. ‘Visionary Power’ is to be found in experiences beyond

its limits has its own fullness; if the motions of winds can never be embodied, if the mystery of words must remain ineffable, still, the veil of poetry irradiates and makes strange the objects it obscures’ (620).

¹³ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 101.

words *and* in the working of ‘a light divine’ in language itself. Bennett points out that ‘it is in writing, only in writing, that this loss [constituted by writing] can be experienced. ... Writing, the act of writing, is precisely the loss that it – that writing – articulates, confronts and laments’.¹⁴ But I think Wordsworth’s writing does more than this; it allows the working of words to transform and incorporate this ‘loss’ into something more than loss. That is, Wordsworth sees in the ‘loss’ experienced in writing a compensatory opportunity for the working of the creative visioning power of language itself.

Wordsworth states that:

I would stand
 Beneath some rock listening to sounds that are
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
 Thence did I drink the visionary power.
 I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
 Of shadowy exultation. (1799, II. 356-62)

This passage, though appearing like the poet’s ‘lament’ for a lost past, makes a subtle interconnection between ‘the ghostly language of the ancient earth’ and Wordsworth’s writing now. First, ‘the ghostly language of the ancient of earth’ is said to be made up of ‘sounds’ that he ‘listen[s] to’. The ‘sounds’ here are defined as ‘spoken’ speech rather than as written words. Bennett remarks that Wordsworth’s poetry ‘seems often to work against’ ‘the question of poetry as writing, as written (not spoken)...’.¹⁵ Bushell argues that Wordsworth’s poetry ‘either suggest[s] orality or avoid[s] representation of the written’.¹⁶ However, my reading argues that there is essentially no resistance to writing in the passage quoted here; rather, the poet attempts to make a connection between the ‘sounds’ of ‘the ghostly language’ and ‘the mystery of words’ in his writing. The working of ‘shadowy

¹⁴ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 174.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁶ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p.102.

things', as in words, moves through the 'dim abode' of past 'sounds' heard in 'distant winds' and also through the 'shadowy exultation' brought by Wordsworth's consciousness of 'fleeting' time. In this sense, the 'distant winds' and 'the visionary power' still retain a link with the same 'motions of the winds' and 'visionary Power' 'embodied in the mystery of words' because of the agency of shadowiness that moves through them. A distinction still exists between the poet's present writing and the 'ghostly' (disembodied) language of the distant past. This 'ghostly language' remains in silence because 'Wordsworth is writing a poetry of deliberate imprecision'; 'his concern is with imminence, with the possible sublimity that will always lead on, because it will never be realized.'¹⁷ We might build on this insight by suggesting that Wordsworth communicates a sense of the sublimity of the ineffable. For example, the source and 'abode' of 'exultation' cannot be specifically named by words because they are 'dim' and 'shadowy'. They can never be caught by writing, but the fact that their power has been felt can be recorded in writing; it is the sense and feeling of that power that Wordsworth wishes to evoke.

Opening itself up to the 'mystery' in 'words', Wordsworth's writing represents that 'mystery', created by 'all the host of shadowy things' to be found in language. Imaginatively representing the 'presence' of things as this is *felt*, and doing this through the 'visionary Power' of words, Wordsworth works with the inherent relationship between writing and the things he intends to write in his poem. 'The mystery of words' can be used to keep things 'midway betwixt life and books' – between their own 'unrepresentable' essence and the representation of them in writing. In Bennett's view, 'poetry, writing, often appears to involve a resistance to thinking'; he thinks of 'writing as *against* philosophy, against thinking'.¹⁸ But my discussion suggests that Wordsworth's writing is not resistant to thought so much as to language's power to detach itself from thought. 'Through the turnings intricate of Verse', the things in Wordsworth's thought are folded

¹⁷ Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision*, p. 17.

¹⁸ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, pp. 137,139.

back into ‘the mystery of words’ – in ways that allow thoughts to be recognized ‘in *flashes*’ even if their ‘glory’ is ‘*scarce* their own’ (my italics). The objects, seen through ‘the mystery of words’, lose their identity. This sense of loss is further intensified in the 1850 version, which changes the phrase to ‘with glory *not* their own’ (V. 607, my italics). However, these objects are still ‘recognis’d’ rather than being totally ‘defaced’. With the words, ‘transparent’, ‘flashes’, and ‘scarce’, Wordsworth holds the things he tries to present back from completely vanishing into language, signalling their ‘presence’ beyond the representation of them, gesturing from within writing to their ‘unrepresentable’ and ‘ineffable’ (II. 419) essence outside writing. To keep ‘objects’ between speech and silence, his writing obscures the representation of them in order to create a feeling that they are evoked but never caught by writing (as ‘recognis’d / In flashes’). For example, Wordsworth is intentionally vague about the things represented with such words as ‘forms and substances’ and ‘objects’. In this way, he protects the ‘unrepresentable’ things from being named and ‘defaced’ by words, while creating a sense of their presence behind his writing. There appears an implicit link between the ‘Power’ of the imagination and the ‘Power’ of language, though the latter can never represent the former. Wordsworth’s words are metaphorical, giving ‘objects’ ‘a glory scarce their own’. The sense of vagueness he creates in the representation of things is Wordsworth’s response to his previous idea of ‘weak words’ (which make things inexpressible and unutterable). Now the ‘weakness’ of words is transformed into the ‘mystery’ of words, as Wordsworth finds ways of both strategically protecting things from being ‘defaced’ in language (as de Man claims) and, at the same time, getting at least the fact of their presence into language through inference.

Bradford K. Mudge thinks that

In the process of relating the original event, ... Wordsworth gives an ineffable amorphous experience a formal shape, a verbal structure. He selects the event, shapes it, but withholds its precise significance: he recreates the *mystery*, perplexing his reader with his own “strange utterance”, while he himself assumes the role of *mysterious*

creator.¹⁹

We do not need to endorse Mudge's implicit claims about the extent of Wordsworth's control over his language to see that Mudge usefully highlights features of Wordsworth's technique here. Wordsworth depicts his life experiences with words but he also at once empties these descriptions of meaning because of, and in order to preserve something of, the 'ineffable' nature of these experiences. He does so, as Mudge says, by 'withhold[ing]' the 'precise significance' of experience within his own 'strange utterance' – by recreating, rather than representing, the 'mystery' that characterizes his early experience. In this way, Wordsworth simultaneously communicates experience through language and protects it from the destructive power of language.

Wordsworth's writing becomes, in de Man's view,

the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech. ... Prosopopeia is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name is made as intelligible and memorable as a face.²⁰

In this reading, autobiography imaginatively 'confers upon [the past self] the power of speech' – but only imaginatively. The 'Power' of words endows the 'voiceless' with 'the power of speech', so that autobiography manifests 'one's name' as 'intelligible and memorable as a face'. It is a 'face' that language itself puts in place and that thus, for de Man, 'defaces' the self Wordsworth seeks to inscribe in words. The 'face' of autobiographical writing leaves the self that the poem claims to represent 'nameless' (216), 'deface[d]', and even 'disfigur[ed]' (by 'the power of speech'). Words present the past not as it used to be (which is left in silence) but as 'recreate[d]' by the 'strange utterance' of language itself. However, we have already moved beyond de Man's account here, to

¹⁹ Mudge, 'Song of Himself', 6 (my italics).

²⁰ De Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', 926.

propose that Wordsworth regains his faith in language by claiming to uncover a ‘visionary Power’ in the mysterious working of words, through which the poet can make the things he desires to represent in writing *half-present* in the ‘texture midway betwixt life and books’. For example, Wordsworth talks about inexplicable, ‘unknown modes of being’ after the stolen boat episode. His ‘sense’ of ‘the unknown’ is ‘dim and undetermin’d’, and ‘there was a darkness’ (I. 422) in his thoughts. The word ‘darkness’ is especially noticeable here. By talking about ‘a darkness’ in his thought, Wordsworth suggests that this ‘darkness’ is like the ‘darkness’ at work in language. That is, he implies that the same kind of ‘darkness’ ‘mov[es] slowly *through*’ his ‘mind’ and through language (I. 427, my italics). In the action of ‘mov[ing]’, the same ‘darkness’ is passing through both language and the mind, which gives this ‘darkness’ agency to create a ‘presence’ of his ‘mind’ in his writing. Equally, the ‘*shadowy* things’ in ‘the mystery of words’ echoes the ‘*dim[ness]*’ of ‘unknown modes of being’ (my italics) ‘sense[d]’ by consciousness. ‘Mysterious’, ‘shadowy’ ‘darkness’ links Wordsworth’s writing and his sense of the being.

At the same time, the poet’s mind and the ‘unknown modes of being’ it ‘sense[s]’ remain outside the reach of words. Wordsworth’s vague phrases – ‘call it solitude, / Or blank desertion’, ‘no familiar shapes’, and ‘huge and mighty Forms’ (I. 421-26) – hint at the existence of ‘unknown modes of being’, and at the ‘mind’ sensing them, but also acknowledge the impossibility of catching their existence, which stays outside language. Yet Wordsworth’s vagueness is also a way of not putting things too precisely into language precisely in order to protect them from language’s overwhelming power. For Wordsworth, the ‘veil’ of words is ‘transparent’, but makes things recognizable only ‘in flashes’. Talking about the ‘build[ing] up’ of his ‘Soul’, for example, he admits that it is a ‘hard task to analyse a soul’ with ‘the words of reason deeply weigh’d’ (II. 232, 236). No words, even ‘the words of reason’, can achieve a thorough and clear ‘analys[is]’ of the ‘human Soul’. Furthermore, though he exclaims ‘O Heavens! how awful is the might of Souls /

And what they do within themselves’, he also says that ‘I wish’d to touch [this ‘heroic argument’] / With hand however weak; but in the main / It lies far hidden from the reach of words’ (III. 178-79, 183-85). Wordsworth hopes to ‘touch’ the ‘might’ and working of the soul with ‘words’; nevertheless, he also points out that ‘*in the main / It lies far hidden from the reach of words*’ (my italics). His use of words here shows the difficulty of ‘analy[zing] a soul’ with words but also indicates some possibility of ‘touch[ing]’ its existence because it is not entirely separated from ‘the reach of words’. The Soul can be glimpsed through the ‘transparent veil’ of words, but only as a glimmering, unsubstantial, indefinable ‘something’, hanging between speech and silence.

Working with rather than against ‘the mystery of words’, Wordsworth ‘communicates precisely by stressing the incommunicable nature of what he wishes to present’.²¹ On the issue of this ‘incommunicable nature’, Mary R. Wedd remarks that ‘There is no word for what he wants to say ... so he employs the rhetoric of the mystics to describe the monistic sense of oneness, contentment, and stillness that accompanies the collapse of the boundary between the terrestrial and the celestial, the two having become commingled in a [problematic] blended holiness’.²² It is exactly this ‘collapse of the boundary’ that baffles Wordsworth’s use of words and constitutes the language most worth exploring in his writing. In Wordsworth’s attempt to express ‘the incommunicable nature of what he wishes to present’, he states, for example:

unfold

Would I endeavour to ~~explain~~ the means ... [MS. Z, 9^r]

Alternatively, he tries:

All that I saw, or felt, or ~~communed with~~ / Was gentleness and peace. [MS. B. [p. 272]]

²¹ O’Neill. “‘The Words He Uttered...’”.

²² ‘Wordsworth’s “Spots of Time”’, in *Literature and Belief* 10 (1990), 55. Quoted from Moores, *Mystical Discourse in Wordsworth and Whitman*, p. 122.

Wordsworth's decision to replace the word 'explain' with the word 'unfold', and the removal of the phrase 'communed with', ostensibly reveal his anxiety about the communicability of the things he seeks to 'unfold', to make known to his readers. This point is also noticeable in the poet's use of the phrase 'speak out' in the 1805 version of the poem (V. 225) but 'pour out' in the 1850 draft (V. 225). The first formulation suggests an attempt to articulate something in words, the second a vaguer attempt to simply, and somehow, express that something in order to protect it from being consumed by his own 'speak[ing]' voice. One more example comes from Wordsworth's manuscripts:

[?maintained]

... the Druids covertly ~~express'd~~ preserved / Their knowledge of the heavens (MS. A,
321')

... the Druids ~~covertly express'd~~ so to represent ... (MW, D stage)

A series of substitutive words, 'express'd', 'maintained', 'preserved', and 'so to represent', reveal the poet's inner struggle when he looks for words to express inexpressible things. All of the key words quoted here, such as 'explain', 'unfold', 'communed with', 'speak out', and 'pour out', are 'similarly employed as verbs that are concerned with communication but place emphasis on the *purpose* of an action rather than on its means'.²³ As Bushell puts it, to explore the way Wordsworth engages with language for 'the *purpose*' of communication, it is useful to 'consider Wordsworth's "compositional contradictions" at both a represented level in the completed work as well as in the underlying drafts'.²⁴ This 'compositional contradiction' surfaces in Wordsworth's conflicting views of words as 'a passion and a power' in 'tuneful order' (1850, V. 558, 557) and as 'a counter-spirit' to, and 'a blast of, harmony'.

Writing his self into the poem, Wordsworth is 'shap[ing] out / Some Tale from [his] own heart' (I. 221-22). This is a 'Tale' 'shape[d]' by his language, which, he hopes,

²³ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 100.

represents his 'own heart'. But his writing posits the 'heart' midway between speech and silence by saying that this 'Tale' is described as 'more near akin' (rather than completely identical) to his 'own passions and habitual thoughts' (l. 222, 222, 223). Wordsworth's 'passions' and 'thoughts' turn out to be a 'half-absence' in the 'Tale' through this opaque representation of them. Wordsworth elaborates a subtle parallel between his verse and his own 'heart' by bringing them both 'more near' to each other but simultaneously keeping them remaining merely 'akin'. The 'heart' is therefore made 'half' present by Wordsworth's constant advertising of the fact that his language has not actually caught it.

The 'visionary Power' of language, as a result, is able to make 'the mystery of words' at least suggest the presence of the things Wordsworth seeks to represent, such as the unknown, the soul, and his own mind. Accordingly, Wordsworth thinks that this 'Power' is capable of 'vision[ing]' the 'deathless spirit' he has been aspiring to in his quest for an 'unconquerable life' for his self. He states that

Hitherto,
 In progress through this Verse, my mind hath look'd
 Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven
 As her prime Teacher, intercourse with man
 Establish'd by the sovereign Intellect,
 Who through that bodily Image hath diffus'd
 A soul divine which we participate,
 A deathless spirit. (10-17)

Seeking a 'life' that is 'unconquerable', Wordsworth turns to 'the speaking face of earth and heaven' and, through this, 'intercourse' between 'the sovereign Intellect' and 'man'. This 'intercourse', significantly, is 'establish'd' *through* that bodily Image' and 'in progress *through* this Verse' (my italics). The word 'face' is key here. The image of 'the speaking face' of nature is a product of Wordsworth's writing, and so is a 'man-made face'; going even further, the speech of the 'speaking face' is the speech of 'this Verse', that of

'*language's* book' rather than any external 'prime Teacher' of Wordsworth's mind.²⁵

If Wordsworth turns to nature as a way of countering the 'defacement' of self in language, his writing inflicts a similar act of violence on nature – by giving Nature a 'face', he obscures, hides, and disfigures nature – obscuring, even while trying to reveal, the 'unconquerable' 'life' he claims to have discovered there. Wordsworth talks about the 'face' of nature in Book I as well. He says that the 'common *face* of Nature spake to me/ Rememberable things' (I. 616-17, my italics). In addition, 'the changeful earth ... on my mind had stamp'd / The *faces* of the moving year' (I. 587-89, my italics). Again, Wordsworth 'defaces' nature in the act of writing and gives nature a 'face' that 'speak[s] to' him 'rememberable things' and 'stamp[s]' on his 'mind' 'the faces of the moving year'. 'Rememberable things' occur within the lapse of time, and in this sense, the 'face' of nature takes on a perishable 'face' like that of books – a 'poor earthly casket' for the 'deathless sprit' of which, according to Wordsworth, it speaks. Yet, as Jacobus suggests, 'if all language is dead metaphor, then a movement towards the literal ... may, in reminding us of that originating death, summon *ghostly presences*'.²⁶ In *The Prelude* a series of 'ghastly face[s]' and 'spectre-shape[s]' (472), 'presences', trouble Wordsworth's retrospective writing of his self precisely by baffling his attempts to revive them with metaphor. On the other hand, a 'ghostly language of the ancient earth' is at least intimated by Wordsworth's explicit acknowledgement of his failure to transcribe it in literal terms. While giving nature a metaphorical 'speaking face', Wordsworth is simultaneously perplexed by the 'ghostly [presence]' of the 'literal' nature he claims to represent in writing, which leads to a language that is intensely inconsistent, contradictory, and ambiguous. Nature, being given a 'face' in Wordsworth's writing, is 'deface[d]' and disfigured to such an extent that Wordsworth starts to doubt and question: 'Why hath not

²⁵ Warmninski points out: 'Nature is the product of the same book-making activity as man's books, it is subject to the same perishing, the Apocalypse of Books: it is also a ghastly face, an unclaimed garment, a soulless image ...' ('Missed Crossing', 1002).

²⁶ Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 628, my italics.

the mind / Some element to stamp her image on / In nature somewhat nearer to her own?' (44-46). However, while Wordsworth seeks to fix – ‘stamp’ – an ‘image’ of his ‘mind’ on ‘nature’, his use of the words ‘some element’ and ‘somewhat’ reveals his hesitancy and uncertainty. As Bennett puts it, ‘the troubling, conflicted nature of writing in Wordsworth’s work emerges ... through the poet’s conception of his compositional practice and in records of his emotional and even psychological response to the act of writing’.²⁷ Here Wordsworth is seeking an external ‘image’ of the mind, yet acknowledges and laments the lack of such an image. He cannot even give a clear idea of the ‘element’ he wishes existed, of which he can only say it would be ‘somewhat’ closer to the mind than anything already available. The aspects of Wordsworth’s poetic project then – the self, nature and their interaction – are only ever obscured, never revealed, by that very project.

However, Wordsworth’s project of a communion between the self and ‘a deathless spirit’ is, to some extent, still described as achievable in these lines. Although Warmninski suggests that, ‘rather than being the incarnation of a deathless spirit ... “the speaking face” is rather a man-made face, man’s book, man’s image – a figural substitution and transfer not between spirit and body but merely between one (physical) body and another’,²⁸ I will show that there is something more promising and vital going on in Wordsworth’s language here. It is ‘*through* that bodily Image’ (a ‘figural substitution’, but also a ‘transfer’) that an ‘intercourse with man’ is ‘establish’d *by* the sovereign Intellect’ (my italics). ‘[T]hrough that bodily Image’, Wordsworth comes to an ‘intercourse’ with ‘a soul divine’. This spiritual ‘intercourse’ is figuratively linked to the ‘speaking face’ of nature. The ‘images’ of language create and represent a ‘mystery’, in which Wordsworth imaginatively comes into interaction with ‘a deathless spirit’ that is both evoked by and found in words. A ‘soul divine’ and ‘deathless spirit’ are both ‘embodied’ and ‘diffus’d’ in the ‘progress through

²⁷ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.68.

²⁸ Andrzej Warmninski, ‘Facing Language: Wordsworth’s First Poetic Language’, *Diacritics*, 17:4 (Winter, 1987), 18-31, 26, 27.

this Verse'. In his own poetic connection with this soul and spirit, achieved through the very act of writing, Wordsworth seeks his own participation in 'unconquerable life'.

Bushell thinks that 'a full intellectual engagement with draft material' would have to engage with the 'words on the page which signify a sequence of actions, of rapidly changing small-scale acts'.²⁹ As we can see, Wordsworth writes the unresolvable conflict between his poetic aspirations and frustrations into precisely such words:

save when realities of act and mien
 If aught there were of real grandeur here
 The
~~'Twas only then when gross realities,~~
 s
 The incarnation of the Spirit{ that moved
 In harmony ,
 ^Amid the Poets' ~~beauteous~~ world{ call'd forth,
 Rose to ideal grandeur or called forth
 With that distinctness which a contrast gives [MS. A, 163^r]

'The incarnations of the Spirit' are not 'gross realities' here but 'realities of act and mien'. It is only when 'the incarnation of the Spirit' moves 'amid the Poet's world' that 'aught' of 'real grandeur' comes into existence. This 'aught' does not exist in the physical world of the earth but in 'the Poet's world' of the imagination, in which, here 'the Spirit' 'rose to ideal grandeur'. The 'Spirit' can neither be 'incarnat[ed]' nor 'call'd forth' by 'gross realities', only in the poet's 'bodily image[s]' of them, which nevertheless remain linked to the 'speaking face' of Nature because it is 'from her' that the poet 'receives' that 'energy' with which 'he seeks [Wordsworth had at one point here added, but then deleted: 'Is roused, aspires, grasps, struggles, wishes, craves'] the truth' (MS. A, 307^r).

To develop an identity for himself, Wordsworth resorts to books of language ('works / Of mighty Poets'), in which his past self is veiled, shaped, and even changed by the

²⁹ Bushell, 'Wordsworthian Composition: The Micro-Prelude', 404.

‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ at work in ‘the mystery of words’. But, at the same time, Wordsworth claims that it is still possible to embody a sense of self in the act of writing because its habitation is ‘midway betwixt’ speech and silence. This self, inscribed in writing, is represented by ‘the word / Invisible’ that ‘flames forth upon’ a ‘black’ ‘garb’ (VII. 309-10, 310, 309, 309). The self is ‘invisible’, hidden behind the ‘veil’ of words, but this ‘veil’ is also ‘transparent’. The very word ‘Invisible’ communicates something real about the self – its ‘Invisibi[lity]’ in language.

Wordsworth himself confesses what he ‘owed to Books in early life’ (631): the ‘Power’ of words to imply a ‘face’ that might facilitate his poetic communion with the self he wishes to commemorate in language. Yet, as always, the ‘Power’ of language starts to appear precarious and Wordsworth, once again, loses his faith in language (‘I was indisposed / To any further progress’). One fundamental problem about ‘the mystery of words’ is: can the ‘mystery’ itself be representable? Wordsworth states at the end of Book V:

Thus far a scanty record is deduced
Of what I owed to Books in early life;
Their later influence yet *remains untold*;
But as this work was taking in my thoughts
Proportions that seem’d larger than had first
Been mediated, *I was indisposed*
To any further progress at a time
When these acknowledgements were *left unpaid*. (630-37, my italics)

The words ‘scanty’ and ‘deduced’ suggest that ‘the mystery of words’, like the things it ‘embodie[s]’, is ‘unrepresentable’. If it is ‘unrepresentable’, the workings of ‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ to be found in language are also ‘unrepresentable’. Then Wordsworth contradicts himself by insisting that ‘the great Nature’ of great ‘Power’ ‘exists *in works / Of mighty Poets*’ even though this mysterious ‘Power’ cannot be represented *by* verse. Moreover, ‘these acknowledgements’ of what he ‘owed to Books’ ‘were left unpaid’.

The idea of ‘unpaid’ ‘acknowledgements’ triggers a series of questions. For example, will the ‘half-absence’ of past experience return to haunt his autobiographical writing? What if ‘the immortal being / No more shall need such garments’ when Wordsworth desires an ‘intercourse’ with it ‘in progress through this Verse’? And – what if he cannot assume ‘the role of *mysterious creator*’ in ‘shap[ing] out / Some Tale from [his] own heart’? Ultimately, Wordsworth knows that he is never able to reach the past even through autobiographical writing because that past self is located in the silence left by ‘life’ and not in the language left by ‘books’. This knowledge haunts, compels, and drives the whole of the poem.

However, this disappearance of the self in language through the replacement of its ‘face’ by words offers an opportunity too: the poet comes to realize that a new self can be developed in the act of writing. He recognizes that his autobiographical writing is based not on a timeless recovery of the past but on an imaginative rewriting of it. This is his response to his poetic failure to develop a unity of self between past and present. In this chapter, I move beyond de Man’s idea that ‘autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause’ by examining ‘the complex, imbricated and conflicted relationship between invention and inscription’ in Wordsworth’s self formation.³⁰ Instead of looking at how his mind is ‘deface[d]’ in the act of writing, I have been mainly concerned with how he writes and develops a sense of self into his self-representation. A new textual ‘I’ is invented and formulated during the process of composition, in which Wordsworth endeavors to ‘hallow’ and glorify a textual self. Wordsworth says:

It seemeth, in behalf of these, the works,
 And of the Men who fram’d them, whether known,
 Of sleeping nameless in their scatter’d graves,
 That I should here assert their rights, attest
 Their honours; and should, once for all, pronounce
 Their benediction; speak of them as Powers
 Forever to be hallow’d. (214-20)

³⁰ De Man, ‘Autobiography as De-facement’, 930; Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.148.

These men in the past (as well as his past self) are either 'known' or 'sleeping nameless' in 'their scatter'd graves', and the writing Wordsworth, through the textual 'I', thinks that he 'should' demonstrate 'their honours' and even 'speak of them as Powers'. Wordsworth is assigning himself a new poetic responsibility here – to '[hallow]' these men and their works like 'the spirit' 'hallowing' the sight of the drowned Man in 'the works / Of ... purest Poesy'. It is Wordsworth's building of a different poetic identity for himself, in the full consciousness of the disparity between speech and silence, that leads into the apocalyptic play of the imagination in the Alps and the sublime display of 'a mighty Mind' on Mount Snowdon.

Part Four Between Internality and Externality

Chapter Seven

Wordsworth develops and rewrites a new self through imaginative confrontations with his own 'Soul' as he reads its workings on the Alps, and with his 'mighty Mind' as he imagines it on Mount Snowdon. This chapter looks at the apocalypse of the imagination in Book VI, and the transcendence of the apocalypse by the 'mighty mind' in Book XIII. Wordsworth, as a '[prophet] of Nature', glorifies the mind and this chapter asks how the poet develops his sense of identity through imaginative encounters between the mind and its powers. In Book VI, Wordsworth writes: 'to my Soul I say / I recognize thy glory' (531-32). In Book XIII it is 'the perfect image of a mighty Mind' (69) that he glorifies. This chapter will argue that in such shifts as those from 'my' to 'a' and from apostrophe to 'image' we see a recognition of generative possibilities of the usurping powers of language.

