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SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S
THE PRELUDE

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ABSTRACT

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S THE PRELUDE

SİRET KOYUNCU

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the element of self-consciousness in William Wordsworth's **The Prelude** (1850) with regards to the poetry of the Romantic Period. Performing a close reading of the poem, the thesis will discuss the argument that an analysis of **The Prelude** from the vantage point of self-consciousness reveals the poem to be a self-conscious poetic endeavour aimed to create a self-fashioned poetic identity. In the light of the phenomenon of self-consciousness, the study asserts that Wordsworth's interest in the self is an essential part of his distinctively modern understanding of authorship, rather than a genuine soul-searching as suggested by the poet himself, or a product of the poetic egotism Wordsworth was initially associated with by his contemporaries. For the purposes of this study, a survey into the Romantic Movement as well as a definition of self-consciousness along with terms such as self-reflexivity, meta-poetry and self-conscious poetry are provided. The Romantic notion of authorship with regards to the Wordsworthian definition of poetry being an "overflow of powerful feelings" with its origin being "emotion recollected in tranquillity" as expressed in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1801) is discussed in the light of the Romantic ideals of immateriality and spontaneity. It is argued that while this definition is paradoxical, the responses to this paradox dominated the Romantic writing. The way this clash is reflected in the poet's work as self-doubt and self-assertion concerning the anxieties about his authorship, poetic prowess, and reception will also be observed. It is also demonstrated that the illusion of poetic failure is a self-conscious mode of writing for Wordsworth in the four texts of **The Prelude**. The constant re-editing of the poem resulting in four versions and its posthumous publication are claimed to serve to

the pragmatic purpose of establishing a domain for the poet in which he becomes the reader and critic of his own poetry in the path towards creating his own poetic identity. The chapter also argues that the anxieties of authorship and reception fashioned as self-exposure and identity crises in **The Prelude** are in fact self-conscious reflections of the poet's aspirations to create a poetic identity.

In conclusion, the aim of this study is to establish that the contradiction between Wordsworth's theory of poetry and his experiment in **The Prelude** promote a self-conscious return to the literary practice and display a growing self-consciousness within the medium of poetry, greatly contributing to poetic theory while providing a unique insight to the phenomenon of self-consciousness.

Keywords: Romanticism, Poetry, Self-Consciousness, Romantic Poetry, Meta-poetry

ÖZ

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'ÜN THE PRELUDE ŞİİRİNDE ÖZ-BİLİNÇ

SİRET KOYUNCU

Bu tezin amacı William Wordsworth'ün **The Prelude** (1850) şiirinde öz-bilinç unsurunu Romantik Dönem şiiri bağlamında incelemektir. Bu çalışmada, Wordsworth'ün şiirini yazdığı atmosferin daha iyi anlaşılması amacıyla 17. yüzyılın sonu ile 18. yüzyıldaki İngiltere Tarım Devrimi, Sanayi Devrimi ve Fransız Devrimi gibi önemli sosyo-politik olaylar ve bu gelişmelerin edebiyat üzerindeki etkisi incelenmektedir. Wordsworth'ün, Samuel Taylor Coleridge ile birlikte İngiltere'de öncüsü olduğu Romantik akım ve özellikleri ele alınır. William Wordsworth'ün, **Lirik Balladlar** (1801)' a yazdığı önsöz, Romantik akımın İngiltere'deki manifestosu olarak kabul görmektedir. Şair, bu önsözünde şiiri “güçlü duyguların kendiliğinden taşması” olarak tanımlamaktadır. Bu tanım pek çok yönüyle Romantik Dönem'in şiire bakışını özetlemektedir. Bu anlayışa göre, şiir şaire doğal olarak gelmektedir, dolayısıyla da spontanedir. Bu anlayış şiirin ve dilin fiziksel varlığını reddetmekte, şaire ve şiire tinsel bir misyon yüklemektedir. Yine aynı cümlede, Wordsworth şiirin kaynağını “huzur içinde anımsanan duygular” olarak ifade etmiştir. Şiirin anımsanarak doğması ise spontanlık ve tinsellik iddiası ile çelişmektedir. Bu çalışma şairin bu paradoks ile, okuyucuyu bilinçli bir şekilde şiirsel teoriye dönük düşünmeye davet ettiğini iddia etmektedir. Şiir teorisi spontanlık üzerine kurulu olmasına rağmen öz-bilinci yüksek şiirler yazan Wordsworth'ün, öz-bilince dair öngörüsünün anlaşılmasının günümüz yazarlık anlayışına ışık tutacağı vurgulanmaktadır. Wordsworth, eserlerini nihai ürünün önemli olduğu Neo-klasik dönemin yerini eser sahibinin bilincinin ve bireysel hayal gücünün önemli olduğu Romantik Dönem'e bıraktığı dönemde üretmiş, nesir ve şiirleri ile bu döneme yön vermiş ve kendisinden sonra gelen şairleri kendisine verilen tepkilerle de etkilemiş bir şairdir. Wordsworth, aynı zamanda değişen sanat anlayışının

ve gelişen seri üretim imkanlarının telif hakları üzerindeki tartışmaları gerekli kıldığı bir dönemde eserlerini üretmiş ve aktif olarak eser sahibinin ve hatta varislerinin eser üzerindeki haklarıyla ilgili makaleler kaleme almıştır. Telif hakları ile ilgili değerlendirmeleriyle de modern yazarlık anlayışına yön vermiştir.

Bu çalışma yazar, eser, dil ve benliğe dair dinamikleri öz-bilinç kavramı ışığında ele alır çünkü Wordsworth kendi dönemi için bir radikal addedilmiş ve eserlerini yoğun eleştiriler altında üretmiştir. Buna karşın şair, sanayileşen ve mekanikleşen dünyada makineleşen insanın kendisinde heyecan, korku, dehşet gibi duygular uyandıran ve çoğu zaman bayağı olan bir edebiyat anlayışı benimsediğini belirtmiş, Shakespeare ve Milton gibi kıymetli yazarların eserlerinin bile göz ardı edildiğinden yakınmıştır. Ancak Wordsworth, şairin görevinin bu anlayışı değiştirmek ve okuyucunun zevkini geliştirmek olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Eserlerini ürettiği ilk yıllarda radikal olarak addedilen şair, son yıllarında ise fikirlerinde ve edebiyatında muhafazkarlaşmakla suçlanmıştır. Wordsworth'ün sıradan insanlara ve sosyal adalete olan inancının doğal olarak onu Fransız İhtilali'nin ideallerini kabul etmeye itmiş olması anlaşılır bir durumdur. Ancak şairin Fransız İhtilali'ni birinci elden yaşaması ve ihtilal kanlı bir hal aldığına ilişki yaşadığı Anette Vallon ve bu ilişkiden olan kızını travmatik bir şekilde terk etmek zorunda kalması ihtilale olan bakış açısını değiştirmiştir. Şair entelektüel ve bireysel anlamda ihtilale ve ihtilalin ideallerine yapılan ihanete dair büyük bir hayal kırıklığı yaşamıştır. **The Prelude**, şairin bu bağlamda muhafazakarlaşan düşünceleri için de bir savunma olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Şairin tüm bu eleştirilere rağmen kendine ve eserine dair sahip olduğu öz-bilinç **The Prelude** şiirinde ona, şiiri 1798, 1799, 1805 ve 1850 olmak üzere dört versiyonu olacak şekilde sürekli olarak düzenleyerek ve bilinçli bir şiirsel başarısızlık yanılsaması oluşturarak eserinin hem üreticisi, hem okuru hem de eleştirmeni olma imkanı sağlamıştır. Öz-bilincin bir gereği olan kendi ölümünün bilincinde olma problemini de bu şekilde çözümlemeye çalışan şair, eserinin her okuyucunun bilincinde sayısız kere yeniden anlamlandırılmasıyla eserini ve belki de kendisini ölümsüz kılmayı hedeflemiştir. Bu anlamda Wordsworth, öz-bilince dair kategorik yöntemlerin ötesinde bir anlayış geliştirmiştir.

Disiplinler arası bir kavram olan öz-bilinç, bu çalışmanın amaçlarına uygun olacak şekilde, natüralist bir temelde ele alınmış olup benliğin varlığını sorgulayan teoriler bu çalışmanın dışında bırakılmıştır. Öz-bilinç kavramı bu çalışmada, bireyin bir birey olduğunun bilincinde olması ve bilinçli olarak özüne dönük düşünebilme yetisi ve bu yetiye dair sahip olduğu bilinç olarak ele alınmıştır. Temel olarak öz-bilinçli bir varlık; tecrübe eden, düşünen, harekete geçen ve bunlara dair bir bilince sahip olan bir varlıktır. Bu çalışma öz-bilinç olgusunu teorik bağlamda ele alır ve özdeşünümsellik, meta-şiiir ve öz-bilinçli şiiir kavramlarıyla birlikte irdeler. Metinsel özdeşünümsellik, metnin yine metin içinde kendine dönük olarak yazılması anlamına gelmektedir. Meta-şiiir, şiiir üzerine yazılmış şiiir olarak tanımlanırken öz-bilinçli şiiir, kendisinin şiiir olduğunun bilincinde olan ve okuyucuyu farklı tekniklerle bundan haberdar eden şiiir olarak ele alınmıştır. William Wordsworth'ün **The Prelude** şiiiri, şiiirin “Bir Şairin Zihninin Gelişimi” olan alt başlığının da ifade ettiği gibi şiiir ve şair üzerine bir şiiirdir. Şiiirin büyük bir kısmı, şairin şiiiri neden yazdığı ve bu şiiiri yazmak için yeterli şiiirsel güce sahip olup olmadığına dair öze dönük şüphe ve inanç arasında gidip gelmektedir. Şiiir okuyucuyu kendi yazılma sürecine şahit olmaya davet eden spontane ve samimi bir dille yazıldığı izlenimini verir. Oysaki şairin okuyucunun farkında oluşu, kendi şiiirsel kimliğine olan ilgisi ve şiiirin yarım asıra yakın bir süre dört farklı versiyonu olacak şekilde sürekli olarak düzenlenmesi, şairin samimiyet ve spontanlık iddiasına gölge düşürmektedir. Bu tekniklerden en belirgin olanı, Wordsworth'ün başyapıtı olarak kabul gören **The Prelude** şiiirinin tüm versiyonlarında var olan ve sıklıkla uygulanan parantez içi açıklamalardır. Bu teknik metnin ve dilin sınırlarını zorlaması yönüyle paratext kavramı ile ele alınmıştır. Wordsworth'ün şiiir teorisi ve pratiği arasındaki bu paradoks ve Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley ve John Keats gibi diğer Romantik Dönem şairlerince bu paradoksa verilen yanıtlar Romantik Dönem yazınına yön vermiş ve günümüz yazarlık anlayışını da etkilemiştir. Bu çatışmanın şairin eserinde yazarlığına, şiiirsel yeterliliğine ve kabulüne dair kendinden şüphe etme ve kendinden emin olma olarak nasıl yansıdığı da incelenir. Bu amaçlarla kabul endişesi ve etkilenme endişesi teorileri bağlamında şiiir ele alınmış ve şiiirin yakın okuması yapılmıştır. Şairin kendini ifşa ve kendine güvensizlik şeklinde özüne dönük değerlendirmelerinin kendisi için bilinçli bir şekilde oluşturmaya çalıştığı şair kimliğinin bir parçası olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Bu tez, öz-bilinç ışığında incelendiğinde **The Prelude** şiirinin kendinden şekillendirilmiş bir şair kimliği oluşturmayı amaçlayan öz-bilinçli şiirsel bir çaba olduğu savını tartışır. Bu çalışma öz-bilinç olgusu ışığında Wordsworth'ün benlik ilgisinin, şairin iddia ettiği gibi özgün bir iç değerlendirmeden ya da çağdaşlarınca ilintilendirildiği gibi şiirsel benlikçilikten çok şairin belirgin bir şekilde modern olan yazarlık anlayışının bir gereği olduğu sonucuna varır. Wordsworth'ün öz-bilince dair bu öngörüsü öz-bilinç kavramı ile ilgili tartışmalara katkıda bulunduğu gibi, modern yazarlık anlayışının temeli olan Romantik Dönem yazarlık algısına dair anlayışı da zenginleştirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: William Wordsworth, Romantik Akım, **The Prelude**, Öz-bilinç, Romantik Şiir, Meta-şiir

PREFACE

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the workings of self-consciousness in William Wordsworth's **The Prelude**. This thesis stems from my passion for poetry and occupation with existential problems. I was driven to this study by the naïve idea that poetry could be a form of genuine soul-searching and **The Prelude** was a great medium to conduct this search to my heart's content. The outcome of this search however was quite the opposite, as my study has led me to the conclusion that although Wordsworth emphasizes spontaneity and sincerity, his masterpiece exhibits the self-consciousness and deliberateness that dominates his verse. In this sense, this study has been much more personal than I ever expected.

I would like to thank first and foremost my advisor Assoc. Prof. Yıldız KILIÇ, whose enthusiastic guidance and endless patience made this thesis possible. All the abstract ideas, which had been floating in my mind over the years, were finally put into words thanks to her critical questions coalescing into this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present thesis is to analyse the complexity of William Wordsworth's theories on poetry and the way they are realised in **The Prelude** (1850) from the vantage point of self-consciousness. In his work "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1801), William Wordsworth famously describes good poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"¹ and "emotion recollected in tranquillity".² While the former definition emphasizes spontaneity and immateriality; the latter emphasizes the physicality of the medium of poetry and thus materiality and self-consciousness. In spite of the claim of spontaneity expressed in **The Prelude**, problems of sincerity and authenticity driven by self-consciousness are brought about by language and memory. The fact that **The Prelude** is fashioned as an autobiography in verse, along with the degree of self-consciousness it displays as a poem and the identity of Wordsworth as the poet within the poem, renders the claim to spontaneity and authenticity even more questionable. Self-consciousness, as well as the physicality of language as a medium, turn the claim of spontaneous expression of "the fluxes and refluxes of the mind"³ in poetry into an illusion. Though **The Prelude** is presented by the poet as a private meditative lyric or lamentation on the growth of the poet's mind as suggested by the subtitle of the poem "The Growth of a Poet's Mind"⁴, it is abundant with social and political reflections and concerns that display self-consciousness, rendering poetry a medium to meditate upon itself. This dissertation asserts that while Wordsworth creates an illusion of spontaneity as a Romantic ideal, his poetry contradicts this illusion with an awareness of its own physicality and the reflection on this awareness within the poems themselves, revealing the self-consciousness behind this illusion and tainting the claim on spontaneity. Besides his poetry, Wordsworth's active involvement in poetic theory with his essays and prefaces, especially the concerns he expresses about the public taste in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" show the degree of Wordsworth's self-consciousness about his position as a poet as well as his consciousness of readership and anxieties of reception. It is argued that the poet, having understood the limitations

¹ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, 1800, Vol. I. Ed. by Jim Manis, Pennsylvania State University, An Electronic Classics Series Publication, Hazleton, 2004, p.8.

² **Ibid.**

³ **Ibid.** p.9.

⁴ Jonathan Wordsworth, Introduction to **The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)** by William Wordsworth, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, London, Penguin Classics, 1995, p. XXVI.

imposed upon him by self-consciousness and language, sets on a quest in **The Prelude** to create a self-conscious poetic identity. The degree of self-consciousness in Wordsworth's reflections, not only about his writing process, career, and poetics but also the dynamics of his private life and social circumstances, render **The Prelude** almost a defence. It is suggested that the representation of the natural surroundings and social circumstances in the poem are self-conscious psychological manifestations of the poet's subjectivity. The poet is self-consciously involved in creating his own artistic or poetic self through which he attempts to reach infinity or posterity. It is demonstrated that as opposed to Wordsworthian claim of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"⁵, **The Prelude** is rich in self-conscious references to its status as a poem spoiling the illusion of spontaneity as prescribed in "Preface to The Lyrical Ballads" (1801). However, his meditations about the poem and his poetic self within **The Prelude** create a textually embedded self-conscious authorial persona and defy the effect of spontaneity. It also indicated that the poet fashions himself as the solitary and meditative individual for pragmatic purposes as a reaction against the restrictions imposed upon him by the industrialized society and to overcome his anxiety concerning authorship and reception. The poet creates various identities for himself with claims of divinity and prophethood, such as the bard or the chosen son, for similar pragmatic reasons. Also, the existence of the 1798, 1799, 1805 and 1850 texts⁶ instead of a single definitive text makes the creative process of the poem available to the reader and turns the focus on the consciousness of the poet rather than the finished work. Thus, the text is open to interpretation by future generations, enabling the poet to transcend the limitations of physicality and reach the infinity to which he aspires in the consciousness of the readers. Books IX, X, XI of **The Prelude** entitled "Residence in France", "Residence in France and French Revolution" and "France (Concluded)", dedicated to the French Revolution, portray the poet's active involvement in the revolution and his later disillusionment when the revolution betrayed its initial ideals with terror and oppression, and thus broke the poet's heart. In order to

⁵ **Ibid.**, p.1.

⁶ "The first draft, "Was It For This", is a self-contained poem of 150 lines composed in Germany in October 1798; the two-part *Prelude*, completed in 968 lines in December 1799, and first published in 1973; *The Prelude* as completed in thirteen books in May 1805, revised over the course of the next year, and first published in 1926; the first edition of *The Prelude*, made ready for the press by Wordsworth and published (with some unwarranted tinkering) by his executors in 1850." Jonathan Wordsworth, Introduction to **The Prelude** by William Wordsworth, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, London, Penguin Books, 1995, p. XXV-XXVI

understand how **The Prelude** serves as an intended self-defence of the poet's changing opinion about the revolution as well as the transformation of his radical political ideology towards a conservative view, even in matters seemingly unrelated to political issues, it is necessary to take a look at the socio-political and literary atmosphere in which the poet produced his works. The eighteenth-century was an era of great social, political and economic changes that set the background for the modern world. Two significant political events, the American and the French revolutions, took Europe by storm. The American Revolution took place between 1766 and 1783⁷ when the British colonies in America fought for their independence from the King and parliament in Britain. The fire of the French Revolution was lit between 1789 and 1799⁸ to fight against the crass political machinations of the French monarchy and culminated in the execution of Louis XVI and his queen by the revolutionaries to establish a republican government.⁹ Besides these political revolutions, two other transformations centring in Britain contributed greatly to today's modern and industrial world: The British Agricultural Revolution and The Industrial Revolution. The British Agricultural Revolution refers to the increase in agricultural production in Britain due to the change from traditional methods to mechanized farming that relied on science. The common view is that the Agricultural Revolution has started earlier and led to the Industrial Revolution. The two revolutions are closely associated and took place almost simultaneously.¹⁰ While the abundance of produce facilitated the developing factory systems, the efficient production methods employed to cultivate the land required less labour force on the countryside. Consequently, more and more people moved to the cities to work in factories, which has resulted in urbanization causing people to live and work in overcrowded areas. The industry required the working class to run arduous tasks at the minimum cost possible for more profit as it also created a middle class which benefited from the wealth. While manufacturers and merchants enjoyed the advantages of this class mobility, the working class worked and lived in dismal conditions. However, at the same time, ideas associated with the Enlightenment such as liberty, fraternity, toleration, progress, and humanitarianism made intellectuals question

⁷ Desmond Mattocks, **The Last Word to America: The World in Context of America**, Bloomington, Westbow Press, 2015, p.16.

⁸ Peter McPhee, **Living the French Revolution**, 1789-1799, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.1.

⁹ Tim McNeese, **The Industrial Revolution**, Missouri, Milliken Publishing Company, 2000, p.1.

¹⁰ Steward Ross, **The Industrial Revolution**, London, Evans Brothers, 2008, p. 14.

the monopoly of political power and the social inequality. The idea of the separation of the church and state to be replaced with a constitutional government called for freer and more civilized individuals. Such ideals brought about the Romanticism movement in literature and art during the period between 1750 and 1850.¹¹ Romanticism aspired to replace the didactic Neoclassical literary practice emphasizing reason with a reactionary practice based on sentimentality and subjectivity by the end of the century. It is not easy to pinpoint the dawn or the end of the movement as there are intellectuals who are associated primarily with the Enlightenment but foreshadow Romanticism with their ideas. These intellectuals produced their work in what can be called a pre-romantic period. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and although quite opposite to him, Edmund Burke (1729-1797) are regarded as the two important intellectuals whose ideas paved the way for Romanticism. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's belief in the innate goodness of humanity and his belief that a social contract among people can lead to an ordered and just world associate him with the Enlightenment; while his disagreement with the idea that contemporary civilization and its advancements had made the world better in **Discourse on the Sciences and Arts** (1750) and his rejection of the excessive reliance on reason that dominated the Enlightenment thought connect him to the Age of Romanticism. **The New Eloise** (1761) and **Confessions** (1782) by Rousseau are cornerstones of Romanticism. The former warns that an individual's feelings should be expressed freely and everyone has to acknowledge the importance of the self rather than conforming to the society; while the latter initiated the Romantic age, since besides Romantic concepts such as retirement from the city and admiration for the solitude and sublime nature, it also introduced the notion of the self as a source of inspiration.¹² Rousseau's **Confessions** is regarded as a great change from the **Confessions** of St. Augustine who dealt with the self in relation to God and discussed it in religious terms. Rousseau's **Confessions** talks about growth in inner self and discusses the self in relation to the individual. This was possible, since by that time, the individual had already become an important subject in their own right and the focus had shifted towards the individual perception. Edmund Burke played a transitional role between the Enlightenment and Romantic thought with his attack on rationalism and the rigid Classicism of the eighteenth-century artistic style, which emphasized balance, harmony and restraint. In

¹¹ Leslie A. Muray, **Liberal Protestantism and Science**, Westport, Greenwood Press, 2008, p. 7.

¹² Joanne Schneider, **The Age of Romanticism**, Westport, Greenwood Press, 2007, p.2.

his belief, the greatest thing about art is its ability to depict the Infinite, which according to Burke has no limits. His ideas claiming that "art must reach a person's imagination and through it, the passions", and that "the love that beauty evokes is a less important passion than the awe which the sublime inspires", as expressed in his **Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful** (1757), convey a Romantic concept of nature and connect him to Romanticism. So, despite their opposite positions during the French Revolution, with Rousseau inspiring the revolutionaries and Burke condemning them, these two intellectuals served as precursors to Romanticism.¹³ While the writers of pre-romanticism featured the characteristics of both Neoclassicism and Romanticism in their works, self-consciousness was a growing concern in this transition and was also reflected in all its complexity.

A group of writers in Germany reacted to the emphasis of the Enlightenment on rationalism. This movement was the footsteps of Romanticism being heard in Europe. *Sturm and Drang* representatives such as Friedrich von Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe inaugurated Romanticism in Germany as early as 1770 and 1780. This movement translated as "storm and stress" was a reaction against the Enlightenment and its principles, and instead celebrated individualism and nature as championed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau by the middle of the eighteenth-century.¹⁴ Besides Schiller, Goethe, other German writers and philosophers including Herder, Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel¹⁵ were also associated with the birth of Romanticism; with ideas on consciousness, self, subjectivity and human nature. The movement soon spread across Europe to England and the ideals of Romanticism started to flourish in the works of English poets such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats who led the movement in English literature. The common view is that William Blake was the first in line, being sort of a proto-Romantic father to his successors. Then the first generation Romantic poets, also called as Lake Poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge followed. The second generation poets, Byron, Shelley, and Keats were born almost two decades after the first

¹³ **Ibid.**, p.3.

¹⁴ Leon Rosenthal, "The Precursors of Romanticism", **Romanticism**, New York, Parkstone International, 2015 p. 7.

¹⁵ Ian Bent, **Music Theory in the Age of Romanticism**, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 40.

generation. Coleridge and Wordsworth outlived this second generation of Romantics and Wordsworth was the one who saw them all come and go. Despite the generation gap and the individual approach of each poet, their works feature certain principles associated with Romanticism such as subjectivity, individual experience, and the theme of childhood. As it is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of the Romantic Movement, it is also not possible to determine a time point when it ended, since its influence is still continued. The effects of Romanticism can be seen in the realism of the Victorian period. Although Romanticism seems to have lost its power especially due to the shift from poetry to novel in terms of popularity, the leading Romantic poets continued to write. Also, the social realism reflected in the works of Jane Austen, Henry Fielding, Dickens or the Brontë sisters are embedded with romantic values such as the individual mind, the theme of childhood, and personal experiences. So, even the *Bildungsroman* considered a product of the realist fiction of the nineteenth-century embodies characteristics of Romanticism.¹⁶ Ever since its dawn, Romanticism has set the tone for contemporary literature with its emphasis on individualism and subjectivity, and it still continues to influence contemporary writers with its ideals. The Romantic emphasis on individual imagination and subjective experience brought about an unprecedented focus on one of the most ancient and lasting questions of humanity; namely self-consciousness. In his book **The Paradox of Self-Consciousness**, José Luis Bermúdez draws the attention to the importance attached to self-consciousness and suggests that philosophers have believed that a philosophical account of self-consciousness could be “an Archimedean point upon which the whole of philosophy might stand”.¹⁷ Thus, the abundance of views and the variety of approaches concerning self-consciousness clearly stem from the importance attached to it. Since it is an interdisciplinary term, there are many different and sometimes paradoxical approaches to self-consciousness. In order to keep the focus on the Romantic Era, this study approaches self-consciousness from a naturalistic point of view observing the self as “a natural entity having the special ability of self-consciousness and thereby of establishing representations about

¹⁶ Derya Benli, Petru Golban, “Nature, Co-Authorship and Metapoetry: Tintern Abbey As A Bildungsgedicht”, **International Journal of Language Academy**, Volume 5, 4 August 2017, p.277, (Accessed) <http://dx.doi.org/10.18033/ijla.3693>, 28 April 2019.

¹⁷ José Luis Bermúdez, **The Paradox of Self-Consciousness**, Massachusetts, the MIT Press, 2000, p. 2.

herself.”¹⁸ For this purpose, dualistic theories, or theories denying the existence of the self, such as Hume’s “bundle theory of selves”,¹⁹ are not taken into consideration in this study. Among the various interdisciplinary definitions, the most relevant one for the purposes of this study is the one by A. Newen and K. Vogeley: “self-consciousness can be defined as the ability to have conscious experiences and on that basis to represent one’s own states (process and events) as one’s own.”²⁰ Newen and Vogeley also note that the term “self” is used interchangeably with the term “I” to refer to a human being by characterizing the specific epistemic status that is connected with self-consciousness and suggest that “the self can be defined as the bearer of self-conscious states”.²¹ Basically, a self-conscious being is defined as “conscious of one’s own acts or states as belonging to or originating in oneself: aware of oneself as an individual”.²² K. L. Leenders and M. Taube define it as a being “that experiences, desires, acts and thinks and knows himself as thinking”.²³ Based on these definitions, self-consciousness is basically the human ability to be conscious of oneself, which is closely related to other human capabilities such as self-reflective thinking, personal identity, retrospective thinking, memory, and linguistic self-expression. Self-consciousness describes the particular condition where an individual is conscious of one’s own mental state in a way that is different from his consciousness of others’. So, the most basic quality of self-consciousness is the ability to nurture the thought of an “I” that makes self-reference possible. Although there are theories suggesting that self-consciousness might exist prior to linguistic self-reference, the focus of this study is limited to self-consciousness in linguistic self-expression. As approached in this study, self-consciousness concerns the ability of an individual not only to be aware of, but also to express oneself, and suggests that speech is closely related to the discovery of an “important invention (or discovery?) in human evolution”, which is “the invention of consciousness and self-

¹⁸ Albert Newen, Anika Fiebich, “A Developmental Theory of Self-Models: Individual-Cognitive and Social-Cognitive Dimensions of Self-Consciousness”, p.3. (Accessed) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226659382_A_developmental_theory_of_self-models_individual-cognitive_and_social-cognitive_dimensions_of_self-consciousness, 20 October 2018.

¹⁹ **Ibid.**

²⁰ A. Newen & K. Vogeley, “Self-Representation: The Neural Signature of Self-Consciousness. Consciousness & Cognition”, 12, 2003, 529, qtd. in Newen, Fiebich, op. cit., p.1.

²¹ **Ibid.**

²² “Self-consciousness”, **The Merriam Webster Dictionary**, (Accessed) <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-consciousness>, 28 April 2019.