In these two Books, Wordsworth seems to present the whole landscape of his past experiences as though seeing it at a distance. *The Prelude* is a poem mainly about 'not being able to say anything'¹ because language excludes whatever is represented by it. Even in moments of self-encounter, the poet can only '[look] ... upon these things / As from a distance' (VI. 694-95). Here is opportunity as well as obstacle. This distance soon facilitates the linguistic transformation of that landscape and his position in it. Pastness colludes with language to generate (re)figuration, in which encounters with 'characters of the great [Apocalypse](#)' (VI. 570) and external 'image[s] of a mighty Mind' become possible. In this way Wordsworth can celebrate the grandeur of the mind – while remaining fully aware of how problematic that celebration is due to a disparity between past and present, signifier and signified.

¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Affirmative Deconstruction, Open Discussion', in Paul Patton and Terry Smith(eds.), *Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction Engaged (The Sydney Seminars)* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001), p. 115.

To use the word from Book V of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's 'hallowing' of his mental powers is his attempt to link the present autobiographical writing to the blessing of his childhood. The poet claims that 'I made no vows, but vows / Were *then* made for me; bond unknown to me / Was given', and that 'the Poet's soul was with me *at this time*, / Sweet meditations ... A thousand hopes / Were mine ... hopes for my future life' (IV. 341-43, VI. 55-60, my italics). Wordsworth seeks to present the textual 'I' as remaining connected to the 'bond' and 'the Poet's soul', while his writing is expressed through the otherness of language and thus forever disconnected from the past. This is thus a 'Romantic fallacy of spontaneous lyric utterance'.² His poetic utterances are actually addressed to his former self through transitions between a range of temporalities. As a result, in Book XIII, images of 'a' mighty mind exclude as much as they might seek to represent 'my' mind, while the 'prophetic' address to a reader replaces the direct 'spontaneous' address to the self.

Reading Wordsworth's descriptions of his past experiences, 'we are left with ... a mystery "clothed" in language, but with no sense of the possibility of recourse to that originary event or experience, for its existence outside language'.³ 'Darkness' and 'shadowy things' in language form the other of Wordsworth's self and thus deface that past self. In this sense, Wordsworth takes on the role of a 'mysterious creator' of his past, tracing the 'growth' of his mind by his own '*dark guess*' (VI. 149, my italics). He himself acknowledges that 'In general terms, / I was a better judge of thoughts than words' (VI. 123-24). For Wordsworth, 'languages' are always in need of 'the living voice' (VI. 131) so that he may be able to recreate a self with the textual recounting of past experiences.

This chapter focuses on the other of Wordsworth's self that is formed and created by 'a mystery "clothed" in language'. From the outset of *The Prelude*, there is a reproduction of

² Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 135 (my italics). This 'lyric utterance', according to Morgan, 'creates a sense of presentness in its illusions of simultaneity and its stress on the "now" of the poem's creation or transmission' ('Narrative Means to Lyric Ends in Wordsworth's *Prelude*', 310).

³ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 160.

Wordsworth as a written self – a reproduction of the self as other in language⁴ – that, as the poet increasingly recognises, distances the poem from the self it claims to represent. In *The Prelude* stable textual identity comes at the cost of interiority. Interacting with autobiography here entails the unsettling and cancellation of the autobiographical project, replacing it with the poetic reconstruction of the self as a ‘[prophet] of Nature’. It is Wordsworth’s continuous development of his poetic identity in the flow of time that keeps the ‘growth’ of his mind moving. In this view, the ‘growth’ of the mind in which this identity is located, is, like the identity itself, a question neither of mental expansion nor maturation but one of textual invention.⁵

Book VI focuses on Wordsworth’s crossing of the Alps. In the first part of the Book, as he confesses, there has always been a conflict between ‘my inner knowledge’ and ‘my outward taste in books’ (VI. 113, 116). He states that his ‘inner knowledge, ... was oft in depth / And delicacy like another mind / Sequester’d from my outward taste in books’ (VI. 113-16). For him, ‘upon these thoughts’ ‘transcendent peace / And silence did await’ (VI. 158, 157-58). Nevertheless, in this ‘course of independent study’, ‘a baffling and a hindrance’ perplexes him; he questions: ‘who knows what thus may have been gain’d both then / And at a later season?’ (VI. 39, 37, 49-50). He wavers between ‘academic Bowers’ and ‘inviting shades of opportune recess’, and his inner mind desires ‘an independent world / Created out of pure Intelligence’ (VI. 287, 88, 186-87).

Wordsworth brings this conflict between his inner mind and his ‘outward taste[s]’ in books to bear on his experience of the crossing of the Alps. As he puts it, ‘A deep and

⁴ Alan Bass remarks that ‘The very substitution at beginning by language with its otherness [produces] “spatial” and “temporal” difference that must precede any origin’. (“‘Literature’/ Literature”, in Ian Maclachlan (ed.), *Jacques Derrida: Critical Thought*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 14-22, p. 17. See Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 83, for a detailed explanation of the ‘difference’.

⁵ There has been a growing interest in the textual development of self in Wordsworth’s autobiographical writing. For example, as Bennett points out, ‘Jay has argued in *Being in the Text* (1984) that Wordsworth writes a “self-analytical” autobiographical poem and that “composing is represented an arduous spiritual journey” in which the growth of the poet’s mind “is best seen unfolding in the process of the poem’s composition”. And in ... *Coleridge, Wordsworth and Romantic Autobiography* (1995), Sheila Kearns works from the assumption that “the autobiographical subject is constructed in the process of its own representation”’ (*Wordsworth Writing*, p. 145). Bennett also states that ‘Wordsworth composes himself – he becomes himself, comes conscious, in an act of composition’ (p. 161).

genuine sadness then I felt: / The circumstances I will here relate / Even as they were' (VI. 492-94). He was climbing with his comrades towards the same destination. But was it his destination? He was walking with others on the same route; however, he, 'a sojourner on earth', prefers to live 'more to [him]self' (VI. 62, 23). Enchanted by the surrounding beautiful landscape that embraces him, Wordsworth nevertheless says that 'Yet still in me, mingling with these delights / Was something of a stern mood, *an under-thirst / Of vigour*, never utterly asleep' (VI. 488-90, my italics). Deep in his mind, there is a longing, an implicit 'under-thirst' for something even more than the surrounding phenomenal world. He has a desire that cannot be satisfied with any outward natural imagery, and he seems to claim that what he is pursuing lies outside the external phenomenal appearance of the landscape. On the way up the Alps, he 'climb'd with eagerness' and with 'some anxiety' (VI. 508, 509). Uncertain about which route to choose, he crossed the Alps without knowing it. In retrospect, the writing poet realizes that what he has sought all along is not sublimity, per se, but his own soul's response to that fulfilment. Here Wordsworth confronts his own soul, saying: 'to my Soul I say / I recognize thy glory' (VI. 531-32).

In this encounter with his soul, the imagination is projected onto the sublime work of nature – by the very medium of words. Here Wordsworth seeks a sense of unity when the outward scene has failed his imagination (due to the mis-crossing of the Alps). He attempts to re-establish a correspondence with, and to envisage a sudden insight into, his own mental powers. Wordsworth claims that

Imagination! Lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my Song
 Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
 In all of the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted without a struggle to break through,
 And now recovering, to my Soul I say
 I recognize thy glory. (VI. 525-32)

The rising of the imagination compensates for Wordsworth's despair at the mis-crossing of the Alps. This passage narrates Wordsworth's recognition of and confrontation with his self, and his writing intends to 'hallow' and glorify his own 'Soul'. Hartman asserts that the imagination 'has shown itself distinct from nature, as an unmediated, apocalyptic force', even as the imagination communes with nature,⁶ and Wordsworth realizes and exclaims that it is towards his 'Imagination', and with it his 'Soul', that the 'progress of [his] Song' is moving. Hartman explains: 'By "apocalypse" I mean there is an inner necessity to cast out nature, to extirpate everything apparently external to salvation, everything that might stand between the naked self and God, whatever risk in this to the self'.⁷ However, this progress towards internality is not an 'unmediated' one. As Jacobus says, 'The effect is that of voice itself, perceived as an interruption of the past from the present'.⁸ In the 1805 text, Wordsworth promises that 'I will here relate / Even as [the circumstances] were', but in the 1850 version he merely says: 'let one incident make known' (VI. 562). 'Apostrophe in *The Prelude* becomes the signal instance of *the rupture of the temporal scheme of memory* by the time of writing'; this 'apostrophe' is most distinctly 'a form of self-constituting self-address'.⁹ Wordsworth's poetic utterance disconnects itself from the memory of the past, generating a 'self-address' that is constituted by language and thus hinders any direct communion with his past and a continuous 'progression' of his 'Song'. We can say that Wordsworth does not seek to 'cast out' nature as much as escape from the 'sad incompetence' (VI. 594) of language in his glorification of the imagination. But the poet also recognizes that it is in the act of writing

⁶ Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814*, p. 216.

⁷ Geoffrey Hartman and Daniel T. O'Hara (eds.), *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004), p. 79.

⁸ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 168. This 'effect' comes from an insistence on 'self-presence and voice', which 'insists too that invocation itself may be more important than what is invoked' (p. 166). On this 'effect' of 'voice', it is also useful to look at Empson's 'Sense in The Prelude': 'The word [sense] ... means both the process of sensing and the supreme act of imagination, and unites them by a jump; the same kind of jump as that in the sentence about crossing the Alps, which identifies the horror caused by the immediate sensation with the exultation that developed from them. ... what is jumped over is "good sense"' (p. 641).

⁹ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 168 (my italics).

that he can confront the imagination that ‘lift[s] up itself / Before the eye and progress of [his] Song’.

Wordsworth’s ‘timely utterance’ here is essentially untimely. The poet is as aware of the losses as much as the gains involved. As he puts it in the 1850 version: ‘Imagination – here the Power so called / Through *sad incompetence of human speech*’ (VI. 593-94, my italics). On the one hand, his use of language distances his textual identity from his past self, leaving this self behind in silence. Because of the ‘silence’ of self, the ‘Imagination’ is able to exert its power ‘*before the eye and progress of my Song*’ (my italics). This imaginative power, like the ‘darkness’ that ‘mov[es] slowly through’ his ‘mind’ in the stolen boat episode, ‘came / Athwart [him]’. It is the other of his soul that is to be found in language. On the other hand, Wordsworth suggests that the imagination is not within his ‘Song’ though he is confronting its ‘Power’. With the negative power of language (its ‘sad incompetence’), the imagination is brought ‘before’ his ‘Song’. An implicit line is drawn between the ‘*unfather’d*’ ‘Imagination’ (‘*that Power*’) and ‘*my Song*’ (along with ‘*my Soul*’). In the manuscript of *The Prelude*, ‘Imagination’:

Lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my Song
 that bestows
 Like an unfather’d vapour; ~~here that Power,~~
 Its presence on some solitary place
~~In all~~ the might of its endowments, came
 A thwart me ... [MS. A 135^r]

The imagination is like a ‘vapour’, to which Wordsworth gives a substantial ‘presence’, but ‘its presence’ is ‘bestow[ed]’ on ‘some solitary place’. The words ‘some’ and ‘solitary’, echoing the word ‘unfather’d’, again draw the imagination away from ‘the eye and progress of [his] Song’. While seemingly celebrating the ‘glory’ of his ‘Soul’, Wordsworth’s use of language enlarges the distance between his self and the

textually-constructed imagination. In addition, where Hartman says of the ‘unmediated’ ‘force’ of the imagination, in fact Wordsworth’s revision shows the impossibility of this ‘unmediated’ imagination once the imagination ‘bestows / Its presence on some ... place’. In this sense, the imagination is mediated by its external ‘presence’ and even its ‘Power’ is unsettled. Furthermore, this most intense feeling of sublime visitation intermingles with a sense of instability and hollowness. At this moment, ambiguously, he is ‘lost’ and ‘halted’ at the same time. And it remains perplexing when the poet says to his ‘Soul’ that he ‘recognise[s]’ its ‘glory’ while he strives to ‘break through’ the usurping power of ‘Imagination’.¹⁰

This sense of ‘loss’ remains, resulting in his baffled and fragmented ‘consciousnesses’ of being between the textually produced self and the self he seeks to recall in writing. Earlier he describes the mighty play of the imagination that entraps and overwhelms him. However, he later ‘say[s]’ ‘to [his] Soul’ that he realizes its ‘glory’ when he strives to get rid of the grasp of the imagination. This shift from ‘that Power’ to ‘my Soul’ is vague, perplexing, but revealing. The power of the imagination is created by his poetic utterance, reinvented as the other self to his own self. Wordsworth’s writing leaves the imagination outside his ‘Song’ and makes it ‘unfather’d’. Forest Pyle says that

Likened to an ‘unfathered vapour’, the imagination invoked in the passage exceeds altogether subjective authority. Here the imagination appears as *an autonomous ‘power’* that, when exercising ‘all the might of its endowments’, creates confusion and despair ... in the shape of the sublime, the imagination poses *a threat to narrative itself*, a moment of sublime blockage to the ‘eye and progress’ of the poem itself.¹¹

In this attempted textual confrontation with his self, Wordsworth is aware that this

¹⁰ For de Man, Wordsworth ‘defines the imagination as being, at the same time, a sense of irreparable loss linked with the assertion of a persistent consciousness: “I was lost / Halted without an effort to break through”; but to my consciousness I now can say “I recognize thy glory” [1850 *Prelude*, VI, 596-99]. The restoring power, in Wordsworth, ... [resides] in the persistent power of mind and language after nature and history have failed’ (‘Time and History in Wordsworth’, 14). However, here I think that Wordsworth’s recognition of both ‘irreparable loss’ and of the ‘glory’ of his consciousness testifies to his ambiguous vision of his mental powers represented in writing rather than to ‘the persistent power of mind and language’.

¹¹ Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination*, p. 69 (my italics).

apostrophe to the imagination is addressed to the other self in language – and is a reconfiguration of the imagination into ‘an autonomous “power”’ that obstructs ‘the eye and progress of [his] Song’ with ‘sublime blockage’.

The sublime ‘usurpation’ of ‘Imagination’ works – ‘in all of the might of its endowments’ – only in Wordsworth’s textual inventions. In other words, this textually produced sense of self (as distinct from the imagination itself) can never exist without language. But it also functions as ‘a threat to narrative itself’. Out of this troubling consciousness of the ‘threat’ to his narrative of, and narrative sense of, subjectivity, Wordsworth tries to restrain the otherness of language from taking too much from his ‘Song’, which claims idealism and ‘home’ ‘with infinitude’ (VI. 538, 539). He states in the 1850 version that ‘still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds’ (VI. 588) – hopes that reach higher than the phenomenal world. As Wordsworth goes on to state:

in such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode. (VI. 532-36)

The imagination’s power here is a ‘mystery’. According to Hartman, it is a mystery that involves the ‘two rival highpoints of *The Prelude* – the energy of imagination, [and] the energy of nature’.¹² Hartman’s influential take on *The Prelude* centres on the idea that the whole ‘tenor’ of Wordsworth’s ‘song’ is that of ‘Nature guiding and fostering the power of song’ through the receptive workings of the poet’s imagination.¹³ We are able to trace this interaction between nature and the imagination in the poem, in Hartman’s view, because the working of the imagination (under nature’s influence) is present to both Wordsworth

¹² Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814*, p. 63.

¹³ Hartman, ‘A Poet’s Progress’, p. 613.

and the reader as ‘an unmediated [...] force’.¹⁴ As a result, in *The Prelude* we see ‘Nature indistinguishably blended with Imagination ... compelling the poet along a *via naturaliter negativa*’¹⁵, and in doing so producing that ‘growth of the poet’s mind’ that is *The Prelude*’s ostensible subject. However, the ‘mystery’ of the imagination’s power is ‘a mystery “clothed” in language’ – it is not present to either Wordsworth or the reader as ‘an unmediated [...] force’, but mediated by language and Wordsworth’s use of it. To get to grips with passages such as the one above, we need to move beyond Hartman’s account by observing the complexity with which Wordsworth’s language works to construct, but also problematize, his encounters with both nature and the imagination.

‘The Soul, the Imagination’ (XIII. 65), as represented in *The Prelude*, is in a much more ambiguous relationship with nature than Hartman allows, as Wordsworth develops his sense of the imagination through the generative and usurping powers of language rather than through its direct engagements with nature. Equally, Hartman fails to fully acknowledge the distinction created by the poem between Wordsworth’s own internal subjectivity and the linguistically-mediated imagination (which ‘exceeds altogether subjective authority’). Focusing only on the interaction between the imagination and nature in Wordsworth’s text, Hartman underestimates the complexity and significance of the working of language in the poet’s continual textual formation of self. Hartman’s reading of the relationship between imagination and nature in Wordsworth pays no attention, for example, to one important sentence added in the 1850 text – ‘the Power so called / Through sad incompetence of human speech’. Yet the ‘sad incompetence’ of language interferes at every stage with Wordsworth’s glorification of the imagination.

In the quotation describing imagination’s ‘strength / Of usurpation’ in Book VI, Wordsworth uses the generative power of language to intensify the surpassing mightiness of the imagination that exceeds the phenomenal world by such words as ‘strength’,

¹⁴ Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814*, p. 216.

¹⁵ Hartman, ‘A Poet’s Progress’, p. 599.

‘usurpation’, and ‘awful’. When this power is put to its limit, surprisingly, ‘the light of sense / Goes out’ and ‘the invisible world’ is revealed – ‘in flashes’. At this moment, a division is becoming sharper and sharper between the ephemeral play of the imagination and the visible world. Jacobus thinks that ‘the [revealed] invisible world’ is ‘darkness made visible’¹⁶ when ‘the light of sense / Goes out in flashes’. In this sense, looking at ‘darkness’ in ‘the invisible world’, we may ask: why does ‘Greatness make [its] abode’ in ‘darkness’ and what is working on ‘the invisible world’? As far as it is ‘invisible’ (mysterious and incommunicable), it can be manifested neither by the external landscape nor by language. Thus Wordsworth’s idealism of ‘Greatness’, ‘infinite’, and ‘hope that can never die’ (VI. 536, 539, 540) is to be sought in this ‘invisible world’ but can never be articulated by his words. The idea that Wordsworth resorts to language to make a presentation of the glorious work of his ‘Soul’, in de Man’s view, shows ‘the necessity of *naming* the eternal by means of an entity – language – that is immediately adequate to neither eternal nor temporal being’.¹⁷ Language is essentially atemporal; though it is the only means through which the ‘*naming*’ of ‘infinite’ is possible, the things represented through it remain figural and insubstantial. This is language’s ‘failure’ to ‘inscribe [infinite] beyond textuality’, in Jacobus’ words, and to ‘give a foundation to what it posits’, in de Man’s words.¹⁸ However, I look not at the sublime entities ‘beyond textuality’ but at the vital working of language in the text, in which Wordsworth attempts to inscribe the sublime.

¹⁶ Jacobus, ‘Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream’, 635. Empson points out that ‘Wordsworth induces his baffling *sense* to become a lighthouse occasionally flashing not on any spiritual world but on the dangerous and actual sea, which at other times is invisible merely because the captain is in darkness’ (‘*Sense in The Prelude*’, p. 632).

¹⁷ De Man, ‘Process and Poetry (1956)’, p. 66.

¹⁸ Wordsworth’s naming of infinite is inscribed through ‘death by writing’, ‘the defile which so traumatically confronts Wordsworth in the failure of the Sublime to inscribe itself beyond textuality, which is also the failure of the subject to reside “with infinite, and only there”’ (Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 15). De Man also remarks that ‘Poetic language ... is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as *an intent of consciousness*’ (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 6, my italics). In my discussion, however, I look not at the sublime entities ‘beyond textuality’ but at the vital working of language in the text, in which Wordsworth attempts to inscribe the Sublime.

Since Wordsworth deploys writing to facilitate the imaginative encounter between the mind and its transcendental powers, I will argue that it is exactly writing that is working on ‘the invisible world’ although the former can never participate in the latter. In ‘the invisible world’, ‘Greatness *make[s] abode*’ and ‘the light of sense / Goes out in flashes’ (my italics). Equally, this ‘invisible world’ is also ‘embodied in the mystery of words’ where ‘darkness *makes abode, / and all the host of shadowy things do work their changes there*’ (my italics). The ‘darkness’ working in ‘the mystery of words’ may be the same ‘darkness’ that is made ‘visible’ in this ‘invisible’ world by writing. This transcendental ‘invisible world’, like the ‘visionary Power’ in Book V of *The Prelude*, is created as an ‘unrepresentable presence’ in writing that can be ‘recognis’d’ ‘in flashes’ – when ‘the light of sense / Goes out in flashes’. ‘Greatness’ can be evoked when the same ‘darkness’ moves through Wordsworth’s writing and ‘the invisible world’. In other words, at the moment when ‘darkness’ is ‘made visible’, an ‘invisible world’ is revealed; the ‘darkness’ in words creates the ‘invisib[ility]’ of the consecrated world. Paul H. Fry suggests that the epiphany of ‘the invisible world’ is ‘the Wordsworthian blank’, and that

thematized emergences from dark to light, sensory to visionary blindness ... are always troped as what Empson saw to be the ambiguously *untransitional* ‘going out’ of the light of ‘sense’ – the suffusion by the empiricist sensorium of all modes of being – in the apostrophe to Imagination.¹⁹

In Fry’s view, the transcendental vision of ‘the invisible world’ is ‘visionary blindness’ – a typical ‘Wordsworthian blank’, in which there is ‘*untransitional* “going out” of the light of “sense”’. However, as I have been arguing, this transition from ‘sensory to visionary blindness’ is intimately engaged with ‘the mystery of words’ rather than with blind blankness. ‘Greatness’ is clothed in language, but it is also revealed ‘in flashes’ ‘in such

¹⁹ Fry, ‘Clearing in the Way’, 9. Similarly, Thomas Weiskel suggests that ‘There is essentially nothingness in poetic representation, which makes ‘[Wordsworth’s] landscapes hover on the edge of revelation without revealing anything’ (*The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1976), p. 100).

strength / Of usurpation'. When 'the light of sense / Goes out in flashes', not 'blindness' but the visioning power from the 'darkness' in words makes 'the invisible world' 'shewn to us'. In other words, the invisibility of the transcendental world is invented by language. The usurping power of language is generative, imaginatively bringing 'Greatness' to 'make abode' in words with 'darkness'.

When it comes to the Mount Snowdon episode, Wordsworth says that, 'as *chanced*', the landscape appears to be 'the perfect image of a mighty Mind' (XIII. 35, 69 my italics). On his way up Mount Snowdon, the working of the mind is projected on to the external landscape with the sudden and startling transformation of the view. At first Wordsworth describes the scene on Mount Snowdon:

The Moon stood naked in the Heavens, at height
Immense above my head, and on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
Which meek and silent, rested at my feet:
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still Ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes
Into the Sea, the real Sea, that seem'd
To dwindle and give up its majesty,
Usurp'd upon as far as sight could reach. (XIII. 41-51)

A vital interplay between various and changeable natural images (moon, mist, hill, vapours, and sea) is taking place as a dynamic prologue to the disclosure of 'The Soul, the Imagination of the whole' (XIII. 65). Through a close analysis, however, this play of the landscape is not actually a harmonious one. The light of moon is falling 'upon the turf' and, at the same time, reflected by the 'huge sea of mist'. Represented through Wordsworth's writing, this collision of bright moonlight and hazy mist appears to encompass the whole scene with a 'transparent veil' that presents the landscape at once as real and illusory. In this intermingling of light and mist, the moon remains 'immense

above', separate from the mist that 'rest[s] at [the poet's] feet'. The adjectives 'meek', 'silent', 'dusky', and 'still' further reveal a sense of inanimate shadowiness. Amid the stillness, there were immanent powers at work, threatening the landscape ('this still Ocean' of mist) with an act of usurpation. The 'backs' of 'hills' *'upheaved'*, and 'the vapours' *'shot'* themselves 'into' 'the real Sea' (my italics). Wordsworth's descriptions shift from the moon which is high above, through the mist resting 'on the shore' and the hills in the background, to the vapours 'far beyond'. The downward invasion of 'the vapour' upon 'the Sea' appears to be the main action that is taking place here. Wordsworth particularly points out that the sea is 'the real Sea'. However, the real is instantly 'usurp'd upon' by 'the vapours' ('a huge sea of mist'). 'The real Sea', being taken over by the ocean-like mist, starts to shrink and lose its 'majesty'. Eventually, 'as far as sight could reach', the whole spectacle is seemingly covered by 'a transparent veil', becoming misty, obscure, and nearly incomprehensible.