²³ Klaus. L. Leenders, Mieczyslaw Taube, **The Search for Terrestrial Intelligence**, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 1998, p. 310.

consciousness”.²⁴ The roots of the discussion concerning self-consciousness is traced back to the ancient Greeks with the dictums “know thyself”²⁵ attributed to Socrates and “the unexamined life is not worth living”²⁶ attributed to Aristotle. In Biblical terms, it is related to Genesis, with the fruit of knowledge providing knowledge of the self and enabling self-consciousness.²⁷ Traditional approaches to self-consciousness depend on “a traditional understanding of persons as immaterial souls or substances”.²⁸ The discussions of self-consciousness in its modern sense as opposed to its Greek and Biblical roots started in the late seventeenth-century. In this century, with the increasing artificiality of the mechanical constructs as science and technology developed, nature was also perceived as being mechanistic. It was a question for philosophers where human beings stood while the perception of nature was shifting. Philosophers like René Descartes suggested that human soul was intangible and eternal, while others like Thomas Hobbes had a rather deterministic approach to human nature. It was a challenge for eighteenth-century philosophers to bring these two opposing ideas together. Their starting point was John Locke with his revolutionary discussions in the second edition of his **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding** (1694).²⁹ John Locke’s approach to individuals as thinking beings is significant in explaining the relationship between self-consciousness, memory and personal identity. Locke suggests:

This being premised to find wherein personal Identity consists, we must consider what person stands for; which I, think, is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it: It being impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive.³⁰

²⁴ Leenders, Taube, **op. cit.**, p.310.

²⁵ Mark J. Bruhn. "The Prelude As A Philosophical Poem", **The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth**, Ed. by Richard Gravil, Daniel Robinson, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 401.

²⁶ Thomas C. Brickhose, Nicholas D. Smith, **Plato’s Socrates**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 13.

²⁷ Genesis 2:9 and 2:17, The Holy Bible, St. Ives, Collins, 2002.

²⁸ Owen Ware, Donald C. Ainslie, **The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy**, Ed. by Aaron Garrett, Routledge, 2014, p. 245.

²⁹ **Ibid.**

³⁰ John Locke, "Chapter XXVII: Of Identity and Diversity," **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding in Focus**, Ed. by Gary Fuller, Robert Stecker, John P. Wright, Routledge, London, 2000 p. 106.

With John Locke's idea of personal identity consisting of a being that can think of "itself as itself", self-consciousness is emphasized as an innate characteristic of the identity. The relation between self-consciousness and memory is emphasized with the idea of consistency "in different times and places". As opposed to Rationalists, Locke relies on sensory experience as the source of knowledge like other Empiricists. Although, according to Locke, memory is treated as "the storehouse of our ideas"³¹, Locke's emphasis on memory and sensory experience for personal identity is a significant advancement towards the contemporary theories suggesting that the memory is a much more complex, selective and fallible process than merely storing information. This is an important innovative step as Locke suggests that the self and personal identity are identical with consciousness. Locke works from the Cartesian concept of the "thinking self" and argues that because consciousness always accompanies thinking, it is consciousness that leads human beings to consider themselves as a self and to distinguish themselves from all other "thinking things".³² According to Lock, the self equates to self-consciousness, as he asserts the self "is that conscious thinking thing... which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness and misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends".³³ The philosophical dilemma of the eighteenth-century is also at the heart of the **The Prelude**, where Wordsworth finds himself torn between Rationalism and Empiricism, Descartes and Locke, as he tries to decide to what extent the self is formed and to what degree it is a pre-existing entity.³⁴ This question is related to Wordsworth's concerns with the nature of the poet's mind and its interaction with the external world. While Rationalists suggest that the mind precedes existence and thus it is transcendental, Locke claims that the mind is a receptor of sense impressions and forms itself through these impressions. **The Prelude** is in defiance of Locke's idea that the self functions only as the receptor of sense impressions and is an entity that owes its existence to past experiences brought together by memory. Although Wordsworth agrees with the idea that the external world has a role in the formation of the self, he also believes that the self is partly pre-given.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³² Stanley J. Grenz, **The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei**, London, John Knox Press, 2001, p. 72.

³³ John Locke, **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding**, Philadelphia, Hayes& Zell Publishers, 1860, p.214.

³⁴ Richard Gravil, Daniel Robinson, "Prelude: Of 'Daffodils' (1802-1815) and 'Yew-Trees' (1804-1836), Poems of Imagination", **The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 23.

This position is quite similar to Immanuel Kant. Like Kant, Wordsworth accepts the existence of transcendental knowledge which is independent from experience. So, the mind is not only a receptor, but also a processor of what it receives.³⁵ Wordsworth has his own unique concept of the self in his poetry in terms of how the self can be defined in relation to its surroundings and how experiences function in the formation of the self. So, even after the firm belief in the transcendence of the self was shaken by empiricists like Locke, Wordsworth came up with a combination of the Lockean man with naturalistic grounds who is at the same time transcendental and pre-given as the Biblical self.³⁶ Wordsworth's unique insight into the self and the consciousness, which do not fit into a clear-cut definition, is presented in a nutshell in **The Prelude** along with his poetics concerning the consciousness of the author and the text; thus providing a unique insight to the paradoxical philosophical question of self-consciousness beyond categorical means.

³⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 23.

³⁶ Robert, Langbaum, **Mysteries of Identity**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 46.

CHAPTER ONE

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND ROMANTIC AUTHORSHIP

Writing is a self-conscious act by its very nature. However, certain texts display a greater degree of self-consciousness to the extent that the text becomes a medium to meditate upon itself. The author is confronted with the limitations imposed upon him by his own physicality or temporality as well as the language itself, further complicating the process. This problematic is most acute in the Romantic poets with a claim on transcendence, infinity and spontaneity. While Romantic poems are overshadowed by a sense of self-consciousness, each poet must find a way of his own to deal with its complications. In Wordsworth's case, not only his prose, but also his verse become the medium for the poet to self-consciously meditate upon the act and artifice of poetry and the character of the poet; displaying a consciousness of the limitations and constraints in terms of time, space, language, etc. on the self and the literary product.

1.1. Self-consciousness in Poetic Theory

Self-consciousness in poetry refers to the consciousness of the poet of himself/herself as the poet, and the medium of poetry as a fictional work of artistic creation as reflected in the poem itself and its process of composition. The scope of this study is the self-conscious elements within Wordsworth's poetry with references to the Romantics' treatment of self-consciousness. However, it is necessary to refer to the post-modernist theory that sets the theoretical framework for the discussion of self-consciousness in writing. Self-consciousness is associated and sometimes used interchangeably with terms including self-reflexivity and self-referentiality, and it is discussed in poetic theory along with the terms self-conscious poetry and meta-poetry. The term meta-fiction, on which discussions of textual self-consciousness focus, was

first used by the American writer and critic William Gass in 1970.¹ The birth of the term reflects a growing Western self-consciousness about the representation of the human experience of the world within the medium of art. The anxiety concerning meditation within a medium mainly takes the form of self-conscious representations. As opposed to realism, which attempts to create the illusion that the world pictured in the medium is the true world, such representations are a constant reminder of the fictionality of the work and prevent the reader from indulging themselves in the fiction.² Patricia Waugh notes that the self-conscious and systematic nature of metafiction reflect on itself as follows:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary text.³

While a fictional work attempts to create an illusion of immediateness, creating a reality of its own, a metafictional work emphasizes its status as a medium and experiments with the limits of the text and language, manipulating the readers' consciousness of themselves and the artifice of the fiction itself. In her book **Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox** (1980), Linda Hutcheon defines metafiction as textual self-consciousness.⁴ According to Hutcheon, while in a fictional work the reader "is required to identify the products being imitated – characters, actions, settings – and recognize their similarity to those in the empirical world"⁵, in a metafictional work, the reader is expected to "be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking".⁶ This sort of writing depends on the consciousness of the reader. The reader with full awareness of the

¹ Helen Stoddart, **Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus**, Routledge Guides to Literature, London and New York, 207, p. 33.

² **Ibid.** p.33-34.

³ Patricia Waugh, **Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction**, London, Methuen, 1984, p.2.

⁴ Linda Hutcheon, **Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox**, Waterloo, Ontario, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980, p. 6.

⁵ **Ibid.**, p.38.

⁶ **Ibid.**, p. 39.

materiality of the text and the medium of language self-consciously joins the author in the act of artistic creation. Hutcheon defines the difference as “mimesis of product” and “mimesis of process”.⁷ Metafictional works focus on the “mimesis of process” through the use of self-conscious and self-reflexive elements, reminding the readers of the fictionality of the work and inviting them into active participation in the creative process. Meta-fiction in general refers to the process of a fictional work reflecting upon its own process of creation. The term is applied to various forms of art and literature such as meta-drama, meta-film, and the meta-poem. Meta-poetry is defined as “poetry about poetry [...] that involves self-conscious commentary on the poem's own genre or on the process of creating the poem”.⁸ Meta-poetry specifically refers to self-consciousness concerning the act of artistic and creative composition within the medium of poetry. In his essay entitled **Toward a Definition of Self-Reflexive Poetry** (1997), Alfred Weber suggests that the 'genre' of self-reflexive poetry denotes the poem's treatment of at least one aspect of the author's theory or poetics as its primary and overt thematic concern. This thematic genre includes all poems that deal with the poet (his position and function in the culture and society of his time), with the writing of poetry (the creative process and the problems of language), and/or with the poem (the work of art, its structure and quality). He suggests all self-reflexive poems have as their dominant subject and central theme any aspect of the poet's poetics.⁹ Thus, a poem that deals with its own process of creation and becomes a medium for the poet to discuss his poetics is regarded as a self-reflexive poem. In terms of the referentiality of the poem, Anna Balakian underlines the distinction between referencing the poet's self and the poem's self:

⁷ **Ibid**, p.38-9.

⁸ L. K. Wheeler, "Literary Terms and Definitions", Dr. Wheeler's Website, 2017, (Accessed) http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_M.html, 18 March 2019.

⁹ Alfred Weber, "Towards a Definition of Self-Reflexive Poetry", **Poetics in the Poem: Critical Essays on American Self-Reflexive Poetry**, Ed. by Dorothy Z. Baker, New York, Peter Lang, 1997, p10, qtd. in H. K. al-Zubaidi, "Self-Reflexivity and Meta-Poetry in Billy Collins' Selected Poems", **College of Arts Journal**, University of Baghdad, 1, No. 111; 215, 2015, p.18, (Accessed) https://www.academia.edu/19235267/Self-Reflexivity_and_Meta-Poetry_in_Billy_Collins_Selected_Poems, 28 April 2019.

My particular definition of the independent or self-reflexive poem is limited to the reflection of the self, with the *self* meaning the poem rather than the poet. If indeed it should mean otherwise, that is the reflection of the poet on his poems, I would call it self-expressive rather than self-reflexive.¹⁰

Balakian makes a clear distinction between self-reflexive and self-expressive poetry and differentiates the representation of the poem from that of the poet. This distinction is reminiscent of Michael O'Neill's definition of self-conscious poetry. In his introduction to **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, O'Neill defines self-conscious poetry as poetry that not only "reflects on the subject of poetry" but also "poetry that displays an awareness of itself as poetry."¹¹ He suggests that a self-conscious poem is a poem that displays an awareness of itself as a poem. In his definition, self-conscious poetry concerns "the recognition made by a poem that it is a poem" and "recognitions poems make concerning authorial agency".¹² A self-conscious poem highlights its nature as a poetic artifice. Also according to O'Neil, self-conscious poetry is concerned with "in what way and with what consequences" a poem is "conscious of what it is doing", rather than "in what way a poet is self-conscious about what he is doing in the poem".¹³ Although self-consciousness and meta-poetry are postmodernist terms in theory, their practices are not limited to any particular historical period. These concepts are as old as Horace's **Ars Poetica** (19. B.C.), which is "a poem in which he gave several advice to poets and writers on the art of poetry and drama".¹⁴ While "there is nothing unprecedented about poems showing awareness of themselves as poems" and "Renaissance and seventeenth-century literature is richly self-conscious", O'Neill suggests that "they do not press against the limits of what we take poetry to be in the way that many Romantic and post-Romantic moments of self-consciousness do".¹⁵ In Romantic poetry, self-consciousness becomes a central mode of writing. O'Neill asserts

¹⁰ Anna Balakian, "The Self-Reflexive Poem: A Comparatist's View." **In Poetics in the Poem: Critical Essays on American Self Reflexive Poetry**, Ed. by Dorothy Z. Baker, New York, Peter Lang, 1997, p.300.

¹¹ Michael O'Neill, **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003, p. XIII.

¹² **Ibid.**, p.XIV.

¹³ **Ibid.**, p.XIV.

¹⁴ "Later, this phrase of *ars poetica* has been naturalized into English to designate a coherent and systematic set of poetics, and poetics, in turn, is "a systematic theory or doctrine of poetry" as Alex Preminger defines it. Qtd. in al-Zubbaidi, **op. cit.**, p.20.

¹⁵ O'Neill, **op. cit.**, XXII.

"many poems by the major Romantic poets are energized and subtilized by their consciousness of themselves as poems", which is "a valuable feature shared by many self-conscious Romantic poems" to explore the limits of poetry.¹⁶

Self-consciousness is of crucial importance in discussing Wordsworth's poetry, specifically **The Prelude**, because throughout his career Wordsworth displays a consciousness of his present and future readership along with his consciousness of himself as a poet. As a poem on the growth of the poet's mind, **The Prelude** stands out as the ultimate self-defence of his poetics. In his "Essay Supplementary to The Preface" (1815), he suggests that "every author, as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed".¹⁷ This statement suggests that Wordsworth is not only conscious of his readership, but is also aware that the success of his poems relies on the readership. While this statement contradicts his claim of spontaneity, the success of Wordsworth's poetry in creating the taste by which his poems are to be enjoyed is proven by the fact that both **The Prelude** and his other works have survived the public taste he had defined as depraved in "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads". Eva Muller-Zetzelmann denotes the social function of a lyric poem that reflects on itself through the term metalyric and suggests that these poems refer not only to lyric inspiration or to the poetic creative process of the works, but also to the social task of literary creation and the intended reader's reception.¹⁸ So, meta-poetry relies on the reader to find its meaning. This is especially important in discussing Wordsworth's works because the human mind as the processor of the subjective world is central to his poetry, and he believes it is the duty of the poet to elevate the reader's taste and to create the very taste by which his poems can be enjoyed. The meta-poetic features of **The Prelude** invite the readers to probe into the powers of the mind along with the poet through their interaction with the poem. The meta-fictional and self-conscious qualities of Wordsworth's work is reflected in his experiment with the paratext as well. The term paratext was first proposed by Gerard Genette in 1997. According to Genette, "the paratext of a book comprises all

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. XIX.

¹⁷ William Wordsworth, "Essay Supplementary to The Preface", (Accessed) <https://www.bartleby.com/39/39.html>, 28 April 2019.

¹⁸ Eva Muller-Zetzelmann, "A Frenzied Oscillation: Auto-Reflexivity in the Lyric", **Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric**, Ed. by Eva Müller-Zetzelmann, Margarete Rubik, New York, Rodopi, 2005, p.132.

constituents that surround the main text, including title pages, prefaces, dedicatory letters or appendices”.¹⁹ In his definition, the paratext is characterized by an “authorial intention and assumption of responsibility”, which extends to everything including the preface and epilogue, interview, or prospectus the author intends to accompany the bare text.²⁰ While “in principle, every context serves as a paratext”, authorial involvement is decisive for Genette.²¹ Thus, the self-consciousness of the author concerning the act of writing is not limited to the fictional work itself. The reflections of the author’s self-consciousness about the act of artistic creation can be expressed in the author’s discursive writings as well, making him almost the critic or the theorist of his own work. So, letters, interviews, reviews, essays and prefaces are regarded as paratext as well.²²

William Wordsworth’s active involvement with the paratext can be seen not only in his discursive writings such as “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” (1800), “Essay Supplementary to Preface” (1815), and his letters; but also, in his experiment with the paratext within his poems. Especially in **The Prelude**, Wordsworth explores the margins of paratext with the explanations he provides in parentheses within the poem. This authorial intervention placed within the poem itself not only highlights his consciousness of the limitations of language and text imposed upon his own literary production, but also his consciousness of himself as the poet, a public speaking persona possessing an audience to addresses with social and political implications. Wordsworth’s experiment with paratext in his prose and verse is significant in understanding his poetics and his interactions with self-consciousness as a poet. The fact that Wordsworth was industriously involved in writing essays, letters and prefaces demonstrate his self-consciousness as a factual poet. Besides making poetry and the poet the very subjects of his poems, he uses techniques such as giving explanations within the poems addressing the reader directly in parentheses and thus experimenting with the margins of the text and the limits of language. Wordsworth’s experiments with the paratext point to his consciousness of the language and its limitations as a medium,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁰ Gerard Genette, **Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation**, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 1.

²¹ A. Den Hollander, U. Schmid, W. Smelik, Leiden, **Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and Christian Traditions: The Textual Markers of Contextualization**, Brill, 2003. p. VII.

²² Alfred Weber "Towards a Definition of Self-Reflexive Poetry", **Poetics in the Poem: Critical Essays on American Self-Reflexive**, p.10-11 qtd. in al-Zubaidi, *loc. cit.*

as well as his consciousness of the poet as a textually embedded self and his efforts to create the desired poetic and public identity.

1.2. English Romantic Poetry and Self-consciousness

Romanticism is a difficult term to define due to its resistance to historical confinement to a certain period of time and a set of definitive qualities. Romantic poetry, however, is an indispensable element to any attempt to define Romanticism.²³ The common view holds that Romantic poetry has shaped the nature of English verse from the late eighteenth-century to the 1920s and continues to influence poetry to this day. Although it is difficult to provide a definition of the movement and each so-called Romantic poet has their individual concerns, it is possible to talk about some common characteristics of Romantic poems. The starting point of Romantic Poetry is a break from the ideals of Enlightenment such as rationalism and the neoclassical denial of self-expression; shifting the focus from reason to sentimentalism and from prose to verse. The new sense of poetry is marked with a move from “the eighteenth-century neoclassical poetic paradigms of 'mimesis' (imitation)” and from “the philosophical values of the Enlightenment such as rationalism and empiricism towards an expressive literary model”, which emphasized the “individual poetic genius and imagination of the poet together with a philosophical cast of mind more attuned to the sublime, the transcendental and the supernatural”.²⁴

This new emphasis upon the individual imagination of the poet has brought about a brand new emphasis on subjectivity and individualism which resulted in a deep self-analysis accompanied with an unceasing sense of self-consciousness. This degree of self-consciousness according to Peter Hühn was not only novel, but also formed the basis of Romantic poetry. Hühn further states:

²³ Charles Mahoney, **A Companion to Romantic Poetry**, Wiley- Blackwell Publishing, West Sussex, 2011, p.1.

²⁴ Jane Moore, John Strachan, **Key Concepts in Romantic Literature**, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010, p. 1.

One of the constitutive and motivating features of English Romantic poetry is an unprecedented degree of self-consciousness accompanied by a marked tendency to self-analysis and the emergence of a distinct selfhood alienated from others and threatened in its existence.²⁵

In Romantic poetry, the most dominant voice is that of the isolated and meditating individual withdrawn from society and retreated to the self with the belief that “the pathway to true knowledge” comes “through introspection - including discovery of one’s own hopes and imaginings - for the finite, individual self is the voice of the infinite.”²⁶ This turn to self-consciousness as reflected in the image of the solitary individual in private meditation lamenting on his private and social circumstances is a reaction against the ills of the industrialized society, which disregards the subjectivity of the individual. These poems create a domain free from the dehumanizing qualities of the society. While self-consciousness is the motivating force behind this inwardness, its paradoxical nature is a challenge for Romantic poets. In an earlier essay, Geoffrey Hartman writes “every increase in consciousness is accompanied by an increase in self-consciousness, and that analysis can easily become a passion, one that ‘murders to dissect’”.²⁷ In order to counteract this, Romantic poets must seek the “remedia intellectus”, or “remedies against the corrosive power of analysis and the fixated self-consciousness”.

Thus, the Romantics are engaged in the deconstruction of the fiction of a unified and stable self. The turn to the self can be explained with escapism, which is a defining concept in Romanticism. The Romantic notion of escapism depends on imagination and usually finds its expression in conceptualizations of nature, the sublime, and quite often, the self. Romantic Poetry has therefore introspective and psychological interests commonly associated with self-consciousness. According to Harold Bloom:

²⁵ Peter Hühn, “Outwitting Self-consciousness: Self-reference and Paradox in Three Romantic Poems”, **English Studies**, 72:3, 1991, p. 230-245, (Accessed)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00138389108598749>, 28 April 2019.

²⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, **The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei**, London, Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001, p.111.

²⁷ Geoffrey H. Hartman, “Romanticism and ‘Anti-Self-Consciousness’” **The Centennial Review**, vol. 6, no. 4, 1962, p. 554, (Accessed) www.jstor.org/stable/23737893, 28 April 2019.

The high cost of Romantic internalization, that is, of finding paradises within a renovated man, shows itself in the arena of self –consciousness. The quest is to widen consciousness as well as to intensify it, but the quest is shadowed by a spirit that tends to narrow consciousness to an acute preoccupation with self.²⁸

The poems by English Romantic poets such as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats reflect their individual and subjective states with strong references to self-conscious attitudes ranging from self-doubt, self-awareness, and self-reflection to self-assertion with a sharpened alertness to experience, which is far from narcissism.²⁹ In Romantic poetry, what is described is almost always how the natural objects appear to the poet, and not the objects themselves. Thus, although nature seems to be the poet's main source of inspiration, it is in fact the consciousness of the self and his individual state of mind in these surroundings that allow the poet to reflect on the natural world around him. Wordsworth's "Daffodils" is a famous example with their "flash upon the inward eye/Which is the bliss of solitude".³⁰ What Wordsworth describes are not the daffodils themselves, but the emotions they kindle within himself. Thus, the focus is not on the natural itself, but on the mind of the poet and his self-conscious observations. The romantic ideal of expressing subjective experience is accompanied by self-consciousness, not only because self-consciousness creates a domain in which the poet reflects on his relationship with the subjective world and external elements, but also the poet's consciousness of his self-consciousness allowing him to reflect on his own feelings in a self-conscious way bestows a means on the poet to create an identity to accomplish the desired artistic effect and poetic self. So, the present study takes the self-conscious Romantic lyric as representing not the poet's self, but that of the speaker's, who is self-consciously created by the poet.

²⁸ Harold Bloom, **Bloom's Period Studies: English Romantic Poetry**, Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, p.4.

²⁹ Michael O'Neill, **op. cit.** p. XV.

³⁰ Daniel Robinson, **William Wordsworth's Poetry: A Reader's Guide**, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, 2010, p.38.

1.3. Romantic Authorship

Romantic notions of authorship have greatly influenced the contemporary approach to the concept. This is partly because Romanticism coincides with the birth of copyright issues and the professionalization of authorship. At the beginning of the eighteenth-century, the concept of art depended on Neo-classicism and was seen as being imitative. Hence, it was of no great consequence whether any writer or author had any rights over their works. The verbal creation was regarded as a product available to the public and literature was an open market. However, with the rise of Romanticism, individual imagination and creativity gained importance. For Romantics, the individual genius, originality, imagination and inspiration were important notions. This new emphasis on the individuality and subjectivity of the creation redefined literary works as products of intellectual labour which belonged to the creative minds behind them.³¹ As Jacqueline Rhodes puts it in her paper entitled “Copyright, Authorship, and The Professional Writer”, “romantic aesthetics were more likely the culmination of a century-long development of the radical textual individual: the professional writer”.³² William Wordsworth himself was actively involved in defining notions of authorship and copyright issues. His ideas had a profound effect on the contemporary understanding of the relation between the literary work that is constructed and the self that constructs it.³³ His aesthetic theories stated in “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” (1798) are precursors of the literary, economic and legal definitions of the contemporary notions of authorship. Wordsworth’s position is also a result of the economic and legal developments that took place in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, forming the basis for the present claim on copyright.³⁴ With this changing emphasis on subjectivity, individual imagination, creativity, and originality, the relation of the author to the literary work as its creator and the authorship behind the text became an important concern, making intellectual labour a professional work which is

³¹ Martha Woodmansee, Peter Jaszi, “The Law of Texts: Copyright in the Academy”, **College English**, 57, 1995, p. 427.

³² Jacqueline Rhodes “Copyright, Authorship, and the Professional Writer: The Case of William Wordsworth”, **Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text**, 8 (June 2002), p.2 (Accessed) http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc08_n02.html, 28 April 2019.

³³ O'Neill, **op. cit.**, p. XVI.

³⁴ **Ibid.**, p.4.

to be managed and assured by copyright laws. So, besides aesthetics arguments, there were economic factors: industrialization in the eighteenth-century brought about an increased commercialization culture which included literary and artistic culture as well. The professionalization of authorship is a result of the aesthetic and economic concerns of the eighteenth-century intellectuals who claimed that writing is a professional occupation rather than a gentlemanly leisure activity.³⁵ This was a crucial view, since the claim to authority gained importance as publishing grew as a sector and the literary work became also a commercial commodity. In the newly growing publishing sector with the proper laws to protect the author, the most privileged individuals were obviously the publishers since the only copyright laws on books at the beginning of the eighteenth-century existed to protect publishers' rights rather than the rights of the author.³⁶

Wordsworth was also interested in copyright law throughout his publishing career. His concern was not only the rights of ownership, but also the extension of these rights to the author's heirs. He emphasized that the authors' rights, as well as the rights of their heirs, over creative works, were in need of protection as most texts may remain unappreciated during the author's lifetime. Lucy Newlyn notes a letter Wordsworth wrote to his friend Richard Sharp in 1808, where according to Newlyn, Wordsworth uses the argument he later repeats in the "Essay Supplementary to the Preface" (1815) claiming that his own fame, like Milton's, will arrive in posterity. She suggests that Wordsworth points to Hartley's *Observations on man* and Milton's minor poems as examples of works that slept for a long time "in almost entire oblivion".³⁷ Wordsworth laments:

The law as it is now stands merely consults the interest of the useful drudges in Literature, or of flimsy and shallow writers, whose works are upon a level with the taste and knowledge of the age; while men of real power, who go before their age, are deprived of all hope of their families being benefited by their exertions.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Lucy Newlyn "A System of Defences", **Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception**, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 271.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Wordsworth's concern about copyright echoes his concern regarding the public taste in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", revealing the degree of his anxiety of reception and partly explaining the extraordinary self-consciousness he displays through his poetic identity. O'Neill draws attention to the self-consciousness and anxiety of reception displayed by the Romantics and in particular by Wordsworth as follows:

Romantic poems are self-conscious partly because of the mixture in them of self-assertion and self-doubt; they know of no mode of knowledge superior to their own, yet their sense of a contract with an audience is fragile. In Wordsworth's case poem after poem seeks to create the taste by which it may be enjoyed.³⁹

In contrast with his emphasis on spontaneity in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", his active involvement with professionalization of authorship show Wordsworth's self-conscious endeavour to create his own poetic identity along with the taste by which his poems were to be enjoyed. His concerns for public taste as reflected in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" with regards to the ebb and the flow in his reception during his lifetime are better understood when studied in the light of self-consciousness.

1.4. Spontaneity vs. Romantic Self-Consciousness: "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"

As the ideals of Romanticism spread across Europe, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published the **Lyrical Ballads** in England in 1799.⁴⁰ A preface entitled "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1800) was later added to the work. The underlying tendency in the preface was to deconstruct the basics of the current conventions of literary practice and establish a new convention by which the poems were to be enjoyed. Wordsworth describes his intention as to provide "a systematic defence of the theory, upon which the poems were written".⁴¹ He formulates his theory of poetry as a metrical arrangement of "a selection of the real language of men in a state

³⁹ O'Neill, **op. cit.**, p.36.

⁴⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads** 1798 and 1800, Ed. by. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter, Broadview Editions, 2008, p.44.

⁴¹ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, **op. cit.**, p.6.

of vivid sensation”⁴², which he believes to be authentic as opposed to the neoclassical taste of refined or elevated language. This class of poetry would deal with the “incidents of common life”⁴³ with an interest to trace the primary laws of human nature in these incidents. For this purpose, the poet chooses a low and rustic lifestyle since he believes that this condition of simplicity nurtures elementary feelings that are close to beautiful and permanent forms of nature.⁴⁴ Besides the subject matter and the language of the poems, in the preface, Wordsworth suggests two basic definitions of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions” and “a recollection of emotions in tranquillity”. The distinction between spontaneity and self-consciousness is rooted on the two distinctive ways of knowing, “mediate and immediate” as based on Descartes’s scepticism, which suggests that between the knower and the knowledge exists “a content” which has no presence but an appearance in the present consciousness. This approach implies that the reality is not directly available but only in the thought; not as reality itself but as the knowledge of reality. This sort of scepticism does not suggest that things do not exist as they appear to us, but that they may not exist at all except for enigmatic appearances. As opposed to knowledge meditated with content, immediacy is proposed as a second way of knowing and suggests a direct relation of the mind to the reality with no intervention of a medium.⁴⁵ In literary production, this discussion results in two opposing approaches to writing: immediacy, which refers to any effort towards the elimination of the medium; and mediacy, which conversely emphasizes the medium.