In the following, Wordsworth starts to depict the transformation of the scene and its emerging sublimity:

Meanwhile, the Moon look'd down upon this shew
 In single glory, and we stood, the mist
 Touching our very feet: and from the shore
 At distance not the third part of a mile
 Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,
 A deep and gloomy breathing-place thro' which
 Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
 Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
 The universal spectacle throughout
 Was shaped for admiration and delight,
 Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
 Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
 That dark deep thoroughfare had Nature lodg'd
 The Soul, the Imagination of the whole. (XIII. 52-65)

This paragraph, like Wordsworth's apostrophe to the imagination in Book VI, manifests

the generative and usurping power of language. This exhibition of sublimity on Mount Snowdon, as Wordsworth later recognizes, ‘appear’d to [him] / The perfect image of a mighty Mind’ (XIII. 68-69). This ‘image’ of ‘a mighty Mind’ glorified by Wordsworth is a new textual identity constituted by his later rewriting of the experience on Mount Snowdon. Wordsworth attempts to glorify ‘the universal spectacle’ (‘the perfect image of a mighty Mind’) by stating that it ‘throughout / Was shaped for admiration and delight’. The word ‘universal’ indicates his aspiration for a unified whole of this sublime ‘image’ of self. Nevertheless, the status of this new identity is made radically precarious by the dynamic interplay between internality and externality, as the textually constructed self is projected upon the landscape. Wordsworth desires to project his mind on to the landscape and to make it a unified whole. At the same time the images of asymmetry, contrasts, and fragmentations are created by his writing. In other words, the poet is creating unity and disunity simultaneously out of his troubled consciousness of the fracture between internality and externality. For example, ‘a huge sea of mist’ intermingles and ‘usurp[s] upon’ ‘the real Sea’; the moonlight above is in contrast with the darkness below. Moreover, ‘there is no single locus of majesty or mastery’²⁰: the moon looks down from heaven ‘in *single* glory’, the waters are ‘roaring with *one* voice’, and the whole spectacle is ‘grand in itself *alone*’ (my italics). There is no direct link connecting the moon, the waters, and the entire spectacle. Wordsworth presents the powers of his mind by means of language, but he unsettles his own claim by building notions of contradiction and precariousness into his writing.²¹

In this spectacle, ‘the vapour’ not only usurps upon ‘the real Sea’ but is also the place where the alteration of the landscape emerges. In the vapour, there is ‘a blue chasm’, ‘a fracture’ – ‘a deep and gloomy breathing-place’ – which is, as Wordsworth describes it, the

²⁰ Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, p. 247.

²¹ See Joshua Wilner, “‘Self-displacing Vision’: Snowdon and the Dialectic of the Senses”, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 37:1 (Winter, 2006), 27-30, 29. Also see W. J. B. Owen, ‘The Perfect Image of a Mighty Mind (1979)’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 37:3 (Summer, 2006), 122-130, esp. 128-129.

site of power and vitality. What craft is forming and working on this ‘chasm’? On the one hand, this craft comes from ‘one function of such mind’ that ‘Nature [had] there / Exhibited’ (XIII. 74, 74-5). The ‘chasm’ is the ‘breathing-place’ of the mind. On the other hand, ‘the mystery of words’ simultaneously works on the ‘chasm’, indicated by a series of words – ‘deep’, ‘gloomy’, and ‘dark’. The same ‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ at work in words also work in the ‘deep and gloomy breathing-place’ with the mind. In this sense, the imagination and the mind, expressed through the creative power of language, respond to it and find a reproduction of them as ‘other’ in words. This transition between internality and externality, again, is by no means a ‘Wordsworthian blank’. The ‘mystery’ of words starts to exert its power at the moment when ‘the voice of waters’ is made ‘homeless’. In Wordsworth’s description of this ‘deep and gloomy breathing-place’, the ‘roaring’ voice of ‘waters’ goes up, beginning to exercise its power in its abundance and abruptly substitutes for the prior muteness. Hartman suggests that ‘Wordsworth’s utterance was not in time, and the darkness that came was not the darkness called’; Wordsworth’s utterance ‘revealed “speaking darkness”, here the poet speaks the darkness’.²² The ‘roaring’ voice emerges from the darkness – through the poet’s speech, which evokes ‘that dark deep thoroughfare’. But I think that Wordsworth’s ‘speaking darkness’ is his ‘timely utterance’ and that his utterance is ‘in time’ because ‘the darkness that came’ is exactly ‘the darkness called’. When ‘the darkness’ is called to this ‘chasm’, ‘the voice of waters’ becomes ‘homeless’, just as the ‘unfather’d vapour’ in the Alps loses its origin. ‘Darkness’ comes with the mysterious power of words that excludes whatever is represented by it. The ‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ in ‘the mystery of words’ ‘work their changes’, creating a ‘breathing-place’ for the mind in that ‘deep and gloomy’ fracture. In this ‘chasm’, the ‘mount[ing]’ of the ‘roaring’ voice multiplies and fragments the images there.

²² Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 107. Here Hartman states that ‘Instead of uttering the primal fiat which conflates light and the word, Wordsworth may have approached an “unutterable” fiat conflating darkness and the word. This would explain the blocking or eliding of wish or fantasy ... in Wordsworth. The fiat is waylaid on its way to utterance because the poet is anxious lest he speak the opposite of a creating word – untimely or “apocalyptic” word’.

There are ‘innumerable’ ‘homeless’ ‘waters, torrents, [and] streams’. In order to stabilize this fragmented and shadowy presentation of the natural images, Wordsworth’s ‘timely utterance’ comes in: they are all ‘roaring with *one* voice’ (my italics). The ‘voice of waters’ is at once ‘homeless’ and ‘one’; the ‘darkness’ in the ‘breach’ is both usurping and generative. Through the working of voice (‘the roar of waters’), ‘the Soul, the Imagination’ is formed and created in ‘that dark deep thoroughfare’, like ‘the invisible world’ that is ‘shewn to us’ ‘in such strength / Of usurpation’. It is exactly in this presentation of the ‘chasm’ in the external landscape that Wordsworth’s internality confronts his textual self produced by language.

‘Nature’ has ‘lodg’d’ ‘the Soul, the Imagination of the whole’ in this ‘breach’. The word ‘lodg’d’ indicates a temporary resting place for ‘the Soul, the Imagination of the whole’ rather than a permanent and stable dwelling place. Intriguingly, the spectacle is ‘the introduction of Nature, and the bracketing of soul and imagination’; the latter is ‘a part of the landscape and not a part of it, autonomous and yet subordinate’.²³ ‘The Soul, the Imagination’ is ‘lodg’d’ in the ‘dark and deep thoroughfare’, remaining precariously detached from and ‘subordinate’ to ‘the whole’ in which it ‘lodg[es]’. Through the landscape on Mount Snowdon, Wordsworth presents a self that is highly unstable, perilously ‘lodg’d’ in the scene of its representation. As Gary Farnell puts it, Wordsworth’s self is ‘located at the narrative centre and circumference of the work’.²⁴ Ambiguously, Wordsworth’s writing focuses on his mental powers, but his use of language instils in them a sense of unsteadiness and (intentionally) ‘lodg[es]’ them at the ‘centre’ of ‘the work’. In this sense, the imagination can never accomplish its ‘Negative Way’²⁵ because Wordsworth’s writing allows no full scope for its operation. One more question ensues: reading ‘the Soul, the Imagination of the whole’, we are left with an uncertainty about

²³ See Jonathan Wordsworth, ‘The Image of a Mighty Mind (1805, Book 13)’, in Stephen Gill (ed.), *William Wordsworth’s The Prelude: A Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 225-58, pp. 236-37.

²⁴ Gary Farnell, ‘Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* as Autobiography of An Orphan’, *Romanticism on the Net* 13 (February, 1999).

²⁵ Hartman, ‘A Poet’s Progress’, p. 599.

what ‘the whole’ means. What ‘the whole’ refers to is made more problematic by the idea that ‘the voice of waters’ that represents ‘the Soul, the Imagination’ is ‘homeless’. In the act of writing, Wordsworth seems to be forming the spectacle without really participating in it (especially when he states that the scene ‘*appear’d to me / The perfect image of a mighty Mind*’ (my italics)). He takes the standing of a spectator, who is ‘a part of the landscape and not a part of it’. The generative power of language creates a self in Wordsworth’s description of the spectacle on Mount Snowdon, but he also situates his real self at a distance from the usurping strength of language by standing at ‘circumference of the work’.

Wordsworth’s textually-constructed self (as projected upon the landscape) is further distanced from his internality when he significantly claims that the landscape ‘appear’d to me / The perfect image of a mighty Mind’. As when he confronts his ‘Soul’ in crossing the Alps, here he comes across a self-encounter with his ‘Mind’. However, senses of instability, doubt, and ambiguity keep haunting Wordsworth’s vision of his mind, which is represented as the other in language – a mirroring ‘image’ of his self. This presentation of self-encounter is like ‘a moment in a dialectic of the self’, which is presented through ‘a reflexive structure’; this confrontation with the textual self is at ‘the same distance within a self, duplication of a self, specular structures with the self, within which the self looks at itself from a certain distance’.²⁶ Projecting the ‘image’ of the mind upon the external landscape in his self-representation, Wordsworth is ‘look[ing] at’ his other self ‘from a certain distance’ while his internality remains inaccessible to language. Contradictorily, this represented self is a ‘duplication’ of the poet’s self while it is also its otherness. ‘An image of the mighty Mind’ (my italics) is *both* the ‘image’ produced by the ‘Mind’ and the ‘image’ representing the ‘Mind’. In other words, this ‘image’ is ‘what [the mind] half create[s]’ and ‘what perceive[s]’ (‘Tintern Abbey’, 106, 107). The poet views the ‘image’

²⁶ De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 169.

of the mind exhibited on Mount Snowdon as a sublime spectacle representing an ‘image of a mighty Mind’, while he also regards it as an imaginative ‘function of such mind’.

Concerning this ambiguous ‘image’ of the mind, W. J. B. Owen asks the question:

In what sense does the scene symbolize the mind? ... the whole scene, which stands for the whole mind of which the Imagination is one part or function. ... The Snowdon scene appears to serve two functions: it is the image of a mind, and it is also a specimen of the quasi-imaginative product of Nature, the product itself an analogue of the imaginative product of the human mind, but not an analogue of the mind.²⁷

Owen thinks that the landscape appears to be both ‘the *quasi*-imaginative product of Nature’ and ‘an *analogue* of the imaginative product of the human mind’ (my italics), rather than ‘an analogue of the mind’. This ‘product’ represents the mind but is never identical to it. Through the ‘dark deep thoroughfare’, in which ‘darkness’ is at work, ‘Nature’ represents Wordsworth’s self. In other words, Wordsworth’s writing creates a self – ‘the image of a mind’ – and he projects this self upon the working of ‘Nature’ as ‘the quasi-imaginative product of Nature’. The textual self nevertheless forms a ‘fracture’ in Wordsworth’s narratives of self-representation because of its otherness to his own self. In this ‘dialectic of the self’, ‘my’ mind becomes ‘a’ mind and his self-representation turns out to be a symbolic ‘image’ of the mind. Most importantly, this encounter with his self does not actually mean becoming one with it. The scene ‘*appear[s]* to’ him the ‘image’ of a ‘Mind’ (my italics). This ‘image’ remains exterior to his inner ‘mind’; it merely ‘appears to him’ as a representative and imitative picture of the mind. Moreover, the transcendental view is ‘an analogue of the imaginative product of the human mind’. This ‘product’, as

²⁷ Owen, ‘The Perfect Image of a Mighty Mind (1979)’, 124, 127. As Derrida remarks, ‘The imagination cannot create truth in its representation of nature’, but it ‘alone has the power of *giving birth to itself* It is pure auto-affection. It is the other name of difference as auto-affection’ (*Of Grammatology*, p. 187). In this ‘pure auto-affection’ of the imagination, Wilner finds that ‘the locus of imaginative activity [is] harder to situate. ... a series of projective displacement are at work in the production of that spectacle’ (“Self-displacing Vision”, 29). Accordingly, Owen ‘think[s] of Snowdon vision, not as the natural transformation of cloud into coastline, but as “The perfect image of a mighty Mind”, to which the transformation into coastline is irrelevant. ... the agents are the poet on the one hand and nature on the other, the products are a quasi-solid coastline and the abstraction of a mighty mind’ (W. J. B. Owen, ‘Such Structures as the Mind Builds’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 20:1 (Winter, 1989), 29-37, 32).

discussed, is a ‘fracture’ in ‘the whole’ (‘the Soul, the Imagination of the whole’), which it also represents. The ambiguous and perplexing relationship between the mind and the other (the image of the mind), between the whole and fragment, is intensely baffling in Wordsworth’s textual representations of his mind.

Wordsworth’s manuscript reveals his struggle with language in describing his thought after beholding the view on Snowdon:

forth
~~From her mysterious fount~~ [~~?within~~] ~~me~~ rose
 A Meditation which & appeared
 - then [~~? reviewed~~]
 To [~~?me~~] I [~~? reviewed~~]
 The spectacle in thought and it appeared
 The embodied perfect image of a might. [bifolium, 1^r, DC MS. 83]

This act of revision indicates Wordsworth’s indecision of the words ‘appeared’ and ‘reviewed’ when he talks about ‘the spectacle in thought’ – in his afterthought. With the word ‘appeared’, he can present the spectacle as naturally ‘appear[ing] / The embodied perfect image of a might’. In contrast, with the word ‘reviewed’, the spectacle turns out to be mediated by ‘a meditation’. Wordsworth erases the words ‘a meditation’ and decides to adopt the word ‘appeared’ after his indecision between ‘~~appeared~~’ and ‘[~~?reviewed~~]’. Additionally, he puts his relationship to this spectacle in doubt by such revisions as ‘[~~?within~~] ~~me~~’ and ‘to [~~?me~~]’. The scene appears as ‘the embodied perfect image of a might’ rather than of ‘a mighty Mind’ (1805). The poet keeps his self from any identical link with the spectacle and reveals his conflicting vision between the view he beholds on the spot and ‘the spectacle in thought’.

Wordsworth recalls the spectacle on Mount Snowdon, stating that it appears to him:

The perfect image of a mighty mind,
 Of one that feeds upon infinity,

That is exalted by an under-presence
 The sense of God, or whatsoever is dim
 Or vast in its own being. (XIII. 69-73)

The words ‘infinity’ and ‘under-presence’ show an intrinsic departing from the outward sensory landscape. The status of this ‘under-presence’ is in question, however. Wordsworth gives a vague description of it as ‘whatsoever is dim / Or vast in its own being’. His draft says that the image of the mind is:

presence
 exalted by an ~~under~~ sense
 {Under consciousness
 Of a [?] sense [?] [?as]
 A consciousness a sense of more than sense
 In soul of more than human Soul –
 In [?soul] of more than perishable power
 [?human]
 In soul of more than {[?] Soul
 privilege
 In soul of mortal {[?] [bifolium, 1^r, DC MS. 83]

The poet cannot decide what he refers to is ‘presence’ or shapeless ‘sense’ and ‘consciousness’. His repetitive use of the phrase ‘more than’ further shows his desire for something more than what his language can reach. For Wordsworth, this ‘under-presence’ should be something more than ‘human Soul’ and ‘perishable power’. Hartman sees in Wordsworth’s imagination a struggle for independence from nature, but here we see the poet’s inner desire for departing from earthly human soul. Reading the 1805 and 1850 texts, we can say that the ‘under-presence’ may be ‘the Soul, the Imagination’; it may also come from ‘the dark abyss’ (1850, XIV. 72) – the ‘breathing-place’ of the mind on Mount Snowdon. Moreover, the same shadowiness in language comes to work in this ‘dim’ ‘under-presence’. In comparison, Wordsworth’s 1850 revision gives a clearer definition of the ‘under-presence’. It turns out to be ‘transcendent power’ – ‘in sense conducting to

ideal form, / In soul of more than mortal privilege' (XIV. 75, 76-77). The power appears to move from phenomenal physicality to idealism of eternity. Nevertheless, in the following Wordsworth skilfully draws the movement towards transcendentalism back to 'the face of outward things' (XVI. 82). The 'function' of the mind can only be 'exhibited' by 'Nature' (XIII. 74, 75, 74). The text of 1850 brings the power of the imagination and that of nature into 'mutual domination' and 'interchangeable supremacy' (XIV. 84). No mastery belongs to either side, and no identification is achieved. The phrase 'in the fullness of [nature's] strength' (XIII. 86) is even removed in Wordsworth's later revision'. Only 'like transformation', 'like existence', and 'kindred mutations' exist between 'higher minds' of the human mind and the textual self projected upon externality (1805, XIII. 93, 94, 1850 XIV. 94).

In autobiographical writing, Wordsworth comes to realize that his poetic identity is to be re-established in the process of poetic composition. During the process, Wordsworth imaginatively rewrites a new self into the poem through the generative and usurping powers of language. The interaction between his interior subjectivity and the exteriorization of his mental powers upon the external landscape signifies the disparity between past and present, signifier and signified. The glorious work of his mental powers on the Alps and the lodging of his soul and imagination in the 'chasm' of the phenomenal landscape on Mount Snowdon are revealing. The power of language brings Wordsworth into a confrontation with his 'Soul' and creates an 'invisible world' when 'the light of sense / Goes out in flashes'. Language represents the invisibility of the transcendental world and the world itself turns out to be the world of language. Additionally, the working of 'darkness' in language is able to 'lodg[e]' 'the Soul, the Imagination' in the sublime spectacle on Mount Snowdon and to facilitate Wordsworth's encounter with 'the perfect image of a mighty Mind'. Nevertheless, Wordsworth's portrait of the spectacle gives a hint of instability to the poetic development of his identity. For example, in the working of

language, there is a difference between ‘a mighty Mind’ and ‘the Soul, the Imagination of the whole’. It is a difference created by language’s power to label and differentiate. If ‘the Soul, [and] the Imagination’ are represented only as parts of the ‘mighty Mind’, then Wordsworth seems to be saying that this ‘Mind’ is ‘the whole’, the ‘one life’, that unifies everything both external and internal. ‘The Soul, the Imagination’ are brought into oneness with the landscape, which constitutes ‘a mighty Mind’. Nevertheless, ‘the Soul, the Imagination’ are merely precariously ‘lodg’d’ by nature in a ‘blue chasm’, forming fragments within the whole unity. Moreover, as Wordsworth later shows, this sublime unity of the whole landscape merely appears to be ‘the perfect image of a mighty Mind’. The notion of fragment and ‘image’ keeps Wordsworth further away from the ‘mighty Mind’ he aspires to.

Wordsworth’s perception of the ‘*image*’ of ‘*a mighty Mind*’, compared to his confrontation with ‘*my Soul*’ in the Alps, shows an increasingly widened distance between the sense of self and its mental powers as represented in his writing (my italics). This distance manifests Wordsworth’s double use of language. He uses its agency to glorify his mind while his use of language subverts his own claims. As Michael O’Neill points out, ‘the poem presents both a question [(the poet’s seeking an identity for himself)] and an answer, but the answer is given in such a way that troubling aspects of the question are never wholly banished or repressed’.²⁸ Wordsworth’s poetic construction of his identity is baffling, and his sense of identity remains uncertain. While he wishes to stay with ‘the sweet promise of the past’ that may make him become a visionary poet (‘Life with me / As far as memory can look back, is full / Of this beneficent influence’ (XI. 277-79)), he is also aware that a new identity is to be developed in the autobiographical composition of his self. But this awareness also drives him to a consciousness of the power of language that threatens to ‘veil’ and ‘deface’ the representation of his self. In this sense, embedded

²⁸ O’Neill, “‘The Words he Uttered ...’”.

in words, his own self is 'usurp'd upon' by the poetically constructed self, like 'a living thought' 'usurp'd upon' by 'a soulless image' (VI. 455, 455, 454), and 'the real Sea' 'usurp'd upon' by the 'sea of mist'. The usurping power of language is indicated again and again through Wordsworth's repeated use of the phrase 'usurp'd upon'. Reading Wordsworth's account of his self-encounter, we find a dominating conflict between his different thoughts. Idealism, doubt, and the imagination are all in conflict through his representation of mental powers. Through the 'usurpation' of the 'unfather'd' imagination in Book VI and the 'roaring' voice of 'homeless' 'waters' in Book XIII, Wordsworth's poetic self is represented as the conflicted self the text presents.

Chapter Eight

In Chapter Seven, we see Wordsworth's awareness and recognition of the generative and usurping power of language in the imaginative encounters between his mind and its powers. This chapter will complicate matters by focusing on the fact that Wordsworth's textual identity in *The Prelude* is not stable. It will go on to examine the contradictions in the text and explore how these unsettle the poet's celebration of the mind. Always 'conscious of myself / And of some other Being', the poet returns again and again to doubt and uncertainty. The discrepancy between internality and externality further moves him to ambiguous visions of fragmented selfhood. However, this very instability points to an insistent interiority that will not rest happily in the poem's textual constructions. The poem's very creation of an unstable self / identity posits a stable self / identity, and this is one of its great achievements.

Wordsworth calls the imagination 'that awful Power [rising] from the Mind's abyss' (1850, VI. 595). This suggests to Hartman that for Wordsworth the imagination is an 'energy ... wishing to generate itself by its proper force'.¹ However, here Hartman pays insufficient attention to the linguistically-mediated nature of the imagination in *The Prelude*, and to Wordsworth's recognition of this. Similarly, Hartman states that, in the Alps sections of the poem, 'every incident involving Nature is propaedeutic and relates to a "dark Instructable workmanship"', an 'element of *obscurity*', that is 'inseparable from the soul's capacity of growth'.² But these statements fail to take into account the 'darkness' and 'shadowy things' at play in the words that Wordsworth uses to represent 'the soul'. Indeed, focusing on moments of multiplicity, fracture, and fissure, this chapter will argue that *The Prelude*'s representation of its author's inner life is fundamentally born of a profound recognition of and restless dissatisfaction with the 'otherness' of language on Wordsworth's part, which force him to seek to stabilize the writing of self 'midway'

¹ Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision*, p. 12.

² Hartman, 'A Poet's Progress', pp. 604, 608, my italics.

between the construction of a coherent, external identity and the recognition of an interiority beyond the reach of textuality. Wordsworth's autobiography endeavours to strike a balance between 'the saving blindness of vision' and 'the deathly fixity of the written page'.³ While presenting his self by means of language, Wordsworth also strives to liberate the written self from the 'fixity' of words. It is in this dynamic interplay between his self and the other in language that Wordsworth's poetic self is finally formed and constructed. In this chapter I hope to show that in *The Prelude* growth of the mind, the soul and the self is the result not simply of the soul's own "'dark Instructable workmanship'", as Hartman suggests, but also of a sustained interaction with, and resistance to, the externality of language.

Wordsworth's apocalyptic landscape in the Simplon Pass episode and 'image' of the 'mighty Mind' on Mount Snowdon are driven by contradictions, multiplicity, and fractures. In the imaginative encounter with his 'Soul' on the Alps, Wordsworth envisages a sublime vision of 'an invisible world', stating that

Our destiny, our nature, and our home
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be. (VI. 538-42)

'Infinitude' and 'hope that can never die' are at the core of this passage because 'only there' does our human nature belong. At the moment of imaginative self-encounter, Wordsworth is attempting to claim an undying life for 'the mind'. At this point, Hartman remarks that 'When thus distinct, when unmediated, [Imagination] blinds speech and extinguishes the light of the senses. The unfathered vapour, as it shrouds the poet's eye, also shrouds the eye of his song, whose tenor is Nature guiding and fostering the power of

³ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 7. Hartman similarly points out that Wordsworth's poem are 'conveying and absorbing the difference between voice and blessing, words and wishes, being and being-in-time (*The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 159).

song'.⁴ This points to the complicated relationship between the imagination and nature for Wordsworth, and Wordsworth repeatedly questions the relationship between his imagination and nature's self in the composition of *The Prelude*, as here:

that first poetic Faculty
Of plain imagination and severe,
No longer a mute Influence of the soul,
~~An Element of the nature's inner self,~~ ? [MS. A, 192^r].

If the imagination is 'unfathered', who can be sure whether it is 'an element' of nature, or even 'nature's inner self'? The deletion here certainly seems to express Wordsworth's own doubts. Wordsworth's imagination, though 'shroud[ing] the eye of his song', remains vital to the 'progress' of his song, of course. But the extent to which the song is 'guid[ed] and foster[ed]' by nature is always a question for Wordsworth, as Hartman's reading suggests. However, Wordsworth is also fascinated by the extent to which it is in fact language, and not nature at all, that 'guide[s]' and 'foster[s]' the 'progress' of his song, repeatedly acknowledging and engaging with the fact that in the 'true pathway of [his] verse' [MS. WW, 28^r] there is a constant tension between a self that is created by the randomness of language and his own self, which remains 'a mute Influence'.

The phrase 'something evermore about to be' is an expression of intense ambiguity. What is 'something' and what is it to be 'evermore about to be'? Does the poet strive to use the phrase 'something evermore about to be' in order to reach beyond the realm of language? Hartman thinks that Wordsworth here 'recognize[s] that "infinite" is not at the end of the path but in a crossing and a losing of the way, by which a power [the imagination'] transcending all single ways guides the traveller to itself'.⁵ But it seems to me that Wordsworth's use of the word 'something' tells us more than this. It is certainly right to say that the imagination seeks to 'transcend' nature and thus to guide the poet to

⁴ Hartman, 'A Poet's Progress', p. 613.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 612.

the invisible world of ‘infinite’. Nevertheless, this imaginative power can only be ‘called’ through the ‘sad incompetence of human speech’, even though Wordsworth longs for a being that is free of the bondage of language. When the imagination seemingly ‘transcend[s] all single ways’ in the poem, it also transcends the power of language, and Wordsworth is fully aware of this. This is why he is particularly vague about the ‘something evermore about to be’. His writing here indicates an attempt to suggest ‘something [...] more’ than the ‘incompetence’ of language can communicate. It is also, of course, an attempt to keep that ‘something’ away from the defacing power of language. Most of the time, Wordsworth tends to give the name ‘something’ (a name that is *no name*) to something external whose existence can only be felt, such as ‘something heavenly fraught’, ‘something unseen before’, and ‘something far more deeply interfused’ (X. 823, XII. 305, ‘Tintern Abbey’, 96). This is his way of ‘mak[ing] / Breathings for incommunicable powers’ (III. 187-88). And this is also the way in which he endeavours to establish an identity that frees itself from the grasp of ‘dead letters’. The challenge for Wordsworth is how the existence of this ‘something’, despite it being inexpressible and indefinable by words, might be manifested within, sustained by and developed through, the ‘progress of [his] Song’.

After the poet’s apostrophe to the imagination in the Alps episode, the natural scene serves as an exhibition of imaginative ‘Power’, through which Wordsworth claims that he has actually encountered his ‘Soul’ rather than any sublimity displayed in nature. This imaginative power is the power to perceive what language creates – the ‘glory’ of ‘my Soul’ and an epiphany of an apocalyptic world. In the following, I will take an in-depth look into this creative power of language and the way Wordsworth depicts the landscape of the Simplon Pass as putting on a countenance full of ambiguity, contradiction, and vagueness, and in this way seeks to poise his poetic self midway between textual identity and interior subjectivity. Where Hartman reads the imagination as an ‘unfathered’ ‘awful

Power' in *The Prelude*, then, I want to focus on the imagination that is linguistically created by the poem, and Wordsworth's repeated attempts to resist this 'Power', a power 'fathered' by language, in order to evoke, if not to voice, his own self.