Wordsworth’s theory of poetry has been deemed “out of touch and irrelevant, boring, too simplistic, or simply idiosyncratic”⁴⁶ by critics and scholars. That Wordsworth’s poems in his **Lyrical Ballads**, or his poetry in general, fail to provide the validity for his claims and to prove that he followed his revolutionary theory of poetry have been repeatedly suggested by his critics including his former collaborator Coleridge. In Chapter XIX of **Biographia Literaria**, Coleridge criticizes Wordsworth’s system for being groundless, strange and overwhelming in its consequences. He also

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ G. F. Stout, **Immediacy, Mediacy and Coherence**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, New Series, Vol. 17, No. 65, January 1908, p. 20, (Accessed) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2248207>, 21 July 2019.

⁴⁶ Brian. R. Bates, **Wordsworth's Poetic Collections: Supplementary Writing and Parodic Reception**, London, Routledge, 2016, p.118.

expresses his belief that Wordsworth never adapted his theory into practice.⁴⁷ As Coleridge indicated, besides the contradiction between Wordsworth's theory and his practice, the preface deconstructs itself with its contradictory statements. Before the poet asserts his claim on spontaneity, he emphasizes that each poem in the volumes has a worthy purpose and states that only on this condition he would deserve the title of the poet. Immediately after his assertion that the poems are purposeful, he gives the following explanation:

Not that I mean to say, that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but I believe that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If in this opinion I am mistaken I can have little right to the name of a Poet⁴⁸

The poet's claim that the poems have a purpose is paradoxical to his following statement of spontaneity, which describes his poetry as a spontaneous overflow of the poet's habits of meditation:

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria", **The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Prose and Verse**, Philadelphia, Crissy& Markley, 1853, p.317.

⁴⁸ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, op. cit. p.8.

⁴⁹ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, op. cit., p.8-9

In these lines, Wordsworth describes poetry as an utterance resulting from sense experience. His description is an embodiment of the Romantic emphasis on the inner world corresponding to the outer world to become a source of poetic creation as opposed to the Neo-classical objective representation of the real world which was regarded as the source of artistic creativity. The emphasis on spontaneity is closely related to the Romantic revolt against the scientific approach to nature based on reason, to be replaced with the Romantic description of nature and the landscape from an individual aspect. However, the same paragraph features expressions such as ‘thinking long and deeply’, ‘modification of continued influxes of feeling’, ‘being directed by thoughts’, ‘past feelings’, ‘production of habits’ which defy the possibility of spontaneity with the implication that poetry by its nature is detached from the original impressions. The second assertion about poetry as being spontaneous makes the paradoxical nature of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry even more explicit:

Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.⁵⁰

Wordsworth’s ideal poetry is free from manipulations of all sorts, whether artistic or pragmatic. It is spontaneous in the sense of oral communication since Wordsworth idealizes the poet as a man speaking to men. In the preface, Wordsworth expresses his belief in the power of poetry and language and asserts that while “the power of any art is limited”,⁵¹ language has a “purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature”.⁵² This superiority of the language depends on its independence from physicality.

⁵⁰ **Ibid.**, p.16-17.

⁵¹ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, p. 20.

⁵² **Ibid.**, p.21.

Wordsworth's formulation of poetry has a close relationship with the Romantic craving to eliminate the medium:

Unlike communicative, mediatory models of language, such a formulation of poetry as a direct utterance or projection of the poet's *mind* illustrates how the Romantic insistence on immediacy is rooted in the illusion of language's transparency.⁵³

Wordsworth's claim of spontaneity comes with a set of conditions. When the source of poetry is the emotions recollected in tranquillity, the retrieval of the past would only be possible through premeditation and would inevitably be dependent on memory. Then the poet needs to translate the nature, the landscape and himself into language. This formulation of poetry defies Wordsworth's illusion of poetry as a spontaneous utterance, but turns it into a self-conscious intellectual labour that is subject to mediums such as memory, language and the poet's self-consciousness. So, as Coleridge indicated, both the preface and Wordsworth's practice in verse fail to validate his theory of ideal poetry. While the criterion of spontaneity was set by Wordsworth with his claim that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, it was acknowledged by second generation poets such as Keats who famously asserted that "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all".⁵⁴ Shelley also believed that toil in terms of poetry could only mean carefully observing the inspired moments, and as poetry being far from reasoning is not a power that could be implemented by will, it would be "an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study".⁵⁵ Almost echoing Wordsworth, Shelley also asserted that "a great poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight".⁵⁶ While adopting a very similar position to Wordsworth, Shelley also wrote poems that embody the lyrical awareness of the difficulties in his efforts to enrich the readers' understanding of their reading.⁵⁷ Keats' poems such as "Hyperion" (1820) and "The Fall of Hyperion" (1856) also display awareness of writing as a form of distortion of historical facts and

⁵³ **Ibid.**

⁵⁴ W. Jackson Bate, **John Keats**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p.234.

⁵⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry", **Essays from Abroad**, Ed. by Mrs. Shelley, Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1840, p. 56.

⁵⁶ **Ibid.**, 51.

⁵⁷ O'Neil, **op. cit.**, XXIII.

his **Epistles** are reflections on poetry.⁵⁸ As the Romantics produced their work with the illusion of spontaneity, self-consciousness ran through the poetry of the first and the second generations of Romantics. As the poets' presence was made explicit in their works and poetry itself became a subject for their poetry, they produced their best works in the light of these paradoxical arguments of spontaneity as opposed to self-consciousness. However, although Wordsworth's poetry is intensively preoccupied with the Romantic ideal of immateriality, spontaneity and immediacy; his metapoetic verse - in which he not occasionally but as a mode of writing reflects on his poetics and poetry - is full of self-conscious, metapoetic characteristics. Also, Wordsworth's discursive writing, his involvement in the copyright issues, and the professionalization of writing as well as his experiments with paratext have proven him as a self-conscious poet with full consciousness of the medium of poetry in practice.

1.5. The Lyric 'I' in Romantic Poetry

In his **A Glossary of Literary Terms** (1957), M. H. Abrams defines a lyric as "any fairly short poem uttered by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a process of perception, thought and feeling".⁵⁹ Abrams suggests that the speaker who addresses the reader in the first person, even when the autobiographical evidences coincide with the poet's life, may not necessarily refer to the poet himself because the 'I' of the speaker may be manipulated by the poet to achieve the desired artistic effect. A decade later, in his essay **The Death of the Author**, Roland Barthes questions the voice that speaks to the reader in a text, asking whether it is the character or the writer's philosophy of the character that speaks to the reader. According to Barthes, "it is language which speaks, not the author" because "to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality... to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'".⁶⁰ While Barthes suggests that writing is "that neutral, composite, oblique space

⁵⁸ O'Neil, **op. cit.**, XXXV.

⁵⁹ M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Galt Harpam, **A Glossary of Literary Terms**, Australia, Cengage Learning, 2013, p. 201.

⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, **The Death of the Author**, (Accessed) <http://faculty.smu.edu/dfoster/English%203304/Barthes.htm>, 24 December 2018.

where our subject slips away”⁶¹ destroying “every voice, of every point of origin”⁶², he also claims that the ‘I’ is a “subject” and “not a person.”⁶³ The lyric “I” serves both pragmatic and aesthetic purposes for the poet. It creates a mode of self-reflexivity that allows for simultaneously existing multiple selves. Through the spontaneous and vulnerable “I”, the poet creates the image of the solitary meditative individual, who creates a domain for himself to address the consciousness of the reader free of the restraints imposed upon him by the society and language. So, the lyric “I” is significant in giving the impression of spontaneity to the reader, while it is a self-conscious and deliberate construct for both aesthetic and pragmatic purposes.

1.6. The Anxiety of Reception

The anxiety of reception is a term suggested by Lucy Newlyn in her study **Reading, Writing and Romanticism, the Anxiety of Reception**. Newlyn builds her arguments on Harold Bloom’s anxiety of influence and extends the discussion to the Romantic writers’ preoccupation with “the combined threats of modernity and futurity”.⁶⁴ Newlyn suggests that Romantic writers show “ambivalent and sometimes even hostile reactions to the growth of literacy, the reading-public, and the rise of criticism”.⁶⁵ This also applies to William Wordsworth’s concern about his reception by the critics and his readership in “Preface to Lyrical Ballads”:

I had formed no very inaccurate estimate of the probable effect of those Poems: I flattered myself that they who should be pleased with them would read them with more than common pleasure: and, on the other hand, I was well aware, that by those who should dislike them, they would be read with more than common dislike. The result has differed from my expectation in this only, that a greater number have been pleased than I ventured to hope I should please.⁶⁶

While Wordsworth accepts that there will be a number of people who will scorn his work, he also claims that a proportionate number will enjoy it. Although he was the

⁶¹ **Ibid.**

⁶² **Ibid.**

⁶³ **Ibid.**

⁶⁴ Lucy Newlyn, **Reading, Writing and Romanticism, the Anxiety of Reception**, Oxford, Oxford University, 2000, p.X.

⁶⁵ **Ibid.**

⁶⁶ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, op. cit., p.5.

Poet Laureate from 1843 to 1850, in his early years when he produced most of his poetry, he did not enjoy a good reception among critics and the public with the number of copies of his poetry sold being much lower compared to other popular literary works of his time.⁶⁷ The confession by Coleridge in a letter to their publisher Joseph Cottle where he wrote “Wordsworth’s name is nothing—to a large number of persons mine *stinks*”⁶⁸ sums up the anxiety concerning their audiences. However, the poor reception and harsh criticism Wordsworth received from the public and the critics was - irrespective of his poetic diction - partly due to his being recognised and labelled as a radical and revolutionary by the establishment. So, he had to create his work in the face of the blatantly personal, rather than singularly artistic animosity towards him. This anxiety is also reflected in the language of “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” in which he almost writes a defence of the preface itself. Wordsworth suggests the idea of theorizing his views on poetry was suggested to him by his friends in the belief that his poetics would renovate the theory of poetry for the good of humanity.

Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these Poems, from a belief, that, if the views with which they were composed were indeed realized, a class of Poetry would be produced, well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant in the quality, and in the multiplicity of its moral relations: and on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory upon which the Poems were written. But I was unwilling to undertake the task, knowing that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of *reasoning* him into an approbation of these particular Poems: and I was still more unwilling to undertake the task, because, adequately to display the opinions, and fully to enforce the arguments, would require a space wholly disproportionate to a preface.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “[...] At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a readers’ market, and success was measured by the number of books sold. Some of the best-selling authors were Byron, Scott, Rogers, Bloomfield, Campbell, and Moore. Twenty-six thousand copies of Robert Bloomfield’s *The Farmer’s Boy* (1800), now long forgotten, were sold in less than three years, and the publisher Vernor and Hood paid 4000 pounds for its copyright. By contrast, in the same year, Longman paid 8 pounds for the copyright of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.” Yun Pei, **The Prophetic Wordsworth: Anxiety and Self-Fashioning**, Printed Doctoral Dissertation, University of Sussex, 2015, p. 98, (Accessed) <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/58875/1/Pei%2C%20Yun.pdf>, 29 April 2019.

⁶⁸ **Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, Ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, Oxford, Clarendon Press, Vol. I, 1956, p.412, Qtd. in Pei, **loc. cit.**

⁶⁹ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, **op. cit.**, p.6.

In the preface, Wordsworth states that the readers' understanding must be "in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated".⁷⁰ Even though he is fully conscious about the quality of his work and feels confident that it will survive the present public taste and activate the readers' mind as he aspires to, this statement clearly indicates that he is aware that the posterity of his poems, and maybe even of his own, depends on his readership. After this statement, he attacks the present public taste claiming that it has deteriorated and suggests that this deterioration can be determined by "pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other"⁷¹ as well as by "retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself".⁷² Wordsworth suggests the deterioration in public taste is caused by urbanization and industrialization.

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state, of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves.⁷³

According to Wordsworth, while the "character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable"⁷⁴ industrialized jobs do not require creativity or individuality but mechanized people with no sensibility. The dullness of modernization makes the mind look for excitement reducing "the powers of the mind" to "a state of almost savage torpor".⁷⁵ Thus, as there was a general shift towards Victorian sensationalism in literature, great works of literature were neglected due to the rapidly growing media, while popular serial fiction such as penny dreadfuls, which became a symbol representing the nineteenth-century consumerist approach to literature with their

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.10

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.10

cheap content and wide availability as booklets for a penny with poor paper quality, were sold in great numbers. Wordsworth was horrified with the fear that the public taste would be so depraved that such cheap taste in literature would replace the great works of the elders. Thus, he laments:

The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.⁷⁶

So, in the face of this threat, Wordsworth believed he had a moral responsibility, and rather than merely grieving at this deterioration, he made it his task to work towards elevating the public taste. He describes **Lyrical Ballads** as a challenge to what he deems as the ‘general evil’:

When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble endeavour made in these volumes to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible; and were there not added to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success.⁷⁷

Thus the Wordsworth we read in “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” is in full consciousness of his standpoint as a poet, and he is consciously working to create his own poetic identity in the eyes of his readership. Wordsworth suggests several identities for himself: he is a poet who works through “a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation”⁷⁸, or the visionary, the spontaneous, an innovator who experiments by publishing “poems so materially different from those upon which general approbation is at present bestowed”.⁷⁹ In this sense, Wordsworth made a distinction between

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.6

professional writers who were popular at the time and real writers who he believed deserved the interest of the public.⁸⁰ This also explains his occupation with the copyright issues. Having acknowledged himself as an innovator renovating poetic theory, his interest in the copyright for heirs is a reflection of his belief in his future readership and partly of his plan to create a public taste by which his poems were to be appreciated. So, he was confident that his work would survive the deteriorated present public taste and reach posterity in the consciousness of his readers.

It is worth noting that while **Lyrical Ballads** was presented as a co-operative work by Wordsworth and Coleridge: in Coleridge's words, it was a product of their conversations "that turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry", "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature" and "the power of giving the interest of novelty, by modifying colours of imagination".⁸¹ In his contribution, "the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural"; while in Wordsworth's, "subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life".⁸² Coleridge emphasizes the collaborative nature of the work. He also emphasizes the anonymity of **Lyrical Ballads** when he says, "the thought suggested itself, (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts".⁸³ Yet, although *Lyrical Ballads* was published as a collaborative work, the preface was signed by Wordsworth himself. Coleridge in the preface is referred to as "a Friend"⁸⁴ who has contributed to the work. In the preface, Wordsworth wrote:

⁸⁰ "Five years later, Wordsworth again made his feelings about both professional writers and copyright known in a letter to Sir William Lowther (Wordsworth's patron, the Earl of Lonsdale). In a letter dated 6 February 1812, Wordsworth writes that 'except writers engaged in mere drudgery, there are scarcely any authors [...] who find literature, at this day, an employment attended with pecuniary gain.' Wordsworth disdains professional writers, clearly holding them to be a breed apart from real 'authors'. He does, however, envy them their moneymaking potential even as he holds their work and popularity in contempt. As in his letter to Sharp, Wordsworth expresses concern about his heirs to Lowther, writing that he had 'erroneously calculated upon the degree in which [his] writings were likely to suit the taste of the times; and [...] much the most important part of [his] efforts cannot meet the public eye for many years through the comprehensiveness of the subject.' In 1814, the professional writer received a substantial copyright increase, when the British government did in fact extend the term to twenty-eight years. Wordsworth continued to lobby not for copyright *reform*, which he saw as a compromise, but for perpetual copyright." Rhodes, **op. cit.**, p.6.

⁸¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, **Biographia Literaria: Or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions**, Leavitt, Lord & Co. Boston, 1834, p.174.

⁸² **Ibid.**

⁸³ **Ibid.**

⁸⁴ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, **op. cit.**, p.5.

For the sake of variety, and from a consciousness of my own weakness, I was induced to request the assistance of a Friend, who furnished me with the Poems of the **ANCIENT MARINER**, **the FOSTER-MOTHER'S TALE**, the **NIGHTINGALE**, and the Poem entitled **LOVE**.⁸⁵

Wordsworth states that he would not have requested such assistance if he had not believed that “the poems of my Friend would in a great measure share the same tendency as my own” and continues that although “there would be found a difference, there would be found no discordance in colours of style” as he believes their “opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide”.⁸⁶ The pastness of his statements suggests a break. By the time Wordsworth expanded the preface for the third edition of his **Lyrical Ballads** in 1802, there was a big gap between the two poet’s understanding of poetry as Wordsworth had forsaken the former Gothic forms and shun on the mixture of Gothic nature reflected in the **Lyrical Ballads**. In 1809 however, Coleridge published **The Friend** (1809), a series of essays that celebrates the diversity and flexibility Gothic achievement provides in terms of authorship and adaptability, as opposed to the aesthetics suggested by Wordsworth which Coleridge thought lacked this flexibility.⁸⁷ Brain R. Bates interprets the break **The Friend** embodies in Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s collaboration:

Wordsworth may be in fact be a better poet, as Coleridge readily admits throughout the *Biographia*. However, the ‘Friend’s’ parodic rendering of Wordsworth’s Gothic church metaphor reveals that, in contrast to Coleridge, Wordsworth buried his Gothic past and attempted to replace it with his all too personal vision of the nation’s pastoral character. As a parodic rendering of Wordsworth’s second-self presented as Coleridge’s own second-self, the ‘Friend’ suggests that Wordsworth has lost a significant part of his authorial appeal to the reading public, as well as his sense of humour about the mixed, critical reception of his literary works.”⁸⁸

This shift in authorship also indicates that Wordsworth claims both **Lyrical Ballads** and his self-consciously created identity. He regards himself not only a poet, but also as a

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁸⁷ Bates, *op. cit.*, p.118.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

poet of a certain type who has self-fashioned that very poetic identity. His self-conscious knowledge of himself, and his confidence in his verse shielded him against the anxiety of reception from which he suffered in both creating his self-fashioned poetic identity and establishing himself in the literary scene.

1.7. The Anxiety of Influence

The Anxiety of Influence is a radical revision⁸⁹ of a standard theory⁹⁰ concerning “the influence of an author, or of a literary tradition, upon a later author, who was said to adopt, and at the same time to alter, aspects of the subject matter, form, or style of the earlier writer or writers”.⁹¹ While the standard theory suggests “that the influence consists in a direct “borrowing”, or assimilation, of the materials and features found in earlier writers, and involves “the element of competitive display which is perhaps present in all verse writing”⁹² Bloom suggests that the influence “evokes in the author an anxiety that compels a drastic distortion of the work of a predecessor.”⁹³ Thus, in Bloom’s theory, the poet has an oedipal struggle with the predecessors and an ambiguous relationship with them, “since any strong poet feels a compelling need to be autonomous and original”.⁹⁴ “The admiration for the father-poets are accompanied with feelings of hate, envy and the fear of the precursor’s pre-emption of the descendant’s imaginative space”⁹⁵ Although Bloom later revives his theory, when it was first introduced in 1973, he excludes Shakespeare for two main reasons: The first reason, Bloom suggests, is that “Shakespeare belongs to the giant age before the flood, before the anxiety of influence became central to poetic consciousness”; while the second reason “has to do with the contrast between dramatic and lyric forms”.⁹⁶ Although he states that “the largest truth of literary influence is that it is an irresistible anxiety”,⁹⁷ he

⁸⁹ Abrams, Harpham, **op. cit.**, p. 173.

⁹⁰ **Ibid.**

⁹¹ **Ibid.**

⁹² Simon Jarvis, “Archaist-Innovators: The Couplet from Churchill to Browning”, **A Companion to Romantic Poetry**, Ed: Charles Mahoney, Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, 2011, p. 28

⁹³ Abrams, Harpham, **op. cit.**, p. 173.

⁹⁴ **Ibid.**

⁹⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 174.

⁹⁶ Harold Bloom, **The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.11

⁹⁷ Bloom, **op. cit.**, p. XVIII.

also asserts that poetry is more prone to the anxiety of influence than other literary styles. Bloom suggests that the more subjectivity is claimed, the more anxiety will be there; and “as poetry has become more subjective, the shadow cast by the precursors has become more dominant.”⁹⁸ With the idea of personal genius and subjective imagination, originality becomes more important and the anxiety of influence gets more repressive upon the poet. Bloom discusses the move towards subjectivity in lyric form in his 1982 work **Agon** as follows:

Poetry from Homer through Alexander Pope had a subject matter in the characters and actions of men and women clearly distinct from the poet who observed them, and who described and sometimes judged them. But from 1744 or so to the present day the best poetry internalized its subject matter, particularly in the mode of Wordsworth after 1798. Wordsworth had no true subject except his own subjective nature, and very nearly all significant poetry since Wordsworth, even by American poets, has repeated Wordsworth's inward turning.⁹⁹

In “Preface to Lyrical Ballads”, Wordsworth complains about the loss of interest the invaluable works of elder writers naming “Shakespeare and Milton”¹⁰⁰ due to the deprivation in the literary taste and calls for a return to them. He then explains his usage of simple language and his choice of common life incidents as subject matter. It is a reflection of his self-conscious effort to establish a literary identity for himself and a justification of his poetry by alluding to the tradition and its revival. In **The Prelude**, Wordsworth invokes four great poets as bards: Spenser as “that gentle Bard/Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State/Sweet Spenser” (III, 279-281); Shakespeare as “...that darling Bard/Who told of Juliet and her Romeo” (IX, 638-639); Milton as “Time out of mind, honor'd by Milton's name;.../O temperate Bard!” (III, 297, 299); and James Thomson with **The Castle of Indolence** as “...the Bard who sang/Of the Enchanter Indolence hath call'd” (VI, 200-202).¹⁰¹ While not specifically addressing his place in the literary tradition, Wordsworth certainly reflects on his place by putting his name beside great poets and reaffirms his own poetic identity by referring to them. In **The**

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Harold Bloom, **Agon: Toward a Theory of Revisionism**, London, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 287.

¹⁰⁰ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, op. cit., p.7.

¹⁰¹ Duncan Wu, **Reader in English Literature: Wordsworth's Reading 1800- 1815**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 222.

Spirit of the Age, Hazlitt refers to Wordsworth saying “Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him. His Sonnets, indeed, have something of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit”.¹⁰² Milton’s shadow in **The Prelude** is perceivable in Wordsworth’s wish to write an epic of human consciousness, as well as his references to **Paradise Lost** throughout the poem. According to Daniel Robinson, “we know from projects such as *The Excursion*, *The Recluse*, and *The Prelude*, Wordsworth was haunted by epic ambition – yes, by the ‘anxiety of influence’ – and his aspiration to write in longer, more Miltonic forms”.¹⁰³ In a fine example of self-conscious¹⁰⁴ poetry, the **Scorn not the Sonnet** (1827), Wordsworth invokes great poets as sonneteers in defence of the form and the poets. He addresses the critic directly in his verse:

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camöens soothed an exile's grief;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land
To struggle through dark ways; and, when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!¹⁰⁵

While he states that the sonnet allows Shakespeare to unlock his heart; eases Petrarch’s wound and cheers mild Spenser”, in his seemingly defensive tone, Wordsworth takes ‘epic’ bards and reduces them to sonneteers.¹⁰⁶ This tension and the underlying rivalry are at the heart of Bloom’s theory of the anxiety of influence. “If ‘Scorn not the Sonnet’ says anything about the Romantic-period sonnet” says Daniel Robinson, then “it is ultimately that the leading Romantic-period sonneteer, Wordsworth, thinks the only sonneteers who really matter are Milton and, implicitly, Wordsworth”, while “the other

¹⁰² **The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt**, Volume 7, *Liber Amoris*, *The Spirit of the Age*, Ed. by Duncan Wu, London, Pickering & Chatto, 1998, p. 166.

¹⁰³ Daniel Robinson, “To Scorn or Not to Scorn The Sonnet”, **A Companion to Romantic Poetry**, Ed. by Charles Mahoney, Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, 2011, p. 73.

¹⁰⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ William Wordsworth, “Scorn not the Sonnet”, **Great Sonnets**, Ed: Paul Negri, New York, Dover Thrift Editions, 1994, p.26.

¹⁰⁶ Robinson, **op. cit.**, p. 74.

poets shrink in stature”.¹⁰⁷ By mentioning his name besides the great poets, Wordsworth not only establishes himself as a great poet, but also as the authorial voice behind his self-conscious creation who can create an identity for the already established great poets, which reveals the degree of anxiety of influence in Wordsworth’s writing.

Scorn not the Sonnet, then, becomes not so much a defence of the form as an excuse for it, expressing implicitly a desire that the sonneteer could write something else instead - as indeed most of the sonneteers Wordsworth names are actually more famous for their poetry than for their sonnets: Shakespeare for his plays, Tasso and Camöens for their epic poems, Dante for **The Divine Comedy**, Spenser for **The Faerie Queene**, and, of course, Milton for **Paradise Lost**. Wordsworth takes big writers and makes them small. The poem reduces and miniaturizes literary giants within the sonnet itself but also suggests, by defining them as sonneteers, that the sonnet’s tradition has diminished them.¹⁰⁸

In his study on Romantic self-consciousness and Shakespeare’s influence on the Romantics, Daniel W. Ross suggests that through their anxiety of influence, the Romantics have inherited self-consciousness from their great poet fathers and contributed in the evolution of the modern subject of self-consciousness. According to Ross;

Harold Bloom has made the poet’s guilt for sins against his poetic fathers a recent critical focal point. Bloom even believes that we can trace the evolution of Romantic self-consciousness on a direct and unbroken line to the Romantics’ chief precursor or father: Milton... But a focus on self-consciousness does not originate with Milton; the Romantics themselves were the first to recognize and to comment extensively on Shakespeare’s preoccupation with self-consciousness... Shakespeare proved a greater influence on the Romantics than Milton, particularly in his anticipation of a modern obsession with self-consciousness.¹⁰⁹

As the only way for the poet to grow strong is to overcome his predecessor, poetic influence is essentially accompanied with self-consciousness. So, in Harold Bloom’s

¹⁰⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 74.

¹⁰⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel W. Ross, “Revising a Map Misread: Hamlet, Romantic Self-Consciousness, and the Roots of Modern Tragedy”, **Shakespeare: Text, Subtext and Context**, Ed. by Ronald, L. Dotterer, Selinsgrove, Susquehanna University Press, London and Toronto, 1989, p.107-8.

formulation of the anxiety of influence, the later poets grow into strong ones by struggling against what they have inherited from earlier poets. In other words, although the influence is undesired, it is ultimately productive. No matter to what extent Wordsworth was influenced by his predecessors, his reflections on his poetry in relation to other works of art – specifically other poems - and his meditations in his prose and verse on his poethood in relation to poet fathers, display his self-consciousness about his poetic identity and the medium of poetry. Although self-consciousness seems to be paradoxical to Wordsworth's theory of poetry defined in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" as a hindrance between the poet and the infinity he wishes to reach, **The Prelude** demonstrates the productive ways the poet deals with self-consciousness so that it helps him overcome his anxieties of influence and reception, and develop the image of a poetic self without claiming the position of authority as a single unified self.

CHAPTER TWO

“THE PRELUDE” AS A SELF-CONSCIOUS POEM: THE FOUR TEXTS (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)¹

William Wordsworth is among the most extensively studied English poets. Although earlier research on Wordsworth's work focused on the elements of nature, there has been a recent shift towards postmodernist readings of his poetry through terms related to self-consciousness such as self-reflexivity, meta-poetry and self-conscious poetry; referring in general to the intentionality and deliberateness of the poem in creating the desired effect. The most commonly analysed works by Wordsworth in terms of self-consciousness include “The Solitary Reaper” (1807)², “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” (1798)³, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” (1807)⁴, “Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room” (1807)⁵, “Scorn not the Sonnet” (1827)⁶ and “Elegiac Stanzas” (1807)⁷. Although these poems also reflect on Wordsworth's poetics within the medium of poetry and display a consciousness of themselves at varying degrees, the focus of this study is **The Prelude** to which Michael O'Neill suggests any study of Romantic self-conscious poem would be lured⁸. The lure of **The Prelude** for a study of self-consciousness in Wordsworth's poetry originates mainly from its status as a preliminary work to the philosophical Poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society, and to be entitled “The Recluse”⁹ which would be Wordsworth's “magnum opus”.¹⁰

¹ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)**, Ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, London, Penguin Classics, 1995.

² William Wordsworth, “The Solitary Reaper”, **The Norton Anthology of Poetry**, Fifth Edition, Ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, Jon Stallworthy, New York, Norton & Company, 2005, p.803.

³ William Wordsworth “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”, **Ibid.** p.765.

⁴ “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”, **Ibid.**, p.801.

⁵ “Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room”, **Ibid.**, p.796.

⁶ William Wordsworth, “Scorn not the Sonnet”, **Ibid.**, p.804.

⁷ “Elegiac Stanzas”, **The Poems of William Wordsworth: Collected Reading Texts from The Cornell Wordsworth Volume III**, Ed. by Jared Curtis, New York, Humanities E-Books, 2009, p.13.

⁸ Michael O'Neill, **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2003, p.XXXIX.

⁹ **The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth**, Vol. III ed. by William Knight, 1986, (Accessed) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12383/12383-h/12383-h.htm>, 26 January 2019.