Descending into 'a narrow chasm' ('gloomy Pass') (VI. 553, 554), Wordsworth describes the scene:

The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
 The stationary blasts of water-falls,
 And every where along the hollow rent
 Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfetter'd clouds, and region of the heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
 Characters of the great Apocalyps,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first and last, and midst, and without end. (VI. 556-572)

Wordsworth projects the imagination upon the apocalyptic work of nature through 'the mystery of words'. In this way, his inner subjectivity comes into an interplay with another self manifested in the landscape. In this shadowy 'gloomy Pass', the display of the imagination's power is worked on by the 'shadowy things' in words. 'Blasts of water-falls' and 'torrents', like the 'homeless voice of waters' on Mount Snowdon that give rise to 'the Soul, the Imagination', constitute 'characters of the great Apocalypse'. Meanwhile, Wordsworth builds a subtle link between self and the other by inserting an implicit but existent sense of self in the exhibition of the imagination in the Simplon Pass. In the act of writing, he intricately hides a self behind the 'fabric' of the text as an 'unrepresentable'

self. As we can see, there is murmur from ‘the rocks’ and there is also sound from the ‘crag that spake by the way-side’ (*‘as if a voice were in them’*, my italics). The status of the ‘[mutter]’ from ‘the rocks’ and the sound from the ‘black drizzling crags’ as ‘voice[s]’ is nevertheless in doubt. The origin of these mysterious and dubious voices is confusing. By implication, Wordsworth desires to hear ‘a voice’ seemingly immanent in the display of imaginative power when he makes a contrast between ‘mutter[ing]’ ‘rocks’, ‘[speaking] crags’, and ‘a [possible] voice’ in them. The ‘voice’, like the unrepresentable voice from his interior self, is unhearable in words because it is only ‘as if a voice’. Wordsworth makes various revisions to this immanent voice. In MS.A [137^r], there is ‘dull reverberation never ceasing’; in MS. B [p. 179], the voice is revised as ‘a plaintive undertone that did not cease’. Wordsworth’s act of rewriting expresses the never-ending sense of dreariness and sorrow that comes from the ‘ghostly language of the ancient earth’. In Wordsworth’s self-representation, the disembodied voice of his inner self is also merely an ‘undertone’, endlessly reverberating beneath the fabric of the text. However, the poet’s creation of vagueness here (*‘as if’*), like his use of the word ‘something’, is actually a rhetorical strategy to reach an identity beyond textuality. In D. J. Moores’ words, ‘By acknowledging his inability to express the inexpressible, Wordsworth is thus in a roundabout way achieving some form of expression that borders on the *via negativa* of the mystics, which asserts by denial’.⁶ In the act of self-representation, Wordsworth, by showing that his words cannot catch the self existing outside the text, successfully ‘achiev[es] some form of expression’ that is in touch with the self. This idea of ‘*via negativa*’, which asserts that ‘no finite concepts or attributes can be adequately used [of the things to be represented], but only negative terms’,⁷ implicitly hints at the self Wordsworth seeks to represent.

Amid the reciprocity between internality and externality, senses of discordance and

⁶ Moores, *Mystical Discourse*, p. 122.

⁷ See *OED*’s definition of ‘*via negativa noun*’, p. 1962.

inconsistency are formed. For example, an obvious contrast surfaces in two juxtaposed but incongruous words – ‘stationary’ and ‘blasts’. In ‘the stationary blasts of water-falls’, the downward movement of ‘water-falls’, the static and motionless stillness, and the gust of ‘blasts’ are working against each other. The word ‘stationary’ is attempting to steady and counterbalance the word ‘blasts’ while the latter also keeps counteracting the earlier.⁸ Wordsworth’s descriptions move from ‘the immeasurable height / Of woods’, through the ‘water-falls’, to ‘the hollow rent’. In this fracture, the feeling of unsteadiness is intensifying with the words ‘thwarting’, ‘bewilder’d’, and ‘forlorn’. The word ‘forlorn’ further reveals a hint of dejection and despondency. In the whole landscape, no place can be spotted to localize and stabilize the voice of Wordsworth’s own self.

This writing (and creation) of contradiction – in language – shows Wordsworth’s grappling with the conflicting ideas about self as in touch with a silent self and the ‘other’ self constructed by language. As Wordsworth goes on to state, ‘tumult and peace, the darkness and the light / Were all like workings of one mind’. In the ‘workings of one mind’, the idea of steadiness is co-existent with the idea of traumatic instability. ‘Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light’ are working together towards the construction of ‘one mind’, ‘the same face’, ‘one tree’, and, ultimately, ‘the great Apocalypse’, and ‘Eternity’. The ‘workings’ of discrete and incongruous elements are components of oneness, like the ‘roaring waters of one voice’ on Mount Snowdon. Between internality and externality, Wordsworth presents the mind as the totality (‘one mind’) made up of a multiplicity of ‘workings’ and ‘characters’.

Wordsworth’s writing here attempts to bring the mind and the external landscape into oneness with the apocalyptic world of ‘infinitude’ (‘of first and last, and midst, and without end’). Hartman sees in this world ‘a power transcending all single ways [and]

⁸ Concerning the phrase, ‘stationary blasts’, Hartman points out that ‘The most torrential thing in nature is frozen by distance ... the maximum of the movement returns to stillness’ (*The Unmediated Vision*, p. 45). However I suggest that here Wordsworth writes both steadiness and instability into his description of the landscape, which reflects his own conflicted self.

guid[ing] the traveler to itself' through the human capacity to imagine. However, at the same time, the poet writes and invents contradiction in the working of this imaginative power. The 'workings of one mind' are further complicated when his writing keeps the idealism of 'one mind', 'the great Apocalypse', and 'Eternity' at a distance with the words 'like', 'features', 'characters' and 'types and symbols'. These unsettling words constitute 'the face of the autobiographer, apocalyptically inscribed in the very signs of its undoing', its "working" at the scene of imagined death'.⁹ This 'death' is signified by the inscription of self. In Wordsworth's writing, a link is built between the 'face' of nature and 'the great Apocalypse'. The 'face' of nature, representing simultaneously the 'face' of the poet's imaginative power, is a reproduction of his inner mind as 'other' in language that 'defaces' his own self. Wordsworth uses the agency of language to glorify the apocalyptic power of his mind, but his use of words also subverts his own claim by creating an unstable and fragmented self. The textual illustrations of the 'workings' of his mental powers reveal a sense of unsteadiness in his self-formation. The 'face' of self is 'defaced' by the words signifying 'death' (such as 'decaying' and 'a sick sight'), the idea of unity subverted by the idea of fragment, and the language of incarnation replaced by the language of clothing. 'One mind' instantly falls silent and becomes absent when its 'workings', 'features' and 'characters' are represented through the text.

Hartman's thoughts on Wordsworth's claim of oneness are applicable here; 'What remains of this rich confusion are partial and contradictory structures of unification, which meet us "at every turn" in the "narrow rent" of the text, and add up less to a "chorus of infinity" than again to a "blast of harmony"'.¹⁰ Hartman also states that 'For prophet as for poet the ideal is "timely utterance", yet what we actually receive is a "blast of harmony"'.¹¹ The ideal 'timely utterance' of 'one mind', represented in Wordsworth's text,

⁹ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 20.

¹⁰ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 173.

¹¹ Hartman, 'The Poetics of Prophecy', in Bloom (ed.) *English Romantic Poetry*, pp. 43-64, p. 55.

is fragmented by ‘blasts of water-falls’, ‘shooting’ ‘torrents’, and ‘raving stream’. Hartman explains that ‘the apocalypse is a picture of a self-thwarting march and countermarch of elements, a divine mockery of the concept of the Single Way [guided by nature]’.¹² For Hartman, ‘It is ... the idea of Nature itself teaching the travellers to transcend Nature’ that is key here.¹³ I disagree with Hartman here for two reasons. First, Wordsworth’s description of the apocalyptic landscape demonstrates that it is not ‘Nature’ but the ‘sad incompetence of human speech’ that the power of imagination seeks to ‘transcend’ in order to reach the idealism of apocalypse. As mentioned, in the world of ‘infinite’, Wordsworth recognizes that only the word ‘something’ can be adopted to refer to ‘something evermore about to be’. In the Simplon Pass, Wordsworth talks about the imaginative world of ‘Eternity’, but this time the words he uses are ‘types and symbols’. The poet acknowledges the impossibility of any unmediated link between ‘the great Apocalypse’ and the world embodied in words. The ‘face’ of nature, created by the working of language, can at best represent the ‘types and symbols’ of the unrepresentable idealism.

Secondly, confronted by a Wordsworthian landscape, the Wordsworthian imagination does not seek to ‘transcend’ nature so much as to work in alliance with the imaginative power it finds in nature itself. For Wordsworth, nature is never a physical landscape waiting to be transcended by the mental power. As he puts it in MS. W, he observes:

The diverse manner in which Nature works
 Ofter times,
 {Upo upon the outward face of
 things
 As if with an imaginative Power ... [MS. W 37^v]

In the apocalyptic landscape, there is an interplay between Wordsworth’s inner subjectivity,

¹² Hartman, ‘A Poet’s Progress’, p. 612.

¹³ Ibid.

the ‘unfathered’ imagination, and ‘an imaginative Power’ seemingly at work in nature. I will discuss this point in fuller depth in relation to the Snowdon episode.

For Hartman, however, the imagination in Wordsworth is an ‘awful Power’, and it is this idea that I want to focus on here. Hartman thinks that ‘The greatest event of his [Alpine] journey is not the “Characters of the great Apocalypse” ... , but the spectral figure of Imagination cutting him off, fulfilling Nature’s prophecy, and revealing the end of his Negative Way’.¹⁴ The spectacle in the Simplon Pass ‘suddenly reveals a power that work[s] against Nature in order to be recognized’.¹⁵ That is, ‘a supremely visual moment’ of the apocalyptic landscape ‘serves only ... to call [Imagination] forth’.¹⁶ But, in fact, Wordsworth’s imagination can never reveal ‘the end’ of its ‘Negative Way’ because, in de Man’s words, ‘the totalization takes place by a return to the emptiness and the lack of identity that resided in the heart of things’.¹⁷ While Hartman focuses on the contradictory relationship between Nature and Imagination, I am mainly concerned with ‘the emptiness and the lack of identity’ evident here, though not as ‘resid[ing] in the heart of things’, as Hartman reads it, but rather as a product of language. Wordsworth’s longing for ‘totalization’, as Hartman puts it, ‘so compressed the element of time that something like a “gravitation” effect was produced, whereby *unrelated incidents* fell toward each other’.¹⁸ This process towards oneness is actually problematic, stumbling along a path that is highly unstable, intermingled with elements that are not only ‘unrelated’ but also conflicting. The words that present harmonic oneness are (nearly) overwhelmed by words suggesting disharmony in Wordsworth’s writing of the sight. This all reveals a conflicting consciousness that attempts to consecrate a self while never resting happily in the textually constructed ‘face’ of the autobiographical self. Out of this troubling consciousness, Wordsworth struggles to strengthen the representative power of language with the words

¹⁴ Hartman, ‘Wordsworth’s Magic Mountains’, *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader*, pp. 79-92, p. 83.

¹⁵ Hartman, ‘A Poet’s Progress’, p. 611.

¹⁶ Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814*, p. 241.

¹⁷ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 37.

¹⁸ Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 170 (my italics).

‘workings’ and blossoms’: though what can at best be represented in writing are ‘types’ of ‘Apocalypse’, these textualized ‘types’ are here dynamically ‘working’, bringing sublime entities into full ‘blossom’.

Wordsworth’s use of the phrase ‘like workings of one mind’ indicates his increasingly baffled thoughts about language. Recalling Wordsworth’s previous apostrophe to the imagination after crossing the Alps: ‘to my Soul I say / I recognize thy glory’, we find that the shifts from apostrophe to the word ‘like’, and from ‘my Soul’ to ‘one mind’, disclose a gradually-enlarged divergence between the poet’s internality and externality. The textually developed sense of self becomes the ‘now’ self, which is ‘representative’ and remaining at some distance from the ‘then’ self. Language, making a (re)figuration of the writing poet’s relationship to his past self, facilitates the imaginative encounter with his own soul. But language also hampers this self-encounter because of the absence behind every ‘I’ in the poem (which produces ‘the emptiness and the lack of identity’ in the textual ‘I’).

Similar to the ‘like workings of one mind’ in the Alps episode, Wordsworth’s vision of sublimity on Mount Snowdon appears to him ‘the perfect image of a mighty Mind’. However, it is merely an ‘image’ of ‘a’ mind rather than of his own mind. He seems to be moving close to this scene of self-representation while implicitly distancing his self from the ‘image’ of the mind. Hartman points out that Wordsworth ‘may insist in the commentary ... that what he saw was the “type” of a “majestic intellect”, yet the most striking feature or “soul” ... of the vision is an instance of *timely utterance*’.¹⁹ Hartman explains: ‘the timely utterance, the strength-restoring event, occurs amid continuing presences that the new feeling of strength makes more apparent’; these ‘presences’ ‘both exist as a function of an immediately perceived identity, and this identity reposes upon the mind’s capacity for non-relational and simultaneous apprehension’.²⁰ Nevertheless, the timely utterance is not far from being untimely because ‘the most striking feature’ of the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁰ Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision*, pp. 41, 45.

vision on Snowdon is not essentially ‘an immediately perceived identity’ and Wordsworth’s presentation of this spectacle does not rest upon ‘the mind’s capacity for non-relational and simultaneous apprehension’. In the following I will look into the way in which Wordsworth develops and unsettles this ‘timely utterance’ through an intricate and complex link between the mind and its ‘image’ projected upon the awe-inspiring sublimity on Mount Snowdon. The mind itself corresponds to the ‘under-presence’ that serves to exalt the ‘image’ of the ‘mighty Mind’. Wordsworth’s use of the prefix ‘under’ suggests the inexpressible and incommunicable nature of his interiority. However, in the poet’s self-encounter on Mount Snowdon, the power of the mind is manifested by the landscape – through the working of language. Once embodied in words, the mind loses its identity, but Wordsworth is also aware that his mind cannot exercise its power without resorting to externality. ‘The perfect image of a mighty Mind’ on Snowdon drives Hartman to see a ‘breach or betrayal of Nature’.²¹ Yet the relationship between mind and nature in the poem is never that direct or straightforward. I think the word most worth discussion remains ‘image’. In Wordsworth’s writing, the imagination never achieves apocalypse because what it can at best create is merely an ‘image’ of the mind.

The poet reveals his troubled attitude to the act of writing in one manuscript:

My present
 [?task]
 [?is] to
 {[? ?] } [? Contemplate] for a needful [?]
 [? Would set in] view
 [?]
 [? Woud shew] the manner in which
 [?shew] Nature
 Works ... [MS. WW, 21^v]

Wordsworth’s words waver between ‘contemplate’, ‘set in view’, and ‘shew’ when he

²¹ Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814*, p. 132.

seeks to present in language ‘the manner in which’ nature ‘works’ upon ‘the outward face of things’. This sense of indecision is further intensified by a series of question marks placed before each of the words. He is uncertain which word can best compensate for the ‘sad incompetence of human speech’ and represent whatever his writing refers to. Wordsworth knows that the self represented through writing is also ‘embodied in material portraiture’ [MS. B, p. 331] as an ‘image’. For Wordsworth, this act of self-representation is problematic. In one revision, the spectacle on Snowdon appears to be ‘~~embodied~~ perfect image of a might’ while it is also:

 th a
 [?Reviewed] in though {an image of ~~the~~ mind
 That feeds upon infinity – a mind
 [?A] [DC MS. 83, bifolium, 1^r]

The transition from ‘a might’, and ‘the mind’, to ‘a mind’ reveals Wordsworth’s doubt about what the ‘image’ represents. His particular revision of ‘the’ to ‘a’ indicates that the textualized self can never refer to any specific self. However, he also questions the use of ‘a’ ([?A]) out of his fear of a lost correspondence to his own self in the representation of the mind.

Wordsworth uses language to glorify the power of the mind, but he also at once empties these claims of meaning by unsettling his statements because of his baffled awareness of the inherent difference between internality and externality. In the act of writing, Wordsworth is precisely producing – in language – this contradiction. Wordsworth’s description of the scene on Mount Snowdon, for instance, actively fragments and incompletes both the ‘mighty Mind’ and ‘higher minds’ (XIII. 90). Wordsworth writes, in the 1805 version:

 The Power which these
 Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
 Thrusts forth upon the senses, is the express

Resemblance, in the fullness of its strength
 Made visible, a genuine Counterpart
 And Brother of the glorious faculty
 Which higher minds bear with them as their own. (XIII. 84-90)

The ‘Power’ exhibited in the sublime landscape is the ‘resemblance’ and ‘Brother’ of ‘the glorious faculty’. Wordsworth particularly (and wishfully) inserts two adjectives, ‘express’ (*immediate*) and ‘genuine’, to intensify the degree of similarity. This exterior ‘Power’ ostensibly appears to be the reflecting image of ‘the glorious faculty’. However, this ‘faculty’ is yet not entirely identical to the mind; it is what ‘higher minds bear *with* them as their own’ (my italics). It is, at most, ‘a unit that is part of the all-encompassing whole’.²² The distance between the poet’s mind and the ‘Power’ displayed in front of him is even further enlarged. Through textual representation, ‘higher minds’ are fragmented and multiplied into a ‘glorious faculty’ and ‘a Power’. The ‘Power’ is constantly in the process of ‘incomplet[ing]’ Wordsworth’s self. Furthermore, ‘the Power’ is both ‘the *immediate* projection of what it nonetheless incompletes’ and ‘a monument to the absence of the whole’.²³ The ‘Power’ is ‘made *visible*’ ‘in the fullness of *its* strength’ (my italics), exhibited in the landscape and represented through Wordsworth’s writing, while ‘higher minds’ remain hidden. By implication, when the ‘resemblance’ of ‘higher minds’ – the ‘Power’ – is ‘made visible’, ‘higher minds’ themselves stay invisible as an ‘under-presence’.

‘The Power’ works as both ‘Brother’ and ‘Counterpart’ of the mind in ‘a dialectic of self’, in which Wordsworth looks at this other self from a distance while his inner subjectivity remains absent. Ironically, ‘[the fragment] covers the thinking of identity through the mediation of non-identity’.²⁴ The represented self, a new self that is created

²² Charles I. Armstrong, *Romantic Organicism: from Idealist Origins to Ambivalent Afterlife* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 44.

²³ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy Jean-Luc., *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 42-43, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

and celebrated on Mount Snowdon, remains the fragmentary other of Wordsworth's own self, unsettling his desire to build a sublime unity of the 'Mind' and its 'image'. De Man points out that 'The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject'.²⁵ Although the self and the other exist in 'an alignment', I do not think that they are in 'mutual reflexive *substitution*' in Wordsworth's description of the Snowdon landscape (my italics). The other self in writing threatens to deface Wordsworth's own subjectivity while posing as a projection of it. This other self is 'visible', serving as an 'image' of the self while his interiority remains hidden and silent. This is the way Wordsworth comes to demonstrate the grandeur of his mental powers but it is also the way he invalidates his claim because of a problematic contradiction between self and language. In this sense, Hartman's idea about 'a vision of nature's resemblance to a mind' is problematic; he thinks that, through 'reciprocity and resemblance in the ... Snowdon meditation', 'man and nature each begin appearing as the other's ontological remainder, the outside of an inside'.²⁶ In my view, it is not 'nature' that stays in 'dialectic' with Wordsworth's self, but the textual self (the 'express / Resemblance', 'genuine Counterpart', and 'perfect image' of 'a mighty Mind') that takes on the role as 'the outside of an inside'.

This very interaction between self and other is both an obstruction to and a motivation for the 'growth' of Wordsworth's mind. It is exactly this dynamic play between internality and linguistic externality that triggers Wordsworth's desire to stabilize a sense of self ('consciousness not to be subdued' (III. 123))²⁷ in confrontation with the textual

²⁵ De Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', 921.

²⁶ Hartman, *Wordsworth's Transcendentalism in 1804*, p. 119.

²⁷ According to *OED*, consciousness is 'a knowledge solely of what is now and here present to the mind. It is therefore only intuitive and its objects exclusively presentative'. Consciousness is 'the perception of what passes in a man's own mind. Consciousness, in the most strict and exact sense of the word, signifies ... the reflex act by which I know that I think, and that my thoughts and actions are my own and not another's'.

construction of self. Talking about ‘higher minds’, Wordsworth explains that

This is the very spirit in which they deal
 With all the objects of the universe.
 They from their native selves can send abroad
 Like transformation, for themselves create
 A like existence, and, whene'er it is
 Created for them, catch it by an instinct;
 Them the enduring and the transient both
 Serve to exalt; they build up greatest things
 From least suggestions; ever on the watch,
 Willing to work and to be wrought upon,
 They need not extraordinary calls
 To rouse them, in a world of life they live
 By sensible impressions not enthrall'd,
 But quicken'd, rous'd, and made thereby more fit
 To hold communion with the invisible world. (XIII. 91-105)

An implicit line between internality and externality is drawn again between ‘higher minds’ (‘their native selves’) and ‘like transformation’ (of ‘higher minds’). The ‘higher minds’ ‘create / A like existence’ and ‘send abroad / Like transformation’. The status of the ‘like existence’ is ambiguous. It is a resemblance of the mind although it is being constructed by writing. It is also connected to ‘all the objects of the universe’ (when ‘sen[t] abroad’) though separated from them by language. Moreover, it is not only ‘a like existence’ but also a ‘like transformation’ of ‘higher minds’. The mind is changed and ‘transform[ed]’ when being externalized. In this act of ‘transformation’, contradictions surface in Wordsworth’s writing here. On the one hand, ‘higher minds’ ‘themselves create / A like existence’; on the other hand, this ‘like existence’ is said to be ‘created for them’. We are left uncertain about what exactly ‘create[s]’ this ‘like existence’. Whether this ‘like’ image is ‘created’ or ‘[caught]’ by ‘higher minds’ is also unknown.²⁸

²⁸ Owen states that ‘in particular I have puzzled over Wordsworth’s seeming failure to distinguish, here and elsewhere, between creating a new existence and observing a created one; between working and being wrought upon’ (‘Such Structures as the Mind Builds’, 30).

As Wordsworth's 'Song' 'progress[es]', we can see that the distance between 'higher minds' and their 'like existence' is gradually enlarged. While the 'like existence' is displayed in 'all the objects of the universe', the 'higher minds' build up a bond with 'the invisible world'. The 'minds' 'need not extraordinary calls / To rouse them' and are 'not enthrall'd' 'by sensible impressions'. The poet's internality still stands apart from externality. He has a longing for an identity beyond 'the limits and conditions of autobiography' – for 'higher minds' that 'hold communion with the invisible world' and even for the mind which is 'itself / Of substance and of fabric more divine' (XIII. 451-52), but his writing also unsettles this claim by representing an 'image' of self 'exhibited' by 'Nature' and 'lodg'd' in the 'chasm' of the whole spectacle on Mount Snowdon.²⁹ In the reciprocity between the internal and the external, Wordsworth creates a self that is 'willing to work and to be wrought upon' by the working of language. For Wordsworth, the most problematic and unresolvable contradiction exists between his interior self and the other self to be found in language – not between Imagination and Nature (as Hartman asserts).

In the act of self-representation, Wordsworth is also aware that the imagination cannot assert its power by entirely transcending the 'imperious' power of nature. He states that 'higher minds' are 'quicken'd, rous'd, and made thereby more fit / To hold communion with the invisible world'. This glorification of the mind is enigmatic because he also thinks that 'higher minds' 'need not extraordinary calls / To rouse them'. At this point, we may ask *by what* these 'minds' are 'rouz'd' and 'made ... fit' for such a holy 'communion'? On Mount Snowdon, it is 'Nature' that 'thrusts forth' 'the Power' 'upon the senses' (XIII. 85, 86, 84, 86). There is a power in nature echoing the power in the mind, though not identical to it. As Wordsworth puts it, 'the forms / Of nature have a passion in themselves' (XII. 289-90). Similarly, in MS. W, he says that:

²⁹ On a detailed discussion of the tropological play of images on Mount Snowdon, see Haney's 'Incarnation and the Autobiographical Exit', esp. 540-42. In addition, see Fry's *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are*, pp. 126-7, for a reading of 'the perfect image of a mighty Mind'.

To these appearan which Nature thrusts
 our notice ork
 Upon ~~the observer~~, her own naked w{[?]
 by the human mind
 Self wrought unaided {inevitable
 Imperious [MS. W, 37^v]

The words ‘naked’ and ‘unaided’ distinguishes the power of Nature from the supposedly ‘awful Power’ of Imagination. The work of Nature is ‘self-wrought’ and ‘imperious’. This manuscript presents the domineering power of Nature itself. And Wordsworth also shows his aspiration to ‘a power like one of Nature’s (XII. 312). It is only through ‘an ennobling interchange / Of action from within and from without’ that Wordsworth’s imagination comes to be restored and empowered. ‘In Nature’s presence [I] stood, as I stand now, / A sensitive and a *creative* soul’ (XI. 254-55). Wordsworth acknowledges that his imagination needs to ‘accompan[y] its course / Among the ways of Nature’ (XIII. 176-77).