¹⁰ D. J. Moores, **Mystical Discourse in Wordsworth and Whitman: A Transatlantic Bridge**, Paris, Peeters, 2006, p.24.

“The Recluse” was never completed but it preoccupied Wordsworth’s mind for almost half of his long life, from 1798 until he was nearly seventy”.¹¹ With the implications it has for Wordsworth’s poetry, **The Recluse** with its subject and material is something much greater than solely an unfinished poem. The great ideal of writing a great modern philosophic poem to be titled as **The Recluse**, in which Wordsworth’s achievement should exceed Milton’s success as the writer of last great religious poem in the language¹² provides a self-conscious background to **The Prelude**, if not to all of Wordsworth’s poetry. While the shift in focus from religion to the human mind and individual subjectivity makes it the modern epic the author aims it to be¹³, the unfinished presence of a great work to challenge a great poet-father such as Milton makes **The Prelude** a unique epic of self-consciousness.

A key feature in analysing **The Prelude** is its multiple texts. Poems that exist in various versions and editions are not uncommon in Romantic poetry. Many major Romantic self-conscious works - Coleridge’s **Dejection: An Ode** (1802) with its fifteen versions being a good example - exist in multiple versions instead of a single definitive text. The fact that the Romantics were so heavily engaged in re-editing their texts contradict with their emphasis on spontaneity and authenticity as suggested by their poetics. On the other hand, it coincides with their focus on subjectivity. Through the textual diversity of the various versions, the readers can witness the writing process of the poems, which invites the reader to focus on the consciousness and subjectivity of the poet rather than solely the finished work. Re-editions resulting in various texts also show the media-consciousness of the Romantics. Through the illusion of poetic failure resulting in various versions of the text over time, the poet not only reflects on the complications of the writing process and poetic artifice, but also sheds light to his own subjectivity through his changing attitude in the face of the issues of the era such as social equality, liberty, naturalism social revolutions and invite sympathetic readerly identifications with the poet speaker. In other words, by deconstructing their own

¹¹ Johnston, **op. cit.**, p.72.

¹² **Ibid.**, p.72.

¹³ **Ibid.**, p.72.

writing process, these poems call for a focus on aesthetics and the social issues of their era.¹⁴

Although Wordsworth promotes spontaneity in his poetics, his masterpiece **The Prelude** overflows with self-conscious representation strategies designed to create a fictional reality concerning his life and poetic career. Thus, **The Prelude** stands out as an exceptional example of the self-conscious poem with the awareness it displays of itself as a poem and of the poet as its creator; its consciousness of its readership and reception as well as the fact that it is an embodiment of the anxiety of poetic influence with complex references to great poetic fathers such as Milton, Shakespeare and Spenser. A comparative study of the self-conscious elements within the four texts of **The Prelude** not only provides an insight into the workings of this phenomenon, but also provides a better grasp of Wordsworth's poetry and Romantic notions of authorship that paved the way for the modern understanding of authorship.

2.1. "A Poet's Praise": A Self-conscious Poetic Identity

The Prelude is structured as a narrative about a person who is preparing for a narrative. The first two books are devoted to the poet's reflections on his poetic prowess and his search for a theme that is worthy of the great epic he aspires to write. In an effort to convince both himself and the reader that he has the credentials of a poet who can write this epic, he decides to reflect on the central issues in his personal life. And through this reflection on the private life of the poet and the growth of a poet's mind, his epic comes to life.

The first two books of the epic are devoted to the poet's childhood and school-time. Book III revolves around the poet's residence in Cambridge, while Book IV remembers his first summer vacation, Book V tells about his return to Cambridge, Book VI recounts the Alpine tour he takes with a friend, and Book VII relates his residence in London. Beginning from Books IX and X, the poet's focus turns to his time in France, and in Books XI, XII and XIII, he describes his experience of the French Revolution and his disillusionment after the revolution and the restoration of the

¹⁴ Bumsoo, Jon, **Romantic Mediacy, Self-consciousness and The Ideologies of Authorship**, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas, 2012, p. 12.

political powers. Book XIV is the conclusion to the poem. Although the poem is fashioned as an autobiography in verse and carries autobiographical references to the personal circumstances of the poet, the main concern of the poem is the transformation of the poet over time and the growth of his consciousness. The function of this piece of poetry as the medium, in which the poet contemplates on what to write and informs the reader of what he intends to write about, renders the poem into a self-conscious work. Through its meta-poetic nature, the poem makes references to its awareness of itself as a poem, and the poet makes references to his own status as the creator of the poem. Instead of creating a fictional world by which the reader would be swept away, the poem constantly reminds the reader that it is a medium reflecting the consciousness of the poet behind it. So, the “I” of **The Prelude** resists to be a fictional poet-persona as much as it refrains from being Wordsworth himself in flesh and blood. In this sense, **The Prelude** explores the relationship between “fiction” and “reality”. Patricia Waugh suggests that meta-fiction provides a resolution to the issues authors encounter with in their arduous task of writing. Waugh explains the function of meta-fiction as follows:

Whatever their philosophical view of fiction, aestheticians and metafictional writers, in exploring the relations between ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’, all address themselves to two problems: first, the paradox concerning the identity of fictional characters; second, the status of literary-fictional discourse (the problem of referentiality). To take the first problem: a fictional character both exists and does not exist; he or she is a non-entity who is a somebody.¹⁵

The composition of the poem expanded to almost half a century from 1799 to 1850.¹⁶ Its constant editions in 1798, 1799, 1805, and 1850 culminating in the posthumous publication of the work direct the focus on the consciousness of the poet and his growth over time rather than the finished product itself. “The Growth of a Poet’s Mind”¹⁷, which was planned to be the theme of **The Prelude**, becomes the poem itself as the poem and the poet grew old together. The self-consciousness of the poem concerning this process is reflected in the poet’s lines “[...] unprofitably travelling toward the grave/Like a false steward who hath much received/And renders nothing back.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Waugh, **op. cit.**, p.91.

¹⁶ Bloom, **The Visionary Company; A Reading of English Romantic Poetry** by Harold Bloom, **op. cit.**, 1961, p.136.

¹⁷ Jonathan Wordsworth, **loc. cit.**

¹⁸ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, Book I, p. 267-270.

The multiple editions of the text provide a range of portrayals of the growth of the poet's consciousness with the influence of the experience he gains and the transformation he goes through as his perception and memory allow him to remember and interpret until the ultimate end of self-consciousness in his death. Thanks to this textual diversity, **The Prelude** continues to give Wordsworth the opportunity to be interpreted and re-interpreted in the consciousness of every single reader, providing him the immortality or the infinity he yearned for. Ernest de Selincourt, Wordsworth's modern editor, observes that among the changes in different versions of the poem, none could be more striking than the change in the lines below:

I worshipped then among the depths of things
As my soul bade me...
I felt and nothing else...¹⁹

Worshipping then among the depths of things
As piety ordained...
I felt, observed, and pondered...²⁰

Another reputable modern critic of Wordsworth, Robert Langbaum notes, the texts of **The Prelude** with each re-edition represent a movement away from the pantheistic tendencies of the young poet, towards the more orthodox, conservative, Christian inclinations of the mature poet. So, while each re-editing shows a decline in the poet's work and politics during his later years, Langbaum suggests amongst the various texts no single text can be the authoritative one. Langbaum states:

The only authoritative text now is a parallel text, which enables the reader to compose his own Prelude by combining the passages he prefers in one version or the other. Actually both texts were stopping points in a continuous evolution of the poem, which might have continued had Wordsworth lived longer. Because of this extraordinary circumstance, there has emerged in connection with 'The Prelude' a new aesthetic by which the evolution of the poem becomes as much a subject of scholarly and critical interest as the poem itself.²¹

¹⁹ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, (XI, 234-8, 1805), qtd. in. Harold Bloom, **Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry by Harold Bloom**, op. cit., p.136.

²⁰ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, (XI, 184-8, 1850) qtd. in Bloom, loc. cit.

²¹ Robert Langbaum, "Review", **Modern Philology**, The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 78, No. 1, Aug., 1980, p.94 (Accessed) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/437257>, 21 April 2019.

Besides the textual diversity provided by the various versions, **The Prelude** stands out as one of the few literary works where the author writes extensively about the composition process. In 1814, Wordsworth published Book I of “The Recluse” as **Excursion, Being a Portion of The Recluse**.²² In the preface, Wordsworth notes that “the reader must be here apprized that”²³ the work published is only a portion of a greater work. He also adds:

It may be proper to state whence the poem, of which the Excursion is a part, derives its title of the Recluse. - Several years ago, when the author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far nature and education had qualified him for such employment.²⁴

Wordsworth’s extraordinary focus on his mind and his acute concern with his readership reflected in his words bring a new level of self-consciousness to his poetry, as the poet and his subjectivity become the very subject of his creation. As his poetic idol John Milton wishes to “justify the ways of God to men” in his **Paradise Lost**, in **The Prelude** “Wordsworth’s ways, like God’s are justified to Coleridge”²⁵ and to his readership. In his **Romantic Agonies**,²⁶ W. Ross Winterowd suggests that Wordsworth does not want to justify the ways of God, but wants to be God himself, and uses introspection as his method to fulfil his aim. To complicate the matters more in terms of criticism, Leon Waldoff suggests in his retrospective method that reading Wordsworth’s poetry requires a leave from “the long-familiar dictum inherited from the New Criticism that the speaker of a lyric is a persona, a fictional representation not be confused with the poet”.²⁷ Waldoff explains the reason for this approach as follows:

²² Bates, **op. cit.**, p.79.

²³ William Wordsworth, “**The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind 1805, 1850**, Djvu Editions, 2001, p. II.

²⁴ **Ibid.**

²⁵ J. Douglas Kneale, **Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth's Poetry**, University of Nebraska Press, 1988, p.47.

²⁶ W. Ross Winterowd, “Romantic Agonies”, **English Department: A Personal and Institutional History**, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1998, p.123.

²⁷ Leon Waldoff, “The Lyrical I as a Self- Dramatization: Wordsworth’s Transitional Self”, **Wordsworth in His Major Lyrics: The Art and Psychology of Self-representation**, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2001, p.15.

No major poet before or since has insisted so much on the autobiographical experience behind his poetry. Throughout his letters, prefaces, essays, and recorded comments, Wordsworth identifies himself as the speaker of his poems. Indeed, he repeatedly authorizes an authorial definition of the speaker of the “I” with the use of the phrase “the poet in his own person”.²⁸

Thus, Wordsworth “as subsidiary to this preparation” for his magnum opus, **The Recluse** undertakes “to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them”.²⁹ In Wordsworth’s own description:

The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the Ante-chapel has to the body of a Gothic Church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor pieces, which have been long before the public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive reader to have such connection with the main work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices.³⁰

The idea of a poet reflecting on his credentials to re-arrange what he thinks is already available to the public emphasizes the authorial consciousness that dominates **The Prelude**.³¹ “The Recluse” was never completed. Solely Book I was written and published as **The Excursion**.³² Meanwhile, Wordsworth continued re-editing **The Prelude** for about half a century until his death in 1850. Although Coleridge initially thought it was a distraction from the main work, as “The Recluse” did not emerge from

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ In a letter to Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth writes: “My dear Sir George, —You will be pleased to hear that I have been advancing with my work: I have written upwards of 2000 verses during the last ten weeks. I do not know if you are exactly acquainted with the plan of my poetical labour: It is twofold; first, a Poem, to be called *The Recluse*; in which it will be my object to express in verse my most interesting feelings concerning man, nature, and society; and next, a poem (in which I am at present chiefly engaged) on *my earlier life, or the growth of my own mind*, taken up upon a large scale. This latter work I expect to have finished before the month of May; and then I purpose to fall with all my might on the former, which is the chief object upon which my thoughts have been fixed these many years [...]”.

Ibid.

³² Patricia M. Ball, “Egoistical and Chameleon: Wordsworth and Coleridge”, **The Central Self: A Study in Romantic and Victorian Imagination**, Bloomsbury Academic Collections English Literary criticism 18th-19th Centuries, London, 2013, p.71.

its hiding place, both Wordsworth and Coleridge realized the unique potential of **The Prelude**, “his unintended masterpiece” now promoted forward.³³ The intended task of self-analysis in a literary medium for a greater task, makes the self-consciousness behind **The Prelude** explicit and casts a shadow on the possible sincerity of the self-analysis. As the poet wishes to establish himself fit for his task, he attempts to create not only an identity of a poet, but also the identity of the poet he wishes himself to be.

Recently, the fictional identity formation process in **The Prelude** is discussed in relation to the concepts of *Bildungsroman*, *Bildungsgedicht* and *Lehrgedicht*. It is suggested that **The Prelude** with its theme of personal growth from childhood to maturity, focusing on the psychology and inner life of the individual, resembles the *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, the formation of the poet from childhood to maturity, reflecting on his emotions and subjectivity to emphasize self-development, corresponds to the *Bildungsroman* genre. Derya Benli and Petru Golban refer to the contradiction between Wordsworth’s claim in **The Prelude** that poetry should be concerned with simple rustic existence, while his best literary works are on the development and workings of his own mind, the complexity of his own personality, with autobiographical reference as to the principles governing the formation of individuality. They suggest this is actually the major concern in the *Bildungsroman* and define the basic characteristics of the genre as follows:

The story usually starts with a child protagonist’s leaving his limited environment for a bigger one, triggered by an educational intention, search for a profession or a social conflict. The hero is mostly a male orphan and reflects the certain points of the author’s life and identity, which reveals the autobiographical aspect of the *Bildungsroman*. The first steps of the development of the protagonist are taken when he receives education, generally institutionalized, such as a boarding school education. As he grows up, he develops social relationships and seeks for a social accomplishment. He is tested through social ordeals, as well as through an emotional one which will determine his success or fail in developing a socially and individually accomplished identity. Upon sufferings and pains caused by these ordeals, he reaches a self-realization which again accompanies him towards his complete formation or failure.³⁴

³³ Johnston, *op. cit.* p.1.

³⁴ Derya Benli, Petru Golban, “Nature, Co-Authorship and Metapoetry: Tintern Abbey As A *Bildungsgedicht*”, *International Journal of Language Academy*, Volume 5/4, August 2017, p.278, (Accessed) <http://dx.doi.org/10.18033/ijla.3693>, 16 June 2019.

Also, in **The Prelude**, the child passes through painful stages of maturation and growth towards gaining self-consciousness. He is dislocated from home and his natural surroundings following his mother's death. He leaves for Cambridge for his education, where he is overwhelmed by homesickness. However, when he returns home for the summer break, he feels like a misfit since he has changed inside. He passes through revolutions and pain and loss. In all of these circumstances, the principle subject of the poem is the growing consciousness of the poet besides other Romantic themes including childhood, imagination, nature, rustic life, subjectivity and individual experience. In the poem, the self-consciously fashioned vulnerable, sincere, spontaneous first person narrator invites the reader to see things as they appear to the poet. Even as he describes the minute details of nature and rustic life, the poet is more interested in his inner states and the impact of the objective world on his subjectivity than the objects themselves. This quality applies to most of Wordsworth's poetry as he is more interested in the relationship of non-human nature to the human mind than he is in nature for its own sake, consequently he spends less time describing nature, and more reflecting the feelings that arise in him and other people.³⁵ The poem emphasizes the growing self-consciousness of its hero making it the centre of its story, rather than the places or events themselves.³⁶ This way the poet, is able to self-create himself. Wordsworth's rhetorical self-examination in the following lines portrays him as the self-conscious poet who has set off to a journey of self-creation or creation of a poetic identity with certain connotations. So, in his self-doubt as to his poetic prowess, he makes his first self-assertion:

When, as becomes a man who would prepare
For such an arduous work, I through myself
Make rigorous inquisition, the report
Is often cheering; for I neither seem
To lack that first great gift, the vital soul,
Nor general Truths, which are themselves a sort
Of Elements and Agents, Under-powers,
Subordinate helpers of the living mind:
Nor am I naked of external things,
Forms, images, nor numerous other aids
Of less regard, though won perhaps with toil
And needful to build up a Poet's praise.³⁷

³⁵ Greg Garrard, **Ecocriticism**, London, Routledge, 2012, qtd. in Benli and Golban, **op.cit.**, p.70.

³⁶ Johnston, **op. cit.** p.76.

³⁷ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 146- 157, 1850).

Pointing to the relatively poor reception Wordsworth received in the early years of his poetic career, Isabella Fenwick states that Wordsworth's "persuasion of his own greatness maintained itself through neglect and ridicule and contempt".³⁸ The self-conscious poetic identity created through his verse and prose, specifically through **The Prelude**, won Wordsworth the title of the poet he aspired to become. The poet Wordsworth is the product of William Wordsworth's self-conscious artistic endeavour. As Ashton Nichols puts it:

The texts of 1799, 1805, and 1850 work to create a "stable Wordsworth" out of Wordsworth's own fears about the instability of his identity. The fragmentary, Humean nonself that Wordsworth dreads is unified by becoming what Shakespeare's King Lear is: an intended, complete artistic creation.³⁹

Wordsworth as we know him is his own creation, he is the poet of the English Lake District, he is the bard of **The Recluse**, and the chosen son of **The Prelude**.⁴⁰

2.2. "Some Noble Theme": The self-conscious self

The Prelude opens with the poet-persona celebrating his newly regained freedom, as someone who has recently "escaped from the vast city"⁴¹ where he has "long pined" as a "discontented sojourner".⁴² The poem has an opening section reminiscent of the epic genre, though its tone differs from the traditional epic. The speaker immediately acknowledges his mission and reflects on his inability to fulfil it. The opening is important in understanding why **The Prelude** is often referred to as an epic of human consciousness. The opening is reminiscent of the traditional epic with its elevated language and tone, though the speaker differs from the traditional hero:

³⁸ Isabella Fenwick to Henry Taylor, **The Prelude**, New York, Norton, 18 August 1858, p.537, qtd. in. Ashton Nichols, "The Revolutionary 'I': Wordsworth and the Politics of Self- Presentation", **Wordsworth in Context**, ed. by Pauline Fletcher and John Murphy, London, Bucknell University Press, 1992, p.79.

³⁹ Nichols, *op. cit.*, p.73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, (I, 7, 1850).

⁴² William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (I, 7-8, 1850).

It is important to study the posture of the speaker as the poem opens. The voice is, of course, epic; the tone and language, elevated. The muse is not some classical god or goddess, not the Holy Spirit, but another power. The speaker is not some remote, austere Bard, but a self-conscious poet speaking naturally, openly, and vulnerably.⁴³

The speaker aims at readerly sympathy and laments his fate. He finds imperfection both in himself and the theme he wishes to write about. As he fails in producing poetry, he laments:

This is my lot; for either still I find
Some imperfection in the chosen theme,
Or see of absolute accomplishment
Much wanting, so much wanting, in myself,
That I recoil and droop, and seek repose
In listlessness from vain perplexity.⁴⁴

This modest confession is followed by a celebration of the scenery in search of a muse in the breeze, the sky and the green fields in order to get inspiration and find a subject that could be fit for his endeavour. However, his search immediately turns into an identity crisis as the poet-persona fails to find any inspiration in the subjective world, and he starts a deep self-analysis fearing that he is inadequate for his mission:

[...] while the sweet breath of heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A correspondent breeze that gently moved
With quickening virtue, but is now become
A tempest, a redundant energy,
Vexing its own creation. Thanks to both,
And their congenial powers, that while they join
In breaking up a long-continued frost,
Bring with them vernal promises [...]⁴⁵

His guidance comes from within as a “correspondent breeze”⁴⁶ to “the gentle breeze”⁴⁷ in the very first line of the poem, which turns the poet’s body into a “tempest”⁴⁸ ready

⁴³ John L. Mahoney, "The Poetic Life as Epic: The Prelude", **William Wordsworth, a Poetic Life**, New York, Fordham University Press, 1997, p. 123.

⁴⁴ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude, op. cit.**, (I, 263-268, 1850)

⁴⁵ **Ibid.**, (I, 33- 40, 1850)

⁴⁶ **Ibid.**, (I, 36, 1850)

⁴⁷ **Ibid.**, (I, I, 1850)

⁴⁸ **Ibid.**, (I, 37, 1850)

for creation with its “redundant energy”⁴⁹. Now the poet is a “renovated spirit”⁵⁰ and has “confidence in things to come”.⁵¹ With this renovation, the poet chooses a “known vale”,⁵² which can be interpreted as both of poetry and of the self. Partly through the process of writing, the poet is now reassured that he has the credentials of a poet, but he still seems to lack one vital element for his poetry, which is his theme:

That hope hath been discouraged; welcome light
Dawns from the east, but dawns to disappear
And mock me with a sky that ripens not
Into a steady morning; if my mind,
Remembering the bold 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 renewed.⁵³

In the process of writing, the poet comes to the realization that his theme has actually always been inside him, which is his “self”. Then a current of negatives follow: He asserts that his theme is neither “some British theme”,⁵⁴ nor “some old Romantic tale by Milton left unsung”.⁵⁵ He does not write about “groves of Chivalry”⁵⁶ or “Christian meekness hallowing faithful loves”.⁵⁷ Nor does he tell of “glorious death that race/Of natural heroes”⁵⁸ or “outward things Done visibly for other minds, words, signs, /Symbols or actions”.⁵⁹ With these references to the traditional poetic themes, he puts “the self” above all other subjects. The poet defines his theme as “What passed within me. Not of outward things”.⁶⁰ Wordsworth calls his creation a tale “Of matters which not may falsely be called/The glory of my youth”⁶¹ and “Of genius, power/Creation and divinity itself”.⁶² Thus, he establishes the self as a subject fit for an epic in its own right:

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, (I, 37, 1850)

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, (I, 53, 1850)

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, (I, 58, 1850)

⁵² *Ibid.*, (I, 72, 1850)

⁵³ *Ibid.*, (I, 124-13, 1850).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, (I, 168, 1850).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, (I, 169, 1850).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, (I, 172, 1850).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, (I, 186, 1850).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, (I, 186, 1850).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, (I, 176-177, 1850).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, (I, 176, 1850).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, (I, 171-172, 1850).

⁶² *Ibid.*, (I, 173-174, 1850).

O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls,
And what they do within themselves while yet
The yoke of earth is new to them, the world
Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.
This is, in truth, heroic argument.⁶³

The lyric self which emerged out of eighteenth-century poetry and stands for the paradigm of deep personal identity, is a specifically authorial self resulting from the conditions, tensions and contingencies of print culture. The “Romantic self” of nineteenth-century lyric poetry with its claims to autonomy, self-possession, and deep personal authenticity is a product of the century-long development of the print culture. Although poets deliberately attempt to elide the traces of the influence of the development of the print culture from their poetry, a careful study of the context and the form of poetic representation in the period reveals the shaping influence of the print culture on the poetic self-representation. Wordsworth's figure of the Pedlar in “The Ruined Cottage” is his early experiment in creating a version of his own identity as a poet, which later becomes the heroic argument of **The Prelude**. “The Ruined Cottage” sets up an encounter between Pedlar and narrator, which is reminiscent of the encounter between the author and the individual print market reader. This type of self-representation is possible due to the development of poetic identity that is a worthy subject on its own. The deep individual self the Romantic poets celebrated as sincere and spontaneous, reveals itself in their poems as the poets are forced to contemplate on their own roles within the contexts of changing print culture, aesthetics and socio-political changes.⁶⁴ Bearing in mind the poor reception of Wordsworth's poetry and the low sales numbers of **Wordsworth's 1807 Poems, in Two Volumes** the self-consciousness of establishing himself as a poet with things “needful to build up a Poet's praise”⁶⁵ is explicit. However, Wordsworth attempts not only to shape his own poetic identity and literary image, but also the reader's taste and his reception. So, the poet's consciousness of consciousness or his conscious self, becomes the noble theme of his epic. Thus, Wordsworth constructs his poetic identity with a professional motivation and in full consciousness of a general print market audience with whom he has a

⁶³ **Ibid.**, (III, 180-184, 1850).

⁶⁴ Scott Hess, **Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth**, New York, Routledge, 2005, p.2.

⁶⁵ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.** (157, I, 1850).

relationship. This was the break from the predecessors and the innovation Wordsworth brought in construction of authorial identity. Wordsworth was self-conscious about his identity creation process and was concerned with the public taste because he needed to authorize his own identity with regards to his readership, as he was conscious that the fulfilment of his professional claims depended on his readers, so he turned to direct self-representation and developed a poetics of personal subjectivity.⁶⁶

2.3. A Self-Conscious Poetic Failure

William Wordsworth spent about forty years editing **The Prelude**: beginning from “Was it for this” written in 1798 and its mature version of 1805, the poem was extended and revisited until 1850. In each edition, the changes made to **The Prelude** reflect developments in Wordsworth’s life as a poet and his changing perceptions of the same incidents over time. The first two books are dedicated to the poet’s self-doubt and his confessions about not being able to find a theme for his poem and not being able to write poetry. In a letter dated 1805, Wordsworth writes:

Unable to proceed with this work, I turned my thoughts again to the *Poem on my own Life*, and you will be glad to hear that I have added 300 lines to it in the course of last week. Two books more will conclude it. It will not be much less than 9000 lines, —not hundred but thousand lines long, —an alarming length! and a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself. It is not self-conceit, as you will know well, that has induced me to do this, but real humility. I began the work because I was *unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers*. Here, at least, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought, and therefore could not easily be bewildered. This might have been done in narrower compass by a man of more address; but I have done my best. If, when the work shall be finished, it appears to the judicious to have redundancies, they shall be lopped off, if possible; but this is very difficult to do, when a man has written with thought; and this defect, whenever I have suspected it or found it to exist in any writings of mine, I have always found it incurable. The fault lies too deep, and is in the first conception.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Hess, op. cit. p. 18.

⁶⁷ **Letters of the Wordsworth Family from 1787-1855**, Volume I, Ed. by William Knight, New York, Haskell House Publishers, 1969, p.185.

The echoes of Wordsworth's words above can be found in **The Prelude** as the poet creates poetry about his poetic failure. This process is however a part of Wordsworth's self-conscious poetic plan. "The trope of the text-in-the-making or the text-never-finished effectually" suggests Theresa M. Kelley "underlines the poem's engagement with the aesthetics of self-consciousness".⁶⁸ Poetry about the failure of the poetic process is a form of self-conscious poetry and is a type of metapoetry, examples of which can be seen even before Romantic poetry.⁶⁹

Wordsworth is not the only one among Romantic poets who has composed this type of meta-poems. Some other great Romantic poets such as Keats and Coleridge are also known for their poems on poetic failure. We see many examples of deliberately constructed never ending poems reflecting on their failures of becoming poems. Friedrich Schlegel, one of the most important theorists of Romantic Era notes in **Athenäum Fragments** (1798):

The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare to try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself.⁷⁰

While Wordsworth meditates on not being able to compose poetry in the opening lines of **The Prelude**, the apparent poetic power he displays through the process of composition and the very existence of the poem contradict with the poet's concerns about his poetic failure. The fragmentary nature of **The Prelude** with its multiple texts and the self-consciousness displayed in the poem draw the readers' attention not to the work itself, but to its process of composition and the creative consciousness behind the poem.

⁶⁸ Theresa M. Kelley. **Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics**, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.99.

⁶⁹ Jon, **op. cit.**, p.10.

⁷⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, **Athenäum Fragments**, qtd. in David Simpson, **The Origins of Modern Critical Thought: German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism from Lessing to Hegel**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.193.

This position of becoming one's own telos represents a radical claim of autonomy—a claim which Wordsworth makes in the *Prelude*, for instance, as he constructs authorship as both the defining category and telos of his identity. Such a position was rare during the eighteenth century, however, because strong assertion of the self was still associated with egotism, wilful pride, and social and religious indecorum. In part for these reasons, Wordsworth did not publish the *Prelude* until after his death; and even so, he was blasted by contemporaries with the charge of “poetic egotism” for the far less self-focused poetry he did publish. For the same reason, autobiography did not emerge as a credible genre in its own right until the nineteenth century.”⁷¹

This comment by Hess on the posthumous publication of **The Prelude** seems to justify Robert Langbaum's disagreement with Wordsworth's modern editor Ernest de Selincourt. While Selincourt thinks the poem remained unpublished because Wordsworth lacked confidence in the poem, Langbaum believes Wordsworth “felt secretly confident that it would immortalize him.”⁷²

2.4. “Was it for this”: Self-conscious Questions in Verse

The poem “Was it for This” (1799) is an embryo of **The Prelude** with its theme of “The Growth of a Poet's Mind” which is central to other versions. The poem was written by William Wordsworth in 1799 when the poet and his sister Dorothy were in a German town called Goslar to spend the cold winter with very little money and comfort. In the poem, Wordsworth asks self-conscious questions in verse.⁷³ The opening question in the poem, “Was it for this”, is an indication of the poet's self-conscious intention to reflect upon his own consciousness. The poem starts with the “stream” imagery that runs through the other versions of **The Prelude**: it sets the tone of the solitary speaker in **The Prelude**, who grows from self-doubt to self-assertion through an examination of his powers and the resources that provided him with these powers. The poet claims to be nourished by nature, and to be provided an insight which

⁷¹ Scott Hess, **Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth**, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 10.

⁷² Langbaum, **op. cit.**, p. 99.

⁷³ **Ibid.**, P.XXVI.

he refers to as the thoughts enjoyed by the “four year’s child”⁷⁴ which he suggests were more than “infant softness”⁷⁵ His education in nature he asserts, provided the poet in his later years “Amid the fretful tenements of man/ A knowledge, a dim earnest, of calm”.⁷⁶

The question “Was it for this” hints to Virgil and is derived from a passage in Milton’s **Samson Agonistes**. In the poem, addressing his fallen son Samson, now blinded and captive to the Philistines, Manoah asks “For this did the angel twice descend- for this/ Ordained thy nurture holy, as of a plant, / Select and sacred?”⁷⁷ Using Christian Biblical imagery, the poet self-fashions himself as the chosen son in the following lines and expresses his belief that the nature has always been at work in his education for a great purpose:

Soul of things,
How often did thy love renew for me
Those hallowed and pure motions 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 which fit
Our new existence to existing things [...]⁷⁸

In the “Two-Part Prelude”,⁷⁹ the poet’s self-assertion in the belief that he is the chosen son by greater powers is expressed more strongly:

[...] I believe
That there are spirits which, when they would form
A favoured being, from his very dawn
of infancy do open out the clouds
As at the touch of lightening, seeking him
With gentle visitation-[...]⁸⁰

⁷⁴ William Wordsworth, “Was it for This”, **op. cit.**, (20).

⁷⁵ **Ibid.**, (12).

⁷⁶ **Ibid.**, (13-14).

⁷⁷ John Milton, **Samson Agonistes**, qtd. in Jonathan Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, p.XXVII.

⁷⁸ William Wordsworth, “Was it for This”, (114-121).

⁷⁹ William Wordsworth, “The Two Part Prelude”, *The Prelude: The Four Texts* (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850), **op. cit.**

⁸⁰ **Ibid.**, (I, 68-73).

Although “Was it for This” is a very short poem, it contains almost all of the important elements of **The Prelude**. In “Was it for This”, Wordsworth suggests he is now assured that the trivial pleasures the poet enjoyed in his childhood are not in vain, but they are reflections of nature at work to educate the poet “by collateral interest” and “extrinsic passion”.⁸¹

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, not in vain
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul;
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things—
With life and nature—purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.”⁸²

Wordsworth creates the idea of “prophets of nature”⁸³ through the pagan imagery with druids and bards due to “their role as to commune with the invisible world”⁸⁴ to assume divinity. Stephen Greenblatt came up with the term self-fashioning referring to an author’s deliberately assumed identity for himself. Although Greenblatt’s study **Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare**⁸⁵ is based on the Renaissance, his theory concerning the self being constructed in the process of writing in relation to author-reader dynamic can be applied to Wordsworth’s, who thinks of the reader to be inferior to the author in terms of their intellectual levels and with their deteriorated taste in literature that needs to be elevated. In this dynamic sincerity of self-expression is naturally replaced with wishful thinking and self-fashioning. So his self-doubt, or even self-analysis, is merely a mode of self-fashioning so that he can re-assert his poetic identity and overcome his anxieties of influence and reception.⁸⁶ As a part of

⁸¹ William Wordsworth, “Was it for This”, *op. cit.*, (11).

⁸² William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, *op. cit.*, (I, 402- 415, 1850).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, (XIII, 442, 1805).

⁸⁴ Richard Gravil, **Wordsworth’s Bardic Vocation 1787-1842**, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p.29.

⁸⁵ Stephan Greenblatt, **Renaissance Self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare**, Chicago, Illinois, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

⁸⁶ Yun Pei, **The Prophetic Wordsworth: Anxiety and Self-fashioning**, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Sussex, 2015. p.81.

his self-fashioning, Wordsworth assumes several identities for himself as the poet, the prophet, and the bard:

Then a wish,
My last and favourite aspiration, mounts
With yearning toward some philosophic song
Of Truth that cherishes our daily life;
With meditations passionate from deep
Recesses in man's heart, immortal verse
Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre;
But from this awful burthen I full soon
Take refuge and beguile myself with trust
That mellow years will bring a ripper mind
And clearer insight. Thus my days are past
In contradiction.⁸⁷

With the self-reproaching nature of the question in the title, "Was it for this" sets the self-conscious tone of **The Prelude**. In the 1850 version, the question is contemplated as follows:

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams?" For this, didst thou,
O Derwent! Winding among grassy holms
Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,
Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.⁸⁸

Although the dissatisfaction with the self as a result of the self-analysis creates an illusion of intimacy, this is the very moment we witness the birth of a hero with mixed human and divine origin, who through his self-consciousness is able to fashion the nature, and its plan to educate him as the chosen son with claims on divinity.⁸⁹ Thus, the

⁸⁷ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, (I, 227-238, 1850).

⁸⁸ **Ibid.**, (269-281, 1850).

⁸⁹ **Ibid.**, Geoffrey Hartman, "Was it for this....?: Wordsworth and the Birth of the Gods", **Bloom's Modern Critical Views: William Wordsworth**, Ed. by Harold Bloom, New York, Infobase Publishing, 2007, p.132-134.

self-conscious question at the beginning, “Was it for this?” is revealed to be a rhetorical one, as it is revealed to be a part of the poet’s conscious plan to self-fashion himself as the chosen one.

2.5 “Now I speak of Things”: Self-conscious Writing

Coleridge’s presence as the addressee of **The Prelude** is the first sign of the self-conscious scheme behind **The Prelude**. Coleridge’s presence in Lacanian terms can be read as “the Symbolic father, from whom Wordsworth had opportunely acquired languages that concealed his own self-division”.⁹⁰ Conversely, Coleridge “had been requiring Wordsworth from 1798 to confront head-on the fact of his Symbolic subjectification by assuming the voice of the great philosophical poet for the project of *The Recluse*”.⁹¹ Besides addressing Coleridge directly in the poem, Wordsworth also employs some self-conscious writing techniques even in the earliest version of **The Prelude**. One of the most frequently used techniques is giving explanations in parentheses as in the quote below:

Was it for this (and now I speak of things
That have been, and that are, no gentle dreams
Complacent, fashioned fondly to adorn
The time of unrememberable being).⁹²

The explanations between the parentheses observed in the very first version of **The Prelude** continue to be used by the poet in all the versions that followed. The function of these explanations is multi-faceted, ranging from readership awareness to the exploration of the margins of the text, and tricks of the memory. They express hesitancy as in the case of “if I err not” and “surely must belong”⁹³ and emphasize problems of memory; or address the reader directly as in the quote below and display an awareness of its readership while exploring the margins of the text and language. Another frequent

⁹⁰ Keith Hanly, “A Poet’s History: Wordsworth and Revolutionary Discourse”, **Wordsworth in Context**, Ed. by. Pauline Fletcher and John Murphy, London, Bucknell University Press, 1992, p.56.

⁹¹ **Ibid.**, p.57.

⁹² William Wordsworth, “Was it for This”, **The Prelude**, *op. cit.*, (16-19).

⁹³ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (1850, I, 556).

usage as in the case of the bird-stealing spot of time, where the poet is stuck on a slippery rock and is afraid of the height, is to express uncertainty:

“[...] Oh, when I have hung
Above the raven’s nest, have hung alone
By half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
But ill sustained, and almost (as it seemed)
Suspended by the wind which blew amain
Against the naked crag [...]”⁹⁴

The self-conscious poem is aware of the problematic nature of language and deliberately forces language to its limits. Language is the only medium where poetry can exist. This fact is a cold reality felt by the poet and he also means the reader to feel it. In **Essay upon Epitaphs** Wordsworth discusses the inherent capacity of language “to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate and to dissolve”.⁹⁵ **The Excursion** is conscious of the threat posed by its own medium, and possible impermanence of language even as it strives to offer a verbal memorial. Romantic writing is attentively and intuitively aware of its own processes. The texts are self-aware, yet not wholly autonomous and pose several questions concerning where the poet stands as creator of such texts. Though the poem is more than a medium or a subject, it becomes itself an object that can speak for itself so Romantic poetry itself often becomes its own severest analyst.⁹⁶ In this sense, the poem actively responds not only to the reader, but also to the critic. In his book **The All-Sustaining Air**, Michael O’Neill sees Romantic poets as “sustaining a supply of imaginative oxygen to later poems”.⁹⁷ According to him, “a vision of poetry” is “an arena of struggle between poetic desire and recalcitrant reality”.⁹⁸ The struggle must be overcome for the poem to come into existence, which means the vision must be materialized in language. Besides the problematic of language, the explanations in parentheses also express the problematic of memory and appear as early as **The Two-Part Prelude** dated 1799. In the First Part of **The Two-Part Prelude**, the poet expands the bird-stealing “spot of time” mentioned in “Was it For This”. In this episode, the poet feels as an intruder in the peaceful natural imagery with his act of stealing and says that

⁹⁴ William Wordsworth, “Was it for This”, (37-42).

⁹⁵ **The Cambridge Companion to William Wordsworth**, Ed. by Stephen Gill, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. XVii.

⁹⁶ **Ibid.**, p.36.

⁹⁷ Michael O’Neill, **All sustaining air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American and Irish Poetry since 1900**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.22.

⁹⁸ **Ibid.**, p.34.

he has become aware of the scary forces of the nature, which he again suggests are a part of nature's educational scheme for him. His interference about that date between the parentheses, "And afterwards ('twas in a later day, /Though early)"⁹⁹, reminds the reader that he is writing from his memory. In the bird-stealing 'spot of time', he recounts being stuck in the tree while trying to capture the bird. The child realizes how high he has climbed and is overwhelmed with fear, but the poet immediately adds the explanation "(as it seemed)" within parentheses to remind the reader that it is a recollection of the poet's perception of the actual incident. In another instance, before he narrates the painful memory of the loss of his father, partly because he blames himself for wishing to go home for Christmas Break strongly, only to lose his father, and learns to "bow low" to "God" to correct his desires"¹⁰⁰, the poet says:

Nor less recollect
 (Long after, though my childhood had not ceased)
 Another scene which left a kindred power
 Implanted in my mind.¹⁰¹

There are numerous examples of such explanations in parentheses and they serve various complex purposes. They may concern issues ranging from problems of memory or language to authorial intervention and they mostly have a tongue-in-cheek style, adding the text a touch of irony. These remarks interspersed in the text create a sentiment of self-consciousness engulfing the poem and establish **The Prelude** as a meta-poem. Indeed, the poem seems to possess all the qualities of a metafictional work as suggested in **Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction** by Patricia Waugh:

[...] a celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an uncertainty about the validity of its representations; an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions; a pervasive insecurity about the relationship of fiction to reality; a parodic, playful, excessive or deceptively naive style of writing.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ William Wordsworth, "The Two Part Prelude", **op. cit.**, p.XXVII.

¹⁰⁰ **Ibid.**, p.XXVII.

¹⁰¹ **Ibid.**

¹⁰² Waugh, **op. cit.**, p.2.

Waugh suggests that the “alternative definitions of self-conscious writing [...] imply a fiction that self-consciously reflects upon its own structure as language” and “offer different perspectives on the same process.”¹⁰³ Her arguments are based on the novel genre, especially in the light of the political, social and cultural upheavals in the aftermath of the Second World War with the culture growing more uncertain, insecure and self-questioning. Metafictional novels are often regarded as escapist in socio-cultural terms and in terms of the development of the novel itself. Metafiction self-consciously draws attention to its own status in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality and also about the fictionality of the world outside of the fictional literary work. As contemporary writers become more aware of theoretical issues, their works get richer in metafiction. The increase in writing coincides with an increased social and cultural self-consciousness and awareness of the function of language in maintaining the sense of reality. This idea stems from the assumption that “it is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer always changes the observed”.¹⁰⁴ By re-examination of its fictional form, metafiction provides a way out of the dilemma concerning fiction and reality and provides the readers and the authors with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative:

Metafictional novels allow the reader not only to observe the textual and linguistic construction of literary fiction, but also to enjoy and engage with the world within the fiction. For the duration of the reading at least, this world is as ‘real’ as the everyday world. Such novels reveal the duality of literary fictional texts: all fiction exists as words on the page which are materially ‘real’, and also exists in consciousness as worlds created through these words: ‘the aesthetic object belongs to the ideal but has its basis in the real’¹⁰⁵ The reader is made aware that, in the fiction-reading process, an act of consciousness creates an ‘object’ that did not exist before. However, the reader is further reminded that this act cannot create anything that could exist outside the dialectic of text and consciousness [...]¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ **Ibid.**, p.14.

¹⁰⁴ **Ibid.**, p.2.

¹⁰⁵ Roman Ingarden, “The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic and the Theory of Literature”. Trans. by George Grabowicz. Evanston, III., 1973, p.xxx, qtd. in Patricia Waugh, **op. cit.**, p.104.

¹⁰⁶ Waugh, **op.cit.**, p.104.

Metafiction is aware of its process of creating an object and a subject that do not exist outside of its fiction. However, metafiction takes a step further and reminds the reader of its consciousness of this process. Waugh's interpretation of playfulness and irony of metafiction in terms of escapism within the context of novel is useful to understand the function of meta-poetry within the context of Romanticism. Romanticism as a movement came about at one of the crisis periods in history, reflecting the dissatisfaction with the period upon literature. As "the materialist, positivist and empiricist world-view on which realistic fiction is premised" was being shaken, "the forms that correspond to this ordered reality"¹⁰⁷ were being rejected. Thus, the Romantics' media awareness is best reflected in their meta-poems or self-conscious poems. **The Prelude** with its meta-poetic nature draws the attention on its condition as a poem and an artifice. It is created and criticized as well as interpreted and deconstructed at once. The way Wordsworth employs the parenthetical explanations technique throughout his texts and addresses the reader directly in all versions of the poem deconstructs its process of writing. This is at odds with the Wordsworthian claim of spontaneity, which suggests "an illusion of immediacy" or "unmediatedness"¹⁰⁸ which is explained as a process in which the reader is "no longer aware of confronting a medium, but instead stands in an immediate relationship with the contents of that medium"¹⁰⁹. William H. Gass, who used the term metafiction for the first time, suggests:

In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean war: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means and the impulse to make an artefact out of the materials and so to treat the medium as an end.¹¹⁰

This contradiction is best reflected in self-conscious works. While fictional works attempt to create an alternative reality through language, meta-fictional works are playful in their representation of reality and fiction with awareness of themselves as a medium. Each time Wordsworth uses the parentheses or addresses the reader in the

¹⁰⁷ **Ibid.**, p.7.

¹⁰⁸ Jon, **op. cit.**, p.1.

¹⁰⁹ Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, **Remediation: Understanding New Media**, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1999, p.24.

¹¹⁰ William Gass, "Gertrude Stein: Her Escape from Protective Language", **Fiction and Figures of Life**, Boston, Nonpareil Books, 1971, p.94.

poem, we are reminded that we are reading a text with physical existence; we are the readership addressed by the poem, and the poem is written through memory and recollection making it several moves away from the original. Metafiction emphasizes the process of “recontextualization that occurs when language is used aesthetically” and when language is used playfully.¹¹¹ So, metafiction and self-consciousness stimulate a focus on recontextualization. This recontextualization process occurs at various levels in **The Prelude**, both with the different texts and within each text itself. Through the self-conscious writing, the subject of the poem turns out to be the poem itself and directs the attention to its own writing process. This type of writing relies on the reader for its meaning, as the reader’s consciousness is heightened as well to be an active participant in the creation of meaning. The self-reflexive nature of metafictional deconstruction leaves it open for interpretation and the text relies on the reader to find its meaning. This instability of the text in various versions provides this openness and flexibility.

Any text that draws the reader’s attention to its process of construction by frustrating his or her conventional expectations of meaning and closure problematizes more or less explicitly the ways in which narrative codes – whether ‘literary’ or ‘social’ – artificially construct apparently ‘real’ and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’.¹¹²

According to Waugh, in order to be successfully decoded, “experimental fiction of any variety requires an audience which is itself self-conscious about its linguistic practices” and “these conditions are surely provided by the contemporary attention to communication problems with the rise of new commercial and technological languages that cannot be translated into the terms of more familiar linguistic codes”.¹¹³ Her remarks are also reminiscent of Wordsworth’s concerns about the readers’ taste and the developing forms of communication as well as his justification about the reason why a poet must be concerned with elevating the readers’ taste, which has led Michael O’Neil to claim that “Romantic poetry is a poetry that is creating the taste by which it might be enjoyed”.¹¹⁴ Wordsworth’s effort to create the taste for his poems to be enjoyed can be

¹¹¹ **Ibid.**, p.36.

¹¹² **Ibid.**, p.22.

¹¹³ **Ibid.**, p.64.

¹¹⁴ O’Neill, **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, op. cit., p. XXII.

seen in the large number of the prefaces, letters and essays he wrote about his ideas on poetry along with his metapoetry. It is expectable that a self-conscious poet is concerned with his readership since he is aware that the posterity of both his work and himself depend on the reader.

2.6. France: A Self-Conscious Revolution; Books IX, X, XI

Three books of **The Prelude** are dedicated to France and to the French Revolution besides Book VI on Cambridge and the poet's journey to the Alps. In **The Prelude**, Wordsworth suggests that his sympathy for the common people and his belief in political freedom naturally drove him towards the ideals of the French Revolution:

O pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, us who were strong in love!
Bliss was it in that down to be alive,
But to be young was, very heaven! O times.
In which the meagre, stale forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statue took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!¹¹⁵

In Book IX, Wordsworth narrates his thoughts about the revolution upon seeing a starving girl with his soldier friend Michael Beaupuy:

[...] And when we chanced
One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,
Who crept along fitting her languid gait
Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane
Its sustenance, while the girl with pallid hands
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood
Of solitude, and at the sight my friend
In agitation said, 'Tis against 'that'
That we are fighting,' I with him believed
That a benignant spirit was abroad
Which might not be withstood, that poverty
Abject as this would in a little time
Be found no more [...]¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, op. cit., (XI, 105- 12).

¹¹⁶ **Ibid.**, (IX, 509-522, 1850).

The girl becomes a symbol of the spirit of the revolution for Wordsworth. Then he expresses his belief in the revolution and his hopes for humanity. However, he is frustrated after the French Revolution and his joy has turned into fear after witnessing the violence of the revolution:

[...] now believing
Now disbelieving; endlessly perplexed
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
Of obligation, what the rule and whence
The sanction; till, demanding formal proof,
And seeking in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out contrarities
Yielded up moral questions in despair.¹¹⁷

In Book X, as he passes through Paris one month after the September massacres, he expresses his emotions as follows:

[...] The fear gone by
Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.
I thought of those September massacres,
Divided from me by one little month
And felt and touched them, a substantial dread.
(The rest was conjured up from tragic fictions
And mournful calendars of true history,
Remembrances and dim admonishments).¹¹⁸

Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine, with their contrasting positions to the revolution, defined not only the experience of the revolution but the general political discourse of the 1790s. The revolutionary experience was outlined positively by Paine and negatively by Burke. Burke defined Paine as “the epitome of destructive revolutionary energy, a reformist zealot capable of abolishing in six or seven days, ‘all which the boasted wisdom of our ancestors has laboured to bring to perfection for six or seven

¹¹⁷ **Ibid.**, (XI, 297-305).

¹¹⁸ **Ibid.**, (Book X 62-69, 1805).

centuries”¹¹⁹. Reading and choosing between Burke and Paine was a defining experience of the 1790s. Consequently, the Burke-Paine binary helped to shape the dualistic mindset of literary Romanticism as it did the greater political mindset of post-1789 Britain.¹²⁰ The French Revolution itself represents two contradictory things between the two periods of 1798 and 1793: While it started off as the old Biblical promise of freedom to man and the declaration of self-consciousness as free will, it ended up in terror which “cancels and does away with self-thinking or self-consciousness”.¹²¹ In his **Phenomenology of Spirit**, Hegel describes this process with the words: “There emerges from an inner revolution [*Umwälzung*] an actual revolution in the real world, the new shape of consciousness, “absolute freedom”. In this absolute freedom, all social classes are abolished. However, as such absolute freedom “can produce neither positive work nor deed, there is left for it only *negative action*”. This action, Hegel suggests, presents itself in The Reign of Terror. He refers to the guillotine as “the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance turning off a head of cabbage”.¹²² According to Hegel:

[...] absolute freedom goes out of its self-destroying reality and passes over into another land of the self-conscious Spirit where, in this unreality, it [absolute freedom] counts as truth... Spirit knows this state, within the enclosure of its self-conscious existence, to be the perfection and completeness of being.¹²³

Wordsworth himself describes his disillusionment and frustration after the violence he has witnessed during the French Revolution in Book X, “Residence in France”:

¹¹⁹ Edmund Burke, “Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace”, **EB Writings**, vol. IX, p.82, qtd. in David Duff, **op. cit.**, p. 48.

¹²⁰ David Duff, “Burke and Paine: contrasts” **The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s**, Ed. by Pamela Clemit, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 47.

¹²¹ François Furet, **Marx and the French Revolution**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 61-62.

¹²² Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, **Phänomenologie des Geistes**, in **Gesammelte Werke** (Hamburg, Meiner, 1999), Vol. 9, p.317 (translated by Marius Timmann Mjaaland), Cf. **Phenomenology of the Spirit**, tr. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 360, qtd. in **The Body Unbound: Philosophical Perspectives on Politics and Religion**, Ed. by Marius Timmann Mjaaland, Ola Sigurdson, and Sigríður Thorgeirsdóttir, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, New Castle, 2010, p.64.

¹²³ G. W. F. Hegel, **Phänomenologie des Geistes**, Ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg, Meiner, 1952, p.414, 416, 418, 422. For an English translation of this section, see Hegel’s **Phenomenology of Spirit**, trans. by A. V. Miller, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, p.356-63, qtd. in M.H. Abrams “Revolutionary Romanticism”, **Wordsworth in Context**, Ed. by Pauline Fletcher and John Murphy, London, Bucknell University Press, 1992, p.21.

Most melancholy at that time, O Friend!
Were my day-thoughts, —my nights were miserable;
Through months, through years, long after the last beat
Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep
To me came rarely charged with natural gifts,
Such ghastly visions had I of despair
And tyranny, and implements of death;
And innocent victims sinking under fear,
And momentary hope, and worn-out prayer,
Each in his separate cell, or penned in crowds
For sacrifice, and struggling with fond mirth
And levity in dungeons, where the dust
Was laid with tears. Then suddenly the scene
Changed, and the unbroken dream entangled
In long orations, which I strove to plead
Before unjust tribunals, —with a voice
Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,
Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt
In the last place of refuge—my own soul.¹²⁴

In terms of artistic creation, this disappointment stimulated the turn to the self and inspired great works of art. In his book **Romantic Inspiration**, Leon Rosenthal explains how this disappointment with the French Revolution turned into a source of inspiration for the Romantics. He observes:

If the Empire had grown stronger and had settled in a stable order, minds would have relaxed gradually; a calm, healthy and balanced kind of art would probably have developed ensuring the triumph of realism. But on the contrary, if a storm was to burst out, a period of crisis would consequently start in which disoriented artists would listen to their sensitivity and nerves rather than rationality: that would mark the triumph of Romanticism. It turned out to be a storm and a most terrible one. The fall of the Empire, the invasion of the country and the return of the Bourbons shook France deeply, and it was left feeling humiliated and hurt. From then on, neither religion, politics nor any position in society could find a secure shelter [...] Helpless man turned in on themselves; they looked into their own minds in search of laws at work behind their actions. They soared painfully on the uncertain paths of liberty, guided by their feelings and not by logic.¹²⁵

Thus what inspired great works of art was not the enthusiasm, the excitement and the expectation in the early years of the revolution; but the disillusionment with its later

¹²⁴ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (X, 397-414).

¹²⁵ Leon Rosenthal, "Romantic Inspiration", **Romanticism**, Parkstone International, New York, 2015, p. 14.

and darker manifestations. The interest in subjectivity and consciousness stimulated a regeneration in the poetry of the period. Wordsworth himself wrote about his feelings ten years after the revolution. So, he did not write about the revolution itself, but about the effects of the revolution on him. In this sense, the French Revolution is regarded as a source of inspiration for artistic creation and philosophic insights. Because of the intellectuals' interest in it, before, during and in the aftermath of the French Revolution, it is often referred to as a self-conscious revolution which is defined as "a revolutionary movement with an intellectual elite which provides it with self-consciousness, forming or adopting an appropriate utopia".¹²⁶ When American and the French revolutions are compared, although in the practical sense the former is the superior one, the latter is regarded as the superior one in terms of being a greater human achievement. Besides its depth in terms of the human condition, the French Revolution has also inspired art in a way the American Revolution never did, such as the "poetry by Wordsworth, music by Beethoven and philosophy by Hegel".¹²⁷ Whether these works condemn or glorify the revolution, their fascination with the artistic imagination is unprecedented. Besides its artistic superiority, the French Revolution is regarded to be superior because it was the more self-conscious of the two revolutions. In terms of the superiority of the French Revolution, James Ceaser states:

The idea that the French Revolution is the truly philosophic revolution was later given its most general and famous expression by the most important philosopher of the nineteenth century, Georg F. Hegel. According to Hegel, is it the French Revolution, not the American Revolution that revealed the fundamental truths about the unfolding of the Spirit and self-consciousness in the world. In his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel argues that it is through the French Revolution's claim of absolute liberty and pure will that can now begin to catch a glimpse of the highest synthesis of civilization.¹²⁸

The French political leaders were not acting self-consciously in Hegelian terms and were swept along by the Revolution itself and by incidents they could not control but

¹²⁶ Leszek Nowak, "Revolution is an Opaque Progress But a Progress Nonetheless", **Social System, Rationality and Revolution**, ed. by Leszek Nowak, Marcin Paprzycki, Amsterdam, 1993, p. 241.

¹²⁷ James Ceaser, "The Two Revolutions", **The Legacy of the French Revolution**, Ed. by Ralph C. Hancock & L. Gary Lambert, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996, p. 86.

¹²⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 88.

only followed the incidents and acted out the roles assigned to them". In Hegel's argument, "it is not necessarily the participants in the Revolution itself who are said to have achieved this philosophic insight, but rather certain philosophers who afterward reflected on its meaning".¹²⁹ So, literary figures like Wordsworth made the French Revolution a self-conscious one and a superior one compared to the American Revolution. The poet also reminds us "the bold promise of the past".¹³⁰ As the "chosen son", the nature and greater powers he refers to throughout to poem have planned both his involvement and his disappointment with the revolution for a greater purpose, to qualify him as a poet with "some noble theme".¹³¹ Wordsworth discusses his involvement with the French Revolution on prophetic terms which serve to his self-fashioning as a poet. Geoffrey Hartman suggests:

And crossing, one might say, through the gloomy gulf of time, his disappointment becomes retrospectively a prophetic instance of that blindness to the external world which is the tragic, pervasive, and necessary condition of the mature poet. His failure taught him gently what now (1804) literally blinds him; the growing independence of Imagination from the immediate external world.¹³²

As Wordsworth in **The Prelude** "represents himself after his involvement with the French Revolution as rediscovering his 'true self', specifically as 'a Poet',¹³³ his relationship to the French Revolution as reflected in **The Prelude** has a very controlled nature and it is a part of "what was fundamentally a project of professional self-authorization".¹³⁴ In this self-conscious journey of earning the professional identity of a poet, "the great political cause of the age, the French Revolution, becomes merely a passing episode in an overarching history of the poet's mind".¹³⁵

¹²⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 88.

¹³⁰ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 128, 1850).

¹³¹ **Ibid.**, (I, 129, 1850).

¹³² Geoffrey Hartman, "The Via Naturaliter Negativa", **William Wordsworth's The Prelude: A Casebook**, **op. cit.**, p. 188.

¹³³ Hess, **op. cit.**, 161.

¹³⁴ **Ibid.**

¹³⁵ Roe, **op. cit.**, p. 44.

CHAPTER THREE

“SPOTS OF TIME”:

MEMORY, RETROSPECTION, RECOLLECTION

Wordsworth suggests poetry is “emotion recollected in tranquillity”¹ as much as it is the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”.² Much of Wordsworth’s poetry is concerned with his recollection of the past in the present. Among these poems are “Tintern Abbey”(1798),³ “Descriptive Sketches” (1793),⁴ “An Evening Walk” (1793),⁵ “I Wondered Lonely As A Cloud” (1807)⁶, and of course **The Prelude** in which the poet conducts an inquiry in retrospection into the growth of his own mind. The formulation of **The Prelude** as a self-analysis in the present through recollection of memories not only sets the retrospective tone of the work, but also displays Wordsworth’s contemporary approach to self-consciousness. Patrick H. Hutton says, “self-consciousness that Wordsworth revealed in his poetry was of relatively recent origin”.⁷ Corresponding to his modern approach to self-consciousness, Wordsworth’s treatment of memory in these poems is highly individual. Hutton asserts that Wordsworth’s approach to self-consciousness and memory “refashioned the genre of autobiography as a modern art of memory”.⁸ **The Prelude** owes this modern autobiographical quality to Wordsworth’s insight into self-consciousness, and thanks to this, it is not a direct account of personal circumstances from the poet’s life, but a self-consciously composed autobiographical piece of fiction which creates a self or an identity that becomes real both to the poet himself and to others.