Yet throughout *The Prelude*, Wordsworth has been attempting to stabilize an identity for his self in the act of writing, not communing with Nature. This effort is nevertheless rendered inoperative by the otherness of language, which produces a ‘counterpart’ of his self. Wordsworth inscribes in his text the ‘other’ self that is highly perplexing and inconsistent. In Wordsworth’s view, the imagination is closely related to the soul. ‘The Soul, the Imagination’ is ‘lodg’d’ in the sublime spectacle on Mount Snowdon. He defines ‘Imagination’ as ‘another name for absolute strength / And clearest insight, amplitude of mind, / And reason in her most exalted mood’ (XIII. 168-70).³⁰ The words ‘absolute’, ‘clearest’, and ‘most’ contribute to effects of precision and certainty. However, on a close analysis, these multiple definitions appear to be perplexing when applied to the representation of the imaginative power in the external landscape. First, what is this ‘clearest insight’ into? It can be said to be into both Wordsworth’s mind and the ‘image’ of ‘one mighty Mind’ when the imagination is ‘lodg’d’ in the ‘dark deep thoroughfare’. The

³⁰ On Wordsworth’s definition of ‘Imagination’ here, see Jarvis’ *Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song*, p. 222.

location of the imagination in darkness is also in question when Wordsworth declares that the imagination is the ‘clearest insight’. Through textual representations, Wordsworth’s ‘clearest insight’ is obscured by the working of ‘darkness’ and ‘shadowy things’ in words. Secondly, in what sense is the imagination identical to ‘amplitude of mind’? To put it in another way, why is the imagination only part of the spectacle on Mount Snowdon, which is viewed as ‘the perfect image of a mighty Mind’? How is ‘amplitude of mind’ related to ‘a mighty Mind’? All of Wordsworth’s statements make his vision of the imagination even more ambiguous and confusing. On the obscurity created by words, it is worthwhile to read one revision in MS. A. In Wordsworth’s view, the imagination is:

[? word]
 Another name for absolute strength. [MS. A, 329^f]

For Hartman, the imagination seeks to transcend nature to claim ‘absolute strength’. But my reading suggests that there is an ‘under-thirst’ in Wordsworth’s imagination for an ‘absolute’ ‘word’, as indicated in this manuscript. He aspires to an ‘absolute’ power in and through words (as opposed to ‘sad incompetence of human speech’) which can adequately represent the power of imagination.

In Books VI and XIII, we see Wordsworth present the apocalyptic landscape in the Alps and the sublime vision on Mount Snowdon as the loci of his mental powers. In this self-representation, there is always a relation of difference between the poet’s interior consciousness and its existence in language. In autobiographical writing, Wordsworth sees in words the other that keeps his identity halted between his ambivalent selves without ever being able to establish a definite sense of identity. For Owen, ‘It is ironic that the vision from Snowdon, which to me demonstrates the poet at the height of his imaginative power as a poet of the natural and intellectual sublime, should be the starting-point for a tedious and obscure argument which will tell you that the very power which conceived

that vision is not enough'.³¹ My discussion in this chapter is not in full agreement with Owen's statement. The descent from Snowdon is not 'the starting-point for a tedious and obscure argument'. It is where Wordsworth's consciousness starts to reflect on its relationship to its other. The interaction between internality and externality drives him to an insight into the textual development of his identity, in which the 'growth' of his mind is developed in 'a dialectic of self'.

Wordsworth's writing offers a structure that preserves but also distances recollected selves. The conflict between internality and linguistic externality – between (unrepresentable) consciousness and its representation – is one of most debated issues in *The Prelude*. For Jacobus, 'In submitting to textuality, we put on inherent garments'.³² She states that 'At the turning or crossing-point of Wordsworth's autobiographical poem, the poet is undone ... by writing that means or signifies him but whose meaning he cannot grasp, since he is not it, even if his is the hand that writes'.³³ In de Man's view, 'It is ... not *a priori* certain that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language'.³⁴ He also points out that 'the metaphorical entity is not selected because it corresponds analogically to the inner experience of a subject but because its structure corresponds to that of a linguistic figure'.³⁵ These statements all testify to the usurping power of language. But I want to add that language itself transforms the poet's self in generative, productive, creative ways, as indicated by Wordsworth's phrase 'like transformation'. In the imaginative encounters between the mind and its powers, Wordsworth confronts a reproduction of his self as the 'other'. This other self is a generated (re)figuration of his previous self, 'exalted by an underpresence' but also 'thrust[ed] forth' by 'Nature'. It is in touch with both but identical to neither. Throughout *The Prelude*, the poet keeps developing a self in his attempt to secure and stabilize an

³¹ W. J. B. Owen, 'The Descent from Snowdon', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 16:2 (Spring, 1985), 65-74, 73.

³² Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', 641.

³³ Jacobus, *Romanticism*, p. 11.

³⁴ Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), p. 11.

³⁵ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 37.

identification between externality and internality. By seeking to poise a Wordsworth 'midway' between the construction of an identity and an identification that reaches beyond textuality, Wordsworth keeps rewriting a self into the poem. His sense of identity remains uncertain and precarious, and *The Prelude* does little more than develop an ever greater understanding of this – without ever solving it.

Part Five Between Self-assertion and Self-repression

Chapter Nine

The focus of this section is Wordsworth's textual dialogue with Coleridge. The chapter asks how Wordsworth develops his identity as a '[prophet] of Nature' by addressing his 'philosophic Song' to Coleridge (XIII. 442, I. 231). This 'Song' is composed for the redemption of all humankind in the wake of the failures of the French Revolution. Wordsworth claims that the 'Theme' of his 'Song' is 'to retrace the way that led me on / Through nature to the love of human Kind' (VIII. 587-88). As discussed in Part One of my thesis, Wordsworth's writing of his revolutionary experience turns *The Prelude* into a lifelong work, and it is Coleridge who plays an important role in Wordsworth's decision to develop and expand his Two-Part *Prelude* in 1799. This final part of my thesis focuses on Coleridge's influence on the composition of *The Prelude* more generally. The decisive interaction between Wordsworth and Coleridge situates Wordsworth's self-formation between past and present, and between private intimacy with nature and public involvement in society. This interaction is made more complicated, however, by Wordsworth's ambiguous attitude towards language when he seeks to narrate a self that lives up to but implicitly resists Coleridge's expectations.

This chapter focuses on Wordsworth's developing construction of a poetic identity for himself and Coleridge's influence on this. The changing roles played by Coleridge at specific moments in *The Prelude* as the poem progresses and evolves will be discussed in depth. A complex link runs through Wordsworth's interactions with Coleridge in *The Prelude* between self-assertion and self-repression – between Wordsworth's private aim as a poet (self-formation), his self-projection for Coleridge, and Coleridge's identification of him (as a poet for humankind). No matter how much contradiction this dilemma may cause, Wordsworth's poem remains a work written to and for Coleridge and derives a great part of its vitality from its problematic relation to Coleridge. In this chapter, I will argue

that Wordsworth reconciles these contradictions not by accommodating himself to Coleridge, but by recreating, rewriting, and redirecting Coleridge's project for *The Prelude* in the 'Wordsworthian' project of self-creation.

As the primary reader Wordsworth addresses in his autobiographical writing, Coleridge plays an important role in the 'growth' of Wordsworth's mind. The roles Coleridge takes on in *The Prelude*, however, are extremely ambiguous. Sometimes he is the 'Brother' of Wordsworth's 'soul' (V. 180), to whom Wordsworth resorts for intellectual stimulation and guidance ('O Friend! ... / Thou wilt assist me as a pilgrim gone / In quest of highest truth' (XI. 390-93)), and sometimes he is the superior talent that hides behind the text, from whom Wordsworth is worried that he may receive reproach.¹ Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth is immense. Wordsworth once stated that '[Coleridge's] mind has been habitually present with me'.² *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's letter to Coleridge and *Biographia Literaria* is Coleridge's reply.³ Wordsworth had an intimate intellectual relationship with Coleridge, who thought that *The Prelude*'s account of 'the Foundations and the Building-up / Of [a] Human Spirit' well represented the relation between mind and world 'revealable' to 'th'understanding mind' ('To William Wordsworth', 5-6, 8, 7).⁴

Coleridge praises Wordsworth as one likely to write 'THE FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHICAL POEM' (*B.L.* II. p.129).⁵ However, in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth works both with and against the poetic (and philosophic) identity Coleridge projects on to

¹ Lucy Newlyn points out that 'Not only is there the obvious contradiction between *The Prelude*'s design and Coleridge's role: there is also a struggle between Wordsworth's personal quest and the wish to pay homage to his friend' ('"A Strong Confusion": Coleridge's Presence in *The Prelude*', in Stephen Gill (ed.), *William Wordsworth's The Prelude: a Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 147-80, p. 148).

² Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: a Biography: the Later Years: 1803-1850* (London: Oxford UP, 1968), p. 520.

³ 'Wordsworth stood at the centre of Coleridge's greatest single piece of criticism (*Biographia Literaria*)', and 'Coleridge was the addressee of Wordsworth's greatest poem (*The Prelude*)' (Seamus Perry, 'Wordsworth and Coleridge', in Stephen Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 161-70, p. 162. Also see Don H Bialostosky, *Wordsworth, Dialogics, and the Practice of Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p. 28.

⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'To William Wordsworth', in Gill et al. (eds.), *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, pp. 542-45.

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (or *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*) (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1975). Unless otherwise stated, the quotations of *Biographia Literaria* in this chapter are from this version.

him. For example, in Book VII Wordsworth by necessity moves away from the role of a philosophic poet (which Coleridge imposed upon him): ‘Beloved Friend, / The assurances then given unto myself, / Which did beguile me of some heavy thoughts / At thy departure to a foreign Land, / Have fail’d’ (13-17). Instead, he sees in his ‘favorite Grove’ ‘something that fits [him] for the Poet’s task’ (50, 53). Here his poem is based upon his intimate communion with nature, through which the ‘growth’ of his mind is formed. In 1809, Wordsworth writes to Coleridge, stating: ‘This was all which I proposed to do when I began the subject, and I have dwelt so long upon it merely because my pen chose to move in that track’.⁶ However, Wordsworth states near the end of *The Prelude* that ‘now, O Friend! this History is brought / To its *appointed* close’, but that ‘much hath been *omitted*, as need was; / ... even of the other wealth / Which is collected among woods and fields / Far more’ ((XIII. 269-70, 279-82), my italics). Is the poem an attempt at self-utterance at all, then, or does it, in fact, involve a rather greater degree of conscious self-repression?⁷ In Book VIII he says that nature ‘rais’d the first complacency in [him], / And noticeable kindness of heart’ (75-76). How is this ‘kindness’ related to the construction of identity for Wordsworth? Similarly, of ‘the mighty City’ (VII. 697) he says in Book VIII: ‘With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel / In that great City what I owed to thee, / ... love of Man’ (VIII. 62-64). What is this ‘love of Man’ and how does it play a role in Wordsworth’s construction of an identity for himself? The particular relation between the Wordsworth who speaks in *The Prelude* and Coleridge offers a way into these larger questions, which this chapter will address in order to explore the role played within Wordsworth’s creation of a poetic identity for himself in *The Prelude* not just by self-assertion and self-creation but also by self-repression.

⁶ Wordsworth, *The Letters of William Wordsworth*, ed. Alan G. Hill, ‘To S. T. Coleridge’, 5 May 1809 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), p. 121.

⁷ As Newlyn says, *The Prelude* is ‘of a particularly divided kind: on the one hand logically moving toward assertions of self-sufficiency and independence; on the other withdrawing guiltily, as though the quest for origins can be valid only if shared, and life without Coleridge would be unthinkable’ (“‘A Strong Confusion’”, p. 148).

Bushell points out that Wordsworth's 'talk and exchange of ideas' with Coleridge in 1799 'prompts the creation of a space for Coleridge's presence within the poem, which is also the space in which the present-tense, self-conscious voice can exist'.⁸ In this way, 'Coleridge's presence within the poem' facilitates self-assertion and self-projection. However, Coleridge writes to Wordsworth on September 10, 1799, stating:

I am anxiously eager to have you steadily employed on 'The Recluse'. ... My dear friend, I do entreat you go on with 'The Recluse'; and I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*. It would do great good, and might form a part of 'The Recluse', for in my present mood I am wholly against the publication of any small poems.⁹

This appeal for a poem of redemption for the public in the aftermath of political turmoil triggers Wordsworth's expansion of his 1799 *Prelude*, but also sets an agenda for that expansion. This clearly entails some degree of self-repression on Wordsworth's part, but, as we can see in Book Two of the 1799 *Prelude*, Wordsworth answers Coleridge in his own ways:

Fare thee well!
 Health and the quiet of a healthful mind
 Attend thee! seeking oft the haunts of men
 But yet more often living with thyself
 And for thyself, so haply shall thy days
 Be many and a blessing to mankind. (1799, II. 509-14)

The two poets have a shared aim (the composition of *The Recluse*) and look forward to the day when they will both bring 'a blessing to mankind'. Yet, as James K Chandler suggests,

⁸ Bushell, 'Wordsworthian Composition: The Micro-Prelude', 420.

⁹ *STCL*, vol. 1, p. 527. This passage is quoted in Richard E. Matlak's *The Poetry of Relationship: The Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1797-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 190.

Coleridge is addressed here as a man in trouble by a poet who thinks he can help'.¹⁰ Coleridge once states: 'To be addressed, as a beloved man, by a thinker, at the close of such a poem as "The Recluse", ... is the only event ... capable of inciting in me an hour's vanity – vanity, nay, it is too good a feeling to be so called; it would indeed be a self-elevation *ab extra*'.¹¹ Wordsworth here sees an opportunity to adapt the project assigned to him into something that might bring to Coleridge his own healing powers.

Coleridge confesses that 'I feel myself a better Poet, in knowing how to honour *him*, than in all my own poetic compositions, all I have done or hope to do – and I prophesy immortality to his *Recluse*, as the first and finest philosophical Poet'.¹² He finds in Wordsworth 'those *profound* touches of the human heart', and feels himself '*a little man* by his side'.¹³ There is much here to encourage, but also to inhibit, Wordsworth's composition of an autobiographical poem. Wordsworth himself acknowledges that 'throughout this narrative, / Else sooner ended, I have known full well / For whom I thus record the birth and growth / Of gentleness, simplicity, and truth, / And joyous loves that hallow innocent days / Of peace and self-command' (VI. 269-74). In his autobiographical writing, Wordsworth sets out to trace the 'birth and growth' of the mind of that 'thinker' Coleridge so admires, a 'birth and growth' that consecrated his childhood – 'innocent days / Of peace and self-command'. But he also recognizes ('I have known full well') that this writing is composed 'for' Coleridge ('I speak to thee my Friend' (VI. 275)), who did not participate in Wordsworth's childhood experience but, rather, influenced his later mental growth. In other words, Wordsworth acknowledges here the difference between what he is writing and what Coleridge is expecting him to write, a difference that Wordsworth becomes increasingly self-conscious about, and feels increasingly compelled to justify. His

¹⁰ James K Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: a Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 240.

¹¹ *STCL*, vol. 1, p. 538, quoted in Matlak's *The Poetry of Relationship*, p. 191.

¹² Quoted in Adam Sisman's *The Friendship: Wordsworth & Coleridge* (New York: Viking, 2007), p. 369. (note84: STC to Richard Sharp, 15 Jan. 1804; *LSTC*, 2, 1034).

¹³ Quoted in Sisman's *The Friendship*, p. 177. (note 3: STC to JC, 8 June 1797; *LSTC*, 1, 325).

poem is ‘a story’, as he tells Coleridge, ‘destined for thy ear’ (X. 946), and Wordsworth never forgets this. Indeed, Wordsworth inscribes the tension between writing about his own memory of the past and his forever being conscious of the auditor – Coleridge – who expects something rather more public into many stages of the composition of *The Prelude*.

In Book I of the 1805 text, Wordsworth still seems uncertain of the ‘aim’ he should ‘determin[e]’ on as a poet in facing Coleridge, and turns ‘towards’ that ‘philosophic Song’ – the ‘immortal verse’ (I. 231, 234), which Coleridge expects of him. Rolland Gaskell points out that ‘When Coleridge suggested a long poem on nature, man, and society, his hope was that Wordsworth would be able to “deliver upon authority a system of philosophy”’.¹⁴ Coleridge’s plan for Wordsworth is that he should be a poet for humankind, prophesying an ideal of hope and freedom that is based upon a philosophical ‘system’. His writing is expected to be philosophically profound and systematically organized, as responding to Coleridge’s insistence on ‘visionary *philosophes*’. However, even in Book I this wish is for Wordsworth an ‘awful burthen’, from which he ‘full soon / Take[s] refuge’ (I. 236, 236-37). As both a thinker and a poet, Wordsworth is, at this point of the poem’s composition, in danger of being overwhelmed by Coleridge, of losing rather than winning for himself his own poetic identity. Indeed, Wordsworth had already confessed in Book I of the Two-Part *Prelude* that he writes

from delicate fears
 Of breaking in upon the unity
 Of this my argument I should omit
 To speak of such effects as cannot here
 Be regularly classed, yet tend no less
 To the same point, the growth of mental power
 And love of Nature’s works. (1799, I. 252-58)

Wordsworth writes with particular care to sustain ‘the unity’ of his ‘argument’, whose

¹⁴ Gaskell, *Wordsworth’s Poem of the Mind*, p. 57.

‘effects’ are expected to be ‘regularly classed’ with ‘*philosophes*’. Coleridge’s insistence on the idea of ‘unity’ continues to repress Wordsworth’s writing of his personal life. For example, in 1815 Coleridge once again writes to Wordsworth, requesting that he compose the poem by following ‘the matter and arrangement of Philosophy – not doubting from the advantage of the Subject that the Totality of a System was not only capable of being harmonized with, but even calculated to aid, the unity ... of a *Poem*’.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in the quoted passage Wordsworth also asserts that his ‘argument’ will still move to ‘the same point’ in his own self-formation – ‘the growth of mental power / And love of Nature’s works’ (though ‘leaving much / Unvisited’ (II. 1-2)). Book I mainly talks about the child’s unconsciousness of nature’s working, and Wordsworth hopes that ‘to thee / This labour will be welcome, honoured friend’ because ‘one end hereby, at least, hath been attained – / My mind hath been revived’ (I. 673-74, 666-66). However, behind this self-assertion lies Coleridge’s request that the ‘Tale’ of the spiritual communion with nature ‘be the tail-piece of “The Recluse”’,¹⁶ and the whole poem sees Wordsworth, in conversation with Coleridge, composing his autobiographical writing in the face of a baffling dilemma between the pressure to write a philosophy for human life and the compulsion to write a poem of private self-formation in spiritual correspondence with nature.

In taking up those ambitions assigned to him by Coleridge, Wordsworth views them as ‘honorable toil’. This ‘toil’ is heavily weighed-down with profound and obscure ‘thoughts’ which proclaim a ‘truth’ that ‘is more than truth’. Yet Coleridge has a particular sense of the kind of thoughts he is expecting from Wordsworth: ‘Friend! as we have known / Among the mountains, by our Rotha’s Stream, / ... To ruminare with interchange of talk / On [*rational*] liberty, and hope in man, / Justice and peace’ (IX. 399-403, my italics).

¹⁵ Coleridge’s letter to Wordsworth (30 May 1815), quoted in Adam Sisman, *The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge*, p. 427

¹⁶ *STCL*, vol. 1, p. 538, quoted in Matlak’s *The Poetry of Relationship*, p. 191.

Coleridge's idea of 'visionary *philosophes*' sets quite a specific agenda for Wordsworth's project. Wordsworth's awareness that he is departing from that agenda is sometimes made very clear in the poem. At the end of Book I (1805), for example, Wordsworth, states that

my hope has been that I might fetch
 Invigorating thoughts from former years,
 Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,
 And haply meet reproaches, too, whose power
 May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
 To honorable toil. Yet should these hopes
 Be vain, and thus should neither I be taught
 To understand myself, nor thou to know
 With better knowledge how the heart was fram'd
 Of him thou lovest ... (I. 649-58)

Wordsworth justifies his deviation from the 'honorable toil' set by Coleridge by suggesting that he 'might' obtain 'revitalizing thoughts from former years' that might 'spur' him to that 'toil'. But equally, he is implying that other kinds of poetic toil might be 'honorable' too. In recalling the growth of his mind, he may even unexpectedly receive 'reproaches' from the past which could further stimulate, impel but also guide his 'toil'. There is a further attempt to create space for the poem Wordsworth wants to write in the suggestion that by sharing his reflections on his own past thoughts, he might help Coleridge better understand how 'the heart was fram'd / Of him thou lovest', but Richard E. Matlak's reading of lines 53-57 suggests that even more self-assertion might be at work here. According to Matlak, what Wordsworth is saying in these lines is something like: 'It can be taken as a matter of "vanity" to believe that "we" see something that I believe in, but perhaps you do not'.¹⁷ Wordsworth, in other words, is telling Coleridge that he is going to proceed with his own poetic project even though he suspects that Coleridge will think it 'vain' to do so.

¹⁷ Matlak, *The Poetry of Relationship*, p. 128.

Wordsworth's ambiguous relationship with Coleridge is most evident in the 1805 text of *The Prelude*. At that time, Coleridge left him to seek 'health and the quiet of a healthful mind', though they still retained a close intellectual relationship with each other. Wordsworth laments with 'grief' that 'Thou art gone' and writes: 'in that distraction and intense desire / I said unto the life which I had lived, / Where art thou?' (X. 980, XIII. 374-76).¹⁸ Despite Coleridge's absence in 1805, Wordsworth nevertheless claims that Coleridge 'in my thoughts art ever at my side' (III. 200). Wordsworth states that

O Friend! we had not seen thee at that time;
 And yet a power is on me and a strong
 Confusion, and I seem to plant thee there.
 Far art Thou wander'd now in search of health,
 ...
 But Thou art with us, with us in the past,
 The present, with us in the times to come. (VI. 246-52)

Wordsworth here appears to be establishing a timeless relationship with his beloved friend. He is describing a never-ending continuation of their former relationship when they were all together. Wordsworth, by giving himself a 'power' ('a power is on me'), 'plant[s]' an image of Coleridge forever rooted 'there' in the past, the present, and the future. We can also see the ongoing intimate relationship between the two poets through their correspondence at that time. Wordsworth writes to Coleridge: 'We talk of you perpetually, and for me I see you everywhere'.¹⁹ Coleridge also writes to Wordsworth, stating: 'William, my head and my heart! dear William and dear Dorothea! / You have all in each other; but I am lonely, and want you!'.²⁰ The contradiction between Coleridge's actual absence and the presence Wordsworth tries to create for him, however, reveals 'a strong / Confusion'. Where is 'there'? Where is the place Wordsworth 'seem[s] to plant' him?

¹⁸ In 1806, Wordsworth writes to Coleridge: 'We had some hopes of a Letter from you today; being most anxious to hear of you', in *The Letters of William Wordsworth*, p. 90.

¹⁹ Quoted in Sisman's *The Friendship*, p. 287. (note11: WW to STC, 24&27 Dec. 1799 & Appendix V; LWDW, 1, 273&679).

²⁰ *STCL*, vol. 1, p. 452, quoted in Matlak's *The Poetry of Relationship*, p. 146.

In Book II of *The Prelude* (1805) Wordsworth, responding to Coleridge's glorification of the mind, goes on to trace the working of his own mind in infancy. This mind is 'as an agent of the one great mind', 'working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds', and he tells Coleridge that this working of the mind is 'the first / Poetic spirit of our human life' (II. 273, 274-75, 275-76). Book II is deeply influenced by Coleridge's organicist principle of 'one life'. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge talks about the organic unity of subject and object: 'All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject ... truth is universally placed in the coincidence of the thought with the thing, of the representation with the object represented' (*B.L.* XII. p.144). For him, knowledge and universal truth are based on a corresponding 'coincidence' of object and subject, and of thought and thing. Everything is interfused into oneness. This is the goal towards which the organicist system is moving. Wordsworth himself states: 'in all things / I saw one life, and felt that it was joy' while acknowledging that to Coleridge, 'unblinded by these outward shows, / The unity of all has [already] been reveal'd' (II. 429-30, 225-26). They both envisage 'the unity' of 'the whole' that holds together external objects.

Yet Wordsworth is working both with and against Coleridge. Near the end of Book II Wordsworth states that

Thou, my Friend! wert rear'd
 In the great City, 'mid far other scenes;
 But we by different roads at length have gain'd
 The self-same bourne. And for this cause to Thee
 I speak, unapprehensive of contempt,
 ...
 For Thou has sought
 The truth in solitude, and Thou art one,
 The most intense of Nature's worshippers,
 In many things my Brother, chiefly here,
 In this my deep devotion. (II. 466-79)

Wordsworth tries to persuade his friend of their mutual and 'self-same' goal (though

Wordsworth is aware that he is doing something different from Coleridge's earlier request). They both have gone different ways, which makes Wordsworth exclaim: 'how different is the fate of different men' (VI. 262) in the 1805 text. In response to this sense of difference, Wordsworth seeks to reinterpret what he is doing in his poem in a Coleridgean way and to recreate Coleridge in his own image. Even though they tread on 'different roads', 'at length', as Wordsworth attempts to tell Coleridge, 'we' 'have gain'd / The self-same bourne'. They are moving forward in the same direction and ultimately to an identical destination. Wordsworth goes further to assert in Book VI that 'breathing / As if in different elements, we were framed / To bend at last to *the same discipline*, / Predestin'd, if two beings ever were, / To seek *the same delights, and have one health, / One happiness*' (VI. 264-69, my italics). His utterance here is even more assertive. Furthermore, in Book X Wordsworth creates an identification between 'Thou' and I by saying that 'Thou has sought / The truth in solitude' (corresponding to his 'self-sufficing power of solitude') and that 'Thou art one, / The most intense of Nature's worshippers' ('with the soul / Which Nature gives to Poets' (X. 998-99)). With these shared attributes, Coleridge comes to be known as Wordsworth's 'Brother' 'in many things', although they were born and reared in different areas. Throughout the compositional process of the 1805 text one of the ways in which Wordsworth seeks to escape the possible contradiction between his own aim and those of Coleridge is by using the creative powers of language to reinvent Coleridge in the image of the Wordsworth created in *The Prelude*.