¹ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, op. cit., p.8.

² **Ibid.**

³ David Galens, **Poetry Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of the Most Significant and Widely Studied Poets of World Literature**, Volume 4, Detroit, Gale Research Inc. 1991, p.409.

⁴ **Ibid.**, p.370.

⁵ **Ibid.**

⁶ **Ibid.**, p.400.

⁷ Patrick. H. Hutton. “William Wordsworth and Sigmund Freud: The Search for the Self Historicized”, **History as an Art of Memory**, Hanover, University Press of New England, 1993, p.53.

⁸ **Ibid.**

3.1. “The Vacancy between Me and Those Days”: The Past and the Present Selves

Although **The Prelude** as an autobiographical work traces Wordsworth’s life from 1770 to 1798, it is also a record of the years of the poet’s writing the poem from 1798 to 1805.⁹ So, the poet needs to deal with his past and present selves at the same time. As he describes the difficulty of writing from his memory, he differentiates between his present and past selves as follows:

[...] so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
That, musing on them, often do I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other Being.¹⁰

In these lines, the poet refers to his consciousness of himself in the past and the present. Through this division between the poet writing in the present and the remembered self, Wordsworth constructs a poetic identity. This process is not free from the anxiety of reception, as the autobiographer needs to challenge the “paradoxical predicament of making themselves the subject of their own discourse while at the same time submitting themselves to being subject to the reading of others”.¹¹ “Others” and “outside of the self” are significant concepts to establish the sense of the self as “self-consciousness requires the presence, real or imagined, explicit or implied, of another”.¹² Especially when he is in solitude, Wordsworth feels overcome by a feeling of the world’s unreality. In phenomenological terms, “the Other”, that conscious presence real or conceived makes us “become self-conscious by considering ourselves as another would”.¹³ In simple words, through the other, one becomes self-conscious. The poet’s presence remains a conundrum except for his connection to the reader who becomes the other and towards whom the poet feels self-conscious. In the poet-reader dynamic, the poet’s

⁹ Stephen Gill, “The Prelude 1804-1820”, **Wordsworth’s Revisitings**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 86.

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, *op. cit.*, (II, 28-33, 1850)

¹¹ Sheila Kearns, **Coleridge, Wordsworth and Romantic Autobiography: Reading Strategies of Self-Representation**, New Jersey, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995, p. 21. *qtd. in Hess, op.cit.*, p.210.

¹² Charles J. Rezepka, “The Idea of the Self as Mind”, **The Self as Mind**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p.1-.6.

¹³ **Ibid.**, p.4.

efforts to disclose the self within becomes an illusion; making it impossible to be fully demonstrated for others, either in person or in poem, in artistic creation.¹⁴ The resistance to self-consciousness leads to “visionary solipsism”, which for Romantics is explained as “that state of waking dream which many of the Romantic poets considered the source of not only poetic insight but of their very identities as poets”.¹⁵ The visionary solipsism is a result of the poet’s efforts to come to terms with his manifested being as well as the presence of others and the factuality of the world. It can be defined as “the withdrawal of the true self, that subjectivity, which characterizes Romanticism generally”.¹⁶ Thus, if self-consciousness is at the heart of the dilemma between the Romantic poet’s desire to self-explore in isolation, so is the need to self-construct in an effort to gain recognition from the others. During the act of writing, memory is overshadowed with this acute feeling of self-consciousness. The poet needs to deal with his past self through his present self, with the full knowledge of the presence of his readership. In the boat scene in Book IV “Summer Vacation”, Wordsworth expresses the difficulty of writing through memory as follows:

As one who hangs down-bending from the side
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 deep,
Sees many beauteous sights—weeds, fishes, flowers
Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more,
Yet often is perplexed, and cannot part
The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky
Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth
Of the clear flood, from things which there abide
In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam
Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,
And wavering motions sent he knows not whence,
Impediments that make his task more sweet;
Such pleasant office have we long pursued
Incumbent o’er the surface of past time
With like success [...]¹⁷

¹⁴ **Ibid.** p.8.

¹⁵ **Ibid.**, p.24.

¹⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁷ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (IV, 256-273, 1850).

In the same scene, as the poet tries to see the bottom of the sea, his image falls onto the water. His reflection on the surface of the water interferes with his vision and makes the bottom of the sea hard to see, just as his present self makes it difficult for the poet to see into his past self. As the poet needs to get past through his mirror-image on the water to see the bottom, he also needs to look at his past self through his present self. This metaphor underlines the poet's awareness that whatever he writes through his memory is far from the original experience. What he writes is his impressions that have been subjected to change over time and are in a continuous transformation during the process of writing. In order to see his past self through his writing self, the poet creates a technique called "spots of time"¹⁸ in which the past and the present function together. These spots of time are certain events in the poet's memory that exist solely in his mind. They help the poet to sustain himself with the powers of the past while he is in the present and stop "the quiet stream/Of self-forgetfulness"¹⁹ in times of crisis such as his college years at Cambridge and his experience during the French Revolution. Through these spots of time, the poet can "retain a renovating Virtue"²⁰ to endure these times of crisis and achieve self-fulfilment, recovering from the "tyranny"²¹ of senses. These spots of times are connected with the stream imagery that flows throughout the poem which maintains a sense of continuity between the past, the present and the future. The association between the poet's mind and the stream suggests that the flow imagery that runs throughout the poem reveals Wordsworth's self-consciousness as it refers to the flow of the self over time and the stream of the mind since the birth:

This particular epic simile of self-regard reveals the characteristics and the degree of Wordsworth's self-consciousness perfectly: not only is there the usual difficulty of seeing clearly what is in the depths of the stream and of the self in time past, but as one both "solaces" oneself in looking there and "fancies" a certain amount of what one sees, one's own necessary presence adds one's own present motives to the task, distorting it.²²

¹⁸ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (XII, 208, 1850).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, (IV, 297, 1850).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, (XII, 210, 1850).

²¹ *Ibid.*, (XII, 135, 1850).

²² Richard J. Onorato, "The Fiction of the Self", *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in the Prelude*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 169.

Through his self-conscious writing in **The Prelude**, Wordsworth displays his awareness of the distorting function of self-consciousness and takes advantage of it in self-fashioning his poetic identity. Writing from memory is difficult not only because memory is prone to err, but also because it is also selective. So, the poet inevitably writes himself into his work; but what Wordsworth does in **The Prelude** is to emphasize his awareness of this process. Throughout **The Prelude**, he talks about his past self from the point of the present one. He emphasizes not only the pastness of the events, but also his awareness of the distorting function of self-consciousness in narrating the “two consciousnesses”. He turns this self-consciousness to artistic advantage in **The Prelude**, constantly reminding the reader of his awareness that these are not original impressions but memories rendered from the consciousness of the poet. Thus, the definition of poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquillity”²³ contradicts the illusion of poetry as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”.²⁴ Similarly, through the subjectivity of the memory, the poet’s image falls upon his description of certain events and adds his presence to them. Through the “spots of time”, the poet is able to make associations between the past and the present, and can narrate his reader the nature of his upbringing that is formative of his present self after his own self-fashioning. Thus, in order to self-fashion his present self, the poet re-creates his past self. In his own words, what he does is to “trace/ how Nature.../first peopled the mind with forms sublime and fair”.²⁵ Although, with these lines, he tries to give the impression that he is in a sincere and spontaneous soul-searching in an attempt to inquire into the growth of his poetic mind and its resources, through his process of writing, he creates those very resources which he claims to be the source of his poetic creation. While doing so, he also probes the margins of the text to make the reader conscious of this process. Thus through his insight into self-consciousness, “the mind” becomes the “lord and master”²⁶ while “outward sense” is “the obedient servant of her will.”²⁷ In these spots of time, what is emphasized is the impressions of the poet and not the events themselves. The interpretation of the past circumstances by the poet’s present self during his retrospective writing gives the real significance to those circumstances

²³ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, loc. cit.

²⁴ **Ibid.**

²⁵ **Ibid.**, (I, 544-545-546, 1850).

²⁶ **Ibid.**, (XI, 222, 1850).

²⁷ **Ibid.**, (XI, 222-223, 1850).

and the poet emphasizes his awareness of this power of the mind. It is as if the spots of time do not act upon the poet, but rather the poet acts upon them and gives them their transformative power. Thus, any given incident may not be recognized as transformative at the time; however, in its recollection, its significance is realized.²⁸ So, **The Prelude** is a tribute to the creative powers of the mind that give significance to what is outside of the self and also construct that very self, displaying its awareness of this process at the same time. The “I” of **The Prelude** not only refers to the self-conscious “I” of the autobiographer, but also to the use of a philosophical eye to explore universal truths. In this sense, through the spots of time, the self-conscious autobiographer fashions his poetic endeavour as a task on two human attributes, the body and soul, justifying his growth from lack of self-consciousness to self-consciousness, from childhood to maturity in time, which enables him to transcend the self.²⁹ This shift is from lack of self-consciousness or “the visionary gleam which refers to a moment in life when the self and the universe perfectly unify”, or childhood, to a “recognition and acceptance of reality” or to self-conscious states or maturity that equip the poet with powers to transcend beyond the self.³⁰ So, these spots of time provide some prophetic truths, as well as to helping with the growth of the poet’s mind.³¹ These spots of time portray the poet in the making and demonstrate his growth into the self-conscious poet with their constant editions as well. The same incidents are edited by the poet over time, sometimes with minor but at times with major differences such as the change of the narrator. Scott Hess introduces the term “self-reading” to explain how Wordsworth’s claims for autonomy of the self in **The Prelude** refer to his aspiration for professional autonomy. He suggests Wordsworth’s assertions of self-rule are usually advanced as vocational claims to construct his poetic identity through a strategic process of professional self-authorization. He suggests, “the intense self-consciousness to which the spots of time all lead” is “a kind of mental self-reading later duplicated by the actual self-reading of the poetic text”.³² So, Wordsworth’s reading of his own mind suggests a

²⁸ Anthony John Harding, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

²⁹ Pauline Ling-Hwai Wu, “‘A Science of Mind’ in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*”, National Taiwan Normal University, p.2, (Accessed)

https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2011008662_Pauline_Ling-Hwai_Wu, 06 June 2019.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Hess, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

model for the way he intends his audience to read his poem. Through the process of self-reading, Wordsworth “becomes his primary judge and interpreter”.³³ He suggests:

Self-reading supports not only **The Prelude**, with its model of the “spots of time”, but the turn to subjectivity and self-consciousness throughout Wordsworth’s poetry. Self-reading, self-consciousness, and self-authorization, in this respect, reveal themselves as inseparable elements of a single process of professional self-construction.³⁴

The claim of spontaneous self-analysis in **The Prelude** is a claim of professional autonomy. This claim also coincides with the publication history of **The Prelude**. As the poet’s anxiety of reception as well as his self-consciousness render the claims of spontaneity impossible, through the constant editing of these spots of time, it can be observed that the poet tries to construct his own professional identity as ultimately independently from his public, re-editing it as his sense of his own poetic identity evolved.³⁵ So, the spots of time strategy is revealed to be a unique formulation of memory and self-consciousness employed by Wordsworth to construct his poetic identity, of which he becomes both the reader and the interpreter, or the critic and the judge, through his self-reading and self-writing processes.

3.2. “Spots of Time”: The Poet in the Making

The poet calls his childhood memories retained for the growth of his mind in later years as “spots of time”, which he suggests are “hiding places of man’s power”.³⁶ **The Prelude** is gathered around these “spots of time”.³⁷ According to Harold Bloom’s definition, a spot of time is “a past event with positive effects on the poet which is retained to be looked back in times of distress” or “past for future restoration”³⁸ and “imagination working through memory”.³⁹ A spot of time reflects how an ordinary event at a time helps in the long term to make the poet. Herbert Lindenberger suggests that a spot of time is “the record of a concrete past event used to

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

³⁶ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (XII, 279, 1850).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, (XII, 208, 1850).

³⁸ Harold Bloom, Introduction to **The Prelude** by William Wordsworth, ed. by Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p. 21.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

illustrate some more general statements about the past”.⁴⁰ When the poet is in crisis to comply with the visionary world that surrounds him, he turns to these spots of times, which are usually based on childhood memories. Especially the first two books of **The Prelude** are rich in childhood memories which show the child as having encounters with self-consciousness. The child faces “unknown modes of being”,⁴¹ and he is forced to define and redefine his relation to himself as well as to the natural and outer world. These spots of time justify the experience of the child of “wrong-doing, suffering, and loss as a necessary means toward the greater good of personal redemption”⁴² in painful processes of “self-formation, crisis, self-recognition” to grow into “a stage of self-coherence, self-awareness and assured power that is its own reward”.⁴³ The spots of time are introduced in the poem as follows:

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence—depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse—our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
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 that give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master—outward sense
The obedient servant of her will. Such moments
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood.⁴⁴

The spots of time not only allow the poet to write about the past and the present simultaneously, but they also create a feeling of identity and provide continuity between the past and the present. They demonstrate how seemingly the fragmentary memories of the past are joined together in making up the poet. In most spots of time, the poet sets

⁴⁰ Herbert Lindenberger, “Time Consciousness”, **On Wordsworth’s Prelude**, the USA, Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 144.

⁴¹ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 393, 1850).

⁴² M. H. Abrams, “Wordsworth’s Prelude and the Crisis-Autobiography”, **Critical Essays on Wordsworth**, Ed. by George H. Gilpin, Boston, G. K. Hall, 1990, 127.

⁴³ **Ibid.**, p. 128.

⁴⁴ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (XII, 208-225, 1850).

out with a guide from whom he is soon parted to have a sudden encounter described as a sublime experience by the author. These encounters can be interpreted both as the child's growth into self-consciousness and the poet's confrontation with the distorting function of self-consciousness during the act of writing. The figures in these encounters are the displaced figures of the poet's authorial self in the formation process of his poetic identity. Such encounters also have the quality of sublimeness even in ordinary events and a self-conscious return to them through memory provides the material for the creation of the poetic self. Each spot of time in **The Prelude** is a "definite and irreversible blow of self-consciousness"⁴⁵ and is followed by self-analyses and epiphanic moments that are formative of the poetic self. Through the spots of time, it is possible to trace the growth of the child's self-consciousness and the poet's growth into a self-conscious one. In this sense, the sublime is within and not in any external source. Derya Benli and Petru Golban note this quality of spots of time as follows:

Keats truly calls Wordsworth's poetry "egotistical sublime", for he writes constantly himself into it and his apprehension of the universe is purely subjective, based on the assumption that "The Child is father of the Man", where a return through memory to childhood experience would link present and past, natural world and individual experience, keep the balance of the insight, and provide stability to the troubled process of maturation.⁴⁶

In 1757, in his **Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful**, Edmund Burke makes a distinction between sublimity and the concept of beauty. In Burkean terms, while the sense of beauty is associated with the passion of love and pleasure, "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is the source of the sublime".⁴⁷ Burke suggests that sublimity appeals to man because of his instinct of self-preservation since it causes terror in him, while the delight comes from "an idea of pain and danger, without being

⁴⁵ M. J. Coutinho, **The Experience of Nature and the Formative Process in The Prelude**, Doctoral Dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2012, p.307.

⁴⁶ Benli, Golban, **op. cit.**, p.281.

⁴⁷ Edmund Burke, **A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our 'Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful'**, London, J.F. Dove, 1827, p.31.

actually in such circumstances”.⁴⁸ It is the spots of time in **The Prelude** that provide this sublime quality for the poet. Wordsworth says he was “Fostered alike by beauty and by fear”⁴⁹ and explains how the sublime and the beautiful have been formative of his character:

[...] fear and love,
To love as first and chief [...]
[...] to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely forms,
With the adverse principles of pain and joy.⁵⁰

Throughout these spots of time, we see both calm and violent forms of nature, which in the eyes of the poet seem to be “all like workings of one mind”⁵¹ and thus are necessary to make up the poet. The spots of time technique also provides “a sort of lens” to the poet through which he can maintain the “distancing in time and the casualness of tone” which can “make a deeply personal experience less overtly and embarrassingly personal”.⁵² The spots of time have two functions: setting an emotion at an appropriately classical distance, and giving life and energy to the present. The poet writes about the empowering nature of these spots of time as follows:

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours. 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 comes, that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. The days gone by
Return upon me almost from the dawn
Of life: the hiding-places of man's power
Open; I would approach them, but 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,
Substance and life to what I feel, enshrining,
Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past
For future restoration [...]⁵³

⁴⁸ **Ibid.**, p.47.

⁴⁹ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 302, 1850).

⁵⁰ **Ibid.**, (XIV, 143, 147-1850).

⁵¹ **Ibid.**, (VI, 636, 1850).

⁵² Lindenberger, **op. cit.**, p.148.

⁵³ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (272-86, XII, 1850).

There are such a great number of spots of time throughout the poem that it is possible to say that the entire poem is made up of spots of time. Actually, “critics have counted more than twenty spots of time in **The Prelude**”.⁵⁴ However, several of the spots of time we will discuss individually are of great importance in understanding how the “displaced figures of authorial identity embodying vocational roles allowed Wordsworth to experiment with the role and identity of the author before representing his authorial identity directly”.⁵⁵

3.2.1. Woodcock-Snaring and Bird-Nesting

These two spots of time are narrated successively. The first one is about the time Wordsworth as a child sets up snares for woodcocks in dark. The wood-cock snaring spot of time shows the feeling of separateness the child experiences from nature:

[...] moon and stars
Were shining o’er my head. I was alone,
And seemed to be a trouble to the peace
That dwelt among them.⁵⁶

The child does not enjoy the unity he once did with nature. The fact that the child feels as an intruder in the nature displays his growing self-consciousness. Once the unity is broken, the child is introduced to the darker forces of nature:

[...] and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.⁵⁷

Similarly, in the bird-nesting spot of time, the child is stuck at high place in a tree while attempting to steal eggs from a raven's nest in stormy weather with no one to help him:

⁵⁴ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, **The Emergence of Romanticism**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.15.

⁵⁵ Hess, **op. cit.**, p.199.

⁵⁶ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 314-317, 1850).

⁵⁷ **Ibid.**, (I, 321-325, 1850).

[...] Oh! when I have hung
 Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
 And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
 But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed)
 Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
 Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time
 While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
 With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
 Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
 Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!⁵⁸

The choice of vocabulary to describe nature in this spot of time indicates the fear the child experiences. The place is "high", the rock is "slippery", the child is "alone" and the utterance is "strange". The child is too scared to look down and focuses on the sky. However, with the fear he experiences, everything seems unreal to him. While the child's perception of nature due to his psychological state at the time indicates the growth of self-consciousness, Wordsworth's urge to give an explanation in parentheses also indicates his self-consciousness about his present self as the grown-up man, reminding the reader that the poem is written retrospectively.

When Geoffrey H. Hartman - one of the major critics of Wordsworth - published his study on Wordsworth's poetry in 1964, he renovated the whole approach not only to the reading of Wordsworth's poetry, but also to Romantic poetry in general. In the introduction to his study, Hartman says: "What I did, basically, was to describe Wordsworth's 'consciousness of consciousnesses. Everything else - psychology, epistemology, religious ideas, and politics - was subordinated. If that is phenomenological procedure, so be it'.⁵⁹ Hartman suggests, such spots of times accompanied with self-consciousness are the source of Wordsworth's poetry:

Such nature-consciousness joined to an answering self-consciousness, is the 'incumbent mystery' from which Wordsworth's poetry springs. He begins with the weight of sense-experience through which [...] the 'foundations' of the mind are laid, or the soul is 'seeded' by feelings and images capable of sustaining it throughout life. There is no vision in his poetry that is not a vision of natural appearances pressing upon child or adult in this way.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, (I, 330-339, 1850).

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, op. cit., p.8.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Hartman, "Nature and the Humanization of the Self", *English Romantic Poets*, Ed. by M. H. Abrams, London, Oxford University Press, 1975, p.125.

These two spots of time show the child's growth into self-consciousness and his understanding of himself as a separate being from the nature. They are concerned with the child's act of stealing and his changing perception of the nature from the peaceful entity where he feels at home, into suddenly a hostile environment. The poet presents this hostility as a part of what nature plans for his education and thus portrays himself as the chosen son, asserting the certain type of poetic identity he wishes to self-fashion.

3.2.2. Ice-Skating

The ice-skating spot of time is a recollection of a childhood experience of skating on a frozen lake in the "frosty season".⁶¹ With full energy, the child forgets about the time, leaves the company of friends behind and spins around and wheels about like a free "untired horse".⁶² But in this feeling of "rapture"⁶³, he is suddenly halted:

Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me - even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.⁶⁴

The fact that Wordsworth suddenly stops while other children give their "bodies to the wind" suggests that, as the earth still seems to be spinning to the child, he feels at that moment "his independence, his separate self-consciousness".⁶⁵ "The stages of emergence into this self-consciousness, a philosophical topic, are surely as much the

⁶¹ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 425, 1850).

⁶² **Ibid.**, (I, 432, 1850).

⁶³ **Ibid.**, (I, 430, 1850).

⁶⁴ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 452-463, 1850).

⁶⁵ Ruth Mead, Review of **Wordsworth and Feeling: The Poetry of an Adult Child** by G. Kim Blank, Cranbury, New Jersey, London, Associated University Presses, 1995, (Accessed) <https://doi.org/10.7202/005714ar>, 25 June 2019.

subject of the spots of time as are Wordsworth's highly personal memories".⁶⁶ However, just as the child attempts to experience his feeling of separateness and the taste of self-consciousness, he is reminded by the setting sun that he needs to go back home. The child's growth is still an ongoing process which requires other ventures for the growth of self-consciousness.⁶⁷ The child who has a taste of self-consciousness takes a step to break further away from the unity with mother nature in the next spot of time.

3.2.3. Boat Stealing

In the boat-stealing spot of time, the young poet takes a boat without the owner's permission. The scene starts with mundane things in their routines such as fields and birds, and progresses towards an "act of stealth with troubled pleasure",⁶⁸ indicating the paradoxical nature of the child's experience. Wordsworth again employs the parenthetical explanations technique in this spot of time:

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure.⁶⁹

In the **The Two-Part Prelude** version of 1799, before the poet narrates this spot of time, he talks about how he believes "there are spirits"⁷⁰ that are at work for the formation of the chosen one for greater ends. He is certain that those powers directed him for this act of stealing for a purpose:

They guided me: one evening led by them
I went alone into a shepherd's boat,
A skiff that to a willow-tree was tied
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.⁷¹

⁶⁶ **Ibid.**

⁶⁷ **Ibid.**

⁶⁸ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (I, 361, 1850).

⁶⁹ **Ibid.**, (I, 357-362, 1850).

⁷⁰ William Wordsworth, "The Two Part Prelude", **op. cit.**, (I, 69).

⁷¹ **Ibid.**, (I, 81-84).

The boy's feelings of guilt and self-reproach are reflected onto his perception of the outer world. The idyllic rowing scene turns into a horrifying experience as the boy sees the vision of the mountain as a living thing coming after him to punish him. The explanation "led by her" in parentheses again reminds the reader that the incident is narrated by the grown-up poet retrospectively and with full consciousness of his readership. It also shows that the poet wants the reader to believe that the incident is designed by nature for the child's growth and claims for divinity, self-fashioning himself as a chosen son again.

When, from behind that craggy steep till then
 The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
 As if with voluntary power instinct,
 Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
 And growing still in stature the grim shape
 Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
 For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
 And measured motion like a living thing,
 Strode after me.⁷²

The child's act starts with ignorance and naivety, but once the power of nature is realized, he becomes conscious of his limitations. Through this spot of time, he also comes to the consciousness of "huge and mighty forms",⁷³ which "do not live like/Living men"⁷⁴ an indication of a growing understanding of his position in the greater universe and of powers completely independent from himself:

[...]for many days, my brain
 Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
 Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
 There hung a darkness, call it solitude
 Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
 Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
 But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
 Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
 By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.⁷⁵

⁷² William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (I, 377-385, 1850).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, (I, 398, 1850).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, (I, 398-399, 1850).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, (I, 390-400, 1850).

The poet claims that nature has led him for his act as a part of its greater plan to discipline him. The idea of greater forces working on the chosen son to educate him for greater ends is suggested as early as “Was it For This” in 1799, although the poet does not explain explicitly what these powers are and refers to them as “ye beings of the hills”,⁷⁶ “spirits”,⁷⁷ “powers of earth”,⁷⁸ and “genii of the springs”.⁷⁹ He suggests that these forces start working on the chosen ones from childhood onwards. In this spot of time, the child in nature is no longer a passive agent. Although the child’s activity arouses the nature, the effects that he sees and hears seem to him as power totally independent of himself.⁸⁰ This spot of time shows the growth of self-consciousness independently from nature. This process is “a progression - from early passivity and dependence to a mature self-consciousness”.⁸¹ The child who experiences a unity with nature is experiencing a break from it as his self-consciousness grows. These spots of time are in direct contrast with the type of union the baby enjoys as celebrated by Wordsworth in Book II:

Blest the infant Babe,
 (For with my best conjecture I would trace
 Our Being’s earthly progress,) blest the Babe,
 Nursed in his Mother’s arms, who sinks to sleep
 Rocked on his Mother’s breast; who with his soul
 Drinks in the feelings of his Mother’s eye!
 For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts
 Objects through widest intercourse of sense.
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
 Along his infant veins are interfused
 The gravitation and the filial bond
 Of nature that connect him with the world.⁸²

Unlike the union and the feeling of oneness with nature the baby experiences, these spots of time emphasize the growth of the child’s self-consciousness. As we know from Wordsworth’s biography, after their mother’s death, both Wordsworth and his brother

⁷⁶ William Wordsworth, “Was it for This” *op. cit.*, (47).

⁷⁷ William Wordsworth, “The Two Part Prelude”, *The Prelude*, (I, 69).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, (I, 186).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, (I, 186).

⁸⁰ Sybil S. Eakin, “Spots of Time in Early Versions of “The Prelude”, *Studies in Romanticism*, Boston, Boston University Press, Vol. 12. No. 1 (Winter, 1973), p.393, (Accessed) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i25599867>, 06 June 2019.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁸² William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (II, 234- 246).

were sent to Grammar School and “were boarded at the home of Anne Tyson”⁸³. So, Wordsworth was separated from his familiar surroundings and his birthplace. These spots of time emanate the feeling of alienation, as they show the child as disturbing the nature and portray him as an intruder. The unity between the child and the nature has obviously been broken. The awakening of self-consciousness in the child is related to his moral growth and the private circumstances of Wordsworth’s life including the trauma of losing his parents as well as the separation from Annette Vallon and their daughter due to the political turmoil during the French Revolution. This spot of time is a displacement of these traumatic experiences that are formative of the poet’s self. The child does not feel at home in nature any more, he is rather frightened by forces of nature, as “Nature is now in opposition with the boy because of the break of innocence and awakening self-consciousness in him- which splits the subject’s moral unity and integration with the world.”⁸⁴ Lucy Newlyn states that Wordsworth confesses minor misdemeanours instead of the true cause of his sufferings and she refers to Wordsworth affair with Annette Vallon that had to come to an end due to the Terror in France despite her being pregnant with their daughter. She suggests this relationship caused an Oedipal struggle within the poet as a moment of disobedience to his parents whose loss were already tragic to him. In this sense Wordsworth’s relation to nature has a filial nature.⁸⁵ Wordsworth’s loss of his parents and his relationship with Annette Vallon can be read as entry from Imaginary order to the Symbolic order in Lacanian terms. The relationship that culminated in the birth of his natural daughter in December 1792.⁸⁶ But once the poet returned back to England after the outbreak of violence in France in December 1792, the poet suffered from self-alienation.⁸⁷ Book IX of **The Prelude** starts with the poet’s record of his second visit to France in the aftermath of the revolution. He is reluctant to face his growth into maturity as a result of the disillusionment. The conflict in the outside world seems to reflect the inner division the poet is experiencing:

⁸³ Shirley Hoover Biggers, **British Author House Museums and Other Memorials: A Guide to Sites in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales**, North Carolina, McFarland& Company, Inc. Publishers, 2002, p. 363.

⁸⁴ Coutinho, **op. cit.**, p. 311.

⁸⁵ Coutinho, **op. cit.**, p. 311.

⁸⁶ Hanly, **op. cit.**, 1992, p.35.

⁸⁷ **Ibid.**, p.44.