Wordsworth appropriates Coleridge for his own poetic project in other ways too. For example, in Book III he states:

Enough: for now into a populous Plain
 We must descend. – A Traveler I am
 And all my Tale is of myself; even so,
 So be it, if the pure in heart delight
 To follow me; and Thou, O honor'd Friend!

Who in my thoughts art ever at my side,
Uphold, as heretofore, my fainting steps. (III. 195-201)

Wordsworth uses the word ‘we’ in order to show that he is speaking to all people so that we can understand and share his own experience and thoughts. ‘Now into a populous Plain / We must descend’. The transition from his ‘self-sufficing power of solitude’ to ‘a populous Plain’ is a route that he ‘must’ take if he is to write such a ‘philosophic Song’ for humankind as that assigned by Coleridge. At the same time, ambiguously, Wordsworth also shows his preference for individuality by stating that ‘all my Tale is of myself’. While staying in densely populated areas, he still remains connected to the ‘Tale’ of his previous self. This is also why he names himself ‘a Traveler’ when he ‘descend[s]’ ‘into a populous Plain’. The social community can never be his permanent abode. With a precarious step into the social world, a world that is unfamiliar to him, Wordsworth appeals to Coleridge (O honor’d Friend!) for his support. He hopes that Coleridge, ‘who in my thoughts art ever at my side’, can assist him as ‘Brother’, though their relationship is changing with the passing of time.

‘Descend[ing]’ ‘into a populous Plain’ with Coleridge, Wordsworth still retains his own private sense of self as a ‘natural [being] in the strength of nature’ (III. 194). Wordsworth claims in Book III that ‘Here, O Friend! have I retrac’d my life / Up to an eminence, and told ... / The glory of *my youth*’ (III. 168-71, my italics). Although Wordsworth calls Coleridge ‘Brother of my soul’, he also tells Coleridge that in ‘our souls’, ‘we’ have ‘points’ which ‘all stand *single*’ (III. 186, 186, 186, 187, my italics). Wordsworth is aware of this inherent difference between them²¹. Out of this awareness, Wordsworth seeks to ‘make / Breathings for incommunicable powers’ in order to share ‘the glory’ of his private ‘youth’ with the social community when ‘descend[ing]’ ‘into a populous Plain’.

Where does this new confidence come from, and how has Wordsworth managed to

²¹ Nicholas Roe points out that ‘*The Prelude* does not recall the coincidence of two like minds, but the dynamic potential released through disparity’ (*Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, p. 10).

downgrade the role of Coleridge to that of ‘Brother’ and supporting ‘Friend’ as his poem ‘descend[s]’ ‘into a populous Plain’? We can suggest that what we are seeing here is an early stage of a transfer of authority from Coleridge to Nature that is made explicit, and completed, when Wordsworth points out that ‘My present Theme / Is to retrace the way that led me on / Through nature to the love of human Kind’ in Book VIII, refraining here from acknowledging any guidance from Coleridge. In Book III, Coleridge is asked to support Wordsworth’s own ‘fainting steps’ along this ‘way’. The impetus behind Wordsworth’s ‘love of human Kind’, as he makes it clear, comes first and foremost from or through ‘nature’, not the promptings of his friend. If Coleridge’s expectations mean he ‘must’ ‘descend into a populous Plain’, then the work he writes while there cannot be what is ‘appointed’ to him by Coleridge. It must be what is dictated by his own love of nature. As he puts it in Book VIII, ‘I already had been taught to love / My Fellow-beings, to such habits train’d / Among the woods and mountains’ (VIII. 69-71), and in Book XII: ‘the genius of the Poet ... / May boldly take his way among mankind / Wherever Nature leads’ (XII. 294-6). Even as he ‘descends’ into the ‘populous Plain’, in other words, Wordsworth is turning from Coleridge and towards Nature, which, by Book VIII, has replaced Coleridge as the poem’s silent auditor and as the poet’s ‘Guide’ in relation to humanity: ‘I found / In thee a gracious Guide, to lead me forth / ... ’Twas thy power / That rais’d the first complacency in me, / And noticeable kindness of heart’ (VIII. 71-76).

Coleridge, whom Wordsworth still asks to ‘uphold’ his ‘fainting steps’ in the 1805 text of Book II, is already being eclipsed as Wordsworth’s guide by Nature even at this point. And, while Wordsworth does continue to draw Coleridge into his own poetic project, he simultaneously, and increasingly, finds ways of writing Coleridge out of it. At this point in the poem, for example, retracing the way in which nature guides him through the ‘populous Plain’, Wordsworth tells Coleridge: ‘O Friend! have I retrac’d *my* life / Up to an eminence, and told a tale / ... The glory of my youth’. Wordsworth is saying that, in

‘retrac[ing] [his] life’ from childhood to youth (before meeting Coleridge), his writing of his early years has already come to a greater ‘eminence’ than any in his later life because ‘youth maintains’ ‘communion more direct and intimate / With nature and the inner strength she has’ (X. 604, 606-07). Looking back to his youthful time, he says that ‘I sought not *then* / Knowledge, but craved for power, and power I found / In all things’; ‘such is the strength and glory of our Youth’ (VIII. 754-56, 760). Before Coleridge’s ‘interposition’, Wordsworth, in his youth, quests for ‘power’ that is to be found ‘in all things’ rather than being ‘circumscribed’ (VIII. 756) to ‘narrow influence’ (VIII. 757) of philosophical ‘knowledge’.

Yet Wordsworth remains always aware of the ‘determin’d bounds’ (I. 670) set by Coleridge. While Wordsworth increasingly tries to write Coleridge out of the poem, he nevertheless addresses the poem to, and writes the poem for, Coleridge. He might be talking about his own life (‘to give the *accidents* of *individual life*’²²), but also feels the pressure to speak for humankind, as Coleridge wants him to do. And Wordsworth remains anxious to persuade Coleridge that he is doing so.

Working with and against Coleridge in these ways, Wordsworth begins to regard himself as ‘a moral agent’ ‘essay[ing] / To give relief’, and ‘to the truth conducted’, as he moves into the recollection of his revolutionary experience. In Book IX of *The Prelude* Wordsworth says that he ‘feel[s] / An impulse to precipitate [his] verse’, though he also knows that this ‘verse’ ‘will be found ... ungenial [and] hard / To treat of’ ‘ere far we shall advance’. He tells Coleridge that ‘the cause / In Part lay here, that unto [him] the events / Seem’d nothing out of nature’s certain course’ (IX. 251-53). This seems a long way from Coleridge’s ideas for the poem, but it is by testing himself against Coleridge’s ambitions for him that Wordsworth eventually comes to see even these ambitions as part of his own poetic identity, rather than simply the identity foisted upon him by Coleridge. Nicholas

²² Coleridge, ‘To William Wordsworth’ (30 May 1815), in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Selected Letters*, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 186.

Roe points out that ‘The immediate challenge of France’ for both poets was ‘the possibility of realizing self-commitment as action’.²³ In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth seeks to define his poetic vocation, that of a ‘Prophet of Nature’, as his response to that shared challenge, a response to place alongside Coleridge’s. In the 1805 version of Book IX, Wordsworth states that

If Nature then be standing on the brink
Of some great trial, and we hear the voice
Of One devoted, One whom circumstance
Hath call’d upon to embody his deep sense
In action, give it outwardly a shape,
And that of benediction to the world:
Then doubt is not, and truth is more than truth ... (IX. 405-411)

The ‘One’ mentioned here refers to Wordsworth, who is to ‘realiz[e]’ his ‘self-commitment as action’ through the composition of *The Prelude*. Coleridge encouraged him to ‘write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind’, and Wordsworth implicitly suggests that by ‘devoting’ himself to ‘embody[ing his own] deep sense / In action’ he is ‘tak[ing] up / A service at this time for cause so great’ (X. 134-35). He, like Coleridge, is facing the challenge of ‘this time’; he too feels ‘call’d upon’ by ‘circumstance’ to respond with ‘action’ but is doing so his own way.

Gill states that Coleridge is ‘continuously invoked’, by ‘words of endearment’ and the ‘repetition of his name’ in Wordsworth’s writing at the time.²⁴ The continuous ‘invocation’ of Coleridge in the 1805 *Prelude* points to the strong, ongoing ‘presence’ of Coleridge’s influence and expectation in the composition of the poem at this particular time. In Bushell’s words, ‘Coleridge and Wordsworth’s personal relationship is bound up

²³ Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Radical Year* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 39.

²⁴ Gill, *Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 15.

his 'present' 'account' is a 'narrative' different from his earlier 'Song', or possibly that 'our' 'account' is not identical to his own verse because of the 'interposition' (XIII. 257) of Coleridge's thoughts.

Amid this sense of ambiguity, Wordsworth tries to translate Coleridge's thoughts and doctrines into his own terms while developing his identity as the poet destined for humankind. Coleridge reminds Wordsworth of 'the necessity of a general revolution in the modes of developing and disciplining the human mind ... Facts elevated into Theory – Theory into Laws – and Laws into living and intelligent Powers ...'.²⁶ In his own movement towards 'truth', Wordsworth accordingly revises the phrase 'a history of love' [MS. W, 47^r] to 'intellectual power' (XI. 43) in the 1805 text. However, this 'intellectual power', seemingly corresponding to Coleridge's 'intelligent Powers', is linked to the power of imagination, not the power of fixed 'Theory' and 'Laws'. As Wordsworth states in the 1805 text,

This History, my Friend, hath chiefly told
Of intellectual power, from stage to stage
Advancing, hand in hand with love and joy,
And of imagination teaching truth. (XI. 42-45)

Wordsworth tells Coleridge that his 'philosophic Song' is actually a 'History', which 'hath chiefly told / Of intellectual power' – 'from stage to stage / Advancing'. In the progress towards the 'consummation of the Poet's mind', there are transitions between different 'stage[s]', which gradually develop, form, and '[advance]' the poet's 'intellectual power'. Moreover, Wordsworth points out that it is 'imagination' that 'teach[es] truth' in the evolution of this 'intellectual power'. In other words, for Wordsworth, 'truth' is to be established by 'imagination' rather than by any set of philosophical doctrines. In a letter to Coleridge, Wordsworth clearly points out that: 'This class of poem I suppose to consist

²⁶ Coleridge, 'To William Wordsworth' (30 May, 1815), *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Selected Letters*, p. 189.

chiefly of objects most interesting to ... the imagination through the understanding, and not to the understanding through the imagination'.²⁷ He intends rather 'to remind men of their knowledge, as it lurks inoperative and unvalued in their own minds, than to attempt to convey recondite or refined truths'.²⁸ The 'imagination', originating from 'the first / Poetic spirit of our human life', evolves through 'stage[s]' of life, 'impregnate[s] knowledge', and ultimately gives him 'elevating thoughts / Of human Nature' (VIII. 800, 801-2). This is Wordsworth's version of Coleridge's 'general revolution in the modes of developing and disciplining the human mind'.

Wordsworth's writing of his life also closely engages with Coleridge's idea of 'Reason'. 'Reason' links to Coleridge's philosophical criterion for 'the inner sense', 'our own immediate self-consciousness' (*B. L.* XII. pp. 143, 148). 'Reason' gives us 'adequate notions of any truth' (*B. L.* XIV. p. 171) with 'sound logic'; it is essential to our capacity for cognition. Coleridge thinks that 'The principle of our knowing is sought within the sphere of our knowing' (*B. L.* p. 154).²⁹ Nevertheless, Wordsworth looks beyond Coleridge's idea of 'knowing' with his inclination for 'deep feelings', imagination, and guidance from nature in writing a 'philosophic Song' for humankind. For Wordsworth, it is 'feeling' that 'has to him imparted strength' (II. 269). Wordsworth points out that human nature and power, though 'in the words of reason deeply weigh'd', are 'felt deeply, [and] not thoroughly understood / By Reason' (II. 236, X. 673-74). If these things cannot be 'thoroughly understood / By Reason', they can be 'felt deeply'. In other words, 'our own immediate self-consciousness' cannot access a thorough 'knowing' of 'what is best in individual Man' (which is beyond 'the sphere of our knowing'), especially when the 'progress of the world' is 'unreasoning' (V. 384). With the phrase 'not thoroughly understood / By Reason' Wordsworth shows his disagreement with and even direct

²⁷ Wordsworth, 'To S. T. Coleridge' (5 May 1809), p. 123.

²⁸ Wordsworth, 'To S. T. Coleridge' (22nd May 1815), p. 182.

²⁹ Roy Park points out that Coleridge elaborates 'a higher reason' capable of intuiting ideas as real not merely regulative' ('Coleridge and Kant: Poetic Imagination and Practical Reason', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* (8, 1968), 335-46, 336).

challenge to Coleridge. Wordsworth's writing clearly shows that Coleridge's criteria of 'refined truth' are what he defines his own thoughts against.

The correspondence between the two poets helps us to see the difference in their thoughts. For Coleridge, Wordsworth's fascination with 'feeling' in describing the history of his life lacks the philosophical sophistication that he desires to see in Wordsworth's writing. Coleridge writes to Wordsworth: 'It is for the Biographer, not the Poet, to give the *accidents of individual life*'; 'In order ... to explain the disappointment I must recall to your mind what my expectations were ... the Poem on the growth of your own mind was as the ground-plan and the Roots, out of which *the Recluse* was to have sprung up as the Tree ...'.³⁰ Nevertheless, Wordsworth once explained to Coleridge: 'Feeling consecrating form, and form ennobling feeling. This may have sufficed to give you a notion of my views'.³¹ He also states that 'I had nothing to do but describe what I have felt and thought, therefore could not easily be bewildered'.³² In Book V of *The Prelude* Wordsworth even claims that 'passion' is 'highest reason in a soul sublime' (V. 39, 40). Wordsworth writes the poem more as a 'Biographer' than as 'the [philosophical] Poet' Coleridge expects him to be.

In recalling the time of the French Revolution, Wordsworth explains to Coleridge that he feels 'motions raised up within [himself]' 'which had relationship to highest things' 'amid the awe / Of unintelligible chastisement' – not through any abstract doctrine of philosophy and idealism. It is through his personal experience of the revolutionary terror that he comes to realize the lesson nature has taught him with 'severe ministry' since childhood. As Wordsworth has stated earlier in the poem that he 'might' meet 'reproaches' from 'former years', 'whose power / May spur [him] on ... / To honorable toil'. This is the way Wordsworth comes to his sense of identity as a poet speaking 'highest things' for

³⁰ Coleridge, 'To William Wordsworth' (30 May 1815), p. 186.

³¹ Wordsworth, 'To S. T. Coleridge' (5 May 1809), *The Letters of William Wordsworth*, p. 123.

³² *Ibid.*, EY, pp. 586-86, Wordsworth to Sir George Beaumont (May 1, 1805), p. 534.

humankind. In Books X and XI of *The Prelude* Wordsworth shows Coleridge how ‘Nature’s self, by human love / Assisted, ... / Conducted [him] again to open day’, and he hopes that this ‘will be shewn, / If willing audience fail not’ (1850, XI. 348-49). After all, Wordsworth, throughout the compositional history of *The Prelude*, recognizes that it is ‘a story destined for [Coleridge’s] ear’. Although Wordsworth says that ‘to me the grief confined that Thou art gone’, he also believes and hopes that ‘thou wilt assist me ... in quest of highest truth’ (X. 980, XI. 392-93).

However, Wordsworth apologizes to Coleridge in Book XII:

Forgive me if I say that I, who long
 Had harbour’d reverentially a thought
 That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
 Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
 Hath each for his peculiar dower a sense
 By which he is enabled to perceive
 Something unseen before: forgive me, Friend,
 If I, the meanest of this Band, had hope
 That unto me had also been vouchsafed
 An influx, that in some sort I possess’d
 A privilege, and that a work of mine,
 Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
 Enduring and creative, might become
 A power like one of Nature’s. (XII. 299-312)

Wordsworth and Coleridge are ‘connected in a mighty scheme of truth’ as ‘Poets’ and ‘even as Prophets’. To practice this holy task (‘as I must be compell’d to do’ (IX. 113)), Wordsworth’s thoughts come into interaction with the ‘interposition’ of Coleridge’s ideas. Nevertheless, deep in Wordsworth’s mind, there is ‘a thought’ that he himself has long revered. As he states, each poet has ‘for his peculiar dower, a sense / By which he is enabled to perceive / Something unseen before’. He is able to envisage ‘something unseen before’ because of his ‘first-born affinities’ with nature. While making an assertion of his ‘peculiar dower’, Wordsworth asks Coleridge for forgiveness by twice saying ‘forgive me’.

By tender links of thought. My present
[?task]

[?Is] to
{[? ?]} [?contemplate] for a needful [?]
[?Would set in] view
[?]
[?Would shew] the manner in which
[?shew]

Nature

works ... [MS. WW, 21^v]

In another later manuscript, Wordsworth revises the above passage to:

Even yet Thou wilt vouchsafe an ear
O Friend
As to this prelude thou I know hast done
And something too of a submissive mind
As in thy mildness Thou I know hast done
While with a winding but no devious song
Through process I make my
Way
By links of tender thought. My present aim
Is to contemplate for a needful while,
Following a track which [?would] in season
(passage which will conduct in seas
On due
Conduct hath been
{[?Lead] us b We
Back to the tale which { I have left behind)
The diverse manner in which Nature works
Oftentimes
{Upo upon the outward face of
Things
As if with an imaginative power ... [MS. W, 37^v]

In these two drafts, Wordsworth asks Coleridge to listen to the way he follows 'Nature process' and the way nature works upon 'the outward face of things' with its own 'power'. He thinks that Coleridge, having listened 'to this prelude' with 'a submissive mind' and

‘mildness’, will understand him. During the ‘process’, the ‘course’ is revised to ‘song’; the ambiguous use of ‘make my [?way]’ and ‘track my [way]’ in MS. WW becomes the revised phrase ‘make my way’ in MS. W. Wordsworth claims that the ‘course’ he takes is actually his ‘song’ and that he is ‘mak[ing]’ his own way rather than merely ‘track[ing]’ any predetermined way. He intends to show Coleridge ‘the manner’ in which the ‘imaginative power’ of nature exerts itself on ‘the outward face of things’, but his words waver between ‘[?would set in] view’ and ‘[?would shew]’. In comparison, Wordsworth makes his ‘present aim’ more justified and reasonable in MS. W with the words ‘in season due’ and ‘back to’. He attempts to say that his interaction of nature is ‘the tale’ that has ‘been left behind’ but will be returned to in ‘due’ time.

Later in the poem, Wordsworth is able to insist that he ‘must then have exercised / Upon the vulgar forms of present things / And actual world of our familiar days, / A higher power’ of his own. (XII. 360-63). And yet, even here, in the 1805 text, he feels the need to acknowledge that even this conviction was ‘*a persuasion taken up by thee / In friendship*’ (XII. 366-67, my italics). Even though Coleridge left Wordsworth at this time, Coleridge’s presence and ‘persuasion’ remain in Wordsworth’s writing of his poem. It is only in the 1850 text that this phrase, ‘a persuasion taken up by thee’, is revised as ‘a partial judgment’ (XIII. 361), and only at the very end of the poem’s long compositional history that Wordsworth can assert that Coleridge’s judgment of him as a poet and thinker is merely ‘partial’. Throughout the composition of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth reveals the extent to which Coleridge’s influence is one that needs to be fought against, but never wholly jettisoned. Wordsworth defines himself as a poet both against but also for Coleridge. Coleridge both motivates Wordsworth to be a poet and offers a poetic identity that Wordsworth can – indeed feels he must – define himself against.

Coleridge asked Wordsworth to write a poem of ‘highest truth’; Wordsworth responds:

yet the mind is to herself

Witness and judge, and I remember well
 That in life's every-day appearances
 I seem'd about this period to have sight
 Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit
 To be transmitted and made visible
 To other eyes, as having for its base
 That whence *our* dignity originates,
 That which both gives it being and maintains
 A balance, an ennobling interchange
 Of action from within and from without,
 The excellence, pure spirit, and best power
 Both of the objects seen, and eye that see. (XII. 367-79, my italics)

As Wordsworth asserts, he is able to envisage 'in life's every-day appearances' 'a new world' – a world 'fit / To be transmitted'. With 'an auxiliary light / [Coming] from [his] mind', Wordsworth not only perceives this 'world' but also has the responsibility of making it 'visible' and 'transmitted' to humankind. Through the 'new world', 'whence *our* dignity originates', Wordsworth begins to speak in the voice of all humankind (my italics) – as Coleridge asks him to do. At the same time, Wordsworth believes that, even though the 'interposition' from Coleridge's thoughts is upon him, 'the mind is to herself / Witness and judge' and 'each man is a memory to himself' (III. 189). He prefers to follow whatever his mind drives him to pursue. Here it is worthwhile to look at Wordsworth's revision of the phrase 'as having for its base' in MS. A and the 1850 text. First, as he puts it,

Soul
 as having for its ~~base~~ [MS. A, 322^r]

For Wordsworth, the sight of this 'new world' is perceived by the spiritual 'Soul'. But, bearing Coleridge's thought in mind, he later says that the 'world' is 'ruled by those fixed laws' (1850, XIII. 371). It appears that he is moving closer to Coleridge's idea of abstract knowledge. However, it is noticeable that this 'new world' is seen '*in* life's every-day

appearances' (my italics). Wordsworth's vision of 'a new world' keeps 'a balance' – 'an ennobling interchange / Of action from within and from without'. This is a different version of Coleridge's 'fixed laws'. Coleridge insists on 'the *absolute* self, the great eternal I AM' (*B. L. XII. p. 152*, my italics). He asserts that the real world is actually a reflection of the mind. 'The absolute self' brings corresponding identity to everything and thus constitutes a living whole.³⁴ This is the very core principle of Coleridge's organicist philosophy. Earlier in the compositional history of *The Prelude*, in responding to Coleridge's thought of 'I AM', Wordsworth refrains from a decisive insertion of the word 'extrinsic' in one manuscript prior to the 1805 version of the poem. Wordsworth describes

How Nature by collateral interest
 extrinsic
 extrinsic
 And by [?] passion peopled first
 My mind with beauteous objects ... [MS. JJ, U^r]

However, as we can see in the quoted passage in the 1805 text, he keeps the sense of self-repression at bay by asserting that his mind is in a reciprocal *relationship* with nature. Although the internal and external worlds are not one, they are interacting with each other with 'the excellence, pure spirit, and best power / *Both* of the objects seen, and eye that sees' (my italics). This phrase is, once again, in contrast with Wordsworth's earlier manuscript, in which he describes the infant babe as

Creates, creator & receiver both
~~Acting~~ but in alliance with
~~Working~~ but in the spirit of the works
 Which it beholds. [MS. RV, 6^v]

³⁴ As Coleridge puts it, 'The true system of natural philosophy places the sole reality of things in ... the absolute identity of subject and object which it calls nature, and which in its highest power is nothing else but *self-conscious will or intelligence*' (*B. L. XII. p. 155*).

While the poet erases the phrase ‘the spirit of the works / Which [the babe] beholds’ in MS. RV, he straightforwardly puts ‘the excellence, pure spirit ... Both of the objects seen, and eye that sees’ in the 1805 text of *The Prelude*. A growing sense of self-assertion is detectable in the evolutionary history of the poem. This ‘ennobling interchange’, upon which the Wordsworthian project is based, is where ‘our dignity originates’, and, through it, ‘we’ are equipped with ‘majestic sway’ ‘as natural beings in the strength of nature’ (III. 193, 194). Wordsworth uses the word ‘we’ in his attempt to bring his own ‘godlike hours’ in the past to share with humankind (the universal ‘we’), as he is expected to do. By developing this claim of ‘dignity’, the Wordsworthian project asserts its independence from and equality with Coleridge’s project for Wordsworth.

Nevertheless, in developing a (public) identity for himself, Wordsworth defines himself as different from Coleridge. In Book XIII of the 1805 text, Wordsworth talks about his being bounded by Coleridge’s thoughts and, at the same time, about his desire for (partial) independence from Coleridge. He states:

With such a theme,
 Coleridge! with this my argument, of thee
 Shall I be silent? O most loving Soul!
 Placed on this earth to love and understand,
 And from thy presence shed the light of love,
 Shall I be mute ere thou be spoken of?
 Thy gentle Spirit to my heart of hearts
 Did also find its way; and thus the life
 Of all things and the mighty unity
 In all which we behold, and feel, and are,
 Admitted more habitually a mild
 Interposition, and closelier gathering thoughts
 Of man and his concerns, such as become
 A human Creature, be he who he may,
 Poet, or destined to an humbler name. (XIII. 246- 60)

Wordsworth calls Coleridge his ‘beloved Friend’, ‘most loving Soul’. For Wordsworth,

Coleridge is to be ‘spoken of’ in the writing of his ‘theme’ and ‘argument’, though he also recognizes Coleridge’s absence in his life. As Wordsworth confesses, Coleridge’s ‘gentle Spirit’ ‘find[s] its way’ ‘to [his] heart’, and ‘thus’ this ‘interposition’ is admitted more habitually’ into ‘the life of all things’ and ‘the mighty unity / In all which we behold, and feel’. It is noteworthy that the plural noun ‘we’ is used when Coleridge and his philosophic idea of ‘one life’ start to be ‘spoken of’. Wordsworth is showing that they both, to some extent, share the same vision of the world. Coleridge’s philosophy of organic oneness helps to regulate and assemble ‘man and his concerns’. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge talks about ‘an intellectual intuition’ that ‘grasps the organism as *a holistic system*’ (B. L. XIX. pp. 234-35).³⁵ In this system, ‘the whole of material nature is reducible to a system of exclusively mechanical laws’, which, as Wordsworth puts it, govern ‘the life / Of all things’ and create ‘the mighty unity / In all which we behold’. Wordsworth views this ‘mighty unity’ as ‘an independent world / Created out of pure intelligence’. In addition, Coleridge insists on ‘philosophical knowledge of facts under the relation of cause and effect’ that ‘disposes us to notice the similarities and contrasts of things’. This ‘philosophical knowledge’ motivates ‘closelier gathering thoughts / Of man and his concerns’ with the ‘logic’ of ‘cause and effect’. Accordingly, Wordsworth talks about the ‘clear *Synthesis*’, which is ‘in verity, an independent world / Created out of *pure Intelligence*’ (VI. 182, 186-87, my italics). This aspect of Coleridge’s influence upon Wordsworth’s thinking seems to continue till the 1850 text of *The Prelude*. In 1815, he writes to Wordsworth: ‘I supposed you first to have meditated the faculties of Man *in the abstract*’.³⁶ In the 1850 text of his poem, Wordsworth revises ‘the life / Of all things and the mighty unity / In all which we behold, and feel’ to ‘thoughts and things / In the self-haunting spirit learned to take / More rational proportions’ (1850, XIV. 283-85). It

³⁵ Roe says that ‘it was this belief [of the One Life] that was to provide the philosophical basis for *The Recluse* as first planned by Coleridge and Wordsworth in spring 1798’ (*Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Radical Year*), p. 233.

³⁶ Coleridge, ‘To William Wordsworth’ (30 May 1815), p. 188 (my italics).

would appear that Coleridge's 'logical' 'interposition' extended into Wordsworth's 'incumbent mystery of sense and soul' (1850, XIV. 286) virtually to the end of his life, still encouraging Wordsworth to think about these things in terms of a 'synthesis' of 'rational proportions'.

However, in the above quoted paragraph, Wordsworth also seeks some space for self-assertion when the 'interposition' of Coleridge's thoughts intrudes upon his 'heart'. This 'interposition' is called 'a mild interposition'. Though Coleridge has his own philosophical vision of the world, Wordsworth attempts to say that what he himself is talking about in *The Prelude* (his own project of self-formation) is equally important and even an alternative version of the same thing. And Coleridge's presence in and influence on what Wordsworth is saying is only 'mild'. Coleridge asks him to '[meditate] the faculties of Man in the abstract', but in the 1850 text Wordsworth talks to his friend as follows: 'O Friend! (I speak / With *due regret*), how much is *overlooked* / In human nature and her subtle ways / As studied first in our own hearts, and then / In life among the passions of mankind' (1850, XIV. 321-25, my italics). By implication, Wordsworth means that Coleridge's way of thinking cannot adequately enable him to gain a full insight into 'human nature and her subtle ways' and 'the passions of mankind'. Wordsworth asserts his right to identity by 'becom[ing] / A human Creature, be he who he may, / Poet, or destined to an humbler name' – thereby containing and limiting Coleridge's presence in his own poem. This statement shows his developing sense of identity both in the 'growth' of his own mind and in the mind's relation to Coleridge as it counteracts and moves beyond Coleridge's 'system of exclusively mechanical laws'.

In the final book of the 1805 text, Wordsworth attempts to tell Coleridge that if he is to write a poem glorifying the mind of man, nature *cannot* be 'omitted'. Wordsworth, disagreeing with Coleridge's idea of 'the absolute self',³⁷ thinks that the mind of man is

³⁷ Through a close reading of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's thoughts, we can find that neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge have stable ideas – they both move between passive and active models – sometimes seeming

internally detached from the outward scene. Wordsworth claims that the mind exists in ‘an ennobling interchange’ with the external world through the ‘first born affinities’. The word ‘affinities’ means resemblance and likeness (in contrast to Coleridge’s idea of being ‘absolutely identical’). An implicit line between the inner and outer worlds is drawn in his wording but also transgressed by the word ‘affinities’. Reflecting on the whole composition of *The Prelude* in Book XIII, Wordsworth states:

much hath been *omitted*, as *need* was,
 ... even of the other wealth
 Which is collected among woods and fields,
 Far more: for Nature’s secondary grace,
 That outward illustration which is hers,
 Hath hitherto been *barely* touch’d upon. (XIII. 279-84, my italics)

The days of ‘self-command’ when he was an intimate with nature have ‘much ... been omitted, as need was’. ‘That outward illustration’ of nature fostered his ‘first Poetic spirit’ in infancy when he possessed ‘the infant sensibility’ (II. 285, 286). Contradictorily, ‘what is collected among woods and fields’ is ‘barely touched upon’ now. There is still a sense of self-repression in Wordsworth’s writing now. To practice the ‘appointed’ ‘project’, Wordsworth needs to testify to the ‘consummation of the Poet’s mind’ (XIII. 271), as the thinker Coleridge expects him to be. However, for Wordsworth, the ‘fair seed-time’ of his ‘soul’ *is* his childhood, when he was ‘an inmate of this *active* universe’ (II. 266). Though this ‘History’ of his life needs to move to ‘its appointed close’, he never deserts the ‘appointed path’ of his ‘Song’, which leads ‘back into Nature’s bosom’ (MS. Y, 14^r). Here it is noticeable that Wordsworth builds a subtle link between self-assertion and self-repression. His innate bond with nature is not entirely ‘omitted’; rather, ‘*much* hath been omitted’ and ‘*barely* touch’d upon’ (my italics). His use of language still keeps the

in opposition, sometimes in agreement, but both move between the same extreme positions. In my discussion of their philosophical differences, I acknowledge their contradictory ideas while trying to make a general sense of how they differ in some particular thoughts about nature and the mind.

construction of his identity in connection with nature (though this sense of connection is partially repressed because the poem is ‘destined for [Coleridge’s] ear’).

Wordsworth is aware that the development of his identity is, at the outset of this poetic project, ‘bound[ed]’ by Coleridge’s expectation of him to ‘exercise’ ‘a higher power’ upon the human world. However, at the end of *The Prelude* (1805) he can say:

And now, O Friend! this History is brought
To its appointed close: the discipline
And consummation of the Poet’s mind
In everything that stood most prominent,
Have faithfully been pictured; we have reach’d
The time (which was our object from the first)
When we may, not presumptuously, I hope,
Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such
My knowledge as to make me capable
Of building up a work that should endure. (XIII. 269-78)

Although Wordsworth composes *The Prelude* as his autobiography, he also states clearly that its ‘close’ is an ‘appointed’ ‘object’. This ‘object’ had been decided at the very beginning of Wordsworth’s writing, and *The Prelude* is to be a prelude to ‘a work’ (*The Recluse*) that ‘should’ continue to exist in the lapse of time. This construction of an ‘endur[ing]’ ‘work’ is Wordsworth and Coleridge’s ‘object from the first’. Nevertheless, Wordsworth’s ending to the 1805 version of the poem still indicates a sense of insubstantial fulfilment. Although ‘the discipline / And consummation of the Poet’s mind’ ‘have faithfully been pictured’, he is less assertive of his ‘confirmed’ ‘powers’ by using the words ‘we may’, ‘not presumptuously, I hope’, ‘suppose’. As we can see in MS. B, Wordsworth reveals his diminishing confidence in ‘tak[ing] up / A service ... for cause so great’ by revising the passage as

undergone
Yet would I willing have ~~taken up~~
A service at this time for cause so great,

However dangerous. [MS. B, p. 258].

Instead of actively exerting a 'higher' power on our world, Wordsworth states that he has merely 'undergone' (experienced) the 'service' that he was expected to '[take] up'. Most of the time, Wordsworth, speaking as and for himself in *The Prelude*, doubts the role he is taking up in writing a 'philosophic Song'; he wonders if it echoes his inner personal voice and if he could successfully accomplish such a consecrated work as that assigned by Coleridge.

In conclusion, this chapter, drawing on the way Wordsworth develops his identity as a '[prophet] of Nature' by addressing his 'philosophic Song' to Coleridge, shows that the advancement of this identity formation is, in part at least, derived from the intricate relation between his self-assertion and self-repression in *The Prelude*. Wordsworth inscribes this dilemma into the writing of his life, and finds that assumptions about the self are precarious most of the time. This sense of precariousness is haunted by a number of voices in the poem, but mainly that of Coleridge. Don H. Bialostosky suggests: 'If we expect Wordsworth's voice to be involved with other voices, if we hear how his voice is indeed constituted in and as an interplay of voices, we will stop complaining of interruptions or condescending to ideologies and move on to examine interactions and resistances'.³⁸ It is through these 'interactions' between different voices and Wordsworth's 'resistances' to their possible domination over his own utterance that he constructs a poetic identity for himself. In the Wordsworthian project, the voices of other people, especially of Coleridge, are pre-empted, manipulated, and reinvented into the poetic utterances that are intended to form the Wordsworth of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth can thus develop his own project as still Coleridge's – as fundamentally the same project, but Wordsworth's own version of that same project. In the end, Wordsworth's attempt to construct an identity that combines his own and Coleridge's project for him involves the rhetorical (diplomatic)

³⁸ Bialostosky, *Wordsworth, Dialogics and the Practice of Criticism*, p. 77.

recreation of Coleridge and his expectations. Although Wordsworth views his friend as one 'more deeply read in [his] own thoughts' (II. 216), Wordsworth, as the speaker in *The Prelude*, rhetorically manipulates Coleridge – who turns out to be called 'in many things my Brother'. In this way, Wordsworth can finally claim that 'It will be known ... that the history of a Poet's mind / Is labour not unworthy of regard. / To thee the work shall justify itself' (XIII. 407-10) – while incessantly haunted by the fundamental difference of thoughts between him and his beloved friend during the process of composition.

Chapter Ten (Conclusion)

Writing from within his relationship with Coleridge, Wordsworth becomes both self-assertive and self-repressive, seeking a way not to identify with his friend, or with his friend's identification of him, so much as to safeguard the continuity of a relationship valued for its mutability. This chapter will then argue that, in the intellectual dialogue with Coleridge, Wordsworth realizes that a self is built on changeable relationships rooted in time, rather than on, say, exchanges of philosophical ideas that might occur within particular relationships at particular times. Wordsworth recognizes, in other words, that identity itself is fundamentally changeable. The continuity of his relationship with Coleridge is valued for its power to stimulate such change. In this sense, by closely examining Wordsworth's textual dialogue with Coleridge – a dialogue fundamentally concerned with Wordsworth's identity as a poet for humankind – I will read Wordsworth's identity-formation as an engagement with the problem of how one writes self, change and growth into 'a written paper' produced in response to the instructions and prescriptions of a close friend.

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth keeps rewriting his past selves in order to accomplish 'the discipline / And consummation of the Poet's mind', as Coleridge expects. Kenneth R. Johnston comments that 'The end of *The Prelude* [1805] thus also marks finis to the composition of "Wordsworth"; the story of young Wordsworth comes to a close at the point where it disappears into Wordsworth's reappropriation of it as the basic poetic material of his writing life'.¹ Reading the 'growth' of the poet's mind, we may be surprised to note that the end of this 'growth' is a predetermined ('appointed') object, and has been Wordsworth and Coleridge's 'project' 'from the first'. The story of Wordsworth's growth is a pre-planned project supposed to be 'a work that should endure' (XIII. 278). However, I will show that this story is essentially based on Wordsworth's constant

¹ Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth*, p. 814.

rewriting of the image of himself he projects into his autobiographical poem, which thereby resigns itself to change and the mutability of time.

For Hartman, Wordsworth's prophetic utterance involves 'the problematic of giving and receiving, of nourishing and being nourished, of self-tasking and being tasked'.² Reading the phrases, 'we to them will speak' and 'we may teach them how'(XIII. 442, 444) we may wonder whether Wordsworth's prophecy of 'redemption' for humankind is a matter of 'self-tasking' or 'being tasked' (following Coleridge's instructions). It can be both. The identity of 'Prophets of Nature' has been, in some sense, 'our object from the first'. But it is an identity that, through Wordsworth's writing of *The Prelude*, has been formed in the 'growth' of Wordsworth's own mind as that mind has moved through a series of changes and transitions among and between the recollections of numerous 'spots of time' (XI. 258).

This chapter will go on to discuss Coleridge's role in Wordsworth's journey to his final understanding of the poetic self as changeable and of his vocation as public. As discussed in Chapter Nine, Wordsworth's textual dialogue with Coleridge is a reinvention of Coleridge's project for *The Prelude* in Wordsworth's own terms. The textual recreation of Coleridge involves further recreations of Wordsworth's own past selves as these were directly related to Coleridge and to the 'appointed' public 'project'. These changes to 'the self then' lead into further readjustments to 'the self now', resulting in a sense of self perpetually subject to change and revision. This is the redemptive idea of 'self' Wordsworth proposes to offer to humankind, though he never did offer it in the end.

In Book II of *The Prelude* Wordsworth tells Coleridge that:

the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which,

² Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p. 114.

With growing faculties she doth aspire,
 With faculties still growing, feeling still
 That, whatsoever point they gain, they still
 Have something to pursue. (II. 334-41)

Wordsworth re-interprets the 'spots of time' in his life. By recalling his earlier days, Wordsworth realizes that 'the soul' 'retains an obscure sense / Of possible sublimity'. The act of remembering the past changes the present and gives a 'possible' prospect of the future. Wordsworth points out that this 'sense' is 'obscure' and vague. He cannot express it clearly but knows that this 'sublimity' is 'possible'. In order to pursue this possibility, the 'soul' 'doth aspire' 'to' the senses of exaltation and grandeur 'with growing faculties'. He needs to pursue it in the passing of time 'with faculties still growing', changing and developing. As de Man puts it, 'one finds, in [Wordsworth's] work, a persistent deepening of self-insight represented as a movement that begins in a contact with nature, then grows beyond nature to become a contact with time'.³ Wordsworth's mental growth is closely connected to his relationship with time. He hopes to keep a link to the visionary past for 'future restoration' (XI. 343), but this link is involved with changes and time, evolving 'from stage to stage' through 'spots of time' and 'urged on by flying hours' (1850, I. 42). Wordsworth gains a clearer insight into his selfhood with his growing consciousness of temporality and the change brought by time. 'Because the spots are of *time*, they are not to be held within any stable perspective, not to be visualized or fixed by the look. They are defined by *process*, monuments of creative instability'.⁴ Though this 'process' of identity-formation is taken to be made up of 'monuments of creative instability' (indicated by Wordsworth's tentative use of the words 'obscure' and 'possible'), his utterance becomes more assertive with the word 'still' that appears twice at the end of the paragraph. He is 'feeling still' that, no matter what his mental 'faculties' obtain and profit from, 'they

³ De Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', 17.

⁴ David E. Simpson, 'The Spots of Time: Spaces for Refiguring', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *William Wordsworth's The Prelude (Modern Critical Interpretations)*, pp. 137-44, p. 137.

still' 'have something to pursue'. In other words, the 'growth' of the mind, as Wordsworth recognizes, is infinite because his mental 'faculties' always need to 'pursue' 'something' in his 'aspir[ation]' to 'sublimity'. And this is the way Wordsworth forms his own poetic project while also testifying to Coleridge the 'consummation of the Poet's mind'.

In *The Prelude*, a 'deepening of self-insight' is 'represented as a movement' that grows into 'a contact with time'. But, disagreeing with de Man, I do not think that this 'movement' '[grows] beyond nature'; I think that Wordsworth's 'contact with time' leads to a changing relationship with nature. On Wordsworth's idea of 'possible sublimity', Harold Bloom states:

This sublimity, in its origin, has little to do with love or sympathy for others, and has small relation to human suffering. It is a sense of individual greatness, of a joy and a light yet unknown even in the child's life. *The Prelude* ... [develops] with a gradually intensifying sense of others held just in abeyance'.⁵

In this sense, the poet's identity-formation is in a progressive movement from, instead of being in a timeless horizontal link with, his childhood. For Wordsworth, there is always 'something' in prospect ('something to pursue', 'something evermore about to be'), though he cannot name it, merely using the word 'something'. This 'something' is 'possible' but cannot be specifically named because it is in the process of changing and becoming. During this very process, the adult Wordsworth, with Coleridge's encouragement in mind, 'descend[s]' 'into a populous Plain' – a world which gives him 'a gradually intensifying sense of others'. In the mutability of time, in other words, his thoughts of nature and self come into interaction with the social community and 'human suffering'. Wordsworth recognizes that 'on the front / Of this whole Song is written that my heart / Must in such temple needs have offer'd up / A *different* worship' (VI. 669-72, my italics). His imagination is 'growing', his soul is 'pursu[ing]' 'something', and his

⁵ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in Bloom (ed.), *William Wordsworth's The Prelude*, pp. 1-23, pp. 9-10. Also see Pirie's *Wordsworth: The Poetry of Grandeur and of Tenderness*, pp. 236-7.

‘worship’ is becoming ‘different’. Wordsworth recognizes that the imagination is more ‘the moving soul / Of our long labour’ (XIII. 171-72) than the addressee of his apostrophe (on the Alps).⁶ He is to exist with the imagination in the mutability of time rather than in an ‘invisible world’. Moreover, the imagination is ‘clearest insight’ into ‘the [transient] works of man and face of human life’ (XIII. 181). Wordsworth points out that ‘the feeling of life endless, the one thought / By which we live, Infinity and God’ is derived ‘from [the imagination’s] progress’ (XIII. 183-84, 182). As a result, to develop an identity as a ‘[Prophet] of Nature’, Wordsworth needs to pursue ‘possible sublimity’ for his ‘growing’ imagination. Thus Wordsworth depicts his self in childhood as a ‘favour’d Being’ of nature who will grow into a poet of Nature (and the imagination) with ‘a gradually intensifying sense of others’ by showing mankind nature’s power to heal and teach. This is the Wordsworthian construction of an identity as a ‘[Prophet] of Nature’, which he hopes may respond to Coleridge’s project for him. Coleridge asks him to ‘[exercise] / Upon ... the actual world of our familiar days, / A higher power’. Answering Coleridge’s expectation of him, Wordsworth arrives at a sense of the self as changeable, and of his poetic vocation as public rather than private.

Although Coleridge’s expectation of Wordsworth remains pivotal as the poem progresses, however, Coleridge’s project for Wordsworth to write a poem of redemption for the humankind is challenged and questioned by Wordsworth at key moments in the poem. For instance, Wordsworth, in his conversation with Coleridge in Book III, says: ‘Points have we all of us within our souls, / Where all stand single; this I feel, and make / Breathings for incommunicable powers’, yet later in the poem questions ‘wherefore speak of things / Common to all?’ (VIII. 665-66). These statements are clearly contradictory and perplexing. While he needs to ‘speak of things / Common to all’ as a philosophic poet, he is also aware that he is talking about his own mind, the private working of his imagination.

⁶ For a discussion of the changing role of imagination in Wordsworth, see Roe’s *Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Radical Year*, p. 61.

When Wordsworth needs to '[essay] / To give relief' (VIII. 666-67), he resorts to writing for the expression of his thoughts. These thoughts, however, are viewed as 'incommunicable' and '[lying] far hidden from the reach of words'. With the word 'incommunicable', Wordsworth tries to tell Coleridge that it is difficult not only to make his personal experience communicable to and sharable with the public but also to 'reach' the 'Powers' by 'words' because of the unresolved tension between language and thoughts; while it is an equally 'hard task to analyse a soul' (II. 232) with a systematic set of philosophical definitions. Although Coleridge praises Wordsworth's writing for 'the union of deep feeling with profound thoughts',⁷ Wordsworth says of himself that 'I was a better judge of thoughts than words'. In developing *The Prelude* 'with a gradually intensifying sense of others', Wordsworth's use of words is constantly in contradiction to his feeling and thoughts.

While Coleridge asserts that words relate both thoughts and objects, Wordsworth makes a distinction between them and finds it difficult to use words to convey his thoughts. 'Words', Coleridge points out, 'are living powers, not merely articulated air'.⁸ 'I include in the *meaning* of a word not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls' (B.L. XXII. p.263).⁹ Through the unifying and living power of language, these 'fixed symbols' are connected to one's inner thoughts through 'a *voluntary* appropriation' (B.L. XVII. p.197, my italics). However, Coleridge overlooks the fact that how language functions in the production of 'the *meaning* of a word' (alternatively, how a sentence tries to limit 'all the associations which it recalls') counts more than 'all the associations' a word *possibly* summons. As Newlyn puts it, in *Biographia Literaria* 'Coleridge becomes ... at once an example, and a warning, of what

⁷ 'The second characteristic excellence of Mr. Wordsworth's works is: a correspondent weight and sanity of the thoughts and sentiments ... from the poet's own meditative observation' (B. L. XXII. p. 265).

⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 3, ed. by David Erdman (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), II. 249.

⁹ See Paul Hamilton's *Coleridge's Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 132. Coleridge states that 'To make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature, - this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts' (B. L., II, p. 258).

... judging between good
 And evil, not as for the mind's delight
 But for her safety, one who was to *act*,
 ...
 And through dislike and most offensive pain
 Was to the truth conducted; of this faith
 Never forsaken, that by acting well
 And understanding, I should learn to love
 The end of life and everything we know. (VIII. 668-77)

The poet knows that he needs to write a poem for humankind to give relief and 'to the truth conducted'. This is a 'faith' that, as he assures Coleridge, will never be 'forsaken'. At the same time, however, Wordsworth is here carrying out this project in his own terms. 'By acting well', the imagination can find 'an element that please[s] her ... / Impregnat[ing] [his] knowledge, ma[king] it live, / And the result was elevating thoughts / Of human nature' (VIII. 798-802). For Wordsworth, it is his imagination (not the 'truth' of philosophy) that impels the 'growth' of his own mind, but his record of this fact also needs to constitute an insight into universal 'human nature'. As Wordsworth claims, '*I should learn to love / The end of life and everything we know*' (my italics). Moreover, he tells Coleridge that 'O Friend! / ... Have I descended, tracing faithfully / The workings of a youthful mind, beneath / The breath of great events, its hopes no less / Than universal, and its boundless love' (X. 940-45). Through these statements (and through the shift from 'I' to 'we'), Wordsworth transforms his personal thoughts into 'things / Common to all', even as he doubts their communicability. His sayings are intensely indecisive. No stable project of *The Prelude* is completely achieved. Even in the 1850 text, Wordsworth reveals his passivity and diminishing confidence in his capacity for 'essay[ing] / To give relief' in the revised sentence: 'I was led / Gravely to ponder' (1850, VIII. 519-20). Indeed, in the 1850 version of *The Prelude*, there is an increasing resistance to Coleridge's 'interposition'. For example, Wordsworth deletes his statement that 'Thou, most precious Friend! ... didst lend a living help / To regulate my soul' (1805, X. 905-7) in the 1850 text. Wordsworth's

earlier hope in Coleridge's 'living help' is being unsettled because of Wordsworth's increasing awareness of the intellectual differences between them, and of their unrecoverable friendship.

These ongoing reconsiderations of the relationship between Wordsworth's own poetic 'self-tasking' (a 'favour'd Being' 'not uselessly employ'd' by nature) and his consciousness of 'being tasked' ('call'd / To take a station among Men') by Coleridge, result in Wordsworth's 'obsessive awareness that making sense of the past calls for a lifetime's revisiting, open to the possibility of and recognizing the necessity for reinterpretation'.¹² Never entirely detached from Coleridge's expectations of him, Wordsworth nevertheless increasingly sees this endless revisiting of self *as* his poetic task. Wordsworth thinks that:

The Human-nature unto which I felt
That I belong'd ...
Was not a punctual Presence, but a Spirit
Living in time and space, and far diffused. (VIII. 761-64)

'The spirit of the past' which he 'belonged' to is no longer a 'Presence' 'register'd' at some specific point of time. It is living in the mutability of time. 'The human is not what we always in any sense have as members of a set; yet nor is it empty abstract possibility floating free from our living bodies like the perennial ought'.¹³ 'Human nature' is neither something beyond this world like a transcendental mind nor any shapeless entity constructed by abstract philosophical doctrines. Living in the 'change' of earth's 'round' (I. 504) 'might' allow Wordsworth an insight into his powers and thus to judge if he has been assured of success in his effort to produce a great poem for humankind. Wordsworth's development of an identity for himself is moving forward in a progression controlled by

¹² Stephen Gill, 'Introduction', in Stephen Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 1-4, p. 4.

¹³ Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song*, p. 152.

the mutable and associative links of memory rather than by any predetermined set of philosophical rules. Instead of viewing himself as a destined poet for humankind following Coleridge's 'appointed project', Wordsworth gradually forms his own sense of the self as changeable through his intensifying consciousness of temporality.

Nevertheless, Wordsworth never shakes off fundamental doubts about the poem's worth as a response to Coleridge's request for a work addressed to humanity at large. In Book XI of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth talks about the famous 'spots of time':

There are in our existence spots of time,
Which with distinct preeminence retain
A renovating Virtue,
...
A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
That penetrates, enables us to mount
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.
Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,
Are scatter'd everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood: in our childhood even
Perhaps are most conspicuous. Life with me
As far as memory can look back, is full
Of this beneficent influence. (XI. 258-79)

The repetitive use of such words as 'our', 'us', and 'we' testifies to Wordsworth's attempt to claim a common and sharable experience with the social community. In other words, he tries to 'mak[e] Verse' for 'communication of truths' (*B.L.* XIV. p. 171)), as he promises Coleridge that he will do in writing a poem for humankind. Looking back to former days, Wordsworth claims to find 'a renovating Virtue' in 'spots of time'. Wordsworth's revisions of 'a renovating Virtue' are noteworthy, however. In the 1799 *Prelude*, it is 'a fructifying

Virtue'. In MS. Z, 11^v, it is revised back to 'a vivifying Virtue':

vivifying
a ~~fructifying~~ Virtue [MS. Z, 11^v]

In the 1850 *Prelude*, the phrase again becomes 'a renovating virtue' (XI. 210). The textual process of revision is revealing. At first, Wordsworth views the 'Virtue' as creative, then as animating, and lastly as restorative. This process indicates Wordsworth's consistent sense that his project of self-examination needs to offer something more than just this, but also his changing sense of what this something more might be. Yet the sentence 'Life with me, / As far as memory can look back, is full / Of this beneficent influence' is deleted in the 1850 text, as if Wordsworth, even as late as this, is losing his belief in the 'Virtue' and 'efficacious spirit' of his enterprize.