Most melancholy at the time, o friend,
 Were my day-thoughts, my dreams were miserable.
 Through months, through years, long after the last beat
 Of those atrocities (I speak bare truth,
 As if to thee alone in private talk)
 I scarcely had one night of quiet sleep,
 Such ghastly visions had I of despair,
 And tyranny, and implements of death,
 And long orations which in dreams I pleaded
 Before unjust Tribunals, with a voice
 Laboring, a brain confounded, and a sense,
 Of treachery and desertion in the place
 The holiest I knew of, my own soul”⁸⁸

This is one of the moments the reader would be most emphatic with the poet and get lost in the fiction he has created. The lines are imbued with the feeling of melancholy and self-division. They fashion the speaker as a person lamenting spontaneously in private. However, two qualities in these lines, as part of the self-conscious writing strategy employed in **The Prelude**, demonstrate his anxiety of reception and show the poet’s awareness of himself as a public speaking persona. Firstly, with his call “o friend”, he addresses Coleridge as the addressee of the poem as well as the reader on a larger scale. Secondly, the self-conscious writing technique runs all over **The Prelude** with the explanations between parentheses clearly addressed to the reader. Besides the technique employed here, the claim to speak spontaneously without the awareness of the medium of text and the audience negates is a refutation of spontaneity itself. Thus, the text fails to create the illusion of spontaneity and asserts itself as a meta-poem and a self-conscious poem. This self-alienation experienced by the poet is reflected at Wordsworth’s return to Paris after the September Massacres that lasted “from September 2 to September 6, 1792”⁸⁹ and “consisted of a wave of killings in Paris during the French Revolution.”⁹⁰ The period referred to as ‘the first terror’ during the French revolution ended up in “the king’s arrest”⁹¹ and the September Massacres referring to the execution of “more than 1.000 prisoners”.⁹² As the poet walks along the

⁸⁸ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, (X, 368-380, 1805).

⁸⁹ **Atrocities, Massacres, and War Crimes: An Encyclopedia, Volume I: A-L**, Ed. by Alexander Mikaberidze, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013, p. 594.

⁹⁰ **Ibid.**

⁹¹ Jean-Marie Apostolides, “Theater and Terror: Le jugement dernier des rois”, **Terror and Consensus: Vicissitudes of French Thought**, ed. by Jean-Joseph Goux and Philip R. Wood, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 135.

⁹² **Ibid.**

streets observing the horrific view of burning of bodies after the September Massacres, he writes:

[...] upon these
And other sights looking as doth a an
Upon a volume whose contents he knows
Are memorable but from him locked up,
Being written in a tongue he cannot read,
So that he questions the mute leaves with pain,
And half upbraids their silence [....]⁹³

As much as to the personal trauma of breaking up a relationship with the knowledge of a natural daughter, it is important to note the fact that Vallon was teaching the poet French “half-learned speech”, so “helping him with reinitiation into the domain of the father”.⁹⁴ In this spot of time, the poet cannot read the sign because it is written in a language he has not fully mastered yet due to a broken relationship with Annette Vallon, who was supposed to teach him French. Consequently, he feels like an outsider. The boy’s feeling of himself as an intruder in nature, as someone who has broken the unity with his rebellious act of stealing, is a displacement of the “peculiar terms of his own linguistic origin” and “his alienation into a separate self-hood”.⁹⁵ The boy breaks away from the unity he enjoys with nature in his journey to growth into a separate being. It also parallels his chivalric excitement in the early stages of the revolution and the later maturity he gains through his disappointment. This spot of time starts as an ignorant act of stealing and ends in the poet’s understanding of his limitation. However, his growing self-consciousness comes with a price. His involvement with the revolution leads to his gradual understanding that the revolution “was a signifier that did not enjoy Imaginary stability” and the poet “could no longer edit out the ‘substantial dread’ of violently opposing differences, exposing his own subjectivity”.⁹⁶ In Lacanian terms, the imaginary “is the most primitive condition associated with the close physical and mental relationship between an infant and its mother”.⁹⁷ The symbolic, however, is the “real realm of language, both as language operates within us to structure our consciousness and as it operates independently of us within society at large; the real is the ‘objective’

⁹³ **Ibid.**, (X, 48-54, 1805).

⁹⁴ **Ibid.**

⁹⁵ Hanly, **op. cit.**, p.59.

⁹⁶ **Ibid.**, p.44.

⁹⁷ Robert Wicks, **Modern French Philosophy: From Existentialism to Postmodernism**, Oxford, One world Publications, 2003, p.133.

realm that remains outside the sphere of symbolization altogether”.⁹⁸ In the Lacanian reading of the boat stealing spot of time, the concept of “the imaginary” is related to “a feeling of identity and harmony”⁹⁹ which was sought by Wordsworth with his initial excitement about the French Revolution, only to realize later that the revolution belonged to symbolic order where the “sign is arbitrary”¹⁰⁰ and “linguistic structures are organized into binary oppositions”¹⁰¹, which eventually refers to the “entrance of a (male) principle that divides the psyche, both from itself, and from other people” after “the introduction of language and the introduction of persons other than the nurturing supportive mother”.¹⁰² The poet’s awareness of the medium of language and his dependence on language to convey his feelings and emotions denies him the filial unity he enjoyed with nature completely devoid of self-consciousness, and imposes upon him his separateness and the sheer feeling of self-consciousness. The realization is reflected in the split in his language, which shifts towards meta-narration as the text reflects upon its condition defying the poet’s ideal of spontaneity.

3.2.4. The Lost Soldier

The encounter with the lost soldier takes place in Book IV, “Summer Vacation”, when the poet returns home from Cambridge for a summer break. The college life in Cambridge is mentioned only shortly and it is made clear that the poet dislikes this kind of life. He refers to his nights spent dancing as “trivial pleasures”¹⁰³ he says the education he received as a child mocks his studies at Cambridge and he wishes to turn away from university to recall “the glory of [his] youth”,¹⁰⁴ which is marked with “genius, power/Creation and divinity”.¹⁰⁵ His search, the poet says, “lies far from the reach of words”¹⁰⁶ and his university education is only an impasse in this respect. During his years at Cambridge, the poet expresses the change in him as turning into someone who cannot tell natural objects from their reflection:

⁹⁸ **Ibid.**

⁹⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁰⁰ **Ibid.**, 134.

¹⁰¹ **Ibid.**

¹⁰² **Ibid.**, 133.

¹⁰³ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (IV, 298, 1850).

¹⁰⁴ **Ibid.**, (III, 173, 1850).

¹⁰⁵ **Ibid.**, (III, 171-172, 1850).

¹⁰⁶ **Ibid.**, (III, 185, 1850).

Yet often is perplexed, and cannot part
 The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
 Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth
 Of the clear flood, from things which there abide
 In their true dwelling [...].¹⁰⁷

As he meditates on his condition and the human condition in the heart of nature, all of a sudden, he sees the lost “uncouth shape”¹⁰⁸ “looking “ghastly”¹⁰⁹ in the dark, which turns out to be a discharged “veteran”.¹¹⁰ The poet takes pity on him and leads him to a nearby cottage to have a place to sleep. Once the soldier has a place to spend the night, the poet leaves him at the door to seek “with quiet heart” his “distant home”.¹¹¹ However, even after the soldier introduces himself to the poet, he still remains “a ghostly figure”.¹¹² The “narrative about an unsheltered human figure and a speaker seeking shelter for and from that figure”¹¹³ remains visionary and sublime. In **Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics**, A solitary figure is a recurrent image in Wordsworth's poetry. With the unexpected appearance of the soldier, and his schizophrenic aspect indicated by the speaker, the soldier even after they are introduced to each other, remains a sublime figure.¹¹⁴ Historically speaking, the discharged soldier is set as belonging to the forces that fought for Britain in the West Indies during the mid-1790s.¹¹⁵ Wordsworth's portrait of the veteran can be interpreted as a personification of himself, a reflection of his alter ego.¹¹⁶ The discharged soldier is Wordsworth's shadow and it reflects the characteristics of a typical journey of self-discovery and psychological growth in quest for individuality.¹¹⁷ Through the encounter with the discharged soldier, the poet “reaches the threshold of overcoming an inferiority

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, (IV, 263-267).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, (IV, 389, 1850).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, (IV, 447, 1850).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, (IV, 417, 1850).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, (IV, 469, 1850).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, (IV, 434, 1850).

¹¹³ Kelley, op. cit., p. 100.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹¹⁵ Note 446 to *The Prelude* by Wordsworth, op. cit., 1805, IV, p. 577.

¹¹⁶ Warren Stevenson, "Wordsworth's 'Satanism'", *The Wordsworth Circle*, 13 (1982), 176-177 qtd. in Matthew C. Brennan, "The 'ghastly figure moving at my side': The Discharged Soldier as Wordsworth's Shadow", *The Wordsworth Circle*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 18, No. 1, WINTER, 1987, p.19, (Accessed) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24040526>, 05 June 2019.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

through confrontation with the soldier- his alter ego or shadow, which was previously submerged in his unconscious”.¹¹⁸ The revised versions of the discharged soldier are the poet’s effort to make his shadow - or alter ego - conscious and integrate it into his conscious personality, so that he can attain the self-knowledge to write the story of his life.¹¹⁹

3.2.5. The Murderer’s Initials

The murderer’s initials spot of time takes place in Book XII, “Residence in London”. Wordsworth narrates this spot of time after talking retrospectively about the dominion of the bodily over all other senses. The spot of time starts with the assertion “I remember well”.¹²⁰ The poet narrates his recollection about ending up at a spot “faltering and faint, and ignorant of the road”¹²¹ after having lost his “encourager and guide”¹²², who is a servant at his father’s house. He sees a murderer’s initials near the decaying remains of a gallows. With fear and shock, he dismounts from his horse and creeps down to a bottom where he discovers the gallows which is mouldy, while the groups of letters are “all fresh and visible”.¹²³

Came to a bottom, where in former times
A murderer had been hung in iron chains.
The gibbet-mast had mouldered down, the bones
And iron case were gone; but on the turf,
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,
Some unknown hand had carved the murderer’s name.
The monumental letters were inscribed
In times long past; but still, from year to year
By superstition of the neighbourhood,
The grass is cleared away, and to this hour
The characters are fresh and visible:
A casual glance had shown them, and I fled,
Faltering and faint, and ignorant of the road.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ **Ibid.**

¹¹⁹ **Ibid.**

¹²⁰ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (XII, 225, 1850).

¹²¹ **Ibid.**, (XII, 247, 1850).

¹²² **Ibid.**, (XII, 230, 1850).

¹²³ **Ibid.**, (XII, 244, 1850).

¹²⁴ **Ibid.**, (XII, 235-247, 1850).

In the 1799 text, the murderer is referred to as “the murderer of his wife”.¹²⁵ There is not much difference between the 1805 and 1850 versions, though the few changes made to the text give the feeling that the poet is less sure of himself when he gives details about the incident, contradictory to his assertion that he remembers the incident well. Jonathan Wordsworth suggests that the tone conveys a mockery of his former self, while also mocking the fantasy of the child setting off to a chivalric expedition.¹²⁶ After fleeing from the scene, the poet narrates the vision of a beautiful woman he had as a child:

[...] reascending the bare common, saw
 A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
 The beacon on the summit, and, more near
 A girl, who bore a pitcher on her head,
 And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
 Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,
 An ordinary sight; but I should need
 Colours and words that are unknown to man,
 To paint the visionary dreariness
 Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
 Invested moorland waste and naked pool,
 The beacon crowning the lone eminence,
 The female and her garments vexed and tossed
 By the strong wind. When, in the blessed hours
 Of early love, the loved one at my side,
 I roamed, in daily presence of this scene,
 Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,
 And on the melancholy beacon, fell
 A spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam;
 And think ye not with radiance more sublime
 For these remembrances, and for the power
 They had left behind? [...]¹²⁷

Jonathan Wordsworth says that in spite of the heightened and intensified horror in the narration, neither an explanation is offered for the appearance of the woman, nor much action happens. What this episode does is to create “another visual image impressed upon the mind by fear and isolation”.¹²⁸ Jonathan Wordsworth writes:

¹²⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Two Part Prelude*, *op. cit.*, (I, 309).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹²⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, (XI, 248-269, 1850).

¹²⁸ Jonathan Wordsworth, Introduction to *The Pedlar, Tintern Abbey, The Two-Part Prelude* by William Wordsworth, Ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 12.

[...] there is motion - not very much, but it is extremely important that the girl with the pitcher on her head is winning her battle against the wind that vexes and tosses her garments. If she were static she would be merely a picture; as it is, she lives on in the imagination of countless readers, as she had lived on in the poet's own.¹²⁹

Geoffrey Hartman says a correct dealing with this spot of time would require a focus on the cause of faltering and feeling, which he suggests is not the gibbet itself but the fresh and visible characters engraved onto the stone by an unknown hand. The poem does not tell us what those characters are, so obviously they do not matter. According to Hartman, this passage concerns the indestructibility of human consciousness, with the characters engraved looking fresh and visible.

Suggested first is the indestructibility of human consciousness, exemplified by the new characters, and after that the indestructibility of a consciousness in Nature, figured in the skeletal characters of a scene denuded of all color, sketched in a permanent black and white, yet capable of immense physical impact. The mystical chord is touched, and the eye overpowered by an intuition of characters affecting no single sense but a compelling comparison between the indestructibility of human consciousness and a physical indestructibility.¹³⁰

This spot of time as "the Arab dream" is an embodiment of the poet's awareness of his own mortality and his concerns for the posterity of his work. Once again, a guide outside of the self fails to help him. His awareness of the difficulty posed by the medium of language is reflected in the verses "I should need/Colours and words that are unknown to man".¹³¹ The poet attempts to create the beautiful and sublime image of the woman, which can be interpreted as in the Boy of Winander episode, a displacement of his efforts of self-creation and self-authorization.

3.2.6. Father's Death

One of the childhood memories with profound effects on the poet is the waiting with his brother for the arrival of his father while they are at the boarding

¹²⁹ **Ibid.**

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Hartman, "The Romance of Nature and the Negative Way", **William Wordsworth's The Prelude**, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p. 58.

¹³¹ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (XII, 254-255, 1850).

school. The incident is narrated in Book XII, "Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored". The poet is at a crossroads, waiting anxiously for his father to arrive from any direction to take him home, only to find out that his father has died. The description of the landscape in this spot of time is wild as ordinary sights appear to him:

[...] the wind and sleety rain,
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that stone wall,
The noise of wood and water, and the mist-"¹³²

Wordsworth was "in the house at Cockermouth when his father died".¹³³ He regrets having such strong homesickness and believes that if he had not longed so much for the Christmas to come so that he could go home, then his father would still be alive. So, the poet says he had a lesson with this experience and he "bowed low/To God, who thus corrected my [his] desires".¹³⁴ Nicholas Roe suggests:

The experience and his reflections upon it told him that to hope too much was to be 'blasted' cast out as an orphan (Prel-2 I. 363), and this was a lesson that the greatest events of the age - the French Revolution - would also impress upon him. As those personal and public events that were experienced or witnessed during the 1780s and 1790s, we can see how their patterns of expectation and disruption foreshadowed the ambitions and discontinuities of Wordsworth's long career as a poet - a reality that *The Prelude* was designed to suppress.¹³⁵

Death is a complex theme in **The Prelude** as it is almost always accompanied with the awareness of his own mortality. "As in a soliloquy by Hamlet, intense consciousness of self breeds a longing for extinction".¹³⁶ A growing self-consciousness brings about a growing self-death awareness. The poet's experience with his father's death, the absence of his mother due to her early demise, and the death of his brother John who was drowned on a trading voyage in "February 1805"¹³⁷ have all found their way into

¹³² *Ibid.*, (XII, 317, 319-321, 1850).

¹³³ Nicholas Roe, "The Early Life of William Wordsworth 1770- 1800", **The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth**, ed. by Richard Gravil, Daniel Robinson, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 38.

¹³⁴ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (XI, 315-316).

¹³⁵ Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹³⁶ O'Neill, **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹³⁷ Susan Wolfson, "Wordsworth's Drowned Man", **William Wordsworth's The Prelude: A Casebook**, Ed. by Stephen Charles Gill, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 88.

his poetry. In Wordsworth's autobiography, Dale Anderson says that John's death was tragic for Wordsworth for two reasons: Firstly, it was the painful loss of a brother; and secondly, "William and Dorothy had both invested some of their money in the voyage in the hope of receiving large profits that John had promised".¹³⁸ He also suggests that John's goal was to provide enough money for Wordsworth so he could comfortably write his great poem, **The Recluse**. "His death was the death of this dream".¹³⁹ The fear of being submerged runs throughout the poem along with the stream imagery. This fear echoes "the drowned man in Esthwaite's Lake" and "the boy of Winander" spots of time and reaches its epitome in the Arab dream. The stream image stands for the "long labor" of the poem, both its writing and reading. At the same time this stream can be identified with the vocational idea of the "true self" of the poet whose development is traced in the poem.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, besides Wordsworth's actual experience of death, the awareness of mortality concerns his poetic process as well. According to O'Neill, "paradoxically the fact that poems seek to give linguistic life to experience coincides that the poetic process is bound up with awareness of death".¹⁴¹ In this sense, Book V is very complex as it resonates with death in almost every line. Titled as Books, it begins with a meditation on the perishability of all books, and criticizes bookish education of children, which according to the poet suggests a spiritual death. As a contrast to this, he narrates the early death of a boy referred to as the boy of Winander, who with his imitation of the owls represents a generation of children close to nature that does not exist anymore. Then, while reading Don Quixote, the poet falls into a dream, in which he fails to help an Arab Bedouin to save two books from the coming flood and thus ultimate destruction. Once the dream narration is over, he addresses Coleridge and says:

O Friend! O Poet! brother of my soul!,
 Think not that I could pass along untouched
 By these remembrances. Yet wherefore speak?
 Why call upon a few weak words to say
 What is already written in the hearts
 Of all that breathe?¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Dale Anderson "Biography of William Wordsworth", **Bloom's BioCritiques: William Wordsworth**, Ed. by Harold Bloom, Philadelphia, Chelsea House Publishers, 2003, p.38.

¹³⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁴⁰ Hess, **op. cit.**, p. 219.

¹⁴¹ O'Neill, **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, **op. cit.**, p. 26.

¹⁴² William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (Book V, 1850, 181-186).

After he questions the adequacy of language, he talks about the maternal bond between the mother hen and the brood, followed by the narration of the early death of his mother and the poet's feelings of sadness due to the lack of the mother. In "A Poet's History: Wordsworth and Revolutionary Discourse", Keith Hanley performs a reading of Wordsworth's traumatic experience during the French Revolution as "crucially overdetermined by the loss trauma of his mother's death in his eight year".¹⁴³ He suggests that both traumas are related to "the normative, primary trauma of language acquisition in infancy".¹⁴⁴ While Hanley follows the Lacanian narrative suggesting that the Symbolical order would proceed the Imaginary order with the birth of the subject and the acquisition of language, he also suggests that the death of the mother might have problematized Wordsworth's entry in the Symbolic order of language and culture, or the domain of the father. In Hanley's words:

He was therefore predisposed to a literary discourse that represented the inheritance of the father's Symbolic domain splendidly undiminished by any sense of detachment from the Imaginary order. But feelings of shock and disappointment resulted from the disruption of Imaginary discourse. As a result of finding himself self-alienating inscribed in contradictory discourses [...] he was compelled to confront the feared reality of his subjectification in the Symbolic. Accordingly, when that recognition eventually became inevitable, the program for the poetic imagination in *The Prelude* turned into the self-conscious reconstruction of a discourse of Imaginary relationships within the Symbolic order.¹⁴⁵

Hanley further suggests that Wordsworth's personal difficulty in his entry into the Symbolic order was complicated by the historical moment of the French Revolution. According to Hanley, the particular problem with Wordsworth was that "the revolution was exceptionally packed with the self-knowledge he wished to repress".¹⁴⁶ The experience of the revolution with its key events, the September massacres, the war England declared on France, and the Reign of Terror caused a sheer realization by the

¹⁴³ Keith Hanley, "A Poet's History: Wordsworth and Revolutionary Discourse", **Revolutionary Romanticism, Wordsworth in Context**, Ed. by. Pauline Fletcher and John Murphy, London, Bucknell University Press, 1992, p.35.

¹⁴⁴ **Ibid.**

¹⁴⁵ **Ibid.**

¹⁴⁶ **Ibid.**, p.39.

poet of an “irrepressible knowledge of self-division” which led to the realization of the “feared otherness in language itself”. Hanley states:

Yet, from the perspective of 1804, the fall into language was after all a felicitous one, since it had enabled the reformulation of established discourses (proceeding from Wordsworth’s peculiarly controlled encounter with language) that in effect had come to make up **The Prelude** itself. In Books 9 and 10 the story has become clarified as one of a compromise complicity in his own self-alienation, as well as providing an epic representation of the history of the national psyche.¹⁴⁷

A final mortal incident narrated in the book is “the drowned man in the Esthwaite’s Lake”. Book V is concluded with being reminded of “a precious treasure”¹⁴⁸ he possessed as a child, a copy of **One Thousand and One Nights**, whose protagonist defies death through narratives. As the complexity of the idea of death in Books has been discussed as a whole, a closer look into these spots of time will provide a better understanding of how they with their intense awareness of death demonstrate the growing self-consciousness of the poet concerning his poetic vocation.

3.2.7. The Drowned Man of Esthwaite

The drowned man of Esthwaite spot of time is narrated in Book V “Books”, which overflows with the theme of death. The poet sets the timeline of the incident at his first week in Hawkshead, where he was placed with Anne Tyson after his mother’s death. The poet is rowing on the lake on his own, not knowing what he is looking for. As the sun is about to set, he distinctly sees “a heap of garments, as if left by one/Who might have there been bathing”.¹⁴⁹ After his long wait, the man fails to appear, the child finds out the next day that the man is drowned and has a vision of the drowned man’s face rising above the lake.

¹⁴⁷ **Ibid.**

¹⁴⁸ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (V, 460, 1850).

¹⁴⁹ **Ibid.**, V, 438-439, 1850

The succeeding day,
 Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale
 Drew to the spot an anxious crowd; some looked
 In passive expectation from the shore,
 While from a boat others hung o'er the deep,
 Sounding with grappling irons and long poles.
 At last, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
 Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright 450
 Rose, with his ghastly face¹⁵⁰

Whether the appearance of the dead man is a factual incident or a purely imaginative one; or whether the poet was a witness to the incident or not hardly relate to the analysis of the drowned man as a spot of time, as the narration is purely a product of Wordsworth's imagination".¹⁵¹ The poet does not give a record of the incident itself, but narrates his experience of the event, which renders the autobiographical authenticity irrelevant. With his "ghastly face", he is no longer human in spite of his likeness to a human being. As a result of this transformation, the drowned man reaches immortality. Through the sublime quality of the vision, the drowned man of Esthwaite is immortalized. In this sense, the drowned man spot of time can be studied as an allegory of the poetic process in general.¹⁵² The revisions of the spot of time offer a larger study on the Romantic approach to autobiography.¹⁵³ Although death is a prevalent theme in **The Prelude**, redemption is central to Wordsworth's poetry. Death as Wordsworth deals with it does not result in nothingness, but on the contrary, it stimulates imagination. In this respect, Wordsworth identifies himself with the Drowned Man of Esthwaite:

That emphasis on the mind explains why the drowned man episode - like the other spots of time - is not merely about, but contained by, an act of perception. We might say that the real, if not very helpful, answer to the enquiring detective, asking who might be the victim and who the culprit - is Wordsworth himself.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ **Ibid.**, (V, 443-452, 1850)

¹⁵¹ Aston Nichols and Susan J. Wolfson, "The Drowned Man of Esthwaite", **PMLA**, Vol. 100, No. 2(Mar., 1985), p.234, (Accessed) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/462292>, 11 June 2019.

¹⁵² Kurt Fosso, **Buried Communities: Wordsworth and the Bonds of Mourning**, New York, State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 4.

¹⁵³ Susan. J. Wolson, "The Illusion of Mastery: Wordsworth's Revisions of 'The Drowned Man of Esthwaite,'" 1799, 1805, 1850 (99 [1984]: 917-35) qtd. in. Aston Nichols and Susan J. Wolfson, "The Drowned Man of Esthwaite", **PMLA**, Vol. 100, No. 2(Mar., 1985), p.234, (Accessed) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/462292>, 11 June 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Duncan Wu, "Tautology and Imaginative Vision in Wordsworth", *Romanticism on the Net*, Issue 2, May 1996, (Accessed) <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/1996-n2-ron414/005717ar/>, 12 June 2019.

As in most of Wordsworth's poetry, water is a recurrent theme in **The Prelude** and it flows throughout the poem in various forms from mist to flood. However mild streams quite often end in mightier forms of water such as waterfalls and floods. The water imagery turning into flood is reminiscent of the fear prevalent among younger poets of being drowned in the flood of their precursors as Harold Bloom suggests in his theory of anxiety of influence. Bloom says the later poets need to know that:

“[...] the dead poets will not consent to make way for others [...]. The precursors flood us, and our imaginations can die by drowning in them, but no imaginative life is possible if such inundation is wholly evaded.”¹⁵⁵

The drowned man in the Esthwaite Lake is initially a displacement of Wordsworth's knowledge of the inevitable confrontation with the flood. In this spirit, the flood is fearsome as much as it is expected for imagination to be triggered and emancipated. Bloom's theory suggests “it is important that the new poets possess a richer knowing”.¹⁵⁶ Similar to the insight and calmness Bloom suggests, Wordsworth continues his narration of the spots of time:

[...] yet no soul-debasing fear,
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before, among the shining streams
Of faery land, the forest of romance.
Their spirit hallowed the sad spectacle
With decoration of ideal grace;
A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
Of Grecian art, and purest poesy.¹⁵⁷

These lines are a summary of Wordsworth's use of self-consciousness to the artistic advantage of **The Prelude**. The drowned man stands for his suppressed fears, and “the reappearance of a once submerged dead man threatens the speaker's ability to manage his discourse”.¹⁵⁸ What Wordsworth does however is to solidify his discourse with “his

¹⁵⁵ Harold Bloom, **The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry**, op. cit., p. 154.

¹⁵⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁵⁷ William Wordsworth, op. cit., (V, 452-460, 1850).

¹⁵⁸ Kelly, op. cit., p.94.

stronger 1805, 1832 and 1850 recognitions of the drowned man as a figure of death”.¹⁵⁹ When the poet cannot prevent the fear, he elaborates his recurrent fears.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the spots of time not only reflect Wordsworth’s anxiety of influence, but also display his formulation of beauty and sublimeness in his visionary aesthetics, as beautiful and sublime are never far from each other in Wordsworth’s poetry.¹⁶¹

3.2.8. The Arab Dream

The incident takes place in a state devoid of any self-consciousness as the speaker falls asleep as he is reading **Don Quixote** and dreams of himself in the Arabian desert. There is an important shift in the narrative between the 1805 and 1850 versions: In the 1805 version of **The Prelude**, the dream belongs to a friend and the narrator simply quotes from his friend. However, in the 1850 version, the speaker relates his own dream. The choice of vocabulary used to depict the Arab is reminiscent of the lost soldier spot of time. Before the poet stretches a “boundless plain/Of sandy wilderness, all black and void”¹⁶², the speaker comes across an Arabian knight on a camel with a stone in one hand and shell in the other which represent the book of geometry and poetry,¹⁶³ respectively. The Arabian knight brings the prophecy of the apocalypse to the poet. He is trying to bury the stone and the shell to save them from destruction. The speaker puts the shell to his ear and the shell prophesizes the coming of the flood in a foreign language. The unknown language suggests the displacement of words in a dream which are at least several moves away from their original meanings.¹⁶⁴ It also refers to Wordsworth’s problem with the language as a poet living in an age in which “mankind has lost a linguistic ability he once possessed when he existed in a less complex world”.¹⁶⁵ The speaker is naturally inclined to help the Arab, but upon seeing the dreadful sight of the flood, he wakes up.

¹⁵⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁶⁰ **Ibid.**

¹⁶¹ **Ibid.**

¹⁶² **Ibid.**, (V, 71-72, 1850).

¹⁶³ Joseph Hills Miller, **The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens**, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2014, p. 94.

¹⁶⁴ Jim Springer Borck, **Wordsworth’s The Prelude and The Failure of Language**, Rice University, Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, Vol. 13, No. 4, Nineteenth Century, Autumn 1973, p.613, (Accessed) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/449803>, 26 June 2019.