Other anxieties surface in this passage too. Wordsworth echoes Coleridge's idea of 'the great eternal I AM' by saying that 'we have had deepest feeling that the mind / Is lord and master', to whose 'will' the 'outward sense' is subordinate and 'obedient'. This aligns the 'spots of time' with the mighty 'mind': the 'spots of time' are endowed with the effective and lively spirit 'mainly' when we recognize the prominence of 'the mind'. However, it is noticeable that Wordsworth's writing about 'spots of time' becomes more and more unstable as the poem progresses. At first, the words he uses show his certainty, such as 'distinctive pre-eminence', 'enhanced', and 'penetrates'. Later, more vague and uncertain words emerge, as in this passage: 'perhaps' and 'as far as'. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Wordsworth is repeatedly uncertain throughout the poem's composition about his capability to envisage these prominent 'passages of life'. He can only say that these 'moments' are '*perhaps*' 'most conspicuous' in 'our childhood' and that 'life with me, / As far as memory can look back, is full / Of this beneficent influence' (my italics). Wordsworth's writing of his life, as well as his view of Coleridge's thoughts, are constant, ever-changing reinterpretations, and this constant reinterpretation becomes, in the end, the

project of *The Prelude*.

It is a project haunted by doubts about its own value but also increasingly changed and influenced by a deepening consciousness of temporality on Wordsworth's part. In Book XI of the 1805 version of the poem, Wordsworth states that:

The days gone by
 Come back upon me from the dawn almost
 Of life: the hiding-places of my power
 Seem open; I approach, and then they close;
 I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,
 May scarcely see at all, and I would give,
 While yet we may, as far as words can give,
 A substance and a life to what I feel:
 I would enshrine the spirit of the past
 For future restoration. (XI. 334-43)

Wordsworth, looking back to the past, thinks that the early days ('from the dawn almost / Of life') 'come back upon' him, and that 'the hiding-places' where his 'power' 'lurks' 'seem open'. However, strangely, Wordsworth goes on to say that when he 'approach[es]', 'they close'. It is such an ambiguous relationship between 'open' and 'close' that even Wordsworth himself seems not to be able to tell whether the past is approachable or not. This precarious vision of the past moments on which his sense of his own 'power' is based drives Wordsworth further towards a sense of self as changeable. Here he starts to counteract Coleridge's idea of 'the absolute self' and his own previous view of the mind as 'lord and master'. However, at the same time, with the phrase 'while yet we may' Wordsworth also shows his longing for Coleridge's company and guidance, his hope that they 'may' still *work together* in the development of this 'history of a Poet's mind'. Coleridge, as Wordsworth says, was always 'with [him]' in his writing of *The Prelude*.

So was Coleridge's expectation of a poem of redemption, Wordsworth talks about enshrining 'the spirit of the past / For future restoration'. Keith Hanley suggests that

Wordsworth ‘reform[s] established discourses under the influence of his psychological history’.¹⁴ But Wordsworth is not engaged with ‘his psychological history’ simply for its own sake; he is also trying to establish, in that psychological history, possible sources of ‘future’ psychological restoration. To this end, the poet reformulates past experiences through the creative power of language in order to counter and hide his self-doubt. In doing so, he can work towards the ‘consummation of the Poet’s mind’, as the project Coleridge assigned him asks. ‘While yet we may’, Wordsworth hopes to work with Coleridge in talking about ‘the Philosophy / That promised *to abstract the hopes of man / Out of his feelings*’ and about ‘those *mysteries of passion* which have made, ... One brotherhood of all the human race’ (X. 806-08, XI. 84-88, my italics). This combination of Coleridge’s abstract philosophical disciplines and Wordsworth’s own inner mysterious feelings, as Wordsworth remarks, culminates in ‘our Song’ (XI. 8). Such a ‘Song’, evolving at least in part from ‘the story of my life’, might prophesy ‘Great Truths’ (XII. 59) for the whole humankind.

Thus, in the movement towards such ‘Great Truths’, Wordsworth keeps developing his own project while simultaneously adapting Coleridge’s philosophical idea of ‘grand / And simple Reason’ into a ‘humbler [imaginative] power’ that is believed to ‘[please] most / The growing mind’ (XI. 123-24, 124, 127-28). Wordsworth says in *The Prelude* that the imagination is ‘reason in her most exalted mood’. For Coleridge, the imagination (the ‘secondary’ imagination) ‘dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and unify’ (*B.L.* XIII. p.167). Sharing Coleridge’s idealisation of the imagination, but moving beyond Coleridge’s philosophical concept of the creative, unifying, and idealizing imagination, Wordsworth views the imagination as a power that is constantly changing and growing as his consciousness of temporality deepens.¹⁵ As Wordsworth says in Book XII:

¹⁴ Keith Hanley, “‘A Poet’s History’”, p. 61.

¹⁵ Simon Jarvis points out that Wordsworth’s definition of the imagination shows that ‘imagination cannot

And it was proved indeed that not in vain
 I had been taught to reverence a Power
 That is the very quality and shape
 And image of right reason, that matures
 Her processes by steady laws (XII. 23-27)

Wordsworth puts his faith in ‘a *Power*’ that is ‘the very quality and shape / And image of *right reason*’ (my italics). This ‘Power’ grows and ‘matures’ the ‘process’ of ‘right reason’ by ‘steadfast laws’. The Wordsworthian reason, like the Coleridgean, has its own ‘laws’, but it is not absolute and fixed; it is moving forward in a ‘process’ with ‘the *growing mind*’ (my italics).

Keeping the task Coleridge assigned him in mind, Wordsworth reinvents his past selves as these were directly related to Coleridge and the ‘appointed project’. However, this constant act of reinterpretation generates further doubts about the poem’s worth as ‘a shared experience’¹⁶ with the social community. Bennett suggests that ‘Wordsworth’s dejection on completing the poem in 1805 – and his inability to stop revising the poem over the next thirty-five years – indicates his discomposure, indicates the destabilizing or discomposing qualities of such writing’.¹⁷ Wordsworth’s insistence on his personal experience is inevitably unsettled and ‘discompos[ed]’ through the textual representation of it, and of its meaning, as ‘a shared experience’.¹⁸ As David B. Pirie puts it, ‘words which could make the experience of isolation sharable seem in practice almost as hard to find as those which could admit the reading public to the secrets of a private relationship’.¹⁹ Wordsworth’s composition of a poem for ‘the reading public’ is always

possibly be a philosophical name for a clearly defined faculty, power or ontological region’. Jarvis goes on to suggest that ‘what the imagination describes’ is ‘a kind of experience’ (Jarvis, *Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song*, p. 222).

¹⁶ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 47.

¹⁷ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.162. For Bennett, Wordsworth’s language is ‘a redefinition of “poetry” as a site of communicative ... faltering, disturbance, failure or collapse’; the ‘suspense’ of ‘communication’ is Wordsworth’s ‘topic’. (pp. 105, 106).

¹⁸ Bushell, *Text as Process*, p. 47.

¹⁹ Pirie, *William Wordsworth: The Poetry of Grandeur and of Tenderness*, p. 240.

trapped in a tension between the social world and private experiences. This baffling thought even drives Wordsworth to tell Coleridge that ‘I speak bare truth, / As if to thee alone in private talk’ (rather than speaking to ‘the reading public’) (X. 371-72). Wordsworth, in working together with Coleridge (‘while yet we may’), hopes to bring ‘a life to what’ he feels with ‘words’, though he also knows that this may be only communicable to Coleridge. And he believes that Coleridge, ‘a Friend / Then passionately lov’d: with heart how full’, will ‘peruse these lines’ which are ‘perhaps / A blank to other men!’ (II. 352-53, 354, 354-55). This sentence (‘as if to thee alone in private talk’) is nevertheless removed from the 1850 text, showing how far Wordsworth has moved away from his former belief that they are ‘twins almost in genius and mind’. Jonathan Wordsworth puts it well: ‘Wordsworth’s faith in Coleridge is touching, but hopeless’.²⁰ In the 1850 version, Wordsworth is sad to find that his ‘private talk’ is not understandable even to Coleridge.

However, seeing a self living in the changing of time, Wordsworth accordingly comes to view his relationship with Coleridge as fundamentally changeable, and increasingly sees this in a positive light. In the 1805 text, Wordsworth tells Coleridge that he finds:

... times which have from those wherein we first
 Together wanton’d in wild Poesy,
 Differ’d thus far, that they have been, O Friend,
 Times of much sorrow, of a private grief
 Keen and enduring, which the frame of mind
 That in this meditative History
 Hath been described, more deeply makes me feel;
 Yet likewise hath enabled me to bear
 More firmly; and a comfort now, a hope,
 One of the dearest which this life can give,
 Is mine. (XIII. 413-23)

‘The frame of mind’ in ‘this meditative History’ is being ‘described’ in *The Prelude*. This

²⁰ Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision*, p. 363.

‘History’ is related to the changing now. As Wordsworth points out, the ‘times’ which ‘have from those wherein [he and Coleridge] first / Together wanton’d in wild Poesy’ ‘*differ’d* thus far’ (my italics). Recalling these ‘times’ in the present act of writing, Wordsworth nevertheless finds that ‘they have been ... / Times of much sorrow, of a private grief’. For the writing Wordsworth, the previous time of ecstasy turns out to be ‘times of much sorrow’, which ‘more deeply makes [him] feel’ when he writes about these ‘times’. This sense of ‘sorrow’ is caused by the fact that Coleridge has left him ‘in search of health’ – and intensified by Wordsworth’s longing for Coleridge’s presence (‘I seem to plant thee there’). ‘Yet’, Wordsworth claims, the writing of the ‘times’ ‘likewise hath enabled me to bear / More firmly’ – now. And *now*, when Coleridge is absent, he knows ‘one of the dearest [comforts] which this life can give / Is mine’ – something he himself has experienced and cherished. For Wordsworth, Coleridge’s ‘interposition’ is becoming ‘mild’ along with his actual absence. Indeed, Wordsworth comes to recognize what his own project is precisely because of Coleridge’s absence. To use Bennett’s words, ‘*The Prelude* acts as an antidote to or a displacement of that impossible philosophical project’ projected on to Wordsworth by Coleridge’.²¹ Wordsworth even writes in the 1850 version of *The Prelude* that ‘One of the dearest [comforts] which this life can give / Is mine’ – ‘the power / Of living nature’ – ‘which could thus so long / Detain me from the best of other guides / And dearest helpers, left unthanked, unpraised’ . Coleridge’s absence allows ‘living nature’ to assert its influence, and allows Wordsworth to follow its promptings.

Moving forward towards the end of the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth, building upon his earlier claim (‘we, by different roads at length have gain’d / The self-same bourne’), seeks to re-establish (and to regain) a close relationship with Coleridge, calling himself and his fellow poet ‘united helpers’, ‘joint-labourers’, and, most importantly, ‘Prophets of Nature’ (XIII. 438, 439, 442). Nevertheless, in the attempt to re-build their intimate relationship,

²¹ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p. 16.

Wordsworth's writing does not actually move in the direction of the original 'project' Coleridge had 'appointed', but rather evolves fully into a Wordsworthian project that progressively articulates and defines Wordsworth's own 'private aims'. In the dialogue with Coleridge, Wordsworth claims that 'Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak / A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth' (XIII. 442-44). Wordsworth's autobiographical writing – 'the story of my life' – develops into a sacred poem ('sanctified / By reason and by truth') for the 'redemption' of all humankind, and the focus of his writing moves from 'my mind' to 'the mind of man' (XIII. 446). This all seems to be following 'that impossible philosophical project' Coleridge expected of Wordsworth. However, this textual constitution of identity for the poet and his project is a complex one, woven from intricate links between past and present, self-assertion and self-repression. And these elements at play in *The Prelude* establish a relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge on Wordsworth's terms, rather than Coleridge's. Wordsworth says to Coleridge that 'I ... design' 'the last, and later portions of this Gift' 'for Thee', and that this 'Gift' is the 'Offering of my love' (XIII. 412, 411, 412, 411, 427). As Gill suggests, the design of *The Prelude*, especially 'the last and later portions', is 'to restore the two poets to their former intimacy'.²² Wordsworth says to Coleridge in the poem: 'Thou art near, and wilt be soon / Restored to us in renovated health' (XIII. 423-24). Yet, while Wordsworth presents *The Prelude* as 'this Offering of my love', and composes the whole poem with a sense of 'being tasked' by Coleridge, the gift the poem gives is 'the story' of Wordsworth's 'life', the 'history' of this particular 'Poet's mind'.

Though Wordsworth could name his self-appointed task, this does not mean that its goals became fixed, or that Wordsworth finally identified its worth. Like Coleridge, Wordsworth glorifies the human mind at the end of the 1805 *Prelude*: 'the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth / On which he dwells'. But, in

²² Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 18.

Wordsworth's view, to seek an independence entirely from 'the earth / On which he dwells' contradicts his project of becoming a 'Prophet of Nature'. Wordsworth claims that 'in the very world which is the world / Of all of ours, the place on which in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all' (X. 725-27). And 'this very world' of 'ours' is one of constant change and uncertainty. This is, in the end, *The Prelude's* theme. In the final Book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth moves to 'the consummation of a Poet's mind', represented through his own, unforeseen recovery on Snowdon, rather than through the completion of any 'appointed' 'project' set at the beginning of the poem's compositional history. He creates and celebrates a new 'mind' on Mount Snowdon – or rather, a new 'perfect image of a mighty Mind'. This image of mind is 'perfect' and 'mighty' precisely because it is 'mold[ed]' by nature 'with circumstance most awful and sublime' – the 'domination which she oftentimes / Exerts upon the outward face of things' (XIII. 79, 76, 77-78). And it is the 'blow' and 'shock' of 'circumstance' that brings forth this power of nature, giving the poet access to, and new understandings of, 'wild blasts of music' and 'worst tempests'. The experience of both hope and despair forms the soul of humanity, and both are to be embraced. Indeed, where Wordsworth says in the 1805 text of *The Prelude* that 'higher minds' 'hold communion with the invisible world', he revises this phrase to 'hold fit converse with the spiritual world, / And with the generations of mankind' in the 1850 version (1805, XIII. 105; 1850, XIV. 108-109, my italics). Wordsworth's self-appointed task is not to imaginatively 'enshrine' 'Otherness [...] revolution [or] sublimity',²³ but to 'hold [...] converse' with humanity and human life. He does this by concentrating on his own personal experience, 'through strict vicissitude', 'Of life and death, revolving' (1850, XIII. 38-39). Thus, at the end of the 1805 version of his 'philosophic Song', Wordsworth exclaims:

Anon I rose

²³ Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination*, p. 93.

As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretch'd
 Vast prospect of the world which I had been
 And was; and hence this Song which like a lark
 I have protracted, in the unwearied Heavens
 Singing, and often with more plaintive voice
 Attemper'd to the sorrows of the earth;
 Yet centring all in love, and in the end
 All gratulant if rightly understood. (XIII. 377-85)

His 'Song', departing from Coleridge's idea of a transcendental world produced by the mind itself, encompasses 'the world' which Wordsworth 'had been / And was'. Wordsworth takes on the role of a poet writing for humanity by laying out his own. His 'Song' evolves from an account of his personal growth into a 'prospect' of human life – a 'prospect so large into futurity' (X. 751). The 'Song' reaches for 'the unwearied Heavens', but also encompasses 'the sorrows of the earth'.

Such sorrows include uncertainty and doubt about the very writing of them, and the value of doing so, and the poem acknowledges these at every turn. Even in this quotation, for instance, Wordsworth says that his project may be 'in the end / All gratulant' but only '*if rightly understood*' (my italics). Another sense of doubt emerges when Wordsworth says that 'Whether to me shall be allotted life, / And with life power to accomplish aught of worth / Sufficient to excuse me in men's sight / For having given this Record of myself, / *Is all uncertain*' (XIII. 386-90, my italics). This statement contradicts Gill's assertion that 'What *The Prelude* actually demonstrates is that Wordsworth's powers [are] never in doubt, and that he has completed the most arduous, and the most exciting work he [is] ever to undertake – an account of the Growth of a Poet's Mind, his own'.²⁴ 'Having given this Record of [him]self' offers no relief from the 'vicissitudes' of fear and doubt, nor does it offer stability of self, poetic or otherwise. Such things are not, in the end, what the poem is about. Wordsworth's identity as a poet remains uncertain, insecure, because Wordsworth

²⁴ Gill, *Wordsworth: The Prelude*, p. 93.

remains unsure of his qualifications as a visionary poet, of his ability to ‘accomplish aught of worth’, and even of the justification of his work, not least as the project Coleridge expects of him. That the poem is, in fact, primarily concerned with instability, uncertainty, change and ‘vicissitude’ is further and finally revealed through Wordsworth’s life-long re-interpretation, re-evaluation and revision of his project. As he asks in the 1850 text of Book XIV of *The Prelude*: ‘Where is the favoured Being who hath held / That course, unchecked, unerring, and untired, / In one perpetual progress smooth and bright?’ (1850, XIV. 133-35). He also says to Coleridge that ‘A human destiny have we retraced’ in ‘backward wanderings along thorny ways’ (1850, XIV. 136, 138). The history of his life, as Wordsworth makes clear here, does not ‘progress’ in any ‘perpetual’ and ‘smooth’ way, not is it recoverable through anything more than ‘wanderings along [the] thorny ways’ of memory. Moving from ‘the story of my life’ to a prophecy of ‘lasting inspiration’ to humankind, from being ‘a wanderer among the woods and fields’ (V. 611) to being a ‘[Prophet] of Nature’, Wordsworth’s textual self is constantly under review.

Indeed, Wordsworth’s creation of an identity for himself as a ‘[Prophet] of Nature’ was never, and could never be, complete. Rather, that identity is a perpetually shifting, evolving, self-transforming one, not just as a result of the poet’s reflections on it, and on identity *per se*, but also as a result of the poet’s changing relationship with other people, and particularly with Coleridge, of his changing understanding of, and attitude towards, the working of language, and of his endless revisionings of his past, present and futures selves, and their relationships to one another. However, it is exactly this contradictory and ever-changing sense of identity that gives Wordsworth’s ‘philosophic Song’ its enormous vitality. His writing is an epic engagement with the problems facing a self’s formation of an identity within ‘the frame of life’, in which there is always ‘joy’ and ‘melancholy’ (XII. 39, X. 868, 869), hope and fear, aspiration and dejection, achievement and failure, but, most of all, change. In the end Wordsworth does write a poem for humanity, though not

the poem Coleridge had anticipated. His vision of the human mind is never detached from ‘the earth / On which he dwells’ and from the common human experiences of happiness and pain, while the uncertain fissures between past and present compel Wordsworth’s ongoing re-visiting of the different moments in his life and incessant re-thinking of his own identity.

In conclusion, my thesis sets out with the aim of offering a more thorough understanding of Wordsworth’s lifelong engagement with the formation and reformulation of his identity as a poet of nature in *The Prelude*. My study has given an account of and the reasons for the way Wordsworth, out of his very anxiety about the ‘counter-spirit’ of language, keeps re-writing a sense of self into the poem. His self-representation, evolving into a poet of redemption for humankind, is precariously situated between past and present, speech and silence, internality and externality, self-assertion and self-repression. As Wolfson puts it, ‘Wordsworth’s voice of heroic argument is a voice of interpretation motivated by an urge to answer the more trouble voices in the self to which he is also audience’.²⁵ My thesis traces and examines Wordsworth’s inward contradictions when he ‘explore[s] the interrelationship of his personal experience, the generic nature of human growth to maturity of spirit, and the common experience of humankind during the great shaping events of his era’.²⁶ I have especially attempted to explore how Wordsworth engages with a baffling dilemma between ‘making / Breathings for incommunicable powers’ (III. 187-88) and his ‘obligation’ to ‘mak[e] Verse / Deal ... with substantial things’. As stated in the Norton edition of *The Prelude*, ‘*The Prelude* is the result of frequent rethinking, not of a single well-executed plan’.²⁷ Moreover, ‘No literary masterpiece has a more complicated textual history than *The Prelude*’.²⁸ Wordsworth himself states: ‘It is a moral and Philosophical Poem. To this work I mean to devote the

²⁵ Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence*, p. 165.

²⁶ Mark L. Reed, ‘Introduction’, in *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, pp. 3-90, p. 5.

²⁷ ‘The Texts: History and Presentation’, in Gill et al. (eds.), *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, p. 516.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

Prime of my life and the chief force of my mind'.²⁹ The worth of *The Prelude* lies in Wordsworth ongoing writing of his 'progress from [his] native continent / to earth and human life', and the point most worth exploring is his continual rethinking of his poetic identity along the 'thorny ways' towards 'universal reason of mankind, / The truth of young and old' (1805, VI. 561-62, 476-77; 1850, VI. 546-47).

Prior studies have demonstrated the importance of nature, imagination, and time in Wordsworth. In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on the issue of language in Wordsworth. My study hopes to contribute to our understanding of all of these by building on, but also moving beyond, the work of earlier readers of Wordsworth's writing. It recognizes the value of, but also challenges, Paul de Man's and Mary Jacobus' largely negative reading of Wordsworth's language (for example, de Man's ideas of 'temporal predicament' and 'defacement' of the self in Wordsworth's writing) by exploring the positive aspects and vital working of language in the poet's act of self-representation. It is indebted to Andrew Bennett's assertion that 'the "loss" of Wordsworth's autobiographical poems may be conceived of as a loss of – a loss constituted by – writing',³⁰ but goes further than Bennett to suggest that Wordsworth achieves a degree of self-presence out of precisely the 'loss constituted by' writing, and that Wordsworth's writing transforms the 'destabilizing or discomposing qualities'³¹ of language into opportunities for the creative visioning power of language to assert themselves.

On Wordsworth's 'consciousness of temporality', I have examined how Wordsworth develops an identity for himself at different moments in the compositional history of *The Prelude*. In this aspect, my reading challenges those of Abrams, de Man, and Hartman by investigating not only the 1799, 1805, and 1850 versions of *The Prelude* but also

²⁹ 'Wordsworth to De Quincey, March 6, 1804', quoted in Gill et al. (eds.), *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, p. 531.

³⁰ Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing*, p.174.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.162.

unpublished draft materials. In other words, my thesis hopes to give a fuller examination of the way Wordsworth records and exhibits his baffled thoughts about, and implicit resistance to, language during his incessant revision and reworking. Through ‘the act and process of writing’, Wordsworth exhibits his ‘struggle and anguish’,³² his inner vexation at language’s ‘counter-spirit’, not only at different stages of writing but also during his re-inventing and reworking of his textual self-formation.

The study of *The Prelude*’s compositional history, then, enhances our understanding of Wordsworth’s developing sense of self in *The Prelude*. This study is especially important in our reading of Wordsworth’s textual representation of the pivotal event in his life – the French Revolution. Here my research opposes new historicist readings of Wordsworth (which criticizes ‘the Romantic ideology’ in the poet’s ‘obsession’ with ‘restoring’ the ‘harmony’ of his childhood) by observing the way he exhibits his conflicting thoughts about the self after experiencing the failure of the Revolution. I have shown that Wordsworth’s writing is more an exploration of his troubled heart in the face of ideological contradictions than the ‘displacement’ of these and a ‘retreat’ from them into his ‘inward consciousness’. At the same time, my discussion shows how Wordsworth, through his positive use of language, creates a self capable of sustaining his role as a poet of nature. That is, corresponding to my former claim that Wordsworth builds a continuous sense of self by resigning himself to the mutability of time, here I suggest that he strengthens the connection between Revolution and nature by establishing a link between the historical ‘accidents’ and the redemptive possibilities in nature’s teaching. The poet associates ‘terrifying winds’ (1850 VIII. 220) and the imagination’s fearful manifestation of guilt in childhood with the terror of the Revolution rather than ‘replac[ing]’ social upheaval with his own ideological ‘picture of the mind’.³³

Finally, my reading has attempted to move beyond Hartman’s insistence on the tension

³² Bushell, ‘Reading below the Surface’, 12.

³³ Levinson’s *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems*, p. 5.

between nature and imagination in Wordsworth by investigating the complexity with which Wordsworth's language works to problematize his encounters both with the self textually representing as 'the Soul, the Imagination' and its ambiguous relationship with nature. In this sense, my reading differs from Harman's by demonstrating that Wordsworth's imagination is ultimately destabilized by the fragment and discontinuity created by his language. This fact, as my research shows, is indicated by Wordsworth's incessant re-inventing a self in the poem, which attempts to stabilize the conflicting selves his text represents.

This ongoing textual formation of a self is closely related to Wordsworth's textual dialogue with Coleridge in *The Prelude*. My study adds to the current scholarly discussions of Wordsworth's relationship to Coleridge by exploring how Wordsworth, out of his sense of self-depression, addresses his 'philosophic Song' to Coleridge in his reformation and creation of the Wordsworthian project at different points in the process of his autobiographical writing. This creation is presented and represented to Coleridge as Wordsworth's response to Coleridge's project for him, and revised again and again to accommodate, and reconcile, Wordsworth's determination to write a poem about his own private communion with nature and the philosophical poem of redemption for society that Coleridge originally asked of him.

In the end, it is these profound problems of self-identification, ever at play in *The Prelude* but never resolved by it, that are the central concerns of this thesis. Indeed, I suggest that it is the poem's handling of these problems that qualify Wordsworth as 'the greatest, most inaugural, and most representative poet of his time',³⁴ as well as 'the

³⁴ James K. Chandler, 'Representative Men, Spirits of the Age, and Other Romantic Types', in Kenneth R. Johnston et al. (eds.), *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), pp. 104-32, p. 106. Abrams remarks that 'for the most sensitive critics in the generation or so after Wordsworth's death, it was precisely his extraordinary success in bringing consolation to what he called a "time of dereliction and dismay" that gave him a status below only Shakespeare and Milton' (M. H. Abrams, 'The *Prelude* as a Portrait of the Artist', in Jonathan Wordsworth (ed.), *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies* (London: Cornell UP, 1970), pp. 180-237, p. 232).

most written-about Romantic writer of our times'.³⁵

³⁵ Kenneth R. Johnston, 'A Tale of Two Titles', in Arthur Bradley and Alan Rawes (eds.), *Romantic Biography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 48-57, p. 48.

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