¹⁶⁵ **Ibid.**

[...] “and this”, said he,
 “This other,” pointing to the Shell, “this book
 Is something of more worth”; and, at the word,
 Stretched forth the Shell, so beautiful in shape,
 In colour so resplendent, with command
 That I should hold it to my ear. I did so, —
 And heard, that instant, in an unknown tongue,
 Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
 A loud prophetic blast of harmony—
 An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold
 Destruction to the Children of the Earth
 By Deluge now at hand.¹⁶⁶

The Arab Dream in Book V of **The Prelude** is the epitome of William Wordsworth’s fascination with the apocalypse and his awareness of the mortality concerning his person and his work. Before narrating the dream, the speaker contemplates on the condition of mankind and on his achievements as ephemeral and perishable:

[...] Thou also, man! hast wrought,
 For commerce of thy nature with herself,
 Things that aspire to unconquerable life;
 And yet we feel—we cannot choose but feel—
 That they must perish. [...] and yet man,
 As long as he shall be the child of earth,
 Might almost “weep to have” what he may lose,
 Nor be himself extinguished, but survive,
 Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate.”¹⁶⁷

But all the meditations of mankind,
 Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth
 By reason built, or passion, which itself
 Is highest reason in a soul sublime;
 The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,
 Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,
 Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes;
 Where would they be? Oh! why hath not the Mind
 Some element to stamp her image on
 In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
 Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
 Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?¹⁶⁸

According to Harold Bloom, “the deluge here threatens Imagination and abstract reason”.¹⁶⁹ While the semi-Quixote flees the waters of the flood, he fails to guide the

¹⁶⁶ William Wordsworth, **op. cit.**, (V, 88-99, 1850).

¹⁶⁷ **Ibid.**, (V, 18-28, 1850).

¹⁶⁸ **Ibid.**, (V, 38-49, 1850).

poet out of it and does not allow the poet to help him in his task either. While the Arab is very determined about his mission, the poet is lost and in need of guidance. The Arab's determination seems meaningless to the poet. He is described as a "semi-Quixote"¹⁷⁰ trying to outrace "the fleet waters of a drowning world".¹⁷¹ However, the poet has a calmness about his reaction to the flood, and an understanding of its role in his formation as a poet. Bloom says, "in Wordsworth's dream of the Arab, the vision of a drowning world brings no initial terror, but a prior vision of desiccation immediately does".¹⁷² In the dynamic with the dead poets, the poet knows he must let the precursors drown him, so that he can make his own way, as avoiding the precursors would mean life without imagination, while death by water ends in birth of imaginative life. Death however is the ultimate form of lack of self-consciousness. The fear of death as complete lack of self-consciousness is a quality shared by many characters in meta-fictional works. In meta-fiction "characters suddenly realize that they do not exist, cannot die, have never been born, and cannot act".¹⁷³ This is problematic in terms of the poet's sense of identity. Harold Bloom suggests that the key question in the Arab dream is how far Wordsworth identifies himself with the Arab Quixote:

For the Arab's mission, though the poet calls it mad, "that maniac's fond anxiety", is very like Wordsworth's own in *The Prelude*. Both desire to save Imagination from the abyss of desert and ocean, man's solitary isolation from and utter absorption into Nature.¹⁷⁴

The Arab's fate is a reflection of Wordsworth's fears for himself. The absurdity the poet sees in the Arab is reminiscent of what he thinks about the lost soldier as someone who is deranged by solitude. In his arduous mission, no matter how harshly he was criticized, Wordsworth was equipped with a consciousness of the self, which was a product of lifelong self-examination that allowed him to be secretly self-assured that his mission was worthy and he was worthy of his mission.

¹⁶⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, (V, 142, 1850).

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, (V, 137, 1850).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Patricia Waugh, op. cit., p.91.

¹⁷⁴ Harold Bloom, *William Wordsworth's The Prelude*, p. 5.

3.2.9. The Boy of Winander

In this spot of time, Wordsworth stands by the grave of a boy who is known for mimicking owls in an effort to communicate with them. In terms of his relation with nature, the boy represents a generation of children that does not exist anymore. Wordsworth's presence by the boy's grave is an allusion to his standing by his former self. The boy is alive in the 1798 version and the narration is in the first-person. In later versions there is a drastic change, the boy is dead and the narration shifts to the third person. A comparison of the 1798 and 1805 versions of this spot of time suggests that they attempt to create a stable image of the self, while both versions portray the impossibility of such a fixation as the self is ever evolving and is in constant change.¹⁷⁵

The Boy of Winander spot of time is also an allegory of the anxiety of reception. The boy calling out to the owls that he cannot see is a parallel to the poet's writing to an audience invisible to him. It's not just the owls that do not reply to the child, but the audiences also remain silent. This refers to the fear of the poet that he may not be appreciated by his readership or even read at all.¹⁷⁶ The disconnection from the audience causes an intense self-consciousness. Thus, "the relation between poet and past self introduces a self-consciousness over time and substitutes for the relation between the boy and owls".¹⁷⁷ Similar to this relationship, the poet's self-reading process, which is marked with the unpublished status of the text and its constant revisions, make up for the relationship between the poet and the audience. Through his self-reading and editing process, the poet returns to the grave as he repeatedly returns to his own text, which turns into a constant self-assurance of his poetic identity in the face of criticism and alienation.¹⁷⁸ The boy of Winander is a perfect symbol of self-conscious murder of the former selves, to give birth to a poetic self so that the poet reaches textual posterity by being self-created through the imaginative powers of the mind. As in the Arab Dream and the Drowned Man of Esthwaite, the boy of Winander spot of time is concerned with burial of the former self not dramatically but wisely and tranquilly, understanding that death of the former self heralds resurrection of the poetic self.

¹⁷⁵ Nichols, "The Revolutionary 'I': Wordsworth and the Politics of Self- Presentation", *op. cit.*, p.75.

¹⁷⁶ Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception*, *op.cit.*, p.259.

¹⁷⁷ Hess, *op. cit.*, 217.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

3.2.10. The Blind Beggar

The Blind Beggar spot of time takes place in London during the poet's introduction to London on his first bus ride into the town. In his brief visit to London, the poet feels "in heart and soul the shock/Of the huge town's first presence".¹⁷⁹ He makes it explicit that he is disappointed in the city. The coldness of winter and the rawness of life are emphasized in his narration. What the poet encountered in London is neither what the accounts of the ancient cities in books sounded like, nor what he was told by a friend in his childhood. The people of London, according to the poet have no individuality or depth and cause no excitement in the poet. The masses and the crows of the streets are not inspiring for the poet. London is portrayed as a threat to the poet's inner peace and his unity of identity. People in London are described as:

[...] melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning and no end.¹⁸⁰

Only a blind beggar with his upright face that suggests individualism and inner peace stimulates the poet's imagination. The beggar is described as:

Abruptly, with the view (a sight not rare)
Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face
Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
His story, whence he came, and who he was
Caught by the spectacle my mind turned round
As with might of waters; and apt type
This label seemed of the utmost we can know,
Both of ourselves and of the universe;
And, on the shape of that unmoving man,
His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed,
As if admonished from another world.¹⁸¹

There is a parallel between the blind man imagery and the gibbet scene in Book II. Both events are similar as both incidents focus on a piece of writing:

¹⁷⁹ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (VII, 66-67, 1850).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, (VI, 726-728, 1850).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, (VII, 639-649, 1850).

Both events focus on a label written by an impersonal hand. But whereas the characters in the one case seem indestructible, here the label is a sign of human impotence. Yet the superficial label clearly points to a set of deeper and indestructible characters, for the suggestion is that the lost eyes of the beggar were only like a piece of paper, a visual surface, and that, being removed, they leave the man more steadfast, fixed, eternal.¹⁸²

The blind beggar is disconnected from his audience as he cannot see them, but he is at the same time vulnerable in front of the audience that are invisible to him. This vulnerability is reminiscent of that of the poet's in the face of his unseen audience. However, Wordsworth does not share the same fate as the blind beggar. The blind beggar remains dependant of his audience. However, Wordsworth thanks to his insight into self-consciousness is able to fashion any given incident as a spot of time, and self-fashion his poetic identity by putting memory, language and the text itself to his service. Although this spot of time reflects Wordsworth's anxieties concerning his reception and authorship, it also displays the significance of self-consciousness with its positive effect in formation of his poetic identity.

3.2.11. The Crossing of the Alps and the Snowdon Episode

In Book VI, Wordsworth narrates his journey to the Alps with a Cambridge in the summer of 1790.¹⁸³ In his words, "Europe at that time was thrilled with joy/France standing on the top of golden hours"¹⁸⁴ with "[...] human nature seeming born again".¹⁸⁵ Wordsworth and his friend Robert Jones,¹⁸⁶ also a mountaineer,¹⁸⁷ rejoice in villages witnessing the "dances of liberty".¹⁸⁸ Nature becomes a book before their eyes in which they could read "lessons of genuine brotherhood, the plain/And

¹⁸² Geoffrey Hartman, "The Romance of Nature and the Negative Way", **William Wordsworth's The Prelude**, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁸³ Janet Adam Smith, Peter Bicknell, "Wordsworth and the Alps", **The Alpine Journal**, Bicentenary Exhibition at Grasmere, 26 July-18 November, 1990, Plates 46-49, 63, 65-70, p. 202, (Accessed) https://www.alpinejournal.org.uk/Contents/Contents_1992-93_files/AJ%201992%20201-209%20Adam%20Smith%20Wordsworth.pdf, 11 June 2019.

¹⁸⁴ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (1850, VI, 339-340).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, (1850, VI, 341).

¹⁸⁶ Smith, Peter Bicknell, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁸⁷ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (VI, 323, 1850).

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, (1850, VI, 371).

universal reason of mankind”.¹⁸⁹ In this spirit, as the two friends climb the Alps, they are parted from their “comrades”¹⁹⁰ at Simplon’s steep and take a wrong direction which seems to end in a stream, only to be informed by a peasant that they have “crossed the Alps”.¹⁹¹ Baffled in his failure to appreciate this important moment, the poet’s lines describing the incident are full of perplexity. Then the celebration of imagination follows, the poet recognizes the glory of imagination:

Imagination—here the Power so called
Through sad incompetence of human speech,
That awful Power rose from the mind’s abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say—
“I recognise thy glory:” in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours; whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being’s heart and 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.
Under such banners militant, the soul
Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils
That may attest her prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in herself and in beatitude
That hides her, like the mighty flood of Nile
Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds
To fertilise the whole Egyptian plain.¹⁹²

The crossing of the Alps scene is a breaking point in the poem. Imagination interferes with what exists in the external world. This passage suggests the union of the self with something greater, ‘infinite’ or ‘one mighty whole’ but antithetically in point of self-consciousness.¹⁹³ The poet’s search is for “a state of being which will result when a psychic experience of Imagination-Revelation increases consciousness and makes the

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, (1850, VI, 544-545).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, (1850, VI, 577).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, (1850, VI, 591).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, (1850, VI, 592-616).

¹⁹³ Onorato, “Memories and Imaginings”, *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in the Prelude*, op. cit., p. 168.

soul fertile like the “fertiliz’d Egyptian plain” so that “his tillage can bring forth the crop of poetry”.¹⁹⁴ Anthony J. Harding defines this as the threshold moment in which “the poet directly speaks to Imagination”;¹⁹⁵ an instance which “since Hartman's landmark essay of 1962” has been recognized “as raising Imagination to a high eminence in Romantic- era thinking about the poet's role”.¹⁹⁶ Even though the inquiry took each of them to a different conclusion, the Romantic poets contemplated a lot on the role of the poet. They considered the role of the poet crucial to human existence and thought that both religion and philosophy depended on poetic imagination without which nature would cease to exist. Their questions such as; “What is a poet?” and “What is literature?” had a self-conscious quality about them, and made their literature profoundly self-conscious.¹⁹⁷ This process is closely related to self-consciousness:

It is of great importance, too, that he feels he must achieve this condition, resisting temptation to lapse into passive and unself-conscious states. As we have observed, the attractiveness of withdrawing into the ‘abyss of idealism’ both express neurotic fears of being burdened by self-consciousness, and suggest psychosis and death.¹⁹⁸

The Alps scene portray independence of imagination from nature. Geoffrey Hartman suggests this process takes place in three stages. In the first stage, there is a sense of separation and a desire for the beyond. The poet and his companion are separated from the road, their guide and also from language as their words need to be translated in order to be able to communicate with the present. After the sense of separation in the first stage, there is a regained sense of harmony in the second stage. In the third stage, nature is overcome and the poet’s imagination is summoned because the apocalypse cannot be realized in nature.¹⁹⁹ This indicates the poet final cognizance that nature’s initial aim is to lead him beyond itself. Nature’s self-concealment is vital at this stage for the self to

¹⁹⁴ **Ibid.**

¹⁹⁵ Anthony John Harding, "The 'I' in The Prelude", **The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth, United Kingdom**, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 391.

¹⁹⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁹⁷ **Ibid.**

¹⁹⁸ **Ibid.**

¹⁹⁹ **Ibid.**

fulfil its capacity for growth, so nature leads the poet to self-dependence self-consciousness.²⁰⁰

The three parts of this episode, therefore, can help us understand the mind's growth toward independence of immediate external stimuli. The measure of that independence is Imagination, and carries with it a precarious self-consciousness." We see that the mind must pass through a stage where it experiences Imagination as a power separate from Nature, that the poet must come to think and feel as if by his own choice, or from the structure of his mind.²⁰¹

The famous Alps episode shows the growth of the poet's self-consciousness as he comes to the realization that any sublime outside of the self, is not adequate or appealing to the poet. The poet comes grasps finally that the power that he has been looking for is not in the outside world, but within the self:

The growth to poetic self-consciousness becomes a journey for Wordsworth- a journey in the world, through its imagery, and perhaps beneath or beyond it. Becoming the highly self-conscious Poet seems inseparable from attempting to be Wordsworth; and at the same time; having true being implies a return to a prior condition, now idealized as the natural habitat of the contented spirit and of the Poet's spirit.²⁰²

Books XII and XIII, "Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored" and "Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored (concluded)" celebrate the elevating powers of the mind, which take the man higher than any other peak that can exist in the world:

[...] our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
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 that give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master—outward sense
The obedient servant of her will.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Hartman, "The Romance of Nature and the Negative Way", *op. cit.*, p. 61.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁰² Onorato, "The Fiction of the Self", *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in the Prelude*, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

²⁰³ William Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, (XII, 214- 223, 1850).

The Snowdon Episode is in Book XIV, the concluding book of **The Prelude**, and the climbing of Mount Snowdon is the last spot of time in the poem. Similar to the first book that opens up with a walk in the fields, the book ends with a walk, this time on a mountain slope. This final growth is closely connected to the lack of self-consciousness the baby enjoys in the mother's arms as the earliest and the last stages of development of self-consciousness. Contrary to the baby's lack of self-consciousness described in Book II, partly through the process of writing, the poet has grown into a mature, self-conscious mind and is ready to take the mind to even greater heights. The opening of the episode on a mountain slope heralds this ascend. This lack of self-consciousness represents the earliest stage in the poet's development. Through the self-doubt and self-division narrated in the poem, the poet grows into a mature mind that is ready to self-assert its powers. M. H. Abrams's interprets the acquisition of self-consciousness as follows:

The mature poetic mind, whose infant perception had been a state of undifferentiated consciousness, has acquired self-consciousness, and is able to sustain the sense of its own individuation-in-union with the objects it perceives.²⁰⁴

The Snowdon episode is closely related to the self-reflexivity that runs throughout **The Prelude** and is embodied in the way the poem reflects onto itself. Through the self-reflexivity within the poem and in its history of publication, a complex impermanence is created. The past time of the events narrated and the present moment of composition overlap. The shift from "I" to "we" in this passage refers to the future readers whom the poet beckons to confront and interpret the vision through his eyes. This change refers to manifestation of absolute autonomy or fulfilment of self-consciousness, as the autonomous professional Poet, is able to construct his own identity through self-reading regardless of the response of his audience". The poet by exercising his imagination on the materials of his mind and poem, constructs his self-authoritative identity.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ M. H. Abrams, "Wordsworth's Long Journey Home", **William Wordsworth's The Prelude**, Ed. by Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p.103.

²⁰⁵ Hess., op. cit., p. 213-214.

Wordsworth's "self-reading" constructs his own autonomous identity. The vision confirms for him what he has wanted to hear all along: that he is a great poet, one of the "mighty Mind[s]" who exercise their shaping imaginative power both over the external creation and their fellow mortals (or readers), so that "even the grossest minds must see and hear/And cannot chuse but hear"(13.69, 83–84). It is not accidental that Wordsworth's great moment of vocational self affirmation Is also the moment of his strongest, most direct claim of power over his readers.²⁰⁶

The poem also displays a self-consciousness about its conclusion, the stress on "it appeared to me",²⁰⁷ "is self-conscious about what took place 'that night'".²⁰⁸ What is taking place Michael O'Neill asserts that "the poetry recognizes, an assertion of the mind's power that depends on metaphorical links that are, in turn, impossible without the natural world".²⁰⁹ Thus by acknowledging its physical existence within the medium of poetry itself, poetry displays its self-consciousness. As O'Neill suggests, "so often in **The Prelude**, the poetry is a testimony to poetry as a way of knowing inseparable from its own procedures".²¹⁰ Unlike the other spots of time where the poet looks for guidance from outside, he finally recognizes at the Snowdon that the only guidance can come from the self. The poet says "Here must thou be, O Man!/Power to thyself", "no Helper has thou here".²¹¹ A spiritual crisis that took the poet to "the soul's last and lowest ebb",²¹² is concluded in recovery with a radical change in the self:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
Others will love, and we will teach them how;
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of quality and fabric more divine.²¹³

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁰⁷ William Wordsworth, **The Prelude**, *op. cit.*, (XI, 68, 1805).

²⁰⁸ O'Neill, **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, *op. cit.*, p. XVIII.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, (XIV, 210, 1850).

²¹² *Ibid.*, (XI, 309, 1850).

²¹³ *Ibid.*, (XIV, 446-456).

Although throughout his writing career, the poet had to go through times when he lost the sight of the vocational idea of his true self such as the years he spent at Cambridge during which ‘Imagination slept’²¹⁴, in the final episode of **The Prelude**, he fulfils his poetic aspirations. He self-constructs his vocational identity through his experimentation with self-conscious writing imbued with meta-poetic and paratextual elements beyond his time, which allow him to be the creator, reader and critic of his own work, thus giving him full autonomy over his vocational identity in a domain freed from anxiety of reception.

²¹⁴ **Ibid.**, (III, 260).

CONCLUSION

William Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1801) and the reactions it received from later Romantic poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats dominated the Romantic poetry in England. In his preface, Wordsworth famously defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".¹ This definition negates the physicality of poetry, language and the poet as mediums, and attempts to create an illusion of spontaneity or immediacy. However, the same definition also suggests that the origin of poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility".² The fact that poetry is a product of recollection implies that it is at least several moves away from the original and emphasizes its mediacy. While Wordsworth idealizes spontaneity in his poetical theory, his actual poetic creation displays an extra-ordinary awareness of poetry as a medium as well as his role as the poet. Moreover, most of his poems - his masterpiece **The Prelude** being a good example - display elements of metapoetic writing and thus an awareness of poetry and language as mediums. **The Prelude** was presented by the poet as an introductory work to a greater poem to be called **The Recluse**, which would aim to express the poet's "most interesting feelings concerning man, nature, and society" in verse, "with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary work that might live".³ The poet stated that it sounded reasonable to him that "he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far nature and education had qualified him for such employment".⁴ Because of his interest in his self, Wordsworth was associated with poetic egotism by his contemporaries. In his own words, he presents **The Prelude**, his autobiography in verse, as a genuine soul-searching. This thesis suggests that **The Prelude** does not stem from either of these claims and establishes it as a self-conscious poem. Created as a poem about writing a poem, **The Prelude** deconstructs its own writing process and makes subjectivity and the authorial identity of the poet its focal point. With the intense self-consciousness reflected between the lines, **The Prelude** exhibits to the reader an

¹ William Wordsworth, **Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems**, 1800, Vol. I. Ed. by Jim Manis, Pennsylvania State University, An Electronic Classics Series Publication, Hazleton, 2004, p.8.

² **Ibid.**

³ William Wordsworth, "**The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind 1805, 1850**", Djvu Editions, 2001, p. II.

⁴ **Ibid.**

awareness of itself as a literary work and manipulates its historical and social context in such a way that it re-evaluates the position of the author, the social and political institutions, and even the literary creation itself. In this sense, Wordsworth's treatment of self-consciousness displays a shift from the conventional approach and provides a model for later poets for self-definition or even self-fashioning independent from the established norms. Self-consciousness itself is a paradoxical interdisciplinary phenomenon. For the purposes of this study, self-consciousness has been approached as the basic human ability for self-reflective thinking, while self-conscious poetry has been defined as poetry that "displays an awareness of itself as poetry".⁵

The theories that deny the existence of the self have been disregarded and the self has been discussed within a naturalistic framework to refer to "a natural entity having the special ability of self-consciousness and thereby of establishing representations about herself."⁶ Self-consciousness in theory has been discussed along with terms including self-reflexivity, metapoem and self-conscious poem. The media-awareness displayed in Wordsworth's verse and prose, rendering them ideal domains to analyse his poetics, have been discussed with regards to Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads."

In **The Prelude**, Wordsworth self-consciously manipulates his text to self-fashion his own poetic identity. While the poet persona has claims on divinity and immediacy as the chosen one who is gifted his poetry almost through divine intervention, the authorial voice on the other hand interferes with this illusion or fiction and calls onto the reader, reminding them that this is fiction and there is a consciousness behind it. This interplay with the readership demonstrates quite a modern understanding of authorship. Through the illusion of spontaneous meditations mostly stimulated by nature, Wordsworth self-fashions himself as a visionary poet who works through professedly spontaneous visions, while he manipulates nature and the landscape to self-

⁵ Michael O'Neill, **Romanticism and Self-Conscious Poem**, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003, p. XIII.

⁶ Albert Newen, Anika Fiebich, "A Developmental Theory of Self-Models: Individual-Cognitive and Social-Cognitive Dimensions of Self-Consciousness", p.3. (Accessed) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226659382_A_developmental_theory_of_self-models_individual-cognitive_and_social-cognitive_dimensions_of_self-consciousness, 20 October 2018.

consciously create his poetic image in verse. Understanding this paradox between the emphasis on immediacy or spontaneity while working through self-consciousness, metapoem or hypermediacy is significant as Wordsworth produced his poetry at a breaking point in history which set the background for the contemporary world with the sociopolitical and intellectual circumstances. The tremendous changes brought about by urbanization and industrialization raising existential questions in the minds of self-conscious individuals led to an unprecedented emphasis on the question of self-consciousness, which manifested itself in the poetry of the Romantic Era. The era was marked with a move from the eighteenth-century neoclassical ideal of mimesis or imitation to a focus on sentimentalism that resulted in a more self-expressive literary model. This intellectual progress caused a novel focus on individuality and subjectivity, which resulted in a deep self-analysis that was accompanied with an exceptional degree of self-consciousness. Thus, the most dominant voice in Romantic poetry became that of the isolated and meditating individual. This turn to self-consciousness as reflected in the image of the solitary individual in private meditation lamenting on his private and social circumstances was a reaction against the ills of the industrialized world, which disregarded the subjectivity of the individual. These poems created a domain free from the dehumanizing qualities of the industrialized society. This newly discovered comprehension of the individual imagination and literary/poetic/artistic genius changed the understanding of the relationship of the author with the literary work or that of the artist with the artefact. Before the Romantics, the artistic or literary production was a gentlemanly leisure. The Romantics have re-defined intellectual labour as a professional occupation. So, the focus shifted from the product to the individual mind behind it, bringing the importance of individual imagination to the spotlight. As this is largely the contemporary view, it is possible to say that the Romantics established the modern concept of authorship, with Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" setting the very foundation of it. Romantic poetry also coincides with the birth of literary writing as a profession and commodification of the written work due to the growth of the publishing sector as a result of industrialization and mass production. Wordsworth lamented that an author might be ignored during his lifetime but appreciated after his death. Therefore, he also actively fought for the rights of the authors and their descendants over the literary work and contributed greatly to the development of copyrights in the modern sense. These prefaces and articles have been discussed through the term paratext

proposed by Gerard Genette, which refers to all constituents that surround the main text including prefaces.⁷ Wordsworth's experimentation with the paratext was not confined to his prose. While the poet attempts to give the impression that **The Prelude** is a spontaneous lyric, the poem overflows with self-conscious writing techniques such as addressing the reader directly or providing explanations in parentheses. Wordsworth's active involvement with the paratext in his prose and verse prove his self-consciousness about his poetic identity and the way he actively strives to self-fashion it. The idea that the human mind is the processor of the subjective world is central to Wordsworth's poetry. The Wordsworthian ideal of expressing subjective experience is accompanied by self-consciousness, not only because self-consciousness creates a domain in which the poet reflects on his relationship with the subjective world and external elements, but also because the poet's consciousness of his self-consciousness allows him to reflect on his own feelings in a self-conscious way to create the desired artistic effect and poetic self. In **The Prelude**, through what the poet calls "spots of time", which refer to "wrong-doing, suffering, and loss as necessary means towards the greater good of personal redemption"⁸, he creates or self-fashions his poetic identity. These spots of time also reveal the poet's modern approach to language and its limitations as he talks about the inadequacy of language and fallibility of memory to express his experience. The changes Wordsworth made in these spots of time in different texts of **The Prelude** portray his changing position towards certain events in the past. In this sense, the poem stands out as a justification of how his first-hand observation of the violence during the French Revolution and the personal tragedy he had to go through with his desertion of Annette Vallon and their daughter as the revolution got more and more violent changed his initial excitement towards the revolution, which was driven by his natural sympathy for the common people.

The extra-ordinary self-consciousness displayed in **The Prelude** manifests itself as self-doubt and self-assertion through the half of the poem as the poet reflects on his inadequacy to write such a poem and his inability to produce good poetry, as the poem comes into existence through these reflections. The analysis of **The Prelude** with

⁷ Gerard Genette, **Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation**, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 1.

⁸ M. H. Abrams, "Wordsworth's Prelude and the Crisis-Autobiography", **Critical Essays on Wordsworth**, Ed. by George H. Gilpin, Boston, G. K. Hall, 1990, 127.

regards to its constant editing resulting in multiple texts dated 1798, 1799, 1805 and 1850 has led to the conclusion that the existence of various versions of **The Prelude**, its fragmentary nature, and its posthumous publication are deliberate constructs to create an illusion of poetic failure. With the various texts, the poet does not assume an authoritative position to maintain a fixated meaning, but declares his awareness of himself as an agent of mediums such as memory and language and leaves the text open to interpretation in the consciousness of his readers in whom he constantly expresses his belief for the posterity of his work and of himself. The abundance of multiple fragmentary texts and the illusion of poetic failure in Romantic poetry are observed to be self-conscious poetic strategies to emphasize the consciousness of the poet and not of the finished work. The multiple texts provide a better display of the poet's manipulations of memory, language and nature to bring about the desired effect towards creating a self-fashioned identity. The clash between the spontaneity claimed by the poet and the self-consciousness displayed by **The Prelude** has been studied through theories of anxiety of influence and anxiety of reception. The anxiety of influence introduced by Harold Bloom refers to the dilemma experienced by the writer to admire or envy the predecessors in the endeavour to be autonomous and original. Bloom's theory is reflected in *The Prelude* on many different levels. Wordsworth declares his purpose in writing **The Prelude** as his desire to surpass Milton, his great idol. He also names Spencer, Shakespeare and Milton as bards in **The Prelude**. Wordsworth's aspiration to add his name next to the already established poets is reminiscent of Bloom's theory. Moreover, Wordsworth displays a paradoxical approach to the already established poetic-fathers, which fluxes and refluxes between admiration and envy. The concept of the anxiety of reception has been built on Bloom's theory by Lucy Newlyn and expanded to the anxiety experienced by the writer concerning his reception by the critics and the readership. As Wordsworth was branded a radical in his early years, he has produced most of his poetry in the face of harsh criticism by the critics and the public. The abundance of long prefaces and letters concerning his works and the authorial intervention in his prose display the degree of anxiety of reception suffered by Wordsworth. In his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", he suggests that the public taste in literature was depraved due to the mechanized jobs that required no sentimentality or individuality, which in turn caused great works of literature to be neglected while cheap literature dealing with horror and indecency became popular. Although he was critical

of the public taste, he was also aware that the posterity of his work, and even that of his own, depended on the reader.

Thus, the present study has established that from the vantage point of self-consciousness, **The Prelude** can be described as a self-conscious poetic endeavour, which aims at creating a self-fashioned poetic identity. In the light of self-consciousness, Wordsworth's interest in the self is revealed to be a distinctly modern insight into the notions of authorship, rather than a genuine soul-searching as claimed by the poet or a result of the poetic egotism initially attributed to Wordsworth. The Prelude presented by the poet as an autobiographical self-analysis is revealed to be a self-conscious effort to create a poetic identity. It has been concluded that the illusion of spontaneity as suggested by Wordsworth was employed in an effort to free the poet and his text from the restraints of the politics and poetics of his time, rendering poetry a medium to meditate upon itself and the poet the judge and critic of his own work until he creates through his self-conscious prose and verse the taste by which his works are to be enjoyed. The contradiction between Wordsworth's theory of poetry and his practice in **The Prelude** promotes a self-conscious return to the literary creation and display a growing self-consciousness concerning the medium of poetry. His unique insight into self-consciousness contributes to the discussions of this interdisciplinary phenomenon beyond categorical means and enriches our understanding of Romantic creativity which set the background for contemporary notions of authorship.

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